Georges Didi-Huberman
Near and Distant:
The Face, its Imprint, and its Place of Appearance[1]

1. *Vestigium*, or the imprint's dialectic

What is a ‹Holy Face› (fig. 1)? Reducing this problematic field to a cultural re-
gion (Byzantium or Rome) or even a historical period (the Middle Ages or the
Renaissance) by no means simplifies the terms of the question. There is in each
particular ‹Holy Face› a dense knot of references (Byzantine references in a
Roman object, for example) and heterogeneous temporalities (medieval tempo-
rality in an object of the Renaissance, for example). Like any ‹prototypical›
image of Christianity, like any image close to an incarnational dynamic, the
‹Holy Face› – each time again – is a *critical image* and a *dialectical image:* an
image endowed with a dual economy, an image tangled up in seemingly insur-
mountable contradictions – but for that very reason exciting, powerful, fer-
tile.[2] Among these contradictions, undoubtedly the most evident one concerns
the specific character of the abyss – an abyss separating *what* a ‹Holy Face› is
(or rather what it is supposed to be) and what it represents (or rather what it is
supposed to represent).

Historians of art, by custom, are primarily interested in the question of rep-
resentation. When they speak of a ‹Veronica,› they generally mean a picture – an
etching, drawing, etc. – where the relic of the same name is depicted, and even
more often what is said about that relic, that is to have originally shown the
‹authentic› aspect of the face of Christ. In being mainly interested in the ‹Holy
Face› as a *representation* of Christ, art historians permit themselves a ‹luxurious›
way of inquiry, but also a misleading one, as we will notice: Its theoretical frame-
work emerges from a well known genre within the aesthetic tradition, the por-
trait genre; its visual material proves abundant and easily recognizable. Hence,
the ‹Holy Face› appears as an extremely widespread and diverse and highly
visible object: It is distributed widely and eventually imposes what must be
called an *iconography* of the Christian face, in short, a set of *ideal* portraits of
which Jan van Eyck's painting of 1438 must be considered as a particularly ac-
complished western example.[3]

By asking the question *what is* a ‹Holy Face,› we are confronted with problems
that differ from those the art historian usually solves. The multiplicity of objects
here gives way to an extreme rarity; the visibility of the images gives way to
quasi-disappearances. The ‹Holy Faces› – Byzantine Mandylion, Roman Veronica,
Shroud of Turin – are, as we know, venerated as relics of contact, as material evi-
dence of the presence of the Divine Word incarnated in Jesus Christ. As such, they
appear of course as *unique*. In addition, their quality of being extremely remark-
able cult objects singles them out as relatively *invisible* – a phenomenon reported
by many eye-witnesses. It is not only the invisibility resulting from the excep-
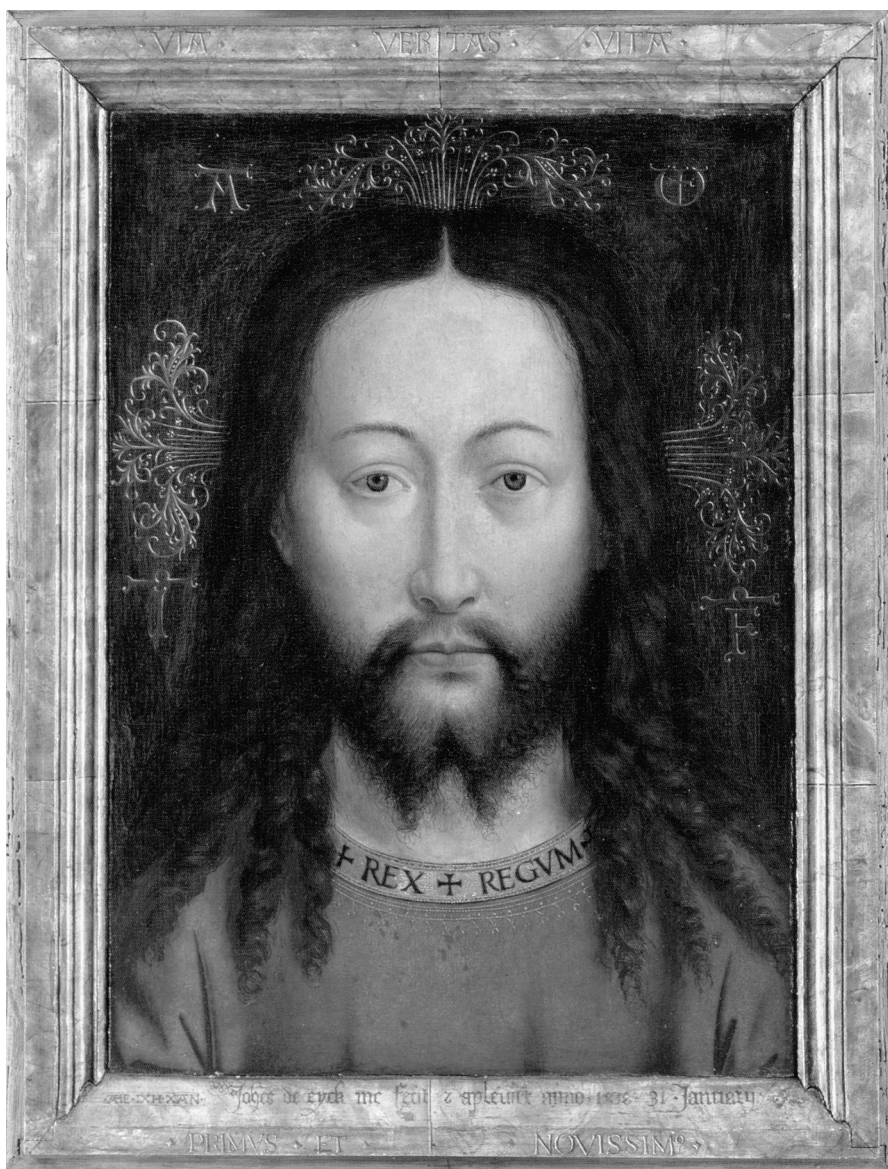
1 Copy after van Eyck, *Portrait of Christ of 1438*, 1438, oil on wood, 44 × 32 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, inv. 528.

tional character of their rare display. It is first of all the invisibility that they always seem to present to the witnesses that were able to approach them and look at them from close by. There are only a few who can claim to have *seen* the Roman Veronica directly and clearly. Monsignor Paul Krieg of the Chapter of St. Peter is one of those, and he describes it as follows: «a slab of gold to which a threadbare veil has been fixed» *(«una lastra d'oro sulla quale è fissato un velo consunto»).*[4] In the late nineteenth century, Antonio de Waal already attempted to describe the relic by giving its exact measurements and examining its color and

2   G. Enrie, *Shroud of Turin* (positive of the face).

appearance closely. However, his attempts lead him to not much more – in terms of the representation, that is in regards to the portrait or the physiognomy – than a frank statement of failure, «[...] one sees absolutely nothing» (*non si vede affatto niente);*[5] a phrase which directly echoes the exclamation heard at about the same time by Paul Vignon during an ostension of the Shroud of Turin: «[...] and this view effectuated a disappointment: *one* sees nothing *(non si vede niente),* I heard being said from all sides» (fig. 2).[6]

The concept of the ‹Holy Face› in its most paradoxical entrenchments poses the fundamental problem of likeness: What kind of likeness of Himself does a God concede to humans? However, this is not *in the first place* a problem of likeness in the sense of the effigy, of portraiture or the classical notion of ‹verisimilitude.›[7] Before becoming an effigy, a recognizable appearance or a typical ‹portrait› of Jesus Christ, a ‹Holy Face› – from a material and ontological point of view – is nothing but an area of traces on a used piece of cloth, an antique face towel or *sudarium,* which supposedly was in immediate touch with the divine face. Thus, the question of the ‹Holy Face› can only be formulated on the basis of this ‹towel› or ‹handkerchief›, on the basis of the paradox of the medium, the trace, and the image, where the very notion of likeness becomes insecure, disturbed, even subverted.

But how do we conceive of such an abyss? What immediately springs to mind here is the typology of *relic/icon*: *relic* refers to what a ‹Holy Face› is, *icon* expresses what it represents (or that it represents). On the other hand: such a typology, although of certain value, does not resolve much – as in front of each ‹Holy Face› one must ponder and question not the separation but the *intricate* entanglement of the two functions, their mutual ‹contamination› and reciprocity, and the consequences of this for the actual shape of the object. Marie-Madeleine Gauthier and of course Hans Belting have shown the crucial role, starting in 1204 in the West, of the «gradual assimilation of the Greek icon to the Latin reliquary,» to the extent that the image actually gained the efficacy of a cult object close to that of the relic, while at the same time the latter became mimetic or at least entangled into a figurative system that served as its framework or context.[8]

Should we then think of this abyss – or rather this ‹contradictory entanglement› – in ‹evolutionary› terms? The historical scheme elaborated for the Roman Veronica by Gerhard Wolf teaches us something essential: Namely that the semantic, conceptual (and also tactile/textile) field of the *vestigium* – a field largely conditioned by the reference to the *sudarium* as an area of traces of the body of Christ – predates the more optically defined of the *effigies* or *imago Christi* as established in the Middle Ages under the pontificate of Innocent III.[9] Yet also this ‹evolutionary› scheme, as fundamental as it may be, does not resolve our question, given that the paradigm of the trace (as *vestigium*) subsists within the figurative institution of the relic (as *imago*). When we consult the texts on the Veronica collected by Ernst von Dobschütz and extend our readings to the wonderful *Diceria sacra* of Giovanbattista Marino dedicated to the Shroud of Turin, we notice that the original vocabulary – the vocabulary referring to the imprint – keeps returning, hence resisting the affirmation of the ‹Holy Face› as an image or portrait.[10]

The problem that arises – an unresolved abyss and the intricate entanglement of two heterogeneous models – essentially is one of ‹survival› or ‹return› of forms. Here, one is of course reminded of Warburg's *Nachleben*, this paradoxical principle stressing anachronisms in favor of evolutions. The problem therefore is in the first place a structural one, a problem of anthropological nature engaging with the longue durée inherent also to singular temporalities, where each object places itself in history.[11] All paradoxes are tied up within this structural problem, even if historical conditions usually tend to favor and stress one aspect at the expense of the other: a way of expressing that the gap between *what is* and *what represents* a ‹Holy Face› subsists within each object, giving it form and keeping up

its vivid dynamics. This perpetual movement or motion between *what is* and *what represents* – because it unfolds a structural capacity of conversion and exchange between heterogeneous orders of reality –, characterizes the particular *dialectic of the image*. This is all the more the case as the conversion at stake, if we further specify it, includes three parameters rather than two. We will call them *trace, face* and *grace*.

What enigmatic organism is a ‹Holy Face› made of? First there is, as we might put it, *something less than an image*: a field of marks, of vestiges (*vestigia*) hard to describe and barely visible, illegible in any case – vestiges not yet icons and to an even lesser extent signs or symbols. The concept of the imprint (*impressio*), which according to the legends determines the material constitution of the ‹Holy Faces›, this concept implies a ‹beyond› or ‹beneath› in regards to any mimetic visibility and any wish to recognize appearances: It is of *trace* and contact that the Christian notion of the ‹Holy Face› speaks of in the first place. Yet, at a second level in both eastern and western Christianity the same notion also comprises something we might call the *matrix of the notion of the image*, its very truth and authenticity. Although, or *because,* it is a negative image, the ‹Holy Face› is *the* model for any notion of the image. It provides the *prototypos* or *charactèr* (we will return to these Greek terms, which in the long run forge the bond between the ancient theologies of the icon and the baroque reflections of a Marino, for example). In short, the ‹Holy Face› is the foundation of the incarnational legitimacy of the image. And it is from this status as matrix that we can think, in the very heart of the trace, the appearance of a divine’s *face*.

But of what speaks this emerging face? Of what speaks this divine faciality that transfigures its own material field of apparition? It speaks – of *grace*. It turns the image into *something more than an image*, something that goes beyond the classical – mimetic – conception of the image. It presents itself as an operator, capable of converting the face *per naturam* to the face *per gratiam*, to use the terms of a similar polarity analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz in another context.[12] This is a decisive conversion, which allowed the Christian theology and liturgy to conceive of the defect of the visible – the vestige and its mere *virtuality* of the aspect – as an authentic surpassing of the visible, an authentic gift of *vision*.[13]

It is important to understand that such an approach to the problem – a dialectical and critical approach – aims to displace, as far as possible, the two obstacles that render the comprehension of the phenomenon ‹Holy Face› so difficult: the obstacle of *not seeing anything* – in terms of what it is as a relic; and the symmetrical obstacle of *seeing too much* – in terms of what it represents, that is the iconography of the ‹portrait of Jesus Christ.› However, before we seek to define what a ‹Holy Face› is or what it represents, we need to understand *how it proceeds*, or how it is said to proceed, by means of both a comparative analysis of the Christian legends and the objects themselves. That is to understand how and in how far the imprint, this multi-functional operation, provides the only procedural model capable of legitimizing both the humble material trace – infra-visible, close to being formless –, and the glorious vision – supra-visible, beyond all form – providing the experience of a divine face-to-face.[14]

But we must also attempt a second displacement: Before even trying to understand what a ‹Holy Face› is or what it represents, we need to understand, in

front of its actual avatars, *how it presents itself*. This means to attempt to understand how, visually, it becomes capable of offering the ‹dialectic anchoring of the vestigium and the visio, of the trace and of the grace.

2. *Facies*, or the mystification of the trace

Aporia of presence, screen of representation – that means we must turn to the question of *presentation* first. What does this word tell us, ‹presentation›? That something stands in front of us, faces us as a body or as a quasi-subject. To feel that something *presents itself* in front of us – unlike a simple object that would be put or ‹placed› in front of us – means to experience its corporeality en face. It also means to endorse a visual relation with some anthropological if not anthropomorphic consistency. This eventually establishes a relation of quasi-presence, a relationship which, I repeat, *is not* identical with the ‹presence,› but is its fictitious construction.

This construction requires a manipulation of space or, more precisely, the *instauration of a place*. The space allows us to believe that it is describable, objectifiable, measurable – in short, that it is a correct assessment of what is *seen*. However, what we are talking about here pertains to a phenomenology involving the subject, subject of the gaze and of the ‹feeling›, in the sense Erwin Straus understood the term, even before Merleau-Ponty.[15] That means a space establishes itself between the face or rather the whole body of the beholder and the ‹Holy Face,› the face leaning toward him, *watching* him and having him bend his knees in worship – be this from the altar of the Sacro Volto in Genoa or from the pillar of the Basilica of St. Peter's, where the Veronica ‹appears›. Something actually happens here, a subtle connection, an interweaving of far and near,[16] an interlacing that also ties an optical dimension (what is seen) to a tactile dimension (what transforms the thing looked at from afar into an *effective thing* which approaches and ‹touches› the beholder).[17]

The hypothesis that I would like to introduce and put to the test here is actually a rather simple one: There would be no effective ‹Holy Face› – one that is capable of setting in motion the dialectic conversion of the *trace* into *grace*, of the *vestigium* into *visio* – if *the proximity* implied by the material process of generation (imprint, contact) were not *presented as a distance*. A proximity presented as a distance: I am of course paraphrasing a famous sentence, in which Walter Benjamin defined the *aura* of a thing or an image as «the unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close it may be» (*einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag*).[18] This definition, I think, is far from being exhausted in its conceptual fertility. Apart from the historical inaccuracies of which Benjamin's text is not free, this spatial definition of the aura remains of central significance – a significance, which may be applied to actual objects and texts by taking into account the two other fundamental characteristics that Benjamin recognized in any auratic phenomenon: the first being its *temporal* dimension (the aura as «a gossamer fabric woven of space and time»[19]); the second being its inclusion in a dialectics of the *look* («The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us»[20]).

To avoid misunderstandings: Such a hypothesis does not aim to apply a straightforward philosophical notion – one formulated in a context discussing

the modern period, particularly Baudelaire's poetry – in order to ‹explain› Byzantine or medieval objects. A strict conceptual application is all the more alien to me as my analysis will modify, as we will see, the Benjaminian concept of the aura (which he actually thought of as in opposition to the concept of the trace); what we are confronted with here is the conversion of the *vestigium* into *gratia*, and we will thus try to understand what the *‹auratisation› or ‹mystification› of the trace is and how it works*.[21] However, Benjamin's statement about the aura is particularly valuable in our context of the ‹Holy Faces,› because the cultic value of the objects – their anthropological efficacy and power, their theological legitimacy, their liturgical coherence – is expressed through a certain *composition of space*, a configuration defined by a specific relationship of proximity and distance. Benjamin's statement provides an efficient instrument to actually escape the patterns which art history often remains caught up in.[22] In this sense, the cult value of images in fact does not appear as an added external value nor as an ultimate ‹content› for which images would, in the end, only be ‹forms› or passive carriers.

Let us thus examine this «unique apparition of a distance, as close as it might be» more closely. First of all, what does this mean from a narrative point of view? Two examples will suffice to show the importance of a *dramaturgy of distance* in the very constitution of the legends of the ‹Holy Face.› The first example concerns the Mandylion in the East: It is no coincidence that the legend of King Abgar takes place far from Jerusalem in a distance, which – for the formal requirements of the miracle – separates the *referent of the imprint* (namely the face of Christ) from its *place of activity* (an Asian population converted to Christianity by the power of images).[23] In the old version of Eusebius of Caesarea – where it is not yet an imprint of is face, but a written letter (*épistolès*) that Christ sends to the king of Edessa – the power to convert pagans is clearly expressed by this sentence: «Blessed art thou who hast believed in me *without having seen me*» – that is in the distance. «For it is written concerning me, that they who have seen me will not believe in me, and that they who have not seen me will believe and be saved.»[24] When finally King Abgar receives the image born out of the miraculous touch – the image that travelled a long way, through multiple twists of fate and the hands of a messenger –, it comes to him as an *apparition* from the *distance*: No matter how close, in his own hands, this apparition may seem – Christ is already dead and resurrected. The miracle of healing and subsequent conversion was certainly not conceivable without the proof of such a *translation*.

The Roman example of the Veronica is no less explicit in its narration to what must, henceforth, be called the ‹power of the distance,› an ‹action of the distance› specific of and belonging to the ‹Holy Face› itself. Once again, it is *the distance that legitimizes the power of contact*. In the version called *cura sanitatis Tiberii*, popularized by Jacobus de Voragine, the Roman emperor first asks his messenger Volusian to cross for him the distance that separates him from Christ: «Cross the sea as fast as you can, and tell Pilate to send this healer to me so that he may restore me to health.»[25] Then Veronica witnesses the ‹healer's› death, refuses – evidently – to sell the miraculous portrait (that does not yet bear her name), agrees to *cross the distance* so that the image will come to heal Tiberius, but insists *to retreat back into the distance,* once the miracle has worked:

Veronica answered: ‹When the Teacher was going about preaching and I, to my regret, could not be with him, I wanted to have his picture painted so that when I was deprived of his presence, I could at least have the solace of his image. So one day I was carrying a piece of linen to the painter when I met Jesus, and he asked me where I was going. I told him what my errand was. He asked for the cloth I had in my hand, pressed it to his venerable face, and left his image on it. If your master looks devoutly upon this image, he will at once be rewarded by being cured.› ‹Can this image be bought for gold or silver?› Volusian asked. ‹No,› Veronica replied, ‹only true piety can make it effective. Therefore *I will go* with you and *let Caesar look upon* the image, after which I will *return home*.›[26]

What the legends express in the narrative element of the *translatio* – where distances are crossed only to create others – is mirrored in the liturgy by the more clearly phenomenological element of the *ostensio*. The liturgy of the ‹Holy Faces› always produces a visual paradox: There is of course *ostensio* in the sense of the etymological meaning of the verb *ostendere*, which means ‹to bring forth,› ‹to present,› but there is no *ostentation* in the sense of an explicit or ostentatious display. What is brought forth will at the same time be in some way removed, *what faces us will not have a face* at all, in the sense that we could recognize, describe, or simply distinguish its physiognomic traits. Such a dialectic – a face facing us yet keeping its distance – can be observed in varying degrees of intensity and complexity, be it the Veronica or its less prestigious copies (that of Il Gesù in Rome, in particular), be it the *Sacro Volto* or the *Santa Sindone*.

Within this context, we also notice that the representations of solemn ostensions found in the woodcuts of the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* of the fifteenth century are quite mendacious – or, at least misleading – from a phenomenological point of view. It almost seems as if the *representation* were aimed to precisely invert the sensory conditions of the *presentation*, at least in regard to some fundamental parameters (fig. 3). The frontality is certainly observed and a simple glance at the image makes us understand that the devout people were ‹placed under the look,› as we might say, of the ‹Holy Face.› What the woodcuts betray is the phenomenology of ostension. They *crush the distance* necessary to the liturgical protocol on the one hand while they *exaggerate the visibility* of the ‹Face› on the other – a face that inevitably escaped the view of the beholders, as all eye-witnesses confirm.

We also notice some kind of (undoubtedly structural) connivance, which links this *phenomenological characteristic of auratic presentation* to the *material characteristic of the procedure* which the ‹Holy Faces› are said to bring forth: the process of the imprinting, when applied to the face, does nothing other than distancing its referent – no matter how close the actual imprint might appear – by ruining its visibility and turning it into something reminiscent of the tortures of disfigurement. While an imprint of the hand restores correctly its contours in the sense of recognizability, an imprint of a face – one is prompted to think, despite the anachronism, of Jasper Johns' *Skins* – completely disfigures the latter, in particular because the face is a convex and complex volume.[27] Therefore, the imprint of a face renders it automatically formless and practically *invisible* – although of course not *non-visual*. The material procedure of the imprint in this sense concurs well with the symbolic procedure of the ostension: in both cases it is about *removing from sight* (although not from *vision*) that which presents itself to the eyes of the believers as the *trace of a contact*. In both cases, we are dealing with an ‹auratization› or ‹mystification› of the trace.

3   Stephanus Plannck (attr.), *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, ca. 1486, Rome, 11 January 1499, paper, 135 × 118 mm, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, St. Ross. 997.

An actual vicinity or an object of contact is hence presented as disappearing. The aura does not emerge from that disappearance alone: It derives from the fact – a subtler and more dialectical one – that *the disappearing quality visually appears* as such, that is as an ‹appearance of a distant.› The aura also emerges when the viewer bestows the power of vision, of looking up, on the ‹Holy Face.› Yet who looks at him from the ‹Holy Face› – I am speaking of the relic still, yet at the
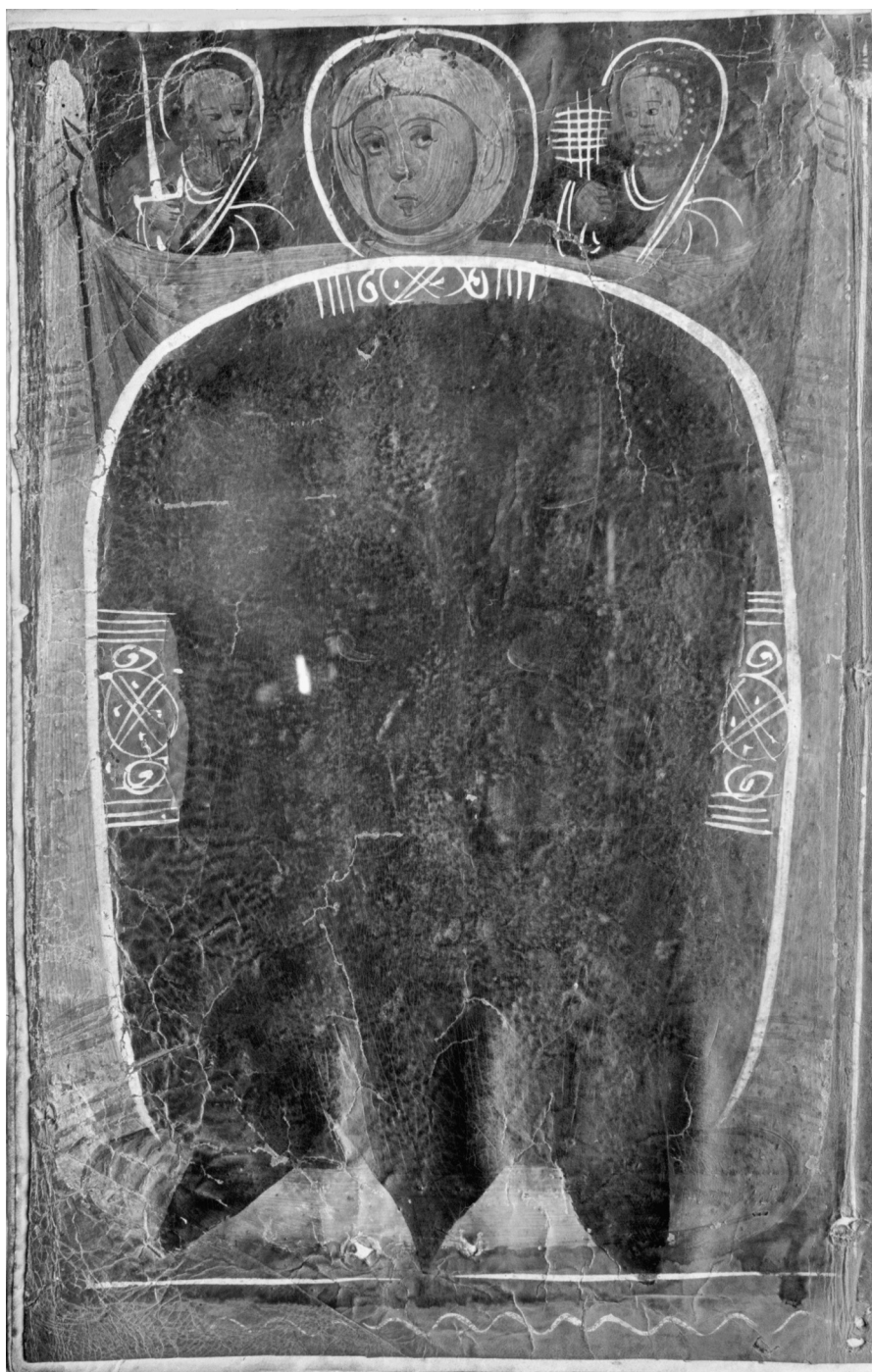
4   *Veronica*, Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, Ms. 11060–61, fol. 8.
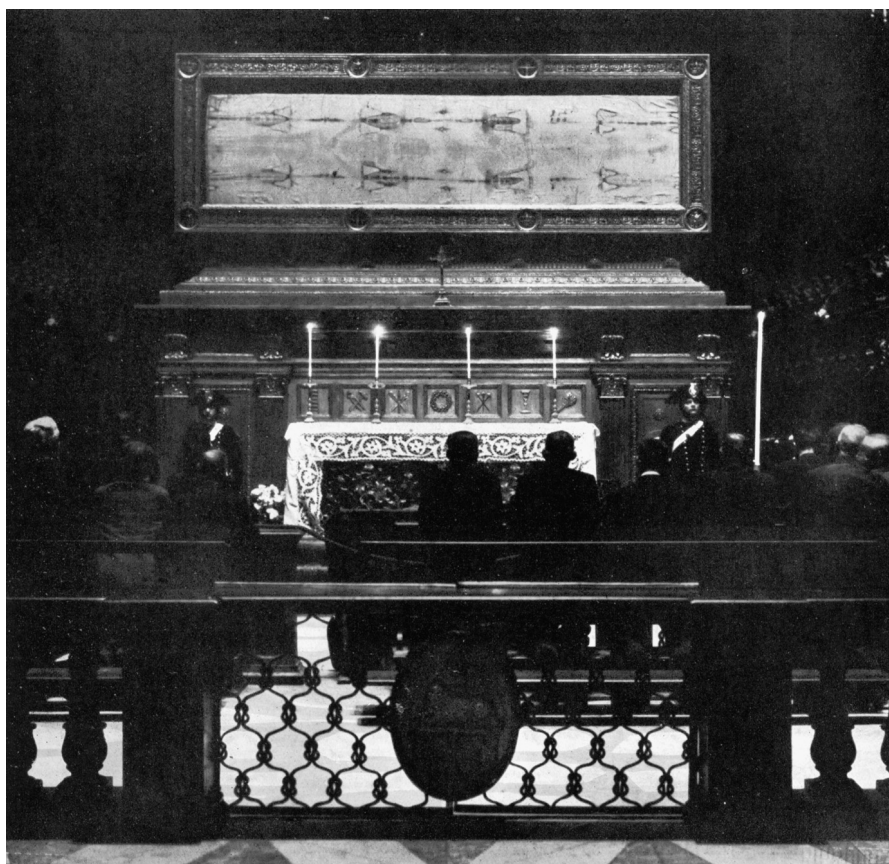
5   G. Enrie, *The Shroud exposed*, 1931, photography.

same time already of a phantasm of the *facies Dei – must not be visible* to him, must – at the cost of a manipulation of space – be withdrawn from him, belonging *visually* to the power of distance. This is the dialectic of the aura. This is the state of being in which any ‹Holy Face› must *hold* its viewer: It takes place in the moment when the facial, frontal and almost tactile power of the object coincides with its withdrawal to a visually arranged distance.

We would need, beyond our basic introduction to the problem, a more specific study to determine how such a dialectic of the near and the distant, of ‹visually laid out withdrawal,› is established in the iconography of each and every ‹Holy Face›, denied or imitated, inverted or repeated. In any case, it is the representation – as we have already seen in the case of the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* – that redistributes the auratic game each time anew, modifying its spatial rules and converting the sensory conditions of reception. Let me briefly evoke three obvious configurations that reveal, within the labors of representation, a certain consciousness of the auratic presentability of the ‹Holy Faces.›

I will call the first of these configurations the *black hole* – obviously a tribute to Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's mode of addressing the problem of ‹faceness› – although the examples discussed here partly invalidate their approach to

6 *King Abgar receiving the Mandylion*, diptych, ca. 10ᵗʰ century, painting on wood, 28 × 19 cm, Egypt, Saint Catherin's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

the face of Christ.[28] The black hole above all relates to images of the relic proper, where the *face* withdraws, is both *detached* yet *present*, and thus shows itself as a *trou en avant*, a ‹hole in the front,› a black stain on the veil's white background. The contours are usually pronounced strongly, but they are just contours – those of the relic's *cadre* – and no facial features as such. These contours only accentu-

7   Hans Memling, *Saint Veronica and her Veil*, ca. 1480, right wing of the Bembo diptych, painting on wood, 31,6 × 24,4 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection, inv. 1952.5.46.

ate a face in its state of disappearance as a recognizable physiognomy. It is the disappearance itself – the effect of the hole – which suddenly shifts into the foreground of the representation, just as is the case with the relic itself (fig. 4).[29]

A symmetrically corresponding figure would be that of a *luminous relief* (fig. 5). These are images in which the phenomenological conditions of the ostension are exactly reversed by the work of representation: Here, the support recedes while the face glides into the foreground. The traces disappear as form-

less material perturbations while the face finally emerges as an appearance that can be perceived as a well defined and recognizable spatial volume: It detaches itself, turns visible, shows its traits, and approaches.[30] Henceforth – and the examples of what might be called a *classical* type of the ‹Holy Face›, beginning in the Renaissance, are enumerable – the image leans towards the genre of portraits: It is no longer a dark stain on a white background, but rather a white face on a dark background, thus restoring the most normal (or normative) optical conditions of Western mechanisms of facial recogniti on (fig. 6). In the nineteenth century, the debate provoked by the photographs of the Shroud of Turin would unknowingly revolve around this restitution of the white face/dark background scheme, ‹miraculously› produced by the photographic *negative* of the linen cloth.

Yet despite all appearances, these two symmetrically related configurations should not be narrowed down to the restricted logic of an evolutionary history of the ‹Holy Faces› over the course of time, from a non-naturalistic Byzantine type to one in accordance with the norms of classical portraiture. Both configurations gain a great deal if we conceive of them in terms of their inherent structural polarity, which the painters obviously have never ceased to play on (a way of making and letting the polarity *work,* in the heuristic sense of the word In fact, the most interesting figurations of the ‹Holy Face› manage to play both sides of the fence: They play off the mode of representation yet at the same time regain something from the presentation – a way of mystifying and *lending aura* to *the representation of the trace*. Artists for that reason create on the touchstone of the painting itself a *double distance*, identified by Walter Benjamin as the fundamental criterion for any auratic phenomenon.

This is the case when the ‹Holy Face› is represented in a frontality that is contradicted by the descriptive or narrative space. For example, when the *facies Christi* appears it presents itself as reaching out of its normal plane of inscription. We see this very early, in the Sinai icon representing the Mandylion of Edessa, and again much later in the *Veronica*, painted by Hans Memling (fig. 7).[31] From there on, there is a fundamental contradiction between space and surface, between the veil's *spatial plane* and the face's *frontal plane*. A creative contradiction, since the face detaches itself as a protruding positive (the private devotion thereby gaining visibility and proximity) yet from an *indistinct* distance and often off-scale: floating in a naturalistic space like a butterfly, a monstrous object, a thing without place. Floating in the painting's proximity like the very appearance of a distance: face, near and distant, all at once.[32]

Annotations

1 Translation from French by Jeanette Kohl und Dominic Olariu. This article was first published in French as: Georges Didi-Huberman, «Face, proche, lointain. L'empreinte du visage et le lieu pour apparaître,» in: *The Holy Face and the paradox of representation*, ed. with an introd. by Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, Bologna, 1998, p. 95–108.

2 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images. Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, University Park (Pennsylvania) 2005 (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image. Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*, Paris 1990), p. 190–191.

3 For the iconography of the ‹Veronica› in general see Albert Chastel, «La Véronique,» in: *Revue de l'art*, 1978, no. 40–41, p. 71–82. For the painting by van Eyck see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1997, p. 430 (Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990).

4 Quoted by Heinrich Pfeiffer, «L'immagine simbolica del pellegrinaggio a Roma. La Veronica e il Volto di Cristo,» in: *Roma 1300–1875. L'arte degli anni santi*, ed. by Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna, Milan 1984, p. 106–112, here p. 106, exhib. cat., Rome, Palazzo Venezia, 1984–1985.

5 Ibid., p. 112. See also Stefano Pedica, *Il Volto santo nei documenti della Chiesa*, Turin 1960, p. 164–166.

6 Paul Vignon, «Réponse à M. Donnadieu,» in: *L'université catholique*, 1902, XL, no. 7, p. 368.

7 As seems to believe David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago/London 1989, p. 207–210.

8 Marie-Madelaine Gauthier, «Reliquaires du XIIIᵉ siècle entre le Proche Orient et l'occident latin,» in: *Il Medio Oriente e l'Occidente nell'arte del XIII secolo. Atti del XXIV Congresso internazionale di Storia dell'arte, II.*, ed. by Hans Belting, 11 vol., Bologna 1981–1983, vol. 2, p. 55–69, here p. 60; Hans Belting, «Die Reaktion der Kunst des 13. Jahrhunderts auf den Import von Reliquien und Ikonen,» in: ibid., p. 35–53. For the ‹relic images› see Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kults und ihre Entwicklung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1940 (new edition Osnabrück 1971), p. 61–69 and p. 380–458.

9 Gerhard olf, «La Veronica e la tradizione romana di icone,» in: *Il Ritratto e la memoria. Materiali*, ed. by Augusto Gentili, Philippe Morel and Claudia Cieri Via, 3 vol., Rome 1989–1993, vol. 2, p. 9–35. The development and a synthesis of this path of research are provided by the same author: *Schleier und Spiegel. Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich 2002.

10 Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, 2 vol., Leipzig 1899, vol. 2, p. 273–335; Giambattista Marino, «La pittura. Diceria prima sopra la Santa Sindone,» in: Giambattista Marino, *Dicerie sacre e la Strage de gl'Innocenti*, new edition by Giovanni Pozzi, Turin 1960 (Turin 1614), p. 73–201.

11 Georges Didi-Huberman, «Pour une anthropologie des singularités formelles. Remarque sur l'invention warburgienne,» in: *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire*, 1996, no. 24, p. 145–163.

12 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, «*Deus per Naturam, Deus per Gratiam*. A Note on Mediaeval Political Theology,» in: Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Selected Studies*, Locust Valley (New York) 1965, p. 121–137.

13 For the incarnational basis of the dialectic see Georges Didi-Huberman, «La couleur de chair, ou le paradoxe de Tertullien,» in: *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse*, 1987, no. 35, p. 9–49; Id., «Puissances de la figure. Exégèse et visualité dans l'art chrétien,» *Encyclopaedia Universalis – Symposium*, Paris 1990, p. 596–609 (both reprinted in id., *L'Image ouverte. Motifs de l'incarnation dans les arts visuels*, Paris 2007).

14 Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Empreinte*, Paris 1997, p. 15–190.

15 Erwin Straus, *The primary World of Senses. A Vindication of Sensory Experience*, New York/London/Toronto 1963 (Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, Berlin 1935).

16 Ibid., p. 379–385, where the play of distance and proximity is defined as a «spatio-temporal form of sensing.» See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London/New York 1962, p. 243–298.

17 Gerhard Wolf addressed this problem significantly through a brief comment of the smile of Beatrice, in Dante's Paradise. See Gerhard Wolf, «*Toccar con gli occhi*. Zu Konstellationen und Konzeptionen von Bild und Wirklichkeit im späten Quattrocento,» in: *Künstlerischer Austausch – Artistic Exchange. Akten des XXVIII Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, ed. by Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Berlin 1993, p. 437–452.

18 Walter Benjamin, «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,» in: Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood, introd. by Amit Chaudhuri, London/New York 2009, p. 228–259, here p. 235. (Walter Benjamin, «L'œuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductivité technique,» in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1936, p.40–68). For a commentary of this formula and a comparison with other expressions used by Benjamin see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Paris 1992, p. 103–123.

19 Walter Benjamin, «Brief History of Photography,» in: Benjamin 2009 (as in note 18),

p. 172–192, here p. 184. (Walter Benjamin, «Kleine Geschichte der Photographie,» in: *Die Literarische Welt*, 1931, no. 38, September 18, p. 3–4; no. 39, September 25, p. 3–4; no. 40, October 2, p. 7–8).

20 Walter Benjamin, «On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,» in: Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life. Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Harry Zohn, Cambridge (Massachusetts)/London 2006, p. 170–210, here p. 204. (Walter Benjamin, «Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire,» in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1939, year 8, p. 50–89).

21 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, (Massachussetts) 1999, p. 447: «Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. Aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura it takes possession of us.»

22 Georges Didi-Huberman, «Imitation, représentation, fonction. Remarques sur un mythe épistémologique,» in: *L'image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval,* ed. by Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (proceedings of the conference in Erice, 1992), Paris 1996, p. 59–86.

23 Dobschütz 1899 (as in note 10), vol. 1, p. 102–196 and vol. 2, p. 159–249.

24 Eusebius of Caesarea, ‹Church History,› I, 13, 9, in: Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History,* ed. by Philip Schaff, New York 1890, (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 1), p. 100. For the destiny of this famous letter see notably Paul Devos, «Égérie à Édesse. Saint Thomas l'Apôtre, le roi Abgar,» in: *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1967, 85, p. 381–400. Italics by the author.

25 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* (ca. 1260), trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vol., Princeton 1995 (London 1941), vol. 1, p. 212.

26 Ibid., p. 212. Italics by the author. For the textual traditions of the Veronica see Dobschütz 1899 (as in note 10), vol. 1, p. 197–262 and vol. 2, p. 273–335. A good resume of the topic is given by Wolf 1989–1993 (as in note 9), p. 9–12.

27 Didi-Huberman 1997 (as in note 14), p. 246–248.

28 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. and foreword Brian Massumi, London 2004 (cop. Minneapolis 1987) (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie,* Paris 1980), p. 185–211.

29 Note, as examples, two Veronicas of the fifteenth century at the Bibliothèque royale of Brussels (ms 11035-7, fol. 8 verso, and ms 11060-61, fol. 8) or, in another context, the imago pietatis of Domenico di Michelino in the Museo Bandini in Fiesole. Not to mention, for the sixteenth century, a rare example of the Veronica painted by Ugo da da Carpi «senza pennello,» and preserved today at the Reverenda Fabbrica of the Vatican: see Didi-Huberman 2005 (as in note 2), p. 194–200.

30 This phenomenon would have to be analyzed in reference to that analyzed, in another context, by Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, Doornspijk 1965 (revised edition, 1984), passim.

31 Kurt Weitzmann, «The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos,» in: *Cahiers archéologiques,* 1960, 11, p. 163–184.

32 In these few introductory pages – and also generally, no doubt – I am only giving a version of the first two parts of a lecture presented at the conference *The Holy Face,* held in May 1996 in Rome (Biblioteca Hertziana) and Florence (Villa Spelman), under the direction of Gerhard Wolf and Herbert Kessler. The other three parts analyzed more specific examples (notably in Dante and St. Bernard) before focusing on the notion of aura.