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The Weight of Love

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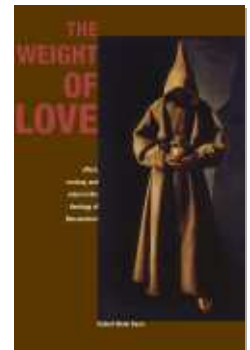
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Introduction: Weighing Affect in Medieval Christian Devotion

“Take a corpse, and place it where you like. You will see that it puts up no resistance to motion, nor does it grumble about its position, or complain when it is put aside. If it is propped up on a throne, it does not raise its head up, but rather looks down. If it is clothed in purple, it will look twice as pale. This is the truly obedient one, who does not judge why he is moved, and does not care where he is placed.” According to his thirteenth-century hagiographers, the Umbrian saint Francis of Assisi responded with these words to a group of followers asking for spiritual instruction by offering, as an example of true obedience, a dead body (*exanime corpus*, literally, a body without a soul).¹

This story, especially in the context of the *vitae* of St. Francis, illustrates what students of medieval Christianity have long known: The saintly body, in its wonderful and pitiful conformity to Christ’s body, played an exemplary role in the Passion-centered piety of late-medieval Europe. But this curious pedagogical scene, which is found throughout the early Franciscan hagiographical tradition, presents the holy body as something more (or less) than simply a vehicle for cruciform suffering. Why was a dead body a spiritual exemplar? What else were holy bodies capable of

besides (alongside of) suffering? As this episode demonstrates, the body, in its most fundamental capacity to be moved by an external force, served as a source of instruction and site of desire for the late-medieval Christian devotional imagination. The pliant body of Francis's macabre exemplum is no particular body—a nameless corpse—but in the *vita* of Francis, the corpse casts its shadow forward over Francis's own body. The earliest legends of Francis's holiness recount his angelic vision near the end of his life that left him branded with the wounds of Christ's passion. In what became the official account of Francis's life, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio's longer *Life of St. Francis* (the *Legenda Maior*) depicts Francis's body transformed by the ardor of his love, pierced by joy and grief at the sight of a six-winged Seraph affixed to a cross. But he is not just transformed by the vision—he is incapacitated by it. Unable to walk, Francis has to be carried through the streets, while still living, like the corpse he would soon become. By the end of his life, Francis has become the yielding body that he had earlier offered to his followers as an example.

Another pedagogical scene, framing and reflecting the first: this time Francis himself is the exemplum, and Bonaventure is the teacher. In a sermon given at the Franciscan house in Paris on the feast day of Francis of Assisi in 1262,² Bonaventure explains the significance of the figure of the Seraph that appeared to Francis shortly before his death and branded him with the marks of Christ's passion:

Why do we, being so wretched, have such cold hearts that we will not endure anything for the sake of our Lord? Our hearts do not burn or boil with love. For just as heat is a property of the heart, and when this heat is greater a person's actions are stronger and more robust, so too one who has more of the heat of love or charity in their heart is for this reason able to perform more virtuous deeds. Do you want to imprint Christ crucified in your heart? Do you wish to transform yourself into him so much that you burn with charity? Just as iron, when it is heated to the point of melting, can be imprinted with any form or image, so too a heart burning with the love of Christ crucified is imprinted with the crucified Christ or the cross, and the lover is carried over or transformed into the Crucified, just as the blessed Francis was. Some people are amazed that a Seraphim was sent to him when the stigmata of Christ's passion were to be imprinted upon him. Surely, they say, no Seraphim was crucified! No, but the Seraphim is the spirit whose name means "ardor," which signifies that Francis was burning with charity when the Seraphim was sent to him. And the cross or the sign of the cross imprinted upon his body signifies the affection which he had for

the crucified Christ, and that, from the ardor of his love, he was wholly transformed into Christ.³

The sermon is an exegesis both of Francis's vision and Matthew 24:30: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven." In the moral sense, Bonaventure explains, the verse refers to stigmata that Francis received; he is the "heavens" upon which the sign of the Son of Man appears. Through this tropological identification, Francis's stigmatized flesh becomes the scriptural text of the homily: An eschatological and cosmic message is legible on his branded body.⁴ The sermon takes the form of an extended comparison of Francis to the celestial sphere—its beauty is reflected in Francis's purity, its orderly movement is modeled in Francis's obedience, its universal expanse is measured in Francis's limitless love, and its mysteries are intimated in Francis's ecstatic contemplation. In this context, the appearance of the Seraph is not out of place. The heavens are not a void dotted with spinning orbs, but a dynamic hierarchy of angelic presences. The figure of the Seraph indicates that Francis's love is as expansive as the heavens and as ardent, even self-immolating, as the fiery creatures who flank God's throne. But if the celestial body of Francis suggests cosmic splendor, the image of a softened heart evokes a more intimate devotion. Inflamed with love, Francis's heart is supple.⁵ The marks on his body bear witness to a heart melted by love, whose receptivity to divine wounding made possible the physical impression. Love makes the body pliable, and a pliable body is the physical manifestation of love.

This scene, like the first, addresses the question of what the devotional body can do. Here, pliability, imprintability, and mobility are capacities of the ardent body—that is, a body inflamed with love. *Amor* as fire is both spiritual and corporeal, the substance that effects the transfer of spiritual ardor into bodily marks, and Bonaventure's sermon presents two embodiments of this love: the impressionable body of Francis and the pliable body of iron. The latter becomes the example of the former, and both exemplify the quality of *amor* that is the focal point of the sermon. *Amor* is the principle of pious devotion to the Passion and of purifying and perfecting union with God: The warm, tender love that Bonaventure urges his audience to feel for the sufferings of the crucified Christ is at the same time the angelic charity that lifts up and divinizes. In his sermon, Bonaventure registers the shock of this coincidence of opposites in the third person: "Surely, they say, no Seraphim was crucified!" The Incarnation itself—Word made flesh—is the ultimate and paradigmatic coincidence of opposites, but the image of the Seraph dying on a cross is represented as a further scandal, an

impossible violation of the cosmic hierarchy. If literally impossible, however, this image nonetheless organizes the affections proper to Franciscan devotion: compassion for the pathetic body of Christ crucified and wonder at the grandeur of the divinely ordered cosmos. Reflection on the crucified Seraph intensifies and perfects the soul's affective capacity—that is, its capacity to be moved, transformed, and united to God.

These two images—the pliable corpse and the cruciform Seraph—adumbrate the central argument of this book: that the medieval devotional techniques aimed at inciting and intensifying affective response (usually of compassion, pity, and grief) to Christ's passion found their complement in scholastic reflection on the nature of the *affectus* and its relationship to the space and time of the soul's return to God. As has been well-studied, another affective turn was taking place in the Parisian schools in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: a revival of theological interest in the sixth-century Syrian ascetic known as Dionysius the Areopagite, whose brief but extremely influential corpus detailed, among other things, the ninefold angelic structure of the heavens and the means by which the mind could ascend this cosmic ladder to a union with God beyond knowledge. For a number of commentators, notably the Victorines Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Gallus, the Dionysian itinerary of mystical ascent to unknowing was the realization of an affective union higher than and exclusive of the activities of the intellect. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, Bonaventure found in this reading of Dionysius not simply an affirmation of love's superiority to knowledge, but a conception of psychic and celestial hierarchy that revealed the cosmic significance of Francis's affective transformation.

Each of these two “affective turns”—devotional programs based on compassionate identification with Jesus's suffering and the “affective” interpretation of Dionysian mystical theology—has been well-observed by historians, literary scholars, and theologians. But the question of their coincidence and coimplication has remained largely unexamined. This book takes up that question by examining a figure who was, more than any other medieval author, central to both of these developments, and argues that a common theory of the nature and role of *affectus* animates both of these “turns.” As regent master of the Franciscan school at Paris beginning in 1254 and then minister general of the order from 1257 until his death in 1274, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio produced university texts such as commentaries and disputed questions as well as meditations intended for broader mendicant audiences of men and women. Across these genres, Bonaventure developed a program of ascent to divinizing union rooted in and realized through the soul's innate affective orientation toward God.

For him, the Passion-centered piety of Francis of Assisi and the cosmic speculations of Dionysius were intertexts that interpret one another and together inform the soul's natural affective inclination toward God.

The nature of this innate affective inclination (which Bonaventure identifies variously as the natural *affectus* or the scholastic concept of *synderesis*), and its role and fate in the soul's union with God, are at the heart of this book's inquiry. While the chapters that follow attend closely to these issues within Bonaventure's own writings, they aspire to an argument with a more far-reaching application: that meditational techniques and writings that scholars identify as "affective" must be examined in conversation with medieval theological sources on the nature and significance of *affectus*. Making this argument does not require subscribing to the limiting interpretive model, critiqued by Thomas Bestul and others, that sees clerical Latin works as a theoretically inexhaustible "background" that guarantees the meaning and import of popular vernacular texts.⁶ Nor does it require, for that matter, much faith in the difference between "scholastic" and "devotional" literature. To be sure, a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* arose out of and answered to different generic and institutional demands than a *vita* of a popular saint. But in the case of a figure like Bonaventure, whose work spans these and other popular genres, it is possible to see the working out, in diverse textual forms, of a set of related theological and practical questions regarding the nature and destiny of the cosmos and the place of human beings within it. As Bonaventure himself has it, the Dionysian universe not only provides a scheme for understanding the spiritual significance of Francis; but Francis's own life interprets the corpus of Dionysius as well. Understanding the role of affect in Bonaventure or any other medieval thinker requires navigating these intertextual dynamics in multiple directions.

These dynamics are evident in Bonaventure's treatment of the climactic episode of Francis's life, his vision of the cruciform Seraph on Mount La Verna. As I will argue in Chapter 1, while Bonaventure is not the first to introduce the image of the Seraph into the legend of Francis's reception of the stigmata, he exploits its Dionysian resonance in a new way. The Seraph is of the highest rank of angels flanking the divine. Dionysius associates the Seraphim with fire and warmth, and later commentators associate them further with ardent love. In Bonaventure's writings, the Seraph of Francis's vision alludes to the drama of the soul's hierarchical ascent to affective union with God beyond the intellect. And yet, at the same time, the scene of Francis being moved to ecstatic joy, pity, and desire by the sight of the crucified Seraph is itself a scene of affective piety. Bonaventure depicts

Francis as the exemplary (and extraordinary) Passion meditator, his gaze fixed on the awful sight of Jesus's suffering, his affections excited with the appropriate responses, and his body overwhelmed by the experience.

Scholars of medieval history and literature typically use the term "affective piety" or "affective devotion" to refer to a family of meditational texts that explicitly seek to stimulate the reader's affections through vivid depiction of Jesus's human sufferings at the events of his crucifixion. The narrative of a broad shift in European Christian devotional practice (at the hands of Anselm of Canterbury and twelfth-century Cistercian authors, above all) toward the cultivation of self-knowledge on the one hand and tender compassion toward Jesus on the other received its classic formulation in Richard Southern's 1953 *The Making of the Middle Ages*: "The theme of tenderness and compassion for the sufferings and helplessness of the Saviour of the world was one which had a new birth in the monasteries of the eleventh century, and every century since then has paid tribute to the monastic inspiration of this century by some new development of the theme."⁷ Textual witnesses of this new birth include both the emotionally performative (and performable) first-person prayers of authors such as John of Fécamp and Anselm of Canterbury, and also graphic guided meditations on the scenes of Christ's life and death intended to stimulate compassion for his pains and for Mary's sorrow. Canonical examples of the latter genre include the fourteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, James of Milan's *Stimulus of Love*, and Bonaventure's *On the Perfection of Life Addressed to the Sisters*.

Pliable as it is, the coherence of "affective piety" as a category describing a historical shift or movement in the later middle ages is debatable; Anglo-Saxonist scholars have amply demonstrated that Anselm and his contemporaries had a long tradition of highly wrought, affective prayers and devotions to draw on.⁸ Moreover, the characterization of particular forms of devotion as "affective" risks both redundancy (what would non-affective devotion look like?) and question-begging, leading us to ignore or de-emphasize aspects and functions of devotional texts other than those aiming at the intensification or direction of affective response.⁹ Yet few would argue with Southern's basic premise that a change—in style, emphasis, and sheer volume—occurred in the devotional literature and practices of Western Christian devotion sometime around the eleventh century.

Scholarly treatments of affective piety, in fact, often open onto larger questions about historical change. The development of affective meditation has long been crucial to the way historians and literary scholars have narrated the development of lay piety, vernacular spirituality, women's

religiosity, and even the very emergence of late medieval society out of feudal Europe.¹⁰ It is as if *affectus* marks in medievalist historiography the privileged site of transformation that it represented on a spiritual level for many medieval writers. For medieval writers and their modern interpreters, affect is axial.

In her monumental study of the change in devotional attitudes from the ninth through the twelfth centuries, Rachel Fulton warns against a tendency to discuss this shift as an “emergence” in the historiographical ether of cultural mentalities, and seeks instead to trace the development of Passion devotion through specific historical catalysts and actors (even as she also addresses herself to “a whole imaginative and emotional climate”).¹¹ Fulton tells a complex story involving the development of Eucharistic theology, post-millennial apocalyptic disappointment, and bridal mysticism. Key actors for Fulton are the Benedictines John of Fécamp and Anselm of Canterbury, and twelfth-century Cistercians, especially Bernard of Clairvaux, figures long central to the narrative of affective devotion emerging from new monastic technologies of the self developed in eleventh- and twelfth-century religious reform movements and spreading, via the Franciscans above all, to the laity. As Southern puts it, “With St. Francis and his followers, the fruits of the experiences of St. Anselm and St. Bernard were brought to the market place, and became the common property of the lay and clerical world alike.”¹² Sarah Beckwith follows the lineaments of this narrative in her study of the role of Christ’s body as social medium in late medieval Europe. In the anguished, excited meditations on Christ’s human and divine body of Anselm and Bernard, Beckwith sees tools for the fashioning of a new, reflexive subjectivity whose self-reformation aims both to intensify and resolve the divisions of flesh and spirit, human and divine, desire and fulfillment, within the self. These new disciplinary practices organized around Christ’s body had far-reaching implications: “The reformist understandings of affective theology developed a set of interpretive strategies which disciplined the way in which they were utilized and understood within the institutional setting of the monastery. But the influence of these texts was felt far beyond the walls of the monastery.”¹³ Crucial to the extension of this influence, Beckwith argues, were the Franciscan devotional texts that opened the reform program of subjective formation around the body of Christ to lay audiences.¹⁴ As she writes, “Franciscanism described the gestural techniques of *affectus* in its development of imitative and meditational schema for the production of contrition.”¹⁵ Thus, whether as innovators or popularizers, the Franciscans have long held a preeminent place in narratives of the development of affective piety.

Thomas Bestul claims that Franciscans “carried devotion to the suffering humanity of Christ to new heights.”¹⁶ For Bestul, Bonaventure’s works represented the highest of these new heights and a model for later Passion meditation literature, much of which circulated under Bonaventure’s authority in the fourteenth century.¹⁷

In a thorough revision of this standard Anselmian-Cistercian-Franciscan narrative of affective devotion, Sarah McNamer contends that the genre of Passion meditation and its techniques for the literary production of affect were not the innovation of a handful of male theologians, but rather in the first instance developed in women’s religious communities. Like Fulton, McNamer seeks to ground the narrative of affective devotion in specific historical actors and motives. For McNamer, this motive was less theological than social and legal: Passion meditation was a technique for the production of compassion, the presence of which functioned as a guarantee of religious women’s status as brides of Christ (*sponsae Christi*).¹⁸ In particular, McNamer disputes claims for Bonaventure’s originality and significance for the tradition of Passion meditation, and even seeks to distinguish his devotional writings from the affective meditations that circulated in his name. For example, she argues, in contrast to the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, in Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* “affective response is assertively situated within a framework of speculative theology; thus the texts seek to engage the reader’s intellect more than the heart, and the apprehension of theological truth is the ultimate aim.”¹⁹ In both the *Lignum vitae* and the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, then, the elaborate theological allegorizations work against affective response, mediating and containing it. The allegorical layering of the Passion narrative in these works obscures, in McNamer’s view, the human, suffering body of Christ, as confronted so frankly in texts that reflect women’s meditational practices.

In her study of the role of imagination in Passion meditations, Michelle Karnes offers a very different construal of the relationship between theological reflection and corporeal sensation. Like Bestul, she sees Bonaventure as determinative for the tradition of meditation on Jesus’s suffering humanity, but for different reasons. Correcting the tendency of scholars to overemphasize affect and neglect other stylistic features and theological functions of meditations on the life and death of Christ, Karnes argues that these texts should be seen as tools for the cultivation of the imagination. As the cognitive bridge between sensory perception and intellection, medieval imagination was positioned on the boundary of flesh and spirit, and thus served as path by which the meditant progressed from meditation on the human, bodily sufferings of Jesus to contemplation of Christ’s divin-

ity. Indeed, for Bonaventure, who, Karnes argues, “first applied scholastic philosophy of imagination to medieval meditations on Christ,” every act of intellect is incarnational, insofar as it unites the sensory with the spiritual.²⁰ In Bonaventure’s hands (and also in the literary tradition he influenced) the purpose of imagining Jesus’s sufferings was not simply to produce emotional fervor, but to be united, in contemplation, to Christ.

Karnes skillfully and persuasively traces the intimate link that Bonaventure’s works draw between devotion to Christ’s humanity and the soul’s union to God. Yet her deliberate focus on the more recognizably Aristotelian aspects of Bonaventure’s psychology leaves a sustained consideration of his mystical theology outside the purview of her study. While Karnes recognizes that Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy are “interwoven” in scholastic thought, she maintains that “the fault lines between them are always visible. They never merge into syncretic union.”²¹ I do not wish to argue the contrary. Yet even the disavowed possibility of syncretism suggests a boundedness to both Neoplatonism (which is, from the first instance, already “Aristotelian”) and medieval Aristotelianism that risks an overly schematic reading of scholastic texts—a risk nevertheless avoided in Karnes’s own lucid and nuanced readings of Bonaventure and the meditative texts he inspired. Tracing the Augustinian and Aristotelian influences in Bonaventure’s thought, Karnes illuminates the devotional and theological goals of his account of imagination and cognition, and in turn offers a convincing account of the theological complexity and depth of medieval devotional literature and practices.

The present book seeks to build especially on this aspect of Karnes’s work, by giving sustained attention to the complex theorizations of *affectus* that animate the context of late-medieval devotional practices studied under the banner of “affective devotion.” In particular, I suggest that the place of affect in medieval Christian devotion cannot be understood outside of its role in the Neoplatonic cosmos and the program of ascent that medieval theologians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries found—and substantially expanded and reimagined—in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.

What follows, however, is not a comprehensive study or survey of the concept of *affectus* in the Bonaventuran corpus.²² Nor is it an attempt to define the boundaries of affective piety or re-narrate its history. Instead, this book advances an interpretation of Bonaventure’s writings on the soul’s capacity for and path to affective union with God that sees the cosmic and mystical dimensions of *affectus* as crucial for the practice of affective meditation. In particular, I focus on Bonaventure’s account of the innate *affectus* that inclines the human person to God. Referring variously to *apex*

affectus, synderesis, a natural instinct, or, most revealingly, the weight (*pondus*) of the soul or will (concepts I will discuss at length in what follows), Bonaventure works out an incarnational understanding of the soul's affective capacity in the context of a mystical itinerary that is profoundly—and paradoxically—embodied. In other words, I argue that for Bonaventure, devotion is essentially an ecstatic enterprise, integrally involving but ultimately abandoning intellect as the soul moves toward affective ecstasy in God. This enterprise is organized around and oriented toward the body of Christ and the body of Francis. As I will argue, the itinerary of ascent begins in the soul's innate affective orientation toward God and culminates in the becoming-body of the soul—its transformation as exemplified by the Christic body of Francis.

The present book is organized according to this same trajectory. Chapter 1 begins with a historical and theological reflection on the Seraph, the image through which Bonaventure connects the exemplary love of St. Francis with the Dionysian program of ascent beyond knowledge. The figure of the Seraph—glossed according to its post-Dionysian association with fiery love—provides for Bonaventure an interpretive key through which to read the life of St. Francis as a Dionysian ascent toward affective transformation through an innate affective capacity in human beings in which is located the possibility of ecstatic union.

After exploring some of the explicitly Dionysian influences on Bonaventure in the first chapter—with special attention to the Victorine Thomas Gallus—Chapter 2 turns to another important and often overlooked source for understanding how affectivity works in Bonaventure's thought: the concept of synderesis, an infallible tendency of the soul toward the Good that he understands as affective. On his account, synderesis marks the place of the soul's most immediate and innate relationship to God. By locating that relationship in a capacity that is entirely exterior to cognition (i.e., synderesis), I show how Bonaventure offers a precise (though not uncomplicated) psychological account of the soul's capacity for affective ecstasy and union. Ecstasy (*ecstasis*) is an inherent tendency within the soul, a capacity for being drawn to the good that is neither truly active nor simply passive. Rather, ecstasy (dis)locates the soul's desire for the good outside of itself.

Furthermore, as I argue in Chapter 3, by identifying the natural motion of the will as the soul's "weight" (*pondus*), Bonaventure links the scholastic debates on synderesis both to an Augustinian motif of love as a spiritual force and to an Aristotelian physics of elemental motion and natural place. In Aristotelian physics, there is an ambiguity regarding the *agent* of natural motion: Is it a capacity inherent in bodies (a body's desire for its natural

place) or a force that the object of desire exerts *on* simple bodies? Bonaventure, I argue, does not simply inherit this philosophical ambiguity. Rather, he exploits it so as to attribute the ascent of the soul to God's grace, while still locating this ascent in a natural capacity of human beings. Desire, then, holds a privileged place in Bonaventure's thought. It is the absolute coincidence of nature and grace in the creation of the cosmos and its consummation in the return of all things to God.

In two subsequent chapters, I read a pair of Bonaventure's works that were extremely influential for later medieval Christian piety: *The Soul's Journey Into God* (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*) and the *Life of St. Francis* (*Legenda Maior*). I approach these two texts as works that, in Ann Astell's formulation, are mutually interpreting.²³ Thus, I argue in Chapter 4 that the *Itinerarium* charts the intensification of desire through a series of ecstatic transformations culminating in the abandonment of intellect. Likewise, Chapter 5 traces the transforming effects of that desire on and through the body of the saint in the *Legenda*. Just as the Seraphic progression of the *Itinerarium* ends in death, so too does Francis's Seraphic vision render him a living corpse. Through three series of *exempla* (the pliability of the inanimate body, the affection of the animals attracted to Francis, and the vulnerable compassion of the saint), the *Legenda* materializes the dynamics of *affectus* that Bonaventure elaborates more systematically in other genres. These *exempla* graphically illustrate the paradox of affectivity: As the soul is consumed progressively by desire for God, its activity is increasingly conceived in physical terms; spiritual progress is, ultimately, the becoming-body of the soul.

Therefore, as I argue in a brief Conclusion, Bonaventure's stages of ascent chart a transformation of soul into body—that is, into the body of Christ and the body of Francis, no longer possessed of intellect or will. As Bonaventure writes in the seventh chapter of the *Itinerarium*, this transformation is “mystical and most secret.” That is, the natural inclination to the good that Bonaventure locates in *synderesis* and that is transformed into God, cannot *as such* be reduced to a cognition of God. This is clear both in the constitution of *synderesis* as simply innate and affective and in the final transfer of affect that takes place in the complete darkening of the intellect. Yet if the secret of affect cannot be told, *affectus* can be witnessed in the silent, stigmatized body, the *exanime corpus*, which offers no resistance to the movement of desire. The “spiritual martyrdom” of Francis is, paradoxically, the becoming-body of his desire.²⁴ Francis therefore embodies for Bonaventure the perfect example of this natural affective tendency in the soul. For Bonaventure, the ascent of the soul in union with

God is the becoming-body of spiritual desire. This entails not simply the exteriorization of an interior capacity, but the coincidence of absolute interior and absolute exterior that takes place, for essential reasons, beyond knowledge. Finally, I suggest, this same dynamic animates and organizes the devotional program of the extended treatise on Passion meditation that Bonaventure addressed a community of Poor Clares (*On the Perfection of Life Addressed to the Sisters*). Here it becomes evident that the program of meditating on the human sufferings of Christ and cultivating compassion is a mystical itinerary.

Becoming and Embodiment

A reader might well suspect that in this alignment of the middle ages, mysticism, affectivity, and the body, the outline of a familiar and stultifying caricature is taking shape—one that many would recognize as that of Teresa of Avila as depicted by Gian Lorenzo Bernini: passive, eyes closed, doubled over by affective ecstasy. The dichotomy of “speculative” and “affective mysticism” (wherein the latter is characterized by an ecstatic, desirous union with God in which the passive soul is stripped of its intellectual capacities) shaped early twentieth-century studies of mysticism and continues today to influence scholarly and popular conceptions of medieval Christian spirituality.²⁵ Most perniciously, affective mysticism has been associated with femininity, and the writings of medieval religious women such as Hadewijch and Marguerite Porete have far too often been assumed to be the unreflective and unmediated transcriptions of an embodied, affective experience (an unwholesome contrast to the more writerly theological expositions of, for example, Meister Eckhart or Jan Van Ruusbroec). Charlotte Radler’s work on Meister Eckhart has forcefully challenged this dichotomy of speculative and affective mysticism by illuminating the centrality of love to the mystical theology of Eckhart—a theologian who has frequently been characterized as privileging the intellect and ontology over affective experience.²⁶ As Radler points out, characterizations of Eckhart’s theology as rigorously intellectual are bound up with claims to his thoroughgoing Neoplatonism. The speculative-affective binary in studies of medieval mysticism, then, rests on a characterization of medieval Christian Neoplatonism itself as entirely intellectualizing, a characterization this book works to correct by examining the deeply Dionysian influences on Bonaventure’s conception of natural *affectus*.

In examining the affective dimensions of Eckhart’s theology, Radler builds on the work of Bernard McGinn and Amy Hollywood, who, in

demonstrating the influences of beguine women on Eckhart's thought, undermine the caricature of women's spirituality as ecstatic and affective in contrast to the intellectual and speculative mysticism of university-trained male theologians. In the last twenty years, a number of feminist scholars, including Hollywood, have further complicated this caricature, and in the process have deepened and expanded our understanding of the rhetoric of gender and embodiment in medieval texts by both men and women.

In drawing attention to the complex and highly constructed relationships between the body, textuality, authorship, and experience in the writings of medieval religious women, feminist scholars have helped to illuminate the original theological interventions of texts whose disclaimers to any speculative intentions have too often been taken at face value.²⁷ And in the process, these scholars have developed a more complex understanding of the role of the body in mystical texts and devotional practices. Caroline Walker Bynum, whose wide-ranging studies of medieval women's spirituality defined a field, has argued that later medieval women authors were "more apt to somatize" their religious experiences than men.²⁸ However, Hollywood's work on figures such as Marguerite Porete, Angela of Foligno, Beatrice of Nazareth has demonstrated that medieval spiritual writers, female and male, held widely variant and highly complex views about the value and role of the body in devotional practice; thus what it means for religious experience to be somatized is not at all self-evident or straightforward.²⁹

Patricia Dailey echoes Hollywood's claims when she cautions that "we cannot presume to know to what medieval mystical texts refer when they call attention to the body."³⁰ In her book *Promised Bodies*, Dailey compellingly demonstrates that the textual mediation of "bodily experience" in women's visionary and mystical writing is textually mediated not simply by virtue of its being written down; rather, mediation is integral to the complex theological poetics and incarnational hermeneutic the texts advance. Indeed, in the case of the thirteenth-century Flemish beguine Hadewijch, it is integral to experience as such, as it is fashioned in her texts. Therefore, Hadewijch's visions should not be read as reports of experience that has already taken place; rather, they articulate experience—at once textual and affective—as the suffering at, and desire for, the postponement of the full inhabitation of her body.³¹

My reading of Bonaventure affirms and seeks to build on Dailey's contention that embodiment in medieval Christian mystical texts was conceived and written not as a static given nor as an unmediated experience of the flesh, but as what she calls a "transformational process": The body of

the medieval Christian mystic is always, in some sense, futural.³² Dailey's elucidation of the poetics of *lichame* (the perfected or spiritual body) in Hadewijch's visions attests to the presence of the paradoxical "embodiment of the soul" in vernacular mystical texts that I examine in Bonaventure's corpus.³³ Where Dailey traces the development of what she sees as a Pauline and Augustinian thematic of "inner and outer persons," I suggest that for Bonaventure, an Aristotelian physics of natural motion undergirds a Dionysian dynamic of ascent that culminates in the coincidence of inner and outer, soul and body.

Far from recurring to a now dismantled caricature of medieval "affective mysticism," then, my own reading of Bonaventure is deeply indebted to, and seeks to build upon, the work of these scholars in a number of other ways. First, I provide further evidence, if any were needed, that any straightforward association of affective, excessive mystical experience with the feminine in medieval Christian texts is undercut by the complexity of the textual evidence. While Bonaventure wrote to communities of men and women, he did not restrict exhortations to affective devotion to women, nor did he go out of his way to code *ecstasis* or *desiderium* as a literally or figuratively feminine experience in the texts written for friars of his own order. Second, against the stubborn persistence of the dichotomy of affective experience and theological reflection, I demonstrate that the program of affective devotion leading to the death of the soul in union is rooted in a detailed scholastic psychology—though one not without its own internal tensions.

Affective experience was anything but unreflective in medieval mystical texts, a point that becomes abundantly clear when we read Bonaventure's scholastic commentaries alongside his devotional guides such as the *Itinerarium*. The language of *affectus* was a profound theological and rhetorical tool for describing the ineffable union of human and divine. Crucially, I am not claiming, however, that Bonaventure encouraged affective excess itself as a tool to be employed by the rational will, or that affect constituted for Bonaventure an alternative form of knowledge or cognition. On the contrary, *affectus* provides in Bonaventure's texts a means of describing an experience that is beyond description; it represents the unrepresentable, and so, for Bonaventure (the university master no less than the Franciscan hagiographer), *affectus* marks the place, textually, of an impossibility. Affect is thus the mode in which the human being exceeds herself in a union that is unknown to the structures of cognition, including deliberative rational thought, free choice, and speech. Accordingly, the language of affect provides a medium for testifying to that which is, fundamentally and finally,

not an object of cognition. Drawing on terms whose medieval and modern resonances I will elaborate in the course of subsequent chapters, the affective marks for Bonaventure the place of a testimony in secret.

Yet such a place is foreclosed when we rush to assimilate *affectus* to the structures and aims of knowledge. To be sure, Bonaventure does theorize the relationship between *affectus* and *intellectus*, and much of what he writes on the subject traces their interpenetration. As Karnes notes, “affect and intellect are proportionate and interdependent, and the accord between them is well demonstrated by Bonaventure himself.”³⁴ I am not insisting to the contrary on an absolute split between the affective and the intellectual in Bonaventure’s thought. However, I am calling attention to a distinction that Bonaventure himself appears to take very seriously and that forms the basis for his understanding of how the soul acts and is acted upon. I agree with Karnes that “to oppose affect to intellect entire is to distort the sources.”³⁵ But it would also be a distortion to ignore the painstaking analytical effort that Bonaventure put into distinguishing them. Thus, we should not overlook the fact that differentiating affect and intellect was a worthwhile task for medieval Christian authors such as Bonaventure—that the difference, or differences, mattered. Understanding why requires more, not less, attention to the ways in which Bonaventure sought to distinguish them. As Dailey argues, warning against an uncritical association of affectivity with excess, “If affect is merely categorized as excessive and irrational, or a sign of ‘feeling’ without any theological connotation, we in turn become ‘illiterate’: unable to decipher the elaborate theological mechanism at work or to understand the subtle textures invoked in the mystic’s text and life.”³⁶ In many key texts of Bonaventure’s corpus, I will argue, this elaborate theological mechanism functions precisely to dissociate affect from the structures of deliberative rationality—and this dissociation also needs to be understood in order to make affect legible in the texts of medieval devotion.

The Tropics of Affect

While the category of “affective devotion” may be so broad as to risk meaninglessness or redundancy, I nonetheless retain the term in discussing Bonaventure’s writings to underscore the work certain texts do to highlight the affective aspect of the soul and the pedagogical strategies that pertain distinctively to that aspect. Though Bonaventure divides the powers of the soul in various ways, as discussed in this book, the most fundamental distinction he draws is between the soul’s cognitive and affective parts.³⁷

Though not essentially distinct, there are good pedagogical reasons for heeding the difference between them because these two parts represent two different capacities for being moved and for acting—and activating them requires rhetorical and argumentative strategies suited to each. As Bonaventure explains in his *Breviloquium*, or little compendium of theology, the aim of scripture is not to impart speculative knowledge but to bring about an affective inclination in the reader. This is why scripture does not read like a university textbook. Similar to Augustine’s argument in *De trinitate* that the low style of scripture aims to humble the vanity of readers accustomed to the sophisticated literary and philosophical works of the pagans, Bonaventure’s *accessus* to scripture works to demonstrate that the sacred writings fit their style perfectly to their aim, for “the affect (*af-fectus*) is moved more by example than by argument, more by promises than proofs, more through devotions than definitions.”³⁸ If the phrase is redundant, the idea of “affective devotion” indicates what to Bonaventure is a distinct pedagogical strategy: Devotion stands alongside example and promise, orienting a whole spatio-temporality of affective transformation. As Francis’s own *imitatio Christi* illustrates, devotion to the exemplar transforms the devotee into the example—thus likeness is the fulfillment of the promise. Such an orientation casts the spiritual journey itself, then, as the movement of the *affectus* through that time and space.

Ancient and Early Medieval Articulations of Affectus

The concept of *affectus* as the dynamic principle of movement within the soul has deep roots in early Christian thought and in the Latin and Greek rhetorical and philosophical traditions that influenced it. In his study of the roots of the twelfth-century Cistercian concept of *affectus*, Damien Boquet identifies two seemingly opposed but intertwined tendencies in early Christian elaborations of the concept. The first tendency treats *affectus* as a morally neutral term for the dispositions of the soul, something like what Quintilian identifies as the *qualitas mentis* that the rhetor seeks to influence or bring about through his art. At the same time, this sense of *affectus* could be used interchangeably with *amor* to denote in general the soul’s attachment to an object.³⁹ In both cases, the ethical value of *affectus* is indeterminate.

The second tendency in ancient philosophical reflection on *affectus*, which Boquet finds especially in the writings of Cicero and Seneca, is to identify affect with the passions—the potential or actual susceptibility of the soul to the perturbations of grief, joy, fear, or desire. Out of this com-

plex ancient semantic field, Boquet argues, a new Christian conception of *affectus* emerges in the fourth and fifth centuries, one that is neither morally neutral nor seen simply as a problem to overcome. For Lactantius, *affectus* refers to the inclinations that can either cause the soul to err or can lead the soul to the Good. For Ambrose, *affectus* is a natural power of the soul, counterposed and cooperating with reason, which innately tends toward the Good but is accidentally prone to disorder in its fallen state. As a principle of movement in the soul toward good or ill, *affectus* becomes the stage on which the drama of spiritual and moral transformation is enacted. Accordingly, late ancient theologians did not abandon the Stoic theory of the passions so much as they integrated it into a broader affective dynamic. With Augustine, all of the ancient valences of *affectus*—attachment, power, inclination, instinct, passion, perturbation—are drawn up into a scale of movements of the soul, more or less voluntary, but all subsumed under the category of the will. And yet, in linking *affectus* both with the movements of the rational will and with the unruly impulses of the sensitive appetite, Augustine doubly (and confusingly) determines *affectus* as both voluntary and corporeal. As Boquet summarizes, “In elaborating the concept of affect on the ruins of the ancient notion of passion, the Latin fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries imputed both the faintest and the most commanding impulses of the soul to the heart of the will.”⁴⁰ Late ancient theologians thereby imparted to medieval Christianity a comprehensive if somewhat confused conception of *affectus*.

While the narrative Boquet tells of the “emancipation” of medieval affect from its ancient roots may at times be overly linear, his survey helpfully maps the semantic overdetermination of the term and its ambivalences. In early Christian usage, *affectus* may be involuntary or willed, rational or opposed to reason; it sometimes refers exclusively to love or attachment and sometimes to a whole range of affective states; it is both an active force within the soul and an external stimulus to which the soul is passive. These antinomies only become sharper in the later middle ages, and especially in the Cistercian writings of the twelfth century (what Jean Chatillon called the “siècle des *affectus*”).⁴¹ In his study of the spiritual senses, Gordon Rudy remarks on the range of meanings that Bernard of Clairvaux attaches to the term, meanings that resonate in Bonaventure’s writings: *Affectus* “refers most basically to a transforming influence on the order of grace, and also the human capacity or faculty for that influence . . . Bernard usually uses it to refer to our active capacity to desire and love, and our passive capacity to receive love.”⁴² Bernard McGinn points out that Bernard, like Anselm of Canterbury and many ancient authors, makes a distinction between *affectio*

and *affectus*. For Bernard, *affectio* is an active stimulus that produces an effect (i.e. an *affectus*) in a passive recipient of that stimulus. But as McGinn notes, there are sound theological reasons for the confusion between the active and passive senses: “Because the *affectus* given us by God’s prior love is the source of our own various *affectiones*, Bernard, William of St. Thierry, and other Cistercians often used the terms interchangeably.”⁴³ As Michael Casey observes, “Bernard used *affectus* equally for the fundamental dynamic principle within the human being and for the range of emotions and activities in which this underlying reality finds expression.”⁴⁴ Casey suggests that Bernard tended more toward descriptions of affective experience than toward technical accounts of the psychological dynamics of the soul. By contrast, many Cistercian authors devoted treatises to expounding the nature and capacities of the soul. Bernard’s friend William of St. Thierry (d. 1148) wrote one of the several Cistercian treatises entitled *De anima*, and there and in other works, he gives detailed attention to the nature and dynamics of *affectus*. (I discuss one of these treatises, *On the Nature and Dignity of Love*, in Chapter 3.) For William, *affectus* has both human and divine aspects: In human beings it tends toward goodness, while in its divine aspects it is the Holy Spirit working within the soul. The transformation of the soul into the *unitas spiritus* in which the human will is conformed to God’s is, as Thomas Davis notes, *affectus*.⁴⁵ Yet *affectus* can also refer to the virtues or various faculties of the soul, “a movement of piety, or perception, or faith, or hope, or love, or thought, or will, and so on.”⁴⁶

Like the category of affective devotion, then, the medieval concept of *affectus* may seem so elastic, so capable of covering even contradictory psychic and spiritual phenomena, as to stretch beyond meaningfulness or analytical value. For medieval Christian authors, however, the opposite was true. The very ambiguities of the concept pointed to its dynamism and thus placed it at the center of twelfth-century spiritual arts. Between wickedness and beatitude, passion and action, the body and the intellect, *affectus* provided an explanatory mechanism and a practical means for the interior and communal transformations at the heart of twelfth-century religious reforms.

In this way, the semantic overdeterminations of medieval *affectus* witness the equally overdetermined ontology of the concept that the term seeks to represent; but this may suggest the way to approach it as a subject of historical and theological inquiry. In short, there is no simple answer to what affect *is*. Not only will no single model or definition of affect cover all cases, but any single definition will be inadequate to the ambiguities involved in any particular instance of the concept in medieval Christian

literature. Rather than offering a singular definition, then, I instead want to consider what work the discourse of *affectus* performed for medieval authors. What I will suggest is that from the thirteenth-century, for interpreters of Dionysius and authors of meditational treatises (and those who, like Bonaventure, were both), *affectus* provided a means of representing the limits of human agency, cognition, and representation itself. My reading of Bonaventure contends that for medieval devotional and mystical texts, the resistance of affect to definition is constitutive of the rhetorical, theoretical, and theological work that it does.

Modeling Affect in Medieval History

To approach medieval Christian articulations of *affectus* as resistant to definition is to quit the search for an appropriate “model” through which to constitute affect and emotion as objects of historical inquiry. Historians and anthropologists in the past twenty years have sought better models by which to account for emotions not as transhistorical givens but as socially and culturally contingent, learned habits that change over time. William Reddy’s 2001 study, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, offers just such a model—a programmatic statement about how to read expressions of emotion and analyze “emotional regimes” in their historical and cultural specificity.⁴⁷ For Reddy, however, the ability to historicize particular emotional regimes depends on recourse to “universal features” of human emotion. He thus positions his framework as a corrective to what he sees as the excesses of social constructionist explanations of emotion.⁴⁸ “If emotional change is to be something other than random drift, it must result from interaction between our emotional capacities and the unfolding of historical circumstances.”⁴⁹ Those capacities include, according to the anthropological and psychological research that Reddy critically appropriates, the “overlearned cognitive habits” by which individuals coordinate effort toward particular goals.⁵⁰ Crucial for Reddy’s theoretical model is an understanding of emotion as a domain of effort for individuals in any society: the management of emotions is central to the project of the self. Identifying emotions as a project allows Reddy to distinguish mental states and habits from the tools by which one manages those states. Among those tools are what he terms “emotives”—speech acts that are both descriptive and performative. This concept of emotives avoids both a credulous expressionism (wherein textual and cultural traces are read as self-interpreting expressions of interior states) and a flattening constructionism that, in Reddy’s view, surrenders the political ground from which

particular emotional regimes might be evaluated and critiqued. In other words, emotives are linguistic tools that describe emotions even as they produce and shape them.

In Reddy's hands, this framework for reading emotives and chronicling historical change proves to be a powerful and supple tool when employed in his analysis of Revolutionary France. An understanding of emotions as a domain of effort and cultivation would seem similarly well-suited to the study of medieval Christian mysticism, and in particular what Niklaus Largier has called (albeit according to a different theoretical framework) the art of sensory and emotional stimulation developed in medieval devotional literature.⁵¹ Sarah McNamer's study discussed earlier, for example, follows the outlines of Reddy's approach. Compassion in the context of meditation on Christ's passion, McNamer argues, served a very specific social function, providing religious women with a tool for achieving recognition in their vocation. McNamer's intervention is therefore organized around the search for a motive for the cultivation of particular emotional complexes as a corrective to a historiographical naivety that accepts emotional utterances in texts as straightforward expressions of interiority.⁵²

Analysis of the social, rhetorical, and performative dimensions of compassion in medieval texts is helpful insofar as a rigorous theorization of performativity offers a way in which to understand the means by which signs (here including emotions and devotional acts) may circulate without imputing those signs to intentional subjects or to an uncritical notion of rational agency. McNamer's phrase for the affective techniques of late medieval Passion devotion, "intimate scripts," suggests the ways in which religious emotions were both interiorly felt and simultaneously determined by a larger matrix of culture, language, and gender expectations in medieval European society.⁵³

In her 2002 essay "Worrying About Emotions in History," the medievalist historian Barbara Rosenwein extends the cognitive and anthropological approaches on which Reddy draws in order to expose the persistence of what she calls the "hydraulic" model of emotions—a nineteenth-century view of emotions as a kind of undifferentiated substance that must be either released or repressed.⁵⁴ While acknowledging that this model has roots in medieval theories of the humors, she pins the persistence of the hydraulic model in modernity primarily on Freud, as well as on Darwin. In this programmatic essay and in her further research into what she calls "emotional communities" in medieval European culture, Rosenwein works to dismantle the stubborn characterization of the middle ages as an unenlightened

age of unchecked emotion—the prejudice that medieval affect was both purer and more puerile than its modern counterpart.

The work of Reddy, Rosenwein, and others working within the paradigm of the “history of emotions” has initiated a greater critical awareness of the historical specificity of emotion—one that understands affectivity not as a physiological given, but as a contextually specific medium of social politics for the varied performance of gendered, cultural, and religious identifications. Yet in arguing for the historical specificity of particular emotional complexes, the “history of emotions” risks losing sight of the historical variability of the very concepts of “emotion” and “affectivity” themselves. A model that understands emotions as “among the tools with which we manage social life as a whole” has the advantage of analytical flexibility: These tools can function differently in different contexts, and as responses to particular social and historical exigencies.⁵⁵ But the assumption that emotions *are* tools or strategies may be primarily reflective of contemporary concerns about the rational efficacy of emotions, and may thus risk failing to attend to the complex ways that affectivity has been understood and embodied historically in different cultural situations. When a historical emotion is explained by way of concrete motive, the concept of *performativity* as a lens through which to understand the overdetermination and circulation of particular emotional regimes is in danger of collapsing into a simple notion of *performance*, wherein emotions become means of exercising rational agency toward a determinate goal.

Surveying and critiquing recent theoretical efforts to “recuperate” emotion as a valuable means of social and political intervention, Sara Ahmed writes, “Within contemporary culture, emotions may even be represented as good or better than thought, but only insofar as they are re-presented as a form of intelligence, as ‘tools’ that can be used by subjects in the project of life and career enhancement. If good emotions are cultivated, and are worked on and towards, then they remain defined against uncultivated or unruly emotions, which frustrate the formation of the competent self.”⁵⁶ Bringing Ahmed’s point to bear on the historiography of medieval emotion, we might ask if the project of exposing the social and political functions of historical emotions participates (albeit from a very different perspective) in the same framework of “good” and “bad” emotions by which earlier generations of scholarship disparaged the emotionalism of medieval cultures. Rosenwein’s essay roundly rejects the enterprise of sorting out salubrious and destructive emotions in medieval history, and argues against the periodization of Western history on the basis of an emotional

maturation at a societal level. Nevertheless, distinguishing between good and bad models of emotion (wherein the good model is informed by contemporary anthropology and cognitive science) would seem to recapitulate the triumph of modern rationality over medieval emotionalism. Here, a modern *theory* of emotion reveals a truth that medieval understandings of affect obscure. Medieval emotions can accordingly be regarded as “good” only when they are construed as rational, strategic, goal-oriented activity.

Yet, as Thomas Dixon has demonstrated in his history of the concept of emotion, the English-language term is of relatively recent coinage.⁵⁷ It emerged, Dixon argues, in the first half of the nineteenth century and came into widespread use in the second half. For moral philosophers and, later, evolutionary psychologists, the term “emotion” was useful as a properly secular alternative to a wide array of then-current terms such as “passions,” “affections,” “sentiments,” and “appetites”—all of which, Dixon maintains, carried religious and theological baggage that threatened the scientificity of the emerging field of psychology in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, Michel de Certeau traces the exile of the “passions” from social and scientific discourses and their relegation to the literary sphere in the same period.⁵⁸ If this historical genealogy is correct, then using “emotion” as the lens through which to analyze premodern Christian texts in historical terms carries with it a number of disadvantages. In the first place, we flatten a complex and highly developed vocabulary into a single, imprecise term. And second, we run the risk of naturalizing “emotion” as a transhistorical given. As Kurt Danzinger observes with respect to the historical use of psychological categories, “The use of contemporary terms [to analyze premodern texts and practices] strongly suggests that the objects of current psychological discourse are the real, natural objects and that past discourse necessarily referred to the same objects in its own quaint and subscientific way.”⁵⁹ Moreover, taking the category of emotion as the lens through which to examine premodern Christian texts and practices may participate in, or reinscribe, the secularization of affectivity that Dixon traces. As a historiographical lens, emotion would then be a tool for ignoring what is irreducibly religious about religious affects, functioning as what Dipesh Chakrabarty analyzes as the scientific “higher language” that is presumed in every case to mediate historically contingent and culturally specific idioms.⁶⁰

If Dixon is right that the emergence of the category of emotion represented a secularizing strategy of the nineteenth century, then it is perhaps especially ill-suited as an analytical category for the project of understanding medieval religiosity—or for understanding the theological genealogies

of secular scientific concepts. Late medieval Christian writers may have had nothing to say about “emotion” as such, but they wrote and reflected at length on “affectus”—a complex term with deep psychological, physical, and theological resonances that still sound in contemporary invocations and experiences of affect and emotion alike.

In its efforts to rehabilitate affectivity from the judgment of irrationality, the study of medieval emotion has disregarded an aspect of how affectivity has been conceived in most periods of Western thought—one that is often considered painfully obvious. For from the standpoint of medieval writers, no less than in the routine confessions of contemporary clichés (the now-inert distillations of centuries of experience and reflection), affections such as love and fear are what move us—they push and pull us to act, make us cling to what we love and flee from what we fear. Affection is a word that describes the way things are affected—not just the way we touch others but also the ways we are touched, acted, and impinged upon. To undertake the historiography of medieval affectivity from the assumption that emotions are only tools for managing individual, collective, and political life is not merely anachronistic; it misses what makes the affective so unsettling and so potent for medieval Christian practice and theological reflection on that practice.

Representing Affect

The perceived need to attend to the “more” of affect—affect as autotelic excess, non-conscious force, and asignifying intensity—has animated a number of philosophers and cultural and literary theorists over the past twenty years, often under the (suspiciously singular) banner of what is generally termed “affect theory.” Writers taking up the mantle of affect theory position themselves variously as participating in a departure from several late-twentieth-century intellectual occupations: the arrest of play in structuralist analyses, the fixed and reductive narratives of psychoanalytic theory, the exhaustion of the humanities in the critique of ideology, and the supposed oblivion of materiality in poststructuralist critiques within which everything collapses into discourse.

In the two sprawling volumes of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari seek to redeploy the Spinozist concept of affect as an increase or decrease in a body’s capacity for action (or passion). Spinoza defines affect, at once corporeal and ideational, as that which is always determining anew (without closing) the question of what a body can do. For Brian Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari’s English

translator), attending to and reanimating this corporeal and dynamic concept of affect for cultural and literary studies means keeping it rigorously distinct (at least analytically) from the concept of emotion. If affect is a non-subjective, pre-personal intensity, by contrast, “an emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal.”⁶¹ Thus emotion is the qualification of—that is, the subjective appropriation of and assigning of signification to—intensity. As Massumi puts it, emotion is “intensity owned and recognized.”⁶² This distinction between affect and emotion is both real and analytical for Massumi, insofar as distinguishing the terms allows him to account more precisely for the emergence of emotion from that which always exceeds and escapes it.

In this way, for Massumi and the many theorists influenced by him, affect comes to mark the place of the immanent other of consciousness, cognition, and volition. As Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg define it, “affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.”⁶³ In light of such declarations, it is not surprising that critics (most notably, Ruth Leys) have charged affect theory with depending on a crude dualism that pits cognition, signification, and language against affect, intensity, and viscosity—and that champions the latter set as somehow in itself politically and ethically salutary.⁶⁴ Such a move, it has been argued, reifies a disembodied notion of cognition and results, ironically, in a static and homogenous view of affect.

More recently, Eugenie Brinkema, while embracing “the passions of affect studies,” criticizes the tendency of affect theory to flatten the varied and particular ways affects function at a formal level in film and texts, reducing this diversity to nothing more than a “vague, shuddering intensity.”⁶⁵

There is a formula for work on affect, and it turns on a set of shared terms: speed, violence, agitation, pressures, forces, intensities. In other words, and against much of the spirit of Deleuze’s philosophy, which celebrated the minor, the changeable, and the multiple, Deleuzian theories of affect offer all repetition with no difference. When affect is taken as a synonym for violence or force (or intensity or sensation), one

can only speak of its most abstract agitations instead of any particular textual workings.⁶⁶

Responding to an anti-formalism in film theory that has styled itself as a “turn” to affect, Brinkema offers the sustained and persuasive rejoinder that turning to affect need not (and should not) mean turning away from careful attention to form. Her intervention extends itself beyond film studies to other fields within the humanities. At the outset, she poses a series of rhetorical questions: “Insofar as affect has been positioned as what resists systematicity and structure, has it in fact been able to recover notions of contingency, possibility, and play? Has the turning toward affect in the theoretical humanities engendered a more complex understanding of texts? Have accounts of affects produced more nuanced, delightful interpretations of forms in texts—and have they recovered the dimension of being *surprised* by representation?”⁶⁷

The presumptive answer to each of these questions is no. Or, at least, not yet, as the rest of the book makes the case for (and productively employs) practices of close reading and formal analysis to nuance and inform theories of affect. The work of attending to specific affective forms, to accounting for the various permutations of particular affects and emotions, is no doubt ongoing, and we should expect it to be inexhaustible. In analyzing affects as something other than expressions of subjective interiority, Brinkema carries on the work that Massumi and others sought to initiate by way of positing a distinction between affect and emotion. However, her project also self-avowedly breaks with Massumi’s, insofar as the latter remains dependent on a visceral embodied subject capable of registering affective intensities, whereas Brinkema seeks to attend to affects as themselves representational forms.

As in Leys’s critique, then, for Brinkema, affect theory is errant insofar as it turns on an absolute separation of affect from signification, one that renders the theory incapable of providing textured accounts of particular affects. And indeed it is difficult to understand what Massumi’s “asignifying philosophy of affect” would mean (presumably, it would mean nothing, or would prefer not to mean).⁶⁸ At the very least, there is surely a tension in the point at which Massumi, on a single page, both declares that “intensity is the unassimilable” and advises that “much could be gained by integrating the dimension of intensity into cultural theory.”⁶⁹ Yet, while the integration of the unassimilable would seem to be a definitionally impossible task, the challenge has been taken up, more or less explicitly, by literary

and cultural theorists such as Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart—to take two of the most luminous examples.⁷⁰ In these works, affect theory becomes an occasion not for flights of theoretical fancy but for developing new modes of observation and description. For example, Stewart describes her “ficto-critical” experiment as an attempt “to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us. My effort here is not to finally ‘know’ them—to collect them into a good enough story of what’s going on—but *to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form*; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate.”⁷¹ Stewart’s book is a proleptic “yes” to Brinkema’s questions as to the creative efficacy of affect theory. As if responding to Massumi’s call for a “cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect,”⁷² Stewart seeks a new form of analysis for that which resists analysis. The wager is that the move to distinguish affect from signification might be generative of new forms of signification proper to affect. And as Stewart’s textured and surprising vignettes demonstrate, if shifts in affective intensity are somehow unknowable per se, they nevertheless form part of the structure of everyday perception and action and thus may yield to properly attuned observation and description. The integration of affect into literary, cultural, and anthropological analysis begins with the recognition of a something that resists assimilation to knowledge even as that “something” is a condition of possibility for knowledge.

Likewise, a tactical distinction between affect and emotion, such as that which Massumi draws, may help to enrich explorations into the medieval representations of emotions by calling attention to the rhetorical dynamics of affect that are missed when one’s analysis focuses narrowly on particular emotion-words or emotional presentations in medieval texts. And this is all the more the case when the concept of “emotion” in view assumes the unity of the cognizing and volitional self that mystical texts aim to disrupt and transform. Yet defining affect against emotion risks reforging the link between the latter term and subjectivity that the theorization of affect works to unseat. Rei Terada critiques modern instances of the assumption that emotion “requires”—i.e., can only be understood as a function of—the self-presence of conscious intentionality. Like Brinkema, Terada works to develop, through close readings of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, a theory of affectivity as a textual effect rather than as an expression of a subject. Though Terada takes up the term “emotion,” she seeks to redraw its semantic scope in relation to its other, affect (or feeling). Not-

ing the emphasis on the ideational and judicative functions of emotion in Anglo-American philosophy since 1950, Terada shows how the distinction between affect (the empirically observable, nonconscious effects of a stimulus in or on a body) and emotion (the intentional articulations of a subject) is in many ways a transposition of Edmund Husserl's distinction between indicative and expressive signs. Where indication is only an external mark or a trace—a pawprint in the sand, a scar on flesh—an expression is a meaningful, volitional utterance of an idea formed and intended in the interior nonspace of a self-present subject. As Terada notes, though Husserl does not develop a “theory of emotion” as such, “emotions appear to be exemplary inner contents” because theories of emotion have long relied on a concept of expression, “with the result that emotions have had to become ‘cognitive’ in order to fit those theories.”⁷³ Terada thus extends Derrida's reading of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* to offer her own critique of expressive theories of emotion. In Derrida's reading of Husserl, soliloquy—the inner voice representing itself addressing itself—is the fable that embodies the reality of self-presence: The *experience* of subjective interiority is an effect of the non-identity of the self to itself. Feeling (or emotion) is possible only because of the impossibility of immediate self-presence: “Emotion demands virtual self-difference—an extra ‘you.’”⁷⁴ As an effect of representation, emotion can therefore never be simply an object of representation. Through a reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau (too intricate to retrace here), Terada develops a conception of emotion as “the difference between subjective ideality and the external world, appearing within experience.”⁷⁵ Emotion is never just a mark, not simply or fully a corporeal effect; in Husserlian terms, emotion is no more an indication than it is an expression. Terada thus rejects the dichotomy between affect (as external, nonconscious, corporeal trace) and emotion (as intentional, ideational content) in favor of an understanding of affective experience as difference. Terada's term for this Derridean account of emotion is “textuality”—the representation of emotion by “traces in a differential network.”⁷⁶

While Terada goes on to critique Deleuze's account of affect as dispensing altogether with experience, her reading of Derridean emotion-as-textuality has affinities with aspects of Massumi and Stewart—insofar as affect functions not so much as the proper name of an ineffable, visceral quantum, but rather to describe the play of differences between representation and its object, marking the inadequacy of representation. Yet where the post-Deleuzian celebration of affect as nonconscious intensity risks leaving intact the subjective concept of emotion (emotion as “intensity

owned and recognized,” to recur to Massumi’s formulation), Terada’s Derridean reading offers an alternative to the depth model in which affect is the corporeal substrate of a personal, subjective experience (emotion).

I contend that such an account of affective experience—one that does not assume a unified, self-transparent subject—is a useful interpretive idiom through which to approach the seemingly paradoxical experience of dispossession that medieval mystical texts describe. The analyses of the following chapters draw on this idiom to offer an interpretation of Bonaventure’s place within the history of Christian mysticism. The school of mystical theology associated with Bonaventure has sometimes been seen as an attempt to domesticate the radicality of Dionysian *apophasis* by reintroducing knowledge, under a different name, into the darkness of union. This book advances a different view: *affectus* for Bonaventure structures a rhetorical strategy of unsaying that marks the place of an immanent excess in language and thereby attempts to account for human beings’ capacity to experience an unknowable God.