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MYSTICISM, ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Certeau's (Mis-)Reading of *Corpus Mysticum* and the Legacy of Henri de Lubac

In his monumental study on the work and person of Michel de Certeau, François Dosse recalls that Certeau updated his obituary for Henry de Lubac each year. When the obituary eventually appeared in *Le Monde* in 1991, the author had already been dead for half a decade. This story not only illustrates Certeau's 'fidélité absolue'¹ to his older Jesuit confrere whom he regarded as an undisputed authority from his student years, but it may also be read as a summary of the thesis of this essay: In his writings the crown prince, Certeau, killed his father; but the father outlived his son.

During the 1950's Certeau was Lubac's favourite student in Lyon. Certeau on his part admired his teacher as a ground-breaking theologian and hero of the Catholic *Résistance*. A polymath of extraordinary intellectual acuity, Certeau was destined to become Lubac's crown prince. However, when the students 'captured the speech'² in May 1968, Certeau not only celebrated their revolutionary protest as a creative 'rupture' of the social business-as-usual and the hierarchical social patterns of the past; he also shocked his teacher by describing the 'founding rupture'³ of Christianity as the interpretative key for a political and spiritual practice of change. From that time, the 'event of Christ' became the starting point for a 'hermeneutics of the other' which focuses not on the unifying concept of 'identity' or on hierarchical principles of order, but on plurality, difference, and 'alterity' (otherness).

According to this new approach to the Biblical narrative, the focal event of Christianity is not the incarnation, the crucifixion, or the resurrection of Christ, but the empty tomb. The Christian form of life is no longer associated with a place, a body, or an institution, but with the quest for a *missing* body: the missing body of the people of Israel, and *mutatis mutandis* the missing body of Jesus.

¹ François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: Le marcheur blessé*, Paris 2002, 58. For a detailed account of Certeau's relationship to Lubac see *ibid.*, 47-58. See also fn. 31 for a German translation of the obituary.

² Cf. Michel de Certeau, *The capture of speech and other political writings* (Ed. Luce Giard, trans. Tom Conley), Minneapolis 1997.

³ Cf. Michel de Certeau, 'La rupture instauratrice', in: Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire* (Ed. Luce Girard), Paris 1987, 183-226.

'Tell me where you have laid him' says Mary Magdalene to the Lord in a pericope of the Gospel of John (21: 13-15), quoted in Certeau's opus magnum *La Fable Mystique* (1982).⁴ The truth is not to be located at a determined place, or in a religious milieu; nor does it have the features of a cosmic universality. It is associated with something particular and unique that evades our grasp. Something is missing from its place whilst the insistent call of an elusive 'je ne sais quoi' demands that we resist the established 'powers of this world'. The missing body of Christ is to be recollected as the power of *résistance* par excellence; an untameable trace of 'alterity'.

The student's revolution against General de Gaulle's post-war establishment was quickly absorbed by the established governmental and academic institutions. However, from this time on, Certeau – both the celebrated historian and cultural critic, and the displaced mystic and Jesuit – felt called to witness the creative tension between existing institutions and their inconceivable 'other'. In a nutshell, he felt compelled to develop a hermeneutics of 'heterologies'.⁵

Lubac was appalled by this 'heterological' turn and responded publicly in 1971 with a ferocious rejection of Certeau's views. In the eyes of the master, the disciples' immersion in the new Parisian *sciences humaines* jeopardized the spiritual renewal of the Second Vatican Council which had been, to a significant extent, the positive outcome of Lubac's quarrel with the Roman authorities prior to the council's opening in 1962. Lubac even dedicated a comprehensive collection of writings to the spiritual repercussions of Joachim of Fiore's chiliastic heresy in modern philosophy and theology, in which he attacked his former crown prince as a neo-Joachimite. This was not quite what Certeau had in mind, though it is true that Christianity was in his view something which transgresses and exceeds the confines of membership to a church. However, 'a church' which could be transcended was not what Lubac considered *the* Church to be. He persistently struggled to demonstrate that the church was not primarily an institution but the body Certeau was in quest of. Defective and fragile though it was from the beginning, the 'community of the saints' was to be received as the incipient actualisation of the body of Christ *in* the ecclesial space of history.

The irony of this conflict is that, that which the older generation defended had *de facto* more in common with an institutionalised milieu than with the 'new creation' of the gospel and the church fathers, but Certeau never questioned the authority of the ecclesial tradition; he never envisaged a future *without* the church.⁶

⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The mystic fable* (Transl. Michael B. Smith), Chicago 1992, 81f.

⁵ Cf. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the other* (Transl. Brian Massumi), Minneapolis 1986.

⁶ I have dealt with Certeau's approach to religious institutions in my book on Foucault and Derrida, which is more influenced by Certeau's implicit ecclesiology as I could approve of today. See: Johannes Hoff, *Spiritualität und Sprachverlust: Theologie nach Foucault und Derrida*,

When Lubac was made a cardinal in 1983, Certeau expressed how glad he was that Lubac's work 'had received the seal of the church',⁷ and in his 'heterological' writings Certeau repeatedly emphasized that we *need* the 'institution' which we are called to transcend. However, from Certeau's heterological perspective, the church was hardly more than the 'corrupt institutions' which some modern mystics entered in order to seek a 'repetition of the founding surprise' in a 'place of mystic "agony" (...) inseparable of social ill'.⁸ Thus it is not only due to mutual misunderstandings that Lubac perceived 'the body of Christ' as something distinct from that which Certeau considered the Catholic church to be.

Twenty-five years after Certeau's death, this intergenerational conflict calls for a cautious re-evaluation, given that our perception of it may have substantially changed subsequent to the political, economical and cultural disenchantments which characterize the beginning of the new millennium. The 'public square' of the great French intellectual debates of the 20th century, which attracted Certeau's attention from the early 60's, has become displaced, leaving the younger generation with the impression that the 'post-modern' response to the crisis of modern institutions was part of the problem it vainly tried to overcome.

I will begin my re-evaluation of this story with a sketch of the continuities and discontinuities between the writings of Certeau and Lubac in order to expose the gravest sign of their conflict: Certeau's reading of Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*. In agreement with Graham Ward, we might identify at least three overall points of contact between Certeau and Lubac:⁹ (1) the (mystical) paradox of human of desire (2) the critique of secular reason in the light of its historical genesis, and (3) the interest in the world as a readable book.

The Paradox of Human Desire in Lubac and Certeau

The paradox of human 'desire' is the key to Lubac's deconstruction of the modern dualism between nature and grace first explored in his book *La surnaturel*

Paderborn et al. 1999, 234-226. As for the generation conflict which becomes manifest in the disagreements between Certeau and Lubac see: Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: Le marcheur blessé*, 206f.

⁷ Dosse, *Le marcheur blessé*, 57.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, 'Mystic speech', in: Idem, 'The weakness of believing: From the body to writing a Christian transit', in: Graham Ward (Ed.), *The Certeau reader*, Oxford, 2000, 214-243, 188-206, 193.

⁹ See: Graham Ward, 'Certeaus Geschichtsschreibung in ihrem jesuitischen Kontext', in: Marian Füssel (Ed.), *Michel de Certeau*, Konstanz 2007, 343-363: 354-356. I have inverted the order of Ward's list for systematic reasons.

(1946).¹⁰ It gets to the heart not only of Lubac's anthropology, but also of his questioning of the modern separation of the science of the supernatural (theology) from its allegedly secular counterparts (philosophy, historiography, sociology, psychology, etc.).

Human action is driven by desire; this observation is the root of the Platonic concept of 'Eros'. However, according to Lubac's Augustinian anthropology, erotic desire is not only insatiable; it is also to be qualified as a natural desire for the infinite, meaning a natural desire for the vision of God. The *infinity* of human desire is a desire for *the* infinite. Only this Christian qualification of the Platonic Eros can solve the conundrum of human insatiability, and herein dwells a paradox, since the vision of God is *per definitionem* a gift of grace. Our desire is *by nature* directed to something which *exceeds* our natural capacities, since this desire can only attain its end through a gift which it cannot administer to itself: the gift of (divine) love. Love can never be acquired or enforced; it may only be received as a free gift. There is something intrinsically supernatural not only in the conditions of human reason and freedom, but also in our innermost desires. Our nature is affected by the superabundance of divine grace from the outset; hence human nature can only be reconciled with itself if it faces a challenge which cannot be overcome through its own means. Lubac rejected any modernistic attempt to downplay the significance of this paradox. What Aquinas called *desiderium naturale* is neither reducible to something merely biological, nor to a vague inclination (*velléité*) of the human will. As a desire for the supernatural it is excessive, 'the most absolute of all desires'.¹¹

The philosophical significance of this paradox is related to the notorious dualisms of modern rationality. Given that we are driven by a natural desire for something supernatural, it is not possible to strictly distinguish between the biological and the spiritual, nor between the natural and the supernatural. The paradox of desire undermines the Cartesian dualism between mind and body. Furthermore it undermines the modern distinction between faith and reason, including the accompanying distinctions between a secularized public and a religious private sphere, and (most importantly with regard to Certeau) the theological distinction between authoritative public revelations and mystical private experiences. As Lubac points out in his monograph *Nouveaux Paradoxes*, the paradox of desire reappears at *all levels* of human being and action. It gains ground wherever life intensifies; it governs the human spirit; and it triumphs in the mystical life: 'Paradoxes: le mot désigne donc avant tout les choses elles-mêmes, non la manière de les dire'.¹²

¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques*, Paris 1946; see also Idem, *The mystery of the supernatural*, New York 1998; and Idem, *Augustinianism and modern theology* (Ed. Lancelot Sheppard), New York (NY), 2000.

¹¹ Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 484.

¹² Henri de Lubac, *Nouveaux paradoxes*, Paris 1959, 72.

Certeau remained faithful to Lubac's conviction that it is impossible to marginalise the paradoxes of life, reason and spirituality, or to suppress their impact on the public exercise of reason. This becomes most obvious in the introduction to his opus magnum *La Fable Mystique*, which to a certain extent summarizes Certeau's previous historical writings. According to this summary, the inevitable failure of modern attempts to marginalize the paradox of human desire has been detectable in the tradition of modern art since the 17th century, and became undeniable when psychoanalysis began to deconstruct the human sciences in a manner which was still attached to the principles of those sciences. However, in Certeau's genealogy of the 'return of the suppressed' the desire for transgression, which characterized the Christian legacy from the desert fathers and mothers to the mystics of the 16th and 17th century, becomes increasingly disorientated in the wake of late medieval nominalism. As an ineffable power of attraction, the former platonic 'Eros' seems to have lost its potential to provide guidance to the seeking spirit, and Certeau does not question this late medieval development. Instead his concept of 'desire' oscillates between the *desiderium naturale* of Augustine and Aquinas, and the highly ambiguous *désir* of Certeau's latter teacher at the 'École Freudienne de Paris', Jacques Lacan. Under the influence of the psychoanalytic tradition, the Jesuit seems to have lost trust in the ecclesial gift to distinguish between the 'demonic' and 'angelic' roots of human desire.¹³

In Lacan's psychoanalytic writings human *désir* is considered to be excessive; as in de Lubac's anthropology, it transcends the limits of natural possibilities. However, its erotic attraction is no longer unambiguously directed to the (divine) good, but has become displaced by an equally fundamental Freudian 'drive of death'. Hence we can no longer trust in its guiding force. As Certeau puts it towards the end of the first volume of *La Fable Mystique*, quoting a poem of Nelly Sachs, the transgression of natural boundaries is now equivalent to the proto-avant-garde attitude of a "Fortgehen ohne zurückzuschauen", a *partir sans retourner*.¹⁴ The *desiderium naturale* of Aquinas appears to be reducible to a desire for departure, an aimless movement without destination, a transgression without essential orientation to the truth and good which perfects the created nature of the desiring creature. What had been characterised, in de Lubac, as the manifestation of an ontologically essential feature of nature, 'les choses elles-mêmes, non la manière de les dire',¹⁵ is turned into its bleak counterpart: 'une "manière de parler", un "style"'.¹⁶

¹³ As for the recovery of the premodern tradition of 'distinguishing the spirits' see: Hugo Ball, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Ed. & Afterword Hans Burkhard Schlichting), Frankfurt a.M. 1984; and Johannes Hoff, 'Bürger, Künstler, Exorzisten: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Kult in den Spuren Hugo Balls', in: *Kultur & Gespenster* (forthcoming, 2011).

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique I: XVIe – XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1982, 411.

¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Nouveaux paradoxes*, Paris 1959, 72.

¹⁶ Certeau, *La fable mystique I*, 135.

Following Heidegger and the early Romantic tradition, this disenchantment of the premodern Eros may be interpreted as a consistent expression of the historical fate of modernity, and of the philosophical articulation of this fate in the modern deconstruction of Western 'metaphysics'. Seen from this perspective, the aimlessness of Lacan's *désir* seems more unbiased, more resistant to metaphysical prejudices with regard to the paradoxes of human life. We no longer know the aim of human desire; its destination has become 'undecidable'. But this reading, which I have shared in my earlier publications, is delusive. The tradition of Christian orthodoxy, from Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa and beyond, was able to avoid this 'undecidability' without taking refuge in metaphysical pre-decisions or dogmatic pre-judgements.¹⁷ The ambiguous dualism of modern approaches to the principles of human desire, which culminates in Richard Wagner's conviction that only death can bring peace to the human soul, and the promise of Nietzsche's 'superman' to lead us to a point 'beyond good and evil', is no less indebted to a 'dogmatic' interpretational framework than its orthodox counterpart. It may be no accident that the uncompleted second volume of *La Fable Mystique* connected up with this orthodox tradition in so far as it had been planned to start with Certeau's pioneering essay on the *The Gaze* in Cusa's book *On the Vision of God*.¹⁸ However, Certeau struggled to overcome the neognostic dualism of modernity right up to his very last publications. In order to understand why he hesitated to embrace the orthodox position whole-heartedly, it is necessary to consider the second point of contact between Certeau and Lubac.

The Criticism of Secular Reason in the Light of its Historical Genesis

As already indicated, Lubac's concept of *desiderium naturale* undermines the modern distinction between natural reason and supernatural faith. Throughout his entire life, Certeau remained attached to this position, even in his more secular writings which tended to dissimulate the theological dimensions of his genealogy of modern rationality in favour of a more laicistic rhetoric. A striking example of this dissimulating rhetoric is Certeau's essay *L'Institution de Croire*¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. Johannes Hoff, 'Mystagogy beyond onto-theology: Looking back to post-modernity with Nicholas of Cusa', in: Arne Moritz (Ed.), *A companion to Nicholas of Cusa*, Leiden 2011 (forthcoming); and John Milbank, 'Darkness and silence: Evil and the western legacy', in: John D. Caputo (Ed.), *The religious*, Malden (MA) 2002, 277-300.

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, 'The gaze: Nicholas of Cusa. Transl. by Catherine Porter', in: *Diacritics* 17 (1987) no.3, 2-38; cf. Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: Le marcheur blessé*, 535-337, 559 Fn. 9, 595, 597. For an attempt to elaborate a comprehensive reading of Cusa starting from Certeau see: Johannes Hoff, *Kontingenz, Berührung, Überschreitung: Zur philosophischen Propädeutik christlicher Mystik nach Nikolaus von Kues*, Freiburg i.Br. 2007.

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau: 'L'Institution de croire', In: *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 71 (1983), 61-80.

which, contrary to expectations raised by the title, is not concerned with the church but with Georg Cantor and the history of mathematics in the 19th century. However, anyone familiar with the Catholic tradition will readily conclude that what Certeau analyses in this essay as the ‘institution of mathematical faith’ is nothing more than a secularized copy of the Catholic Church. *L’Institution de Croire* might be read as a historically and sociologically informed study on the history of sciences, but it could just as equally be read as a study on the non-foundationalist Augustinian conviction that every kind of scientific knowledge is based on principles of belief.

More precisely, Certeau analyses in this text why Georg Cantor was unable to believe in his innovative methods of proof, despite the mathematical evidence for his discoveries, until he received the blessing of ‘his church’, i.e. the community of mathematicians. His success story confirms the basic insight of the Augustinian gnoseology of the Middle Ages that it is not possible to isolate a sphere of ‘autonomous’ rationality which is not governed by matters of belief. Our rational capacity to ensure the validity of scientific conjectures is always affected by the desire for a truth that exceeds our natural control. Every natural activity, including the scientific endeavour for evidence based truth, is governed by the desire for (supernatural) grace. Even in the most calculable activities of human rationality, we are directed to something only to be received graciously, i.e. *without reason*.

Seen from this perspective, Certeau’s text is an exemplary approach to a historiography of culture which coincides with the investigation of human spirituality, however rudimentary this spirituality might be. It exemplifies how Certeau rearticulated Lubac’s discovery that the reality of history is always impregnated with the seeds of a spiritual truth, and conversely, that the spiritual depth of the incarnated word is always and only to be rediscovered in the contingencies of historical events.

However, the contingencies of Certeau’s historiography are no longer unambiguously directed toward a universal good. As is the case with his Lacanian concept of desire, the ‘gifts’ of history are no longer analogically directed toward a gathering principle of harmony and peace. Instead Certeau’s deconstructive historiography oscillates between the aimless contingencies of his neostructuralist contemporaries, and his clandestine attempt to continue a tradition which seems no longer sustainable.

The first paragraph of *La Fable Mystique* is in this respect symptomatic of Certeau’s works as a whole: ‘This book (...) stands exiled from its subject matter. It is devoted to mystic discourse of (or about) presence (of God), *but its own discourse does not share that status*’. Certeau’s *opus magnum* opens with an unambiguous tribute to the ‘secular’ rationality of his time. However, the subsequent sentences qualify this concession: ‘It [this book] emerges from a mourning, an unaccepted mourning (...). One who is missing moves it to be written’. This concession might be read as a gesture of acknowledgement to de Lubac.

Certeau's book *is* the expression of the natural desire for the vision of God; it is *moved* by the power of divine grace. However, both sentences have to be kept together. Certeau's book is exiled from the mystical tradition in that it adopts a neutral, 'scientific' attitude to its history, and yet at the same time it is the expression of a mystical movement. It adopts the stoic attitude of an unaffected observer whilst keeping open the possibility of a clandestine mysticism.

The ambiguity of this attitude may appear less mysterious if we recall the intellectual climate of the public debates in which Michel de Certeau participated as a celebrated Parisian historicist and cultural critic who played, so to speak, the warm-hearted Jesuit counterpart to Michel de Foucault's cold and uncompromising stoicism.²⁰ This mood is palpable in a fictional trialog written by a secular admirer of Certeau, Jacques Derrida, which appeared in a little-known publication a few years before Derrida's death. Derrida refers in this text to the 'enormously ostracised marginal zone'²¹ of his private library while he quotes a sermon of Nicholas of Cusa which he had already quoted in his infamous book *La Dissemination* without naming the author. The laicistic climate of the neo-structuralist debates of the late 20th century required that even the main players hide religious or spiritual writings in a private marginal zone. Certeau's writing style reacted to this climate. In order to participate in the intellectual debates of his time, he conformed to the boundaries of a discursive practice which separated the 'public square' of philosophical or scientific controversies from the private sphere of religious attachments, although he always kept open the possibility of a 'return of the suppressed'.

The irony of Certeau's tribute to the laicistic rationality of the Parisian *fin de siècle* was that it aimed to achieve no more than what de Lubac had already accomplished in 1946 when he deconstructed the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Twenty five years after Certeau's death, the intellectual climate of public debates has profoundly changed. The language of the public square has become colonised by the tautological language of a globalized capitalism which is indifferent to the distinction between private secrets and public statements. This might explain why it has become harder to do justice to de Certeau's ambiguous intellectual attitude. If it is understandable at all, it needs to be interpreted within the framework of his own account of discursive practices, namely his notorious distinction between strategy and tactic.²²

²⁰ This difference in attitude becomes most evident in Certeau's sympathetic reading of Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir*, see: Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Transl. Steven Rendall), Berkeley 1984, 45ff. As for Foucault's stoicism see: Paul Veyne, *Foucault, sa pensée, sa personne*, Paris 2008.

²¹ Cf. Jacques Derrida and Catherine Malabou, *La contre-allée*, Paris 1999, 277f. For a more detailed analysis of this passage see Johannes Hoff, 'Berührungspunkte: Ein Trialog zwischen Jacques Derrida, Nikolaus von Kues und Michel de Certeau', in: Marian Füssel (Ed.), *Michel de Certeau*, Konstanz 2007, 317-342, 317-320. As for Derrida's admiration of Certeau see: Jacques Derrida, 'Nombre de oui', in: Luce Giard (Ed.), *Michel de Certeau*, Paris 1987.

²² Cf. Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 37-39.

According to this distinction, 'tactic' is the *modus operandi* of the weak who have neither the capacity to determine the rules of the games they are playing nor control over the space in which these games take place. This is what distinguishes the 'tactic' of the weak from the 'strategy' of the powerful. Tacticians are neither able to adopt the position of the master of the game nor to have the panoptic overview of the playing field. Like partisans or Taliban fighters, they can only rely on ruses, feints and guileful sleights of hand which gradually corrode the strategic power of their adversary. Due to a lack of spaces for retreat, the power of the weak is exclusively founded on the unpredictable erosion-effects of time.

This reflects fairly accurately the role Certeau adopted with regard to the neo-structuralist master thinkers of his time: the stone-fighting David against the Goliaths of the Parisian Metropolis. But his *tactical* attitude was subversive only in so far as he assumed the role of the opponent to a *strategic* adversary, regardless if this was an institutionalised church or a state governed academic establishment. This is problematic in so far as the antagonistic framework of Certeau's subversion not only affected his writing style, but also the content of his writings: The truth is no longer to be discovered in an abstract institution or an intellectual milieu; it is *always* somewhere else – the body of Christ is *lost*. As Peter Candler has pointed out, spiritual or mystagogical attitudes are not *necessarily* related to a strategic counterpart; they are not necessarily tactical, though they may have subversive features, and they are *per definitionem* incompatible with strategic power.²³

This leads us to the critical point of the conflict between Lubac and Certeau. Certeau's 'heterological' polarity between the 'corrupt institutions' of modern mysticism and the missing body of Christ is deeply attached to the modern *epistème*; and this seems anachronistic in contrast to Lubac's more radical attempts to overcome the dualisms of modernity. In order to assess the theological and philosophical significance of this contrast it is necessary first to consider the third meeting point between Lubac and Certeau: their shared interest in the world as a readable book.

The World as a Readable Book in Lubac and Certeau

Lubac has unfolded this topic extensively in his monumental compendium on the spiritual exegesis of the Middle Ages and the 'four senses of the scripture'.²⁴ Certeau summarizes the outcome of this project as follows:

²³ Cf. Peter M. Candler: *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture together on the Path to God*, Grand Rapids 2006, 35-40.

²⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval exegesis Vols. 1 & 2*, Vol. 1 translated by Mark Sebanc; Vol. 2 translated by E.M. Macierowski, Mich 1998. This publication is related to his earlier book on the Biblical exegesis of Origen, see: Henri de Lubac, *History and spirit: The understanding of*

Before the 'modern' period, that is, until the sixteenth or seventeenth century, this writing [the Holy Scripture] speaks. The sacred text is a voice, it teaches (...) it is the advent of a 'meaning' (*un 'vouloir-dire'*) on the part of God who expects the reader (in reality the listener) to have a 'desire to hear and understand' (*un 'vouloir-entendre'*) on which access to truth depends.²⁵

The critical point of this quotation is related to Lubac's observation that the practice of 'reading' scriptures, and particularly the Holy Scriptures, had significantly changed subsequent to a process which started in the 12th century and culminated in the Age of Reformation.²⁶ This change becomes most evident when we open early medieval, illuminated Psalters and Gospels, or liturgical Missals and Books of Hours. Nowadays we may perceive the illuminations of the Rossano Gospels (6th century), the Lindisfarne Gospels (8th century), or the Book of Kells (about 800) as nothing more than decoration. However, the painstaking labour devoted to illustrating and glossing books was part of a sublime culture of non-identical repetition. Even the great scholastic *Summae* of the high Middle Ages were not perceived as a systematized, identically repeatable encyclopaedia of knowledge in between two book covers. Rather the content of these books was perceived as a *manuductio*, a guide which enables us to read the signs of the world. This being the case, it was impossible to isolate their usage from their spiritually and liturgically informed context of use which included a *practice of shared* reading, and for the same reason the Holy Scriptures had to be illuminated, glossed, and liturgically performed in accordance with the yearly cycles, historical changes, and vagaries of time. The testimony of 'the bible' had to be discovered again and again through shared exercise of a liturgical imagination which was informed by the great masters of the spiritual and allegorical reading of the scriptures. Imaginative, textual and performative practices which framed the inexhaustible mystery of the holy letters charged them with significance and made them speak anew.

When the reformed, iconoclastic tradition rejected this imaginative contextualisation of medieval reading practices in favour of the *sola scriptura* principle, it made a pretense of fulfilling the Biblical ban on images, but in reality it only enforced the privatisation of our spiritual imagination. This explains why 'the scripture' became voiceless and dumb after the early modern break. The non-identical re-narration of the Holy Scriptures in varying shared contexts was no longer perceived as a necessity. Instead, the faithful exercise of our spiritual imag-

scripture according to Origen (Transl. Anne Englund Nash; with Greek and Latin transl. by Juvenal Merriell), San Francisco (CA) 2007.

²⁵ Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 137; see also Certeau, *The mystic fable*, 90-94.

²⁶ Cf. Candler, *Theology, rhetoric, manuduction*; and with regard to the 12th century Ivan Illich, *In the vineyard of the text: A commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago 1993.

ination became reduced to a more or less arbitrary private matter, and in the worst cases it fragmented into the religious 'private languages' of neurotic imaginations. At the same time, the early modern subjectification of the imaginative context was accompanied by a fetishising of its textual counterpart, the latter now appearing as identically reproducible thanks to Guttenberg's print machines. 'The bible' became reduced to a 'physical object', and perceived as an authoritative, positive entity, something which could be identically repeated without provoking unpredictable spiritual side effects on the level of our collective imagination.²⁷

Following Catherine Pickstock's book *After Writing*, we may call this phenomenon the 'spatialisation' of the scripture. The Biblical Scriptures are no longer passed down as part of an ongoing story which needs to be performed and renarrated in the suspended time of a public liturgy. Bound together in discrete book editions, 'the bible' is now perceived as a reproducible and locatable entity while its shared mystery becomes absorbed into the private imaginations of individuals who see themselves as religious.

The leading exponents of this neurotic fetishising of 'the bible' were progeny of the reformed traditions, but it is important to note that the more reactive post-Tridentine tradition of the Catholic Church did not resist this epochal shift. Certainly, the Counter-Reformation insisted on reading the Bible in the context of a broader tradition, but it viewed this heritage as a *depositum fidei* comparable with a modern book. In accordance with the encyclopaedia of Melchior Cano's *loci theologici*, 'the tradition' appeared as 'a set of codified and quantifiably authoritative deposits of revealed truth'.²⁸ Hence, although the duo of scripture and tradition extended the sacred text, the codified revelation of the Catholic milieu had as little impact on the uncontrollable collective imagination of modern societies as the privatized imaginative free-play of the reformed milieu.

Certeau had already learned these lessons from Lubac's writings on the 'four senses of the scripture'. The scripture is no longer speaking, because it has become disconnected from shared mnemotechnical, liturgical and imaginative practises of non-identical repetition which at one time kept open the imaginative and communicative space of the public square to the unpredictable voice of a divine author. Certeau returns to this subject on frequent occasions. In the second chapter of *La Fable Mystique*, he investigates the imaginative scope of this epochal change using, as an example, Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The*

²⁷ Cf. John Milbank, *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*, Cambridge (MA) 1991, 17-20.

²⁸ Candler, *Theology, rhetoric, manuduction*, 18; cf. 10. This reductionism is the root of the modern overemphasis on the concept of revelation. See: Johannes Hoff, 'The rise and the fall of the Kantian paradigm of modern theology' in: Conor Cunningham & Peter M. Candler (Eds.), *The grandeur of reason: Religion, tradition and universalism*, London 2010, 167-196.

Garden of Delights (1500). Ambitious both in form and content, this masterpiece of early modern painting thwarts every effort to uncover a stable relation between meaning and imagination. By provoking endless *possible* interpretations, it exemplifies the early modern subjectification of the imago. The viewer's imagination becomes, according to Certeau, suddenly mute. However, Certeau is well aware that this disturbing experience did not befall us unprepared. In similar vein to de Lubac, his interpretation of Bosch's masterpiece is placed against the background of medieval experiences of upheaval. The modern inflation of the imago is already detectable in the late medieval, Ockhamist universe, in which every meaning appears to be the outcome of an arbitrary abstraction, and as such is no longer rooted in the contemplation of the essential qualities of things, or in the liturgical commemoration of the history of salvation. Bosch's triptych marks a turning point only in so far as it indicates that this destabilisation is no longer viewed as fate, but is now turned into a deliberate attitude. In his masterpiece everything appears as if it were consciously intended to undermine our ability 'to read the whole and have it read by others as the "natural" revelation that a Speaker, through the complex texture of the world, addresses to listeners'.²⁹

Up to a certain point this historico-cultural contextualisation of the epochal change of early modernity is consistent with de Lubac's own diagnosis. However, in contrast to Certeau, Lubac's 'return to the sources' sought to recover the pre-nominalist universe. Lubac recalled the allegorical reading of the scriptures, and its unity with the reading of the inexhaustible 'book of life',³⁰ in order to uncover spiritual and liturgical sources of *enduring* significance. The allegorical universe of the past was, in his view, indicative of a way of participating in the life of the church which was still rewarding. Certeau, on his part, admired Lubac's contemplative power to recover the 'vital energy' of the past in the 'impenetrable teeming' of historical sources, and he appreciated Lubac's 'Resourcement' strategy as a genuinely modern attempt to uncover a time still yet to come from out of the ruins of departed generations.³¹ But Certeau's appreciation remained ambiguous, since Lubac's approach to the historical sources was, in Certeau's perception, too confined to a particular tradition; it was, as it were, too trapped in the Catholic milieu.

On a more formal level, Certeau remained faithful throughout his life to Lubac's conviction that every process of narration is a spiritual or performative act of non-identical repetition. Whenever we recall past events, we are already involved in a reformulation of the past that produces something new; for this

²⁹ Certeau, *La fable mystique* I, 59.

³⁰ Lubac, *Medieval exegesis*. Vol I, 77, 85f., et al.

³¹ Cf. Michel de Certeau, 'Der Theologe des Menschen: Zum Werk des Franzosen Henri de Lubac', in: *Publik* 9 (26.1.71), 21.

reason Certeau rejected modern attempts to reify the past as something 'made'. According to the title of his book on *The Writing of History*, 'writing history' is coincidental with a process of 'writing (in the sense of making) history'; and this is only conceivable in the light of the Judeo-Christian conviction that the past is to be reinterpreted and transformed over and over again.³² However, Certeau's approach to history is also heavily indebted to the observer-attitude characteristic of a de-Christianized modernity which considers its own narratives as superior to the narratives of the past.³³ Following on from a tradition which might be traced back via Durkheim and Weber to Comte and Hegel, Certeau never questioned the conviction of his post-structuralist contemporaries that the processes of institutional bureaucratisation, formalised rationalisation and disenchantment are matters of necessity and not, as in de Lubac, the outcome of historical contingencies which are open to unpredictable new twists.³⁴ In keeping with his 'practice of transgression' Certeau preserved the *form* of the Judeo-Christian practice of 'writing history' without questioning the marginalisation of its content.

Lubac's relation to Certeau is in this respect comparable with the former's relationship with liberation theology. The older Jesuit had already developed an inherently social account of the Christian concept of salvation in his seminal book *Catholicism* (1938), which contained a profound critique of modern attempts to isolate the Christian concept of salvation from its socio-historical implications.³⁵ According to Lubac the church is not reducible to a merely 'spiritual' means of salvation; the history of salvation is destined to be actualised in a community of reconciliation. Hence, salvation is neither separable from its social context, nor from the historical conditions of its repeated actualisation. However, Lubac tended to isolate this ecclesial context from its broader secular and political context.³⁶ The secular appeared as an autonomous sphere, as if it were separable from the *milieu divine* of the church.

This dualism is hardly consistent with the insights of Lubac's theology as discussed above. Hence liberation theologians had good reasons to reject the milieu-focused attitude of the older generation. However in doing so, liberation theology took its inspiration primarily from the post-Kantian tradition of German philosophy and theology. In line with Hegel, Karl Marx and his (German and French) Neo-Marxist successors on the one hand, liberation theologians viewed the process of secularisation as the outcome of a necessary and irreversible process; on the other hand, following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Rahner and

³² Cf. Michel de Certeau, *The writing of history* (Transl. Tom Conley), New York 1988.

³³ See also Ward, *Certeaus Geschichtsschreibung in ihrem jesuitischen Kontext*, 359-363.

³⁴ For a profound critical discussion of this modern narrative see: Milbank, *Theology and social theory*, 51-258.

³⁵ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the common destiny of man*, San Francisco 1988.

³⁶ Cf. Milbank, *Theology and social theory*, 225-228; and with regard to the following *ibid*, 228-255.

Johann Baptist Metz, they confined the genuinely theological contributions of their own tradition to the task of providing the narrative and liturgical resources for the encouragement of a secular ethos. Theology had to come to terms with the allegedly 'neutral' space of a secularized modernity, and to efface itself by elaborating a hermeneutic of social life which is able to make the best of the inevitable marginalisation of Christian learning. Consequently, not only did liberation theologians accept the inconsistency of Lubac's *de facto* position instead of radicalising his attempts to recover the pre-modern tradition; even worse they also elevated Lubac's attitude towards the secular to a matter of principle which confirmed the allegedly unshakable 'laws' of a Marxist dialectic of history.

Certeau, who visited Latin America repeatedly after 1966, agreed with this modern narrative without substantial reservations. His analysis of the interconnection between social and thinking practices was certainly closer to Durkheim and the neo-structuralist approaches of Foucault or Pierre Bourdieu than to the German tradition, but at the end of the day both traditions reduced the 'religious' to the 'excluded other' of a rationalized public space.

Certainly, Certeau rejected Lubac's dualism between the churchly milieu and the political space, but he did so for the same reasons as his Latin American friends. Consequently Lubac's inconsistent dualism of the sacred and the secular became substituted and even reinforced by the postmodern dualism of the secular and its margins, while the supernatural became ethereal just as it had in Rahner, Metz, and the theology of liberation.³⁷ Like the ineffably sublime 'transcendental experience' of Rahner, the motivating force of the supernatural can now only manifest itself through the traces of an 'absolute mystery' which is no longer *intrinsically* related to the life of a real existing body. The task of reading the traces of this mystery condemns the faithful individual to dwell in a perpetual exile, or to wander aimlessly through the panoptic space of a foreign strategic power: 'God is not there; he is somewhere else, always further away'.³⁸

The basic pattern of this nomadism is already elaborated in Certeau's early monograph *La Possession de Loudun* (1970), which investigates the rise of the early modern split between the individual and the 'public square' based on a case study of the events surrounding the diabolic possession of 17 nuns in the Ursuline convent of Loudun during the early 1630s.³⁹ The poles of the modern split are represented in this monograph by Louis XIII's chief minister Cardinal Richelieu on the one hand, and the spirituality of the nuns and their chief

³⁷ For a concise account of this essentially nihilistic dualism with regard to *La Fable Mystique* see: Graham Ward, 'Michel de Certeau's "Spiritual Spaces"', in: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100 (2001) no.2, 501-517.

³⁸ Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire* (Ed. Luce Giard), Paris 1987, 19.

³⁹ Cf. Michel de Certeau, *The possession at Loudun*, Chicago (IL) 2000.

exorcist, Jean-Joseph Surin, on the other. Richelieu exercised his power as a man of the church, but it slipped his control, hence the public square was eventually occupied by the power of the king: 'the demons can only be driven out by the power of the sceptre; (...) the crosier would not suffice to break the dragon's head'.⁴⁰ This public manifestation of a secular power channelled the spiritual upheavals of Loudun in such a way that by the end of the affair the displaced individuals could only express themselves either in an idiosyncratic and solitary mode of possession (exemplified by father Surin) or in the inner life of mystical experiences (exemplified by the mother superior Jeanne des Anges).

Up to a certain point, this case study is yet again consistent with de Lubac. *La Possession de Loudun* may be read as an attempt to demonstrate how a centralised, absolutist system achieved control over the public sphere whilst generating 'a supernatural and inner world'.⁴¹ Thus it confirms Lubac's thesis that modern rationality is based on a contingent and philosophically inconsistent split between the natural and the supernatural. Certeau even radicalises this thesis by providing a historical account of the contingency of the social and political practices which generated and sustained this split. However, in Certeau's view the outcome of this split seems nevertheless to be inescapable. The fact that the public square became increasingly focused on the body of the King, who constituted a secularized substitute of the sacramental body of Christ, was the outcome of contingent events. But in Certeau's monograph this outcome is, at the same time, depicted as the starting point of a potentially infinite series of substitutions. In the manner of his neo-structuralist contemporaries, the substitute eventually becomes substituted by a series of substitutes for the substitute of the lost body. The divine author no longer speaks, nor will he ever speak again. Trapped in the spatialised metaphysics of the modern panopticon, we are left with nothing but the cry for a missing body.

Certeau's Tactical Misreading of *Corpus Mysticum*

This leads us to the most revealing sign of Certeau's conflict with de Lubac; Certeau's misreading of Lubac's 1944 monograph *Corpus Mysticum* in *La Fable Mystique*. The latter book draws attention to the modern shift of perception with regard to the body of Christ starting with Lubac's genealogy of this epochal upheaval in the first mentioned book. This procedure enables Certeau to trace the genealogy of *La Possession de Loudun* further back to its medieval roots, and to present *La Fable Mystique* as a 'sequel' to Lubac's 'detailed theological study' (79).

⁴⁰ Certeau, *The possession at Loudun*, 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 89, see also 132-151.

The early modern coordinate system, in which this sequel is placed, might be sketched out following Ernst Kantorowicz's classical study *The King's Two Bodies*.⁴²

Kantorowicz's book demonstrates how the expression *corpus mysticum* increasingly assumed a juridical meaning in the wake of late medieval nominalism. Similar to the modern expression 'corporation', '*corpus mysticum*' turned into the designator of an abstract institution which was marked as a 'body' through the real presence of the public body of the King. The body of the King appeared as the visible head of an invisible and, in this sense, 'mystical' body. Given that the religious wars of early modernity had threatened the integrity of the state and undermined the integrity of the Church, a secular body ensued and authorised the unity of the state as an abstract 'body'.

This prototypical scenario marks one side of Certeau's approach to the modern use of the concept '*corpus mysticum*'. The other side is uncovered by Certeau's genealogy of a secondary use of the predicate 'mystical' which leads to its modern substantivation as a noun that designates a distinctive discipline ('mysticism') or role type (the 'mystic'). In light of the modern decline of churchly authority, the unprecedented presence of an abstract, juridical 'body' provoked the religious quest for a lost body, the missing body of Christ, which was accompanied by the cultivation of a distinguished mode of 'mystical' experiences:

The task of producing a Republic or a State by political 'reason' that would take the place of a defunct, illegible, divine order, is in a way paralleled by the task of founding places in which to hear the spoken Word that had become inaudible within corrupt institutions.⁴³

Since this prototypical constellation was the outcome of a genuine theological development, Certeau goes back to *Corpus Mysticum* in order to demonstrate that the modern codification of the body of Christ was already been prepared by a fundamental shift within the Medieval tradition. However, rather than simply summarizing the outcome of Lubac's research, the relevant chapter elaborates a concise interpretative key to Lubac's complex text based on the linguistic tools of Certeau's neo-structuralist contemporaries (cf. 79-90).

According to this key, the theologically most fundamental shift, which took place about the middle of the twelfth century, was related to an inversion of the semantic relation between two expressions, 'mystical body' and 'true body'.

⁴² Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The king's two bodies: A study in mediaeval political theology*, Princeton (NJ) 1957. See also with reference to *La Fable Mystique*: Hélène Merlin & (Transl.) Alison Tait, 'Fables of the "mystical body" in seventeenth-century France', in: *Yale French Studies* No. 86: *Corps mystique, corps sacre: Textual transfigurations of the body from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century* (1994), 126-142.

⁴³ Certeau, *The mystic fable*, 154. Page numbers in the ongoing text are subsequently referring to the English translation of this book.

From a certain point onwards *corpus Christi mysticum* no longer designates the Eucharist but the church; and inversely *corpus verum* (true body) no longer refers to the church but the sacramental body (i.e. the host).

After this shift, the grammar of Christian learning becomes increasingly focused on the authoritative presence of a visible, positively objectifiable body. This is most evident in the post-Tridentine, scholastic language-use of the Catholic Church which increasingly obscured the mystical, apophatic roots of Aquinas' conservative concept of 'transubstantiation' in favour of the modern doctrine of the 'real presence' of the body of Christ. However, the positivistic trends of the late Middle Ages were just as important for the protestant tradition. Given that from the 12th century onwards 'the bible' was increasingly perceived as an objectifiable entity (as outlined above), Luther's *sola scriptura* principle was ultimately coincidental with the semiotic substitution of the physical body of the Catholic host by the Bible reprints of early modernity. Regardless of whether we focus on the host, the Bible or the body of the king, we are always dealing with competing candidates for the slot of the 'true body' in so far as it is determined through the semantic opposition to the 'mystical body' of the church or the state on the one hand, and the 'missing body' of the new 'mystical' movements on the other.

Certeau's interpretative key to Lubac's account of this shift is focused on this semantic inversion and its impact on the dialectic of the visible and the invisible. But according to de Certeau the modern shift concerns the relation between not just two but three bodies: the historical body of Christ; the body of the sacrament; and the body of the church. This triad raises the question of where the caesura is to be placed in terms of the binary opposition between the visible and invisible. In early medieval times it was placed between the first (historical) body, and the second (sacramental) body, since the sacramental body mediated between the historical body and the body of the church (i.e. between a present body and the past) in a manner which, though based on a mystical action, was part of the visible liturgical practice of the church.

Certeau summarizes this 'punctuation' of the sacred triad through the following semiotic schema: *historical body vs. sacrament and church*. In contrast to this pre-modern schema, the modern caesura is placed between the second body of the sacrament and the church considered as 'mystical body'. Accordingly the historical body can be placed together with the sacramental body, since the historical reality of Christ is now considered to be mediated through the Bible as an authoritative, objectifiable, revelatory fact. The increasingly competitive relationship between the visible body of the host and the visible body of the Bible does not prevent them from performing *structurally* the same function. Consequently the modern punctuation of the body of Christ can be formalised as follows: *historical and sacramental body vs. church*.

The crucial point of this shift of 'punctuation' is, according to Certeau, related to the dialectic of temporality and spatiality. The older, predominantly

temporal and, for this reason, incalculable order of non-identical repetition becomes replaced by the functional order, which subordinates the contingencies of time to a spatial arrangement. The sacrament is no longer perceived as the mystical mediator between a past event and its unpredictable effects in the community of faith, but rather, as 'true body', it is designed to inspire the *projection* of a mystical body. Consequently the temporal order of the medieval tradition, which was based on the shared listening to a promise of salvation emerging from out of the past, is replaced by a functional order which does not primarily require us to listen but to act. This is consistent with the modern principle that the truth is something to be created or invented. The 'mystical body' no longer appears as something to be received and rememorized, but now appears as something to be "invented", in the same sense in which there was to be an invention of the New World' (84). As both Catholics and Protestants, we are called upon and authorised to 'make up' what is missing, be that in line with the *strategic* power of public institutions like the Church or the state, or with the reactive *tactics* and ruses of the growing population of 'mystics' on the quest for a missing body. This new focus on the feasible explains why, according to Certeau, the unknown mystical body of early modernity became substitutable by secular eschatologies, from the classical-modern promise to create the living body of a nation state to the late-modern, medical promise to recreate the human body in accordance with the principles of technical perfectibility (cf. 85).

How is this clear-cut account of Lubac's genealogy of the late medieval upheaval related to the relevant source text? Lubac's book on 'The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages' was as revolutionary as it was, he later admitted, 'un livre naïf'.⁴⁴ Given that nearly all historically significant publications on this topic were in German, and that, due to the war, it was hard to access relevant libraries, the young theologian basically ignored the leading scholarship of his time. Instead of taking the well travelled path, Lubac delved into the primary sources of the Latin tradition and created a reading of the ancient fathers which was as fresh as it was impenetrably erudite. This explains to a significant extent the overwhelming success of Certeau's neostructuralist systematisation of *Corpus Mysticum*; it was successful because it made Lubac's labyrinthine text accessible.⁴⁵ However, the almost Cartesian clarity of Certeau's reading is seductive. One might even argue, following Laurence Hemming who edited the new English Translation of *Corpus Mysticum*, that the desire

⁴⁴ See Laurence Paul Hemming's 'Editors' Preface' in: Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Transl. Gemma Simmonds), London 2006, ix.

⁴⁵ Cf. for example Catherine Pickstock, *After writing: On the liturgical consummation of philosophy*, Oxford 1998, 158-166; John Milbank, *Being reconciled: Ontology and pardon*, London 2003, 122-126; Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of nihilism: Philosophies of nothing and the difference of theology*, London 2002, 201-202; Aaron Riches, 'Church, Eucharist, and predestination in Barth and de Lubac: Convergence and divergence in Communio', in: *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (2008), 565-598, 588-594.

for clarity made Certeau utterly miss the point of Lubac's account of the medieval shift. Certeau's neostructuralist interpretation focuses on the 'punctuation' of the three bodies of Christ. However, 'Lubac understood the real shift to be the triumph of a certain kind of rationalism, exemplified by Berengar's thought (...) eclipsing the ground character of the liturgy as the source of meaning in theology'.⁴⁶

Lubac's monograph is certainly not focused on the semantic opposition of the visible and the invisible, but on the clash between a (symbolic) realist and a (dialectical) rationalist approach to the liturgy of the church. This explains why he identifies the early scholastic and dialectician Berengar of Tours (†1088) as the villain in the battle concerning the Eucharist and the church. Lubac describes the critical point of his monograph regarding Berengar's innovation as follows: 'a somewhat new concept of mystery was developing (...) that is what we must investigate in greater detail'.⁴⁷

The significance of the clash between symbolic realists and dialectical rationalists becomes evident when one considers modern attempts to reduce the symbolisms of religious traditions to the 'merely metaphorical' expressions of allegedly more elementary truths which are meant to be discernable without figurative 'distortion'. To a certain extent Berengar anticipated the foundationalist promise that the imprecise meanings of symbols, allegories or metaphors might be accounted for in terms of clear and evident conceptual distinctions or empirical observations in the sense of Descartes and John Locke.⁴⁸ In accordance with this modern trend, *mystically* means 'not truly' in Berengar's writings; and conversely, truly means 'not mystically': 'against *mystically*, *not truly*, was set, in no less exclusive sense, *truly*, *not mystically*'.⁴⁹

In contrast to this rationalist account of the 'mystical', Lubac's recovery of the sacramental ontology of the Middle Ages aimed to demonstrate that the symbolic reality of the Eucharist as 'source and summit of the Christian life'⁵⁰ was *more true* than everything which might appear to be true according to our naive, everyday perception. The evident 'truths' of human perceptions or cognitions are deceptive. Only the mystical body of Christ can unclothe a truth which is immune to the false security of a foundationalist 'real presences'. Hence, the mystical body of Christ *is* Christ's true body to the same extent as it *includes* the apophatic dimension of something invisible. Thomas Aquinas' Eucharistic

⁴⁶ Laurence Paul Hemming: 'Henri de Lubac: Reading Corpus Mysticum' in: *New Blackfriars* 90 (2009), 519-534: 519.

⁴⁷ Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 230.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 225-230. For a critical discussion of this naive epistemology which focuses on John Locke cf. Janet Martin Soskice, 'Naming God: A study in faith and reason', in: Paul J. Griffiths & Reinhard Hüter (Eds.), *Reason and the reasons of faith*, New York 2005, 241-254.

⁴⁹ Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 223.

⁵⁰ *Lumen gentium*, no. 11. Significant passages of this principal document of the Second Vatican council are, as it is well known, informed by Lubac's Eucharistic ecclesiology.

hymn *Adoro te devote* provides us with one of the most condensed poetic expressions of this premodern perception of the mystical:

*Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived:
How says trusty hearing? that shall be believed;
What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;
Truth Himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.*

The truth speaking through the 'Godhead' hidden under the species of bread and wine is, in these verses, not just that which is most reliable; *nothing* would be true without participating in this mystery. The divine mystery is not simply contemplated as something unproblematic; it is celebrated as a reality in comparison to which 'the right of what we ordinarily call 'reality' to be so called is what is problematic'.⁵¹

The irony of Certeau's (mis-)reading of de Lubac is that this sacramental realism is perfectly consistent with Certeau's own criticism of the foundationalist rationality of modernity. Certeau's repeated attempts to conceptualize 'What We Do When We Believe'⁵² aimed to demonstrate that matters of belief are significant to the extent that our appreciation of 'clear and distinct' evidence is always based on pre-judgements which are unjustifiable in terms of evidence-based standards of rationality. However, Certeau tended to neglect that this aporia affects publicly significant matters of *belief* to the same extent that it affects 'private' matters of *faith*.⁵³ Conversely, he underestimated the extent to which the commitment to matters of *faith* might change, in an ontologically qualified and hence publicly significant sense, our perception of reality as a whole. Certeau never moved as far as his teacher in considering the sacramental ontology of the Middle Ages as a serious alternative to the modern foundationalist focus on 'visible' or 'evidence-based' truths.

On closer examination, however, the divergence between the disciple and his teacher turns out to be more multilayered. On the one hand, Certeau's groundbreaking, late essay on the visibility of the invisible in Nicholas of Cusa might be read as an attempt to investigate the viability of Lubac's ontological path starting from a phenomenology of the 'trusty hearing' of faith.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Certeau's hesitancy to move in this direction becomes more understandable if we place it in the broader context of the scholarly debates of his time, both Catholic and neostructuralist, which were focused on the tension between practices of social unification and the fragmented 'spirituality' of the modern individual.

⁵¹ Hilary Putnam, 'On negative theology', in: *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), 407-422, 410.

⁵² See, for example, Michel de Certeau, 'What we do when we believe', in: Marshall Blonsky (Ed.), *On signs*, Baltimore 1985, 193-202; and Certeau, 'L'Institution de croire'.

⁵³ Cf. Graham Ward, 'De Certeau and an enquiry into believing', in: www.ku.dk/satsning/Religion/sekularism_and_beyond/.../Paper_Ward.pdf (2010).

⁵⁴ See above fn. 18.

Within this dualistic framework Certeau's research investigated the inexhaustible inventiveness of ruses and tactics in the face of the strategic power of abstract institutions. However, Lubac's approach to the sacramental ontology of the past was not easily compatible with this research interest. Worse still, if we consider the history of the reception of *Corpus Mysticum* in Hans Urs von Balthasar for example, Lubac's approach was hardly distinguishable from the defensive, apologetic strategies of the institutionalized Catholic milieu which Certeau struggled to overcome. Lubac's criticism of the ecclesiological paradigm shift of the Middle Ages was interpreted as a criticism of the individualistic, objectifying, sacramental piety of early modernity and a call to reinstate the social dimensions of the Eucharist.⁵⁵ *Individual vs. society*: this was the interpretative matrix in which *Corpus Mysticum* was placed. Certeau did not challenge this matrix, because it was consistent with the neo-structuralist debates of his time; but he accepted it for different reasons to that of the Catholic mainstream. To a great extent, the post-Vatican awaking was the outcome of a belated counter-reaction against the juridical power strategies of early modernity. Hence Catholics were inclined to substitute the post-Tridentine fetishization of the host by the fetishization of the churchly 'community'. This was ironic, given that Certeau's secular contemporaries had just begun to uncover the late modern 'tyranny of intimacy'⁵⁶ as nothing but another 'power technology' of modernity. Thus Certeau had good reasons to keep distance from both the early and late modern fetishisms of ecclesial 'power technologies'.

However, even if we take into account that Lubac might have been misled by the history of the reception of his own writings, *Corpus Mysticum* does not really fit into this interpretative framework. Certeau's explicit formulations in *The Mystical Fable* are more cautious than the standard interpretation given above, but they do suggest that the sacrament after the 12th century was increasingly objectified as a *visible* sign while the social body of the church *became* an invisible mystery.⁵⁷ This supposes that the *mystery* (i.e. the *invisible*) was, up until this time, only related to the accidentally-visible, instituting operation of the Eucharist, whereas the community of the church was considered to be essentially *visible* (cf. 83). However, the opposite is true: because the truth is *not* the visible according to de Lubac's criticism of Berengar, the community of the church, though considered as the *true* body of Christ, was not visible either. The reverse was also valid: the sacrament was considered a mystery not because of its invisibility but because of its capacity to make the

⁵⁵ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk*, Einsiedeln 1976, 32.

⁵⁶ Cf. Richard Sennett, *The fall of public man*, New York 1996; and Johannes Hoff, 'Das Verschwinden des Körpers: Eine Kritik an der "Wut des Verstehens" in der Liturgie', in: *Herder Korrespondanz* 54 (2000), 149-155.

⁵⁷ See above fn. 45.

invisible visible. The *visibility* of the sacramental body revealed the community gathered together *as* a mystical reality which participates in the true body of Christ:

If liturgy is the work of the 'people' (...), the *laos* is not ever the *visible* people or 'community', but rather the invisible *stem* and root, the tribe or nation, implied and manifest by *this on there*. (...) The *laos* has a past and a future (...), it is never *reducible* to (...) any visible form. (...) To undertake leitourgia is to make a public manifestation, through visible works, of the invisible (and so mystical) meaning and destiny of the *laos*.⁵⁸

This is consistent with the traditional orthodox doctrine that the *ecclesia*, gathered together in the Eucharist, includes the invisible community of the blessed, the saints, and those suffering in purgatory, while the visible gathering of the present time includes individuals who are not really members of the church considered as the 'true body (*corpus verum*)' of Christ. In the orthodox tradition the *ecclesia* was not celebrated as a *visible* assembly gathered together in order to perform a mystery which reconnects this present reality with the historical body of Christ. The assembly of the saints was celebrated as a *true mystery* which was, for the current time, essentially invisible while the visible performance of the sacrament of the altar was the act which made this invisible reality manifest. At the same time the dynamic of this manifestation was not focused on the transformative power of the present sacrament, but on the non-identical repetition of a transformative event which had its roots in a non-identical past. The sacramental body made manifest that the true body of Christ *had* already gathered in view of its future glorification *through* the repeated remembrance of the historical body of Christ. It revealed the transubstantiation (or transfiguration) of the community of the saints into the glorified body of Christ to be a dynamic process which gathers together not only heterogeneous individuals but also heterogeneous times.⁵⁹

According to this more complex account of de Lubac's genealogy, the Church as body of Christ was already perceived as a mystical body before the modern shift. The difference between modernity and pre-modernity is not to be located at the semantic axis which distinguishes the visible from the invisible, but on the level of a different attitude to the mystical. In the pre-modern tradition, the invisible appeared not as something to be made up or 'invented', but to be received and confirmed in love *as* an invisible reality. For this reason the 'true body' of Christ was celebrated as something inchoately actualised already here and now, though it was not yet possible to know who truly participated in this reality. Since the unity of the Church with

⁵⁸ Hemming, 'Henri de Lubac', 525.

⁵⁹ Lubac repeatedly quotes a passage of Augustine's *Confessions* (VII, x, 16) in which he hears the voice of Christ saying: 'You will not change me into you, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you will be changed into me'. cf. for example Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 178.

the transubstantiated and glorified body of Christ will only become visible in the heavenly Jerusalem, the 'true body of Christ' will become visible only when the visible sacrament is no longer required; and conversely, as long as we need the visible sacrament, the community of the saints will remain invisible.

Looked at it from this perspective, Berengar's attempt to provide a dialectical account of the mystery of the body of Christ was misleading from the outset. *Lex orandi, lex credenda*: the law of prayer precedes the laws of rational reflection on matters of faith. The community of the earthly church can only reflect afterwards on what it receives when it celebrates its *leitourgia*. What the church affirms as an overwhelming, pre-reflexive givenness might be 'formally indicated' (in the sense of Martin Heidegger)⁶⁰ based on an analysis of our preconception of reality, but it is never to be explained. Cogitations on the dialectic of the visible and the invisible might be illuminating in this indicative sense, but they will never achieve more than a *docta ignorantia* with regard to the reality-transforming Eucharistic 'source and summit' of Christian faith.

If we read the conflict between Certeau and his teacher against the background of the early medieval conflict between symbolic realist and dialectical rationalist approaches to our understanding of reality, it becomes hard to ignore the gap that separates Certeau's account of Lubac's teaching from the remaining legacy of Lubac's Eucharistic ontology. Certeau was suspicious of the community-fetish of the post-Vatican movement for the same reason that he was suspicious of the sacramental fetishism of the post-Tridentine tradition. Hence he considered the true body of Christ as something essentially absent. In de Lubac's account of the church as the body of Christ, this 'missing body' is already mystically present. The gathering together of the body of Christ has already 'taken (its) place' here and now, if only as an inchoately actualised reality. In this sense alone might the body of Christ be perceived as an 'absent' reality.

⁶⁰ See: Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* (Transl. Joan Stambaugh), Albany, NY 1996, §7. I owe the greatest debt to Kate Butler for proof reading this essay and patiently tidying up my attempts to express my German thoughts in this foreign language.