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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>INTERFERENCE STRATEGIES: IS ART IN THE MIDDLE?</td>
<td>Lanfranco Aceti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>INTERFERENCE STRATEGIES</td>
<td>Paul Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>THE ART OF DECODING: n-FOLDED, n-VISIONED, n-CULTURED</td>
<td>Mark Guglielmetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>THE CASE OF BIOPHILIA: A COLLECTIVE COMPOSITION OF GOALS AND DISTRIBUTED ACTION</td>
<td>Mark Cypher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>CONTAMINATED IMMERSION AND THOMAS DEMAND: THE DAILIES</td>
<td>David Eastwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>GESTURE IN SEARCH OF A PURPOSE: A PREHISTORY OF MOBILITY</td>
<td>Darren Tofts &amp; Lisa Gye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>HEADLESS AND UNBORN, OR THE BAPHOMET RESTORED</td>
<td>Leon Marvell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>IMAGES (R)-EVOLUTION: MEDIA ARTS COMPLEX IMAGERY CHALLENGING HUMANITIES AND OUR INSTITUTIONS OF CULTURAL MEMORY</td>
<td>Oliver Grau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>INTERFERENCE WAVE DATA AND ART</td>
<td>Adam Nash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>INTERFERING WITH THE DEAD</td>
<td>Edward Colless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>MERGE/MULTIPLEX</td>
<td>Brogan Bunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>A ROBOT WALKS INTO A ROOM: GOOGLE ART PROJECT, THE NEW AESTHETIC, AND THE ACCIDENT OF ART</td>
<td>Susan Ballard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>TOWARDS AN ONTOLOGY OF COLOUR IN THE AGE OF MACHINIC SHINE</td>
<td>Mark Titmarsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>TRANSVERSAL INTERFERENCE</td>
<td>Anna Munster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interference Strategies: Its Ant in the Middle?

If we look at the etymological structure of the word interference, we would have to get back to a construct that defines it as a sum of two Latin words: interferre (to interfere in between) and terminus (boundary). Thus, with a particular attention to the meaning of the word interference—interference as the state (we would not use what Alfred Korzybski etymologically incorrectly calls “interference”—it may be preferable to think of interference as an accomplishment of a form of communication as well as an interference with Michelangelo’s vision.

Interference is a word that assembles a multitude of meanings interpreted according to the perspective anti-intellectual construct of misconception, relativization, and an alienation of the interferences as being two different things between two parties. In this book, there are several representations of the interference phenomenon that are not possible to contemplate, form or form interference with scientific and aesthetic—what are the strategies that cannot be adapted to and interactively interfere. The complexity of the strategies of interference within contemporary political and aesthetic discourses appears to be summed up by the perception that interference is a necessarily act of gesture. This perception appears to be at the same time the very existence of an artwork is based on an interference in nature, on a common aesthetic that has come to be as a consequence of a mind, interfering with a political project.

Interference, artworks, which are of their own nature challenges systems, were the art work of choice for the exhibition (Entertainer Kunst) (Interference Art), exposition (to the many images of the point of counterproductive summaries and billboards in museums and avant-gardes amount of the globe, glistening with pride over the propaganda, or better cover the breaches that they have commissioned artists to produce. Today, contemporary art should be interfering more and more with the art itself. It is not the interference that is destroying the artwork, but the艺术家 interfering with the artwork and the artist with the artwork (interference as a tool of interference and the strategies that cannot be produced). This leaves the greatest common denominator interference and its terminus still possible? There are still spaces and opportunities for interference, and this volume is one of these maintaining areas. But if they are extended towards spaces and time thinking of fast, leaving an overwhelming disharmony in the world of art and measurable off as multidimensional of the others.
Interference Strategies: Is Art in the Middle?

If we look at the etymological structure of the word interference, we would have to go back to a construct that defines it as a sum of the two Latin words inter-(in between) and Ferio (to strike), but with a particular attention to the meaning of the word Ferio being interpreted principally as to wound. Albeit perhaps etymologically incorrect, it may be preferable to think of the word interference as a composite of inter-(in between) and the Latin verb Ferio (to carry), which would bring forward the idea of interference as a contribution brought in the middle of two arguments, two ideas, two constructs.

It is important to acknowledge the etymological root of a word not in order to develop a sterile academic exercise, but in order to clarify the ideological underpinnings of arguments that are then summed up and characterized by a word.

This book, titled Interference Strategies, does not (and in all honesty could not) provide a resolution to a complex interaction - that of artistic interferences - that has a complex historical tradition. In fact, it is impossible, for me, when analyzing the issue of interference, not to think of the Breeches Maker (also known as Daniele da Volterra) and the coverings that he painted following a 1559 commission from Pope Paul IV to ‘render decent’ the naked bodies of Michelangelo Buonarroti’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. That act, in the eyes of a contemporary viewer, was a wound inflicted in between the relationship created by the artwork and the artist with the viewer (intention auctoris with intention lectoris), as Umberto Eco would put it. Those famous breeches appear to be both: a form of censorship as well as interference with Michelangelo’s vision.

Interference is a word that assembles a multitude of meanings interpreted according to one’s perspective and ideological constructs as a meddling, a disturbance, and an alteration of modalities of interaction between two parties. In this book, there are a series of representations of these interferences, as well as a series of questions on what are the possible contemporary forms of interference - digital, scientific and aesthetic - and what are the strategies that could be adopted in order to actively interfere.

The complexity of the strategies of interference within contemporary political and aesthetic discourses appears to be summed up by the perception that interference is a necessarily active gesture. This perception seems to exclude the fact that sometimes the very existence of an artwork is based on an interfering nature, or on an aesthetic that has come to be as non-consonant to and, hence, interfering with a political project.

Interfering artworks, which by their own nature challenge a system, were the artworks chosen for the exhibition Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) exhibitions to the many images of pompously strutting corporate tycoons and billionaires in museums and art fairs around the globe, glancing with pride over the propaganda, or - better - over the breeches that they have commissioned artists to produce.

Today’s contemporary art should be interfering more and more with art itself, it should be corrupted and corrupting, degenerate and degenerating. It should be producing what currently it is not and it should create a wound within art itself, able to alter current thinking and modalities of engagement. It should be - to quote Pablo Picasso - an instrument of war able to interfere: “No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy.”

If art should either strike or bring something is part of what has been a long aesthetic conversation that preceded the Avant-garde movement or the destructive fury of the early Futurists. In this particular volume the issue of art as interference and the strategies that it should adopt have been reframed within the structures of contemporary technology as well as within the frameworks of interactions between art, science and media.

What sort of interference should be chosen, if one at all, remains a personal choice for each artist, curator, critic and historian.

If I had to choose, personally I find myself increasingly favoring art that does not deliver what is expected, what is obvious, what can be hung on a wall and can be matched to trappings. Nor can I find myself able to favor art that shrouds propaganda or business under a veil with the name of art repeatedly written in capital letters all over it. That does not leave very much choice in a world where interference is no longer acceptable, or if it is acceptable, it is so only within pre-established contractual operative frameworks, therefore losing its ‘interference value.’

This leaves the great conundrum – are interferences still possible? There are still spaces and opportunities for interference, and this volume is one of these remaining areas, but they are interstitial spaces and are shrinking fast, leaving an overwhelming Baudrillardian desert produced by the conspirators of art and made of a multitude of breeches.
In this introduction I cannot touch upon all the different aspects of interference analyzed, like in the case of data and waves presented by Adam Nash, who argues that the digital is in itself and per se a form of interference: at least a form of interference with behavioral systems and with what can be defined as the illusory realm of everyday’s ‘real.’

Transversal interference, as in the case of Anna Munster, is a socio-political divide where heterogeneity is the monster, the wound, the interfering and dreaded element that threatens the ‘homologation’ of scientific thought.

With Brogan Bunt comes obfuscation as a form of blurring that interferes with the ordered lines of neatly defined social taxonomies; within which I can only perceive the role of the thinker as that of the taxidermist operating on living fields of study that are in the process of being rendered dead and obfuscated by the very process and people who should be unveiling and revealing them.

With Darren Tofts and Lisa Gye it is the perusal of the image that can be an act of interference and a disruption if it operates outside rigid interpretative frameworks and interaction parameters firmly set via intenio operis, intenio auctoris and intenio lectoris.

It is the fear of the unexpected remix and mash-up that interferes with and threatens the ‘purity’ and sanctimonious fascist interpretations of the aura of the artwork, its buyers, consumers and aesthetic priests. The orthodoxical, fanatic and terroristic aesthetic hierarchies that were disrupted by laughter in the Middle Ages might be disrupted today by viral, a-syncretic hierarchies that were disrupted by laughter in the Middle Ages.

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The role of the publication, as a vehicle to promote and encourage transdisciplinary research, is to question what fine art image-making is contributing to the current discourse on images. The publication brings together researchers, artists and cultural thinkers to speculate, contest and share their thoughts on the strategies for interference, at the intersection between art, science and culture, that form new dialogues.

In October 1927 the Fifth Solvay International Conference marked a point in time that created a unifying seepage between art and science and opened the gateway to uncertainty and therefore the parallels of artistic and scientific research. This famous conference announced the genesis of quantum theory and, with that, Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. These events are linked historically and inform interesting experimental art practices to reveal the subtle shift that can ensue from a moment in time.

The simple yet highly developed double slit experiment identifies the problem of measurement in the quantum world. If you are measuring the position of a particle you cannot measure its momentum. This is one of the main theories that have been constantly tested and still remains persistent. The double slit experiment, first initiated by Thomas Young, exposes a quintessential quantum phenomenon, which, through Heisenberg theory, demonstrates the quantum universe as a series of probabilities that enabled the Newtonian view of the world to be seriously challenged.

REFERENCES AND NOTES
INTRODUCTION

N

Diagram of the double slit experiment that was first performed by Thomas Young in the early 1800s displays the probabilistic characteristics of quantum mechanical phenomena.

When particles go through the slits they act as waves and create the famous interference pattern. The concept is that one particle going through the slit must behave like a wave and interfere with itself to create the band image on the rear receptor.

Interference strategies look at the phenomenon of interference and places art at the very centre of the wave/particle dilemma. Can art still find a way in today’s dense world where we are saturated with images from all disciplines, whether it’s the creation of ‘beautiful visualisations’ for science, the torrent of images uploaded to social media services like Instagram and Flicker, or the billions of queries made to vast visual data archives such as Google Images? The contemporary machinic interpretations of the visual and sensorial experience of the world are producing a new spectacle of media pollution, obliging the viewers to ask if machines should be considered the new artists of the 21st century.

The notion of ‘interference’ is posed here as an antagonism between production and seduction, as a redirection of affect, or as an untapped potential for repositioning artistic critique. Maybe art doesn’t have to work as a wave that displaces or reinforces the standardized protocols of data/messages, but can instead function as a signal that disrupts and challenges perceptions.

‘Interference’ can stand as a mediating incantation that might create a layer between the constructed image of the ‘everyday’ given to us by science, technological social networks and the means of its construction. Mediation, as discussed in the first Transdisciplinary Imaging conference, is a concept that has become a medium in itself through which we think and act; and in which we swim. Interference, however, confronts the flow, challenges currents and eulogizes the drift.

The questions posed in this volume, include whether art can interfere with the chaotic storms of data visualisation and information processing, or is it merely reinforcing the noxious nature of contemporary media? Can we think of ‘interference’ as a key tactic for the contemporary image in disrupting and critiquing the continual flood of constructed imagery? Are contemporary forms and strategies of interference the same as historical ones? What kinds of similarities and differences exist?

Application of a process to a medium, or a wave to a particle, for example, the sorting of pixel data, literally interferes with the state of an image, and directly gives new materiality and meaning, allowing interference to be utilised as a conceptual framework for interpretation, and critical reflection.

Interference is not merely combining. Interference is an active process of negotiating between different forces. The artist in this context is a mediator, facilitating the meeting of competitive elements, bringing together and setting up a situation of probabilities.

In response to the questions posed by the conference theme, presentations traversed varied notions of interference in defining image space, the decoding and interpretation of images, the interference between different streams of digital data, and how this knowledge might redefine art and art practice. Within that scope lies the discourse about interference that arises when normal approaches or processes fail, with unanticipated results, the accidental discovery, and its potential in the development of new strategies of investigation.

In ‘[The case of Biophilia: a collective composition of goals and distributed action],’ Mark Cypher highlights the interference in negotiations between exhibit organisations, and space requirements, and the requirements for artist/artworks, resulting in an outcome that is a combination generated by the competition of two or more interests. As part of the final appearance of Biophilia, the artwork itself contained elements of both interests, an interference of competing interests, comprising a system in which the artist and the artwork are components, and the display a negotiated outcome. Each element interferes with itself as it negotiates the many factors that contribute to the presentation of art. In this sense the creation of the final appearance of Biophilia is the result of the distributed action of many “actors” in a “network.” To put this in another form all actors are particles and interact with each other to create all possible solutions but when observed, create a single state.

In summing up concepts of the second Transdisciplinary Imaging conference, particularly in reference to the topic of interference strategies, Edward Colless spoke of some of the aspirations for the topic, entertaining the possibilities of transdisciplinary art as being a contested field, in that many of the conference papers were trying to unravel, contextualise and theorise simultaneously.

The publication aims to demonstrate a combined eclecticism and to extend the discussion by addressing the current state of the image through a multitude of lenses. Through the theme of interference strategies this publication will embrace error and transdisciplinarity as a new vision of how to think, theorise and critique the image, the real and thought itself.

Paul Thomas

REFERENCES AND NOTES

4. Ibid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Special thanks to researcher Jan Andruszkiewicz.
Interfering with the Dead

1. CORPUS CHRISTI

Jesus said, “Whoever has known the world has fallen upon a corpse.”
— Logion 56.1, Gospel of Thomas

To be worldly is to be dead. Falling upon something that you know: this is not like making a stumbling discovery; it is more like a plunge, more like leaping onto something than being accidentally tripped up by it. The corpse in this image is not the victim in a crime scene awaiting investigation, identification and justice. It is the sex object bidden by, succumbing to, and complying with necrophilic ravishment. Worldliness is a matter of life and death, of knowing that they will embrace, in a consummation devoutly to be wished. It might at first sound all too dour, but one can force a crazy twist of logic out of the timeworn death-drive in this odd remark of Jesus’s. If to be worldly is to be dead, then to be unworldly is to be undead. But being undead is the most one can hope for by way of resurrection or salvation in this petulantly, huffy, pessimistic warning from a character who will later, in other venues, claim to be the Christ.

ESSAY

by

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ABSTRACT

An ancient library of what has become known, if contentiously, as the “gnostic gospels” was accidentally exhumed in 1945 from a monastic graveyard in Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Among these esoteric texts, most of which were lost to history since their hasty burial in the fourth century, the Gospel of Thomas has an especially piquant pedigree. Cited throughout early Christian literature as an exceptionally heretical and prohibited text that had been purportedly composed in the first century CE, its cryptic (when not incomprehensible) apothegms are claimed to have been secret knowledge written by the twin brother of Jesus Christ. This claim, even taken as figurative, poses a modest predicament for the archaeology of Christian theology. However, taken as an artifact of media archaeology, this text—one of its verses, in particular, which proposes an equation of knowledge and death—extends a dark perspective on our own contemporary cultural imperatives with embodiment and performativity.
Throughout the history of their various authoritative translations (from 1556 to 1888), the Nag Hammadi codices have collectively if contentiously become characterised as “the Gnostic Gospels” or “Gnostic Scriptures,” the Gnosticism of which identifies a miscellany of purportedly separatist mystery cults dispersed across the eastern Mediterranean in the first to fourth centuries CE (Christian, Jewish and Graeco-Roman Pagan). The Nag Hammadi texts are pungently placed within the orthodox landscape of early Christian church doctrine, indicating sects in open or clandestine conflict with an emerging institutional apostolic Christian authority. The gnostic featuring in many of these sectarian texts is a type of learning associated with initiation into an unspoken mystery distinct from philosophical wisdom (sophia) or intellectual comprehension (sunesis), and in this respect a learning distinct from the logos that provides an accountable ground of knowledge or, according to the famous opening of the Gospel of John, the ground of divine incarnation and incarnation. In the milieu of, for instance, the Hellenic Judaism of the Biblical Proverbs, gnostis (from the Hebrew da’ath) is identified, in chapter 2 verse 6, with the face of God. That’s a pretty solid grounding. Many of the Gnostic sects acknowledged that such an exceptional exposure to gnostic would be a redemptive illumination, igniting an otherwise forsaken soulful atom of divine light within the dark matter of the world and the bodies blindly banging around in it.

But the advent of the gnostic testified to in this Nag Hammadi literature had little to do with the more common godly smiley-face benefactions, which might involve the reception of grace and the occasional epiphany, or to do with godly intercession, such as an Annunciation. The setting for a Gnostic illumination is characterised as “the Gnostic Gospels” or “Gnostic Scriptures,” the Gnosticism of which identifies an accountable ground of knowledge or, according to some, a learning distinct from the bishops that judged him deviant: if he had his way, only Paul’s writings would have qualified as true scripture.

The God of the Marcionist heresy was utterly alien to the creator God of demurge who appears throughout the Hebraic Tanakh, the body of scriptures including Proverbs that will become known by Christians, when incorporated into their canon, as the Old Testament. This God, who permits no graven images of itself, is incongruously not only anthropomorphic in personality but tyrannical in temper: stubborn, concerted, jealous, and vengeful. For all his protestations that he is supreme and thus intolerant of competition, this God (who, in Marcion’s tenacious anti-Judaic rage, is an flattened tribal Hebrew God) was a deceptive, indeed an abominable mask – just like the world he created, and like its creatures – obscured the true God who had drowned and retreated from the arrogant sordid theatra of creation. Marcion’s dualistic doctrine bears only slight affinity with the verginously complex cosmogenies of contemporaneous Christian Gnostic religious systems, such as those of Valentinus, but is congruent with them in its insistence on the derogation of the created world. The redemptive gnostic offered by Christ in such religious topography would need to be pledged to an utterly faceless God not an omniscient and omnipresent entity but an estranged absent divinity, both awfully remote to and alienated from the created world. And the world it has abandoned is not an illusion so much as it is a dreadfully real, terminal slave colony and abattoir: in short, death row. If there can be a Gnostic mystery extorted from Jesus’s gnomic dictum told to Thomas, it would be that the created world is not just a dark world, but a dead world.

Today, when Gnostic spirituality is buoyantly promoted with the facile enthusiasm for New Age lifestyle therapies that include Wicca and Tantric sex and Kabbalah as a Hollywood hobby, the spiralling and even abyssal negative theology of these antique mystical schemes can be hilariously trivialized or trivially romantized. Popular Gnostic revivals are straw figures that deserve the ridicule brilliant polemicists like Slavoj Zizek hurl effortlessly at them. However, the liberty I am taking here with by this epigraph from Thomas is not to précis, revise or critique (let alone defend) Gnostic tradition (in some respects Thomas also eludes characterization as Gnostic), but to provoke the perverse trajectory of this particular motto as a morbid inversion of enlightenment. This provocation is not only a wanton wish to embellish logion 56 with Gnosticism, with a Doom House or a Death Metal timbre, even if it would wear each of those genres stylishly. It is also a reprimand against neutralizing the venom spat with each historical accusation of heresy and monstrosity delivered against it. (And just this sort of acquisitive, or at least parfiting dismissal of those charges, accompanies the diplomatic, pluralist inclusion of the Nag Hammadi library into postmodern Gnostic exegeses of early Christianity.)

So let’s take Irenaeus at his word when he levels against the gnostoi the charge that their speculative cosmogonies and cosmologies are “an abyss of madness” and “a blasphemy against Christ.” We might well deduce that this particular “Gnostic” cache which included Thomas was being hidden as a precious object when evacuated hastily from an archive in the desert monastery to be sunken into its graveyard; and that this provenance endows the Nag Hammadi artifacts with the patina of secret, forbidden literature interred for its own protection and clandestine preservation, with expectation of its eventual salvage and restoration. It was buried as treasure rather than as waste, but nonetheless it would have been hazardous material. Evidently, too, this library was not the exclusive testimony of a single cell or sect: the scope of metaphysical and mythographic speculation, as well as apocalyptic pronouncements, are too diverse and contrary to suggest anything other than that this was a miscellany of enigmatic heretical arcana. An illegal, underground, collection of prohibited knowledge. And the strange urgency to conceal these tracts back in the fourth century as much as the story of their twentieth-century discovery and passage into scholarly exegesis is a tale of tantalizing drama – in the now idiomatic phrase – of a Dan Brown novel.

Illiterate and uninterested in his own Egyptian history, Mohammed al-Samman had hardly any idea of what he had discovered inside the large red earthenware jar in a cave that he had stumbled onto while digging for a natural fertilizer (“known as sabkhat”) on the edge of the desert. Bitterly disappointed not to find any palpably recognizable treasure in the jar that he had broken open (despite the promising adjacency of a human skeleton), and regarding these old papyrus documents bound in leather as having negligible immediate value, the story goes that he tore a few up to trade for cigarettes with the camel drivers who were passing by at the time. Suspecting that objects of that vintage might involve the reception of grace and the occasional epiphany, he took the rest back to his house, although negligently throwing them onto a pile of straw in the open yard, where his mother resourcefully used some of them as kindling for the household clay oven. In addition to this archaeological fiasco, Muhammed himself was emboiled in an aston-
ishingly gruesome family vendetta at the time. Shortly
after the fertilizer expedition, he and his brothers at-
tacked a man from a neighbouring village whom they
believed responsible for the murder some months
before of their father, dismembering the culprit, tear-
ing the man’s heart out of his chest and eating it! Needing to lie low from police, Muhammed entrusted
the remaining papyri to a local priest who, twigging to
the possible historical significance passed a sample
to a local Egyptian historian, who then contacted Cai-
rus’s Coptic Museum, initiating a consequent black mar-
ket narrative of theft, extortion, curatorial ineptitude
and smuggling involving postwar antiquities markets
in Egypt, the United States and Europe (Zurich’s Jung
Institute, notably). Juicy as all this anecdotal intrigue is,
and alluringly esoteric as much of the theological con-
tent and attribution of these codices has been, there
is no fantastic conspiratorial history to their heresies,
just as there was – despite Muhammed al-Samman’s
quaintals at breaking open the jar with the mattock kept
sharp to use on his father’s murderer – no djinn let
loose, no diabolical curse to carry away.

Well, not entirely.

Among the texts of this Nag Hammadi Library, the
testimony is attested in ancient literature from the
councils considered to have dubious provenance, at
Well, not entirely.

Among the texts of this Nag Hammadi Library, the
testimony is attested in ancient literature from the
councils considered to have dubious provenance, at
the time of this council. For Eusebius, however, not only doesn’t Thomas fit
the designation of apocrypha; it doesn’t even warrant
the designation of being a bastard text! He needs to
create a fourth category beyond the capacity of cor-
rection or expurgation, a sort of outlattice exclusively
reserved for Thomas: a dark pit of prohibition and
proscription, a sarcophagus like that around the Cher-
nobyl nuclear reactor that shullenly entombs something
too hot to handle…too contaminating even for alert,
devout scholarship to cope with. Something poison-
ous, wicked, impious, evil. 

Some twenty-five years later, heeding the warn-
ing expressed by Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem in his
Catachresis (possibly around 345 CE) predictably
and generally declares false gospels to be harmful,
but especially insists, “Let no one read the Gospel of
Thomas.” 12 In 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria
issues one of his Festal Letters with an inventory of the
twenty-seven books which he asserts authori-
tatively constitute and foreclose the content of the
Christian New Testament. (Thomas is markedly not
among them.) It’s a list later deemed canonical by
the synods of Hippo Regius (393 CE) and then at
Carthage (in 397 and 419). This ruling would not have
been treated lightly by any officers of the churches
and monasteries who came within the orbit of Atha-
nasius’s correspondence. He had some serious clout.
At the Council of Nicaea, called by the converted Em-
peror Constantine back in 325, Athanasius had won a
momentous victory against a faction led by a bishop
of Alexandria named Arius. The Nicaean dispute had
been over the ‘substance’ of Christ. Arius proposed
that Christ was similar but not identical in substance
to God the Father and thus Jesus, as the incarnate
son of God, was son of Man with a mortal body. See-
ing both a profound ideological scission looming
from this disagreement as well as spotting a political
opportunity, Athanasius countered that father and
son were indeed identical in substance, and thus
eternal. Suddenly, by denying what ought to be an
incontrovertible belief in the divinity of Jesus, Arius
sounded Saracenic.

Athanasius’s strident success in theological battle
meant the denunciation of Arianism as heresy — a
term derived from the Greek airesis, initially indicat-
ing a choice to disagree or dissent, but among early
Christian apologists it assumed the judgment of a
dangerously incorrect and misleading position on
Church doctrine. Corrupted and corrupting, Arius
lost his job (into which Athanasius stepped) and he
and his followers were exiled. And Athanasius, during
a checkered career with the church characteristic
of an ideologue (requiring occasional flight from
_set down in the desert monasteries of North Af-
rican); conducted further campaigns to clean up the
speculative curiosities in Christian dogma; indeed,
with a rhetorical style that would gain currency over
the next thousand years as his legacy, heresies were
regarded not only as misconceptions of doctrine but
as unclean deviations, perversions, infections, which
if not lanced and purged would spread like poxy
contaminants. In one intriguing acerbic outburst in
his thirty-ninth Festal Letter, Athanasius confirmed
that “...we have made mention of heretics as dead, but
of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for
salvation...”

Only those vigilantly compliant with the divine author-
ity of orthodox scripture would be saved to live again.
Unorthodoxy induced ontological doom as well as
professional disaster: its perpetrators were already
“dead;” lost and rotting while yet living and spread-
ing their filth. Heresarchs were not only regarded as
leprous outcasts, polluters, carriers of contagion, but
as the walking dead. It’s a reasonable conjecture that
— when delivered to a small monastic compound near
Nag Hammadi, five hundred miles south of Alexandria
— it was Athanasius’s vitriolic letters that prompted the
furious, stealthy and secret burial of what must have
seemed a damned or accursed book: the Gospel of
Thomas. And the black mark against it persisted down
the years. By the late tenth century, to read Thomas
incurs anathema. Those who would dare open and
respectfully scrutinize this by now legendary book,
whether by deliberation or out of folly, are beyond
redemption. Excommunicated, they are thus cursed
by the church. The Synodicon Orthodoxiae pronounces
that, “To whomever who accepts or has affection for
[Thomas]...and does not abominate [this book] and
spit upon [it] as being worth only to be burned: anath-
ema.”

Why did this book — which we now know to be so
slim and terse and such a puzzling volume — incur
such animosity and contempt from orthodoxy for so
many centuries? In part, this was due to a belief initi-
ated by Cyril of Jerusalem that the gospel had been
written by a Manichean sect. That misconception
was a boon to its notoriety. We owe the preserva-
tion of the citations of Thomas and their persistent
sedition into the European Middle Ages largely to this
guilt by association with the third-century CE Baby-
lonian prophet and artist Mani and his heretical vision,
steeped in a millennium-old Zoroastrian legacy, of an irreconcilable cosmological dualism: a good God of spiritual light in fierce battle with its evil twin God of material darkness. A contrived joke against Mani’s fol-
lowers was how orthodox Christians referred to them as “Maniacs,” spinning on the Greek words maniakos or mainestein: to be mad. Delightfully inspired as this madness might sound, there is only a slim and op-
portunist relation between Thomas and Mani. Given
the probable date of Thomas as a late first-century CE
composition, it’s improbable to think of it as having a
Manichaean origin. And it is this putative date of origin
that injects the logos of this gospel with scintillating
scandal, disclosed in the short prologue on the book’s
incipit or title-page: “These are the secret [or hidden]
words that the living Jesus spoke, and which Didymos
Judas Thomas wrote down.” Two momentous dares
accompany this parvenu’s arrival, and it’s little wonder
that the guard dogs at the gates of canonical ortho-
doxy would fiercely rear up.

Firstly, were these esoteric, condensed “secret words”
intended to be read only by the initiate? Well, not en-
tirely. Almost half of the text, in the form of parables
and more comprehensible maxims, correlate with
passages in the canonical, synoptic gospels and which
are hardly meant to be obscurely reserved for an in-
ner circle. But other sayings manifest a mystifying and
beguiling novelty and have little equivalence with the
sentiments of the Christian Testament, Lagon 42, for
instance, laconically declares: “Be passersby.”

Secondly, Thomas is often described as a sapiential text,
which induces a cryptographic spin on the piquracy
of this figure’s connection with Jesus. Didymos Judas
Thomas. Judas Thomas was a common name in the era of ear-
ly Christianity, stigmatized among Christians through
its association with the story of the betrayal of Jesus to
Roman authorities by Judas Iscariot. Converts to
Christianity born with the name of Judas usually add
supplementary names to mitigate this connotation. But the
Greek component
of the name, Didymos, means ‘twin’ and appears in
the Gospel of John describing the apostle who, re-
fusing to believe in the resurrection of Jesus until
he places his fingers into the wounds of crucifixion,
gains subsequent fame as Doubting Thomas. In the
Greek version of John he’s called ‘Thomas the Twin’;
as if it were a commonplace nickname, like Eric the
Red. – The Syriac version of that gospel names this
character as Judas Thomas; but in Syriac (or Eastern
Aramaic) Yomo or tauuma (transliterated in both Greek
and Coptic as Thomas) also means ‘twin.’ Moreover, in
another apocryphal if less problematic text, The Acts
of Thomas, the apostle Judas Thomas is named as the
twin of the messiah.

The signification of the authorship of the Gospel of
Thomas is convoluted and abstrusely intertextual, per-
haps deliberately to encrypt the author’s prestigious
but also audacious claim on being the twin brother of
the “living Jesus.” As with a nun’s vow to become a
‘bride of Christ.’ Jesus’ twin brother cannot be con-
tained within a purely spiritual allegory. In Irenaeus’s
words this opens onto an abyss of madness: no longer
a relation of apostolic deference, nor of mentorship,
but of doubling. Entertain the dazzling blasphemy of
this metaphor for a moment! Was Thomas conceived
at the Annunciation at the same time as Jesus, and
then disowned by the father as illegitimate, as his
bastard progeny? Does this figurative illegitimacy
shadow the spiritual imitation of Christ? But there
may be another view on this quandary that offers it
as a negation rather than as a digression of parental
accountability. It would take a strange adjective to
describe this annulled relation, one that slurs categorial
distinctions and invokes a mode of exclusion in the sly
way that the word ‘undead’ does: the twin of Jesus
Christ is ‘unfathered.’

Salvation – the ultimate therapeutic treatment –
comes to the world, it’s announced in another Nag
Hammadi text, the Gospel of Philip, ‘when the two
become one and the outer become as the inner.’ This
also is described in a ritual or ceremonial practice cen-
tral to Valentinian Gnostic Christianity as the ‘bridal
chamber’: an allegory of salvation in which spirit and
physical matter are married into one (recycling the
therapeutic union of opposites into an original unity,
derived from Platonic philosophy). But the twinning
of Jesus invoked by Thomas goes the other way. What
happens to a world that turns against this pacific re-
conciliation of opposites; when, to use an odd recurrent
autobiographical declaration of Nietzsche’s, “the one
becomes two”? Mani claimed to receive his Gnostic
revelation from his suddenly manifested divine twin; in
effect, what was revealed to him was a simulacrum of
the divine, and with that the duplicity of his God who
also was not one (the monotheistic persona of Abra-
hamic religions) but two (antagonistic but identical
rivals). The heresy in Mani’s prophecy – from which we
derive any combative, destructive duality as Manichae-
an – was not just that there were twinned Gods (one,
the substance of light; the other, the material of dark-
ness) but that any God that divided from itself, who
produced like this, would have to be a suspicious
character and any world created by this God would be
at best dubious, and more likely evil.

To understand such a world is to find a corpse. Not
just a material, fleshly, down-to-earth world, but a
dead one. But this is to be understood in the manner
that the heretic is dead: living dead, anathema – in dis-
tinction to how the piou, the saved, live through the
promise and provision of divine scripture. Let us think
of this strange maxim uttered by a living Jesus as
though it were in the words of the corpse in the tomb.
A prophet speaking on behalf of the undead. Think
of it as a defiance of the logos as holy word and in the
Annunciation: of word made flesh and disown by
God in the way that Didymos Judas Thomas must be disowned. Not orphaned or cast out, but ‘unfathered,’ ‘unmade.’ To understand the world is to rot with it, to be its leper, be its grave, to be its black gnosia and black mass. Dead to the world.

2. CADAUER CHRISTI

Jesus said, ‘Whoever knows the world has fallen upon the body.’

— Logion 81, Gospel of Thomas.

What can we make of this tiny scribal alteration between logion 56 and logion 80, which are identical other than for the substitution of “the body” (in Coptic transcription: p-soma) for “a corpse” (p-ntoma)? Perhaps it was a slip of the pen, or of the ear. One commentator suggests that logion 80 should be taken as the original because it implies a divine primordial body, and thus a far more positive image: “Whoever recognizes the world” in the Thomasean sense, a world permeated by the primordial light of the kingdom of God, finds the body and those who find the body are highly commended: they are superior to the ordinary world.”

This would be uninterestingly pious stuff, except that it portrays logion 56 as an astonishing impropriety and compelling corruption of the original, and thus far more interesting than its imputed correct version — particularly if it results from a symptomatic slip. One should note that while p-soma could at a stretch be interpreted as the “corpus” (or proper scriptural body), p-ntoma could readily be not only a “corpse,” but also a “cadauer” or a “carcan.”

With such a tantalizing profile, this exquisite corpse — symptoma of the corruption of a Jesus-corpus — deserves more of our attention.

Corpses are not simply dead bodies. Corpses are problematic, recalcitrant, and obstinate. The corpse may epitomize the entropic processes of self-digestion or autoysis, bloated decomposition and putrefaction in the steady, fatal slide into dank manure, slime and sewage; but the corpse also is paradoxically a ghastly icon of arrested rigor and ceremonial rigidity. As the problematic “stiff” in crime stories, the corpse has a colloquial phallic exhibitionism and obduracy, associated with awkward practical problems of disposal and with concealing guilt. And, of course, “stiffs” keep popping back up in these stories with the discomforting if not horrifying homecoming of a disavowed secret: floating to the surface in a black lake, exposed by accident in the boot of a car in transit, roused from a fetid tomb or clawing their way from an unholo grave. And sometimes, too, with blackly comic impropriety.

Hitchcock’s 1955 movie The Trouble with Harry plays with sport with the embarrassing persistence of the guilty secret embodied in the well-dressed and forever immaculately neat male corpse lying in a meadow, whose death every member of the nearby tiny New England community separately believe they must have somehow caused, and whose corpse each person furiously drags from view in repeatedly failed attempts to cover up their complicity. The corpse in Ted Kotcheff’s Weekend at Bernie’s (1989) has a similarly stubborn and unspoiled conspicuousness. Bernie is the uncruel head of a corporation who has been murdered by a Mafia colleague at his beach house retreat. Two young innocent employees who have arrived for a weekend party at Bernie’s witness the crime, and must keep the pretense of Bernie being alive in order to escape death themselves. Bernie’s corpse is handled like a puppet, much to the maddening bewilderment of the hit-man who, despite repeated efforts, cannot put Bernie down.

Why insist on the implacable designation of ‘corpse’ for the protagonist in this sort of danse macabre rather than the more supple and chic term ‘body’? It’s not pedantry. The corpse is a residual inedency of life that remains paradoxically unincorporated; that’s to say, resistant to embodiment even as decay. A corpse is the atrocity, or perhaps the expletive of a body: the corpse that diverts an oath from a pledge into a swearword, but it’s also something that ludicrously or offensively sticks out of the form of the body. Stiff with erotic concentration but without the motivating surge of tumescence, the corpse stands spastically and forever at attention as a zombie soldier guarding a memorial flame of animate life or vitality, and attending this memorial in a hideous formal pantomime or pageant of the death it commemorates. Or, in another scenario, the corpse is the cadaverous ‘ich’ sustained by a curse, like the damned sailors of the legendary Flying Dutchman or Hector Barbossa’s skeletal crew on the Black Pearl in Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End (2007). Mumified or desiccated in a golden reliquary and in rotting lace or linen, the corpse is an enduring and magical artifact fabricated and maintained by a priestly caste or cult; an article so potent it must be locked away in secret; unseen, but guarded by spells and repeated rituals for the eternity it survives. Corpses are exquisitely blighted by an exclusion from both life and death. In the current popular jargon of vampiric and zombie fantasy, we would call this exclusion the protocol of the undead. Yet, as we intuitively acknowledge, corpses — certainly those farcical mummywalks like Harry and Bernie — are worse than undead, more pathetic, less romantic. In comparison with any kind of corpse however, bodies are infinitely more flexible and inclusive, informal and mobile. They come and they go without ceremony.

Corpses may seem to be a subcategory of bodies; but where the corpse is a grotesque mockery, black magical ornament or irony of lifelessness, the body is anything and everything that is opposed to this specific state of the corpse. This is nominally so, because a ‘body’ can name structures of living as well as dead flesh, while also designating any extensive ensemble of things concrete (organic or inorganic) or abstractions becoming material or tangible. Embodiment involves incorporation: the constitutive formation of complex but unified substance. Compellingly, as a property of substances, ‘body’ always implies a volume if not fullness, a strength if not intensiveness, and weight if not ripeness... even in its morbid connotations. A body of water, a body of work, a body of evidence, even the bodies of plague victims piled in a cart: these have an agency and animation that the corpse — as the cul-de-sac of the corpus (which in its ancient and modern senses is a mass and massing together of working material, the stuffing of form) — no longer possesses. The Latin location that the Vulgate Gospel of John renders for the dying Christ could be the nihilist slogan for all corpses: “Consummatum est;” it is finished, my work is done.

But this has to be understood, however, not with the triumphal significance of Biblical concordances that identify this finish as consummation (fulfillment of passion), nor as consummate utterance (perfect in its fidelity to prophecies of the messianic mission). Instead, we would treat the Corpus Christi as a black magic of the corpse, and the miraculous transubstantiation of the sacrificial body as an interference with death comparable to the putridly vouracious, hellishly unfilled, unresurrected (unsaved) zombie. The paradoxical reticence of the corpse’s consummation is an exquisite diabolical spell.

Bodies on the other hand are loquacious, even garrulous. They can be vivaciously original, sporting customized and unique aesthetic adornments and modifications, or can be subsumed in anonymous victimization or mass conformity. They can be tossed like debris within the fury of a tsunami; flow in ecstatic rage through streets or stadiums as inspired torrents; submit to masochistic objectification on grandly militaristic and on intimately tender scales of behaviour; they can entwine in rawness, hunger, affecion and compassion with seeping volatility or with taut density...
and severity. Whatever they get to up or submit to, suffer from or are suffused with, however they may be intended or intended, bodies are garrulous, mutable and performative in ways that corpses are not. This is dramatically demonstrated in the ascendency of performance art through the second half of the twentieth-century, comfortably aligned with the emergence of the philosophical discipline of biopolitics and also strikingly coincident with the critical and pedagogical eclipse of the genre of the nude. By the mid 1970s the nude and the life classes that trained artists in this genre were politically noxious art historical relics, eclipsed by the bodily acting out of desires, sexual and gender identities, appetites, regressions, transgressions, perversions, sensualities, dietary or exercise regimes, therapeutics, and so forth. By the turn of the millennium, the polymorphous, polysexual, performative and performance-enhanced body had become the commodified core of lifestyle marketing as well as of the cultural studies industry.

It doesn’t seem that surprising to encounter the hordes of the undead clamouring for enfranchisement such as it appears later in Aristotelian em eidos as a living person and which you encounter when you are unconscious, and sent by the soul (psuche) as an index to nor a potentiality of life since it plays no role in life and has no relevant relation to it, other than that it is identifiable in its rotting double, the corpse. The corpse doesn’t quite meet any criteria for citizenship if there is anything timely about putting a case for the corpse of Christ did not decompose), but deposited a Rayogram and a Roentgen ray or X-ray. But there is a further point here that makes even this attempted explanation falter, and yet which shifts the theological doctrine into occult speculation. The theology of an acheiropoieton was allegedly miraculous, indexical images of divinity, the most famous of these today being the Shroud of Turin: an alleged monoprint left on the funereal shroud of Jesus Christ, stained not by his corpse's blood loss nor by bodily secretions associated with putrescence of the cadaver (which would of course be a blasphemous explanation, since the corpse of Christ did not decompose), but deposited like a photographic print through the action of a divine, immaterial radiance. It is still postulated by stubborn apologists for the authenticity of the Shroud that rather than being a hoax produced with a fabric dye, the image may have been created by a mode of primitive camera-less photography, somewhere between post-mortem photography or photography of a body that isn’t yet dead. But there is not a process of living but the advent of simulacrum) of nothingness. We might say that, as with divinity mediated through the acheiropoieton, psuche is not non-existent so much as ‘inexistent.’ And, again comparable to the acheiropoieton, psuche is an image only insofar as it is a stain or blot that occludes the image of life. Inasmuch as un-being is an identifiably macula or blot rather than a hole or absence, we could say, that the corpse is a body seen against the transit of psuche. Sic transit.

Obviously, in the Homeric world, psuche is not the soul as the animating life-force nor is it cause of the vitality of an organism (associated, for instance, with pneuma), such as it appears later in Aristotelian empiricism, and where it becomes a principle of generation or composition, of change, and also of decomposition or compost; and where it is necessary for a being to decay as much as grow in order to be of its own essence. Nor, evidently, is psuche in this archaic sense the flourish of an intelligibility of essence: of being as the possession of an inalienable identity. In the legends that are canonized through the Homeric stories, a living being does not possess a psuche; once dead they become a psuche. However, this becoming-psuche is not a process of living but the advent of un-being and of life being undone, of being other than itself. Thus the Homeric, archaic psuche is neither an index to nor a potentiality of life since it plays no role in life and has no relevant relation to it, other than that it is identifiable in its rotting double, the corpse. Psuche is outside this corpse as an unbeing, yet identified with it in the way that in a morgue a witness is asked to identify a dead body: duplicitously invoking the verb to be: “yes, this is so-and-so,” but only if one adds “it is no longer this person.” What is no longer is not pictured as a divorcing of life and body, or the subtraction of a living essence or ghost from the inert vehicle or machine, but as a wedding of body and corpse, an alchemical wedding in which the corpse is the blackening introduction of the catalytic bride;
in alchemical as well as Duchampian terms, a bride “striped bare.” This compromised recognition of the corpse could not occur if psuche were an immortal entity; what we identify as the archaic unbeing of a body as psuche is rather an un-mortaled image of the corpse. Psuche is the image of a death in transit (not a life in transit, nor life moving to another state of its being; nor the recurrent consoling benefaction of death as a further stage of life’s way), and we construe this transit as an interference of images by occultation; we might say that psuche is a black cloud, and we might dub psychic images as ‘clouding.’

But we must quickly add that this psychic image is not in any way an affirmation of life-after-death, not an evanescence of the animate spirit; nor, indeed, of any spirituality whatsoever. Outside but occulting that decaying and disappearing thing that it identifies, psuche is beside itself: sidelined, it is the literal ecstasy of the corpse. I’ll borrow a phrase from Reza Negarestani – admittedly in a cavalier act, out of context – in his brilliant exposition of the mode of execution, mentioned in Virgil’s Aeneid among other ancient sources as a practice of the so-called barbarous and pratical Etruscans, dubbed “the corpse-bride” in which a putrefying corpse is tethered to the living victim in an intimate face-to-face embrace, if not in actual copulation. The amorous, sexual embrace of the corpse and living body occasions an exquisitely horrific image, which desecrates not only the transfiguring sanctity of marriage but also the spiritualizing aspirations of the alchemical wedding recited in the alembic precedes the revelation of the philosopher’s stone. Exploiting this desacralized miracle, I would describe the interference of the psychic black cloud (abducting the phrase from Negarestani) as “an epiphenomenon of necrophiliac intimacy.” More bizarrely, if more technically, this ecstatic position of the corpse-bride could be a crypto-archeological media artifact: an image of psychic blackening, which could in turn be dubbed, casually adopting a term of diverse mathematical and philosophical currency, a singularity. The singular, in my white-dwarf and perverted contraction of this usage, is a situation of the subject subtracted from any particularities, or from particular knowledge of the subject. A singularity, suggests Alain Badiou, is a situation of the subject as an “upursue” or advent, an exception, rather than a condition of being or of predicated meaning. We might think of this grammatically rather than in the more difficult logical terms of Badiou’s remarks, and say that in a sentence that has a subject and a predicate, such as “the cat sat on the mat,” the singularity is the subject subtracted from its predicated knowledge (that it is “the cat that sat on the mat”). Singularity is an interference with the ontological intelligibility of the sentence. Paradoxical as it sounds, the singularity will be universal since it excludes anything particular about the cat, but this is not the eternal essence of cat we are talking about, not ‘catness’ (since that essence can include the knowledge that “cats are beings that sit on mats”). Singularity (and here the term may have opportunistic coincidence with its use in astrophysics) involves not the revelation of essence but an exceptional disappearance or obscuring of it.

The singularity is the exceptional situation of the cat without its particular identifications that would identify and would make it appear as a being. In other words, that render it as unbeing. The singularity of the subject – and consequently, the image of psuche as an ontological interference – is beautifully eventful in the Cheshire cat’s ecstatic grin from Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, the grin which importunately and obscenely lingers beyond the disappearance of its predicate. The facetious obstinacy of this grin suggests the incomprehensible predatory unbeing of the living dead who don’t stay within their graves or memorials, or the ghostly persistence of an important property outside its body, as an afterimage with the aesthetic effrontery of a hallucination that haunts and horrifies. The Cheshire cat’s smile is obscenely unworlidy. In part, this is because that smile is sinister – in the way all cat’s expressions seem elusively, disaduly, deceptively enigmatic (captured expertly in Tenniel’s original illustrations of the first publication of Alice in Wonderland, but not in any many other versions, such as the Disney animations). Partly too, this smile is also ominous. The Cheshire cat is a living oracle: it tells the adventurer Alice, with mischievous unintelligibility, what will happen and which way to go. Yet – in a world where one’s size telescopes and inflates like a concertina, where one must run as fast as possible to stay in the same place, where at the Mad Hatter’s table it is tea-time all the time and one must celebrate unbirthdays – this advice about which way to go is not so much less useful than more than useless. In its ecstatic state, extended beyond and yet subtracted from its nature and its being, does the cat’s grin belong to it any longer? Is not the extension of this smile a hideous intimacy with the cat? Is not such a smile the very emblem of psuche, and thus a miraculous unworldly image? This smile is the mischievous horror of the corpse’s un-embodiment and the eucharist of a blackening mass of the corpse.

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The full verse continues “[…] and whoever has fallen onto a corpse, the world is worthy of him not.” An Interlinear Coptic-English Translation of the Gospel of Thomas, 56i, http://gospel-thomas.net/splitth.htm (accessed June 5, 2013). See also Coptic Gnostic Chrismatology: A Selection of Coptic Texts with Grammatical Analysis and Glossary, ed. Bentley Layton (Leuven: Peeters, 2004). Other translations politely moderate the verbs, but in rendering a more familiar rhythm lose the brusqueness of the source’s compounded syntax, and in some cases editorially enhance the source: for instance, “Whoever has come to understand the world has found (only) a corpse; and whoever has found a corpse, is superior to the world.” Trans. Thomas O. Lambdin, The Gnostic Society Library, http://gnosis.org/naghamm/ahl_thomas.htm (accessed June 5, 2013), in which the parenthetical English adverb is an unqualified clause, just as “worth,” and the lack of it, suggests suitability rather than superiority. The Coptic term translated as “world” here is, appropriately grand and inclusive: “kosmos.”


3. The text authored as by “Mark” is presumed to have been composed between 60-70 CE; those attributed to “Matthew” and “Luke” between 75-85 CE. The oldest fragment of the New Testament is the Rylands Papyrus dated at 190 CE (fragment of John, chapter 18) in the John Rylands Library, Manchester UK; the oldest extensive papyrus of the New Testament is The Chester Beatty and Bodmer Papyri, dated between 180 and 225 CE in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland. Among others, Thomas scholar and researcher Philip R. Fee, in his The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland. Among others, Thomas scholar and researcher Philip R. Fee, in his The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland.
translator James M. Robinson has proposed that Thomas could be affiliated with the hypothetical Q source which, throughout the twentieth century has been theoretically postulated as a sayings compendium (partly oral, partly written but no longer extant) providing the source along with Mark for the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke. Some suggested dating of the conjectural “layer 1” of Q, and by association Thomas, even precede the composition of Mark by thirty years.

4. The common noun gnostos, technical as it is, has a relatively benign and even banal affect compared to its more piquant adjectival use, both in antique testimonia and in modern usage. But the term ‘Gnostic’ as used today in an expedient summary of extremely diverse religious and metaphysical doctrines is an appellation that, with perhaps one exception, those ancient sectarian movements would have been unlikely to recognize. The exception may be that of the faction led by Marcion in mid-second-century Rome. Her Christian sect, which allegedly practiced a type of communist social code, is contemptuously mentioned by Irenaeus as publicizing themselves with the adjective gnostiskeno, although no testimonial of their own survives. (Irenaeus in Philip Schaff, ed., _The Apostolic Fathers with Justo Martín and Irenaeus_, 503.) Irenaeus used the derogatory nuance of this word in the manner of Paul’s usage for a reprimand against false knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20), with an evident Platonic pedagogy. Modern scholarship has tended to employ this adjective and the proper noun ‘Gnostics’ anachronistically: derived from Irenaeus’s derogatory jibe, it entered common English usage with Henry More’s 1669 exegetical commentary on 2:20 of the _Revelation of John_ (An Exposition of the Seven Epistles, no 99), in his _Antidote Against Idolatry_ (which was printed with the Exposition). More alludes to “the old abhorred Gnostics.” See Bentley Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in _Doctrinal Diversity: Varieties of Early Christianity_, ed. Everett Ferguson. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, 106-122. (Specifically on More’s terminology, see Bentley Layton, op. cit., 120-121.)

5. In her _Gnostic Gospels, Pagels_ rhymically portrays Gnostic Christian communities of the late Roman empire as almost counter-culturally militant or renegade, in both their various ascetic as well as libertarian social and religious principles. In a more recent (1998) PBS education blog on Thomas, she associates gnostics with a Zen-like satori or insight, and also with a mode of Socratic self-knowledge instead of apocalyptic prophecy, situating the Jesus in Thomas in the tradition an enlightened religious sage figure rather than the rabbinical messiah of the canonical New Testament. “Jesus, in effect, turns one toward oneself, and that is really one of the themes of the Gospel of Thomas, that you must go in a sort of spiritual quest of your own to discover who you are, and to discover really that you are the child of God just like Jesus.” Elaine H. Pagels, “The Gospel of Thomas,” _FRONTLINE_ (blog), April 1998, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/thomas.html (accessed June 5, 2013).


11. Ibid., 58.


19. Gospel of _John, chapter 19, verse 30_. The full verse is _cum ergo acceptum Iesus acerum dixit consummatum est et inclinator capite tradidit spiritum._ (The King James Version translates as: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar [sour wine] he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.” The Revised Standard Version translates the last clause as “gave up his spirit.”) The phrase consummatum est is derived from the Greek original, tetelstai, which invokes a stock term used in the completion of an economic, or financial, transaction equivalent to ‘paid in full,’ and which would in the gospel text would refer to a blood debt having been accounted for. The Vulgate Gospel indicates the genealogy of the prophesied sacrifice in chapter 19, verse 28: _ponsa sciont Jesus qui omnia consummaretur._


21. The miraculous authority of acheropoieta may have an analogy if not source in material practices such as the use of clay seals for authenticity of imperial proclamations and legal testimonials, or cast images in imperial coinage, as well as the indelible pattern left in dyed cloth after it has been washed. See James Trilling, “The Image Not Made by Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing,” in _The Holy Face and the Paradiso of Representation_, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 109-127. A startling extrapolation of the dyed image is the suggestion that the acheropoieta known as Veronica’s veil or the mandylion, bearing the face of Christ during the Passion, is associated with menstruation, thus identifying the Christian blood debt and sacrifice with the mandil as a menstrual towel. See Ewa Kuryluk, _Venetian and Byzantine Iconoclasm_, and Herbert L. Kessler, “Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face,” both in _The Holy Face and the Paradiso of Representation;_ and Jeffrey Hamburger, _“Vision and the Veronica,”_ in _The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany_ (New York: Zone Books, 1998). On the signification of the untouched and the impure touch in manufacturing the image, see Marie-José Mondzain, _The Holy Shroud: How Invisible Hands Weave the Undecidable_, in _iconoclasm Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art_, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 324-335.

22. Archeological and forensic assessments of the Turin Shroud are detailed in Robin Cormack, _Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds_ (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 89-132. On the centuries-long debates, generally called the iconoclastic controversy, over the possible iconality or idiosyncrasy of acheropoieta in Byzantine


25. Sic transit gloria mundi (“Thus passes worldly glory”) is, of course the keystone to funereal homilies and valediction as well as having a ceremonial utterance in papal coronations, and is likely derived from Thomas a Kempis’s imitation of Christ (1418). O quam cito transit gloria mundi: My truncation of the phrase isolates the inevitability of the unpredicated passing as a crossing, an obscuring or an eclipse rather than a passing away or loss.


27. Perhaps the most vivid and lurid manifestation of this bizarre identity is in the recurrent exquisite corpses of Edgar Allan Poe’s fantastic premature burials and somnambulant revenants: Madeleine Usher clawing her way out of her coffin; Berenice’s unearthly scream from the grave as her lover, in a fugue state, tears her teeth out with dental pliers; or Monsieur Valdemar, when released from his post-mortem mesmeric trance explodes into a puddle of putrescence.

28. “[...] The Lydians, / Renowned in war, in the old days / Settled there, / On the Etruscan ridges, and for years / The city flourished, till an arrogant king, / Mezentius, ruled it barbarously by force. / How shall I tell of carnage beyond telling, / Beastly crimes this tyrant carried out? / Requite them, gods, on his own head and on / His children! He would even couple carcasses / with living bodies as a form of torture / Hand to hand and face to face, he made / Suffer corruption, oozing gore and slime / In that wretched embrace, and a slow death.” Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York, London and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf/Everyman’s Library, 1992), Book VIII, lines 644-656. The reference to this practice occurs in several lost sources from antiquity: such as the florid oratory of Quintus Hortensius Hortalus (first century BCE), reported by Cicero in his lost dialogue Hortensius, and which St. Augustine in turn reports on. Cicero also cites a reference to the corpse-bride in Aristotle as an analogy for the amalgam of body and soul, which in later Pauline language becomes the Christian soul shackled to the mortal flesh of the body.

