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## THE VISUAL PRESENCE OF REMEMBRANCE: THE IMAGE AS PALIMPSEST

Arnulf Rainer's *Madonna*, dating from 1982-84, stages its subject in the manner of a palimpsest (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. At its center is a black-and-white photograph which reproduces, in slightly reduced dimensions, the celebrated early 12th century *Madonna of Vladimir icon* (Fig. 2)<sup>2</sup>.



Fig. 1. Arnulf Rainer, *Madonna*, 1982-84, 121 x 80 cm, Vienna, Collection Rainer



Fig. 2. Unknown icon painter, *Our Lady of Vladimir*, early 12th cent., 104 x 69 cm, Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery

- 1 Peter Weiermair (Ed.), *A. Rainer. Retrospektiva 1948-2000* (Exhib. Cat. Bologna, Galleria d'Arte Moderna 2001), Bologna, Hopefulmonster, 2001, pp. 134 and 181.
- 2 «*Gottesmutter von Wladimir*». *Zum 600. Jahrestag der Ankunft der Ikone der Gottesmutter von Wladimir in Moskau am 26. August 1395* (Exhib. Cat. Moscow, Tretyakov-Gallery, 1995), Moscow, 1995, pp. 82 et seqq., Cat. 1.

The photograph, a picture-within-a picture, has been mounted exactly at the center of the upper half of the pictorial ground, itself entirely white and painted with the finest layer of glaze. Superimposed onto this arrangement – consisting of figurative image and nonfigurative monochromatic surface – is a third layer, consisting of dark, vigorously applied paint in the form of thick bundles of furrows-like stripes, streaks and dashes. This vigorous paint application, generated through an act of spontaneous, gestural, eruptive fingerpainting, is the visible trace of a violative, even a violent attack. And yet at the same time, it takes the form of indisputably delicate tonalities. In such a way, for example, that Rainer's overpainting surrounds Mary's head, like an aura or a halo, with a finely orchestrated arrangement of gently curved lines; or that the dark streaks of paint, which seem almost to stroke the cheeks of mother and child, disclose an almost tender empathy, the gesture of fingerpainting manifesting a yearning for intimate approach and contact. If the thick, impasto application presents itself on the one hand as a smirching or defilement of the formerly untainted and inviolate picture surface, then it simultaneously testifies to a drama of approach and intimacy. And even more: it is the gestural and physically concrete mimesis of precisely the act of caressing which constitutes the striking pictorial focus of the so called 'Eleousa' or 'Virgin of Tenderness and Mercy', i.e. the fond and heartfelt devotion of the mother to her child.

What comes to light in this highly-charged dialogue between photograph and gesture, between figuration and abstraction, between the sheer materiality of the painted color and the colored diaphane, and what attains fulfillment in it is in the end the artistic realization of the act of devotion to a religious image. Simply put, it is an act of reverence toward an image, but transformed now into an aesthetic configuration. This religious meaning, however – which is to say the generation through the imaginative power of remembrance, (*Andacht, Angedenken, ricordatio*) of a visually intense experience of an individual who is ultimately invisible, the establishment of a face to face communication with someone who genuinely exists only beyond her pictorially mediated presence, a meaning which involves an act of contemplation which transcends the image itself – this original religious meaning through the artistry of Arnulf Rainer now experiences a fundamental transformation. For the religious dimension is displaced now in favor of a dynamic dialogue which is staged *immanently*, like a processual contestation, one that is materialized in the form of the work itself, and which is carried out between generation and eradication, between setting and dissolution, fixation

and disaggregation, between elementary artistic acts of construction and those of destruction. In short: the religiously-founded dialectic of contemplating the image and at the same time transcending it is integrated here into the image itself, qua form, qua material. As Arnulf Rainer once made clear in this context, he wanted to «disclose» painting «through its own presence», and, moreover, as he so decisively formulated it, «as a substitute for a deficient, a now lost metaphysical connection»<sup>3</sup>. This can only mean that having sacrificed its anchoring in religious meaning, art necessarily elevates itself to the status of revealing its own mystery<sup>4</sup>.

That which appears to manifest itself in Arnulf Rainer's work is the transformation of religious truth into the experience of artistic form, which is to say: the conversion of the image of Mary into an aesthetic epiphany. It would seem to be exemplary, then, for *that* fundamental process of displacement referred to by Max Weber in his much-cited discussion about art as a «surrogate form of the primal religious experience», and insofar as a specific form of secularized modernism: «Art, then, constitutes itself as a cosmos of intrinsic values which are grasped with growing levels of awareness. It assumes the function of worldly redemption, however interpreted [...]. Through this claim, however, it enters into direct competition with the religion of salvation»<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the notion of a soteriological dimension of art, and of the structural equivalence which links the artifact with the mystery of the sacred (i.e., through the artifact's holistic, inexhaustible and unconditional nature) was a central figure of thought in the intellectual history of modernism from the very beginning. Prefigured historically in the 18th century, first and foremost in Baumgarten's establishment of the truth value of artistic beauty, a

3 «Man muß die Malerei enthüllen durch sie selbst [...], als Ersatz für die mangelnde und verlorengegangene metaphysische Bindung»: Arnulf Rainer, «Malerei, um die Malerei zu verlassen» (1952), in A. Rainer, *Hirndrang. Selbstkommentare und andere Texte zu Werk und Person*, ed. by O. Breicha, Salzburg, Verlag Galerie Welz, 1980, p. 47.

4 For the wider context see J. Schütt, *Arnulf Rainer. Überarbeitungen*, Berlin, Reimer, 1994; M. Leisch-Kiesl, *Verbergen und Entdecken. Arnulf Rainer im Diskurs von Moderne und Postmoderne*, Wien, Passagen Verlag, 1996; W. Hofmann, «Rainer – Eine Notwendigkeit», in A. Rainer, *Gegen-Bilder. Retrospektive zum 70. Geburtstag*, Wien, Kunstforum 2000, pp. 17-33; R. Hoeps (Ed.), *Arnulf Rainer. Auslöschung und Inkarnation* (Exhib. Cat. Münster, 2004), Paderborn, Schöningh, 2004.

5 M. Weber, «Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen» (1920), in Idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1988, pp. 237-573, esp. pp. 536 et seq. («Zwischenbetrachtung: Theorie der Stufen und Richtungen religiöser Weltablehnung»), pp. 555 et seq.

truth that is experienced in the work of art only sensually, that is to say, through the *cognitio sensitiva*, as an irreducible totality, this redemptive quality of art was an important reference for thinkers such as Georg Simmel, Rudolf Otto, and Benedetto Croce, and was set out later in a multitude of versions. By Adorno, for example, who claimed that works of art were directly comparable with «celestial phenomena», with «apparitions (*Apparitionen*)», and regarded them as «neutralized and hence qualitatively altered epiphanies»<sup>6</sup>; and more recently in the treatises on aesthetics of thinkers like George Steiner, or Jean-Francois Lyotard, who reflected about this transhistorical form of experience in contemplation of the paintings of Barnett Newman as follows: «Presence is a moment when the chaos of history is interrupted, is only recalled or appealed to, it is the ‘something that is’ which precedes an ascription of meaning to the ‘that which is’. This is a notion that might be referred to as mystical, for it pertains to the mystery of existence»<sup>7</sup>.

In light of this notion, according to which the aesthetic immanence of the now autonomous, modernist work of art is interpreted as the inheritor to religion, and for this very reason is itself inflated to the level of religion<sup>8</sup>, the Philosopher Thomas Rentsch once arrived at the remarkable conclusion (in the context of a systematic review of the extensive tradition of premodern doctrines and concepts of the beatific ‘contemplation of God’ or *visio Dei beatifica*) «that by virtue of their terminological and epistemological status [...], the character and logical structure of the formal qualities of aesthetic experience as manifested beginning with the aesthetic doctrines of the 18th century [...]» correspond to «the form of

6 Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 125.

7 J.-F. Lyotard, «Newman: The Instant», in Idem, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, transl. by G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, pp. 78-88, esp. p. 87.

8 «Das theologische Erbe der Kunst ist die Säkularisierung von Offenbarung» (Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, cit., p. 162). The literature on this notion is quite wide, e.g. R. Volp and G. Wohlfart, «Kunst und Religion», VII: «Vom Ausgang des 18. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts», VIII: «Das 20. Jahrhundert», IX: «Philosophisch», in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Bd. 12, Berlin and New York, de Gruyter, 1984, pp. 292-337; A. Stock, *Zwischen Tempel und Museum. Theologische Kunstkritik. Positionen der Moderne*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 1991; W. Lesch (Ed.), *Theologie und ästhetische Erfahrung*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994; W. Braungart, G. Fuchs and M. Koch (Eds.), *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung der Jahrhundertwenden*. I: um 1800, II: um 1900, III: um 2000, 3 voll., Paderborn, Schöningh, 1997-2000; J. Herrmann, A. Mertin and E. Valtink (Eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Kunst. Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung heute*, Munich, Fink, 1998.

medieval contemplation and in particular of visionary recognition»: «In this way, the experiences mediated through art and the beauty of nature become endowed with those qualities of delight and sacredness formerly constituted by the dignity of the *visio* of the beyond». «The quest for felicity and happiness embodied in the aesthetic gaze, and the way in which its fulfillment is conceptualized in relation to auratic art, postfigures the traditional eschatological promise of blissful happiness»<sup>9</sup>.

The idea that the experience of contemplating the divine, of gazing toward the beyond, has been perpetuated in aesthetic experience raises a number of questions which can only be approached tentatively here. To this end, let us turn again to Arnulf Rainer's painting (Fig. 1). Stated simply, his Madonna picture can be grasped as a form of reflection which inscribes a variety of historical, religious, and aesthetic, but also personal and psychological discourses. In this context, it becomes clear that the soteriologically grounded quest for felicity and blissful happiness is expressed here in all of the emphatic potency of its claims, and yet at the same time in its profound brokenness and unredeemed condition, or stated differently: the above-mentioned turn from religious to aesthetic claims of revelation is not actually fulfilled in the painting, but instead objectified in a self-referential way as an autonomous visual discourse. This occurs in a way that highlights a number of aspects, and which also opens up a semantically multidimensional reading of the depiction, whose actual and essential theme is revealed to be the aesthetic experience of pictorial mediality (which is to say, a threshold experience).

So, unquestionably, the streaky, dark colored areas set against the delicate picture surface and its pristine whiteness present themselves as a visual contradistinction that is set against the notion of Mary's immaculate virginity. This becomes even clearer when we realize that traces of blood-red paint are visibly intermingled into the streaks. On the other hand, if the same bundles of color in their planar, diffuse disposition are read as a vigorous artistic act of abstraction set against figuration, then on another level as well, they embody a subtle dialectical reference to

9 «Die durch Kunst und schöne Natur vermittelte Erfahrung erhält so diejenigen Genuss- und Heilsqualitäten, die ehemals die Dignität der jenseitigen *visio* konstituierten. Der Glücksanspruch des ästhetischen Blicks und die Art, wie seine Erfüllung angesichts einer auratischen Kunst gedacht wird, postfiguriert die traditionelle eschatologische Glücksverheißung»: T. Rentsch, «Der Augenblick des Schönen. *Visio beatifica* und Geschichte der ästhetischen Idee», in A. Mertin and E. Valtink (Eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Kunst*, cit., pp. 106-126, p. 108 and 120.

the actual message of belief which is intrinsic to the image of the Madonna, namely the presentation of Christ to the viewer as nothing other than the visible figuration – now become human – of the invisible and abstract Logos. And further: as traces of a palpable attack to which the image of the Madonna has manifestly been exposed, the gestural streaks of paint testify with striking dramatism to that «internal iconoclasm» (as Gottfried Boehm once put it) that so persistently characterizes the art of the 20th century as a whole (abstraction against figuration; pure form as anti-mimetic expression; and so forth)<sup>10</sup>. And yet, as fingerpainting, as painted forms executed by human hand, they visibly bear the signum of an animate and creative will to form, thereby once again visualizing, even concretizing, the categorial tension between human and divine, between material and spiritual acts of generation, and by extension, between art as imagination and as incarnation.

But such a palimpsest-style layering, bundling and sedimentation of connotations, finally, is also reminiscent of the almost mythical legend which has since the Middle Ages attributed the origin and genesis of the Marian image to St. Luke, hence allowing him to become the emblematic figure of the profession of painter (Figg. 3 – 6)<sup>11</sup>.

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- 10 G. Boehm, «Ikonoklastik und Transzendenz. Der historische Hintergrund», in W. Schmied, *Gegenwart Ewigkeit. Spuren des Transzendenten in der Kunst unserer Zeit*, Stuttgart, Cantz, 1990, pp. 27-34, p. 28. For the wider context see J. Hoffmann, *Destruktionskunst. Der Mythos der Zerstörung in der Kunst der frühen sechziger Jahre*, Munich, Silke Schreiber, 1995; D. Gamboni, *Zerstörte Kunst. Bildersturm und Vandalismus im 20. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, DuMont, 1998, esp. pp. 241 et seqq. and pp. 265 et seqq.; B. Mersmann, *Bilderstreit und Büchersturm. Medienkritische Überlegungen zu Übermalung und Überschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 1999, esp. pp. 34 et seqq. and pp. 95 et seqq.
- 11 G. Kraut, *Lukas malt die Madonna. Zeugnisse zum künstlerischen Selbstverständnis in der Malerei*, Worms, Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986; H. Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich, Beck, 1990, pp. 170 et seqq. and 559 et seqq.; H.U. Asemissen, G. Schweikhart, *Malerei als Thema der Malerei*, Berlin, Akademie, 1994, pp. 37 et seqq.; G.-W. Költzsch, *Maler Modell. Der Maler und sein Modell. Geschichte und Deutung eines Bildthemas*, Cologne, DuMont, 2000, pp. 12 et seqq.



Fig. 3. Maerten van Heemskerck, *Saint Luke painting the Virgin*, 1532, detail, Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum



Fig. 4. Maerten van Heemskerck, *Saint Luke painting the Virgin*, 1545-50, Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts



Fig. 5. Jan Gossaert, *Saint Luke painting the Virgin*, Vienna, ca. 1520, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Fig. 6. Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, *Saint Luke painting the Virgin*, 1515, Bern, Kunstmuseum

As we know, the legend, and all of its variants, revolves increasingly around the question of whether Luke realized his painterly performance – through which he endowed the Holy Virgin with a permanent and authentic presence in the form of an image – from the strength of higher religious inspiration (as shown in the painting by Jan Gossaert: Fig. 5), or instead out of his own artistic imagination, as an achievement of imitation (Figg. 3 and 4), or instead even as an act of invention (here the painter in his atelier doesn't have any model at all before his eyes: Fig. 6). Arnulf Rainer heightens this polarization to the point of the most extreme confrontation, and in such a way that on the one hand, the liberatory act of artistic self-determination results well-nigh in the extinction of the normative parameter (of the marian likeness), while on the other, precisely this parameter (one authenticated strongly by tradition reaching back to the Middle Ages) figures actually as the core and central point, as the destination, even as the premise of the act of painting as such, and is unswervingly determinative of form and aesthetic structure of the whole picture.

The structure of the palimpsest, of a layered and interwoven, contradictory and even conflictive interpenetration not only of materials (of photo and paint etc.), but also and much more of references and connotations, is bundled together as well in the image of the Madonna itself, and in the discourse inherent to it, with its paradoxical status of a picture within a picture, a reproduction of a reproduction. Remarkably, this status is already inherent to the icon of *Our Lady of Vladimir* itself (Fig. 2), which on her part replicated a celebrated original whose presence in Constantinople was documented in the 11th century. With the passage of time, this replica, also executed in Constantinople, but in the early 12th century, would itself become a highly revered original. Not long after its production, it was transported from the Byzantine capital to the residence of the Russian Grand Dukes, initially to Kiev, then to Vladimir in 1155, from which point, finally, it was sent to Moscow in 1395, where it acquired the special status of patron saint to all of Russia<sup>12</sup>. In its new

12 For the origin, date, history and meaning of this famous icon see M. Alpatoff and V. Lazareff, «Ein byzantinisches Tafelwerk aus der Komnenenepoche», *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 46, 1925, pp. 140-155; A.I. Anisimov, *Our Lady of Vladimir*, Prague, Seminarium Kondakovianum, 1928; K. Berckenhagen, «Die Ikone der Gottesmutter von Wladimir und ihre byzantinischen Parallelen», *Kyrios* 3, 1963, pp. 146-151; H. Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter. Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion*, Berlin, Mann, 1981, pp. 174 et seq.; H. Belting, *Bild und Kult*, cit., pp. 314 et seq.



home, thereafter, it has been copied repeatedly for centuries and engendered countless replicas, among them an icon of the highest quality, quite similar in format, which was executed in either 1395 or 1408, probably in Andrei Rublev's workshop (Fig. 7). The sequence of such faithful copies continues virtually without interruption throughout subsequent centuries, and even into very recent times (Figg. 8 and 10)<sup>13</sup>.



Fig. 7. Andrey Rublev (or circuit), Our Lady of Vladimir, 1395 or 1408, 101 x 69 cm, Wladimir, Museum



Fig. 8. Unknown icon painter, Our Lady of Vladimir, mid-19th century, 38 x 30,5 cm, Kholui, private property

13 For comprehensive historical information see Exhib. Cat. *Die Gottesmutter von Wladimir*, cit., esp. pp. 92 et seq., cat. 4 (for the icon of Rublev); for the early copies and replicas see also I. Bentchev, «Zum Verhältnis von Original, Kopie und Replik am Beispiel der Gottesmutter von Wladimir und anderer russischer Ikonen», in E. Haustein-Bartsch (Ed.), *Russische Ikonen. Neue Forschungen*, Recklinghausen, Bongers, 1991, pp. 141-169.

As copies of one identic icon, and regardless of their historical distance as images of an image, all of these replicas function as surrogates for an original, albeit one already postfigured as a surrogate image for yet another image. Produced in a genuinely serial sequence, yet at the same time distinctly individual in their materialities and sizes, these images signal their common identity, one that transcends all such distinctions, through their stringent identity as exemplars of a type – a type, moreover, which embodies a theologically and affectively specific message (identified through the caressing and snuggling contact of the cheeks and through the mutual embrace, as the ‘Eleousa’, alias the ‘Virgin of Tenderness and Mercy’, who manifestly seeks intimate proximity with her child, and in a way which – through a motivic analogy to the ‘Pietà’ – already prefigures the future suffering of the son, who will one day lie dead in her arms, etc.: Fig. 9)<sup>14</sup>. This establishment and securing of identity, one grounded in an iconographic type, which necessarily excludes every interpretive intervention on the part of the painter, was defined already by Theodoros of Studion at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787: «The execution of the image involves no inventiveness on the part of the artist, but is a sacred matter that is determined and transmitted by the church exclusively. [...] The artist’s concern is exclusively technical, while the arrangement (or feature) of the image is a matter for the venerable church fathers»<sup>15</sup>. This authoritative axiom concerning the relationship between archetype and image, paradoxically, was also and even especially valid in instances where embellishments, real garments and pieces of clothing were applied to the painted panel in order to decorate, cover, or single out the depicted figure, and which sought to heighten or to accentuate the distinctive materiality of its existence, the exemplary status of the individual image (Fig. 10).

14 See D.I. Pallas, *Passion und Bestattung Christi in Byzanz. Der Ritus – das Bild* (Miscellanea Byz. Monacensia, vol. 2), Munich, Salzer, 1965, pp. 166 et seqq.

15 Cf. L. Koch, «Zur Theologie der Christuskone», in *Benediktinische Monatschrift* 19, 1937, pp. 375-387 and 20, 1938, pp. 32-47, 168-175, 281-288, 437-452, cit., p. 42.

Fig. 9. Prochor from Gorodec (circuit of Andrej Rublev), Lamentation of Christ, detail, 1405, Moscow, Kremlin, Annunciation Cathedral



Fig. 10. Andrei Andreevich Aleksandrov, Our Lady of Vladimir, 1895, 31,5 x 27,7 cm, Moscow, private property



Arnulf Rainer's *Madonna* (Fig. 1) as well displays an image of an image, but one which no longer exercises an exemplary surrogate function, but instead, as a pale, monochrome photograph, and entirely in the spirit of Roland Barthes's *camera lucida*, testifies to a previous presence and authenticity, albeit one that is no longer recoverable, and which is instead displaced, overlaid, and substituted for by a new and different form of

authenticity: namely that of artistic expression, which, as a processual and metamorphic power of appropriation, adaptation and transmutation, is superimposed on the picture, thereby generating a new, heterogeneous ordering of layers, a new, materialized palimpsest.

Basically, to speak in terms of an explanatory model, we are confronted here with two contrasting and contrary dispositives. In the first, the image in each instance generates a singular, material exemplarity in its presentation, yet nonetheless defines its meaning and function entirely out of its own transparency: the authenticity of the image always resides behind its material manifestation, i.e., in a realm beyond the concrete image. In Arnulf Rainer's painting, this dialectic between that which lies in front and that which lies behind is converted and substituted by a dialectical ordering of layers, one now rendered immanent, a heterogeneous, multi-polar conceptual texture, one that – not unlike a palimpsest – generates a permanent and intrinsic discontinuity.

Now, seen against this background, what in the end is meant by the concept of the palimpsest, which I have used before a number of times? I think that the idea of the palimpsest in fact offers an adequate conceptual model for grasping – in a systematic fashion – the coherency or coexistence which is concretized in images, not only between original and copy, between prototype and afterimage, but also by extension between remembrance and actual reality, between authentic and staged presence, between identity and difference, etc., and going beyond this, to conceptualize the image as a symbolic web of connotations composed of appropriation and obliteration, taking and giving, imagination and power. All the more so when we consider the manifold ways in which the concept of the palimpsest has been applied fruitfully in the discourses of cultural and literary theory<sup>16</sup>.

Clearly, and regardless of its provenance in the field of paleography, the palimpsest concept has proven especially useful in such contexts, and has long been charged with multifaceted and metaphoric levels of significance. As we know, this concept in its original and literal sense means «scraped off» (*παλίμψεστος*), and refers to an early technology of cultural recycling which involved the abrading, scraping, or other treatment,

16 For the following remarks see K. Krüger, «Bild – Schleier – Palimpsest. Der Begriff des Mediums zwischen Materialität und Metaphorik», in E. Müller (Ed.), *Begriffsgeschichte im Umbruch?* (Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, Sonderband Jg. 2004), Hamburg 2005, pp. 81-112; Idem, «Das Bild als Palimpsest», in H. Belting (Ed.), *Bilderfragen. Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, Munich, Fink, 2007, pp. 133-163, with further literature and references.

for example with tinctures, of an already inscribed support material such as papyrus or parchment in order to replace an older text with a new one. This practice was motivated by the necessity for reusing precious materials and for recodifying obsolete elements of law and cult, liturgy and custom. Familiar from the very beginning was either the reappearance of the obliterated text after an extended period of time, or its persistent visibility in the form remainders, traces, shavings, etc.

Already in antiquity, this specific structure of a mostly multiple stratification and displacement, of superimposition and interpenetration, one that manifested itself less as succession than as material coexistence or structural coherence, meant that the concept of the palimpsest was predestined for metaphorical usage. Plutarch, for example, used the concept in order to describe the complex interrelationships between the changeable exterior of the human individual and his inner nature, which could not be effaced entirely. Here already, the concept reveals itself as signifying a dynamic, bipolar texture of meaning, a texture of identity and difference in its double aspect, one which encompasses both an object and a subject side, which is to say: pertains both to the object itself as well as to its perception, to the way in which it is experienced.

In this metaphorical form, the concept of palimpsest was exploited later in multiple ways in the realms of historical and cultural theory, but also by a variety of theories and concepts concerning the structure of human consciousness, that is to say, in the realms of universal as well as individual history. This was particularly the case when it was a question of constituting reality (whether as outer or inner reality, whether in its objective or subjective dimension) as a transitory order of levels of being or as a stratification of modes of experience and semiotic formations that were said to be formed processually. Thomas Carlyle in his essay *On History* of 1830<sup>17</sup>, Thomas De Quincey in an article of 1845 about *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*<sup>18</sup>, and Charles Baudelaire already interpreted the human brain through an explicit recourse to the concept of the palimpsest as the continuous superimposition of ideas, images, and sensations, as an «endless strata [...] not as a succession, but as parts of

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17 Th. Carlyle, «On History» (1830), in Idem, *Works*, 18 voll., London, Frowde, 1904-05, vol. 5, pp. 500-507.

18 Th. De Quincey, «The Palimpsest of the Human Brain» (1845), in Idem, *Collected Writings*, ed. by D. Masson, 14 voll., Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1889-1890, vol. 13, pp. 340-349.

a coexistence»<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, Sigmund Freud later developed the concept of the *Wunderblock*, or «mystic writing pad», in which he discerned an analog to the human perceptual apparatus as a dynamic structure of the registration, preservation, and sedimentation of experience<sup>20</sup>.

Within the horizon of this metaphorizing usage of the concept, it also became a model in the field of the history of mentalities and theories of civilization, where it served to characterize the continuous process by which culture is inscribed onto nature as a dynamically structured coherence. In the later 20th century, not least of all, it was invoked with growing emphasis in literary studies, where it became productive for theories of literary historicity and models of historical influence. In a way that distanced it consciously from traditional conceptions of rhetoric and the procedures it designates (*interpretatio, imitatio, aemulatio* etc.), the concept was taken up in particular in the field of research into intertextuality. The most striking instance is that of Gerard Genette, who elevated the palimpsest concept almost to a guiding metaphor which is used to characterize the semantic interlinking of various textual layers, thereby characterizing an elementary aspect of textuality and of practices of literary citation. Here, the 'text' is understood as a self-referential system which is said to acquire theoretical status through its reflexivity in relation to its own conditions of production and by virtue of its dissociation from the reality it describes, thereby always allowing literature to be conceived as meta-literature<sup>21</sup>.

In art history, the palimpsest concept has to date been used only sporadically. Its conceptual value as a theoretical model has been recognized primarily in the context of examinations of the structure and impact of intermedial procedures in postmodernism, but here as well, its use has been extremely isolated and unsystematic. In an influential essay published in 1980, for example, Craig Owens discusses postmodernism in relation to the «allegorical procedures» through which every text or im-

19 Ch. Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels – Opium et haschisch*, Paris, 1860; see Chr. Buci-Glucksmann, *La folie du voir. De l'esthétique baroque*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1986, pp. 197 et seqq.; and K. Stierle, «Rhetorik und Poetik der Metapher», in Idem, *Ästhetische Rationalität, Kunstwerk und Werkbegriff*, Munich, Fink, 1997, pp. 224-233, esp. pp. 230 et seqq. about the «Poetik der Erinnerung als Palimpsest» in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

20 S. Freud, «Notiz über den Wunderblock» (1925), in Idem, *Psychologie des Unbewussten* (Studienausgabe, vol. 3), Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1975, pp. 363-369.

21 G. Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1982.

age is said to speak through another, the concept of the palimpsest now becomes *the* decisive paradigm<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, Douglas Crimp defines the postmodern image categorically as formed by superimposed layers of representation, and defines the artistic practice of «appropriation» as a discursive procedure that is simultaneously critical as well as affirmative, even regressive<sup>23</sup>.

As we turn back now, against this theoretical background, to Arnulf Rainer's painting, we tackle the question of the degree to which the dissociation of religious from aesthetic experience observable in this work may be regarded as an index of a historical process of transformation (i.e., the breakthrough to 'modernity'), and of the degree to which the palimpsest model renders this difference more clearly graspable. The focus now is on the specific treatment of the image's mediality as the actual condition of image production, and on the artistic procedures by means of which the materialization of the imagination that is enacted via the picture becomes effective and is at the same time mastered. As we have seen, this occurs in Rainer's painting as the interleaving, integration, and superimposition of heterogeneous elements, as an ordering of layers that is constitutive for the processuality and threshold structure both of the image itself (the objective dimension) as well as its external conditions of perception (the subjective dimension).

In concluding, we shall attempt briefly to historicize this constellation, which is to say, to ask how it relates to a long-standing tradition of intertextual and intermedial image procedures that were already in force in the premodern era.

Let us turn to an exemplary instance, a painting by Michele Tosini executed around 1561 for an altar in a chapel of the Convent of San Vincenzo in Prato (Fig. 11)<sup>24</sup>. The viewer standing before the picture

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22 C. Owens, «The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism», *October* 12, 1980, pp. 67-86; Idem, «The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism (Part 2)», *October* 13, 1980, pp. 58-80 (reprinted in Idem, *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 52-87).

23 D. Crimp, «Pictures» (1979), in B. Wallis (Ed.), *Art after Modernism. Rethinking representation*, New York-Boston, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, pp. 175-184 (formerly in *October* 8, 1979, pp. 75-88): «Those processes of quotation, excerption, framing, and staging that constitute the strategies of the work [...] necessitate uncovering strata of representation [...]: underneath each picture there is always another picture».

24 F. Grimaldi, K. Sordi (Eds.), *L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto nell'Arte* (Exhib. Cat. Loreto, 1995), Loreto, Carilo, 1995, pp. 118 et seqq.

sees perspectival depth and gradations in height in relation to which he participates from the lowest position. Removed into the distance which is filled by celestial clouds, and surrounded by a bright, radiant gloriole, the standing Mother of God appears in the form of an image: she is set off from the assembly of saints in the foreground by a painted frame which was formerly even more strikingly elaborated, and once took the form of a three-dimensional relief. The elevation and distancing of the Madonna, her manifestation as a celestial apparition, thereby coincides with her identification as an image.



Fig. 11. Michele Tosini, Vision of the Madonna di Loreto with saints, 1560-61, Prato, San Vincenzo

But there is more. This palpable identification of image and vision becomes incomparably more compelling once we realize that the standing Virgin assumes the form of the celebrated *Madonna di Loreto*, a purportedly miraculous statue revered throughout Italy (fig. 12)<sup>25</sup>. Image and vision, then, stand here in a relationship of mutuality, one that reciprocally strengthens their claims to authenticity and endows each with credibility. In short: the visionary appearance of the mother of God in the Prato

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 184 et seq.



painting is credible and authentic because she resembles the 'true' holy image in Loreto, and conversely, the Loreto Madonna is credible in its appearance and spiritual power because it receives confirmation from this celestial apparition.

The importance of this state of affairs becomes clearer when we recall that in the late 16th century, the veneration of the holy image in Loreto experienced a remarkable upsurge, one that was promoted aggressively by the Counter Reformation. It was precisely in the years around 1560-70 – which is to say the period of both the efforts of the Counter Reformation to validate the authenticity of its own religious practices through recourse to tradition and of the production of the Prato painting – that a lively discussion took place concerning the veracity of the Loreto legend. Circulating increasingly throughout this controversy were graphic depictions of the holy image of the Virgin furnished with inscriptions such as *vero retratto* or *effigies S. Mariae Lauretanae*, which attested to its authenticity (Fig. 13)<sup>26</sup>.



Fig. 12. Unknown artist, Statue of the Madonna di Loreto, early 17th century, Montalto Marche, Convent of Santa Maria delle Clarisse



Fig. 13. Unknown artist, Madonna di Loreto, engraving, 1580s - 1590s.

26 See F. Grimaldi, *La historia della chiesa di Santa Maria de Loreto*, Loreto, Carilo, 1993, with further references; C. Ammannato, «L'immagine lauretana nell'eta della Riforma», in F. Citterio, L. Vaccaro (Eds.), *Loreto crocevia religioso tra Italia, Europa e Oriente*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1997, pp. 349-362, esp. pp. 357 et seqq.

In light of this context, we can say that Tosini's painting (Fig. 11) testifies to certain central claims of the Counter Reformation church, namely to authoritatively regulate religious images, especially those having supra-regional influence and popularity, in order to maintain control over and to canalize the religious gaze and the imaginative activity that is activated through it<sup>27</sup>. This is also manifested in the figures of the saints that are gathered in strict symmetry to the left and right below the celestial apparition of the Virgin, and which through their varied poses and gestures offer the believer a model for his own devotions and reverential attitude: the pious devotion, the stiffly severe gravity and emphatic religiosity, the abstracted humility, the meditative immersion, and so forth. Pointedly, it could be said that as rhetorically-charged mediators which delimit the threshold between sacred image and beholder, these figures establish a relationship of proximity and distance, of immersion and reflection, one that is not unrelated structurally to Arnulf Rainer's emphasis, articulated in gestural terms, on the act of establishing physical contact with the depicted individual – and which at the same time permanently hinder and refuse such accessibility and tangibility through their medially determined existence, their image character.

I shall not prolong my analysis of this image; at this point, I want to arrive at a conclusion. Regardless of the historical specificity of a multifaceted deployment and instrumentalization to which such paintings were subjected in the context of struggles around religious-discursive authority and the mastery of imagination, they point in the first place toward a decisive insight into the categorial dependency of the imagination on the medium of representation, a circumstance which they seek to master by integrating heterogeneous modes: iconic and narrative, historic and trans-historical, the here and now and the beyond, presence and absence, the unattainable and the appropriatable image, etc.

One could go as far as to say that images – and not only since modernism, with its tendency to expand artistic practice all the way to the blurring of boundaries and the hybridization of the arts – are charged with inter-pictorial and inter-medial relations which interweave, overlay, interpenetrate, and permeate them with other pictorial structures.

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27 For the historical context and further references see K. Krüger, «Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy», in R.L. Falkenburg, W.S. Melion, T.M. Richardson (Eds.), *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, pp. 37-69.

And yet emerging as well are decisive criteria for a historical differentiation. For if one wants to situate the concept of the palimpsest in the context of current discussions of leading metaphors and concepts of perception in pictorial discourse, for instance those of the image as veil, as mirror, as imprint, as window or trace etc., and to illuminate these in definitional terms, then we can begin by saying that in contrast to that of the palimpsest, other metaphors (especially the image as veil, as mirror, as window) are derived from an established and historically long tradition; secondly, the semantic charging of these metaphors and their corresponding functionality in images has been stamped in essential ways by two cognitive categories: on the one hand by metaphysical and religious foundations and by the objectives pertaining to a pictorially-mediated experience of transcendence, and on the other by incisive claims to mimesis and the imitation of nature, to illusion and fictions of reality<sup>28</sup>. If these metaphors (veil, mirror, or window), then, are aimed toward a categorical dialectic between the aspect of the image as presence and its connection to something essentially beyond, then associated decisively with the concept of the palimpsest, by contrast, is the process by which this dialectic becomes immanent, and hence undergoes a reflective displacement toward an intra-pictorial relationship. Instead of functioning as a threshold to a beyond, the image now harbors this liminality within itself as an internalized reference. As the fundamental structure of a dynamically determined, bipolar texture of meaning, this intra-pictorial dialectic can be described and differentiated via a broad register of antinomic conceptual pairs in whose context the copular «and» is of essential importance: absence and presence, aging and renewal, extinction and

28 Amongst others see R. Konersmann, *Der Schleier des Timanthes. Perspektiven der historischen Semantik*, Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1994; V.I. Stoichita, *L'Instauration du tableau: Metapeinture a l'aube des temps modernes*, Paris, Librairie Droz, 1993, esp. pp. 72 et seqq.; A. Assmann, J. Assmann (Eds.), *Schleier und Schwelle*, 3 voll., Munich, Fink, 1997-99; G. Didi-Huberman, «La ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte», in *L'Empreinte*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997, pp. 15-192; K. Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich, Fink, 2001; P. Oster, *Der Schleier im Text. Funktionsgeschichte eines Bildes für die neuzeitliche Erfahrung des Imaginären*, Munich, Fink, 2002; G. Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel. Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich, Fink, 2002; J. Endres, B. Wittmann, G. Wolf, *Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes. Der Schleier als Medium und Metapher*, Munich, Fink, 2005; P. Oster, *Der Schleier im Text. Funktionsgeschichte eines Bildes für die neuzeitliche Erfahrung des Imaginären*, Munich, Fink, 2002.

conservation, expunction and trace, identity and difference, transparency and opacity, original and copy, past and present, memory and immediate experience, appropriation and loss. It will become clear by now that a strict opposition between the notion of the image as palimpsest and that of the image as veil or window is neither especially practicable nor theoretically useful. This conceptual differentiation can be expected to yield systematic conclusions only through its historicization, that is to say, through questions concerning the phases of its demonstrable effectivity, or those concerning the latency of palimpsest-like pictorial structures, and finally, by investigating the degree to which models of the experiences of transcendence and of the transhistorically perspectivized blurring of boundaries are opposed to those of immanentization and of the notion of the 'stratified' as a category of this-worldly 'historicity'<sup>29</sup>.

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29 See for further discussion references in note 16.