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The Necessity of Emotion:

Antonello da Messina's *Dead Christ supported by Angels in the Prado**

To look at Antonello da Messina's painting of the Virgin in Palermo (fig. 1) is to ask three questions (at least): Is this the Virgin Annunciate, the Immaculate Mother of God about to receive the message that she will bear the Son of God? Or is it a portrait, perhaps even of someone we know or might know? Does it matter? No. What matters is that we respond to her as if she were human, not divine or transcendental—someone we might know, even in the best of our dreams. What matters is that she almost instantly engages our attention, that her hand seems to stop us in our passage, that we are drawn to her beautiful and mysterious face, that we recognize her as someone whose feelings we feel we might understand, someone whose emotional state is accessible to us.

Immediately, upon first sight of her, we are involved in her; swiftly we notice the shadow across her left forehead and eye, and across the right half of her face, the slight turn of the mouth, sensual yet quizzical at the same time.¹ What does all this portend? She has been reading; her hand is shown in the very act of being raised, as if she were asking for a pause, reflecting, no doubt on what she has just seen.

There is no question about the degree of art invested in this holy image; but even before we think about the art in the picture, what matters is that we are involved in it, by

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¹ Cf. Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 48.

virtue of the expression and action of the Virgin. It was painted by Antonello da Messina, around 1475, at more or less the same time as the Prado *Dead Christ Supported by Angels*, the subject of this essay (fig. 2). Whether or not we meditate upon the craft and art of the work, what is critical, just as in the case of the famous and much-discussed painting from Palermo, is that we are so rapidly involved in her mood, her feelings, her emotions, even prior, often enough, to thinking about its artfulness. I would be the first to admit that we do not know exactly what these emotions might be.

But this is precisely Antonello's brilliance. Our puzzlement is her puzzlement too. If it is the angel of the Annunciation to whom she is responding (which it probably is) what can its unforeseen and unseen presence portend? She does not yet know, this lily amongst lilies, this sensual and fertile yet immaculate mother of God and bride of Christ. We are as puzzled and as engaged as she is. But it is not, of course, as if Antonello could not paint a clear emotion. It's a mark of his ability as an artist that he should be able to convey this woman's ambivalence or perplexity about both her pleasure and her wariness at being the mother of God. It is this skill too that enables us as viewers to recognize that mixed emotion so immediately and so clearly.

When Nuria de Miguel asked me whether I'd like to speak about Antonello's *Dead Christ* of 1476-79, or Rogier van der Weyden's *Deposition of Christ* of around 1434-8 I was in a quandary (fig. 3). These two works are amongst the greatest devotional paintings in the Prado. But "devotional" means many things, and for the rest these works could not be more different, in scale, in number of protagonists, in commission, in destination and so on. Rogier's *Deposition* was acquired by Charles V's sister Margaret of Austria around 1548, was brought by Philip II to the Prado in 1555, and has been

admired as one of the great paintings in the world from the day it was set up as a major altarpiece in the Church of Our Lady Outside the Walls in Louvain;² Antonello's *Dead Christ* was almost totally unknown until it was bought by the Prado in 1965 and published by Javier de Salas and George Mandel in 1967.³ It was immediately recognized as a masterpiece. A few people tried to attribute it to other artists, to lesser followers of Antonello, but such attempts understandably failed. In his most recent catalogue, Mauro Lucco dated the work to the period between 1476 and 1479 when after a long stay in Venice he was already back in his native Messina at the very end of his life.⁴ This seems right to me, although the case has usually been made that it was made before that in Venice, on the basis of similarities with several paintings of the *Dead Christ* by Giovanni Bellini.⁵

These are two great paintings and two great works of art. They are also works that arouse devotion and compassion. But are these qualities—art and devotion via compassion—continuous with each other, or separate? Some insist that emotional involvement is essential for art, others—especially contemporary critics and thinkers who follow the great German philosopher on art, Immanuel Kant, argue not only that emotion has or should have nothing to do with what constitutes art, but that many modern and

² This work now has one of the best documented histories of Early Netherlandish Painting, and the literature on it is vast, but see now Lorne Campbell et al, *Rogier van der Weyden*, Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2015.

³ Xavier de Salas, "Un tableau d'Antonello de Messine au Musée du Prado, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 70 (1967), pp. 125-138.

⁴ Mauro Lucco, *Antonello da Messina. L'Opera Completa*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013.

⁵ Although, as I indicate throughout this paper, I disagree with Hans Belting's basic observation about the epistemic changes involved in the transition from holy image (or "icon") to work of art (cf. note 9 below), these paintings are all brilliantly discussed in his *Giovanni Bellini Pietà. Ikone und Bilderzählung in der venezianischen Malerei*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985.

contemporary works contain or elicit no emotion at all. Whether they are right or wrong is of course another matter.

For over forty years I have been arguing about the importance of emotional responses for our understanding of art works. My positions have often been dismissed. For much of this time, people have said that art has nothing to do with emotion. They still say this. Following Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and works such as R.C. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* they say that art is a matter of pure form, that emotion is just some kind of trick to draw one in. They say that in making an esthetic judgment one must leave aside whatever emotion one derives from a picture and not allow it to affect one's judgment of form or of what makes a work a work of art. As if that were possible! They say that we only see the art in a work of art when we judge a work independently of its emotional context, when we detach ourselves from the emotions it arouses. Only magicians, said Collingwood, rely on emotion to achieve their purposes; real artists do not. To most people this will now seem an absurd position; we all know how emotionally involved we can become in a work of art. But the Kantian tradition that excludes emotion from the realm of art on the grounds that one's engagement with art should be disinterested, detached from body and all forms of personal interest, is still strong. It continues to influence more of us than we might think.

For almost the same length of time I have written about the importance of empathetic responses for the understanding of art,⁶ but once again my claims have been

⁶ Not only in *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989, but particularly after my engagement with the neural substrates of empathetic response, beginning with David Freedberg, "Empathy, Motion and Emotion," in: K. Herding and A. Krause Wahl, eds., *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nahsicht*, Berlin: Driesen, 2007, pp. 17-51 and David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, V. 2007. "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, May 2007, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp. 197-203.

pretty much dismissed. Just as they do of emotions, intellectuals and academics also deny the role of empathy in our understanding of what constitutes art.⁷ But how can one say this before a painting such as Antonello da Messina's great *Dead Christ supported by an Angel* (74cm x 51cm)? In this essay I will show why they are wrong—and why their analyses of this work fails to capture what makes it so effective both as a religious image and as a great work of art. I will also suggest some of the continuities—and not the ruptures—between the religious and esthetic dimension of other works like it.

Since I have already spoken and written so much about Rogier's *Deposition* in the context of empathic bodily responses to the expression of emotion and suffering, and have often used it as a centerpiece of my examination of the neural substrates of the relations between movement, emotion and the evocation of simulated bodily responses in viewers,⁸ my aim here is to concentrate on the painting by Antonello.

Christ is seated on his tomb in a beautiful landscape. Blood streams from the gaping wound in his side. His head is thrown back in exhaustion, his eyes closed, his mouth half-open. Despite his travail, it's a handsome head, more earthly than transcendent (fig. 4). Two crystalline tears fall from the angel's red-rimmed eyes, evidently swollen from weeping. He pulls back Christ's arm as if purposefully to display the wound (or perhaps simply to stop the hand from being smudged or stained with

⁷ As was already made clear (though it is often forgotten) in the work of the great expert of empathy, Theodor Lipps, most notably in Theodor Lipps, "Einfühlung, innere Nachahmung, und Organempfindungen," *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 1 (1903-1906), pp. 185-204, but see also now Alessandro Pignocchi and Roberto Casati, "Mirror and Canonical Neurons are not Constitutive of Aesthetic Response," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, May 2007, vol. 11, No. 7 pp. 4-5 (with a rebuttal in David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese "Mirror and Canonical Neurons are Crucial Elements in Esthetic Response," *Trends in Cognitive Science*, May 2007, Vol. 11, No. 7, p. 6.

⁸ For example, in David Freedberg, "Empathy, Motion and Emotion" (as in note 6 above), and Freedberg, "Memory in Art: History and the Neuroscience of Response", in: S. Nalbantian, P.M. Matthews and J.L. McClelland eds., *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2011, pp. 337-358.

blood). There's a puncture in the flesh and tendons of his left hand, but the stigma on the right palm, just by the skull on the left, is barely visible; blood also flows in thinner streams between the delicately painted strands of disordered hair on the left of his forehead. There can be no question of the emotional content of this picture or that it was intended to be viewed with according emotions as well. And we almost feel as if our own heads were tilted back, as if we were inclining to the same actions both of Christ and the angel.

There can be no question of the art in this painting either. The exceptionally subtle and delicate modeling of the flesh, the subtle modulation of light and shadow passing across both flesh and muscles, the expansive, luminous landscape, the crisp folds of the cloth, the lovely colors, the way in which the salmon-colored armband and red tinge in the wings of the angel serve as a kind of artful prelude to the deep red wound from which the blood gushes in Christ's side: all these are the work of a genius of painting. Do we need to be detached from emotion, as my opponents argue, in order to perceive how all this is done? Or to appreciate the ways in which emotion and suffering are so effectively conveyed? The art itself, they say, doesn't depend on our emotional involvement: it depends on the form and technique of the work, irrespective of the emotions involved in our viewing it, which in any case, they insist, vary from viewer to viewer and epoch to epoch.

That's true, of course, but to a lesser extent than fashionably claimed. As if to emphasize this view of a divide between emotion and art, a recent group of scholars has claimed that there is a sharp divide between what they call the age of the icon when people responded to religious images as if the god were in the icon (and worshipped it on

the basis of their religious and emotional feelings), and the age of art, when people were basically interested in the aesthetics of the image.⁹ That divide was marked by the Renaissance and documented by Giorgio Vasari, the first great historiographer of Renaissance artists, and one of the main harbingers of the turn from iconicity to esthetics were artists like Antonello. The great theorist of this position is Hans Belting, and his views have had wide influence.¹⁰ Would that things were that simple! Here I want to suggest that there was no such decisive split; and that medieval artists were more attentive to esthetic factors for the arousal of religious feelings than Belting allows, and Renaissance artists were more generally attentive to the evocation of religious responses, even when using their extraordinary artistic skills to evoke them, than he and his followers acknowledge.

What I want to suggest here is the necessity of emotion for the engagement of viewers' attention—both then and now—in a picture like Antonello's, for drawing them into it, and for enabling them to share in the emotions conveyed there – even before they begin to appreciate it as art, even before they begin to understand what makes it a great work of art, however instantaneous that awareness may seem to be. (One of the many merits of the new cognitive neurosciences is precisely that it can enable us to actually time the transition between involvement in what we see and conscious awareness of what we see.) I will suggest how pre-conscious forms of emotional engagement with an image

⁹ As, most notably in Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult, Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1990, and *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte, Eine Revision nach zehn Jahren*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2d enlarged edition, 2002; see also Belting, Giovanni Bellini Pietà (as in note 5 above) for a further outline of this position. But for a rebuttal of Belting's position, see my "Holy Images and Other Images," in: *The Art of Interpreting (Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University)*, Ed. Susan C. Scott, University Park (Pennsylvania): The Pennsylvania State University, 1996, pp. 68-87).

¹⁰ For Belting, see the references above. For the influences, see *inter alia* (and perhaps most famously in the Anglo-Saxon art historical world), Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York: Zone Books, 2010.

precede and prepare our calibration of the artist's skill in producing both the work and generating the effects she wishes to convey. I will show how the perception of emotion and the ways in which it is expressed by a face or by the movements of the body arrest one's attention, and drive one's engagement with it. As my and others' researches in the field of neuroscience have demonstrated, the emotions of others—and of depicted others—are not only *expressed* by the movements of the face and the body but are also *felt* in the body of the viewer through the embodied simulation of those movements.¹¹ It's the artist's skill in understanding how best to convey to others the relevant emotions through the movements of the body appropriate to the evocation of such emotion that is critical. I will propose that works like Antonello's show that this is all facilitated by one's sense of felt closeness to, one's sense of felt intimacy with, what is shown within the image. Such feelings of closeness are enhanced by making the person one sees in a picture look somehow like oneself or like someone whom one knows—or might know, the more intimately the better—a friend or relative for example. That's why one feels so involved with Antonello's great *Virgin Annunciate* in Palermo, for example (fig. 1), the same date as our painting today. Our engagement with pictures is predicated on our emotional engagement with them even prior to our awareness of the artistic effects that produce them; only then, once we are unconsciously drawn in, do we become capable of judging the artist's skill. It may be the skill of the maker that actually brings one in, but what we feel first is the emotion, and only then do we become conscious of ourselves as viewers and be in position to assess the art.

¹¹ As set out in many of the articles and books by Gallese and myself. See, for example, the citations in notes 6 and 8 above.

Let us briefly return to the painting by Rogier van der Weyden (fig. 3). It has served as an emblematic—and very well documented—example of the relationship between movement and emotion in a work of art. Fifteenth-century understandings of the function and effect of works of art, whether religious or secular, are attributable to factors that depend precisely on the relationship between emotion and the body. What draws people into this work—as we see every day in the Prado—is not just the unquestionable brilliance of the artist’s techniques but the way in which he succeeds in conveying emotion through the expressions, movements, and sufferings of the body, and through the very tears that so vividly descend from their eyes across their cheeks (fig. 5). One does not need to know the biblical story at all to have a sense of the grief and compassion that that lies at its core. One has a physical sense of emulating the very gestures that convey that grief. One doesn’t need to know the crucial texts—one goes along with the emotions that involve one, and the visceral and interoceptive feelings that automatically absorb one. The artist so well conveys what he needs to in order to achieve this that one barely has a choice.

Indeed, fifteenth century understandings of compassion—co-suffering, remember, in the literal sense, not just sympathy—dovetail with present understandings of empathy, where both emotional and visceral states are predicated on a feeling within oneself of both the actual movements and the feelings of those bodies there (of their motions and emotions if you like).¹² Viewers then and now understand both the grief of the Virgin and

¹² And this old predication of feelings in oneself of what one sees out there, whether in reality or in images (see for example, not only the late fourteenth century *Meditations on the Life of Christ* cited in note below, but also Otto von Simson, “Compassio and Co-Redemptio in Rogier van der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross*, *Art Bulletin*, 35, pp. 9-16) has its precise biological accounting in contemporary cognitive neuroscience, particularly in the development of mirror theory and the consequent emphasis on the neural substrates of felt imitation of the actions and sufferings of others, embodiment, and embodied simulation.

the slump of the body that expresses it (itself mirroring Christ's own bodily movement) because of the feeling of an empathetic slump within oneself upon sight of that movement; they understand at least something of the pain of the wound in Christ's side because of the arousal of their own secondary somatosensory cortices upon seeing it (fig. 6).

Many of these factors remain directly relevant for Antonello's picture as well, and it was indeed Netherlandish works like Rogier's that inspired it. This art that is so accomplished in showing emotion in the eyes and via tears, expression and even the entire body, further reveals Antonello's famous debt to the Early Netherlandish masters, to his alleged training with Jan van Eyck and his firsthand knowledge of the work of artists like Roger van der Weyden, who himself worked in Italy.

Vasari himself maintained that Antonello studied with Jan van Eyck, the alleged inventor of oil painting, and is thus supposed to have brought the craft of oils to the Italian peninsula. Though it's now clear that the development of oil painting preceded both Jan van Eyck and Antonello, there can be no question that it was his mastery of this technique that enabled him paint with such extraordinary precision: not only the enamel-like depth of the colors, but the crisp folds of Christ's tunic, only conceivable in the light of a knowledge of Netherlandish painting, the shimmer of the angel's hair, each individual lock so finely painted, the even more remarkable detail and fineness of Christ's hair, interspersed with drops of blood from the crown of thorns that once rested on that holy head, the marvelous shading and modeling of the flesh, and—of course—the extraordinary beauty of the landscape, clearly recalling the walls and the Duomo of

See not only the work of myself and Gallese (as in notes 6 and 8 for example) but also that of Beatrice de Gelder, set out, for example, in her recent *Emotions and the Body*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Messina, the aerial perspective that carries our eyes into the luminous distance, the blue water off to the left, the fineness of the trees and the high and rocky walls from which more vegetation grows, the detail of the bones scattered on this tragic landscape. All this is entirely Netherlandish, and unimaginable without the lessons Antonello learned from Northern masters, whether in the Low Countries himself or on the Italian peninsula, where by mid-century there was, of course, no shortage of available examples. But the question may certainly be raised as to whether it is the beauty of the art, or the painter's skill in evoking an emotional response in his viewers, somehow equivalent to what the suffering and weeping protagonists themselves may be feeling, that draws us into the painting.

Especially in the context of Antonello's attentiveness to the setting of the scene as well as to the emotions it is worth remembering what Michelangelo (according to Francisco de Holanda) is supposed to have said of Flemish painters, namely that they were skilled at showing landscape and emotions, and that it was precisely these two aspects of their work that chiefly pleased women and nuns. Be that as it may, let us note that this angel is no transcendent, inaccessible being, it is a boy, a boy whom we could so easily know, so much so that we almost seem to suffer with that too-young sufferer who is so akin to ourselves, and, even more poignantly, to our children. It is this kinship that makes our empathy all the more trenchant (though it is the expression and the very movements of the face that arouse it in the first instance).

It pays to consider a series of three Crucifixions by Antonello. The first one is in Sibiu in Romania and is a small picture (29 x 23.5 cm) and has been variously dated anywhere from the early 1450s to the early 1470s. My own sense is that it was painted

towards the beginning of this range, and has rightly been compared to Jan van Eyck's *Crucifixion* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where the rather elongated figures beneath the cross and the high crosses themselves are indeed similar. The Flemish influence is again pretty clear, with the landscape spreading upwards to the boat-dotted sea, filled with buildings and winding river and road that carry the eyes upward to the high horizon in the distance. Since we will comment on them later again, note also the tall crosses to which the good and bad thief are attached, and the ways in which grief are expressed, from the expostulating hands on both sides, to the tensely clasped hands of the Virgin and those pressed to the eyes of third Mary on the right: is she simply covering her eyes to avoid looking at the excruciating and bloody Crucifixion, or because she must wipe her eyes of her tears? From now on, Antonello's gestures become ever clearer, and the elements of emotion, of crying and looking, grow ever more central. All of these motifs recur throughout Netherlandish painting but also occur in much other early painting, as, for example, in the great scene of the *Lamentation* in the Arena chapel by Giotto himself.

We see such gestures again in what is probably the next in this series, perhaps from around 1473, the *Crucifixion* in London (42 x 25.5 cm). Once more the use of aerial perspective—though here with a lower horizon—ensures a sense of distance. This illusion is further enhanced by the extended body of water, the processions of people and trees, and the overlapping planes of landscape all the way to the horizon. The extraordinary detail of the skulls on the ground below the Crucifixion—referring to Golgotha, “the place of skulls”—and the crows picking at the remaining flesh on them is also unimaginable without the lessons learned from the precise techniques of the

Netherlandish masters. But what is most striking in this painting, what instantly engages one's attention and absorbs one in the mood of the picture, are the figures of the Virgin and John the Evangelist below the cross. They are like children, it seems, altogether lost in their sadness, desperation, and grief. We feel for them immediately, because they are so accessible in their need for both our compassion and our protection. This is no majestic Queen of Heaven; she is a Virgin of humility, not standing beside the cross, as in the earlier painting (and in most others too), but seated directly on the ground: humility and simple childish sadness go together. It's impossible not to be emotionally involved either with her or the poor John the Evangelist, his arms outstretched in hopelessness, his eyes swollen and red with crying—It took the artist just a slight tint of red paint to indicate this. To have access to the core of this story, the artist realizes, one needs emotion; one needs to evoke the compassion of the viewer through her empathic understanding of what is happening inwardly to the mother of Christ. And this is enhanced by the compassionate downward gaze of Christ, clearly looking at his mother, as if he had become the father, not the son—the compassionate father of this childlike mother, as if he, even in his suffering, has pity on her sorrow for him.¹³

These multiple forms of compassion, of compassion via suffering, all occur richly and repeatedly in the popular literature of the time—and so do the constituent elements of

¹³ A careful examination of this work reveals that the concentration on the co-suffering of the Virgin and St John—and, presumably, on the emotional depth of these figures—was enhanced at some point in its early history by the fact that the painted label with Antonello's name—fairly typical for his work, and especially for the portraits in which he excelled—has somehow been cut from some other part of the painting, and stuck to the frame below, and that probably the work was cut not just at the top but perhaps on both sides too. This would have enhanced viewers' concentration on the emotional protagonists of the scene, perhaps further emphasized by the probability that the work must also once have contained, as such representations of Golgotha are supposed to have, the crosses of the good and bad thief as well. Cf. Lucco, *Antonello da Messina* (as in note 4 above).

compassion: humility, emotion, suffering and co-suffering, *passio*, as they say in Latin, and *compassio*.

The last in this series is the Antwerp *Crucifixion*,¹⁴ perhaps from around 1475, but certainly very close in time to the London picture (conceivably even before it). It too reveals the Flemish influence on Antonello: the landscape, the aerial perspective, the roads winding into the distance, the successive planes receding to the glorious sea beyond, the meticulous representation of the buildings and vegetation culminating in the precision of the skulls, the bare rocks and the owl in the very foreground, and the crisp folds of the Virgin's dress. Here the stump with Antonello's signature reminds us of the presence of the artist in the scene. And how present he is! The tormented bodies of the thieves—notice the ways in which the good thief's legs have been hacked across the shins—have here been turned into displays of ornamental virtuosity. The very trees, for they are no longer the crosses they are supposed to be, have been turned into the most elegant curves and arabesques, while the bodies of these thieves, especially on the right, are extended and suspended in ways that add a kind of exquisite elegance to their torture. Indeed, Antonello here appears to have borrowed from a striking example of the very latest in the most up-to-date Florentine art of the time, Pollaiuolo's bronze statuette of *Hercules and Antaeus*.

This is certainly self-conscious art. There is no question that a work such as Antonello's would have appealed very precisely to collectors sensitive to just such competitive emulation, such signals of what was then most modern.

¹⁴ In that city at least from the early seventeenth century on; see Lucco, *Antonello da Messina* (as in note 4), p. 216.

But still it was the emotional dimension that provided the occasion and spurred on the art. Amidst all the clear signs of artistic emulation here, and of how much Antonello is thinking of his achievement in esthetic terms, still the most powerful of the initial relational signals to the spectator are surely the psychological rather than the pictorial indices: The Virgin, now no longer a child and much older, is still visibly sad and still a Virgin of humility, John now with his hands clasped in devout and poignant prayer. One must remember, as it would not then have been difficult to do, how often contemporary treatises on prayer like the very popular *Giardino de Oratione*, insisted that prayer always be accompanied by humility.¹⁵ The point was, first, the involvement of the spectator, then the recognition of the art involved in creating such involvement. For the age of the icon continued into the age of art. Such forms of arousal and continuity were scanted or overlooked by Belting, who, ironically, was actually one of the most sensitive to such features, given his expertise in Byzantine and early Medieval art and the many texts that underlie them. To suggest that a work like Antonello's represents a whole new paradigm—let alone a new age of art—is to overlook what draws the viewer into the work in the first place. It is only once emotion has grasped one's attention—as we know from many studies they do—that one becomes aware of the art in the picture.¹⁶ This is the ever-present factor in all religious imagery and, arguably, in all works of art.

Antonello's *Dead Christ Mourned by an Angel* (fig. 2) is indeed very closely related to a tradition that hovers on the borderline between an image produced for

¹⁵ For this conjunction of prayer and humility in Savonarola's treatises on precisely this topics of 1492, see notes 23 and 27 below.

¹⁶ Indeed the study of the ways in which emotion can be a prime and automatic attractor of attention has now become a major are of research in the cognitive neurosciences of vision, attention and emotion, following the pioneering researches of scientists like Larry Weiskrantz, Steven Yantis, Luz Pessoa, Peter J. Lang, Margaret Bradley, Bea de Gelder and very many others.

devotion, and an image produced as a work of art—a borderline that is both a modern invention and an invention of the kinds of censors and critics like Gilio da Fabriano who critiqued Michelangelo for concentrating on style and art at the expense of religion and spirituality. There is a significant continuum between these two categories, not a division, and that continuum started well before the Renaissance—and went on for long after.

The immediate predecessors of Antonello's work, as has often been noted, are Venetian—both Jacopo and Giovanni Bellini and—as has less been noted—Antonio Veneziano and Carlo Crivelli. The degree to which he was competing with them—or, for that matter, they with him—is not entirely resolved, but what has not been sufficiently emphasized is the iconographic originality of the work.

As has often been noted, the position of Christ's head, thrown back and open mouthed, is very close to that in Bellini's Pesaro altarpiece of 1474 (Musei Civici, Pesaro). It is usually said that Antonello's painting is somehow derived from Bellini, but who is to say? In any case, whether it's before or after Bellini, the competition between them was obviously swift and intense. They are in fact are very different kinds of paintings, with Antonello's vastly more emotional than Bellini's. The same, in a way, for Bellini's certainly earlier painting (1465-70) of the *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* in the National Gallery in London, where his efforts at emotional intensity seem all-too routine and mechanical in comparison with Antonello. The wound is revealed by exactly the same pulling-back of the arm with the shroud, but the gesture that does so is much less obviously explicative, the wound almost a scratch in place of the fountain of blood that issues from the gaping wound in the side of Antonello's picture. While the probably

later picture in Berlin (ca 1480-85) contains all the stigmata, it is an even blander performance. For emotional intensity in Bellini, in fact, we find a closer parallel in the pinnacle of the Saint Vincent Ferrer altarpiece in Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice of 1465 and which we can assume Antonello knew well; but here there is no effort to pull away the arm to show the wound; rather the showing of the stigmata in the right hand seems to dominate it. It too reveals how much Bellini fell short of Antonello's emotional intensity, even in the case of an image which was certainly not destined for the private market, but for a major devotional altarpiece in a one of the most crowded churches of Venice.

In all these paintings there are two angels; a rare example with only one is the moving work attributed to Giorgione in the Barbara Piasecka Johnson collection in Princeton, which, however, probably reflects rather than precedes Antonello's Prado painting. So with this in mind, let us now turn to further aspects of the iconographic originality of the work.

On the face of it, the iconography of the Prado *Dead Christ with Angels* does not seem so unusual. It's basically an *imago pietatis*, an image of Christ as Man of Sorrows seated on his tomb (here barely visible at the bottom of the painting). In a famous article, Panofsky identified such images as *Andachtsbilder*, images which command its viewers' attention in order to arouse devotion, usually to the body of Christ. One was supposed to meditate upon these images, concentrate on them and pray to them, and in this a combination of both humility and emotional engagement was usually regarded as essential. Like the archetypal example of such works, the famous *Imago Pietatis* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, it's a full frontal type to which sometimes Bellini and

his school are directly indebted, and which—in keeping with his narrative drive—is occasionally placed in a pleasant landscape (as in the example from the late 1450s in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan). By 1475 this was a commonplace type in Venice, but Antonello's conception of it was strikingly original.

To some extent Antonello was more indebted to the Northern type of *Christ as Man of Sorrows*, as in the painting of 1430 by Meister Francke in the Museum in Leipzig. At very first glance we think we see only one angel here, just like Antonello, supporting a Christ explicitly showing the gushing wound in his side. But then one notices the second and third angels in the lower corners, while the blood also streams from the crown of thorns, perhaps slightly more subtly. Similar features also appear, but much more blandly, in Petrus Christus' painting of around 1450 in Birmingham in England. This form with the two angels was the one that Bellini always used. But Antonello was much more emotionally explicit than any of these.

For instances of emotional drama, however, one must also turn to the sculptors: Giovanni Pisano for example, in the fragment from the Pisa Pulpit of the first decade of the fourteenth century (thus contemporary with the first of the texts that I will shortly discuss) and above all Donatello, in his panel of the same subject on the Altar of Saint Anthony (1446-53) in the Santo in Padua. Here at last—and not unexpectedly—one finds the kind of emotional pitch that we also see in Antonello. These are angels who if they had red eyes to disgorge their tears over the wounds of the suffering Christ would certainly do so.

But the painting by Bellini that should be recalled here is the example from around 1460 in the Museo Correr in Venice. It may have inspired both paintings by

Antonello of the Dead Christ supported by two angels—that is, both the work in the Prado and the much smaller painting, also in the Museo Correr, that served as an important precedent for it. In fact, such a degree of emotion really only appears in the paintings of Christ as Man of Sorrows with the Virgin and John the Baptist (and occasionally the Magdalene), rather than with angels. This is a type that seems to begin with works such as Giovanni da Milano's 1385 *Imago Pietatis* (Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia), but is perhaps most famously exemplified by Bellini's powerful painting in the Brera (1465-70), and even more so by the still more extravagantly emotional work in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice a few years later. It is also to be found—always set in a landscape—in the earlier drawings by Jacopo Bellini in the Louvre sketchbook, where that open-mouthed expression of emotional distress also appears (as too in many later Mantegnesque examples, and in the one set of unacknowledged sources for Antonello's work—including Antonio Vivarini's fragment from the top of the Praglia altar in the Brera, and that survive in several examples by Carlo Crivelli, particularly those in the National Gallery in London (1470/75), in the Louvre (ca. 1480) and Philadelphia (around 1472 or later). But in the latter case, it is not clear who inspired whom here? Antonello may have offered the initiating impulse for the formal aspects of this work (especially, perhaps in the head of Christ tilted back and in the way in which Christ's demonstrative gesture round his wound would be transformed by the angel's revelatory pressure on Christ's arm away from the wound, to show it better). Once again it is hard not to be struck by the intense forms of emulation over this iconographic type amongst painters and sculptors working in the same circle and around the same time.

By now, however, we have plainly moved across several different genres of religious imagery. One can be fairly sure that the earlier paintings of the *Man of Sorrows supported by angels*, just as in the case of Vivarini's Praglia altar, were intended for devotion; but with Crivelli's panels (perhaps most strikingly in the panel of around 1472 in Philadelphia), both genre and function seem less clear. What was primary? Their esthetic or devotional function? On the one hand the backgrounds in most of these pictures—just as with Vivarini—are gold, as in all the early *imagines pietatis*, but the works seem to contain much else made for the art admirer and collector: the careful still life of fruit at the top of Crivelli's painting in Boston, the extraordinarily foreshortened foot there—always a kind of *paragone* for a painter. But here, as already in the earlier paintings by Crivelli, it all seems too overwrought to be convincing as pure devotional paintings—but then again it would be hard to argue that even the purest of such examples were devoid of esthetic impulse or invention. But Antonello clearly knew how to represent convincing emotion better than Crivelli—and seems also to have inspired him, perhaps excessively so, well beyond his competence.

The earlier men of sorrows are *Andachtsbilder*, paintings intended for focus and devotion; the last ones by Bellini, in which Christ and his mother show their agony and empathy in front of landscapes, seem different. There is a landscape to walk through, a kind of pleasant counterpoint to the drama being enacted, with the figure of John in the famous work in the Brera most obviously engaging the viewer outside the picture. It's almost, Belting would say, as if the iconic devotional form—or the devotional iconic form, if you like—has become entirely esthetic. The narrative expansiveness contrasts with the concentration on the figurational signs of devotionality. This seems to be the

kind of claim he and his followers Alexander Nagel and Chris Wood would make. The landscapes, they claim, make them a form of narrative; so too, they say, the emotion in these faces that seem all too easily recognizable. They are this-worldly, not otherworldly; present and terrestrial, not transcendental. But what all these writers forget is that the transcendental is present in the everyday too.

For Belting the signs of naturalism, whether in the Virgin in Messina as a possible portrait or in these pictures within their naturalistic landscapes and their narrative expansiveness closed the door to transcendence in the icon and instead mirrored real space in front of the painting.¹⁷ For him Bellini's painting in the Brera for example, and Antonello's in the Prado (fig. 2), mark a significant break with the past and a corresponding dawn of modernity. In Belting's model the age of the icon is overtaken around 1500 (or slightly earlier) by the Renaissance the age of art. In this model, notes Gervase Rosser, there is no room for the possibility of continuity in visual response and modes of behavior around devotional images across this hypothesized divide.¹⁸

For me this continuity is critical. Pictures such as those discussed in these paragraphs suggest that there is in fact no turning point—or no sense in postulating such a turning point—away from the holy icon and towards the mundane work of art around 1500. If there is a stylistic drift accompanying a spiritual one then it needs to be better defined. There is no question that Antonello introduced into his pictures an unprecedented potential for psychological engagement of the beholder, but this is nothing like as clear or significant a turning point as Belting and Nagel seek. There is very much

¹⁷ As in Belting, *Giovanni Bellini Pietà. Ikone und Bilderzählung* (note 5 above).

¹⁸ Gervase Rosser, "Antonello da Messina, the devotional image and artistic change in the Renaissance," in *Around Antonello da Messina: Reintegrating Quattrocento Culture*, edited by Michael W. Kwakkelstein and Bette Talvacchia, Istituto Olandese per la Storia dell'Arte, Firenze: Centro Di, 2014, pp. 103-126.

less an opposition, if there is one at all, between icon and image, between cult and art. Both artists and mundane imagemakers had always sought the psychological engagement of the beholder, especially in the case of *Andachtsbilder* and countless *imagines pietatis*. The boundary between new and old paradigms is simply too fluid.

You need to have figures you can recognize as akin to yourself in order to empathize with them and with their suffering, as indeed with Christ's, because their bodies are our bodies, and because Christ was born a man. But to claim, as Nagel does, that the *Annunciate* in Palermo is no longer strictly speaking the subject of the painting as much as framework for understanding how a work of art comes to acquire meaning. Nonsense! In this modern account the sacred character of the traditional religious image has allegedly been appropriated by the artist to serve as a framework for understanding a work of art. This is wrong. A framework for intellectualizing art historians, perhaps—but before any viewer can engage with this framework, she must engage empathetically with the suffering of Christ that enables her prayer and devotion. Perhaps Nagel means to claim that understanding how a religious image—especially one vested with the authority of the apparently everyday (or the apparently sexual)—has its effect is to understand the art in and of a work of art or that (as I claimed in *The Power of Images* that understanding a religious work of art stands as a model for all works of art), but this seems unlikely. Nor is a work like the Palermo *Annunciate* to be understood as a fictionalization of the icon as Klaus Krüger has put it (much as it may serve the modern art historian to insist on the separation of a work of high fiction from the directness of real life—alas, another failed hope).¹⁹ Rosser again notes rightly that it's an assumption

¹⁹ Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier der Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich: Fink, 2001.

of all such analyses—whether in Belting or in Nagel or in Krüger that an image which uses naturalistic affective techniques to evoke an unfolding human story set in the world cannot have been intended primarily to function as the catalyst of transcendental, a-temporal and otherworldly experience.²⁰ They have forgotten the ways and means of anagogy. And we can only understand the framework of the fiction once we understand the life upon which it is—or is not—predicated. This is what comes first, and this is what draws us into the picture: the sense not of fiction, but of reality; only later, as I have suggested, do we come to the former, to the framework for understanding how a work of art comes to acquire meaning.

What is critical to all of the paintings discussed in this article is what I have called the necessity of emotion. In order to achieve the engagement that emotion brings, the artist, whether in the Renaissance or earlier, needs to mobilize his full skills in drawing the viewer into the religious moment, the moment that depends on empathizing with Christ and those who suffered with him in order to arouse devotion. And it is precisely this, as Belting and his followers forget, that actually motivates and inspires the art.

We learn this with great clarity from the two texts which I have alluded to earlier. The continuity between them is clear, despite the differences in their original contexts. The first text is the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, once attributed to St Bonaventure then to the Pseudo-Bonaventure, but expressly originating in a late thirteenth-century Franciscan context, of precisely the kind we know Antonello often worked for;²¹ the

²⁰ Rosser, Antonello da Messina (as in note 18), pp. 110-112.

²¹ This text is available in the beautiful English edition by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Princeton Monographs in Art and Archeology, no. 35, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

second is by none other than the radical Florentine monk, Girolamo Savonarola.²² The *Meditations* circulated in hundreds of copies that undoubtedly influenced pictorial art, while Savonarola's texts aroused the most passionate of followers. But what, it might be asked, has Savonarola, the fervid Dominican monk, to do with Antonello, so close to the modest Franciscans? The fact is that a number of his treatises, particularly a set of them written in the second half of 1492, show extraordinary similarities with the earlier *Meditations*, especially in their visualization of the life of Christ, their significance for the understanding of paintings, and their recommendation of the evocation of the emotions in the devotional life and their use of visualization in doing so.²³

Both texts contain frequent exhortations—of the kind regularly transmitted by preachers to non-literate as well as literate audiences—to transform the act of looking into corporeal feeling, in order to better understand Christ's suffering. No text better exemplifies this than the *Meditations*; none do so more fervidly than Savonarola's treatises of 1492. "Look at him well then, as he goes along bowed down by the cross and gasping aloud. *Feel* as much compassion for him as you can, placed in such anguish", runs a typical passage, emphasizing the conjunction between looking and feeling as well as how one is supposed to imagine the scene visually.²⁴ As He hung on the cross, Christ himself said, "My Father, see how afflicted my mother is. *I* ought to be crucified, not she, but she is with me on the cross.... She does not deserve the same."²⁵ "And she was

²² Savonarola, *Trattato dell'amore di Gesu Cristo* (1492), ed. Tito Sante Centi, Bologna: Studio Domenicano, 1993.

²³ The *Trattato dell'Amor di Gesu Cristo* is dated 17 May, 1492; the *Trattato dell'Umiltà*, 30 June, the *Trattato dell'Orazione*, the 20th October, and the *Trattato in Defensione dell'Orazione Mentale* at some still unclear date, probably in 1492 as well.

²⁴ *Meditations*, ed. 1961 (as in note 21 above), p. 331.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 335. This insistence on the empathy of the Virgin and through her of the spectator of paintings with the suffering of her son would also have passed via Dionysius the Carthusian to Roger van der Weyden in Flanders around 1435 and via Bernardino of Siena to Antonello thirty and forty years later.

grieved, and looking at the wounds of her son, was weakened by the sorrow of death. Do you see how often she is near death today?”²⁶ The link between looking and feeling, between sight and actual physical sensation, could not be clearer. One must *look* and *feel* with the body as if to feel in our body what he feels in his... and when I say “feel”, I mean feel in both senses, both physical and psychological.

It’s worth recalling that one of the commonest synonyms for empathy is compassion (from the Latin for co-suffering), and that in the fourteenth and fifteenth century the passage from actual bodily suffering to emotional co-suffering was a frequent and insistent topos. Viewers were asked to imagine scenes that were clearly predicated on actual paintings, and then to feel Christ’s wounds as if they were in one’s own side and in one’s own hands and feet. One had to visualize, recall and feel the bloodied forehead pricked by the Crown of Thorns, his deeply pierced side and the wounds in his hands and feet (the parallel with St Francis’s stigmata was never far). It was this that aroused both pity and piety, imitation and compassion, and this that underlay pictures such as the Prado *Dead Christ Supported by an Angel*, who pulls away Christ’s hand, using the shroud to do so, in order to display the wound in his side ever more clearly, and whose red-eyed weeping is so clearly supposed to call forth the weeping and tears of its beholders.

“O my soul, what are you doing?”, says the devotee in the final chapter of Savonarola’s first text of May 17, 1492, the *Treatise on the Love of Jesus* (it was followed, just over a month later, by the *Treatise on Humility*).²⁷ It was illustrated by a

²⁶ *Meditations*, ed. 1961, p. 340.

²⁷ Savonarola, *Trattato*, 1492, p. 159. For the *Trattato dell’Umiltà* and other relevant Savonarolan texts, see also Girolamo Savonarola, *Itinerario Spirituale*, ed. P. Tito Santo Centi, O.P., Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1993.

woodcut showing Christ in his tomb, his arms held up by two angels that is closely related to the very similar iconography of this subject in both Bellini and Antonello.

“Open your eyes”, the devotee says to himself,

and look at the scene that you see before you today. Respond to me o Soul, respond! What are you thinking? What are you looking at? I can't reply at all, I can only cry. I can't even think, I don't have the strength to speak. O eyes, cry, and shed tears; bathe my face.²⁸

And so the speaker continues: look, don't think, cry, shed tears, as the devout soul beholds Christ's suffering—and looks even more closely.

Contemplate then, my soul, how great his suffering was, and how much pain and sadness... But above all remember that these afflictions what caused him still greater remorse were his pity and his compassion for all those devout women (*lo amareggiava interiormente la pietà e la compassione che sentiva per quelle donne devote*) ... Above all grief, it was their tears, their signs that afflicted him, and most of all the great *spasimo* of his sweet mother...²⁹

To read a text such as this is to understand more clearly the red-eyed angels and the tears that fall from their eyes in Antonello's paintings of the Dead Christ supported by Angels.

It is precisely texts like these that show the necessity of the forms of emotion that go hand in hand with the coupled with the desire to look at pictures like these. Earlier on the same treatise contains this passage:

And when he stood at the column he had a sharp suffering in his external senses, and especially in the sense of touch, as he was struck with so many blows and wounded by the sharp crown of thorns, and already the pain of the nails from the Crucifixion, all the more so because he was hung for so long, and he was of such delicate complexion and touch, so that every small prick was extremely grievous too him. He suffered in his other senses as well, but above all by the tears and sighs of his mother.... How, o Soul, can you see your beloved exposed to so many torments because of love for you.³⁰

Says the devout beholder.

²⁸ Savonarola, *Trattato*, 1492, pp. 159-160.

²⁹ Savonarola, *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁰ Savonarola, *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

You see him torn and hit with blows, bathed with blood from you to head. Why do you not bathe your own face with tears... O Virgin, why don't you run to help your sweetest son? I know that your heart was strongly wounded along with his hand, The hammer and nails that perforated his holy flesh, have also penetrated your pure and chaste breast, have run through your very viscera, have torn apart your soul".³¹

Savonarola knew and Antonello knew, in all their art, how to show this passage from body to mind, from viscera to mental feeling. At one minute, it's the Virgin grieving for her son; at the next it's Jesus being afflicted at the sight of his own grieving mother.

At the next it's we the spectators who, thus afflicted at the sight of both Son and Mother in their grief for each other, at the sight of the tears on Jesus face, and then his Mother's and the Angel's, grieve along with him. You look, you see the tears, and you cry yourself.

"Look at the son, look at the mother, and consider whether you ever saw so cruel a spectacle."³² Savonarola himself refers to the reciprocal looking, working up to a high emotional pitch. It is an imploration about and for empathy, the empathy felt for the grieving body of Christ, the empathy Christ feels for his grieving mother, the empathy we have for both. And it's an empathy that in our case—the viewers—is heightened by the very looking at the body that suffers solely because of our own sin, the sin that precipitated the suffering of the son. "*Dammi l'abbondanza delle tue lacrime, poiché con te desidero piangere, con te sospirare, e con te rivolgere alla croce el mio santissimo e amorissisimo Redentore un grand lamento.*"³³ The whole treatise is fraught with compassion, literal compassion, mutual compassion, Christ and his mother. His mother weeps for him, and he weeps as he sees his mother weeping; and finally the viewer

³¹ Savonarola, *Ibid.*, 169.

³² Savonarola, *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³³ Savonarola, *Ibid.*, p. 173.

pleads to be allowed to participate in both her and his suffering, to be allowed to share in the laments, in the tears, the abundance of tears, the sighs.... And all this is generated through the evocation of high emotion – the suffering of Christ for which the viewer is alone responsible (along with the Jews), the feelings of the mother for the *figliolo*, the feelings of the *figliolo* for being responsible for the suffering of the mother, etc. The pitch is very high indeed.

When we put together these texts by Savonarola with the longest series of works by Antonello of the same subject—*Christ at the Column*—we find that they turn out to be perfectly clarified where they might otherwise have been regarded as vague or ambiguous. Together they bring together the entire trajectory of this discussion.

*“Ebbe ancora e porto una passione acerbissima nei sensi esteriori e soprattutto nel senso del tatto, essendo stato percosso da tanti colpi alla colonna e ferito all testa della corona di acutissime spine...”*³⁴ In the very decade in which Antonello painted his *Dead Christ supported by an Angel*, he also painted at least five half-length paintings of Christ as Man of Sorrows at the Column, all but one with the noose around his neck (New York, Private Collection, Piacenza, Collegio Alberoni, Genoa, Palazzo Spinola, Louvre). Even in the case of the most polished and formal—even majestic—of them, the painting in the Louvre (fig. 7),³⁵ there is something intimate about them, something that makes the suffering of Christ all the more personal, all the more capable of arousing compassionate feelings, not only because of the seeming familiarity of the figures,

³⁴ Savonarola, *Ibid.*, p. 161; and then same idea is again repeated later on, on p. 179, emphasizing even further the wounds of the crown of thorns on Christ’s golden head.

³⁵ On this work – as well as on its visual cognates by Antonello – see the excellent monograph by Dominique Thiébaud, *Le Christ à la colonne de Antonello de Messine*, Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993.

because He looks like some person we could conceivably know; but—as we learn both from the *Meditations* and from the *Treatise on the Love of Christ*—because we love Christ and pray to him because of his suffering, and because of the compassionate suffering that allowed beholders to feel even more closely what he felt, to expand their devotional sentiments to the largest capacity. We see Christ here, we feel pity for him—no wonder such images have acquired the sobriquet of *imagines pietatis*—and we are roused to ever more intense devotion.

But there is something more about the earlier pictures, the ones that predate the painting in the Louvre. They show a Christ who is not just suffering, but someone who himself feels compassion, who looks, as it were, as if he himself were looking empathetically onto someone else. For of course he is doing just that, just as the Savonarolan text more than any other makes plain—or perhaps more than any I have cited so far. There are almost certainly others. But these are pictures in which Christ is not so much suffering because of his own wounds, but because of his pity, as the texts insist, for those who are suffering because of him.

If we look at the various paintings of the Man of Sorrows, especially those in Genoa and Piacenza, we suddenly realize that Christ is not presented as suffering from extreme physical torment; he is co-suffering; he is empathetic, showing understanding. What greater empathy could there be than this? Christ does not appear tortured by his wounds or beatings; in his expression he reveals his awareness of the pain he has caused in others and his compassion for them. And so this series, for all its art, continues through those works which ever more emphasize Christ's physical suffering as result of the ways he was treated by others, or the ways in which he was persecuted for you and

for me—the external ones exemplified by the noose, or by the crown of thorns, the internal ones by the expressions just described and clarified.

The culminating point of this entire series, the one in which Antonello brings together all his artistic skills in the representation of suffering as well as all his technical skills in painting is of course the one in the Louvre (fig. 7), which he perhaps comes closest to the very portraiture in which Antonello excelled. And it is precisely the head that he immediately turned—morphed, we would now say—into the head of the Christ in the Prado (fig. 2). The power of the painting in the Louvre lies in the vivid power of this portrait of a distinctive head, of the strong yet desperate imploration of God, and the magnificent painting of the tears of this man in the prime of vigorous life. The purely devotional picture, whether portrait or not (because, in fact, it is a portrait), whether art or not (but it certainly is art) turns quite precisely, except for the final closing of the eyes, into the painting in the Prado.

Were these pictures, then, bought because they roused devotion, or because of their art? Do they show real people or not? We don't always know. But that is not the point of these paintings. Even if, in the end, we decide that painters merely used devotional subjects such as these to show off their artistic skills, the point is the necessity of emotion, not just as a means to show off those skills, but as the very hook that draws people into their involvement, their immersion and their absorption into the picture. Only then can beholders detach themselves, become aware that they are not the person in the picture, or amongst the tormentors who have caused the trouble and pain in the picture, but rather themselves, capable of showing true and self-aware compassion—and only

then can they see these images as representations, and these great works of painting as art.

There can be no question of the art in these works by Antonello. Indeed, they are not just harbingers but full-blown representatives of the forms and priorities of Renaissance art. But we are still in the age of the icon. What drives them in the first place is religion, not art. What informs them is the necessity of emotion, the emotion that allows the viewer to engage with these images in such a way that not only may or may not serve spiritual purposes, but actually provides access to the art within them. The painter uses all his not inconsiderable skills to engage viewers to feel the suffering of Christ and thereby to arouse both prayer and devotion. But even if we were to postulate that in the Renaissance not all viewers would have been provoked to the kinds of spiritual and religious devotion that lies behind these images with their still iconic functions (to use Belting's categorization), still the artist's ability to enlist the viewer's body as a means of understanding the body of Christ is what precedes his or her reflections—and ours—on the stupendous art that lies within them. There is no rupture between the alleged age of art and age of the icon; there is a direct continuity, and that continuity is what makes one realize the need to attend to the necessity of emotion, and to attend to these more or less religious works, these residues of the worship, devotion and empathy that stand for all our engagement with images. For in images such as the ones I have been showing you today we learn the profound lessons of how aesthetic judgment is always preceded by that which draws us into the image in the first place. In other words, what draws our attention to it (and in it) is always the emotion that springs from the ways in which what

we see evokes in our own body, and how that body there, or even that thin line there, engages our bodily responses and the emotions that follow directly from them.