

## **Genealogies of Art Criticism – Burren College of Art (June 2005)**

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For the conference, I'm submitting the text of a recent lecture (pdfs of the illustrations to follow in due course). It exemplifies in brief compass one of my long-standing interests in art-historical criticism—namely, that it should concretely address the “activation” of pictures (pictorial artifacts) in physical handling and in visual-optical movements in architectonic and social locations. I have written extensively about these phenomena in ancient cultural traditions (see, for example, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* [1992]) and continue to work on them in many arenas of art history (see *Archaeologies of the Standpoint*, forthcoming). My other principal interest in historical criticism consists in addressing what I have called the “replication” of previous artifacts, images, and pictures in the configuration of any particular artifact or picture presented for critical investigation. Unlike other art historians and archaeologists who have worked on the questions of iconography, “tradition,” survival/revival, or *Nachleben*, I do not consider that works of art primarily—or even interestingly—replicate other *works of art*; I consider that they primarily—or most interestingly—replicate artifacts and pictures that are *not* artistic or, often, are not even artifacts at all (even though they might be images or visualizations). I have written extensively about this problem—and about the archaeological, art-historical, and psychological models that might aid historical criticism in tackling it—in my book *Replications* (1996) and elsewhere (see *Forms of Likeness*, forthcoming). My interests in activation and replication are fully general; they need not only apply to—they are not limited to—contemporary works of art as constituted as objects of so-called “art criticism.” It is true that the historical criticism of contemporary works of art—as opposed to the critical investigation of works of art produced long ago—sometimes has *methodological* advantages: both activation and replication can be overtly visible historical processes in contexts of art produced, used, and interpreted by people right around us and contemporary or near-contemporary with us (see my *Pacing the World: Construction in the Sculpture of David Rabinowitch* [1996]). Still, there is no special *theoretical* reason to believe that activation and replication are easier to observe in contemporary arts than in historical arts. In all cases, our critical method must be what I call “archaeological”: it must attend to contexts and histories—for example, architectonic locations and psychological horizons. To be sure, this “archaeology” cannot itself be limited to the methods of professional or academic archaeology. It must also address problems of perception, understanding, and use adumbrated (for example) in hermeneutics, aesthetics, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. On this understanding, what we call “art criticism” can be defined as the archaeological identification—and discursive description and demonstrative illustration—of historical processes of activation and replication in the making of works of art in the past and in the present.

## The End of the World and the Mystic Horizons of the Lamb

**L: God separating the light from the darkness, Bible historiale, mid-fourteenth century, France (Montpellier, Bibl. Interuniv. MS H49, fol. 3v) (Mentré, p. 59)**

**R: Bible moralisée, fourteenth century, France (Oxford, Bodleian 270b, fol. 2)**

As these miniatures from late fourteenth-century French *Bibles moralisées* remind us, late-medieval pictorialists did not always discover the horizon-line in God's separation of the heavens from the earth, as we might expect.<sup>1</sup> Rather horizon was sometimes discovered in God's separation of light and darkness at the beginning: "Fiat lux." The pictorialists' envisioning of this primordial division seemingly could not help see it *also* as the constitution of our familiar visual world—the *mundane* visual world—in which we can see to the end of things in sight and in the light—and no further. But as the pictorialists remind us, there is a light *outside* the lighted world and *beyond* our sight—the radiance of the creator. The manuscript on the left, now in Montpellier, shows God standing in a matrix of glinting multi-hued gem-like tesserae that the pictorialist used to represent the divine and transcendent ground of light—that is, the ground of light when conceived as mere illumination.

**L: God placing the sun and moon in the watery firmament, Bible historiale, 14<sup>th</sup> cent. France (Montpellier, Bibl. Interuniv. Ms H49, fol. 5v) (Mentré, p. 67)**

**R: God separating light from darkness, Bible moralisée, mid-13<sup>th</sup> cent. France, (Vienna, Österr. Nationalbibl. Cod. 1179, fol. 2) (Zahlten, fig. 203)**

The pictorialists were clear that this primal radiation *outshines* the created luminaries—on the left, in the Montpellier manuscript, God places the sun and the moon in the watery firmament in the field of his far greater irradiateness. Indeed, as in the superb visualization in a *Bible moralisée* now in Vienna on the right, the divine irradiateness shines *into* or shines *through* the created world of

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<sup>1</sup> For the moralised Bible on the right, see A. de Laborde et al., *La Bible moralisée, conservée à Oxford, Paris, et Londres*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1911-27). Thorough—but not comprehensive—guides to medieval pictorial envisionings of creation and apocalypse can be found in Johannes Zahlten, *Creatio mundi: Darstellungen der 6. Schöpfungstage und naturwissenschaftliche Weltbild in Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1979), and Mireille Mentré, *Creation et apocalypse: histoire d'un regard humain sur le divin* (Paris, 1984). Both books focus on manuscript illumination. For the early Italian Renaissance pictorializations, see Creighton E. Gilbert, *How Fra Angelico and Signorelli Saw the End of the World* (University Park, PA, 2003).

the light and the dark: it appears as it were *between* the light and the dark, the fields of illumination, created by God—and seems to seep through or shine behind their horizonary conjunction at the beginning of the world.<sup>2</sup> And it's no surprise to find this imagery replicated in visions of the *end* of the world. Hence my title—The End of the World and the Mystic Horizons of the Lamb.

**L: Oxford, Bodl. MS Douce 180, 28v: The Great Angel with the Book (Klein, opp. 96)**

**R: John Martin, *Angel with the Book*, lithograph, 1837 (Carey ed., no. 39)**

“And I saw a strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth; and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth; and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices” (Rev. 10:1-3). On the left, the Angel with the Book in a thirteenth-century English *Apocalypse*: wrapped in cloud, with a rainbow on his head, the seven thunders sound aloud for him—for he doesn't look like he roars as lion.<sup>3</sup> On the right, John Martin's large lithograph “The Angel with the Book,” printed in 1837.<sup>4</sup> John the visionary stands on an outcropping of Patmos, head raised, reeling back, right hand raised as if to ward off a blow and, we can see, shielding his eyes. Right foot on the sea, the Angel rises above the horizon-line—not easy to see right off, for Martin shows us *several* horizon lines rising vertically on the plane. The “real” horizon line of the earth is marked by two tiny ships in the distance. Above it, strata and striations of cloud—long strips against the sky echo the five fingers John holds up before his eyes, against the glare—these strata blend imperceptibly with the island in the right background, where the angel steps

<sup>2</sup> For the manuscript, see Gerard B. Guest, ed., *Bible moralisée: Codex Vindobonensis 2554, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (London, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> For the manuscript and its comparanda in historical context, see Peter Klein, *Endzeiterwartung und Ritterideologie: die englischen Bilderapokalypsen der Frühgotik und Ms. Douce 180* (Graz, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> For Martin's prints, see Michael J. Campbell, *John Martin: Visionary Printmaker*, with essays by J. Dustin Wees and Richard A. Burnett (London, 1992). This print, however, was published by David Bindman, “The English Apocalypse,” in Frances Carey, ed., *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (Toronto, 1999), no. 39. According to Bindman, “The translucency of the Angel suggests that the vision is the product of an imagination stimulated by natural effects, in this caes an unusual cloud formation.”

with his left foot onto the earth—a mass of mountain in the distance that curves round the town of Patmos to reconnect with the standpoint and the body of John.

**L: Francis Danby, *A Subject from Revelations* (?), 1829 (Grubb, p. 34)**

In 1829, Francis Danby had explored a similar effect in a small painting. Holding aloft the little book, the Great Angel appears to stride out of the clouds—his legs “as pillars of fire” reddened by the setting sun.<sup>5</sup> At the bottom of the picture we can just see where land, sea, and sky merge together. But Danby—like Martin—suggests that the great image has somehow been relayed to us from *beyond* the horizon—like the orb of the setting sun reflected to us in low clouds *above* the horizon even as the sun itself disappears entirely *below* the horizon. In both pictures, then, we find *several* horizons—the real horizon between earth and sky is too dim *or* too bright to be seen clearly—making possible the emergence of an image *above and beyond* the horizon—several horizons reflecting and refracting a dazzling radiateness emanating from elsewhere . . . from *outside* the horizon, we might say . . . or even from *behind* the picture. It is as if the picture itself had become a translucent veil in turn admitting an unbearable luminosity filtering into the tenebrous painted world—a great radiance that cannot itself be pictured *without* this partial obscuring. This veiling and shielding, this washing- or lining-over, not only establishes a horizon but also produces a world illuminated, or, better, *de-illuminated*, in such a way—neither too dark nor too bright—that we can actually *see* it. Many horizons, then, as a series of deflections between us and what we could never see without dimming its unbearable light—the horizonless, the Alpha and Omega, the Unnameable One.

**L: Morgan/Beatus, *The Angel Standing in the Sun***

The transcendent light relayed across the translucences of the more crepuscular world of human seeing is not the light of the sun *as we see it in our world*. In the Morgan Beatus around 950—one of more than twenty illuminated Spanish texts of Saint Beatus’ *In Apocalypsin*, a commentary on John—the created sun is not too bright for us to *read its name* in the picture—*Sol*. It can be depicted and it can be labelled like every other thing in the created world—including the Angel

Standing in the Sun.<sup>6</sup> “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven. Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God: that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great” (Rev. 19:17-18). Stretching out his arms and wings, the angel inhabits a zone of brilliant yellow that interlocks with the red rays of the sun. The painter wants to show his glory to be *brighter* than the sun, which is relatively dim—like the ember of the setting sun in Danby’s apocalypse or the cloud-covered sun in Martin’s.

**L: Silos Beatus (BL Add MSS 11695), fol. 197 (Williams IV, fig. 314)**

**R: Las Huelgas Beatus (Morgan M.429), fol. 133v (Williams V, fig. 419)**

The pictorialists of Beatus’s commentary found many ways to indicate this brightness—in the Silos Beatus, the angel’s robe is composed of *many* suns; in the Las Huelgas Beatus, the angel’s face is brighter—whiter—than the sun.

**L: J. M. W. Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun*, 1846**

**R: BLANK**

In Turner’s famous painting of 1846, living up to Ruskin’s description of the painter himself as the “Great Angel of the Apocalypse,” the Angel Standing in the Sun appears as a sun that is both intensely bright and hot—brighter and hotter than our mundane sun in the sky . . . and burning off the flesh of Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, and Judith and Holofernes—recognizable figures in the foreground. I cannot resist quoting the present Archbishop of Canterbury’s remarks on Turner’s painting: “*The Angel Standing in the Sun* is Turner demonstrating something of the terror of light: it dissolves, soaks away the specific reality, it isn’t just a benign glow or a clear spotlight. Other artists do astonishing things with light, but only Turner makes it frightening like this—all

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<sup>5</sup> The painting has not been well published, although illustrations are available. It is in the collection of Robert Rosenblum, New York City.

<sup>6</sup> John Williams, *A Spanish Apocalypse: The Morgan Beatus Manuscript*, with codicological analysis by Barbara A. Shailor (New York, 1991). For the illustrated texts of Beatus, see the essential reference source: *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 5 vols. (London, 1994-2003).

the more frightening because obviously irresistible and total.”<sup>7</sup> And yet that light—that sun—remains somewhat obscured in mist, vapor, and cloud—a mist and smear of paint that enables us to *see* the vision that would otherwise be too much for our eyes. If the mist were entirely to burn off or the clouds were to part, the searing heat of the transcendent vision would consume the picture itself, reducing it to char and ash—and we wouldn’t see its admission of the blinding radiance of the vision into our seeing of it. But the question is moot—for we’d be burned to death too. In this painting, we’re closer to the end of our world than in Danby’s and Martin’s; we’re *in* it: we feel horizonless—swept off our feet, carried away—in the whirling vortex of the vision.

**R: Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun*—UPSIDE DOWN.**

It wouldn’t really matter whether we hung the painting right-side-up or upside-down, whatever those terms of orientation could possibly mean at the apocalypse. Here, we’re not looking *outward* toward the horizon of our world at something like our usual eye-level, but rather *upward* into burning heavens that entirely *surround* and completely envelop us on all sides—an upward that is also an *inward*, a visionary rather than an optical seeing, and a *behind*, a looking at what’s entirely on the other side of what we can possibly depict—the back of our eyes as it were. Turner’s Angel in the Sun wields a sword as if at the end of the world he is the Angel of the Expulsion at the beginning of human history—and in the vortex of this pictorial vision of the end of the world it’s not clear whether we’re cast out, cast *down*, or lifted *up* and brought *toward*—or both at once. The nearest thing to solid ground provided for our sense of a firm viewpoint is the chained serpent in the middle foreground: “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Rowan Williams’ comments were prepared for an exhibition of the painting at the Tate Gallery, London, in 2002; see “Talking Turner,” *Tate Britain: Turner Online* (<http://www.tate.org.uk/about/turner/williams.htm>). For the painting, see John Gage, *Color in Turner: Poetry and Truth* (New York, 1969); Gage identifies the depicted figures as well as the several passages in the text to which the painting seems to refer. Washington Allston’s *Uriel Standing in the Sun* (1817)—it belonged to one of the young Turner’s patrons, the Marquess of Stafford—has sometimes been said to have provided a pictorial prototype for Turner’s later painting. But in fact the classical clarity of Allston’s figure of Milton’s angel cannot be readily equated with the Angel imagined in Turner’s painting.

him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more" (Rev. 20:1-2).

**L: BN Madrid Vit. 14-2, fol. 116v (Eco, p. 91)**

**R: BN Paris Ms N.a.l. 1132, fol. 33 (Mentré, opp. p. 218)**

The illuminators pictorialized the vortex of the end of the world as four-sided or, really, as if seen from *all sides at once*: they could take advantage of the fact that the reader of the book could turn it round and round in his or her hands. On the left, a page in the illuminated Beatus of King Ferdinand I shows the beginning of John's vision: here, John appears stretched out—but with the wide-awake eyes of all these figures—*four times* around the inside of the central circle.<sup>8</sup> "Behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, a voice of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will shew thee the things which must come to pass hereafter." The illuminator shows us the angel *twice* at the "top" of the page; at the "bottom" of the page, the picture squeezes in four angels for all four sides of the emergent vision-vortex—of all four cardinal world-edges, looking from the outside in. "Straightaway I was in the Spirit: and behold there was a throne set in heaven, and One set upon the throne . . . and there was a rainbow about the throne. And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting"—a detail omitted by the pictorialist in this case. "And in the midst of the throne, and around about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle." The picture, viewed "upright," takes us through this vision in two leaps, right to left and bottom to top, as it were making "the sign of the cross," (**L: Morgan Beatus, UPSIDE DOWN**) and simultaneously encourages us to turn the entire page *all the way around twice*. "And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. . . . And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. And he came, and he taketh the

book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne. And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals . . .” (Rev. 4-5). **(R: New Jerusalem—UPSIDE DOWN)** Though I haven’t made a systematic survey—and I can’t locate one in the codicological scholarship—this movement of turning-the-picture-round seems to have been constructed frequently.<sup>9</sup> In a ninth-century French apocalypse on the right, the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem—sets of three doors facing each one of the four cardinal directions of the universe—are labeled in *didascalia* that encourage the reader to turn the book all the way around itself. In Ferdinand’s book showing the vision of the Throne, it’s only because we tend to take the bottom of the page as a ground-line for the angels that we think we see them “upside down” when the page is rotated: throughout, they’re always entirely “above us”—in turn pointing to a *central horizonless vision*—an appearing that is even higher or more inner than they are.

**R: Dürer, *Apocalypse in Figuris, Vision of the Throne, woodcut c. 1511***

If the picture itself cannot be rotated, the “aboveness” of the apocalyptic vision—its outsideness and behindness—can be constructed *within* the depicted world as a complex of counterthrusting spatial involutions. One common pictorial solution divides mundane and visionary worlds into earthly and heavenly, upper and lower, separated by the horizon. But the horizon can be constructed pictorially not so much as an edge as a *hinge*—a virtual seam along which one could *fold* the picture, top over bottom or bottom into top, as if to press the two worlds into another, imprinting them in one another. In Albrecht Dürer’s *Vision of the Throne* in his *Apocalypse* of 1511, the heavens tier or tower upward toward the throne and fold *down* on the placid earthly landscape below.

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<sup>8</sup> For the manuscript, see Umberto Eco, *Beato di Liébana: Miniature del Beato de Fernando I y Sancha (Codice B. N. Madrid Vit. 14-2)* (Parma, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> Of course, it is constructed frequently in the visual culture—better, the materiality of the visual culture—of many traditions; it involves not only complex movements of passage before or circumambulation around the pictorial artifact but also specific routines of turning it around, turning it over, passing *through* it or taking it apart—etcetera. I have explored other cases in Whitney Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), and *Pacing the World: Construction in the Sculpture of David Rabinowitch* (Cambridge, MA, 1996). Needless to say, these ubiquitous material and “performative” properties or potentialities of pictorial artifacts acquire or attract endlessly varying significances: the activation of the image can be thematized in—or provide a fundamental pole for the metaphors of—many representational interests.

At the same time, the great doors of heaven open *up or outwards* to reveal the unearthly events to us, like a self-opening book: a *double* fold—inheriting the four- or all-sided visualizations of the old apocalypses. This fold is centered pictorially in the small blank space above and behind the tower by the sea—and it is matched pictorially by a second, transcendent horizon, a horizon of all horizons, that emerges behind the body of John and the twenty-four elders and *beyond* which appears the Throne—truly *outside*. *Between* these two horizons—and more or less at the geometrical center of the pictorial field—Dürer situates the figure of John speaking with one of the elders: “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon; and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain . . .” (Rev. 5:2-7). The visionary picture is the double unfolding—or more exactly the all-sided opening—of the mystic book. In the woodcuts that follow it in Dürer’s series we will read it, that is, we will see the unfolding of the end of the world—the great undoings.

**L: Memling, right wing of Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine (Bruges)**

**R: Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine—view of triptych**

I could devote many hours to one of the most extraordinary pictorial notations of the *overturning* of the world—the right wing of Hans Memling’s altarpiece, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, dated to 1479, which depicts the seer of Patmos envisioning virtually all of the apocalyptic events related in his book.<sup>10</sup> Off the rocky coast of John’s island, a tempest is gathering; dark storm clouds have

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<sup>10</sup> In setting out the iconography of Memling’s painting, I have followed Frederick van der Meer, *Apocalypse: Visions from the Book of Revelation in Western Art* (New York, 1978), 259-72, who deals with it in detail; I have, however, described the spatial relations in my own way. Although Van der Meer specialized in Netherlandish art, his magnificent book surveyed the apocalyptic tradition from the later Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century—a fundamental source.

entirely blotted out the sun. “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book. And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which will come to pass.” **(R: detail: theophany)** The theophany appears in the semi-sphere at the upper left: the angel summoning John to witness the Throne of the Unnamed One, the *sol formosior* or “more perfect sun”; the Tetramorphs; the twenty-four elders; the Lamb taking the Book—but *also*, and as it were arrayed around and outside the orb of the theophany, what follows on. **(R: detail: middle distance)** In the middle distance from the left edge of the picture to the right, we see the opening of the seven seals. At the far left, the opening of the first seal **(R: detail: first horseman)**: “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I saw a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering and to conquer.” **(R: detail: second-sixth seals)** In the middle, the opening of the second, third, and four seals—the other horsemen of the apocalypse. At the right, the opening of the fifth and sixth seals: “And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freedman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?”

The opening of the seventh seal—the beginning of the end—is not shown in Memling’s picture: at the opening of the seventh seal, you recall, “there followed in heaven a silence that lasted about the space of half an hour.” *Silentium est*: the illuminators of Beatus had found many vivid notations for this—

**R: Navarre Beatus, fol. 85v (Williams V, fig. 274)**

. . . in the Navarre Beatus, four angels with fingers to their lips, hushing;

**R: El Escorial Beatus, 91v (Williams III, fig. 178)**

. . . in the Escorial Beatus, the twelve letters of “*silentium est*” in rosettes;

**R: Silos Beatus, fol. 125v (Williams IV, fig. 263)**

. . . and most famously, in the Silos Beatus a completely empty space—no picturing, no words. **(R: detail: right far distance)** In Memling’s pictorialization, the opening of the seventh seal *translocates* us to a space *behind* the horizon of the horsemen and the caverns of men—pictorially *beyond* (but mystically *within*) the *now-fully-opened* book of the Lamb. As we look deeper toward this second horizon—the *horizon-within-the-horizon* of the vortex-vision—we see many episodes of the world-ending (episodes usually pictorialized separately and sequentially in apocalyptic narratives): the wrecking of the ships; the locusts; the Angel with the Book, with a tiny John on the shore of his island; the Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Dragon assaulting her; the battle between the heavenly hosts and the Dragon. At the horizon-line itself, the Dragon passes the scepter to the Beast from the Sea. **(R: detail: middle distance UPSIDE DOWN: theophany reflected)** Many of these happenings are meticulously reflected in the greenish-blue waters of the sea around John’s island—including the rainbow that englobes the appearance of the Throne at the moment John enters the Spirit **(R: detail: far distance UPSIDE DOWN: apocalypse reflected)** as well as the Dragon and Beast from the Sea at the far horizon-within-the horizon . . . as if the world-ending above, beyond, and outside were dimly reflected, made visible in, John’s real illuminated world—dark as it has become. The reflections show that the apocalyptic visions “above” find their refracted reversions, “upside down,” in the mundane world below. But they also show that the visions above him are—to use a paradoxical formula—*transcendentally real*: they unfold within the unbearable radiateness of the One now come *into* the world in the great day of his wrath at the end—the undoing.<sup>11</sup> **(R: detail: John gazes at theophany)** The reflection of the rainbow in the sea around John’s island positions the orb of the theophany, the “more perfect sun” obscuring the sun itself, high above and *in front of* the uplifted face of John—who’s staring intently at the *back of his own head*

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<sup>11</sup> The striking effect was replicated in a miniature, possibly painted by Gerard David of Bruges, in the Breviary of Queen Isabella the Catholic Monarch of Spain, produced around 1490. The painter must have known Memling’s work of about a decade before. See Hans Van Miegrot, *Gerard David* (Antwerp, 1989), 80-84, cat. 85, figs. 75-77, and M. W. Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York, 1998), 109, fig. 107.

as he kneels in the spirit before the Throne. In this way, then, the vision flies us through the involuted vortices of the radiance—*in* to the radiance of the theophany and then *out* again, with its light streaming all around into the end-time-world filled to its far horizons with emanations of the book unsealed by the Lamb. But *we* see only *three-quarters* of the rainbow-englobed orb of the Throne; typically, of course, we're shown the *entire* theophany, usually centered in the pictorial field. Memling means, I think, that John sees it at the *edge* of his vision—the horizon not in the sense of a demarcation between land or sea and sky—that horizon is a transcendently real horizon-within-the-horizon of the end-time-world—but in the sense of the outer bounding of his field of vision itself . . . what appears at the dim and cloudy upper circumference of the circular field of view when our sight fixes intently on an object at hand, in the distance, or at the horizon—the *lower* segment of the curve being occupied by the blurry protrusion of our own body into the visible world. The rainbow encircling the theophany represents the circumscription of the visual field itself, the edge of the view—the place where the pure light outside all sight transfers across the edge of sight into the dimmer colors of the seen world. In this picture, then, we're not so much looking *out* with John's eyes as looking deep *into* John's eyes. The clear, fiery forms of the apocalyptic figures are mystic reflections at the *back* of his seeing . . . visionary mirrorings—clarifications in the light of the more perfect light of God—of the dark uncertain indistinction of things in the world of plain sight.

**L: Munich, Bayr. Staatsbibl., Cim 53, fol. 6 (van der Meer, opp. p. 80)**

**R: BLANK**

Just as there always seems to be something beyond the actual world-horizon, the ending that seems to move away as we come toward it, there always seems to be something beyond the bounding of the visual field, the circumferencing of our view—a horizon that is always absolutely near to us, we might say, rather than somewhere very far away from our body. This horizon is the *ocular* bound as such. At this boundary, the crisp shapes and clear colors of things straight *ahead of us* in the world pass into a blur and gloom *around us* in the world. We can roll our eyes in our heads; we can turn our head far round to one side or the other;

we can crane our necks back and back—or all of these things at once. But we can never catch what's beyond the edge of sight as it continually moves away all around us even as we roll, turn, or crane to look at it.

In a profound pictorialization of the Lamb in the Golden Codex of St. Emmeran, written for Charles the Bald about 870, the elders leap from their stools in a frenzy of adoration. As Frederick van der Meer writes, they “rush forwards in a semicircle to look *up* at the Lamb, who stands quietly in the sun of his *clipeus* [a coppery-gold shield-shaped sun-disc now oxidized to green] in the midst of the celestial spheres. . . . The whole image is circular. **(R: the page UPSIDE DOWN)** The spheres, full of stars, seem to revolve, giving an impression of the slow rotation of the nocturnal sky, in which hangs the quiet sun of the Lamb.” The inscription—needless to say, it must be read by turning the book a full turn round itself—reads “Your own blood, venerable Lamb, your people now receives and the Synagogue, her colors darkened, has withdrawn.” Eyes dilated and rolling wildly upwards in their sockets, some elders throw their heads back so far that they seem to break off. The old men leap *forward*, in a golden “V” toward the edge of their world, marked by the curving rainbow band near the top of the “V” . . . eyes and heads thrown back all the way so as to see the Lamb high *above* them and as it were *behind* them. **(L: the page ON ITS RIGHT SIDE)** In the mundane world below, Oceanus and Tellus—Ocean and Earth—are separated by a barely perceptible actual world-horizon, the joining of real land and sea, subtending at right angles to the axis of the vision. But it slips up into the vision as the bottom joint of the “V”—a doubly-unfolding place (we have already seen it in other instances of the vision) whence the elders leap ecstatically *beyond* their world-horizon gaping up into the heavens cupped entirely over it. In leaping off the page toward the Lamb reading the opening book (here, a scroll), the elders gape upwards—leap upwards—toward the place of the *reader's* eyes as they look *down* on the separations of land and sea and earth and heaven out of which the vision has turned out. This is a place above the page in the reader's hands and eyes; in the activation of the picture, it is wholly identified with the Lamb at the edge of the visual ken of the elders in the vision—in *their* vision. The reader of the book, in other words, is the Lamb adored by the elders—the Lamb is *within* the reader so to speak—even as it is in

our reading that the book of the Lamb is made clear to us—that the vision turns. In this pictorialization, the *behind* or *beyond* of the world is understood to be in *front* of it *inside* our eyes—the place from which we look into a picture that shows what we can't see in the world precisely because we're not actually seeing *into* the world all the way to its far horizons but mystically seeing *from* the far horizons of the world *within* us back into the world. Because the picture requires us to move the image-field itself at the same time as it creates a real straining of the eyes, its figurative involution—allegorizing sight in the spirit—becomes virtual, a real immersion of corporeal looking in a simulation of its liberation from seeing.

**L: Correggio, The Throne, Interior of cupola, S. Giovanni Evangelista at Parma, 1520-21—"RIGHT SIDE UP" (i.e., viewed from the ALTAR)**

**R: View from apse through nave crossing down the nave to the west door**

In 1521, Antonio Allegri—Correggio—painted the interior of the oval dome (it's 29 meters from the floor of the crossing) and the drum, pendentives, and arches of the Benedictine monastery church of San Giovanni Evangelista at Parma.<sup>12</sup> The image—sometimes mistaken for the Ascension of Christ—presents Correggio's apocalyptic vision of the Throne: the Unnameable One of the fourth and fifth chapters of John's book appears as *sol formosior* surrounded by the eleven Apostles and John. The figures are dimly lit from below the cornice of the dome by four small windows in the narrow drum, a fact that viewers have deplored since the paintings were completed; among the Parmesans, the figures have been known as *I santi carbonari*, the "holy charcoal-burners."

**(R: Interior of cupola, Assumption, Interior of cupola, Duomo, Parma)**

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<sup>12</sup> For the cupola and its iconographic program, see L. De Giorgi, *La cupola de San Giovanni Evangelista a Parma* (Fresching, 1918), and Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavale, *Correggio: The Frescoes in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma*, trans. Olga Ragusa (New York, 1964). The broader reflections of Josef Strzygowski remain fundamental: *Das Werden des Barock bei Raphael und Correggio* (Strassburg, 1898).

Several years later, Correggio began his more famous and more ambitious *Assumption* in the Duomo at Parma.<sup>13</sup> But the earlier work is most instructive for our purposes.

As in Memling's altarpiece, storm clouds shroud the sun. **(R: detail: the Throne)** At the sound of the thunderous angelic Voice, the Unnameable One appears in a golden well of light when the doors of the vision open up—the dome splits open. The Throne—One who looks like the Son of Man—rides in a dazzling aggregation of cherubic faces. **(R: detail: apostles)** Eleven near-nude Michelangesque apostles are seated on the clouds. Some of them gesticulate to one another; they try to mime or name in gestures or words the moment and place of the appearance of the One for any others who might be able to see. Seven of them—like James the Minor **(R: detail: James the Minor)**—strain to look upward, eyes practically rolling in their sockets. **(R: detail: Bartholomew, Matthias, Paul)** Three apostles, however, look toward the *lower*, west edge of the dome and **(R: detail: James the Major)** a single one—a hypnotically staring James the Major—looks *down* directly to viewers in the crossing of the nave far below, seeming to point out to us where we should stand so that we too might see. **(R: detail: the Powers)** The Powers Incorporeal—corporealized as *putti* diving through the storm clouds—float upward into the radiance, **(R: detail: the Powers in the light)** where they're rendered translucent and finally dissolved entirely into the transcendent light. The Throne is far brighter than the gilding of the cornice below the dome and the surface of the arches: truly a “more perfect sun.” **(R: detail: Andrew)** Only the oldest apostle, Andrew, looks straight into its radiance; he is the closest of all to the touch of the One—who appears to bless the transported mystic's ecstatic blindness.

**L: Interior of cupola—“UPSIDE DOWN” (viewed from the NAVE)**

**R: detail—three apostles looking at John**

So far, I've showed you this vision upside down so that you too can see it—that is, so that you can see the Throne “right side up.” Right side

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<sup>13</sup> See Carolyn Smyth, *Correggio's Frescoes in Parma Cathedral* (Princeton, 1997). In a model analysis from which I have learned a great deal, Smyth pays extremely close attention to the standpoints and correlated “views” within which Correggio organized the painted image(s).

up—viewed as we must move visually into its virtual world when walking down the nave into the crossing—we see what Bartholomew, Matthias, and Paul are looking at *below* the clouds: **(R: detail: John)** John “in the spirit.” With his hands cupped and spread apart as if to hold the whole orb of the theophany, **(R: detail: face of John)** it’s been said that “his eyes are so violently raised that nearly all the white of the eyeballs is shown beneath the staring pupils.” He strains to see so much that he, like Andrew, is as if blinded. His eagle, symbol of his gospel, replicates his distressed ocular action, staring at the vision as if thunderstruck. A book for the writing of the Throne—of the opening of the seven seals—of the seven trumpets announcing the end of the world—lies open before John spread out on the eagle’s wings. But we see no pen or page; John doesn’t write anything. Indeed, Correggio knew perfectly well that in the architectonic horizontalities of this location we cannot see—or we can hardly see—the book and the eagle tucked behind the protruding cornice of the dome; thus we can barely identify John himself as seeing, as speaking, and as writing the gospel and the prophecy. **(R: detail: view of John in dome—ALTAR perspective)** Walking down the nave, in fact, to see John fully we must pass *all the way through* the crossing into the apsidal space of the high altar, then *turn entirely around* and *look back* and *upward* into the dome. At this standpoint, we can *only* see John the evangelist and his book; the transcendent vision that *he* sees is entirely invisible to *us* at this location. Standing here, the apsidal image—the image of the edging of the ocular field as an eye opening beneath its upper and lower lids—transcribes the image *as if taken from the outside of the eye*. But this eye isn’t open wide enough: it doesn’t quite and never can fully open into a perfect circle—enabling the dome’s image *as if taken from the inside of the eye*. **(L: detail: Throne—“upside down”—ALTAR perspective)** *This* image returns to us as we walk back and beneath the dome, craning our necks further and further back to look, with John, at the vision opening high above us—indeed, as if to see *beyond* the uppermost limit of the circumference of our own ocular field, where the Throne appears as if from *behind* us—from the very back of our eyes lifted as high and behind our head tilted back as far as it can go.

**L: Young John writing, San Giovanni Evangelista, north transept door, lunette.**

**R: Dome: detail: Throne ON ITS RIGHT SIDE to face lunette**

In this simple, subtle program, John appears once again. In the lunette over the door in the north transept leading to the cloisters, the young evangelist-seer writes his book. As the legend tells us, it is the *Apocalypsis*: “More profoundly than others this man revealed God’s secrets.” According to one art historian, John in his lunette is staring directly at the radiant Throne at the top of the dome. **(L: detail: John writing)** But actually, I think, it’s quite obvious that he doesn’t crane his gaze *that* high. Rather, he gazes toward the horizon of the world given to him in this configuration—the storm clouds massing above the nave crossing. **(R: detail: John above the cornice)** And in that position, gazing upward and slightly to the right (that is, to the west), he is, of course, seeing *himself* seeing the Throne. **(L: Throne)** His gaze reflects through itself, folding or turning round itself, as it goes from *outward seeing* to *inner vision*: in staring fixedly at the real *optical* horizon and what might appear beyond it, he passes above and behind the edges of his own *ocular* horizon. We can say without too much paradox or artifice, then, that he passes out of sight.

**R: Wolfenbüttel, *Liber floridus* (cod. Guelf Gud. lat. 2), fol. 22r, Lamb with the Book, c. 1120 (van der Meer, pl. 88—detail)**

These are the mystic horizons of the Lamb—the involution of the visions at the circumference of the eye, at the very far edge and in the utter end of sight.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> My final picture shows the intersection of the “circular” and “elliptical” mandorlae surrounding the Lamb (or, in other cases, the Throne) that frequently appear in medieval pictorializations. This peculiar and vivid cipher has never been fully explained figuratively; commentators confine themselves to its self-evidence iconographic significance as a representation of the glory of the Lamb (or the Throne). But we can see, I think, that it presents the merging of world-horizons—optical and ocular, mundane seeing and “seeing in the spirit,” looking inward (at the back of the eyes) and looking outward (to the edge of sight)—that Correggio constructed architectonically and vividly activated at S. Giovanni Evangelista.