



...cauili uis uis  
Terra autem erat in  
uacua; et tenebre erant  
in abyssi. et spiritus  
rebatur sup aquas  
deus. fiat lux. Et facta  
est uisus deus lucem  
bona. et diuisit lucem  
nebris. Appellauitque  
et tenebras noctem. Et  
est uespe et mane. die  
Sicut quoque deus. fiat  
mentum in medio  
et diuidat aquas a  
Et fecit deus firmam  
diuisitque aquas que

# Phantoms of Emptiness: The Space of the Imaginary in Late Medieval Art

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*The soul never thinks without an image [phantasm].<sup>1</sup> (Aristotle, *De Anima*, book III, chapter 7)*

*Зачем я лишь о том всё время думаю, как сделать, чтоб не думать ни о чём? Михаил Щербаков, 'Интермедия 4'.<sup>2</sup>*

Dated to the end of the eleventh century, and reworked in the fourteenth, the portable altar of Sainte Foy, now in the treasury of Conques, overwhelms the beholder with its sheer amount of stuff (plate 1). Likely refashioned from an earlier binding of a gospel book, the altar is framed with a wide border of gilded silver that contains ten enamel plaques. At each corner, cloisonné medallions figure evangelist symbols; at the top, a bust of Christ counterbalances the image of the paschal lamb inserted at the bottom; on the sides, enclosed into neat squares, are bust-length images of the Virgin, Sainte Foy, and two unknown saints.<sup>3</sup> Translucent cabochons are nestled between the enamels, interlaced with a fine filigree pattern. The border encloses another frame, of punched metal, with three different designs, which fastens the filigreed frame to an alabaster panel that bears no representation whatsoever but foregrounds, instead, the natural pattern of veining and clouding. The working surface of the altar remains empty, all the more so because its originary colour is a transparent white. If the finely worked frame recalls John Ruskin's admiring yet withering description of Gothic cathedral stonework as 'the rude love of decorative accumulation', the alabaster rectangle commands the beholder's attention precisely because, in its ostensible visual lack, it is unlike all else that surrounds it.<sup>4</sup>

Although it has been nuanced, tempered, and complicated, Ruskin's assessment remains insidious in the field of art history. The impulse to fill in visual lacunae is a trait frequently ascribed to later medieval imagery, which is regularly defined by its allegedly omnipresent *horror vacui*, or fear of empty space. Book margins teeming with grotesques, the profusion of sculpture on church portals, images colonizing road interstices on maps: all contribute to the collective conception of medieval art as a paragon of crowded spaces, which strives – with certain mindless insistence – to plug and veneer every possible gap by whatever means necessary, generating meanings through sheer profusion.<sup>5</sup> But empty loci are many and multifarious in the visual culture of medieval Europe, and they invade its material universe persistently and exultantly. In particular, their patent indexing of the invisibility of God has piqued the interest of several scholars, some of whom, not surprisingly, singled out portable altars as potent sites of ontological

**Detail of the Genesis  
initial, from *Biblia Veteris  
Testamenti*, c. 1263 (plate 7).**

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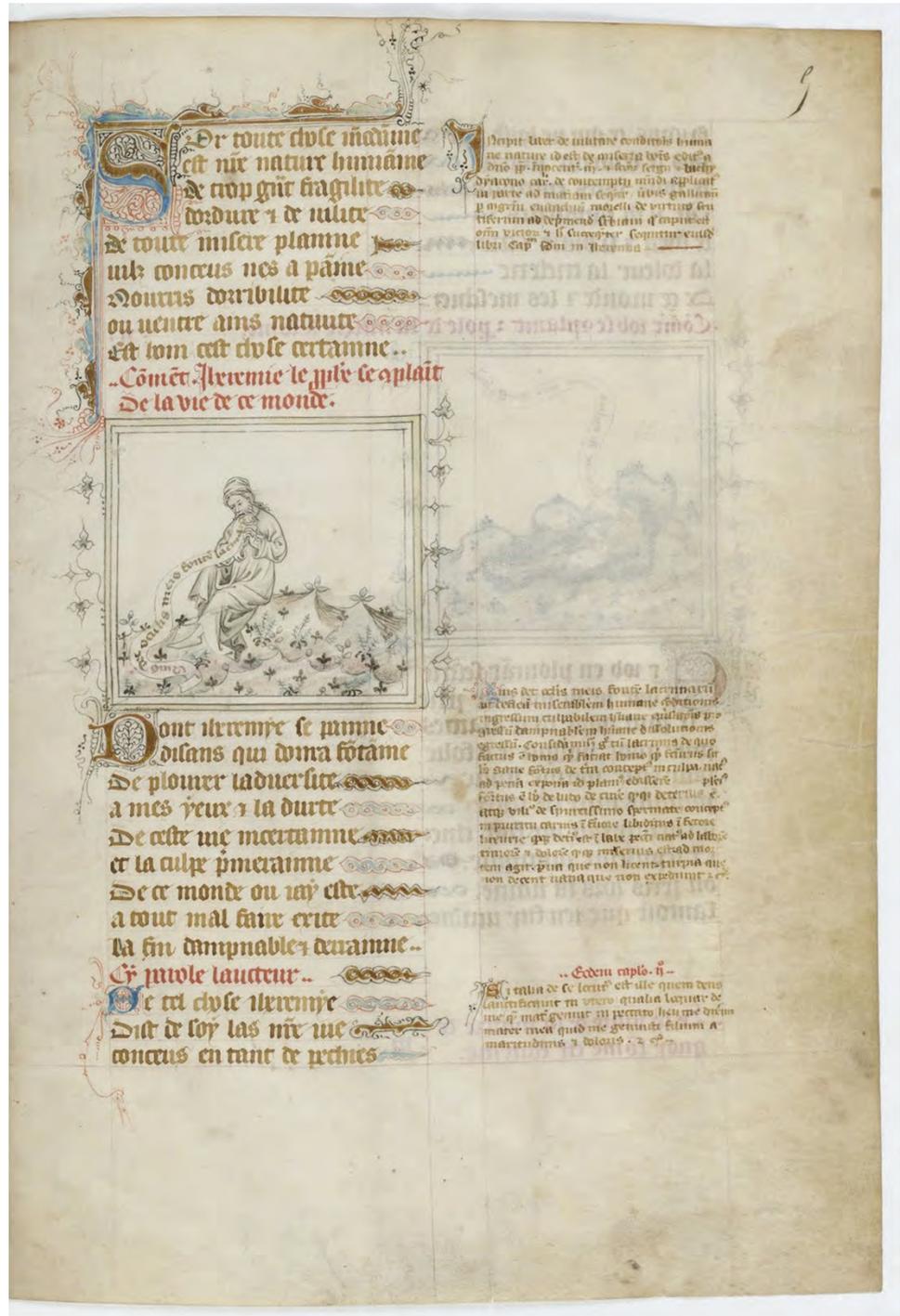
1 The portable altar of Sainte Foy, late eleventh century, reworked in the fourteenth century, Conques, France. Alabaster, gilded silver, gems, enamel, 28 × 20 cm. Conques: Abbey of Sainte Foy, Treasury. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



emptiness.<sup>6</sup> Their gleaming tops made of porphyry, serpentine, alabaster, and marble, often framed with intricate metalwork, lend themselves particularly well to the study of emptiness.

Of course, the alabaster surface of the Sainte Foy altar is not really empty. It is, instead, aniconic, with absence as its semiotic predicate. Its milky surface, which bridges and exceeds images of God as Christ and a paschal lamb, not only suggests the unrepresentable presence of the divine, but also provides space for another species of this presence, bread and wine. Its very material indexes Christ, 'the stone which the builders rejected [...] made the head of the corner' (Mark 12:1, cf. Matthew 21:42, Luke 20:17) Simultaneously, the empty stone alludes to the empty tomb, recalling Christ's absence in the sepulchre as a theological keystone of salvation. Its

nature as an enduring mineral, too, conveys what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has termed ‘a thickness of time’, which ‘triggers the vertigo of inhuman scale’ and puts our anthropocentric scopic regimes to shame.<sup>7</sup> But the materiality of the alabaster itself is also significant: when initially quarried, it is malleable and supple – and, like the more rarefied ivory, it warms to the touch.<sup>8</sup> The veining in the stone enlivens it, suggesting arterial flow pulsing beneath pale flesh. But the streaks also suggest erasure, an image wiped off: the replacement of God’s corporeal body, no longer visible, by mere trace.



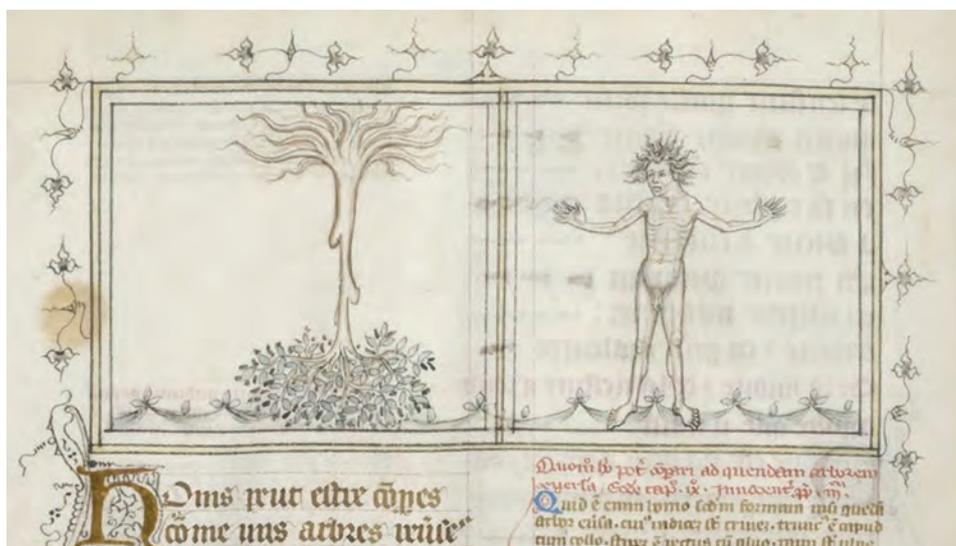
2 Jeremiah, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/ Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 5r). Photo: BnF.

Indeed, because all emptiness bears traces – visual, cognitive, material – it often functions as a footprint of its makers and beholders, of their viewing practices, of their sensorium. Such traces constitute the subject of this article, which seeks to explore empty images, images that treat absence as a generative presence. My concern here is parchment, which – unlike the stone of portable altars – does not only index a body but is also made from a body, a generative object *par excellence*. Any blank space on parchment is implicated in the substance of the exposed, rubbed, or cut skin: an implication that has far-reaching consequences for the construction of emptiness. Parchment, as the bodily substance, spans a broad semiotic spectrum, from the late medieval elision of Christ’s skin and parchment, especially favoured in Middle English literature, to Peter Comestor’s comparison between *libri pergamenum* and the devotee’s heart; to the baseness of the matter – ‘a stack of dead animal parts produced from and at the expense of animals’, to quote Bruce Holsinger.<sup>9</sup> As a body, it awaits inscription, physical or cognitive, in image or word.

I take, as a point of departure, the fourteenth-century manuscript of Eustache Deschamps’s *Le double lay de la fragilité humaine* (1383).<sup>10</sup> The book is a royal commission, a translation and poetic adaptation of Lotario dei Segni’s masterwork *De miseria conditionis*

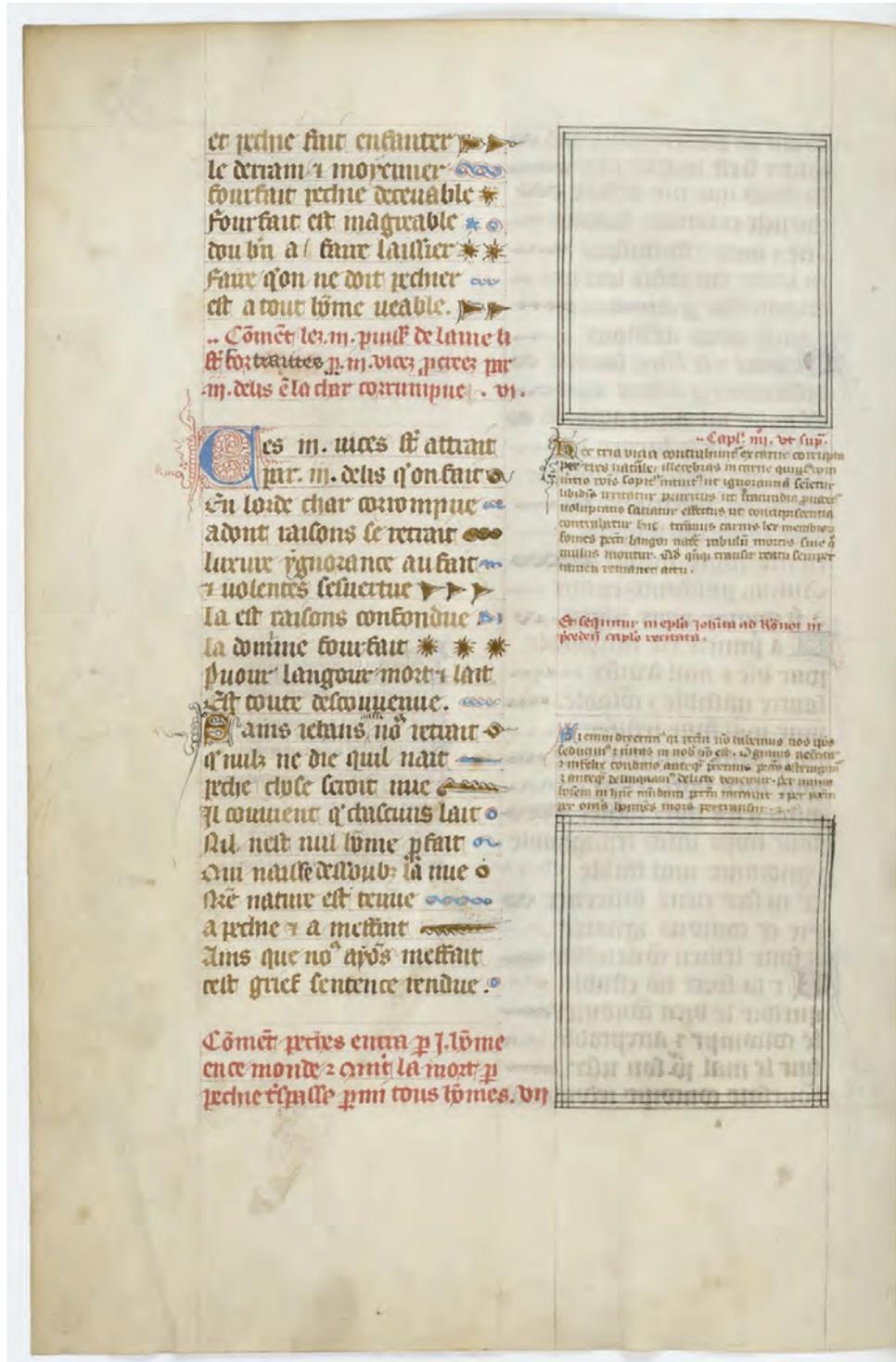


3 Sorrows of birth, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/ Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 8v). Photo: BnF.



4 A man and a tree, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/ Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 9v). Photo: BnF.

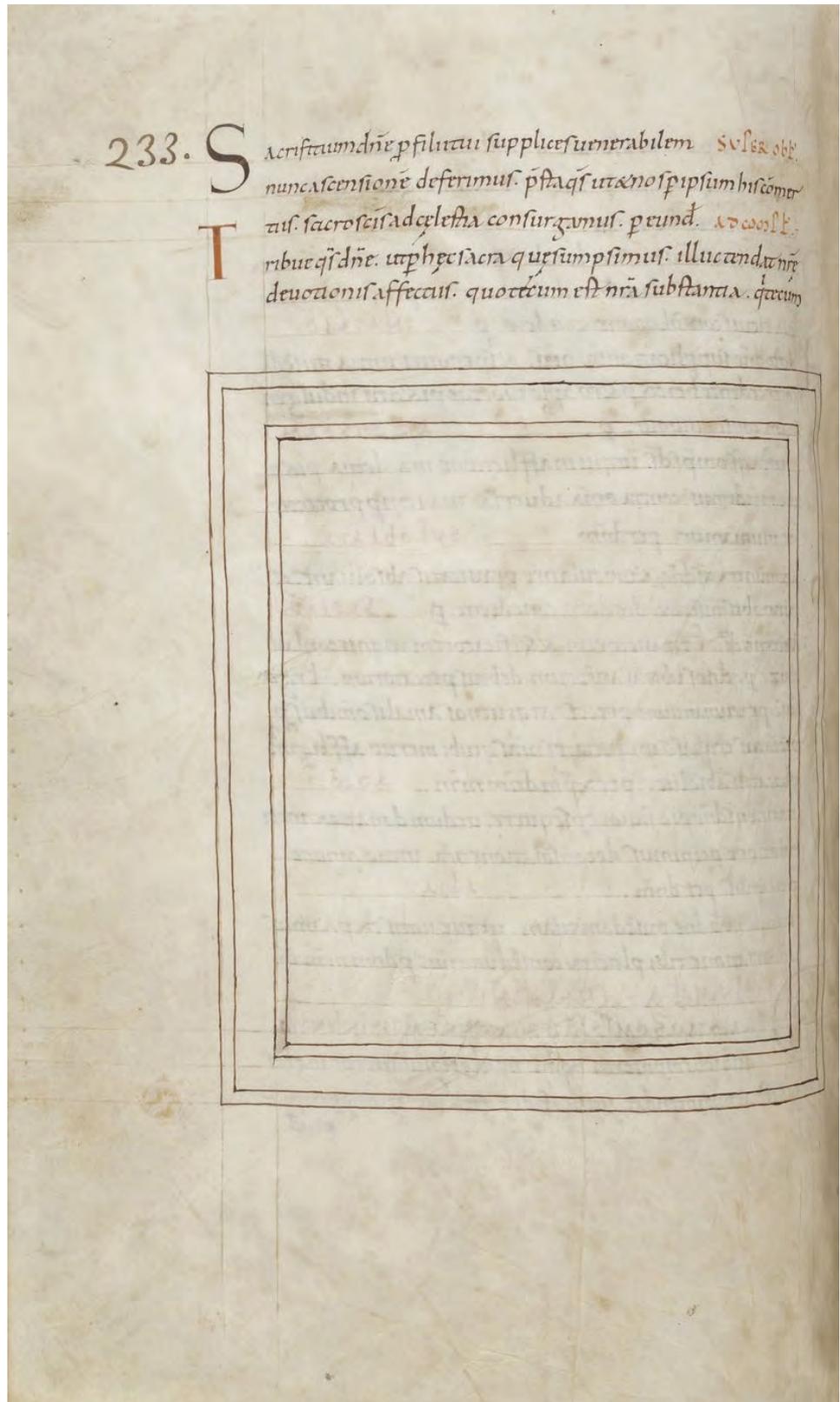
5 The unrepresentable, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine/Lotario dei Segni, De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 x 18.5 cm. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 7v). Photo: BnF.



humane.<sup>11</sup> Written in the late twelfth century by the future Pope Innocent III, this contemptus mundi tract unfavourably compared human to vegetal nature, contrasting, for example, 'flowers, foliage, and fruit' produced by trees with 'nits and lice and worms' produced by human beings.<sup>12</sup> In commenting on Job's words 'I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me', the none-too-cheerful text underscores the multitude of depravities inherent in humanity: 'Not in one such sin, not in one such transgression, but in many sins and in many transgressions: in

6 Ascension, from the Sacramentary of Hugues II (the Nevers Pontifical), 1013–66, Nevers, France. Parchment, 33.5 × 22.7 cm. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. lat. 17333, fol. 233v). Photo: BnF.

7 Creation ex nihilo, the Genesis initial, from Biblia Veteris Testamenti, c. 1263, Kaisheim(?), Germany. Parchment, 42.5 × 31 cm. Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München (Ms. Clm. 28169, fol. 5r). Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.

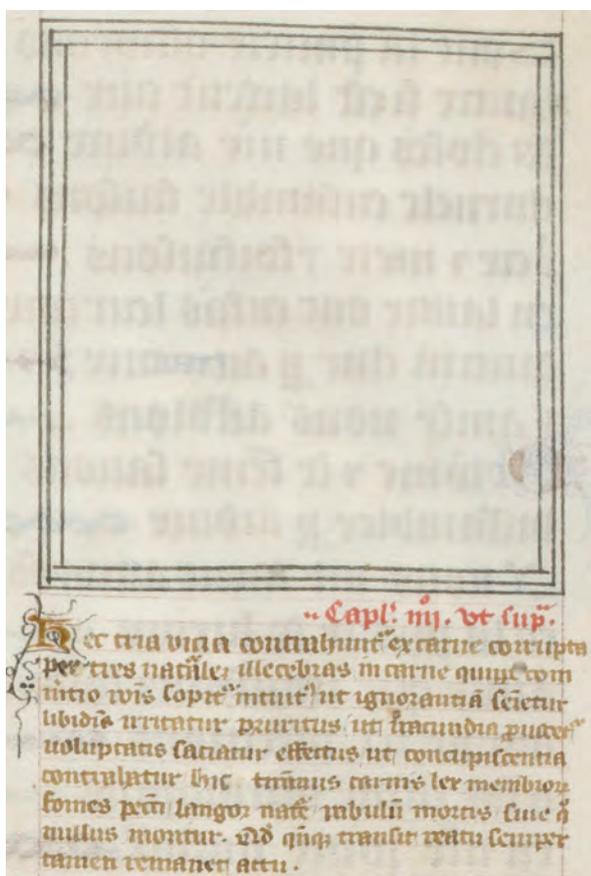


[woman's] own transgressions and sins, in the transgressions and sins of others.<sup>13</sup> Deschamps, a great moralizer in his own right, translated the treatise into vernacular, here accompanied by the original Latin text, had it illustrated, and presented it to the young Charles VI.



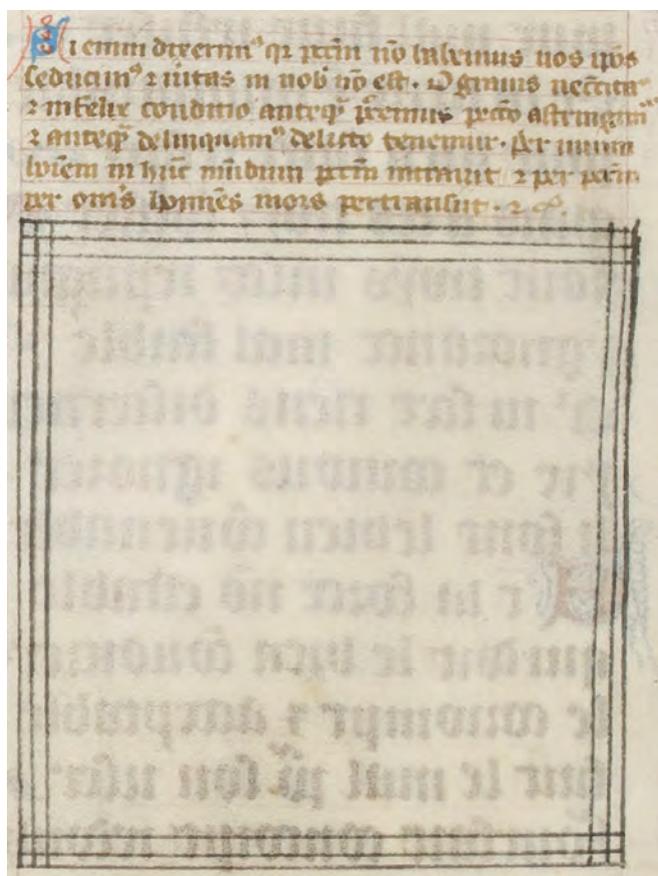
In attributing the manuscript's drawings to the Parisian illuminator Pierre Remiet, Michael Camille drew attention to the illustrator's affinity for leaving entire swathes of parchment blank.<sup>14</sup> Of the twenty-four folios, only twenty carry verses. Folio 4v shows the presentation: the kneeling poet proffers the young king and his two bodyguards a hefty volume – hefty certainly than the little booklet wherein the miniature is found. Two-thirds of the page are left blank, a portent of what is to come. Indeed, because of the manuscript's layout – each folio is divided in half vertically, with the rather tiny Latin text on the right side and Deschamps's verses and many images inscribed on the left – the right side of most pages is haunted by absences, by parchment left bare. The eye is taunted by these gaps, which are underscored by the assiduously completed line fillers that streamline the text. Blankness similarly troubles the copious miniatures themselves. The first image shows Jeremiah in a half-empty landscape (plate 2); a human birth takes place in a desolate void, unalleviated by the trees that provide some backdrop for the nearby birth of a colt (plate 3); a comparison between a man and an upside-down tree is placed in a vast nothingness (plate 4). Not incidentally, Camille pointed out this artist's mastery of 'half-empty horror', although he, too, found surprising the pair of carefully outlined but unpopulated frames on folio 7v, barren even of the exquisite if spare vine scrolls that grow out of other drawings (plate 5).

Such framed emptiness has a considerable history in medieval art, although, as in the case of the Sainte Foy altar, it tends to appear in liturgical contexts. For example, the framed square in the eleventh-century Sacramentary of Hugues II (plate 6) introduces the section on Christ's Ascension: the only one of its kind in the book, it seems to affirm the final withdrawal of Christ's body from view, the ultimate loss of God's material visibility.<sup>15</sup> The 'disappearing Christ' of other eleventh-century codices, characterized by partial visibility – upper half obscured by clouds, legs or feet still on the terrestrial plain – has vanished completely, with only the materiality of the empty parchment space indexing corporeal loss as much as it does spiritual gain.<sup>16</sup> Positioned in the middle of the manuscript – in the middle of a section, in fact – preceded and followed by other frames that do contain images, this square is no less a figuration than others: not a sloppy lacuna, not an unfinished representation, but a palpable, intellectually fertile absence. So is



8 The unrepresentable I, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine/Lotario dei Segni, De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 7v). Photo: BnF.

9 The unrepresentable II, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine/Lotario dei Segni, De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 7v). Photo: BnF.



the remarkable ‘I’ initial that opens the book of Genesis in the thirteenth-century Kaisheim Bible (plate 7).<sup>17</sup> Flanked by other medallions that teem with images, placed directly below the Creator, himself painted against the rich gold background, the non-image refuses even the veneer of gold, which would risk reflecting the viewers’ faces as they peer in. The emptiness, compromised only by the ruled lines on the other side of the folio, is absorbent and generative: it is the place where and from which anything can happen: it waits for God’s act of creation *ex nihilo*. Because of the ruling, the words seen through, and the adjacent text inscribed on the equally naked parchment, the emptiness seems to await the inscription of the very *Verbum* that was at the beginning and that was God – the Genesis, in other words, in John’s retelling.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the fleshliness of the parchment points to that other act of creation, of the Word made flesh (John 1:14), its emptiness anticipatory of the acceptance of the Word. On the other hand, the blank space indexes a dual possibility of creation, disputed so hotly by theologians: creation out of nothing and the generation and shaping of creation out of pre-existent matter.<sup>19</sup> Either possibility admits the concept of an incipient idea, about to be made, formed and shaped: it is the space of the imaginary and the imaginative, the power of which held a central place in later medieval ontological debates.

This is precisely the space delineated in Deschamps’s book, which, however, eschews the essentially uncomplicated theological discourse that informs non-images of Creation (the incipient appearance of earth from the void) and Ascension (the ultimate disappearance of Christ from view), explicated by the very text they accompany. No such explication is furnished either by the verses of *Le double lay* or by Innocent’s original text. In fact, although they have been linked to the beginning of

Deschamps's fifth chapter on the tainted 'double conception' of humanity in seed and in nature, the framed spaces are positioned to refer to the Latin original more so than to its poetic paraphrase, which moreover appears in the sixth chapter of the poem. The first square (plate 8) is immediately followed by Innocent's discussion on the three vices that corrupt the soul:

Hec tria vicia contrahuntur ex carne corrupta per tres naturales illecebras. In carnali quippe commercio rationis sopitur intuitus, ut ignorantia seminetur, libidinis irritatur pruritus, ut iracundia provocetur; voluptatis satiatur affectus, ut concupiscentia contrahatur. Hic tyrannus carnis, lex membrorum, fomes peccati, langor nature, pabulum mortis, sine quo nullus moritur; quod quandoque transit reatu, semper tamen remanet actu.

These three vices are contracted from the corrupt flesh through three fleshly enticements. For in fleshly intercourse the clarity of reason is lulled to sleep, so that ignorance is begotten; the heat of desire is stimulated so that anger is propagated; the desire for pleasure is satiated, so that lust is produced. This is the tyrant of the flesh, the law of the bodily members, the kindling wood of sin, the weakness of nature, the nourishment of death, without which no one is born, without which no one dies; but if at any time it passes away in terms of culpability, it still remains in terms of potentiality.<sup>20</sup>

The second empty space (plate 9) hangs below Innocent's comment on humanity's predestination to sin and die:

'Si enim dixerimus, quia peccatum non habemus, nos ipsos seducimus et veritas in nobis non est.' O gravis neccessitas et infelix conditio: antequam peccemus, peccato astringimur, et antequam delinquamus, delicto tenemur. 'Per unum hominem in hunc mundum peccatum intravit, et per peccatum in omnes homines mors pertransiit.'<sup>21</sup>

'For if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' O grievous necessity and unhappy condition: before we sin, we are bound by sin; and before we transgress, we are held fast by transgression. 'By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death passed upon all men.'

The excerpts are from the third chapter of the first part of *De miseria* that discusses the 'duplex concepcio' of humanity and specifically juxtaposes the three vices to the 'three natural forces: the rational to distinguish between good and evil, the irascible to reject evil, the appetitive to desire good'.<sup>22</sup> The vices corrupt these virtuous forces: ignorance squashes rationality; anger destroys the ability to reject evil and instead makes one reject the good; and lust converts the appetitive power so that it desires to sin. Deschamps's verses, no less morbid than the musings of Pope Innocent, run all the way down the left side of the page and provide another side of the textual frame for the empty squares. The page first carries the conclusion of the previous chapter: 'Et pechié fait enfanter / Le derrain, et moyenner / Forfait, pechié decepvable. / Forfait est inagreable, / Doit bien a faire laissier; / Faire qu'on ne doit, pechier / Est a tout homme veable' [and sin

makes born this last (Lust), and by the mediation of transgression, deceitful sin. Transgression is objectionable, it is well to avoid it; to do what one ought not, to sin, is to each person forbidden].<sup>23</sup> Chapter six proper, which rephrases Innocent's text, follows:

Ces trois vices sont attrait / Par trois delis que on fait / En l'orde char  
 corrumpe: / Adonc raisons se retrait, / Luxure, Ignorance au fait / Et  
 Voluntez s'esvertue; / La est raisons confundue, / La domine forfeit / Puour,  
 languor, mort, et lait / Et toute desconvenue. / Saint Jehans aussi nous  
 retrait / Que nulz ne die qu'il n'ait / Pechié: chose seroit nue. / Il convient  
 que chascuns l'ait / N'il n'est nul home parfait / Qui naisse dessoubz la  
 nue; / Nostre nature est tenue / A pechié et a meffait / Ains que nous ayons  
 meffait: / C'est grief sentence rendue.

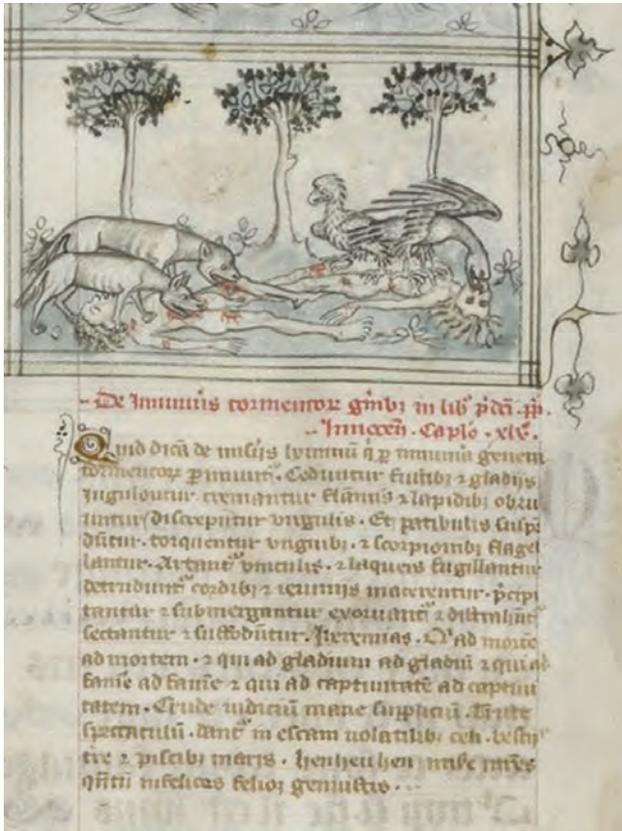
These three vices are attracted by three pleasures that one accomplishes by way of the dirty corrupt flesh. Just as the reason withdraws, Lust, Ignorance and Desire strive; There reason is confounded, There transgression dominates: Fear, sloth, death and ugliness and all wrongdoing. St John also tells us that no person dies without sinning: this would have been unheard of. It is necessary that each one sins, nor is there any perfect man who might be born beneath the heavens; our nature is obligated to sin and wrong-doing even before we have done so: Ours is a doleful fate.<sup>24</sup>

The page then ends with a rubric for the following chapter: 'Comment pechié entra par un home en ce monde et comment la mort par pechié trespassa parmy touz homes' [How sin entered by a man in this world and how death spread by sin to all people]. Although it belongs to Deschamps's discourse on the Original Sin, the text of which continues on the following page accompanied by an image one would expect – the Fall with Adam and Eve, and a corpse stretched below the Tree of Knowledge – the rubric squarely abuts the lowest empty frame on folio 7v.

Together, the texts work in concert to indicate the kind of discourse that is both unrepresentable and open to fertile imagining: the intertwinement of death and desire, inherent in human nature from the start, the unquenchable

**10 Impaled bodies, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/ Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 13r). Photo: BnF.**





**II Beasts devour the dead, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humane conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 13v). Photo: BnF.**

(see plate 3); there, soldiers impale each other's bodies, producing such large oval holes that one can almost hear a pop as the flesh is pierced and oozes blood (plate 10). Here, dogs voraciously and sloppily devour the dead (plate 11); there, two men busy themselves blowing their noses on the ground, while shaking out lice and maggots (plate 12). Beset by snakes, frogs, and worms, a corpse is stretched out in the sepulchre, its gaping eye sockets fitting companions to the blackness of the grave (plate 13). And yet, unlike the two framed voids, these images describe the readily imaginable. The dogs who feast on human corpses amid other acts of violence refer to 'the miserable people who are destroyed by countless kinds of torments ... torn to pieces with claws ... given as food to the birds of the sky, the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea'. The French verse is somewhat tamer; in place of the visceral 'discerpuntur unguibus' and 'dantur in escam bestiis terre', Deschamps proposes a more poetic 'aux bestes et oyseauls promis'.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the miniature responds directly to the images evoked by Innocent and Deschamps both: animals bite into corpses, birds peck out their eyes and tongues. Similarly, the drawing that contrasts two foul humans with two fruit-bearing trees stands above the emphatically graphic text that compares noble plants that 'produce flowers, foliage, and fruit' with unworthy humans who produce 'nits and lice and worms [...] spittle, urine and excrement [...] [and] stench'.<sup>26</sup> In turn, a corpse stretches above Deschamps's verse that describes a dead body beset by worms, the verse echoed by Innocent's exhortations themselves peppered by quotations from Isaiah and Job: 'But when man shall die, he shall inherit beasts, serpents, and worms' ['Cum autem morietur homo, hereditabit bestias, serpentes, et vermes'].<sup>27</sup> In other words, the images establish conversations with particularly descriptive passages, always raw and often familiar in their rhetoric. They do so by adhering to the letter of the text, visualizing directly that which is being recounted.

yearning of two corrupted bodies devoid of reason, directed toward evil and toward death. The rhythmic repetition of the French 'pechié' and the recurrence of Latin 'peccati / peccatum / peccemus / peccato' point to what is not, and cannot be, represented in the empty squares: the concept of corrupting lust and its mortal consequences. Camille suggests that emptiness signals discomfort: a direct depiction of such things may have been deemed inappropriate material to illustrate for the youth who was the intended recipient of the manuscript. Perhaps – but other images in this little book, explicit and frequently repugnant, belie any conceivable notion of propriety. Surely 'the kindling wood of sin' would be no more upsetting or unsuitable for the young king than those grisly drawings that did find their way into this manuscript to visualize some equally distressing themes.

Such images, which could easily compete with both the Latin and the French texts in their raw, visceral quality, unabashedly illuminate the foulness of human nature, from birth to death. Here, a seemingly dead woman has just given birth to a writhing infant, his umbilicus cut, his limbs flailing



12 Foulness of humanity and nobility of trees, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine*/ Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 9r). Photo: BnF.

But how to give visible form to a text that, instead of literal stench, evokes the stench of lust? Certainly, ‘fleshly intercourse’ is easy enough to picture, and it has been pictured in innumerable contemporary manuscripts – most commonly in the many versions of the *Roman de la Rose* – sometimes combined with the ‘propagation of anger’ (for example, plate 14).<sup>28</sup> But that would reduce the moral lesson to its particulars, at the cost of neglecting and negating the true thrust of Innocent’s contemplation: that lust, which is the ‘nourishment of death’, is inherent in humanity as an inescapable and, at best, latent power. The empty space, conversely, offers an apophatic way to figure sin, by allowing the beholder to see what it is not: not one particular transgression, not one particular instance of intercourse, not one particular inch of exposed flesh. Blankness, moreover, emphasizes parchment as a symbolic surface: it is bare skin, raw body – a gesture, perhaps, to the lusting flesh condemned by Deschamps and Innocent both. The exposed parchment stands in for exposed body, ready to be inscribed; as Camille has pointed out, ‘the traditional association between the act of copulating and the act of writing [...] was taught to every schoolboy in his first Latin lessons about conjugations and the gender of nouns.’<sup>29</sup> Blank vellum is the elision of colour and matter: it can represent skin and it is skin. Just as the female flesh was imprinted and implanted with the seed during coitus, so was the matter – *materia*, *mater* – of the page imprinted and marked with a pen or a brush. Both the page and the

female body were the tablets of Nature ripe for insemination and the generation: of a child, of a text, of an image.<sup>30</sup> In Deschamps’s little book, the empty frames of matter lie bare before the gaze of the beholders, ready to be impregnated with the images produced by their *phantasia*.<sup>31</sup> The reflexivity of parchment as both a meta-sign and the very stuff of the body emphasizes Innocent’s contention that ‘before we sin, we are bound by sin’ and that transgression is always present in human nature, if only ‘in terms of potentiality’. Still pure, the blank space within the squares is nonetheless inherently corruptible – by pen, by sin, by the imagination – with the possibility of visual corruption, at least, already signalled by the text inscribed on the reverse of the page and faintly visible in the frame.

The framed emptiness here does double duty. On the one hand, it points to the impossibility of visualizing the subject – the never-to-be-extinguished potential to lust – signalling the utter horror of the ‘unhappy condition’ to be bound by sin and transgression. How better to figure the unrepresentable than with an empty space, both circumscribed and yet bursting out of its thin twin frame? On the other hand, nothing excites one’s imagination more than the lack of representation: the empty squares call attention to themselves much more than the rest of the drawings that abound in this manuscript. They might be prudishly blank but they are also cognitively fertile, purposely failing in figuration yet ripe with imaginative potential. When framed as if to contain or delimit something, empty spaces suggest

presence, and the absence of the expected image within signals its importance.<sup>32</sup> In a sense, a defined vacant space suggests an object that cannot or should not be thought about and therefore insists that we think about it.<sup>33</sup> In this way, frames around emptiness act as cognitive frames, predicated on the beholder's cultural expectations: here, that the viewer recognize absence as an absence and not merely as an accidental lacuna. Bracketed by Innocent's and Deschamps's vivid texts, framed by a multitude of equally vivid images, empty squares in the *Le double lay* function, I suggest, as prompts to imagine, to fashion the vileness of human nature in one's own mind's eye, and to conceptualize the squares as the deliberate, fertile realm of imagination – *phantasia* – which was both a philosophical and physiological concern for later medieval thinkers.

**13 Corpse beset by vermin, from Eustache Deschamps, *Le Double lay de fragilité humaine/Lotario dei Segni, De miseria humanae conditionis*, 1383, Paris, France. Parchment, 27 × 18.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 20029, fol. 15r). Photo: BnF.**



Medieval concepts of imagination rested on the perceived capacity of memory to create things heretofore unseen and unknown in an act of generative heuristics. In great part, they were based on Avicenna's work and on the Aristotelian concept of *phantasia*, filtered through and reformulated in Albertus Magnus's commentaries. Although, like memory, imagination is rooted in perception, it also employs the power of reasoning, a process that is as intellectual as it is corporeal. Vision was perceived to have an inscriptive power: sensible species of all things visible were believed to combine into a single image and to impress themselves first on

the eye, then on the brain, and thereby infuse one's memory or soul.<sup>34</sup> The sense of sight trumped the other senses: St Augustine thought it to be the 'more noble' of the five; and Isidore of Seville found it to be more 'vivid' (*vivacior*), 'more important and faster, and endowed with greater liveliness', because 'it is closer to the brain, from which everything emanates'.<sup>35</sup> Visual impressions were, in turn, moderated by two apprehensive faculties, which Albertus, in *On the Soul* and *On Apprehension*, defined (and distinguished) as *phantasia* and *imaginatio*.<sup>36</sup> *Imaginatio* was clearly seen as a subordinate power: together with another faculty, *sensus communis*, it served as a preserve of all things seen, perceived in an unmediated sensory fashion. Late medieval brain diagrams regularly linked *imaginatio* and *sensus communis* directly to the eyes.<sup>37</sup> Both were grounded in vision and corporeal perception, located in the anterior part of the brain and acting as receptacles and filters for the entering species. What *sensus communis* received, *imaginatio* shaped and made coherent. In his take on the subject, Roger Bacon defined *imaginatio* as a faculty that, 'owing to its tempered moistness and dryness [...] is the coffer and repository of the common sense'.<sup>38</sup> Bacon invoked Aristotle and Alhazen, but was, as many others, including Albertus, Dominicus Gundissalinus and Petrus Hispanus, mostly indebted to Avicenna. Imagination was thus an instrument that helped human beings discern truth, and its power lay in retaining things seen rather than the invention of new

ones – it was, for instance, harnessed, as Michelle Karnes has demonstrated, in the late medieval meditations on the life of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Brain diagrams further suggested that the information received by *sensus communis* and *imaginatio* was subsequently judged by the faculty of *estimativa* and relayed to *cogitativa vel formalis*, responsible for what we would call imagination, fantasy: and what Bacon termed *cogitatio* and Albertus defined as *phantasia*. *Cogitatio*, writes Bacon, ‘is the mistress of sensitive faculties [...] Man by means of this faculty sees wonderful things in dreams [...] [f]or the species that are in the imagination multiply themselves into the cogitative faculty [which] uses all the other faculties as its instruments.’<sup>40</sup> *Phantasia* or *cogitatio*, then, was accorded a vastly more important place in this physiological schema. It was a faculty of intellect, whose function was to rearrange sensory input, which would be stored, with other types of information, in the final compartment of *vis memorativa*. Although regulated by the rational soul, *phantasia* was a power as refined as it was dangerous because it could slip the constraints of the soul’s control, in illness or in sleep. As the twelfth-century *Canon Episcopi* concedes, while condemning demonic illusions, ‘Who is there that is not led out of himself in dreams and nocturnal visions and sees much when sleeping which he had never seen waking?’<sup>41</sup> If the frontal ventricle dealt with ‘sensible species’, the middle one was the locus of ‘intelligible species’: it allowed to draw from the image store to visualize something not previously seen – or, indeed, something that cannot exist.<sup>42</sup> The cogitative faculty was therefore the place of conjuring that did not have to correlate to any discernible truth. To quote Simon Kemp and Garth Fletcher, *phantasia* was the faculty that ‘enabled the putting together of images to make new forms’.<sup>43</sup> Therein lies the power of invention.

Imagination as invention, with its heuristic potential to recall and reshape the store of images received by the front ventricle of the brain, is precisely the source tapped by the viewers of empty spaces. It is activated in the absence of visible models, and subsequently

relays the conjured images into storage, to be kept there and remembered alongside real objects. Ostensibly, one draws on this faculty when exercising one’s ability to recollect, and its mechanics can be best seen, perhaps, in treatises on trained memory, which encourage their readers to remember things and concepts by inventing their own visual schemas related to those things and concepts. The process, outlined in works like the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and popularized in the later Middle Ages by scholars from Thomas Aquinas to Thomas Bradwardine, suggests the setting up of empty *loci* – spaces – and subsequently populating them with systematically arranged *imagines agentes* that would facilitate recall.<sup>44</sup> Art historians who seek to analyse medieval imagery in terms of its mnemotechnic potential often focus on the quality of *imagines agentes*, and especially on their unusual, active, and arresting nature.<sup>45</sup> But the characteristics of the *loci* are equally important: spare and discreet, ‘neither too bright nor too dim’, preferably located ‘in a deserted region’ (3.17.31), they can change form at the whim of the one who imagines them. *Ad Herennium* suggests that these places have architectural features, but medieval writers put particular stress on their empty nature: Bradwardine, for

**14 Passion and anger: Vulcan finds his wife, Venus, in bed with Mars, from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Roman de la Rose*, fourteenth century, Paris (?), France. Parchment, 20.5 × 14 cm (entire folio). London: British Library (Ms. Egerton 881, fol. 141v). Photo: British Library.**



15 Biblical cycle: the anointing of Saul; David playing the harp before Saul; David and Goliath; and the anointing of David, from James le Palmer, *Omne Bonum*, c. 1360–75, London(?), England. Parchment, 45.5 × 31 cm. London: British Library (Ms. Royal 6 E VI, fol. 5v). Photo: British Library.



instance, in *De Memoria Artificiali*, writes that ‘the detail of [the] background [...] should be none, but it should be an empty void’.<sup>46</sup> In this void, he instructs, one inserts the striking images, preferably ‘the most beautiful or ugly, joyous or sad [...] of great dignity or vileness’, or, as an anonymous fifteenth-century author suggests, ‘unusual or appalling’.<sup>47</sup>

16 Biblical cycle: the Pentecost; and the Second Coming, from James le Palmer, *Omne Bonum*, c. 1360–75, London(?), England. Parchment, 45.5 × 31 cm. London: British Library (ms. Royal 6 E VI, fol. 14r). Photo: British Library.



These kinds of loci, not yet inhabited but gravid with imaginative potential, await the reader-viewer at the end of the prefatory biblical cycle in the fourteenth-century encyclopaedia *Omne Bonum*.<sup>48</sup> Each folio features four neat rectangles, read vertically, as if columns of text: first the column on the left, then the column on the right (*plate 15*). The drawings themselves are unusually spare and markedly different from other miniatures in the book, even those executed by the same artist: Lucy Freeman Sandler has noted the peculiar quality of elongated figures that vainly try to fill the stark rectangular spaces.

The narratives progress apace as God creates the earth and heavens, as humanity falls, as Christ is born and crucified and ascends to heaven. On folio 14r, however, only two rectangles, on the left side of the folio, are filled: the one on top figures the Pentecost; the one below, Christ's Second Coming and the Resurrection of the Dead (plate 16). The two frames on the right remain empty, as do the four rectangles on the verso of the folio. Those, in turn, are followed by four additional pages that separate the biblical cycle from the three devotional images that preface the encyclopaedia proper; two of these folios are similarly ruled for miniatures, but their framed loci are left unpopulated.<sup>49</sup>

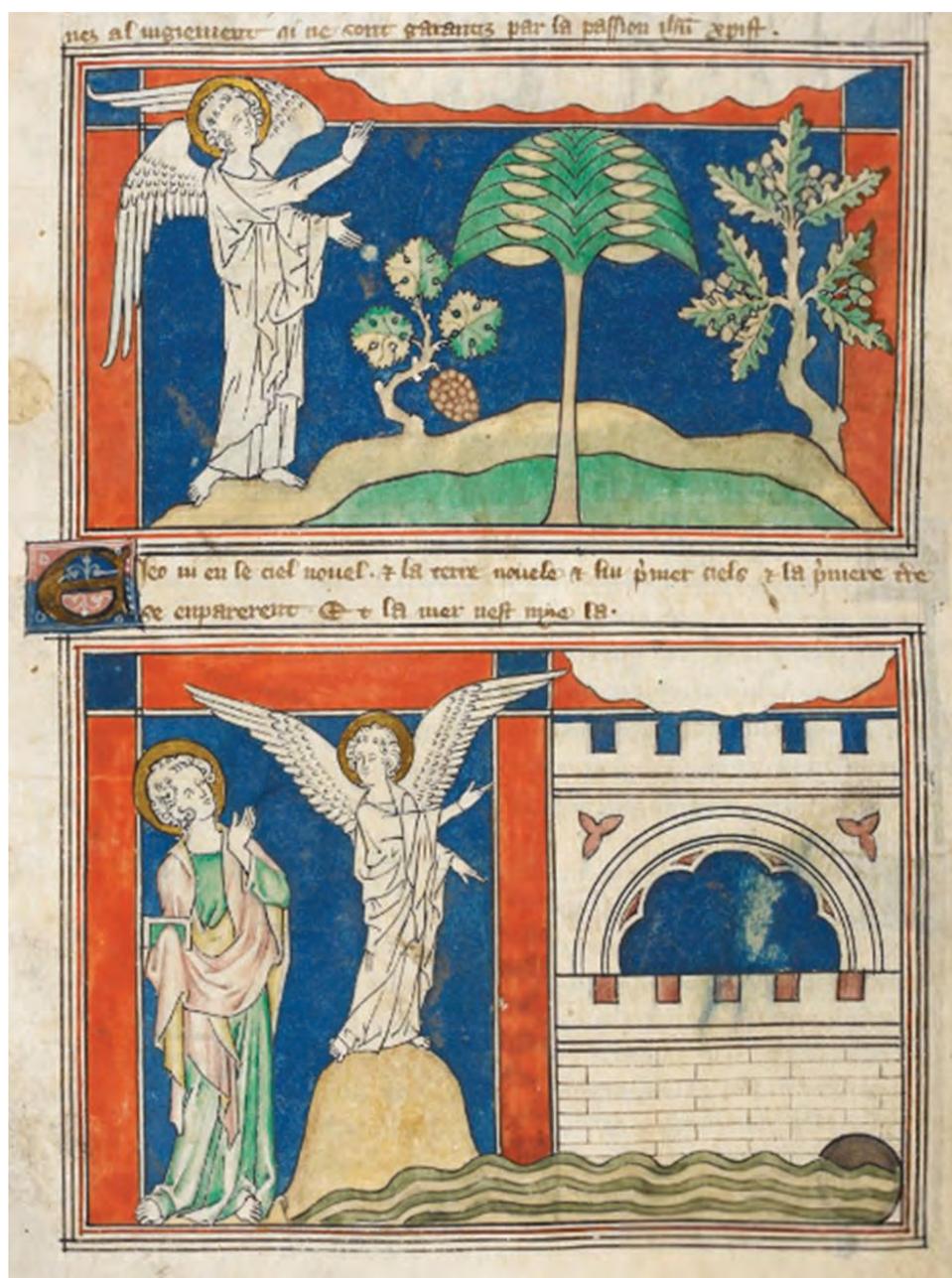
Certainly, from the point of view of intention, the blank rectangles in the *Omne Bonum* are qualitatively different from the framed squares in the *Le double lay*: the latter were left empty deliberately, while the former may have well resulted from the incompatibility of the initial ruling with the final iconographic programme.<sup>50</sup> From the point of view of reception, however, this difference is incidental: in both manuscripts these visual lacunae are not so much reductive as productive in terms of fourteenth-century practices of viewing that demand to have empty spaces inhabited by appropriate *imagines*. The models for such imaginary creations would have been still more numerous for the *Omne Bonum* sequence than they would have been for Deschamps's text: the post-Judgment bliss and horrors of the afterlife (the saved ascending to heaven, the damned suffering in hell) were solicitously detailed for the viewer in countless tympana, murals, and manuscripts. The most striking detail is often found in illuminated Apocalypses: for instance, in the East Anglian Queen Mary Apocalypse beholders are treated not only to the ascent of virtuous souls and the agony of the impious, but also to the visions of the new earth and the new sea (plate 17 and plate 18).<sup>51</sup> But this, the logical continuation of the biblical cycle, remains blank in the *Omne Bonum*, and so the framed emptiness – perhaps a happy accident of imperfect design – functions as a visual pause that both marks the end of time and sets out a schema for the activation of the beholder's *phantasia*. Here, the empty loci



17 God with the saved and impious souls, from the 'Queen Mary Apocalypse', with the prologue of Gilbert de la Porrée translated into French, first quarter of the fourteenth century, London or East Anglia, England. Parchment, 30.5 × 21 cm (entire folio). London: British Library (Ms. Royal 19 B XV, fol. 40r). Photo: British Library.

call on the viewer to envision that which comes after the end; to imagine that which is unrepresented; to recall that which has been seen elsewhere; and to populate the emptiness with this rescued set of *imagines agentes*.

Empty spaces thus stand on the brink: they are incipient, fertile. Their function in later medieval art as such liminal, inchoate *loci* that presume a performative response is especially obvious in the use of empty speech scrolls.<sup>52</sup> These banderoles visualized oral discourse, their directional unfurling a mimetic take on the linear unfolding of the spoken word. At times, however, speech scrolls remained empty – not out of neglect or because the artist was content to use the scroll as a generic sign for oral communication, but to indicate temporary silence and emergent speech. When Zechariah, the high priest struck dumb upon doubting the news of his impending fatherhood, is shown clutching a blank banderole, the emptiness where his words should be calls urgently to be filled – and



18 Visions of the New Earth and the New Sea, from the 'Queen Mary Apocalypse', with the prologue of Gilbert de la Porrée translated into French, first quarter of the fourteenth century, London or East Anglia, England. Parchment, 30.5 × 21 cm. London: British Library (Ms. Royal 19 B XV, fol. 40v). Photo: British Library.

19 Ecclesia and Synagoga; the muteness and misunderstanding of Zechariah, from Guillaume Durand, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, trans. Jean Golein, 1380–90, Paris, France. Parchment, 41.5 × 31.5 cm (entire folio). Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France (Ms. fr. 176, fol. 1r). Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



suggests that it will be as Zechariah regains his ability to speak eight days after his son, the future St John the Baptist, is born, and he must choose his name. Such empty scrolls appear in a prologue to Jean Golein's translation of William Durand's *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, illuminated c. 1380–90, where an image of the Synagogue and the Church is contrasted with the angelic announcement to Zechariah (plate 19).<sup>53</sup> The juxtaposition of the two marks the Zechariah miniature as a clear typological image: Zechariah, who first rejects and then accepts and transmits the angel's message, is a transitional figure between the Old and the New Law. The miniature shows both the angel and the priest with empty scrolls – the only place in the manuscript where such scrolls appear. Zechariah does not believe or understand the angel, whose blank banderole figures the priest's spiritual deafness, and he is subsequently unable to speak, his muteness signified by his own blank scroll. But both empty spaces are about to be filled: Zechariah will come to witness, comprehend and accept the divine prophecy, and he will announce the birth of his son and, essentially, the coming of Christ to his congregation.<sup>54</sup> In the roughly contemporary

20 The muteness of Zechariah, from Giovannino de' Grassi, Gian Galeazzo Visconti's Book of Hours, c. 1390–95, Milan. Parchment, 25 × 17.5 cm (entire folio). Florence: Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze (Ms. BR 397, fol. 146 v). Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.



Italian Book of Hours, illuminated by Giovannino de' Grassi for Giangaleazzo Visconti, the duke of Milan, this visual strategy is used once again; although Giovannino's use of speech scrolls in the Visconti Hours is sparing, he places an empty gleaming banderole in the right hand of his Zechariah (plate 20).<sup>55</sup> The priest's implied silence is spiritually propagative, because it marks the space of time that passes between the angel's words and his own, the space in which the divine message is generated and from where it emerges.<sup>56</sup>

The reader-viewer, of course, knew – at least in general terms – what Zechariah was about to say: empty scrolls as generative spaces were particularly productive because they sought to locate speech in the mind and on the lips of the beholder.

Similarly, the reader of the *Omne Bonum* recognized perfectly well that the Archangel Gabriel, leaning dangerously over the vase of lilies and clutching tightly a long, empty scroll, was about to say 'Ave gratia plena dominus tecum' (plate 21). His words-to-be



21 Biblical cycle: the Annunciation, from James le Palmer, *Omne Bonum*, c. 1360–75, London(?), England. Parchment, 45.5 × 31 cm (entire folio). London: British Library (ms. Royal 6 E VI, fol. 7v). Photo: British Library.

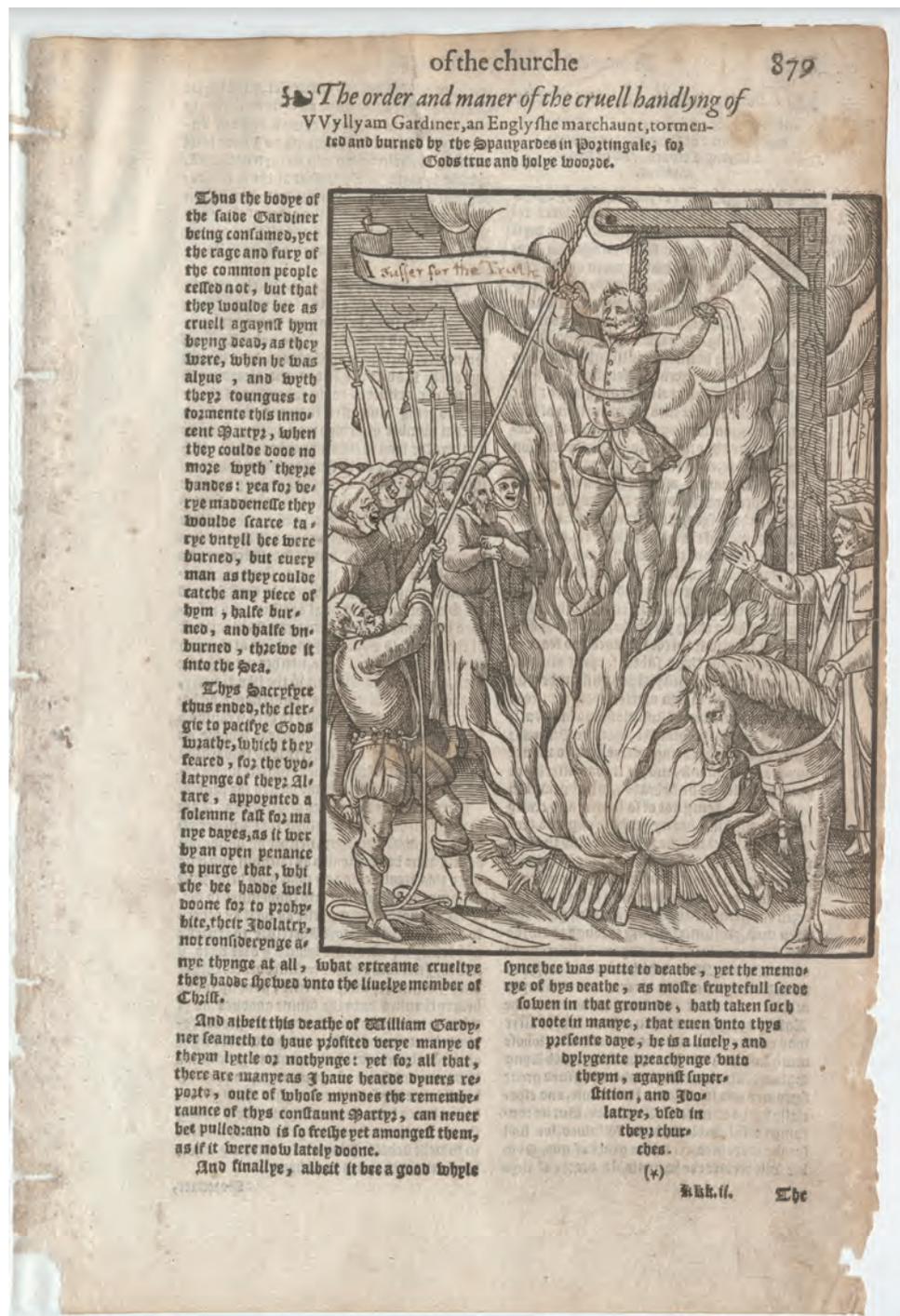
were associated with daily devotions and formed the basis for the greatly popular ‘Ave Maria’ prayer; in the fourteenth century, an indulgence was attached to the continual recitation of this prayer during the ringing of the evening bell. More often than not, similar banderoles were actually inscribed with the angelic salutation, as in the exquisite miniature from the *Cloisters Apocalypse* (plate 22), and Gabriel’s greeting was used by the pious as a devotional model – a guide to repeat the messenger’s address.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, emptiness triggers not imitation but recall, and the blankness of the speech scroll provides a particularly strong stimulus to fill in the still-missing, yet-unuttered words; as Emma Dillon suggests in discussing an empty banderole in the Annunciation scene of a French fourteenth-century *Book of Hours*, ‘the blank scroll may be understood [...] as an imperative: to supply the voice, to ventriloquize the scene’.<sup>58</sup> These words can be recalled and they can be re-imagined: not only are they open to the beholder’s own agency, but they also activate it. Emptiness in place of speech is generative because it is vulnerable to the production of meaning; and although the *Omne Bonum* miniature makes quite clear what was expected to be said, the materialization of the speech was predicated on the reader-viewer’s memory and imagination. This materialization was as inevitable as it was potentially unpredictable. A century later, empty scrolls – built on just such function of unpredictability – began to appear regularly in the medium of print. Their devotional and secular content not always as unequivocal as the Annunciation, the prints encouraged viewers to generate their own meaning for the images by writing their interpretation on the blank banderoles. So, for instance, the unlucky English merchant William Gardiner from *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* has a banderole attached to the stump of his right wrist, in a bid to activate the beholder’s imagination (plate 23). Gardiner, who is being lowered into flames by an executioner and whose hands have been cut off, speaks, but his words are meant to be imagined and performed by the readers-viewers, who did just that: in one book the empty space is inscribed with a handwritten emendation ‘Pitty, Pitty’, in another (shown here) with ‘I Suffer for the Truth’, and in yet another with ‘Lord rec[e]ave my sole’.<sup>59</sup>

Emptiness is thus both generative and catalytic, and its fluid, unfixed nature betrays its philosophical and physiological potential especially where images are concerned. Seeing was a means of knowing, and imagination, consequently, had an



**22 Annunciation, from *The Cloisters Apocalypse*, c. 1330, Normandy, France. Parchment, 30.8 × 23 cm (entire folio). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection (Ms. 1968, fol. 1). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.**

23 The execution of William Gardiner with inscription 'I suffer for the Truth', woodcut from John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments (Book of Martyrs)*, 1563. Columbus: Ohio State University (BR 1600. F6 1563, p. 879). Photo: Ohio State University.



epistemological function. And yet, devotional mnemonic exercises predicated on imagining suggest that while inner senses commonly process input from external senses – such as vision or olfaction – they are also activated when there is no external input. Because empty spaces offer no visually specific feedback, they escape rational control predicated on the ingress of sensible species; in other words, they allow the brain to function in waking reality as if in a dream, while exercising appropriate constraint. Emptiness sets in motion the key power of imagination: to make the absent present. It skips, as St Augustine has put it, ‘the eye of the body’ and goes straight to ‘the eye of the mind’, from physical to spiritual vision.<sup>60</sup> Just as human intellect at

24 Silence, from Beatus of Liébana, Commentary on the Apocalypse (The 'Silos Apocalypse'), 1091–1109, Silos, Spain. Parchment, 38 × 24 cm (entire folio). London: British Library (Ms. Add. 11695, fol. 125v). Photo: British Library.



birth is a *tabula rasa* – to borrow, again, from Aristotle and Avicenna – ready to receive inscriptions of experience and perception, so is an empty frame a *tabula rasa*, equally ready for any kind of inscription guided by imagination.<sup>61</sup> In a manner of speaking, blank spaces gesture to partial sensory deprivation; in studies conducted over the last several decades, perceptual isolation has produced visual sensations.<sup>62</sup> An empty space thus necessarily makes imagination, and its hermeneutical function, a subject of representation: therein lies the recursive nature of a vacant space as a kind of a *mise en abîme* of *phantasia*. A study of emptiness is per force a phenomenological study of response, or at least of its possibilities.

Would the effect be the same if the empty spaces contained colour? Would they remain properly empty – at least to the extent that any such potentially signficatory space can be called 'empty'? The bareness of the parchment is the predicate of the concept of nothingness where Deschamps's book is concerned: we understand spaces as empty because the parchment is exposed, its colour within and without the confines of the frame identical, unchanged. This lack of change, moreover, emphasizes parchment as a symbolic surface: it is exposed skin, raw body – a gesture, perhaps, to the lusting flesh condemned by Deschamps and Innocent both. But empty speech scrolls are not technically empty: they are painted white to look empty. They are still performative spaces, but here, the semiotic potential of the parchment is negated, or at least deflected: the scrolls have different materiality, and some are shaded to look like textile rather than the skin they are painted on. So what of the parchment that accepts pigment, what of the emptiness that figures nothingness through colour alone? In what way, finally, does a monochromatic block represent, or not represent, emptiness? Abstract framed swaths of colour begin appearing in manuscript illumination some two hundred years before Deschamps's manuscript – to suggest, for example, verbal void as an apocalyptic silence in the twelfth-century Silos Apocalypse (plate 24) – but it

is in the fourteenth century, in a manuscript roughly contemporary and geographically close to the *Le double lay*, that we see a particularly instructive example of the way that pure colour can and cannot signify emptiness.<sup>63</sup>

The manuscript in question is one of the earliest copies of the *Ci nous dit* (Chantilly, Musée Condée, ms. 27), a compendium of moralizing stories composed around 1320 for an educated lay audience. If the illustrator of Deschamps's book showed a penchant for empty spaces, the illuminator of the *Ci nous dit* had a predilection for red and blue monochromatic backgrounds that often subsume the figures and objects scattered against them. One miniature, however, stands out, containing not a scrap of blue and outlined in a fine red frame (plate 25).<sup>64</sup> It is the only one of its kind in this codex, which contains more than 800 images.<sup>65</sup> The image strives to capture the



25 Debauchery, marriage, widowhood, and chastity, from *Ci nous dit*, c. 1330–40, France. Parchment, 18 × 24 cm (entire folio). Chantilly: Musée Condée (Ms. 27, fol. 28). Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

description of the four social states of mankind: debauchery, marriage, widowhood, and chastity. The accompanying text recalls the old adage: 'Good is marriage, better is widowhood, excellent is chastity', and declares that, as a heavenly reward, the married, the widowed, and the chaste will receive crowns in paradise with thirty, sixty, and one hundred gems, respectively. In suggesting that *Ci nous dit* alludes to the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–9, Mark 4:1–9, Luke 8:4–8), where the same numbers are figured vis-à-vis the grain planted in the soil, Christian Heck points to the genesis of such tripartite division in a second-century Judeo-Christian sermon, which concerns the martyrs, the chaste, and the married, and to its development and transformation both in patristic literature and late medieval homiletic treatises.<sup>66</sup> Heck also draws attention to the striking quality of the image that tops the text: divided into four parts, it is an exercise in abstraction.

All four sections have a monochromatic background. Chastity and widowhood are indicated by the expanses of green, indicating the devotional fruitfulness of a sexless life: widowhood is symbolized by four connected sheaves and chastity by schematic flowers. Marriage is indexed by delicate grain stocks arranged against a light-yellow field: it, too, bears fruit. But debauchery, metaphorized as a barren field, bears nothing. It produces nary a blade of grass: the image is blank, or, more accurately, black. Moreover, the dark nothingness of debauchery is formless – it has shape only inasmuch as it fits in the confines of the supplied frame. It is not an accident that Heck's iconographic analysis is entirely dedicated to the rich textual and visual history of the three last states: iconography fails at the discussion of the field of dark void, emptiness made subject.<sup>67</sup> Chastity, marriage, and widowhood are clearly defined states, but debauchery is at once more general and more graphic: it is a concept more than it is a state, and, like the stench of lust, it eludes precise figuration.

And yet, the semiotics of blackness here intrude on the playing field of the imagination, offering more guidance and less freedom than does the naked parchment.<sup>68</sup> From the twelfth century on, black – heretofore an ambiguous colour – became directly associated with Satan and hell, and the association held fast in the 1300s when the intensely black images of the *Inferno* appeared in a wide variety of contexts, from English psalters to Italian manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>69</sup> Black animals accompanied Satan and served as his preferred modes of incarnation: black cats, black crows, and especially black wild boars, whose demonic properties were delineated in handy diagrams. The usually imprecise descriptions of demonic apparitions became focused when it came to describing their blackness: Raoul Glaber, a monk at Saint-Léger de Champeaux, saw the devil's 'very black eyes'.<sup>70</sup> Black was also the colour of death, and since the middle of the fourteenth century it became firmly associated with mourning.<sup>71</sup> It is the colour of the night, of the lack of light; at the breaking of the sixth seal, the sun becomes black (Revelation 6:12). And, if the *monachi nigri* adopted black habits to signal their penitence and meekness, the Cistercian reaction to the excesses of Cluny had Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, with his customary panache, describe the density of this black as indicative of hell and of a barrier that stands between men and the divine.<sup>72</sup> When negotiating the 'I am black and comely' phrase from the *Song of Songs*, Bernard compares the black Bride with Christ, nonetheless calling black the 'abject hue that indicates infirmity', and assuring his audiences that the blackened Christ will not remain so in heaven: 'God forbid! Your beloved will be fair and ruddy.'<sup>73</sup>

Empty parchment opens a mnemonic chasm, but once it accepts colour, it functions as a screen that enhances the original and provides additional meaning. The emptiness of lust and death in Deschamps's book lies bare on the parchment, but the black field in the *Ci nous dit* is semiotically constrained: it guides its viewers

in their feats of imagination. Like the blank squares of *Le double lay*, it figures what is inconceivable yet awaiting conception: its barren field proves to be a generative space for the imaginary, dependent on the beholder to bring it into being. Still, whereas the framed naked parchment completely relies on viewers to participate in the construction and population of its heretofore empty *loci*, the black debauchery of *Cinous dit* is closer in conception to the whirling empty scrolls in that the boundaries of the imaginary are already drawn. The pious users of the *Omnne Bonum* were expected to mouth the words 'Ave Maria' and, taking on the archangel's role, were made complicit in the impregnation of Mary. Similarly, they anticipated and envisioned the realms of paradise and of the abyss, directing the imagined judgment, partaking in it alongside Christ. And even in Deschamps's little book, where the emptiness of the framed *loci* spreads like disease throughout the manuscript, it infects other images and inflects their meanings: it encroaches on the dead mother and her vulnerable child, pressing down on their bodies, and weighs heavily on the decomposing corpse. Palpable and fecund, emptiness announces itself as a paradoxical presence, here guided and restricted by what is represented. The playing field of *phantasia* narrows with the introduction of subsidiary images: inscribed into specific narratives, empty spaces take on explicit meanings. Their semiotic richness is now restricted, bounded by representation; and at the same time, it is brought all the more so into relief, underscored by the presence of what it is possible to figure. Absence once again becomes a sign of impossibility, an index of visual failure to figure the unseeable and the unknowable, heavy with signification and redolent of its eventual loss.

In discussing the conspicuous blankness of the wall that separates the Virgin and Gabriel in Fra Angelico's Annunciation painted for the third cell of the San Marco convent (plate 26), Georges Didi-Huberman proposed that it becomes 'the ultimate pictorial object for contemplation.'<sup>74</sup> He is exactly right, as he reads in this emptiness the distance that the Word must travel to infuse Mary, the distance uninhabited still; empty, but already pregnant with possibilities just as the Virgin is impregnated with the Word; it is the unimaginable that wants to be imagined, the emptiness that invites – indeed, forces – the beholder to populate it with the unseeable and the unseen. It is a place of potential creation, the raw matter of the unknown and the unquantifiable.

Empty spaces, outlined and presented as if exposed, exhibited, or revealed, function as signs: they act to subvert expectation and therefore draw attention to themselves. Vacant space designates nothing until it is delineated, but once it is, it reframes emptiness as a visual, theoretical object. Thereupon, it becomes a *locus* ready to be filled, arranged to accept whatever *imagines* the reader-viewer chooses to inhabit it with. In principle, whether such emptiness is accidental or planned, should not forestall a formation of certain reception regimes: even the vacant *loci* of the *Omnne Bonum*, with their productive incompleteness, offer a mnemonic playing field for mental retrieval, recombination, and subsequent invention. In actuality, however, carefully outlined and intentionally empty segments of parchment, such as the two squares on folio 7v of *Le double lay*, provide a visual stimulus that particularly resonates with *cogitativa vel formalis*, a stimulus unusual because it evokes those things that are impossible to see but possible, if particularly hard, to imagine. In querying the epistemic nature of emptiness, they are, most purely, those very forms that, to borrow from Henry Focillon, 'tend toward realization; they do, in fact, realize themselves and create a world that acts and reacts [...] Forms never cease to live. In their separate state, they still clamour for action, they still take absolute possession of whatever action has propagated them, in order to augment, strengthen, and shape it.'<sup>75</sup>

26 Fra Angelico, *Annunciation with Saint Peter Martyr*, c. 1440–45. Fresco, 187 × 157 cm. Florence: Museo di San Marco. Photo: Scala/ Art Resource, NY.



The late Middle Ages, as the altar of Sainte Foy amply attests, did not conceive the culture of emptiness. Still, it is worth repeating that the altar's current appearance – the veiny alabaster encased into a busy frame – was devised in the fourteenth century, in the wake of or in concert with recent intellectual developments in theology, philosophy, mathematics, and physics that began engaging with the notions of emptiness, absence, and negation in a profoundly intense way. One such development was the reformulation of the notion of the void as a physical space. In 1277, the bishop of Paris Etienne Tempier issued condemnations of more than 200 philosophical errors promulgated by the masters of the University of Paris. Error 185 – or what the bishop certainly saw as an error – concerned the impossibility of the void's existence: 'It is not true that something comes into being out of nothing and nothing was made before the creation.'<sup>76</sup> To claim so, as Tempier makes clear, would set limits on God's omnipotence. The matter was far from inconsequential: nature, medieval theologians exclaimed in an unsteady chorus, abhors a vacuum. Aristotelian theories unambiguously suggested that all existing matter was contained within this world; therefore, the nonexistence of matter beyond the

world's finite borders indicated the nonexistence of the vacuum as a space in which the presence and formation of new matter was possible. Guided by this system, numerous philosophers, from Avicenna to Robert Grosseteste, rejected the possibility of the void. Empty space, a *locus sine corpore locato*, was a contradictory notion, and God, even in his omnipotence, surely could not create anything contradictory.<sup>77</sup> Grosseteste, for instance, claimed that the void could exist only semantically: the void, he wrote, 'does not have a real definition [. . .]. It admits only of a definition in name.'<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, Roger Bacon argued through the possibilities of what the void is not (a substance or an accident), and concluded that it is 'nothing at all' – 'it appears that the void cannot be'.<sup>79</sup>

In the wake of the Condemnation of 1277, the crux of the problem shifted from the simple existence of the vacuum to the possibility that God can create several worlds, separated by empty spaces. To reconcile the two theories – the Aristotelian point of view and Tempier's condemnation – Henry of Ghent distinguished between the vacuum/void (as the accidental distance between two bodies) and the nothingness that exists outside the world and above heaven. Slowly, the void becomes 'a place' in scholastic discourse – a place in which our universe was created, and in which God may yet create another universe; Ramon Lull discusses 'a place [created by God] in which the substance of the world resides', where the world is 'lodged'; and John Duns Scotus, while refusing the void positive dimensions, formulates it as a possibility: the 'possibility to receive a body of determined magnitude and shape [. . .] the possibility to receive a movement of determined duration'.<sup>80</sup> As Edward Grant concludes, '[t]o Aristotle's claim that, since all the matter in existence is in our world, no other world could be formed, medieval theologians and philosophers countered that, by virtue of his absolute power, God could create new matter from nothing and create another world.'<sup>81</sup> The empty void – heretofore the domain of the abhorrent and unnatural, the site that defies existence and divine omnipotence but persists in language and thought – became the space of latent generation, a potentially proliferant *locus* not unlike the gravid emptiness of Deschamps's squares.

Acceptance of the void's existence came alongside the acceptance of the concept of zero. The etymologies of the two are closely linked: the ancestor of 'zero' is the Arabic 'sifr', which was a translation from the Sanskrit word for 'void' (*śūnya*).<sup>82</sup> The Greeks rejected both; zero could not be expressed as a geometric shape, and so had no place in Pythagorean mathematics. Medieval scholars looked at zero with similar suspicion for similar reasons: the impossibility of this little sign was embroiled in a potent mix of philosophy, mathematics, and theology. As early as 1202, the Italian mathematician Leonardo of Pisa, also called Fibonacci, sought to introduce the Arabic numeral system in his *Liber Abaci* (The Book of Calculation), with its 'nine figures, and with the sign 0 which the Arabs call zephyr'.<sup>83</sup> But the new system – which was much easier to use than the old Roman one – was consistently rejected. Zero – visually, semiotically – materialized the abhorrence of the void. This abhorrence was deepened by the otherness of cultures – the Hindus, the Arabs – who regularly used it as part of their mathematical system. It was not by accident that William of Malmesbury associated the entire system with magical esoteric Saracen knowledge, and spoke of it with disparaging fear when describing the suspect scientific exploits of Gerbert of Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II.<sup>84</sup> In practical terms, all Arabic numerals were too easy to falsify – at least that was the claim of the Florentine government that banned such numerals in 1299.<sup>85</sup>

The proper entrance of zero into medieval European culture in the fourteenth century was finally facilitated by merchants and architects – those whose business was arithmetic, not epistemological gate-keeping. The influence of Fibonacci's *Liber Abaci* grew, and zero's potency was embraced. The Middle English treatise *The Craft of Nombrynge*, penned c. 1300, explained the use of zero as the nothing that generates everything: 'A

zero means nothing [by itself], but it makes the figure that comes after it to mean more than it should if it [the zero] were away, as thus 10. Here the figure of one means ten, and if the zero were away and no figure before it, it should mean but one.<sup>86</sup> As Brian Rotman has so eloquently put it, zero was ‘a sign inside the number system’ as well as ‘a meta-sign, a sign-about-signs outside it’, and this double duty ‘allowed zero to serve as the site of ambiguity between an empty character [...] and a character for emptiness.’<sup>87</sup> In other words, because zero was a number that could signify nothing but, when placed next to another digit, could create an entirely new number, it was semantically and ontologically akin to the empty yet generative void. Into the fifteenth century, however, the zero retained a somewhat ominous character: Georges Chastellain (d. 1475) memorably described it as the number that darkens and obstructs.<sup>88</sup>

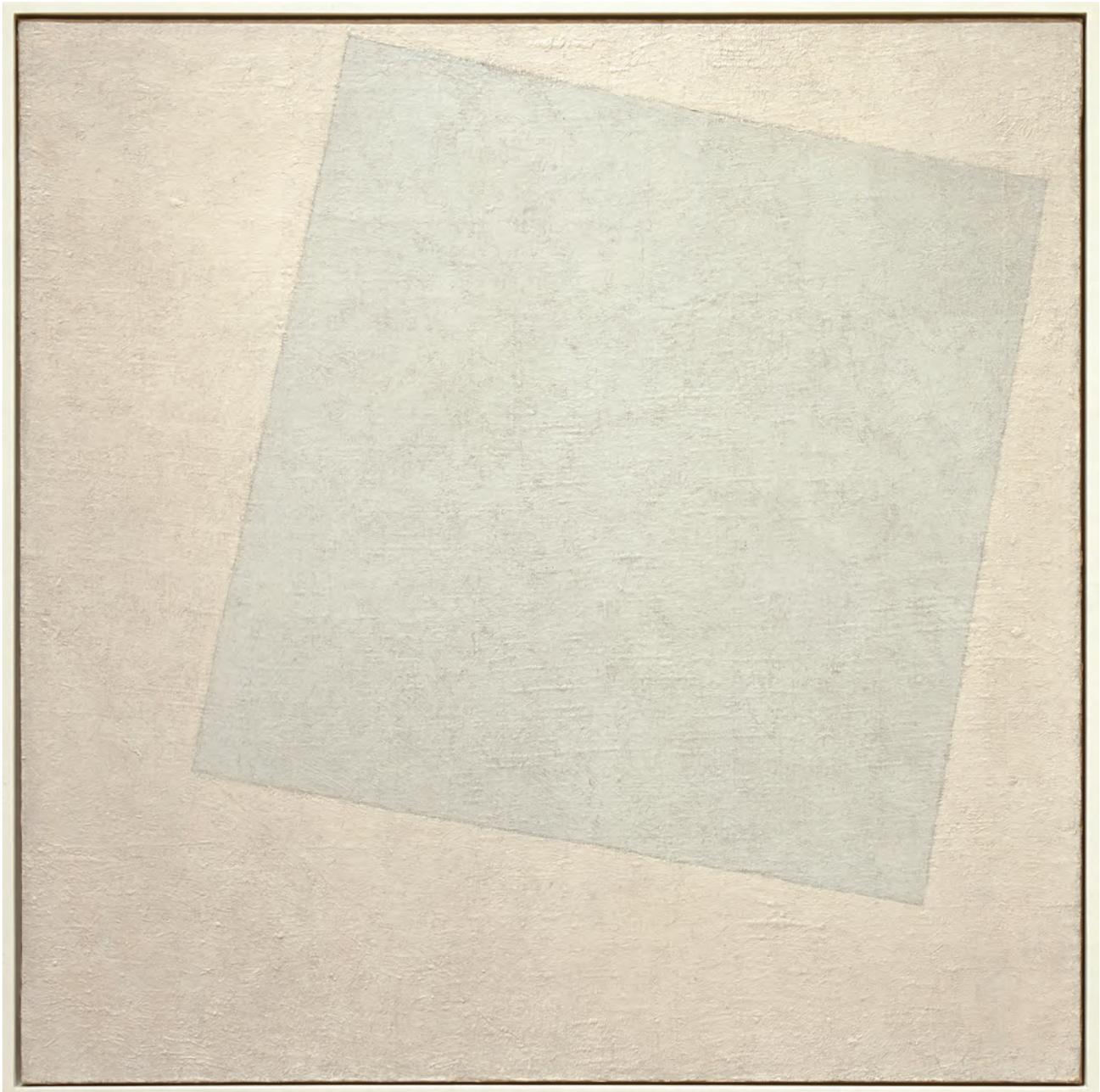
The two developments coincided, finally, with the flourishing of apophatic mysticism, which strived to describe by negation that which cannot and should not be described.<sup>89</sup> Apophasis, or negative theology, has roots in early Christianity – from Clement of Alexandria to Basil the Great to its greatest proponent, Pseudo-Dionysius – and enjoyed a robust following in the East, but western theologians embraced it fully only in the late Middle Ages. The way to describe a zero was a way to describe God: ‘Now I am what I was and I neither add to nor subtract from anything, for I am the unmoved Mover, that moves all things.’<sup>90</sup> These words belong not to a mathematician but to a theologian, the Dominican Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), who considered God to be ‘empty and free in himself’ (‘got ledic und vri ist in im selber’), free of form, impossible to name, and so indescribable by the very language that has to be used in characterizing him.<sup>91</sup> This is Pseudo-Dionysian apophatic discourse at its best, and it is similarly apparent in the late fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing* whose author prefers to ‘be nowhere so nowhere bodily, wrestling with that blind nought [nothing]’, and who, in his *Epistle of Discretion*, characterizes God by what he is not: ‘Silence is not God’, the author says, ‘nor speaking is not God; fasting is not God, nor eating is not God; loneliness is not God, nor company is not God.’<sup>92</sup> The theology of emptiness finally became the guiding force in the work of Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), who studied and annotated Eckhart’s Latin works. In the thirteenth chapter of his *De visione Dei*, Nicholas accepts that God ‘cannot be approached, comprehended, named, multiplied, or seen’, and repudiates imagery that only distracts from the truth: ‘Should anyone express any likeness and say that you ought to be conceived according to it, I know in the same way that this is not a likeness of you.’<sup>93</sup> In *De docta ignorantia* Nicholas invokes Pseudo-Dionysius and equates the incomprehensible God with nothingness indiscernible for the intellect: ‘Denis the Great says that an understanding of God is not so much an approach toward something as toward nothing.’<sup>94</sup>

This is to say that apophaticism is paradoxical: in its apparent impulse to reject both the intellect and the imagination, it embraces both. The urge to dematerialize the encounter with the divine ultimately posits emptiness as the site of this encounter; in eschewing the literalizing drift of the imagination, theorists of *via negativa* were forced to embrace it in the guise of potentiality, which was pregnant with expectation of mystical union. Their divine ontology thrived on and extolled ignorance – the lack of sight, the lack of intelligibility – but this very lack was the predicate of the indescribable evocation of the indescribable god. In other words, like the contemporaneous theories of void and zero – and like the gravid imaginary of Deschamps’s empty squares – negative theology was rooted in the trope of experiential unavailability and its generative outcome.

Blankness as a visual discourse was rediscovered in the twentieth century and reframed in terms of abstraction.<sup>95</sup> In 1918, Kazimir Malevich – who, not

incidentally, used Byzantine and Russian icons as models for his own work – painted Suprematist *Composition: White on White*, re-introducing the basic modalities of late medieval art into the contemporary enterprise of visual and aural perception (plate 27).<sup>96</sup> In 1951, the experiment was picked up in the all-white canvases of Robert Rauschenberg, and again in the 1960s in Robert Ryman’s white paintings. Visual engagements with absence continue to pervade contemporary art. Empty white rectangles found throughout cities – the essential readymades – form David Batchelor’s ongoing *Found Monochromes* cycle, exhibited in 2015 at Whitechapel gallery; absence stands at the heart of the Ground Zero monument in New York City, an inverted footprint of towers haunted by what is lost.<sup>97</sup> Decades of conceptualized emptiness were summed up in the 2009 exhibition *Voids: A Retrospective*, which opened at the Centre Pompidou and then at the Kunsthalle Bern, and featured empty spaces as conceived by Yves Klein, Robert Irwin, and Roman

**27 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 79.4 x 79.4 cm. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art, Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.**



Ondák.<sup>98</sup> It is no wonder that nothingness as a mode of visual communication is considered to be an invention of modernity.<sup>99</sup>

The short view is, perhaps, the function of existing information: while artists from Malevich to Wassily Kandinsky and from Antonio Tapies to Ilya Kabakov freely wrote about whiteness, nothingness, and the void, medieval sources are not as forthcoming.<sup>100</sup> Medieval concepts of emptiness, and their relationship with material culture, have to be teased out from treatises on cosmology and mathematics, theological and devotional tracts, handbooks on memory and poems on mortality. The work is hard but the reward is rich: it suggests that at least as early as the fourteenth century visual culture began to explore the possibilities of the void as a place of generative and catalytic forces, interrogating the place of images in the epistemologies of absence. Much remains to be explored about the complex interconnections among formal, empirical, and natural sciences, and the material culture of the ensuing centuries, which saw a wide variety of inventive approaches to empty spaces: spaces made empty and spaces left empty, spaces erased and spaces excised. What seems certain, however, is that such (non)figurations function as potent sites of invention, stimuli for cognitive generation: they demand that we ask not simply how emptiness was represented, but rather what emptiness can represent. Deschamps's little book forms but a part of the many late medieval engagements with emptiness, construed in visual, philosophical and scientific paradigms as a place of generative and catalytic forces.<sup>101</sup> The displays of absence and therefore intimations of presence are just as fertile as the primordial void; just as agentic as the troublesome zero; and just as vivid as the language of unsaying. Their fertility and their agency are rooted in the unseen: if figural imagery constrained and tethered one's imagination, then empty spaces unleashed the *phantasia*, freeing it and simultaneously shifting the responsibility of visualization from the artist to the viewer. Emptiness as a space of the imaginary became, to quote Edward Grant, 'dimensionless or dimensional in a transcendent sense'.<sup>102</sup> Here, the 'beholder's share', a term formulated by Ernst Gombrich to indicate the expectations and experiences that viewers employ to discern, recognize, and make sense of the image in front of them, is spectacularly inadequate and therefore paradoxically powerful.<sup>103</sup>

And so we may want to borrow the language of unseeing from the language of unsaying, and to echo Didi-Huberman's question about early modern painting: 'in what, why and how does this not resemble?'<sup>104</sup> What is it that the frames around a void – frames as lines, frames as texts, frames as visual environment – really anchor? Certainly, debauchery can be represented in literal terms and the deathly stench of lust can be figured by a *vinitas* image. But these emphatically invisible, unrepresentable aspects of the world – unrepresentable not because they are unseemly, but because they are un-seeable – can only be truly figured through figurative lack, through occasional failure of the image, through displacement of the visible into the domain of the imaginary and intellectual. Brazenly put on display, medieval empty spaces are semiotically and epistemologically fraught: they demand to be grappled with and they hold the beholder in suspension, awakening doubt and spurring on invention.

#### Notes

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- 1 Bekker, 431a16–17, or *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols, Princeton, 1984, volume 1, 685.
- 2 'Why do I only think about how / to make it so as to think of only nothing?' Михаил Щербаков, 'Интермедия 4', from *Ложный шаг* (Faux Pas), 1999.

- 3 The altar has been briefly treated in several survey works on the treasures from Conques as well as in literature on medieval metalworking; among others, see *Le trésor de Conques*, ed. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin and Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre, 2 November 2001–11 March 2002, Paris, 2001, 62ff; Marie Renou and Renaud Dengreville, *Conques: moyenâgeuse, mystique, contemporaine*, Rodez, 1997, 67–90; and Emmanuel Garland, 'L'art des orfèvres à Conques', *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique du Midi de la France* 60, 2000, 83–114, at 101 and 103.
- 4 John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic', from *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 10, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander

- Wedderburn, London, 1904, 244; Ruskin tempers this with his reading of the true desires of 'the Gothic heart': 'There are, however, far nobler interests mingling, in the Gothic heart, with the rude love of decorative accumulation: a magnificent enthusiasm, which feels as if it never could do enough to reach the fullness of its ideal; an unselfishness of sacrifice, which would rather cast fruitless labour before the altar than stand idle in the market; and, finally, a profound sympathy with the fulness and wealth of the material universe, rising out of that Naturalism whose operation we have already endeavoured to define.'
- 5 On horror vacui in manuscripts see, *inter alia*, Keith Busby, "'Codices manuscriptos nudos tenemus': Alexander and the New Codicology", in *The Medieval French Alexander*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, Albany, 2002, 259–273 (264: 'Manuscript planners had a horror vacui'), and Babette Hellemans, 'Horror vacui: Evil in the Incarnated World of the Bibles Moralisées', in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, ed. Nienke Vos and Willemien Otten, Leiden, 2011, 231–248; for horror vacui on maps see, e.g., Chet van Duzer, 'Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, Burlington, VT, 2013, 387–448 (at 393: 'on maps there is an additional factor favoring the placement of something at the edges of the worlds, which is a horror vacui...'), or Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken's various publications, e.g., 'Weltbild der lateinischen Universalhistoriker und -kartographen', in *Popoli e paesi nella cultura altomedievale*, 23–29 aprile 1981, vol. 1, Spoleto, 1983, 377–408, esp. 403. Michael Camille sums up the sentiment in his *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator*, New Haven, 1996, 15–16: 'an anxiety about vacant spaces in this period [...] is evidenced in everything from scholastic discussions of nature's abhorrence of the vacuum to decoration of housewares.'
- 6 See Didier Méhu, 'L'évidement de l'image ou la figuration de l'invisible corps du Christ (IXe–XIIe siècle)', *Images revues: histoire, anthropologie, et théorie de l'art*, 11, 2013, <http://imagesrevues.revues.org/3384>, accessed 25 December 2015; on empty spaces and gaps on a manuscript page, see Camille, *Master of Death*, and Elina Gertsman, 'The Gap of Death: Passive Violence and Visual Void in the Encounter of the Three Dead and the Three Living', in *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Erin Labbie and Allie Terry, Burlington, 2012, 85–104.
- 7 Jeffrey J. Cohen, 'Geophilia, or The Love of Stone', *continent*, 4, 2, 2015, 9; this is an excerpt from Cohen's *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, Minneapolis, 2015. In addition to Cohen's work, some of the more intriguing studies of the semiotics of stone include Fabio Barry, 'Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages', *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXIX, 4, December 2007, 627–656; Brigitte Buettner, 'Precious Stones, Mineral Beings: Performative Materiality in Fifteenth-Century Northern Art', in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics*, c. 1250–1750, ed. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith, Manchester, 2014, 205–222; and, on trompe l'oeil stone, Georges Didi-Huberman's assorted work, including *L'Homme qui marchait dans la couleur*, Paris, 2001, 23–25 (on faux marble panels as vestiges of the absent divine), *Fra Angelico: dissemblance et figuration*, and *Devant l'image*, as in notes 42 and 63.
- 8 On the devotional signification of alabaster's material properties, see Anne Harris, 'From Stone to Statue: The Geology and Art of English Alabaster Panels', forthcoming in *Art and Devotion in Medieval England*, ed. Stephen Perkinson, Jessica Brantley, and Elizabeth Teviotdale, Kalamazoo, MI, TBA. I thank her for sharing the typescript of the article with me. On alabaster see Fergus Cannan, "'If Marble Will Not Serve", Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture, from Quarry to Object of Devotion', from *Object of Devotion: Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Paul Williamson, Alexandria, VA, 2010, and Fergus Cannan, 'Alabaster', in *The Making of Sculpture: The Materials and Techniques of European Sculpture*, ed. Marjorie Trusted, London, 2007, 105–113.
- 9 On the various valences of skin in the Middle Ages, see essays in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, ed. Katie L. Walter, New York, 2013 and, most recently, Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, Chicago, 2017; for the Holsinger quote, see Bruce Holsinger, 'Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal', *PMLA*, 124, 2, March 2009, 616–623, at 619.
- 10 The edition of the poem is found in Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire, 11 vols, Paris, 1878–1903, vol. 2: *Balades de moralitez*. Lays, 1880, 239–305.
- 11 For full text see Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, Athens, GA, 1978, in Latin and English; the introduction is very valuable, and translations are the ones quoted here. On the treatise, see Johannes Bartuschat, 'Il De Miseria Humane Conditionis e la letteratura didattica delle lingue romanze', in *Innocenzo III. Urbis et Orbis. Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, Roma, 9–15 settembre 1998, vol. I, Rome, 2003, 352–368; John C. Moore, 'Innocent III's *De miseria Humane Conditionis: A Speculum curiae*', in *Catholic Historical Review*, 67, October 1981, 553–564; Robert Bultot, 'Mépris du monde, misère et dignité de l'homme dans la pensée d'Innocent III', in *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 4, October–December 1961, 441–456; and Mario Di Pinto, 'Il "De miseria condicionis humane" di Innocenzo III', in *Studi medievali in onore di Antontio di Stefano*, Palermo, 1956, 177–201.
- 12 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 104–105. On the vegetative metaphor here and in comparable texts, see 'Vegetative Language of Virtue and Vice', chapter 6 of Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge*, Princeton, 1998, esp. 120–128.
- 13 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 94–95.
- 14 Camille, *The Master of Death*, chapter 2; discussed also in the notes to *Oeuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, vol. 2, 361–366.
- 15 BN lat. 17333, fol. 233. See Méhu, 26–7; and Victor Leroquias, *Les pontificaux manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, vol. 2, Paris, 1937, 201–208.
- 16 Meyer Schapiro, in 'The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, XXIII, 1943, 133–152, argued that this liminal status indicates some empirical observation on the part of Anglo-Saxon artists. Conversely, in 'Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images', Robert Deshman argued that the image both asserts 'the limits of the corporeal sight in the achievement of spiritual vision' and affirms that 'images can and do aid in the acquisition of spiritual understanding' (*Art Bulletin*, 79, 3, September 1997, 518–546, here at 545).
- 17 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Cod. lat. 28169, fol. 5; see Johannes Zahlten, *Creatio mundi: Darstellungen der sechs Schöpfungstage und naturwissenschaftliches Weltbild im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart, 1979; 60, 136, 175; fig. 79; and Elisabeth Klemm, *Die illuminierten Handschriften des 13. Jahrhunderts deutscher Herkunft in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, Wiesbaden, 1998, cat. No.178, 180–181.
- 18 John 1:1: 'In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.'
- 19 On Creation imagery, see Zahlten, *Creatio mundi* and Conrad Rudolph, 'In the Beginning: Theories and Images of Creation in Northern Europe in the Twelfth Century', *Art History*, 22, 1, March 1999: 3–55.
- 20 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 98–99.
- 21 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 100–101.
- 22 'Habent enim anima tres naturales potencias sive tres naturales vires: racionalem ut discernat inter bonum et malum, irascibilem ut respuat malum, concupiscibilem ut appetat bonum' (Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 98–99).
- 23 Here and further translations from Deschamps were generously provided by Daisy Delogu, and subsequently amended by me in consultation with her.
- 24 Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 253–254.
- 25 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 136–139: 'Quid dicam de miseris qui per innumera tormentorum genera perimuntur? [...] discrepantur unguibus [...] [d]antur in escam volatilibus celi, betiis terre, piscibus maris'; Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 278.
- 26 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 104–107: '... ille de se productum flores, frondes, et fructus, et tu de te lendes et pediculos, et lumbricos [...] sputum, urinam, et stercus [...] tu de te reddis abominacionem fetoris.' Deschamps is equally explicit: 'tu es dompée / A polz, vers et lentes querre [...] tu es chargée / De fiens, pyssat, cracherre; / Bonne odeur seult on requerre / Es arbres: en toy: fumée' (*Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 262).
- 27 Lotario dei Segni, *De miseria condicionis humane*, 204–205; Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 282–283.
- 28 On the manuscript in the context of courtly love imagery, see Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire*, London, 1998, 148, pl. 134, and Pamela Porter, *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts*, London, 2003, 32.

- 29 Michael Camille, 'Manuscript Illumination and the Art of Copulation', in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schulz, Minneapolis, 1997, 58–91, at 80. See also Betsy Bowden 'The Art of Courtly Copulation', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 9, 1979, 67–86; Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex: The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual*, Cambridge, MA, 1985; and Elizabeth Pittenger, 'Explicit Ink', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, New York, 1996, 223–242, esp. 228. We retain the expression 'the virgin page' for a reason; on the modern literary view of sexual poetics, see Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity', *Critical Inquiry*, 8: 2: Writing and Sexual Difference, 1981, 243–263; and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, 1984, 6. Jacques Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, 2016, identifies the page with the hymen and the pen with the phallus. On the elision of flesh and parchment in medieval discourse, see, e.g., Dieter Richter, 'Die Allegorie der Pergamentbearbeitung: Beziehungen zwischen handwerklichen Vorgängen und der geistlichen Bildersprachen des Mittelalters', in *Fachliteratur des Mittelalters: Festschrift für Gerhard Eis*, ed. Gundolf Keil, Stuttgart, 1968, 83–92; and entry 49 in *Origins of European Printmaking*, ed. David S. Areford, Richard S. Field, and Peter Schmidt, New Haven, 2005, 185–188; David Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe*, Burlington, VT, 2010, 79–80; Elina Gertsman, 'Multiple Impressions: Christ in the Wine Press and the Semiotics of the Printed Image', *Art History*, 36: 2, 2013, 310–337, at 324–325; Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, Peterborough, Ont., 2004, 33; for early medieval instance, Heather Pulliam, 'Color', *Studies in Iconography*, 33: special issue, *Medieval Art History Today: Critical Terms*, ed. Nina Rowe, 2012, 9–10.
- 30 Michael Camille, 'Book as Flesh and Fetish in Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon*', in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, Notre Dame, IN, 1997, 34–72. See, e.g., the monologues of Genius in Jean le Meun's portion of *Roman de la Rose*, which, directed at clerics, styles the process of writing in highly sexual terms, urging men to 'use their pens, by means of which the mortal live forever, on the beautiful and valuable tablets which Nature certainly didn't prepare for them in order that they should lie idle...' trans, Dahlberg, 323–324.
- 31 For the double meaning of the Latin *penicillus* ('little penis' and little paintbrush), see Louise O. Vasvari, 'Festive Phallic Discourse in the Libro del Arcipreste', *La Corónica*, 22, 1994, 104.
- 32 Junichi Toyota, Pernilla Hallonsten, and Maria Shchepetunina, 'Presence of Absence', in *Sense of Emptiness: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Junichi Toyota et al., Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012, xi. On framing, see Ortega y Gasset and Andrea L. Bell, 'Meditations on the Frame', *Perspecta*, 26: Theater, Theatricality, and Architecture, 1990, 185–190; essays in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro, Cambridge, 1996; introduction to Gregory Minissale, *Framing Consciousness in Art: Transcultural Perspectives*, New York, 2009; and Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens, 'Parergon', *October*, 9, Summer 1979, 3–41, esp. 21: the frame's 'exteriority touches, plays with, brushes, rubs, or presses against the limit'. On medieval and early modern frames, in particular, see Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1992; Meyer Schapiro, *The Language of Forms: Lectures on Insular Manuscript Art*, New York, 2005; Wolfgang Kemp, *Christliche Kunst: Ihre Anfänge, ihre Strukturen*, Munich, 1994; Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, University Park, PA, 2004; Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *L'instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l'aube des temps modernes*, Paris, 1993, trans. as *Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-painting*, New York, 1997; and Asa Simon Mittman and Susan Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript*, Tempe, 2013, chapter 6.
- 33 Daniel M. Wegner and David J. Schneider, 'The White Bear Story', *Psychological Inquiry*, 14: 3/4, 2003, 326–329.
- 34 Among most thoughtful studies on medieval optics and modes of seeing are David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago, 1981 [1976] and Roger Bacon and the Origins of *Perspectiva* in the Middle Ages: A Critical Edition and English Translation of Bacon's *Perspectiva*, Oxford, 1996, as well as Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology, and the Foundations of Semantics, 1250–1345*, Leiden, 1988 and Dallas D. Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Late Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life*, Cambridge, 2005. For the art-historical take on these studies, see, for example, Michael Camille, 'Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson, Cambridge, 2000, 197–223, and Cynthia Hahn, 'Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality', in the same volume, 169–96, as well as her 'Vision', in *Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph, Malden, MA, 2006, 44–64, with excellent bibliography; I treat this briefly in 'Multiple Impressions: Christ in the Winepress and the Semiotics of the Printed Image', *Art History*, 36: 2, April 2013, 310–337. A seminal and much too underappreciated study is Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, New York, 2002. See also Herbert Kessler, 'Real Absence', in *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia, 2000, 104–148 and Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?' The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum*, 80, January 2005, 1–43. For the discussion of the historical notion of species, see Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis*, Vol. 1, *Classical Roots and Medieval Discussions*, Leiden, 1994; Spruit nuances the great diversity of conceptualizations of vision and imagination that were embraced in the wake of translations of Arabic-Aristotelian materials.
- 35 Saint Augustine, 'De Duabus Animabus contra Manichaeos' ('Concerning Two Souls, Against the Manichaeans'), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 4, The Anti-Manichaean Writings, The Anti-Donatist Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, Edinburgh, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.i.html>, accessed 19 December 2015, 98; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. and ed. Stephen A. Barney et al., Cambridge, 2006, Book XI, Chapter 1.21, 232. On the hierarchy of senses, with the special valorization of sight, see Eric Palazzo, 'The Rites of the Mass', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold, Oxford, 2014, esp. 243–245, as well as his 'Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages', *Viator*, 41: 1, 2010, 25–56.
- 36 Albertus Magnus, 'De Apprehensione', parts 3–4, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, ed. August Borgnet, Paris, 1890, 577–589; see also part 2 of 'Summae de Creaturis' in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 35, 323ff. On a cogent discussion of this distinction, see John Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental*, Bloomington, 2000, 55–57. Similar ideas are fleshed out in his commentaries on Aristotle's *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*. The model is indebted to Avicenna's *Kitab al-Shifā* (1014–20), which was translated into Latin in the twelfth century. For the latest translation, especially useful for its parallel English–Arabic text, see *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, trans., introduced, and annotated by Michael E. Marmura, Provo, 2005. See also *Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitab al-najāt*, book II, chapter VI, with historio-philosophical notes and textual improvements from the Cairo edition, ed. Fazlur Rahman, London, 1952; and *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de anima, seu sextus de naturalibus*, ed. S. van Riet, Leiden, 1968.
- 37 Among important studies of medieval concepts of imagination are Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought*, Urbana, 1927; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton, 1994; Simon Kemp, *Cognitive Psychology in the Middle Ages*, Westport, CN, 1996; and Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought*, Bloomington, 2004; the role of imagination in the theory of inner senses is also discussed in Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 2008, 51–54. For pictorial versions of inner sense diagrams and the discussion of the theory in early modernity, and its relationship with the notion of witchcraft, see Claudia Swan, 'Eyes Wide Shut: Early Modern Imagination, Demonology, and the Visual Arts', *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit*, 7, 2003, 156–181.
- 38 Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, volume 1, distinction 1, chapters 2–4; trans. in Edward Grant, *A Sourcebook of Medieval Science*, Cambridge, 1974, 407–410. The terms for imagination, in its two versions, are slippery: Bacon terms the first cells together (common sense and imagination) as 'phantasia'; in turn, Aquinas (in *De potential animae*, cap. 4) calls this second power *phantasia*, a retentive imagination different from *imaginativa* – a composing imagination that Albertus Magnus, in fact, calls *phantasia*. For a cogent discussion of Avicenna's theory and its effect on medieval thinkers, see Kemp, *Cognitive Psychology*, esp. 45–63. For Avicenna's

- theories and their influences on ibn Ezra and ibn Tufayl, see Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine*, chapter 3.
- 39 See Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, Chicago, 2011.
- 40 In *Sourcebook of Medieval Science*, 410.
- 41 *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, Philadelphia, 1972, 31. Essays in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane, University Park, PA, 2010, tackle the question of dreams and visionary experience in the Middle Ages; Eric Palazzo's essay therein, 'Visions and Liturgical Experience in the Early Middle Ages', summarizes historiography on medieval vision and visionary experiences in the early pages, foregrounding the work of Jeffrey Hamburger, Caroline Walker Bynum, Barbara Newman, Herbert Kessler, and Peter Dintelbacher.
- 42 Avicenna, *Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, 2 vols, Leiden, 1968–1972, volume 1 (parts 1–3), 89; volume 2 (Parts 4–5), 6.
- 43 Discussed in Simon Kemp and Garth J. O. Fletcher, 'The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 106: 4, Winter 1993, 559–576.
- 44 Ad C. Herennium: *De Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica Ad Herennium)*, trans. Harry Caplan, Cambridge, MA, 1981 [1954], 209–225. The importance of Ad Herennium for the medieval audience is discussed in numerous studies on memory, including work by Mary Carruthers, Frances Yates, and Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas, London, 2000; for a specifically art-historical study of Ad Herennium and its relationship with late medieval art, see Peter Parshall, 'The Art of Memory and the Passion', *The Art Bulletin*, 81: 3, September 1999, 456–472.
- 45 Ad Herennium 3.22.35 insists on unusual images because 'ordinary things easily slip from the memory while the striking and novel stay longer in the mind'. For a useful overview of these characteristics, see Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, chapter 1, as well as Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, New York, 1992, 51–89. As Rossi mentions (15–16), these characteristics are repeated in numerous medieval treatises, with one writer evoking another, e.g. Jacopo Ragone who writes in his *Artificialis memoriae regulae* (1434) 'As Cicero taught, and as Thomas Aquinas also attests, artificial memory is achieved by means of two things: namely, places and images' etc. For studies that link images and images, see, e.g. John Friedmann, 'Les images mnémotechniques dans les manuscrits de l'époque gothique', in *Jeux de mémoire. Aspects de la mnémotechnie médiévale*, ed. Bruno Roy and Paul Zumthor, Montreal and Paris, 1985, 169–184. See also Lina Bozoni, 'Gedächtniskunst und allegorische Bilder. Theorie und Praxis der ars memorativa in Literatur und Bildender Kunst Italiens zwischen dem 14. und 16. Jahrhundert', in *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Dietrich Harth, Frankfurt, 1991, 147–176, and idem, 'The Play of Images: The Art of Memory from Its Origins to the Seventeenth Century', in *The Enchanted Loom: Chapters in the History of Neuroscience*, ed. Pietro Corsi, Oxford, 1991, 16–65; Daniel Arasse, 'Entre dévotion et culture: fonctions de l'image religieuse au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Faire croire. Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes de la table ronde de Rome (16–19 mai 1979)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 51:1, 1981, 131–146; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: dissemblance et figuration*, Paris, 1995, 60–75, esp. 64–66 on Giotto's personifications in the Arena Chapel and mnemonic figures; Peter Parshall, 'The Art of Memory and the Passion', *The Art Bulletin*, 81: 3, September 1999, 456–472, at 460–461; and Gertsman, *Worlds Within*, chapter 4, on spatial configuration of Shrine Madonna statues. Carruthers has fruitfully explored this aspect in her books, especially in chapter 7, 'Memory and the Book', of *The Book of Memory; Gesta*, 48: 2, 2009, was dedicated to this topic.
- 46 Bradwardine, 'De Memoria Artificiali', 281 and 282.
- 47 Bradwardine, 'De Memoria Artificiali', 283–284, discussed also in Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence*, Ithaca, NY, 1999, 82–96 vis-à-vis birth violence, esp. 82–86; Bibliotheca Marciana, Ms. Lat. Cl. VI, 274, ff. 41v–42v, trans. and discussed in Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 18–19, original quote on 251, n. 37.
- 48 On the definitive study of *Omne Bonum*, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Omne Bonum: The Fourteenth-Century Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*, 2 vols, London, 1996, specifically vol. 1, 92–95 on the prefatory biblical illustrations; see also Sandler, 'Omne bonum: *Compilatio* and *Ordinatio* in an English Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Fourteenth Century', in *Medieval Book Production: Assessing the Evidence*, ed. Linda Brownrigg, Proceedings of the Second Conference of The Seminar in the History of the Book to 1500, Oxford, July 1988, Los Altos Hills, 1990, 183–200, and on the Beatific vision, Sandler, 'Face to Face with God: A Pictorial Image of the Beatific Vision', in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1986, 224–235 (esp. 228–234, figs 1–5). For a list of titles relevant to the manuscript, see the British Library's bibliographic record at <http://tinyurl.com/k6v38w2>
- 49 Folio 14v is ruled for miniatures, as are the unfoliated fols 14a verso and 14b; 14a and 14b verso are pricked for miniatures.
- 50 Certainly, there is a wide variety of empty spaces in medieval manuscripts that were not meant to be left empty. On emptiness that resulted from removal of pasted images (or that was left specifically for their insertion), see Kathryn Rudy, *Postcard on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books*, New Haven, 2015, e.g. 34–37 for word frames that surround images-that-were (or images-to-be).
- 51 See Lynda Dennison, 'The Apocalypse', British Library, Royal Ms. 19 B XV: A Reassessment of its Artistic Context in Early Fourteenth-Century English Manuscript Illumination', *The British Library Journal*, 20, Spring 1994, 35–54; Nigel Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, 2 vols, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles, 4, London, 1982–1988, II: 1250–1285, 40, nos 75, 64, 74, and 176; Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285–1385*, 2 vols, 'A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles', 5, London, 1986, I, no. 61; for further bibliography on the manuscript, see the BL bibliographic record at <http://tinyurl.com/o65mg7m>. Other devotional books were not far behind. For example, in the border of the contemporaneous Bohun Hours, next to the historiated D initial, the Last Judgment proceeds precisely so: above, Christ judges the resurrected humanity; below, the damned are swallowed by the flaming mouth of hell and boil in a cauldron above flames stoked by two demons, one red, one black. For up-to-date bibliography, which includes Lucy Freeman Sandler's prodigious contributions, see the BL bibliographic record at <http://tinyurl.com/p2ycw3r>
- 52 On speech scrolls in manuscript illumination in particular see Alison R. Flett, 'The Significance of Text Scrolls: Towards a Descriptive Terminology', in *Medieval Texts and Images: Studies of Manuscripts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Margaret M. Manion and Berard J. Muir, Philadelphia, 1991, 43–56; Susanne Wittekind, 'Vom Schriftband zum Spruchband: Zum Funktionswandel von Spruchbändern in Illustrationen biblischer Stoffe', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 30, 1996, 343–367; Michael Camille, 'Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy', *Art History*, 8: 1, March 1985, 26–49, at 29 in *passim*; and Emma Dillon, *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260–1330*, Oxford, 2012. On orality, see, first and foremost, Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307*, Malden, MA, 2013.
- 53 See Claudia Rabel, 'L'illustration du Rational des divins offices de Guillaume Durand', in *Guillaume Durand, évêque de Mende (vers 1230–1296): canoniste, liturgiste et homme politique. Actes de la Table ronde du CNRS, Mende, 24–27 mai 1990*, ed. P.-M. Gy, Paris, 1992, 171–181; on a more in-depth discussion of the empty scrolls as symbols of spiritual misunderstanding specific to Jean Golein's translation, see Pamela Nourrigeon, 'Talking Empty Scrolls: Zechariah's Images in the *Rationale divinarum officiorum*', presented at ICMS, Kalamazoo, 2014.
- 54 Luke 1:67–80.
- 55 On Giovannino de Grassi's work, see Marco Rossi, *Giovannino de Grassi: la corte e la cattedrale*, Cinisello Balsamo [Milan], 1995; the manuscript facsimile, created in 1972, includes critical essays by Millard Meiss and Edith W. Kirsch: *The Visconti Hours*, National Library, Florence, New York, 1972.
- 56 The naming episode offered countless ways to play with the notion of (un)spoken word for late medieval artists. As Kathryn Smith points out, in the Naming of the Baptist bas-de-page image in the Taymouth Hours Zechariah holds a scroll that has already been inscribed, seemingly in response to the psalm verse found in the main text of that folio, 'callest them all by their names' (see *The Taymouth Hours: Stories and the Construction of Self in Late Medieval England*, Toronto, 2012, 127, 131, fig. 53).

- 57 On Simone Martini's Annunciation and the use of this scripted greeting as an example for the pious, see Ann Van Dijk, 'The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery', *Art Bulletin*, 81: 3, September 1999, 420–436.
- 58 Dillon, *The Sense of Sound*, 211; for a general discussion of speech scrolls, 203–214.
- 59 David Landau and Peter W. Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470–1550*, New Haven, 1994, 62. See the discussion of various readings and filling in of empty speech scrolls in the depiction of William Gardiner's execution, and for a similar device in Caxton's *Mirror of the Worlde and Golden Legend*, discussed in John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture*, New York, 2006, 202–203. See also David Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe*, Burlington, 2010, 70–71 on the interpretation of the Crucifixion by different viewers who wrote different words as issuing from Christ.
- 60 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus, De Genesi ad litteram, Locutiones in Heptateuchum*, CSEL 28/1, ed. J. Zycha, Vienna, 1894, liber XII.xxvi.53, 418–419; on this concept, see, among others, Matthias E. Kogger, 'Grundprobleme der augustinischen Erkenntnislehre: Erläutert am Beispiel von *De genesi ad litteram XII*', *Recherches augustiniennes*, 2, August 1962, 33–57; Ronald Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, Lexington, 1969, 9–122, 39ff; Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination*, 165–172; Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1992, 36–43; and *Craft of Thought*, on the discussion of Augustine's visions concept, 172; see also Sermon 88.5.5., discussed in Margaret Miles, 'Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's "De trinitate" and "Confessions"', *The Journal of Religion*, 63: 2, April 1983, 125–142, at 125.
- 61 Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. Ronald M. Polansky, New York, 2007, Book 3, chapter 4; Avicenna, *De Anima (Fi'l-Nafs)*, trans. and ed. Fazlur Rahman, London, 1959.
- 62 See, e.g. Marvin Zuckerman, 'Hallucinations, Reported Sensations, and Images', in *Sensory Deprivation: Fifteen Years of Research*, ed. John Zubekk, New York, 85–125.
- 63 The Evangeliary of St Andreas of Cologne contains green and blue swaths over still-visible parchment (AE 679, fol. 126v, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt): briefly discussed in Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, Peterborough, Ont., 2004, 173 and flap jacket. The Silos Apocalypse features a brilliant yellow square in place of a miniature that usually indicates sky or spells 'silentio' (BL Add ms. 11695, fol. 125v): explored in Francisco Prado-Villar, 'Silentium: el silencio cósmico como imagen en la edad media y la modernidad', *Revista de Poética Medieval*, 27: Poéticas verbales, Poéticas visuales, 2013, 21–43, at 36–37. Bibliography on the manuscript: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_11695](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_11695)
- 64 Christian Heck. *Le Ci nous dit: l'image médiévale et la culture des laïcs au XIVe siècle: les enluminures du manuscrit de Chantilly*, Turnhout, 2011, discussed on 66–67, fig. 417; see also Elisa Brilli and Aline Debert, 'La lettre et l'esprit des images. Problèmes d'indexation des images du Ci nous dit', in *Le Tonnerre des exemples. Exempla et médiation culturelle dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu, Pascal Collomb, and Jacques Berlioz, Rennes, 2010, 317–326 at 317–318. For the edition of the text and a critical introduction, see Gérard Blangez, *Ci nous dit: recueil d'exemples moraux*, Paris, 1979–1986.
- 65 This miniature is also one of the only six images that do not contain any human beings or other animals; moreover, along with the apocalyptic image, it is the only abstract one.
- 66 Christian Heck. *Le Ci nous dit*, 66; the concept discussed by Jean Daniélou in *Les origines du christianisme latin*, Paris, 1978, 64–87.
- 67 Failures of iconographic legibility have been pointed out by several scholars, albeit in different contexts; see, e.g. Michael Camille's 'Mouths and Meanings: Towards an Anti-Iconography of Medieval Art', in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy, Princeton, 1993, 43–54, or Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image*, Paris, 1990, 145–153, and *Fra Angelico*. On the concept of 'reading' images, see the eponymously titled article by Elizabeth Sears in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas, Ann Arbor, 2002, 1–7.
- 68 On the meanings of the colour, see Michel Pastoreau, *Black: The History of a Colour*, Princeton, 2009, esp. chapter 3, 45–76; and John Harvey, *The Story of Black*, London, 2013.
- 69 One must differentiate here between blackness and darkness; the latter, of course, has been assigned a negative valence since the dawn of Christianity, and articulated already in St Augustine's discussion of the Fall of the Rebel Angels (*City of God*, 11, 33).
- 70 Raoul Glaber, *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*, ed. Maurice Prou, Paris, 1886, 123
- 71 Michel Pastoreau, 'Les couleurs de la mort', in *A Réveiller les morts: la mort au quotidien dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. Danièle-Bidon and Cécile Treffort, Lyon, 1993, 102–103.
- 72 Discussed in Michel Pastoreau, 'Les cisterciens et la couleur au XIIIe siècle', *L'ordre cistercien et le Berry, Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire du Berry*, 136, May 1998, 21–30.
- 73 St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 28 in *On the Song of Songs*, vol. 2, ed. Jean Leclercq, trans. Kilian Walsh, Collegeville, MN, 1976, 89, 97.
- 74 Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 376: '[un] ultime objet pictural de la contemplation.'
- 75 'Elles tendent à se réaliser, elles se réalisent en effet, elles créent un monde qui agit et réagit [...] elles ne cessent pas de vivre, elles sollicitent l'action, elles s'emparent à leur tour de celle qui les a propagées, pour l'accroître, la confirmer, la conformer.' Translated in Henri Focillon, *Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler, 1934, 1948; New York, 1989, 127.
- 76 'Quod non est verum, quod aliquid fiat ex nichilo neque factum sit in prima creatione.' Heinrich Denifle, with Emile Chatelaine, *Cartularium Universitatis Parisiensis: Sub auspiciis consilii generalis facultatum parisiensium*, 4 vols, Paris, 1889–1897, here: vol. 1, 553.
- 77 Pierre Maurice Marie Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, trans. Roger Ariew, Chicago, 1985, 392. On the impossibility of such a locus, see Eduard Jan Dijksterhuis, *The Mechanization of the World Picture*, Oxford, 1961, 39. The impossibility of the void was formulated by numerous early philosophers, from Aristotle (who rejected the existence of the void in Book IV of *Physics*) to Avicenna (d. 1037) and al-Ghazzali (d. 1111). As Edward Grant elegantly sums up (*Physical Science in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1971, rpt. 1990, 73–74), Aristotle 'concluded that all matter in existence was contained within our finite world. Nothing remained outside from which another world could be formed; nor could any matter come into being there [...]. The non-existence of material bodies beyond the world [...] implied the impossibility of a vacuum, which was defined as something in which the presence of a body was potentially possible.'
- 78 Divi Roberti Lincolniensis *Super octo libris Physicorum brevis et utilitis summa*, fol. Sign. Q2, col. C (fol. 281, col. A), trans. in Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology*, 539, note 14.
- 79 *Questiones supra librum Physicorum a magistro dicto Bacun, Queritur utrum sit ponere vacuum in natura*, fol. 48, col. d (XIII, 240), trans. and discussed in chapter 9 of Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology*. Duhem (389), however, draws attention to the scholastic distinction between 'God's absolute omnipotence, for which nothing is impossible except that which is contradictory, and His restricted omnipotence, which cannot produce that which divine wisdom would disapprove'; he concludes that 'the production of void' is therefore 'prohibited from restricted omnipotence'.
- 80 Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology*, 403.
- 81 Grant, *Physical Science in the Middle Ages*, 75.
- 82 Robert Kaplan, *The Nothing that Is: A Natural History of Zero*, Oxford, 2000, 93.
- 83 Leonardo Fibonacci, *Fibonacci's Liber Abaci: Leonardo Pisano's Book of Calculation*, trans. Laurence E. Sigler, Berlin, 2002, 17.
- 84 William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*, London, 1866, 172–181; in particular, in recounting Gerbert's mathematical feats, William speaks of a certain Saracen philosopher who possessed a book filled with sorcery and knowledge, the book that was eventually stolen by Gerbert in the middle of the night (174).
- 85 Charles Seife, *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*, New York, 2000, 80.
- 86 Passage reproduced and discussed in E. R. Sleight, 'The craft of Nombryng', in *The European Mathematical Awakening: A Journey through the History of Mathematics from 1000 to 1800*, ed. Frank J. Swetz, Mineola, New York, 2013, 27; translation mine. The explanation is preceded by the following rubric: 'Nil cifra significat sed dat signare sequenii.' Sleight's article originally published in *Mathematics Teacher*, 32, 1939, 243–248.

- Full text published as 'The Crafter of Nombrynge' in *The Earliest Arithmetics in English*, ed. Robert Steele, Early English Text Society: Extra series 118, London, 1922, 132.
- 87 Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, 1987; Stanford, 1993, 13.
- 88 'Aussi bien n'y suis fors que une chiffre donnant ombre et encombre', in Georges Chastellain, *Œuvres de Georges Chastellain*, 8 vols, Bruxelles, 1863–66, vol. 2, 26.
- 89 See essays in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, Cambridge, 2004.
- 90 Meister Eckhart, 'Blessed Are the Poor', in *Readings in Western Religious Thought: The Middle Ages through the Reformation*, ed. Patrick V. Reid, New York, 1995, 264.
- 91 Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, 11 vols, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1936–, vol. I, 39:1–41:7, translated in Bruce Milem, *The Unspoken Word: Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons*, Washington, DC, 2002, 73. See also Eckhart's Sermon 83 ('Renovamini Spiritu'): 'God is nameless, because no one can say anything or understand anything about him [...]. Do not try to understand God, for God is beyond all understanding. [...] If you do not wish to be brutish, do not understand God who is beyond words', in Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. and intro. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, New York, 1981, 206–207.
- 92 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Evelyn Underhill, 1912, Mineola, New York, 2003, 116, chapter 68; for the quote from the *Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings*, see Underwood's preface, vi–vii.
- 93 Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, Mahwah, NY, 1997, 258.
- 94 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, trans. Fr Germaine Heron, New Haven, 1954, 17; discussed in Rosalie L. Colie's brilliant book *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, 1966, Hamden, CN, 1976, 26–27.
- 95 On the discussion of void spaces in modern art, see Craig Dworkin, *No Medium*, Cambridge, MA, 2013. The unexpected modernity of medieval and early modern culture has recently been explored in Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time*, New York, 2012, and Amy Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum*, New York, 2012.
- 96 For the discussion of icons and abstraction in Russian early twentieth-century art, see Sarah Warren, *Mikhail Larionov and the Cultural Politics of Late Imperial Russia*, Burlington, VT, 2013, 83–110.
- 97 For the interview with Batchelor in *Artimage*, see <https://artimage.org.uk/news/2015/david-batchelor-in-conversation-with-artimage-about-found-monochromes/>, accessed 16 February 2016. On negative casting, see Moran Pearl, 'Negative Casting as a Container of Memory', in *Transgressing Boundaries: Humanities in Flux*, ed. Marija Wakounig and Markus Peter Beham, Berlin, 2013, 138–141. See also Ulrike Ghering, 'Reinventing the White Icon', in *Nichts/Nothing*, ed. Martina Weinhart and Max Hollein, Frankfurt, 2006, 71–77; Branden Joseph, 'White on White', *Critical Inquiry*, 27: 1, Autumn 2000, 90–96; Michael Gibbs, 'All or Nothing', in *All or Nothing: An Anthology of Blank Books*, Derbyshire, 2005, 7–23. In 2011, Derek Beaulieu sent the Bury Museum and Archives an empty box via UPS; UPS refused to promise that such a box of 'nothing' would be safely delivered to the museum; see Derek Beaulieu, 'A Box of Nothing', in *A Box of Nothing*, Calgary, 2011.
- 98 *Voids: A Retrospective*, ed. John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, and Philippe Pirotte, Zürich, 2009.
- 99 See, e.g., Max Hollein, 'Preface', *Nichts/Nothing*, ed. Martina Weinhart and Max Hollein, Frankfurt, 2006, 5: 'From the birth of conceptual art in the 1960s down to the immediate present, visual artists have constantly been addressing the idea of nothing.'
- 100 See, e.g., Kazimir Severinovich Malevich, *Bog ne skinut: iskusstvo, tserkov, fabrika (God Is Not Cast Down: Art, Church, Factory)*, Vitebsk, 1922; Wassily Kandinsky, 'Empty Canvas', in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, New York, 1994, 780–783; Ilya Kabakov, 'On the Subject of "The Void"', in *Total Enlightenment: Moscow Conceptual Art 1960–1990*, ed. Boris Groys, Max Hollein, and Manuel Fontán del Jundo, Ostfildern, 2008, 366–375; Antonio Tapies, 'Painting and the Void', trans. Cathy Douglas and Patricia Matthews, in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Christine Stiles and Peter Selz, Berkeley, 1996, 57–58.
- 101 It is seductive to see this change develop in concert with the anxious distrust of figural imagery that pervaded late medieval culture, rooted – at least in part – in an overabundance of images, not all of them necessarily sanctioned by the ecclesiastical establishments (see, e.g., Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, New York, 1989, 203–220, at 213: 'Representations were becoming more difficult to regulate and control, more unruly in their form and variety.') Like his many contemporaries, the ever-cheery prolific moralizer Deschamps opined on the subject by writing an exhortatory ballad that began with 'Ne faites pas les dieux d'argent / D'or, de fust, de pierre ou d'arain, / Qui font ydolatrre la gent' and ended each stanza with 'Telz simulacres n'aourons' [Do not make gods of silver / Of gold, of wood, of stone, or of bronze, / Which lead people to idolatry [...]. We won't adore such simulacra]; Deschamps, 'Que on ne doit mettre...', in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 8: Lettres. Balades. Pièces diverses, ed. Gaston Raynaud, 1893, 201–203, here quoted from 210–212, lines 1–3 and 10.
- 102 Edward Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge, 1981, 80.
- 103 For 'beholder's share' see part 3 of Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, New York, 1960.
- 104 Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: 'en quoi, pourquoi et comment cela ne ressemble-t-il pas?'*