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Embodiment and Devotion in the *Très Riches Heures* (or, the Possibilities of a Post-Theoretical Art History)

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Introduction

This article seeks to further our understanding of the *Très Riches Heures* as both a devotional manuscript and as a work of art through an extended consideration of one of its key images, the Fall of Humanity (Fig. 1). I will be especially concerned in this analysis with the ways in which the book’s patron, Jean, duc de Berry (died 1416), might have experienced the manuscript if he had lived to see its completion. In negotiating what I see as a tension between the book’s devotional concerns and its aesthetics, I will argue for an approach that I characterize here as post-theoretical. It will take the full space of this article to explain what that term means and how it might be applied to a work of art from the late Middle Ages. Suffice it to state at the outset that I will draw from various strands of theoretical work in the humanities developed over the past few decades but that my reading will also be cognizant of the ways in which my theoretical excursions fail to account fully for the rich hermeneutic potential of this one particular work of medieval art, which was

likely created with the express intention of stimulating the Duke’s desires in multiple and even contradictory ways.



Fig. 1. The Limbourg Brothers, the *Très Riches Heures*, folio 25v (image provided by the CNRS-IRHT © Chantilly, Bibliothèque du musée Condé).

It should be admitted at the outset that the notion of the “post-theoretical” as it has been applied in the humanities over the past few decades has been marked by conceptual inconsistencies, sometimes intentionally, across authors and disciplines. At its heart the term implies that there was once a period of academic inquiry that was marked by some sort of commitment to theory and that this time is now over.¹ What those commitments entailed and how theory was defined as a collective enterprise is also not easily characterized—not to mention how to understand and characterize its decline. To flesh out the implications of our current post-theoretical condition requires us to define, however generally, the age of theory both in terms of key ideas and historical trajectory. In what follows I rely on scholars whose expertise in these matters is greater than mine.

In attempting to define “theory,” which might also be referred to as “critical theory,” I will begin first with Jonathan Culler’s assertion that theory is “an American invention.”² What he would seem to mean by this is that the makings of what we call theory developed both in North America and Europe, particularly in France, but that the individual components were assembled, critiqued, and rethought within the walls of North American universities. In terms of the broad outlines of this body of thought, I am especially drawn to D.N. Rodowick’s concise characterization of the movement as a bringing together of semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxism.³ Principle concerns within this coming together of thought traditions might be said to include ideology critique, the world as text, and critical historiographies. Using these formulations, the

origins of theory would date to the 1950s or 1960s with the acknowledgment of notable forerunners such as the Frankfurt school.⁴ Dating the end of the age of theory is a difficult task, but the 1990s is often cited as a key time—although it should be admitted that there is still work being produced today that sits squarely within the intellectual heritage of the age of theory.⁵ It simply comes after the period of theory’s greatest influence.

The period that comes next, the post-theoretical, extends this legacy but as a scholarly field of inquiry is marked by a complex temporality and topography. Some scholars still produce work that is continuous with the intellectual commitments of theory. Others are more conscious of the ways in which their work breaks with the past; I would label such thinkers as post-theoretical. Still others have ignored or resisted the ways in which theory has sought to transform humanistic inquiry.⁶ D.N. Rodowick, whose ideas about theory’s roles within the humanities (past and future) is among the most forceful and persuasive that I know, puts it thusly:

...theory’s endings are recurrent, multiple, and interminable...each proclamation of its passing, every mournful eulogy or triumphant grave-dance, yields renewed and often powerful examinations of its powers, goals, histories, meanings, and values.⁷

To follow the logical extension of his argument requires us to think of the post-theoretical as simultaneously part of the history of theory and separate from it, a kind of intellectual Möbius strip.⁸

This then begs the question of how to differentiate theory from post-theory. Let

me offer one potential response. The philosopher and blogger Levi Bryant has written that theory:

is a sort of strange work that precedes anything true, allowing that which does not appear to appear. There is never a simple gaze or seeing, but rather there is always an apparatus that allows something to appear that would not otherwise appear. And there is no looking nor acting that doesn't presuppose an apparatus of appearance.⁹

If the age of theory might be characterized by its development of methodologies and approaches (Bryant's apparatuses of appearance), I consider the post-theoretical period as being marked by the development of multiple *spaces* in which the legacy of theory has been evaluated and transformed. The scholarly spaces of the post-theoretical age are shaped by their objects of study as well as their methodological affinities and scholarly communities. The topography of these spaces is emphatically disaggregated and rhizomatic.¹⁰ As a whole, the post-theoretical enterprise is more global, more diverse, and more concerned with the ethics and affective ties of scholarship.¹¹ It reflects the seismic shift that the 21st-century academy has taken toward the contemporary and away from considerations of the historical.

Again, it is worth quoting D.N. Rodowick, who imagines a central place for theory in the future of the humanities: "...I want to distinguish for the humanities a fluid metacritical space of epistemological and ethical self-examination that we may continue to call 'theory' should we wish to do so."¹² This openness with regard to the term "theory" and its relationship to past

conceptualizations might be seen as another aspect of the post-theoretical; again, the topological and temporal borders of the project cannot be defined simplistically.

How might all of this relate to the field of art history and more narrowly to the study of medieval art? These intersections create their own special set of challenges. First, each academic discipline, in a broad sense, carved out its own relationship to theory. Art history is arguably a discipline held together by its objects of study (however diversely and fluidly they are defined) rather than by commitments to theories, methodologies, or historiographical genealogies. The discipline is, in general, ideologically committed to a certain pragmatism; it seeks "merely" to advance our knowledge of certain aspects of the world's visual culture. In this respect, many of the experts in the field can be labeled as anti-theoretical.¹³ Still, if we adopt Levi Bryant's position quoted above, then we are all theorists of some sort. We all work to make things visible. We do not simply recover the past lives of images and objects, we narrate and frame them in all sorts of ways that presuppose Bryant's notion of an "apparatus of appearance." Closer to home the art historians Anne Harris and Karen Overbey argue for a similar notion of appearances:

Every interpretive frame is a "future we want." The frame is how we now present our works of art to the future: the frame is now the means of transference, claiming ontological status for any object as art. The frame will change (always), but it will be there (always).¹⁴

How might we understand their claim that interpretation (or framing) claims

“ontological status for any object as art”? In considering a manuscript as well known and as complex as the *Très Riches Heures*, I will need to consider carefully the ways in which I bring the images not just to view but to life, how I characterize their dynamism and their cultural effects. Hopefully that will be made clear in the analysis below.

Taken together, these three position statements (Rodowick’s, Bryant’s, Harris and Overbey’s) suggest either implicitly or explicitly that a more carefully theorized medieval art history might help us to think critically about the frameworks that we employ for understanding visual culture and the ethical commitments that subtend our work as producers of knowledge in the twenty-first century. In this light it is worth noting a significant development in medieval studies across the disciplines in recent years—namely, the attempts by many to decolonize the field and produce an approach to the period that is less white, more diverse, and more global.¹⁵ These issues of diversity and justice embody, I believe, Rodowick’s call for a humanities more attuned to issues of epistemology and ethics. The foregrounding of such issues offers us new ways forward. It also has the potential to help us think through the institutional constraints that limit and shape what we are able to say as scholars within the academy.¹⁶ With this in mind, we turn to a concrete example and attempt to bring a post-theoretical point-of-view to the history of medieval art.

The *Très Riches Heures*

The *Très Riches Heures* is possibly the most famous manuscript of the late Middle

Ages.¹⁷ It is a French prayer book that was begun for Jean, duc de Berry; the manuscript seems to have been written almost entirely by a single scribe and painted principally by the three Limbourg brothers (Pol, Jean, and Herman), who in turn were assisted by many other artists who worked on the secondary decoration of the book.¹⁸ The project was left unfinished at Jean de Berry’s death in 1416.¹⁹ The posthumous inventory of his belongings included the following entry: “Item, in a box, many quires of a very rich hours [*très riches heures*], that Pol and his brothers made, very richly historiated and illuminated, valued at 500 *livres tournois*.”²⁰

How might a post-theoretical orientation affect the ways in which we look at the *Très Riches Heures*? What kind of new art historical understandings might result? In what follows I want to consider notions of male embodiment and how they might relate to the image of Adam in the manuscript; such a focus potentially has much to teach us about the fifteenth century and about our own practices as scholars of the past. A focus on the body, as well as on constructions of gender and sexuality, has undoubtedly impacted the study of the period but only barely when it comes to this particular manuscript. At stake is an ethics of desire, one that recognizes the repressed erotics of art history as a discipline.²¹

In order to do this, one has to adopt multiple “apparatuses of appearance” (to appropriate Levi Bryant’s formulation discussed above). In adding to the extensive bibliography on the manuscript, one has to recognize the ways in which it was been understood as an object—as a collection of paintings, as an unfinished manuscript with

a complex codicology, as a devotional book, as one book among many in a genealogy of aristocratic patronage, as an example of the international style, as a proto-Renaissance example of painterly naturalism, and as a work of almost obscene luxury (to name just a few). These are some general frameworks for understanding or narrating the manuscript; they strongly shape our current understanding of the book. In addition to this, there have been more markedly theoretical approaches to the manuscript.²²

This article engages with these issues by attending closely to the miniature of the fall of humanity, examining it from different perspectives that take as their principal concern the body; each of these approaches has its own relationship to claims of historicity and embraces different ways of knowing (theological, scientific, and psychoanalytic). These frameworks might be understood as comprising a post-theoretical foundation for future work on the devotional aesthetics of the manuscript.²³

The Fall of Humanity

If Jean de Berry had ever had the chance to use the manuscript for its intended purposes, prayer and devotion, he might have started at the opening depicted in Figures 1 and 2. These pages mark the beginning of the Hours of the Virgin, a set of prayers to Mary, which is by definition the core text in any Book of Hours. The iconography seen here is relatively straightforward: on the left, the Garden of Eden with the fall of humanity and on the right, Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary and the conception of Christ.²⁴ The typology is simple and would have been well known: humanity's fall had

to be undone by Christ's coming into the world to die. Nevertheless, the combination of these two images at the start of the Hours of the Virgin is unusual at this time—but not unprecedented.²⁵



Fig. 2. The Limbourg Brothers, the *Très Riches Heures*, folio 26r (image provided by the CNRS-IRHT © Chantilly, Bibliothèque du musée Condé).

At left, Eve is seduced by a female-headed serpent. She then gives the fruit of the tree to Adam. God confronts them for their disobedience, and they are ejected from Paradise. On the facing page, Gabriel greets Mary as the dove of the Holy Spirit seems to alight on her head. God the Father and the angels look on from above. All of this seems made for a comfortable spur to devotion as one begins morning prayers.

Yet, for a medieval Christian, there was no neutral way of seeing this image. It directly interpellated the viewer in the Christian economy of salvation. Early Christian theologians, beginning as early as Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), asserted that the serpent was the devil.²⁶ Its female face dates only to the central Middle Ages and was chalked up to the notion that seduction was more easily accomplished in a familiar form, that is, with like seducing like.²⁷ Mary becomes the new Eve, untainted by original sin and bringing forth the savior of humanity.

Taken as a whole, the iconography of the *Très Riches Heures* is dominated by images of men, whether shown as individuals or in groupings.²⁸ Given this fact, the painters might have expected Adam's fallen body to receive special attention from the duke's gaze. These painters, the three Limbourg brothers (Pol, Jean, Herman), created a strikingly unusual pose for Adam as he receives the fruit from Eve. Kneeling, he twists his body to take the fruit, giving the viewer a glimpse of both his buttocks and genitals. He has been cited by scholars as an example of the Limbourgs' interest in ancient art; a statue now in Aix is one work that has been adduced to support this claim, and it certainly may be the case that classical statuary was an inspiration for the artists when painting this figure (Fig. 3). Yet it should also be noted that the Limbourgs had used this kneeling-Adam motif several years earlier in their unfinished moralized Bible, a manuscript begun by Jean and Pol, probably in 1402, for Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, the brother of Jean de Berry (Fig. 4).²⁹ It is the text of this earlier manuscript that can help us understand the contorted Adam in the *Très Riches Heures*.

There, we read in Latin and French that when one obeys the will of the Devil one becomes entwined by the mouth, the neck, the loins, the limbs, and the feet.³⁰ In this formulation of embodiment, sin moves downward from the head toward the feet. In the image of Adam, we see virtually all of these body parts as well as his orifices, all caught unaware and about to be entrapped by the devil, a striking visualization of the fallen body.



Fig. 3. *Defeated Persian*, Roman copy of a Greek sculpture of ca. 200 BCE (Musée Granet, Ville d'Aix-en-Provence; image supplied by the museum).

It is important to note that later medieval theologians generally argued that Adam and Eve would have been without lust before the Fall.³¹ There was an ordered bodily harmony at work in the Garden that prevented sins of desire. In the image of the contorted Adam, however, we see a body both open to sin and disordered by it in his final moments before consuming the forbidden fruit. A medieval viewer might have understood this image to present a polymorphous sexual awakening about to take place.



Fig. 4. The Limbourg Brothers, *Bible moralisée*, folio 3v (detail) (image provided by the Bibliothèque nationale de France).

The text passage from the moralized Bible that was referenced above was found in the manuscript painted by Pol and Jean, but the formulation can be traced back to the earliest surviving moralized Bible (Vienna, ÖNB, codex 2554), a royal manuscript of ca. 1220 (Fig. 5). In this manuscript, the devil's ensnarement of the fallen body is linked to same-sex desire in an image of two same-sex couples, one female and one male. This representation of sodomitical sex has been much reproduced by scholars in recent decades and is given extended analysis by Robert Mills in his recent book on the visualization of sodomy in the Middle Ages.³² Mills situates this image in the context of anti-sodomitical discussions that would have been familiar to



Fig. 5. Anonymous artists, *Bible moralisée*, folio 2r (detail) (image provided by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

learned clerics in and around the Paris schools ca. 1200. Key intellectuals such as Peter the Chanter and William of Auvergne continued a tradition developed by monastic writers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For Mills, this tradition of thought is clear cut in its claims that only those possessed by demons would engage in sodomy.³³ Something of the pervasiveness of this logic is suggested by the moralized Bibles themselves, which replicated this particular commentary text and image across multiple iterations and into the fifteenth century when the Limbourg brothers joined the list of artists called on to produce this very special type of luxury book. Up until that time as well, the image of the Fall had remained stable in the manuscripts,

with Adam and Eve shown flanking the tree in each exemplar. The Limbourg brothers, however, changed that, creating what might be called the sodomitical Adam. They also changed the commentary image; instead of same sex couples, it now shows a single heterosexual couple and a man adoring an idol. The change in the two images might be understood as reflecting a change in the ways in which human sexual desire was understood by intellectuals in the late Middle Ages.

Here, some speculation is required. When the two Limbourg brothers, Jean and Pol, were working for the Duke of Burgundy (1402–1404) on the moralized Bible mentioned above, they lived in Paris in the home of the duke's physician, Jean Durand, who was effectively charged with supervising their progress. Durand was a canon of Notre-Dame. In addition to medicine, he was also an expert in astrology. An estate document listing his worldly goods in the wake of his July 1416 death has recently been studied by Donatella Nebbiai.³⁴ It makes clear that Durand's house, within the cloister of Notre-Dame, was remarkably lavish. We know that the Duke of Burgundy stayed there on more than one occasion when visiting Paris. The brothers were thus living in a milieu both aristocratic and intellectual. Jean Durand had a substantial library in his home. From their landlord they could have learned something about late medieval understandings of the body and human sexuality.

Human sexuality and the fallen body

Jean Durand's library included a copy of the pseudo-Aristotelian text known as the *Prob-*

lemata. This large compendium is divided into 38 sections and consists of question-and-answer discussions of various topics relating to natural philosophy. The exact relationship of the text to Aristotle is debated. Whether or not the Limbourgs learned anything from this text via Durand is of course impossible to say. Nevertheless, this text and its commentary tradition in the late Middle Ages formed the important site for discussions of human sexuality and desire. This phenomenon has been given an in-depth examination by Joan Cadden in her recent book on the ways in which late medieval academics understood same-sex desire.³⁵ Importantly, Cadden's study demonstrates that the *Problemata's* investigations of the natural world were of interest not only to scholars but to aristocrats and the world of the court as well.³⁶

Cadden's main concern in this study is a consideration of the tradition in which natural philosophers of the later Middle Ages were keen to understand why it was that some men enjoyed anal stimulation, arguing that there could, in some cases, be a biological (and thus natural) basis for such a pleasure, even though the acts that resulted were traditionally categorized as sodomitical and hence sinful.³⁷ This understanding of human sexuality goes against the earlier, mostly monastic traditions discussed by Mills, in which sodomitical acts were universally condemned as diabolically inspired. Cadden is able to show that late medieval intellectuals chipped away at this monolithic notion. The play of sexual desire in the world was seen as complex, being shaped by both biology and habit. I am reducing her arguments here, but suffice it to say that an educated viewer of the early fifteenth

century might have seen in the Limbourgs' Adam a provocative visualization of the male body in a fallen and disordered state, potentially sodomitical, something that might be mapped onto the devotional reader of the manuscript.³⁸

Adam's fallen body thus becomes a key figure in the psychodynamics of devotion in the manuscript. It might even be said to be the degree zero of the book's devotional aesthetics and its privileging of bodies either fallen or saved, for one of the things that I want to argue for the *Très Riches Heures* is that its imagery shows a special concern with male embodiment. How might this affect our understanding of the manuscript as a devotional book? Here, I think that queer theory can help us. In this regard I have found Tim Dean's book *Beyond Sexuality* to be of help.³⁹ Its brand of queer theory is psychoanalytic, specifically Lacanian, something which feels a bit out of fashion at the moment, but I don't think that trends need to dictate our use of theory for a post-theoretical understanding of medieval culture. Taken as a body of thought, theory does not demonstrate continuing progress toward some notion of truth or greater explanatory force. Instead, our current post-theoretical moment allows us to create new intellectual genealogies, new assemblages of thought models (a topic to which I will return in my conclusion). In Dean's rethinking of traditional queer theory, he argues that desire, as a feature of psychic life, should be considered distinct from sexuality. His Lacanian approach argues that desire begins with an illusory lost object and that that perceived loss marks the body. Desire then operates largely within our unconscious where it shapes our

subjectivity and sense of embodied experience. Dean stresses that the subsequent objects of our desires, which follow from the illusion of an original lost object, are "multiple, partial, not necessarily gendered, not necessarily genital."⁴⁰ I want to consider how notions such as this might transform our understanding of the *Très Riches Heures* in its late medieval courtly and devotional contexts.

I would argue that a roughly Lacanian structuration of desire and subjectivity is presented in the Eden miniature, and that this structuration is written on the body. Eve's body is aligned with the serpent through the mirroring of their faces. The instantiation of Eve's conscious desire to disobey might be said to begin with the serpent's voice and gaze (see Genesis 3). In the wake of the Fall, the fruit of the tree, as symbol and stand-in for Paradise, arguably becomes the ultimate lost object in Judeo-Christian culture; in this way Eden as an internalized but lost space might be said to structure the sexual unconscious of medieval Christianity. In the *Très Riches Heures* Adam's body is marked by this loss and presented by the Limbourgs as a collection of surfaces and openings, marked out as the potential future sites of pleasures and sins. In keeping with the biblical text, both Adam and Eve's shame mark their bodies and also signify the loss of Paradise. In the *Très Riches Heures* their final look back at Eden during the expulsion is obstructed by the gaze of the seraph who evicts them, signaling their exile and their distance from God.

Read in concert with Dean's *Beyond Sexuality*, the Eden page might be seen as functioning as an example of what he

describes as the “mediating relationships of nonhuman forms,” which he suggests co-exist with sexual experiences in what he refers to as “the broader matrix of relationality.”⁴¹ Here, I think that the provocative final line of Dean’s book might help us to think in non-traditional ways about the Eden image: “Beyond sexuality lie the myriad possibilities of aesthetics.”⁴² In this light, the Eden page might be seen as a condensation of contemporary ideas about embodiment and desire, pleasure and loss. In this regard we might think about Adam’s fallen body as a constellation of surfaces open to multiple desires and multiple pleasures, existing beyond traditional notions of gender and sexuality. For medieval viewers, such a structuring (or unstructuring) might have evoked the monstrous, thus positioning the figure of Adam as a body to be repudiated by the viewer as he begins morning prayers.

Yet the image also might have functioned as a site for the sublimation of same-sex desires within a devotional context or even simultaneously as a site of pleasure in contemplating both the male and female nude (as well as the overall beauty of the page). These various pleasures are worth considering, in part, because Jean de Berry was accused of sodomy or at least the appearance of it in his lifetime.⁴³ The chronicler Jean Froissart (d. 1405?) suggested this, as did an unnamed author in a poem of 1406 known as the *Songe véritable*.⁴⁴ These accusations have been given the most thorough consideration by Michael Camille in his 2001 article on Jean de Berry and more recently by Sherry Lindquist in an article on the *Belles Heures*, also painted by the Limbourg brothers for

Jean de Berry.⁴⁵ Both authors offer remarkably sophisticated readings of Jean de Berry’s manuscripts in relation to notions of gender, sexuality, and devotion. Lindquist argues that the imagery of the earlier *Belles Heures* tests the Duke’s gaze with alluring figures, both male and female, that might potentially evoke impure thoughts when they should be received penitentially. Camille’s study of the *Très Riches Heures* offers a layered and complex consideration of the Duke, weaving together ideas about his sexuality, collecting habits, and personal faith into an organic whole that reflects the complexity and contradictions of late medieval court culture. Both Camille and Lindquist exemplify Tim Dean’s approach to thinking about human sexuality within a “broader matrix of relationality.” It would seem almost certain that neither Camille nor Lindquist was familiar with Dean’s *Beyond Sexuality* when they wrote their articles on Jean de Berry, but their readings of the *Belles Heures* and *Très Riches Heures* are, to my mind, fully compatible with Dean’s model of humanity’s relations with aesthetic objects.

Camille and Lindquist are both aware that we cannot draw conclusions about Jean de Berry’s sexual history and/or identity from the text sources that accused him of sodomitical tendencies; those medieval authors were, in fact, concerned with doing damage to the Duke’s reputation. Given that Cadden’s work, as discussed above, demonstrates that there were new and evolving notions of human sexuality in the late medieval period, we should avoid speaking of an individual’s sexual orientation at this time and rather consider those medieval constructions of sexuality that depended on

both “biology” and “habit,” as defined variously by different authors. Whether Jean de Berry was open to the myriad and complex pleasures and warnings offered by the Eden miniature in the *Très Riches Heures* will likely never be known.

Conclusion

As a means of drawing my argument to a close, let me return to the idea of the “interpretive frame” as theorized by Harris and Overbey. The interpretive frames that have shaped my understanding of the *Très Riches Heures* and given “ontological status” to its imagery have been multiple. Refracting the miniature of the Fall of Humanity through the work of Robert Mills, Joan Cadden, and Tim Dean has allowed me to construct an argument that I have characterized as post-theoretical. It is those authors’ own theoretical positions that allow me to assume that stance. Each of my three interlocutors in this article has staked out their own personal relationship to theoretical inquiry. Cadden’s book is rigorously historicist and rooted in manuscript sources; on the surface, it might not seem to be theoretical at all. Yet as she notes in her introduction, her book “would exist neither in the listing of the publisher nor in the mind of the author were it not for the urgency of issues surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender voices, relationships, and rights that are relevant to our particular time and place.”⁴⁶ This ethical subtext, to my mind, marks the book out as a post-theoretical project. Mills offers a more overtly theorized approach to medieval studies with his provocative collision of modern categories of sexuality with

medieval texts and images to produce new understandings of the interrelations of sexuality and gender in the pre-modern; in making his points he has recourse to the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jack Halberstam, Heather Love, and other important theorists. Finally, Dean’s work may seem the most purely theoretical of the three as his text positions itself within the legacy of queer theory as it emerged in the 1990s. Yet his work also stands apart from that inheritance, for he has also been a sharp critic of what might be called orthodox queer theory.⁴⁷ It is in the overlay of these various authors’ interpretive frames that my own post-theoretical readings are made possible.

Had Jean de Berry lived to see a complete version of the *Très Riches Heures*, his use of this devotional manuscript might very well have been animated by his own interpretive frames. His experience of the manuscript would likely have been driven by desires that were simultaneously salvational, political, aesthetic, and erotic. By the time of the making of this manuscript, the duke was already in his seventies, and this manuscript, his final prayer book, had become a multi-year project with no end date in sight. The finished book might have given him the chance to seek forgiveness while contemplating both his public and private sins during a time of social and political crisis for the French monarchy.⁴⁸

A post-theoretical understanding of the manuscript recognizes that the play of desire which exists in the encounter between viewer and object is not easily defined and not easily circumscribed; it is often not conscious to the artists and patron in question. Roland Betancourt has written insight-

fully about the potential of a post-theoretical psychoanalytic approach to such issues:

Even divorced from all psychoanalytic methodologies, the trope of the unconscious imaginary serves as a potent tool through which to incise historical spaces for resistance and dissent, despite the placid or coherent narratives into which we have been thrown.

and

The examination of the unconscious produces a narrative with a plurality of voices that exist amidst and within the dominant narratives of any given ideological field.⁴⁹

It is in this resistance to the dominant art historical narratives of luxury patronage and artistic genius that a post-theoretical understanding of the *Très Riches Heures* might emerge. It might begin with something as seemingly straightforward as the tension between the manuscript's status as devotional object and as work of art. The post-theoretical narratives that would emerge would recognize and build upon the

many interpretive frames that have been assembled by scholars in their attempts to understand the work; the resulting scholarship would consider the explanatory force and rhetoric of these different accounts and the ways in which they have contributed to the discipline of art history. Equally important would be an embracing of new stories rooted in an ethical commitment to history beyond the master narratives that continue to shape the history of art in its mostly conservative iterations. One aspect of this would be a commitment to the complexity of pre-modern sexualities as revealed in the art of the period. Pioneering work in this area has already been done by scholars who have focused their attention on medieval women and on constructions of gender in medieval culture; the study of medieval sexuality in its complex diversity is now in the process of catching up.⁵⁰ In this regard the figure of the "sodomitical" Adam in the *Très Riches Heures* is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. His monstrous beauty can serve as a point of departure leading us toward new understandings of a manuscript that is far less familiar than it seems.

References

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¹A useful starting point for understanding both theory and the post-theoretical is Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 4th edition (Manchester, 2017).

²Jonathan Culler, "The Literary in Theory," in *What's Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, ed. Judith Butler, John Guillory, Kendall Thomas (New York, 2000), 286.

³See D.N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 229.

⁴See the useful discussion by Patrick Ffrench, "The Fetishization of 'Theory' and the Prefixes 'Post' and 'After'," *Paragraph* 29/3 (2006), 105-114. Recently, Andrew Cole has argued that the history of theory begins with Hegel, whose method finds its ultimate point of origin in medieval dialectic. See his "The Function of Theory at the Present Time," *PMLA* 130/3 (2015), 809-818. The argument is given fuller treatment in his *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago, 2014).

⁵D.N. Rodowick has argued that film theory comes to a kind of end around 1995 (*Elegy for Theory*, as in note 3, 263).

For important considerations of the post-theoretical, one might begin with the following: Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Post Modernism/Post Marxism* (London-New York, 1990); Jeffrey Williams, "The Posttheory Generation" *Symplokē* 3/1 (1995), 55-76; Neil Larsen, "Theory After the 'Theorists'?", *College Literature* 26/3 (1999), 115-126; Vincent B. Leitch, "Theory Ends," *Profession* (2005), 122-128.

Important collections on the topic include *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Martin McQuillan et al. (Edinburgh, 1999); *What's Left of Theory?* (as in note 2); *Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Albany, 2000); *Life After Theory*, ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (London, 2003); *Theory After Theory*, ed. Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (New York, 2011).

⁶See, for example, *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*, ed. Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral (New York, 2005).

⁷Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory*, as in note 3, 207.

⁸Ffrench, as in note 4, 106.

⁹Levi Bryant, "Regimes of Appearance," *Larval Subjects* (blog), June 27, 2018, <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2018/06/27/regimes-of-appearance/> (accessed April 18, 2020).

¹⁰I take this characterization from Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory*, as in note 3, page 202.

¹¹On the ethical commitments of theory, see also Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York, 2003). On communities textual and affective, Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC, 1999) might be considered a seminal post-theoretical work of medieval studies.

¹²D.N. Rodowick, "Elegy for Theory," *October* 122 (Fall 2007), 102.

¹³Perhaps the impact of theory and the post-theoretical has been most significant in the study of modern and contemporary art. Journals such as *October* and the *Oxford Art Journal* have been markedly progressive in this regard. North America's flagship journal in the discipline, *The Art Bulletin*, has been more ambivalent. The journal published a series of theoretical overviews and their impacts on the discipline only beginning in 1987 with "The Feminist Critique in Art History" by Thalia Gouma-Peterson

and Patricia Mathews. This article initiates a roughly ten-year engagement with theoretical issues, ending essentially with 1996's "Art History and Its Theories," a series of essays by Mieke Bal, Yves-Alain Bois, Irving Lavin, Griselda Pollock, and Christopher S. Wood. It is also worth noting that it was at this time that the term the "new art history" gained currency in the field, most visibly in the 1986 anthology *The New Art History*, edited by A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello.

¹⁴ Anne Harris and Karen Overbey, "Field Change/Discipline Change," in *Burn After Reading*, volume 2, *The Future We Want: A Collaboration*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York, 2014), 134.

¹⁵ For an accounting of this turn by the mainstream media, see "Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists and One Another," published in the *New York Times* on May 5, 2019 (<https://nyti.ms/2JhMAO4>).

¹⁶ D.N. Rodowick refers to these constraints as "enunciative modalities" (*Elegy for Theory*, as in note 3, page xv).

¹⁷ Chantilly, Musée Condé, manuscript 65. The key monographs on the manuscript are the following: Paul Durrieu, *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, duc de Berry* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1904); Jean Porcher, *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry, Musée Condé à Chantilly* (Paris: Éditions Nomis, 1950); Jean Longnon, Raymond Cazelles, Millard Meiss, *The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry: Musée Condé, Chantilly* (New York: George Braziller, 1969); Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry: Kommentar zur Faksimile-Edition des Manuskriptes Nr. 65 aus den Sammlungen des Musée Condé in Chantilly* (Lucerne: Faksimile-Verlag, 1984); Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988); Patricia Stirnemann, Gabriele Bartz, Mara Hofmann, Claudia Rabel, *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry* (CD-ROM) (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004).

¹⁸ On the Limbourg brothers, essential starting points are Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries* (New York: George Braziller, 1974); Rob Dückers and Pieter Roelofs, *The Limbourg Brothers: Nijmegen Masters at the French Court, 1400-1416* (Nijmegen: Ludion, 2005) (see especially, Willy Niessen, Pieter Roelofs, and Mieke van Veen-Liefink, "The Limbourg Brothers in Nijmegen, Bourges, and Paris," pp. 13-27); Timothy Husband, *The Art of Illumination: The Limbourg Brothers and the Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008).

On the secondary decoration of the manuscript, see Patricia Stirnemann, "Combien de copistes et d'artistes ont contribué aux *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*?" in *La création artistique en France autour de 1400*, ed. Élisabeth Taburet-Delahaye (Paris: École du Louvre, 2006), pp. 365-380 as well as her more recent "Introduction: Johan Maelwael, the Van Limborch Brothers and the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*," in *Maelwael Van Limborch Studies* 1, ed. André Stufkens and Clemens Verhoeven (Turnhout, 2018), 18-37.

¹⁹ Paradoxically, this is one of the most studied books of the later Middle Ages but one about which many questions, some likely unanswerable, remain. Recent studies of the manuscript have returned to some of the key issues surrounding it: the nature of the achievements of the Limbourg brothers and the influences on them; the other artist-decorators who worked alongside them; the stages of production; and the relation of the *Très Riches Heures* to Jean de Berry's other manuscripts (to name just a few issues). This work has been extremely useful in helping us to see the *Très Riches Heures* as a made object that was left unfinished in 1416 and later worked on by two more artists, around 1440 and then in the 1480s.

The campaign of ca. 1440 is sometimes attributed to Barthélemy d'Eyck. See Luciano Bellosi, "I Limbourg precursori di Van Eyck? Nuove osservazioni sui mesi di Chantilly," *Prospettiva* 1 (1975), 23-34; Eberhard König, "Le peintre de l'Octobre des 'Très Riches Heures' du duc de Berry," *Dossiers de*

l'archéologie 41 (1976), 96-123; Cazelles and Rathofer, as in note 17, 217-218. Catherine Reynolds has recently cast doubt on the Barthélemy attribution; see her "The 'Très Riches Heures,' the Bedford Workshop and Barthélemy d'Eyck," *Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1229 (August, 2005), 526-533. The artist of the 1480s was Jean Colombe (see Cazelles and Rathofer, as note in 17, 216-217).

²⁰ The book was relatively unknown in the history of art until Durrieu's 1904 monograph initiated the modern study of the manuscript. On the historiography of the manuscript, see Cazelles and Rathofer, as in note 17, 214, as well as Michael Camille, "The 'Très Riches Heures': An Illuminated Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990), 72-107. The reference to Pol and his brothers has been universally seen as indicating that the manuscript was painted by the Limbourg brothers. The book contains 206 folios that each measure approximately 290 x 210 mm; the current binding is Italian and of the eighteenth century.

²¹ On this issue and its implications, see Whitney Davis, "Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History," *Journal of Homosexuality* 27/1-2 (1994), 141-160.

²² Michael Camille, for example, considers the erotics of the manuscript in his "'For Our Devotion and Pleasure': The Sexual Objects of Jean, Duc de Berry," *Art History* 24 (2001), 163-194. Notions of class and privilege are discussed by Jonathan Alexander in his "*Labeur and Paresse*: Ideological Representations of Medieval Peasant Labor," *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), 436-452.

²³ I would argue that the book's devotional complexity has been underestimated. For an important consideration of this topic, see Margaret M. Manion, "Psalter Illustration in the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean de Berry," *Gesta* 34 (1995), 147-161.

²⁴ Meiss, *The Limbourgs*, as in note 18, 148-150, 176-178; Cazelles and Rathofer, as in note 17, 70-75.

²⁵ See, for example, Vatican, Pal. Lat. 537 (made in England, ca. 1350). On the manuscript, see Wolfgang Metzger, *Das Stundenbuch Rom: Biblioteca Vaticana, Ms. Pal. lat. 537 und verwandte Handschriften: Studien zur englischen Buchmalerei 1330-1370* (Frankfurt, 1994).

²⁶ See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C., 2003), chapters 45, 79. On the broader significance of Adam and Eve, see the recent study by Stephen Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* (New York, 2017).

²⁷ See most recently Nancy Mandeville Caciola, "Serpents and Lies," *Speculum* 93/1 (January 2018), 101-110.

²⁸ This has been considered most perceptively by Michael Camille (as in note 22). Nevertheless, I believe that there is much more to be said with regard to constructions of masculinity in the manuscript, something that I hope to explore in future publications.

²⁹ This manuscript was left incomplete upon Philip's death in 1404 and is generally agreed to be Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 166.

³⁰ Robert Mills notes that the use of puns in the text might have also evoked the genitals (*Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* [Chicago, 2015], 38).

³¹ See for example, Pierre J. Payer, "The Fall, Original Sin, and Concupiscence" (chapter 2), in *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1993), 42-60.

³² Robert Mills, "Translating Sodom" (chapter 1), as in note 30, pages 25-80.

³³ Mills, as in note 30, page 9.

³⁴ See Donatella Nebbiai, "Les livres de Jean Durand († 1416), 'physician' et astronome," *Médiévales: Langues, Textes, Histoire* 68 (Spring 2015), 83-118.

³⁵ Joan Cadden, *Nothing Natural is Shameful: Sodomy and Science in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2013).

³⁶ Évrart de Conty, physician to Charles V of France, is an example of one individual who did serious work in natural philosophy and also produced work for the royal court.

³⁷ In simple terms, medieval natural philosophers debated how anatomical defects in men might divert semen from its “proper” path and create non-normative sexual desires; they also considered how habit might reinforce such desires with or without such “natural” causes.

³⁸ Viewed in the context of the full opening, Adam and Eve stand in contrast to Gabriel and Mary. As Christ enters the world, Gabriel’s modest genuflection supersedes Adam’s awkward kneel turning toward sin.

³⁹ Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago, 2000).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 201. On this notion of an illusory lost object as the cause of desire, see also Leo Bersani, “Sociality and Sexuality,” *Critical Inquiry* 26/4 (Summer 2000), 641-656.

⁴¹ Ibid., 277.

⁴² Ibid., 279.

⁴³ Henri Moranvillé, *Le Songe véritable. Pamphlet politique d’un Parisien du XVe siècle...* (Paris, 1891).

⁴⁴ Froissart asserted that Jean de Berry had had an inappropriate relationship with a young man who is called Tacque-Tibaut. The author of the anonymous *Songe véritable* does not name names.

⁴⁵ Camille, as in note 22, and Sherry C.M. Lindquist, “Masculinist Devotion: Flaying and Flagellation in the *Belles Heures*,” in *Flaying in the Pre-Modern World: Practice and Representation*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge, 2017), 173-207.

⁴⁶ Cadden, as in note 35, page 27.

⁴⁷ See his “Queer Theory Without Names,” *Paragraph* 35/3 (November 2012), 421-434.

⁴⁸ For political and ideological interpretations of the manuscript, see Robert G. Calkins, *Programs of Medieval Illumination* (Lawrence, KS, 1984), 113-151 (especially, pages 135 and 151); Michael Bath, “Imperial *renovatio* Symbolism in the “Très riches heures,”” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 17 (1987), 5-22; Alexander, as in note 22; Françoise Autrand, *Jean de Berry: L’art et le pouvoir* (Paris, 2000), 440-459; Joyce Kubiski, “Orientalizing Costume in Early Fifteenth-Century French Manuscript Painting (Cité des Dames Master, Limbourg Brothers, Boucicaut Master, and Bedford Master),” *Gesta* 40 (2001), 161-180.

⁴⁹ Roland Betancourt, “Beyond Foucault’s Laugh: On the Ethical Practice of Medieval Art History,” in *Postcolonising the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic and Catherine E. Karkov (London, 2017), 153 and 165.

⁵⁰ Recent work on the Limbourg brothers’ *Belles Heures* has done just that. In addition to Lindquist’s article cited in note 45, see also Martha Easton, “Uncovering the Meanings of Nudity in the *Belles Heures* of Jean Duke of Berry,” in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C.M. Lindquist (Farnham, Surrey, 2011), 149-181.