PRESENTING, (RE)CONSTRUCTING AND ARRANGING MEDIEVAL ARTEFACTS FROM NON-RELIGIOUS AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS: CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Today, the influence of digitalised images on individual everyday life and across various areas of society is undeniable. This is largely because digitally reproduced artefacts have become an integral part of daily life. Against this background, it is not surprising that questions about the benefits and uses of digital artefacts arise across multiple disciplines, including art education, media education and religious education, as well as sociology and economics. The digital media revolution has had a particular impact on the way we engage with works of art: initial encounters now usually take place through their digital reproductions, which are selected by internet search engines.[1]

Museums are key players that (co-)shape the collective memory of a society.[2] Unlike other educational institutions, they primarily structure our relationship to the past through the arrangement of objects and artefacts. They ensure that religious and non-religious cultural heritage is preserved, and they present exemplary artefacts from their collections. These religious and non-religious objects or artefacts do not carry their

[1] Claire Reymond et al., "Aesthetic Evaluation of Digitally Reproduced Art Images," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, no. 11 (2020): 2, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.615575.

[2] Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Beck Verlag, ³2006), 19.

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meaning in themselves; rather, they recall and embody religious knowledge and religious practices in various ways. Scholarly enquiry into the material dimension of religion focuses primarily on the handling of objects that were used in specific ways in religious spaces.[3]

The emergence of digital technologies is reshaping the self-image of museums, which are becoming increasingly viewed as political or societal actors.[4] Even though digital copies play an important role for museums – and despite foundational essays on technologically reproduced copies – there are still hardly any approaches or criteria for engaging with digital copies of artworks. Recently, cultural sociology based on practice theory has drawn attention to media practices[5] in engaging with things and artefacts. They focus on a knowledge-based, culturally specific approach to digital artefacts[6] and thus replace practices of individual, bourgeois contemplation that arise from religious and cultic rituals.[7] The following considerations investigate the opportunities and challenges that arise from the digital transformation for the presentation of medieval artefacts coming from religious and non-religious contexts: To what extent does digital reproduction affect analogue forms of presentation in museums?

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3 Antje Roggenkamp and Sonja Keller, "Artefakte, Objekte, Räume. Praxeologische Zugänge in Praktischer Theologie und Religionspädagogik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 118, no. 2 (2021): 242 f, https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/artikel/artefakte-objekte-raeume-101628zthk-2021-0012/.

4 Hans Peter Hahn, "Das digitalisierte Museum – Erweiterung oder Transformation? Zur Selbstpositionierung von Museen im 21. Jahrhundert," in *Objekte im Netz. Wissenschaftliche Sammlungen im digitalen Wandel,* ed. Udo Andraschke and Sarah Wagner (Transcript, 2020), 47, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839455715-004.

5 Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kultursoziologie.* (Transcript, ²2010), 165, https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-89942-917-6/unscharfe-grenzen/.

6 Ibid., 172.

7 Cf. Sophia Prinz, „Einleitung: Politisierung der Ästhetik," in *Ästhetik und Gesellschaft. Grundlagentexte aus Soziologie und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Andreas Reckwitz, Sophia Prinz and Hilmar Schäfer (Suhrkamp, ⁴2022), 108.

The relationship between original and copy

From the perspective of practice theory, it is useful to refer back to the approach of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), who described the relationship between the original and the technologically reproduced copy in his classic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (1935/1939)[8]: The technological reproduction of artworks has an effect back on the artefact, whose *aura* changes: "what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura."[9]

The concept of aura emerges from the unique existence of the artwork "in a particular place".[10] From the perspective of media practices, this initially includes *describing* the *materiality* of a work of art,[11] but also the changing of *ownership* relationships[12]. The original artwork, on the other hand, loses its authority when technological processes expand our *viewing*: the camera lens can depict aspects of an artwork that are not accessible to "the human eye".[13] However, "technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain."[14] *Comparing* a technical reproduction with an original work of art alters its authenticity: on the one hand with regard to the historical dimension of *witnessing*,[15] and on the other hand with regard to the *ritual dimension of cultic integration*:[16] "Nevertheless, the

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8 In the following with reference to Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility. Third edition 1939," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected writings, vol. 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (University Press, 2003), 251–283, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00579.x.

9 Ibid., 254.

10 Ibid., 253

11 Vassilev describes this definition of materiality as contrary to the aura and thus as paradoxical. Cf. Kiril Vassilev, "The Aura of the Object and the Work of Art: A Critical Analysis of Walter Benjamin's Theory in the Context of Contemporary Art and Culture," *Arts* 59, no. 12 (2023): 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12020059.

12 Benjamin, Work of Art, 253f.

13 Ibid., 254.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 "As we know, the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals – first magical, then religious. And it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function." Ibid.

concept of authenticity still functions as a determining factor in the evaluation of art; as art becomes secularized, authenticity displaces the cult value of the work."[17] Are there any other criteria or modes that can further specify the practices of describing, seeing and comparing?

In the following, an in-depth re-reading of Benjamin's text concentrates on the conditions and modes of engaging with artefacts and technologically reproduced copies. The conditional and modal specifications of the handling of artefacts and their technically or mechanically produced copies should result in criteria that are subsequently transferred to the handling of digital copies. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the German term *technische Reproduzierbarkeit* is translated both as "technological reproducibility" and as "mechanical reproduction".[18]

The criteria proposed by Benjamin refer to different approaches. On the one hand, they refer to the original work of art – describing the aura of a work of art is already different at the level of *materiality*: A panel painting can be exhibited differently from a fresco or a wall painting.[19] On the other hand, the mechanically produced copy takes centre stage: The technological reproduction changes its *authority* in so far as it actualises the perception of the artwork by addressing the viewer in his or her respective situation.[20] A further distinction arises in painting – while the original exhibits the painter's *natural distance* from their work, thereby respecting the original cultic function, this distance is undermined in the technological copy: The camera reveals dimensions and perspectives that are denied to the natural gaze.[21] The *possibility of reception* is also altered – while access to works of art exhibited in monasteries or royal courts was only possible for small groups of people,[22]

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17 Ibid., 272.

18 "The case of Walter Benjamin can serve, perhaps, as a reminder that the objects of knowledge are not self-announcing entities, (…). 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical reproduction' perhaps alerts us to the interminable process of rethinking that is involved in engagements with knowledge." Cf. Nick Peim, "Walter Benjamin in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Aura in Education: A Rereading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41, no. 3 (2007): 377, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00579.x.

19 Benjamin, Work of Art, 254.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 264.

22 In the past, access was even structured hierarchically. Cf. Ibid.

technological reproductions open up the possibility of mass collective reception.[23] Finally, Benjamin also undertakes a comparison of the original and the mechanically produced copy *in relation to religious or cultic practices* – the comparing of technological reproduction and artwork frees the latter from its "service of ritual"[24]. On the one hand, in that the reproduction brings *secularisation* to an end,[25] and on the other, in that *political effect* can be attributed to the artwork: "Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: Politics".[26] I understand this to mean that in the materiality of a work of art is inscribed its *memory of traditional ritual practices*: "In other words: the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the source of its original use value."[27] Whereas its technologically reproduced copy removes it simultaneously from the *realm of tradition*: "The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition."[28] Technological reproducibility thus continues the development that begins with the transfer of an artwork into the museum.[29]

Let us summarise briefly: The aura of an artwork is reflected in the practices of *concrete describing* it, while practices of *extended seeing* through the technologically reproduced copy change its authority. This is not without consequences for the quantitative and qualitative perception of a work of art. On the one hand, it can be presented to a wider public, it is democratised in a certain sense, but on the other hand, the original perspective is blurred. Finally, practices of *multi-perspective comparing* with the mechanical reproduced copy thematise the materiality of an artwork as an inscribed memory of traditional ritual

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[23] Ibid.: "The simultaneous viewing of paintings by a large audience, as happens in the nineteenth century, is an early symptom of the crisis in painting, a crisis triggered not only by photography but, in a relatively independent way, by the artwork's claim to the attention of the masses."

[24] Ibid., 257.

[25] Benjamin, Work of Art, 256.

[26] Ibid., 257.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 256.

[29] Ibid., 272.

practice in times of secularisation and the possibility of its actualisation by museal presentation.[30]

Presenting, (re)constructing, arranging

Taking the practices of describing, seeing and comparing as a starting point, in line with Benjamin's criteria, the project explores modes of presenting the original artwork, (re)constructing it in digital copies and arranging artwork and digital copies in museums. Two artefacts were selected as examples, the *Bayeux Tapestry* and the *Halderner Altar*. They were selected firstly because they come from the era in which Benjamin presupposes a cultic or ritual practice for all works of art, an original cult value.[31] Secondly, both objects represent a material that is suitable for analysing the religious or non-religious materiality of a work of art.[32] Lastly, the artefacts are on display in renowned museums: *La Tapisserie de Bayeux. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire Baron Gérard*[33] and the *LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur. Westfälisches Landesmuseum.*[34]

In the following, I would like to transfer Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between the original work of art and its mechanical reproduction to digital copies. What functions do digital copies take on for the presentation of artefacts in museums? Insofar as the artworks are exhibited in a profane museum, it is less about the question of their secularisation and more about which concrete practices will be possible in the museum. The initial question here is whether and in what way the cultic or ritual dimensions of a religious or religion-related work of art can be exhibited in a museum.

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30 Peim, "Benjamin," 377.

31 Benjamin, "Work of Art", 269: "The epic, which originates in the early days of peoples, dies out in Europe at the end of the Renaissance. Panel painting is a creation of the Middle Ages, and nothing guarantees its uninterrupted existence."

32 Both artefacts are also available in the form of digital copies.

33 https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/la-tapisserie-de-bayeux/.

34 https://www.lwl-museum-kunst-kultur.de/.

Presenting as a practice of describing

Over a length of more than 68 metres, the Bayeux Tapestry presents the conquest of what is now Great Britain by the Normans in 1066, including its prehistory. The Bayeux Tapestry was completed before 1087 and the individual scenes cover the last years of Edward's reign and the end of Anglo-Saxon rule. The narration of the story contains some religious elements and symbols.[35] The detached scenes presumably depict William's accession to the throne.[36] The traditional term "tapestry" is rather inaccurate for at least two reasons: on the one hand, the tapestry is made of multi-coloured woollen threads embroidered onto lengths of linen; on the other hand, the term "tapestry" actually refers to a wall hanging.[37] The patrons of the tapestry are attributed to the Norman upper classes, who may have used such tapestries to decorate (tower) rooms in a representative manner.[38] Occasionally, tapestries can also be found in the narrower ecclesiastical milieu. In this case, researchers believe that monks from St Augustine's designed the tapestry for their abbey church in Canterbury to tell their own story of the Norman invasion of England.[39] The first written description of the tapestry dates back to 1476 and places it in Bayeux.[40] For several centuries, the tapestry was regularly presented inside the Bayeux cathedral. The function of the regular hanging and unhanging may have been a ritual of remembrance.

Compared to the Bayeux Tapestry, the Halderner Altar[41] is a genuine religious artefact. The altar is dedicated to the Passion of Jesus, including his resurrection: on the festive side, the second painted front, it shows a Calvary as well as elements of the New Testament's accounts of

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35 Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers* (Taylor & Francis, 2012), III, 1, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781003420927.

36 Ibid., II, 1–2.

37 Ibid., VIII, 106.

38 Ibid., xvii.

39 Elizabeth Carson Pastan, Stephen D. White and Kate Gilbert, *The Bayeux tapestry and its contexts. a reassessment* (Boydell Press, 2014), XXV, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782043898.

40 Owen-Crocker, Bayeux Tapestry, xvii.

41 Paul Pieper, "Ludger oder Martin auf dem Halderner Altar?," *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur* 45 (1967): 124.

the Passion, including Gethsemane, imprisonment, scourging, mockery, the washing of Pilate's hands and the carrying of the cross. On the outer, everyday side, the first painted front, two lives of saints are depicted, an indication that the altar was originally created for a church with a double patronage.[42] The term "altar" is somewhat misleading: it is a painted reredos that probably closed off an altar at the back.[43] The Haldern altar dates from the middle of the 15th century. Its original location is difficult to determine. The fact that it was not intended for the village church of Haldern in which it was found[44] is evident from its length, which is four and a half metres when fully extended. If it is not the village church of Haldern, in which the altar has been exposed, other buildings nearby or in the surroundings of Münster come into the focus.[45] There could have been a corresponding room in the ancient (women's) convent at Schledenhorst or Choir or chancel room in a larger town church.[46] The altar from the workshop of the unknown Schöppingen master was discovered at the end of the 19th century and kept in a Cologne museum for more than half a century before it was added to the Westphalian collection.[47] The two-winged reredos has been preserved without the typical predella.[48] In medieval times, it was probably mostly closed so that only the outside could be seen.[49] It would have been used in liturgical celebrations throughout the church year.[50]

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42 John the Baptist plays a prominent role, as does a church official. Cf. Ibid., 124f.

43 Rainer Kahsnitz, "Das Hochaltarretabel in St. Jacobi zu Göttingen," in *Kunst und Frömmigkeit in Göttingen. Die Altarbilder des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Thomas Noll and Carsten-Peter Warncke (Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012), 48f.

44 Cf. Paul Pieper, "Als der Kunstverein den Halderner Altar erwerben wollte," *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur 59* (1981): 128f.

45 Cf. Paul Pieper, "Westfälische Maler der Spätgotik," *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur* 30 (1952): 82.

46 Rensing suggests as other authors the church of Billerbeck, cf. Theodor Rensing, *Der Meister von Schöppingen* (Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1959), 16.

47 Cf. Pieper, "Kunstverein," 128. Cf. Wolfgang Böcker, *Eine gemalte Predigt. Der Schöppinger Altar* (dialogverlag, 2020), 114 f.

48 Karl Arndt, "Das Retabel der Göttinger Paulinerkirche, gemalt von Hans Raphon," in *Kunst und Frömmigkeit in Göttingen. Die Altarbilder des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Thomas Noll and Carsten-Peter Warncke (Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012), 200.

49 Kahsnitz, "Hochaltarretabel," 48 f.

50 Perhaps it is the case, as Sadler suggests, that altarpieces played a significant role in the liturgy of the Mass in the 15th century. Cf. Donna L. Sadler, *Touching the Passion – Seeing*

Let us summarise – and in doing so, apply Benjamin's criteria. Although the medieval originals presented today as a tapestry or altarpiece in their respective museums date from the 11th and 15th centuries, they can be characterised by a number of similarities that align with Benjamin's criteria. Firstly, their specific *materiality* can be determined as embroidered wall hangings and as painted reredos. Both objects were produced in different workshops and are movable. Secondly, their specific *ownership* can only be described approximately. The tapestry has been exhibited in both secular and sacred buildings, while the altarpiece has been housed in churches and museums. Finally, even if their religious and cultic function cannot be precisely determined, both objects had a *liturgical function* in the late Middle Ages. The two artefacts correspond to what Benjamin describes as an original work of art surrounded by an aura. But what happens when one looks at the digital copies?

(Re)Constructing as a practice of technological vision

A digital copy is available on the website of the museum in Bayeux.[51] The presentation of the long tapestry is organised by number, making it easier to interact with the digitalised object. Above the embroidery are numbers between 1 and 58, which refer to individual scenes. Latin inscriptions provide additional information about the events depicted.[52] The colour scheme of the embroidery also plays a special role in emphasising individual characteristics: in the opening scene, black contrasts draw attention to the communication between the English king and his brother-in-law Harold Godwinson (scene 1). Horses standing directly next to each other, as well as their riders, are embroidered in different colours. While William delivers his speech, rousing the Normans in

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Late Medieval Altarpieces through the Eyes of Faith (Brill, 2018), 37 f, https://brill.com/display/title/36135.

[51] Tapisserie de Bayeux, accessed November 2, 2024, https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/la-tapisserie-de-bayeux/decouvrir-la-tapisserie-de-bayeux/explorer-la-tapisserie-de-bayeux-en-ligne/. Cf. Antoine Verney et al., "Redocumentariser la Tapisserie de Bayeux: base de données documentaire et système d'informations spatialisées," in *Tabularia*. (Sources écrites des mondes normands médiévaux, 2018), 15f, https://doi.org/10.4000/tabularia.3278.

[52] Ibid.

battle (scene 50), the horses are coloured from left to right following a specific pattern: red, green, yellow, then blue-black.[53]

The narrative of the battle unfolds with various forms of commentary.[54] Along the borders of the tapestry, different animals and mythical creatures support the development of emotions: Birds become the immediate audience of a story steeped in the glory and horror of battle.[55] The rivalry between William and Harold for the English throne is obvious, but there is also another rivalry involving Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux, and Harold, both of whom are privileged relatives outside the royal line.[56] The religious elements reveal asymmetrical power structures in the relationship between Odo and Harold and in the story: Odo, identifiable as a clergyman through his hairstyle, clothing and mace,[57] appears to be blessing the promise of marriage between William's daughter and Harold (scene 15), standing prominently at Mont Saint-Michel (scenes 16-17) and observing Harold's oath on the relics (scene 23). Further, the hand of God comments on Edward's death (scene 26), and Halley's comet on the conversation between Harold and a scout (scene 33).[58]

Unlike the numbers and colours, the religious elements do not have an ordering function, but instead indicate spaces in the story that can be interpreted in different ways.

Although the database of the museum in Münster does not currently list the Haldern altar,[59] a link to the German Digital Library makes high-resolution digital copies of the altarpiece accessible (also suitable for zooming in). The painted fronts are arranged in an organisational structure and a stemma facilitates digital navigation.[60] The first painted front contains the lives of saints (John the Baptist and

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53 Owen-Crocker, *Bayeux Tapestry*, IX, 240f.

54 Ibid., II, 15f.

55 Shirley Ann Brown, "Preface", in Owen-Crocker, *Bayeux Tapestry*, xi–xii.

56 Although Edward and William were royal cousins, Harold as Edward's brother-in-law and Odo as William's half-brother were of the same lineage. Cf. ibid., VIII, 113.

57 Ibid., II, 13, n. 39.

58 Ibid., III, 1.

59 https://www.lwl-museum-kunst-kultur.de/

60 Halderner Altar – Schauseite (Zweite), accessed November 2, 2024, https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/HQHGNZ2FGFH36PHV5HYQDEFPYJ26MYFE.

probably Liudger, the first bishop of Münster), the second the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ.[61] In addition, the individual scenes on the outer and inner wings are each arranged in four squares. They are interrupted by a red border, while a similar border with plants frames the side wings and centre panel. The pictorial elements are read from left to right and from top to bottom.[62] The order is also known as the "Westphalian scheme"[63]. On medieval altarpieces the colours of the garments traditionally (re)identify individual persons: Judas appears in the yellow cloak of the traitor, Jesus' cloak shows the colour of suffering and love, Mary appears in the blue cloak of the Queen (of Heaven).[64] On the Haldern altar, clothing colours are important to be able identify persons on the central Calvary, which looks like a huge "hidden object":[65] Various scenes that are narratively linked to the crucifixion of Jesus are depicted simultaneously, but in condensed form. The dying Jesus and the thieves on the cross are surrounded by a crowd of people and armed soldiers on horseback. Due to the use of specific colours, several people close to Jesus – John, Mary, Mary Magdalene and others – can be identified beneath the cross.[66] This applies even more so on the right-hand wing, which, in an atypical way, repeatedly places female figures in relation to the Risen Jesus. The sequence of images on the second painted front of the altar adopts a (pictorial) programme that had changed in the 15th century in response to increasing devotion to the Passion. Instead of depicting the most important elements of Christ's youth with the "scenes from the life of the mother of God" and "the scenes of the Passion of the Lord",[67] the focus here is exclusively on the suffering, death and res-

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61 Halderner Altar – Schauseite (Erste), accessed November 2, 2024, https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/4KVAT3KFSD7MSE4ZPXIQZHB2IZTLM2LC.

62 Paul Pieper, *Die deutschen, niederländischen und italienischen Tafelbilder bis um 1530* (Aschendorff, 1986), 106.

63 Böcker, *Predigt*, 14 f.

64 Rensing, *Meister von Schöppingen*, 16.

65 Rensing, *Meister von Schöppingen*, 11 f; cf. Arndt, "Retabel," 197.

66 The Calvary shows the normal crucifixion depiction of Old Westphalian painting, with a large "apparatus" and mostly Jerusalem in the background. Cf. Paul Pieper, "Der Meister von Liesborn und die Liesborner Tafeln," *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur 44* (1966): 4–11, 10.

67 Kahsnitz, "Hochaltarretabel," 50.

urrection of Jesus. Non-biblical scenes also appear on the altarpieces. But what special modes of seeing does the digital copy open up?

On the Haldern altar, the *descent into (pre-)hell,* situated at the bottom right next to the Calvary, shows the gates of (pre-)hell opening. Jesus is standing on two door wings, while two demonic beings aim at him from above with a pipe, bow and arrow, and two similar creatures harass him from below. The digital copy not only reveals more details – such as these little devils – but also allows for a closer formal analysis.[68] Various lines in the scene form a triangular composition in the middle of the painted scene. The legs of the triangle are marked by Jesus' arms and the victory banner: This creates a new division of space, separating Jesus vertically from Adam and the naked people in (pre-) hell. However, a connection between Jesus and Adam is also implied, running through their right hands, which appear to be touching.[69] At the same time, Adam's other hand points behind him. It remains uncertain whether he is protecting himself from the flames or asking Jesus to look after the naked people.

Jesus' approach seems hesitant, as his left leg moves rather tentatively and he does not look directly at Adam. His posture reveals a specific wavering or, at least, does not indicate a determined certainty of victory. Does he seem to be affected by the expectations of the inhabitants of (pre-)hell? Is he questioning the necessity of the path laid out for him in the creed?[70] The certainty that Jesus descends into hell in order to save those banished to (pre-)hell is, at the very least, brought into question.

A similar finding can be made regarding the digital copy of a further scene: In the last picture on the right-hand inner wing, lines marked by the fence and lawn, but above all diagonals intersecting in the spade and flagpole, open up a special space. The figures set opposing accents in terms of body language, but also gestures and facial expressions. In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene turns to the Risen Christ twice.

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68 Cf. Antje Roggenkamp, "Religionsbezogene 'Kunstbilder' als Artefakte. Zur praxeologischen Erweiterung von Religionspädagogik," in *Die materielle Kultur der Religion. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Objekte religiöser Bildung und Praxis*, ed. Sonja Keller and Antje Roggenkamp (Transcript, 2023), 19f, https://www.transcript-open.de/doi/10.14361/9783839463123-002.

69 Pieper, *Tafelbilder*, 106, 115.

70 Böcker, *Predigt*, 93 f.

At first, she thinks he is the gardener and believes that he has taken Jesus' body away. Only after he addresses her by name does she recognise him and wants to touch him. In response, the Risen One says, "Do not touch me" (John 20:14–17). In the painted scene, one can see a double effect: While the Risen Christ – although more vulnerable in his nakedness – remains gracefully superior due to his posture, Mary Magdalene shows a kind of double physical presence, tender feelings and astonishment.[71] The meaning of *Noli me tangere* emerges in its full sense: Mary Magdalene appears to show with her posture that the body of the Risen Christ has changed not only physically.[72]

The formal analysis of the digital copy can identify spaces or postures in which several interpretations correspond to the religious. The religious characteristics of the painted scenes only emerge in the digital copy.

Let us apply Benjamin's criteria for mechanically produced copies and transform them into criteria for digital copies: Firstly, the numbers affixed above the embroideries of the Bayeux Tapestry and the Westphalian scheme enable individual scenes to be found quickly in the digital copies. They make it easier to assign the individual scenes to the major narratives of the artefacts and thus emphasise their *authenticity*. On the other hand, the digital copies allow a closer look due to a certain spatial distance from the original and the limited time spent in front of it:[73] By showing plants, animals or demonic beings, they reveal interesting details compared to conventional lore and traditional depictions. The digital copies do not so much undermine the *natural distance* to the original (Benjamin)[74] as they *vary* it. Thirdly, formal analyses of individual scenes point to interpretations that deviate from traditional forms. Religious perspectives appear differently: While the

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71 Rensing, *Meister von Schöppingen*, 12.

72 Ingeborg Eugenia Doetsch, "Die Metamorphose des Löwenzahns im Lichte der Auferstehung. Seine Symbolik in der mittelalterlichen Kunst, insbesondere der westfälischen Tafelmalerei des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur* 73 (1997): 52.

73 This applies insofar as Benjamin's criteria are transformed: "Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part." Benjamin, Work of Art, 254.

74 "The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue." Benjamin, Work of Art, 264.

Bayeux Tapestry opens up spaces for religious interpretations of history through its view of the relationship between hostile ethnic groups and specific clerical rivalries, the individual scenes on the Haldern reredos offer a variety of religious perspectives: not only in dealing with biblical and non-biblical traditions, but also by varying possible interpretations. In this respect, they do not reduce the authority of the original artefact (Benjamin), but seem to increase *religious authority* by creating space for a variety of interpretations. Do the digital copies also prove to be productive for engaging with religious materiality?

Arranging as a practice of comparative seeing

Walking along the tapestry opens up a physical experience: together with many other people, one walks around it in a darkened room, listening to the sounds of courtly fanfares and the audio guide, which describes and comments on epic narratives. Since 1983, the tapestry has been housed in a gallery of the former Great Seminary in Bayeux.[75] A glass safety screen protects the tapestry. It hangs on a rail and curves outwards in the shape of a parabola. Unlike in Bayeux Cathedral, the tapestry currently curves outwards instead of inwards.[76] Although the tapestry was probably created with a specific building in mind, it was probably never intended to hang in just one place.[77] In the centuries between its production and its localisation in Bayeux, it may have been displayed in different buildings in different countries to varying effect.[78] From the fifteenth century onwards, the tapestry was regularly hung in the nave of the cathedral, in the meantime stored on a roll.[79] Suitable forms of presentation have long been the subject of open-ended discus-

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[75] In 2007, the tapestry was added to the UNESCO "Memory of the World" register. Cf. Verney et al., "Redocumentariser," 2.

[76] Owen-Crocker, *Bayeux Tapestry*, 129.

[77] Architectural historians have considered a Norman keep with a corner staircase. Ibid., VIII 122.

[78] This is certainly in line with Benjamin's criteria: "In the churches and monasteries of the Middle Ages, and at the princely courts up to about the end of the eighteenth century, the collective reception of paintings took place not simultaneously but in a manifoldly graduated and hierarchically mediated way." Benjamin, Work of Art, 264.

[79] Ibid., VIII123.

sions.[80] Setting the relationship between digital copies and the original artwork can draw attention to different aspects that do not fit directly into Benjamin's criteria,[81] but modify them in changing the cultic and remembering dimension: What logistical considerations and physical practices were necessary to hang and remove the tapestry in a square tower or in the Bayeux nave? Were these routines or did these practices have to be (re)practised? What religious elements does the tapestry contain and what significance do they have? What is the relationship between national and universal cultural heritage?

In 2014, the Haldern altar found its permanent place in the new building of the LWL-Museum. In the centre of a large rectangular room, the arrangement of the painted fronts almost reproduces the original state of the medieval altarpiece. However, the slanted position of the wings makes it difficult to have a look on the first painted front. In their current position, the wings cannot be closed. This has two consequences: Firstly, the lives of saints cannot be compared with each other in analogue space. Secondly, the second painted front can be viewed almost all year round.[82] By fixing the wings at an obtuse angle, the original transformation can no longer be depicted in the analogue room:[83] the effects of the opening and closing are omitted. In its current setting, the Haldern altar is displayed between various panel paintings dating from the 14th or 15th centuries, presenting different variations of the religious motifs from the Haldern reredos. In particular, the second side is related to artefacts that have been preserved as fragments. The focus is centred on aspects of suffering, death and resurrection: Carrying of the Cross made from Baumberg sandstone, the Elevation of Henry II next to a Calvary on another panel.[84] They invite us to en-

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80 Verney et al., "Redocumentariser", 4f. |.

81 Benjamin, Work of Art, 272: "In the viewer's imagination, the uniqueness of the phenomena holding sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the artist or of his creative achievement."

82 Cf. Arndt, "Retabel," 193, 214.

83 Cf. Heike Schlie, "Die Ordnung der Bilder. Positionierungen im Hochaltarretabel der Göttinger Barfüßerkirche," in *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte. Das Göttinger Barfüßerretabel von 1424*, ed. Cornelia Aman and Babette Hartwieg (Michael Imhof, 2015), 185.

84 To the master of the Barbara legend cf. Petra Marx, "Heinrichstafel, um 1494," in *Einblicke – Ausblicke. Spitzenwerke im neuen LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur in Münster*, ed.

gage in practices of comparison, insofar as they open up the suffering of Jesus in terms of stylistic and, in some cases, material aspects.

While the analogue presentation draws attention to different stylistic paintings and other materials, accessing the digital copies illustrates the different interplay between the first and second painted front. The juxtaposition, which can be accessed digitally, gives an idea of how differently the artefact can be perceived with the wings open and closed. However, linking the digital copies with the artefact in front of it can illustrate the original arrangements and the efforts involved in opening and closing the wings become comprehensible on the original. A comparison of the original and the digital version allows further questions to be asked: How does the perception change when the sashes are open or closed? What effects do the different perspectives have on the altar? What religious practices does the altar offer to reconstruct or deconstruct in its current context?

Let us summarise and ask for the transformation of criteria at the same time: Although the modified relationship to tradition becomes visible, must the question of religious-cultic authenticity (Benjamin) remain open? Firstly, it is obvious that no religious-cult practices[85] can be exhibited in a museum. However, digital copies allow us to study practices of *liturgical changing*. Secondly, while the analogue presentation of artefacts only provides a view of a specific perspective – the Bayeux Tapestry is mounted in an oval display case at roughly eye level, the panels of the Haldern altar are anchored on a plinth – the digital copy allows the *original practices* to be imagined or even demonstrated. The original object encourages the viewer to stretch or bend their neck, depending on their height. Finally, digital copies draw attention to the particular content of religion. The adaptation of heroic tales, Christian legends and biblical motifs demonstrates the creativity of medieval artists in dealing with their own traditions. Therefore, perhaps and in

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Hermann Arnhold (Wienand Verlag, 2014), 88-89.

[85] Cf. Sadler, *Touching*, 47: "And this (...) leads us back to the altarpiece, for the image that was sanctified by its presence on the altar was endowed with both cultic and devotional powers: the altarpiece guided the faithful to a state of mind conducive to prayer; facilitated communication with the saints; served as a mnemonic device for meditation, and could even assist a mystic in achieving ecstatic communion with the divine."

contrast to Benjamin's ideas, we can find answers to some existential questions: What kind of being do we expect after death? Is there a specific encounter we are waiting for? And what do these changes have to do with the traditional faith representations?

In this respect, digital copies not only serve to convey the effects of original religious materiality, but also inspire modern interpretations of religious traditions. By keeping alive the question of the being and passing of human beings or the meaning of life, they become productive of religion. The specific answers they provide can raise further and other key questions.

Practice-orientated enhancements: Digital and analogue approaches

The approach derived from a practice-theoretical re-reading of Benjamin draws attention to the fact that the religious significance of the original artefacts can at best be approximated, not defined concretely. The application of practices such as concrete description, extended vision and multi-perspective comparison to concrete artworks and digital copies suggests an intertwining of analogue and digital perspectives. Digital copies, in particular, make original orders visible through a different, technological way of seeing. Meanwhile, the originals make physical and logistical processes comprehensible that are often hidden due to presentation constraints in museums. Together, these perspectives clarify how repositioning these artefacts was once a time-intensive task.

Additionally, the digital copies provide access to the religious materiality of the originals by means of colouring and colour contrasts, thus making interpretations visible that change conventional religious motifs. Finally, digital copies contribute to keeping questions of authenticity and authority of the original open in the reconstruction. In this respect, digital artefacts not only work towards a reconstruction of original practices, but also towards a change in current forms of presentation. Compared to the effects of mechanical reproduction, this devel-

opment does not lead to a kind of negative theology (Benjamin).[86] The materiality of an artefact that was previously used for religious purposes can itself become productive of religion.

As Mieke Bal points out, presentations and specific exhibition arrangements can lead to distortions, resulting in super- and subordination.[87] This is particularly true when the form of presentation of objects and artefacts leads to a mono-perspective comparison. By supplementing or modifying the use of digital artefacts, mobile applications[88] could offer further perspectives. By commenting on controversial findings and making comparable artefacts available, mobile applications open up further opportunities for participation. The question of the limits of technological reproduction shifts to the opportunities that digital data offers for engaging with original artefacts. Expanding these practices to encourage participation would also be a considerable enhancement for analogue museums.

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86 Benjamin, Work of Art, 256: "This in turn gave rise to a negative theology, in the form of an idea of 'pure' art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content."

87 Mieke Bal, "The discourse of the museum", in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne (Routledge, 1996), 201f.

88 Lena Wulf, "Von der Vitrine in die Hand : Smartphone-Apps in der Museumsvermittlung," *Hamburger Journal für Kulturanthropologie* 5 2016): 15f, https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/hjk/article/view/1037/951.

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