Chapter 14

Super-Entanglement: Unfolding Evidence in Hieronymus Bosch’s *Mass of St. Gregory*

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In a study of Hieronymus Bosch’s painting of the *Mass of St Gregory* published some years ago, I addressed a phenomenon that until then had hardly evoked any art historical comment—despite or because of the fact it is so utterly unique: the depiction of Golgotha atop the retable that decorates the altar of the saint [Fig. 14.1].¹ Whereas Bosch’s work has produced an endless stream of commentaries and interpretations regarding his unconventional, phantasmal and bizarre imagery, the more traditional aspects of his style and iconography have largely failed to provoke serious attention. For this reason, perhaps, the easily recognizable representation of the Crucifixion at the apex of Gregory’s altar has been taken for granted. The mode of representation, however, is as extra-ordinary, not to say bizarre, as the phantasmal fruits, animated rocks and hybrid demons that populate his dream-like landscapes and scenes of hell. Its extraordinariness lies in its hyperbolic realism and fractured relationship with the rest of its physical environment. I want to return to this strange pictorial device, since it has prompted me to formulate a thesis about the status and identity of Bosch’s retable that goes beyond current thinking about this motif.²

¹ This paper is the result of my research as member of the ‘Kolleg-Forscherguppe Bildevidenz. Geschichte und Ästhetik’ at the Kunsthistorisches Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin, and participation in the colloquium ‘Incarnation Doctrine and Art Theory’, held at Emory University (April 2013).

Figure 14.1 Hieronymus Bosch, “Mass of St. Gregory,” exterior of the Epiphany Triptych (ca. 1505). Oil on wood, 138 x 72 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.