

# CATHOLIC KINAESTHETICS

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## ABSTRACT

The study of Christian art is often synonymous with the study of Christian images. Yet in this article we adopt a different approach; examining a particular corpus of Christian art not as a collection of images, so much as the outcome of bodily gestures. Specifically, we analyze an extensive collection of rock art from the deserts of northern New Mexico as traces left behind by generations of Catholics, particularly the members of a lay fraternity known as the Penitentes. These penitents sought to manifest their piety through the pain and suffering incurred in the repetitive pecking of crosses onto basalt boulders. Even though the result of their actions was an image, we argue that privileging an iconographic analysis of such art fails to adequately capture the kinaesthetic theology that underlay its production.

## KEYWORDS

Rock Art; Catholicism; Kinaesthetics; Penitentes; Descansos.

## I. Introduction

For Catholics, the *Via Crucis* or “Way of the Cross” has long been an important generator of devotional imagery, particularly in the colonial Americas where *Via Crucis* iconography – sometimes created by Indigenous artists – has drawn significant art historical attention.<sup>1</sup> The term references Christ’s final journey through the city of Jerusalem, culminating in his execution and burial, and is traditionally divided into fourteen narrative beats, referred to as “stations”. Since antiquity, Christians have sought to walk in Christ’s footsteps along this redemptive path,<sup>2</sup> and prior to the seventeenth century, they did so through outdoor processions in which each station was marked by a simple cross.<sup>3</sup> Today, we are more likely to encounter the *Via Crucis* inside a Catholic church and to find stations marked by iconographically rich paintings, carvings, or prints, each labeled with a Roman numeral and arranged around the walls of the nave. This variant of the *Via Crucis* is comparatively modern. In 1686, Pope Innocent XI granted the Franciscan Order the exclusive right to establish the Stations of the Cross inside their churches. He even permitted the Franciscans to grant indulgences (remissions from punishment in purgatory) to those who prayerfully processed through the stations,<sup>4</sup> something the Church had previously only offered to pilgrims undertaking the arduous journey to sacred places in the Levant. In this sense, performing the *Via Crucis* in a Franciscan church and long-distance pilgrimages to the Holy Land became theologically equivalent.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the close attention paid to the devotional icons of the *Via Crucis*, its basic logic is more *kinaesthetic* than iconographic. We use this term in the sense put forward by the archaeologist

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On the California missions, see Norman Neuerburg, The Indian *Via Crucis* from Mission San Fernando. An Historical Exposition, in: *Southern California Quarterly* 79/3, 1997, 329–382, and George Philips Harwood, Indian Paintings from Mission San Fernando. An Historical Interpretation, in: *The Journal of California Anthropology* 3/1, 1976, 96–100. For a broader discussion, see Yve Chavez, Remarkable Native Paintings. Indigeneity and Exhibitions of California Mission Art, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 2/3, 2020, 99–108. For Mexico, see John F. Schwaller, Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt. The “*Via Crucis* en Mexicano”, in: *The Americas* 74/2, 2017, 119–137.

2

Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem and other holy places first becomes common during the AD 300s; see Pierre Maraval, The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East (before the 7th Century), in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56, 2002, 63–74.

3

See Neuerburg, Indian *Via Crucis*, 332–338.

4

See Anthony Wallenstein, St. Leonard of Port Maurice and Propagation of Devotion to the Way of the Cross, in: *Franciscan Studies* 12/1, 1952, 47–70.

5

In 1731, Pope Clement XII gave permission for stations to be set up in non-Franciscan churches, providing they were under the aegis of a Franciscan friar. The Franciscans’ exclusive right over the *Via Crucis* was not rescinded until 1857. For the historical development of the *Via Crucis* tradition, see Sandro Sticca, The *Via Crucis*. Its Historical, Spiritual and Devotional Context, in: *Medievalia* 15, 1989, 93–126.

Chris Tilley, who defines kinaesthetics as “the study of the active effects of imagery in relation to the human body, its balance, effort, postures, and gestures”.<sup>6</sup> A kinaesthetic approach does not mean that we ignore images, but it does encourage us to rethink their analytical privilege. Rather than focusing on questions of iconographic content, stylistic elements, or critical reception, the image instead becomes a kind of road sign or set of directives in a field of significant bodily habits and movements. From a kinaesthetic standpoint, the gestural response in the presence of an image is of greater analytical interest than the image itself. Or following Hans Belting, one might say that the “image” is reimagined as an animating spark, leaping the gap between pictorial media – wood, canvas, stone, paint – to take up residence in the choreographed body of the viewer.<sup>7</sup>

## II. The *Via Crucis* and the Penitent Body

*Via Crucis* imagery, in both orthodox and vernacular forms, has persisted across Latin America into the present,<sup>8</sup> and in northern New Mexico, where our research is based, it is commonly found not just in Catholic churches but in outdoor settings as well, echoing the oldest manifestations of the phenomenon. In fact, the early missionization of New Mexico was carried out under the auspices of the Franciscans, and it was they who undoubtedly introduced the *Via Crucis* to the region. Ironically, the strong commitment to *Via Crucis* rituals among New Mexicans has sometimes been used as a symbol of the region’s autonomous or even deviant Catholicity. This is due to the influence of the Penitentes Brotherhood,<sup>9</sup> a lay Catholic fraternity in New Mexico and southern Colorado best known for its outdoor processions during Semana Santa (Holy Week).<sup>10</sup> The origins and early history of the Penitentes’ *Via Crucis* processions are debated – some trace their ancestry all the way back to the Lenten ceremonies practiced by Juan de Oñate during his journey

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Christopher Tilley, *Body and Image. Explorations in Landscape Archaeology* 2, Walnut Creek, CA 2008, 41.

7

Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton, NJ 2014.

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See Neuerburg, *Indian Via Crucis*, 332–338.

9

Although popularly referred to as the Penitentes, the full name of the brotherhood is Los Hermanos de la Fraternidad Piadosa de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno. For classic accounts of the Penitentes, see Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood*, Albuquerque, NM 1976; William Wroth, *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy. Southwestern Santos in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Norman, OK 1991. For a more recent revisionist history, see Michael P. Carroll, *The Penitente Brotherhood. Patriarchy and Hispano-Catholicism in New Mexico*, Baltimore, MD 2020.

10

For a recent ethnographic account of the Penitente practice of the *Via Crucis*, see Sylvia Rodriguez, *Procession and Sacred Landscape in New Mexico*, in: *New Mexico Historical Review* 77/1, 2002, 1–26.



north to settle New Mexico at the end of the sixteenth century<sup>11</sup> – but they seem to have intensified and taken on added cultural salience after the U.S. invasion of the region during the mid-nineteenth century. This is also when the first detailed descriptions were recorded by Protestant observers, who drew special attention to the Penitentes' allegedly excessive use of flagellation, and other techniques of “christomimetic bloodshed and pain”.<sup>12</sup>

Mortification of the flesh has historically been a widespread Catholic practice with diverse variants, although large-scale processions of flagellants are mainly associated with the lay millenarian movements that emerged in Europe during the Later Middle Ages. As such, the Penitentes' continuation of this practice has been alternately regarded as problematically pre-modern by its critics, or as proud tradition, faithfully kept, by its advocates. Making note of the fact that most Catholics in New Mexico trace their ancestry through both settler and Indigenous lineages, some detractors have attempted to further portray the Penitentes' embrace of bodily pain as a degenerate practice, corrupted through centuries of contact with “primitive” Native traditions.<sup>13</sup> Self-mortification was indeed an important component of initiation ceremonies among various Indigenous societies, and specific understandings of whipping as a means of conveying blessings, as well as of wounds as signs of fertility, had a particular theological significance within the Pueblo communities that encircled colonial settlements.<sup>14</sup> But even allowing for such connections, the rigors of the Penitentes clearly had deep roots in European Catholicism as well.

A kinaesthetic approach to the analysis of images, as we have noted, is one in which bodily experience is centered. And in New Mexico, the Penitentes' *Via Crucis* can be read as an interpretive key to a broader tradition – a kinaes-*theology* – in which the Catholic principle of *Imitatio Christi* conjoins piety and “enfleshed sensa-

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For a first-hand account of Oñate's acts of penance, see Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà, *History of New Mexico, 1610*, ed. by Giberto Espinosa, Los Angeles 1933 [1610], 110.

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Mitchell B. Merback, The Living Image of Pity. Mimetic Violence, Peace-Making and Salvific Spectacle in the Flagellant Processions of the Later Middle Ages, in: Debra Higgs Strickland (ed.), *Images of Medieval Sanctity*, Leiden 2007, 137. See also William J. Purkis, Zealous Imitation. The Materiality of the Crusader's Marked Body, in: *Material Religion* 14/4, 2018, 438–453.

## 13

The New Mexican experience of *mestizaje* centers on the figure of the detribalized Indigenous captive, incorporated into Spanish colonial society during the eighteenth century as part of an emergent social class. Such captives and their progeny are locally referred to as *genizaros*, and some regard them as a key creative force in the local development of the Penitentes Brotherhood. On the *genizaro* history of New Mexico, see James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins. Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*, Chapel Hill, NC 2002; and Moises Gonzales and Erique R. Lamadrid (eds.), *Nación Genizara. Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico*, Albuquerque, NM 2021.

## 14

Severin Fowles, On Torture in Societies against the State, in: Geoffrey Emberling (ed.), *Social Theory in Archaeology and Ancient History. The Present and Future of Counternarratives*, Cambridge 2015, 205–230.

tions” in very particular ways.<sup>15</sup> Three bodily experiences are especially noteworthy: procession (the physical movement from station to station following in Christ’s footprints), pain (which, for Franciscans, establishes a sensuous connection not just to the Savior but also to Francis of Assisi, the saint who famously suffered stigmata during the thirteenth century), and less obviously, *rest*. The Catholic sanctification of pain gets a great deal of – often sensationalized – attention. However, sanctified rest also plays an important role in the *Via Crucis* tradition. At the third, seventh, and ninth stations, Christ falls under the weight of the cross, temporarily laying down his burden. The fifth station also involves Simon of Cyrene briefly relieving Christ of the cross, providing him with another moment of respite. Suffering – even divine suffering – is never a continuous monotone. It manifests as a series of waves, defined as much by its troughs as by its peaks. Few things consume the conscious mind like pain, and someone in agony is frequently forced to abandon rational thought, opening up space for visions, transcendence, truth, and, in some cases, otherwise unobtainable sensations of communion.<sup>16</sup> But it is in the contrasting moments of relief that penitent individuals are able to reflect on their suffering, relating it to Christ’s example.

### III. Rock Art and Kinaesthology

Let us now return to the images associated with the *Via Crucis* – or rather, with a particular example located on the outskirts of the small village of Pilar (formerly Cieneguilla). Like many nineteenth-century rural villages in northern New Mexico, Pilar was home to a local chapter of the Penitentes, organized around a small *morada* (literally “dwelling”) or chapterhouse in which sacred objects were stored and indoor ceremonies were held [Fig. 1]. Today, the Pilar *morada* lies in ruins, its formal use as a Penitente structure having ended in the 1940s. Elderly members of the local community are slowly losing their memories of the devotional practices that once took place there, now only sharing with us fragmentary narratives of the *hermanos* (brothers) crawling over cactus, wielding *disciplinas* (whips), and dragging large *maderos* (carrying crosses).

Our archaeological surveys of the landscape surrounding the *morada* have revealed a dense network of features once associated with local *Via Crucis* performances. These include an abandoned *camposanto* or cemetery, a large wooden cross or *Calvario* where processions once culminated, a small rock shelter that may have served as a model of Christ’s tomb, and various connecting trails. Of particular interest, however, is the site’s abundant rock art, which

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The idea of *Imitatio Christi* has been variously interpreted. For some, it refers to an entirely immaterial and inward-focused spirituality, whereas others understand it as the outward bodily imitation of Christ. On “enfleshed sensations”, see David Morgan, *Visual Piety. A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*, Berkeley, CA 1999, 66.

<sup>16</sup>

On the creative deployment of pain in the Abrahamic tradition, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA 2003.



[Fig. 1]  
The Penitente *morada* at Pilar as it currently stands. Photograph by author.

includes hundreds of Catholic cruciform petroglyphs [Fig. 2 and Fig. 3]. The rock art appears to have been associated with the Penitente *Via Crucis* rites that took place around Pilar during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar to the painted images that mark the Stations of the Cross in nearby churches, such rock art panels likely served as focal points in processional movements of Catholic bodies. As such, they represent especially formalized and public manifestations of Catholic kinaesthology, drawing our attention to the principles of sanctified pain and rest that can help us interpret Catholic rock art in New Mexico more generally [Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3].

How are we to understand such images from a kinaesthetic perspective? We might begin by considering the bodily manner in which they were created. One of the most distinctive features of Catholic petroglyphs in northern New Mexico is that they tend to be very low to the ground. This spatial pattern is atypical of the region's non-Christian rock art and thus seems to be a characteristically Catholic phenomenon. Practically speaking, such images could only have been produced by a *kneeling* artist, whose body was pressed against the sharp volcanic rocks and low-lying cacti that cover the landscape of the *morada*. The gestural act of artistic creation would have been painful as well. Most Catholic rock art emerged through the repeated strikes of a hammerstone against a hard basalt boulder – a physically demanding act liable to bruise and cut the hand. The appropriate bodily stance for making such images, then, was one that enacted humility, produced pain, and generated small wounds from which a certain amount of blood would inevitably flow [Fig. 4].

Tempting though it might be to brush aside the rock artist's exertions as a mere side effect of image production, the significance of pain within Penitente theology demands that we consider such suffering as integral. Blood, as a material index of pain, is also an index of piety here, and it is worth recalling how these two are fused within the Franciscan tradition; with stigmata as the paradigmatic example. The artist's own blood presumably sometimes ended up on the rock alongside the pecked cross, in which case it may well have been regarded as both pigment and substance, effectively becoming part of the image itself. Blood on rocks exposed to the elements does not preserve long so we are unable to directly study this possibility today, but a measure of support is found in the occasional rock art panel where a deeply pecked cross has been subsequently painted with red pigment, as if the skin of the boulder had been pierced and the image itself were bleeding.

Bleeding images are a recurrent theme within the Christian tradition. "The story that most frequently recurs", observes David Freedberg, "is that of the Jew at Constantinople who stole a painting of Christ, struck it, and took it to his home to burn it; whereupon



[Fig. 2]  
Penitente rock art and associated cacti at the Pilar Morada Site, New Mexico. Photograph by author.





[Fig. 3]

Detail of a Penitente rock art panel, depicting a kneeling supplicant holding a cross-embellished chalice at the Pilar Morada Site. Photograph by author.



[Fig. 4]

Two cross petroglyphs (highlighted in red) located along the Rio Grande gorge, approximately 6 km southwest of Pilar. One of the authors is shown kneeling in front of the images to demonstrate the bodily stance required to produce them. Photographs by author.

it issued blood from the place where it had been struck.”<sup>17</sup> Within dominant art historical approaches, such stories tend to raise questions about the power and animacy of icons, if not of representation more broadly. But a kinaesthetic approach moves in a different direction, encouraging us to inquire instead into the role such images played as scripts for bodily actions performed in their presence. Here, we are reminded of another Penitente practice: that of using an obsidian blade to actually carve the cross into the flesh of ritualists during their Lenten processions along the *Via Crucis*. It is not difficult to imagine that the depiction of a bleeding cross on a rock was the very thing that prompted the creation of a bleeding cross on the Penitente’s body.

How else might subsequent “audiences” for a cross petroglyph respond? What would be the experience of a Catholic traveler who happened upon such an image well after it had been created? Today, the most commonly encountered crosses are the roadside *descansos* that mark places where motorists have died in car accidents [Fig. 5]. Although the term *descanso* refers to a memorial cross, in Spanish it literally means “a rest”, with the connotation of a pause or break that occurs during a journey. Interestingly, the reference is not to the rest of the deceased, nor does it have a direct link to the Latin epitaph *requiescat in pace* (“rest in peace”). Scholars of the New Mexican *descanso* tradition point out that its origins more precisely lie within funerary processions and the need for pallbearers to periodically pause, or rest, in the course of their labors. According to one account,

The first *descansos* were resting places where those who carried the coffin from the church to the *camposanto* paused to rest. In the old villages of New Mexico, high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains or along the river valleys, the coffin was shouldered by four or six men [...] the procession made its way from the church to the cemetery. The rough hewn pine of the coffin cut into the shoulders of men. If the *camposanto* was far from the church, the men grew tired and they paused to rest, lowering the coffin and placing it on the ground. The place where they rested was the *descanso*.<sup>18</sup>

*Descansos*, then, are places where the *living* stop to rest, where the pallbearers take a brief respite from the painful burden of carrying the wooden coffin. We are reminded of the multiple Stations of the Cross where Christ was briefly relieved of his own burden. Moreover, the term *descanso* could refer to any place in the burial ground

<sup>17</sup>

David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1988, 310.

<sup>18</sup>

Rudolfo Anaya, Juan Estevan Arellano, and Denise Chaves, *Descansos. An Interrupted Journey*, Albuquerque, NM 1995, 14–15.





[Fig. 5]

A modern *descanso*, marking the site of a roadside death along Highway 68, New Mexico.  
Photograph by author.

where one paused to recite the rosary or offer a requiem.<sup>19</sup> So again we encounter moments of sanctified rest alternating with moments of sanctified pain.

Modern *descansos* are typically made of painted metal or wood and erected along highways, but many older versions were pecked onto rocks and were positioned along foot or wagon trails, or on prominent landforms overlooking sites of tragedy. One elderly Hispano resident of the region told us the story of his uncle, who was thrown from his wagon while descending a steep mesa with a big load of firewood; he died, and his relatives returned to the location of the accident to peck a cross on a boulder. Prior to the twentieth century, when the region was a more politically contested space, travel through the landscape opened one to the added dangers of warfare, raids, and ambushes. For instance, about 10 miles south of Pilar is the site of a skirmish between the United States Army and a group of allied Hispano and Native insurgents in the wake of the 1847 Taos Revolt. Our archaeological survey of the site of the Battle of Embudo, as it has come to be known, documented a cluster of cross petroglyphs, pecked onto the rocks as memorials to the deceased insurgents.

Violent interactions between Spanish settlers and Indigenous communities seem to have generated a good many *descansos* right from the start of the colonial period. In fact, during the 1780s, Spanish colonial officials in New Mexico actually sought to prohibit the creation of crosses in the vicinity of major trails. The colony and its leaders were devoutly Catholic, and the spread of religious iconography had, up to then, been regarded as a desirable material extension of the missionary project. But the bloody struggles of the mid-eighteenth century changed things. Many Indigenous groups – notably the Apache and Comanche – now possessed horses and guns. As a result, raids on settler communities intensified. And crosses memorializing dead settlers dotted the New Mexican landscape, appearing in especially high densities along routes of movement where so much colonial violence took place.

In part, the worry was that the proliferation of *descansos* had begun to serve as a kind of tally of Indigenous military prowess, demoralizing settlers and emboldening the so-called barbarian enemies of the state. The semiotic status of the cross had shifted, in other words: no longer an iconic presence drawing viewers' thoughts toward Christ, crosses had begun to function as indexes of Indigenous agency and the failures of the colonial government.<sup>20</sup> But the more immediate problem with cross imagery was kinaesthetic. As the late Chicano writer and historian Estevan Arellano

<sup>19</sup>

See Holly J. Everett, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Material Culture*, Denton, TX 2002, 28–29.

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On the 1780s ban on *descansos*, see Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania. Public Feeling in America*, Chicago 2010, 83–84; James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places. A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta*, Tucson, AZ 1992, 101–102.

explained to us one afternoon, the depiction of a cross at, say, the side of a road where a settler had perished would have compelled other Catholic travelers to stop and kneel. “The whole place is full of crosses, which I saw, and I prayed for those dead”, wrote Fray Miguel de Menchero in 1744, commenting on his devotions in the very same landscape that surrounded us as we listened to Estevan’s account.<sup>21</sup> All the Apache had to do, observed Estevan, was to hide nearby, wait for pious settlers to kneel at these clearly marked locations, and then send a well-aimed arrow their way.<sup>22</sup> Another death, another cross, more kneeling, another arrow, yet another cross – one can see how the situation might get tragically out of hand, and why the ban on *descanso* production briefly became a priority, even for a colonial government committed to Indigenous missionization.

Not all such crosses would have been pecked onto rocks. Many were likely wooden constructions that have not survived. Regardless, it is not the medium that defines the *descanso* phenomenon, so much as the kinaesthetic logic of the responses it engenders. Outside of formal burial grounds, *descansos* mark places of violent and sudden death. In this sense, they index a prior life unnaturally interrupted.<sup>23</sup> But they also project that interruption into the future, urging future travelers to pause in their own journeys, to kneel, and to rehearse pious bodily gestures. As such, they function less as a representation of something than as an instruction of how the pious should behave in their presence.

#### IV. Conclusion

One could read the eighteenth-century attempt to quell the proliferation of *descansos* as a kind of prohibition on images, but in truth the New Mexican authorities were really concerned about the gestures and practices that took place in their presence. Catholics who happened upon a *descanso* would feel compelled to pause in their journey, kneel, and pray. Such pious habits left them vulnerable to attack, and it was this bodily precarity that the authorities were ultimately seeking to prevent, not the images themselves.

Further vulnerabilities arose during the nineteenth century, in the wake of the U.S. invasion of New Mexico, when the bodily rigors of the Penitentes became targets of Protestant propaganda designed to undercut Hispano claims to land and local self-governance. Here again, it was not Christian imagery that drew condem-

<sup>21</sup>

Fray Miguel de Menchero, Declaration of Fray Miguel de Menchero. Santa Bárbara, May 10, 1744, in: Charles Wilson Hackett (ed.), *Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya and Approaches Thereto, to 1773*, vol. 3, Washington, DC 1937, 400.

<sup>22</sup>

Estevan Arellano, personal communication, 2013. See also Anaya, Arellano, and Cháves, *Descansos*, 97.

<sup>23</sup>

“Life is a journey, and for that person who tragically met his or her death on the highway, the journey was interrupted. We take a cross and place it where the accident occurred, there where the loved one met the shadow of death.” Anaya, Arellano, and Cháves, *Descansos*, 10.

nation so much as the Penitentes' pursuit of Christomimetic pain, which the invading Anglos portrayed as barbaric, irrational, and anti-modern. It was another tragic irony of colonialism. For by this point, the ranks of the brotherhood had filled with converted people with at least partial Indigenous heritage, whose ancestors had been forced to abandon their native ceremonial practices and to take up the bodily habits of Catholicism. And now a new wave of Christian invaders was using those very same Catholic habits to cast the Penitentes as "primitive" and to justify yet another round of dispossession. Perhaps the most influential manifestation of this anti-Penitente propaganda was the 1936 exploitation film, *Lash of the Penitentes*, in which the flagellant's whip became a focus for creating lurid and sensationalized images of "false religion".

Religious opprobrium towards gestures is not confined to colonial New Mexico and is something that we can identify in Christian contexts elsewhere. For example, bodily gestures were also a major point of contention between the Old Believers and the seventeenth-century reformist movement led by Nikon, the Patriarch of Moscow and head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Among other things, the reformers sought to suppress the traditional sign of the cross made with two fingers extended and replace it with a version where three fingers were extended.<sup>24</sup> One woman, Feodosia Prokopiyeвна Morozova – commemorated in a well-known 1887 painting by Vasily Surikov – was herself a prominent Old Believer and eventually suffered martyrdom for her insistence on signing the cross in the traditional fashion.<sup>25</sup> Just as the Old Believers raising their hands to make the sign of the cross provoked the ire of the Orthodox reformers, the Penitentes raising their *disciplinas* to scourge their flesh was perceived by Protestant colonizers as yet another *gesture* of flawed religiosity.

Interestingly, we lack a word to even describe this phenomenon. Everyone knows the term iconoclasm, as a struggle around offensive images that are themselves offended in return. But we have no term for its kinetic equivalent: the suppression or prohibition of sacred gestures. An appropriate neologism would perhaps be something like "chiroclasm". Yet, chiroclasm is more than simply the repression of gestures narrowly conceived as signs. The martyrdom of Morozova was a long and excruciating affair, in which she was subject to various tortures and eventually died of starvation. As a subject of martyrdom – perhaps the ultimate expression of Christomimesis – her experience of chiroclasm was one of profound and agonizing piety. And her tormentors no doubt thought themselves equally pious. Whereas iconoclasm focuses on violence towards images, chiroclasm highlights the waves of experiential intensity

<sup>24</sup>

On the schism between the Old Believers and the Russian Church authorities, see Irina Paert, *Old Believers. Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia*, Manchester 2003, 23–30.

<sup>25</sup>

For the biographical details of Feodosia Morozova, see Margaret Ziolkowski, *Tale of Boiarynia Morozova. A Seventeenth-Century Religious Life*, Lanham, MD 2000, 2–3.

and enfolded sensations that we previously underscored as central to kinaesthology more broadly. We cannot extract sacred gestures from the real bodies in which they are manifested.

The scholarly attention lavished on images contrasts markedly with how gestures continue to linger at the margins of archaeological, anthropological, and art historical theory.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, where gestures exist in articulation with images, we immediately jump to the assumption that it is the image or the icon that merits our analysis. Thus does each theory of human response become a treatise on the power of images.<sup>27</sup> Even when an act of physical destruction is pursued, we quickly slip back into the familiar terrain of image theory, transforming the iconoclastic gesture into yet another image, this time the image of anti-imagistic violence.

What, in the end, does it mean to assent to the conclusion that “image is everything”?<sup>28</sup> Our scholarly fixation on the ontology of the icon is largely a bias we have inherited from Protestantism, which has long nurtured an obsession with other peoples’ responses to images. Originally, the Protestant interest in others’ treatment of images existed in the service of anti-Catholic polemics, although today it has since been reconfigured in a variety of ostensibly secular directions. Whether pornography, flags, statues, cartoons in French magazines, or Andrew Serrano’s infamous photograph *Piss Christ*, the West has been fighting “image wars” of one kind or another for a long time.<sup>29</sup> Here, we have explored a different analytic, one in which the image is decentered in favor of a focus on the bodily worlds in which it operates.

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<sup>26</sup>

For exceptions in art history and archaeology respectively, see Lisa Trever, *Image Encounters. Moche Murals and Archaeo Art History*, Austin, TX 2022; Severin Fowles and Jimmy Arterberry, Gesture and Performance in Comanche Rock Art, in: *World Art* 3/1, 2013, 67–82.

<sup>27</sup>

Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

<sup>28</sup>

W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago 2005, 2.

<sup>29</sup>

See Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclasm. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA 2002.

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