Part 3

Pushing the Envelope, Breaking Out: Making, Materials, Materiality

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Chapter 6

ANGELIC ANAGOGY, SILVER, AND MATTER'S MIRE

LOOKING AT BYZANTINE icons is a difficult experience to articulate entirely. Our immediate impressions are very often preconditioned and so not really accessible. We are at the very least struck by their weathered antiquity, distinctive formal qualities, and probably above all by their confident charisma, their ability to confront without apology or qualification anyone entering their presence. One of our protective positions before that self-possession is to fall back on readings of contemporary (that is, primary) documents that indicate native ways of looking at such objects. These leading documents are often persuaded to agree with our commonly held explanations for these objects, explanations that in fact did not really exist in that culture. This chapter explores some of our useful fictions about images of angels, their recursive play, and matter's implications in this play.

Anagogy is the process habitually summoned to explain how objects, icons mostly, portage the space between the sacred and the profane. That is to say, the object transports the mind to a spiritual place and erases its own presence in this process of spiritual desire. A classic example is an epigram on an image of the Archangel Michael by the poet Agathias, sometimes called Scholasticus, who lived from about 532 to about 580. I use here a recent translation by Aglae Pizzone, who has also written a thoughtful and very useful analysis of this poem.

> The wax—how daring!—molded the invisible, the incorporeal archangel in the semblance of his form. Yet it was no thankless task, since the mortal man who beholds the image directs his spirited impulse by way of a superior imagination. His veneration is no longer distracted: engraving within himself the model, he trembles as if he were in the latter's presence. The eyes stir up a deep intellection, and art is able by means of colours to ferry over the heart's prayer.[1]

Like other scholars (including me),[2] she treats the icon as window, a transparent entity that exists to erase its existence.[3] Moreover, in her model, the viewer (and really, the writer, since the icon does not survive) is an autonomous agent, and the matter at hand is not only the image. Instead, the viewer's imaginative carnality, his/her corporeal presence before the object, is the determining materiality.[4]

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1 Pizzone 2013. On the relevance of this epigram into fifteenth-century Rome, see Gill 2014, 78–83.

2 Peers 2001.

3 Pizzone 2013, 80, "Agathias stresses the emotional impact of the image, eventually eliciting intellectual ascension. The painted portrait of Michael both stimulates embodied faculties and triggers a superior cognitive ability."

4 Pizzone 2013, 83–84: "By 'matter,' I mean not only the substantial, material object, i.e. the

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Figure 26. Paten with the Communion of Peter and Paul, 65 cm in diameter, silver repoussé in high relief, ca. 600 CE. The Menil Collection, Houston (1990-12DJ), photograph: Paul Hester, with permission of The Menil Collection.

Pizzone's analysis rests on an understanding of spiritual knowledge and fulfillment working through vision and resulting in communion with the divine. This explanation, to be sure, parallels many descriptions in devotional literature and theological florilegia. But those sources are not neutral and need analysis, just as any sophisticated, self-involved literature would. Pizzone's work does certainly advance the question of the viewer's body in relation to the icon, and I am really using her for rhetorical contrast. My argument takes a strongly divergent tack, because I want to make a case for eliminating discussion of transparency, as well as of carnality as it belongs to humans only, and not least, I favour object over text, so I do not elide that sixth-century writer's explanations with a reclaimable material reality. A text is always self-interested, and it is always in an agonistic relationship with its subject ("art"), especially when it is ekphrastic. It is only one interpretative position among many possible, and it is prescriptive in the face of objects' own ceaselessly asserted materialistic independence.

My position tries to take account of the variety of experience and ontologies of the late antique/early medieval worlds. No single, discrete category exists, for them or even for us, and my argument champions mixture over line, multiplicity over binaries, and progress through many possible states of contact with the divine. That mixture is a natural state for us all. As Michel Serres has written, "No-one has ever witnessed the great battle of simple entities. We only ever experience mixtures, we encounter only meetings."[5] At stake, just the same, in any historical analysis is the particularity of mixture in that context. I want to confine myself here to relatively narrow limits, objects, and texts from approximately 550 to 650 and primarily in Greek. I will stray a little, but this period stands for larger issues meaningful for understanding Byzantine and Eastern Christian relationships to their material world and consequently (always as a consequence, one has to stress) to the divine.

Moreover, I want to spend time on silver, because of this precious metal's role in defining craft, science, and interpretations of the world for this period (and beyond). This medium also illuminates others used for this period's art. Protochemistry (or alchemy) and geology are necessary knowledge for viewing this period, as it would be

painted image, eliciting the beholder's progress, but also the carnality of the beholder him/herself, the physicality of his/her sight."

5 Serres 2008, 28.

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for anyone attempting to understand us. The science of late antiquity was a distinctive system of thought, organic with their relations to the world, however well or poorly any one person knew it.[6] Alchemy also combined those fields in its search for essences, for ways to perfect matter, and in its careful attention to process, however misguided many early scientific fields were, by our standards.[7] Our time is deep time, the time of geological and evolutionary processes, and is based on assuming that minerals and ores are inert. It is easy, then, for us to ignore alchemy, and to overexploit it, too.[8] Late antique explanations were based on an organic geology, and their temporal assumptions of minerals and ores necessarily were not deep. That time was flowing and emergent, because stones were constantly making and moving. (They are for us, too, if we stop to recognize it.)[9] Time was mixed, in the sense that human time was also mingled with stony time. Moreover, that geology was not then simply under their feet, but living its mingling life among other living creatures.[10] Geology, and its chemistry and physics, were divinely compelled and soaked in God's presence and provided the fullest understanding of crossing to the divine.[11] Rather than Agathias's anagogy (or at least our explanation of it as such), I would argue for straddling or bestriding over traversing, that is to say, mixture, relation, mingling, movement, a perfect meeting of physics and metaphysics.[12]

Drawing on the example of Michael Baxandall in *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, these late antique objects can likewise be "addressed as lenses bearing on their own circumstances."[13] In the first regard, art historians use their eyes, but vision dislikes mixtures, and most conditions of display in museums undermine the heterogeneous in favour of clarity and legibility.[14] This silver plate from the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, dates to around 600 CE (Figure 26), and it shows a scene of communion given by Christ to Sts. Peter and Paul. In documentary photographs, the plate is evenly lighted and consistently easy to read for narrative and identities. But in *Byzantine Things in the World*, and indeed in its display in the collection current to this writing in 2019, the silver plate partook and partakes in a dynamic process of figural passages yielding to

6 For bibliography on Byzantine science, see O'Meara 2017; Mavroudi 2015. For a wider net, see also Takahashi 2011, Takahashi 2014 and Lazaris 2020.

7 Alchemy's scientific roots are often borne out with sympathetic examination, if not realized as such. See, for example, Viano 2006, 199–206.

8 Parikka 2014, 22.

9 See, for example, Norris et al. 2014.

10 Feigelfeld 2015.

11 Braidotti 2013, 60: "'Life', far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended."

12 See the excellent article Smith 2012, as well as Chin 2015.

13 Baxandall 1980, vii.

14 Serres 2008, 81: "A medium is abstract, dense, homogeneous, almost stable, concentrated; a mixture fluctuates. The medium belongs to solid geometry, as one used to say; a mixture favours fusion and tends towards the fluid."

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abstraction under light's intensities, even if installation photographs resist that dynamic (see Figure 21).[15]

Strangely, the embossed plate became illegible at just the points where figures and representational elements were present. In that sense, the apprehension of the scene takes self-conscious searching for the right position vis-à-vis the plate for seeing figuration, while its "natural material state" is lambent, mysterious presence. An irony, perhaps, is that the "natural state" took place in such a constructed setting, and photography scarcely touches its effects. Moreover, the colour values of the sheens of the plate revealed an identity instability that echoed alchemists' notion of shared essential qualities of silver and gold. From certain angles, the silver came to look golden and appeared to traverse both metals almost simultaneously. Exhibition is really the only way most of us can experience this changeable nature.[16] Silver reveals its own instability, its movement from state to state, its ability to cross worlds. Matter, in other words, is not an intruder on the making of meaning; rather, it contributes directly and fully to passages among states.[17]

And yet our explanatory framework asserts no real connection between an image and its model, except insofar as conventionalized *essential* resemblance gives it. To return to Agathias, wax is in some sense "greatly daring" in its material capture of the archangel. Such metaphors from technology have led scholars to develop theories of nonessential relations between images (the impressed wax) and the model (the seal)—one impresses the other and leaves a trace, but no essence is shared between the two, seal and wax. Theologians did employ this metaphor, and it allowed them to pursue an inoculating relation between icon and subject. Friedrich Kittler tells us, however, that a historical discursive practice is predetermined by media technology, and media—such as seals and wax, to take it to late antiquity—established and maintained a certain understanding of the operations that materials bore out.[18]

Materiality made passages between the terrestrial and divine, and technologies (and their descriptions) attempted to catch up with matter, its *Stoffe*, and its effects.[19] Alchemy was in the first place a strongly observant system. It examined the shining, self-perfecting lambency beyond the eye's reach and then attempted to articulate it and harness it. Here, silver and wax provided—and provides for us retrospectively—lenses with which to understand their own circumstances in their world. As Jussi Parikka

15 See Peers 2013.

16 I am also thinking of the David Plates in *Byzantium and Islam* at the Metropolitan Museum, where the plates shone brilliantly in silver and gold flashes. I am immensely grateful for the collegial sharing of installation photographs by the curator, Helen Evans, who also edited the catalogue (Evans 2012). See, also, Kiilerich 2012b.

17 See the stimulating book by Bucklow 2014.

18 See Kittler 2013 and Kittler 1999.

19 Jussi Parikka in Feigelfeld 2015: "I want to insist that the materiality of media starts even before we talk about media: with the minerals, the energy, the affordances or affects that specific metallic arrangements enable for communication, transmission, conduction, projection, and so on. It is a geopolitical as well as a material question, but one where the *geos* is irreducible to an object of human political intention."

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has argued, "The engineer does not breathe life into inert material. With their specific qualities and intensities, the material demands a specific type of specialist or a specific method to be born, so that they might be catalyzed into the machines we call machines. The material invents the engineer."[20]

If Kittler tried to position media at the outset of cultural discourses, Parikka takes us one step back in the chain, to an originary moment of materials, or just matter, which includes stones, ores, wax, and so on, as formative or generative of its own outcomes in human hands. And to take this recursiveness one step further, or deeper, that lack of individuality or independence of the human agent, or even its self-evident existence, is difficult to catch hold of in these contexts where media technology shines its light.[21]

Substance as a basic stratum of the world is a necessary component in any historical discourse concerned with things. Naturally, contemporaries of this silver plate had notions about substances, and they sought explanations, as far as their media allowed, for how substance or matter worked and unfolded. For example, in this period, Stephanus of Alexandria is one of the most important sources for natural philosophy, in which alchemy should be included.[22] He has been credited with being an important intellectual bridge between Alexandria and Constantinople in the crucial seventh century, when the loss of Egypt meant a new gravitational centre for intellectuals was needed at the capital. That reputation may be undeserved, as recent work has argued,[23] but in any case, Stephanus wrote important treatises for this issue of substance, for matter and its dynamic independence.

Alchemy, in the hands of a thinker such as like Stephanus, was a program of self-improvement, indeed, of spiritual perfecting, that matched the self-refining progress of base metals to gold. Only the pure in spirit could help realize pure matter, and discerning that essential aspect of matter was based on a belief that all bodies, down to the lowest level of matter, have power and ability to regenerate. Those qualities all derive from an understanding of and connection with a vital spirit in matter:

> And being burnt to ashes they make many and divine works and various colours […] leading the nature back outside to the visible. On the one hand, [those sulphurous things] are active bodies; on the other hand, a power, according to another discourse, displaying activity […]. For such things as come to rebirth, relate to an easily apprehended art, especially they who cook together the ash of common plants with the like, and melt together the ashes of bodies and glasses with the like […]. For [these bodies] come again to a certain power and virtue and re-birth, having a nature imitative of the whole universe and of the elements themselves, whence also they have re-birth, a communion with a certain spirit, as of things coming into existence by a material spirit. So copper, like a man, has both soul and spirit.[24]

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20 Parikka in Feigelfeld 2015.

21 See Holl 2015, 86.

22 See Papathanassiou 2008.

23 Rouché 2011.

24 And further: "For these melted and metallic bodies, when they are reduced to ashes, being joined to the fire, are again made spirits, the fire giving freely to them its spirit. For as they manifestly take it from the air that makes all things, just as it also makes men and all things, thence

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In this elaborate way, Stephanus's position permits a further view into how substance or basic matter was conceived and explained in this period. It conforms to some fundamental definitions for substance used by scholars today: the possibility of division and separation, while retaining identity as substance; characteristic structures remaining in the substance despite separation; and certain tendencies predictable in themselves and in relations.[25] An important distinction is the vital spirit, the animating current that runs through matter. Modern physics and chemistry have their explanations for this spark of life, while scientists of all kinds had their own explanations in late antiquity. For Lucretius, famously, the movement of atoms was due to *clinamen*, an unpredictable and arbitrary swerve.[26] For this period, the swerve may be unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary, but that opacity is due only to a lack of discernment: for alchemists, investigation and experimentation were ways into a deeper and fuller understanding than was possible for those not able to reach that level. Alchemy was self-perfecting in claiming that vital spirit and to further world-knowing.

Part of that knowing involved risky work, and here I would like to bring us back to silver. Silver was a metal nearly stainless. In a system without classifications for metals and ores as we have them, the only real way to rank and organize them was through their relative purity. Ruled by the moon (as gold was ruled by the sun), silver had lofty celestial credentials, and it moved to perfection's rank naturally, as all things in the world moved to their proper places eventually. No one knew how long silver's route to perfection would in the normal course of time take to reach its goal, but the assumption was always that it would. Alchemy was the search for the accelerant for that purity, a way to harness that vital matter to its own perfecting end. And so the plate in the Menil is not inert according to this system; in its substance, it is moving that way through its vital spirit. Its vital spirit is most often temporally quite deep and slow, and it is also most often innocuous. But another quality of substance is its unpredictable and dangerous potential for change, regeneration and combination.[27]

In the absence of definitions of distinguishing characteristics that we would recognize from our geological framework, silver had such traits, too. Silver possessed qualities that were not fully explicable, especially when the problematic aspect of its relationship to quicksilver is examined. In Greek, *hydrargyros*, and in Latin, *argentum vivum*—the difficulty is evident in the very designation of mercury in that world.[28] Its vitality, both in its neutral form as silver and in its active form as quicksilver, is a common assumption in that world. Indeed, Stephanus inferred its basic sympathy with life-giving fluid, because

is given them a vital spirit and a soul. So also the fusible bodies, being reduced to ashes with the metallic bodies, by a certain method recover their soul, as if becoming akin to the fire. And likewise all the elements have creations, destructions, changes and restorations from one to another" (text and trans. Taylor, 1938, 40–41).

25 See Hahn and Soentgen 2011.

26 On Serres's use of this theory, see Hahn 2006.

27 Hahn and Soentgen 2011.

28 See Stillman 1924/1960, 7–11.

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warm, human blood is most like quicksilver.[29] In those terms, quicksilver and its slow brother, silver, are kinds of the lifeblood of earth that have cognate human attributes, but also dangerous and miraculous qualities. Mercury and sulphur were the basic catalysts of life in these theories, and their basic interaction produced vermilion, the material that artists and others knew to be closest to blood.[30]

In these ways, Greek science in the period around 600 was able to draw connections and, in fact, to find substantial unity in the world, from cosmos to humanity to the matter underfoot. Not everyone would know or articulate the material world in this way, of course, but the general position was certainly deep seated in nearly every aspect of life.[31]

Those properties are similar to descriptions found in intellectuals' texts, alchemists' included, of the cosmic sympathies that guide and govern. And all these qualities establish ways for bodies to know, experience, and be guided to proximity to the divine and even contact with God. Geology's organic qualities, its patterns of growth, its abilities of motion and action, were common assumptions that linked the Bordeaux Pilgrim—never given a great deal of credit for his critical faculties—and great thinkers such as Proclus (412–85), who also wrote of the living qualities of stone and metals. Two principal camps, to generalize, claimed the field. On the one hand, Platonists, for whom the cosmos was caused by the One, saw soul in all things, making alive even those things that could not live otherwise. "Indeed, [soul] accounts for or is closely involved in a wide variety of functions that few people nowadays are inclined to ascribe to a single thing: reason, sensation, passions, appetite, and so on, but also life and growth, the 'vegetative' function people share with plants and the living, growing earth."[32] On the other hand, from the ancient world through the Byzantine, late antiquity was part of a long continuum wherein geology was life and provided passage from stones' and ores' matter to the highest insights into the unified workings of the cosmos.

Explanations for those workings varied among intellectuals writing in the fields of philosophy and science in this period. Aristotelians offered explanations from the other direction from Platonists, not top down and form on matter from above, but a solid stratum from which form could emerge and pass. Their philosophy in this period established a continuum from heaven to earth that broke the old dichotomy between the two realms. But they kept the notion of a dynamic universe filled with *pneuma*, or spirit, which pervaded the universe and established basic balances whereby all things strove to reach their own perfection, according to their nature. In this period—the sixth and seventh centuries—major arguments were mobilized that altered age-old Aristotelian

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29 Papathanassiou 2006, 176, translating an unpublished text by Stephanus: "blood composed of air is warm and human and is like quicksilver. Yellow bile composed of fire is warm and dry and is like copper. Black bile composed of earth is dry and cold and is the dross of both [quicksilver and copper]. Phlegm composed of water is cold and humid and is like the vapours of a watery solution of gold, which are the souls of copper."

30 See Smith 2014a, 110–12, and 2014b, 36, as well as Connor 1998, 28–29.

31 Smith 2012, 516: Plotinus and others are a "potential index of certain deep-seated assumptions that rarely made it to the surface of explicit discussion."

32 Smith 2012, 526–27.

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dogma. Adapted by philosophers such as John Philoponus (ca. 490–ca. 570) to the Christian deity, the *pneuma* became the divine spirit, heaven and earth were governed by the same principles, and the eternity of the universe was cut, replaced by creation and finitude.[33] A Christian understanding of the mechanics of the universe in these terms became increasingly exclusive in this period.

Two examples show how these models implicate the stuff of silver. The first comes from the life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, an Anatolian monk and bishop who lived during the reign of Heraclius (610–41); his hagiography dates shortly after that reign ended.[34] In one episode, the saint sends a deacon to Constantinople to purchase a silver service set for liturgical celebration. The deacon returns with a shiny new set, but Theodore discerns a problem with the silver. Not visible to a normal eye, the silver atoms had been debased by a previous form imposed on them, namely, that of a chamber pot for a prostitute. Judging the silver to be forever spoiled, Theodore had them both perform a prayer of blessing over the liturgical vessels, which tarnished before their eyes. Miraculous connoisseurship is revealed here. At a level distinguishable only by the saint, matter had sufficient form still to be intelligible as rotten and debased, but that level was below the current, apparently blameless form that the silver had taken. The real protagonist here, Theodore, is working through reductive concerns, of right and wrong substance, pure and contagious mixture. Almost radioactively tainted by sin, matter was in this episode the aspect that carried the body (in the end, the liturgical set), but the unformed substance of silver is the basic subject and discerned only by symptoms observable by an informed examiner.

The other example gives the positive side of mixture and contagion. Written a century or two after the fact, the *Narratio de Sancta Sophia* described the silver altar produced for Hagia Sophia in the sixth century in terms of a bravado mingling of stuff: in order to produce a work costlier than gold alone, Justinian collected a team of specialists in different materials, who advised him to combine all the most precious substances: "gold, silver, various precious stones, pearls and mother of pearl, copper, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass and every other metallic substance."[35] The craftsmen ground the sub-

33 On Philoponus, see Sambursky 1962; Wildberg 2008; Sorabji 2010b; Torrance 1999; and among other noteworthy studies, MacCoull 2010a.

34 Festugière 1970, 1:36–38 (42); Dawes and Baynes 1948/1996, 117–18. Festugière 1970, 2:196–98, also mentions a very similar contemporary story from Theophylactus Simocattes (active first half of the seventh century).

35 *Narratio de S. Sophia*: "Wishing to make the altar table much costlier (*polytelesteran*) than gold, he called in many specialists and told them so. They said to him. 'Let us place in a smelting furnace gold, silver, various precious stones, pearls and mother of pearl, copper, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass and every other metallic substances (*hylen*).' Having ground all of these in mortars and bound them up they poured them into the smelting furnace. After the fire had kneaded together (*anamaxamenon*) these (substances), the craftsmen removed them from the fire and poured them into a mould, and so the altar-table was cast, priceless mixture. In this way, he set it up, and underneath it, he placed columns of pure gold with precious stones and enamels; and the stairs all round upon which the priests stand to kiss the altar table he made of pure silver. As for the basin of the altar-table, he made it of priceless stones and gilded it. Who can behold the appearance of the altar table without being amazed? Who indeed can comprehend it as it changes

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stances in mortars, smelted them all at once, and kneaded them together, and finally poured them in a mould. The text gives other extravagant descriptions of the liturgical furnishings, but the effect is also noteworthy: the resultant material brought out wonder in viewers (naturally), and it more compellingly altered colour and brilliance, so that sometimes it was golden and sometimes silvery in sheen and glow, but also alternating with sapphire; it was able simultaneously to include all colours and hues.

This narrative has a number of points of contact with my argument: in the first place, it shows the nature of mixture according to understandings of the period, that is to say, as a blend without loss of individual characteristics. Each material retained in some way an aspect of its own appearance and substance that played out in the altar cladding. Such questions of identity and mixture had been debated throughout this period. The examples of torches and woven cloth often played into these philosophical discussions: torches when bundled together can seem united, but are perfectly distinct when they are separated, and likewise, cloth of many-coloured threads can appear one colour, but examination of the weave reveals individual threads and colours. For Platonists, "mixture is one of the delusions so characteristic of the world of seeming and becoming,"[36] but for an erstwhile Aristotelian such as Philoponus, while mixture is ultimately reducible to the four elements, above that level, substances, such as water and wine, retain their particularity while losing or reducing their actuality.[37] Without that position, every combination above the four elements would have been very hard to comprehend and to describe, according to how we know the world.

In the second place, the process described has a great deal in common with methods of alchemy preserved in late antique sources. The kneading of metal to produce certain effects occurs as a cognate to breadmaking, because as we've noted, alchemy has many cognate forms in other fields such as cookery and agriculture. The kneading takes place there because the smiths are working with a yeast—namely, gold. Gold is a seed, like semen or yeast, that enlivens and engenders all with which it comes into direct contact in such processes.

In the third place, this description takes us back to the Menil silver plate. That object is an antidote, as so many things are when considered in themselves very carefully, to mental or spiritual anagogy as the prescribed means for late antique people to overcome the limitations of this world and to traverse to the next. The conditions of display and points of contact with such a plate allow us to imagine what that anonymous narrator could be describing, that is, the play, growth, and change of substance so richly seen in gold and silver, but evident in all materials in descending show. In this way, the plate comments on its own circumstances. It can reveal, if looked at in light and space, its silvery, watery quality, when forms submerge in that glowing field; it can stabilize

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colour and brilliance, sometimes appearing to be gold, at other places silver, another gleaming with sapphire—in a word, reflecting seventy-two hues according to the nature of the stones, pearls and all the metals?" See Preger 1901–7/1975, 1:94.17–96.6 (17); Mango 1986, 99 (slightly modified).

36 de Haas 2003, 262–63.

37 Erismann 2014; Sorabji 2010a, 24–26; de Haas 1999; Sambursky 1962, 99–121; and for Philponus, Sorabji 2004b, 291–94 (20a.4–7) and Sorabji 2004a,178–80 (5c.2).

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and coalesce into that legible moment of communion with Christ; it can also show its golden substance, which ferments and grows the plate to the perfection that only gold can give. Such an object can recapitulate in its matter and form the very nature of the world and its relation to God. Nothing is eternal but God, according to thinkers such as Philoponus, and that belief—strongly against tradition—became increasingly common in this period.[38] God created and provided motivation to all matter, and nothing reduces entirely to nonbeing (except in its form).[39] For Philoponus, this argument about the non-perishability of substance can also apply—strikingly—to the Eucharistic materials, too. So the bread can become flesh, as he wrote in his refutation of Proclus in *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World* (529), but when the form of the flesh has perished, the form of the flesh can be "non-being," and yet the body or substance remains itself.[40] And so for the wine as well: "For when the wine is changed into blood, straight away the form of the wine is destroyed; and likewise, if the bread changes into flesh, the very form itself of the bread has not become flesh, but rather it itself has on the one hand gone into non-being, yet on the other in its substrate the form of the flesh is generated."[41]

God-motivated, but not activated by ritual or prayers in this model, what Philoponus is describing is in some fashion the tainted substance of Theodore of Sykeon's silver. Form is passing, however miraculously produced, and substance retains its nature, however it is shaped. In other words, the plate and icon, like so many objects or things in that world, can reveal their own self-directed anagogy through their substances.

As in Baxandall's aphorism, the object is its own lens on its own circumstances—its recursions are always rich. The forms on the plate show the very anagogy in matter: Christ is giving his own blood, but the wine remains, even having received that form, while the bread is sitting there, separated flesh (though unrecognizable as such from its appearance) of the man behind it. On the Menil silver plate, the Lord is giving his very (undiminishing) body for eating and drinking by the two princes of the apostles.[42] The bread is still bread, clearly—this is Philoponus's point, as Leslie MacCoull says: "there is no need to imagine some kind of incorporeal matter mysteriously at work in our world. On the contrary: the three-dimensional performs as matter perfectly well."[43]

Here is a remarkably realist philosophy that also finds resonance in hagiography and other literary genres, such as ekphrasis. Alchemy is a cognate system of thought, one in which the substratum of matter can be directed and purified to its best essence. Likewise, the liturgical action of the Eucharist demanded purity on the part of the participant in this period, so in a remarkable conjunction of thinking and being, transitive

38 Burrus 2013 reveals some of the beautiful complexity of this position.

39 See, for example, Torrance 1999, 323–26.

40 On this issue, see the excellent MacCoull 2010b.

41 Rabe 1899, 358.14–20, trans. MacCoull 2010b, 320. For an alternative translation, see Share 2010, 41.

42 On a comparable plate, see Krueger 2014, 113–14.

43 MacCoull 2010b. 322.

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matter refined Christians to their best, most divine form.[44] Gold is the divine substance that pulls along *every* other substance in its wake toward accomplishing its ultimate self-realization, its best essence. Science told them about such matters, and the things around them told them what their science could say.

The mix and mingling that we all do was active on stuff's side, too. The wax was greatly daring in the image of the archangel, and the silver of the plate was deeply involved in its search for perfection. Movingly, matter was able to bestride these passages between material and spiritual realms. The angelic wax might have been about anagogy for Agathias, but that anagogy was, ironically, downward, to the matter that made present and real to him the fearful archangel.[45] At this level, substance trumps form. Agathias's semblance of the archangel's form is only ever stated at the level of wax and colour, the basis of the encaustic technique of icon painting. Tellingly, the archangel is never described as such; he has none of the attributes other texts might give him, such as wings, a beardless face, youthful beauty, a staff or orb. He is revealed on the level of matter, the wax and colours. And the viewer is likewise made into a semblance: the moulding of the archangel is also performed on that imaginary viewer, who is engraved within himself or herself in that same spiritual semblance. Substance, shared among God's creation, is the stratum truer to the divine than form, and the mingling of this matter, our mire in our world's stuff, shows forth the archangel's anagogy, descending to the "deep intellection" of strangely invisible matter.

44 On the move from communal to penitence and purity in understanding and performance of the Eucharist, see Krueger 2014, 127–29.

45 I have argued for this movement in Byzantine and some modern art in Peers 2018c.

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Chapter 7

LATE ANTIQUE MAKING AND WONDER

I ENTER INTO this discussion on making with the fear that appropriate modesty causes. Treating craft in the late antique world, let alone the Middle Ages, is a humbling enterprise, not any less for the company, for Anthony Cutler has for over twenty years been examining, with typical vigour and incisiveness, just these issues of maker, making, and made, to provide a cognate-filled triad that covers the range of craft's life. He has presented compelling arguments and careful analyses, and he has treated the life range of objects without neglecting the thing at the centre of craft's process.[1]

Cutler discussed the "shadow cast by a higher plane" onto late antique craft, that is, the way craft became simply a way of arguing on a symbolic level at the expense of making itself.[2] While engaging the symbolic world that craft encourages, I will argue for directing that plane back, in a sense, on the things themselves. By looking closely at the things and their processes in late antiquity, I want to argue for the hand making a world in its thinking and practice that are cognates of divine world-making skills. Even if writers did not articulate that animating process always as such, craft skills—such as metal casting, painting, and ceramics—*made* worlds, small and large, and they extended their agency, their material thinking, into a world constantly filled and refilled with new versions of world-making things.[3]

Taking this position means pushing back against a deeply held bias in our culture for the priority of interior thinking and against thinking with the body.[4] For example, in an article published in *The New Yorker*, a test for Parkinson's Disease privileged unseen thought as a sign of mental well-being. When the author attempted to experiment by moving objects around before submitting his answer, he was told, "Putting action before thinking is the kind of error you made. You did something and then thought about it. That's less efficient and less elegant than planning a strategy."[5] Of course, that statement cannot be validated, and many of us would not support such a position on principle, but the statement constitutes a diagnosis and carries serious weight for human subjects.

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1 Some of Anthony Cutler's work on the subject is listed in the Bibliography. On craft's conception and realities, see the useful historical studies of Magoulias 1976; Burford 1998, 186–200; Sparkes 1998; Morel 1993, 214–44; and Burford 1972, 184–218. And now the significant study Kessler 2019, 59–89.

2 Cutler 1997, 971.

3 Bray 2015 makes a case for her artistic practice as anthropological research in which a portrait gets "more intimate, truthful and 'thick' than were it to have been done in just a few hours." Artistic practice learns and discloses essential truths about humans, in this approach, as it can about materials and materiality.

4 See, for instance, Adamson 2007, for a carefully reasoned response.

5 Kinsley 2014, 30.

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In modernism, that emphasis on innate abilities and intellectual inspiration is fundamental to our value judgments of made things, namely, art. The debate begins, perhaps, with Goethe and Schiller on dilettantism in 1799: Does a real artist, as opposed to an amateur, need more than genius (whatever that is)? In the twentieth century, modernism went strongly toward "genius," because the hands of the real artist were guided by idea, concept, and inspiration at the expense of skill, technique, and material knowledge. To take just one example, the German painter and teacher Willi Baumeister wrote that genius is not taught, has no experience or standard; modern art emancipates us from training or vocation.[6] In terms laid out by Gilbert Ryle, for example, we value museum knowledge over instrumental knowledge,[7] or the elegance and efficiency of the thinking over the same qualities in the doing. These positions have a long history beyond modernism, but bias against making and craft—hand thinking—is still a prevalent mode of explaining our relation to the material world.[8]

So I am reacting to the weight and value, as I perceive them, of previous positions in the history of art. In the first place, my insistence on relation among all these agents—makers, things, and users—comes from recent work in anthropology that allows me to argue for a world livelier than we admit normally for our historical subjects and for ourselves.[9] In this way, craft's self-knowing process, a doing that thinks, rather than relying on rote learning and repetition, is a way into arguing for an extended mind that things bring into the world.[10] I posit an effective persuasion that craft can carry out in the world; its thinking, formed, but not determined by the maker, is in force and difficult to resist. I want to address aspects of revision and renovation that also implicate issues of "distributed authorship," in which objects carry marks of multiple traces of renovation and remaking.[11]

Finally, I want to focus on wonder—sensations of perplexity and astonishment that made things cause—as a way of approaching cultural models of makers and the effects and lives of the things they make. The Shield of Achilles in archaic and classical Greece provides incentive to think about the play of that model of the craftsman (Hephaestus), the commissioner (Thetis), and circles of recipients (among whom: Achilles, the Myrmidons, the Greeks, and all the strata of readers of the *Iliad*) extended into late antiquity. The uncertainties of wonder, its displacements, fear and attraction, are means by which craftsmen and craft extend their reach out into their world and put all their agencies into play.

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6 Baumeister 1947, 124–25.

7 Ryle 1971, 212–25. See also Polanyi 1974, 92.

8 See Mark 1995, but also Auther 2010.

9 For example, this pithy statement with tremendous potential from Conneller 2011, 20: "Becomings always exist in relation to something else (becoming-animal, becoming-stone)."

10 For example, see Descola 2013; Descola 2010; Marchand 2010; Ingold 2001; and essays in Rose and Rose 2000.

11 I also want to argue for a kind of social idealism around craft, which is often the case for writers on craftsmen in the modern world. I take Richard Sennet's model of social cohesion that arises from practicing craft to be very stimulating. See Sennett 2012.

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Craft Hands

The lives of almost all of the women and men who performed any kind of specialized work in late antiquity are invisible to us now. Representations show some of the *realia* of a studio,[12] but of course no representation is transparent to process.[13] Indeed, many representations of craftsmen—even if done by craftsmen, as they invariably were—reveal very little that we can see about the realities and processes of craft that are *self-reflective*. They are commissioned and interpreted for their symbolic, referential value. For example, at the other end of late antiquity, the images of craftsmen in the painted program of the desert palace Qusayr ʻAmra (Jordan, early eighth century) are not autobiographical in a transparent way, but highly determined by the overall demands of the program in that set of rooms.[14] In other words, craftsmen most often describe themselves through their work and its outcomes, not by representational self-portraits.

The material results of that thought-filled work, which is craft, tells us almost all we can know about the skills and knowledge of those workers or craftsmen. [15] They scarcely reveal aspects of craftsmen's beliefs or aspirations in ways that we can understand. But made things can demonstrate how craftsmen used their work to gain the world a thing, a "letting appear" that confirmed, extended, and amplified their agency.[16] For example, Karl Marx made this point of working on and with the world as a full reciprocity: "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes himself." His examples of making are about loss of will and subordination, but I will not admit alienation is part of the process I am describing. For Marx, the spider and the bee are supreme craftsbeings, because they do not have an ideal form imposed on them for production—they do not have need to impose preformed images from their head directly on the world.[17]

Insisting on the skill of late antique craftsmen runs against certain official expressions that survive in hagiographies and theological texts. Church officials, priests, bishops, and saints alike revealed their suspicion of the independent hands of craftsmen, and they were often, at least in public pronouncements, willing to denigrate or neutralize the potential of unchecked power that makers and their things had.[18] For example, an episode in the hagiography of Symeon the Younger (ca. 600) reveals an attempt on

12 Such as the Roman sarcophagus in Lazaridou 2011, 62.

13 On this issue, see Lehmann 2012.

14 See Fowden 2004, 215–16; and see Maranci 2015, 146–56, on portraits of workers and their crafts at Zuart'noc'.

15 See Dormer 1994, 14: "Tacit knowledge refers to a body of knowledge which we have gained through experience—both through the experience of the senses and through the experience of doing work of various kinds. Tacit knowledge differs from propositional knowledge in that it cannot easily be articulated or described in words."

16 I take the "letting appear," or "Erscheinenlassen," from Martin Heidegger: in his essay "Bauen, wohnen, denken," he described "*techne*" as a dynamic process of bringing into being, rather than a stamp of mind on world. See Heidegger 2000, 161; Heidegger 1971, 159.

17 Marx 1962, 4:178; Marx 1957, 1:169–70.

18 See Peers 2012b.

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the part of the saint to dispense craft skill to a young man who wishes to become a sculptor.[19] The saint touched the chest of the young man in order to give him the inspiration and skill that God would provide. The gesture is almost romantic, in the sense of a generalized, transforming touch of the whole body—it is not placing a hand on the head, the place of intellect, or taking the man by the hand, where the wished-for skill would begin its world changing. The saint channelled skill and inspiration, the apprentice accepted the hierarchy of craft, and presumably—according to the text—the sculpture was acceptable to the church. And yet this institutionally idealized process cannot be "real," for sculptors learned their craft through watching, doing, and working with and against materials in the usual ways that craft is acquired and enacts.

A World-Making Basket

My point is that humans and materials work together in a mutually enlivening process of more or less ability or interest in self-articulation on the part of either. As Chris Gosden has recently written, "Artifacts do not reflect intellectual schemes, but help to create and shape them."[20] Basket weaving is an excellent example of this process, and as an ancient art with not much technological change over millennia and with global applications, it allows us to see how weavers still manipulate raw materials into new, practical, pleasing objects. And yet weavers, like all craftsmen, do not impose an order or image; they must work with and on the material, just as the material works with and on them.[21] Moreover, the work is not simply performed by a person emptied of mind and initiative, fully trained to produce in rote; it does not eliminate creativity and free expression, because materials always insist on their equal role.

Baskets survive from the late antique period, mainly from Egypt, and anthropological work in that country also reveals essential features of making.[22] The craft depends on intense concentration and full-bodied engagement with materials.[23] But this precious equilibrium between attention to materials and the application of acquired knowledge is also seen in other contexts, such as modern workshops, in which highly developed skill is self-maintained at great cost in a battle to ensure quality and output.[24] Basket making is likewise improvisational to some extent, while maintaining a need for results. That is a little obvious, maybe, but the point is that unlike mechanical production, handicraft is process, and the environmental, material elements matter as much as the skill and strength of the maker. Where one makes a basket, indoors or outdoors, with a firm set or hand held, with resistant strands or pliant, all these are participants with maker in a process that does not need, maybe cannot have, a predetermined outcome.

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19 *Acta Sanctorum, Maii*, 5: 349B.

20 Gosden 2013, 39.

21 On this process, see Ingold 2011; and also Ingold and Lucas 2007, 296–98.

22 See Wright 1959; Colt 1962, 59–60; and Wendrich 1999.

23 This engagement occurs in ways that perhaps reveal some of the tensions that Marx saw leading to alienation in modern workers.

24 Dormer 1994, 40–41.

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Moreover, baskets have no frame, no inside or outside, because wrapping transverse fibres makes them alternately inside and outside.[25] That organic quality makes it sometimes difficult to know when a basket is finished, though when it is finished, it can last a very long time. The basket then emerges in a mutual agreement through an interaction of skilled action and materials, and repetitive, attentive action makes the resultant thing regular and complete.

The acquisition and development of such skills is a social activity, naturally, and in this world, it took place in workshops within master-apprentice frameworks. The mosaicists in the apse at San Vitale worked in tandem, beginning in the middle of the apse, for example, and worked outward from that point; constant communication, mutual realization, and result matching must have taken place in that creative process.[26] That type of craft learning could not really be called independent, nor is it a fully integrated activity shared between teacher and pupil. It leads by example, in fact, to another kind of knowledge that has been called a "material consciousness," that is, a way of knowing that develops through sensitive, attentive familiarity with materials.[27] This kind of knowledge operates, perhaps, as a basis for a "dialogic social behavior,"[28] and if that is so, it comes out of those particular master-apprentice and maker-material relationships. Beyond the social ramifications, that set of relationships enlarges the maker's experience and knowledge of the world. As Peter Dormer wrote, "Craft knowledge is genuine knowledge. To possess it in any form is to see the world in an enriched way compared with someone who does not possess it."[29] Anna Odland Portisch tells a story about a craftswoman in Kazakhstan who constantly eyed and coveted her niece's new outfit—until she could manage to persuade the girl to relinquish it so that she could make a wall hanging from the yarn,[30] a story that reveals the particular acuity with which craftspeople look at the world, not as a passive field, but as a realm for creative engagement and fashioning.

In that sense, baskets are both the result of a set of actions between maker and materials and answers to a vast number of needs in the world for containing, storage and transport. The objects themselves are modest, almost unremarkable, but they are found in a large number of contexts and in endless forms and sizes. Their domestic and ecclesiastic uses are obvious, but their adaptability is remarkable, such as being used as insulating shutters in late antique houses in Egypt.[31] Holding and containing are natural uses to which these things have always been put, but they have added valences when they are represented in late antique art as sources of bounty. So, for example, at

25 Ingold 2000, 55.

26 See Andreescu-Treadgold 1992, 34.

27 See Venkate 2010.

28 Sennett 2012, 199–220, and Sennett 2008.

29 Dormer 1994, 68. Kentridge 2014 is very rich in such observations on practice, perhaps most movingly on drawing as negotiation with the world.

30 Portisch 2010.

31 See Dauterman Maguire, Maguire, and Flowers 1989, 89–90. And on basketry's connections to the development of the codex, see Boudalis 2018, 28–29, 54, 59–60.

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Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, baskets (among other things) contain the bounty of paradise, and in other scenes, such as the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, they are vessels of miraculous plenitude.

The Stuff of Making

These modest things, then, are impressive distillations of the dynamic relationship among makers and materials, of the work that happens in the flows of matter and attentive, evolving, reactive skill by which thing and maker reciprocally emerge. This model, in general terms, applies equally well to humble objects such as baskets as it does to elevated categories such as like metalworking, bronze casting, mosaic, and painting.[32] Just as all these categories of making belong to a more undifferentiated group of activities than they do for us and our fine-art traditions, so all these ways of making take part in these same cooperative world-making actions and energies.

Can worked materials and the artisan's work form and change how we understand nature or life? And can the raw materials themselves also determine a craftsman's approach, experience, and outcome?[33] Such questions have a history, and materials are not absolute in the world, because they have explanations and functions that change with period and culture.[34] So engaging in a kind of materialist iconology can open up some of the ways materials and their worked states participate in a world-defining process.[35] How one explains the materiality of reeds and twigs, for example, might be one way into the inherent meaning of their worked forms.

Likewise, to travel to the other end of the spectrum of material values, how one explains the meaning of gold as mineral and medium should tell us a great deal about what the material and resultant thing *did* in its culture.[36] So the small gold box in the Menil Collection does a great deal still, but it does more when its material explanations are examined and its worked qualities are explored (Figures 5, 6, 12, and 14).[37] Only in this way can we approach the particular work that the material and its partnering maker did and how that thing went to work in its world. The box is small scale, and I want to talk about wonder and the miniature, too, but in the first place, I want to address briefly what gold did in late antiquity. By its doing, I mean the explanations that culture had for its materiality.

That understanding goes back at least to classical antiquity, and it strikingly undermines our understanding of materials as inert. The geology is based on mixtures of ele-

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32 On that categorization, see, for example, Scott 2006; Olson 2005; and Lapatin 2003.

33 See Bensaude-Vincent and Newman 2007, 9, and Cutler 2011, 186.

34 An important offshoot of material-culture studies needs to be noted here, because it examines the interplay between matter and form, but gives significant credit to the *Stoffe* or basic substances of making and life (and social effects). See Boscagli 2014; Espahangizi and Orland 2014; Hahn 2014; and Naumann, Strässle, and Torra-Mattenklott 2006.

35 See Zaunschirm 2012.

36 Beer 1983.

37 See Peers 2013, Peers 2012b, and above.

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ments, and most metals were thought to be primarily water based, that is, water trapped in the earth and hardened into metals such as gold and silver. This elemental combining then is an animating force in the earth, rather like a vital force that runs through creation like a lifeblood. Aristotle spoke of the spirit in the moisture within the earth that, combined with life heat, produced these metals. In some way that Aristotle could not explain, that combination charged the materials with soul: "In earth and in water, life occurs, and plants through the water in the earth appear, and in the water is spirit, and in everything the soul life-heat is present, so that in this way all things are full of soul."[38] If the world has soul, it also has feelings, and Pliny the Elder describes the earth trembling in indignation at the rapaciousness of humanity; we would be better off if we had never broken ground and had never succumbed to the greed for what lies under earth's skin.[39] These general notions are basic to a material iconology, and they can be applied across a wide chronological range, because they continued to be in play well into the Renaissance, as Michael Cole has shown in his work on Benvenuto Cellini.[40]

That play of spirit in matter was an essential part of the iconology of matter in that world, and it also affects the resultant forms, such as this box, and its functions. In that sense, the watery nature of gold is part of the enlivening action apparent from careful attention to the box itself—perhaps better, from careful imagination, because to perform this action is to forget the ways most of us encounter such things, as well-lit objects in museum cases.[41] After something is made, the materials remain, and they continue to do things, as in this box, to shimmer and to halate in weak light, to disappear to lustre in stronger light, to vacillate between elemental states apparently even as the box glosses and maintains its natural lambent substantiality. The limitations and expansions of life, one might say, are the subject of something like this mere box. The box cannot hide its history as water and earth, ensouled by geological process, and it adapts its nature to the ways the maker forms it. The dappling and denting, its uneven surfaces, are the result of handicraft, not machine work, obviously, and the necessary way maker and materials worked through the sheeting's irregularities demonstrate the box's faceted reflecting and absorbing light. Seeing these aspects, imagining them, as it were, means working against our own experiences, not just those determined by museums, and reexamining senses and relation to the natural world.

As we have noted before, in the work of modern artists such as Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg and James Lee Byers, gold also is the matter at hand.[42] Klein's Monogold series reveals the instability and partial quality of our perception of gold; it always shifts

38 *De generatione animalium*, 3.11 (762a). See also Theophrastus in Caley and Richards 1956, 19 (1). Likewise, gems are created through various actions in the environment, most importantly by celestial bodies such as the sun and moon, but also by climatic conditions, such as heat and cold. See Halleux 1981, 50–51, on theories of Poseidonius (ca. 135–51 BCE), for example. And for miraculous or otherwise inexplicable generation, see Epstein 2012 and Lugt 2004.

39 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 33.1.

40 Cole 2011 and Cole 2002. See also Weinryb 2016.

41 See Greenblatt 1990. On the triangulation of poetry, water, and gold, see Usher 2019, 48–54.

42 The artists are included not only because of their mutual interest in working with and through

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and changes, moves from gold to silver, reflects and absorbs, shows its environment back while staying aloof from it (Figure 13). These qualities are useful to observe and describe, because they are inherent to gold as matter and apply equally well in principle to the late antique box. But we are minimalists at heart, and we know the gold is just gold.[43] For people who made and witnessed the gold box in late antiquity, gold was more than the itself that we give it. Gold was a divine material that demonstrated in its birth, its making, and its made state the wonder of the world that can contain and recapitulate divine truths and presence.

Emergent meaning in craft made the divine immanent, and craftsmen's knowledge and experience of the world were instrumental in this process.[44] But that reality is worth stating, because it asserts the distance between a theory of practice and activities based in practice and experience in a craft. It is the difference between reading a language with a dictionary and actually manipulating all potentialities of a language in its diverse forms—or, coming close to home, like writing about painting versus painting.[45] Separating the makers and users into a teleological relationship where the makers gave the box over after having done their separate work is probably false. Different agents were involved in the making and use of the box, in all likelihood, not least the materials themselves, from the conception of a container, through its making, and then its birth into the world, and then its long life, which shows on the gold skin's marking, and meaning was distributed among and by all of them.[46]

Our mastery of materials made into things is an easy illusion—let alone our mastery of the things that result—but anyone who has worked by hand on wood or metal realizes that one is necessarily in a compromising position before materials.[47] The gold painting series by Robert Rauschenberg abounds in certain ironies about this sense of

gold, but also because their artworks were included in Peers 2013 and are discussed in the exhibition volume. For a comparable exploration, see Dupré et al. 2014.

43 Analogies with modernist approaches to gold are suggestive for understanding the divergent materialities at work. For the modern position, see the useful essay Gehring 2012.

44 Ludwig Wittgenstein was dealing with linguistic determinism, that words have a meaning but also a *work*, and in this way, he indicated an obvious craft reality: "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to master a technique." See Wittgenstein 1958, 81*e* (199).

45 See Keller 2001 on the divergences in perceptions of an activity between practitioner and spectator, master and novice.

46 See Knappett 2004, 43–51 and Knappett 2005.

47 Warnier 2001, 8–9. And see Latour 2007, 74–75, on *homo faber* as *homo fable*: "I never act, but I am always surprised by what I do. That which is acting through me is also surprised by what I do, by the occasion offered to mutate and change and bifurcate that which is offered, by me and by the circumstances surrounding me, to that which has been invited, recovered, welcomed." Moreover, Gordon 1979, 21: "In the products both of ordinary labour and of the artist, conception is translated into artifact, into an object, which exists independently of those intentions. An idea is concretized, but in such a way that the object transcends the idea: the object does not merely 'betray' the intention which formed it, but provides the objective basis for further acts of signification. Its meaning is no longer confined to the intention of the maker, which has no special privilege and may, in a given society, have no privilege at all."

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mastery (Figures 13 and 16). Of course, he was a maker revealing his making at every turn, despite his denial of art as such, and he certainly played with the arbitrariness of process and the visual interest and pleasure that could result. In this series, he applied gold leaf to fabric or cardboard and allowed the qualities of gold as glowing surface to emerge when it wanted to, as it were, and the surface qualities of the support, fabric etc., to do so when it could. The subject is the gold and what it does, according to certain varying aspects of his practice. Here, materials and hands work together without forethought, but full of process thought.[48]

I am arguing that the gold in the late antique gold box does more because it was allowed to perform beyond its surface, where Rauschenberg stayed so productively. While still significant, surface was just the place for late antique craftsmen (and anyone else in that culture) to find the different meanings, if not also the wonder, of the divine: transmutable matter moves toward gold always, naturally, just as human nature moves toward the divine, and gold is the perfect condition of salvation.[49] For that reason, one of the first acts performed by Adam and Eve after tilling the soil was setting up a forge; they were crafting redemption.[50] Labour and making were basic ways in which the heirs of Adam's fault could find a return to divine likeness.[51] On the one hand, pseudo-Macarius (ca. 400) wrote about Christian self-fashioning being comparable to a portrait maker capturing a likeness (in this case, a Christian studying the face of Christ), and on the other hand, and in a less metaphorical sense of craft, Egyptian monks wove reeds into mats while in communal prayer and reading.[52] Handiwork accompanied the making of salvation and guided the hand, and thus the soul, back to the divine.[53]

The shape of the object, with its lid and receptacle, its boxness, recalls sarcophagi, and so death; it was connected with death, too, in its likely use as a reliquary.[54] In that way, moving from its utility as container and object of beauty and wonder, the box also travels from craft to art; as it withdraws in its role as holder of divine substance, it becomes the precious miniature that gives sacred death emotional resonance.[55] In this world, death was in life, and vice versa, and the box's material performance made that death dramatically, physically alive to one—all the while showing the animate, perdurant metal life of the made thing. Gold is untarnishable, seemingly permanent in its conditions, and its deathless life is a perfect surround for sacred relics. That surplus or excess is the place where enlivened material is made dynamically active in the world

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48 Here, I would note diverse examples of things making arguments and, moreover, demonstrating them nonverbally and materially. See Haug 2014; Kessler 2012; and Faraone 2011.

49 See Mertens 2004.

50 See the tenth-century ivory in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan, for example, in Dupré, et al. 2014, 12 and Daim 2010, 198.

51 Ballan 2011.

52 Peers 2004; Zanetti and Davis 2016; Veilleux 1968, 307 and 309n142.

53 Painters, moreover, performed acts of piety through their active practice. See Limberis 2011, 53–96 and Webb 2007.

54 This indexical evocation is skeuomorphism, according to Knappett 2002, 108–10.

55 Olson 2005, 327. See also Kohring 2011.

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by knowing hands of its maker.[56] Indeed, gold's material transcendence paradoxically foregrounds the madeness, the process by which it came into this being.[57]

The Craft Life of Things

At variance with the notion of authority in modernism,[58] craft presupposes the distribution of authorship across makers who work together and also through time. In *Medieval Modern*, Alexander Nagel glances at mosaic through the lens of the interest of Marshal McLuhan in Byzantium.[59] In striking ways, McLuhan's notion of the author's role, Nagel argues, approaches medieval notions: "Authorship before print was to a large degree the building of a mosaic." Mosaic has long life in part because of the durability of the materials, but also because of the ongoing work of restoration that takes place on these fields. In effect, mosaics reveal an unstable set of practices with open, distributed authorship where revision and restoration are the means by which things survive.

Craft is clearly in play when mosaic fields are being made and mended, however successful we consider the result or however much we devalue the intervention at all. When interventions occur in painting or sculpture, we are almost always disappointed. The interference by Medicean painters in the Rabbula Gospels (Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana, cod. Plut. 1, 56) was not a positive addition, for example, and discovering those Renaissance alterations to the sixth-century manuscript took a surprising amount of time.[60]

Marble heads received attention by Christian editors in late antiquity, and crosses were added or imposed on heads carved already in the Roman period. A sculptor—if he deserves the name (I grant him the privilege at least)—recarved the face of a female figure in the fifth or sixth century, evidently to remake a face into a human-cross composite. And another head, also recently exhibited in travelling shows, shows related work by a carver who incised the cross on another female head, this time of Aphrodite.[61] The former is certainly engaged in a stronger statement and with more skill than the latter, but is that a qualitative distinction that matters? This act of replacing face with cross is brutal on one level, but perhaps one could also see this alteration as a way for an argument

56 So I am arguing against the excellent, but to my mind limiting argument in Schwarz 2012.

57 Conneller 2011, 13, provides a useful corrective for going too far to materials' side: "at times, materials do seem more important in the generation of an artifact and the affects it may come to have; at other times, materials' properties are subsumed, transformed or transcended in the making of an object. As a result, a meta-theory where things are always animate only by virtue of their materials does not allow us to conceptualize the variability of past interactions."

58 No matter how hard Rauschenberg fought "art," he was still Rauschenberg.

59 Nagel 2012, 159.

60 Bernabò 2008. And see Heilmeyer 2004, 409, on remaking of bronze in the Renaissance.

61 Drandaki, Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and Tourta 2013, 60 (created second/first century BCE, revised fifth/sixth century, marble, 25 × 20 cm, now in the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, in Rhodes, Greece); and Lazaridou 2011, 147–48 (created first century, revised fifth/sixth century?, marble, 40 cm high, now in the National Archaeological Museum, in Athens); and see Kristensen 2012, who stresses purification.

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to be made about the indelibility of the cross in all reality. Justin Martyr in the second century was already making claims that the cross is like a Christian DNA that was visible only after the Incarnation and Crucifixion (See Figure 3).[62] Since then, we can know that all of reality is built from this building block of life. While unsubtle, this face clearly comprises the cross, the meeting of brow and nose that is one of the crosses embedded in the surface of our bodies. The victory stamp of cross and inscription demonstrates its reality in the partition of a human face into Christian quadrants.[63] Here certainly is an unstable set of practices that served to reveal skeleton and leave flesh, and both authors retain some claim to copyright here.

A bronze figurine of Dionysus likewise had its active life extended by craftsmen separated by centuries (now in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia).[64] Cast in the second/third century, it was once more elaborate than it is now, in the sense that peg holes reveal it also had a wreath and a cloak (and of course, all four members), but in the eighth/ninth century, a new craftsman approached the object and revised it for new work. That new work was perhaps twofold: the presentation of Psalm 29: 3 (in the Revised Standard Version: "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters") as a belt resting on the hips of the god. The text begins to the right of a cross, which rests midway between navel and genitals; it does not follow the same sinuous curve of the hips, but its straight lines serve only to accentuate the sensuous S pose of the god. If that cross might be said to be trying too hard, then the cross-shaped monograms on chest and thighs also work at sealing and inoculating.

I want to give proper credit to the person who performed these revisions, because to my mind, they are very sensitive to combining what might seem the incommensurable of sacred and sensual. Although the belief in the innate qualities of material that relate to purity/impurity was also in play, as it was in the story related in the seventh-century vita of Theodore of Sykeon, when the saint perceived the taint in the previous use in a profane context of a silver chalice and paten set, this statuette obviously did not partake of the same unforgiving text-world analysis that Theodore directed at that silver.[65]

In the Theodore of Sykeon story, once form is impressed, matter is marked, but here, the statuette is a telling example of an object that was determined to retain essential aspects of its original makeup while operating as something quite different at the same time. Irony has to be playing a role here, too, for that Psalm passage was also used at Epiphany for blessing the waters. The head, too, underwent revision, and it was opened

62 See Peers 2004. Gerhard Richter in his *Kreuz* from 1997 claims to have measured himself to determine the proportions of the work.

63 The face is an essential and understudied aspect of late antique self-understandings. For example, the theologian Evagrius (345–99) wrote: "So just as the mind receives the mental representations of all sensible objects, in this way it receives also that of its own organism—for this too is sensible—but of course with the exception of one's face, for it is incapable of creating a form of this within itself since it has never seen itself" [*On Thoughts* 25]. See Casiday 2013, 170, on the assimilative power of faces for Christian and Christ.

64 Cutler 2013, 172, and Althaus and Sutcliffe 2006, 50, 86, 171. On medieval revisions, see Cutler 2011 and Cutler 2010.

65 Festugière 1970, 1:36–38 (42). And see above on this episode.

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at the crown to provide room for a small receptacle to hold, perhaps, oil or water or wine—something precious, at least. One can certainly wish to know more about this piece (its context is not clear, since it was found in the Don River in 1867), but the distribution of craft authorship over the surface and its interior is worth noting. While the cloak was likely missing by the time the revisions were made, the craftsman was evidently sensitive to the material qualities of the bronze and respected them to the degree of addressing the contours and surfaces of the figure in a way that the sculptors who intervened in the marble female heads did not.

Bronze casting, its materials, and its processes, have a long and fascinating history, from Pliny's description in the *Natural History*, where he ascribed its invention to Hephaestus, to the Italian Renaissance, when the self-heroizing narrative of Cellini kept the stakes at an Olympian height.[66] I cannot absolutely establish the connections, but I want to indicate the possibilities for bronze and casting in the late antique world that might have influenced choices made by the craftsman in updating and intensifying this statuette's work.

Writers had long used bronze casting as a means to comprehend drawing order out of chaos and for world making. Moreover, making humanity out of earth was also explored as a natural, even divine, precedent to this craft. The molten material used in casting was sometimes, evocatively but also in some sense literally, like blood.[67] Minerals and ores are like earth's blood, not precisely, but blood is in the earth, and like blood does in this world, it becomes other things while retaining its nature. Hematite, for example, is obviously a bloody remnant in the earth, congealed somehow and transformed into a precious stone.[68] And if blood could be stone, the reverse was logically possible. Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 263–339) tells of marble columns sympathetically weeping blood before the terrible martyrdom of Ennatha in 308; the stoas were forever stained, because they refused to relinquish their bloody witness. Moreover, the streets were wetted from no other sources than the secreting flagstones, and many stones wept real salty tears. Their flesh suffered with her flesh.[69] (I am not claiming this as "fact," only that stones always had the potential in this world for secretion, transformation, and acting.)[70]

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66 See Grammaccini 1987, 163–64.

67 Galen (129–ca. 200), *Peri physikon dynameon*, 2.3.83; Brock 1916, 131: "But nature does not preserve the original character of any kind of matter; if she did so, then all parts of the animal would be blood—that blood, namely, which flows to the semen from the impregnated female and which is, so to speak, is like the statuary's wax, a single uniform matter, subjected to the artificer. From this blood there arises no part of the animal which is as red and moist [as blood is], for bone artery, vein, nerve, cartilage, fat, gland, membrane, and marrow are not blood, though they arise from it."

68 Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 19 (37).

69 See, generally, the tremendous work of Silverman 2009; but also Morel 1998, 43–85, specifically on the self-production of images in nature.

70 Cureton 1861, 33–34 (Syr. 35): "The atmosphere was perfectly calm and clear, when, all on a sudden, many of the columns of the porticos in the city emitted spots as it were of blood, while the market-places and the streets became sprinkled and wet as with water, although not a single drop

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Blood was also a highly changeable material, altering according to conditions to breast milk and sperm, for example. And as a constituent material of all life, it also extended itself into the natural world again, for example as honey. Honey is all the more powerful because it is an excretion by bees, but incorruptible, and paradoxically an almost miraculous nutrient, like breast milk.[71] Milk, however, loses it life the farther and longer it goes from the secreting body, and it becomes dangerous under those circumstances.[72] Honey, however, has an enduring quality that appears exempt from the constraints of time and space, and it was closest to ambrosia in this world.[73] Blood, tears, and milk all saturated the environment throughout antiquity and into the Byzantine period, and while their outward forms changed, the vivid viscousness flowed all through the landscape.[74]

I am trying to suggest here some of the things bronze was in that world, along with other cognate phenomena that have, of course, very different meanings for us. I can indicate then some of these lexical cognates: blood was another constituent material in the world that carried with it animation as an enspiriting, enlivening element.[75] The miracle and wonder of this element are fantastic, and they likewise need to inform our view of how bronze and its working were understood, from extraordinary skill to world making in its formation and renovation. Bronze workers into the Renaissance were fashioning life out of raw matter in ways God themself modelled, and those workers performed God's acts again in the creation of form and in the infusion of forms with vivacity (literally) that made real and present the latent life of materials.

This notion of God as first and perfect artist played a role in these conceptions of craft. According to Romanus the Melode in the sixth century, potting is God's act of creation of humanity, and Christ's blood was ink for writing; in these instances, the divine is not only the maker, but also the means of making. The Mandylion, Christ's miraculous self-portrait produced by his own blood (or sweat), is not just the best example of God taking in hand the accuracy of his own portrait; it even had the extended agency of God in making versions of itself and acted on its own.[76]

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had fallen from the heavens. And it was declared by the mouth of every one, that the stones shed tears and the ground wept; for even the senseless stones and the ground without feeling could not endure this foul and barbarous deed; and that the blood which flowed from the stones, and the earth which without any rain emitted as it were tears from its body, rebuked all these godless folk." Bardy 1967, 151, in the Greek version, just tears. See Patrich 2011, 269–70. On the stone that would have cried out to Jesus in Jerusalem, which Mark Twain was directed to when he visited the city, see Twain 1895, 575.

71 See Tétart 2004.

72 Orland 2010.

73 Tétart 2004, 89.

74 Buxton 2009, 191–230.

75 See the tradition that the Trojan Horse needed to bleed in order to convince the Trojans. Burgess 2011, 211n18.

76 Grosdidier de Matons 1964, 33.106; Peers 2004 and Peers 2018b. For more on blood in Western Christianity, see Jansen and Dresen 2012; and Fricke 2013.

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Matter can be its own self-crafter, too, so deeply is this vivacity of making woven into the world by God. Stones have marvellous power, as Philostratus said, one of which is to give birth. That ability is an outcome perhaps of their gendering, apparent by observing different colours of the same stone.[77] Precious stones not only regenerated themselves, but as animate things, they also could demonstrate theology.[78] Gregory of Tours (538–94) related the story of three drops falling to form a gem that demonstrated orthodox thinking on the Trinity, "While the drops were spinning in an indeterminate circle over the altar, they flowed unto the paten and immediately fused together, as if they formed one extremely beautiful gem. By an obvious deduction it was evident that this had taken place in opposition to the evil heresy of Arianism, which was hateful to God and which was spreading at that time."[79]

No other agency than matter itself is stated by Gregory; evidently water before gem thought out the act, planned the right moment, and made evident to human bystanders what it intended. Indeed, cognitive mind is not necessary for thought or intentionality, as biologists and philosophers would claim.[80]

The Wonder of Craft

Wonder arises not only from materials, but also from intricate work, from miniature fine work, and from the monumental—from every made thing out of our control. The wonder of the Shield of Achilles from book 19 of the *Iliad* is the first and greatest of such object emotions. Hephaestus with his robot maidens crafted the peerless shield, and to see it, as the poet did, is the wonder. Wonder, or *thavma*, is the uncanny animation of the shield itself. We are prepared for it by his robot apprentices, but nothing can fully cushion the blow of that incredible excess that Homer relates. The *thavma* is, on one level, an aesthetic pleasure to be had from encountering a work of art, but the power to evoke wonder is not in mimesis, in capturing an evocation of life, but in the very ability of a made thing to produce life out of materials that may have seemed simply inert, inactivated.[81] In the shield is contained an impossible world, of course, and its manifold operations (including, at the end, craftsmen such as an architect and a potter, and maybe a bard, who all do their work) are a real *mise en abyme*. That self-sustaining generation of life within the ekphrasis is noted several times: the prediction by Hephaestus that before the shield all will marvel (18.467), and women within the scenes did (18.496), and the ploughed fields were the greatest marvel, for they turned the gold black as they overcame their own materials (18.548–9).[82] Homer's privileged vision mediates world

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77 Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 19 (5) and 23–24 (30–31).

78 See, for example, Gaifman 2008, 37–72.

79 Krusch 1885, 496.24–27 [12]; Van Dam 1998, 33.

80 See Turner 2007. From that point of view, the Trinitarian drops-to-gem story of Gregory of Tours was a dramatic, theologically oriented recapitulation of a geological process.

81 De Jong 2011.

82 See Cullhed 2014; Squire 2011; and Kokolakis 1980.

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and our imagination, and effects compound so that the description constantly shifts between real and poem in a way that is very difficult to disentangle.[83]

The history of readings of this Homeric ekphrasis traces understandings of central conceptions of craft, materials, and even life itself. Some viewers within the shield are caught in moments of awe and wonder before their crafted landscape and their very ability to be in such a living, crafted landscape. But the witnesses of the shield within the *Iliad* are not so many, so we are led in other ways to understand how we should see and experience this made world. In book 19 (14–19), Achilles's mother delivers the armour, and the Myrmidons are fearful and look away.[84] The surfeit produced by Hephaestus's craft is not for everyone. Achilles himself experiences a range of reactions: his anger blazes forth like flames, and then he lapses into gladness and delight.[85] This ekphrastic rendering of wonder was of course immensely influential throughout antiquity, into the period of late antiquity, and up to the present day. How late antique poets took up the challenge of the shield is revealing of attitudes toward made things.[86] Achilles's elite, controlled viewing may have been a model in archaic and classical Greece, but it no longer applied in late antiquity. Hephaestus, however, is still heroic, an unattainable paragon of craftsman who continues to stir wonder in those who experience his craft.

In Quintus Smyrnaeus's *Posthomerica* from the third century, the shield is full once again of "countless other scenes upon the shield, artfully wrought by the deathless hands of cunning Hephaestus."[87] Quintus stressed lifelikeness in a way that emphasizes also the poet's mediation; the shield here has been made—we are not witnessing Hephaestus himself do it—and the life is in Quintus's own craft, one might say.[88] Quintus underlines the importance of "know-how" when he describes Odysseus winning the armour from Ajax: *metis* is the key, the knowledge that is superior in performing every task.[89] In a sixth-century silver plate now in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, the armour is lying on the floor before the competitors and judge, and Ajax stands erect and principled, while Odysseus hunches over, his entire body entering the quarrel and channelling his powerful *metis*.[90] Quintus has Odysseus laud the know-how of men, the intelligence of men who are able to overcome and tame the world (5.247–52). This

83 Squire 2011, 337.

84 See also Becker 1995, 29–30, on Aelion Theon (first century), who presented the armour as positive for allies and as fearful for enemies.

85 Only then can he speak, after he has travelled that emotional path to acceptance—and to his murderous mission. Achilles's vision is privileged, possessing, and it denies any easy access to that made, living world. See Papalexandrou 2011.

86 The conditions under which figures encounters their miraculous artifacts are also telling of attitudinal changes. Achilles and the Myrmidons do not figure as exemplars in the examples of *Homerica* I briefly discuss, and book 19 is the least attested in surviving papyri of the poem, so its popularity seems to have passed in this period. See Cribiore 2001, 194.

87 Quintus Smyrnaeus. *Posthomerica* 5.97–98, in James 2004, 82, and see Baumbach 2007.

88 See Maciver 2012, 45–46.

89 *Posthomerica* 7.200–204; Maciver 2012, 54.

90 Cutler 1990, 14.

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championing of will and skills in human activities presents the very best model for the enrichment of the world that experienced doing produces.[91]

Ekphrasis consistently deals in verbal control of visual experience, and that trait is marked in late antique examples of the treatment of Homer's shield. Late antique writers on contemporary and still-extant monuments give some sense of a related, but not direct emulation of that great paradigm of poetic wonder. Quintus again picks up the Homeric topos when Odysseus gives the armour of Achilles to the rightful owner, Achilles's son Neoptolemus. Hephaestus took delight in making: "those immortal things, which will be a great wonder to you as you look upon them, because the land and heaven and sea are artistically worked here and there on the shield, and creatures in a boundless circle are fashioned all around—they look as though they are moving, a wonder even to the immortals" (7.200–204). The wonder appears when Neoptolemus dons the armour, mounts his father's horses, and appears divine to those around him, as Deiphobus reacts in the poem—as we do, too.[92]

That oscillation between the real, made thing and the impossibility of its madeness brought about wonder and perplexity, fear and joy. In literary terms, the issue was never resolved through late antiquity or by Byzantine writers, either. Procopius of Gaza (ca. 465–528), for example, wrote about a marvellous water clock, and his point of comparison at the outset is naturally Hephaestus and the shield, as well as Alcinous's dogs.[93] Through the unity of his mind and body and through his sure action in gold and silver, Hephaestus made the handicraft as good as alive. Contemporary know-how is just as demanding of wonder, according to Procopius, and indeed it is not fiction, like what Homer produced. The irresolution of the animate qualities, however, of both past and current examples of extraordinary crafting, gave that wonder its piquancy and allowed the animate quality of made things to simmer, percolate, and erupt into experience for Procopius's audience.

Sixth-century descriptions of Hagia Sophia even more powerfully evoke both the overwhelming madeness of everything *and* its more-than-made plenitude, its excessive quality surpassing human skill, making it a heaven and earth.[94] In these descriptions, wonder is also being evoked and programming our own reaction: for Paul the Silentiary, the wonder is never ceasing, and his prose travels the heights of Hagia Sophia to make it so.[95] Describing the crafting of this wonder intensifies the experience: the mason

91 In the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos of Panopolis (active first half of fifth century), the god is on campaign in India when the shield is delivered, unexpected and unmotivated—a clear case of Homeric emulation. See Hopkinson 1994, 23; Vian 1990, 33–42 and 260–62; Vian 1991. The shield is described at some length (25.384–567) as the richly wrought, cunning work of the god (383–84; *polydaidalon*, *sophon ergon*). The book ends with all gathered around and praising the fiery forge of Hephaestus.

92 Maciver 2012, 52, on 9.230–46 and 5.220–21: "The heavenly armor that covers the breast of the god resounds and flashes as brightly as fire."

93 Amato 2010, 204.

94 On a parallel track, see Tanner 2013.

95 De Stefani 2011, 28.398–29.416; Mango 1986, 82.

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"weaved together with his hands" the slabs of marble that produced effects of fruits on boughs, vines and wreaths—in other words, confounded orders of existence in making plant and stone indistinguishable.[96] Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500–65) likewise emphasized his sense of wonder: Hagia Sophia is a "spectacle of great beauty, stupendous to those who see it and altogether incredible to those who hear of it."[97] It possesses "ineffable beauty" to the degree that the wonder of the place is simply impenetrable. God's richly wrought craft is at work here: "No matter how much they concentrate their attention on this side and that, and examine everything with contracted eyebrows, they are unable to understand the craftsmanship and always depart from there amazed by the perplexing spectacle."[98] The inevitable sense of perceptual shortcoming before this monument is perhaps shared by all who visit Hagia Sophia, though few would express that impression as Paul or Procopius did. Wonder for them, as it was during much of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, was a *cognitive emotion*, a mixture of thought and feeling that is unsettling, irresolvable. In sometimes breaching the boundaries between the possible and impossible, made and not made, craft undermines visitors' categories of the world.

Late antique *thavma* was expansive to all senses, not restricted to the one sense of sight, and extended across all ways of knowing the world through bodies. That relation of bodies to work was in Achilles's Shield and in other *Homerica* of late antiquity, and it was in that church, but it was also in the mere, in baskets and boxes. It was in remade marble faces and in bronze flesh. Our bodies make judgments of scale, and the enormity of the church and tininess of the gold box both tell us what human bodies can do.[99] They especially tell us what we did not know bodies could do until we witnessed them do it, and then a miraculous making shocks our world. The thinking hand of the craftsman is in and motivating all these phenomena. The making of small gold reliquaries reveals to careful looking and imagining more in the object than passive description of the world on the part of the box or its maker. Such objects show that makers *and* made participated in producing powerful wonder through materials and their formation. Those things are never in one's hands fully; they constantly escape, captivate, and make every view of the world wondrous—otherwise, they are false.[100]

96 De Stefani 2011, 44.647–45.663; Mango 1986, 86. On stone and metaphor, see Kiilerich 2012a.

97 De Stefani 2011, 1.1.27; Mango 1986, 72–74.

98 De Stefani 2011, 1.i.49; Mango 1986, 75.

99 See Mack 2007, 46–47.

100 The last word, as is right, belongs to Bynum 1997: "wonder."

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Chapter 8

SENSES' OTHER SIDES

AN INITIAL PAIR of propositions: senses work in language, but are not original to, dependent on, or servile to it; and on account of that nonlinguistic basis of senses, many entities, maybe all, but at least far beyond language's reach, sense their worlds.[1] Such propositions are simply that: possibly or even just intuitions or inferences; that is to say, they engage philosophical and ethical questions, at best, and become intellectual *passatempo*, at worst. Naturally, I want to argue for the former, because on the one hand, our own resources for understanding relations among entities in late antiquity and Byzantium are so incomplete and inarticulated that engagement with how we relate to and judge our own worlds is crucial. Patchwork, piecemeal, puzzling is our approach to the consistency of sense lives across living things, both in beings we easily assume have feelings (ourselves, animals) and those we assume do not (inert materials such as metals, for example). And so on the other hand, confronting our assumptions about life and our responsibilities can arise from historical investigations and determine both our attitudes toward the past and toward our common present. For these reasons, a highly provisional exercise that stretches the historical imagination and accords sense lives to others can be mutually beneficial.[2]

My specific attention in this chapter is directed at the viscous in Byzantium. By that I mean (mostly, but not only) the molten: the state that wax, metal, glass, stone, and similar, can achieve when heat is applied to it, a state that can bridge the liquid and heated and that can also be the process in which fusion of otherwise separate materials can take place. The state between solid and liquid is always in process; almost no substance stays viscous. Something is always on the way to something else when in a state of viscosity. In that mobile passage between states, essences are declared, as in alchemy's belief in the process of purification toward gold when some materials are melted and fused with others. One could take a lead on viscosity from a Christology of matter, because all matter can; for Christ's own blood, flowing and turning to gore, is the most significant precedent of all for Christian thinking on matter's sliding states and their holy mimesis.[3] Mimesis is a deep need for humans and for all other entities.[4]

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1 Sensing ought not to be confused with thinking, though the tension between the two is long-standing. For a rich treatment of such issues, see Shiff 2013. Thought, mind, and brain can extend into the world.

2 Serres 1995b, 30, and 34: "Can I think without thinking something? To be sure. But when I think this object, that subject, there is doubt that I am this subject, that object, if I truly think them"; and "Inventive thinking is unstable, it is undetermined, it is un-differentiated, it is as little singular in its function as our hand."

3 See Fricke 2013.

4 See Taussig 1993.

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But what can be discovered from thinking of how materials feel when viscous or molten? In the first place, some of that question has to be approached from our isolationist sensorium: How does it feel *to us* when a material state is changed, when states are bridged, when new forms and meanings arise from observing those states? But in the second, the more challenging question is: Can we know how it feels, however inadequately or approximately, to be in something else's molten or viscous passage from one state to another? Is language up to the task?[5] Is our sense of empathy sufficiently developed for such a leap of imagination? A historical imagination is one extra leap, and we enter a different event now, the triple jump: to an absent situation and even perhaps thing, analogical thinking, and an expansive ontology.[6]

To try this argument and to feel how it fits and suits representation in this world we perceive and answer to, let us turn once again to wax.[7] In the hands of some important scholars (Herbert L. Kessler, Bissera Pentcheva, and Charles Barber, in varying degrees), wax has been a significant (if secondary) material for the demonstration of Byzantine explanations of and attitudes toward matter and representation.[8] It has stood for a commonsense demonstration of the distinction between form and matter that is necessary for seemly Christian worship. Those scholars have opened up a revealing aspect of theological rationalizations, but in doing so, they have also neglected implications of the work of wax and other viscous materials in a lived economy—as opposed to the theoretical, linguistic world of theologians.

As we've noted above, such scholars have often accepted theologians' metaphor concerning the relationship between an image and its model in terms of the analogy of seals pressing into wax (as well as other materials). Recall that according to this longstanding assertion, an image is left behind in matter without any essential (that is, sharing essence) relation between image and model. This explanation of image making has all kinds of shortcomings: mind or spirit making the world with almost incidental participation of matter, for one thing. It implies a hierarchy of ontologies, too, in which a sentient, invisible agent (the hand holding seal here) controls process and outcome. The "world," however, operates a little differently, and the analogy of the molten, quickened material poured onto a surface or into a shaped form by a conscious, thinking hand—

5 Maybe not. See Serres, trans. in Connor 2005, 164: "We have lost hopelessly the memory of a world heard, seen, perceived, experienced joyfully by a body naked of language. This forgotten, unknown animal has become speaking man, and the word has petrified his flesh, not merely his collective flesh of exchange, perception, custom, and power, but also and above all his corporeal flesh: thighs, feet, chest, and throat vibrate, dense with words."

6 *OED*: imagination, 1a, "The power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects and situations, and those constructed by mentally combining or projecting images of previously experienced qualities, objects, and situations. Also (esp. in modern philosophy): the power or capacity by which the mind integrates sensory data in the process of perception."

7 A useful reminder from Stoller 2011, 23: "To put the matter bluntly, we often avoid acknowledging the contingent nature of situated experience, which distances us from the ambiguous, from the tangential, from the external textures and sensuous processes of our bodies."

8 See, for example, Kessler 2000.

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which is always resistant to analogy—simply and directly recapitulates every process of image making, but that image making is not what those theologians imagined it was. It is not so easily instrumentalized. It *is*, rather, participation among relational agents that work with and against each other to bring something new and necessary into this world.

Bissera Pentcheva, for example, has built a large part of her arguments around ideas of seals and impressions. For her, these practices fundamentally informed the making and meaning of images in Byzantium, and they led her to propose *repoussé* icons, with gems, gold and enamel, as the paradigmatic iconic form in Byzantium after the period of Iconoclasm. The process begins for her with late antique tokens of the elder Symeon the Stylite (ca. 388–459). She describes these small objects as miraculously potent impressions in matter that had taken on powers of the saint, and such processes also paralleled processes in divinized and divinizing materials such as the Eucharistic bread.[9] Ensouling, or *empsychosis*, is an important transmission mode in this model for the ways imprinting or sealing showed the movement of the divine through the world. "The Spirit sealed the saint; his *pneuma* in turn sealed the column, the soil around it, and the *eulogiai* [tokens] made from this earth [...]. This serial imprinting ensured continual access to the miraculous."[10] The movement of soul throughout matter is a compelling way of seeing chains of operation in Byzantine materiality, but it still stops short of according self-regulating agency to matter and leaves very often a bias in place that assumes the impression of form on matter.

Moreover, magic appears as an unproblematic term in her model and seems to stand straightforwardly for the way sacred power enters matter.[11] Sealing matter is a way the divine enters it, so matter becomes a passive field for the divine to spread its special potency in the world. Perhaps a(n impossible) parallel would be opening a circuit for electrical current that does not depend on the physical transfer of electrons for the passage of electric charge; in other words, disembodied electricity passes through matter without affecting or depending on it. This quasi-material magic also seems to stand for an animism, a belief that allows for a harnessing of nature, a.k.a. spirits, in inanimate objects.[12]

Both these usages, of magic and animism, are strikingly reminiscent of nineteenth-century precedents for a history of religion.[13] As sympathetic as Pentcheva is to her subject, she also works to create distance *to* it and *within* it: Byzantines belong to a more primitive world of shimmering effects that mesmerize its inhabitants, and all things obey their Cartesian compartmentalization.

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9 See Caseau 2014.

10 Pentcheva 2010, 34.

11 Pentcheva 2010, 30–31: "The potency of the ring stems both from the precious stone and the seal carved in it. It is this seal that controls the evil spirit: the *sphragis* of the master imprinted on all. Again the seal introduces the master-slave relationship." Similarly to my mind (*pace*) Caseau 2012. See, for example, Herva 2012, 74–75, on Greenwood 2009, who has "stressed that magic is not about belief or the supernatural but a form of knowledge. Magical practices, in her view, manipulate perception and consciousness which in turn restructure one's relationship with the world" and "artefacts can facilitate 'magical' connections with reality." The single quotation marks here do a lot of work.

12 Pentcheva 2010, 34.

13 See the Introduction to the present book.

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But this world was animist, and distance was not part of it. Many animisms exist and have existed, but they all posit (to generalize) a relational system among agents, a system that can potentially encompass human and nonhuman entities, as well as places and natural phenomena.[14] And such a system also depends on "serious, lively, socially relevant intellectual traditions and knowledges," ways of knowing "that would support an expression of animism." Without those features, we lapse into Romanticizing views of exotic and mystifying otherness.[15] So dialogue among participants, ontological flexibility, deeply and thoughtfully lived—these are explicit characteristics of animisms.[16] To plant spirit on matter and discuss it as manipulation is another system from animism altogether, one closer to that imagined by previous generations of historians of religions for their own purposes, which are now subject to historical analysis more than their erstwhile "animist" subjects.[17]

That preceding paragraph probably unfairly judges Pentcheva's argument (and lets others off the hook), but the lack of precision in basic definitions—and the dangerous assumptions behind those definitions that are offered—is strongly at odds with the clear competency in her mastery of sources and their historical settings. That discrepancy is difficult to assimilate. And yet the presentation of seals and stamps is forthright. To take the most important source for her argument, here is a passage from the great iconophile champion, St. Theodore of Stoudios (759–826): "A seal is one thing, and its imprint is another. Nevertheless, even before the impression is made, the imprint is in the seal. There could not be an effective seal that was not impressed on some material. Therefore, Christ also, unless he appears in an artificial image, is in this respect ideal and ineffective."[18] This formulation reveals "a perfect objective reciprocity between intaglio and imprint" for Pentcheva, and so we come to see in this way how the seal and its imprint in matter take on a theoretical symmetry—each relates to other in natural and obvious ways, each receives shared veneration, and each possesses mutually supportive identity for and with the other.

But wax has had almost no voice in this series of analyses (here both Pentcheva and Theodore are guilty), because it is an empty receiver, a passive field for signification, an invisible viscosity. Yet wax—indeed, matter—does not have limits; it arrives us; or, to put it bluntly: it has to be the *whole world*.[19] The miniature, the mere, stands for the mighty,

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14 Curry 2006.

15 See, for example, Rooney 2006, 13.

16 Bird-David 2006, 48: "In the animistic cosmos, beings are invoked as participants and members of a single community of sharing. They cannot be depicted and looked at as objects. They have to be invoked and engaged with as co-subjects. They cannot be looked *at*; rather one has to look *with* them sharing a perspective." See also Bird-David 1993 and Bird-David 1999.

17 See, for example, Engelke 2012.

18 See Pentcheva 2010, 86; Roth 1981, 112.

19 Taussig 2009, 14: "To thus consciously see ourselves in the midst of the world is to enter into ourselves as image, to exchange standing above the fray, the God position, for some other position that is not really a position at all but something more like swimming, more like nomads adrift in the sea, mother of all metaphor, that sea I call *the bodily unconscious*."

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as metaphor allows it to do. Wax is not empty, passive, invisible, however much texts seek to disappear it. Simply dripped or poured molten onto a surface, wax pools, oozes, spreads—depending on the surface, angle, temperature, all contingencies matter—and then it buckles, waves, sighs when pressed and penetrated by the metal seal, and then it holds that memory of shape and form, but with imperfect recall, since it is in viscous passage from solid to viscous and back to solid, and then it sits, lies legible and witnessing to a moment of intimate enveloping of itself on hard metal, but like memory—smoothed of some detail and intensified in others, the unpredictable import and pathos of one detail over another—still able to support and contain that inerasable contact.

How does it feel to traverse those states and senses? And what is at stake in asking that question? I'll argue that the second question should wait until the first is attempted. On the one hand, the imagining necessary for the first question means looking at texts, an imperfect way in and perhaps useful only as a negative exemplar (not because it's wrong as such, but because its basic premise is off). On the other, that waxy ontology is not our own, and not only will we have to think *wax*, but we will also have to think *past wax* (both in the senses of old wax and of distant wax, in each process done, passed, and ageing, aged).[20] Seals often declare identity, and identity with the person sealing (I am the seal of […]; I validate the letter of […]) or servitude to the saint portrayed (Saint […] help thy servant […] watch over me [owner, wax and document, presumably] […]). Theodore also gives intentionality to the seal, which "shows its desire for honor when it makes itself available for impression in many different materials." The seal is manifestly Christ himself here and takes upon itself to press pliant wax to that extra body.[21] Theodore also gives necessity—an effective seal is pressed into matter, otherwise it is ineffective. (And to carry the implications forward, Christ needs our resemblance more than we need his.)

Identity is transferred in this way and now legible in a new medium, but legible always as the medium allows and is able. I have focused on wax here, but wax is fragile, flakeable, and fragmentable, and it seldom survives.[22] As a result. the primacy or exclusivity of seal over wax is always too easily accepted. The linguistic content of so many seals, too, gives them authority over seemingly blank fields for representation. Words speak and represent and fix, and their hegemonic strength is expressed into the softened, yielding wax ground. But when the seal withdraws and the wax shows, only then does the incoherence of the seal clarify.[23] Illegible, reversed characters come to take on a new, fuller identity in matter. If theologians neglected that weakness of the seal (the incoherence of the divine) before matter arrives it, they had their reasons. We have less of an excuse for overlooking that gap in a confused self-expression (of God) and its real expression only on emergence in matter (in wax). This gap rather turns the tables in matter's favour.

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20 Most important precedent for this attempt is Didi-Huberman 2008.

21 Roth 1981, 112.

22 Very few wax impressions are extant. The majority by far of the impressions surviving are in lead, and are much more numerous than wax impressions.

23 www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/christian-jankowski-casting-jesus.

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Moreover, this language is lazily gendered: the wax is feminine (accepting, pliant, furrowed, fertile), and the seal is masculine (demanding, pressing, imprinting, withdrawing). It may reduce to an easy gender binary that was enforced by uniformly male theologians in the past. It also belongs to a long tradition in Western thought describing a binary-based cosmology of human thought and action on/in the world. That is to say, human agency, primarily mind generated, imposes its will on the environment, any environment, in which humans live. Here is another real danger of this metaphor so often deployed by theologians and accepted by art historians, and it is a trap laid by the great Aristotle himself—a productive mistake, but a wrong turn just the same. In the simplest formulation, being derives from matter and form, and body works with soul in this way to create a living, animate being. In that way, wax and the seal are a metaphor that Aristotle could prefer: just as wax takes its form from its seal or impress, so form and matter create a unity of body and soul.[24] This metaphor opened up a whole line of other metaphors that made making or action in the world a process of imposing form on matter, of mind projecting its will into the world.

Here is where mind, brain, will come to seem dominant. But really, how can any such system survive experience of the world we live in, which is after all a world of sense and matter independent of our desires? Theologians had an agenda, to be sure, and they were countering specific arguments about the essential relations of things to God. One side said images refer to a model by resemblance, custom, and even human frailty, while the other said such weak resemblance makes images beside the point, but in themselves images are too compelling, insistent, urgent, to be permitted. Both sides had only a few avenues open to counter those arguments, which are essentially right—everything *is* in relation to God, who filled the world with grace and presence—but it was a matter of submerging that relational position in other terms, for example, idolatry and decorousness, excessive and respectful veneration, correct and incorrect interpretations of the past. That's to say, the question is fairly simple, but also simplistic, because matter is either innocent or guilty in this debate. (As has been pointed out before, iconoclasts are far more invested in the independent power of made things than the so-called iconophiles; the former were aware, but afraid, the latter disingenuously found neutralizing language, always language, that ploughs once again in the ancient plots of Plato and Aristotle.)[25]

This statement can bring us back to wax's feelings, that is, to try to take matter's side again—and not to judge, just to empathize. A hand presses a seal (metal, stone, hard) into warm (even room temperature, let's say) wax. Hand and seal withdraw. Their work is brief. Look at (imagine) the wax field, its luscious, viscous spillage, pressed and peaked and left to cool and harden, over against (but really under and around) the imprint, which pushes out the wax into that frozen lava ooze. The first (only) thing you see, experience, is the wax, that uneven and splayed edging, and searching, an eye finds an image, verbal and/or figural, that coalesces on secondary inspection. That field is a little unsettling: it has shape and form insisted on by the seal, and yet it has other (its own) direction and dimensions in ruffing wax. It escapes a little its category (impres-

24 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 412b5–6.

25 See Warner 2015.

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sion, but then it is not a real mirror of its seal, yet it is also not independent, because it exists in this form because of the seal); it is both still molten or viscous (it never quite loses that quality, even when cooled and dried) and yet compliant with the seal, too. No wonder theologians took the side of the seal. The wax is in fact defiant: it absorbs the seal's form, but submerges it, and (quasi-selflessly) wax lets the seal subside and withdraw into a spectre of itself.[26]

This chapter favours the particular ways matter constitutes itself, behaves, acts, and searches for its own meaning. In other words, it assumes we can observe how matter, the basic stuff of the world, plays a role in the unfolding of its own history. What results is a horizontal playing field that resists vertical ordering or stratigraphic description or temporal precedence; what results is a position *for* matter. And one might also claim that rather than showing how wax participated in its own negligence, the position taken here can also show how wax undermined that estimation of its passivity. That is, by reversing the order of the seal-wax hierarchy, we can see better how matter is the playing field through which the game is played, rather than upon.

The viscous can behave in a variety of ways. It can enfold and seep, withdraw and spread, as well as engulf and consume. Thinking through some implications of two late antique stone moulds in Jerusalem (at the museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum) can also open up, some other ways that the viscous is really how making works, as well as ways that molten materials can show relations and transformations (Figure 27). These moulds generally were used to make small souvenir tokens or flasks or ampullae for storing and carrying sacred substances, such as oil, water, or soil.[27] The first mould is two-sided, with scenes in both sides' carved cavity. The second, aniconic mould presumably, could have provided a nearly plain reverse that could have been fitted or soldered to the moulded obverse. The two figural sides could also have been cast and soldered to make a double-sided ampulla with

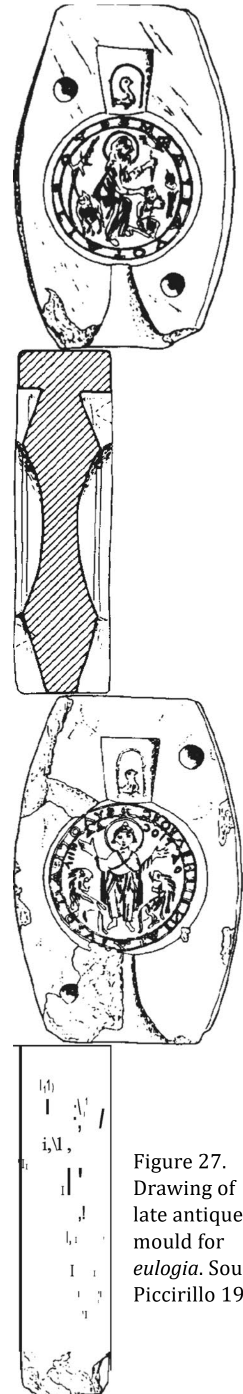

Figure 27. Drawing of late antique mould for *eulogia*. Source: Piccirillo 1994

26 Didi-Huberman 2008, 155: "The reality of the material turns out to be more troubling because it possesses a viscosity, a sort of activity and intrinsic force, which is a force of metamorphism, polymorphism, imperviousness to contradiction (especially the abstract contradiction between form and formlessness). Concerning the viscous, Sartre articulates very well how that activity, that 'sort of life,' can be symbolized or socialized only as an antivalue."

27 Piccirillo 1994.

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two scenes, heads and tails. One side shows the sacrifice of Isaac (labelled "evlogia tou avraam"), and the other has Daniel in the lions' den (labelled "o agios Daniel," "evlogia tou Daniel"). The two sides may have been connected with specific pilgrimage sites attached to the prophets, but the moulds were both found in different locations near Jerusalem and had some involvement in the pilgrimage trade.

The valve or opening at the bottom of the intact moulds is highly evocative, and it represents a kind of punctum, a passage of the object that emerges forcefully after the apparently necessary work of identifying and describing the figural portions is done, as it was above. In contrast to the cool, pale moulds—carved out of limestone—the valve represents a passage for change and othering. Bound together with a nonfigural backing, the moulds would be set upside-down so that the molten liquid could be poured into the receptacle created.[28] Cooled, the moulds would be separated, and an object with raised elements, figural and textual, would remain. Unlike wax (or lead) impressed by a seal, in these moulds, the viscous here stays elevated from the ground, lead or wax, after passing to a settled state.

So how does the molten *feel* in these different contexts in which it finds itself?[29] Warmed to its new, near-liquid consistency, wax pools against itself and drops into the moulds, leaving the wick's light to fall on the rough surface, which catches the fall and stops the rush, as the cooling air had already begun to do. How does that feel—to metamorphose and stay oneself? To travel across a state, return to oneself, but find oneself in a different form and place? Because then the hard form does descend and push, penetrate, and attempt to leave a seed of its own form in wax's forgiving, pulsed mound. Wax gets its own back by taking the other. The wax coats and blurs and swallows that form's insistence. The form or imprint in the moulds is never absolutely, entirely itself again. The pressing hand also stands back now and watches its work duck the intracting, hardening pool: not what the hand intended, but it never is.

Lead is a material that also needs addressing. Does lead feel differently, being poured and impressed into the moulds? Bright and silverish in its usual state, lead is also prone to tarnish and corrosion on exposure to air for any period of time. It has a relatively low melting point for a metal. And it responds to other metals and bonds easily with some. Lead's appearance changes to an even more intensely chrome-silver lustre as it forms a liquid state, and so as it readies to pour, it also intensifies its qualities. The lead fills, and the shallow indents in the stone are coated with this pooling metal, subsiding from its viscous state quickly and entering its condition of diminishing shine and increasing heft. Able to breathe once again with the removal of the forms, it is a new, less silvery thing,

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28 Piccirillo 1994.

29 Symmetrical archaeology provides one model, to my mind, for this kind of writing, its worthwhile aspects and its solipsistic dangers. Olsen 2012, 220: "To extend ethical concerns and notions of care to also embrace things is not a question about anthropomorphizing them, turning things into human, but rather to respect their otherness and integrity." And as corrective: "Processes of embodiment may well have charged things with sociality and personality, but simultaneously silenced their own utterances. And if they speak, it is most likely our own voices that are heard."

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and it emerges as base, eldest of all (like Saturn, according to alchemists), hoary, heavy, hard, like that ancient god.

I raised and then deferred answering the questions of what is at stake in asking how it feels to traverse the states and senses of the viscous. Put succinctly, it is the nature of relationality manifest *as* feeling. "No-one has ever witnessed the great battle of simple entities," Michel Serres writes. "We only ever experience mixtures, we encounter only meetings."[30] And here we are born, each time, to the world. Aristotle talked about a sixth sense, a kind of *metasensum*, that mediated and articulated the working of the first five senses. Michel Serres treats that sixth sense as the skin, and perhaps this feeling surface is what we might take as the great common sense we all share, with which we meet and mix with the world. And in this case, the "we" includes wax and molten lead, the self-surfacing, viscous muck that heat makes, the substances whose inside and outsides became evident only vicariously as they wait for the next move to melt. Serres talks also about the discovery of the soul on skin, when skin touches skin, in those converging, excursive, and recursive accidents of self-touch. Maybe most significantly for Serres, the skin is the place where all entities meet and mingle.

We are born, each time, to the world, but so are objects, things, however we call entities we consign to nonfeeling. Images in the Byzantine world and into the present in Orthodox churches received intense sensual attention: kissing, fondling, stroking, leaning, embracing, and so on. They are still the concentrated focus still compelling tactile piety.[31] These things are not passive and are not without feeling, and they moreover create our place and time. According to Serres, if we tried to do without things, we would spin mindlessly and aimlessly; but things give us mind and a slower pace in which to have mind.[32] Without their contingencies, our own are very difficult to recognize, or even to have.

The viscous is a difficult state. Thus, wax has long been a particularly threatening substance. It is unstable, too contingent, perhaps reminding us too much of flesh or too

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30 Serres 2008, 28, and also 80: "The skin is a variety of contingency; in, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge [...]. I do not wish to call the place in which I live a medium, I prefer to say that things mingle with each other and that I am no exception to that, I mix the world which mixes with me." And Chrétien 2014, 85–86: "The most fundamental and universal of all the senses is the sense of touch. Coextensive for Aristotle with animal life, it appears and disappears with it [...]. Every animated body is tactile [...]. The first evidence of soul is the sense of touch [...]. Touch is not primarily and perhaps not even ultimately one of the five senses: for Aristotle, touch is the necessary and sufficient condition for the emergence of an animated body, the perpetual basis for the possibility of human life and therefore eventually also of additional senses, which will always belong as such to a tactile body. Moreover the sense of touch, far from making the living organism into a mere spectator, pledges it to the world through and through, exposes it to the world and protects it from it. Touch bears life to its fateful, or felicitous, day."

31 See Caseau 2017.

32 Serres 1995b, 87: "The only assignable difference between animal societies and our own resides, as I have often said, in the emergence of the object. Our relationships, social bonds, would be as airy as clouds were there only contracts between subjects. In fact, the object, specific Hominidae, stabilizes our relationships, it slows down the time of our revolutions. For an unstable band of baboons, social changes are flaring up every minute. One could characterize their history as unbound, insanely so. The object, for us, makes our history slow."

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little of the metaphoric.[33] According to Georges Didi-Huberman, that quality is what Jean-Paul Sartre must also have meant when he described the uncanniness of the viscous, that is, the ways it threatens and undermines.[34] Perhaps it is the antivalue of the viscous, wax and lead, that allows it to disappear not only from theological writings, such as those of Theodore of Stoudios, but also from art-historical writings on sense and representation. Perhaps the viscous undermines safe categories of representation, and it also threatens the authority of the seal, the metal or stone impress that tries to make wax the world in its own image, even if he really is Christ.

That threat was felt from the beginning of this sort of metaphoric manipulation of wax, and in conclusion, two texts—one from the fourth century and another from the fourteenth—can show the resilience of it, but from different directions. In the first place, Gregory Nazianzenus initiated a line of theological approach that denigrated the material and its effects at the expense of the noetic form of the divine. The menace of the wax is strongly felt in this rhetoric, but this expression is disingenuous, too,

> Let us take two seal rings, one is gold, the other iron, which bears the same engraved imperial image [...]. Let us then impress these in the wax. What difference is there between the two seals? None. Look at the wax, and even if you are wise, can you tell me which form has been impressed with iron and which with gold? How then have these become the same? It is because the difference derives from the material and not the portrait.[35]

Can it really be the case (to answer one hypothetical with another) that iron and gold hold form in the same way and thus transmit it equally well? Gold is a much finer, ductile material that takes detail more easily than iron can. One might not be able to tell absolutely that a seal was gold or iron from its impression in wax, but the clues would be there in most cases, even for the not wise. The impression became the same because it suited Gregory's point. The textual quality of the metaphor gained the upper hand, and the wax continues to be silent. And yet the final sentence: the portrait or form does not differ from prototype to image, but differences do enter from choices in materials, that is, wax or something else changes form? So the material matrix is given its due indirectly. Here is the place, then, of metamorphosis, where form does change and Gregory's portrait takes shape and qualities that only the viscous can sense.

Antivalues can characterize wax and lead, but also pitch, or resin, or petroleum, or mud, because all can be unrealized being, and all can participate in processes of making and feeling. So in the second place and at the other end of the period, the fourteenth-

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33 Gombrich 1960, 60: "Such a bust may even look to them unpleasantly lifelike, transcending, as it were, the symbolic sphere in which it was expected to dwell, although objectively it may still be very remote indeed from the proverbial wax image, which often causes us uneasiness because it oversteps the boundary of symbolism."

34 Sartre 1943, 702–3, "Toucher du visquex, c'est risquer de se diluer en viscosité [...]. L'horreur du visquex c'est l'horreur que le temps devienne visquex, que la facticité ne progresse continûment et insensiblement et n'aspire le Pour-soi qui "l'existe" [...]. [L]a viscosité se révèle soudain comme symbole d'une antivaleur, c'est-à-dire d'un type d'être non réalisé, mais menaçant, qui va hanter perpétuellement la conscience comme le danger constant qu'elle fuit et, de ce fait, transforme soudain le projet d'appropriation en projet de fuite." See Didi-Huberman 2008, 154.

35 *Patrologiae Graecae* 36, 396C; Barber 2007, 137–38.

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century theologian Neophytus Prodromenus, a continuator of iconophile theology, used the seal as a metaphor for the innocence of matter. The chain of models extends here from the emperor, his hand, wax, and so on, and participant matter strikingly expands to include several types of the viscous:

> Consider the example of an image of the emperor engraved on a seal ring. This might now be impressed in wax, in pitch, or in mud. For while the seal [image] is one and invariable in them, the materials are different; hence the seal [image] also remains in the ring, separated from the [materials] in thought. It is the same for the likeness of Christ, since no matter which medium presents this, it has nothing to do with these materials, but remains in the person of Christ.[36]

The language has not clarified since the fourth century, but the use of pitch and mud as another kind of semiliquid/solid for sensing and showing relation with the divine reveals the ongoing usefulness of the viscous for these theologians.

Theologians believed that viscous matter was doing one thing, but really it was doing the other. It looked like it was passively receiving and like it could be tamed by this metaphor, but naturally, matter outside of text behaves like itself—because it feels like it. In this way, perhaps, the viscous approaches a place of antivalue from which consciousness flees and is haunted by it still, itself becoming a kind of uncanny wax, lead, mud, pitch. How each might feel about this accusation is a different subject from what the theologians are relating, but the seal needs to suppress such apparent gains of the liquid over the solid (to paraphrase Sartre). Nevertheless, the viscous here can feel its way to escape those confines and breathe and act beyond text and seal.

In the end, sight is a very unreliable way into the world.[37] But art historians use it so often to think sense. At issue is perhaps the resistance to the viscous and messy that making partly serves; the wax, mud, pitch, and lead travelled that making path only to be made into something clean and clear for the eye to apprehend and master. If we allow ourselves to step back and see a common skin (or flesh) for the world, maybe the mutual materiality emerges in ways that allow self-knowing likewise to enter passages of solidity and melting.[38] This claim to speak for those things is presumptuous, and it serves only us. But to locate our mutual, overlapping skins (and Serres's souls) is a kind of victory, provisional, fragile, and forever too bound in speaking about it.

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36 Barber 2015: 216 (Greek) and 222.

37 Again Serres 2008, 67: "Sight is pained by the sight of mixture. It prefers to distinguish, separate, judge distances; the eye would feel pain if it were touched. It protects itself and shies away. Our flexible skin adapts by remaining stable. It must be thought of as variety […]. It apprehends and comprehends, implicates and explicates, it tends towards the liquid and the fluid, and approximates mixture."

38 Connor 2005, 168: "This intolerance of the exteriority represented by death and degradation makes for a certain paradoxical claustration in Serres's work, makes it a monism of the manifold. There is nothing Serres can with do with it, because there is nothing anyone can do with it, this slow going, this ungraspable, unknowable, unignorable squandering of energy that in the end is what we will have amounted to. There is nothing we can do with it, though it has everything to do with us."

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