

- 3 Gavin Butt, *Between You And Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 116–18.
- 4 One such work of this kind is Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

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Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Absentees: On Variously Missing Persons*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2021, 320 pages, hardback, ISBN 9781942130475, £28.00.

Archie Squire

In the age of indelible digital traces, the case of the ‘absentee’ may appear at once faded and extraordinarily vivid. ‘Regrammed’ appeals for missing persons; divisive ‘cancel’ cultures; and respects paid to deceased influencers via their final social media posts: each of these virtual phenomena reproduces distinct ‘nonpersons’ of the kinds set forth by Princeton Comparative Literature Professor Daniel Heller-Roazen in his most recent book, *Absentees*. By way of three typologies, Heller-Roazen explores literary figurations of the absent(ed) or missing. His examples range from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) to Franz Kafka’s unpublished texts. He also attends with admirable precision to legal, social, ritual and theological practices, and in so doing opens his work to the possibility of

other overlapping spheres, not least that of art history.

As the preface to *Absentees* makes clear, Heller-Roazen is interested in the ‘nonperson’ not as the negation or contrary of the person, but rather in the same sense as the nonstarter is still a starter, or the nonentity an entity. ‘This “nonperson” names the depletion of the notion to which it is bound,’ he writes.¹ The prefix *non-* reads perhaps as ‘nevertheless’. The nonperson thus remains a person, only one for whom the very status of personhood does not remain fully intact or wholly concrete. For Heller-Roazen, the nonperson is also manifold: nonpersons possess many forms and make themselves known and/or unknown through a multiplicity of apparitions both positive and negative.

In ‘Part One: Vanishings,’ Heller-Roazen navigates the undulating terrain of civil law and its wide-ranging treatment of vanished persons, troubled always by the doubt, in the words of the Roman jurists, of ‘where [s]he is and whether [s]he is’ [*ubi sit et an sit*]. He demonstrates that across cultures and millennia, the law has sought to stipulate the abstract continuation of personhood for designated periods and under specific conditions, despite the lack of a present body.

‘Part Two: Lessenings,’ is concerned with an apparently opposite configuration. Contrary to the space carved out to protect and hold the place of the disappeared, Heller-Roazen highlights the civil diminishment of present persons – their recreation as nonpersons, as variously ‘cancelled’. Departing from the Roman term *capitis deminutio* [‘decrease of the head’], which delimited (non)persons whose statuses were lessened, their citizenship reduced, or liberty altogether extinguished, Heller-Roazen

alludes to an idea of disablement recurrent throughout human history that he suggests, ‘may be less the exception than the rule’.²

In ‘Part Three: Survivals,’ Heller-Roazen grapples with the liminality of death and its residues. ‘A human cadaver is neither a person nor *not* a person,’ he notes with a casualness that belies the conceptual density of this statement.³ Such an ontological aporia gives way, he shows, to stories of apparitions and anatomical possessions, among them Henry James’s ‘The Jolly Corner’ (1908) and Jean Gobi’s fourteenth-century *Treatise on the Ghost of Gui*. Each example lends historical precedence to the Instagram profile that lingers on between the moments of mortal and digital death, between life’s passing and its administrative termination.

If *Absentees* closes on a spectral high, it does so not only on account of its final chapters, but also because three further ghosts increasingly haunt Heller-Roazen’s writing. The first is that of persons of colour, who are astonishingly absent despite the countless and systematic assaults on their personhoods across the ages and up to the present. That Heller-Roazen makes no mention of racialised histories invokes a second meta-poltergeist in the reciprocal spectrality of whiteness itself: as María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren observe, ‘the normative position (of masculinity, heterosexuality, whiteness) is ghostly in that it remains un(re)marked, transparent in its self-evidentiality’.⁴ While the conspicuous non-attendance of racial politics is an oversight, the lack of any overarching critique of nonpersonhood is both deliberate and effective. Indeed, *Absentees* is not a political project but an anthology of absence. In bypassing judgement, Heller-Roazen proffers his three categories of nonpersons as a triadic framework untethered

to any one discipline and undefined by a primary thesis. He is not the claimant of so-called absentees; instead, he appeals to other scholars to trial the applicability of the subtitled ‘variously missing’ as preliminary and provisional elements of a critical quasi-model.

Taking up this invitation, I urge that we recognise the rule of absenteeism in art history. Consider the vanishing of conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader in 1975; photographer Taryn Simon’s eighteen-part project, *A Living Man Declared Dead* (2008–2011); or the stony pallor of Bunny Rogers’s CGI cadav/atars. Recall the frequent non-naming of Black subjects who flank named White counterparts, or the subsumption of ancillary hands under the ‘workshop’. The third such ghost of *Absentees* is that of art history. While Heller-Roazen focuses in his fourth chapter on select painted and sculpted likenesses of absentees – the *kolossoi* of Greek antiquity and the *pittura infamanti* of medieval Italy – the broader histories of art suffuse every page of his book, delivering the definite images to which literature has always appealed. Not only does art figure on the peripheries of Heller-Roazen’s other theoretical writings and in his collaborations with, among others, the painter R. H. Quaytman, but its genealogies are entwined in narratives, spectral accounts, and the nonpersonhoods of its protagonists and makers.

In laying the groundwork for an extensive reconsideration of the personhood of nonpersons, *Absentees* opens onto art history just as it bleeds into matters of virtuality, or presents the opportunity of its lacunae to ethnic and racial studies. With a lucidity that borders fittingly on the juridical, Heller-Roazen’s book shows that if the absentee is truly the rule, then law and literature are but

two possible avenues for the interrogation of absenteeism and its subjects. The universal language of art poses a third way: the afterimage not only of fabled nonpersons, but also of *Absentees*.

- 1 Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Absentees: On Variously Missing Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 9.
- 2 Heller-Roazen, *Absentees*, 81.
- 3 Heller-Roazen, *Absentees*, 159.
- 4 María del Pilar Blanco, Esther Peeren (eds.), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 310.

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Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, *Clothing the New World Church: Liturgical Textiles of Spanish America, 1520–1820*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2021, 408 pages, hardback, ISBN 9780268108052, \$50.00.

Daen Palma Huse

Maya Stanfield-Mazzi's *Clothing the New World Church: Liturgical Textiles of Spanish America, 1520–1820* is the first broad survey to highlight several essential threads in the social and material history of textile production and usage within the context of the Catholic Church in Spanish America. The publication examines these textiles against the backdrop of Spanish colonial rule and expanding international trade networks. The investigation begins with a

consideration of the various textiles depicted in the seventeenth-century painting *Mass for the Dead and Souls in Purgatory* from the Church of San Pablo de Cacha, Cusco, Peru. Members of the clergy or religious statuary are dressed in cloth (a common practice throughout the colonial era in Spanish America) as well as furniture, altars and walls. Stanfield-Mazzi contends that cloth 'was the single most important material and visual feature of Catholic church interiors in Spanish America' and successfully supports this claim with wide-ranging examples of church textiles' dominant role in colonial interiors.¹ The book's chapters are organised by textile type: woven silk, embroidery, featherwork, tapestry, and painted cotton and lace. Its taxonomic framework is non-hierarchical, placing pieces that are not always categorised as 'fine art' within dominant Western frameworks amongst those more traditionally considered as such. The text's strength lies in its detailed descriptions of textile terminology accompanied by lucid illustrations that exemplify each textile type at a macro-level.

Importantly, *Clothing the New World Church* draws attention to the underlying fact that the manufacture and maintenance of these cloths was a collaborative project shared between Spanish colonisers and diverse groups of Indigenous people across former Spanish colonial territories. Spanish imperial expansion resulted in multifaceted influences on textile design, its material production and its agents. Stanfield-Mazzi expands this history first discussed in her article 'Weaving and Tailoring the Andean Church: Textile Ornaments and Their Makers in Colonial Peru' (2015), which stresses the previously undervalued role of Indigenous people as mediators between regional ancestral