

## Presence Through Absence: Thresholds and Mimesis in Painting

### A Close Reading of a Flemish Painting of Saint Anthony

AN AGED AND VENERABLE MAN in a black habit is sitting in the country with a book in his hands (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Slightly confused about whom this might be, but intrigued by the idyll, the viewer leans in to take a closer look at the label on the wall of the museum in Brussels where the painting hangs (fig. 2). Next to this exquisite painting he reads its attribution to the southern Flemish school of the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and its subject: “La tentation de saint Antoine” and on the line below that, “De bekoring van de heilige Antonius.” Still unsure whether the French “temptation” is in fact the same as the Flemish “enchantment,” the modern viewer returns his gaze to the painting. Analogies to other paintings that clearly depict Saint Anthony sweep away his initial doubt about whom the painting shows—it is Saint Anthony (and not another prophet or saint, for example, Job).<sup>2</sup>

In the foreground, Anthony sits atop a small hill in a kind of garden with a variety of plants. Placed next to him are a shiny jar and a plate, probably both made of brass. Behind him a bright hillside undulates with lighter colored grass; at the bottom of the hill lies a body of water, possibly a pond or small creek. The bridge on the right side of the panel leads through a roofed gate; a herald is stepping through it. Through the opening of the gate and above the flowering hedge on either side of it we see an enclosed strip of lawn. Two trees, browsing animals, and the front side of a house at the edge of the forest all enclose the area against the darker background. An old picket fence leads the beholder to assume that a kitchen garden is located to the right side

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**ABSTRACT** In this essay, through a close reading of a little-known painting of the temptation of Saint Anthony, I propose that every convening of images inspired by the viewing of a picture is a unique “event,” a transformation that occurs during the act of perception, in which various images can be seen as an assemblage generated by one picture. The analysis of such assemblages provides insight into the making and reception of the image, as well as the potential variance between the artist’s making and viewer’s reception. Further, such analysis reveals a structure of “thresholds” within the picture, a structure that refers to inherent principles of representation and mimesis. *REPRESENTATIONS* 130. Spring 2015 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 1–27. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/rep.2015.130.1.1.

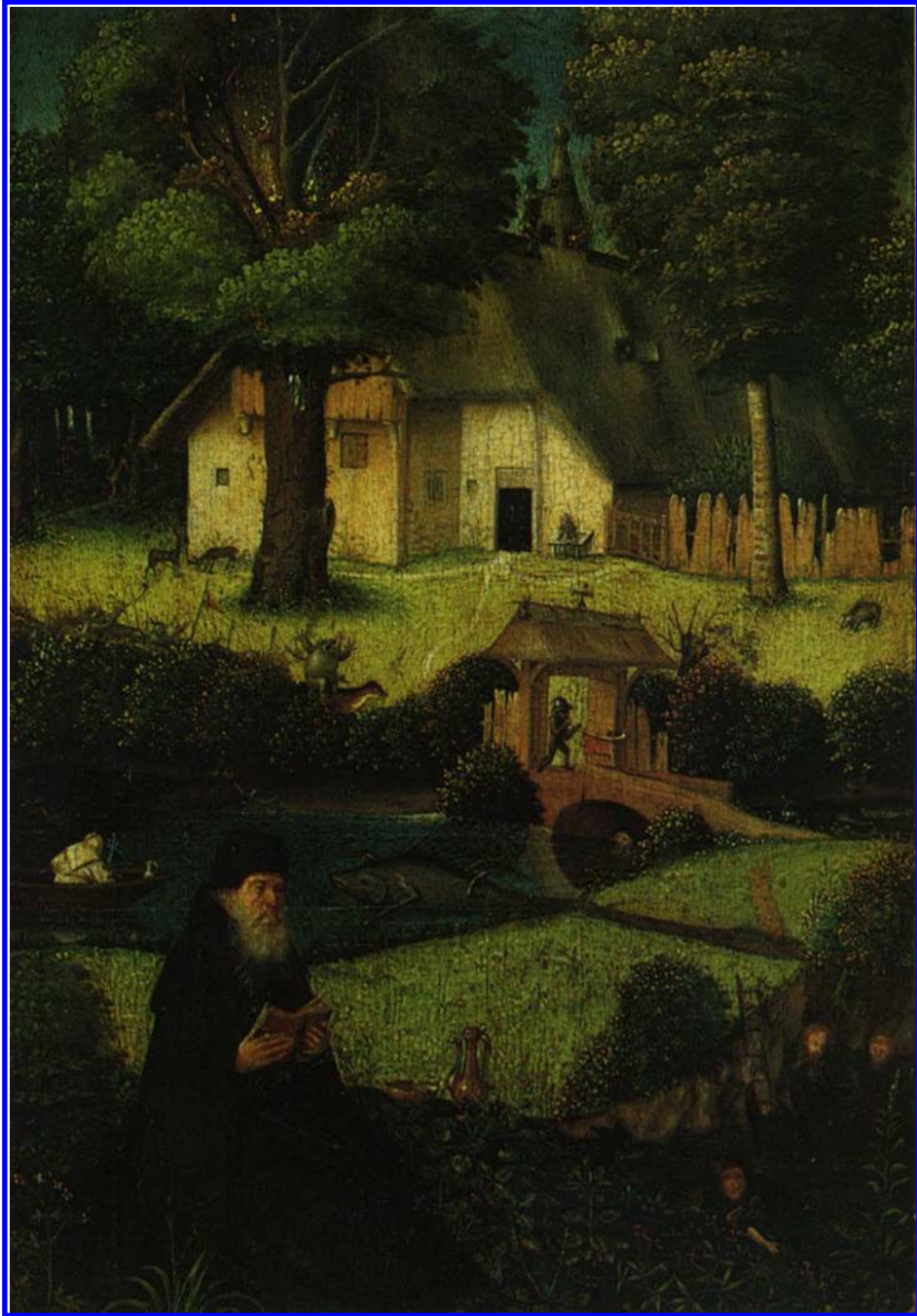


FIGURE 1. Anonymous, St. Anthony, ca. 1525, 29 × 18 cm. © Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. Photo: J. Geleyns/Ro Scan.

of the house. In the shadowed semidarkness to the left of the house a path leads into the forest.

What we see at first glance—this peaceful landscape and the silence of the reading or meditating hermit—appears on further inspection rather uncanny. In the foreground, in what looks like an open fold in the ground, we can identify three dark figures. Two of them are men in black who have just entered or are about to exit the crevice on a ladder (fig. 3). The third person is stretching out his or her arm, probably the right one, and is holding something, maybe a pipe, in the other hand. Whether this person is a woman or a man, and whether the object is a pipe or a flute, remains undetermined even after closer observation with a magnifying glass. In fact, we find ourselves stuck almost at the surface of the picture. Our second, more searching gaze allows us to approach the panel in more detail, yet it reveals the limits of perception even in looking closely. Gazing at length, we seem to discern a billow of smoke. In the pond there is even more oddness lurking (fig. 4). To the left of Anthony, a man in a boat, dressed and hooded in white, with a dip net and a jug next to him in the boat, is drifting toward a huge barbed fish to Anthony's right. The fish has two arms and strange, seemingly useless extremities at the upper edges of its hindquarters. This spiny swimming animal looks friendly, but the bearded man hiding below the bridge looks a little sneaky. Then, behind the hedge, a threatening-looking company is being led by a kind of toad with six extremities riding a brown dog-like



FIGURE 2. Taking a closer look at the Brussels St. Anthony.

creature. This platoon of creatures seems to be following the herald. To the right of the gate, behind the hedge, we discover the barren branches of a dead weeping willow. On a bench next to the open door of the house sits another person (fig. 5). The house seems to be burning; sparks are flying out of its chimney and a dark gray devil on the roof seems to have contributed to this mischief. The tree to the left of the house, despite being full of sap, is glowing internally with a blazing fire.

Slowly, our now seriously puzzled gaze slides toward the forest, past the two browsing roes. In the forest we, or rather our fantasy or *imaginatio*, which has now been ignited, is discovering further fiends or monsters. To corroborate my own perception of these details, I sent a friend to look at the painting himself, and this is what he reports having seen:

A big reddish animal with a tail and two long back legs, like a heraldic lion, standing a little bent, his head disappearing behind a tree trunk. There may possibly be a long paw projecting out from the other side of the trunk. Behind this creature, at the far-off edge of the forest, I have a sense that there is a shimmering human figure or guardian angel, maybe even two.<sup>3</sup>

My description has now changed from one of a harmless landscape idyll into the realm of fantasy. Looking very closely, I have pointed out details of the panel that are barely discernible. The close reading by “me” as a modern viewer unfolds the layers of the painting while addressing the thresholds in it. To show how these layers and thresholds interact, in this essay I discuss how modes of representation were changing (and in some cases ending) at the time of the Brussels painting and how medieval spiritual traditions also persisted into later epochs, in “the era of art,” as Hans Belting has called it in the subtitle of his influential study *Likeness and Presence*.<sup>4</sup>

In a trenchant review of Belting’s book, Jeffrey Hamburger put the medieval/modern opposition in a nutshell: “Religious convictions,” he wrote, “are hardly incompatible with—dare one use the word?—the aesthetic cunning of much medieval art, witness its renewed appreciation in the modernity from which Belting too stringently divorces it.”<sup>5</sup> The German double meaning of *Bild* (images and pictures) has been lost in the translation of Belting’s subtitle: *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art (Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst)*.<sup>6</sup> The subtitle has also led many scholars to make arguments based on the opposition between works of art and cult images, assuming that their differences can be described only as ruptures with traditions—as major changes or shifts. More recently, important studies have begun to resolve the rigidity of these oppositions.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Belting’s subtitle’s claim of a rupture, of a significant change resulting in the beginning of the era of art, there is an essential continuity in the fact that images have always consisted and will continue to consist of



FIGURE 3. Three figures with ladder, St. Anthony, Brussels (detail).



FIGURE 4. Pond and middleground, St. Anthony, Brussels (detail).



FIGURE 5. Background, St. Anthony, Brussels (detail).

multiple layers of representation: images are everywhere; pictures make up images.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence of this intrinsic mutual relationship, a picture always refers to multiple images. These images often serve as the basis for the act of interpretation; that is, one reads the images to which a picture refers in the process of understanding its imbricated layers of meaning. By doing so, one understands how the picture itself operates on multiple levels of meaning. Analysis of these images, following the references in the picture itself, provides us with important insights into a visual culture foreign to our own and reveals as well the assumptions of how perception today differs from the perceptual assumptions contemporaneous with the Brussels painting. Historians of visual culture working with concrete pictures and objects face the challenge that many of the images evoked by a particular object have been lost, were idiosyncratic in the first place, or can only be reconstructed on the basis of presumptions about iconographic and cultural traditions and analogies drawn from the wider historical and cultural context. Yet for the modern viewer, the image's different layers of representation provide a rich ground for speculation about the visual and aesthetic experience of the painting. The ambivalence noted between our first and second impressions of it will serve as a point of departure.

So, to resolve the confusion caused by the discrepancy between these first and second impressions of the Brussels painting, let us first look at Athanasius's *vita Antonii* and ask what these details have to do with the actual story of the hermit. To understand what might have been the historical viewer's or the painter's knowledge of Saint Anthony, we need to understand "which" Saint Anthony and which aspects of his life, personality, and experiences are referred to in the painting. To do this we'll take a look into the *Legenda Aurea*, which provides a different account of the saint's life.

### **Narrative: Reading Anthony's Life and Rereading the Picture**

Anthony was born to wealthy parents in Upper Egypt in the fourth century. At the age of twenty, he sold all his goods and chattels and moved to the desert to live as a hermit. During the twenty years that he lived there in seclusion, he was visited by demons. They tempted him with their devilish or magical forces, trying to awaken his physical lust and leading him to believe in illusions of strange beasts and women, gluttonies, physical tortures, and the like.

Some of the changes that occurred between Athanasius's early Christian version of the life of Anthony and the medieval versions of the legend, collected by Jacobus de Voragine in *The Golden Legend*, are important for

a reading of this late-medieval Flemish painting. In fact, both versions, the early Christian *vita Antonii* and the medieval *De Sancto Antonio*, are relevant to the possible readings enclosed in the painting. The two versions of the legend offer two different “images” that can be seen to contribute to the Flemish picture. In *The Golden Legend*, some of the episodes describing the natures of the various temptations are followed by, or rather conclude with, a dialogue between Anthony and “the vision.” These dialogues question some of the events that have been recounted and, in so doing, introduce a new level of representation and a split in the narration; the perspective of the reader changes from that of a bystander to that of a participant in a conversation about what has just happened. In one episode, Anthony in his chamber experiences earthquakes, demons, and pains. When God has finished the apparition with light appearing through the roof, *The Golden Legend* continues, “And he asked the vision: ‘Where were you? Why did you not appear at the beginning to stop my pains?’ And a voice came to him: ‘Anthony, I was right here, but I waited to see you in action.’” Here, in the narrative of the legend as in the picture of the vision, a split is opened between the real and imaginary worlds; the reader, like Anthony, learns that there is more to the vision than he perceived, and what he perceived was the devil’s temptations. He cannot trust his eyes; God is present through his absence.

This episode is followed by another temptation, also mentioned in *The Golden Legend*: the temptation in which the devil appears to Anthony in the shape of gold and silver vessels.<sup>9</sup> In *The Golden Legend*, the reader’s perspective comes very close to Anthony’s, so close that it is as though the reader were a bystander, overhearing a conversation that begins as a discussion between Anthony and the vision and ends in one between the saint and God. While Anthony is still a prisoner of his visions, of his imagination (*dum in spiritu raptus esset*), he begs the visions to disappear; his plea is answered and the optical vision turns into an auditory vision or direct conversation with God, consisting of one word in response to his plea: “humility” (*humilitas*). In the earlier legend written by Athanasius, the saint acts at a greater distance: after recognizing in some metal goods the temptations of the devil, “on the far side of the river he found a desert fort which in the course of time had become infested with creeping things. There he settled down to live. The reptiles, as though someone were chasing them, left at once.”<sup>10</sup> In our Flemish painting we can see this moment. In the *vita Antonii* a longer time period is condensed into a few sentences: “For a long time he persisted in this practice of asceticism; only twice a year did he receive bread from the house above.”<sup>11</sup> It does not matter whether the house depicted above him is actually the chamber in which he experienced the vision mentioned earlier (in chapters 9 and 10) or is simply there to refer to the ascetic way in which he receives his bread. In Athanasius’s version, the perspective of the reader

now becomes that of someone overhearing from outside what is happening inside Saint Anthony's "shrine-like" home in the desert: "They heard what sounded like riotous crowds inside making noises, raising a tumult, wailing piteously and shrieking: 'Get out of our domain! What business have you in the desert? You cannot hold out against our persecution.'"<sup>12</sup> The text of the legend now describes their thoughts about what they hear happening inside, which is invisible to them. "At first those outside thought there were men fighting with him and that they had entered in by means of ladders."<sup>13</sup> Ladders and men next to the saint who has stopped reading: this is also what the spectator discovers in the Flemish painting, so we see what he sees. As the legend continues, we see a vision, something that appears to be real, but is just an illusion, a fornication by the devil: "But as they . . . saw no one, they realized that demons were involved." Anthony explains to the fearful questioners that "it is only against the timid . . . that the demons conjure up specters."<sup>14</sup> This is the moment that Voragine or his forerunners have taken up and modified in such a way that, in playing with a conflation of Athanasius's *vita Antonii* and the reader's moment of perception, they seem to merge in the moment of perception, of experiencing the illusion of the fiction. This is also the moment that the painter has picked up, by opening up the fold in the ground. He allows us virtually to climb the ladder into the locked-up residence and see the origins of what is described as hidden from the visitors to the hermit's residence. The beholder can unfold the layers of the painting, as though stepping from one layer of the image to the next or from one level of imagination to the next. Presence is generated through references to the imaginary nature of what is there to be seen, while the absence of the Lord, of the real, guided only by the dialogue with the spirit (with its echo in the illusion of painting, the split between picture and image), is an absence that turns into presence.

Our second gaze upon the panel from Brussels puts us in a situation similar to Anthony's. We can no longer differentiate between represented nature and imagined reality in the picture; that is to say, between the various images to which the picture (the painting) refers.<sup>15</sup> Continuing the close reading of the painting in Brussels, the following thing happens: our gaze is split. We see what Anthony, deeply immersed in meditating, sees with his inner and outer eye. We are, like him, unable to differentiate between the degrees of fictionality in the picture. In the act of reading it, we become witnesses to his vision.<sup>16</sup> In this way, the beholder remains unsettled, observing with a split regard.

Every picture is an assemblage of a variety of images related to that particular picture.<sup>17</sup> As Louis Marin has put it, "Every representation, every sign or representational process, includes a dual dimension—a reflexive dimension, presenting oneself; a transitive dimension, representing something—a dual



effect—the subject effect and the object effect.”<sup>18</sup> As in the Latin *imago* (an imitation, copy, image, representation, likeness, statue, bust, picture), and bearing most of the notions of the ancient Greek *eikon*, the English *image* can include mental imaginings, memories, ideas, or concepts. These notions describe the manifold nature of imaginary references made in, on, or by the actual picture (the *tabula*, the *statua*, the *icona*, or, in short, the visual object).<sup>19</sup> The traditional opposition between the immaterial and material aspects of an image has been reinforced in visual studies by critics such as James Elkins and W. J. T. Mitchell, who have associated the immaterial with *image* and the physical pictorial object with *picture*.<sup>20</sup> The notion of an essential twofoldness of pictures and images—oscillating between representation and material, between different modes of representation and their reception—though relevant, seems to impede the theoretical study of the reception of images and their audience. This is the case because scholars tend to align the immaterial and conceptual aspects with theory, setting aside the perception and reception of an artwork, its material and its actual making, as belonging to the realm of (nontheoretical) practice.

While neither the dichotomy regarding the origin of the power of images nor the opposition between the artist’s original ideas and thoughts and the actual viewer’s response can be easily dissolved, they can—as Bruno Latour has suggested—be sidestepped.<sup>21</sup> In offering a theoretical analysis of how pictures refer to a multiplicity of images, I want to shed light on essential changes in the composition of a picture or, to be more precise, to focus on how the references to a variety of images in the same picture are resolved via thresholds—sometimes overly obvious, sometimes almost invisible—within the image.<sup>22</sup> I would like to argue, however, that this modern opposition overshadows the premodern conditions that provided the grounds by which Renaissance and early modern paintings preserve medieval pictorial and imaginary traditions associated with panels that were looked at in religious contexts, for example, as part of a religious ceremony, as an element in an altar, or as part of an individual devotional practice involving a small *Andachtsbild* (devotional image). Michael Baxandall has described how late Gothic altarpieces, often set apart from the main church in their own individual chapels, acted as “self-contained centers of spiritual consolation.”<sup>23</sup> In what follows I show how this afterlife, the end of a long pictorial tradition of painting visions, was an end and at the same time a beginning. Large altarpieces, and the transformations they underwent during the Reformation (consequences of a vivid cultural exchange with the south, along with the growing confidence and self-esteem of northern Renaissance artists) are well studied, but the early stages of these transformations, the smaller-format paintings, and especially the continuities in the medieval tradition, have received less attention. Then what actually are the

paintings that closely relate to the painting in Brussels in genre, iconography, and “style”?

We do not know by whom, where, or when exactly the tiny panel shown in figure 1 was painted, though today it is preserved in Brussels. Stylistic and iconographic comparisons with paintings by Joachim Patinir (fig. 6) and Hieronymus Bosch (figs. 7, 8, and 9) lead to the presumption that the Brussels painting stems from the second quarter of the sixteenth century, probably from a southern Flemish painter. It was probably produced for the rising market for small tableaus with a somewhat religious tone.<sup>24</sup> As Larry Silver has pointed out (speaking of Patinir), “Origins are notoriously difficult to pinpoint. When does a painting of a saint in a landscape become a painting of a landscape with a saint?”<sup>25</sup> The small painting indeed shows a close familiarity to the works of Patinir, and demonstrates as well a certain affinity to Bosch’s play with the fiction of realism through the insertion of marvelous creatures in landscape or genre scenes.<sup>26</sup>

To elucidate the innovative moment of this particular Flemish painting (fig. 1), which contributes to its ambiguity, it will be helpful to indulge in a brief overview of the iconographic traditions typically followed by painters for the Temptation of Saint Anthony. As a hermit, Anthony is usually depicted in the habit of a monk. His attribute is a pig, a symbol of gluttony and reference to the fact that, to support their charities, the Hospitallers of Saint Anthony, a medieval monastic order, raised pigs, which were then slaughtered and distributed to the poor. Looking at the tiny painting in Brussels, we do not see the scene of erotic temptation shown in Niklaus Manuel’s *Temptation of St. Anthony*, now in Cologne, nor can we discover any plague spots or signs of the suppurating Saint Anthony’s fire on the saint’s body. A painting by Matthias Grünewald shows Paul visiting Anthony during an encounter described by Jerome in the *Vita Sancti Pauli* (fig. 10). In the painting in Brussels, however, no second hermit is shown, nor any burning monastery, nor a hermit’s refuge. What we see is a farmhouse whose chimney is spitting sparks and the closest tree apparently dying from an internal fire. None of the visible fabulous creatures are concerned with Anthony: none of them are threatening him, nibbling at him, or badgering him in any immediate way. The man below the bridge is not entering the names of the blessed ones on a list, which is the occupation of a group of three men in the triptych of Saint Anthony in Lisbon by Hieronymus Bosch (fig. 8).<sup>27</sup> Nor do we see Anthony carried up into the air, as he is in that triptych.

However, the temptations of Anthony by Bosch and Grünewald are themselves also not particularly conventional in how they represent the story. As Larry Silver has shown, this breaking with convention was clearly perceived by their contemporaries. His observation is based on the remarks of José de Sigüenza, who wrote in his history of the order of Saint Jerome in 1605:



FIGURE 6. Joachim Patinir, *St. Anthony*, ca. 1515, 155 × 173 cm. © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

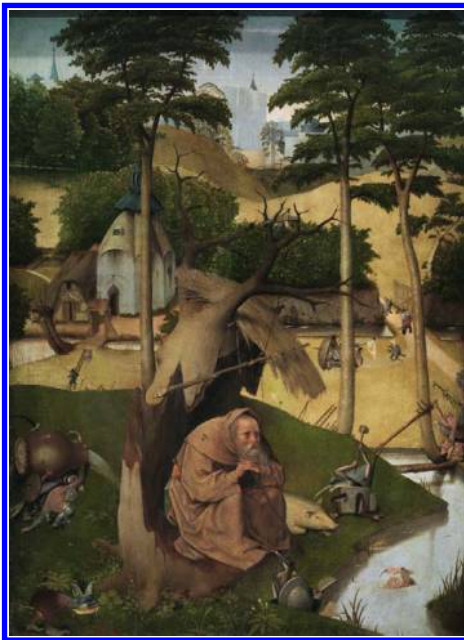


FIGURE 7. Hieronymus Bosch or follower, *St. Anthony*, 1500–25, 70 × 51 cm. © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



FIGURE 8. Hieronymus Bosch, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1501 or later, 131 × 119/238 cm, inner panels. Direção-Geral do Património Cultural/Arquivo e Documentação Fotográfica, Museu Nacional de Arte Antigua, Lisbon.

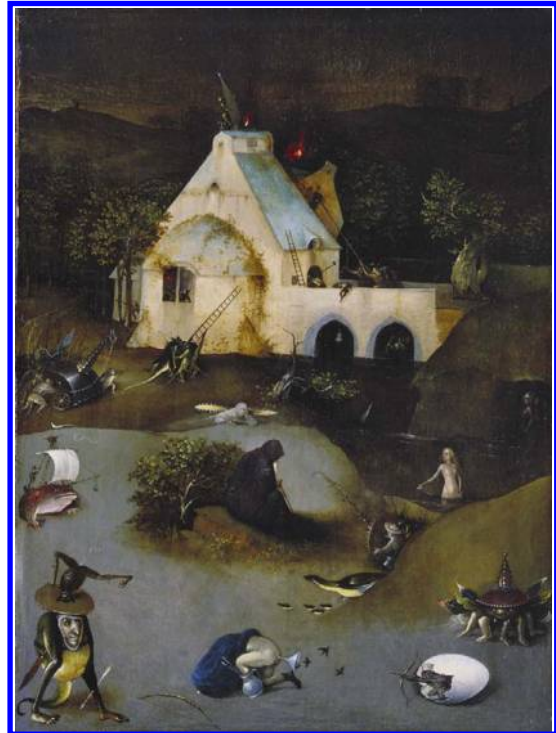


FIGURE 9. Follower of Hieronymus Bosch, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, after 1525, 26 × 19.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: © National Gallery of Canada.



FIGURE 10. Matthias Neidhart (Grünewald), *Temptation of St. Anthony*, inner wing of Isenheim altarpiece, 1512–16. © Musée Unterlinden, Colmar.

The difference between the paintings of this man [Bosch] and those of others is the following: The others want to paint humans like they appear seen from outside. Only he possesses the courage to paint them as they are internally.<sup>28</sup>

How Bosch achieves this is described as follows:

He [Anthony] is surrounded by countless fantasies and monsters, which the enemy creates to confuse the pious soul and its steadfast love, to trouble and to disturb. For this purpose he conjures animals, fierce chimeras, monsters, conflagrations, images of death, cries, menaces, vipers, lions, dragons, and horrible birds of so many kinds that one has to admire his ability to give shape to so many ideas. And all this he did to prove that a soul which is carried by the mercy of God, and elevated by his hand to a kind of saint-like life, cannot be led astray from the goal—even if the devil is depicting, in fantasy and for the outer and inner eye, that which can provoke laughter or lead to jesting or anger or other unbridled passions.<sup>29</sup>

Sigüenza is already conflating the beholder's perceptions with Anthony's own as shown in the painting by Bosch. This brief overview of earlier depictions has shown that, in most cases, older pictures showing this subject followed Athanasius's *vita Antonii* pretty closely, showing the saint sitting in the desert in a kind of cave, surrounded by menacing creatures. According to Athanasius, Saint Anthony faints after an attack by the devil and is carried to his house by

a friend. After regaining consciousness he returns to the grotto to fight the devilish illusions. None of the ferocious creatures, in the shapes of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, wolves, scorpions, or serpents, does him any harm. *The Golden Legend* embellishes this episode further by having the devil return in the shape of animals that attack the saint with their horns, claws, teeth, and nails. This moment is shown spectacularly by Bernardino Porenziano in his 1494 painting (fig. 11).<sup>30</sup> Porenziano fills the tableau's stage with a vision of the cruelest detail; however, the beholder is set apart by the earth's opening crust (at the bottom edge)—the whole scene appears like a vision staged on a relatively flat foreground. Only the gaze of the saint seems to pierce the devilish creatures' layer, and while Anthony's dwindling physical forces merge him with this layer, another layer is formed by the appearance of the cross lighting up a dark cave and the gaze itself. From the left background five men dressed in black robes gesticulate toward the scene in the foreground. While the red gloom of the sky in the background could be read as sunset, this cannot be the case in the foreground. The reddish glow here seems to point to hell's fire, and the little ruddy devils on the right, moving between the back- and foreground and leaving a trace of sparks, especially enhance the visionary character of the whole picture. Here, we look upon a scene where a saint has a vision and is saved by a second visionary appearance—Christ on the cross.



FIGURE 11. Bernardino Porenziano, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1494, 46.4 × 58.2 cm. Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome.

## Having a Vision: Painting and Perception

Looking at Anthony in the Flemish painting in Brussels, *we* perceive *his* vision; step by step, as beholders we experience what Anthony sees. To achieve this effect the painter relies on the initial coherence of the first impression, which is supported by the allegorical mode that links all contradicting details, all references to devilish appearances. What then is the significance of the difference between Parenzano's two visions and the beholder's view of what the Flemish Anthony sees? For the depiction of visions and the representation of visions, medieval painters had rather clear conventions, as is evident in the *Mass of Saint Gregory* from the Master of the Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece (fig. 12) and in a vision of Saint Benedict by Hans Schäufelein (fig. 13).<sup>31</sup> For Gregory, the threshold between this world and the next is dissolved in the gaze toward the altar; history (the history of salvation) and present time permeate each other, and the transformed host, the body, is becoming an image, coming alive. In the case of Benedict, this threshold is clearly circumscribed. The saint looks into a circle with a clear contour, as though looking into a fortune-teller's crystal ball, and sees the world in a nighttime vision, in the light of the creator: "The whole world, gathered together, as it were, under one beam of the sun, was presented before his eyes."<sup>32</sup> Here the split between different layers of pictorial reality, between allegorical and mimetic representation, is made evident.<sup>33</sup> Generally in representations of visions this split can be signaled by a clearly drawn line or by clouds bridging the vision and the reality of the visionary. This line, this limit between the layers of reality, can also be invisible, emphasizing the effect of visions in blurring the layers of reality and fiction, in creating the inability to distinguish between imaginary and real worlds. But these different modes of representation can be merged through painterly mimesis or in the act of their perception by the beholder.

Historically, medieval artists have employed (roughly speaking) two modes of representation: either what I will call a "horizontal split," between the beholder and the work of art, or what I will call a "vertical split," a split within the representation itself. In the first mode, the visible artifact appears as a coherent representation of an imaginary world, and the perception of that world is intended to allow the beholder to cross a threshold into it, into another reality. The second mode refers to images that combine clearly visible multiple realities, which sometimes (but not always) bridge different layers of time. The gaze of Gregory into another reality, transgressing the limits of time and space, represents the iconographical conventions for showing that the same picture combines two realities, the two realities involved in having a vision. By representing the boundaries between the depicted reality of a picture and

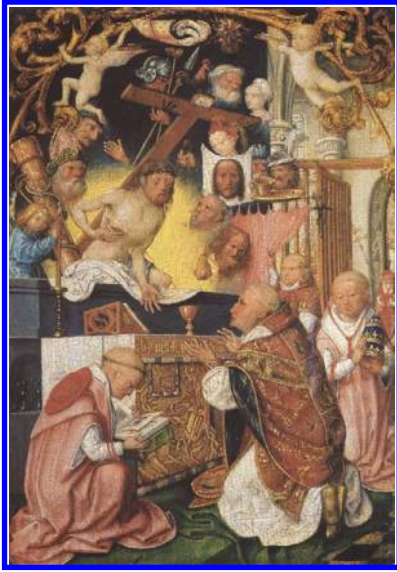


FIGURE 12. Attributed to the Master of the Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece, *Mass of St. Gregory*, 1500–05, 28 × 19.5 cm.  
© Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Trier, inv. no. 64.



FIGURE 13. Hans Schüpfelin, *St. Benedict's vision of the universe*, pen and ink, c.1505. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.

the imagined reality of images related to the depicted scene, their coexistence becomes evident through the very fact of their conflation.

This split recalls and puts pictorial emphasis on the internal experience of Saint Anthony. As Michael Taussig writes, “The hermit, notes Callois, wants to split himself thoroughly, to be in everything, to immerse himself in matter, to be matter.”<sup>34</sup> Two paintings of Anthony from the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, also dating from the first half of the sixteenth century, show this vertical split quite clearly (figs. 14 and 15). In both cases the split is perceived by the



beholder dividing the scene into a “normal” and a “fantastical” realm based on the appearance of the imaginary creatures born out of the mind of Saint Anthony and populating the scene like cattle on the plains. In both cases we encounter the house in flames, still small in the tiny panel by the Bosch follower (fig. 14), and grown to a serious fire blast in the painting by Jan Wellens de Cock (fig. 15). Especially in figure 14, all the fantastical creatures, the fire, and the threat of evil is happening within sight of Anthony, who is focused on the book in his hands, firm in his belief, knowing he cannot trust his eyes. Were he to look up, he would see that the part of the landscape within his visible radius, that is, the areas not blocked by the huge rock or the trees, are populated by devilish forces. In this composition, the vertical split is made evident for the beholder through the divide between a world filled with monsters, devils, creatures, and dangers and a world filled with peace, silence, and beauty—the latter, however, being beyond Anthony’s sight. Reindert Falkenburg has compared the coexistence of equally relevant “visions” in one picture with *diplopia*, double vision—that is, the simultaneous perception of two images referring to the same object.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in shedding light on the sensory perception elicited by late medieval *Andachtsbilder*, especially given the context of mysticism, he has underscored the “twofold function of the painting both calling the viewer to prayer and meditation.”<sup>36</sup> Martin Büchsel has pointed out that, in contrast to the reading of perspectival projection, the reading of images of visions implies a beholder that is accustomed to reading such iconographical projections. Reading such a picture does not rely solely on interpretation but also depends on the anticipation of perception utilized by painters as part of the composition (for example, by Jan van Eyck in the Rolin Madonna), which in turn contributes to the visual experience. A beholder accustomed to devotional practice and familiar with Christian iconographical traditions will see a vision or, better, in looking at the picture, will have a vision.<sup>37</sup> In order to read the painting successfully, the beholder must operate within two different layers of reality, the same layers that are conflated in our Flemish painting.

The allegorical mode of artfully conflating references related to the same picture has a lasting importance and is of significant concern in the consideration of the Renaissance concept of an artwork (if such a coherent concept exists). This becomes evident if we travel back half a century from the Brussels painting to Nicolaus Cusanus’s famous treatise *De visione Dei*, written in 1453 to the monks of Tegernsee, and compare it to slightly later altar paintings showing the wall-encompassed Paradise. Cusanus describes his imaginary position as being at once outside the walls of Paradise, within the walls, and within Paradise itself. At the same time, he addresses the visionary experience and its impact on his perception:

FIGURE 14. Follower of Hieronymus Bosch, St. Anthony, oil painting, first half of the sixteenth century, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.  
© Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin/  
Gemäldegalerie, Sammlung Museen, Berlin/  
Jörg P. Anders.



FIGURE 15. Attributed to Jan Wellens de Cock, St. Anthony, oil painting, before 1527, 33.5 × 47 cm. National Museum, Warsaw.



While I imagine a Creator creating, I am still *on this side* of the wall of Paradise! While I imagine a Creator as creatable, I have not yet entered, but I am *in the wall*. But when I behold Thee as Absolute Infinity, to whom is befitting neither the name of creating Creator nor of creatable Creator—then indeed *I begin to behold Thee unveiled and to enter into the garden of Delights!*<sup>38</sup> (My emphasis.)

Cusanus is elaborating on different abilities to see—on the fact that after the Fall, mankind has lost the ability to truly see, humans can no longer see God,

and in general every act of seeing is merely a blurred version of reality, which humans will be able to perceive truly only after the Last Judgment. Only then will the blurred image become clear, like the blurred image in the mirror of 1 Corinthians 13:12. Looking at an artwork made in the second half of the fifteenth century (with Cusanus's words in mind) may illustrate the declining genre of the altarpiece—an object designed to be opened, with a visible vertical split, divided into multiple panels that make up a single scene (fig. 16). This mode of representation was coming to an end at the beginning of the sixteenth century, by which time a panel was no longer an altar. The two wings were probably once the outer panels of an altar, showing again a garden, the walled paradise, in front of a larger landscape, when the altar was closed. Where the two wings touch each other at the center is where the act of opening would reveal another picture behind, what would have been the central altar panel. However, the painter elegantly plays with the mind-opening experience of imagination upon both wings. The doors are open for the beholder following Mary carrying Christ with her left arm, and they are shut for Adam and Eve, who are being evicted from Paradise after having eaten from the apple, ignited by the promise of knowing, seeing, and desiring each other. The Hebrew ידע (knowing, Jod-Dalet-Ajin) is the expression by which the serpent describes what will happen if Adam and Eve eat from the apple (Gen. 3:5). The term's multiple meanings can describe cognition in both a visual and an epistemological sense, but it can also refer to a sexual dimension, of begetting or becoming pregnant.<sup>39</sup> In the outer wings of the altar, the end is the beginning. Mary and Christ entering the Heavenly Paradise are shown at the left, and the beginning (the eviction from Paradise) is depicted at the right. The painting combines different levels of time (Old Testament/New Testament) and space (Paradise/Heaven) that cannot be resolved by a logical mode of reading, but only through various acts of imagination. The whole picture is divided in two parts, opened up along the actual split of the two panels. This actual threshold is touched only by the feathers of the two acting angels: one sitting in the green grass and playing the harp for Mary and Christ on the left, one standing and swinging his sword to shut the doors until the last of days. The encounter of the two epochs, of the Old and the New Testament, as well as of the two events, promise and condemnation, runs along the division of the two wings of the altarpiece, which would have been closed during the week.

The two panels do not produce a coherent "picture." Here, unlike the Flemish painting, the thresholds impeding such a coherence are manifold and evident: in the way the walls of Paradise refer to more than one moment and event, in the fact that the painting is split over two panels, in the inversion of the narrative, and in the uncertainty of whether the angels are the same figure appearing twice or are two different angels. The various images that might arise in the mind of the viewer do not necessarily involve both panels;



FIGURE 16. French or German Master (?), Two wings from an altar: Mary and Christ entering Paradise(right) and expulsion from Paradise (left), ca. 1450, 102 × 90.5 cm. © Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, inv. no. 2234.

the assemblage of images can only be linked through allegory.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the images are not pictures in the picture, nor do they rely on a mimetic framework, perhaps the most common way of demonstrating the meeting of the pictorial realities that represent a visionary experience (a supernatural appearance that enters the “reality” of the depicted scene). For the modern viewer, the open lines of rupture in pictorial illusion in the panels from Karlsruhe contrast sharply with the Flemish painting, which makes an impressive effort to level out all possible ruptures in the illusion at first glance.<sup>41</sup> Only a third mode of representation, mentioned earlier, can provide access to other layers of the painting for a viewer who looks more than just briefly: the conflation, in the act of imagination, of the assemblages of images to which the picture refers. Tracing the allegorical mode of representation or the visionary mode of its perception from its medieval origin to its impact on later developments in the intrinsic relationship between images and pictures provides us with a better understanding of how mimesis works—the mimesis of reality in the painting is achieved through the merging of the thresholds and conflation of all images and layers of meaning to which the same picture can refer.

In the case of our Flemish hermit we see a picture of an illusion. But it is represented from the point of view of the visionary or saint betrayed by the devil, despite the fact that the devil is shown too (fig. 1). We see both Saint

Anthony *and* the fantasies that emerge from his mind.<sup>42</sup> Our gaze is split, through the conflation of Anthony's suspicion regarding his own perception (he does not believe in what he is seeing) and our own perception of the picture and the related images. Our imagination conflates the split gaze, the different layers of meaning and, by doing so, constitutes a mimetic representation. We see what the reader in the picture sees when he looks up from his book. When we look at the painting, we are looking *upon* his reality but also *from within* his reality. We see from Anthony's point of view (seeing demons and their destructive work), *and* we see the saint himself. The particularity of the Brussels painting is that the discovery of the subtle transition from quotidian reality to fantasy and imagination is predetermined for the beholder of the painting, inherent in how the painting is made. Similarly Bosch, as Joseph Koerner has pointed out, "allies his own imagination, as a mind capable of picturing the impossible, with demonic mimesis. . . . Bosch brings artistic and diabolical imitation into an uneasy proximity. . . . Bosch paints and draws devilry in such a way as to make viewers uncertain about what they see."<sup>43</sup> Painters of that particular region seem to have had a particular interest in this threshold between various pictorial realities.

In the moment when the picture turns into a painted vision, the polyvalence of medieval paintings is resolved. In medieval pictures, multiple realities are depicted in the same picture; when these ruptures or fissures of parallel realities are excluded, the picture becomes early modern and refers instead to multiple images (what is seen by the beholder, not actual realities).<sup>44</sup> In the early modern work, the vision turns into a picture of a landscape, the imagined space into the space of art. The eyewitness turns into the beholder, becoming a witness to another world, the world beyond the threshold of the depicted reality. The painting addresses both these audiences.

The tiny Flemish painting by an unknown artist at the beginning of the sixteenth century represents the end of a development that has yet to be described and analyzed in full detail. This essay has been an attempt to contribute to that analysis and to inspire a deeper consideration of both continuities and changes that were occurring in painting around 1500. As a reflection on the phenomenology of close looking, a critical discussion of the theories of pictorial depiction operative in current art history, a claim about the *Nachleben* (afterlife) of medieval spirituality, a theory of medieval composition, and a historicist account of a single work, the essay points to problems with our current view of the historical account of representation. In looking closer at the changes around 1500, we begin to see an important moment in the history of a larger development, one that I would like to suggest was triggered by the opposition between picture and images, objects and imagination. I propose a middle path, and a third mode of representation, one that conflates an assemblage of the images to which pictures can refer;

connects different layers of meaning in doing so; and generates, last but not least, presence through absence.<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

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1. The wall text reads: “L’école des Pays-Bas méridionaux, premier quart du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, La tentation de saint Antoine, Inv. 2585.” The panel was reproduced in an English edition by Eugène Fromentin, *Master of Past Time* (New York, 1997), plate 18. The panel was bought by the museum in Brussels in 1873 together with other paintings from the collection of the Duc d’Arenberg. In 1959 the painting was shown as part of the exhibition “La Magie de l’Art” in Antwerp. For this information I am grateful to Veronique Bücken, conservator of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts. The poet and literature scholar Anne Duden published the painting in her book *Der wunde Punkt im Alphabet* (Hamburg, 1996); she discusses the painting in the chapter “Was geht in den Büchern vor,” 33–36, to which Anja K. Johannsen has drawn my attention.
2. To show the ambiguity of the painting, one might doubt for a moment the identity of the saint and explore the difference in interpretation if the old man depicted were Job instead of Anthony. In the Old Testament we learn that Job’s steadfast belief was tested by Satan (with God’s permission). In the Job interpretation, the four men in the earth’s fold in the foreground of the painting would be Job’s friends Eliphath, Baldach, and Sophar, as well as Elihu, who ask Job to speak about his dreadful situation. The army behind the hedge could be interpreted as the Chaldeans or the army from Saba who devastate his grounds and belongings (Job 1:15, 1:17). Satan would be the gray demon next to the chimney, and the fire from heaven would have already ignited tree and chimney (Job 1:16). The creature in the river would be a Behemoth with a tail like a cedar, bones like tubes of bronze, and extremities like iron rods lingering in the mud (Job 40: 15–18). However, Job is mostly shown naked and only very rarely as a reading eremite. Another interpretive option might consider that the painting was inspired by the mystical religious play “La patience de Job,” which was popular in France at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This would explain the player with the fanfare, the army, and the figure in the open door of the burning house as the alms-giver. But we do not know any other picture inspired by this play.
3. “Ein großes rötliches beschwanztes Tier, das mit zwei langen Hinterbeinen, ähnlich einem Wappenlöwen, gekrümmt steht, wobei dessen Kopf hinter einem Baumstamm verschwindet. Möglicherweise ragt aus der anderen Seite des Baumstamms eine lange Pranke hervor. Hinter ihm am weit zurückliegenden Waldesrand ohne ich eine schimmernde menschliche (Heils-)Figur, vielleicht auch zwei”; Stephen Stern, personal correspondence.
4. Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich, 1990); in English: *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1994). For the importance of mediation in medieval art, see, for example, Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of Saint Gregory in the Fifteenth Century,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anne-Marie Bouché and Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Princeton, 2005), 208–40; and Herbert L. Kessler, “Real Absence: Early Medieval Art and the Metamorphosis of Vision,” in

- Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1998), 2:1157–1211.
5. Jeffrey Hamburger has also pointed to the shortcomings of earlier descriptions that draw the opposition between medieval and modern contexts in black and white instead of shades of gray, e.g., Max Weber's concept of disenchantment/enchantment and Walter Benjamin's concept of aura/loss of aura. In Belting's study these dichotomies loom "larger than Belting acknowledges in his interpretive framework"; Jeffrey Hamburger, "Art History Reviewed XI: Hans Belting's 'Bild und Kult,' 1990," in *Burlington Magazine* 153, no. 1294 (January 2011); for the concept of aura in medieval and modern art see Wolfgang Kemp, "Fernbilder: Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft," in *Walter Benjamin im Kontext*, ed. Burkhardt Lindner, 2nd enlarged ed. (Königstein im Taunus, 1985), 224–57, esp. 250–54; Horst Bredekamp, "Der simulierte Benjamin: Mittelalterliche Anmerkungen zu seiner Aktualität," in *Frankfurter Schule und Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Andreas Berndt et al. (Berlin, 1992), 117–40, translated as "The Simulated Benjamin: Medieval Remarks on its Actuality," *Art in Translation* 1, no. 2 (2009): 285–301. For Weber, see Stefan Germer, "Entzauberung des Außen. Bruchstücke einer Theorie der Überschreitung," *Im Blickfeld* 2 (1997): 129–42, and Francesco Ghia, *Max Weber und die Kunst: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion der Weberschen Ästhetik* (Hamburg, 2005). See also Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (New York, 2012).
  6. Belting, *Bild und Kult*.
  7. Gerhard Wolf, review of *Anachronic Renaissance*, by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 1 (2012): 135–40.
  8. Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham, 2013).
  9. Jacobus de Voragine, "Historia de Sancto Antonio," in *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence, 1998), 105: "Cum autem in alteram eremum pergeret, argenteum discum reperit et intra se sic dicere coepit: 'Unde hic argenteus discus, ubi hominum vestigia nulla videntur! Si enim viatori cecidisset, utique prae sui magnitudine latere non posset. Hoc, diabole, artificium tuum est, voluntatem tamen meam numquam potens immutare.' Et hoc dicens, discus ut fumus evanuit. Postmodum ingentem massam veri auri reperit, sed ut incendium, aurum fugit, sicque ad montem fugiens XX annis ibi permansit innumeris coruscans miraculis. Quadam vice dum in spiritu raptus esset, totum mundum laqueis se invicem connectentibus plenum vidit. Qui exclamans ait: 'O quis istos evadet!' Et audivit: 'Humilitas.'"
  10. Athanasius, *Vita Beati Antonii abbatis*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina* (Paris, 1844–91), 73: cap. 11, col. 133C: "ad montem usque perrexit, ibique flumine transuadato, inuenit castellum desertum, plenum (ob tempus & solitudinem) venenatorum animalium, in quo se constituens nouus hospes habitauit. Statim ad eius aduentum ingens turba serpentium, quasi persecutorem passa, profugit."
  11. *S. Antonio Abbate*, in *Acta Sanctorum* (hereafter AASS), 2: January 17, cap. 4, 22, col. 489: "At ille obstructo lapidibus introitu, panes mensium sex, vt Thebæis mos est, secum recondens (nam crebro per annum incorrupti durare solent) necnon & exiguum habens aquæ solitarius perdurabat: nusquam inde procedens, numquam aliquem suscipiens, intantum vt cum bis in anno per tectum desuper panes acciperet, nullum cum deferentibus haberet alloquium."
  12. Athanasius, *Vita S. Antonii—Versio Evagrii*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca* (Paris, 1857–66), 26: col. 861f.: "audiebantur vt vulgi voces aduersum Antonium, tumultusque dicentium: Quid te nostris ingeris habitaculis? quid tibi

- & deserto? Abscede a finibus alienis, non potes hic habitare, non nostras insidias sustinere.”
13. *S. Antonio Abbate*, in *AASS*, January 17, cap. 4, 22, col. 489: “Et primo quidem, qui foris erant, existimabant aliquos homines scalis appositis introisse, ibique contendere.”
  14. *Ibid.*: “At ille ostio propinquans ad consolandos Fratres, ne timerent, atque vt inde recederent, precabatur: trepidantibusque, asserebat cunctis a dæmonibus incuti metum.”
  15. On the plurality of painting and its impact on perception: Daniel Arasse, *L’homme en perspective: les primitifs d’Italie* (Paris, 2008); Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 1994); Victor J. Stoichita: “Beautiful Helen and Her Double in the ‘Galeria’ by Cavalier Marino,” *RES* 46 (2004): 120–33; Christopher S. Wood, “Painting and Plurality,” *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2013): 116–39; revised version, “Das Bild ist immer schon plural,” in *Das Bild im Plural: Mehrteilige Bildformen zwischen Mittelalter und Moderne*, ed. Felix Thürlemann and David Ganz (Berlin, 2010), 87–110.
  16. Jeffrey Hamburger has laid the groundwork for analysis of artistic traditions that represent visions in pictures: Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley, 2002); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion,” in *Imagination und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Klaus Krüger and Alessandro Nova (Mainz, 2000), 47–69.
  17. Assemblage is a concept that connects very different disciplines. It is used in the digging disciplines of archaeology, geology, and paleontology; was an important, although rather different concept for twentieth-century artists; and continues to be an influential concept for art practitioners and curators, especially since the important 1961 MoMA New York exhibition *Art as Assemblage*. Since the 1980 publication of *Mille Plateaux* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and especially since the publication of the English translation of that work, which uses “assemblage” for the French *agencement*, the term has also experienced popularity in the political sciences through the work of Manuel De Landa, in science and technology studies via Bruno Latour, and in cultural studies through Brian Massumi’s work. The concept of assemblage I am proposing here is inspired by two ideas. The first is Latour’s idea of the collective and the second De Landa’s theory of assemblages. By incorporating these views, assemblage can be seen as a result of the assembling of people and things (objects and processes) and their continual interactions rather than associations.
  18. Louis Marin, “Mimesis and Description,” in *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, 2001), 256.
  19. Gottfried Boehm and Hans Belting have argued that the German word *Bild* overcomes this opposition; however, “their concepts of, respectively, *Ikonische Differenz* (iconic difference) and *Bild-Anthropologie* (image anthropology) still situate the immaterial *Bild* (namely ideas, memories, concepts, etc.) prior to its materialization into actual artifacts, and thereby incorporate the opposition rather than resolving it.” Anne Sophie Lehmann, “Taking the Lid off the Utah Teapot: The Materials of Computer Graphics,” *Zeitschrift für Medien und Kulturforschung* 1 (2012): 171; Hans Belting, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology,” *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005): 302–19; Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton, 2011); Gottfried Boehm, “Ikonische Differenz,” *Rheinsprung 11—Zeitschrift für Bildkritik* 1 (2011): 175.



20. James Elkins, "On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History," in "Taktilität. Sinneserfahrung als Grenzerfahrung," ed. Stefan Neuner and Julia Gelshorn, special issue, *31: Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie* 12 (2008): 28; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Four Fundamental Concepts of Image Science," in James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (New York, 2008), 16–18. Since then, this opposition has increasingly widened the gap between two currents, especially in German-language art history; one can even speak of two camps. One group, which prioritizes the immaterial *Bild* over its materialization, includes voices that argue that the agency possessed by an object of visual culture is based, in the end, on a projection, linking these inner images with actual visual objects, including the process of an artistic idea taking a visual shape as part of the process of making art. The other group argues that the origin of the agency and the power that pictures may possess lies in the visual objects themselves. Horst Bredekamp, Jane Bennett, and others base their ideas on the premise that images do something to us, that they have a primordial power that precedes acts of imagination and projection.
21. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005), 76.
22. The play with these thresholds in pictorial realities in general has been described by Victor Stoichita as the "meta-picture"; Valeska von Rosen calls the artful play of artists, picking up these layers and transforming them, *Interpikturalität*. Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge, 1997); Gerhard Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel. Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance* (Munich, 2002); Valeska von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen des Darstellbaren. Ambiguität, Ironie und Performativität in der Malerei um 1600* (Berlin, 2009); Valeska von Rosen, "'Res et signa'—Formen der Ambiguität in der Malerei des Cinquecento," in *Kann das Denken malen?*, ed. Inigo Bocken and Tilman Borsche (Paderborn, 2010), 243–74.
23. Paul Crossley, "The Man from Inner Space: Architecture and Meditation in the Choir of Saint Laurence in Nuremberg," in *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives*, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham (Manchester, 1998), 165–82, referring to Michael Baxandall *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven, 1980), 56.
24. Reindert L. Falkenburg and Jan de Jong, eds., "Kunst voor de markt," *Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek* 50 (1999): 1–280; Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Art's International Economy: Artists and Market; Northern-Central Europe," in *Economia e arte, secoli XIII–XVIII: atti della trentatreesima Settimana di studi*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence, 2002), 73–91; Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting & the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven, 1998), and Antonia Boström, "The Acquisition of Flemish Landscapes for Italy on the Antwerp Art Market in the Sixteenth Century," *Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek* 48 (1997): 8–21; Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Turnhout, 2003).
25. Larry Silver goes on: "That is precisely the transition that occurred over the span of the first quarter of the sixteenth century, particularly in Antwerp and principally in the oeuvre of Joachim Patinir, designated already by Albrecht Dürer in 1521 as 'the good landscape painter'"; Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia, 2006), 2, and especially "Natuur en landschap in de nederlandse kunst 1500–1850," ed. Reindert L. Falkenburg and Jan de Jong, special issue, *Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek* 48 (1998).
26. Joseph Leo Koerner, "Wirklichkeit bei Hieronymus Bosch," in *Realität und Projektion. Wirklichkeitsnahe Darstellung in Antike und Mittelalter*, ed. Martin Büchsel and

- Peter Schmidt (Berlin, 2005), 227–38. For an English version see Joseph Leo Koerner, “Impossible Objects: Bosch’s Realism,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46 (2004): 73–97.
27. A copy of this triptych, made by a follower of Bosch shortly afterwards, is shown in the museum in Brussels on the wall directly opposite our Flemish painting.
  28. Also quoted by Michel Foucault in *Maladie mentale et psychologie* (Paris, 1954). For the context see Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York, 2006).
  29. José de Sigüenza, *History of the Order of San Jerónimo*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1909).
  30. For older examples of this subject see Gherardo Starnina’s fresco in the Castellani Chapel of the Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence. Cf. Jean Michel Massing, “Schongauer’s ‘Tribulations of St Anthony’: Its Iconography and Influence on German Art,” in *Studies in Imagery*, vol. 1, *Texts and Images* (London, 2004), 328n5. At the same time as our painting, although somewhat less frequently, Saint Anthony is shown in a fertile oasis, as in Bernhard Strigel’s fresco (in the Benedictine Monastery of Marienberg in Burgeis, Germany), which is similar to the oasis of the southern Flemish panel.
  31. Fritz Koreny, “Albrecht Dürer oder Hans Schäufelein? Eine Neubewertung des ‘Benediktmeisters,’” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 56/57 (2002/03): 144–61.
  32. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 2.35 (Life of Saint Benedict): “During this vision a marvelously strange thing followed, for, as he himself afterward reported, the whole world, gathered together, as it were, under one beam of the sun, was presented before his eyes. While the venerable father stood attentively beholding the brightness of that glittering light, he saw the soul of Germanus, Bishop of Capua, in a fiery globe, carried up by Angels into heaven.” Translation quoted from Terrence G. Kardong OSB, *The Life of Saint Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, 2009).
  33. Wolfgang Kemp has identified two major developments in representation resulting from the major changes between 1300 and 1500: the rise of perspective and the rise of cartographic representation. Prior to Kemp, art historians had conventionally argued that there were two major changes around 1300: first, the rise of naturalism alongside the increasing importance of the study of nature, and second, the introduction of constructed forms of representation based predominantly (but not only) on perspectival considerations, optical knowledge, and/or calculations. Additionally, I suggest that the representation of effects, of visionary experiences and supernatural aspects, must be included as a third development, which could more generally be described as the rise of an allegorical mode. This third mode is essential for the constitution of the illusion of mimetic representation. In the moments of a picture’s perception the viewer is conflating the different modes of representation, and by doing so, also the different layers of meaning, the latter relying upon the images to which a picture can refer. See Wolfgang Kemp, *Die Räume der Maler. Zur Bilderzählung seit Giotto* (Munich, 1996). For the role of ambiguity, see Beate Fricke, “Matter and Meaning of Mother-of-Pearl: The Origins of Allegory in the Spheres of Things,” *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012): 35–53.
  34. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993), 43.
  35. Reindert Falkenburg, “‘Diplopia,’” in *Ut pictura meditatio*, ed. Walter S. Melion, Ralph Dekoninck, and Agnes Guiderdoni-Bruslé (Turnhout, 2012), 85–105.
  36. Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450–1550* (Amsterdam, 1987), 86.

37. Martin Büchsel, "Einleitung," and "Realismus und Meditation. Überlegungen zu einigen Madonnenbildern Jan van Eycks," in *Realität und Projektion. Wirklichkeitsnahe Darstellung in Antike und Mittelalter*, ed. Martin Büchsel and Peter Schmidt (Berlin, 2005), 17, 191–227.
38. Nicolaus Cusanus, *De visione dei*, in *Nicolaus of Cusa: The Vision of God*, trans. Emma Gurney Salter, intro. Evelyn Underhill (London, 1928), chap. 12, 55–56: "Si videre tuum est creare tuum et non vides aliud a te, sed tu ipse es obiectum tui ipsius, es enim videns et visibile atque videre, quomodo tunc creas res alias a te? Videris enim creare te ipsum, sicut vides te ipsum. Sed consolaris me, vita spiritus mei, quoniam etsi occurrat murus absurditatis, qui est coincidentiae ipsius creare cum creari, quasi impossibile sit, quod creare coincidat cum creari. . . . Sic vocare est creare, communicare est creari. Et ultra hanc coincidentiam creare cum creari es tu, deus absolutus et infinitus, neque creans neque creabilis, licet omnia id sint, quod sunt, quia tu es. . . . Quamdiu concipio creatorem creantem, adhuc sum citra murum paradisi. Sic quamdiu concipio creatorem creabilem, nondum intravi, sed sum in muro. Sed absolutam cum te video infinitatem, cui nec nomen creatoris creantis nec creatoris creabilis competit, tunc revelate te inspicere incipio et intrare hortum deliciarum, quia nequaquam es aliquid tale, quod dici aut concipi potest, sed in infinitum super omnia talia absolute superexaltatus."
39. Gen. 3:5: "For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil." See also Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das alte Testament*, 12th rev. ed. (Leipzig, 1895), 284–85, and Beate Fricke, "Zeugen und Bezeugen. Vom Anfangen, Blicken und Enden. Lot und seine Töchter von Joachim Patinir," in *Zeugen und Zeugenschaft. Perspektiven aus der Vormoderne*, ed. Heike Schlie and Wolfgang Drews (Paderborn, 2011), 271–97.
40. The allegorical mode is essential for the constitution of the illusion of mimetic representation. The diversity of images that are or can be related to one object of visual culture—such as a painting, a sculpture, or a religious object like a reliquary—can differ from beholder to beholder but does not necessarily have to.
41. By "lines of rupture" I mean the disposition of the scenes contradicting the narrative structure of beginning to end; the reading from right to left; and the disposition of the scenes over two wings that are regularly opened, though when closed at the center the wings still provide visual access to the walled paradise.
42. If we were to read the panel as a picture of Job, we would see the works of Satan, who—with God's permission—brings chaos into the earthly life of innocent people. We—as beholder—watch these actions and perceive an impression of Job as a model for single-mindedness. Most frequently Job is depicted as an outlaw, marked by the divine punishment. The phantastical element of the story in the Old Testament (the Behemoth) is usually omitted.
43. Koerner, "Impossible Objects: Bosch's Realism," 96.
44. Christopher Wood has described this effect in *Painting and Plurality*.
45. Images are entities that are products of historical processes; as De Landa emphasizes, "Assemblage theory may also be applied to social entities," and to explain their synthesis, historical processes are used. De Landa added a third dimension to his assemblage theory: "an extra axis defining processes in which specialized expressive media intervene. Processes which consolidate and rigidify the identity of the assemblage or, on the contrary, allow the assemblage a certain latitude for more flexible operation while benefiting from genetic or linguistic resources (processes of coding and decoding)"; Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London, 2006), 19.