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Black and White or Technicolor

Marty Slaughter

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Abstract: This article traces the repression of signifying elements like color in the art of the late medieval period and coordinates it with the rise of text, sovereignty and legal order in the 16th century. It uses Deleuze's notions of life and the virtual as a springboard for an analysis of the power of color in Giotto, Fra Angelico, Grunewald, Cranach and Holbein. It traces a trajectory from an art in the late Middle Ages that decodes and escapes judgment through a joyful use of color to a privileging of text (be it biblical or legal), repression of color and its reterritorialization in classical representation, a despotic regime of signs – seen quite literally in the portrait of the imperial and despotic monarch, Henry VIII. This trajectory in art is linked to an analogous movement: the imposition and extension of sovereignty and the legal system as well as the colonization of social life by law in the formative period of the nation state. The challenge is to create a world of technicolor, to actualize the color of living and the living of color. Without it, there is only law, in black and white.

Keywords: color, Deleuze, legal order, Middle Ages, painting, Reformation, sovereignty

On all sides there appears so rich and so amazing a variety of forms that it is more delightful to read the marbles than the manuscripts, and to spend the whole day in admiring these things piece by piece, rather than in meditating on the Law....¹

INTRODUCTION

In 1521 Hans Holbein painted 'The Body of the Dead Christ in His Tomb', one of the most desolate images of death and its finality in the western canon.² It is also one of the most achromatic, painted mainly in minimalist shades of the brown and gray and the yellow-green of the body's putrefaction. In *The Idiot*, one of Dostoevsky's characters claimed it was enough to make one lose one's faith.³ As I shall discuss below, it can be taken as resting not only at the outermost limit of faith but also of representation. Fifteen years later (1536), Holbein had become

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, quoted in E. Panofsky ed. and trans., *Abbot Suger*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 22.

² Hans Holbein, 'The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb' (Basel: Kunstmuseum, 1521).

³ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. H. and O. Carlisle (New York: New American Library, 1969), 428.

court painter to Henry VIII and painted his now iconic portrait.⁴ In contrast to the earlier painting of Christ, Henry is in full regalia rendered in rock-solid silver, gold and jewel-like colors. Holbein's trajectory runs from the death of God to his resurrection in the figure of the sovereign, from a world leached of color to one of deeply saturated brilliance in the service of form or, more to the point, of the propaganda of sovereign power. That sovereign founds our juridical order and there is good reason to see this as the judgment of God resurrected in secular form. Holbein's portrait can also stand as an icon for the regime of classical representation, as Foucault called it, whereby the force of paint and color was repressed, if not eliminated, in favor of the written word. This cultural privileging of representation, text and law go hand in hand. We can trace the disappearance of asignifying elements like color and coordinate it with the rise of text and legal order.

Painting — the visual — is not text. That immediately sets it in a world separate from law, which is. My interest is in the non-discursive, asignifying qualities of the visual, of painting; more specifically in the forces of paint and of color, of the way in which color actualizes the virtual of paint, in the same way that 'living' actualizes the forces of 'life' and provides a means of deterritorialization in order to generate or re-generate that 'life'. Color can free itself from the law of form and render another kind of justice, giving justice to those forces, a justice that is very different from the judgment and law — culture — that suppress life and its forces.⁵

For Deleuze, art is a way of doing or thinking philosophy. It gives rise to problems that require new kinds of thought. Thus he is not writing as an art critic (although he was a brilliant one) or putting philosophy to work in the service of art history or theory. He picks his artists for the problems pose and the insights they provide, which is to say, for the *work* they do for thinking. Deleuze develops his thoughts about painting mainly in terms of modern art and discusses color in his work on Francis Bacon.⁶ There he discovers a kind of color that generates 'sensation' and makes itself felt, not in the mind or even the 'optical unconscious', but directly on the nerves. In *Francis Bacon* he analyzed the modern colorists, Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh, and placed Bacon in that tradition. In passing he relates these artists to the great tradition of baroque colorists (Titian, Giorgione, Tintoretto, Veronese) and suggests that their work is a kind of 'minor literature' or a deterritorialization of classical representation.

While there is no quarrelling with Deleuze's argument, his examples are limited to what we recognize as the modern world, either early or late. I would like to push this back and use Deleuze to interrogate the work of color in art before that period. Here we might see late medieval art as itself a kind of 'minor literature'. This is an alternate story, not entirely the one that Nietzsche proposed about Christianity and its instantiation in theologico-political form. Rather, it is one of a joyous paganism rendered in colors of shattering beauty. For all the repression in medieval

⁴ Holbein's original, full length portrait of Henry VIII was part of a mural in the Privy Chamber at Whitehall and was widely copied. The original was lost in a fire in 1698. A preparatory cartoon (1536) is held by the National Portrait Gallery. One of the most popular copies of the Whitehall image of Henry VIII, dated 1536, is by an unknown artist and is found at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

⁵ J. M. Bernstein, 'Judging Life: From Beauty to Experience, From Kant to Chaim Soutine', *Constellations* 7 (2000), 170. Deleuze routinely linked Soutine with Bacon and other 20th century colorists.

⁶ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. D. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003).

Christianity — detailed by Foucault in his studies of the confession of the self — there is another, virtual history that we might try to recover. In the art of that history there are points where the force of color separates from the codes and forms — the representations — that would subordinate and contain it. Thus we can interrogate late medieval art to ask what the pure materiality of paint and the virtuality of color, as opposed to form, tell us about the force of 'life'. Although Deleuze doesn't discuss this, it is related to the strength and joy — the vitality — that arises out of, and is one of the virtualities actualized by, the material body of paint.⁷

These joyous moments in late medieval art are brought to an end by the Reformation in the North and the high Renaissance in the South. In different ways, each subordinates paint and color to representation and form. Here I start with Giotto and Holbein. I use these painters as bookends because they straddle the historical divide — the transition from late medieval to early modern — that concerns me. On the medieval side I also treat Fra Angelico as representing the South and Grunewald as representing the North. On the side of the early modern, I add Cranach, the unofficial artist of Lutheran Reformation. Through these examples I would like to trace this trajectory from art that decodes and escapes judgment to its reterritorialization in classical representation, a despotic regime of signs.

In this period we witness the rise of the state and colonization of social life by law. My further question is therefore how Deleuzian philosophy can be used to forge new connections between art and (legal) history, and putting those to work, to make new connections about our world of law and judgment. From a Deleuzian perspective how did art work at the point where the modern state with its imposition of a legal system and the hegemony of law came into being? I would like therefore to weave together three strands of thought: Deleuze's ideas on the nature of painting and the role of color in it; changes witnessed in art and in particular the use of color between the late medieval and the Reformation and Renaissance; finally, the way in which Deleuzian painting and color might be related, might be a symptom or sign of a regime of judgment that needs to be transformed.

Deleuze's objection to law is implicit. It is all that goes with judgment — the judgment of mother, God, critic or whatever other form it takes; judgment that is disciplinary and penetrates the heart of whatever BWO we possess to diminish life force. This complements Deleuze's horror of the codes, clichés, ideologies and practices that work to suppress the forces of life and make us dumb (as in cow) and sad.

For Deleuze, there are three kinds of thought or ways of creating something new: philosophy, which works with the concept; science, which works with functions and art, which is the domain of sensation, of percepts and affects.⁸ Art struggles to revive sensations captured by convention: 'What is painted on the canvas is the

⁷ For the sake of simplicity, in this essay, I use the term 'painting' to refer to any kind of visual art, e.g., it includes frescoes. I use the term 'paint' to refer to any colored media, e.g., it includes tempera.

⁸ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), ch. 7.

body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as experiencing *this* sensation.⁹ The 'essence of art' brings 'a kind of joy', a joy based on a revolution, a turning away and around so as to create something new.¹⁰ As Deleuze puts it: 'The only revolutionary is a joyful revolutionary, and the only painting that is esthetically and politically revolutionary is joyful.'¹¹ Ordinary life is therefore in a constant struggle with the chains of law, judgment, cliché and convention, trying to free itself. In the specific area of painting, this means the Deleuzian 'figure' must be freed from those forms. That means there is necessarily dis-figurement and de-formation.¹² One of the best means of doing this is through color. In my terms here, creating the new means bringing (the forces of) color back into life, transforming life from its capture or death in black and white, to its joy in technicolor. To the extent that art contributes to this creation and transformation, it opposes the world and work of judgment and law.

I. HOW PAINTING WORKS

Painting is composed of line and color. Classical line is often associated with representation and has been treated extensively in art criticism; color less so. One of the reasons for this is clear: line is or can be associated with objects and forms, and forms can be read semiotically as though one were reading a text. This, for example, has been the basis of iconography. Furthermore, the relations between objects and forms can be narrativized and turned into a further kind of signification or representation. Color can be used to illustrate forms, just as a child is taught to color within the lines. Color can also operate as a code (green signifies hope; red signifies passion). Besides this obvious kind of symbolism, color can be related to, or can encode objects. Thus we learn not to color leaves pink or flowers black. Or take Byzantine painting. Not only are the figures structured on hierarchy and stasis but color also enters into this code as figures are clothed in dark colors associated with the Emperor.¹³ Compared to form and contour, however, color is relatively unstable and can be used in a way that precedes and/or cuts against form. This is the lesson of the great colorists, among whom Deleuze places Bacon.

Traditionally color is differentiated by hue, saturation and value. Hue is color or pigment (red, yellow); saturation is its intensity or diminishment (white mixed with red diminishes the intensity of the red); value is the shading, the lightness or darkness (*chiaroscuro*). As Deleuze points out, color does not operate in a binary system. While we may know the difference between black and white, as anyone who tries to choose 'off-white' paint knows, there are an infinite variety of shades.¹⁴

⁹ *Supra* n. 6, at 35.

¹⁰ G. Deleuze, 'Mysticism and Masochism', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-74*, ed. D. Lapoujade, trans. M. Taormina (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2002), 134.

¹¹ G. Deleuze, 'Hot and Cool', in *Desert Islands*, *supra* n. 10, at 251. As D.H. Lawrence explains, 'the subject [of a painting] can be ugly, it can have a terrifying quality, a desperate, almost repugnant quality, as in El Greco's paintings. But all of this is strangely swept away by the joy of the painting ... the strange joy which the creation of the image begets.' *Ibid.*

¹² On the concept of the 'figure' in Deleuze, see M. Slaughter, 'The Arc and the Zip: Deleuze and Lyotard on Art', *Law and Critique* 15 (2004), 231.

¹³ G. Deleuze, 'The Nature of Flows', Seminar 14/12/1971 at www.webdeleuze.com.

¹⁴ The bibliography on color is voluminous and far beyond the scope of this paper. It is discussed by anthropologists, philosophers, aestheticians, art historians, critics and conservationists, as well as artists themselves. A good starting point is J. Gage, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstractions*

The history of color in painting might be thought of as color endlessly differentiating itself. It arises from and retreats into shadow or black obscurity, new tones breaking away from old. For example, it was not until the Renaissance that violet, aubergine and purple were distinguished from red and blue.¹⁵ Or to cite a different example, in his late period, Titian juxtaposes brushstrokes of opposing colors to achieve an optical mixing of colors, thereby extending the range of color.¹⁶ Later, Van Gogh mixes colors ('broken' colors) and differentiates them from pure hues. Added to that, the tonal value and the effect of a particular patch of color changes depending on what color is put next to it. Some theorists describe color as either moving toward or receding from the viewer.¹⁷ Goethe, on the other hand, describes colors as either warm or cold, expanding and contracting — pulsing with the systolic and diastolic — and it is his analysis that Deleuze depends on.¹⁸

Deleuze's most extensive discussion of painting is in *Francis Bacon*. His theory (and history) of art is drawn from the art historians Riegl, Worringer and Wolflin and the phenomenologists Strauss and Maldiney for whom Cezanne is a pivotal figure.¹⁹ Maldiney adopts Strauss' general theory of sensation and applies it on both a historico-cultural level and in terms of individual works of art. Deleuze combined this with Riegl for whom these perceptual moments delineated genres of art. According to Maldiney, first there is chaos; then a systolic movement in which subject is separated from object and each takes form. This creates a haptic space in which contour is defined. Egyptian bas reliefs are the prime example. The systolic is followed by a diastolic movement in which form erupts and dissolves into color in a pathic, ecstatic communication with the external. The diastolic creates optical space in which light and color seem to move between appearance and disappearance. Here Byzantine mosaics, which catch light at different angles, would be the prime example.²⁰ Classical art is characterized as the balance between haptic and optic. To this Deleuze adds Worringer's analysis of Gothic art which Deleuze treats as an exclusively haptic style.

Color, for Deleuze, is force, which means movement and movement aligns it with the vital forces of 'life'.²¹ In art, however, there is a distinction between optic and

(London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); C. Harrison and P. Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

¹⁵ P. Hills, *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250-1550* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 150.

¹⁶ M. Hall, *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 215.

¹⁷ Kandinsky noted that if yellow and blue circles are put next to each other, the spectator will see 'in the yellow a spreading movement out from the centre, and a noticeable approach to the spectator. The blue, on the other hand, moves in upon itself, like a snail retreating into its shell, and draws away from the spectator.' W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 37.

¹⁸ *Supra* n. 11, at 248: 'a color is only potentially hot or cool, and this potential will be actualized only in relation to other colors ... A circuit of exchange and communication is set up in the painting, and from one painting to another.'

¹⁹ For cites and an extensive treatment of this background see R. Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*, (London: Routledge, 2003), chs. 5 and 6. See also S. Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 2005). Other general discussions of Deleuze on art are: P. Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), ch. 5; S. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Palgrave, 2006); and D. Smith's Introduction to the American edition of Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of light in Byzantine mosaics, see L. James, 'Color and Meaning in Byzantium', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003), 223.

²¹ Deleuze also has brief discussion of the philosophical aspects of color in C. Boundas, ed., *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester (London: Continuum, 2001), 128-29 and in his discussions of the 'colorists' Minelli,

haptic color. Optical color is based on relations of value (light-dark); the hand that holds the brush is dominated by the eye, and hence by the mind. As Jay Bernstein put it in a different context, 'it abstracts line (as boundary, border, limit) and color from colored things, and by extension discounts the sensuous particularity of *things*, and hence their thingliness' As he points out further, whatever occurs in the perceiver — color included -- necessarily comes with the baggage of culture.²²

Haptic color ('colorism') on the other hand is a force of permutation and modulation that is based on relations of hue or tone (warm-cold) rather than value.²³ As Deleuze defined it,

"Colorism" means not only that relations are established between colors (as in every painting worthy of this name), but that color itself is discovered to be the variable relation, the differential relation, on which everything else depends. The formula of the colorists is: if you push color to its pure internal relations (hot-cold, expansion-contraction), then you have everything.²⁴

In haptic color, the hand moves almost automatically; neither hand nor eye is subordinate. For Deleuze logic of haptic color is that of sensation itself, the time of pure becoming. Not only that. Haptic color depends on the material properties of paint, a colored thing. Color becomes a thing in itself, with a rhythm and life of its own and this is what modern artists like Bacon develop.²⁵

Before I turn to specific artists, there is a further issue: art of this period is based on and depicted a Christian narrative or at least traditions spun from that. We need to ask why paintings of religious figures and narratives are not simply representation, a dogmatic Christian 'image of thought' as it were. Furthermore, it would be foolish to claim that Christianity and its art do not depend on transcendence. That transcendence, however, is complicated by the very figure of Christ who, through his Incarnation, made the divine immanent in creation. The manifestation of this paradox (the divine in the human; the virtuality of the religious image) ranged from the crude to the exquisite. Religious art was one of the places to explore the fantasy of an incarnate, if not immanent divinity and did so often with a joyous paganism.

Deleuze himself discussed this in detail. As he observes, the code of Christian dogma was given and inalterable and artists were content to rely on it. But the code itself was based on a fantasy so that 'with God, everything is permitted'.²⁶ Thus it allowed the 'liberation of Figures ... freed from all figuration'.²⁷ As a result, the figure was not 'linked to essence, but ... its opposite: the event, or even the changeable, the accident'. Artists working with divine figures were permitted, even obligated, to be creative so that Christianity contained 'the germ of a tranquil

Antonioni and Godard in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (London: Athlone Press, 1992), 118-19. There he claimed that 'Godard's formula, "it's not blood, it's red", is the formula of colourism.' *Ibid.*, at 118.

²² *Supra* n. 5, at 170.

²³ *Supra* n. 19, at 151-55.

²⁴ *Supra* n. 6, at 139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, at ch. 17, 'The Eye and the Hand'.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, at 9-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, at 10.

atheism', a paganism that nurtures painting.²⁸ In this painting there is 'a kind of exultation', 'the most unbridled strokes of madness'²⁹ and 'religious sentiment is painted in all the colors of the world.'³⁰ It was 'under the sign of the cross' that artists 'learned to steer the face [of Christ] and processes of facialization in all directions,' most pertinently in the direction of sensation, zones of indeterminacy, deterritorialization and the BWO.³¹ Here Deleuze liked to use the example of El Greco's 'The Burial of the Count of Orgaz' with elongated figures looking to heaven. In Deleuze's analysis, the lower half is representation; but 'in the upper half, where the count is received by Christ, there is a wild liberation, a total emancipation ... the Figures are relieved of their representative role, and enter directly into relation with an order of celestial sensations.'³² This is painting, or philosophy 'as passion'.³³

In Deleuze's account, beginning about 1450 with Bellini and culminating in the great Venetian painters of the 16th century, artists broke with the code of their Byzantine artistic heritage. They decoded and played with forms through flows of paint. Paint has forces that blow like the wind across the fixed plane of the canvas (the perfect analogy for the two dimensional plane of immanence). It creates its own forms — think of a flag or light dress in a breeze. Thus through these (decoded) flows of paint, artists produce all manner of decoded religious figures — queer and mannerist Christs; dreamy, vacant Madonnas; 'baby boys who have just nursed, little boys pooping'. Whether it is amorous or tortured, it is joyous.³⁴

It is clear that Deleuze finds the Baroque, and its colorists, to be the high point of painting before Cezanne. There color loosened its bonds with representation, creating a space that arises out of color and a kind of movement that depends on it.³⁵ To read Paul Hills' book on the Venetian colorists (a book Deleuze would have loved) is to understand why. Hills traces the process in which the early Renaissance denigration of color — as mere ornament, decoration or description of form — gives way to its release from its subordination to form.³⁶ Hills argues that by 1500, as opposed to the emphasis on form in central Italian painting, in northern Italian painting there was a 'softening' of contour so that it shades off into the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, at 124.

²⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (London: Continuum, 1987), 178-79, referring to Giotto's 'Stigmatization of St. Francis', in *The Life of St Francis Cycle*, Assisi (the translator's note wrongly identifies it as the 'Transfiguration'). For Deleuze, the figure of Christ here resembles a kite or an airplane.

³⁰ *Supra* n. 6, at 10.

³¹ *Supra* n. 29, at 178-79.

³² *Supra* n. 6, at 9; see also Deleuze, 'Seminar on Spinoza', 25/11/1980, www.webdeleuze.com: 'the way painting invests the divine is a way which is nothing but pictorial, where the painter finds nothing but the conditions of his radical emancipation.'

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Supra* n. 13.

³⁵ For H. Focillon, 'Baroque' is a late stage of period styles. 'Baroque forms ... live with passionate intensity a life that is entirely their own; they proliferate like some vegetable monstrosity ... They break apart even as they grow; they tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it, to become as one with all its possibilities.' *The Life of Forms in Art*, (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 58

³⁶ Interestingly, Hills sees the beginning of this in marble, which has no descriptive function, being brought into the pictorial field. This is part of Hills' larger thesis that the color and sparkle Venice itself — in the lagoon, in rich material draperies, in Venetian glass, in rich architectural materials like marble — give rise to the colorism of the Venetian school. *Supra* n. 15

ground. Color is no longer 'the stuff of dull matter but valued as the essential sign of life'.³⁷

Marcia Hall's study of the Renaissance shows that this development was not limited to Venice but is evidenced in early Renaissance painters in both Italy and the North (The Netherlands, France, and Germany). One of the things that precipitated the revolution in color was Van Eyck's 'discovery' in the 1430's (apocryphal as it turns out) of how to bind pigment in oil, a technique adopted in Italy by mid-century. Hall explains the import of this simply and succinctly. Oil allows a painter to apply color in relatively thin and transparent layers. Once the surface of the canvas was prepared with an impermeable white substance, '[t]he lights would be painted thinly, allowing the white ground to shine through; the shadows would receive multiple glazes, becoming thicker and more opaque ... A wonderful depth of color was achieved because the light actually penetrates the glazes and bounces off the white ground.'³⁸

With this expanded power in painting, by the early 16th century Italian critics were making a distinction between color (material, descriptive) and coloring (a power to affect). Thus we can see in Titian color that creates 'states of becoming'.³⁹ It not only shows the movement in individual bodies and flesh (even in small movements like blushing), but also shows movement traveling over the entire canvas, 'the total expanse of the picture as an entity rather than its separate descriptive parts'.⁴⁰ The energy of the figures in the Italian colorists

flows out of them and into the surrounding air, charging the atmosphere with a positive force ... As contours disappear, the boundaries of forms merge to permit this flow. Open brushwork [creating figures by strokes of color directly on canvas rather than starting from an outline] and tonal coloring work together to fuse the parts and transmit energy.⁴¹

In Deleuzian terms, '[t]he energy of coloring is a metaphor for life, its quickenings and extinctions'.⁴² These then are the possibilities of deterritorialization through color, color that no longer follows form but takes on a life of its own in a Deleuzian movement and rhythm.

II. Late Medieval Art: Giotto, Fra Angelico and Grunewald

The examples from late medieval art, north and south, reveal a kind of Deleuzian force that creates zones of indeterminacy. Christ passes from the human to the abject as well as the human to the divine, becoming-Other with as much sensation as the figures of Bacon. In each of these cases, this is achieved through the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, at 216.

³⁸ This created the effect of 'the translucency of stained glass ... Compared to that of the Italians, the coloring of Van Eyck and his followers is deeper and more saturated ... Paler colors may better simulate the bleaching Italian sun where reflection washes out the intensity of color. Van Eyck [and his followers in the North] created a cozy, sheltered interior, where candles, rather than sun, provide the illumination.' *Ibid.*, at 70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, at 220-24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, at 226.

⁴¹ *Supra* n. 16, at 216. Hall treats Michelangelo as one of the first painters to set color against form; Deleuze claimed that Bacon was the product of a kind of haptic colorism that had begun with Michelangelo. See *supra* n. 6, at 161.

⁴² *Supra* n. 15, at 224.

materiality of paint and through color. Late medieval-early Renaissance art took two different paths, however, one in Italy, the other in Northern Europe. In contrast with the art of the North, which I shall discuss presently, Italian art is more given to form, harmony and what might be called the beautiful. There is not as much focus on the suffering Christ as there is on the serene joy of his presence in the world. The gestures of Italian art towards transcendence or toward the event (of the divine) are more subtle, and ironically, more dependent on color and the materiality of paint.

In her perceptive analysis of Giotto, Kristeva links color to drive and its articulations in and on the body. Although she writes from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is possible to ignore that element and still profit from her analysis. For Kristeva, form and narrative in painting belong to the signifying, symbolic system, somewhat like Deleuze's codes and representations. This is the order of the One, of unity and closure both of meaning and narrative. Color on the other hand — in language that could come from Deleuze — is 'a pressure ... linked to the body proper', 'a physiologically supported drive', a Deleuzian force if you will.⁴³ Color in art lays down 'One Meaning so that it might at once be pulverized, multiplied into plural meanings. Color is the shattering of unity'.⁴⁴ Color is the trace of the excess — of meaning and drives — that escapes symbolization or representation. It is not therefore the unity of white light, 'of meaning cut off from body'; rather it fragments and segments that light into difference and multiplicity.⁴⁵

Despite this potential multiplicity inherent in art, for the most part medieval art was dominated by the Christian narrative and the work itself meant to be read. Kristeva argues it was Giotto who revolutionized the art of his time by liberating color and turning it against form, 'the transcendental domain of One Meaning'.⁴⁶ Giotto of course is famous for turning his figures in space, away from the flat plane and frontal view of Byzantine figures (organic bodies if there ever were ones). Theologically this reverses the order of the hieratic Byzantine icon in which the status of the divine is maintained as wholly Other by the symmetry of its form and its direct regard of the viewer. God is the subject; the viewer is his object. By placing the divine in perspectival space, he is given body and humanized. Some would say this deprived the divine of glory and transcendence; Deleuze would say transcendence is collapsed into a plane of immanence.

Kristeva shows the way in which Giotto organized the Arena chapel frescos into overlapping and conflicting space — 'a space of noncentered, unbordered and unfixed transitions' — through contrasts in color.⁴⁷ The most significant is the stunning blue, which given its perceptual qualities, is the most colored of colors. It comes before or beyond the object's fixed form, creating a zone that escapes structure and form vanishes.⁴⁸ It collapses form, erasing 'angles, contours, limits,

⁴³ J. Kristeva, 'Giotto's Joy', in L. Roudiez, ed., *Desire in Language* T. Gora, A. Jardine and L. Roudiez trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 219. In 'Motherhood According to Bellini', Kristeva discusses color in Bellini's late painting, 'where forms are differentiated until they disappear into pure light'. See *ibid.*, at 266-69.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, at 221.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, at 223.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, at 224.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, at 230.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, at 225.

placements, and figurations but produces the *movement* of their confrontation.⁴⁹ Through this use of color, the frescos evade the 'law' of form, representation and univocal meaning and present a picture of sheer sensation and joy.

While Kristeva's brief analysis establishes the asignifying potential of color, she does not investigate how this is related to the material nature of paint, and thus, color itself — something that would be of concern to Deleuzians. That analysis has been carried out for more modern painters but hardly at all for medieval ones. The one exception is Georges Didi-Huberman who, in a remarkable series of discussions, engages with paint and color in a variety of late medieval contexts, none more illuminating than his analysis of Fra Angelico.⁵⁰ If 'life' is movement, this need not be a large one. A little breeze, a small 'agitation' of things is sufficient, and this is what we see in Angelico's work.

If color shatters the unity of meaning so too did medieval biblical exegesis. Fra Angelico in turn performed that exegesis in painting. Medieval biblical exegesis is based on a principle of association that pulverizes the literal, unitary meaning of the texts (as well as the mimesis, or semblance, assumed in narrative and in form) and creates a web of associations for any given figure, word or image so that images point to something else. Images (in language or art) are vestiges, traces of the divine that all lead back to the divine. But since also the divine is absolutely alter and uncircumscribable, they cannot directly signify it. It can only be approached, in Didi-Huberman's term, through 'dissemblance'. In contemplating biblical texts in this manner, the mind flits between (dissemblant) images; it is translated, in the sense of being moved from one state to another. Thus it is movement, which in Deleuzian terms, we know as force.

Using Fra Angelico as an example, what Didi-Huberman discovers in late medieval painting is movement of the image similar to that in biblical exegesis, one that is often achieved not only through the image and its line, but through color. In the San Marco frescoes there are moments where paint/color is set against narrative and form: 'All signs become *translata*. All places become places of passage ... of exchange, of displacement.'⁵¹ The dissemblant figures — the blotches in the paintings — make the beholder 'penetrate the admirable depths of the *figura Christi*, force [him] ... into a perpetual slippage'. Meaning is made infinite.⁵² They are signs of a non-sense, a presence, a force.⁵³ Fra Angelico's dissemblant images actualize Christ who presents himself through vestiges (such as paint).⁵⁴ What is most striking is the way in which Didi-Huberman shows the points in the paintings that achieve this actualization. In each of the paintings that he analyzes there is a kind of 'patch' that de-forms or dis-figures the forms in the painting. These patches reach the limits of representation and gesture to what remains and

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, at 231.

⁵⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. J. M. Todd (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); *Confronting Images*, trans. J. Goodman (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, *supra* n. 50, at 217.

⁵² *Ibid.*, at 100.

⁵³ This non-sense is replicated in Dionysian negative theology. It leads not to a mystical void but to a non-sense that sounds like nonsense. For example the images and analogies of Christ's wounds are increasingly odd: they are jewels, flowers, a breast, a vagina.

⁵⁴ Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, *supra* n. 50, at 88.

cannot be represented. They take on a life of their own outside the symbolic system (for Fra Angelico, that 'life' is necessarily that of the divine godhead).

An extended example comes from the faux-marble panels painted under the San Marco fresco called the 'Madonna of the Shadows'. While the fresco panel of the Madonna and Child represents the mystery of the Incarnation — the literal narrative — in Didi-Huberman's analysis, the marble panels below it are the unfigurable that point to the unrepresentability of the mystery. The panels are not a realistic rendering as is usually the case in faux marble paintings. Rather they are painted in a crude gesture of sprinkling or throwing red, white and yellow-green paint in the manner of Jackson Pollack.⁵⁵ They show a muddled, formless colored matter.⁵⁶ The panels do not represent marble but present themselves as paint.⁵⁷ The gesture of throwing paint disturbs the economy of representation to go beyond, i.e., 'to endow the visible with an anagogical virtue with the aim of "rendering a presence" ... of the mystery of the Incarnation.'⁵⁸ The painted surface, i.e., the marble, shows how 'painting works at joining sign and presence'. Because presence and representation — incarnation and imitation — are opposites, such a sign can only be created by disrupting the order of representation.⁵⁹ Truth is not represented or demonstrated but is created in dissemblance and passes like a wind or breath, 'like a virtuality'. The wind of dissemblance and of mystery 'agitates' resemblances and makes them move.⁶⁰ It is not something one can know; one simply experiences it as event. The dissemblant images do not simply evoke the meaning 'Christ' but actualize it.⁶¹

In Fra Angelico's frescoes, the forces of dissemblance work against the rigidity and discreteness of form by means of color. '*Color does not serve to distinguish bodies*' as it will do in the high Renaissance. Rather 'it drowns them, devours them ... *melts* them into one another ... as if the limit between [them] were being erased.'⁶² It brings together 'extremes of representation'; wind of dissemblance travels through the 'edge to edge relation'.⁶³ Colors 'allow the painting ... *to exhibit the mystery* (...to imply it in its surfaces), by *diffusing* across the whole field of the painting ... procedures of virtuality.'⁶⁴

A good example is found in the garment of Mary in 'The Annunciation' in cell 3 at San Marco. It realistically falls to the ground but on the hem there is a 'patch' of color where verisimilitude ends in an 'agitation of the colored material'.⁶⁵ The paint

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, at 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, at 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, at 30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87. As Didi-Huberman phrases it, 'I paint an aspect, knowing full well it is not that, knowing the relation of an image ... lies elsewhere.' *Ibid.*, at 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, at 87. The splatter-patches are a dissemblance that imitates, 'not the aspect, but the process'. *Ibid.*, at 96. There are elements in the visual image that resist signification, that rend or disfigure the fabric of signification.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, at 222.

⁶¹ This is to 'lay claim to ... an originary pictorial gesture, and to the whole humility of the pigment-vestiges of an object -- divine, unattainable -- that nonetheless incited ... his desire to paint'. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, *supra* n. 50, at 201.

⁶² Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, *supra* n. 50, at 218.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, at 227.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, at 222.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, at 228.

seems 'to go astray' in incomprehensible lines then 'bleaches out and dissolves'.⁶⁶ The color is abandoned to its 'perpetual agitation' as the interior of Mary's body is agitated by the divine, just as the body of Christ begins its auto-generation, and just as color expands as the self-generating force of the painting.⁶⁷ The force of color makes the paint radiate, just as the force of life radiates through the living.

Art can have an element of performativity that in itself is ethical. In this case, the frescoes were painted in the cells and corridors of monks who were dedicated to Mary. The frescoes, as for example, the marbles create a forest of scriptural images in which the devotee is disoriented and turns inward to the work of contemplating the mysteries of the divine.⁶⁸ To paraphrase Didi-Huberman, what he discovers in the depths of these images is his own capacity for virtue.⁶⁹ 'Through indexes, detours and traces', the dissemblant images stimulate contemplation to make the mysteries manifest.⁷⁰

The images, however, go one step further than this contemplative process. If the point of biblical exegesis is the experience of the mystery and incorporation by the word, the point of the frescoes is a kind of visual exegesis. The viewer is incorporated in and clothed by color. The setting of 'The Annunciation' in cell 3 is a white alcove reminiscent of the actual cells of San Marco. There is no other color. The whiteness of the alcove's walls surrounds the figures of the Virgin and Archangel. The viewer-monk is clothed in and incorporated in the fresco's white walls just as he is clothed incorporated in the white robe of the Dominican order.⁷¹ As he clothes himself in the Other, the Other embraces, invades and penetrates his being.⁷² He is rendered dissemblant from himself, turned around, trans-formed.

What Fra Angelico's paintings present are images of the incarnated divine, the angelic, and sometimes Heaven itself. Their appeal however is not as much in the form of the figures as in their sublime color. That belongs to the beauty of this world — as it is or could be. The patches in the paintings are not merely the destruction of an existing form. They are additions to it, different forms, ones that are to some extent impersonal. It is the color and paint that speak: 'That is what color is like; that is what color can do'.⁷³

For Didi-Huberman, Fra Angelico had 'mad' moments of paint because he wanted to do in art the same kind of exegesis that his fellow Dominicans were doing in language. These moments are however encounters with Deleuzian haecceity and singularity, moments or bits of 'life'. They are a kind of 'and' attached to, and outside of the narrative of a Dominican monk.⁷⁴ That 'and' is a moment of a painter wielding paint, and that painter is the virtual in the life of a pious cleric.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, at 228-30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, at 228.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, at 224.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, at 225.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, at 227.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, at 231-33.

⁷² *Ibid.*, at 233.

⁷³ J. Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 86.

⁷⁴ Rajchman treats the rhizomatic as multiple accretions; it is a case of "And" before "Is". *Ibid.*, at 6.

To reach this point requires a withdrawal from or 'lightening' of 'real' life or a lightening of the hand that holds the brush (and it is hard to think of a painter who is more light). If color is the virtual of paint what we have here is a hand that is guided by paint to free up the virtualities of color.⁷⁵ Freeing color simultaneously frees the virtual in the image, the artist and ultimately, if it works, in the viewer. This is Deleuze's highest point: of creation, creating something new.

Giotto and Fra Angelico come at the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the Renaissance. The high Italian Renaissance brought the end to any remnant of the sacred medieval image; henceforth the truth of art would rest not on sacred history and divine presence but on the artist's invention. Painting no longer worked as an icon of divine presence, or as a means of approaching and experiencing the divine, but purely as representation. Color was subordinated to the law of form and form to the law of perspective. Art no longer involved the viewer in feeling and sensing but in thinking and, more to the point, judging.

As opposed to the Italian, the art of Northern Europe was characterized by a plethora of 'realistic' detail, the disparate items being unified by the even distribution of light. Furthermore, the Gothic predilection for rich, saturated colors such as we find in stained glass windows was heightened by Van Eyck's mastery of the medium of oil paint in the 1430's. Late Gothic art was associated with the tradition of passion devotion, characterized by the emphasis on Christ's humanity, his affective and bodily suffering and on the sensuous, physical, harrowing details of that suffering — the scourge, thorns and spit; the weight of the cross and length of the nails; Christ's dislocated and twisted body, but most of all on his blood and wounds. Huizinga aptly characterized late gothic art as bearing 'the mixed smell of blood and roses'.⁷⁶ In Deleuzian terms, Christ's body, as well as those of the Virgin, Magdalene Mary, John the Baptist, the Good and Bad Thieves, saints and martyrs, are sites for exploring forces and the BWO (for Deleuze, 'all the tortured bodies are good bodies without organs').⁷⁷ Portrayals of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion show a body that passes 'through all the "areas of sensation"'.⁷⁸ Although these images were contained in a narrative that promised forgiveness and salvation, the increasing deformation, disfiguration and grotesqueness of the figures' torture indicate an anxiety about that promise.

Grunewald's 'Isenheim Altarpiece' (1510-15) comes out of this tradition and represents the culmination of the gothic (in all senses of the word).⁷⁹ In keeping with the tradition of gothic altarpieces, the panels encompass the entire Christian narrative. When closed, the outer panels present the Crucifixion. When the leaves are open, the left panel shows an Annunciation, the large middle panel, a Nativity (which includes a concert of angels and image of God the Father), and the right panel, a Resurrection. In terms of color, the pictures range from the darkened horror of the outer panels to the gloriously radiant scenes of the inner. The Crucifixion and Resurrection in particular represent the two extremes, not only of Christ's body but of the color spectrum itself. As Huysmans writes, Grunewald is

⁷⁵ See *supra* n. 21, at 128-29.

⁷⁶ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 25.

⁷⁷ *Supra* n. 13.

⁷⁸ *Supra* n. 6, at 10.

⁷⁹ Matthias Grunewald, 'The Isenheim Altarpiece' (Colmar, France: Musée d'Unterlinden, 1510-15).

'the first artist who has tried to convey, through the wretched colours of this earth, a vision of the Godhead ... visible to the naked eye'.⁸⁰

Grunewald's 'Crucifixion' is possibly the most brutal and horrific ever painted. It does not rely solely on gruesome effects (although it has those) but is a controlled delineation of the minute particulars of Christ's tortured body. It impeccably cites the gothic tradition of rendering Christ's abjection, yet it is hard to see the excruciating detail of Christ's flayed body as simply facilitating a devotion that assures salvation. Against the daytime darkness, the painting depicts Christ's last moments. His gigantic body is stretched from the top to the bottom of the panel and hangs like dead weight on the bowed branch of the cross. His head falls on a chest that bulges out grotesquely as he suffocates. His mouth hangs open, his lips grayish-blue. His shoulders are dislocated, his arms unnaturally stretched with twisted fingers clawing the air in pain and supplication. His feet are a pulp of muscle and rotting flesh whose softness contrasts with the black iron spike driven through them. The carefully delineated toenails are a dirty blue. His loincloth is filthy and tattered and his skin darkened with dirt and spit. The entire surface of his decomposing flesh is covered with small wounds gouged by sharp, black thorns. Each tiny wound has been meticulously rendered — the congealed blood, pus and infected tissue painted in dark red, purple, yellow-green. 'Suffering', as Nancy notes, 'has its colors'.⁸¹

The inner panels and their luminous color are a startling contrast to this. The Nativity occupies the largest middle panel. It is painted in a superbly rich palette, made even richer by virtue of the variety of details it contains. Benjamin described the color of the Angels' halos as 'the chromatic immanence of the absolute'.⁸² It is the Resurrection, however, that is the most compelling painting. It shows a pleasant, fair-haired Christ draped in a long furling robe, rising toward heaven. The colors of the robe are astonishing: it 'turns ice green, then violet, and deep lilac in the shadows; surrounding the body of Christ, it is rose, then scarlet and a brilliant yellow the closer it approaches to the Godhead....'⁸³ Behind Christ is an aureole almost as large as the figure itself. I can do no better than quote Huysmans' description:

All round this soaring body are rays emanating from it which have begun to blur its outline; already the contours of the face are fluctuating, the features hazing over, the hair dissolving into a halo of melting gold. The light [of the aureole] spreads out in immense curves ranging from bright yellow to purple, and finally shading off little by little into a pale blue.⁸⁴

Human form dissolves into light. In these panels, color works against and subverts form and signification. It shatters the unity of the organic body which begins to

⁸⁰ J.-K. Huysmans, *Grunewald: the Paintings*, with two essays by J.-K. Huysmans, trans. R. Baldick (London: Phaidon, 1958) in G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 146.

⁸¹ M. Buber, 'The Altar' and J.-L. Nancy, 'Chromatic Atheology', *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2005), 116, 127 (hereinafter 'Nancy').

⁸² H. Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 151.

⁸³ *Supra* n. 80, at 146.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, at 164.

move and become: in the Crucifixion becoming the hardly-human tortured body, in the Resurrection becoming the divine.

One of the most acute analyses of the Isenheim Altarpiece is that of Martin Buber and this forms the basis of a commentary by Jean-Luc Nancy. In Buber's analysis God is 'not formally denied' in the altarpiece 'but put aside' in favor of the 'glory of things'. Critically for Buber, that glory 'is the spirit of the earth'. As Nancy notes, this is the *spirit* and not the soul of the earth, the form or formative principle of the body which 'becomes spirit in the world and the earth'. Thus Christ 'embraces the world' and fashions what Buber calls the 'unconditional unity' of its spirit. The divine is a power diffused through and working in the world; it is not transcendent to it but is 'nothing other than human acting.'⁸⁵ As Nancy describes it, 'at the heart of the multiple immanence of world ... a force reveals itself and acts, a force that only transcends toward supreme unity from within the world ...' What Grunewald has shown is not "'unity behind multiplicity'" but rather he has put unity "'into act through multiplicity"' .⁸⁶

For Nancy, Grunewald paints a reality that is diverse, disparate and variegated. The manifestation of Christ is a manifestation in the world of the world. There is nothing behind it. 'It is, or makes, the color that composes the variegated unity of the light of the world ... Color is assimilated to the multiplicity, and multiplicity to the reality of the world'. Color is also, however, presented as the "'ultimate *materia*" in which each thing is "exalted" and "rejoices" of, and in, its singular determination.' Most importantly what the Isenheim Altarpiece shows is that 'the world is colored in its essence: color does not adorn it; it constitutes it.'⁸⁷

In the Crucifixion panel, John the Baptist is clothed in the red of life in contrast to the grieving Virgin clothed in the white of death. John strikes a now iconic pose. Holding an open book of revelation in one hand, he points to the crucified Christ with the other. Beside him, Grunewald has painted in red the legend, 'He must increase but I must decrease'. In the Christian story, revelation is made manifest, is manifested in the passions and actions of the body of Christ. Here the painting shows the words of Revelation but the painting itself 'doubles' as the language of Christ's language, thought and speech. What Christ makes and manifests in the world is the same as the painter. He unifies each 'iridescent particle of the world': 'Solar glory is nothing set apart from [color] nor the pure fusion of colors, but rather ... their generous abundance'. In Grunewald's musical angels 'tones and timbres are attuned by their very differences'. This is a language of color, which marks out difference and 'gives sense to the diversity and the disparity of its marks and tones'. For Nancy, therefore, the glory of painting and of color — revealed in this supreme achievement of late gothic art — manifests "'the glory of things [which] is the spirit of the earth'". It puts 'into act a light ... that gives itself in the very coloration of colors.'⁸⁸ If Grunewald makes colored matter 'mean', what it ultimately 'means' is creation; creating is the 'meaning' of painting. It is the event of bringing the event into being.

⁸⁵ *Supra* n. 81, at 125.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, at 124.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, at 126.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

III. Reformation and Early Modern: Cranach and Holbein

The Isenheim Altarpiece, which marks the outer limit of the medieval gothic, was painted between 1510 and 1515. A little before, in 1509, Henry VIII ascended the English throne; a little after, in 1517, Luther nailed his theses to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral, which was to begin the Reformation. The Reformation in turn instituted a secular legal order based on scripture (the Ten Commandments) in order to discipline the innate wickedness of man.⁸⁹ In 1531 Henry VIII cut his dependence on Rome and seized power not only as the supreme head of the state but also as supreme head of the Church of England. As I indicated in the Introduction, the divine presence found in the medieval world passed away only to be resurrected in the sovereign and the state, a state that commanded power over men's souls as much as their property. These reterritorializations of the late medieval can be traced in Reformation art.

While the style of Reformation art bore little resemblance to that of the high Italian Renaissance, they were alike in one respect: both instituted a world of representation that subordinated all to form, and more to the point, to the law of the written, be it biblical or classical. Painting was read as text, either the text behind the artist's invention in Italy or the text of divine revelation in Northern Europe. Furthermore, in the North the reversion to word was taken one step further as the visual image was repressed in a violent iconoclasm or reduced to a pedagogy no less violent. Although Luther himself eventually recoiled from the strict iconoclasm of some of his followers he nevertheless severely restricted the scope of visual images. For Luther and the Reformation, there is only the Word, *sola scriptura*. This is the law and the visual was to be no more than an illustration of that. This shift from the visual to the textual was amply recorded in art by Lucas Cranach.

Cranach had one foot in the late Gothic and one step in the burgeoning humanism of Northern Europe and a comparison of his paintings before and after his recruitment to Luther's cause is revealing. In 1503 he painted a beautifully colored 'Crucifixion', the brightest colors somewhat reminiscent of Grunewald's 'Nativity' and 'Resurrection'.⁹⁰ Christ is seen from the side hanging from the cross, contorted in pain. His feet, for example, are arched in an unnatural hump showing the distortion caused by the nail. In the background is a weird wilderness of hanging vegetation. On one side, an eerie light radiates from a cerulean sky and billowing white clouds. On the other side, dark storm clouds gather behind the figure of Christ. Christ's white loincloth unfurls and ripples like a lengthy banner in a sharp wind. Every detail — including the color — moves in concert with Christ's pain and contortions.

Compare this with the Crucifixion Cranach painted in 1547 for the praedella of the altarpiece in Luther's church at Wittenburg. This is a long narrow painting done in muted mustards, browns, grays and black. It depicts the still, claustrophobic interior of a windowless church. Crowded against the left side of the panel are cartoon figures of the congregation. On the right, Luther stands in a pulpit. In an

⁸⁹ For a good description of the relation between the Reformation and the secular legal order, see H. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: the Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁹⁰ Lucas Cranach, 'Crucifixion' (Munich: Alte Pinakothek, 1503).

empty space in the middle, a full-length crucifix is planted in the stone floor. Christ's loincloth (meager compared to the earlier Crucifixion) ripples improbably in the dead air. The pulpit is projected out into this void, and from it, with open Bible, Luther preaches, one hand pointing to the words of the text, the other pointing to Christ on the cross. In Koerner's excellent analysis, the painting is the 'materialized content of a speech act ... a visual quotation ... Christ dies in the dead air of a school room, despite the flapping loincloth.'⁹¹

Similarly, Cranach's 1538 'Crucifixion with Longinus' (the converted Centurion) is both dark and inert as befits a sober lesson on an iconic text.⁹² Against a dark blank background, the figure of Christ on the cross and the mound of stone on which it stands are painted in muted tones of mustard and gray. The figure is standardized and formulaic like the abstraction of a rigorously imposed law, with none of the detail or color that marked the 1503 Crucifixion. The feet for example, are like round mitts and the nails like decorative points.⁹³ Nevertheless this is an image of God made visible as an inscription makes clear. To the side of Christ, Longinus sits on a rearing horse. Pointing to the crucifix, he lays down the law, the words of the Gospel: 'Truly this man was God's son'. The words are painted across the panel with the crucifix placed in the middle of the sentence. This is a scene that 'takes place more in words than in a world'.⁹⁴ Cranach has extracted the figure of Christ from any lived reality and placed it inside 'implied quotation marks'. It is 'materially and syntactically embedded in the Gospel quotation', which is to be believed with little experience and even less sensation. The BWO of Grunewald's Christ has been re-territorialized and firmly anchored in the law/code of the biblical text. Truth does not lie in experience but 'in faith in words', in the law laid down by the book.⁹⁵ There is no movement, force, sensation, depth or complexity. The scene is a self enclosed totality, denying access to anything beyond the literal text. This is the word as law, sacred idol not holy icon bearing witness to a living presence. This is the reality principle, a world devoid of singularity and sensibility, reduced to the verities and ratifications of a literal text. This is our world.

James Elkins has a stunning example that epitomizes what has been lost. It is the letter 'I' superimposed upon a figure of a body on a grid (significantly, in black and white). On the vertical axis of the 'I' there are two dots for eyes and a small mark for a penis.⁹⁶ What Elkins' points out is that '[a]ll representations of the body distort it by pressing it flat.' They take away its 'motion, its roundness, its texture, its individuality ... They hide the body, erasing, censoring, and repressing....'⁹⁷ It is language however that 'most forcefully evicts bodily meaning'.⁹⁸ This image 'is the

⁹¹ J. L. Koerner, 'Icon as Iconoclasm,' in B. Latour and P. Weibel, eds., *Iconoclasm* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 209-10. See also M. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 1999).

⁹² Lucas Cranach, 'Crucifixion with Longinus' (Seville: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1538); J. L. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 236.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, at 238.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, at 226.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, at 235.

⁹⁶ J. Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) 284.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, at 282.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, at 283.

end of the body, the place where the body fades and language begins'.⁹⁹ It is the place of the letter, of the law. It is also the place where color ends, where color is leached out of things until they become black and white. This is but one chromatic step removed from Cranach's yellow and gray compositions: pictures that fade into text until they become no more than colorless extensions of it.

If late medieval painters decoded and deterritorialized color and the material body of paint, what we see here is its reterritorialization by a new kind of worldly religion, and it is but one step away from this organization to the sovereign state. If medieval man was penetrated and permeated by divine presence, modern man was to be penetrated and permeated by sovereign power and its law.

If Cranach shows the ways in which the visual image could serve religion, Hans Holbein shows the way it can serve the state. This was not, however, before he painted the very loss of religious meaning and the crisis of representation occasioned by the Reformation's disenchantment of the world. While art is not history, Holbein's 'Dead Christ in His Tomb' (1521) can be taken to mark the still point between passing of the medieval and the establishment of the modern. Once again it is Kristeva who has commented on this painting, and while her discussion is about depression and representation and not about color as it was with Giotto, it is worth juxtaposing the two.¹⁰⁰

'The Dead Christ' was a scandalous image for its time and its believers. It is a side view of Christ in a stone coffin barely larger than the laid-out body. His head is thrown back, eyes blank, mouth open as if stopped mid-stream in the last gasp of life. The body is rendered with anatomical precision and detachment (it has been argued that Holbein's model was a corpse dredged from a river). There is no pathos and no gothic excess; if anything, the painting is, in Kristeva's words, 'minimalist'. In other pictures of this genre, Christ's dead body is surrounded by his grieving mother and followers; here he is entirely alone. This, combined with the stone that oppressively presses down and seals the tomb, gives a sense of utter finality of human death. Indeed, the figure is entirely and only a corpse; there is no suggestion of transcendence or hope of resurrection.¹⁰¹

The color in the painting is also minimal: subdued and subtle gray, green, brown. It is, as Kristeva describes it, a 'chromatic and compositional asceticism', a 'minimal visibility'.¹⁰² The background is dark, ranging from brownish black to muddy khaki. Against this, Christ wears a simple white loincloth and lies on a simple white sheet. Most of the body is painted with a bloodless, stone cold pallor. The wounds themselves are dark red. Parts of the face and the areas around the wounds

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, at 284.

¹⁰⁰ J. Kristeva, 'Holbein's Dead Christ', in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, at 110. Dostoevsky's description is even more chilling:

'In the painting [Christ's] face is disfigured by blows, swollen, covered with terrible swollen and bloody bruises, the eyes open, the pupils turned up, the large open whites of the eyes bright with a sort of deathly glassy reflection ... As one looks at that painting, one conceives of nature in the form of some huge, implacable, dumb beast, or to be more exact ... in the form of some huge machine of the latest design which, deaf and unfeeling, has senselessly seized, crushed, and swallowed up a great and priceless being'

Supra n. 3, at 427.

¹⁰² *Supra* n. 100, at 123.

shade into the yellow-, blue- and gray-green of decomposing flesh. This is the place where the body begins to seep out of itself, where it can no longer be represented or contained. It is also where the body and meaning seep out of representation, text and world and collapse in the 'caesura' of death.¹⁰³ Here the nonrepresentable 'the dissipation of means of representation on the threshold of their extinction in death.'¹⁰⁴ This is the 'ultimate essence of [Holbein's] desacralized reality'.¹⁰⁵

Holbein's painting is 'calm and dismal', 'an intimate, slender response', located at 'the ultimate threshold of representability'.¹⁰⁶ That slenderness is achieved through a 'controlled and mastered', minimal use of color.¹⁰⁷ The minimalism points to the severance between life and death, meaning and non-meaning. In place of the expansiveness of medieval color, here there is only the 'rigorous technique' of a minimalist art.¹⁰⁸

If Christ and meaning — be it the enchantment of the transcendent or the joy of the immanent — have died what takes their place is wealth and power. For the rest of his career, Holbein worked as portraitist of the rich and powerful, none more so than Henry VIII. In Holbein's famous portrait of Henry VIII the abject, impotent Christ is resurrected as the all-powerful monarch, bull-necked and barrel-chested, codpiece prominently asserted. There is not a trace of movement in the portrait, affective or otherwise, nor is there an iota of freedom of color. Henry VIII is portrayed as authoritative, imposing, commanding and the colors — ruby red, silver and (real) gold — simply the 'code' of sovereign power. (Behind it we can already hear the blast of 'Zadock the Priest', Handel's imperial coronation anthem). As its endurance as an image of the British monarchy testifies, it is exquisite propaganda. Color does not flow like the movement of life; rather it takes its assigned place in a despotic regime of signs. If with Cranach the Biblical word became the iron clad law, in Holbein it is the sovereign. This painting is the icon (or idol) of the modern state and its legal order.

CONCLUSION

Reformation art is about text and law; it reduces painted images to representations and univocal significations. This reduction is marked by the repression and constraint of color, if not its disappearance. Giotto and Fra Angelico — the end of the medieval — were also related to text but their art generated an open, endless network of associations, bursting beyond form and signification with all the colors of the rainbow. (Grunewald tried to paint the rainbow itself).

There have been/are times, therefore, when the world of meaning and meaning of the world were not colonized by law, nor the meaning of life given by the sovereign or his law. Rather meaning was polyphonic and polymorphic. It was apprehended by and through eye (and ear and touch) through a multiplicity of genres (legal, poetic, incantatory, ritual, prayer) and a multiplicity of visual forms (windows,

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, at 113.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, at 122.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, at 119.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, at 125.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, at 129.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, at 135.

paintings, statues, carvings, illuminated manuscripts). To be sure, these can be and were 'used' and manipulated as rhetoric and spectacle. But the entries into and more importantly exits from code and convention were various. There were ways to resist the law of univocal meaning, the defined and the signified, the conventional and controlled. What resists meaning and determination is found in sheer, stubborn, horrific materiality and sensation, the very fact that we are, only because we are and are sensate, the very fact of 'life'. That fact and that life are to their core constituted by and in color.

Paint is glorified mud. Color is no more added to it than is pink, chocolate or olive to the skin. It arises from the very condition of life. Paint and color do not, or need not, apprehend, clarify and codify. Painting is not the white light of knowing. Rather paint brings out the opacity, density and force of things. The depth of sensation and affect is conveyed in the movement of paint — the very matter of which things are formed and for that matter deformed. It makes a world and just as inexorably unmakes it. Paint and color de-form and this is the movement that turns on form to actualize the virtual.

Deleuzian 'signs' (try to) get at and express something that cannot be signified or codified, cannot be law.¹⁰⁹ Color can be — and at times has been — one of those signs. We labor under the black and white of the law (and its cameras), written in texts and increasingly and elaborately on our streets, houses, work, accounts, health, desires, passions and others, significant and otherwise (and that's only the law, and not the laws of convention). Law and control are the colorless air we breathe. The challenge Deleuze poses — and history reveals — is to escape this and create a world of technicolor, the technicolor of creation, of the new, to actualize the color of living and the living of color. Without color, there is only law, in black and white.

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¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of signs, see G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. R. Howard (London: Allen Lane, 1973); B. Massumi, ed., *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 2002).