Christ on the Cross

The Boston Crucifix and the Rise of Monumental Wood Sculpture, 970–1200

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The Boston Crucifix and the Rise of Monumental Wood Sculpture, 970–1200

Edited by Shirin Fozi & Gerhard Lutz

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Fig. 1. Still from Herbert Achternbusch, *Das Gespenst* (1982): the crucifix hangs in a chamber of the convent. (Photo: after Herbert Achternbusch, *Das Gespenst: Filmbuch* [Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1984], p. 9)

Epilogue: The Strangeness of Crucifixes

Jacqueline E. Jung

At the beginning of Herbert Achternbusch's film *Das Gespenst* (The Ghost) of 1982, a crucifix hanging on the wall of a Bavarian convent comes to life (Fig. 1).[1] Slapstick high jinks and philosophical digressions ensue as the corpus, played by Achternbusch himself, adjusts to life off the cross. But even as this all-too-human Christ serves up Schnapps, ambles around the Marienplatz and picnics with the lusty abbess, his body never lets him forget its erstwhile status as a cult object: smarting wounds require him to toddle on the sides of his feet, and his arms continually snap up to their accustomed outstretched position (Fig. 2). Although the film generated huge controversy



Fig. 2. Still from Herbert Achternbusch, *Das Gespenst* (1982): the living crucifix serves Schnapps in a tavern. (Photo: after Herbert Achternbusch, *Das Gespenst: Filmbuch* [Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1984], p. 18)

1 Herbert Achternbusch, *Das Gespenst: Filmbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1984).

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in Catholic Bavaria and Austria for its critiques of traditional religious images, practices and even doctrines (critiques that are, in the end, often more sophomoric than profound),[2] its special interest for historians of religious art lies in the way it plucks at the fine line that separates artifice from reality, image from body. Outrageous as it may strike many viewers today, Achternbusch's choice of a crucifix to be his main character and *Doppelgänger* makes perfect sense. For nowhere – at least in Western art – is the convergence of image and body, sign and referent closer than in the life-sized sculpted crucifixes that dominated the sacred spaces of Western Europe for at least 500 years.

If we were to subject the figure played by Achternbusch to art historical analysis, we would probably locate it in Bavaria or Austria and date it to the late eleventh or early twelfth century. (Dendrochronological analysis would obviously be impossible.) If we imagine away the incongruous phallic tongue hanging from the figure's mouth, we could say that the upright head and posture, wide-open eyes, painted chest and dreadlocked hair recall those features of the Romanesque crucifix in the *Gotthardkapelle* of Mainz Cathedral (Fig. 3), or the wonder-working crucifix in Forstenried (a neighborhood in Munich) from around 1200 – though the latter's feet are pierced with just one nail,



Fig. 3. Crucifix from parish church in Udenheim, now in Chapel of St Gotthard (*Gotthardkapelle*), Mainz Cathedral, *c.*1100. (Photo: Jacqueline Jung)

2 In response to protests about the film's content, the German government withheld funds it had committed to Achternbusch for its production, sparking counter-protests from other filmmakers. In the meantime, thousands of Bavarian Catholics, many carrying crucifixes, marched in the streets to atone for Achternbusch's blasphemy and beg God to show him forgiveness. Although, despite some efforts in this regard, the movie was never formally banned in Germany, its distribution was limited; it was (and remains) banned in Austria. For an assessment of the film and an overview of the controversy it stirred, see Stefan Volk, *Skandalfilme: Cineastische Aufreger gestern und heute* (Marburg: Schüren, 2011), pp. 215–21.



Fig. 4. Crucifix in parish church of the Holy Cross, Munich-Forstenried, *c.*1200. (Photo: Jacqueline Jung)



Fig. 5. Replica of crucifix in parish church of the Holy Cross, Schaftlach, with reconstruction of original polychromy, as displayed in Freising, *Diözesanmuseum*, June 2005. (Photo: Jacqueline Jung)

not two (Fig. 4).[3] With its parallel feet and bent arms, the figure also resembles the crucifix from Schaftlach – and, even more so, the replica of that object based on the original traces of polychromy discovered during investigations between 1999 and 2004, and displayed in the Diocesan Museum in Freising (Fig. 5).[4] Here we see that the eyes, painted closed in a post-medieval century, were in fact meant to be wide open, if slightly downcast, and framed by evenly arcing eyebrows.

The dating of the Schaftlach Crucifix is controversial, as other authors have made clear; whereas the organizers of a 2005 exhibition in Freising claim a very early date of around 970/1000, most other scholars assign it to the first half of the twelfth century.[5] For my purposes, the specific date is not terribly important. What I would like to consider further is the way the sculpted figure relates

3 Manuela Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters: Ein Beitrag zu Typus und Genese im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2005), pp. 709–13, 805–08

4 See *Kreuz und Kruzifix: Zeichen und Bild*, ed. by Sylvia Hahn, Carmen Roll, and Peter B. Steiner (Freising: Diözensanmuseum für christliche Kunst des Erzbistums München und Freising, 2005), cat. II.20.1, 2), pp. 192–98.

5 See Manuela Beer, 'The Bavarian Context of the Boston Crucifix: Origins and Chronology', and Matthias Weniger, 'The Debate on Dating the Crucifixes at Schaftlach, Enghausen, and Schlehdorf', in this volume; see also Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters*, cat. 96, pp. 764–69.

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Fig. 6. Crucifixion with Ecclesia and Synagoga and other allegorical figures. *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, *c.*1170. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 64, fol. 86 (Photo: The J. Paul Getty Museum)

to the body of the actor who mimics it (or something like it). If we took Achternbusch to be a 'real' crucifix, we'd have to describe him as highly stylized in form, with his static, symmetrical posture and linear polychromy, and, with his open eyes and smooth skin, far removed from what anyone would consider a realistic representation. Indeed, as a Christ figure he looks even more abstracted – more 'triumphal' – than the Schaftlach crucifix, with its bent knees and slightly downturned head. And yet, physically, Achternbusch's version is as real as it could possibly be: it is a body. It is a body that has become an image. In a way no less forceful or deliberate, the Schaftlach Crucifix – along with the Boston Crucifix, the Gero Cross and others discussed in this book – is an image that has become – that *is* – a body.[6]

6 For the implications of this point, see Rainer Kahsnitz, 'The Image of the Dead Christ on the Cross in the Ottonian Era: The Artistic and Theological Problems of Sculptural Crucifixes', in this volume.

I begin my reflections with this seemingly obvious point because in our close concentration on the elements of artifice that make up these crucifixes – the assembly of wooden pieces, the application of pigments, the interplay of convex and concave forms, the conventional lines of ribcages and loincloths – and in our consideration of their theological implications (their relation to the Eucharist, their presentation of Christ's double-nature), it is sometimes easy to forget that what we're seeing are so many inversions of Achternbusch's embodied artifice: these are, first and foremost, artificial bodies. Regardless of their surface details or their employment (or rejection) of reality effects (naturalistic modeling and polychromy, or the inclusion of other props such as clothing or wigs), they are objects shaped to resemble physically, in size, proportions and volumes, a human body, stretched against a backing support and suspended upright in the air.[7] The contributors to this volume have brought us so close to these remarkable early examples, and made us so familiar with the objects' internal details and external art historical context, that I feel that the best service I can offer, in this epilogue, is to make them strange again. If the idea of worshiping the body of a dead man was perplexing, even abhorrent, in the Judaic religious tradition – 'Cursed are all who hang on trees', a bust of Synagoga says of the crucified Christ in an illumination from the Stammheim Missal, of about 1170 (Fig. 6)[8] – how much more far-fetched was the practice of fashioning life-sized likenesses of dead or dying bodies for display and veneration? What bizarre things we have been looking at! With the artist Thomas Lehnerer (d. 1995; Fig. 7), I want to turn the crucifix on its head and look at it from a different, but I hope complementary, perspective – that of an art historian trying to understand how the forms and surfaces, materials and techniques of these early sculptures, about which this volume's authors have taught us so much, generated meanings for their beholders.

Let me say it again: crucifixes are strange. Medieval Christians knew it. The literature of Jewish-Christian debates is full of arguments about these objects.[9] Critics such as Herman Judah, in a debate with the Benedictine abbot Rupert of Deutz purportedly held in 1128, condemned them as 'such likenesses [*simulacra*] as, by a many-formed delusive error, paganism normally dictated for itself'.[10] Making them even more offensive was the fact that they were *simulacra* of the 'cursed' dead body hanging on wood.[11] Rupert, like many others before and after him, swiftly brushed aside the 'crime of idolatry you are trying to foist on us', explaining that Christians did not 'worship as a divinity the image of a crucified man or of anything else'. Rather, he insisted, crucifixes were displayed in churches as one sign among many, 'so that while we externally image forth [Christ's] death through the likeness of the cross, we may be kindled inwardly to love of him and . . . may always consider with pious reflection . . . what a great obligation we owe for his love'. Echoing Pope Gregory the Great's oft-repeated words first written some 500 years earlier, Rupert reminded Herman that such images were also devised

7 For the heightened naturalism of early and high Gothic crucifixes, see Gerhard F. Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel: Die sächsischen und westfälischen Kruzifixe derersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2004). For late Gothic examples, see Fabienne Joubert, 'Stylisation et vérisme: Le paradoxe d'un groupe de Christs franconiens du XVème siècle', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 51 (1988), 513–23; John T. Paoletti, 'Wooden Sculpture in Italy as Sacral Presence', *Artibus et Historiae*, 26 (1992), 85–100.

8 Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, *The Stammheim Missal* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum Studies on Art, 2001), pp. 63–65.

9 For additional critiques of crucifixes from Christian perspectives, see Paul Binski, *Becket's Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England, 1170–1300* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004), especially pp. 209–12, 221–23.

10 Translation of Herman-Judah, 'Short Account of His Own Conversion', in Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 80.

11 'Short Account of His Own Conversion', p. 82.

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Fig. 7. Thomas Lehnerer (1955–1995), *Doppelnature*, 1983. Inverted plaster crucifix on mirrored tabletop, with spotlight. Freising, *Diözesanmuseum*, June 2005. (Photo: Jacqueline Jung)

'to benefit the simple and uneducated so that those who could not learn the Passion of their Redeemer by reading in books could see the very price of their redemption through the visible appearance of the cross'.[12]

Coming from Rupert, this seems a strange and disingenuous argument. Just one year before, in a commentary on Matthew written for his monastic brethren, Rupert recalled sensing a large crucifix staring at him as he prayed before an altar, and growing distracted by the desire 'to grasp [the body] with my hands, to embrace and kiss it'. Miraculously, the altar split open and formed a kind of stairway, inviting Rupert to scramble upward. 'For a long time', he tells us, he clung to the corpus. As he kissed its mouth, he distinctly felt the figure's own mouth open so as to accept and respond to the kisses more deeply.[13] This crucifix was no mere stimulator of 'pious reflection'. It was not just a reminder of man's debt. Nor was the crucifix that hung high in the nave of a church Rupert saw in a dream, which he recounted in a commentary on the Song of Songs from 1126.[14] 'Immersing his thoughts in the figure', he tells us, he 'witnessed the image come to life, with a face like a king's, with radiant eyes and awesome gaze'. As Rupert watched, the figure 'drew its right hand down from the cross arm and with a grand [motion] made the sign of the cross'. Rupert began to quake 'like the leaves of a tree when the wind shakes them violently,

12 'Short Account of His Own Conversion', p. 83. On the resonance of the Gregorian dictum, see most recently Herbert L. Kessler, 'Gregory the Great and Image Theory in Northern Europe During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. by Conrad Rudolph, 2nd ed. (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), pp. 221–44.

13 This episode has garnered much attention in recent scholarly literature. See the detailed analysis in Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 309–17; for further bibliography, see Jacqueline E. Jung, 'The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination', in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. by Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2010), pp. 203–40 (p. 218).

14 Discussed in Jung, 'The Tactile and the Visionary', pp. 218–20; Eric Palazzo, 'Visions and Liturgical Experience in the Early Middle Ages', in Hourihane (ed.), *Looking Beyond*, pp. 15–29 (pp. 25–26); Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 334–41. The material conditions for this vision were already discussed by Hubert Silvestre, 'Trois témoignages mosans du début du XIIe siècle sur le crucifix de l'arc triumphal', *Revue des archéologiques et historiens d'art de Louvain*, 9 (1976), 225–31, a reference I owe to Jeffrey Hamburger.

and then felt himself wrenched into the air. 'His hands outstretched,' he soared upward to meet 'those hands attached to the cross, and likewise with his mouth [he clung to] that mouth, so that it finally seemed that his whole body adhered to that other body'. Again: this object was not just a teaching tool, a sign of Eucharistic presence, or a reminder of God's love. It was an uncanny being, at once inert and alive, distant and accessible, visible and tangible, with the capacity to melt the differences between itself and the human other, standing as the silent mold against which the living being would be pressed.

What did Rupert's crucifixes look like? We have no way of knowing for certain. But thanks to the efforts of the experts whose writings fill this volume, we have an ever-sharper understanding of what Rupert could have seen. Of course, it will be incredibly difficult for some readers to think about medieval crucifixes without conjuring up the pathos-laden bodies of the Gothic period, from the swaying, swooning Christ of the Naumburg *Westlettner* to the gory *crucifixi dolorosi* of the fourteenth century and the jointed, bewigged crucifixes of the late Middle Ages.[15] Compared to those examples, the sculptures of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries look tame indeed, and it is small wonder that scholars long preferred to divide crucifixes into the straightforward categories of 'triumphal' and 'suffering' types.[16] Yet, as the preceding contributions make clear, we cannot fully understand the earlier sculptures if we only hold them up against later ones, defining them by what they are not. The absence of visible suffering in the early examples does not mean that they can be uniformly characterized as 'triumphal' – at least, not if 'triumphal' means conquering death and demonstrating divinity in an unambiguous way.[17] Even in cases where the figures are crowned and alert, their insistent corporeality – with knees that press into real space, bellies that bulge, heads that tilt, arms that flex – keeps them firmly in the realm of humanity.[18] They are images that are also bodies.[19] They are artifice, yet they look back at us – vessels of meaning that are also compelling presences.[20]. They should just be seen, yet they can also be grasped. They show us the God-man, the death in life and life in death. They embody the paradox that lies at the core of Christianity.[21]

This is also the case with the Boston Crucifix, the Gero Cross, and their many relatives, presented so vividly in this volume. More than 40 years ago, Reiner Haussherr argued that these sculptures

15 On the Naumburg crucifix and related examples, see Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten*; Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, c.1200–1400* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 48–53, 80–82, 89–90. For *crucifixi dolorosi*, see Godehard Hoffmann, *Das Gabelkreuz in St Maria im Kapitol zu Köln und das Phänomen der Crucifixi dolorosi in Europa* (Worms: Wernersche, 2006); Pavel Kalina, 'Giovanni Pisano, the Dominicans, and the Origin of the crucifixi dolorosi', *Artibus et historiae* 47 (2003), 81–101. For jointed and other mobile crucifixes, see Johannes Tripps, *Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Mann, 2000), 129–36; Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010).

16 This kind of strict division has proven particularly attractive for those who wish to see art following changes in devotional praxis, specifically the well-studied move toward affective piety and the increased interest in the humanity of Christ that began in the early twelfth century; see R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 219–57 (esp. pp. 236–38).

17 Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters*, pp. 24–32 makes clear that the term is not related to the iconography of the corpus but rather to the size of the crucifixes and their placement at the threshold to the sanctuary (beneath the 'triumphal arch' dividing this from the congregational nave). The term also relates, in a more general way, to Christ's triumph over death – even if the corpus appears dead.

18 Photographs preferentially included in scholarly studies, which show the *corpora* frontally, head-on, and evenly lit, suppress the plasticity and multifacetedness of the sculptures. See, for example, Paul Thoby, *Le crucifix des origines au Concile de Trente* (Nantes: Belanger, 1959).

19 See Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2001), pp. 11–56.

20 For this point see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

21 For paradox as central to medieval Christianity, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

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responded to and reinforced certain new ideas in Eucharistic theology that defined the death of the historical, incarnate Jesus as the basis of the salvific act continually re-played in the sacrament, and this is certainly correct.[22] But it seems to me that explaining these crucifixes in strictly theological terms, as reminders of Christ's historical death and his real presence in the Eucharist, is to flatten out their visceral effects – their strangeness. Early medieval churchmen knew as well as we do that, as signifiers, manuscript illuminations, bronze figurines or wall paintings could serve just as well.[23] Klaus Endemann has shown us quite vividly how difficult, how utterly un-self-evident, in the early years at least, was the process of fabricating these large-scale, awkwardly posed *corpora* – quite apart from their internal stylistic elements or expressive nuances.[24] Given this complexity of labor involved – and, as many of these authors have shown, the close connection of many large wooden crucifixes with small-scale processional objects[25] – what advantages did this medium and this format offer to clerical and monastic patrons, and these artifacts' anticipated viewers, in the tenth and eleventh centuries?

This is a question that deserves further discussion, much more than I can offer here. The first, most obvious answer that comes to mind is that the large scale enabled Christ's human presence to be made manifest to a large public at once. Especially in cases where the crucifix stood atop an elevated beam *in medio ecclesiae* (such as the detachable silver 'Benna' figure at Mainz Cathedral),[26] the corpus could be seen from multiple angles and degrees of proximity by men and women of various social stations; this suggests a promotion of *Schaufrömmigkeit* on a mass scale far earlier than the thirteenth century, the period generally associated with the rise of such highly visual modes of devotion.[27] As Gerhard Lutz notes, the large scale and high placement of these figures enabled them to assume a kind of movement, limited though it was, in the perception of mobile viewers.[28] If the splayed arms and frontal chests, visible all at once from a distance, held beholders at bay, the downturned heads invited them to proceed closer, to look for glimmers of continued vitality or signs of agonies overcome in the eyes, the lips, the creases of the forehead.

This downward positioning of the face, so deathlike when seen from a distance, not only summoned viewers to draw nearer; it also gave new meaning to the bodies of those who actually did stand close to these objects in the course of liturgical rites. To beholders standing at a distance, a priest consecrating a host beneath one of these crucifixes seems to be watched over by Christ himself

22 Reiner Haussherr, 'Der tote Christus am Kreuz: Zur Ikonographie des Gerokreuzes' (Ph.D. diss., Bonn 1963). More recent work on the Gero and other early crucifixes likewise tends to focus, in very sophisticated ways, on their visual logic within a theological and liturgical system; see Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

23 See Beatrice E. Kitzinger, *The Cross, the Gospels, and the Work of Art in the Carolingian Age* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

24 See Klaus Endemann, 'Wood-Carving Techniques in Early Monumental Sculpture', in this volume.

25 See Klaus Gereon Beuckers and Anna Pawlik, 'In Memory of Duke Otto of Swabia: The Crucifix of Aschaffenburg', and Beatrice Kitzinger, 'The Cross and the Monumental Crucifix', in this volume, for discussion of such intermedial connections.

26 Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters*, pp. 174–75.

27 The term was coined and developed by Anton L. Mayer, 'Die heilbringende Schau in Sitte und Kult', in *Heilige Überlieferung: Festschrift für Ildefons Herwegen* (Münster:Aschendorff, 1938), pp. 234–62, and has been nuanced and complicated in recent years. See for example Christoph Diedrich, 'Desire for Viewing: A 'Deluge of Images' in the Middle Ages', in *The Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals: Genre and Ritual*, ed. by Eyolf Østrem et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2005), pp. 87–118; Beate Fricke, *Ecce Fides: Die Statue von Conques, Götzendienst, und Bildkultur im Westen* (Munich: Fink, 2007), translated by Andrew Griebeler as *Fallen Idols, Risen Saints: Sainte Foy of Conques and the Revival of Monumental Sculpture in Medieval Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

28 See 'The Crucifix from the Fuld Collection' by Gerhard Lutz in this volume.

– even somewhat tenderly, as we can imagine in the case of the Aschaffenburg Crucifix. From this point of view, the aestheticizing rhetoric of the twelfth-century monastics studied by the historian Sara Lipton assumes a more concrete basis: in this language, which found its way into the public sphere in the form of sermons in the thirteenth century, the 'sweet lean' of the crucified Christ's head became itself an act of desirous looking, and specifically an invitation to kiss, and his open arms became an urging to embrace.[29] In light of these ideas, we would do well to keep in mind that assertive power – one is tempted to say, the agency – of crucifixes to make claims on the spectator, to create viewers as subjects (as witnesses to the Crucifixion; as fellow mourners with Mary and John; as the blaspheming crowd; as testifiers, like Longinus, to the divinity within the human flesh) even as they formed the objects of their gaze.[30]

The constitutive power of the sculpted crucifix lies not only in its iconography but also in its formal composition. As we have seen, the carvers of crucifixes, even when perplexed by the qualities of wood, made every effort to shape their figures with a strong degree of plasticity – to make them thrust into their surrounding space as much as the nature of the subject matter and the quality of their materials allowed. The Gero Cross (Fig. 8) – originally made for display on a column *in medio* of



Fig. 8, a-c. Three views of Gero Crucifix, Cologne Cathedral, *c.*970. (Photos and montage: Jacqueline Jung)

29 Sara Lipton, '"The Sweet Lean of His Head": Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 80 (2005), 1172–1208.

30 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). As Klaus Endemann notes in 'The Boston Crucifix in the Context of Early Wood Sculpture: Technical Observations', in this volume, the eyes of the Boston Crucifix (like those of many others) were painted shut in a later period. In light of related depictions of Christ in other media, as well as large-scale sculptures whose original polychromy has been revealed, it is likely that the eyes were at least partially open. For the case of the thirteenth-century crucifix at Biberbach near Augsburg, see Johannes Taubert, *Farbige Skulpturen: Bedeutung, Fassung, Restaurierung* (Munich: Callwey, 1978), pp. 134–35; translated by Carola Schulman as *Polychrome Sculpture: Meaning, Form, Conservation*, ed. Michele D. Marincola (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2015), pp. 141–46.

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the Ottonian *ecclesiae*[31] – is the supreme example of this sculptural shaping of space, with the knees that both thrust forward and twist gently sideways, the head that wrenches forward, the shoulders that stretch, the hips that sway, that remarkable, beachball-like abdomen that surges up diagonally over the loincloth–one of the great passages in all medieval sculpture, and one that was copied by the Boston Crucifix carver and many others, as we've seen. It may not be completely out of the question to see this belly, with its undeniably pregnant appearance, as a sign of Christ's encapsulation of *all* humanity, male and female, and his continued fecundity even in death – the kind of fecundity other scholars have recognized in his blood-spouting side-wound in numerous ivory reliefs from the Carolingian era.[32]

The plenitude of this Christ's body asserts itself most powerfully in the diagonal view from his right (Fig. 8a), which brings into a loose alignment the firmly planted feet and cricked knees, the supple knot of the loincloth, the swollen belly and fleshy pectorals, and the downturned face, which from here displays a perfectly symmetrical, calm demeanor. The smooth lines of stretched tendons and muscles running along the right armpit and down the right leg accentuate the smooth curve of the body's composition in this perspective, lending it a literally overarching cohesiveness despite its varied focal points. This combination of formal diversity and cohesiveness, along with the sense of personal engagement that the visibility of the face sparks, vanishes in the corresponding view of the figure's left side (Fig. 8c). From here the body appears flat and unvariegated; both the knees and the abdomen, which respectively bend and protrude in our direction, become visually absorbed into the body's cruciform contour, and their rich plasticity is thus effaced. Nothing in the figure's formal design, in other words, entices us to take up this standpoint, and everything directs us around to the other side.

All of this would be quite banal, perhaps attributable to the (presumably right-handed) carver's facility working with the frontal and right sides of the wooden block, if not for the close association of the Crucifixion with the Last Judgment in Christian soteriology. Cast our eyes ahead, into the 1140s, and we find Christ enthroned in the tympanum at St-Denis, stretching his arms against the horizontal cross-beam and clasping banderoles that invite the Elect to join him at his right side and the Damned to depart from his left (Fig. 9).[33] In a more subtle vein, Gregory the Great, in his *Moralia in Job* (591), likened the dying Christ to a kind of balance borne by God Father, upon which the trays of Justice and Mercy competed for greater weight, and writers in subsequent centuries found it easy to slip this analogy onto the form of the crucifix.[34] Thus Rupert of Deutz would envision the cross itself, bearing the body of Christ, as a set of scales, of which the side of Mercy, replete with the sufferings

31 See Rolf Lauer, 'The Gero Cross in Cologne Cathedral', in this volume; Beer, *Triumphkreuzgruppe*, pp. 178–79; Annika Elisabeth Fisher, 'Cross Altar and Crucifix in Ottonian Cologne: Past Narrative, Present Ritual, Future Resurrection', in *Decorating the Lord's Table: On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, ed. Søren Kaspersen and Erik Thunø (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 43–62.

32 For example, the plaque on the book cover of the Pericopes of Henry II, *c.*840–77 (Munich, Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 4452), discussed by Chazelle, *Crucified God*, pp. 239–40, 267–89.

33 The scroll in his right hand reads VENITE BENEDICTI PATRIS MEI ('Come ye blessed of my Father,' Matt. 25:34), that in his left DISCEDITE A ME MALEDICTI ('Depart from me you cursed', Matt. 25:41). In the episode in which Jesus assigns these lines to the Son of Man upon his return, he explicitly associates them with his right and left sides. For the iconography and design of this portal, see most recently Conrad Rudolph, 'Inventing the Gothic Portal: Suger, Hugh of Saint Victor, and the Construction of a New Public Art at Saint-Denis', *Art History* 33 (2010): pp. 568–95.

34 Francis Wormald, 'The Crucifix and the Balance', *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 (April 1938): 276–80.

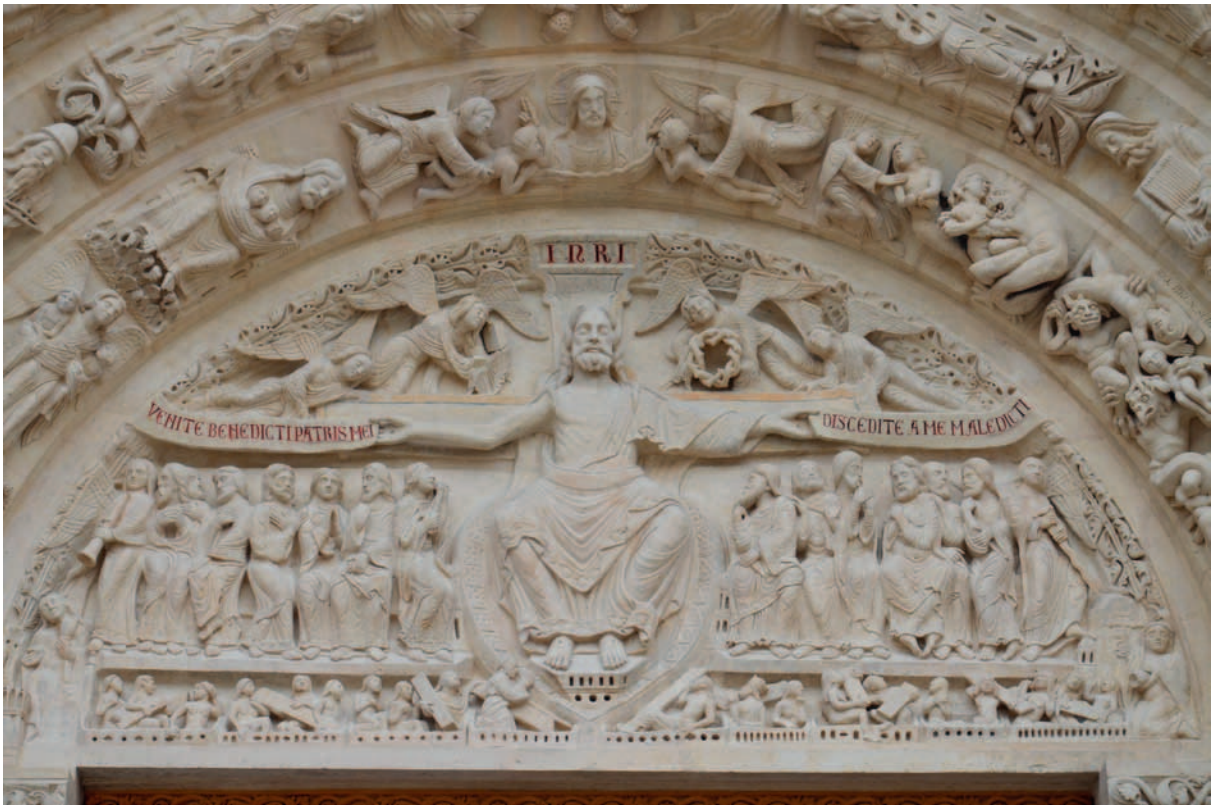


Fig. 9. Abbey church of St-Denis, west façade, center tympanum, *c.*1140: Christ the Judge with arms outstretched against cross, with inscribed banderoles. (Photo: Jacqueline Jung)

Jesus endured at the Passion, outweighed the side of Justice, the accumulated sins of humanity.[35] We might think about the body of the Gero Cross as itself engaged in such a contest, with the frontal view (Fig. 8b) forming a transition between two starkly contrasting bodily compositions, one flaccid, thin, and alienating, with the face turned away, the other ample, open, and engaging, its volumes bursting out toward us and face offered fully to our view. Even the hands participate, very subtly, in this play of contrasts, as the right continues the straight line of the arm and the left cricks abruptly downward. No inscription is necessary here: 'Come ye blessed' is precisely what the *dexter* of this corpus is calling on onlookers to do. Through this invitation, it constructs all beholders as members of the Elect. Despite its unabashed emphasis on the dying body, its sculptural configuration makes the Gero Cross a profoundly optimistic image.

The impression of plenitude the effulgent right side of the Gero Cross gives us becomes even more apparent if we contrast it with its complementary opposite, the magisterial wooden *crucifixus dolorosus* in St Maria im Kapitol from around 1304 – a work I would like to think was directly informed by the venerable Ottonian sculpture in the cathedral (Fig. 10).[36] Here the orientation is reversed:

35 Ibid., p. 279.

36 Hoffmann, *Das Gabelkreuz in St Maria im Kapitol*, pp. 43–44 notes the striking similarity in the sharp fold that hangs upon the upper thigh of the two figures. It would not be surprising if the sculptor of the St Maria im Kapitol *Gabelkreuz*, arguably the greatest surviving work of its kind, took the Gero Cross as a special challenge to which he aimed to respond.

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Fig. 10, a-c. Three views of the *crucifixus dolorosus* in St Maria im Kapitol, Cologne, *c.*1304. (Photos and montage: Jacqueline Jung)

now it is the left side that offers the most dynamic and textured composition (Fig. 10c), whereas from the right (Fig. 10a) the body collapses visually into an inchoate mass. Approaching from the nave toward the figure's left side, we see how the body – uncanny in its application of the most atrocious signs of suffering to what seems to be still (barely) living flesh – folds in on itself, with the abdomen retreating from the world; the outpouring of blood from the wound and the jagged, aggressive joints of the limbs replace the smooth, bulging stomach of the Gero Cross as the focus and core of man's salvation. What does protrude toward us is the bony ribcage, an empty, bloated shell that in fact hides a collection of relics; these were installed through the side wound that gapes from the proper right side of the torso (Fig. 10a) – the only sign of the sacred to be found, as the head cricks down so starkly that the face is, in this view, entirely obscured. Thus in the Kapitol crucifix, salvation, couched in holy matter, is present but masked by the hideous body; in the Gero Cross, salvation is revealed through the body's sculpted plenitude and its summons to beholders. Both sculptures are about the paradox of life in death. But while the *Gabelkreuz* confronts us with the horror of a person living through a crush of torments no ordinary body could endure (as in the Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of the Christ*),[37] the Gero Cross – and the Boston Crucifix as well – show us death couched within a body that seems untouched by pain. No bones are broken here, no flesh is rent; the legs stand strong, the arms reach with vigor. Though the eyes are closed, the wholeness of the bodies,

37 Relevant here is the medievalist Amy Hollywood's essay 'Kill Jesus', in *Mel Gibson's Bible: Religion, Popular Culture, and 'The Passion of the Christ'*, ed. by Timothy K. Beal and Tod Linafelt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 159–68.

their elegant contours and their smooth surfaces, testify to the beauty of the life once lived, and the life that will, in the end, be reclaimed.

This is, to be sure, a strange message. But crucifixes are strange things. They are forever like us, and forever other. Scholars of medieval art, history, literature and religion need to talk about them more in our interpretive scholarship – their diversity, their complexity, their paradoxes. But before we can talk about them as images, we need to know them as *things* – bodies that share our space, our human shape and our three-dimensionality, but that are crafted of wood or stone, silver or bronze. The wooden objects we have been reading about in this volume are bodies that were once vibrant life-forms, entities flowing with invisible juices and leaving traces of their yearly growth on their inner flesh – bodies that were chopped, hewn, and left to dry, then cut apart, pierced, nailed back together in new forms.[38] Sometimes they incorporated relics or other holy items either on their surfaces or in cavities invisible to the eye, so that they were also imbued with the ongoing lives of the saints.[39] In the late Middle Ages, their limbs might be jointed and covered over with leather that both masked the mechanism and simulated human flesh; their heads might be bedecked with wigs of animal hair, and their cheeks pitted with holes through with the strands of a beard might flow.[40] Blood might ooze out of wounds in coagulated sculptural masses of gesso, or it might gush more literally, a liquid squeezed from a bladder behind or within the figure.[41] Both as bodies fashioned of organic materials and as images reverberating in the minds of their viewers, these wooden images of a dying man were profoundly, paradoxically, alive.[42] As much as we have come to accept them as familiar parts of Christian visual culture in Europe – and, since the early modern period, well beyond –, and to understand them more fully as objects of scientific and historical inquiry, we lose much if we forget how *strange* they are.[43]

38 The technical conservation essays in Hoffmann, *Das Gabelkreuz in St Maria im Kapitol* present x-ray images that show long iron nails driven into the Christ figure's head, to hold on the crown of thorns, and holding his shoulders and neck in place. There is much about the manufacture of such objects that echoes the abuses imagined to have been inflicted on Christ's own body in the process of crucifixion – a topic that begs for further exploration.

39 For this facet see most recently Anna Pawlik, *Das Bildwerk als Reliquiar? Funktionen früher Großplastik im 9. bis 11. Jahrhundert* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2013), which demonstrates that not all early sculptures were meant to hold relics; and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011), a volume of special relevance to the present essay more broadly. For the living quality of wood, the seminal source remains Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1980); and see now Gregory C. Bryda, 'The Exuding Wood of the Cross at Isenheim,' *Art Bulletin* 100 (2018): 6-36.

40 See Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010); Paoletti, 'Wooden Sculpture in Italy'.

41 See most recently Johannes Tripps, '"Ein crucifix, dem ausz den funff wunden rotter wein sprang": Die Inszenierung von Christusfiguren in Spätgotik und Frührenaissance', in *Das Bild Gottes in Judentum, Christentum, und Islam: Vom Alten Testament biz zum Karikaturenstreit*, ed. by Eckhard Leuschner and Mark R. Hesslinger (Petersberg: Imhof, 2009), pp. 117–27; Beate Fricke, 'A Liquid History: Blood and Animation in Late Medieval Art', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 63/64 (2013), 53–69.

42 Medieval visionary literature is famously replete with cases of the crucified Christ, either in the form of a material sculpture or an apparition, moving and speaking; for examples, with reference to much earlier literature, see Jung, 'Tactile and Visionary,' esp. 215–24. For well-documented cases in the twentieth century, see William A. Christian, Jr., *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

43 The story charted here and throughout this volume extends outward not only in time but also in geography, as crucifixes became central features to the Christianized parts of Asia, Africa, and the New World. See for example Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Sara Ryu, 'Calendar, Column, Crucifix: Material Reuse in the Early Modern Transatlantic World' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2015).

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