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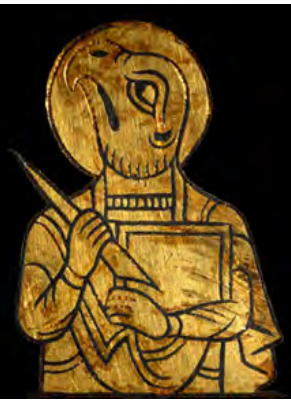

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PICTURING BODIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE: 'WHAT, THEN, IS EVERYONE WRITING ABOUT?'

Andrew Murray and Margit Thøfner

Abstract

This opening essay establishes the rationale and scope of the present issue, which examines how bodies were visually constituted in Europe across the medieval and early modern periods. Moving beyond the notion of images as mere representations, the essays explore how artworks and other forms of visual culture actively shaped, perpetuated and challenged ideas of embodiment. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, contributors investigate the dynamic interplay between the physical and the visual, considering how images informed practices of veneration, medicalisation and sensation, as well as the conceptual boundaries between materiality and representation. By foregrounding the formative role of visualisation in the history of bodies, this collection demonstrates the necessity of interdisciplinary methods for understanding the complex entwinement of images and corporeality in premodern Europe.

Keywords: medieval art, early modern art, visual culture, embodiment, materiality, discourse, bodies, sculpture, representation, ontology of images, interdisciplinary art history, corporeality
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Biographical note

Andrew Murray is a lecturer in the history of art at The Open University, UK.
Margit Thøfner is a senior lecturer in art history at The Open University, UK.

Banner image: Detail of niello-inlaid engraving of a haloed eagle-headed St. John the Evangelist upon gold plaque from Brandon, Suffolk. (©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence)

PICTURING BODIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE: 'WHAT, THEN, IS EVERYONE WRITING ABOUT?'

Andrew Murray and Margit Thøfner, The Open University

This special issue of the *Open Arts Journal* consists of a set of essays that explore how bodies are constituted visually. It is about how artworks and other types of visual culture shaped, perpetuated and challenged ideas of exactly what constitutes a body in Europe across the medieval and early modern periods.

Not all of the essays in the special issue are about Christianity. Yet it is still instructive to begin with a Christian image given that the iconoclastic disputes and iconodulic practices of this religion shaped how bodies and images conceptually related to one another throughout the European Middle Ages. Our example is a life-size sculpture of the dead Christ in the tomb (Fig. 0.1). This is a rare Scandinavian survival of a type of painted body that was once common across medieval Europe (Kopania, 2015). One remarkable facet of this sculpture is that the body is detachable. It can be lifted out of the sepulchre and be carried around or stood up, perhaps against a wall (Fig. 0.2).

Figure 0.2: Unrecorded sculptors and painters, *Christ in the Sepulchre, c.*1500–25, polychromed wood, full length 204 cm. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (formerly in the church of St Laurence, Kerteminde). (Photo: Arnold Mikkelsen; source: Nationalmuseet, Danmark)

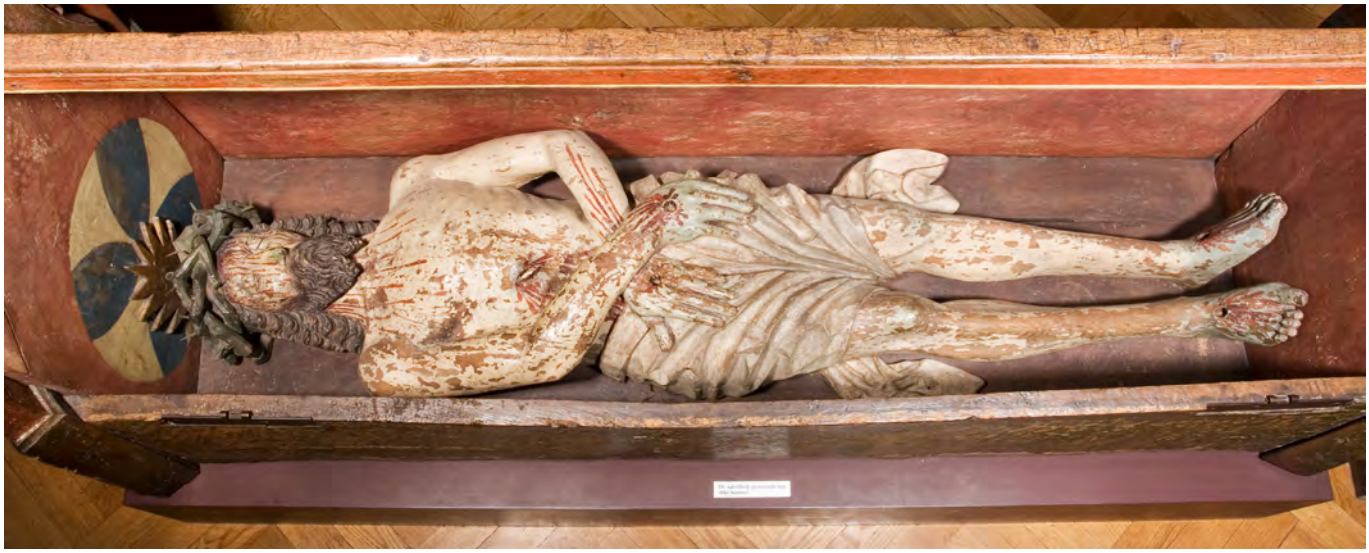

Figure 0.1: Unrecorded sculptors and painters, *Christ in the Sepulchre, c.*1500–25, polychromed wood, full length 204 cm. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (formerly in the church of St Laurence, Kerteminde). (Photo: Arnold Mikkelsen; source: Nationalmuseet, Danmark)

That, of course, would enhance its lifelikeness; treating it as body would, in effect, challenge the distinction between the actual and the represented. Serving in the liturgical dramas that re-embodied the Passion of Christ at Easter, it was a somatic entity with evident traces of wounding and suffering. Indeed, some surviving examples of this type of Christ-figure have movable limbs so that they could be posed (for example by being attached to a crucifix), taken down, deposed in a sepulchre like the one from Kerteminde and then resurrected in a sequence of liturgical performances – involving song and other interventions from a number of living bodies – designed amongst other things to erase the difference between the sculpted and the actual body of Christ (Kopania, 2015). This is not Plato's cave but rather a world where representations embody life itself, most notably in the salvific Eucharist where bread and wine became the suffering body of Christ.

If an image is not merely a secondary representation – a sign – but possesses its own ontological weight, distinctions such as those between the 'pictorial/visual' and the 'embodied/material' collapse. Hans Belting explores this in his *Anthropology of Images* (2011), arguing against a semiotic reduction of images to proxies for 'real' bodies. For Belting, images make bodies present despite their absence, just as the Kerteminde image manifests Christ's presence to the faithful when lifted for veneration. The true difference between bodies and images, he contends, lies not in ontological priority – bodies as 'real' and images as 'representation' – but in their respective media: bodies are flesh and blood; images, in the case of our sculpture, polychromed wood. Beyond this distinction through medium, both the historical Jesus and his depictions serve to make Christ present to believers.

Belting's argument lends itself particularly well to sculpture, which perhaps seems more 'embodied' than two-dimensional images. But the distinction between three- and two-dimensional images is not always clear-cut, as Scarlett Butler shows in this volume in her discussion of the material fat-likeness of Rubens's painterly medium. 'Flat' images have a material presence and a somatic effect, just as three-dimensional ones do. Consistent with Belting's ideas, this volume contends that the supposed distinctions between, on the one hand, the categories of 'images', 'pictures' and 'the visual', and on the other hand, those of 'objects', 'bodies' and 'the material', cannot be taken as given when studying medieval and early modern Europe.

The contributions to this special issue explore a wide range of methods, theories and ideas that more concretely address the fraught relationship between images and bodies. It is important to underscore that this special issue arose from lengthy and profoundly interdisciplinary discussions in the medieval and early modern research group at The Open University, discussions that then came to include interested colleagues from other institutions. One of our central contentions is that the history of bodies can only be approached in an interdisciplinary manner precisely because it involves studying a highly dynamic entwinement of the physical and the visual. Our colleagues, who work across various periods, places and sources, bring to this journal their own approaches to this entwinement.

Picturing bodies

A Penrose mosaic allows for the infinite addition of new pieces, each of the same measurements, while never forming a whole in which new patterns predictably repeat earlier ones. Writing new articles on the history of the human body can feel much like adding tiles to such a mosaic. While these additions may well reveal new and important topics and ideas at the edges of an ever-expanding literature, at the same time the parameters of this *body* of literature recede infinitely from view and, therefore, even a provisional wholeness of the 'history' can never be found. Notably, Willemijn Ruberg's recent comprehensive overview of the field is divided into chapters that engage with very distinct subjects, if not disciplines, including a chapter on periodised conceptions of the body, another on medical history, another on gender and sexuality, and others on theories of agency, discipline, phenomenology and materialism (Ruberg, 2020). The expansive state of this field has long been self-evident, as was demonstrated already thirty-five years ago, with the publication of the first volumes of *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (1989, hereafter *Fragments*) under the editorship of Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. The concept of the fragment suggests that the contributions to this collection could not be synthesised. Perceiving this Protean nature of any history of the body, Caroline Walker Bynum later stated that it 'is no topic or, perhaps, almost all topics' (1995, p.2). 'What, then, is everybody writing about?', she asks (p.3). In producing yet another collection on the medieval and early modern body, are we just adding further tiles to this Penrose mosaic, with articles saying both everything and nothing about an infinite and amorphous subject of study?

After lengthy discussions, the editors and contributors to this volume collectively agree that we must put to bed the idea of a single history of the human body. There are, instead, many different histories and problems that relate to the body, and the diversity of these histories demonstrate many interrelations that will never constitute a completeness. This volume and its contributors aim to explore the role of the picturing of bodies within this diverse field. We believe the role of pictures has not received enough attention, and this has considerable implication for scholars addressing other areas of research into the history and historiography of bodies. Taking case studies from across medieval

and early modern Europe, collectively we address how images – broadly conceived as acts of deliberate visualisation – did more than represent or reflect bodies as some kind of prior reality and/or schematise knowledge about them. The production, reception and use of images were, instead, formative of the knowledge, medicalisation, sexualisation, veneration and sensation of bodies, as well as of the processes through which bodies came to exist, be modified, and used during and after life.

One example from our special issue demonstrates this theoretical position. In her contribution, Butler examines how Peter Paul Rubens portrayed Marguerite de Valois as excessively large in his *Medici Cycle* (completed 1625). On the one hand, the image may be a function of both physical and social realities: Marguerite was reportedly a fat woman, and her reputation as such also shaped public and posthumous opinion of her as wicked and indolent. But rather than simply reflect material and social reality, the image, and ideas about images and fatness, may have contributed to it. One of Butler's considerations is how Rubens's painting developed his ideas of feminine 'roundness', as opposed to masculine 'squareness', to construct women as weak, malleable and, in Galenic terms, cold and uncreative. Rubens's visual thinking and his paintings thereby constructed rather than simply reflected prevailing norms. Butler argues that by portraying Marguerite as excessively fat, his paintings also claimed she transgressed bodily and other norms. As this suggests, images could be both normative and disruptive; they could construct and reinforce ideals and at the same time transgress or challenge them.

Our assertion of the role of images in the constitution of bodies is not new or radical, but, rather, overlooked and understudied. The demotion of images as the site in which bodies become subjects of culture was originally noted by Colleen Ballerino Cohen and Karen Robertson in their 1992 review of *Fragments*. They point out that, although there was an ample use of images within *Fragments*, they were often used unreflectively to 'enhance and embellish' the text (Cohen and Robertson, 1992, p.138). In this use of images as mere illustrations, Ballerino Cohen and Robertson detected the reduction of those portrayed within those images – especially people racially coded as not white – to objects for the scientific gaze of the book's authors and readers.

Ballerino Cohen and Robertson's assertion that images do not passively represent people, but shape and constitute how those people are engaged within the public sphere, was explored at length in the decade that followed their review in the emergent field of visual cultural studies. One prominent voice in this field was Stuart Hall's, who argued that images of black people in the British media did not simply reflect race relations in Britain, but participated in shaping them (Hall, 1997). While Hall's influence may not have been directly felt in medieval and early modern studies, the research of medievalists exploring images from the 1990s coincided with research in visual cultural studies that analysed how images constructed racial and sexual norms. Notably, Michael Camille's *Image on the Edge*, published the year before Ballerino Cohen and Robertson's review, drew attention to juxtaposition between the seeming orderliness of the text in the centre of medieval manuscripts and the chaotic ribaldry of monsters populating its margins, arguing that the racial and sexual disorderliness of the latter constructed the spiritual authority of the former, and *vice versa* (Camille, 1990). In early modern studies, similar concerns for how images of bodies constructed norms centred around what Lorraine Daston categorised as the 'epistemic images' that proliferated alongside European print culture (Daston, 2015). Prints of human and animal bodies, both from Europe and the wider world, accompanied a nascent scientific literature. Despite the fact that such imagery was meant to illustrate empirical observations, researchers in this field have also emphasised the normative function of these images, especially in how they draw on classical and Biblical conventions for depicting the human body and the distinctions between the sexes.

Despite these methodological and historiographical reflections, one might well argue that the contributions in this volume, like those in *Fragments*, also use images as illustrations, and construct or reinforce norms in doing so. To some extent, this is unavoidable: all academic knowledge is necessarily logocentric, being built on the use of text to produce arguments, with images supplementing their exposition. But the European tradition of logocentrism is not monolithic: it has a history, and part of that history involves changes to how images were and still are combined with texts. For instance, Daston points out that norms for early modern 'epistemic images', discussed above, varied with the epistemological positions of their producers, so that, for example, Carl von Linnaeus was wary of using colour in botanical illustration, as it was a not a criterion for his classifications (Daston, 2015, pp.22–3). Similarly, marginal images in medieval manuscripts present an alternative mode of logocentric relations between text and images: while marginal images do not serve to explicate the text they frame, according to Camille's analysis their chaotic, monstrous and humorous forms present that text as reassuringly stable and authoritative.

By attending to case studies in Europe, the articles in this special issue of the *Open Arts Journal* analyse the traditions and discourses that Ballerino Cohen and Robertson questioned in their review, namely, the tacit and unexamined centrality given to texts, scientific discourses, male and European perspectives. Indeed,

medieval and early modern Europe witnessed a series of vectors that fed into the emergence of modern conceptions of the body, conceptions that increasingly became, during and after the eighteenth century, plotted across various dualisms (with one superior and the other inferior). These include the mental and the corporal, reason and desire, male and female, the upper and lower body, the healthy and unhealthy, the human and the animal. And yet, attention to medieval and early modern visual traditions demonstrates that, while these binaries may have roots in Christian and classical traditions, they were often contested. Butler, for instance, examines how within the court of France the conception of women as inferior to men could be interrogated and challenged by female patrons and authors. Similarly, Robert Wallis argues that, in the early medieval British Isles, the human body may not have been experienced as distinct from animal bodies such as those of raptors, and that jewellery manifesting its wearer's adoption of raptor-like qualities were displaced by Christian art and theology, whereby personhood became located more firmly within the perceived boundaries of the human body. Therefore, while focusing on Europe comes with the risk of reproducing the perspectives outlined by Ballerino Cohen and Robertson, it also demonstrates that those same perspectives emerged not by a teleological right, but through longstanding and layered cultural, gendered and political struggles: sometimes subtle, other times bitterly violent.

These conceptual and methodological points might not be new or even surprising. But they have hitherto been marginalised within the histories of the body. If, as we noted above, images have been sidelined as a constitutive component of the history of the human body, it is because the scholarly literature has instead built itself around two other approaches, the linguistic turn on the one hand, and the materiality of the body on the other. Roger Cooter has pointed out that much of the literature in the 1980s and 1990s contrasted these two approaches (Cooter, 2010, pp.397–8). Post-structuralist and cultural analyses of representation, as well discursive analysis inspired by Foucault, presented the body as cultural to the extent that it was an object of language. However, from the late 1980s, some historians felt this approach occluded the physical reality of the body as well as embodied experience. An example is Barbara Duden's book, *Geschichte unter der Haut* (1987), translated into English as *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991), which provided an early appraisal of the limits of discourse analyses of the body. Duden sought to extend her analysis beyond a Foucauldian perspective by differentiating between 'two bodies': the body as represented by discourse and the experience of the body, an experience which was not some essential biological reality, but itself conditioned by the imagination (pp.1–8). However, Duden's effort to think beyond discourse analysis seems to have been exceptional. By 1995, Caroline Walker Bynum would more directly criticise the growing expanse of scholarly literature that seemingly reduced the body to discourse, agreeing with the sentiment of one of her students surveying the field that, in so much research 'the body dissolves into language', so that 'the body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid – that body just isn't there' (Bynum, 1995, p.1).

Less emphasis is given to discourse in more recent research. But interdisciplinary anthologies focused on the medieval and early modern body still broadly fall into the two divisions set out during the 1990s: those emphasising discourse and those focussing on materiality. First, there are those trying to organise this material chronologically, creating a history of the human body as a discursive category. *A Cultural History of The Human Body* provides the most significant case, surveying the history of the body in Western societies through six volumes, each respectively dedicated to a broad period (Antiquity, the Medieval Ages, The Renaissance, Enlightenment, the Age of Empire, The Modern Age; Kalof and Bynum, eds., 2014). Secondly, there are 'organ-by-organ' histories (term from Jajszczok and Musiał, 2019, p.2), volumes that draw attention to the materiality of the body through interdisciplinary analysis of specific organs or excretions, such as the recent *Fluid Bodies and Bodily Fluids in Premodern Europe* (Scott and Barbezat, eds, 2019). These volumes do engage with images of the body, in the former with sections on beauty and 'cultural representations', and the latter containing art-historical chapters. In this way, they are representative of how such studies couch the analysis of images within a wider, interdisciplinary field, yet without any sustained interrogation of the role that visual culture may have in shaping ideas, uses and formations of bodies.

Close engagement with images allows researchers in this special issue to draw on analyses of the body as biological reality and as discourse, but without reducing them to either. As Marshall *et al.* make clear in this volume, by positioning ourselves against the Scylla and Charybdis of socially constructive approaches versus biologically realist ones, an avenue opens that allows us to reimagine how past societies understood the relationship between bodies and images. Their work shows how bodies and images within Viking graves are constitutive of one another, entwined in their mutual construction of narratives about the deceased and the communities remembering them. This way of thinking cuts against the conceptual division between representation and reality evident throughout the history of European philosophy and thereby demands we be 'open to seeing strangeness in the Viking Age'. This strangeness does not mean backwardness, but rather alterity to the Christian cultures that has survived in place of these Viking ones, and which still shape modern Euro-

pean preconceptions. Post-human and object-oriented philosophies provide one means for archaeologists and anthropologists to imagine such 'strange' ways of thinking without divisions between subject and object, reality and representation, and Robert Wallis too draws on these discourses to consider real and represented bodies of raptors in the early medieval British Isles as 'ontological equivalents'. While Wallis highlights the danger of comparing to and equating global indigenous cultures, his case study, like that of Marshall *et al.*, shows how medieval and pre-Christian cultures in Europe offer their own alterity to modern ways of thinking about images.

Marshall *et al.* and Wallis are well positioned to explore pre-modern ontologies because they engage with cultures that were still largely oral rather than textual, and it is perhaps this fact that has led to the categorisation of the study of Viking and early medieval cultures as 'archaeological' rather than art-historical. It is, however, necessary to think beyond such disciplinary boundaries if we are to adopt a similar train of thought to 'make strange' images that may at first seem familiar to modern eyes. If there has been comparatively little extended interdisciplinary attention paid to how visual culture, just like language, was a central agent in the cultural construction of medieval and early modern bodies, it may be because – despite several decades of development – visual culture studies remain perceived as a specialised interest, an offspring of art history, rather than a fully-fledged field of interdisciplinary concern like language, materiality, gender and sexuality. But challenging the marginalisation of visual culture in the research field of medieval and modern bodies opens up new 'strange' ways to think with and about these other social and cultural categories: what is it to think the language, or gender, or material of the body visually? All the contributors to the issue share this methodological approach and yet each author has taken it in different directions.

Bodily pictures

The contribution of M. A. Katritzky in this volume, a study of Albrecht Dürer's and Leonardo's respective drawings of conjoined twins, is a truly interdisciplinary engagement with visual culture. It demonstrates how analyses of images as constitutive of the knowledge and experience of bodies cuts across research into medicine, theatre, and visual culture. Moving between these fields, Katritzky demonstrates the complexity of early modern images of the body. Pictures that recorded medical knowledge and stimulated scientific curiosity also drew on other forms of viewership. Katritzky carefully considers these images in relation to contemporary knowledge of conjoinment while rightly warning against treating them diagnostically. The images are from an age before photography, which entails not only that the evidence they provide has to be considered against the norms for representing bodies, but also that they have to be framed in the context of how such images constructed and organised knowledge: 'Informed interpretation of pre-photographic imagery requires an understanding of differences distinguishing early modern perceptions of the non-normative body from current teratological classification systems'. While Dürer and Leonardo were undoubtedly fascinated by physiology, Katritzky situates their conjoined twins within other contexts for seeing such bodies: in Dürer's case, a print culture that catered to a market fascinated with 'omens' and 'marvels', and for Leonardo, the theatrical display of non-normative bodies. Therefore, the two works interrogated by Katritzky did not simply act as 'epistemic images', that is, devices for recording, organising and sharing empirical knowledge. They were also facilitated by, and may have extended, attention to such bodies as theatrical, wondrous, deviant or degraded. In this manner, Katritzky demonstrates how contemporary medical knowledge can, when used critically, be brought to bear on historical images. But interdisciplinary conversations go both ways, for Katritzky also emphasises that knowledge of early modern visual cultures provides as much evidence on the prevalence and reception of conjoinment as does demographic data.

Likewise, De Renzi interrogates images with an ostensibly medical function. Her contribution reveals the contrary impulses involved in studying the reception of historical images of medicalised bodies. For De Renzi, such work requires speculating on the most plausible responses to images, an appeal to plausibility that, through contextual analysis, can simultaneously recover sensibilities that might be 'strange' to modern readers (to reuse Marshall *et al.*'s term). While the responses that De Renzi studies, sexual attraction and somatic repulsion, are intuitive, it is the manner and context in which images stimulate such responses that makes them 'strange'. She examines surgical images as catering to lurid curiosity and humour as much as to medical knowledge. This is done through a set of prints by Giovanni Guglielmo Riva that portray ailments related to the anus within the context of surgical instructions, hospital environments, quotidian sexual violations, and the wider representation of male bodies in seventeenth-century Rome. On this basis, De Renzi argues that such images may well have prompted bawdy humour amongst their viewership of male surgical students. That male students may have fraternised through shared vulgarity is not at all surprising to present-day lecturers. But it is more disturbing that such humour, anxious though it may have been, was formative of the surgical images these men studied, and perhaps embedded within the acquiescence towards sexual violence

within early modern hospitals, an acquiescence that becomes more plausible in light of the contextual evidence deployed by De Renzi.

Whereas De Renzi's work considers how male sociability could centre around attention to the bodies of others, two contributions to this volume, those of Margit Thøfner and Andrew Murray, address how images could form communities by framing shared bodily sensations. Thøfner examines how the organ in the church of Kloster Lüne, Lüneburg (1645 and 1651) related to the singing undertaken by the convent's nuns as a collective, embodied experience. The organ acted as a body, a contribution to the choir, and its images would characterise the participants as a religious community. Thøfner asks her readership to consider the range of embodied experiences demanded by singing, experiences that are not easy to recover within historical sources. Yet the risk of not empathetically imagining such experiences is greater than avoiding to do so. That is because relying solely on written texts to understand the meaning of the organ's images and the shared experience of singing is not only restrictive; it also inverts how the organ would have been experienced. Singing in effect enfleshes words, giving such words their true poetic resonances. Thøfner studies how such enfleshed experiences of singing shaped how nuns would have experienced their own bodies, but also their collective body as a community.

Thøfner deploys concrete evidence for the real consequences of collective embodied experiences. In the early sixteenth century, the nuns of Kloster Lüne would continue to sing in Latin to resist the pressure of reformers to perform the liturgy in the vernacular. The continued sensory and collective experience of singing thereby shaped the nuns' collective memory as a community with agency over their own lives and rule, even if they gradually conformed to the requirements of Lutheran worship. While the subject of Murray's study is the late medieval Latin Church, he similarly addresses how shared sensory experiences would shape a religious community. He examines how the portrayal of mourners on tomb sculpture, as well as the wearing of mourning robes in funeral ceremonies, were formative of the perceived bonds between the living and dead as a universal Church. Actual mourning bodies function pictorially for Murray, as visually constituting fallen humanity awaiting redemption through Christ. Thus by participating in the Church that, collectively, manifests Christ's body on earth, one awaits becoming his image. At this point we have come full circle. Just as Marshall *et al.* and Wallis challenge the boundary between bodies and images in their speculative ontologies, Murray shows that tracing the relationship between these two concepts in Christian thought can defamiliarize conventional depictions of mourning.

Thøfner and Murray's contributions might be argued to align with more recent approaches to affect that have analysed the body and vision alongside one another, not as a history of visual culture, but rather of the affective power of images on the body. Over the last decade, David Freedberg has developed his research into the instinctive responses people have towards images into an interdisciplinary form of scholarship that moves between art history and cognitive neuroscience. This shift in attention towards the biological processes of vision dovetails with what Douglas Cooter describes as a third possibility for writing a history of body, beyond attention to discourse and materiality to consider instead the politics of biological life, or the history of biopower, in Foucault's terms (Cooter, 2010, pp.401–2). While Cooter uses Nikolas Rose's research into contemporary politics as exemplary in this regard, the philosophical genealogies of Giorgio Agamben also demonstrate how this type of work can extend into pre-modern studies (Agamben, 2015). While Freedberg's attention to neuroscience does not align itself directly with the Foucauldian attention to biopower, he is concerned with 'the use of bodies' in Agamben's terms, understood as the ways that cultures use unmediated, neurological responses to images to shape and reinforce the memories of their audience (Freedberg, 2011, especially pp. 345–8). Comparable to Katritzky's demonstration of the necessity of interpreting seemingly 'medical' visual sources from the perspective of cultural history, Freedberg shows that the biological body, while subjecting people to processes beyond conscious control, does not dictate or shape human behaviour, but rather becomes entwined with cultural practices.

While there are neurological bases to vision and the emotions that come with grief and song, in Thøfner and Murray's research, as well as in other contributions to this volume, the distinction between images and bodies is elided, such that images, too, can function like, alongside, or as bodies in collective experience, even if they have no biological functions or origin. To think of images as constitutive of bodies is not simply to think of their affects and uses, but also how bodies function as images and images as bodies, possibilities that do not have their basis in neuroscience. Instead, they are rooted in pre-modern ontologies like Christian image theology, non-Socratic understandings of identity or other similarly complex relations between the real and representation. While such perspectives might be constructed through specific cultures, the image that they produce are agents within their relevant cultures, rather than simply reflections of them. And while they may be articulated through language, neither images nor bodies are reducible to it.

Bodying forth

This introductory survey of the contributions to this volume has outlined the methodological stakes at play in analysing historical images as constitutive of rather than simply mirroring bodies, whether they be read as biological or social. To do so requires deep consideration of how pre-modern European and indeed other cultures conceptualised images, bodies and their relationship. Our present habit of seeing the body as a site of individuated identity is not instinctive, even if may seem so. It is, in fact, only a historical contingency, one that was achieved first by the successive cultural hegemonies of Christianity, classicism and Enlightenment. Furthermore, even when dealing with Christian, classical, or empirical modes of knowledge, images demonstrate that bodies were still shaped, used, treated and experienced in ways that may seem strange to us. In the pre-photographic age, images of bodies were produced to generate a range of emotional and somatic experiences and often for multiple types of viewers, with the result that modern, medicalised ways of reading them may well be misleading. Finally, bodies were, and remain, experienced as a collective, such as through the embodied experience of singing or of shared grief. Images were constitutive of such collective bodies, providing the frame for interpreting them, and/or eliding the distinction between bodies and images, such that images could act like bodies participating in a collective experience, or the collective group be thought of as conforming to an image. That is perhaps nowhere as obvious as in the body of Christ from Kerteminde (Figs. 0.1 and 0.2). This was an image that was treated as a body. And, as the body of Christ, it was also the embodiment of a community constituted in and through the Eucharist, every time the words were whispered: 'hoc est corpus meum' ('this is my body'). The central aim of this collection of essays is to take such fundamentally visual and performative types of bodily experiences at face value, as ontological realities in their own right.

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