

SENSUAL BODIES AND DEVOTIONAL ENCOUNTERS:
THE INFLUENCE OF PERFORMANCE ON LAY VISUAL PIETY IN
LATE MEDIEVAL YORK

by

JILL STEVENSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Pamela Sheingorn

In this dissertation I assert that religious performance influenced late medieval visual culture by offering laypeople opportunities for embodied spectatorship. In the first chapter I use records of public performances in medieval York and that city's Corpus Christi cycle text to argue that York's religious performance tradition encouraged laypeople in a particular form of devotional seeing that not only instructed them in sacred viewing practices, but that also situated the lay body as a central element in popular visual piety. In the second chapter I employ phenomenology and medieval visual theory to examine various moments in the York cycle when the encounter between the actor's and the spectator's live bodies may have generated meaning for the audience beyond the text. I analyze the anti-theatrical discourse in the Middle Ages and argue that it was the material, bodied encounter between actor and spectator that generated medieval anxiety about performance. I suggest that the performance viewing experience may have constituted a form of lay literacy that I ultimately label "performance literacy."

In my final chapter I use performance literacy to explore other devotional practices, contexts, and objects, in order to identify instances in which laypeople either *perceived through* performance or constructed situations in ways that provoked others to *perceive through* performance. I first examine how laypeople may have evoked performance literacy through their funeral arrangements. I then explore the parish church as a material space that encouraged laypeople to see with their bodies and that afforded them ways to prompt others do to the same. In this section, I also analyze late medieval discourse about devotional images and show how texts about images convey an emphasis on materiality that parallels what I identified in anti-theatrical writing from the same period. Finally, I examine the domestic space and different material objects of devotion that laypeople employed in that space. In situations when a material devotional experience may have prompted the lay person to see *by means of* performance, I do not simply detect performativity, but I also identify certain practices of visual piety as extensions of performance.

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Introduction

Ways of Seeing: Visual Culture, Performance Theory, and Visual Piety

As Marvin Carlson writes

The term ‘performance’ has become extremely popular...and as its usage has grown so has a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyze and understand just what sort of human activity it is.¹

Pivotal work of the last three decades has challenged traditional definitions of “theatre” and effectively inserted notions of “performance” and “performativity” into mainstream scholarship.² One result of this shift in theatre studies is what Carlson identifies as a new emphasis on “physical activity and embodiment rather than the presentation of a literary text.”³ A great amount of work on contemporary performance has focused attention on the body of the performer and the relationships constructed between that body and the theatrical space, dramatic text, and spectator’s body. But performance theory also helps us make claims about bodies located in the past and, particularly, about how the materiality of those bodies influenced the reception of performance events. Recent scholarship in medieval studies has effectively expanded discussions about medieval theatre beyond texts and has specifically tried to identify the cultural products constructed by performance. Such scholars as Kathleen Ashley, Theresa Coletti, Sarah Beckwith, and

¹Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

² For recent work that contextualizes performance theory and performance studies within academic discourse, see Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³ Carlson, *Performance*, 83.

Claire Sponsler have successfully applied contemporary theory to medieval performance in order to engage medieval bodies.⁴

Yet, these scholars have primarily explored how the bodies of actors contribute to the creation of meaning in performance, while largely ignoring ways in which the spectator's body participates in this process. Like the actor's body, the spectator's body brings with it to performance the potential to contribute value to the theatrical event. During religious theatre, this body can function as a site where theology is generated and subsequently practiced. This occurs through both the spectator's physical and her visual involvement. This dissertation includes the spectator's body in scholarly discourse by considering how performance in the medieval city of York may have shaped popular visual piety, what art historian David Morgan defines as "the visual formation and practice of religious belief."⁵ Visual practice is a central element of my research because I consider not only performance images, but also the ways in which performance itself encouraged a "way of seeing"⁶ among York's medieval laity. Not only do I analyze both dramatic texts and performance events, but, unlike previous scholars, I use performance theory to analyze the live, embodied nature of medieval theatre.

I examine public performance in late fourteenth- to mid-sixteenth-century York, focusing primarily on the York Corpus Christi cycle, but also considering other examples

⁴ Kathleen Ashley, "Sponsorship, Reflexivity and Resistance: Cultural Readings of the York Cycle Plays," in *The Performance of Middle English Cultures: Essays on Chaucer and Drama in Honor of Martin Stevens*, eds. James J. Paxson, Lawrence M. Clopper, and Sylvia Tomasch (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998); Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of the Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and, Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁵ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

⁶ Robert Scribner describes piety as a "way of seeing." See "Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late Medieval and Reformation Germany," *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): 448-69.

of lay theatrical production in York, including the Creed and Pater Noster plays (for which records but no texts are extant), as well as royal entries and other civic ritual performances (for which detailed records and some texts survive).⁷ Records reveal that public performance in medieval York was not only a medium described and experienced in terms of vision, but that it also offered medieval laypeople a unique “way of seeing” that engaged spectators through their bodies and operated as a powerful agent of visual piety. This viewing experience did not end with the performance, but was retained within the spectator’s material body as a cultural product that laypeople could continue to use and manipulate for other, often unregulated or unsupervised, purposes. I situate the spectator’s viewing body alongside the actor’s body as an equally important component of theatrical function, and I argue that unless we incorporate that body into our studies of medieval drama we are missing an essential element of performance.

Performance in Visual Culture

Medieval theatre, like many other performance traditions, was a process of image-making and image-viewing. Although it is often analyzed as text, the most compelling and memorable moments of its performance were frequently those witnessed through the eye.⁸ In both its dialogue and spectacle, medieval drama, not only in York but throughout late medieval Europe, emphasized spectatorship. Seth Lerer identifies in medieval drama

⁷ Gordon Kipling has written much of the recent work on medieval royal entries in England. For specific information on York’s royal entries see *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 134-9. In my discussion of civic rituals, I specifically analyze York’s Corpus Christi processions. For general information on the development of Corpus Christi processions and drama in the Middle Ages, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 213-87.

⁸ Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby offer a collection of references to staging in *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documentation in English Translation* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982). Much of the material they include refers to visual elements in performance.

“a growing self-consciousness about the theatricality of theater.”⁹ For instance, he concludes that the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* “with its elaborate stage directions for the bleeding of the Host, the severing and restoration of the Jew’s hand, the appearance of the *imago Christi* on the side of an oven, and the bursting of that oven to reveal Christ’s body itself—is as much a play about the pleasures and horrors of the vision of the mutilated corpus as it is a play that enacts and represents those phenomena.”¹⁰ The extant production record for the Gréban-Michel *Passion*, performed at Mons from July 5 to 12, 1501, documents extraordinary visual effects, such as mechanisms that caused blood to pour from Christ’s wounds, a spectacular set for Hell, and special effects such as fire-throwing machines.¹¹ In York, civic records reveal similar attention paid to the visual details of performance events. In the later Middle Ages, dramatic images were not only constructed to excite audiences, but they were also operating in a culture that had sophisticated ways of managing the visual.

For the last decade, studies in medieval visual culture have stressed the unique position of vision and visual theory in the later Middle Ages and the many ways in which laypeople engaged the world through visual means. Medieval communities recognized performance as an element of their visual culture. Theodore K. Lerud demonstrates that medieval treatises on art and drama, such as the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* and *Dives*

⁹ Seth Lerer, “‘Representyd now in yower syght’: The Culture of Spectatorship in Late Fifteenth Century England,” in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, eds. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹ *Le livre de conduite du régisseur et le compte des dépenses pour le Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons en 1501 (The Director’s Handbook and the Expense Record for the Mystery of the Passion Performed at Mons in 1501)*, ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris: Champion, 1925).

and Pauper, place “plays firmly in the same phenomenological realm as images.”¹² And Pamela Sheingorn argues that theatre scholars can use the same principles of composition to explore medieval drama that art historians employ to study medieval art.¹³ I have therefore found it useful to employ a visual culture approach in order to analyze the unique performance-viewing experience that medieval drama constructed. I use Jeffrey Hamburger’s definition of visual culture as a method that “insist[s] on the historicity of visual experience—what has since come to be called ‘visuality’—and the degree to which what and how we see depends on complex, deeply ingrained protocols, some unconscious, some carefully controlled, still others self-consciously cultivated.”¹⁴ Based on evidence of people’s experiences with images, Hamburger argues that images served functions distinct from those of texts and elicited a range of responses. Visual culture considers images of different media, genre, and subject, and attempts to uncover how these images work in combination to shape our perceptions of and attitudes toward the world. As a category of analysis, visual culture is also useful because it includes popular art, the category into which I place medieval vernacular performance and many of the art objects and literary examples I draw upon. It is relevant to this project because it grapples with questions surrounding reception, especially the differences in viewing experiences among different communities. In his consideration of fourteenth- to early sixteenth-century texts that discuss works of northern European medieval art, James H. Marrow concludes that these texts “show a minimal concern with *what* the art represents; their

¹²Theodore K. Lerud, “Quick Images: Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama,” in *Moving Subjects: Procession Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskén (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 224.

¹³Pamela Sheingorn, “The Visual Language of Drama: Principles of Composition,” in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldeway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 173-91.

¹⁴ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 28.

focus, instead, is overwhelmingly on how the art is to be used and experienced.”¹⁵

Images might be expected to elicit certain emotional responses, implicate the beholder in the image’s fictive world, or stimulate states of spiritual consciousness. These responses are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Marrow argues that late medieval artistic invention and consciousness in northern Europe “were focused above all upon problems of *how art works*,” and specifically upon the issue of how art “structures experience and interpretation.”¹⁶ Visual culture theory recognizes that most works of art were created to be used, not simply admired, and therefore it considers the functions of images.

Medieval performance images emerged from a cultural context that produced many different kinds of visual material for the laity. These images not only reflected lay devotion’s prominent themes, but they also functioned as tools within lay piety. Writing about popular religious imagery in general, Morgan notes that “an examination of how images are used by the devout shows that the image is part of a larger cultural literacy, one that includes pointing, verbal narration, oral traditions, singing, and pious devotion. Devotional images, in other words, participate in a visual piety that encompasses a range of interacting, interdependent forms of meaning-making.”¹⁷ Religious performance in medieval York functioned within this kind of context alongside other popular images. Although most scholars studying medieval visual culture have ignored theatre’s contribution to devotional seeing, scholars of medieval drama who have engaged its visual aspects have effectively shown that this genre was firmly embedded within lay devotional culture. Gail McMurray Gibson’s *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama*

¹⁵ James H. Marrow, “Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance,” *Simiolus* 16 (1986): 152.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 24.

and Society in the Late Middle Ages and Victor I. Scherb's *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* offer two excellent examples of this kind of work.¹⁸

Gibson's ground-breaking book explores East Anglian drama through its cultural and devotional context, identifying images, ideas, and preoccupations that influenced its creation. She understands drama as responding to the devotional preoccupations of the later Middle Ages and begins her study by outlining late medieval East Anglian religious culture, identifying in this culture an "incarnational aesthetic" to which drama contributed. She describes her work as "an effort to reconstruct an accurate overview of fifteenth-century English religious culture—and then the way that East Anglian poets, playwrights, patrons, and especially the East Anglian people, fit with that context."¹⁹

Scherb examines how drama was a product of the local East Anglian milieu and considers both the social and the devotional goals of these plays. He also argues for a visual approach to the plays, noting that "the use of blessings, prayers, and sacred hymns all played their part in making these East Anglian plays devotion. But if these dramas, both parochial and professional, were performed as worship, it was chiefly because that drama was seen as analogous to the painting or sculpture of religious and moral subjects. The two mediums, artistic and dramatic, were mimetic and hence essentially similar."²⁰

In addition to dramatic texts, Scherb also explores the different staging practices active in East Anglia. He argues that plays, like other forms of visual art, provided solutions to the problems of the world through devotional images. Both Gibson and Scherb situate medieval plays within the East Anglian culture of devotion, but they do not interrogate

¹⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 1-2.

²⁰ Scherb, *Staging Faith*, 43-4.

performance as a devotional experience involving image-making and image-viewing.

Like these scholars, I examine York's medieval performance as operating within a local, devotional context, but I also combine visual culture theory with theatrical theory in order to identify the unique ways in which performance influenced devotional seeing.

Although I employ theory to unpack the performance event, I recognize the danger involved in drawing conclusions about the relationships among medieval texts, the images constructed in their performances, and the interpretation and reception of those images by spectators. The state of medieval records, coupled with our own cultural and temporal distance, leaves many scholars wary of such conjecture. Pamela M. King writes,

The student of medieval theatre does well to proceed with caution in speculating on or theorizing about the relationship between medieval plays and their audiences. We can read the text of a dramatic action, and reconstruct plausible versions of that action, and we can even intellectually construct what the original audience decoded from what it saw and heard on the occasion of an individual performance, but dramatic action is metonymic in that its enacted speech stands for a part of a whole experience, and different audiences will always form discrete interpretative communities participating in different and ephemeral whole experiences.²¹

Yet, King also concludes that a degree of speculation is necessary if we are to understand the "cultural complexities" of medieval drama and bring these texts to life. Such informed speculation requires us to consider the different modes of reception practiced in the Middle Ages in relation to dramatic texts. For instance, we must acknowledge that some medieval drama manuscripts may have been experienced primarily as text. Specifically, scholars have argued that the N-town manuscript was compiled for a reader

²¹ Pamela M. King, "Seeing and Hearing; Looking and Listening," *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 155.

and that it reflects the East Anglian devotional literature tradition. Martin Stevens describes this manuscript as “product rather than process” and analyzes its structure as that of “a literary text.”²² He concludes that the group of plays in this manuscript was likely never performed as a whole and that “we must entertain the possibility that if it was not aimed to serve as a script for a production it at least was designed to be read thematically and structurally as a dramatized life of Jesus within the yet larger framework of salvation history.”²³ Darwin Smith makes similar conclusions in his work on *Pierre Pathelin*.²⁴ Smith discusses a medieval copy of this play that is located in a collection of texts intended for meditation. He concludes that in this instance *Pierre* was not engaged as a performance text, per se, but instead as a work meant to inspire meditation on the vice of Pride. But, despite these examples, the majority of laypeople would have engaged massive religious dramas, such as the York Corpus Christi Cycle or Arnoul Gréban’s four-day *Mystère de la Passion*, as live, performance events. This does not mean these events had no relation to text—their connection to familiar sacred texts is precisely what enabled their images to achieve devotional status—but the images themselves did not exist as naïve reflections of text. As David Morgan asserts, a popular religious image is not “a neutral or a blank slate, an unresistant medium that receives whatever believers wish to see limned there.”²⁵ The meaning invested in images is located not only in their content, but also in the ways they were materially offered to and used by viewers. Public performances accomplished cultural and spiritual work for medieval laypeople, not only

²² Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 184; 191.

²³ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁴ Darwin Smith, *Maistre Pierre Pathelin-Le Miroir d’Orgueil* (Saint-Benoît-du-Sault: Tarabuste Editions, 2002).

²⁵ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 122.

by constructing devotional images, but also by introducing spectators to a unique type of devotional seeing. Hamburger notes that, “In the Middle Ages, there was not one dominant discourse of vision; there were many.”²⁶ I argue that public performance was a discourse of vision that has been relatively neglected in studies of medieval visual culture. Its production and reception must be examined if we are to understand the density of performance and the unique functions it served for medieval lay audiences.

Performance and Visual Piety

Visual piety is an active process informed by “the set of practices, attitudes, and ideas invested in images that structure the experience of the sacred.”²⁷ In general, the later Middle Ages witnessed an increased emphasis on seeing and identification through vision. Sumptuary laws, spectacles of punishment, and the wearing of livery are all evidence that late medieval laypeople understood and ordered many aspects of their world through visual signifiers. In addition, Eamon Duffy describes late medieval Christian piety as “a Christianity rooted in the concrete, nourished by the sight of images and the touch of relics and of ‘sacramentals’ (sacred objects and ceremonies) like holy water, focused on the Passion of Christ and the intercession of the saints – above all the Virgin Mary.”²⁸ Duffy suggests that the “integration of personal devotional gesture” into the liturgy of this period, gesture that often involved objects such as Books of Hours or

²⁶ Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 28.

²⁷ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 1; 2-3.

²⁸ Eamon Duffy, “Late Medieval Religion,” in *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547*, eds. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 57.

rosaries, reflected this concreteness.²⁹ An Italian visiting England in 1497 commented upon the centrality of these activities to lay piety:

Although they all attend mass every day, and say many Paternosters in public, the women carrying long rosaries in their hands, and any who can read taking the office of our Lady with them and with some companion reciting it in the church verse by verse in a low voice after the manner of churchmen, they always hear mass on Sunday in their parish church.³⁰

Lay devotional practices were, by their nature, materially invested activities. Images and objects gave sanctity a degree of mobility, such as when laypeople brought the candles from Candlemas services into their homes. Vivid mental images were equally important to lay piety. As Duffy notes, during the later Middle Ages laypeople were often encouraged to participate in the liturgy through “vivid picturing of the events of Christ’s life and death.”³¹ Texts such as the *Lay Folk’s Mass Book* helped laypeople structure their faith by uniting words and images, and engaging them as part of physical rituals.

Yet, as Beth Williamson skillfully demonstrates in her article on altarpieces, liturgy, and devotion, oftentimes our conception of the relationship between art and lay piety is oversimplified.³² Williamson argues that “it should be clear that liturgy and devotion do not inhabit opposite ends of a spectrum of religious thought and activity, corresponding respectively to public and private realms, as is sometimes implied” and that it is particularly useful to “think more of different types of responses to images,”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁰ “A Relation...of the Island of England...about the Year 1500,” in *Women in England c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg, trans. C. A. Sneyd (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 283.

³¹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 19.

³² Beth Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” *Speculum* 79, no. 2 (April 2004): 341-406.

some of which might be “‘liturgically structured’ or ‘liturgically related.’”³³ Building in part on Marrow’s conclusions, Williamson not only offers a more fluid understanding of image response than do most medieval visual culture theorists, but she also argues that certain images could offer viewers “cues and encouragements to different types of devotional activity.”³⁴ She tries to open up our analysis to “possibilities for a more diffuse, more complex, but perhaps ultimately more satisfying, understanding of religious activity and of the place of images within that activity.”³⁵ Williamson challenges many of the same assumptions and dichotomies that I address in relation to performance. I echo her in arguing for a more complex understanding of medieval images, but I expand this analysis to include performance images and to show what types of lay devotional activity and response these images may have cued or encouraged as part of lay visual piety.

Visual Piety and Performance Theory

Although I recognize that many media in late medieval York influenced the construction of visual piety, I use performance theory to isolate the differences between theatre and other kinds of image-making, between performance and other kinds of images, to understand the genre’s unique contribution to visual culture. My analysis builds on Morgan’s assessment that “the act of looking itself contributes to religious formation and, indeed, constitutes a powerful practice of belief.”³⁶ Different contexts engender different types of viewing practices; my analysis centers on how the live encounter of actors and spectators influenced medieval visual piety both during and

³³ Ibid., 381.

³⁴ Ibid., 387.

³⁵ Ibid., 406.

³⁶ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 3.

beyond performance, not only in the representations it constructed visually, but in the viewing experience it embedded in the spectator's body. Devotional treatises, sermons, and art often provided laypeople with "ways of seeing" their faith by offering them models of devotional seeing. Performance further developed these models by allowing spectators to practice a form of visual piety that was oriented in terms of their material bodies and that they could use in other devotional situations. Although I recognize the ephemeral aspect of performance, I am inspired by Aleksandra Wolska's notion of "theatre as a mode of becoming" that "does not stop with the fall of the curtain, but continues in the body and mind of the viewer."³⁷ This dissertation explores the "mode of becoming" constructed in medieval religious performance and how that becoming continued to operate in the bodies of medieval laypeople as a devotional "way of seeing."

Various forms of medieval devotion engaged the layperson's body. Other scholars have examined devotional practices that involved physical rituals, such as processions or gestural interactions with small objects. For example, at the beginning of his study of devotional images used by nuns, Hamburger writes that "medieval devotion embraced the entire person, not only the mind, the emotions, and the imagination, but the body as well. Devotional performance engaged all the senses, corporeal as well as spiritual, through speech, sight, and gesture."³⁸ Hamburger recognizes the performative nature of object-focused medieval devotion, but he does not include performance images in his study. Other scholars acknowledge the different performative activities laypeople incorporated into their devotional lives. Volker Schier and Corine Schleif study *Heiltumsbüchlein*, printed booklets that contained texts and images of the relic ceremony of the Holy Lance,

³⁷ Aleksandra Wolska, "Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 1 (March 2005): 88.

³⁸ Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 19.

in order to consider the interaction between art and ceremony that these suggest. They examine how the images in these booklets allowed viewers of the ceremony to see the biblical moment, rather than the object, by providing “amplifications” and informing the “seeing” of onlookers.³⁹ Schier and Schleif argue that these small devotional booklets attest to an “interactive embodied devotion involving touching, holding and turning the object as well as reading, writing and then reading again.”⁴⁰ Laypeople were also taught to respond physically to visual and aural cues. One example of this is found in *Piers Plowman* when Will is awakened at the end of Passus Eighteen by the church bells and immediately instructs his family to go to Mass,

The ladies danced until the day dawned,
When the men rang bells to the resurrection—right then I woke,
And I called to Kytt my wife and Calote my daughter:
“Rise and go do honor to God’s resurrection,
And creep to the cross on knees, and kiss it as if it were a jewel!”⁴¹

Although these examples represent forms of bodily devotion, they are not the kind engaged and learned during performance. Only by making this distinction between devotional practices can we understand drama’s contribution to visual culture.

Performance did not simply teach physical responses to sacred images, it also constituted a unique viewing experience that was grounded in the relationships created when live bodies encountered one another in performance. Phenomenology helps us

³⁹ Volker Schier and Corine Schleif, “Seeing and Singing, Touching and Tasting the Holy Lance: The Power and Politics of Embodied Religious Experiences in Nuremberg, 1424-1524,” in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and Their Representation in the Arts, 1000-2000*, eds. Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 409.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁴¹ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 325; my translation. Original text: “Til the day dawed thise damyseles carolden, / That men rongen to the resurexion – and right with that I wakede, / And callede Kytte my wif and Calote my doghter: / ‘Ariseth and go reverenceth Goddes resurexion, / And crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth it for a juwel!” Unless otherwise indicated, I use my own translations of Middle English quotations throughout this dissertation. When the Middle English word choice proves significant to my argument, I have included the original text in brackets within or after my translation. Otherwise, I have placed the modern translation in the body of the dissertation and the original Middle English quotation in a note.

engage this experience and suggest how it may have contributed to lay visual piety. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, “Phenomenology is the study of essences...and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity.’”⁴² I recognize that grounding a study in “essence” is extremely problematic, but I believe that, when applied with caution, this concept yields constructive modes of inquiry. Stanton Garner, Jr. points out that phenomenology “is intended to reveal the perspectival aspect intrinsic to any act of perception conducted by an embodied subject, a variable invariably present in terms of which individual perceptual experience is conducted.”⁴³ Essence should not then be interpreted as a uniform, unconditional, or ideal mode of perception, but as a way to engage “lived experience.” Rather than ignoring or removing issues of experience from theory, phenomenology challenges the strictly “representational” body by returning both experience *and* subjectivity to the forefront, while never erasing the very real existence of difference.

In his study of phenomenology and performance, Garner writes, “theatrical space is ‘bodied’ in the sense of being comprised of bodies positioned within a perceptual field, but it is also ‘bodied’ in the more fundamental sense of being ‘bodied forth,’ oriented in terms of a body that exists not just as the object of perception, but as its originating site.”⁴⁴ This theory has special implications for my work. Medieval religious performance not only grounded the spectator in her body, but likewise grounded live, devotional viewing in the spectator’s body, thereby drawing attention to that body, not only as the

⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1945; New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), vii.

⁴³ Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

“agent of theatrical experience,”⁴⁵ but also as the agent of devotional viewing. Religious performances engaged bodies in a pious practice, but unlike other forms of enacted devotion in which a viewer might physically act on an object or in which the viewing is strictly mental, performance constitutes a mutual interaction of bodies. Both spectators and image are embodied in a performance and neither acts exclusively on the other. This occasion of bodies watching bodies offers unique opportunities for examining visual piety. In order to better understand how performance was engaged as a devotional act, we must, as Garner writes, reembody the discourse of theatre.⁴⁶

Significantly, phenomenology seems to return us to a medieval theory of viewing practices. As Robert S. Nelson writes, “Ancient and medieval writing about vision is more active, for seeing itself was performative. Seeing was doing For viewers of religious images in the Middle Ages and before, seeing was connective and embodied.”⁴⁷ The thirteenth century witnessed a shift from a theory of extramission (vision resulting from something leaving the eye, making contact with the object, and returning to the eye) to a theory of intromission (vision resulting from rays moving from the object to the eye). Although, as Michael Camille notes, intromission constructed the senses as “crucial creative conduits for taking in, grappling with, and ultimately understanding the world through the body,”⁴⁸ both intromission and extramission characterized seeing as a process of physical contact. Seeing was never abstract or purely visual, but always involved a concrete, tactile component. Throughout history, dramatic performances have offered

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁷ Robert Nelson, “Introduction: Descartes’s Cow and Other Domestications of the Visual,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

⁴⁸ Michael Camille, “Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 206.

spectators a way to understand and gain access to the world through a viewing process that is embodied. This is in effect the kind of “connective and embodied” viewing we identify in medieval visual theories. A phenomenological approach to performance identifies ways to consider spectatorship from a perspective more akin to medieval notions of seeing, a perspective that imagined vision as literally “bodied forth.”

If we acknowledge how medieval laypeople understood “seeing,” and their different visual interactions with images, we can understand how they may have *used* images, including those from dramatic performances. In addition, we can recognize images themselves as records of changes in visual theory. Cynthia Hahn analyzes representations of vision that appear in medieval images and identifies within them a shift from an “instantaneous and powerful effect, which struck or engraved the heart” to “the prolonged gaze apprehended as an interactive experience.”⁴⁹ She argues that “art may have responded to this change or, as I believe, may have helped to shape it.”⁵⁰ Similarly, I show how drama shaped ideas about seeing and, ultimately, other visual experiences. My analysis not only identifies medieval performance-viewing practices, but goes further to suggest how these continued to function within York’s medieval visual culture. Scholars who have recognized the embodied experience of viewing ceremony, drama, and spectacle have imagined a one-sided devotional mechanism because they have neglected to consider how these experiences informed other kinds of seeing. In order to understand late medieval lay devotion in all its complexity, we must consider how the visual encounters at public performance created a unique kind of devotional seeing that could be used in other spaces.

⁴⁹ Cynthia Hahn, “*Visio Dei*: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Ways of Seeing

The York cycle was a performance event whose power to influence visual piety was based, in large part, not on what it communicated in individual pageants, but in the impression it made and the experience it created as a large-scale religious event. This is not to imply that most, or even any, spectators watched the cycle in its entirety each year. Nor does this mean that I do not examine evidence from individual pageants. Instead, this contention requires me to analyze the cycle as a whole, rather than as individual pageants or pageant series experienced discretely by spectators. To this end, I have organized my dissertation into three chapters, each of which investigates a different way of seeing York's medieval performance. I first examine how performance is "seen" in the medieval records and how seeing was modeled in York's performance texts, then how devotional images were visually experienced by laypeople during performances, and finally how performance viewing continued to function as a mode of seeing in other contexts. This is an organizational device, not an argument that seeing occurred in ordered, isolated stages. Throughout these chapters I repeatedly argue that laypeople employed a sophisticated practice of seeing that moved between approaches easily and combined them continually.

Before introducing each chapter in more detail, I must acknowledge that throughout my analysis I refer to the medieval "layperson" as a coherent subject largely without distinctions in age, class, sexuality, or gender. Many theorists, such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, have expressed frustration with phenomenological analyses for this very reason. As I have already indicated, phenomenology is often interpreted as a theory that collapses individual experience into homogeneity. Gender emerges as perhaps the most obvious trait that I have neglected to take into consideration in my analysis. The

emergence of gender theory as an academic discourse prompted a great deal of excellent research on women and female piety in medieval studies.⁵¹ In particular, Caroline Bynum's work has revealed the prevalence of the body as a theme in feminine spirituality.⁵² Other scholars have looked specifically at differences between the ways in which lay women and men related to their bodies. For instance, conduct literature provides important evidence that laypeople were engaged in thinking about their bodies and body practices during the Middle Ages. As Claire Sponsler notes, books of conduct explicitly for the laity begin to appear in England in the thirteenth century and these define the individual as in control over his or her own self-fashioning via the management of bodily impulses.⁵³ A number of scholars have considered the differences in tactics used in books directed at girls versus those written for boys to suggest that women were taught to control their bodies in different ways than were men. Anna Dronzek argues that authors of fifteenth-century conduct books not only assumed boys would encounter the material text visually (through reading) and girls aurally (hearing

⁵¹ This is just a very brief sample of some of the texts published in the last few decades. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, eds. *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopio Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Gendering the Master Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, eds. *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); Linda E. Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage and Social Relations in Thirteenth Century England* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); A. B. Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Seeing and Knowing: Medieval Women and the Transmission of Knowledge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mary Beth Rose, ed. *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1983); Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, eds., *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); and, the *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality Series* published by Brepols.

⁵² Caroline Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵³ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 53.

them read aloud), but “they also presumed that boys and girls would process information in two different ways.”⁵⁴ The literature for girls uses a more experiential format than that for boys, and Dronzek suggests that authors believed “that girls needed knowledge tied to the physical, to the world of the body that was at the very center of their nature.”⁵⁵ Likewise, Robert Clark has discussed how devotional guides directed at women construct the female subject by prescribing a program of physical attitudes and gestures.⁵⁶

This scholarship has demonstrated that gender distinctions operated within medieval devotional culture, but the affective piety popular during the later Middle Ages placed emphasis on the body for all laypeople—men and women. Although it is necessary to recognize the role that gender may have played in constructing medieval ideas about the body, vision, and devotion, I maintain that gender differences were as important to visual piety as were differences in class, social status, age, or sexuality. I recognize that a multitude of factors shaped the ways in which laypeople saw and experienced performance. Therefore, throughout my analysis I suggest a range of possibilities for how performance may have influenced visual piety.

My choice to define devotional practices as individual pursuits filled with opportunities for idiosyncratic interpretations and activities has allowed me to explore many different possibilities that performance offered the lay devotee. By emphasizing the

⁵⁴ Anna Dronzek, “Gendered Theories of Education in Fifteenth-Century Conduct Books,” in *Medieval Conduct*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 142.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 143. Similarly, Sponsler argues that in *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, a fifteenth-century conduct book, “the female subject is taught to be conscious of herself as an object of public regard, as a performer closely watched by spectators.” Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 63. For a copy of this text, see *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, ed. Tauno F. Mustanoja (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948). For an excellent discussion of this text, see Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (January 1996): 66-86.

⁵⁶ Robert L. A. Clark, “Constructing the Female Subject in Devotion,” in *Medieval Conduct*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 173-4.

role of bodily experience in performance viewing, rather than homogenize reception, I expose the personalization it offered spectators. The body was a site for negotiation among many competing discourses, but it also constituted the basis for individual experience and decision-making. For this reason, because I inevitably define the “way of seeing” generated in performance as embedded in the body, I find it useful to characterize it as a tactic of consumption.⁵⁷ By manipulating her body, a layperson could turn this “way of seeing” towards her own objectives. I argue that it was this embodied characteristic of performance viewing that posed a threat to the many clerical attempts to control devotional seeing. In Chapters Two and Three, I examine late medieval discourse surrounding performances and images in order to demonstrate that it was the bodily nature of the visual encounters laypeople had with these genres that prompted much of this period’s anti-theatrical and iconoclastic discourse. I contend that it is precisely because there is no single homogenous body that we should not let the medieval spectator’s bodily presence dissolve into a language of signification, but that we should instead use phenomenology to explore the ways in which that body offered possibilities for individual manipulations, transformations, and reinterpretations of devotional performance.

In my first chapter I analyze performance records from York and the city’s Corpus Christi pageant texts in order to propose that medieval laypeople understood and documented performance as a visual encounter. I then suggest that the York cycle’s performance entered and influenced the matrix of lay piety by presenting devotion as a viewing practice centered in the lay body. After recognizing medieval York as a culture

⁵⁷ I discuss Michel de Certeau’s theory of consumption in greater detail at the end of Chapter Two. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

that framed performance as a site for devotional seeing, I then try to identify the unique kind of visual piety experienced by spectators during performance. In my second chapter I use phenomenology to suggest ways in which lay spectators experienced live performance and to argue that performance offered spectators a specific kind of devotional viewing that correlated with medieval theories of vision. I also examine individual pageants to show specific moments when the physicality of the performance encounter contributed to the play's devotional meaning. Sometimes this supported orthodox theology, while at other times it threatened to destabilize belief. In my final chapter I examine various object-centered devotional encounters in which, I believe, a performance-viewing aesthetic is recreated. I propose that the experiences at performance constructed a form of "performance literacy" that laypeople could transfer and apply to other devotional contexts, particularly spaces over which they exerted material control, such as the parish church or the home. Whereas my first two chapters argue that laypeople understood and experienced drama as a unique visual encounter, my last chapter applies these conclusions to other pious practices and outlines the ways laypeople may have tried to recreate the experience of performance viewing in other devotional contexts. Throughout the dissertation I refute such binaries as individual/corporate, sacred/secular, and visual/tactile by demonstrating that the devotional experiences laypeople created for themselves rarely respected such divisions.

By examining how performance is documented in medieval York, how performance was engaged by spectators and actors, and how the performance experience was transferred to other devotional settings, I not only suggest how the live, embodied nature of performance-viewing contributed to its positioning within medieval visual

culture, but also how it influenced the spiritual value of performance. In the visual performance, value accumulated around particular sites, specifically the space of the city, the bodies engaged through performance, and the identity of the city and its occupants. For instance, in my first chapter I describe the various ways the visual structure of the cycle, as described in the civic records, created a mnemonic system that operated on multiple levels. According to the extant records, the pageant stations were first recorded in 1399. Four of these twelve stations are recorded as being before a particular person's door, something Sarah Beckwith identifies as a strategy used by prominent citizens to inscribe themselves onto the pageant route.⁵⁸ Although I agree with her conclusions, I find it more significant that, particularly in this first list, the stations function to memorialize a specific community within York.⁵⁹ Attaching names to stations indicates that the play was involved in a kind of visual memorializing of space that, I argue, was part of a civic devotional program. All performances transform space, but the York cycle, as it moved through the city, transformed public, everyday space into extraordinary, sacred space. This powerful transformation was employed to serve various civic agendas. In his discussion of the aesthetics of everyday life, Morgan writes, "the extraordinary is ritualized, repeated behavior, but it steps outside the security of the familiar in order to secure the old foundations or to erect a new basis for the everyday world in which people dwell."⁶⁰ This is an excellent way to understand how the York cycle transformed the city space. The cycle enacted the extraordinary Christian narrative in the everyday streets of the city, thereby recreating that city for its citizens in a new sacred context. That context

⁵⁸ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 23-55.

⁵⁹ Alexandra Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*. 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 28.

⁶⁰ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 12.

was realized again and again, consolidating memory with each annual performance, and re-inscribing the sacred story, and its spiritual value, onto the York community space.

Spiritual value could also be tested during performance. In my second chapter I argue that medieval anti-theatrical prejudice, which challenged the spiritual value of performance, was often directed at the viewing of and by live bodies that theatre produces. This anxiety is not only apparent in texts such as *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, which is more concerned with responses to dramatic content than with the content per se, but it is also articulated with great passion in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine juxtaposes his discussion of theatre against extremely visceral, physical descriptions, and thereby suggests that theatre's crime is not simply in moving the emotions, but in satisfying the body. Rather than the specific iconography of theatre, these authors are troubled by the fleshy materiality of performance.

The embodied encounter at performance can create potential instability for devotional viewing and this may threaten the intended spiritual value of religious plays. I find this unpredictability particularly apparent in the confrontation of bodies staged in the York *Crucifixion* pageant. Although the pain inflicted on Christ's body is the play's central focus, spectators do not seem to *see* this pain enacted for very long. Christ spends most of his time lying down, apparently out of view.⁶¹ When the cross is lifted, about two-thirds of the way through the play's dialogue, it becomes an iconographic image for lay viewers. This pageant is an excellent example of Garner's "theatre of the image,"

⁶¹ One of the four soldiers notes that the cross is on the ground (line 39) and that the "wretch on the length be laid" [ladde on lenghe be layde] (line 41). See Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 316.

since its pivotal action is “lodged in stillness.”⁶² Plays with this quality generate meaning through the spectator’s presence as a body “with its own positionality and material presence.”⁶³ But the still image of Christ also functioned as a devotional image and therefore the play’s devotional meaning was likewise generated through the viewer’s positionality and material presence.

I will argue that the staged *Crucifixion*’s use of enacted pain breaks down the image of Christ *as* image, and thereby offers Christ’s body as an inhabitable place into which the embodied spectator may slip. This performance-viewing experience threatens the devotional stability of the scene, and I argue that the pageant’s creators and producers recognized, and worked to avoid, this potential for slippage. I also describe how other pageants that employ the crucified Christ image manipulate the bodied similarity between actor and spectator in different ways and for different ends—but all in the service of lay visual piety. Dramatized images of the crucified body offer excellent examples of how the spiritual value that accumulates around performance images is contested.

The value that accumulated around space and bodies coalesced to influence social identities. For instance, during the later Middle Ages laypeople increasingly brought devotional images into their homes to facilitate “private” pious practices.⁶⁴ Alabaster carvings were one popular type of image laypeople purchased for the home, and these frequently represented Biblical scenes that were also enacted in the York cycle. A family might choose a particular alabaster panel for its home for a number of different reasons,

⁶² Although Garner uses this phrase to describe some of Samuel Beckett’s later plays, the term seems applicable here as well. Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁴ Richard Marks, “An Age of Consumption: Art for England c. 1400-1547,” in *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547*, eds. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 12-25; Duffy, “Late Medieval Religion,” 56-67.

but this opportunity for choice opens up one possibility for performance images and art objects to intersect. A guild member was involved in the annual production of a particular pageant play, and these plays were often, in some manner, symbolically linked to the craft of the guilds that produced them. For instance, the Pinner produced the *Crucifixion* and the Shipwrights produced the *Building of the Ark*. Beckwith interprets the York cycle as invested in a theme of labor that supported craft interests: “My contention is that many of the pageants reveal and help to articulate an artisanal ideology that placed importance on manufacture, or on making...as central.”⁶⁵ An, admittedly, complicated pride in one’s work was displayed in the plays, thereby forming an identifying link between that sacred moment and the labor of a guild’s members. In addition, some level of personal connection between craftsman and play was likely forged, since he had been involved in the planning, construction, funding, and, perhaps, presentation of this pageant year after year. Might then a guild member have chosen an image of his pageant moment to place in his home if one was available? If so, this would be one way to take the associations formed in performance-viewing and apply them to a new space in which they might continue to function.

A painted glass window in the York Minster’s nave, now known as the Bellfounder’s window, was donated by a goldsmith and bellmaker and contains many different images of bells, and their casting and tuning. It was therefore not unheard of for a York craftsman to include his craft in the personal construction of his identity, both secular and sacred. An alabaster picturing the pageant episode to which his work identity was affixed may have seemed a very reasonable image to place in the home, since it not only announced the devotion of the family, but also the connection between the family’s

⁶⁵ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 53.

craft and its spiritual life. In this context, spiritual value relied upon the impressions made in the cycle's annual viewing.

And, yet, as in performance, personal devotional images and objects generate other modes of encounter beyond the visual. The materiality of certain objects—such as alabasters or painted glass windows—affects both the object's reception and the ways in which it generates spiritual meaning for its users. In my final chapter, I argue that, like the actor's body, the materiality of certain devotional objects creates an embodied visual experience for spectators. This experience could be used to mnemonic effect in funeral rituals or it could be employed to heighten devotional encounters in the parish church. By embedding a devotional “way of seeing” in the layperson's body—one that operated as a tactic of lay consumption—performance gave laypeople a way to create powerful visual encounters for themselves and for others by using material culture. The experiences these material objects, like the dramatized *Crucifixion* image, created could destabilize meaning and create potentially subversive possibilities within visual piety. I conclude my dissertation by examining various ways that performance influenced visual piety by conflating devotional contexts and creating rich associations of meaning for its spectators.

York as a Subject of Study

The available civic records, dramatic evidence, and extant art from York made it an excellent focus for this study. In British Library Additional Manuscript 35290, we have a nearly complete text of the cycle, assembled sometime between 1463 and 1477. This manuscript, intended to be the official record of the text, was a public document and

apparently compiled from guild prompt copies of the plays.⁶⁶ The first record of the Corpus Christi cycle in York is from 1376 and refers to the storage of Corpus Christi wagons.⁶⁷ This entry, as well as the 1415 Ordo paginarum, are recorded in the *A/Y Memorandum Book*, York's principal city register. The last known medieval performance of the cycle was in 1569.⁶⁸ There is also performance evidence, though no extant texts, of Creed and Pater Noster plays from York. In addition, six kings visited the city between 1377 and 1569,⁶⁹ and the city's records include particularly detailed evidence of two civic triumphs, the first in 1486 when Henry VII entered the city and the second in 1541 for Henry VIII.⁷⁰

Drama in York has been a serious subject of study for many decades. Since E. K. Chambers's influential book *The Mediaeval Stage*,⁷¹ the cycle has been situated as the most prominent example of English medieval drama, and the York cycle specifically as its model. Scholarship on the English cycle as a genre⁷² eventually led to studies of the distinct features of the individual cycles.⁷³ Scholars now realize the dramatic cycle is a northern English phenomenon that is not representative of medieval drama (English or

⁶⁶ Richard Beadle, "York Cycle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

⁶⁷ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 355-8.

⁶⁹ These kings are Richard II, Henry VI, Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII, and Henry VIII. Princess Margaret, daughter of Henry VII, also visited the city.

⁷⁰ The detailed preparations and display for the 1486 triumph are described in Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 137-52. The 1541 triumph is described in Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 271-7, which indicates that it was modeled on Henry VII's 1486 entry. The *York* volumes also contain records of the preparation for the visit of James I in 1603, and the royal entries of James I in 1617 and Charles I in 1633 and 1639. These are not analyzed in this study because they do not fall within the timeframe I consider.

⁷¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*. 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1903).

⁷² Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946); V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972)

⁷³ Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*; R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Patrick J. Collins, *The N-Town Plays and Medieval Picture Cycles* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1979).

continental), and that the York cycle cannot be considered a medieval performance archetype.⁷⁴ Alexandra F. Johnston, Richard Beadle, Peter Meredith, Clifford Davidson, Margaret Rogerson, and Meg Twycross are among those who have contributed a great deal of scholarship on York's dramatic activity, and particularly its Corpus Christi cycle. The first volume of the *Records of Early English Drama* series, edited by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, is devoted to York.⁷⁵ York also represents a large percentage of the citations in J.W. Robinson's *Studies in Fifteenth-Century Stagecraft*. And, importantly, because the topography of York maintains much of its medieval character, the city offers scholars of medieval drama a valuable opportunity to consider performance and city space in a very immediate context.⁷⁶

York also works especially well for my study due to the great deal of evidence available regarding its medieval culture. During the later Middle Ages, York had a clear sense of itself as an historically significant city. The Roman walls, still standing today, were a visible reminder of its origins. It was a self-governing city, the seat of England's

⁷⁴ In *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, Martin Stevens identifies the York cycle as "more nearly a communal enterprise than any other extant English cycle" and "not so markedly as the other cycles the work of an individual consciousness" (17). This play was more intimately linked to the civic identity than the other cycles. In his essay "The York Cycle," Richard Beadle describes this cycle's "powerful submerged consistency of intent that informs the writing at every point... It contrasts variously with the eclectic approach to the cycle structure adopted by the compiler of the N-town manuscript, or Chester's self-conscious attempt to recreate the genre in a form appropriate to the changing times of the sixteenth century, or the radical experimentations with the individual components of the cycle found in the plays of the Wakefield Master" (89).

⁷⁵ Although this is the first volume in the *REED* series and therefore maintains more restrictive criteria for dramatic evidence than later volumes, it offers an extensive collection of references to dramatic activity from public and ecclesiastical records. I rely on this evidence heavily in my first chapter.

⁷⁶ I am not suggesting that an exact reconstruction of a medieval performance could ever take place. As Eileen White notes, certain spaces in the city, such as St. Helen's Square and the third stories of some buildings, did not exist in the thirteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries. See Eileen White, "Places to Hear the Play: The Performance of the Corpus Christi Play at York," *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 49-78. But York's topography still offers us the route of the pageant, with many of the medieval buildings and churches along its path. As White notes, "it is still possible to walk the streets of York that contained the procession of wagons and by their shape and size dictated the style of performance, and sense a link between the old and the new tradition" (75). York gives us opportunities to consider, if not decisively answer, questions of medieval staging and the cultural work it may have accomplished.

other archbishopric, second only to Canterbury, and by the late fourteenth century its estimated population of 15,000 was the second largest in England. The city's religious life was visible in the York Minster and its numerous parish churches, at one point numbering forty.⁷⁷ As Peter Meredith writes, "it was clearly a city proud of its history and its status and jealous of its privileges."⁷⁸ The numerous medieval civic records, including inventories, guild records, registered wills, and charters, attest to a medieval interest in creating an archive of the city itself. It was a remarkably self-reflexive city, and the cycle is one example of how conscious York was of its own size and power.⁷⁹

The evidence of York's medieval devotional culture is particularly rich. Many of its parish churches are still standing, and York has the largest collection of medieval stained glass in any English city. There has been a significant amount of research on the art and architecture of medieval York, including *York Art: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (the first volume of the Early, Drama, Art, and Music Series), and the Royal Commission's Inventories of Historical Monuments in York.⁸⁰ The medieval city was home to many artisans and craftsmen who produced devotional art, and evidence of lay devotional instruction, such as the *Lay Folk's Mass Book* and *The Lay Folk's Catechism*, is also extant.

⁷⁷ Peter Meredith, "The City of York and its 'Play of Pageants,'" *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁹ In *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, Stevens writes that the Corpus Christi play in York "was no mere popular entertainment, no ordinary annual festive occasion; it was the city's proud and solemn celebration of itself" (17).

⁸⁰ Clifford Davidson, ed., *York Art: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1978). I use both Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York. Volume Three: Southwest of the Ouse* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972) and *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York. Volume Five: The Central Area* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1981).

This rich supply of evidence has enabled scholars to investigate medieval drama in its cultural context. Scholars such as Kathleen Ashley, Claire Sponsler, Patricia Badir, and Sarah Beckwith have coupled evidence of the city's devotional and civic life with extensive research on York's medieval drama and have employed contemporary theory to suggest what kind of cultural work performance accomplished in the Middle Ages. In her article on sponsorship, reflexivity, and resistance, Kathleen Ashley considers how the York pageants served a variety of social needs particularly because they were fundamentally reflexive.⁸¹ Ashley problematizes the causal links posited between a play and its social effects, and argues for multiple types of producers and sites of sponsorship of the cycle. She identifies possibilities for resistance in the plays and asserts that whether or not these sites of resistance were seen by some or all members of the audience depended on a variety of factors involving reception and local situation.

In *Drama and Resistance*, Sponsler applies de Certeau's theory of popular culture to medieval performance and frames performances as embodied events. Like Ashley, she identifies moments of resistance in performance and acknowledges that not all spectators would have recognized or acted upon these sites.⁸² Although her work considers the visual performance event, she does not examine drama's role in constructing visual piety or a unique mode of seeing, both concerns of my project. Badir also applies de Certeau's theory to York's medieval drama. She engages issues of the body in space and argues that "the phenomenological parameters for both the performance site and the urban environment are reoriented by the physical presence of spectators and actors so as to focus attention on the corporeal inhabitation of the rather unstable boundaries and

⁸¹ Ashley, "Sponsorship, Reflexivity and Resistance," 9-24.

⁸² Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, xi-xvii; 161-3.

perimeters of ordered space.”⁸³ Her work attempts to recuperate the archive by showing how its records allow us to engage performance and space in ways that disrupt the easy construction of historical narratives: “the archival context reinserts the dramatic event back into the everyday.... Operating in a performative mode that constitutes what it describes, the archive determines and prohibits while gesturing toward the anecdotal, tactical acts that stubbornly refuse to be contained within abstract mappings of subjectivity and identity.”⁸⁴ Following Badir, I, too, consider how the archive constructs performance, but I focus on how the visual elements of performance were recorded and what this reveals about drama’s function in York.

My project has been significantly influenced by Sarah Beckwith’s work on York, specifically *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*. Like Beckwith, I see the York cycle as community theatre that created theological meaning, defined civic space, enacted penance, expressed local tensions, and articulated social ideology. Her project uses a semiotic framework to investigate how the cycle functioned in the local community. She analyzes the York cycle as a mode of cultural reproduction that creates a network of associations which, using the bodies of actors, inscribes meaning onto the city space. She recognizes that medieval religious performance manipulated the symbol of Christ’s body, in particular, as a site of signification and argues that this did not create uncontested meaning or social unity, but could visually signify multiple meanings and division within the community. I find Beckwith’s ideas about space compelling and agree with her assessment that the York

⁸³ Patricia Badir, “Playing Space: History, the Body, and Records of Early English Drama,” *Exemplaria* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 275-6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

pageants held “fictive localities...in active tension with the public spaces of the city.”⁸⁵ I also echo her assertion that the York plays “remember and argue over memory.”⁸⁶ Beckwith recognizes the visual characteristics of drama and her approach to the visual performance has been fundamental in shaping my project. Although her analysis of the York cycle inspired many of the ideas with which my project began, her goals are different from mine. She raises provocative questions about what bodies might signify in communal, religious performance, but she is not immediately concerned with the *spectator’s* body and how that body not only influences the spectator’s viewing experience, but also contributes to cultural formation in performance. Although Beckwith acknowledges the actor-audience relationship as crucial to the way the plays functioned, she does not explore the way this mutually “bodied” relationship shaped drama into a new form of visual piety. These are the ideas that I explore in the next three chapters.

Although this is a localized study, its conclusions are not always particular to York, and the issues and questions I raise could be directed at other medieval communities throughout England and the continent. Similarly, performance has operated as a central component of visual culture during other periods of history and therefore my questions about its contributions to such a culture could be asked of other performance traditions. Yet, late medieval culture had a particular relationship to public, corporate performance and to specific visual theories and traditions; therefore, I believe some of my conclusions are specific to the Middle Ages. This does not mean they have no relationship to pre- or post-medieval religious performance—and I use such periodization cautiously. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler write, at stake when studying

⁸⁵ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xvi.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

cultural phenomena of the Middle Ages is “the very pastness of the past, its placement in a temporal category that declares the past has already done its work, that we who study it merely trace its pre-effects to posit cause.”⁸⁷ The power of religious performance is very much alive today, and our conclusions about the Middle Ages can help us understand the complicated ways in which that power manifests itself, especially when it does so in potent images. Cohen and Wheeler also assert, “The Middle Ages have a power, and it is not the tyrannical power of the past to determine the present through some dull progress narratives or evolutionary tree. The power of the Middle Ages is the fact that it is middle to nothing, that it does not end, that we encounter its processes of becoming only through a dangerous becoming-process of our own.”⁸⁸ Before and beyond the Middle Ages, religious imagery has influenced Western society. Questions about medieval images are neither incidental nor academic. Their answers reside in today’s religious imagery and continually make themselves known in our world.

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, “Becoming and Unbecoming,” in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Cohen and Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), xviii.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter One

York Performances and a Lay Theology of Vision: Civic Documents and Play Texts

Before examining how devotional theatre influenced lay visual culture beyond the performance event, it is necessary to establish the kinds of experiences that medieval performance offered its spectators. The city of York provides scholars with a unique opportunity for exploring how a late medieval community framed and memorialized performance. As I mentioned in my Introduction, numerous civic records referring to public ritual in York, as well as texts for most of the city's Corpus Christi pageants, survive. These documents create an entry point into the medieval performance encounter, not only because they are evidence of performance practices, but, more important for my thesis, because they reveal what views laypeople held regarding drama's function within a community. Performance in York not only supplied entertainment, it was also the primary means by which the city created, maintained, and proclaimed its identity, interests, and values. Although we can never hope to recreate the original medieval theatrical experience, we can explore the ways in which laypeople recorded and thereby defined its functions. Medieval religious performance was a process of devotional image-making and image-viewing, and York's laity, recognizing the power of these dramatic images, repeatedly manipulated them to serve secular, as well as sacred, ends. In doing so, they created a massive religious performance that not only underscored the importance of seeing as a devotional act, but also instructed its audience in sacred viewing practices.

York's Corpus Christi cycle was performed on a processional route composed of between twelve and sixteen stations that traversed the city's streets. Evidence of York's cycle first appears in a 1376 entry in the *A/Y Memorandum Book*, one of three manuscript compilations that contain important civic and guild documents.¹ As a working manuscript, designed to be amended and updated by civic officials over the course of generations, the *A/Y* reflects the city's dynamic past.² An entry for 1376 refers to the storage of Corpus Christi wagons, the mobile stages on which the play's pageants were performed, and thus provides evidence of performance earlier than the extant text of the cycle, which is dated to between 1463 and 1477.³

The cycle was performed on a more or less annual basis, with the last known pre-modern production taking place in 1569. It was composed of around fifty individual pageants, each typically performed by a different guild or group of guilds, and, in its entirety, ran to around 14,000 lines of Middle English verse. Its annual performance was a major community event that drew spectators from across the region, and therefore offered York an exceptional opportunity to make powerful social and political statements.

¹ The other two manuscripts are the *B/Y Memorandum Book*, a later companion volume to the *A/Y*, the majority of which is taken up by guild ordinances, and the *E Memorandum Book*, which contains guild ordinances after 1573.

² Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), xix. This chapter relies heavily on the exceptional archival work compiled in these volumes. Unless otherwise noted, I use the transcriptions and Latin translations of York's medieval performance records as they appear in the *REED* volumes. If I use Johnston and Rogerson's English translation of an original source, I will also include the page numbers of their transcription of the original language in parentheses following the page numbers of the translation. When I have not specifically noted the original source from which the quotation is drawn, I will also include that information in my note. As I indicated in a previous note, all Middle English translations are my own, unless I have specified otherwise. Although there has been much thoughtful criticism of the *REED* series by those both within and outside of the project (see particularly Theresa Coletti's "Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 248-84, and Patricia Badir's response, "Playing Space: History, the Body, and Records of Early English Drama," *Exemplaria* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 255-79) the value of this project's contribution is immense.

³ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 3.

I argue that this power was primarily located in and manipulated through the play's visual images and juxtapositions. After introducing the emphasis on seeing and spectatorship that pervades civic records related to public performances in York, I will explore how this spectatorial theme influenced regulation of the Corpus Christi cycle. I suggest ways in which specific lay communities in York used the visual aspects of the cycle and other public performance events to promote their personal agendas. Turning to the plays themselves, I then identify moments within the pageants that model devotional seeing. Using these examples, I argue that York's cycle staged a lay theology of pious vision, one that specifically defined the lay body as an important participant in visual pious practices.

Part I: The Records

Sumptuous Display

There are a number of instances in the city's records when individual guilds or civic government officials express concern over the cycle's reception. One concern repeatedly raised was that the cycle's ever-increasing length had consequently hindered its devotional impact. On 31 January 1432, representatives from the Painters, Stainers, Pinners, and Latteners (brass workers) craft guilds requested that their two plays—"one on the stretching out and nailing of Christ on the cross, and the other, indeed, on the raising up of the Crucified upon the Mount"—be combined into a single pageant because the cycle had grown too long and unwieldy.⁴ The *A/Y* entry on this matter begins,

⁴ *Ibid.*, 722 (37). Richard Beadle discusses possible reasons for this performance change in "The York Cycle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100-2.

He who is ignorant of nothing knows, and the whole people lament, that the play on the day of Corpus Christi in this city, the institution of which was made of old for the important cause of devotion and for the extirpation of vice and the reformation of customs, alas, is impeded more than usual because of the multitude of pageants, and unless a better and more speedy device be provided, it is to be feared that it will be impeded much further in a very brief passage of time.⁵

The craftsmen recommend that the pageant performed by the Painters and Stainers be removed, and that the Pinners and Latteners “should take upon themselves the burden of performing in their pageant the matter of the speeches which were previously performed in their pageant and in the pageant of the Painters and Stainers.” They argue that such a change will result “rather profitably for the people hearing the holy words of the players.”⁶

This argument concerns the speeches in the plays, reflecting an anxiety over whether or not people were able to hear the holy words spoken in the pageants. This may at first seem to contradict my premise, but, instead, it points to the medieval conviction that the verbal message could be easily confused or misunderstood during performances. The verbal is thus framed as a fragile mode of communication that is easily broken during an imperfect or overly long performance. Such a concern is also expressed in the Banns to the Chester cycle. The 1609 Banns describe Chester’s pageants as “set forth apparently to all eyes,” thereby acknowledging the visual component of performance. Yet, the anxiety over reception expressed in the Banns is directed at the performance’s verbal cues, “Condemn not our matter when simple words you hear / which convey at

⁵ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 722 (37).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 723 (38); 722 (37).

this day little sense or understanding.”⁷ Peter Meredith identifies in the Banns an “awareness of the old-fashionedness of the language at Chester” that, over the years, would have caused it to sound different to audiences, something he believes may also have been the case in sixteenth-century York.⁸ As the English language transformed over the course of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, York’s laity must have recognized to some degree that the city’s cycle texts were no longer, if they had indeed ever been, stable sites of meaning.⁹ This development could, perhaps, hinder the play’s devotional aspirations and would inevitably have led people to rely more heavily upon the pageant images.

It may be for this reason that York’s civic documents reveal a large psychological and financial investment in the presentation of the cycle’s visual images. In 1432 the Goldsmiths, who had previously performed two pageants, asked that one of these be reassigned to the Masons. According to the *A/Y* entry, the Masons had been unhappy with their own pageant “in which Fergus was beaten because the subject of this pageant is not contained in the sacred scripture and used to produce more noise and laughter than devotion.”¹⁰ These reasons relate to the devotional aims of the pageant and the guild’s unhappiness at being associated with a non-scriptural story. But the entry also states that the Masons were unsatisfied because “they have rarely or never been able to produce

⁷ Lawrence Clopper, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 240; 241. Original: “sett forthe apparante to all eyne”; “Condemne not oure matter where groosse wordes you heare / which Importe at this daye smale sence or vunderstandinge.”

⁸ Peter Meredith, “The City of York and its ‘Play of Pageants,’” *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 27.

⁹ In an analysis of the York pageants, Pamela M. King points out that “as dramatic texts they are inherently unstable, as performance can be a subversive act.” See Pamela M. King, “The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments,” in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 178.

¹⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 732 (47-8). For work on this pageant and the laughter it provoked, see Ruth Evans, “When a Body Meets a Body: Fergus and Mary in the York Cycle,” in *New Medieval Literatures*, eds. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 193-212.

their pageant and to play in daylight as the preceding pageants do” and are therefore relieved to be assigned a play “which is in harmony with sacred scripture, and which they will be able to produce and play in daylight.”¹¹ This emphasis on the circumstance of “daylight” suggests that guilds invested meaning—whether it was dramatic or social—in the visual elements of their pageants, and therefore wanted these to be seen by spectators. The record notes that the Masons will produce the new pageant “in the more lavish manner which is seemly for the praise of the city.”¹² This not only implies that there was spectacle in the play, but that this spectacle conveyed meaning beyond the dramatic premise, in this case, bolstering guild identity and pride. Although the verbal aspect of the cycle performance is important, and records repeatedly describe individuals or groups paying to “hear” the pageants, the Masons’ particular concern with performing during daylight underscores the importance that guilds placed on their visual presentation.¹³

Not all craft guilds were wealthy enough to invest in elaborate spectacles, but those that were seemed to have focused a great deal of attention on these visual displays. This is exemplified by the York Mercers’ guild. Fortunately, we have a large amount of evidence related to the York Mercers, who were responsible for the cycle’s spectacular final pageant of the Last Judgment. This guild also provides us with an excellent example of how secular and sacred visual codes were often inseparable during the Middle Ages, a contention that I asserted in my Introduction and will repeatedly emphasize throughout this dissertation. This guild was first established in 1357 as the fraternity and guild of

¹¹ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 732 (48).

¹² Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 732-3 (48).

¹³ It may be that the Masons were unhappy with performing after daylight for other, less performance-oriented, reasons. They may have simply wanted to finish early so that they could take part in the celebrations that surrounded the cycle production. Yet, because their concern about daylight is juxtaposed against concerns about the sacred nature of the pageant story and its devotional goals, I would argue that, at least before the civic authorities, their argument regarding daylight was likely framed as a concern over the audience’s ability to see their pageant and thereby receive its spiritual benefits.

Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was associated with the parish church of St. Crux.¹⁴ During the following year, the fraternity began building a guildhall on the Foss river. The hall was completed by 1361. In 1371 the fraternity was licensed to establish a hospital by King Edward III, who also provided a chaplain, and by 1397, the main guild supporting this hospital was known as the Holy Trinity guild of Fossgate. As the guild's history indicates, "from the start, however, there was a business side to the guild which gradually increased its influence over the devotional side."¹⁵ From early in its existence, the guild was associated with the Mercers' craft and, by 1420, more than two-thirds of the men working in the hospital were Mercers.¹⁶ But, as David Crouch notes, though the majority of people who made bequests to the Holy Trinity guild were Mercers, other professions are also represented among these gifts. Therefore, it seems that although the religious guild may have offered a fertile beginning for the Mercers' guild, it was open to a wider range of professions. The Mercers themselves were incorporated as a mystery guild by charter in 1430, which makes no mention of the Holy Trinity Guild, and the association between the two organizations is unclear in many respects. Crouch asserts that "occupational guilds and craft organizations, however closely they were associated, remained technically separate, allowing those who were not mercers...to join an occupational guild, for reasons of business, friendship or piety, and to contribute to it socially and financially."¹⁷ Therefore, as we consider the evidence surrounding the production of the Mercers' pageant, we must be careful to acknowledge

¹⁴ D. M. Palliser, "Company History," (York: The Company of Merchant Adventurers of the City of York, 1998), 4; David Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Guilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389-1547* (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), 139. For an early history of the guild see L. R. Wheatley, "The York Mercers' Guild, 1420-1502: Origins and Ordinances" (MA thesis, University of York, 1993).

¹⁵ Palliser, "Company History," 5.

¹⁶ Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, 139.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

the diversity of individuals who may have contributed to the play's performance. We should also bear in mind the intermingling of secular and sacred identities that was a significant feature of the guild and likely informed the production of its pageant.

By the 1430s, the Mercers' guild, which counted women among its members, was the wealthiest of the city's trade and craft guilds.¹⁸ This wealth may be glimpsed in a 1433 indenture that details the costumes, props, and scenery of the guild's pageant.¹⁹ This document offers us the most extensive description of any York pageant set and silences any arguments about the unsophisticated nature of medieval performance. For the sake of brevity, I have only included excerpts from the lengthy description,

A pageant with four wheels, Hell mouth, three garments of three devils, six devil faces in three masks. Array for two evil souls, that is to say two shirts, two pair of hose, two masks, and two wigs. Array for two good souls, that is to say two shirts, two pair of hose, two masks, and two wigs, two pair of angel wings with iron on the ends...A cloud and two pieces of rainbow made of timber. Array for god, that is to say a wounded garment, a crown with a gilded mask. A large curtain of red damask painted for the back side of the pageant.... Four squared to hang at the back of god, four irons to support heaven, four fastening bolts and an iron bolt. A swing of iron that god shall sit upon when he shall ascend up to heaven, with four ropes at four corners.²⁰

¹⁸ Palliser, "Company History," 5.

¹⁹ See Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Dorrell, "The Doomsday Pageant of the York Mercers, 1433," *Leeds Studies in English* 5 (1971): 29-34; Johnston and Dorrell, "The York Mercers and their Pageant of Doomsday, 1433-1526," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 10-35; Peter Meredith, "The Development of the York Mercers' Pageant Waggon," *Medieval English Theatre* 1 (1979): 5-18.

²⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 55. Original: "A Pagent With iiij Wheles helle mouthe iij garments of iij deuels vj deuilles faces in iij Vesernes Array for ij euell saules þat is to say ij Sirkes ij paire hoses ij vesenes & ij Chaulers Array for ij gode saules þat ys to say ij Sirkes ij paire hoses ij vesernes & ij Cheuelers ij paire Aungell Wynges with Iren in þe endes...A cloud & ij peces of Rainbow of tymber Array for god þat ys to say a Sirke Wounded a diademe With a veserne gilted A grete coster of rede damaske payntid for the bakke syde of þe pagent...iiij squared to hang at þe bakke of god iiij Irens to bere vppe heuen iiij finale coterelles & a Iren pynne A brandreth of Iren þat god sall sitte vpon when he sall sty vppe to heuen With iiij rapes at iiij corners."

These details give us an idea of the concentration on color, texture, and shape found in these pageants. The play texts and language were supported, perhaps even superseded at times, by the visual components. Throughout the extant documents, guilds are recorded investing money in props and costumes. This attention to visual detail was also applied to other public performances in the city. For instance, the Corpus Christi guild's account rolls from 1449-50 note receipts for the Creed Play that include payments for "4 red silk banners laudably worked with gold, price 4s. Item, 4 embroidered banners called pennons, price 26d. Item, 13 diadems with 1 gilded mask, with wigs, and with the ornaments of the aforesaid play which have been furnished, price 6s. 8d."²¹ The work invested in constructing these sumptuous displays certainly indicates that laypeople believed the visual contributed greatly to the devotional goals of religious performance. It also indicates that both secular and sacred agendas were operating in these events. In the Mercers' pageant, the sumptuous visual spectacle was an excellent means of advertising the wealth and continued prosperity of the guild. Associating wealth with piety formed an important component of York's late medieval visual piety, one to which I will return. The Last Judgment pageant is a vivid example of how this combination was visually coded as part of the city's lay devotional theology.

²¹ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 755 (78). Monetary values in York's medieval records are given in pre-decimal notation. Four farthings equaled one penny (d.); twelve pennies totaled one shilling (s.); and, twenty shillings equaled a pound (£1). Sometimes values are given in marks, with one mark typically worth 13s. 4d. These monetary values are outlined in P. M. Stell and Louise Hampson, *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese 1350-1500* (York: Unpublished typescript of forthcoming book, 2005), 11. Bound copies of the typescript are available through the York Minster Library.

Devotional Memory

There were likely many reasons that a guild might wish to create lavish visual displays in its pageants. I have just suggested one such reason—the association of wealth with piety. As with the cycle as a whole, an impressive pageant would embody a guild’s position and prestige within the community. But sumptuous displays also supported the cycle’s devotional goals. These elaborate images forged vivid memories of the sacred moments presented in the cycle for spectators. Images play an important role in forming communal religious memory. I use David Morgan’s definition of memory as “the forging of another link in a historical chain of social acts of representation.”²² As I suggested in my Introduction, York’s performance images were intended to be used, not simply admired, and therefore their value was located in their functions. The cycle encouraged spectators to construct visual links between other religious images, texts, and experiences, and the performance itself. These defined the biblical episodes in the imagination, and therefore also defined the way that York, as a community of believers, imagined these events; in Morgan’s words “as a collective or social act of memory, the image connects devout viewer to fellow believers, that is, to those who see in it the same likeness. Visual piety, therefore, exerts a strong communal influence.”²³ The visual details in the pageants not only made the images memorable, they also made them specific to York.

The way in which the laity first recorded the full cycle reinforces this notion that they believed civic memory was formed through visual performance. A 1415 entry in the

²² David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 48.

²³ *Ibid.* For work on communal religious memory, see also Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

A/Y contains two lists of the sequence of Corpus Christi pageants, together entitled the “The Order of the pageants of the play of Corpus Christi” (*Ordo paginarum ludi Corporis Christi*).²⁴ The first list records the guild names on the left side of the manuscript folio and their corresponding episodes in the cycle on the right. This first list does not refer to the episodes by name or title, such as “The creation of heaven and earth”; only the second list that follows this one includes those titles. Instead, the first list identifies each pageant by summarizing the play’s major action. Significantly, these descriptions appear to be based on what was *seen* in the plays. For example, the Coopers’ play is described as “Adam and Eve and the tree between them, the serpent deceiving them with fruits, God speaking to them and cursing the serpent, the angel with a sword casting them from Paradise.”²⁵ The Pinners, Latteners, and Painters produced the play in which the following is dramatized: “The cross, Jesus stretched out on it on the ground, four Jews beating (him) and dragging him with cords, and afterwards raising the cross and the body of Jesus nailed to the cross upon the mount of Calvary.”²⁶ These visual descriptions sometimes provide more production details than are included in the extant play texts. For example, the text for the Ascension pageant does not provide details about how Christ physically ascended during performances, but the *Ordo paginarum*’s tableau description offers some clues about the staging: “Mary, John the evangelist, eleven apostles, two angels, Jesus ascending above them, and four angels bearing a cloud.”²⁷ Although the

²⁴ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 16. See also *The York Play: a Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290, together with a Facsimile of the Ordo Paginarum Section of the A/Y Memorandum Book, and a Note on the Music by Richard Rastall*, eds. Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1983).

²⁵ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 703 (17).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 707 (22).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 708 (23).

pageants were assigned titles, they are recorded first as visual tableaux, thus memorializing them as events engaged through the eye.

The ways in which the city regulated the cycle supports this theory; York's cycle was not regulated as text, but as a performance event. This evidence suggests that York's lay community believed much of drama's power to create memory was located in its seeable features—guarding the city's devotional memory necessitated controlling the cycle's visual meaning. A 1476 entry in the city's House Books, which contain the minutes of the city council's meetings, stipulates,

It is also ordained and established by the full consent and authority of the aforesaid Council on the day and year here written that from this day forth perpetually be observed and kept. That is to say that yearly in the time of Lent there shall be called before the current Mayor four of the most expert, discrete, and able players within this city to examine in accordance with guild regulations, to hear and to examine all the players and plays and pageants throughout all the craft guilds belonging to the Corpus Christi play. And to admit and make ready all such that they shall find sufficient enough in person and competence to honor the city and honor the said crafts, and to discharge, remove from position, and avoid all other persons insufficient either in voice or person.²⁸

Before a guild was approved to perform its pageant in the cycle, it had to “audition” before four of the most able players in York, selected by the Mayor, who would deem it sufficient enough “in voice or person” to bring honor to the city. By testing the plays in performance, York's community leaders were recognizing that the true meaning of the

²⁸ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 109. Original: “Also it is ordeined and stablished by þe ful consent and auctoritie of þe Counsaile aforesaide þe day and yere within written from þis day furth perpetually to be obserued and keped That is to saie þat yerely in þe tyme of lentyn there shall be called afore the Maire for þe tyme being iiij of þe most Connyng discrete and able playeres within þis Citie to serche ^{^here^} and examen all þe plaiers and plaies [and] pagentes throughte all þe artificeres belonging to corpus christi Plaie And all suche as þay shall fynde sufficient in persone and Connyng to þe honour of þe Citie and Worship of þe saide Craftes for to admitte and able and all oþer insufficient personnes either in Connyng voice or persone to discharge ammove and avoide.” A ^ indicates a manuscript caret.

pageants, and their ability to become part of the life of the community, were not contained in the text, but in the visual and oral spectacle that they created.²⁹

This view continued to influence subsequent regulations of the cycle. By 1501, the Common Clerk was checking the performance against the textual register near the first performance station: “And concerning the rent of the first station, it is let to William Catterton and others beyond the station of the common clerk.”³⁰ Although this regulation inevitably identifies the textual register as the “approved” version of the pageants, the act of checking the performance against it acknowledges the live production of the plays as a space in which visual and verbal cues might change. Such efforts indicate that guilds did not stick to the “approved” versions of the plays, but made changes that were only perceptible in the verbal and visual performance.³¹ These instances of regulation suggest that civic authorities not only recognized the subversive space that performance creates, but also the contribution that the visual features make to how meaning and memory are forged during live performance.³²

Civic Identity

It is not surprising to find this attention to visual meaning in medieval York, a city in which government authorities were actively involved in constructing, and then

²⁹ As I indicated in my Introduction, Sarah Beckwith’s work on York’s medieval religious drama has emphasized the cycle’s unique ability to generate meaning through visual associations. See “Making the world in York and the York cycle,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 254-276 and *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 801 (187). Original source: City Chamberlains’ Rolls.

³¹ See Peter Meredith, “John Clerke’s Hand in the York Register,” *Leeds Studies in English* 12 (1981): 245-71.

³² See Claire Sponsler’s *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) for analysis of potential resistance and subversion in medieval performance traditions, including the York cycle.

controlling, civic identity. As Sarah Rees Jones notes, in the fourteenth century the civic powers of York began a campaign to record the city's history for future generations. She argues that the "foundation of the city archives and the beginning of the writing of civic history...show us that here was a civic community which had a clear perception of itself as a public body which occupied an honourable place in the history of the kingdom, and in the history of Our Lord's creation."³³ In addition to maintaining written records, the civic administration planned visual displays that created and regulated York identity. The most obvious examples of this planning are found in the copious records related to royal entries into York. As I mentioned in the Introduction, York hosted six kings between 1377 and 1569.³⁴ Records for two of these events offer particularly detailed descriptions: the 1486 visit by Henry VII and the 1541 visit by Henry VIII.³⁵ The city's House Books typically contain multiple entries in the months leading up to a royal visit, and these usually describe appropriate changes made to the civic calendar, such as the decision to perform the Creed Play for Edward V's 1483 visit, and other related preparations.³⁶

The tremendously rich records surrounding Henry VII's 1486 entry contain details that expose the city's anxiety preceding his visit. As Lorraine Attreed writes, the dynastic struggles of fifteenth-century England "presented unique problems for towns

³³ Sarah Rees Jones, "York's Civic Administration 1354-1464," in *The Government of Medieval York: Essays in Commemoration of the 1396 Royal Charter*, ed. Rees Jones (York: University of York and Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1997), 112.

³⁴ These kings include Richard II, Henry VI, Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII, and Henry VIII. Princess Margaret, daughter of Henry VII, also visited the city.

³⁵ The detailed preparations and display for the 1486 entry can be found in York's House Books (see Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 137-52). The 1541 triumph is described in House Book entries from that year, which indicate that it was modeled on Henry VII's 1486 royal entry (see Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 271-7). The *REED* volumes also include records of the preparations for the visit of James I in 1603, and the royal entries of James I in 1617 and Charles I in 1633 and 1639. These are not analyzed in this study because they do not fall within the timeframe I consider.

³⁶ The decision to produce the Creed Play for Edward was made on September 2nd for his anticipated September 7th arrival, suggesting that the community was adequately prepared to perform their religious civic drama on relatively short notice. Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 130-1.

and the welcomes they were expected to extend.”³⁷ York supported Richard III and his claim to the throne during the Lancastrian-Yorkist conflict, and, by receiving Richard into its city walls and Minster in August of 1483, had publicly endorsed him as the rightful king. During the 1483 royal entry, Richard was greeted with “various spectacles and decorations” as he entered the city and processed to the Minster.³⁸ Henry VII’s August 1486 visit to the city occurred not long after Richard’s defeat at the Battle of Bosworth, and the lavish, intricately designed reception prepared for Henry functioned as a visible public apology for the city’s “mistaken” loyalties. The attention to visual signs is palpable in the entries in York’s House Books dedicated to preparations for this event:

The Mayor and aldermen in similar clothing of scarlet, the common council and clerk in violet, chamberlains in blood-red, and many of the inhabitants in red on horse-back shall wait for the king at Bilburgh cross, about five miles from the city, and the other inhabitants, who may not ride or be in the position to have red gowns, to give their attendance on foot between Dringhouses and the city beside a certain number of children that shall be gathered together around Saint James chapel calling joyfully King Henry, in the manner of children.³⁹

The plans involved Henry encountering a number of scenes presented throughout the city on a route that closely followed that of the cycle. At the first gate he was met by a wilderness of trees and flowers into which spring a red rose and a white rose, while “all other flowers shall bow and evidently give sovereignty, showing the Rose to be principal

³⁷ Lorraine Attreed, “The Politics of Welcome: Ceremonies and Constitutional Development in Later Medieval English Towns,” in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 215.

³⁸ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 786 (132). Original source: Vicars Choral Statute Book.

³⁹ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 139. Original: “The saide Maier And Aldermen in like clothing of skarlet the Common Counceseill and clerck in violet Chambrelayns in murray and many of thinhabitances in Rede on horse bak shall wait on the king at Bilburgh crose about v miles fro the Citie and other thinhabitaunces which may not ride or be of power to haue rede gownes to yeue yer attendance on foote betwixt dringhowsis and the Citie beside a certaine nowmbre of Childrine as shalbe gaddard togiddre aboute saint James Chappell calling Ioyfully king henrie after the maner of Children.”

among all flowers.”⁴⁰ In this scene, all flowers bow down to the red rose, representing the Lancastrians, and the white rose, associated with both York and Henry’s new wife, Elizabeth of York. As Gordon Kipling notes, Henry was entering the city that symbolized his adversary, and therefore his entry, as designed by York’s civic leaders, allowed the king to demand allegiance and perform miraculous deeds, such as this spectacle with the flowers.⁴¹ At this first gate Henry also meets Ebrauk, the legendary founder of York, who greets him in a twenty-eight-line speech and gives him the keys to the city, his title, and his crown; “To you Henry I submit my city key and crown / To rule and correct your right to defense / Never to this city to presume nor pretense / But wholly I grant it to your governance / as a principal piece of your inheritance.”⁴² This staged submission is typical of the entire eight-scene procession, which also included a device that rained rose water on the crowd; a royal throne of six kings symbolizing the six Henries; an actor playing King Solomon who addressed the king and offered him his royal scepter; a greeting from an actor portraying King David, who surrenders his sword of victory and castle to Henry; and a final scene in which the Virgin came down from heaven to welcome the king before she “ascends to heaven with angel song and here shall it snow by means of wafers made in the manner of snow.”⁴³

Throughout these descriptions, there are various instructions regarding costuming, both color and kind, and about how the streets should be lined with hangings

⁴⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 139. Original: “all other floures shall lowte and evidently yeue suffrantie shewing the Rose tobe principall of all floures.”

⁴¹ Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 134-9; Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 139.

⁴² Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 140. Original: “To you henrie I submitt my Citie key and Croune / To reuyll and redresse your dew to defence / Neuer to this Citie to presume ne pretence / Bot holy I graunt it to your gouernaunce / as A principall parcel of your inheritaunce.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 142. Original: “ascend ayene into heven wit angell sang and yer schall it snaw by craft tobe made of waffrons in maner of Snaw.”

and other clothes “of the best that can be obtained within the city for the honor of the same.”⁴⁴ Great care is taken with the verbal and visual spectacles, and both are imbued with layers of symbolic meaning. A duplicate account of this procession, found in a British Library manuscript and apparently recorded by a herald in the king’s train, reinforces the consideration given to the visual during this entry.⁴⁵

Henry VII’s second entry into the city in 1487 involved a less elaborate performance than his first, but details of the preparations are still meticulously recorded. Similar to the 1486 event, the council orders that within Mickelgate bar on either side of the street there should “stand the commons of every craft in their best array without bearing any staffs,” crying King Henry’s name.⁴⁶ The mayor, alderman, and common council also move the date of the Corpus Christi cycle to coincide with the king’s stay. But it is Henry VII’s first elaborate entry that serves as the barometer when in 1541 the city learns of Henry VIII’s imminent arrival; “thereupon they had delivered to them a copy of an old precedent of the first arrival of King Henry VII to this city.”⁴⁷ Planning this entry began with a review of the 1486 spectacles and a determination of how to top the show this time around.

York’s leaders recognized that performance not only provides a community with a powerful language, but that it can also inscribe an event with layers of meaning. As I suggested in my Introduction, during York’s performances value accumulated around particular sites, such as the space of the city and the identity of its occupants. During this

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140. Original: “of the best which may begottyn within the Citie for the honourment of the same.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., xl.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 154. Original: “stand the Communaltye of euere craft on þer best array without any staffes bering.” Original source: House Books.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 271. Original: “yeruppon they hadde delyuerd vn to them a Copy of an olde precydent of the furst commyng of kyng henry the vijth to this City.” Original source: House Books.

royal entry, it also accumulated around the body of Henry as he became part of the ritual. The 1486 entry is not just a play with four monologues, but a vivid display of subordination that is most cleverly communicated not in the blatantly obsequious speeches, but in the visual cues that allow Henry to embody the role of a powerful monarch: receiving the symbolic keys, crown, and scepter; causing flowers to appear and bow; producing rose rain or a snow shower. In performing submission, York shows an understanding of how performances can use visual language to add layers to, or even overshadow, the verbal language. Writing about carnivals, Max Harris says, “Treated as illustrations of what is already scripted, they withhold their secrets,” and he argues that to find the hidden transcripts of these events we must watch for their display “not in text or speech, but in performance.”⁴⁸ In the case of York’s religious performances, I do not believe that I can always (accurately) identify when the pageants’ visual cues were functioning as a hidden transcript. But I will suggest places in the cycle where I suspect that a visual transcript offered spectators a level of meaning that ran parallel to the verbal or textual transcript. At times this corroborated the text, but in other instances it may have operated as part of another agenda entirely.

Social Transcripts

The Corpus Christi procession offers us a particularly good example of an accompanying visual transcript. The feast of Corpus Christi was officially established by Pope Urban IV in 1264, but did not actively spread throughout Europe until the

⁴⁸ Max Harris, *Carnival and Other Christian Festivals: Folk Theology and Folk Performance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 20; 19.

fourteenth century. By 1318, the feast had been established in England.⁴⁹ As Miri Rubin notes, “Although the bull of foundation never strictly required a procession—it provided only for a mass and an office—by the early fourteenth century this was deemed the most appropriate mode of celebrating the eucharistic feast.” Rubin concludes that these celebrations, including those that developed in the secular sphere, like the procession in York, “enshrined common practices of eucharistic veneration and exposition; the host was carried in a costly and ornate vessel, carried by the clergy, and often covered by a canopy of rich material held up by staves which were handled by prominent laymen.”⁵⁰ This was certainly the case in York, where the visual spectacle was closely regulated by the laity.

By the fifteenth century, the feast of Corpus Christi had prompted the formation of York’s Corpus Christi guild.⁵¹ The guild’s register begins in 1408, and its first ordinance outlines aspects of the eucharistic procession. The scribe uses the adjective “antiquitatis” to describe the procession, indicating that it was already an established part of the city’s devotional culture. A 1432 agreement between the Corpus Christi guild and the City articulates the significance of this event as celebrating God’s willingness to become visible and physically present: “we should give the thanks of festive worship and praise to him, in memory of the body, by which he daily restores us spiritually, of him whose kindness to us was so copious that he, wishing to show his rich love for us by special generosity, *has shown his own self to us*, and transcending every fullness of

⁴⁹ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 176; 199.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 243; 247-8.

⁵¹ An edition of the guild’s register has been published through the Surtees Society. See R. H. Skaife, ed., *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York* (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1872). For York’s Corpus Christi Guild see chapter five of Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power*, 160-95. For the Corpus Christi guild and its performance traditions in York, see Alexandra F. Johnston, “The Guild of Corpus Christi and the Procession of Corpus Christi in York,” *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976): 372-84.

giving, and exceeding every means of loving, gives himself as food.”⁵² As this agreement makes clear, the theme of this religious event was God’s visible presence, and this visibility was appropriately mirrored in lay celebrations. Proper “festive worship” in York involved a public procession that included an elaborate shrine enclosing the Eucharist.

The 1408 guild register also refers to the perceived value of this ancient rite:

We ordain that on the feast of Corpus Christi all chaplains walk in procession in surplices in a decent manner, processionally in the age-old order, unless they can reasonably be excused. And in order that the worship of God may be increased more reverently, in order that the priesthood may be thought of more worthily, and that the people may more suitably be incited to devotion by these things, we ordain that the six masters, or at least two of them, who must manage others in processions of this kind, shall carry white rods, during their terms in every general procession to distinguish them from others, considering that such a firm and devout pace may be due, ordered and proper to the praise of God, the respectability of the priesthood, the edification and good example of all Christian people, but most of all for the honour of God and of the city of York.⁵³

The procession’s visual decorum is invested with a great deal of meaning. The white rods distinguish certain men from others, while the proper manner of the procession itself is believed to increase devotion, elevate the priesthood, and bring honor to God and the city. The visible symbols are imbued with social meaning. This tactic continues in the seventh ordinance of the guild, which specifies “that ten great torches be borne before the sacrament in the procession of Corpus Christi, and that only six processionally before the body of a deceased brother.”⁵⁴ This attempt to control the visual symbolism of the torches

⁵² Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 735 (50), italics mine

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 701 (15).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 702 (15).

serves to reveal the hidden transcript. Although I suspect it was unlikely that any medieval Christian layperson believed that having ten torches at a funeral made the deceased equivalent to the Eucharist, members of the Corpus Christi guild were careful to control the hidden transcript suggested by these torches. The guild members recognize that funeral torches convey meaning and must be regulated.⁵⁵

The emphasis on physical decorum and visual order in the procession continues throughout other city and guild documents. An entry in the House Books dated May 31, 1476 orders that all “citizens and inhabitants of this city, both from the guilds and from the craftsmen, who from devotion or custom are accustomed to hold and carry their torches, either themselves or through (the agency of) others, in the said procession annually...are to present themselves and go peaceably in their order, manner, and places” according to the instructions of the Common Clerk.⁵⁶ Those delinquent in this obligation must pay a penalty of 40 shillings. A 1477 entry in the Corpus Christi guild register instructs those in the procession to walk “decently and reverently” [honeste & reuerenter], and indicates that clothing was used “to distinguish” [ad distincionem] certain people from others.⁵⁷ By the middle of the sixteenth century, descriptions of the procession become more elaborate, suggesting that views of acceptable processional decorum may have changed. A 1544 description included in the House Books specifies that the Master of the Corpus Christi guild and all the priests in the procession should be dressed “in the best cloaks that can be obtained within the said city” and that every house on the processional route “shall hang before their doors and principal faces the best

⁵⁵ In my final chapter, I discuss lay funerals in more depth, particularly how performance practices may have influenced the visual and material construction and reception of these rituals.

⁵⁶ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 777 (109).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 780 (117).

bedding and bed coverings that they can get. And place before their doors branches and other such flowers and strewing as they think right and proper for the honor of god and honor of the city.”⁵⁸ It is unclear whether these “bedding and bed coverings” [beddes and Coverynges] were included, but simply not specified, in the earlier processions, or if they were a sixteenth-century development.

Maintaining the established order of the procession seems to have become more challenging during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Multiple entries in the House Books outline penalties for those who do not attend the procession and efforts to more closely regulate the event; “every craft was put in clothing and ordered how they shall go in procession at Corpus Christi and at all other times of assembly.”⁵⁹ In 1501, an *A/Y* entry lists the order of craft guilds in the procession, indicating which walk on their own versus in pairs and how many torches each is permitted to carry. The Cobblers are first with four torches, followed by the Porters with eight, and so forth. Some guilds process “by tham self” while others process as a pair, such as the Weavers and Cordwainers. The Weavers are noted as of the “right hand” while the Cordwainers are of the “left hand.”⁶⁰ The visual transcript is obviously important because disputes between guilds regarding the processional order are recorded repeatedly throughout the civic record. The most famous is a disagreement between the Cordwainers and Weavers, which continued for many years. In 1492 the Cordwainers were actually fined because they did not carry their torches in the procession “according to the ordinances and against the commandment of

⁵⁸ Ibid., 283. Original: “in Coopes of the best that can be gottyn within the sayd Citie”; “shall hang before ther doores & forefrontes beddes & Coverynges of beddes of the best that thay can gytt and Strewe before ther doores resshes and other suche fflowers & Strewing as they thynke honeste & clenly for the honour of godd & worship of this Citie.”

⁵⁹ Ibid., 186. Original: “euery crafft was put in a clothyng & ordered howe thei shall go in procession at Corpuscristenmes & at all oþer tyme of assemblez.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 186.

the mayor and common council previously made and given.”⁶¹ But there were other disputes as well, such as a 1530 disagreement between the Carpenters and the Joiners and Carvers regarding the processional arrangements; “dissension, dispute, and debate have been heretofore lately taking place among the said occupations regarding going in procession the day after Corpus Christi day.”⁶² These disputes suggest that there was more at stake in the visual codes of York’s Corpus Christi procession than we may now be able to recognize.

Controlling material objects during public events—clothing, torches—was as important as controlling the bodies of participants. For this reason, the visual concerns over the procession extended to the Corpus Christi shrine. The 1432 agreement describes how the men and women of the Corpus Christi guild offered the city

At their own expense a certain shrine of sumptuous work, lately both carved and moreover painted with gold, which henceforth (is) to be enriched and ornamented more preciously with the purest silver and gold with the Lord’s help, which they wish also to be carried each year in the hands of priests on the feast of Corpus Christi...with sacrament of the body of Christ enclosed in it and in crystal or beryl or some other thing open to the sight of men more suitably for the sacrament, always preceded by the light of the torches of the good citizens of the aforesaid fraternity.⁶³

The shrine added an additional degree of visibility to the Eucharist, layering it with jewels, gold, and silver. Control over this shrine is clearly stipulated in the agreement; the shrine is to remain locked in St. William’s chapel on Ouse bridge with free access granted only to the fraternity’s wardens and the mayor. The mayor is given his own key to prevent any delay should he wish to show the shrine “to any honourable persons, lords

⁶¹ Ibid., 795 (166). Original source: House Books.

⁶² Ibid., 252. Original: “discencion travers & debate haith been heretofore laitely movyd emonges ye saides occupacions for goyng in processyon the next day after Corpus christi day.”

⁶³ Ibid., 735 (51).

or ladies, or others of noble birth wishing to see the same uncovered.”⁶⁴ These terms essentially control access to the sight of, and presence before, the shrine.

As with proper processional decorum, the specified purpose behind using an elaborate shrine is “so that from this, faith and devotion may be increased among the present people.”⁶⁵ This same language was also used to describe the goals of performing York’s Creed and Pater Noster plays. Although texts for these two play cycles do not survive, a significant number of records of their planning and performance exist, and these allow us to make claims about how they functioned within the city.⁶⁶ Alexandra F. Johnston argues that these plays were presented on wagons in the same processional format as the Corpus Christi cycle, and most scholars believe that both the Creed play and the Pater Noster play were divided into smaller pageants that coincided with the petitions.⁶⁷ Eamon Duffy notes, “whatever their precise content, these plays clearly involved a massive corporate effort by the laity of York to foster knowledge of the elements of the faith.”⁶⁸ Records verify that these plays were used as lay instructional tools. The Pater Noster guild was specifically founded in order to continue the production of its eponymous play. A 1389 return, which describes the guild’s activities and its properties, reads,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 736 (52).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 735 (51).

⁶⁶ See Alexandra F. Johnston, “The Plays of the Religious Guilds of York: The Creed Play and The Pater Noster Play,” *Speculum* 50 (1975): 55-90, particularly the appendices that list all extant documents related to these plays. See also Sue Powell, “*Pastoralia* and the Lost York Plays of the Creed and Paternoster,” *European Medieval Drama* 8 (2004): 35-50.

⁶⁷ Johnston uses the work of Rosemary Woolf and M.D. Anderson, as well as contemporary comments by John Wycliffe, to examine structure. Anderson, in particular, infers the structure of the plays from late medieval visual art and homiletic traditions that generally divided both the Creed and Pater Noster into petitions to aid instruction. See Johnston, “The Plays of the Religious Guilds,” 66; 77.

⁶⁸ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 67.

It should be known that after a certain play on the usefulness of the Lord's Prayer was composed, in which play, indeed, many vices and sins are reprov'd and virtues commended, and was played in the city of York, it had such and so great an appeal that very many said: "Would that this play were established in the city for the salvation of souls and the solace of the citizens and neighbors."⁶⁹

The return also indicates that the guild was responsible for maintaining "a certain drawing which hangs above a column in the cathedral church aforesaid, next to the above candelabrum and depicts the layout and usefulness of the Lord's Prayer."⁷⁰ The guild obviously had great confidence in images as tools for lay devotional instruction.

The 1449-51 account rolls for the Corpus Christi guild indicate that it held similar goals for its Creed play, though these were coupled with other civic aims:

[The Creed play] can be fittingly (done) openly and publicly through the city of York in various <places>, both to the praise of God and particularly to the educating of the people..., indeed, so that the Creed may be brought a little to the good of the ignorant of the city...and the honour and great merit of the present fraternity.⁷¹

As in the Corpus Christi procession, the play links civic prestige to a devotional program of images. Documentation related to the Corpus Christi shrine reinforces this intertwining of "secular" and "sacred" objectives. The records assert that when "any honourable persons" see the shrine uncovered, "their devotion may grow from this and the honour of the said city increase, and most especially that the praise or honour of the beholders may redound to the Lord."⁷² The city's honor is reflected in the sumptuousness of the shrine, whereas devotional activities, like the eucharistic procession, are expressions of a city's power and prestige; a city with lavish pious practices must be truly blessed by God.

⁶⁹ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 693 (6).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 864 (646).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 757 (80). The <...> surrounding words indicates that these are damaged or lost letters.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 736 (52).

Devotional aims are aligned with honor, either for the city as a whole or for particular lay institutions within the city, and this association is often accomplished using visible material images. Funding sumptuous plays was not only a pious practice, but a practice of identity construction. In a culture in which visible cues were understood as elements of a social transcript, the sequence of crafts in a religious procession, the opulence of a sacred shrine, the number of torches displayed at a funeral, and the dramatic presentation of religious stories all convey multiple levels of visual meaning.⁷³

It is clear that within this sophisticated visual culture, the York cycle functioned as a powerful tool of visual piety. Medieval drama not only created sumptuous images and visually oriented encounters, but it also constructed particular ways of seeing. As I noted in my Introduction, Robert Scribner encourages us to understand piety as a “way of seeing” located in and shaped by particular cultural and devotional contexts.⁷⁴ He argues that during the later Middle Ages a certain type of religious seeing developed, something he calls “the sacramental gaze.”⁷⁵ He writes that, “As a visual experience and as a pious action, the act of ‘sacramental seeing’ was essentially a form of the gaze, a prolonged, contemplative encounter with the holy figure represented. . . . This form of contemplative gaze constituted a personal encounter between the viewer and the viewed that constituted a characteristic feature of the pious image.”⁷⁶ The “sacramental gaze” became part of the image itself, sustained by its form and content. I believe York’s dramatic cycle also encouraged a particular mode of seeing, a devotional gaze, that is similar to Scribner’s

⁷³ I recognize that there is also an important material aspect contributing to the meaning of these visual elements. I discuss the role of materiality in visual piety in the next two chapters.

⁷⁴ Robert Scribner, “Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late Medieval and Reformation Germany,” *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): 456.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 461.

“sacramental gaze” in that it was both a visual experience and a pious action, but, unlike Scribner’s gaze, not limited to a private, prolonged, and contemplative experience.

Instead, the devotional gaze was both contemplative and cumulative, both personal and corporate.⁷⁷

As I established in my Introduction, the York cycle was embedded in a rich visual and material culture of devotion.⁷⁸ Performances were in conversation with the rituals, objects, and texts that surrounded them. They also offered laypeople a rich supply of images with which they might actively construct visual piety. A frequently quoted story from the early seventeenth century tells of an old man who was quizzed on his knowledge of Christ. The man replied “I think I heard of that man you spake of, once in a play at Kendall, called Corpus Christi play, where there was a man on a tree, and the blood ran down.”⁷⁹ Dramatic imagery clearly formed and impressed sacred images on the lay imagination.⁸⁰ But, as Morgan astutely points out, a popular religious image “is part

⁷⁷ In David Morgan’s recent study of religious visual culture, he employs the term “sacred gaze.” My notion of a lay “devotional gaze” is related to this. Morgan writes, “Vision happens in and as culture, as the tools, artifacts, assumptions, learned behaviors, and unconscious promptings that are exerted in images. But seeing is more than its product.... Sacred gaze is a term that designates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance” (3). Although Morgan acknowledges the devotional aspect of the “sacred gaze,” he does not use the term to describe seeing that functions as an explicitly devotional practice. I, on the other hand, use the term “devotional gaze” but it is precisely this idea—performance viewing as a pious practice of belief—that I wish to examine. See David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson’s *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Victor I. Scherb’s *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001) particularly examine this embeddedness in respect to East Anglian drama. The ways in which they contextualize drama by analyzing it alongside art objects and textual practices has been extremely important in shaping my work. Theresa Coletti’s *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of the Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) takes a similar approach to drama.

⁷⁹ “The Life of Master John Shaw” in *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Charles Jackson (Durham: Andrews and Company, 1877), 139.

⁸⁰ A fascinating example of drama used for religious instruction in the later Middle Ages appears in the late fifteenth-century Dutch play *Mariken van Nieumeghen*. In *Mariken*, a young girl is persuaded to repent her

of a larger cultural literacy, one that includes pointing, verbal narration, oral traditions, singing, and pious devotion. Devotional images, in other words, participate in a visual piety that encompasses a range of inter-acting, interdependent forms of meaning-making.”⁸¹ The devotional gaze participates as an active force within such a culture, manipulating, combining, and erasing images when this is necessary for the viewer’s religious needs.⁸² Morgan notes that when given multiple sacred images, “Believers don’t have to choose among these; instead they compile them in their devotional gaze.”⁸³ The devotional gaze is open, thereby allowing contextual, structural, and experiential elements to accumulate around images and enrich our visual encounters with them. But it also serves as a space in which these images create meaning; as Morgan asserts “the power of images it would seem, particularly religious images, is measured by their relevance in solving problems and in coping with the problems that can’t be solved.”⁸⁴ For this reason, the devotional gaze can be controlled or manipulated by the creators and producers of images in an effort to solve problems related to specific communities. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I examine how the dramatic structure, staging practices, and textual elements of York’s medieval performance influenced the devotional gaze, and, therefore, lay visual piety. I will consider instances where I identify specific communities within York actively directing this “way of seeing” in order to

sins after she attends a public play in which repentance is advocated. This play also suggests that plays are better than preaching at converting because they reach a wider and more diverse audience. This episode also appears in the sixteenth-century English version of this play, published as *Mary of Nemmegen*, ed. Margaret M. Raftery (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

⁸¹ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 24.

⁸² Morgan’s work argues for an aesthetic of popular religious art viewing and identifies a number of its characteristics, including recognition, interactivity, projection, empathy, and sympathy. All of these suggest an active encounter between believer and image, and all are forms of meaning-making that were likely to have been present in the medieval layperson’s encounter with dramatic religious images.

⁸³ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

promote their own agendas. As with York's Creed Play or its Corpus Christi procession and shrine, laypeople often accomplished this layering by folding "secular" priorities into a visual devotional program.

City Space as Dramatic Structure

The York cycle was a particularly effective means of controlling the devotional gaze, and thereby influencing visual piety, because of its dramatic structure. In his article on memory and English medieval drama, Theodore K. Lerud employs medieval mnemonic theory to demonstrate that the images in these plays were the kinds of "quick images" prescribed in treatises on memory.⁸⁵ Scholars such as Lerud and Victor Scherb have analyzed the relationship between medieval mnemonic theory and English drama in order to examine how theatre operated within the visual culture of the Middle Ages.⁸⁶ This relationship appears significant if we consider that laypeople were instructed in the use of mnemonic theory during sermons, and therefore may have actively applied this devotional tool to their performance viewing encounters.⁸⁷ Using the medieval art of

⁸⁵ Theodore K. Lerud, "Quick Images: Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama," in *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskén (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 213-37.

⁸⁶ Victor Scherb particularly builds on the correspondences between medieval art, drama, and memory articulated by Robert Edwards in "Techniques of Transcendence in Medieval Drama," in *The Drama of the Middle Ages*, eds. Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 103-17.

⁸⁷ For an excellent essay on how laypeople were instructed in memory theory during sermons see Kimberly Rivers, "Memory and Medieval Preaching: Mnemonic Advice in the *Ars Praedicandi* of Francesc Eiximenis (ca. 1327-1409)," *Viator* 30 (1999): 253-84. For an examination of performance elements in medieval sermons see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record," in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill, 2002), 89-124. Significantly, Alexandra F. Johnston's recent work connects the creation and monitoring of the cycle play with the Augustinian Friary in York, whose residents were important members of the city, particularly in their role as preachers to the city's occupants. This theory closely and significantly aligns the cycle with preaching, supporting the suggestion that mnemonic devices were consciously employed in the cycle text and recognized as effective instructional tools by authorities in York. See "John Waldeby, the Augustinian Friary, and the Plays of York," in *In Honor of Clifford*

memory, we can begin to understand specifically what characteristics made these images such effective devotional aids, and how they could be manipulated to generate additional visual meaning.

Ancient mnemonic images were active, three-dimensional constructions. In *De Oratore*, Cicero's mnemonic examples are described as scenic tableaux. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, by pseudo-Cicero, instructs readers to remember a man accused of murder in order to obtain an inheritance by imagining a man "lying ill in bed.... [W]e shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, and in his left tablets, and on the fourth finger a ram's testicles" (III.xx). Medieval writers made these dramatic tableaux more active. In his treatise *On Acquiring a Trained Memory*, Thomas Bradwardine, a fourteenth-century academic and cleric, maintains that a mental image "should have some other quality such as movement, that thus it may be commended to memory more effectively than through tranquility or repose."⁸⁸ One of his examples for memorizing the signs of the zodiac is quite violent: "a woman may be placed before the bull as though laboring in birth, and in her uterus as if ripped open from her breast may be figured *coming forth* two most beautiful twins, *playing* with a horrible, intensely red crab, which *holds captive* the hand of one of the little ones and thus compels him to weeping and such outward signs, the remaining child wondering yet nonetheless *touching the crab in a childish way*."⁸⁹ This striking image moves through the zodiac as if it were a kind of active dramatic sequence.

Davidson: Papers Presented at the 35th International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 6, 2000 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 1-15.

⁸⁸ Thomas Bradwardine, "On Acquiring a Trained Memory," in *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, eds. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 208.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 210, italics mine.

Simonides, who is credited with establishing the art of memory, is based upon visual order; Simonides was able to identify the bodies of people who had been crushed by a fallen roof from his recollection of the place where each of them had been reclining at table.⁹¹ Most mnemonic texts formulate a system of organization. Mary Carruthers describes such a “locational memory system” as “any scheme that establishes a set of ordered, clearly articulated, and readily recoverable background locations into which memory ‘images’ are consciously placed.”⁹² In his treatise on memory, Francesc Eiximenis maintains that preachers must present their material in an orderly fashion and, for this purpose, offers different types of structures into which they can place their images. The first four are “in major roads and paths known to us, in anything that is straight and situated in an orderly way, in large and ornate homes, in the human body and its ordered members.”⁹³ Eiximenis recommends that we find and use an *existing* order. The York cycle operates under this same principle. By separating the Christian narrative into smaller units and placing these in an ordered procession before the eyes, it creates an effective locational memory system. The Christian narrative, from Creation to the Last Judgment, is not presented as a single, large story, but instead, the cycle presents key events in the narrative as individually packaged pageants. This structure was used in York not only for its Corpus Christi cycle, but, as Johnston argues, was likely also employed for its Creed and Pater Noster plays.

⁹¹ Cicero recounts this story in Book Two of *De Oratore*, but it is also included in a number of memory treatises in antiquity, and throughout and beyond the Middle Ages.

⁹² Mary Carruthers, “The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 881-2.

⁹³ Francesc Eiximenis, “On Two Kinds of Order that Aid Understanding and Memory,” in *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, eds. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 192.

The sequence created in these medieval locational memory systems was conceptualized as a journey. Carruthers identifies this as the *ductus* or directed movement in a text, and writes that “*ductus* is what we sometimes now call the flow of a composition.... [I]t is the movement within and through a work’s various parts.”⁹⁴ There is an element of performance in her definition of *ductus*, particularly when she contends that a composed work is “open” and that every reading or “repetition of a work will differ.”⁹⁵ For this reason, medieval compositions can be interpreted as highly flexible texts, since they present a conversational and personalized way of working through them. Carruthers describes early monastic meditation as “initiated, oriented, and marked out especially by the schemes and tropes of Scripture. Like sites plotted on a map, these functioned cognitively as the ‘stations’ of the way, to be stopped at and stayed in mentally before continuing.”⁹⁶ Meditative and mnemonic processes were imagined as physical journeys taken by the participant. But, in the case of the cycle, the pageants, not the spectator, made the mnemonic journey through the streets. Audience members may have visited multiple stations, but likely did not follow the full processional route. Whereas the dramatic structure allowed the pageants to create and then reinforce particular visual associations at each station, something I discuss in my next section, the complete cycle journey sacralized the city space on a symbolic level.⁹⁷ Both the

⁹⁴ Carruthers, “Rhetorical *Ductus*,” 101.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁷ Much has been written on the social functions of the processional cycle in the medieval civic space, the most widely cited article being Mervyn James’s “Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town,” *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 3-29. Many scholars have refuted James’s interpretation of the Corpus Christi procession and play as resolving social conflict through ritual action. For instance, see Chapter Two of Beckwith’s *Signifying God* and Benjamin R. McRee, “Unity or Division?: The Social Meaning of Guild Ceremony in Urban Communities,” in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), 189-207.

individual stations and the route as a whole therefore formed parts of a mnemonic devotional program.

Like many medieval mnemonic programs, the York plays selected and sequentially processed information before the eyes, but they also encouraged spectators to make a visual journey through their faith, and provided “stopping points” on the way, as well as time in between the individual plays to meditate on the action and personalize the experience. As Eiximenis suggests, the play borrowed an existing order—York’s street design—and impressed the stories onto it. By using this structure, the York plays forged a memory of Christian history in the minds of the lay community that included the stations themselves. Documentation describing these performance stops reveals that they were as actively regulated and contested as was the content of the pageants.

Civic Space as a Contested Site

Throughout its life, the York cycle followed the basic route described in the first extant record of the York pageant stations from 1399.⁹⁸ The pageant wagons assembled at

For general work on theatre and processional space, see David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 63-91.

⁹⁸ A great deal of scholarship has focused on the York cycle’s route and staging, including Eileen White, “Places to Hear the Play in York: The Performance of the Corpus Christi Play in York,” *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 49-78; Meg Twycross, “The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 37-84; Meg Twycross, “The Left-Hand Theory: A Retraction,” *Medieval English Theatre* 14 (1992): 77-94; David Crouch, “Paying to See the Play: The Stationholders on the Route of the York Corpus Christi Play in the Fifteenth Century,” *Medieval English Theatre* 13 (1991): 64-111; Alexandra F. Johnston, “The York Corpus Christi Play: A Dramatic Structure based on Performance Practice,” in *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, eds. H. Braet, J. Nowé, and G. Tournoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 362-73; Meg Twycross, “‘Places to Hear the Play’: Pageant Stations at York, 1398-1572,” *REED Newsletter* 2 (1978): 10-33; Martin Stevens, “The York Cycle: From Procession to Play,” *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 37-61. Although the 1980s witnessed intense debate over whether or not it would have been possible to stage all of the York pageants processionally on wagons in a single day at multiple stations, this has, for the most part, been put to rest in favor of such a possibility. For a summary of this debate, see William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 114-20. For scholarship on medieval processional performance, see the essays in *Moving Subjects: Processional*

Toft Green, an open public space next to the city's Dominican Friary. In 1307, the Dominicans tried to enlarge their landholdings to include Toft Green, but the city decided it needed this space since it was not only the location of a common market, but also the only place in the city large enough for such events as erecting military engines of defense and holding duels in trial by combat.⁹⁹ The cycle began near Mickelgate bar at the gates of Holy Trinity Priory before progressing down Mickelgate, crossing the Ouse Bridge, and entering the city center. Here it continued through the most affluent areas of the city, along Coney Street, Stonegate, and Petergate, before concluding at the open market space called the Pavement, with the churches of St. Crux and All Saints Pavement at either end. As with the Corpus Christi procession of the Eucharist, York's records reveal multiple attempts to prevent any deviation from the approved route. A 1394 *A/Y* entry, which predates the first explicit list of the stations, reads "it was agreed that all the pageants of Corpus Christi shall play in the places appointed from ancient times and not elsewhere, but just as they shall be prearranged by the mayor, the bailiffs, and their officers."¹⁰⁰ The punishment for failure to follow this instruction is payment of 6s. 8d. by the craft to the common purse.

In 1399, and throughout most of its fifteenth-century life, the cycle consisted of twelve stations. During the sixteenth century, the number of stations grew to as many as seventeen, but the same basic route was maintained. One important characteristic of this route, which is still apparent today, is the number of stations located before parish churches. From the evidence available in the 1399 list, it appears that as many as ten of

Performance in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

⁹⁹ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York. Volume Three: Southwest of the Ouse* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972), 106.

¹⁰⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 694 (8).

the twelve stops were located near or before a parish church or the Minster. The chart below lists the stations, as they appear in this first list, beside their associated parish churches. I have noted on this chart whether or not the church building is still extant or if the church's location is only suggested by the medieval record and archaeological evidence.¹⁰¹ Most of these churches are still standing; therefore, walking the route today makes the mnemonic possibilities very immediate.

	Station Location as Specified in 1399 <i>A/Y Memorandum List</i>	Parish Church	Extant or Suggested
1	Gates of Holy Trinity Priory	Holy Trinity Church	Extant
2	Robert Harpham's house	St. Gregory	Suggested
3	John de Gyseburn's door	St. Martin, Mickelgate	Extant
4	Skeldergate and North Street	St. John	Extant
5	End of Coney Street opposite Castlegate	St. Michael	Extant
6	End of Jubbergate in Coney Street	---	
7	Henry Wyman's door in Coney Street	St. Martin, Coney Street	Extant
8	End of Coney Street next to the Common Hall	St. Helen	Extant
9	Adam del Brigg's door	---	
10	Gates of the Minster of blessed Peter	Minster ¹⁰²	Extant
11	End of Girdlergate in Petergate	Holy Trinity, Colliergate	Suggested
12	On the Pavement	St. Crux and All Saints Pavement	Both Extant

Until it reached the Minster Gates, the cycle followed the same route as the procession of the Eucharist. At the Minster, the procession wrapped its way west to conclude at St. Leonard's Hospital, an ecclesiastical institution, while the cycle continued east toward the Pavement, a public, civic space. Stopping the cycle at churches may simply have been

¹⁰¹ Johnston and Rogerson, York, 698 (11). For the topography of medieval York, I have used the York Archaeological Trust's "Viking and Medieval York" map (1998). This is reconstructed from ordinance survey results and includes medieval parish district outlines, as well as parish churches.

¹⁰² I include the Minster on this list because cycle spectators would certainly have been visually aware of the large structure of the Minster in the background even though pageants were not performed directly before it. One could argue that the cycle purposefully does not make the same visual association with the Minster as it does with the parish churches.

the continuation of a feature of the procession of the Eucharist, initially established for the sake of convenience.

The parish church played an important role in the life of the medieval laity since it formed the basis of one of the many communities of which each layperson counted him or herself a member. Parish churches were filled with art, memorials, vestments, and devotional objects, such as liturgical books and silver, that had been donated by parishioners. In my third chapter, I more thoroughly discuss late medieval lay wills, so for now I will only mention that in almost every medieval will the testator bequeaths money or objects to his or her parish church. These bequests usually appear early in the body of wills and, though not always accurate, constitute one means of tracing where individuals lived within the city. Parish limits were geographical, which, as Gervase Rosser notes, did not usually lead to exclusivity within that community, though some parishes had professional associations.¹⁰³ For instance, many laypeople whose crafts contributed to the construction or upkeep of the Minster lived in the districts around the cathedral. Consequently, the parishes of St. Helen and St. Michael-le-Belfry included a number of glaziers and masons. Therefore, there could be a degree of professional identification and unity associated with a parish identity. As a geographic force, parish churches may have been convenient locations for certain communities to gather and watch the eucharistic procession. When the cycle first borrowed the same route, it may

¹⁰³ Gervase Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages," in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750*, ed. Susan Wright (London: Hutchinson 1988), 35.

therefore have seemed equally convenient to choose these audience clusters as station locations.¹⁰⁴

But the 1399 list also reflects how the cycle performance might complicate any neat boundaries between the secular and the sacred. I have already suggested that one important way that the cycle influenced visual piety was by incorporating secular elements into the devotional gaze. In the first list of stations, four of the twelve are identified as being before a particular person's door. As I mentioned earlier, Sarah Beckwith suggests that this arrangement may have been a strategy used by prominent citizens to inscribe themselves onto the pageant route.¹⁰⁵ Although I agree with her argument, I am interested in how this list may also have functioned as part of a particular community's agenda. The four named individuals in the 1399 list are Robert Harpham (second station, in Mickelgate), John de Gyseburn (third station, in Mickelgate), Henry Wyman (seventh station, in Coney Street), and Adam del Brigg (ninth station, in Stonegate). All four men were members of the city's merchant elite with familial or social ties to the Mickelgate community. I argue that this community employed the cycle's visual structure to further its specific goals.

Although Mickelgate was the main street of southwestern York, its surrounding neighborhood was separated from the commercial center of the city by the river Ouse. It was not until the fourteenth century that this area grew prosperous and became an affluent quarter of mercantile importance, primarily due to the wealth of noble and gentry

¹⁰⁴ See also Lynette Muir's argument regarding the development of the cycle route from the eucharistic processional route in *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 23-55.

families that moved there from the country.¹⁰⁶ Exemplifying this change, we find a number of late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century civic officials, including mayors, living in Mickelgate, among them Gyseburn (mayor from 1371-3 and 1379-81) and Del Brigg (sheriff 1403). As Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy note, the Mickelgate community, and particularly the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century mayors from that neighborhood, played a leading role in developing new forms of civic religion and regulating public ritual, including the cycle play.¹⁰⁷ I characterize the affixing of the names of prominent citizens from, or associated with, Mickelgate to this major religious performance as part of a civic devotional program that attempted to incorporate Mickelgate more completely into the pious landscape of York through visual associations. In addition, these visual associations were reinforced through the bodies of the spectators, who enacted their visual piety in a space defined by these associations. As with the Mercers' play of the Last Judgment, it is significant that this first list of the stations is recorded at a historical moment when wealth began to be interpreted as a reward for piety and hard work.¹⁰⁸ The cycle may have functioned as a visual means for the "new" merchant elite in Mickelgate to associate themselves—and their wealth—with pious practices, and, in this way, to integrate themselves symbolically into the religious and social landscape of the city. The cycle stations create a scenario in which these

¹⁰⁶ Crouch, "Paying to See the Play," 66-7; Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *York. Southwest of the Ouse*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy, "The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domesticity, Piety and the Public Sphere," in *Household, Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, eds. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakke and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), forthcoming. I wish to thank the authors for allowing me to see a very early draft of this article.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Dyer, "Work Ethics in the Fourteenth Century," in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. James Bothwell and P. Jeremy P. Goldberg (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), 24.

associations were experiential for the audience, thereby forcing the lay spectators to enact a visual piety that confirmed the Mickelgate neighborhood as a devotional site.

The greater community probably recognized the efficacy of this visual program, because the city Commons began to regulate it beginning in the fifteenth century. A 1417 ordinance required all stationholders to give the common purse a percentage of all profits collected from the scaffold seating they erected at their designated stops. In her excellent dissertation on civic elite in York from 1476 to 1525, Charlotte Carpenter challenges the widely held supposition that late medieval York's civic government was dominated by wealthy merchants, thus resulting in a tension between merchants and artisans, as well as between civic officials and the masses.¹⁰⁹ She argues that "the influence of wealthy merchants over the government of later medieval York was never constant and has in some instances been overemphasized."¹¹⁰ Carpenter's work challenges the conflation of political and economic influence, and seeks to uncover other means by which the civic elite consolidated power. One such method is ritual action: "the élite constructed or consolidated itself as a unified group through defensive and pro-active ritual actions. In turn, these ritual actions constituted a discourse of unanimity which reflected contemporary civil thought."¹¹¹ Carpenter's analysis concerns the middle period of the cycle's life, but her conclusions about ritual action are pertinent to the act of stationholding. This specific ritual action not only offered elite members of York the opportunity to make money and guaranteed them a good viewing location, but it also visually and experientially associated them with the devotional event. David Crouch

¹⁰⁹ This argument is repeated by many scholars, but is most often associated with Heather Swanson's *Medieval British Towns* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Charlotte Carpenter, "The Formation of Urban Élites: Civic Officials in Late-Medieval York 1476-1525," (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 2000), 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

argues that by the end of the century erecting scaffolds may have been interpreted as a duty required of wealthy citizens,¹¹² but it likely never lost its associations as a pious practice. And, as in Mickelgate, regulation effectively limited spectators to sites where their devotional experiences became visually and physically merged with the identities of elite citizens. In this way, the staging of the pageants not only memorialized the city space, but also functioned to establish new pious codes within York.

Similar reasoning may have influenced the initial decision to establish a dramatic cycle sponsored by craft guilds. Jeremy Goldberg posits that

It was the desire of collectivities of craftworkers to give religious meaning to their labours and to participate in this collective manifestation of civic pride, this act of devotion, and this work of mercy that in many instances gave rise to the guilds....With the exception of the weavers and the girdlers, we have little evidence for the existence of craft guilds before the ordinances are first recorded in the city Memorandum Book from the end of the fourteenth century. Equally we have no notice of the Corpus Christi play before 1376....What this chronology suggests, however, is that a multi-pageant Play cycle had already evolved by 1376 and that large numbers of craft guilds had come into existence within a decade or so of that date.¹¹³

Disputing the notion that the cycle was imposed upon the craft guilds,¹¹⁴ Goldberg further argues that the plays themselves enacted the notion of a “gild ethos” that craftsmen were trying to promote, and, therefore, in the plays we find that “gild values and godly values

¹¹² Crouch, “Paying to See the Play,” 85.

¹¹³ Jeremy Goldberg, “Craft Guilds, The Corpus Christi Play and Civic Government,” in *The Government of Medieval York: Essays in Commemoration of the 1396 Royal Charter*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (York: University of York and Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1997), 148-9.

¹¹⁴ Swanson, *Medieval British Towns*. In his article “Craft Guilds and City: The Historical Origins of the York Mystery Plays Reassessed,” R. B. Dobson builds on Swanson’s conclusions to argue that the cycle developed, not out of the Corpus Christi procession, but instead from a desire by an overseas merchant elite to exert control over York’s commercial life. Dobson’s article appears in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Knight (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 91-105.

are inextricably combined.”¹¹⁵ Beckwith similarly posits that the York pageants offered an “artisanal ideology” that linked the cycle’s sacred moments to craft labor.¹¹⁶ These arguments support my suggestion regarding the Mickelgate stations. For both of these late fourteenth-century communities—the residents of Mickelgate and York’s craftsmen—the cycle may have operated to fuse group identity with pious practice, and devotional imagery with experience.¹¹⁷ For guildsmen, this melding occurred during performances as they enacted the holy roles and as spectators saw them in those roles. In my next chapter, I examine the implications of this process in more detail when I consider issues of reception and embodiment in live performance, and how these elements of the performance viewing experience uniquely influenced medieval visual piety.

Visual Penance

Each year around the time of Lent, the city council of York met to determine whether to authorize a performance of the Corpus Christi cycle for that year. If a performance was planned, the mayor sent billets to the guild masters to notify them of this decision, and the masters assembled their guild members to “take order for their pageant and their light,” the light being the torches they carried in the Corpus Christi

¹¹⁵ Goldberg, “Craft Guilds,” 157.

¹¹⁶ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 53. See also Margaret Aziza Pappano’s “Judas in York: Masters and Servants in the Late Medieval Cycle Drama,” *Exemplaria* 14, no. 2 (October 2002): 317-50, in which she argues that the play’s representations of labor may reflect artisanal interests. For an insightful article that examines those strategies for influencing labor conditions that were available to medieval workers, see Gervase Rosser, “Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town,” *Past and Present* 154 (1997): 3-31.

¹¹⁷ This conclusion also suggests that various levels of sponsorship operated during the cycle. For more on this see Kathleen Ashley, “Sponsorship, Reflexivity and Resistance: Cultural Readings of the York Cycle Plays,” in *The Performance of Middle English Cultures: Essays on Chaucer and Drama in Honor of Martin Stevens*, eds. James J. Paxson, Lawrence M. Clopper, and Sylvia Tomasch (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 9-24.

procession.¹¹⁸ The guilds seem to have funded their own pageants. A fourteenth-century entry in the *A/Y* regarding the Tailors' guild notes that "four searchers will collect each year within the city the proper amount from each man of the said guild for the support of their pageant of Corpus Christi."¹¹⁹ In addition to a general collection, throughout the year guild fines, usually half of all paid, were diverted to fund the pageants. For example, in 1398, the Saddlers decided that "henceforth a half of all said fines of their guild and ordinance...be paid to the searchers and governors of their said guild to support their pageant of Corpus Christi."¹²⁰ Most guilds followed this model. A guild fined members for an assortment of reasons, as well as nonmembers who threatened its monopoly. An individual could be fined for practicing a craft within the city without belonging to the associated guild. In 1401, the Saddlers and Lorimers fined nonmembers who practiced their trade 13s. 4d., half of which went toward their pageant. The searchers of guilds were not only responsible for identifying those craftsmen who were practicing illegally, but also for fining members who broke guild rules regarding the keeping of apprentices, quality control, or selling goods. For instance, the Plasterers fined members 40d. to the Chamber and 40d. to their pageant if they employed apprentices for terms shorter than seven years.¹²¹ Guild members were also fined for preventing searchers from inspecting their craftsmanship. The Parchmentmakers fined their members 40d. for this offense, to be divided equally between the common purse and their pageant.¹²² Any crime against the integrity of the craft was punished, and the accumulated funds were almost always used, at least in part, to finance the guild's pageant.

¹¹⁸ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 701 (15). Original source: *A/Y Memorandum Book*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 690-1 (4).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 696 (10). Original source: *A/Y Memorandum Book*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 16. Original source: *A/Y Memorandum Book*.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 39. Original source: *A/Y Memorandum Book*.

Such a system offers a particularly interesting case of visual piety. The pageants were funded through misbehavior, and therefore an exceptionally elegant, lavish, and spectacular pageant may have represented not only the unruliness of that guild's members, but also the effective control of such misbehavior exercised through the guild structure. In this way, the performance could be interpreted as an act of penance, one offered in a public space and witnessed by the entire community. The performed images signified a guild member's confession and subsequent reintegration into the craft community. Therefore, they represented the authority that the craft guilds exerted over their members and the order that was thereby maintained.

If Goldberg's suggestions are correct, by the late fourteenth century York's craftsmen were invested in integrating themselves into York's social fabric as acceptable self-governing guild units. One way to do this was to convince those outside the artisanal classes that guilds provided a system that was advantageous to the city as a whole. The 1399 *A/Y* entry that first lists the stations is framed as an address by the commons of the city to "the honourable men, the mayor and aldermen of the city of York."¹²³ The entry is a request for more formal regulation, particularly that the civic leaders limit all playing except at those stations "assigned by you and by the aforesaid commons previously," because the pageants "are played in so many places at considerable hardship and deprivation to the said commons and strangers who have traveled to the said city."¹²⁴ Until 1517, "les Comunes," the largest of the three civic councils in York, was composed of forty-eight members who were apparently drawn from the crafts. After 1517, when this body was patented as the "Common Council," it was composed of two

¹²³ Ibid., 697 (11).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

representatives from each of the thirteen “major crafts” and one representative from the fifteen “minor crafts.”¹²⁵ Meetings of the civic council were normally attended by the mayor, Council of Twelve (made up of the twelve aldermen), and the Council of Twenty-four (whose life-term memberships were limited to ex-sheriffs). The Common Council did not convene regularly, though it sometimes met to protest the actions taken by the senior Councils or to present its concerns to these bodies. Essentially, it appears that the Common Council represented the interests of the craft guilds. Therefore, the 1399 ordinance is perhaps an effort by the guilds to demonstrate to the mayor and senior councils their commitment to social order and decorum. The entry shows exaggerated deference and humility: “And they (the commons) ask these things for the sake of God and as a work of charity for the benefit of the said commons and of the strangers who have travelled to the said city for the honour of God and the promotion of charity among the same commons.”¹²⁶ Presented in this way, the guilds seem to have only the best interests of the city in mind. At this moment in York’s history, when the guild structure was relatively new, it was to the crafts’ advantage to present their interests as aligned with those of the other governmental councils and their pageants as symbols of order, decorum, and, even, penance. The guilds’ request effectively portrays guild and godly values as indistinguishable.

Documentation surrounding the cycle’s structure, financing, and regulation reveals that York’s laity understood the value of its cycle as a visual medium and recognized the different opportunities this offered. The organization of the cycle not only fulfilled certain spiritual goals, but it could also be manipulated for other agendas. As a

¹²⁵ Ibid., xiii. See also Rees Jones, “York’s Civic Administration.”

¹²⁶ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 698 (11).

visual performance event that processed through various neighborhoods and past several religious institutions, the cycle could add layers of meaning to the city space. But it is critical to keep in mind that first and foremost the Corpus Christi cycle was a devotional event. I have examined how the cycle's performance form and structure may have merged civic agendas with that devotional gaze, thereby sacralizing individual communities within York, as well as their practices and values. I will now turn to the pageants themselves and examine how these entered and influenced the matrix of lay piety by presenting devotion as a viewing practice.

Part II: The Pageants

Visual piety involves constructing religion out of visual experiences in the world. Rather than a passive mode of religious understanding, visual piety is defined by Morgan as “the set of practices, attitudes, and ideas invested in images that structure the experience of the sacred.”¹²⁷ Medieval records indicate that York's lay communities actively utilized the cycle's visual structure and its images as a means to define and maintain their sacred and civic identities. The pageants in the cycle were part of this program, not only in the ways that they emphasized the role of seeing and sight in devotion, but also by offering and modeling very specific forms of lay visual piety. My analysis in this chapter begins to examine the medieval devotional encounters created in plays, specifically those that included Christ as a character. Morgan notes that “To have an image of Christ that listens, an image that returns one's gaze or watches over one, is to have a Christ who is not simply represented by the picture, but is in some sense presented

¹²⁷ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 2-3.

in it. Contemplation of this image is an encounter, an act of visual piety.”¹²⁸ Morgan uses this language to describe art objects, but the potential for visual piety greatly increases when we apply this notion of a contemplative encounter to religious performance. In this section, I highlight many examples from the York pageants when vision is staged as the primary means of experiencing divinity. By the chapter’s end, I also begin to analyze how the visual theology constructed by the cycle incorporates the lay body into these pious visual encounters, making the visual piety that it enacts immediately applicable to the cycle’s medieval spectators. In this way, the pageants frame visual piety as an embodied practice.

Visual Vocabulary and Anticipation

York’s pageants employ a vocabulary that repeatedly identifies sight and seeing as a form of devotional encounter. Words associated with vision are ubiquitous in these plays, particularly in reference to Christ. For instance, *The Purification* dramatizes Symeon’s desire to see Jesus and his joy when this finally happens. Vision metaphors are scattered throughout the play. Symeon repeatedly proclaims his intense hope to “see that babe so bright” [se that babb so bright] (17.133). When Jesus is brought to the Temple he is described with phrases such as a “bright star that shines bright as day” [bright starne that shyneth bright as day] and “the blessed beam so bright” [the blyssed beam so bryght] (17.326; 328). Jesus’ divinity is outwardly expressed in these visible signs. In *The Nativity*, a light “that comes shining thus suddenly” [Pat comes shynyng þus sodenly] (14.79) indicates Christ’s birth to Joseph, again offering visible signs of divine action. Frequently, evidence of God or Christ’s divinity, as in these cases, takes the form of light

¹²⁸ Ibid., 57.

or brightness. In *The Agony in the Garden and the Betrayal*, the soldiers have a problem seeing Christ because they “are lost because of the brightness of this light” [are loste for lerne of þis light] (28.258). One of the soldiers threatens Christ by saying, “I will no more be frightened by the radiance of your countenance” [I will no more be abasshed for blenke of thy blee] (28.263). These lines also indicate possible costume or make-up choices for Christ, such as a mask painted gold. The Chester Banns indicate that the face of God was presented as a “face gilte,” which implies either a mask or painted face.¹²⁹ Something similar may have been used in York’s pageants to create the brightness of Christ’s countenance that is frequently mentioned, thus accentuating the sacred nature of this visual encounter and differentiating him from other mortal characters.

Christ also describes himself in visual terms. In *The Baptism*, he calls himself a “mirror” [myrroure] for men and says that he must fulfill righteousness not only “in word but also in deed” [in worde but also in dede] (21.93; 130). This metaphor, or something similar, recurs in other York pageants, such as *The Temptation* (“their mirror may they make of me” [þare myrroure may þei make of me], 22.195) and *The Last Supper* (“Example of me ye shall take / Forever to heed in youth or old age” [Ensaumple of me take 3e schall, / Euer for to 3eme in 3ouþe and elde], 27.65-6). In *The Transfiguration*, not only do the words “seeing” and “sight” occur repeatedly, but the viewing experiences of the original witnesses to the Transfiguration are described at length in vivid visual terms: “this brightness made me blind” [þis brightnes made me blynde], “that cloud stunned us completely, / that came shining so radiantly, / Such a sight was never seen” [þat clowde cloumsed vs clene, / þat come schynand so clere, / Such syght was never sene] (23.191; 201-3). Privilege is accorded to those who experience this sacred event visually.

¹²⁹ Clopper, *Chester*, 247.

Significantly, the pageant situates its spectators as privileged witnesses alongside the disciples. This witnessing also occurs in *The Baptism*, during which the angels tell John that during Christ's baptism,

The heavens shall then be open,
The holy ghost shall be sent down,
To be seen
The father's voice with great force
Will be heard outright (21.66-70).¹³⁰

Likely some visible sign of the Holy Spirit accompanied the baptism, such as a dove, which often appears in iconography of the period, but we cannot be sure. Regardless, the medieval spectators witnessed the sacred moment. Similarly, in *The Women Taken in Adultery/The Raising of Lazarus*, the audience witnesses the miracle of Lazarus raised from the dead. The play ends with Jesus blessing all who have seen this event: "those who have seen this sight / My blessing be with you" (24.208-9).¹³¹ The cycle's language implies that, like the characters, the spectators are taking part in pious visual encounters. These encounters are central to the cycle's devotional function because they offer spectators a way to practice their faith during the performance.

Yet, the cycle does more than allow the audience to gaze upon the body of Christ; the pageants create scenarios that heighten opportunities for visual piety. For instance, in *The Transfiguration* the medieval audience may actually see more of the action than the dramatized disciples do. Although the disciples describe some visual aspects of the event—"His clothing is as white as snow / His face shines as the sun" (23.97-8)—they

¹³⁰ Original: "Þe heuenes schalle be oppen sene, / The holy gost schalle doune be sente / To se in sight / The fadirs voyce with grete talent / Be herde full rist."

¹³¹ Original: "3e þat haue sene þis sight / My blissyng with 3o be."

also remark on their physical inability to see everything.¹³² James says, “this brightness made me blind” (23.191), while Peter remarks that a brightness mars his vision:

Brother, whatever is that brightness?
Such marvel was never before seen.
It impairs my ability, I may not see,
Such wondrous thing was never seen (23.85-88).¹³³

The characters are able to see part of the event, which Christ asks them to recount, thereby indicating that their vision is a worthy record. But, the disciples admit that they could not see it all, particularly the face of God—“Ah, lord, why do you not let us see / Thy father’s face in his splendor?” (23.217-8).¹³⁴ Jesus remarks that to see God’s face is to ask “over-grete degree” and the disciples have not been granted “that grace” (23.219-20). This statement complicates how we define the spectator as viewer in this play. A later scribal hand interpolated stage directions into the play’s text on folio 104, which designate God as “Father on a cloud” [Pater in nube] and indicate that clouds descended (“Hic descendunt nubes”). But this may not accurately reflect the original staging of the play, nor does it clarify for us exactly what the medieval audience saw. Perhaps, as suggested by the Chester Banns, God appeared with a painted face or wearing a gilded mask. Yet, regardless of whether or not the spectators saw a representation of God or his face, it seems likely that they were situated as privileged witnesses who saw all of the staged action, even during those moments when the disciples enacted obstructed seeing. This juxtaposition likely heightened the spectator’s visual encounter.

The pageants also reinforce the spectator’s act of seeing by creating moments of visual anticipation. The expectation of Christ’s presence onstage is particularly central to

¹³² Original: “His clothyng is as white as snowe, / His face schynes as þe sonne.”

¹³³ Original: “þis brightnes made me blynde”; “Brethir, whateuere zone brightnes be? / Swilk burdis before was neuere sene. / It marres my myght, I may not see, / So selcouth thyng was neuere sene.”

¹³⁴ Original: “A, lord, why latest þou vs nozt see / Thy fadirs face in his fayrenes?”

the group of pageants that begins with *The Entry into Jerusalem* and ends with *The Ascension*. The *Entry* pageant oscillates between a scene with Christ and a scene between the Porter and Burgesses. These men recount Christ's miracles and the Old Testament prophecies about a redeemer: "What prophets said in their proverbs, / All pertains to him" (25.153-4).¹³⁵ During the next hundred or more lines, these men grow more eager to meet and see Christ: "And since we thus this matter feel / We go to meet him as our own king / And call him king" (25.171-3); "For I desire to see him eagerly / And to honor him as his own man. / Since the truth I see" (25.220-2); "I long for him with fervent will / To see once, / I think from thence forth I shall / a better man be" (25.256-9).¹³⁶ The men want physically to witness Christ's entry as a sacred event, an anticipation of the visual experience that incorporates the body into visual piety. This desire is continued through the character Zaché, who climbs a tree in his desperation to see Christ pass by. Significantly, all these characters believe that seeing Christ will make them better people. The transformative experience of seeing Christ's body is a theme that recurs and one to which I will return.

The cycle develops an anticipatory devotional gaze for spectators. During the Passion pageants, as Christ is brought before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and the crowd of Jews, care is taken in each scene either to place Christ before the eyes of the cycle's spectators or keep him out of view. For instance, during the *Christ Before Herod* pageant the first 166 lines indicate that Herod is delighted finally to see the famous

¹³⁵ Original: "What þe prophettis saide in þer sawe, / All longis to hym."

¹³⁶ Original: "And sen we þus þis mater fele / Go we hym meete as oure owne kyng. / And kyng hym call"; "For I desire to se hym fayne / And hym honnoure as his awne man. / Sen þe soth I see"; "I coveyte hym with feruent wille / Onys for to see, / I trowe fro þens I schall / Bettir man be."

prophet, but without, apparently, actually bringing Christ onstage until this anticipation has built to a climax, when Herod exclaims,

Oh, my heart leaps for joy
To see now this prophet appear.
We shall have good sport with this boy —
Take heed, for soon ye shall hear (31.163-6).¹³⁷

Perhaps *The Crucifixion* is the pageant which creates visual anticipation most effectively, with a dramatic sequence of approximately sixty-five lines in which the soldiers attempt to lift Christ on the cross multiple times. This scene is particularly sophisticated in the way it controls the devotional gaze. The dramatic moment replicates the Elevation of the Host, which, as Pamela King notes, “had become an essentially voyeuristic experience” for the laity by the late medieval period.¹³⁸ The play’s creators, knowing that this is a critical pious moment, seem to exploit its devotional and dramatic potential by drawing out the experience for spectators. Perhaps, by controlling changes in tempo, the actors further developed the anticipation during performances.

Lay Bodies and Pious Viewing

Christ’s body becomes the central focus for spectators during the cycle. Many of the pageants in the Passion sequence specifically contrast Christ’s words with his physical presence, and thereby make powerful statements about the importance of Christ’s body as a devotional image. Those who interrogate Christ wish to hear him speak and incriminate himself, something he continually refuses to do. As Alexandra F. Johnston points out, “At the centre of the play the Word falls silent,” and she concludes

¹³⁷ Original: “O, my harte hoppis for joie / To se nowe þis prophette appere. / We schall haue goode game with þis boy — / Takis hede, for in haste 3e schall here.”

¹³⁸ King, “The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments,” 165.

that the York playwright(s) “exploited the concept of logos” and by doing so portrayed the Word as a silent, still center in contrast to the deceitful speech of Christ’s interrogators.¹³⁹ But we must also acknowledge that during this silence Christ is not dramatically absent and, therefore, cannot be labeled as theatrically silent. The audience sees, in place of the spoken Word, the visible body of Christ, and this condition forces the audience to engage Christ through the eye, rather than the ear. This not only fixes Christ’s body as an object of visual piety, but it also provides opportunities in the pageants to show the role of the lay body in the devotional gaze.

The trial plays dramatize a tension between Christ’s speech and his visible body, and in these plays Christ becomes a silent center that forces authorities to judge him solely based upon his physical presence. The powerful experience of seeing this silent *corpus Christi* creates pivotal dramatic moments in three pageants in particular, *Christ Before Pilate I: The Dream of Pilate’s Wife*, *Christ Before Herod*, and *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*. During Christ’s first appearance before Pilate, the audience is offered a model of proper devotional gesture through the character Bedellus, Pilate’s servant, who is represented as extremely worthy and honest throughout the pageant. When Bedellus is ordered to fetch Christ, he replies,

But first shall I honor you with mind and with will.
 This reverence I do you therefore,
 For people who were wiser than I,
 They honored you completely on high
 And with solemnity sang Hosanna to you (30.311-5).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Alexandra F. Johnston, “‘His Language is Lorne’: The Silent Centre of the York Cycle,” *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 185; 194. Johnston traces the York cycle’s emphasis on *logos* to the centrality of Augustinian theology in York. See “*The Word Made Flesh: Augustinian Elements in the York Cycle*,” in *The Centre and its Compass: Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor John Leyerle*, ed. Robert A. Taylor, et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 225-46.

¹⁴⁰ Original: “But firste schall I wirschippe þe with witte and with will. / This reuerence I do þe forthy, / For wytes þar wer wiser þan I, / They worshipped þe full holy on hy / And with solempnit  sange Osanna till.”

The soldiers who speak next describe how, either during or after his lines, Bedellus not only worshipped Christ in words, but also in devotional gesture: “this boy here before you full boldly was bowing / To honor this scoundrel” (30.318-9) and “in your presence he prayed him of peace, / In kneeling on knees to this knave / He prayed him his servant to save” (30.320-2).¹⁴¹ It is not only Bedellus’s pious words that the soldiers and high priests find offensive, but also that these words are coupled with a physical devotional response to Christ’s present body.

Bedellus’s actions mirror late medieval devotional gesture. The heresy trial of Margery Baxter of Norwich offers insight into the physical rituals English laypeople used in parish churches. Although trial records are not always reliable sources, this record likely offers relatively accurate information about orthodox devotional activity. During the trial, Joan Clyfland recounted a conversation that she and two other women had with Margery while sitting and sewing by the fireplace. The record reads, “This witness then says that Margery asked her what she did in church every day. And she replied to her saying that first after her entrance into church, kneeling before the cross, she was accustomed to say five Paternosters in honour of the cross and the whole Ave Maria in honour of the Blessed Mary, mother of Christ.”¹⁴² These devotional responses reiterate those that Reginald Pecock defends in his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*. Pecock, a fifteenth-century priest, wrote many vernacular texts devoted to pointing out errors in Lollard theology. In this treatise, he describes how, in response to images, laypeople “kneel before them, or pray before them, or cense before them, or set

¹⁴¹ Original: “þis boy here before yowe full boldely was bowand / To worschippe þis warlowe”; “in youre presence he prayed hym of pees, / In knelyng on knes to þis knave / He besoughte hym his seruaunte to saue.”

¹⁴² “Trial of Margery Baxter of Norwich,” in *Women in England c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources*, ed. and trans. P. J. P. Goldberg (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 291.

lights or lamps before them, or hold or bear any such commemorative signs before them.”¹⁴³ It is this same kind of kneeling and praying that the physical presence of Christ inspires in Bedellus. Later in the play, other physical reactions to Christ are recounted and enacted. Bedellus explains how people of both high and low status ran to Christ on Palm Sunday and called “Hosanna, son of David.” Annas and Caiaphas dismiss this story as untrue (“his reasoning does not reckon with that which is right,” 30.355), to which Bedellus replies, “Sirs, truly the truth I have told” (30.357).¹⁴⁴

This play continues a theme begun during the preceding pageant, *Christ Before Annas and Caiaphas*, in which Peter’s denial of Christ is dramatized. Peter’s guilty reaction reinforces the potency of Christ’s visible body. After his third denial, Peter sees Christ and says, “The look of his fair face so clear / With great sad sorrow shears my heart” (29.168-9).¹⁴⁵ Looking at Christ prompts an appropriately guilty and humble devotional response. In this case, it is an internal gesture of self-examination. This moment communicates the same message as Bedellus’s external reaction: Christ’s visible body has the power to provoke involuntary, but appropriate, lay devotional gestures. These plays contrast the deceptive language of Annas and Caiaphas with the divine truth that Bedellus and Peter see with their eyes and enact through their physical bodies.

Conversely, *Christ Before Herod* turns the idea of devotional gesture, specifically kneeling in reverence, on its head. After a lengthy set-up, Christ is finally brought before Herod and told to “Kneel down here to the king on thy knee” (31.177). When Christ does

¹⁴³ Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Robert, 1860), 169. Original: “knele bifore hem, or preie bifore hem, or cense bifore hem, or sette listis or laumpis bifore hem, or holde or bere eny suche rememoratijf signes bifore hem.”

¹⁴⁴ Original: “his resoune þei rekenne nozt with right”; “Sirs, trulye þe troupe I haue tolde.”

¹⁴⁵ Original: “The loke of his faire face so clere / With full sadde sorrowe sheris my harte.”

not kneel, Herod remarks that Christ is treating him as if he were “a man of their own town” (31.180).¹⁴⁶ Christ not only maintains this refusal to kneel, but also a refusal to speak, which only aggravates Herod and his associates; they repeatedly ask Christ if he is crazy and why he “stands still as a stone” (31.324).¹⁴⁷ This silence becomes so frustrating that Herod and his courtiers begin to attack Christ’s body in an attempt to control him. This is one of numerous instances in the cycle when authority figures, recognizing the power of Christ’s body, try to suppress it by using force. In this example, Christ’s body is dressed in white, which is said to befit “a deranged” [forned] lad (31.351). But I would argue that Herod knows this superficial change will not actually tame him and therefore insists that Christ be returned to Pilate. This play not only enacts an appropriate refusal to perform devotional acts before profane images, but it also reemphasizes the idea that Christ’s body is a visible symbol of power.

Christ’s next encounter with Pilate, *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*, continues these themes. Christ is again mostly silent, thereby making his body the object of Pilate’s and the Jewish high priests’ scorn and anxiety, and the focus for the medieval spectator’s devotional gaze. During this play, Annas and Caiaphas continually try to persuade Pilate that Christ is a threat because of his dangerous language. In their initial tirades, the priests mention his “speakinges” [seggynges], “wordis,” “expounding” [legyng], “tales,” “speche,” and “boasting” [blure] as evidence of his crime. Pilate initially finds this evidence suspect and warns them about their use of false language (“For I like not your unrestrained language,” 33.131).¹⁴⁸ When the priests cannot convince Pilate through their own words, they ask to call witnesses for further testimony,

¹⁴⁶ Original: “Knele doune here to þe kyng on thy knee”; “a man of þer awne toune.”

¹⁴⁷ Original: “standis þou stille as a stone.”

¹⁴⁸ Original: “For me likis nocht youre langage so large.”

rather than bringing in Christ himself. Throughout this play, Annas and Caiaphas try to convince Pilate of Christ's crimes using different types of language, but the truth is revealed when Pilate makes visual contact with Christ. When Christ eventually enters the scene, his presence provokes an involuntary devotional response from Pilate, who remarks,

Such a sight was never yet seen
 Come sit,
 My control was taken from me completely –
 I stood up, I could not restrain myself
 From honoring him in deed and in thought (33.271-5).¹⁴⁹

Not only is Pilate struck by the sight of Christ, but his body uncontrollably springs up to worship him “in deed and in thought” [in wark and in witte].¹⁵⁰ Pilate's body understands what his mind does not. The lay body is thereby revealed as a better gauge of sacred truth than the mind or speech. This is a vivid enactment of the shift from the Old Testament focus on the Word to the New Testament focus on the flesh.

Unfortunately, we do not have the complete text for this pageant and therefore do not know how the trial of Christ and Barabbas was handled, but even without this section the focus on seeing, responding to, and attempting to tame Christ's body is clear. Like Herod, when Pilate finally feels threatened by Christ (“To be king he claims [claymeth],” 33.329), he tries to control him through his body, in this case by having Christ beaten. The lengthy beating scene is narrated by the four soldiers who perform the task, one of whom reiterates the goal of this assault on the flesh: “Thus we teach him to moderate his

¹⁴⁹ Original: “Slike a sight was neuere zit sene. / Come sytt, / My comforth was caught fro me clene – / I vpstritt, I me myght nozt abstene / To wirschip hym in wark and in witte.”

¹⁵⁰ Pilate's reaction is drawn from an apocryphal episode that was embellished in the contemporary narrative poem, *The Northern Passion*. See *The Northern Passion*, ed. Francis Foster (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2002). Richard Beadle notes this connection in “The York Cycle,” 104.

words” (33.400).¹⁵¹ But, in the eyes of the medieval spectators, as this body is beaten it only grows more powerful as it looks more and more similar to the image of the true suffering Christ. By the end of the play, the priests, their fears about Christ’s compelling presence having been realized in Pilate’s physical reaction, are eager to remove this body from the public space. Annas commands, “Draw him quickly away, deliver you, have done. / Go, do see him to death without further delay” (33.474-5).¹⁵² The body is situated as a medium that cannot be manipulated as words may be, and Pilate’s response to Christ not only enacts proper devotional gesture, but it identifies Pilate’s body as more sensitive to divine truth than his mind. The body responds appropriately, even when the mind cannot differentiate truth from deceit. As they watch these plays, spectators are taught to trust and follow the instincts of their bodies when they are stand in the presence of sacred images.

This contrast between Christ’s words—which can be twisted by his enemies—and his visible body—which, despite torture, remains an indelible sign of divinity and truth—is brought to a climax in *The Death of Christ*. In this pageant Christ hangs from the cross, having already been crucified in the preceding play. Annas and Caiaphas continue to focus their condemnation of Christ on his words and what these words convince others to say about him: “With tricks yet spoke this Jew / And cursedly he called himself a king” (36.57-8); “And worst of all, / He made them call him / God’s son” (36.63-5). They abuse him verbally by turning his own words against him, “I call you a coward / That marvels and miracles made. / You displayed your tricks among many

¹⁵¹ Original: “Thus we teche hym to tempre his tales.”

¹⁵² Original: “Drawe hym faste hense, delyuere zou, haue done. / Go, do se hym to dede withoute lenger delay.”

people; / But, wretch, you spoke thoughtlessly” (36.92-5).¹⁵³ Shortly thereafter, Christ addresses the crowd and asks them to look upon his body on the cross. In doing so, he walks the medieval audience through a devotional viewing practice,

You man that has sinned,
Pay close attention to me.
On a cross I am ragged and torn asunder,
For the sake of your sinful soul;
For your misdeeds I will repent.
Here I remain, my back stretched out,
Enduring this harm for your trespasses (36.118-24).¹⁵⁴

The play ends with this devotional seeing enacted. After wrapping and anointing the body, Joseph of Arimathea kneels before it saying, “To thee, king, on knees here I kneel, / That readily you place me in bliss” (36.406-7).¹⁵⁵ Spectators do not see the message of the Christian faith revealed in the misused words of the high priests, but instead in the broken body of Christ and the devotion that this body prompts in laypeople.¹⁵⁶

In this pageant, as in *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*, Christ’s body is shown prompting an involuntary response from a visual witness. But in this case, the witness is blind. When Longinus pierces Christ’s side with his sword, as instructed by Pilate, his sight is restored by the water that spills out from Christ’s side. Through this water, Christ’s body literally extends out to touch the viewer and thereby enable him to gaze upon the image. A similar moment occurs in the *Entry* pageant when Christ looks

¹⁵³ Original: “Of japes zitt jangelid yone Jewe, / And cursedly he called hym a kyng”; “And worste of all, / He garte hym call / Goddes sonne”; “I calle þe a coward to kenne, / Þat meruaylles and mirakills made. / Þou mustered emange many menne; / But, brothell, þou bourded to brade.”

¹⁵⁴ Original: “Þou man þat of mys here has mente, / To me tente enteerly þou take. / On roode am I ragged and rente, / Þou synfull sawle, for thy sake; / For thy misse amendis wille I make. / My bakke for to bende here I bide, / Þis teene for thi trespase I take.”

¹⁵⁵ Original: “To þe, kyng, on knes here I knele, / Þat baynly þou belde me in blisse.”

¹⁵⁶ Claire Sponsler offers an interpretation of the broken body of Christ as displayed in York’s cycle in her chapter in *Drama and Resistance* entitled “Violated Bodies: The Spectacle of Suffering in Corpus Christi Pageants,” 136-60. See also Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

upon a blind man and thereby restores his sight.¹⁵⁷ For those who cannot see the divine image, the sacred body acts as a remedy that miraculously restores this devotional possibility. In my next chapter, I discuss the ways in which these moments enact not only the physicality of Christ's body, but also the sacred contact this body makes with devout viewers when they look upon it. This physical contact is a central component of medieval visual theory.

Visual Slippage in the Devotional Gaze

Pious seeing is a particularly appropriate focus for a performance event that was staged as part of the Corpus Christi Day celebrations, a religious event structured around the procession of the Eucharist. But the cycle's emphasis on sight may also indicate the reason that by 1476 the city had moved the procession of the Host to the day after the cycle performance. Debate over the relationship between procession and play apparently began in 1426 when William Melton, a member of the Friars Minor in York, argued that the two should be separated. Entries in the *A/Y* note that Melton had

commended the said play to the people in several of his sermons, by affirming that it was good in itself and most laudable; nevertheless, he used to say that the citizens of the aforesaid city and the other foreigners coming in to it during the said festival, attend not only to the play on the same feast, but also greatly to feasting, drunkenness, clamours, gossipings, and other wantonness, engaging the least in the divine service of the office of that day and that, alas, for that cause, they lose the indulgences granted to them in that matter by Pope Urban IV.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Although in the *Entry* pageant text no staged physical contact is indicated, medieval theories of vision would interpret this visual encounter as a tactile one, something I examine in greater detail in my next chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 728 (43).

Melton recommends instead “that this play should take place on one day and the procession on the other.”¹⁵⁹ In agreement, the council decided that the play, which had previously been played on the feast, “should be presented each year on the Wednesday which is the eve of the same feast, and that the procession should always be made solemnly on the day of the feast itself.”¹⁶⁰ But a 1444 entry in the *B/Y Memorandum Book* specifies that the craft of armourers brought forth their pageant “vpon corpus christi day,” and by 1476 an entry from the House Books clearly indicates that the Corpus Christi procession was held the day after the official feast: “annually in the procession the Friday, the day after the feast of Corpus Christi.”¹⁶¹ The pageant and procession were separated as Melton requested, but the cycle remained on the feast day as the primary act of devotion.

Playing the cycle on Corpus Christi day may have framed it as a devotional event. In that context, placing the procession the day after the play encourages spectators to transfer the anticipation of seeing Christ that is modeled in performance onto the eucharistic procession. The visual piety slips from the actors’ bodies to the actual body of Christ, the Host. York’s community leaders may have recognized that staging the pageants after the procession had the potential to confuse this sequence of pious seeing and, inadvertently, encourage people to *see* the bodies of the actors as they had *seen* the Eucharist the day before. Particularly in a play like *The Death of Christ*, in which Christ speaks such lines as “Pay full attention to me” [To me tente enterly þou take] and “Faithful attention onto me that thou take, / And trust” [Trewе tente vnto me þat þou take, / And treste] (36.119; 190-1), the cycle creates a very real possibility for this dangerous

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 729 (43).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 729 (44).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 62; 777 (109).

slippage to occur. Instead, playing the cycle on Corpus Christi day encourages audiences to engage it as a sacred event and interpret its pageants as modeling the importance of seeing as a devotional act. It thereby offers its spectators a way to anticipate the procession and look upon the Host the following day. Yet, even when the cycle is performed first, certain pageants may have blurred the boundary between the two experiences even as they presented proper devotional conduct. Live religious performance can never completely control the spectator's devotional gaze nor, more importantly, how she uses it.

Many of the pageants use direct address to acknowledge the presence of the audience and purposefully situate it within the play's action.¹⁶² This may have been an attempt to create stable viewing sites, though, I would argue, no performance viewing position is ever entirely stable. *The Temptation* opens with the Devil seeming to move through the audience as he says, "Make room quickly, and let me move! / Who here makes all this commotion?" (22.1-2).¹⁶³ Here it is only the audience's physical presence that is referenced, not any contribution that this might make to the play's action. On the other hand, a pageant such as *The Death of Christ*, which actively directs the devotional attention of the spectators and thereby incorporates them more immediately into the play, seems to be purposefully creating a spectatorial site. Creating such a site not only limited other potential viewing positions but, in making pivotal visual choices for the audience member, could be interpreted as a means of creating a more passive spectatorial position. This pageant situates the audience members as visual participants, but not visual actors.

¹⁶² For more on the use of direct address, see Michelle M. Butler, "Direct Address and Incarnational Theology in the York Cycle: The Word Made Flesh/the Flesh Made Word," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 42 (2003): 147-57.

¹⁶³ Original: "Make rome belyve, and late me gang! / Who makis here all þis þrang?"

Other York pageants challenge the separation between action and audience, and thereby force spectators to make embodied viewing decisions during the plays. *The Road to Calvary* pageant begins with a soldier yelling at the crowd to “stand stone still” [stonde stone stille] (34.2). This type of address is a tactic used in a number of pageants to get the attention of the wandering audience focused back on the cycle as the next play began. But, in this case, the soldier continues by saying, “Therefore I command you on every side, / That, upon pain of imprisonment, no man appear / To aid this traitor” (34.9-11). A few stanzas later, he continues to threaten them by saying, “And this day shall his death be ordained – / Let’s see who dares say otherwise?” (34.20-1).¹⁶⁴ The spectators are warned against offering Christ any support or disagreeing with Pilate’s sentence of death. This challenge lessens the distance between the staged action and the audience’s reality, between the sacred past and the medieval present, and effectively implicates the medieval audience in the staged (and, perhaps, historical) action by addressing them as culpable viewers.¹⁶⁵

A play such as *The Road to Calvary* raises many questions about what was happening during medieval performances. Did medieval spectators heckle the soldier? Or, did they stand relatively silent as they watched the inevitable Passion of their saviour unfold? But such an example also draws our attention to the sensuality involved in viewing these pageants. Medieval religious performance offered spectators a unique viewing practice that engaged the body in visual piety. In the next chapter, I posit that

¹⁶⁴ Original: “Therefore I comaunde you on euere ilke a side, / Vppon payne of enprisonment þat no man appere / To suppowle [aid] þis traytoure”; “And þis daye schall his deth be dight – / Latte see who dare saie naye?”

¹⁶⁵ For other work on the ways these plays actively incorporate the spectator into the action, see Beadle, “The York Cycle”; Twycross, “Theatricality”; and, Chester N. Scoville, *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

medieval anti-theatrical prejudice was prompted by the recognition of this embodied viewing encounter. I argue that the unique visual experience offered to spectators during performance needed to be controlled; otherwise, it could create devotional encounters that bordered on the unorthodox. The visual codes used in these plays were lived by the audience. The slippage that might occur had real-life implications because it could have moral consequences.

When devotional viewing was described or enacted in the pageants, the cycle was actively promoting a theology of vision. This theology defined visual piety as an interdisciplinary practice centered in the body. It enriched a dramatic moment like the one created when Longinus is “touched” by Christ and restored to sight. For the medieval spectator, whose theory of seeing was grounded in concepts of touch, and for whom every instance of sight involved physical contact with the body, Longinus’s experience mirrored the medieval devotional viewing experience. It was therefore the spectator’s viewing body that united all visual practices of devotion. In order to suggest how performance influenced medieval devotional culture, we must analyze the embodied experience of performance spectatorship.

Chapter Two

Performance Literacy as Visual Piety: Theories of Vision, Phenomenology, and the Embodied Medieval Spectator

In the previous chapter, I asserted that the creators of the York Corpus Christi cycle attempted to control the devotional gaze by incorporating into the text specific dramatic devices that overtly situate the audience within the play's action. York officials also exerted control by purposefully scheduling the cycle so that it was performed on the day before the Corpus Christi procession of the Eucharist and staged at specific locations within the city. I interpreted these choices as efforts by York's leadership to secure stable sites of devotional seeing for the lay audience. But, near the end of the chapter, I suggested that such stability is never guaranteed in performance, not only because the possibility for change is inherent in live events, but also because the spectator's devotional gaze resides within a living body. Performance viewing functioned as an embodied experience for the spectator. The York cycle's representations of sight and vision, as I outlined and analyzed them in my first chapter, were offered to an audience comprised of seeing individuals engaged in pious viewing practices. As spectators watched the cycle, they enacted the theology of vision that the plays promoted. Therefore, spectators not only observed this theology as practiced by characters within the pageants, but they also performed it themselves as part of visual piety.

I contend that we overlook an essential mode of religious performance if we do not include the spectator's body in our studies of theatre. Using phenomenology as a theoretical basis, in this chapter I analyze the medieval spectator's body during the performance encounter and argue that performance offered laypeople a unique way of

seeing, that engaged their bodies and thereby operated as a powerful agent of visual piety. After presenting a brief outline of phenomenological theory, during which I apply the notion of “lived bodiliness” to a particular aspect of the York cycle’s production, I examine this theory’s relationship to medieval conceptualizations of vision. I then return to the cycle text to investigate the ways in which the pageants engaged the spectator’s body. Far from anachronistic, my concentration on the body in performance foregrounds an aspect of theatre that I assert fuelled much of the preserved medieval prejudice against performance. I conclude this chapter by positing that the spectator’s body not only shaped performance experiences, but also physically retained elements of these experiences. If we incorporate the spectator’s body into our studies of medieval drama, we can recognize the fundamental materiality of live performance viewing and begin to suggest ways in which this materiality influenced other pious practices.

Phenomenology and Embodiment

As I noted in my Introduction, phenomenology is often used to analyze lived experience. The overall aim of studies that employ phenomenology is to redirect attention from an allegedly objective conception of the world to an understanding of the world as perceived by subjects. It is worth repeating Stanton Garner, Jr.’s assertion that phenomenology “is intended to reveal the perspectival aspect intrinsic to any act of perception conducted by an embodied subject, a variable invariably present in terms of which individual perceptual experience is conducted.”¹ Rather than limiting our

¹ Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 12.

definition of experience, phenomenology tries to establish modes of inquiry into various, subjective lived encounters.

The birth of phenomenology is typically attributed to Edmund Husserl for his work at the turn of the twentieth century.² As Dermot Moran summarizes,

Husserl's central insight was that consciousness was the condition of all experience, indeed it constituted the world, but in such a way that the role of consciousness itself is obscured and not easy to isolate and describe. Husserl therefore constantly sought to explain how to overcome *prejudices* which stood in the way of the recognition of the domain of pure consciousness, leading to a new beginning in philosophy.³

Husserl established a theory of the observational stance and outlined a strategic methodology aimed at reaching a “phenomenological attitude” from which an observer could apprehend lived reality and return to “the things themselves.”⁴ Husserl's approach has been widely criticized by a number of scholars both within and outside the field, including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler, particularly for his use of “essence” as a foundational concept and for his belief in a pure or ideal observational position. As Moran notes, according to critics,

[Husserl's] discoveries are too heavily dependent on others 'seeing' things just in the manner Husserl does, because he lays such a heavy stress on essential intuition (*Wesensschau*) rather than on theory formation, hypothesis testing, or even deductive argumentation. If someone

² Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Q. Lauer (1910; New York: Harper, 1965); *Ideas: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. R. W. Boyce Gibson (1913; New York: MacMillan, 1962); *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (1931; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (1936/54; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970); *Experience and Judgement*, trans. J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks (1939; London: Routledge, 1973).

³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 61-2, original emphasis.

⁴ Paul Stoller reviews the birth of phenomenology in “Rationality,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 249.

disputes Husserl's phenomenological discoveries he can only argue that they have got it wrong; they haven't seen what he has in the phenomenon.⁵

Scholars have also found it troubling that Husserl's principles seem to rely upon notions of fixity, determinism, universality, origins, stability, and naturalness. This critique of Husserl's theory is valid, but perhaps beside the point, because later phenomenologists effectively shifted the field's focus away from this early model. Although phenomenology is still concerned with "essences," as Garner notes, later theorists attempted to balance this principle with an exploration of the various ways in which essences are manifest.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a second-wave phenomenologist, was particularly resistant to Husserl's idealist tendencies. In response, Merleau-Ponty focused his attention on corporeality and is generally credited with inserting the body into phenomenological discourse. As Garner notes, "Merleau-Ponty posited a consciousness caught up in the ambiguity of corporeality, directed toward a world of which it is inextricably and materially a part."⁶ In his preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty situates perception as "the background from which all acts stand out," and argues that "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself."⁷ He argues that our being of existence is a "being-in-the-world" (*être au monde*) and that our body is the basis by which we differentiate ourselves from that world and thereby derive meaning from it. He writes, "we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our

⁵ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 188.

⁶ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 27.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1945; New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), x-xi.

body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body.”⁸ The body is both open to the world and reflective of it. Continuing this line of thought, Merleau-Ponty turned his attention to *Leiblichkeit*, or “lived bodiliness,” and many phenomenologists, following his example, have explored the opportunities and problems this concept affords. For instance, Drew Leder uses the principle of *Leiblichkeit* to analyze experiences of bodily absence. By doing so, he specifies ways in which the body itself supports, and even encourages, the Cartesian mind-body dualism, a dualism that much post-Merleau-Ponty phenomenology attempts to dismantle.⁹ Although embodied perception is unstructured and difficult to recapture, Paul Stoller notes that, unlike Husserl’s theoretical framework, “it is always historically, socially, and politically situated.”¹⁰

One recent trend in this philosophical field involves exploring phenomenology’s relationship to cognitive science. There is still debate amongst scholars over passive and active theories of reception. Typically, passive theories argue that meaning is in the world and the brain selects only what may be needed in order to function. Conversely, theorists who support an active model argue that the observer creates meaning from data available through the senses. Richard Gregory observes that passive theories are generally favored by philosophers, and active theories by scientists.¹¹ The active model posits that language and visual perception are intimately related. Gregory writes that according to activists, “language structure and understanding may reflect, and be derived from, cognitive processes of (especially visual) perception.”¹² In the last two decades, work in cognitive

⁸ Ibid., 239.

⁹ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Stoller, “Rationality,” 252.

¹¹ Richard Gregory, “How Do We Interpret Images?” in *Image and Understanding: Thoughts About Images, Ideas About Understanding*, eds. Horace Barlow, Colin Blakemore, and Miranda Weston-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 311.

¹² Ibid., 314.

science has particularly influenced conceptualizations of embodiment and perception, and the philosophical application of *Leiblichkeit*. For instance, drawing upon cognitive psychology, Nelson Goodman argues that “having an [mental] image amounts not to possessing some immaterial picture in something called a mind but to having and exercising certain skills—a matter of producing, judging, revizing [*sic*] certain material pictures and descriptions.”¹³ He further asserts that “having a mental image may be construed in terms of ability to perform certain activities.”¹⁴ This principle situates the body in the work of perception and suggests that mental processes are founded in physical experience. As an example, Goodman argues that possessing a mental image of a horse is based upon our abilities to describe a horse, construct a horse image, sort descriptions and pictures into categories of horse and not-horse, and criticize or revise faulty descriptions of a horse. Mental pictures are neither metaphors nor patterns of cerebral activity; instead, they are a combination of these, the result of both philosophical and physiological processes. Goodman seems to propose that our mental constructions develop out of our “being-in-the-world” and therefore derive from our *Leiblichkeit*.

This model of perception works very well alongside David Morgan’s definition of visual piety as an active process of discernment and selection. Mentally constructing a coherent devotional image depends upon the devotee’s ability to reflect upon her experiences with images and to do things with those images—choose, ignore, combine, revise. Although cognitive theories were first explored exclusively by scientists, recent interdisciplinary projects—such as the collaborations of George Lakoff (cognitive

¹³ Nelson Goodman, “Pictures in the Mind?” in *Image and Understanding: Thoughts About Images, Ideas About Understanding*, eds. Horace Barlow, Colin Blakemore, and Miranda Weston-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 362-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 363.

linguist) and Mark L. Johnson (philosopher)—have explored how sensori-motor experience affects what and how we think. Like Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, cognitive science dismantles the Cartesian dualistic person, replacing it with a mind that is inherently embodied with reason that is itself shaped by that body. In *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, Lakoff and Johnson argue that the cognitive unconscious, a term used to describe all unconscious mental operations concerned with conceptual systems, meaning, inference, and language, functions “like a ‘hidden hand’ that shapes how we conceptualize all aspects of our experience.”¹⁵ And yet, our unconscious grows out of and employs our body. They contend that the phenomenological person is a fiction, and therefore access to real human beings and embodied reason requires us to supplement phenomenological reflection with empirical research into the cognitive unconscious.¹⁶ Although Lakoff and Johnson attempt to access something similar to *Leiblichkeit*, they also recognize the limitations of a purely philosophical approach.

Lakoff and Johnson assert that the ways in which we construct meaning are shaped by the “peculiar nature of our bodies” and that we must therefore turn, not only to the experience of the body, but also to the body itself.¹⁷ For instance, in respect to our ability to categorize, they write,

A small percentage of our categories have been formed by conscious acts of categorization, but most are formed automatically and unconsciously as a result of functioning in the world.... Most important, it is not just that our bodies and brains determine *that* we will categorize; they also

¹⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

determine what kinds of categories we will have and what their structures will be.¹⁸

Drawing on evidence from cognitive science, they argue “that human concepts are not just reflections of an external reality, but that they are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, especially by our sensorimotor system.”¹⁹ This research shifts the study of embodiment from an investigation of what we think as an embodied subject, to an exploration of how we think as a result of being essentially bodied. This approach may help us to understand better York’s religious theatre, particularly if we apply it to the audience’s bodied presence at performance.

York as a Biblical Place

The York cycle, like many medieval plays, acknowledges the presence of the audience during performance.²⁰ Such an acknowledgment not only situates the audience within the dramatized events, but also emphasizes the body’s role in audience experience, both for the medieval spectator and for our modern inquiry. In many different ways, the cycle draws a physical continuum between the world of the plays and the world of the audience. One way in which it does this is by assimilating the city of York into the historical or biblical places staged in the cycle. In the first play, *The Fall of the Angels*, Deus pronounces how he will mould “A place full of abundance [plenté] to my liking [plesyng]” (1.12). We can imagine the actor playing Deus gesturing to the city as he says

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ See analyses of direct address in the York cycle in Chapter 1 and in Richard Beadle, “The York Cycle,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 85-108; Michelle Butler, “‘All hayll, all hayll, both blithe and glad’: Direct Address in Early English Drama, 1400-1585,” (Ph.D. diss., Duquesne University, 2003); Michelle Butler, “Direct Address and Incarnational Theology in the York Cycle: The Word Made Flesh / The Flesh Made Word,” *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 42 (2003): 147-57; Chester N. Scoville, *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Biblical Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

this line, in order to make the geographic assimilation clear. In the next play, *The Creation*, Deus describes the world as he creates it. When making the earth, he says,

The firmament shall not move,
But be an intermediate place, thus will I intend,
Over all the world to stay in one place and remain suspended,
And be there *two waters between* (2.41-4, emphasis mine).²¹

Most of York's city space was geographically located between two waters—the rivers Ouse and Fosse—and therefore these lines conjure a striking similarity between the world of the play and the city's topography. Again, gestures might have made this association more overt. These early plays place York at the very center of the action and, perhaps, propose a world created in the image of York.

Later pageants, especially those that cover the life and passion of Christ, maintain this geographic assimilation. For instance, in *The Temptation* Diabolus says to Christ,

For I have all this world to command,
Tower and town, forest and field:
If you will yield thine heart to me
With words polite,
Yet will I obediently be thy help
And faithful friend.
Behold now sir, and you shall see
Various kingdoms and diverse country;
All this will I give to thee
For evermore,
If you will fall and honor me
As I said before (22.145-56).²²

As Diabolus offers Christ the world—both town and countryside—he instructs him to “behold” it. The Devil presents Christ with the world that is directly before him: the city

²¹ Original: “þe firmament sal nough moue, / But be a mene, þus will I mene, / Ouir all þe worlde to halde and houe, / And be þo tow wateris betwyne.”

²² Original: “For I haue all þis worlde to welde, / Toure and toune, forest and felde: / If þou thyn herte will to me helde / With wordis hende, / 3itt will I baynly be thy belde / And faithfull frende. / Behalde now ser, and þou schalt see / Sere kyngdomes and sere contré; / Alle þis wile I giffe to þe / For euermore, / And þou fall and honour me / As I saide are.”

and diocese of York. Many scholars have likewise noted how *The Entry into Jerusalem* pageant, staged in the city streets, effectively transforms York into another Jerusalem.²³ Rather than reiterate the conclusions of these scholars, I will instead point out that, as with *The Temptation*, the pageant's characters look upon York as they describe the biblical place. Christ says, "I grieve, I sigh, I weep also / Jerusalem to look on thee" (25.470-1).²⁴ The association of York with Jerusalem not only occurs in the staging of the play, but also in the way that the pageant's dialogue verbally and visually marks the city as a biblical place. If we consider how these assimilations functioned for spectators, we begin to identify ways in which the York cycle's meaning operated through the spectator's bodily experience of space.

Stage space is not only conceived through dialogue, but it is also constructed in great measure through the bodies of actors. As Garner notes, "phenomenological space is *oriented space*," and "with the actor's entrance, the stage as a whole becomes a differently oriented field in the broader field of spectatorship."²⁵ But Garner also points out that theatrical space is oriented not only by the actor's body and the spectator's gaze, but also by the actor's gaze that acknowledges the spectator's body. Garner explores how the actor's gaze functions in Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*, concluding that "by raising his head and fixing the audience in a stare...[the Protagonist's] gaze renders objective, suddenly and vulnerably *embodied*, an audience that had, through a self-effacing voyeurism, collaborated in the relegation of body to image."²⁶ This theatrical moment, as

²³ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 100-3; Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

²⁴ Original: "I murne, I sigh, I wepe also / Jerusalem on þe to loke."

²⁵ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 46; 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48, emphasis mine.

described by Garner, grows almost violent in its sudden implication of the audience and disruption of the theatrical fiction.

The theatrical space of the York cycle is often oriented in terms of the actor's body and spectator's gaze, but the continuum between the theatrical and "real" worlds constructed in a number of the pageants suggests that it was also oriented by the spectator's body. By fusing York with Deus's ideal creation or with Jerusalem, the pageants place the city streets and the spectators within the phenomenological boundaries of theatrical space. This is critical to how the cycle functioned for laypeople as an element of visual piety. As Garner notes, "Alone among the elements that constitute the stage's semiotic field, the body is a sign that looks back."²⁷ Visual piety, as practiced within the York cycle, is not only a reciprocal exchange of looks, but an exchange that allows the gaze of the "object" (here, the actor) to situate the pious layperson within the boundaries of the devotional image. Garner argues that crossing the boundary between actor and audience disrupts the fictional world. But the York cycle does not create a fictional world in the traditional sense. The audience witnesses a living story that they believe began in the past and now continues through their contemporary lives and into their futures. The worlds of the play and York must appear united, because they are ultimately the same. This continuum is critical to the cycle's message of salvation. York *is* creation. York *is* the world offered to Christ as a temptation. York *is* the community that Christ mourns and saves through sacrifice. The ways in which the pageants position York as a physical space remind the spectators that the story they are witnessing constitutes the story of their own salvation.

²⁷ Ibid., 49.

The pageants can perform this assimilation effectively because spectators experience it through their bodies. Not only do they hear and see characters make this association, but they actually stand before the events as they occur. Spectators find themselves physically present at sacred events—in the crowds on Palm Sunday, at Christ’s trial, at the foot of the cross. *The Baptism* pageant situates medieval spectators as the biblical audience that originally heard John preaching and witnessed Christ’s baptism. *The Ascension* opens with dialogue that utilizes the word “we” to include the audience in the community that Christ leaves behind and closes by explicating this community’s charge to spread the gospel. Although this pageant’s subject is Christ’s ascension, the central message of the play is proper witness of the sacred. Garner identifies “the actual...as the currency of ludic exchange.”²⁸ For the medieval spectator, the most basic actuality of the York cycle was her physical presence at the event. These pageants generated meaning through participation and involvement that began when the actor’s gaze and words fixed the spectator as present. The plays allowed laypeople to practice an immediate, physical visual piety simultaneously in the biblical past and in medieval York.

Other scholars have identified the ways that many of York’s pageants generate theological meaning through the spectator’s presence. Ruth Evans considers how Mary’s body is staged in the York cycle and “the effects of this staging on the viewer.”²⁹ Sarah Beckwith describes how “the resources of the audience’s presence are axiomatic to [York’s] performance of resurrection” fundamentally because “[r]esurrection theater embodies sacramentality through the resources of acknowledgment rather than

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

²⁹ Ruth Evans, “When a Body Meets a Body: Fergus and Mary in the York Cycle,” in *New Medieval Literatures*, eds. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 212.

knowledge, trust and imagination rather than doctrine.”³⁰ For Beckwith, theatre’s liveness and “presentness” actually enacts the cycle’s eucharistic theology. These scholars examine the spectator’s presence within the cycle’s representational field. Although they acknowledge that the spectator (as well as the actor) is bodied, these scholars concentrate on how meaning develops through signification in relation to that body rather than through the spectator’s embodiment explicitly. I, on the other hand, use a phenomenological approach to examine the range of lived experiences made possible during performance and how these may have contributed to the cycle’s personal devotional meaning for spectators.

During the cycle, the spectator’s actual presence at biblical events merged with her fundamental actuality of bodily presence in York. In the previous chapter, I argued that different lay groups or civic authorities exerted control over the cycle route in order to promote certain values. They did this by aligning the devotional images of the plays with various visible, civic sites. For instance, during the late fourteenth century the community of Mickelgate attempted to incorporate itself into the devotional landscape of the city by exerting control over the stations. I also suggested that these associations moved beyond the visual to generate experiential meaning through the bodies of spectators. By forcing spectators to practice visual piety at specific locations, the cycle physically confirmed those areas of the city as devotional sites. They constructed a system of viewing that, through the actuality of bodily presence, viscerally linked sacred events to performance viewing practices.

Here it is useful to return to Lakoff and Johnson’s notion of the cognitive unconscious. The spectator’s body plays a role in how she understands performance and

³⁰ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 88; 89.

the meanings generated through performance. Her bodily experience fundamentally shapes how she interprets the staged events. Therefore, when the medieval layperson stood in a designated place to watch the cycle, she unconsciously associated the experience with her physical *presentness* at that site. The verbal and visual associations between York and the world of the cycle repeatedly reminded her of this live presence and oriented the dramatic space to incorporate her body. By emphasizing the spectator's bodily presence, the cycle performance pulled that body into the foreground and linked its physical presentness with the cycle's devotional message.

In certain cases, such a spectatorial experience could have remained an individualistic pursuit, but, instead, the stations in York are likely to have been crowded places that constructed a communal viewing experience. By suggesting that cycle performances created a sense of community, I do not wish to imply that lay spectators were unaware of divisions or stratifications within the audience.³¹ Sarah Beckwith has argued that the ritual of the cycle “does not so much assert a set of monolithic beliefs as construct a series of tensions.”³² Like Beckwith, I do not envision the cycle as unifying York's population into an undissenting whole. And yet, I assert that the regulation of the cycle stations controlled certain aspects of the spectator's bodily experience and therefore successfully created, at some level, a sense of community. Physical presentness not only

³¹ The theory that the York cycle's performance symbolically created a unified civic community is most famously asserted by Mervyn James. He argues that “[t]he play cycle therefore, with its stress on equality, change, and social mobility, provided the appropriate counter-balance to the procession, with its stress on status, hierarchy and the role of authority.” See Mervyn James, “Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town,” *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 21.

³² Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 28. Beckwith analyzes the ways in which the York cycle transformed the city space through “webs of signification” particularly by the “manipulation of the symbol of Christ's body in ritualized performances,” (38; 39). As I mentioned in my Introduction, Beckwith's work has been fundamental in shaping the way I interpret the cycle as creating multiple levels of meaning through bodies. But while her focus is the actor's signifying body, mine is how the spectator's body generated meaning during performances.

generated participatory sensations during crowd scenes—*The Entry into Jerusalem*, *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*, *The Crucifixion*, *The Death of Christ*—but it also framed performance spectatorship as a communal practice. Therefore, the performance encounter occurred not only between actor and spectator, but also between individual and group audience. Individual spectators were likely aware of themselves in relation to their fellow viewers and felt themselves situated as members of a community.

The multiple references to York as biblical place imply that constructing a communal vision of York as an ideal, sacred space was one of the cycle's goals. Placing people at specific crowded locations may also have created a sense of community—though, as I noted in the previous chapter, these communities may already have aligned themselves through parish or craft alliances. Regardless, the stations created an experience of lived community, and this physical viewing arrangement certainly generated some degree of meaning beyond the performance event. The devotional program that linked civic sites with religious images functioned effectively, in part, because spectators actually lived it. The body shaped the experience into a lay pious practice.

Drew Leder argues that “the notion of the lived body can give rise to important social and ethical implications.”³³ He asserts that phenomenology not only refutes the dualistic mind-body model, but also offers other models of meaning that are generated from the lived body experience. One such model is compassion, what Leder defines as “a general term that refers to an experiencing-with, whether it takes the form of sharing another's sorrow or joy, mourning together, or partaking in communal celebration. In each case we enter into the experience of others through a process of empathetic

³³ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 156.

identification.”³⁴ During the cycle, viewers were consciously reminded, and unconsciously aware, of their physical presence at sacred events, and thus a “suffering with” is likely to have occurred during the plays. As spectators watched the events unfold before them, especially the passion scenes, they formed a community of viewers. They not only felt compassion for the characters, but they lived compassion alongside fellow audience members. Each spectator’s emotions were shared with others around her, thereby binding together the spectators at each station. As Leder notes, the empathetic bond of compassion “can be indefinitely extended.... In each case I form an ever larger body through joining my welfare, desires, and abilities with those of others.”³⁵ Placing spectators at specific stations associated this identification and pious “suffering with” experience with sites around the community. If we agree with Lakoff and Johnson’s assertion that the body is not mere background but instead the place from which meaning grows, then the cycle spectator’s compassion was fundamentally linked to the place where she bodily saw the plays. As the pageants passed before her eyes, compassion may have inspired her to relate her experience to the space and, therefore, to the “welfare, desires, and abilities” of the people associated with that space. The civic agenda is no longer simply visual; it is now absorbed into a seeing body that unites experience with place. Simon Shepherd argues that “bodily effects in theatre presumably flow from the placing of performance attendance in relation to the rest of daily life.”³⁶ In the same respect, the annual cycle performed in the city streets may have produced bodily effects—feelings, associations—that flowed from the placing of houses and residents of daily life in relation to performance. The cycle’s continuum of spectator and place

³⁴ Ibid., 161.

³⁵ Ibid., 163.

³⁶ Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 94.

produced a lived associative compassion that the spectator's body may have retained and which may have continued to influence how that spectator felt when walking through certain parts of the city—or interacting with those who lived and worked in those neighborhoods—in the months between cycle performances.

The notion that the body is not only a background that informs experience, but that it also actively shapes the ways in which we interpret experience, is important to my theory of how medieval performance influenced visual piety. Lakoff and Johnson conclude that,

Cognitive science and neuroscience suggest that the world as we *know* it contains *no* primary qualities in [John] Locke's sense, because the qualities of things as we can experience and comprehend them depend crucially on our neural makeup, our bodily interactions with them, and our purposes and interests. For real human beings, the only realism is an embodied realism.³⁷

I suggest that the layperson's reality of the cycle was inseparable from the way in which she saw it. Although the cycle did not transform York into a cohesive, unified community, I contend that when spectators experienced the play as part of viewing groups at specified sites, the physical experience generated a sense of community that may have contributed to visual piety. Although Lakoff and Johnson maintain that direct access to the unconscious can never truly be gained, they also recognize that phenomenological analysis is a constructive mode of inquiry that “can make us aware of many aspects of consciousness and, to a limited extent, can enlarge our capacities for conscious awareness. Phenomenological reflection even allows us to examine many of the background prereflective structures that lie beneath our conscious experience.”³⁸ In

³⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 26, original emphasis.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

this chapter, I suggest some of the ways that the lived performance-viewing encounter influenced the devotional consciousness of York's laity. Yet, before exploring more examples, I will first examine the distinctive way that medieval discourses of vision fundamentally implicated the body in viewing practices.

Medieval Visual Theory and Phenomenology

Phenomenology offers us an embodied model of perception that ultimately reproduces medieval theories of seeing. Vision had been theorized long before the medieval period, with figures such as Euclid, Aristotle, and Plato among the ancient writers who proposed visual models. Suzannah Biernoff notes that vision and understanding are metaphorically and etymologically linked in Indo-European cultures.³⁹ Therefore, the study of vision was—and perhaps still is—popular because it has been interpreted as the study of knowledge itself.

Optics and visuality engaged many of the major writers and thinkers of the Middle Ages. In *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, Biernoff traces the major theories of vision that influenced medieval theology, science, and ethics.⁴⁰ Her project complicates any attempt to construct a universal definition of medieval visual theory and demonstrates how trends within visual theory were representative of larger cultural concerns. Like David Morgan, Biernoff contends “that looking is a cultural practice as well as a physiological process; and that vision is always mediated by discourses about

³⁹ Suzannah Biernoff, “Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon and St Francis,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2005): 39-40.

⁴⁰ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

vision.”⁴¹ As her title suggests, she is particularly interested in discerning how theories and models of vision influenced conceptualizations of the body. She writes:

My contention that looking in the Middle Ages entailed a *physical* encounter between bodies, needs to be differentiated from arguments about the poetics or metaphors of sight. We do not think of metaphors or allegories as having corporeal effects...In the Middle Ages, however, a lascivious gaze was said to be equivalent to sin, and a look could literally be venomous: these were no mere figures of speech.⁴²

Biernoff considers a variety of texts, images, and devotional practices that reflect visual theories from the period around 1200 and suggests that “vision was a rich and contested discursive terrain in the later Middle Ages.”⁴³ Such fertile discourse influenced practices and interpretations of medieval visual piety.

As both Biernoff and Robert S. Nelson suggest, prior to Descartes’ *camera obscura*, which effectively separated the mind and soul from the eye and body, the study of vision constituted an exploration of the body.⁴⁴ This refusal to dislodge the viewing mind from the viewing body constitutes one important similarity between medieval perspectives and phenomenology. Most ancient and medieval theories of vision rested on the principle of species. Such theories proposed that the physical world radiates species, a substance that travels between object and viewer to produce visual effects. As Michael Camille notes, species was a concept “developed in order to bridge the physical gap between object and sense organ.”⁴⁵ Both of the most prevalent medieval visual models—

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴² Ibid., 4-5.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁴ See Robert S. Nelson, “Descartes’s Cow and Other Domestications of the Visual,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others See*, ed. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-21.

⁴⁵ Michael Camille, “Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, 208.

extramission and intromission—assumed the existence of species. A number of ancient theorists, including Euclid and Plato, championed extramission, a theory which proposed that perception occurred when species traveled from the eye to the seeable object. As I mentioned in my Introduction, the thirteenth century witnessed a general, though not universal, shift to a privileging of the theory of intromission over extramission.

Intromission argued that species passed from the object to the viewer. Early, fragmented ideas about intromission can be found in Aristotle's *De sensu* and *De anima*, but the first systematic arguments for this theory were written by the tenth-century Arab writer Ibn al-Haytham and translated into Latin during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Writers such as Roger Bacon and John Pecham modified al-Haytham's work in their own treatises and thus popularized intromission as a perceptual model.⁴⁶ Both intromission and extramission were models that portrayed seeing as a moment of physical contact between object and viewer. Intromission began to dominate discourse in the thirteenth century, but it is likely that many individuals understood vision as some interplay between the two.

Both David C. Lindberg and Biernoff demonstrate that there were a variety of co-existent visual theories that circulated through medieval culture and influenced medieval thought. For this reason, it is difficult to propose a single theory as a medieval model of seeing. But, in order to draw connections between medieval and modern theory, I will examine a few writers as representative of late medieval thought. I have chosen to focus primarily on Roger Bacon's work. Bacon (c. 1214-92) was born in England and studied

⁴⁶ David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision From Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 104-21.

at Oxford and Paris. He was a Franciscan, but chafed under the order's restrictions.⁴⁷ According to Lindberg, Bacon represents a synthesis of medieval visual theories up to the thirteenth century that was prevalent until Descartes.⁴⁸ His work shows the influence of ancient writers, including Aristotle, and near contemporaries, such as the twelfth-century Robert Grosseteste, but Lindberg contends that Bacon owed his greatest debt to al-Haytham.⁴⁹ Although a number of commentaries on Aristotle emerged during the later Middle Ages, written by individuals such as John Buridan, Nicole Oresme, and Joannes Versorius, these only offered slight modifications of established traditions. Bacon's conceptualization of vision proved fundamental to late medieval thought and serves as an appropriate model for this chapter.

Although he argues that sight is basically a process of intromission, as Lindberg notes, Bacon's doctrine "requires the visual power itself to serve as a source of species."⁵⁰ A section from Bacon's *Opus majus* illustrates this point:

The species of the things of the world are not suited to act immediately and fully on sight because of the nobility of the latter. Therefore these species must be aided and excited by the species of the eye, which proceeds through the locale of the visual pyramid, altering and ennobling the medium and rendering it commensurate with sight; and thus it prepares for the approach of the species of the visible object.⁵¹

For Bacon, vision is a mutual process that requires the agency of both object and eye. The object's species impress themselves upon the eye, as Aristotle proposed, but the visual

⁴⁷ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁸ Bacon's synthesis of intromission with aspects of extramission—a merging of Greek, Islamic, and Christian optical traditions—was later disseminated by John Pecham and Witelo.

⁴⁹ Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 109.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁵¹ Roger Bacon, *The Opus majus of Roger Bacon*, 3 vols., ed. John H. Bridges (London, 1900; Reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva-Verlag, 1964), 2: 52; as quoted in Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 115.

rays from the eye “alter” and “ennoble” the object’s species in order to make this process possible.

Bacon’s species are highly theorized. As Biernoff notes, for Bacon species were not only responsible “for sensation or thought, but physical causation generally.”⁵² What is significant about Bacon’s theory for the study of visual piety and performance is that although he defines species as neither body nor matter, they do have “corporeal form that does not have dimensions of itself but is produced according to the dimensions of the air.”⁵³ For this reason, Biernoff describes Bacon’s species as “paradoxical,” in that they have material existence without being objects. She writes, “*Bodied forth* in the matter of air, light, water or the transparent humours of the eye, species have corporeal being.... One could say that species colonise matter: the corporeal nature of a species is identical to that of its recipient because the latter is merely a ‘host,’ transformed into the likeness of its colonizer.”⁵⁴ Such a model created a range of dangerous possibilities for pious vision in a Christian context. Biernoff points out that Bacon’s theory required him to bridge the polarity between matter and intellect, specifically in respect to how the body influenced knowledge (of God): “As a scientist he is attentive to the world of sensible forms; as a Christian he cannot dispense with a realm of pre-existent, universal and immutable truths.”⁵⁵

As I already noted, a number of commentaries on Aristotle emerged during the later Middle Ages. Although Bacon’s theory was quite dominant and continued to influence Western thought, Lindberg observes that “the Aristotelian theory of vision rose

⁵² Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 74.

⁵³ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, 2: 71-2; as quoted in Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 113.

⁵⁴ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 75, emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

to a position of clear supremacy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”⁵⁶ This resurgence of a more sophisticated and theorized intromission did not contradict Bacon’s theory, but rather emphasized certain aspects of it over others, particularly the prominence of the body in seeing. Biernoff writes, “The images of the visible world reproduced in the eyes and brain are, for Bacon as for Aristotle, *material* images. The idea of the disembodied mind having visual experiences is an oxymoron in this context because the sensitive soul is embodied.”⁵⁷ She also concludes that “[t]his Aristotelian understanding of the body-subject coincided with a new devotional emphasis on the bodily (especially visual) experience of an increasingly human God.”⁵⁸ Visual theories of the later Middle Ages promoted the kinds of affective, body-oriented pieties associated with the period.

Prominent medieval theories described vision as a process that engaged the whole body, a concept related to medieval sense theory in general. Unlike our modern notion that the five senses are directed outward and, as Phillip B. Zarrilli notes, “open us out to the external world, usually ‘without immediate emotional response,’”⁵⁹ medieval theorists believed stimuli entered the body via the senses. For instance, Thomas Aquinas developed a somewhat “materialist” theory of sensation, positing that physical changes occurred within the sensing individual. As Robert Pasnau argues,

Aquinas seems to be presupposing that colors in the medium are physical forms—that is, forms of wholly physical bodies, like air and water. “Color must actually move the translucent medium, for example, air or something else of that sort, and by that the sensory

⁵⁶ Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 116.

⁵⁷ Biernoff, “Carnal Relations,” 42, original emphasis.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Phillip B. Zarrilli, “Towards a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 4 (2004): 658.

capacity—the organ of sight—is moved, as by a body in contact with it. For bodies don't alter one another unless they are touching.”⁶⁰

A passage from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* further reinforces this point: “Sensing, however, and the consequent operations of the sensory soul, manifestly occur along with some alteration of the body—as, in the case of seeing, the pupil is altered through the species of a color.”⁶¹ Medieval theories of vision defined seeing as an active physical practice that altered a person's body.

But according to many medieval theorists, sensation not only engaged the body, but also the soul. Perception was therefore understood to be a physical practice with ethical associations and spiritual consequences. For instance, Saint Augustine described ears as vulnerable because music that was not pleasing to God could cause him pleasure when it entered his body and “in these matters I sin unawares, and only afterwards become aware of it.”⁶² The ears cannot be blocked as conveniently as the eyes, and are therefore at greater risk of corruption. In relation to sight, Jean Gerson (1363-1429), the prolific and influential French theologian, wrote, “for chastity, good reputation, *one's vision*, and one's faith are not toys. They are things that are all too easily harmed and corrupted.”⁶³ Seeing constituted a concrete interaction, not only in how it changed the body, but also in how it affected the soul. Suzannah Biernoff notes that both Aquinas and Bacon suggest that “meaning already inheres in the object and its sensory simulacrum” and therefore constituted a physical part of the object that was transmitted during visual

⁶⁰ Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41-2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶² Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10.33.

⁶³ Jean Gerson, “Treatise Against *The Romance of the Rose*,” in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 388, emphasis mine.

encounters.⁶⁴ Thus, bodily alteration in the perceiving subject was due to an inherent quality of the object itself.⁶⁵

The metaphors and models developed by ancient and medieval writers to describe visual practices are strikingly similar to those used in modern phenomenology. As Nelson notes, “in the Middle Ages and before, seeing was connective and embodied.”⁶⁶ For this reason, “lived bodiliness” has surprising applicability to studies of medieval visual theory. Biernoff has analyzed the inherent similarities between embodied sight as described by Merleau-Ponty, St. Francis, and Roger Bacon. She writes, “In medieval sources, and in Merleau-Ponty’s writings, ‘flesh’ exceeds the visible body. Sight lends the flesh an intersubjective dimension; it literally carries carnality outside the viewer’s corporeal envelope and into the world.”⁶⁷ Both theoretical models situate the body as a “hinge between self and world,”⁶⁸ and vision as an experience during which the body inserts the self into the world. Although there was no single visual theory during the later Middle Ages, the discursive trends often revolved around themes of touch and agency. When Merleau-Ponty writes, “My eye for me is a certain power of making contact with things, and not a screen on which they are projected,”⁶⁹ he sounds remarkably medieval.

During the Middle Ages, objects and images exerted both physical and moral force upon the viewer. As Biernoff astutely maintains, “vision was a dynamic extension of the subject into the world and at the same time a penetration and alteration of the viewer’s body by the object. This model of reciprocity—the idea that the eye can *act* and

⁶⁴ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 82.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 87

⁶⁶ Nelson, “Descartes’s Cow,” 4.

⁶⁷ Biernoff, “Carnal Relations,” 45.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 325.

be acted upon—helps to explain the popularity and religious significance of devotional images.”⁷⁰ Such an interpretation of perception had serious consequences for religious performance and its contribution to the practices of lay visual piety.

Pious Bodies Watching Bodies

Religious performance events create unique opportunities to explore medieval ideas about embodied vision in a devotional context. As I noted in my Introduction, Garner describes the theatrical space as both “bodied” (comprised of visible bodies) and “bodied forth” (originating in a bodied spectator and oriented toward a bodied object); the body resides at both ends of the optical relationship. The body is situated as what Leder, following Merleau-Ponty, calls “a path of access, a being-in-the-world.”⁷¹ The spectator’s body is her path of access into the performance encounter; she cannot see the action or hear the spoken text without engaging her body, nor can she make meaning from it without drawing upon her bodily experience. The spectator’s interaction with performance, as in all perceptual encounters, requires the body to engage in the perceived event, or, as Leder writes, “to project outward from its place of standing.”⁷² Performance, an artistic form oriented in terms of bodies, uniquely literalizes the process of perception.

Medieval visual theories used language similar to Garner’s and Leder’s to describe spectatorship as a visual experience in which the body projects outward. In the case of a performance event, the body extends itself toward other bodies. Religious performances made this a high stakes encounter, not only because they offered bodies as devotional images, but also because they allowed the spectator’s body to engage and

⁷⁰ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 102, original emphasis.

⁷¹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 22.

manipulate these “body images” as part of a viewing process that, as I have indicated above, had spiritual consequences. Therefore, medieval religious performances offered laypeople a unique pious practice, one in which both the actor/image and spectator were embodied and each was visible to the other. The analysis I presented earlier in this chapter explored how the physical context of performance influenced the reception and meaning of the cycle’s pageants. I will now examine how embodied viewing, as practiced in performance, influenced the cycle’s devotional constructions.

For this analysis, I have found it useful to draw upon Leder’s work on the absent body in which he investigates various ways that the body disappears (becomes backgrounded in the corporeal gestalt) or dys-appears (is brought into explicit awareness). In cases of dys-appearance, “the body *appears* as thematic focus, but precisely in a *dys* state—*dys* is from the Greek prefix signifying ‘bad,’ ‘hard,’ or ‘ill.’”⁷³ Leder recognizes “the body’s own tendency toward self-concealment that allows for the possibility of its neglect or concealment,”⁷⁴ but he also identifies occasions of bodily dys-appearance—certain situations that evoke an extreme consciousness of our embodiment due to physiological need or affective disturbance. Because these conditions usually arise as unwelcome disruptions—pain, disease—even within dys-appearance we can experience a distancing from our bodies because “the body is away from the ordinary or desired state, from itself, and perhaps from the experienced ‘I.’ This presence is not a simple positivity. It is born from the reversal, from the *absence of an absence*.”⁷⁵

Although Leder admits that situations exist in which we cultivate a bodily presence or awareness in satisfying or enjoyable ways—meditation or exercise—he

⁷³ Ibid., 84, original emphasis.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 90-1, original emphasis.

argues that episodes of dys-appearance “demand attention.”⁷⁶ These moments seem to be occasions when the body’s role in shaping how we conceptualize our experiences is brought from the unconscious background into the conscious foreground. For the remainder of this chapter, I argue that particular dramatic moments within medieval devotional performance functioned to bring the body into conscious awareness. In exploring these, I will examine whether or not we might identify them as occasions of dys-appearance and, if so, how that function contributes to lay visual piety.

York’s medieval cycle is theatre “of the body” not only because it is comprised of bodies (as are most performances), often revolves around the use of bodies, particularly Christ’s body (as I’ve shown in the previous chapter), or was staged as part of the Corpus Christi (“Body of Christ”) event, but also because medieval spectators were conscious of viewing as a bodied experience. The notion of dys-appearance is therefore particularly useful for a study of medieval vision, because when a visual encounter brought the lay body into the foreground it would have reminded the viewer that images were entering into and being consumed by her body, and, thus, affecting her soul. When the visual performance called attention to the lay body, it called attention to a physical encounter. Therefore, the conclusions of my first chapter gain greater significance once we situate them within the context of medieval interpretations of vision and viewing practices. The York Corpus Christi cycle’s concentration on the visual and the visible image of Christ were also explorations of a physical, bodied encounter with Christ that brought the “bodied forth” aspect of the theatrical event immediately to the surface. This aspect required spectators to engage their material, present bodies in order to derive devotional meaning from the pageants.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 92.

Body Language

In the previous chapter, I recounted various ways that language about “seeing” and “sight” recur throughout the York pageants. In a similar fashion, words such as “body” and “flesh” are repeated in these plays in various forms. This vocabulary pattern begins in the very first play, *The Fall of the Angels*, when the character Deus opens the entire cycle with a lengthy speech in which he identifies himself using various descriptors. He announces:

I am gracious and great, God without beginning,
I am maker unmade, all power is in me;
I am life and the way unto salvation,
I am foremost and first, as I bid shall it be.
My blessing of my countenance shall be dazzling,
And pouring forth, from harm to be protecting,
My body in bliss abides forever,
Endlessly, without any ending (1.1-8, emphasis mine).⁷⁷

During this description of God as supernatural being—without beginning, maker unmade, the life and way to salvation—Deus also remarks upon his body, which remains in bliss without end. This line establishes a continuum of bodies between the characters, including God, and the audience. Use of the term “body” was not just a convention of language, but served as a staging principle as well. In the 1415 Ordo paginarum, the description of the Plasterers’ play, *The Creation*, reads, “God the Father in his (own) substance creating the earth and all things which are in it in the space of five days” [Deus pater in sua substancia creans terram & omnia que in ea sunt per spacium v dierum].⁷⁸

This note indicates that the city, or at least the civic official who recorded the play

⁷⁷ Original: “I am gracyus and grete, God withoutyn begynnyng, / I am maker vnmade, all mighte es in me; / I am lyfe and way vnto welth-wynnyng, / I am formaste and fyrste, als I byd sall it be. / My blyssyng o ble sall be blending, / And heldand, fro harme to be hydande, / *My body* in blys ay abydande, / Vnendande, withoutyn any endyng.”

⁷⁸ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 17 (703).

sequence, conceived of this play as not only representing the creation of the world in five days, but also representing God doing so *in sua substancia*—in his own essence. I interpret this phrase as specifying that God appeared as an embodied, physical character onstage. During these plays, God’s embodiment functions in the communal imagination of York to extend the continuum between spectators and space, which I have already explored, to include the actors. This language makes spectators conscious of the material presence of bodied images.

These early pageants establish that spectators will not only see places, events, and spectacles recreated during the cycle, but they will also see holy people embodied in the same fleshy material that the spectators themselves inhabit. By using language that draws attention to the material similarity and presence of both spectators and character, these pageants decrease the activity of representation. As Garner notes, “Though the play of elsewhere and otherness guarantees that theater can never be spoken of in terms of uncomplicated presentness, actuality continually pressures representation/fiction/illusion with the phenomenal claims of an experiential moment.”⁷⁹ The experience of presence at biblical events that I analyzed above, coupled with language that continually reminds the audience of the continuity between their bodies and the bodies onstage, pressures the scene into actuality for spectators. As Garner points out, the power of experience cannot be underestimated: “Our vocabulary fails to capture the experiential weight of this ‘as if’ response to theatrical (or other) phenomena, this mutuality of the real and the unreal at the heart of what we call ‘actuality.’”⁸⁰ I propose that an important feature of the cycle’s program of visual piety is the desire to offer for devotional consumption fleshy images of

⁷⁹ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 41.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

the sacred. The bodies of the actors do not disappear, nor does the acknowledgment that laypeople are watching embodied faith.

Words that comment on the bodied nature of the characters occur throughout the plays, particularly in reference to the Virgin Mary and Christ. In the early plays in which Mary appears, the language choices not only define her body, but they also emphasize her fleshiness. In *The Annunciation and Visitation*, the Angel tells Mary that “In chastity of thy body / Conceive and bear a child you shall” (12.157-8).⁸¹ In the same play, when Elizabeth welcomes Mary she remarks upon “the fruit [frute] of thy body” (12.207). In the following play, *Joseph’s Trouble with Mary*, it is Mary’s body that reveals the truth of her pregnancy.⁸² When Joseph visits Mary he remarks, “Thy womb is grown large, I think / You are with child” (13.95-6). After one of the women in waiting tries to defend Mary’s chastity, Joseph counters “Believe it not? Dear wench, enough of this! / The sides of her body show that she is with child” (13. 101-2).⁸³ This play focuses a great deal of attention upon Mary’s body. When Joseph accuses Mary of indiscretion, the women continue to assert her purity by saying:

For truly no man ever came near her
To shame with evil *the body*
Of this sweet person,
For we have dwelt with her all the time
And were never away from her day or night.
Her keepers have we been
And she always in our sight,

⁸¹ Original: “In chastité of thy bodye / Consayue and bere a childe þou sall.”

⁸² For more scholarship on this pageant, see Chester Scoville’s chapter “Joseph, Pathos, and the Audience” in *Saints and the Audience*, 55-80; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 159-81; and, Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-evaluation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 89-96. Alexandra F. Johnston discusses how verse is deployed in this pageant in “*The Word Made Flesh: Augustinian Elements in the York Cycle*,” in *The Centre and its Compass: Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor John Leyerle*, eds. Robert A. Taylor, et. al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 241-3.

⁸³ Original: “Thy wombe is waxen grete, thynke me, / Þou arte with barne”; “Trowe it noght arme? Lefe wenche, do way! / Hir sidis shewes she is with childe.”

Come no man between us
 To touch that lady so splendid (13.114-22, emphasis mine).⁸⁴

Mary's body is ascribed with a certain degree of revelatory power; her visible, bodied form reveals the truth, even when that truth seems impossible. Her physical state reveals the child within her, but this body is assessed as pure and without sexual stain only because it has been watched by its "keepers" [kepars]. The play takes great pains to emphasize that Mary's body has been watched and thus seems to express a degree of anxiety about Christ's conception. Her body's truth—chastity within pregnancy—is only recognized as such because it has been controlled through the waiting women's surveillance.⁸⁵ In the next pageant, *The Nativity*, Christ's birth is staged virtually as a speech act:

Now in my soul I have great joy,
 I am all clad in glorious comfort,
 Now will be born of my body
 Both God and man together
 Blessed must he be.
 Jesus my son that is so dear,
 Now born is he (14.50-56).⁸⁶

This language would lead us to believe that once Christ entered the scene the pageant redirected the devotional gaze from the bodied nature of Mary's pregnancy to the body of Christ.

⁸⁴ Original: "For trulye her come neuer no man / To waite *þe body* with non ill / Of this swete wight, / For we haue dwelt ay with hir still / And was neuere fro hir day nor nyght. / Hir kepars haue we bene / And sho aye in oure syght, / Come here no man bytwene / *To touche þat berde* so bright."

⁸⁵ For work on the late medieval culture of surveillance and its relationship to drama, see Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-49 and Seth Lerer, "'Representyd now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late Fifteenth Century England," in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, eds. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 29-62.

⁸⁶ Original: "Nowe in my sawle grete joie haue I, / I am all cladde in comferte clere, / Now will be borne of my body / Both God and man togedir in feere, / Blist mott he be. / Jesu my sone *þat* is so dere, / Nowe borne is he."

Christ's bodiedness, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is carefully monitored throughout the pageants. But the cycle draws attention not only to the sight of Christ, which I have already shown, but to his physicality as well. This begins with the nativity when Mary holds and dresses Christ ("That I might take thee in my arms / And in this humble clothing clothe thee," 14.66-7) and the animals warm him with their breath ("The weather is cold as you may feel, / To keep him warm they are eagerly / With their warm breath," 14.129-31).⁸⁷ Christ's body is not only present, but it is treated with the same concern for physical comfort that the body of an infant should receive. Scenes of this nature continue throughout the Christ child pageants. Symeon holds Christ in *The Purification* ("Come embrace me, the baby that is best born," 17.382; "That this sweet babe, that I in arms embrace," 17.392) and Joseph takes him from Mary's arms during their flight into Egypt ("And if you will ease your arm a bit / Give him to me, let me bear him awhile," 18.197-8).⁸⁸ This language, and the action that likely accompanied it, reinforced the weighty nature of Christ as human flesh, the central theme of *Corpus Christi*. Brigitte Cazelles identifies a similar theme in the thirteenth-century narrative *Vie de Saint Jehan Paulus*. During a recognition scene, Cazelles notes that "the fact that the spectacular is no longer a matter of *looking* at the saint's body, but of *touching* it, suggest[s] a treatment of the sacred focusing on the protagonist's corporeal rather than spiritual identity."⁸⁹ When a character touches Christ in the York cycle this action directs the audience to contemplate Christ's physical aspect. But it also maintains the continuum

⁸⁷ Original: "That I myght þe take in þe armys of myne / And in þis poure wede to arraie þe"; "The wedir is colde as ye may feele, / To halde hym warme þei are full fayne / With þare warme breth."

⁸⁸ Original: "Come halse me, the babb that is best born"; "That this sweyt babb, that I in armes hent"; "And yf þou will ough eise thyn arme / Gyff me hym, late me bere hym awhile."

⁸⁹ Brigitte Cazelles, "Bodies on Stage and the Production of Meaning," *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 62, original emphasis.

between characters/actors and audience that Deus establishes in the first pageant. The audience is continually reminded of the flesh and blood quality of the people they are seeing, both the living actors and the bodied people of the past they represent.

The shared bodiedness of actor and audience not only creates a way for the audience to relate to salvation history, but also an essential way for them to derive meaning from that history. Patricia Cox Miller identifies certain characteristics in late ancient hagiographic imagery that emphasized a mode of “visceral seeing” that created “a stance for the beholder to occupy, a stance in which the senses have cognitive status and in which the intellect was materially engaged. This kind of embodied thoughtfulness was crucial to the experiential engagement of the beholder or reader with the saintly image.”⁹⁰ Miller argues that the affective quality of these images “not only brings materiality and meaning very close together, it also demonstrates the close alignment of insistent physicality and equally insistent looking.”⁹¹ In the same way, the reiterated bodiedness of the characters onstage generates a dys-appearance of the spectator’s body and thereby invites viewers to engage visually their own materiality, alongside the actors’ materiality, as essential to the devotional meaning. Phillip B. Zarrilli writes that the actor’s body “is dually present for the objective gaze and/or experience of an audience, and as a site of experience for the actor per se. The actor’s body is a site that generates representation, as well as experience, for both self and other.”⁹² Spectators not only see the action represented, but they vicariously experience it through the actor’s flesh. The actor’s

⁹⁰ Patricia Cox Miller, “Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 4 (2004): 398.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁹² Zarrilli, “Towards a Phenomenological Model,” 664.

experience constitutes, as Zarrilli notes, “one’s being-in-the-world”⁹³ and offers that “being” as the way into the biblical event. For the medieval spectator who was conscious of visual theory, looking at the actor also amounted to a being-with-the-actor in the world. The plays repeatedly remind the spectator that she is looking at fleshy material images. One way performance functioned for visual piety was to allow the bodies of actors—bodies performing sacred roles—to impress themselves onto the spectator’s soul. This constitutes a deeply spiritual interaction of bodies. According to medieval theory, the actor truly enters the viewer’s body as lived experience.

Complicated Pain in the *Crucifixion*

The continuum that the pageants create between actor and spectator bodies becomes more pronounced through the adult character of Christ. I have already noted that the sight of Christ’s body is an important theme in the passion pageants, but the physicality of that body also becomes a central focus. At times, this emphasis on Christ’s physicality reminds the audience of his human nature. For instance, in *The Temptation* Diabolus remarks, “If he is man in bone and blood / He is very hungry” (22.45-6).⁹⁴ The first temptation assumes that Christ’s fragility as human flesh will cause him to fall into “gluttony” [glotonye] (22.47). But it is particularly during the passion plays, beginning with *The Agony in the Garden*, that Christ’s fleshy fragility is emphasized. During *The Agony*, Christ admits, “My flesh is afraid due to doubt” [My flessh is full dredande for drede] (28.48), and he repeats a version of this line a number of times during his prayers: “I feel by my terror that my flesh would quite gladly / Be gone from this trial” [I fele by

⁹³ Ibid., 664.

⁹⁴ Original: “If he be man in bone and bloode / Hym hungri ill.”

my ferdnes my flessch wolde full fayne / Be torned fro this turnement] (28.89-90); “My flesh is very afraid and gladly would resist” [My flesshe is full ferde and fayne wolde defende] (28.105 and 28.130); “Now since my flesh is afraid, father I am glad / That my anguish and my torments are near an end” [Now if my flessch ferde be, fadir I am fayne / Pat myne angwisshe and my noyes are nere at an ende] (123-4). This pageant represents a turning point in the cycle; suddenly, spectators are faced with the full realization of Christ’s humanness. Throughout the rest of the passion plays, spectators derive theological meaning through the bodied experience of the actor. That body is scourged, spat upon, pierced with the crown of thorns, forced to drag the heavy cross, and finally crucified. And yet, this bodily continuum also may have threatened neat theological meaning. The actor’s body may have offered spectators a vicarious experience, but it also complicated any attempt to regulate visual piety.

Miri Rubin argues that anxieties arise when the body is engaged in religious rite, specifically because such physical engagement destabilizes meaning by making it subject to varied interpretations and translations. She describes how this happened in late medieval eucharistic practices, especially those that incorporated physical gestures, such as the Elevation of the Host. She writes, “This type of eucharistic practice exerted inevitable pressure on the neatly designed mass of the liturgists and theologians.... The balance of meanings presented in normative texts could never be fully achieved; the symbol was bound to be appropriated not only in the minds, but in the handling, seeing, and tasting of this very material artifact of divinity.”⁹⁵ By engaging both actors’ and spectators’ bodies, performance made the potential for such instability even greater. The

⁹⁵ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 98.

confrontation of bodies staged during the York *Crucifixion* pageant illustrates this possibility particularly well.

The pain inflicted on Christ's body is central to the York *Crucifixion*'s action and its theology, and yet, spectators do not see this pain enacted for very long. In the pageants following *The Agony in the Garden*, the cycle builds toward a visible identification with Christ through tortures inflicted upon his body. V. A. Kolve notes that during York's cycle, "a strange and disturbing mood is created the minute Christ is captured and the Passion begins: the stage is suddenly filled with noise, violence, rough laughter, talk of game."⁹⁶ This raucous tone is reinforced through Christ's stillness in these moments. In the trial scenes, as I already noted, Christ is mostly silent, a state that offers spectators an opportunity to meditate on Christ's body and his trials before Herod, Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas.⁹⁷ Christ's scourging, occurring in the middle of *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*, pressures this material identification. Kolve argues that the English cycles transform the passion violence into game or play, thus aesthetically controlling it for spectators.⁹⁸ He writes that this action "is translated into everyday medieval terms, into a common children's game, called 'papse' in the York cycle."⁹⁹ I, too, recognize this element of game in the pageants, particularly within the scourging scene, but my conclusions about their reception are closer to those of Claire Sponsler. Sponsler contends that "rather than downplaying the work of pain and distancing the audience from it, configuring torment as play can emphasize the sadistic pleasure of the torturers

⁹⁶ V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 182.

⁹⁷ For Christ's silence during York cycle's trial and passion plays, see Alexandra F. Johnston, "His Language is Lorne': The Silent Centre of the York Cycle," *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 185-95.

⁹⁸ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 175-205. Alexandra F. Johnston describes how the use of verbal parody and rapid stichomythia in *Christ Before Pilate II* turn the pageant's scourging into a kind of dance. See Johnston, "The Word Made Flesh," 239.

⁹⁹ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 185.

while also inviting the audience to join in vicariously, since after all it is just a sport.”¹⁰⁰
 Framing violence as medieval play creates a very specific viewing position for the audience.

As I mentioned in my previous chapter, the next play in the cycle, *The Road to Calvary*, begins with a soldier challenging the audience to disagree with Pilate’s judgment. I propose that the beginning of this play offers us a way to appreciate better the viewing experience of spectators during the previous pageant, specifically its scourging scene. If the scourging was staged as a game, and therefore enjoyed by the audience as entertainment, the condemnatory tone of *The Road to Calvary*’s opening monologue would make a great deal of sense. If during the previous pageant, rather than resting their eyes meditatively upon the body of Christ, spectators had directed them at the soldiers and, thus, experienced the pleasure of a medieval pastime, the opening lines of the next play, *The Road to Calvary*, would call attention to this lapse in the audience’s devotional gaze. Rather than challenging them to speak up at the moment, lines such as “And this day shall his death be ordained— / Let’s see who dares say otherwise?” (34.20-1) would remind spectators of their complicity, since they did not “say otherwise” [saie naye] during the staged brutality.¹⁰¹

Sponsler makes a similar point in reference to characters in medieval morality plays. She writes,

Even at their moments of greatest transgression when they would seem to be least susceptible to a sympathetic reading, Mankind, Youth, Mary [of Nimmegen], and the vices and devils who tempt them look less like cautionary examples whose behavior is to be avoided at all costs than like symbols of the satisfaction of personal desire whose

¹⁰⁰ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 150.

¹⁰¹ Original: “And þis daye schall his deth be dight – / Latte see who dare saie naye?”

escape from social control offers many inducements for imitation.¹⁰²

I find Sponsler's analysis of *Mankind* particularly insightful, especially in how she considers the visual presentation of bodies on stage. She interprets corporeality as central to the play's message, with *Mankind*'s fall into sin represented as "lack of bodily decorum and control."¹⁰³ But it is specifically her analysis of the vices—New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought—that is applicable to my interpretation of York's plays. She writes, "Although the vices' labor is here presented as overtly criminal activity, complete with an inverted trial and punishment scene, it cannot completely avoid looking attractive in its promise to fulfill material and sexual desires, particularly in contrast to *Mankind*'s hard, barren life."¹⁰⁴ The spectacle of enjoyment and excess has the potential to override the devotional message of restraint. In reference to the English cycles, Sponsler writes, "The plays seem rather to encourage spectators to enjoy the attacks on Christ's body as moments of undisguised sadistic delight in the inflicting of bodily pain."¹⁰⁵ Although brutal, if the scourging was presented as a game, the audience may have engaged it as a form of play. Rather than connect with Christ's body, spectators may have experienced the "being-in-the-world" of the soldiers.

Simon Shepherd argues that when a spectator arrives at a performance, his or her body arrives "in a more or less heightened state of openness to rhythmic possibility. And in this state of openness it is confronted by the play's own rhythms.... It will also be encouraged to take pleasure in the bodily event or rhythm offered for attention."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 102.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰⁶ Shepherd, *Theatre*, 94-5.

Although not all spectators may have vicariously fallen into “rhythm” with the soldiers’ bodies, the opportunity for this vicarious experience alongside a more orthodox devotional viewing experience reflects the complicated nature of visual piety as practiced in performance. I interpret this possible manipulation of the embodied devotional gaze in the scourging, and then its redirection at the beginning of *The Road to Calvary*, as a sophisticated aspect of visual piety in performance.

The *Crucifixion* creates another, equally sophisticated, moment of visual piety. When Christ is onstage during this play, he spends most of his time lying down, perhaps out of view for a large portion of the audience, as the soldiers fasten his body to the cross. One of the four soldiers notes that the cross is on the ground (35.39) and that the “wretch on the length be laid” [ladde on lenghe be layde] (35.41). Between lines 49 and 60, Christ makes a brief appeal to God, but is then silent until line 253. Over the course of the play’s action, four soldiers vividly describe pulling Christ’s arms so that his body will fit the ill-made cross and then nailing him to the wood. They frequently mention how they are inflicting pain on specific parts of his body: “Strike on then hard, for him thee bought. / Yes, here is a short, thick nail that will stiffly stand, / Through bones and sinews it shall be used” (35.101-3); “Fasten on a cord / And tug him in two, by his head and feet” (35.113-4); “The ropes have greatly increased his pains / Ere he were to the holes pulled. / Yea, both sinews and veins are asunder / On each side, so have we seen” (35.145-8); “Let it down, so all his bones / Are now asunder on all sides” (35.223-4).¹⁰⁷ The language not only explores the pain inflicted on Christ’s body, but also the physical ache this work

¹⁰⁷ Original: “Strike on þan harde, for hym þe boght. / 3is, here is a stubbe will stiffely stande, / Thurgh bones and senous it schall be soght”; “Faste on a rope / And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile”; “Ther cordis haue evill encessed his paynes, / Or he wer tille þe booryngis brought. / 3aa, assoundir are bothe synnous and veynis / On ilke a side, so haue we soughte”; “Latte doune, so all his bones / Are asoundre nowe on sides seere.”

causes in the soldiers' bodies. For example, one soldier says, "Great harm have I experienced, / My shoulder is out of joint" (35.189-90).¹⁰⁸ After numerous attempts and the expense of great effort, they succeed in raising the cross at around line 210, two-thirds of the way through the play's dialogue. At this point, as many scholars have observed, the scene forms an iconographic image for lay viewers that replicates the Elevation of the Host.

This play provides an excellent example of Garner's "theatre of the image."¹⁰⁹ As I noted in the Introduction, Garner uses this phrase to describe many of Samuel Beckett's later plays, but it seems applicable here as well. In Beckett's plays, Garner describes how, as the "characters find themselves increasingly confined in their ability to act...the audience finds itself involved more deeply in the activities of seeing, engaged more fully in the perception of the theatrical image."¹¹⁰ In the York pageant, once Christ is crucified—now immobile, and largely silent, on the cross—the agency shifts to the spectator. This change creates a different theatrical dynamic, as it compels spectators to engage the pageant in a different perceptual way—one relevant to the theory of visual piety. Garner writes,

To explore the activity lodged in stillness and to investigate the depths of visual latency...is to etch the contours of performance even more in the spectator and to replace a theater of activity with a theater of perception, guided by the eye and its efforts to see.¹¹¹

Performance viewing now becomes the primary dramatic action. Garner argues that plays with this quality generate meaning through the spectator's presence as a body "with its

¹⁰⁸ Original: "For-grete harme haue I hente, / My schuldir is in soundre."

¹⁰⁹ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 79.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70-80.

own positionality and material presence.”¹¹² I have already argued that spectators generate meaning for themselves through the actors’ bodies, and through their own bodily presence at the theatrical event, but the stillness at the heart of “theater of the image” “embodies [audience] members as participants in an actual intercorporeal event.”¹¹³ Spectators are not only conscious of themselves as present at the event, but as actually creating meaning by *seeing* the sacred event. After the brutal activity enacted in the previous plays, during which Christ’s body is very much present and active in the tortures inflicted upon it, *The Crucifixion* abruptly changes pace and situates Christ as image. This image, which does not move or speak during most of the play’s remaining minutes, fails to impart its full dramatic meaning until the spectator’s gaze activates it.¹¹⁴ But, as I mentioned above, the still image of Christ on the cross was more than a dramatic image, it was a devotional one as well, and the pageant’s devotional meaning is likewise generated through the viewer’s positionality and material presence. Particularly because this is a still image of the *suffering* Christ, the dramatic moment also contains the possibility for destabilizing the spectator’s devotional positionality, a possibility that the play’s structure actively resists.

Writing about plays that enact human suffering, Garner notes that for spectators “to the extent that this witnessing [of pain] is itself a vicarious reexperiencing of pain, a mimetic inhabiting of the suffering body, it finds itself subject to pain’s perceptual

¹¹² Ibid., 81

¹¹³ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁴ Robert Sturges discusses the crucified Christ as image in this pageant. He argues that the play’s action is concerned with achieving Christ’s visibility and that “[i]n submitting to the soldiers, Christ allows them to turn him into an object of vision, a spiritual and theatrical icon” (44). He contends that “the spectators are to ‘behold’ [Christ], and by beholding him, to ‘fully feel’ his sacrifice, to make an empathetic connection between street and stage, between audience and performer, in an act of affective piety that characterizes the York cycle as a whole.... Christ here demands an audience” (43). See “Spectacle and Self-Knowledge: The Authority of the Audience in the Mystery Plays,” *South Central Review* 9, no. 2 (1992): 27-48.

modulations.”¹¹⁵ Enacted pain breaks down the image of Christ *as* image and offers an inhabitable place in Christ’s body. As the embodied spectator slips into Christ’s body, she destabilizes her position as a viewer of devotional images. The play’s creators seem to recognize the potential for this slippage, and therefore only allow the audience to see enacted pain for a short time. Christ’s address from the cross interrupts this moment of identification with his body and emphasizes instead the audience’s presence as bodied witnesses and their material resemblance to Christ’s own body: “Every man who walks by way or street, / Pay attention that you miss none of this affliction. / Behold my head, my hands, and my feet, / And truly understand anew, as you pass by” (35.253-6).¹¹⁶ As Christ speaks, he resists the spectators’ slippage into his body by identifying the common but distinct corporeality of spectator and image, and offering the spectator a stable site as bodied witness. In this way, the play constructs a relationship between spectator and Crucifixion that is similar to that found in widely read devotional texts such as Nicolas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Medieval laypeople encountered images of the crucifix in a variety of public and private settings and were encouraged to construct a mental crucifix as part of personal meditation. As Duffy notes, “The liturgical centrality of the Crucifix in the surroundings of late medieval English men and women was matched by a similar emphasis on the Passion as the centre of their private

¹¹⁵ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 183

¹¹⁶ Original: “Al men þat walkis by waye or strete, / Takes tente e3 schalle no trauayle tyne. / Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete, / And fully feele nowe, or 3e fyne.” David Mills argues that Christ’s lines from the cross are directed at the audience and only secondarily intended for the characters within the dramatic action. See “‘Look at Me When I’m Speaking to You’: The ‘Behold and See’ Convention in Medieval Drama,” *Medieval English Theatre* 7, no. 1 (1985): 4-12. Philip Butterworth discusses his attempts to put this theory into practice in modern productions of the York *Crucifixion* in “The York *Crucifixion*: Actor/Audience Relationship,” *Medieval English Theatre* 14 (1992): 67-76.

devotion.”¹¹⁷ In the next chapter, I suggest various ways in which the dramatic crucifix and different material representations of this image may have interacted through the medium of the spectator’s body. At this point, I wish to consider briefly how popular narratives, like Love’s, related to the layperson’s experience before dramatized versions of this ubiquitous devotional image.

In Love’s text, the crucifixion is a closely controlled visual encounter in which the eye is directed to “see” the various details within the “scene.” Love admits that his text is for the “simple soul that cannot think but of bodies or bodily things” [symple soule þat kan not þenke bot bodyes or bodily þinges].¹¹⁸ Perhaps for this reason, his devotional project builds out from the visualized body of Christ:

Take heed diligently with all your heart, all those things that are now coming, and make them present in your mind, beholding all that shall be done against the lord Jesus and that has been spoken of or done to him. And so with the inner eye of the soul, behold the same, setting and fixing the cross firmly into the earth... And then he that was on the ladder behind the cross took Christ’s right hand and nailed it firmly to the cross. And after that he went on the left side and drew up with all his might the left arm and hand, and drove into it another large nail.¹¹⁹

Love takes the reader through Christ’s words on the cross and his death. He then writes,

You also if you behold well the lord, you may have means enough for the greatest compassion, seeing him

¹¹⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 234. See also Sarah Beckwith’s *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) for a discussion of the various ways that crucifixion iconography was employed in late medieval England.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 10.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-5. Original: “Take hede now diligently with alle þi herte, alle þo þinges þat be now to come, & make þe þere present in þi mynde, beholdyng alle þat shale be done azeynus þi lorde Jesu & þat bene spoken or done of him. And so wiþ þe innere eye of þi soule beholde sume, settyng & ficching þe crosse fast in to þe erþe... And þan he þat was on þe laddere behynde þe crosse takeþ his riht hande & naileþ it fast to þe crosse. And after he þat was on þe lift side draweþ wiþ alle his miht þe lift arme & hande, and driueþ þerþorh a nopere grete naile.”

tormented, from the sole of the foot up to the highest part of the head. There was in him no place nor part without passion.

This is a pitying sight and a joyful sight. A pitying sight of him, because that difficult passion that he suffered for our salvation, it is but a good sight for us, because it is by its means and effect that we have our redemption. Truly this sight of our lord Jesus is thereby a sight of our redemption. Truly this sight of our lord Jesus hanging on the cross, by devout imagination of the soul, is very good for those creatures who, after long exercise of sorrowful compassion, feel sometimes such a great pleasure not only in the soul, but also in the body, that they understand it not, and which no man may know, but only he who by experience feels it.¹²⁰

This passage places the reader at the biblical event as a visual witness and introduces visceral possibilities for experiencing the passion, but it clearly draws a distinction between the physical experience of the reader and that of Christ. As William Hodapp notes, texts like Love's were written to "break down time-space barriers...during which Jesus' Passion becomes immediate and present for those who enter and participate in the poem's dramatic world."¹²¹ But medieval laypeople were taught to participate in such devotional literature as witnesses, not to inhabit the body of Christ. Beckwith asserts that in the York *Crucifixion*, "we are asked not to merge with Christ in the identificatory theater of passion, not to become him, or to enter or be at one with him, but to *bear a terrible witness* as we ourselves are addressed as participants at the scene of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 179. Original: "Þou also if þou beholde wele þi lorde. Þou maiht haue here matire ynouh of hye compassion, seyng him to tormentede, þat fro þe sole of þe fote in to þe heist part of þe hede. Þer was in him none hole place nor membre without passion.

Þis is a pitevous siht & a ioyful siht. A pitevous siht in him. for þat harde passion þat he suffrede for oure sauacion, bot it is a likyng siht to vs, for þe matire & þe effecte þat we haue þerbye of oure redempcion. Soþely þis siht of oure lord Jesu þerbye of oure redempcion. Soþely þis siht of oure lord Jesu hangyng so on þe crosse by deuoute ymaginacion of þe soule, is so likyng to sume creatours. Þat after longe exercise of sorouful compassion. Þei felen sumtyme, so grete likyng not onely in soule bot also in þe body þat þei kunne not telle, & þat noman may knowe, bot onely he þat by experience feleþ it."

¹²¹ William F. Hodapp, "Ritual and Performance in Richard Rolle's Passion Meditation B," in *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, eds. Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 242.

crucifixion.”¹²² Yet, as a medium comprised of live bodies, performance can not guarantee this stable position for its spectator. In performance, the *Crucifixion*’s display of pain threatens to blur the distinction between the spectator’s and actor’s bodies, and it must therefore work to avoid this slippage through Christ’s monologue from the cross.

As I already noted, one of Drew Leder’s three models for reclaiming the lived body is compassion. He writes,

The word compassion is derived from the Latin *cum* and *patior*, which together can be literally translated as ‘to suffer with.’ . . . However, the Latin notion of *patior* is not only solely in reference to pain and misfortune; more broadly, it means to suffer something to happen, that is, to undergo an experience. I use *compassion* in this sense as a general term that refers to an experiencing-with.¹²³

Building on this definition, Leder asserts that “to experience true sympathy for others . . . it is necessary to retain a sense of their otherness. I feel *for* my friend; if I am completely taken over by her experience such that our identities blur, I can no longer speak of concerned relation.”¹²⁴ Compassion, in this sense, is a useful concept to apply to the *Crucifixion*. Christ’s monologue asks audience members to experience the crucifixion with him, but from a fixed, stable site that maintains a spectatorial distance. Spectators must remain separate from him in order to have true compassion for what has been inflicted upon his body. But, although the spectator must maintain an understanding of Christ’s otherness, it is still his body (“my head, my hands, and my feet”) that generates and nourishes compassion. As Leder writes, “To become aware of and deepen this concerned linkage is to realize ontological relatedness; my friend and I belong to one

¹²² Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 69-70, original emphasis.

¹²³ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 161, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 162, original emphasis.

flesh and blood.”¹²⁵ Christ’s body must maintain a certain distance from the spectator, while still remaining an embodied other, in order to evoke compassion.

Leder also offers us a way to think about the problems of pain in the cycle in relation to compassion. Following Elaine Scarry, Leder asserts that “pain is marked by an interiority that another cannot share.”¹²⁶ This might seem to be an advantage for a play attempting to stimulate compassion; if pain is individualistic, then it maintains the separation necessary for Leder’s “concernful linkage.” Unfortunately, as Garner indicates, pain also pulls us back into our selves, into our own bodily experience of pain. Moving into the body of Christ constitutes a dangerous mode of visual piety because it constructs a self-referenced experience that is too individualistic to generate compassion. As Leder notes, “pain exerts a phenomenologically ‘centripetal’ force, gathering space and time inward to the center. We are ceaselessly reminded of the here-and-now body.”¹²⁷ This is why pain evokes dys-appearance. For compassion to transpire, otherness must be maintained, but not at the expense of the other. This pageant tries to establish Christ’s similar but distinct body as the focus of lay visual piety. Through such a thoughtful positioning of bodies, the play engenders compassion for Christ.

The next pageant, *The Death of Christ*, does not have to overcome the same problem as the *Crucifixion*. During this pageant, characters do not actively torture Christ’s body, which appears fixed and immobile on the cross for most of the play. Because his body is not overtly engaged as living flesh, Christ is more easily assessed as a stable crucifixion image. Christ’s address from the cross, which is of a very different kind than the address in the *Crucifixion*, enhances the stability of the layperson’s viewing

¹²⁵ Ibid., 162.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 76.

position. As I noted, the address in the *Crucifixion* accents the body of Christ as similar to but distinct from the spectator's. But, after doing so, the monologue evolves into an address to God:

My father, who can relieve my suffering,
 Forgive these men that torment me.
 They know not what they perform;
 Therefore, my father, I ask,
 Let their sins never be visited upon them,
 But see that their souls are saved (35.259-64).¹²⁸

As a moment of visual piety, this appeal to God on behalf of the audience pulls the spectator out of her identification with Christ's body and into meditation on her own blameworthiness and need for grace, thus shifting the spectator's experience from compassion for Christ to compassion for humanity.

In *The Death of Christ*, Christ similarly offers medieval spectators a stable viewing position, but it is one of active viewing that is also modeled by other characters in the play. Christ commands the characters (and therefore also the spectators) to look upon his body as a devotional image:

You man that has sinned,
 Pay close attention to me.
 On a cross I am ragged and torn asunder,
 For the sake of your sinful soul;
 For your misdeeds I will repent.
 Here I remain, my back stretched out,
 Enduring this harm for your trespasses
 Who could you have shown more kindness
 Than I?
 Thus for your good
 I shed my blood.
 Mankind, mend your frame of mind,

¹²⁸ Original: "My fadir, þat alle bales may bete, / Forgiffis þes men þat dois me pyne. / What þei wirke wotte þai nocht; / Therefore, my fadir, I craue, / Latte neuere þer synnys be sought, / But see þer saules to saue."

For bitterly I must buy your salvation (36.118-30).¹²⁹

Christ frames his own body as an image of salvation. It is a corporeal image—his body is beaten and broken—but it serves viewers as a means to a spiritual end. Later in the play, Christ tells Mary not to look upon his body (“on me to look let thou not,” 36.185), but then commands the attention of everyone else: “Mankind, make my kindness known, / True attention pay unto me, / And trust” (36.189-91).¹³⁰ Christ asks spectators to trust in the body of Christ as a devotional image. In addition, near the end of the play Christ says that God’s will “have I wrought in his place / thus broken and bent on this cross” (36.252-3).¹³¹ The body has fulfilled God’s plan. These lines support a phenomenological reading of the function of Christ’s body: the actions of and against Christ’s body generate theological meaning for believers, just as the actions of and against the actor’s body create meaning for the audience during performance.

The Last Judgement’s Call to Action

The cycle offers a theology that deems action necessary for the creation of meaning. As Gail McMurray Gibson notes, the late Middle Ages experienced an “ever-growing tendency to transform the abstract and theological to the personal and concrete.”¹³² Dramatic action created concrete images of the Christian story and personalized them for medieval lay people. This is particularly true with respect to how

¹²⁹ Original: “Þou man þat of mys here has mente, / To me tente enterly þou take. / On roode am I ragged and rente, / Þou synfull sawle, for thy sake; / For thy misse amendis wille I make. / My bakke for to bende here I bide, / Þis teene for thi trespase I take / Who couthe þe more kyndynes haue kydde / Than I? / Þus for thy goode / I schedde my bloode. / Manne, mende thy moode, / For full bittir þi blisse mon I by.”

¹³⁰ Original: “on me for to looke lette þou nozt “; “Manne, kaste þe thy kyndynesse be kende, / Trewe tente vnto me þat þou take, / And treste.”

¹³¹ Original: “haue I wrought in þis wone, / Þus ragged and rente on þis roode.”

¹³² Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 7.

the York pageants represented rituals, specifically the sacraments. As Sarah Beckwith notes, “Theatre is not so much inimical to the sacramental disclosure of God as the perfectly consonant form for the religion of incarnation. Precisely because sacraments are best understood as actions and not things, it is in the theater of dramatic action that they are best understood.”¹³³ The York pageants repeatedly dramatize moments from the Bible that involve sacred rituals—for instance, Mary’s purification in the temple. Some of these pageants present actions that establish Christian rituals, such as baptism or the eucharistic prayer. These ritual practices, in many cases, do not appear to be theologically necessary, but the dialogue in these plays often explains that this action is necessary in order to fulfill God’s law or, more often, to establish a living example for future believers. A number of pageants address this paradox. For example, when Mary and Joseph go to the temple for her purification after giving birth, Joseph argues that Mary does not need to perform this ritual because, “For indeed you are a clean virgin” (17.212). Mary replies that by completing the ritual she will “fulfill the law for certain” and offer others “an example of humility” (17.219; 221).¹³⁴ Her body must complete the deed in order to maintain consistency within God’s law. Christ states something very similar in *The Baptism*. When John argues that Christ’s baptism is unnecessary because he is without sin, Christ replies:

Mankind may not go unbaptized
 To endless bliss.
 And since I have taken human form,
 And men shall make me their mirror
 And have my actions in their minds,
 Also I will baptism take.
 I will therefore
 Myself be baptized for their sake

¹³³ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 59.

¹³⁴ Original: “For certys thowe arte a clene vyrgyn”; “fulfill the lawe ewysse”; “A sample of mekenesse.”

Very openly (21.90-98).¹³⁵

Christ's fleshly human form not only allows him to establish bodily rituals, but it also requires him to do so by performing them himself. Bodily engagement creates meaning within an otherwise meaningless practice. This is the basis of the Eucharist, which is given meaning—transfigured into the body of Christ—through a ritual action.

Established through Christ's performance, this action is recreated each time (properly ordained) bodies engage in a similar ritual action. Beckwith notes that within the medieval context "the sacraments as signs participate in the reality that they signify and are not 'mere signs.'" ¹³⁶ Throughout the cycle, the sacraments are represented through the actions of human bodies.¹³⁷ The pageants thus suggest that creating theological meaning requires bodily involvement. It is not enough to establish baptism verbally; Christ must practice the ritual in order to institutionalize it as a necessary and central tenet. Thus, bodies not only represent sacred events, they themselves create the sacred events.

Near the end of the previous chapter, I analyzed moments in certain pageants when bodies respond instinctively to the presence and divinity of Christ: Pilate leaps to his feet, and Bedellus and Joseph of Arimathea kneel before Christ's body. By physically engaging the lay body, these reactions demonstrate appropriate ways to worship God. The body plays a significant role in the cycle, just as it does in the creation of rituals, because its proper or improper actions are a constant concern. When bodies piously engage the material world, they essentially assert their importance within sacred history.

¹³⁵ Original: "Mankynde may nost vn baptynde go/ Te endless blys. / And sithen myselffe haue taken mankynde, / For men schall me þer myrroure make / And haue my doying in ther mynde, / Also I do þe baptyme take. / I will forthy / Myselfe be baptiste for ther sake / Full oppynly."

¹³⁶ Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 61.

¹³⁷ See King, "The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments," 155-78.

Impromptu or uncontrolled physical actions emphasize the materiality of devotional bodies. As I already mentioned, Leder argues that the body's own tendency to disappear is what gives the Cartesian dualistic model of mind-body separation such staying power. Conversely, when the actor's body reacts in a physical manner, the action accentuates the bodies of both actor and spectator and causes bodily dys-appearance for the spectator. Leder writes, "the materiality of a perceptual object correlatively implies that of the perceiver."¹³⁸ Emphasizing the actor's/image's bodied materiality implies the bodied material presence of the spectator, establishing the relationship between actor and audience as one of bodies. Therefore, the cycle suggests that through her body the spectator will become part of Christian history. This theme is present throughout the cycle, but reaches a climax in the later pageants.

Witnessing emerges as a central theme throughout the cycle. Not only does the spectator become the live, privileged witness to sacred events—sometimes, as I have noted, even directly addressed as witness—but the act of witnessing is also explored in the plays.¹³⁹ For example, after Christ ascends, the disciples discuss their charge to "depart unto various countries / To preach throughout the whole world" (42.255-6).¹⁴⁰ They are not commanded to dwell in their current place, but to "go from here" [wende vs hense] (42.263). In the opening monologue of the next play, *Pentecost*, Peter claims that Christ commanded the disciples to preach and "bere wittensse" (43.15). According to Richard Beadle's gloss, "bere" means to bear or carry. In this sense, witnessing implies

¹³⁸ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 124-5.

¹³⁹ Pamela King briefly describes how the York pageants present witnessing as a "process of seeing," specifically during the moment when Longinus' sight is restored by Christ's blood in *The Death of Christ*. See "Seeing and Hearing; Looking and Listening," *Early Drama 3* (2000): 163.

¹⁴⁰ Original: "wende we vnto seere contre / To preche thurgh all þis worlde so wide."

actually carrying the message of Christ through one's body. For the disciples, witnessing is defined as a physical action.

This idea continues the theme established in the earlier plays, in which bodies voluntarily or involuntarily "bere wittnesse" through impromptu action. When Pilate rises or the blind receive sight, they bear witness through their bodies. The sight of Christ brings Symeon the peace necessary to welcome death: "Now I care no more for my life / Since I have seen here this royal one so generously bestowed" (17.411-2).¹⁴¹ At other times, witnessing takes the form of a change in the perception or interpretation of events. For example, seeing the crucifixion and the events that follow mentally transforms the Centurion, who then accuses Pilate and the high priests of slaying a "rightwise mane" (38.65). Such a change in attitude represents another way that characters "bere" Christ's message into the world. This theme shifts somewhat near the end of the cycle, when the medieval spectators, no longer addressed as present witnesses, are instead directed to future action. *The Harrowing of Hell* and *The Last Judgement* pageants particularly assert the need for medieval Christians to "bere wittnesse" physically as part of their spiritual lives.

The Harrowing of Hell is staged as a confrontation of bodies. Christ, having saved all believers "through buying with my blood" [thurch bying with my bloode] (37.12), descends into Hell in order to reclaim God's people from eternal damnation. Although it is Christ's spirit that enters Hell since, as he notes, "my body remains in the grave" [my bodie bidis in graue] (37.23), the audience watches an *embodied* Christ performing before them. For this reason, it seems that *The Harrowing of Hell*'s premise works against theatre's strength as a representational mode: the play attempts to show a

¹⁴¹ Original: "Nowe care I no moore for my lyfe / Sen I haue seen here this ryall so ryfe."

disembodied event through staged physical action. The lines suggest that Christ's costume makes him appear shining and bright, and therefore somewhat disembodied: "Now I see a sign of solace, / A glorious gleam to make us joyful" [Nowe see I signe of solace seere, / A glorious gleme to make vs gladde] (37.41-2); "This light comes from Christ" [Pis light comes all of Criste] (37.57); "This light thou has provided" [Pis light pou hast purueyed] (37.69). But, considering the continual emphasis on Christ's and God's bodiliness in the early plays, it does not seem as if costumes or word choices would be able to overcome the actuality of the actor's body onstage. In addition, the character Belliall tells the devils to "Beat him hard / and make him go away" [Lay on hym þan hardely / And garre hym gange his gate] (37.143-4). This command reinforces Christ's bodied presence in Hell. Likewise, lines spoken by some of the characters refer to the bodiedness of Christ that was on display in the earlier plays. For instance, Symeon remembers, "I had delight to associate with him / And embraced him affectionately with my hand" [I hadde delite with hym to dele / And halsed homely with my hande] (37.63-4). These allusions remind spectators of Christ's physical humanity. Although the pageant stages supernatural disembodied events, I contend that it exploits the physical similarity between actor and spectator in order to reinforce the play's call to action.

The bodies of the characters in *The Harrowing of Hell* underscore the notion that witnessing requires a bodily "bearing forth." During the play, Christ explains that he has come to save all believers and that the prophets' words must be fulfilled through him (37.274). God's new law will therefore be fulfilled not only in Christ's death and resurrection, but also through the action of leading the souls from Hell. Satan assumes that he "shall have more" people in Hell than he has currently, since he knows he can

“pervert them quickly” (37.332) and plans to teach men to disrespect “this law that you recently have set” (37.329).¹⁴² Satan says, “I shall walk east and west, / And make them act much worse” (37.333-4). To prevent this, Christ chains Satan (“Nay, fiend, thou shall be chained [feste],” 37.336) and commands him to “thy cell where you shall sit” (37.342) so that he cannot tempt Christians.¹⁴³ This staged action visualizes and makes physical the power struggle between good and evil that is the subject of the pageant. Christ not only fulfills the Christian law of salvation by sacrificing his own body and leading the bodies of the righteous from Hell, but he also physically restrains temptation and the possibility for sin, symbolized by Satan’s body. As it did with Christ’s spirit, the pageant’s dramatic action, in this case chaining, makes Satan’s spirit concretely bodied onstage.

This pageant offers a striking example of how the action of bodies becomes the “currency of ludic exchange.” The doubled potentiality of the spectator’s body is a powerful theme of this play. Citing such writers as Augustine, Alan of Lille, and Robert Grosseteste, Biernoff discusses a recurrent distinction found in medieval writing between the incorruptible, glorified body and the living, sinful flesh.¹⁴⁴ *The Harrowing of Hell* seems to offer an enactment of this same theory of bodies. Staging Christ’s body alongside Satan’s body visually contrasts the tension ascribed to the human condition. And yet, in the harrowing story Christ and Satan do not represent bodies or even conditions of the body—as Christ says, he is without a body while in Hell—but are

¹⁴² Original: “turne þame tye”; “þis lawe þat þou nowe late has laide.”

¹⁴³ Original: “I schall walke este and weste, / And garre þame werke wele were”; “thy selle where þou schalte sitte.” According to the Gospel of Nicodemus, from which the harrowing scene is derived, Hell cast Satan from his dwelling to fight Christ (V.1). Christ then trampled upon death and “laid hold on Satan the prince and delivered him unto the power of Hell, and drew Adam to him unto his own brightness” (VI.2). See the descent into Hell section of “The Gospel of Nicodemus, or Acts of Pilate,” in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. and trans. M.R. James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹⁴⁴ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 17-39.

instead potential paths available to the human body. Christ chains Satan, not because he constitutes sinful flesh, but rather because he threatens humanity with temptations to sin. In Hell, Christ is not glorified flesh, but the opportunity, available to all Christians, to follow a sinless life and ultimately attain eternal incorruptible flesh in Heaven. Christ and Satan do not represent states of the human condition, but are instead the contrasting possibilities available as part of the human condition.

As the currency of ludic exchange however, the actors' bodies cannot be contained as metaphors. I assert that during embodied performance the premise of the play's action—a disembodied event—could not stand on its own, but would inevitably accumulate meaning around the actuality of the actors' bodies. Perhaps the pageant's creators recognized this and therefore chose to layer these bodies with additional connotations in order to generate theological meaning and exploit the body's potential to make abstract ideas concrete. As a result, during this play Christ and Satan simultaneously symbolize abstract concepts (good and evil) and embody elements of the human condition. By virtue of their bodied states, during performance the characters Christ and Satan present spectators with two models of bodily conduct.¹⁴⁵ Spectators are thereby offered a way to interpret the actions of these characters as more than metaphor and to see them as potential, contrasting responses to God. This helps to reinforce the play's overall theme of proper witness.

The pageant tries to direct the play's theology by offering medieval spectators a way to control their fleshiness. Christ clearly outlines the criteria for salvation:

¹⁴⁵ Alexandra F. Johnston discusses how the use of verbal, and perhaps physical, contrast in this pageant emphasizes the Augustinian notion that “good is stable, tranquil, and harmonious; evil is unstable, restless, and dissonant” (235). Therefore, the differences in how the actors portraying Satan and Christ controlled their bodies likely contributed to this play's devotional meaning as well. See “*The Word Made Flesh*,” 234-6.

That my coming must be known,
 And to my sacraments pursue,
 My death, my resurrection, rightly understood—
 Whoever does not believe, they are not steadfast.
 Unto my doom I shall draw them,
 And judge them worse than any Jew.
And all that like to learn
My law and live [leue] thereby
 Shall never experience harm,
 But wealth, as is worthy (37.315-24, emphasis mine).¹⁴⁶

According to Beadle, the word “leue” means both to live and to believe. Believing is therefore associated with living one’s faith; in order to escape flesh’s corruption, one must live the law of Christ. It is not enough to know and understand this law, one must also be a living witness of this law through the body. The sacraments—such as baptism, the Eucharist, and penance and absolution—offer Christians specific and codified ways to accomplish this, but the final pageant in the cycle, *The Last Judgement*, reminds its lay audience of everyday practices of belief.¹⁴⁷

The Last Judgement continues the witnessing theme, but makes it even more central to the pageant’s message. I interpret this final pageant as a meditation on the lived body. The cycle allows spectators to witness the spectacular and to experience the entire story of Christian history, sometimes even as confidantes. But at the day’s end, it ultimately confronts the audience with a decision about how they will respond in the future to what they have witnessed from the past.

¹⁴⁶ Original: “þat is my comyng for to knawe, / And to my sacramente [*sic*] pursewe, / Mi dede, my rysing, rede be rawe – / Who will nocht trowe, þei are nocht trewe. / Vnto my dome I schall þame drawe, / And juge þame worse þanne any Jewe. / *And all þat likis to leere / My lawe and leue þerbye / Shall neuere haue harmes heere, / But welthe, as is worthy.*”

¹⁴⁷ In his most recent book, David Morgan argues that belief is “a *Christian* way of thinking about religion” (6, original emphasis). His study of belief proceeds from two presuppositions: belief does not happen without a body, and belief happens between and among people (8-9). See *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

The Last Judgement opens with Deus offering a recap of the day's/cycle's events. He describes creation, the Fall, the appearance of Christ, his crucifixion, the harrowing of Hell, and the resurrection. He emphasizes that Christ bought them with his "body bare" (47.30) and, through that body, "Example he gave them to win heaven" (47.38).¹⁴⁸ Christ's body is defined as the example that, when followed, wins salvation. Deus recounts how people have badly repaid Christ's sacrifice by returning to their wicked ways. Up until this point, Deus has permitted humankind to continue on this destructive path, although "on earth I see only sins diverse" (47.61), but now he will send his angels to earth to blow their trumpets and announce that "the time is come I will make an end" (47.64).¹⁴⁹ As the angels call all souls to God, they tell them to "rise and fetch the flesh that was your companion" [rise and fecche youre flesh þat was youre feere] (47.86) and "body and soul with you bring" [body and sawle with 3ou 3e bring] (47.91). These lines implicate the body in the judgment to come. It is not enough to acknowledge Christ as an example; in addition, believers must follow that example through action in the flesh. The pageant imagines individuals bringing their souls and bodies to the final judgment.

The first Anima Mala who speaks describes how it not only rejected Christ's flesh ("we have his flesh forsworn," 47.119), but also "may bring forth no good deed" before God (47.123).¹⁵⁰ This soul says:

Alas, that we such a life should lead
That prepared us for this destiny
Our wicked actions they will betray us
That we believed never would become known (47.127-30).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Original: "Ensaumpill he gaue þame heuene to wynne."

¹⁴⁹ Original: "in erthe I see butte synnes seere"; "the tymen is comen I will make ende."

¹⁵⁰ Original: "we haue his flesh forsworne"; "may bringe forthe no goode dede."

¹⁵¹ Original: "Allas, þat we swilke liffe schulde lede / þat dighte vs has þis destonye / Oure wikkid werkis þei will vs wreye / þat we wende never schuld haue bene weten."

Later, this same character notes “Our deeds are our damnation” (47.138). Similarly, the second damned soul says, “Our wicked actions we may not hide, / But on our backs we must bear them” (47.154-5), and then recounts the ways in which the body has sinned:

Before us plainly are brought forth
 The deeds that we shall damn immediately
 That ears have heard, or heart has thought,
 Since any time that we may speak of,
 That foot has gone or hand has wrought,
 That mouth has spoken or eye has seen –
 This day very dearly then it is bought;
 Alas, it would be better had we never been born (47.161-8).¹⁵²

Having ignored Christ’s example, these souls are damned, and the text overtly implicates the body in this damnation. Christ reiterates this judgment in another passage when he specifies that he will “judge folk far and near / By their deeds, wrong or right” (47.191-2). A few lines later, he again emphasizes that “But, after their deeds, they shall have bliss or punishment” (47.200).¹⁵³ At the final judgment, Christians will not be measured by their thoughts or convictions, but instead by their deeds. The text is emphatic about this detail.

The next section of this pageant focuses spectators on physical sensations. The body becomes both a visual reminder of Christ’s sacrifice and a means to connect humanity with Christ. He says:

Therefore, to earth now I will go
 Myself to sit in majesty
 To deliver my judgment I will descend;
This body will I bear with me –
 How it was afflicted, to save mankind,

¹⁵² Original: “Oure dedis beis oure dampnacione”; “Oure wikkid werkis may we not hide, / But on oure bakkis vs muste þem bere –”; “Before vs playnly bese fourth brought / Þe dedis þat vs schall dame bedene / Þat eres has herde, or harte has boght, / Sen any tyme þat we may mene, / Þat fote has gone or hande has wrought, / That mouthe hath spoken or ey has sene – / Þis day full dere þanne bese it boght; / Allas, vnborne and we hadde bene.”

¹⁵³ Original: “deme folke ferre and nere / Aftir þer werkyng, wronge or right”; “But, aftir wirkyng, welth or wrake.”

All mankind there shall it see (47.179-84, emphasis mine).¹⁵⁴

Christ's account of the pains he suffered returns the audience to meditating on the passion. He presents his wounds to the audience, using vivid language to express his sacrifice of the flesh:

Here may you see my wounds wide,
 These which I endured for your misdeed.
 Through heart and head, foot, hand and skin,
 Not for my guilt, but for your need.
 Behold both body, back and side,
 How dearly I saved believers.
 These bitter pains I willing experienced –
 Thus would I bleed to buy you salvation.

My body was scourged without cause,
 Like a thief roughly I was threatened
 On the cross they hanged me, on a hill,
 Bloody and livid, as I was beaten,
 With a crown of thorns thrust severely.
 This spear unto my side was set—
 My heart-blood they did not spare to spill;
 Mankind, for love of you I did not prevent it.

The Jews spit on me contemptuously,
 They spared me no more than a thief.
 When they struck me I stood meekly,
 Against them I did nothing grieve. (47.245-64).¹⁵⁵

A few lines later, Christ asks “Say, man, what suffered þou for me?” (47.276).

This series of verbal images, placed at the very end of the cycle, redirects attention back to Christ's suffering. And yet, at the same time it prompts spectators to

¹⁵⁴ Original: “þerfore till erþe nowe will I wende / Miselue to sitte in magesté / To deme my domes I woll descende; / *þis body will I bere with me* – / Howe it was dight, mannes mys to mende, / All mankynde þere schall it see.”

¹⁵⁵ Original: “Here may 3e see my woundes wide / Þe whilke I tholed for youre mysdede / Thurgh harte and heed, foote, hande and hide, / Nought for my gilte, butt for youre need. / Beholdis both body, bak and side, / How dere I bought youre brotherhede. / Þes bittir peynes I wolde abide – / To bye you blisse þus wolde I bleede. / Mi body was scourged withouten skill, / As theffe full thraly was I thrette / On crosse þei hanged me, on a hill, / Blody and bloo, as I was bette, / With croune of thorne throsten full ill. / Þis spere vnto my side was sette – / Myne harte-bloode spared noght þei for to spill; / Manne, for thy loue wolde I not lette. / Þe Jewes spitte on my spitously, / Þei spared me no more þan a theffe. / Whan þei me strake I stode full stilly [meekly], / Agaynste þam did I nothing greue.”

contemplate this suffering in relation to their own bodies. The vivid language creates identification between Christ's suffering body and the spectator's own flesh, but not by the same mechanism as did the *Crucifixion* and *The Death of Christ*. In those pageants, Christ's body on the cross was displayed before the audience. In *The Last Judgement*, Christ's wounds are presented, but the suffering is only verbally recounted—not enacted. This prevents the visual piety from becoming merely a visceral, physical identification with Christ and instead establishes for the audience a certain mental distance from the suffering. Therefore, contemplation on the *pain* of the passion can be encouraged. The play's devotional goal requires the spectator to acknowledge her physical association with Christ's body, and then to move beyond this bodily identification and consider its ramifications. As Richard Beadle and Pamela King note in their introduction to the play,

the Judgement is the only event of the future dramatized in the cycle, and this has the effect of placing the audience within a temporal continuum stretching beyond the end of Christ's earthly life. It shows them that the time of mercy, in which they live, is not of infinite duration, and it thereby calls upon them to search their consciences and choose whether they will be among the saved or the damned.¹⁵⁶

Corpus Christi day was a religious event, but it was also marked by folly, feasting, drinking, and celebrations. The final play in the cycle confronts the audience with the question, "Today, as I have suffered in the flesh, how have you exercised your body?" The pageant does this by contrasting the satiated, festive bodies of the spectators with the broken, tormented body of Christ.

The play ends with Christ separating the saved from the damned as he speaks lines found in the parable of the great judgment, Matthew 25: 31-46. This action focuses

¹⁵⁶ Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, eds., *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 267.

attention on the body as a unifying force between both groups and Christ. Christ recounts the various ways the damned “never comforted me in my suffering” [neuere me comforte in my care] (47.318). When faced with the hungry, thirsty, “clothles,” “harde presse,” pained, or ill, the damned offered these people neither help nor pity. The model of salvation offered in the play is one of lived bodies; how these bodies perform deeds and treat other bodies during their lifetimes will determine their fate at the end of time. This emphasis on deeds is also found in devotional literature and sermons of the period. For instance, a sermon for All Souls Day, composed around 1400 by the English curate John Mirk, argues that “three things help souls out of suffering: devout praying, alms-giving, and mass singing.”¹⁵⁷ Mirk offers various examples of people physically performing these pious deeds. In the same way, artistic representations of the seven Corporal Acts of Mercy, such as an early fifteenth-century stained glass window in the parish church of All Saints, North Street in York, often showed laypeople acting out different pious deeds.¹⁵⁸ The York pageant applies this theme to its audience by creating a contrast between the comfortable bodies of the celebratory audience and the neglected bodies of the needy. Whereas the previous pageants establish, and then take advantage of, the continuum of flesh between actors and audience, *The Last Judgement* projects that continuum outward and onto the medieval audience. As Clifford Davidson notes:

The Last Judgment plays in the civic cycles thus prove that late medieval Christianity did not merely look back at the events of past biblical history; indeed, there is after all a future orientation about the religiosity of this period.... The Mass itself is at once a memory of past events in time and a

¹⁵⁷ John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, vol. 1, ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905; Kraus Reprint, 1987), 269. Original: “þre þynges helpen soules out of penance: devot prayng, almes-zeuyng, and masse-syngyng.”

¹⁵⁸ The seven Corporal Acts of Mercy included feeding the hungry, offering drink to the thirsty, providing hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison, and burying the dead.

foreshadowing of events which are summed up in this hope. But in order to have hope, despair must also be potentially present; the possibility of the joys of the heavenly banquet is balanced against that of the sorrows of Hell.... In a sense, therefore, the vernacular plays of Doomsday set out to do something encouraged by the contemplative tradition: they attempt to visualize what it would be like for the individual to be present at this final act of history.¹⁵⁹

But plays representing the final judgment not only visualize this event, they also allow the audience to experience it firsthand. The York pageant directs spectators to their own bodily experiences by using language and images that focus on Christian bodies as the material of salvation. Audience members are asked to consider what they will do after this performance experience has ended, not only in word and thought, but also in deed.

It is appropriate that the cycle concludes by turning attention to the bodies in the audience. This was a devotional mechanism employed in other media. In her recent article on *Book to a Mother*, a devotional text written in the 1370s for a widowed mother, Nicole Rice argues that the book's clerical author "encourages his mother to understand her efforts to imitate Christ as a combination of somatic/affective and textual practices."¹⁶⁰ Rice asserts that the author "privileges the experiential understanding of Christ" and "emphasizes the direct connection between reading Christ's life and performing imitative teaching."¹⁶¹ I contend that a similar emphasis characterizes *The Last Judgement*. The physical similarity between Christ and spectator, as well as between person in need and spectator, reinforces the necessity of an enacted understanding of

¹⁵⁹ Clifford Davidson, "Space and Time in Medieval Drama: Meditations on Orientation in the Early Theater," in *Word, Picture, Spectacle*, ed. Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984), 80.

¹⁶⁰ Nicole Rice, "Devotional Literature and Lay Spiritual Authority: *Imitatio Clerici* in *Book to a Mother*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, no. 2 (2005): 195.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 198; 203.

Christ. This final play in the cycle reiterates the need for medieval spectators to perform deeds that Christ has exemplified because belief alone is not enough to win salvation. The flesh will return in the final days and, just as with Mary's pregnant body, it will reveal the truth of the soul housed within it.

In each of these examples, I argue that meaning is generated in the York cycle, in part, through the spectator's visual performance experience. This is by no means the only way the cycle created meaning, nor, at times, would it be the primary mode of understanding. Cazelles asserts:

the theatricalized representation of the sacred invites its witnesses to act as both viewers and interpreters of a spectacle whose script produces meaning to the extent that its climactic moment translates the unexplainable into flesh, thereby enabling the collectivity to assign meaning to the heretofore unreadable body exposed at center stage, by means of a second translation, that of the flesh into words.¹⁶²

I find Cazelles' assessment useful, since I too believe that the York cycle constructs a scenario in which spectators are both witnessing and interpreting the sacred events staged before them. But I would take Cazelles' conclusion in a slightly different direction and argue that the second translation is not from flesh into words, but from flesh into spectator's body. Particularly if we consider these plays in relation to medieval theories of vision, which not only liken seeing to touch, but to touch that enters into and impresses itself upon the body, the sacred as flesh enters the spectator's body to become part of it. As Biernoff notes, "vision, in the medieval world, did not leave the viewer untouched or unchanged. . . . Given that perception was defined as assimilation, the objects of one's

¹⁶² Cazelles, "Bodies on Stage," 57.

attention were of critical importance. To see was to become similar to one's object."¹⁶³ This assimilation was not fleeting, but instead, as I have already shown, for many medieval theologians it had moral consequences. Such a belief is similar to those held by theorists of the cognitive unconscious. Lakoff and Johnson argue that the body "remembers" experience and that our unconscious is shaped by bodily encounters. The body is no mere background; reason does not transcend the body, but arises from and is shaped by the body.¹⁶⁴ The idea that conceptual systems arise *out of* the body implies that perceptual encounters are incorporated into and made one *with* the body. Experience is assimilated into our selves and shapes our opinions and ideas about the world. Although it is, perhaps, a less tactile model than those developed during the Middle Ages, it is equally invested in the occupations of the flesh.

Embodied Spectators and Anti-Theatrical Prejudice

I identify performance as a particularly potent medium for the making of devotional images, whose power resides in moments of bodily contact. It is easy to see how performance, when viewed in this light, provoked medieval anti-theatrical prejudice. As Biernoff writes, "Studying historical accounts of embodied vision helps us to make sense of the power that images have exercised. It also sheds light on their prohibition. Iconoclasm and iconophobia confirm the transformative potency of images—not primarily as communicative media, but as objects that inexplicably and irresistibly affect our feelings and behaviour."¹⁶⁵ The ways in which medieval writers described dramatic

¹⁶³ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 137.

¹⁶⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 5-6.

¹⁶⁵ Biernoff, "Carnal Relations," 44.

encounters reveals that it was specifically performance's unique embodied visual experience that often evoked fear.

Medieval writers identified the "bodiedness" of drama as its unique contribution to visual culture. For example, *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (c.1380-1425) is more concerned with responses to dramatic content than with the content per se, reflecting a medieval preoccupation with the performance encounter, rather than the dramatic text.¹⁶⁶ As Claire Sponsler points out, this treatise "consistently links 'miraclis pleyinge' with the body, emphasizing how dramatic activity caters to the bodily at the expense of the spiritual."¹⁶⁷ In the first half of the *Tretise*, the author worries that "pleyinge" will lead men to serve "desires [lustis] of the flesh [fleyssh] and pleasure [mirthe] of the body" and entice people away from proper "recreacioun" such as "works [werkis] of mercy to his neiebores."¹⁶⁸ He presents a number of arguments that he has heard in support of drama's devotional efficacy and then refutes each one. His responses suggest inherent contradictions located within medieval religious drama, particularly in respect to its characteristic as embodied art. In respect to the claim that these plays are performed in the worship of God, he writes that on the contrary such plays "are presented more to be seen by the world and to please the world than to be seen by God or please Him" [ben don more to ben seen of the worlde and to plesyn to the world thane to ben seen of God or to plesyn to him], particularly because these plays are "only signs, love without deeds" [onely singnis, love withoute dedis] and therefore "contrary [contrarious] to the honor

¹⁶⁶ Ruth Nisse's recent work on the *Tretise* reads it alongside Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. See *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 9-21.

¹⁶⁷ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 76. Sponsler's analyzes this characteristic of the treatise in relation to misbehavior and carnivalesque play, not pious intention or devotional reactions, which are my foci.

¹⁶⁸ *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. Clifford Davidson, (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 96; 104.

[worschi]pe] of God.”¹⁶⁹ Although plays present religious, ritual actions, the author argues that these actions should not be confused with true worship because they are only empty gestures, not pious deeds. The author appears troubled by the fact that because “miraclis pleyinge” portrays bodies engaged in sacred events and actions, spectators might interpret these plays as religious worship. This implies that religious drama created a degree of confusion between play and worship, and I suggest that this confusion occurred primarily because theatre, like worship, was “bodied forth.”

The author also states that there exists a belief that by visualizing the effectiveness of the devil “such miracle playing makes men committed to moral living” [siche miraclis pleyinge ben men committed to gode livinge].¹⁷⁰ To refute this, the author argues that these plays may convert some individuals, but only as they pervert the community as a whole. This perversion seems to be an issue of bodily virtue, since as evidence the author cites the Old Testament story of Sarah: “a young woman of the Old Testament, in order to keep *her bodily virtue of chastity* and to worthily take the sacrament of marriage when her time came, abstained from all manner of idle playing and from the company of idle players” [a yonge womman of the Olde Testamen for keeping of *hir bodily virtue of chastite* and for to worthily take the sacrament of matrimonye whanne hir time shulde come, abstenyde hir fro al maner idil pleying and for al company of idil pleyeris].¹⁷¹ The author asserts that priests should likewise abstain from taking part in or attending plays.¹⁷² Thus, the author shifts from discussing the spectator’s *visual* experience at the plays to discussing his experience as a bodied

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 98; 99.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 101, emphasis mine.

¹⁷² Ibid., 101.

attendee. This is one of many examples that reveal the author's fixation on the degree to which "pleyinge" works on bodies. In another instance, the author argues that "miraclis pleyinge" makes men "weep of the play of Christ's passion, failing to weep for their own sins and those of their children" [wepen for the pley of Cristis passioun, leevinge to wepen for the sinnes of hemsilf and of theire children].¹⁷³ This troubles him because,

Therefore, hence as the weeping that men commonly weep at such play is false witnessing that they love more the pleasures of *their bodies and of worldly prosperity* than the pleasures in God and prosperity of virtue in the soul, and, therefore, having more compassion for pain than for sin, they falsely weep *for their lack of bodily prosperity* more than they do for their lack of holy [prosperity], just as do the damned in hell.

[Therefore right as the weping that men wepen ofte in siche pley comunely is fals wittnessenge that they lovyn more the liking of *theire body and of prosperite of the world* than likinge in God and prosperite of vertu in the soule, and, therefore, having more compassion of peine than of sinne, they falsly wepyn *for lakkinge of bodily prosperite* more than for lakking of gostly, as don dampnyd men in helle].¹⁷⁴

The author is concerned that plays focus spectators on their own bodies, which takes them away from meditation on Christ. Later, he argues that "miraclis pleyinge" should be avoided because it "is intended to delight men bodily" [ben made more to deliten men bodily].¹⁷⁵ His main problem with "pleyinge" seems to be its innate ability to access and influence the spectator's body.

The second part of the *Tretise*, which may or may not have been written by the same author as the first part, reflects a similar attention to the bodily effects of "pleyinge." One argument presented in this section maintains that "since Ismael was born

¹⁷³ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 102, emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 104.

of the flesh, and Isaac of the spirit, as the apostle says, to make an example of playing of the flesh is neither appropriate nor helpful to the spirit, but takes away from the spirit's heritage" [sithen Ismael was born after the fleysh, and Isaac after the spirit, as seith the apostele, to exsaumplen that pley of the fleysh is not convenable ne helpely to the spirit but to the bynimming of the spiritus heritage].¹⁷⁶ Thus, play of the flesh cannot aid the spirit, but ultimately detracts from it. Similarly, the author articulates the Christian assertion that the Old Testament is the testament of the flesh, whereas the New Testament is of the spirit, and therefore "fleshy play is not allowable alongside the spiritual works of Christ and of his saints" [fleysly pley is not leveful with the gostly werkis of Crist and of his seintis] but, instead, in "pleyinge" "the flesh is maintained most and the spirit less" [the fleysh is most meintenyd and the spirite lasse].¹⁷⁷ "Pleyinge" is not only associated with the flesh, but it offers an experience of God that is founded in the (lesser) body. This section of the *Tretise* also reiterates the argument presented in the first half that "pleyinge" represents "going backward from deeds of the spirit to only signs made after desires of the flesh" [goinge backward fro dedis of the spirit to onely signes don after lustis of the fleysh] and is practiced "among Christian men who show their religion only in outward signs and not in deeds" [among Cristene men but sithen religious onely in tokens shewiden ther religioun and not in dedis].¹⁷⁸ Here, again, "miraclis pleyinge" is interpreted as empty gestures.

All these arguments against drama's value as a mode of religious instruction are useful to review, particularly because they articulate many of the same conclusions that I drew regarding the York cycle. Like the author(s) of the *Tretise*, I contended that

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 109.

performance emphasizes the flesh in ways that draw the spectator's attention to her own body and bodily experience. I argued that the plays show characters enacting religious works and deeds, which I interpret as inspiring the medieval layperson to take action, but which the *Tretise's* author(s) believed functioned as a substitute for performing good works. Although we arrive at different conclusions, it is significant that this/these contemporary writer(s), who was/were opposed to religious "pleyinge," identified in performance many of the same characteristics as have I. In addition, I argued that drama influenced lay visual piety during the actual experience of performance—not simply in the act of looking upon dramatic images, but through the changes that this devotional looking caused within spectators. Similarly, the *Tretise's* anti-theatrical prejudice articulates a fear of theatre located not in the dramatic iconography, but in the actual performance encounter. In this way, the *Tretise* acknowledges performance's "bodied forth" nature.

We find a similar concern expressed in Saint Augustine's account of theatre spectatorship. Augustine proposed a tripartite model of the senses. When applied to vision, corporeal vision was located at the lowest level of the hierarchy, with spiritual vision in the middle and intellectual vision as the highest form. Corporeal vision is perceived through the body and presented to the senses. Spiritual vision is what we imagine in our thoughts when the objects themselves are not before us. Intellectual vision is pure and imageless, with no sensory referent.¹⁷⁹ Augustine's discourse, as represented by this hierarchy, places corporeal vision in an inferior position, and therefore promotes a general suspicion of all experience or knowledge attained through physical seeing.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine, *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, trans. R. J. Teske (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1991), 2: 186-215.

Biernoff notes, “The point being made is invariably that in this mortal, sinful, fleshly body we cannot know, or see, the truth with clarity.”¹⁸⁰ In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes that the soul is tempted both by pleasures of the senses and by curiosity for knowledge, and he locates both temptations in the senses:

Beside the lust of the flesh which inheres in the delight given by all pleasures of the senses (those who are enslaved to it perish by putting themselves far from you [God]), there exists in the soul, through the medium of the same bodily senses, a cupidity which does not take delight in carnal pleasures but in perceptions acquired through the flesh. It is a vain inquisitiveness dignified with the title of knowledge and science.¹⁸¹

He identifies the eyes as playing “a leading role in acquiring knowledge” and argues that the eyes, like the ears, can be abused for such non-spiritual ends:

To entrap the eyes men have made innumerable additions to the various arts and crafts, ... things which go far beyond necessary and moderate requirements and pious symbols. Outwardly they follow what they make. Inwardly they abandon God by whom they were made, destroying what they were created to be (10.35; 10.34).

These “arts and crafts” keep the soul trapped in corporeal vision, which prevents them from seeking a less material knowledge of God. Augustine’s interpretation of theatre is largely informed by his hierarchy of vision. Corporeal seeing is one means by which people seek out and experience pleasure, and Augustine believes theatre is a particularly dangerous instance of this process.

Augustine begins Book Three of his *Confessions* by discussing his own physicality. He describes “being flogged with the red-hot irons of jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger, and contention,” his “hunger” and desire “to love and to be loved,” and how

¹⁸⁰ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.35.

his soul was “rotten in health. In an ulcerous condition it thrust itself to outward things, miserably avid to be scratched by contact with the world of the senses.” He recognized that “physical things had no soul” and therefore could not satisfy these desires, so he instead yearned to “enjoy the body of the beloved.”¹⁸² He then begins the next chapter, in which he describes the theatre in Carthage and how it captivated him as a young man. Augustine’s responses to theatre are all sensual; theatre worked on his body. Objecting to the encounter with performance and the way a spectator “wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure,” he argues that performance diverts feelings, leading friendly feelings to “run down into the torrent of boiling pitch, the monstrous heats of black desires.”¹⁸³ Theatre creates opportunities to shed tears and wring the heart, to find delight in sorrow. Augustine’s descriptions concentrate on the immediate reactions, often pleasurable, that performance prompts. Yet, by placing this section on theatre immediately after very visceral descriptions of his own physical yearnings—hunger, desire, the need to enjoy the body of another—Augustine suggests that theatre’s crime is not simply in moving the emotions, but in satisfying the body, something that begins with the sensual viewing experience. The spectator’s body is engaged by and in performance, and it is this bodily experience that Augustine condemns.

Augustine and the author(s) of the *Tretise* seem to fear the uncontrollable responses provoked by theatre’s physical engagement with spectators. Garner writes that for modernists involved in early twentieth-century theatre, such as Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, “the actor’s body threatened the stage’s formal autonomy through its

¹⁸² Ibid., 3.1.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 3.2; 3.3.

non-aesthetic physiology, its independent sentience, the various ways by which it registers its living presence... [it] posed a danger to the aesthetic enterprise through its insistent naturalism.”¹⁸⁴ I would argue that, for the medieval theologian, the spectator’s body similarly threatened the devotional aesthetic because of its “insistent naturalism.” Such naturalism focused devotion on the flesh, rather than the spirit.

To better explore the devotional opportunity that medieval theatre offered laypeople, we might interpret the unique theatrical encounter as a phenomenological vector. Leder writes, “a phenomenological vector is a structure of experience that makes possible and encourages the subject in certain practical or interpretive directions, while never mandating them as invariants.”¹⁸⁵ For Augustine and the *Tretise*’s author(s), performance functioned as a phenomenological vector that encouraged risky responses and interpretations. Leder maintains that no pure phenomenological vector exists and that all are shaped by cultural context.¹⁸⁶ The medieval cultural context offered a fertile field for such an interpretation of performance: medieval visual theories that emphasized touch; the association of vision and embodiment that Biernoff outlines; the late medieval affective devotional culture; and, the post-1215 Fourth Lateran Council emphasis on “seeing” the body of Christ, made visible in the Eucharist, which the Corpus Christi procession ritualized. Michal Kobialka analyzes changes in representational practices at the turn of the thirteenth century and links these to the theological concerns and interpretations represented within the constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council. The Council shifted church doctrine away from embracing a representational model of Christ’s body that integrated multiple approaches (corporeal, mystical, and

¹⁸⁴ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 57.

¹⁸⁵ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 150.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

ecclesiological) with both private and corporate experiences. Instead of this multivalent model, the Council favored a binary model that privileged sight and delimited what the body of Christ was, how it could be seen, and who could experience it. Kobialka writes, “In this process of producing and disseminating the visibility of the sacramental body, the debates regarding the body of Christ centered on the mode of seeing, as opposed to the domain of touch and hearing that dominated, for example, Hildegard of Bingen’s visions.”¹⁸⁷ Within this late medieval cultural context, the lay body’s experience of performance represented a potentially dangerous devotional encounter because it had the potential to encourage spontaneous, unconscious visceral responses. The very ways in which I have argued that the York pageants drew attention to, and were based on, a theology of the living body, are exactly those characteristics of drama that theologians feared.

Learning Literacy through the Body

In his article on bodily knowing, J. Giles Milhaven describes his viewing experience before a three-dimensional pieta as unique to this particular art form:

Before the Pieta I rested in pain. In every line of stone or wood, I felt Christ, God and man, dead for love of me. I felt the mother grieving him dead. That was all I felt. I felt nothing else at the moment, nor wanted to.... The art itself pinned me down within the Passion of Christ and Mary. It held me fast in their pain and sorrow.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Michal Kobialka, *This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 198.

¹⁸⁸ J. Giles Milhaven, “A Medieval Lesson on Bodily Knowing: Women’s Experience and Men’s Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 2 (1989): 356-7.

He later suggests that the materiality of sculpture may “convey more powerfully than painting a tactile experience.”¹⁸⁹ This unique experience of visual piety, established through the materiality of a devotional object, is what I have attempted to describe in reference to actors’ bodies in the cycle pageants. The physical encounter between actor and spectator bodies that occurs during religious performance is a phenomenological vector that creates and encourages certain devotional reactions. But Milhaven further argues that the traces of a viewing experience continue to influence subsequent devotional encounters. He writes, “After the devout person’s experience of the Pieta, she cannot go back in memory and distinguish in the original experience a nonbodily union with Mary from a bodily one.”¹⁹⁰ Applying this same enduring experience of materiality to medieval performance suggests a new type of literacy.

I contend that the spectator’s body learned a viewing practice during performance that functioned as a form of lay literacy. Building on Katherine Zieman’s idea of “liturgical literacy,” I call this “performance literacy.” Zieman writes that “literacy, whether defined in medieval or modern terms, is not a unitary or uniform activity, nor does it have meaning outside of the social formations that determine how written texts might function within them.”¹⁹¹ Rather than explore literacy through strictly textual practices, Zieman asserts that the lay “understanding” of texts was “grounded in the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 360. Here Milhaven builds on Joanna E. Ziegler’s ideas about materiality and devotion discussed in *Sculpture of Compassion: The Pietà and the Beguines in the Southern Low Countries c. 1300- c. 1600* (Rome: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1992). Ziegler’s goal is “to pursue the exchange between material (object) and the immaterial (feeling), and to explore the construction of emotions through art” (15), specifically as this occurs between Christian believers and the pieta.

¹⁹⁰ Milhaven, “A Medieval Lesson,” 355.

¹⁹¹ Katherine Zieman, “Reading, Singing and Understanding: Constructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England,” in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 97.

body” through a “visceral” relationship.¹⁹² For the person who is not connected to the Mass in a grammatical relationship, one that is subsumed by linguistic knowledge conveyed through grammatical instruction, “meaning is perceived in the body, not in the mind.”¹⁹³ In relation to medieval nuns, Zieman constructs a notion of “liturgical literacy” that “could draw upon a number of learned abilities, from those we might qualify as musical (such as solmization), to phonetic decoding skill, to mnemonic techniques, to a variety of grammatical proficiencies.”¹⁹⁴

Literacy is an extremely useful term to apply to medieval lay performance-viewing practices. As an experience grounded in the body, performance-viewing taught laypeople how to engage their faith through their bodies. It therefore constructed a kind of “performance literacy” that laypeople could employ in other devotional settings. A phenomenology of performance, as articulated by Garner, demands that we put the body with all its ambiguities back into the theatre. Anything learned in performance is learned via the body, and medieval religious performance offered that body a truly synaesthetic pious encounter. Beyond sight and sound, medieval vernacular outdoor theatre events like the York cycle engaged spectators through the food they ate, the smells of the city and of special effects like fire and incense, and the feel of the climate, the benches on which some sat, the crowd around them, or the touch of actors who might mingle in the crowd. The cycle created a sensual devotional space in which laypeople controlled their piety, beginning with how they controlled their bodies. Eating, drinking, shouting, heckling, walking, following a single pageant, leaving, arriving—all of these constitute

¹⁹² Ibid., 101.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 103; 101.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 106.

changes made through the body. These bodily changes altered the perception of performance and transformed lay visual piety.

But phenomenology also argues that an essential element of “lived” experience is the invariable variability of perception. No matter what regulatory measures were taken in the cycle’s text and staging practices, performance evokes individualized responses, and, as the unstable viewing position of the *Crucifixion* pageant reveals, it could create potentially subversive possibilities for what kind of “performance literacy” the body learned. These possibilities were then available for the layperson to apply to her other pious practices. According to Michel de Certeau’s theory of consumption, the marginalized “other” uses tactics to seize and manipulate events temporarily in order to transform them into opportunities, thus turning the order of things to his/her advantage.¹⁹⁵ I interpret “performance literacy” as one tactic of lay visual piety. Kathleen Ashley argues that the metaphor of the tactic “allows us to see medieval dramatic performances as always a reinterpretation or adaptation of traditional myths and ideologies.”¹⁹⁶ But it also allows us to see the performance encounter as a reinterpretation or adaptation of the laity’s traditional role in devotion and devotional seeing. Performance constituted a space in which laypeople could develop a sensual, individualized, and, most importantly, transportable devout “performance literacy.” The performance event—not only the spoken words and dramatic images, but also the lived experience of spectatorship—prompted this literacy.

¹⁹⁵ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

¹⁹⁶ Kathleen Ashley, “Contemporary Theories of Popular Culture and Medieval Performances,” *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995): 9.

If we agree with Lakoff and Johnson and position the body, not as the mere background of experience, but instead as the fundamental means by which we conceptualize experience, then religious performance uniquely contributed to lay visual piety, specifically because it constructed lived, bodied encounters. Although many media in late medieval York influenced the construction of visual piety, performance was distinctive in that it allowed people to live out and body forth their faith. Morgan writes that “the act of looking itself contributes to religious formation and, indeed, constitutes a powerful practice of belief.”¹⁹⁷ The act of looking in the theatre was visceral, particularly so for those medieval laypeople who were familiar with contemporary visual theory and therefore believed that dramatic images impressed themselves onto the viewer’s body and soul. If we define performance-viewing as physically engaging, as well as visually engaging, we can identify ways in which the live encounter of actors and spectators influenced visual piety both during and beyond performance, not only in the representations it constructed visually, but in the viewing experience it embedded in the spectator’s body.

Here I wish to return to Aleksandra Wolska’s notion of “theatre as a mode of becoming,” which I outlined in my Introduction.¹⁹⁸ Wolska’s idea of “becoming” is very similar to Bacon’s model of perception as assimilation: we do not simply see; instead, seeing continues within us. Similarly, religious performance images were visually assimilated into the spectator’s body. Leder argues that the lived body constantly transforms itself by acquiring new skills. He writes,

¹⁹⁷ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3

¹⁹⁸ Aleksandra Wolska, “Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance,” *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 1 (2005): 88.

This skill acquisition is accomplished via a process I will term *incorporation*. From the Latin *corpus*, to “body,” the etymology of this word literally means to “bring within a body.” A skill is finally and fully learned when something that once was extrinsic, grasped only through explicit rules or examples, now comes to pervade my own corporeality.... Whereas in the stage of learning I act *to* the skill qua thematized goal, in mastery it becomes that *from* which I operate upon the world.... I act from not just my present organs, but a bodily past that tacitly structures my responses.¹⁹⁹

If vision is an embodied experience, then unique visual encounters offer the body new skills that it can learn and master. As medieval spectators watched religious performance, they engaged in a unique visual “skill set,” and that engagement entered into and merged with the body. The layperson’s corporeal “I can” included performance viewing.²⁰⁰

Although my theory of “performance literacy” is based upon analysis of the York cycle, it is by no means specific to York. As I mentioned in my Introduction, although this is a localized study, the issues and questions I raise could be directed at other medieval communities throughout England and the continent. The model for analysis that I outline and apply in this chapter could similarly be applied to other medieval performance examples. For instance, one could use this phenomenological approach to build on Seth Lerer’s conclusions about spectatorship and performance images in his article “‘Representyd now in yower syght’: The Culture of Spectatorship in Late Fifteenth Century England” or to develop further the rich contextualized readings of East Anglian drama in the works by Gail McMurray Gibson and Victor Scherb.²⁰¹ In addition, the visual theories that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter influenced medieval

¹⁹⁹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 31-32, original emphasis.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰¹ Lerer, “‘Representyd now in yower sight,’” 29-62; Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*; Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001).

thought across Europe. Therefore, this model is also applicable outside of England.

Indeed, I argue elsewhere that such an interpretation of devotional performance viewing's impact on the body is not exclusively medieval, and that concerns raised by contemporary critics of religious performances sometimes echo those found in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* and other medieval texts on performance.²⁰²

I do not believe that performance literacy was an experience that could be contained. As I noted in my Introduction, Beth Williamson argues that certain images might have offered medieval viewers “cues and encouragements to different types of devotional activity.”²⁰³ In the next chapter, I argue that the materiality of certain devotional images “cued” performance literacy in medieval laypeople. These images—in their material constructions, in the relationships they created between object and viewer, in their physical locations within homes and churches—evoked performance, and, thereby, performance literacy. I apply performance theory to medieval devotional objects, not only to suggest how lay people used these objects, but also to suggest previously unrecognized ways that performance may have contributed to lay visual piety.

²⁰² For a comparison between concerns expressed in negative reviews of Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of The Christ* and those in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, see Jill Stevenson, “The Material Bodies of Medieval Religious Performance in England,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): forthcoming. James Shapiro examines anxieties surrounding contemporary passion play performances in *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

²⁰³ Beth Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” *Speculum* 79 (2004): 387.

Chapter Three

Performance Seeing and Material Devotion: A Theory of Sensual Piety

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argued that medieval York's religious performance tradition encouraged a particular "way of seeing," to use Robert Scribner's phrase, that functioned as a powerful tool of visual piety. This "way of seeing" not only supported a theology of vision that emphasized the importance of seeing as a devotional act and instructed the lay audience in sacred viewing practices, but it also situated the lay body as a central element in lay visual piety. I demonstrated ways in which laypeople likely employed this "way of seeing" to further their secular and sacred agendas, and I argued that performances provided lay audience members with examples of how they could use sacred performance imagery to reinterpret their social identities.

In the next chapter I identified and analyzed the spectator's live, material body as the unique component of this "way of seeing." I examined various ways in which the encounter between live bodies in medieval religious performance may have generated meaning for spectators beyond the text and, at the end of the chapter, I suggested that the performance viewing experience functioned as a form of lay literacy. In doing so, I labeled the "way of seeing" I had identified in my first chapter "performance literacy." I argued that for visual piety to function in performance, it required spectators not only to recognize the cycle's textual references and dramatic iconography, but also to engage the pageants with their bodies. Performance literacy offered laypeople a "way of seeing" with their material bodies. Therefore, in this second chapter I argued that religious performance in York not only focused at least some lay spectators on seeing as a

devotional act, but that it may also have trained them to see *with* their bodies and thereby generate devotional meaning *through* their bodies. I analyzed a number of dramatic moments that foreground the spectator's material presence and thus might intensify, transform, or destabilize the pageant's devotional meaning and, hence, lay visual piety. These pageants demand not only the spectator's visual attention, but also her bodily participation, in order to achieve their full devotional potential.

At the end of the last chapter, I asserted that medieval performance viewing continued to function as a "way of seeing" in other contexts. To demonstrate this point, in my final chapter I use performance literacy, a literacy embedded in the spectator's body through performance viewing, to explore other devotional practices, contexts, and objects in order to suggest instances in which laypeople may have engaged this "way of seeing," and to propose that religious performance had possible ongoing, everyday devotional values and functions. In making this proposal, my primary goal is to identify situations in which laypeople either *perceived through* performance or constructed situations in such a way that others *perceived through* performance. These instances seem to reflect a strong lay desire to engage, and thereby validate, the material lay body in sacred visual encounters. In this way, performance lingers in lay devotional culture as an act of looking that, as David Morgan would suggest, in and of itself "constitutes a powerful practice of belief."¹

In my Introduction, I outlined a number of contributions that visual culture theory has made to the study of images and objects. The visual culture model broadens the image repertoire to include popular genres and emphasizes the functions of images and

¹ David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

objects. In addition, this theoretical approach studies how an image generates its own reception, function, meaning, and ongoing interpretation. David Morgan argues that “as a subject matter, visual culture refers to the images and objects that deploy particular ways of seeing and therefore contribute to the social, intellectual, and perceptual construction of reality.”² Images are not simply open objects, but contain within them strategies of interpretation and intention.³ In his study of religious visual culture, Morgan writes, “images may prompt in their subject, composition, display, and use the very practices of seeing that believers engage in.”⁴ Scholars such as David Freedberg, Jeffrey Hamburger, and Beth Williamson include materiality in this line of investigation and consider how an image’s specific material presence may trigger or direct ways of seeing it and what it represents. As I already noted, Williamson suggests that certain images within the medieval church cue or encourage types of devotional activity, and that attending to this interaction between viewer and image can enrich our understanding of medieval space, art, and ritual. In my previous chapter, by taking a phenomenological approach to the actor’s and spectator’s bodies, I explored how lay visual culture’s material intentionality related to medieval religious drama. Rather than study the cycle pageants’ iconography or textual references, I engaged the ways in which the material presence of the pageants and

² David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 27.

³ See Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); E. H. Gombrich, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999); Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: the Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition: The Northrop Frye Lectures in Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

⁴ Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 21.

their audience might have contributed to the lay viewer's religious and social construction of reality.

But visual culture theory demands that we consider images as participants in a matrix of visual phenomena and try to understand how they operated within that system. Therefore, in this final chapter I suggest how performance literacy—a “way of seeing” with the body—permeates the material culture of late medieval lay devotion in York. Since images can trigger specific visual practices, people can use images deliberately to prompt specific “ways of seeing.” Performance literacy situates the body as the locus of devotional meaning. I argue that by using material objects, laypeople constructed scenarios in which they “bodied forth” their faith in ways akin to performance viewing. I first examine ways that laypeople evoked performance literacy through their funeral arrangements. Rather than simply identifying the performative elements of these activities, I examine what laypeople may have tried to accomplish by “choreographing” the spectators at their funerals through their bequests. I next examine the parish church as a material space that encouraged laypeople to see with their bodies and that afforded them ways to prompt others do to the same. Finally, I examine the domestic space and the material objects of devotion that laypeople employed in that space, in order to suggest that the accentuated materiality of certain objects may have enabled laypeople to construct their own practices of visual piety that, like performance, oriented meaning in terms of the viewing body. I understand the bodies that used these objects as charged with performance literacy and thus I propose ways that materiality contributed to the use, function, and meaning of devotional objects. I contend that performance exerted an explicitly visceral influence on lay visual piety in York. As I identify instances when a

material devotional experience prompted the lay person to see *by means of* performance, I do not simply detect performativity, but I also recognize certain practices of visual piety as extensions of performance. I suggest that for medieval laypeople, performance literacy constituted a “mode of becoming” that continued through the ways they used and experienced the material objects of their devotional culture.

Contextualizing Bodies in Devotion

The late medieval lay catechetical program situated the body as an essential component of devotion. People learned a range of devotional literacies through liturgy, texts, sermons, the sacraments, and other activities, and most of these literacies engaged the body in some capacity. I devote much of this chapter to articulating how performance literacy, which existed alongside these other practices, encouraged people to employ their bodies in specific ways. As I noted in my Introduction, the late medieval laity cultivated not only affective piety, but also very material pieties. We may attribute this focus on sacred materiality, at least in part, to the period’s emphasis on Christ’s incarnation. Late medieval incarnational theology accomplished a number of things, among them sanctifying the human body and sanctioning religious images. As Sarah Beckwith notes,

Christ’s willingness to be incarnated, his embodiment, is crucial because it is only this condescension to the flesh which will allow other images to signify. It is only his incarnation which, by symbolizing and embodying the union of image and exemplar, establishes for fallen man the possibility of a knowledge of God through His vestiges in nature. The world, then, as an image of God, is potent with signification. The material world becomes a text which may be interpreted, scrutinized, allegorized and investigated for the way it pointed to its exemplar and author: God. In this extraordinary renegotiation...there are new possibilities for the body as text and instrumental

medium.... Part and parcel of this renegotiation of the role of the body in worship, was a new appreciation and re-evaluation of the role of experience, affectivity and emotion.⁵

Many devotional genres, among them performance, focused laypeople on material bodies and thereby reinforced the central tenets of incarnational theology.

As I have already discussed, devotional texts such as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* acknowledged the reader's body as part of their instructional agenda. The late medieval catechetical program supported this emphasis by directing laypeople in specific ways to participate actively in their faith. Scholars locate the roots of this program in the constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council, which strongly advocated more systematized pastoral care of lay souls (*cura animarum*).⁶ As Leonard E. Boyle notes,

It is not an exaggeration to say that it was at the Fourth Lateran Council that the *cura animarum* came into its own for the first time ever. Before the council there was an entity called the *cura animarum* and there were priests known as parochial or parish priests...but it was the Fourth Lateran Council which gave both these parochial priests and the *cura animarum* or parishioners an identity and self-awareness, and an honorable, recognized place in the church at large.⁷

This identity and self-awareness were honed into a devotional program, the most prominent element of which was the lay obligation to confess annually to a parish priest.

The English church formulated the Fourth Lateran Council's devotional agenda into an instructional program at the Council of Lambeth in 1281. As Eamon Duffy notes,

⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 49-50.

⁶ The Fourth Lateran Council took place on November 11, 20, and 30 of 1215.

⁷ Leonard E. Boyle, O.P., "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology," in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 31.

The Council drew up a schema for instruction for the laity, *De informacione simplicium*, better known by its opening words *Ignorantia Sacerdotum*, which was to be expounded in the vernacular to parishioners four times in the year. This scheme was structured round the Creed, Ten Commandments and Christ's summary of these in the dual precept to love God and neighbour, the seven works of mercy, the seven virtues, the seven vices, and the seven sacraments, and was intended to provide a comprehensive guide to Christian belief and practice.⁸

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, some church leaders were charging parish priests with neglect in these duties and seeking ways to remedy the problem. Particularly troubled by the laity's "ignorance," John de Thoresby, archbishop of York from 1352 until 1373, adapted and translated the devotional schema into the *Lay Folks' Catechism*. Dated November 25, 1357, the *Lay Folks' Catechism* outlines the various doctrines with which laypeople should be familiar, demands more instruction in English from parish priests, and offers an indulgence of forty days to all who try to teach or learn the program ("Our father the archbishop grants by his grace / Forty days of pardon for all who learn by heart these things, / Or who diligently try to learn them").⁹ As Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth explain, "to amend the ignorance and neglect of the parish-priests, and the consequent godlessness of their flocks, the Archbishop put forth the Catechism...issued both in Latin and in English—the latter of the simplest character, so as to be understood by the most uncultured of the laity."¹⁰ Following the Lambeth design, Thoresby organizes the book around six components of God's law: fourteen

⁸ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53.

⁹ *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People*, eds. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1901), 98. Original: "Our fadir the ercebissshop grauntes of his grace / Fourti daies of pardon til al that kunnes tham, / Or dos thair gode diligence for to kun tham."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

points of belief, the ten commandments, seven sacraments, seven deeds of mercy, seven virtues, and seven deadly sins.¹¹ He insists that,

It is by hearing, instruction, and teaching by others
The religion and laws that belong to the church
That all creatures who love god almighty
Ought to know and learn by heart, and lead their lives thereafter
And thus come to never-ending bliss.¹²

He further asserts that the “deeds” [dedis] of the laity “openly shewes” that their souls are in great peril and that “all [als] prelates, parsons, vikers, and prestes” “should teach them” [suld teche thame] in order to save them from this fate.¹³ Throughout his catechism, Thoresby thematizes the necessity of “good dedis” demonstrated through proper conduct. He admonishes those who “lead their lives as their flesh desires” [ledis thar lifs als thaire flesch yhernes] and argues that one should “not live in pleasure nor in lust that the flesh desires, but instead gladly serve God by clean living” [ne lyue in lykyng ne lust that the flesh yernes, Bot gladly to serue god in clenness of life].¹⁴ He states that there is no hope for eternal life “withouten gode dedis” and repeatedly insists that his readers follow the commandments in both “bodili” and “gastly,” bodily and spiritual, actions.¹⁵

Thoresby’s catechism teaches laypeople that they must not only learn these six tenets of Christianity, but also demonstrate their knowledge through daily conduct. Knowledge of God must be accompanied by good living in order to merit salvation. This lesson echoes—or, rather, corroborates—the devotional meaning that I identified in such pageants of the York cycle as *The Last Judgement* and *The Harrowing of Hell*. As I noted

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

¹² Ibid., 4. Original: “[It] is of heryng, and leryng and techyng of othir, / Of the lawe and þe lare þat langes till halikirke, / The whilke al creatures that loues god almighten / Awe to knawe and to kun, and lede þaire lyue aftir / And so com to that bliffe that never more blynnes.”

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 96; 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., 70; 46; 52.

in the previous chapter, many devotional texts and sermons emphasize the necessity of good deeds. But there is a clear distinction in how the different genres convey this devotional message. The catechism verbally directs the body in proper deeds by offering it specific examples of how to follow the program, whereas *The Last Judgement* is less explicitly directive in its lesson. This play verbalizes the need for good deeds, but it presents both possible fates that can befall a person—salvation and damnation. The pageant does not show examples of good deeds, but, instead, their results. The saved and the damned receive equal time onstage, and therefore the lay spectator experiences both fates vicariously. It may have been the physical fear of damnation generated by this experience that proved most convincing. Or, alternatively, it could have been the rush of joy for the saved that was most effective. Regardless, I would argue that the play teaches the audience by emphasizing the results of choosing or rejecting the devotional program and embedding both alternatives in the spectator's body.

I would define the “choreography” of gesture and language prescribed by the *Catechism* as its own lay literacy. Laypeople learned this literacy by hearing, reading, and practicing it repeatedly. This is one of many lay devotional literacies of the body I identify in the daily practices of medieval culture. Simon Shepherd articulates how the spectator's body functions as a bridge between performance and the everyday, and his ideas have helped me to theorize how performance literacy may have interacted with these other lay literacies. Shepherd writes,

A play's rhythm works on an audience. It does so through the agency of the performer body rhythm which stimulates response in audience bodies. The audience bodies are not, however, without their own rhythm, which is derived from their everyday lives. In watching, the rhythm of their bodies may be confirmed or drawn into a new rhythm by

the play.... Thus body rhythm is the agency whereby a play may negotiate with its audience an affirmation of or deviation from the rhythmic experience of their everyday lives.¹⁶

Shepherd suggests that body rhythms function as “strategies for attending to and making sense of phenomena” and that new rhythms “can be modeled, explored, contested by the stage in relation to an audience which has its own rhythms adjusted to perceived contemporary tempo.”¹⁷ I construe performance literacy as one such body rhythm that could affirm the body’s centrality in devotional viewing. It encouraged the spectator to cultivate (consciously or unconsciously) a similar embodied visual piety in other contexts by confirming everyday rhythms, drawing the body into a new rhythm, or coalescing with another rhythm to form a new literacy.

Significantly, performance literacy did not require physical choreography in order to generate devotional meaning through the body. Instead, performance literacy impressed upon laypeople the power of the devotional gaze. This realization becomes particularly valuable in respect to funeral practices. The rituals surrounding medieval funerals provide an especially fruitful terrain for performance analysis. In their wills, lay testators outlined the activities and elaborate visual displays they wanted at their funerals. Testators often specified clothing, movements, lighting, texts, music, and participants for these posthumous rituals. Medieval wills have been examined as telling examples of the medieval performance of identity and the funeral activities they describe as instances of public lay-designed performances.¹⁸ My approach to funeral arrangements concentrates

¹⁶ Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 85.

¹⁷ Shepherd, *Theatre*, 90.

¹⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson discusses the ways in which laypeople used wills to construct their spiritual identities and, in some cases, to create “funeral theater.” See *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 67-106. See also Eber

on the physical experiences that testators constructed for funeral attendees. In the following section, I argue that we can identify traces of performance literacy in the ways that laypeople designed the rituals surrounding their deaths, specifically in the viewing experiences testators created for those witnessing these rituals. Performance literacy reinforces in the viewing body a very important principle: the most memorable experiences are synaesthetic in nature.¹⁹ But it also demonstrates that when one cannot physically choreograph the viewing body, one can still create synaesthesia through the viewing eye. Rituals surrounding funerals memorialize the deceased by constructing a synaesthetic viewing experience for those left behind. The meticulous attention testators paid to the material effects of their funerals, as recorded in these documents, may be understood as revealing that performance literacy was at work in these rituals.

Funeral Arrangements and Material Memory

I draw my examples of lay funeral practices from York wills dated between 1390 and 1550, the same period for which we have records of York's cycle performances.²⁰

Carle Perrow, "The Last Will and Testament as a Form of Literature," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, 17, no. 1 (1914): 682-753; Gail Camiciotti Del Lungo, "Performative Aspects of Late Medieval Wills," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 3, no. 2 (2002): 205-227. Though not specifically on medieval practices, David Wiles discusses the elements of performance displayed in funerals. See *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71-2; 98-99.

¹⁹ As I showed in the previous chapters, medieval texts about memory also reinforced this principle. Performance allowed laypeople to experience physically the truth behind this concept.

²⁰ I surveyed over 300 wills from the York diocese, concentrating on those made by people who identified themselves as members of parish churches in the city of York. This testamentary evidence is drawn from two sources: Registers of the Exchequer and Prerogative Court of the Archbishops of York, held at the Borthwick Institute (hereafter referred to as BI Reg., followed by volume and folio numbers) and Registers of the Peculiar Jurisdiction of the Dean and Chapter, held at the York Minster Library (hereafter referred to as D&C Reg., followed by volume and folio numbers). The Yorkshire Archaeological Society published three indices for these collections: F. Collins, ed., *Index of Wills etc. from the Dean and Chapter of York, 1321-1636*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 38 (1907) and F. Collins, ed., *Index of Wills in the York Registry, vol. 1, 1389-1514 & vol. 2, 1514-1553*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 6 & 11 (1891 & 1899). Although I will use published transcriptions when available, I looked at all the wills that I cite in their original manuscript version to confirm the published versions. I will note when I use my

Although wills offer us a great deal of information related to medieval funeral practices and devotional materiality, they are not unproblematic sources. As Clive Burgess cautioned in 1990, a will offers only a “key-hole” vision of the testator and “tends to emphasize the individual, excluding the role that others may have played in his or her practices and priorities, and neglecting corporate activities in which a testator would probably have been involved.”²¹ He notes that many things were settled before an individual’s death via established parish practices, and these plans may have remained undocumented. In addition, wills reveal only “a glimpse of testators’ giving, but reveal little or nothing of what testators thought they would receive in return. They cannot illustrate reciprocation and so fail to represent one of the period’s most crucial pious characteristics.”²² Wills disclose only one force in a complex system of lay piety and convention.

Perhaps most troubling, and yet most obvious, is the fact that wills only document those individuals for whom they exist, and therefore supply demographically narrow evidence. Peter Heath notes that by the fifteenth century the wills of ordinary townsmen

own transcriptions and Latin translations. All Middle English translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. The primary source for transcriptions that I use is the *Testamenta Eboracensia* volumes (Surtees Society: vol. I, wills up to 1429 (1836); vol. II, 1429-67 (1855); vol. III, 1467-85 (1865); vol. IV, 1485-1509 (1869); vol. V, 1509-34 (1884); vol. VI, 1534-50 (1902)). I refer to these volumes as *TE*, followed by volume and page numbers. Another source I use is *Some Early Civic Wills of York*, ed. R. Beilby Cooke, compiled from York Architectural Society Reports and Papers, 8 vols. (1906; 1911; 1913; 1914; 1915; 1916; 1917; 1919). I refer to these volumes as Cooke, followed by year and page numbers. The Surtees volumes, while extremely useful, do not include the full text of many of the wills they transcribe and are therefore problematic when not used in conjunction with the manuscript originals. In addition, there are serious gaps in York’s medieval probate records. In addition to smaller breaks in the records, the Borthwick evidence has large gaps from October 1408 to March 1417, and from January 1418 to May 1426.

²¹ Clive Burgess, “Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered,” in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990), 17.

²² Burgess, “Late Medieval Wills,” 18.

and villagers of England tend to survive, especially in the diocese of York.²³ But, even so, as Jeremy Goldberg reminds us, “only a minority of all lay people are represented by surviving wills,”²⁴ and therefore when using this evidence we effectively eliminate from our studies those who did not make wills or for whom none survive. Although individuals who held large estates were more apt to create wills, and the length of a will often signifies an individual’s wealth and social standing, this is not always the case. As Burgess notes, “It is daunting, too, to realize that a meagre will may be indicative more of the fact that the testator dies with his wishes and estate well in order and with widow and parish prepared for what was to be done, rather than suggesting lack of funds or apathy toward religion.”²⁵ Similarly, wills follow strict conventions in form and content and therefore constitute a very specific and standardized public genre. Scribes may have excluded practices, items, or objects they thought inappropriate to the genre, or added unstated bequests based on custom. It is therefore necessary to assert any conclusions based upon testamentary evidence with a degree of caution. But even with these limitations, wills offer us a unique perspective on ways that laypeople attempted to control the communal memory of their lives.

The medieval rituals surrounding death are closely aligned with memory. As Eamon Duffy notes,

For medieval people...to die meant to enter a great silence, and the fear of being forgotten in that silence was as real to them as to any of the generations that followed. But for them that silence was not absolute and could be breached.

²³ Peter Heath, “Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of Hull Wills,” in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R. B. Dobson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 210.

²⁴ Jeremy Goldberg, “Lay Book Ownership in Late Medieval York: The Evidence of Wills,” *The Library* 16, no. 3 (September 1994): 182.

²⁵ Burgess, “Late Medieval Wills,” 21.

To find ways and means of doing so was one of their central religious preoccupations. For what late medieval English men and women at the point of death seem most to have wanted was that their names should be kept constantly in the memory and thus in the prayers of the living.²⁶

Duffy describes a number of ways that laypeople attempted to “make it impossible for the living to forget or ignore” them after death.²⁷ These included prayers, chantries, memorial statuary, monumental inscriptions, donor images, and candles. I analyze donor images in the parish church in more depth later in this chapter. In this section, I examine the funeral events themselves as prescribed in wills and show how these arrangements constructed synaesthetic mnemonic experiences for the family and friends of the deceased.

The wills of York’s most affluent citizens, particularly its former mayors, offer scholars the most detailed evidence of the great degree of control that laypeople often exercised over their funeral arrangements.²⁸ The will of Thomas Bracebrig will serve as my example of the typical form a medieval will took, as well as of the specificity that laypeople of great means could choose to employ in their post-mortem instructions. Bracebrig, a York merchant, served as mayor of the city in 1424. His will is dated 4 September 1436 and was proved on 10 May 1437.²⁹ As in most wills, Bracebrig begins by offering his soul to God almighty, the blessed Virgin, and all saints. As is standard, his first directive refers to burial and asks that his body be buried in his parish church of St.

²⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 328. Robert N. Swanson also discusses the importance of memory to will-making practices in *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 191-34; 322-9.

²⁷ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 328.

²⁸ For an introduction to the typical features of late medieval wills from York and the customs surrounding funeral practices see P. S. Barnwell, “‘Four hundred masses on the four Fridays next after my decease.’ The Care of Souls in Fifteenth-Century All Saints’, North Street, York,” in *Mass and Parish in Late Medieval England: The Use of York*, ed. Barnwell, Claire Cross, and Ann Rycraft (Reading: Spire Books, 2005), 57-87. For a more detailed discussion of funeral practices in late medieval England, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 301-76.

²⁹ Thomas Bracebrig, 4 September 1436, proved 10 May 1437 (BI Reg. 3 fols. 487v-490r).

Saviour in York before the image of the crucifix, and beside the bodies of his wives and children. Duffy notes that by the late medieval period to stipulate burial within the church was a symbol of status in England.³⁰ Most of the wills that I reviewed specify burial in a church, and many of them, like Bracebrig's, use a particular image or object within the church as a reference point. For instance, in his 1459 will John Dautre, a lawyer, requests burial "before the altar of the Holy Trinity in my parish church of St. Michael near the Uxe bridge before the image of St. John the Baptist whom I have loved the most before all other saints since I was a child."³¹ John Mirk, a late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century English canon and preacher, expressed frustration at this practice, arguing that only those "who have been ministers of the holy church and the defenders of the church" should be offered such a privilege.³² Burial provisions reveal one way that laypeople employed the material space of the parish church, as they did the material bodies of actors, to mark their lives as sacred. I will return to this point in greater detail in a later section.

In his will, Bracebrig stipulates a number of rituals common for the period. He bequeaths two candles made of thirty pounds of wax to burn at his funeral procession and ten torches, each containing fourteen pounds of pure wax, to burn around his body on the day of his burial. Wax was the layperson's most common means of devotional giving and therefore testators often specify the amount, and sometimes the type, of wax to be used in

³⁰ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 332.

³¹ John Dautre, 20 May 1458, proved 14 August 1459 (BI Reg. 2, fols. 413r-414r): fol. 413r. Original: "coram altari Sanctae Trinitatis in ecclesia mea par. S. Michaelis juxta pontem Use coram ymagine Sanctissimi Johannis Baptistae quem prae ceteris Sanctis a juventute mea in maximo ardoris amore habuissem" (Transcription from *TE* 2, 230-1).

³² John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, vol. 1, ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905; Kraus Reprint, 1987), 297. Original: "þat ben mynisteres in holy chyrch, and also þe patrones of þe chyrch."

their funeral candles and torches.³³ Bracebrig also stipulates where each of the ten torches should be placed after his burial: two should remain at the high altar for reverence at the elevation of the Host, the third at the altar of the blessed Virgin Mary, the fourth at the altar of St. John the Evangelist, the fifth at St. Anne's altar, the sixth at St. Nicholas's altar, and the seventh at the altar of St. James.³⁴ The remaining three should be placed individually in a mortice of stone—made specifically for this purpose—to burn at the elevation of the Host.³⁵ He also bequeaths specific amounts of wax over the course of fifteen successive years,

for the maintenance of three candles upon the iron candelabrum made by me in honour of the Holy Trinity in the aforesaid parish church...to the maintenance of one candle before the image of the most blessed Virgin Mary in the same church...for the maintenance of one candle before the Crucifix in the Rood loft...for the maintenance of one candle burning before the image of St. John the Baptist...one candle to burn before the image of St. Anne.³⁶

These instructions for candles point toward the synaesthetic approach to memory that Bracebrig, like many testators, continues to develop throughout his will.

As is common, Bracebrig specifies particular funeral participants. He stipulates that ten poor men attend and carry the ten torches at his funeral rites, and he leaves money to dress these men in gowns of black cloth lined with white wool. He bequeaths money to pay chaplains to pray for his soul and the souls of his family and benefactors, as well as money for a number of masses to be sung immediately following his death. He gives money to various religious institutions in York—the Friars Carmelites, Friars

³³ Both wax candles and torches are stipulated in wills. According to Duffy, torches were flaring lights made with thick plaited wicks and a mixture of resin and wax. See *Stripping of the Altars*, 96.

³⁴ This bequest also provides us with information about the many different side altars that existed in the parish church of St. Saviour. Further into this chapter, I consider the medieval parish church's interior design and decoration as it relates to performance literacy.

³⁵ Bracebrig, 487v.

³⁶ Bracebrig, 487v; translation of Latin from Cooke, 1915: 8.

Preachers, Friars Minors, and Augustinians³⁷—as well as to various chaplains and to every rector of the parish churches in the city and suburbs of York to sing and pray for his soul. He leaves money to various guilds, anchoresses, hospitals, chapels, hermits, nuns, and prioresses, as well as alms to the poor and needy in various parishes and hospitals, all for the purpose of remembering his soul.

As Burgess suggests, these bequests function as one half of a devotional dialogue. Wills only document “moveables,” since the distribution of land and real estate was typically already arranged, and not all moveables were divisible by the will. The standard practice in England at the time was for a man’s moveable estate to be divided into three equal parts. One part was distributed to his wife, one divided among his children, and the final third went toward his soul’s salvation. It was this last third that wills typically document.³⁸ Bracebrig stipulates specific rituals—prayer recitation, his Placebo and Dirige,³⁹ masses, bell ringing, requiem music—as reciprocation for his gifts because these bequests are distributed for the care of his soul. Specific physical gestures often accompanied these rituals. This reciprocal model foregrounds the body in devotional memory—the bequests are not simply for thoughts, but for thoughts attached to activities that encourage a longer-lasting memorial. These arrangements operate under a premise of bodily engagement that functions performatively; Bracebrig’s bequests create a memory of his life through the bodies of those who enact, experience, or participate in rituals.

³⁷ As P. S. Barnwell notes, “at their deaths virtually all of the more prosperous York testators paid for the four orders of friars to celebrate Masses for the welfare of their soul.” See “Four hundred masses,” 23.

³⁸ Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 60.

³⁹ “Placebo” refers to the first line in the office of Vespers of the dead (“I shall please the Lord in the land of men”) from Psalm 116 verse 9 and “Dirige” is the first word of the antiphon at the office of Matins for the dead, which is taken from Psalm 5 verse 8. The full line reads “Dirige, Domine, Deus Meus, in conspectus tuo viam meam” (Direct my way in your sight, O Lord my God). See Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 62.

When individuals repeat liturgical words in honor of a specific individual, that person's memory and the ritual action fuse—the speaker “bodies forth” the deceased.

In these cases the participants are physically active and choreographed by Bracebrig. Anne Bagnall Yardley discusses the power of liturgical processions to create bodily memory. She writes, “The processional practice of singing and walking simultaneously complexifies the liturgical experience and embeds the music very deeply in the body of the participant.”⁴⁰ Building on C. Clifford Flanagan's analysis of medieval processions, Yardley argues that “the dramatic physical nature of processions allows the participants to absorb the events of salvation history kinesthetically and emotionally as well as intellectually.”⁴¹ Wills suggest that laypeople believed certain activities performed in their honor could embed a memory of them within the bodies of participants. For instance, when late medieval testators request that someone go on pilgrimage in their name—a request that appears in a number of wills—this act operates on two levels.⁴² As Duffy notes, “bequests for surrogate pilgrimages are a common occurrence in wills from all over England up to and beyond the break with Rome.”⁴³ He indicates that such bequests were designed by an individual to receive vicariously the

⁴⁰ Anne Bagnall Yardley, *Music in Medieval English Nunneries: Performing Piety* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 113.

⁴¹ Yardley, *Music in Medieval English Nunneries*, 114. Yardley builds on Clifford Flanagan's work in “Medieval Liturgical Processions in Semiotic and Cultural Perspectives,” in *Moving Subjects: Procession Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 42–43.

⁴² Examples of pilgrimage by proxy in the wills that I reviewed include: Dame Jane Chaumerleyn requests that someone go on pilgrimage to Canterbury and offer “an old nowbull” at St. Thomas's shrine (dated 1502; BI Reg. 6 fols. 34v-35v); John Cowper asks his wife, or someone else, to ride to four different pilgrimage sites (dated 1518; BI Reg. 9 fol. 71v); Thomas Batley asks an honest person to travel to Walsingham for him if he fails to do so himself (dated 1521; BI Reg. 9 fol. 217v); Thomas Strangways wishes someone to ride to both Canterbury and Walsingham and offer money to the images of the saints located there (dated 1525; BI Reg. 9 fols. 343v-344r). Other testators bequeath objects to images at pilgrimage sites, but do not specify that an individual go on pilgrimage in their name.

⁴³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 193.

blessings and indulgences related to that pilgrimage location.⁴⁴ I identify a second intention at work. As Duffy notes, pilgrimage offered “a temporary release from the constrictions and norms of ordinary life.”⁴⁵ The event was extraordinary in nature and therefore quite likely a very memorable experience in the pilgrim’s devotional life. When testators request pilgrimage by proxy, they embed a powerful memorial in the pilgrim’s body. Recalling the experience or undertaking another pilgrimage at a later date activates the memory of the testator in the pilgrim’s body.

There are other, less elaborate, examples of testators creating this kind of bodily memory. In his 1436 will, John Kyrkedy, a York “gentilman,” asks to be buried at the Friars Minor, or Franciscans, “where people walk over most often.”⁴⁶ Kyrkedy does not specify a place that is most commonly noticed or seen by people, but a place that they physically pass. In order to solidify and perpetuate his memory, Kyrkedy chooses a burial site that passersby both see and physically experience. In similar fashion, John Gilliot, knight and alderman of York, gives twenty marks “to fixing and making highways around York, where there is most need.”⁴⁷ Fixing roads not only establishes a visual mnemonic, it also creates a physical mnemonic for those who live in York and travel along these roads. Medieval laypeople recognized that the body provides a unique time capsule for devotional memory and took advantage of this phenomenon in their last requests.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁴⁶ John Kyrkedy, 2 November 1436, proved 23 August 1438 (BI Reg. 3 fols. 536r-v): 536r. Original: “ubi populi volutate solent maxime” (Transcription and translation mine).

⁴⁷ Sir John Gilliot, 28 December 1509, proved 4 March 1510 (BI Reg. 8 fols. 32v-34v): 34r. Original: “to emending & makyng of hie waies abowt Yorke, where most neid is” (Transcription *TE* 5: 16). Barnwell discusses this practice as well. See “Four hundred masses,” 65.

And yet, although these are all performative rituals, performance literacy, as I suggested above, taught people that they need not choreograph the whole body—only the eye within that body—in order to generate an experiential bodily memory. The visual piety practiced in performance rests on the principle that situating the spectator’s body within a material environment that foregrounds its physical presence activates that body in visual devotion. Performance accomplishes this through the actor’s live body.

Although Bracebrig engages a number of bodies by stipulating their physical participation in his funeral, he also uses aspects of material devotion to engage visually even more lay bodies in his funeral. As I described, Bracebrig, like other testators, specified for his funeral types and colors of cloth, sizes of candles, songs for the rituals, and the appearance of processions. Dame Joan Thurescrosse’s 1523 will offers us another vivid example of this detail. In it she requests,

Also to have wax and other things as are most seemly with thirteen beadmen and every one of them having a white gown and thirteen poor women, [and] cloth to make each of them a white gown. Also I bequeath that my executors have a canopy or a pell of black velvet made to cover the hearse with all in our Lady church and thereupon I will have an image of the Blessed Trinity wrought with gold and a dead man lying before Him in a winding sheet and at the sides I will have four angels wrought with gold and needlework with candlesticks in their hands as though they are giving reverence to the Trinity and my name written under the feet of the dead man for a memorial.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Thurescrosse’s will identifies her as a vowess from Kingston upon Hull. Dame Joan Thurescrosse, 17 September 1523, proved 22 January 1524 (BI Reg. 9 fols. 272r-273r): 273r. Original: “Also to have wax & other thinges as shalbe moost seemly with xiiijth beademen and every on of them to have a white gowne and xiiij poore women clothe to make every of them a white kirtell. Also I will that my executours shall cause a bawdkyn or a pell of blake velvett to be maide to covere the herse with all in our Lady church and theroppon I will have an ymage of the Blissid Trinitie wrought with golde and a ded man lyeng before Hym in a wyndding shete and at the sides I will have iiij anggels wrought with golde and nedill warke with candilstikkes in ther handes as though they gave reverence to the Trinitie and my name writtyn under the fette of the dede man for a memorial” (Transcription *TE* 5: 172).

For those who did not have the means of a Bracebrig or Thurescrosse, candles were the most common items specified and arranged in funerals. P. S. Barnwell notes that the light from candles set around the body served “to ward off demons as well as to light the soul on its ways towards the next life.”⁴⁹ Donating candles to particular altars also functioned as a bequest aligned with ritual action. As I noted in my first chapter, laypeople enacted a number of physical rituals, such as kneeling and prayer recitation, when they entered churches or approached altars. By donating a torch to an altar, a testator linked his memory to the ritual actions of that space.⁵⁰ But the candle itself also functioned as a powerful physical presence. Candles are sensual objects with an acutely material quality that, I would argue, like the actor’s body, acknowledges the devotee’s presence before it. As Drew Leder notes, “the materiality of a perceptual object correlatively implies that of the perceiver.”⁵¹ Torches or candles—which emit sound, smell, warmth, and varying degrees of light—may have functioned as powerful mnemonic tools in all funeral rituals because, like the actor’s body, they made the viewer aware of her physical presence and therefore synaesthetically engaged her in the memory they represented. By designing their funerals with attention to these sensations, medieval laypeople constructed synaesthetic experiences for their “spectators” that engaged their viewing bodies in a mode of visual piety similar to what I identified in religious performance. Through materiality these rituals reached out to the viewer’s body and drew it into the mnemonic experience.

⁴⁹ Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 63. Eamon Duffy also discusses this *Stripping of the Altars*, 361-2.

⁵⁰ Most late medieval wills from York contain some or all of the type of bequests we find in Bracebrig’s, so it would be repetitive to recite them here. For purposes of reference and comparison see: Robert Sauvage, (dated 1391; BI Reg. 3 fols. 17r-18r); Thomas Graa (dated 1405; BI Reg. 3 fols. 235v-236v); Katherine de Craven (dated 1418; BI Reg. 3 fols. 613r-v); William Seleby (dated 1423; BI Reg. 2 fols. 513v-514v); William Ormeshede (dated 1435; codicil 1437; BI Reg. 3 fols. 503r-504v); William Bowes (dated 1437; BI Reg. 3 fols. 580v-583r).

⁵¹ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 124-5.

I am suggesting that the rich materiality of funerals prompted people to see with their bodies as they did in performance, thus allowing meaning to accumulate in their bodies and to forge within them deep memories of the deceased. That process requires specific attention to the kind of materiality constructed at the rituals. As Barnwell notes,

While there were many variations of detail, the general medieval custom was for the body to be taken to the church the day before the burial, and for the coffin, sometimes draped in a pall, to be surrounded by a timber frame, or hearse, which held candles.... Late on that same day, was performed the first part of the Office of the Dead, consisting of the Placebo.... An overnight vigil ensued, followed, the next day, by the second part of the Office, the Dirige.... Later that day the Requiem Mass was celebrated, after which the body was usually taken out of the coffin for burial. Arrangements for the basic funeral were well known, and are almost never revealed by the wills.⁵²

This is true of Bracebrig's will, which leaves out many formal details about the order and timing of events that would have been considered standard practice in York. But Bracebrig does include a few specific guidelines that suggest that he recognized the significance of the material details of these customs and understood their important role in constructing memory. Near the end of his very lengthy will, Bracebrig asks that his wife, children with their husbands, his brothers, and his executors and their wives be present at his burial, clad in black cloth if they wish, "as the manner and dignity of the City require" [*modus et honestas civitate exposunt*].⁵³ By specifying the clothing and decorum of the burial attendees, Bracebrig is perhaps reminding them that their presence communicates significant visual meaning. As a former mayor, Bracebrig was likely well aware of the power of the visual in constructing public meaning, and in his will has done everything possible to ensure a decorous visuality; hence, he does not want his family

⁵² Barnwell, "Four hundred masses," 62.

⁵³ Bracebrig, 489v; translation of Latin from Cooke, 1915: 14; transcription mine.

and friends to spoil the effect by dressing or acting inappropriately. My assertion that Bracebrig knowingly creates a visual spectacle is supported by a note in the will that specifies that his body be carried to church “by daylight” [lucem dies].⁵⁴ I find this detail significant, particularly when considered alongside the 1432 *A/Y Memorandum* entry about the Masons’ pageant that I analyzed in Chapter One. In that entry the Masons asked to be reassigned to a new pageant for a number of reasons, one of which is that they wished to perform their pageant “in daylight” [clara die].⁵⁵ The will and *A/Y* entry, separated by only four years, suggest a general awareness of the potential for visual piety in public spectacle. Bracebrig stipulates that ten poor men carry his ten funeral torches in the procession to the church. This establishes an important visual theme. Bracebrig’s relatives and executors also function as components of his funeral’s spectacle at his burial, and their dress and behavior were therefore important visual cues.⁵⁶

But there may be another reason for including this note about clothing. Bracebrig may specify clothing and behavior in an effort to ensure that his funeral’s materiality is aptly decorous. Not only does Bracebrig want others to see his funeral in certain terms, but he wants viewers to experience it in certain terms. In addition to visual meaning, the dress and manner communicate a material meaning that is translated through the bodies of viewers. This concern for the situatedness of the spectator is one that may have developed out of performance literacy. By choreographing the materiality of his funeral’s participants, Bracebrig likewise exerts a level of control over the material bodies of his

⁵⁴ Bracebrig, 489v; translation of Latin from Cooke, 1915: 14; transcription mine.

⁵⁵ Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 732 (48).

⁵⁶ Although I need to conduct more research into this topic, I suspect that ensuring a funeral procession during daylight hours was a more pressing concern for those in northern cities, like York, where the winter days are extremely short. The city’s communal memory of the plague may have included stories about the logistical need to conduct many funeral processions after daylight.

funeral's "spectators" and therefore the kind of memory the spectacle lodges in their bodies.

It would seem likely that those individuals whose work familiarized them with the bodily impact of rituals might become more attuned to the value of constructing their funerals with extra attention paid to the synaesthetic details. The will of Maurice Biront, "organe maker" of York, is dated 19 August 1510 and was proved on 30 September 1510.⁵⁷ Biront's requirements suggest that his craft left him particularly sensitive to the way in which music would be employed at his funeral. He specifies,

I will that all the torches of every guild of which I am a brother be carried before my body's light to the church, and to burn as I am buried. [Also] I will have an honest priest, who can sing both plain and prick song, to sing at our Lady's altar as my body is buried, and that he attend on every holy day Matins, Mass, and Evensong in the church, to help to maintain God's service, for the time of two years after my death.⁵⁸

His use of the phrase "that canne singe" indicates that it is important to him that the priest at his funeral have a particular set of musical abilities that will enable him to establish a proper tone for the funeral's mnemonic process. Likewise, in his 1503 will Robert Preston, a York glazier, ordains an "able priest that can both sing and read" to sing for him for one year.⁵⁹ As a glazier, a craftsman of painted glass windows, Preston may have spent a particularly large amount of time in churches and the Minster overhearing liturgical rites. Such familiarity may have trained his ear to the discrepancies in skill and

⁵⁷ Maurice Biront, 19 August 1510, proved 30 September 1510 (D&C Reg. 2 fols. 95r-v): 95r; transcription *TE* 5: 22.

⁵⁸ Biront, fol 95r. Original: "I wooll that all the torches of every gild that I be brother of be borne afor my bodie light to the church, and thai so to burne to I be buried. I wooll have an honest priste, *that canne singe both plane song and prik song*, to syng at our Lady alter wher as my body is buried, and at he attend every holy day both at Matyns, Messe and Evynsong in the saint church, to help to mayntynd God service, by the space of thwo yeres next after my deth" (Transcription *TE* 5: 22, emphasis mine).

⁵⁹ Robert Preston, 24 July 1503, proved 2 August 1503 (BI Reg. 6 fols. 71r-v): 71r. Original: "able prest that canne both synge and rede" (Transcription *TE* 4: 216).

talent among York's clergy and convinced him that specifying the level of the priest's ability was good insurance. These wills suggest that testators were not only concerned with visual cues, but also considered the synaesthetic elements of their funerals in order to control the material experience where possible.

Many lay wills read like the 1433 account of the costumes and props used in *The Last Judgement* pageant.⁶⁰ The "performances" associated with both wills and this account attempt to materialize the immaterial. *The Last Judgement* materializes the future in order to create a vivid memory that will prompt changes in everyday conduct. Wills attempt to materialize experience in an effort to perpetuate the memory of the testators in the months and years that follow. While liturgy and the sacraments attested to the fact that engaging the body in physical rituals solidified devotional memory, performance suggested that one could also embed memory deeply in the spectator's body by constructing material experiences of devotional viewing.

Performance literacy is, of course, not the only interpretive lens we can use to examine funeral practices, but it offers us one way to see laypeople as agents in their own memorializing. It also adds another, distinctly performative layer to this practice. Performance not only occurred in the presentation, but also in the viewing, of these rituals. Testators could use elaborate materiality to encourage "spectators" to see funerals with their bodies and experience them synaesthetically. But funerals were not the only manifestations of late medieval devotional materiality. The parish church is another, equally lay-oriented site of material religion. The parish church served a number of social and devotional needs for York's laity. But, like funerals, its material presence also

⁶⁰ Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 55.

nourished the kind of visual piety that the laity developed and practiced during religious performances.

Material Devotion in Medieval Discourse

One striking feature of the medieval parish church was its elaborate material decor. A number of texts attest to the centrality of images to the parish church space and its devotional rhythms. Robert Parkyn's "Narrative of the Reformation" (c. 1555), a lengthy diatribe against Reformation doctrine, supplies a particularly good example.⁶¹ A. G. Dickens notes that Parkyn's "Narrative" provides "useful and original hints as to the introduction of Reformation changes" into South Yorkshire.⁶² But his detailed account also reveals the large number and variety of images placed and used in parish churches. A large percentage of his narrative recounts how Reformation proscriptions altered the visual culture of churches. For instance, Parkyn writes that at Lent in 1547 "all images, pictures, tables, crucifixes, tabernacles, were utterly abolished and taken away from the churches within this realm of England, and all serges of wax (except two standing upon the high altar)."⁶³ He also writes that in 1548 "the pixes hanging over the altars...were despitefully cast away as if very abominable," and that on All Souls Day in 1548 "the pix with the blessed sacrament therein was taken down in the York Minster and set upon the high altar; likewise did all parish churches in York and diverse deaneries within the

⁶¹ A. G. Dickens, ed., "Robert Parkyn's Narrative of the Reformation," *English Historical Review* 62 (1947): 58-83.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 64. Parkyn's will, dated 16 March 1568, appears in the York Probate Registry and reveals that he was a parish priest in Adwick, near Doncaster. See BI Reg. 19 fols. 54v-55r.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 66. Original: "all yimages, pictures, tables, crucifixes, tabernacles, was utterly abolischide & takyn away furth of churches within this realme of Englande, and all searges of wax (except two standynge uppon highe alters)."

shire.”⁶⁴ Repeatedly, he notes that churches or other religious institutions are directed to take inventory of “all jewells and goodes” they possess. In December of 1550, he describes how all stone altars were replaced by wooden altars, and in the next year how the playing of organs in churches was forbidden.⁶⁵

In addition to documenting the presence of images, Parkyn’s narrative also exposes how physical interactions with material objects were fundamental to medieval piety: “no palms were sanctified nor carried in men’s hands”; “no altars were washed”; “All other ceremonies, such as creeping to the cross...were utterly omitted”; “no fire or paschal candle was sanctified, no procession to the baptismal font performed, no candle present at the sanctification”; “neither bread nor water were sanctified or distributed among Christian people on Sundays, but clearly omitted as things tending toward idolatry”; “[there was] made no elevation at Mass after consecration”; “it was strictly forbidden that any adoration should be shown toward” the elements.⁶⁶ After Queen Mary takes the throne, Parkyn heralds the return of these customs: “Holy bread and holy water were given, altars re-edified, pictures and images set up, the cross with the crucifix prepared to be carried in procession, and...all the English services recently used in the church of God were voluntarily put aside and the Latin services taken up again.”⁶⁷ Parkyn

⁶⁴ Ibid., 68; 68-9. Original: “the pixes hangyng over thallters...was dispittfully cast away as thinges most abominable”; “was the pixe with the most bliside sacrament therin taken down in Yorke Mynstre and sett uppon the highe alter; lykewisse dyde all parysche churches in Yorke and diverse deanries within the shire.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁶ Ibid., all excerpts from 68, except the final quotation from 75. Original: “no palmes was sanctified nor borne in men’s handes”; “no alters was waschide”; “All other ceremonyes, as creappinge before the crosse...was utterly omittide”; “no fyre was sanctified, no paschal candle, no procession unto the foont, no candle present att sanctifyinge therof”; “nather breade or watter was sanctifide or distributte emonge Christian people on Sondays, butt clerely omittide as thinges tendinge to idolatrie”; “mayke no elevation at masse after consecration”; “strattely forbiddynge that any adoration sholde be done ther unto.”

⁶⁷ Ibid., 80. Original: “Holly breade and holly watter was given, alteres was reedefide, pictures or ymages sett upp, the crosse with the crucifixe theron redye to be borne in procession, and ...all thenglishe service of laitte uside in the church of God was voluntarilie layde away and the Lattin taken upp agayne.”

communicates changes in religion largely by describing changes in the presentation and use of material objects. Such objects were the means by which medieval laypeople defined, structured, and interpreted their faith.

In relation to art in the English parish church, Paul Binski contends that “the color, finish, expressivity, structuring, iconography, and even idiom of medieval images and installations... may be far more important than we have been inclined, or dared, to think.”⁶⁸ He argues that scholars should not only consider the parish church as “medium,” but that we must develop ways of approaching parish churches that move beyond liturgical reconstruction and offer “a richer sense of activity, of movement, of performativity within these buildings.”⁶⁹ At the end of his article, Binski questions to what extent the gestalt of late medieval art charts a transition within the life of the medieval parishioner from seeing and hearing to thinking and feeling.⁷⁰ I contend that the ways in which laypeople interacted with the parish church’s devotional materiality reveals this transition from a visually oriented relationship with faith to one that engaged the body, not only in ritual, but in the visual processes of piety. I will use performance literacy to suggest how that materiality functioned for medieval laypeople and thereby influenced visual piety within the parish church.

As I suggested in the previous chapters, the parish church fulfilled a number of specific roles for York’s inhabitants. It was an institution that, for the most part, established geographic communities. When the members of a guild, such as the glaziers

⁶⁸ Paul Binski, “The English Parish Church and Its Art in the Later Middle Ages: A Review of the Problem,” *Studies in Iconography* 20 (1999): 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

or butchers, lived in close proximity to one another, a parish community might also become associated with specific trades. In addition, as Katherine French notes,

The laity's involvement in their parishes went well beyond attending the liturgy and paying tithes. Episcopal mandate also required them to maintain the nave and churchyard and to supply various liturgical items such as mass books, candlesticks, and chalices, while the clergy took care of the chancel. Meeting these requirements necessitated that the laity organize themselves into an administrative structure that could, among other things, raise and spend money. This exercise in collective planning and action catalyzed the formation of community identity.⁷¹

The church's physical interior offered lay communities a space over which they exercised a large degree of control. As French writes, "building and furnishing a church required piety and organization; the final product revealed much about the self-definition of the parish community."⁷² In this respect, the parish church offered laypeople an opportunity similar to that provided by the cycle performance: the occasion to assert identity publicly by orienting communal visual piety through material means.

Many scholars who study medieval devotional art have focused their attention on the parish church and its iconography.⁷³ Recent scholars have taken an approach to parish art that contextualizes it within the church and as part of a larger visual culture of devotion. For instance, in *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* Richard Marks

⁷¹ Katherine French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 20. Eamon Duffy lists various objects for which the parish had responsibility. See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 132-4.

⁷² French, *People of the Parish*, 173.

⁷³ For instance, John Agate, *Benches and Stalls in Suffolk Churches* (Suffolk: Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, 1980); Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Sutton: Stroud, 2004); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Eamon Duffy, "The Parish, Piety, and Patronage in Late Medieval East Anglia: The Evidence of Rood Screens," in *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600*, eds. Katherine French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 133-62; Diana Wood, ed., *The Church and the Arts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

argues that “the English devotional image flourished in the public space of the parish church and was often on a monumental scale. The individual’s interiorized religious experience, which focused on the devotional image, was not limited to the upper echelons of society; indeed, everyone might share in its patronage and use.”⁷⁴ Marks contends that devotional images are incomprehensible without considering both community and individual users, and this assertion makes the parish church an excellent subject for his study. He is interested in the function of images, the beliefs and practices associated with them, and the ways in which the forms of images were determined by their social users. Therefore, in addition to considering specific iconographic characteristics, Marks examines the material production of images, ritual and devotional practices surrounding them, and the overseas competition England’s medieval craftsmen faced. Although some of these topics require Marks to expand his analysis beyond the church, he does not stray very far afield and presents an extremely useful analysis of the visual culture of the late medieval parish church. His study reveals the value of examining the processes and practices surrounding the construction and use of parish art.

A number of York’s parish churches, both on the medieval cycle route and in other parts of the city, are still extant and many contain impressive collections of late medieval art. As the Commission on Historical Monuments indicates, “the city of York contains the greatest concentration of medieval stained glass in England. Much of this is in the Minster but that in the parish churches is exceptional by the standards of other cities in the country.”⁷⁵ Most of the medieval parish glass can be found in All Saints

⁷⁴ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 16.

⁷⁵ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York. Volume Five: The Central Area* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1981), 6. According to this and other volumes, existence of this collection is attributed to Lord Fairfax who served as governor of

Pavement, Holy Trinity Goodramgate, St. Martin Coneystreet, St. Michael-le-Belfry, and St. Michael Spurriergate. St. Denys' Walmgate houses York's only extant thirteenth-century glass in a parish church. Arguably, All Saints North Street, in the Mickelgate neighborhood near the River Ouse, holds the city's most notable parish collection of painted glass and art, including donor images. As the church's guidebook indicates, "the glazing dates from two phases, coinciding with rebuilding campaigns. The earliest glass is from the first half of the 14th century when the east-end was rebuilt, and the rest, the majority, is from the 15th century, when among other work, the north and south walls were rebuilt."⁷⁶ All Saints North Street houses two particularly famous stained glass windows—The Corporal Acts of Mercy (c. 1410) and The Pricke of Conscience (1410)—both of which are currently located in the church's north choir aisle. As we find elsewhere in York, this church also contains glass that was originally placed in other churches. For instance, the west window in All Saints (c. 1370) is from St. Saviour's York.⁷⁷

Scholars have long recognized that the plethora of medieval parish art, especially in a city such as York where it exists alongside extensive documentation of medieval performance, provides an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between art and drama. As Pamela Sheingorn notes, early studies of this relationship focused on iconographic similarities between the two and often argued that one genre's iconography

York after the siege of the city in 1644. Parliamentary loyalists destroyed of much England's medieval glass during and after the Civil War, but Fairfax threatened his soldiers with death if they took part in such activity.

⁷⁶ Allan B. Barton, *A Guide to the Church of All Saints North Street, York* (York: Parochial Church Council of All Saints Church, North Street, 2005), 4.

⁷⁷ Clifford Davidson, ed., *York Art: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1978), 2.

served as the source for the other's visual design.⁷⁸ Most notably, Emile Mâle proclaimed that dramatic images served as the source material for other medieval images and objects.⁷⁹ In his studies of English alabaster carvings, W. L. Hildburgh contended that these objects supplied evidence of medieval costuming and staging practices.⁸⁰ Similarly, M. D. Anderson maintained that church art contained representations of performance practices. For instance, she argued that the roof bosses of Norwich Cathedral provide detailed impressions of plays in the lost Norwich cycle, and, like Hildburgh, she used alabaster images as evidence of staging practices.⁸¹ The founding of the Early Drama, Art, and Music project (EDAM) in 1976 signaled a more interdisciplinary, though still problematic, approach to research in art and drama. One of this project's goals is to place drama within its artistic and geographic context by creating localized catalogues of medieval art. In the first of these, *York Art*, Clifford Davidson professes, "The ultimate purpose is to have immediately accessible information which will support methodologically sound work on topics associated with style and iconography. This will, of course, be of practical importance for our understanding of the spectacle associated with the religious theater of the Middle Ages."⁸² Davidson's model offers the visual arts as a tool for reading drama. Although EDAM has immense value, and finding "origins" is not its explicit purpose, the project's philosophy is founded upon the notion that a high

⁷⁸ Pamela Sheingorn offers an overview and critique of the methodology employed in studies of medieval art and drama. See "On Using Medieval Art in the Study of Medieval Drama: An Introduction to Methodology," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 22 (1979): 101-9.

⁷⁹ Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, The Twelfth Century: A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); *The Gothic Image* (New York: Harper, 1958).

⁸⁰ W. L. Hildburgh, "English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval English Drama," *Archaeologica* 93 (1955): 51-101.

⁸¹ M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 87-104.

⁸² Clifford Davidson, ed., *York Art: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1978), iii.

degree of representational similarity between medieval art and drama exists. Thus, intentionally or not, the project promotes the theory that one artistic genre served as the visual “source” for the other. For instance, in *York Art* Davidson describes the west window of All Saints North Street, which contains a scene representing the placing of Christ on the cross. He writes,

it is a unique illustration of the immediate relevance to drama. The glass...shows ropes attached to stretch the body, while executioners are beginning to drive the nails into place in Christ's left hand and feet. The placing of the Savior on the cross *jacente cruce* thus depicted is precisely the iconography of the York play. Both the glass and the play participate in the deep-seated emotionalism of the late medieval spirituality—an emotionalism that especially stressed the human suffering of Christ during his Passion.⁸³

Davidson also elaborates on the overlap between members of the All Saints parish and members of the Mercers' guild. As I explained, the Mercers produced York's *Last Judgement* pageant, and Davidson suggests connections between the iconography displayed in All Saints' Pricke of Conscience window, which presents the fifteen signs of Doomsday, and what is described in the 1433 record of *The Last Judgement* pageant.⁸⁴ Likewise, in *The N-Town Plays and Medieval Picture Cycles*—another EDAM volume—Patrick Collins argues that medieval artists employed traditional iconographic conventions to create thematic patterns within the narrative sequence for biblical episodes, and he uses narrative, pictorial cycles to guide his close reading of the N-town plays.⁸⁵ In many ways, Davidson and Collins use the same methodology as Anderson and Hildburgh, simply arguing for art, rather than drama, as the “original” source.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁸⁵ Patrick J. Collins, *The N-Town Plays and Medieval Picture Cycles* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1979).

Responding to this trend, and specifically to EDAM's mission, in 1991 Martin Stevens suggested that scholars study art and drama in semiosis, as confirming and distorting one another, rather than as operating in causal or agentive relationships. By arguing that each medium fills the gaps of the other, Stevens suggests an "intertextual" approach that appreciates each genre as "a complex response to a sacred vision of sacred history. In the medieval context...each appropriates a body of images which have found currency in the common tradition of scriptural interpretation in a variety of forms that made up an international Gothic style."⁸⁶ Although this intertextual approach takes regional preferences into account, it need not be constrained by geography.

More recently, medieval scholars have employed a visual culture approach to the relationship between art and drama that echoes Stevens' ideas, but introduces a more contextual edge. This interdisciplinary turn was foreshadowed by Pamela Sheingorn's 1979 article in which she suggested "an introductory methodology for using visual materials" that would prove useful to literary scholars of medieval drama, and also outlined potential "pitfalls" literary scholars might face when working outside their original discipline.⁸⁷ In a 1989 lecture, Sheingorn argued that scholars must treat the visual as an integral part of medieval drama⁸⁸ and offered a model of one such method in her article entitled "The Visual Language of Drama." In this article, she expresses a need for interdisciplinarity in medieval drama scholarship and argues that the underlying principles of composition that govern the medieval pictorial arts also govern the stage pictures of medieval drama. She writes, "Understanding the principles of visual

⁸⁶ Martin Stevens, "The Intertextuality of Late Medieval Art and Drama," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 318; 333-4.

⁸⁷ Sheingorn, "On Using Medieval Art," 101.

⁸⁸ This lecture was later published as "Medieval Drama Studies and the New Art History," *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995): 143-62.

composition, based in perception theory, provides new insights into the meaning of medieval drama for its medieval audience by helping us to see what they saw.”⁸⁹

Sheingorn’s work has always situated art and drama as deeply embedded in a common visual culture and, therefore, as responses to the needs, desires, and anxieties of the people living within that context.⁹⁰ Although not all scholars examine medieval drama as an element of a larger visual culture, studies by such scholars as Victor Scherb and Gail Gibson McMurray demonstrate the value of examining drama as one of many participants in a larger visual discourse.

Identifying links between parish art and drama underscores the ways in which visual forms functioned in conversation during the Middle Ages, repeatedly building on and responding to one another. This approach to visual culture can, as Sheingorn notes, help us see what the laity saw. But parish churches also provide us with opportunities to consider how materiality functioned in late medieval devotional culture and to examine the relationship between the lived experience in the material space of the parish church and the lived experience at performance. Therefore, situating both experiences within a common visual culture can also help us to see *as* the laity saw. Foregrounding materiality—as opposed to iconography—moves us from a strictly visual analysis to an analysis of seeing itself. In doing so, I wish to consider, as Binski suggests, the activity, movement, and performativity that the material space of the parish church generated.

⁸⁹ Pamela Sheingorn, “The Visual Language of Drama: Principles of Composition,” in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldeway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 188.

⁹⁰ For an example of Sheingorn’s approach to art and drama, see “The Moments of Resurrection in the Corpus Christi Plays,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1982): 111-29. Sheingorn takes a similar approach to art and liturgy in “The Te Deum Altarpiece and the Iconography of Praise,” in *Early Tudor England: Proceedings of the Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Daniel Williams (Suffolk: Boydell, 1989), 171-82.

A study of visual culture must not only examine images and objects themselves, but the practices and discourses that surrounded them. To understand the functions attributed to images in specific cultural contexts is critical. I have already established the perceived instructional value of performance in medieval York, testified to by the use of plays to teach the laity the Creed and Pater Noster. *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* reveals that this value was also contested. The pedagogical efficacy of religious images was similarly asserted and disputed during the Middle Ages. In 600, a letter attributed to Pope Gregory the Great declared, “For what writing offers to those who read it, a picture offers to the ignorant who look at it, since in it the ignorant see what they ought to follow, in it they read who do not know letters; whence especially for gentiles a picture stands in place of reading.”⁹¹ Although scholars have debated the exact interpretation of this passage, as Celia Chazelle notes, variations of Gregory’s words “appear in a multitude of Latin writings throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, including in the decrees of the sixteenth-century Council of Trent which responded to the Protestant Reformation.”⁹² A number of scholars have analyzed medieval image theory from Gregory to the Reformation, the more recent of whom take a visual culture approach in order to suggest how art functioned and what it accomplished. Scholars such as Jonathan Alexander, Hans Belting, Michael Camille, Celia Chazelle, Marilynn Desmond, Cynthia Hahn, Jeffrey Hamburger, Pamela Sheingorn, and Henk van Os, to name only a few, have explored a

⁹¹ Cited in Celia Chazelle, “Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I’s Letters to Serenus of Marseilles,” *Word and Image* 6 (1990): 139; “Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa etiam ignorantes vident quid sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde et praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est” (140). For addition discussion and interpretation of this passage see, Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate?’” *Word and Image* 5 (1989): 227-51; Chazelle, “Memory, Instruction, Worship: ‘Gregory’s’ Influence on Early Medieval Doctrines of the Artistic Image,” *Gregory the Great: A Symposium*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 181-215; and, Michael Camille, “Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” *Art History* 8, no. 1 (1985): 26-49.

⁹² Chazelle, “Pictures, Books,” 138.

variety of genres and periods of medieval art. Many of them have also placed texts about images alongside the images themselves in order to examine the discourse that helped shape image use and interpretation.⁹³

As with discourse on medieval performance, I have found that texts about medieval images often focus on the role materiality plays in reception. I have already demonstrated that in anti-theatrical texts medieval writers often expressed anxiety about the material encounter between spectator and performance image. I characterized the language used in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* to describe drama as steeped in the body and its fleshy concerns. I will now argue that medieval arguments for and against art employed a similarly “bodied” vocabulary.

Other scholars have identified in medieval texts similarities between the language used to describe and conceptualize art and drama, particularly in respect to the mnemonic value of these genres.⁹⁴ Theodore K. Lerud notes that,

both elaborate visual tableaux and religious plays were seen as quick images, to be considered in the same general category as painted and sculpted images. All, whether moving or static, “quick” or “deed,” were designed as

⁹³ See Jonathan J. G. Alexander, “Iconography and Ideology: Uncovering Social Meanings in Western Medieval Christian Art,” *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 1-44; Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990); Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and “*Visio Dei*: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169-96; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998); Henk Van Os, et al., *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁹⁴ For a number of articles that argue for connections between iconoclasm and anti-theatrical prejudice, see *Iconoclasm vs. Art and Drama*, eds. Clifford Davidson and Ann Eljenholm Nichols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989). See also Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). O’Connell argues that early modern anti-theatrical prejudice was a subset of the iconoclast movement.

external versions of those images necessary to the psychological processes of memory and understanding. Far from being conceived in aesthetic terms (e.g., as drama, painting, sculpture, art, etc.), all were viewed as images or *phantasmata* which, in Aquinas' model, served as the link between body and soul, sense and understanding.⁹⁵

Lerud argues that medieval discourse about images and image veneration is applicable to our analyses of drama, specifically because drama—like parish art—functioned as a “thesaurus” of key Christian images for the laity.⁹⁶ He demonstrates that medieval authors used similar language to describe the value, or threat, inherent in images and drama. For instance, he analyzes Reginald Pecock's *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, an anti-Lollard tract written around 1450, in which Pecock defends the use of images by the clergy and the laity. At one point, Pecock contends that scripture says it is bad to “worship the images as if God” but “in these days no person does so toward the images placed and used in the church.”⁹⁷ He argues that Christ ordained images because they act as memorable signifiers (“the signe forto signifie and forto make remembraunce the bettir vpon the thing signified”),⁹⁸ and much of his argument rests on the premise that images are easier to remember, require less labor to understand, and touch the mind more deeply than words (“his witt schal be dressid and lad for the euener and more stabili and with myche lasse peyne and labour”).⁹⁹ Pecock also asserts that when laypeople use images they are able to register the difference between the images themselves and what they signify. People employ devotional images

⁹⁵ Theodore K. Lerud, “Quick Images: Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama,” in *Moving Subjects*, eds. Ashley and Hüsken (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 213.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁹⁷ Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Robert, 1860), 145. Original: “worschipid the ydolis as Goddis”; “so no persoon dooth in these daies aboute the ymagis had and vsid in the chirche.”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

because it is customary, not because “they believe and feel that this image is the Trinity, or that such an image is truly Jesus, and so forth for other images.”¹⁰⁰ Pecock places a great deal of faith in the layperson’s ability to negotiate the relationship between sign and signifier.

As Lerud points out, Pecock also uses a performance image as a reference point.

To counter the Lollard argument that people themselves serve as more appropriate images of God than stone or wooden objects, he writes,

Wherefore, no man living and walking on earth and engaged himself and engaged with other men, as other men living and walking and engaged and occupied, is so very perfect an image of Christ crucified or of Christ doing this miracle or that miracle, as that offered by the graven wood or stone shaped as such.¹⁰¹

Pecock argues that a crucifix is a better image of God than any living man because it meets three conditions necessary for any image to be a perfect representation. To meet these conditions an image must resemble the thing it claims to represent, must have been originally designed for the purpose of representation, and must have been intended to represent a single thing. He writes of this last condition,

For if the thing which is created in order to represent to us another thing in such a way that we have many uses for it and many instances of contact with it separate from the thing to be remembered, our mind shall fall so much and often upon the other thing that it is representing that it shall seldom be occupied in remembering the original thing.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 152. Original: “thei meenen and feelen that this ymage is the Trinyte, or that thilk ymage is verili Iesus, and so forth of other.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 221. Original: “Wherefore no man lyuyng and walking in erthe and occupying him silf and occupied of othere men, as othere men lyuen and walken and occupien and ben occupied, is so perfit and so ful an ymage of Crist crucified or of Crist doing this miracle or that myracle, as graued stok or stoon therto schapun is.”

¹⁰² Ibid., 220-1. Original: “Forwhi, if the thing which is deputid forto represente to us an other thing be such that we haue manye vsis of it and many entermetingis with it dyuers fro remembering bi it the othir thing, oure witt schal falle so miche and so ofte vpon the same thing in othere wisis than as he is representing the other thing, that he schal seelde among be occupied of us as representing the othir thing.”

The only exception he makes is “when a living man is placed in a play hanging naked on a cross and seemingly wounded and scourged. But this occurs very seldomly and in few places and countries.”¹⁰³ Lerud astutely concludes that “this passage places plays firmly in the same phenomenological realm as images.”¹⁰⁴ Lerud sees this phenomenological similarity as one of vision. Although I agree with Lerud, I also identify another phenomenological continuum implied by Pecoock’s validation of the performance image. In this passage, Pecoock endorses the representational efficacy of the human body. According to Pecoock, although the average person cannot serve as a model of God because s/he does not meet his three conditions, the body in performance—reenacting the scourging and crucifixion—functions as the most effective model of God. Pecoock’s reference to the performing body suggests that its efficacy derives from the material continuum of flesh between lay devotee and image, which allows the viewer to register it as an ideal model. I contend that Pecoock recognizes material interaction as a critical—perhaps, even defining—feature of the encounter between devotional image and lay viewer. In the case of the performing body, this materiality overrides any confusion in representation, design, or signification. Pecoock’s one exception for the performing body suggests that it may in fact be due to the fleshiness of this image that any confusion disappears and the devotional efficacy is clarified and heightened. The dramatic crucifixion is particularly effective because it replaces the stone or wooden image with a living image. The bodily continuum between viewer and image ensures the clear devotional meaning.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 221. Original: “whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be hangid nakid on a cros and to be in symyng woundid and scourged. And this bifallith ful seelde and in fewe placis and cuntrees.”

¹⁰⁴ Lerud, “Quick Images,” 224.

I am thus expanding Lerud's phenomenological conclusion to encompass materiality. When he states that Pecoock or the author of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* "conceives of plays as phenomenologically in the same category as painted and sculpted images,"¹⁰⁵ Lerud considers only visual, mnemonic categories. I would argue that medieval writers also recognized materiality as an important element in the reception of both drama and images. One particularly good example of this is found in the *Tretyse of Ymagis*, which appears in the same manuscript as *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*.¹⁰⁶ This pairing does not mean the same person wrote both texts, but it suggests rather that these texts functioned as parts of a coherent manuscript program, or were at least interpreted by the manuscript's compiler as somehow related. The author of *Ymagis* repeatedly expresses concern over image materiality, which, if considered phenomenologically, echoes the concerns about bodily engagement that I identified in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*.

At the beginning of *Ymagis*, the author initially appears to take a rather conservative approach to images that deviates from the incarnational stance. He writes,

For first men err in making images when they make images of the Godhead, as in the Trinity, painting the Father as an old man, and the Son as a young man on a cross, and the Holy Ghost coming from the Father moving to the Son as a white dove.¹⁰⁷

He argues that making religious images contradicts the Old Testament commandment against such activity, but is then quick to point out how, because God was made man

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 216.

¹⁰⁶ *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* appears in British Library Add. 24202, fols. 14r-17v. *Tretyse of Ymagis* follows it on fols. 26r-28v. I will refer to this second treatise as *Ymagis* and the treatise on drama as *Tretise* for the remainder of this chapter. For a transcription of *Ymagis* see "Images and Pilgrimages," in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 83-8.

¹⁰⁷ "Images and Pilgrimages," 83. Original: "For first men erren in makyng of ymagis whanne þei maken ymagis of þe Godhed, as of þe Trinite, peyntyng þe Fadur as an olde man, and þe Son as a zong man on a crosse, and þe Holy Gost comyng furþe of þe Fadur mowþe to þe Son as white dowfe."

through Christ, it is proper to use a simple crucifix as a reminder of the passion: “But since Christ was made man, it is acceptable for unlearned men to have a simple crucifix, to serve as memory of the difficult passion and bitter death that Christ suffered willingly for the sins of man.”¹⁰⁸ The passage that follows this exception makes it clear that the author’s reservations about certain images are not prompted by their representational features, but instead by their materiality. He writes, “And yet men err greatly in this crucifix making, for they paint it with great cost, and hang much silver and gold and precious clothes and stones thereon and about it.”¹⁰⁹ Throughout the treatise, the author repeatedly condemns richly arrayed images as contrary to God’s law. One of the *Ymagis* author’s arguments against elaborate images is that the money spent on such decoration (“þis ilke tresour þat is þus veynnely wasted on þes dede ymagis”) would be better spent on helping the needy,¹¹⁰ an argument, incidentally, echoed in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* in reference to performances. But most of the *Ymagis* author’s arguments focus on the (seemingly) overwhelming power these elaborate images exert over the layperson. He describes how “simple people” [symple puple] are overwhelmingly drawn to such decorous images, rather than to properly modest images,

For to the gayest and most richly arrayed image will people make offerings most quickly, and not to the poor image standing in a simple church or chapel, but if it stands royally enshrined and with carving and painted with gold and precious jewels as I said before, and within a minster or a great abbey where there is little or no need for such offerings.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Original: “But syþen Crist was makid man, it is suffrid for lewid men to haue a pore crucifix, by þe cause to haue mynde on þe harde passioun and bittere deþ þat Crist suffrid willfully for þe synne of man.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Original: “And zit men erren foul in þis crucifixe making, for þei peynten it wiþ greet cost, and hangen myche siluer and gold and precious cloþis and stones þeronne and aboute it.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 84. Original: “For to þe gayest and most rychely arrayed ymage rapeest wil þe puple offur, and nouzt to no pore ymage stondyng in a symple kirk or chapel, but zif it stoned ryaly tabernaclid wiþ keruyng

The author feels that people are drawn to the rich materiality of images rather than to the devotional reflection they should prompt. He maintains that the laity “should be more spiritual and take less heed of such sensible signes” [shulden be more gostly and take lesse hede to siche sensible signes], thereby sounding remarkably like the author of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (“fleshy play is not allowable alongside the spiritual works of Christ and of his saints” and represents “going backward from deeds of the spirit to only signs done after pleasures of the flesh”).¹¹² Both authors want lay devotion to move from the “sensible” to the “spiritual.”

Although these arguments clearly reinforce the privileging of spiritual and intellectual sight over corporeal sight outlined in Augustine’s hierarchy of vision, they also imply something beyond differences in meditative vision. I assert that the author of *Ymagis*, like the author of the *Tretise*, insinuates that the critical problem with these images relates to the ways they manifest themselves in the bodies of laypeople. The *Ymagis* author writes that “since these images serve as books for unlearned men to stir them on to memory of Christ’s passion, and to teach by their portrayal, vain glory that hangs upon them is a public error against Christ’s gospel.”¹¹³ According to him, such images should turn the mind to Christ, but their rich details instead orient the mind to an inaccurate understanding of the passion. He argues that people “conceal their own sinful lives using these false paintings; and therefore they misrepresent the saints, turning their

and peyntid wiþ gold and precious iewelis as byfor is seyð, and sit wiþinne a mynstre or a greet abbey, where litil need is, or noon, to help by siche offeryng.”

¹¹² Ibid. *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. Clifford Davidson, (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 107; 109. Original: “fleysly pley is not leueful with the gostly werkis of Crist and of his seintis”; “goinge backward fro dedis of the spirit to onely signes don after lustis of the fleysh.”

¹¹³ “Images and Pilgrimages,” 83. Original: “siþ þes ymagis ben bokis of lewid men to sture þem on þe mynde of Cristis passion, and techen by her peyntur, veyn glorie þat is hangid on hem an opyn error azenus Cristis gospel.”

lives to the contrary to comfort men in worldly pride, vanity, and pleasures of their bellies and other lusts.”¹¹⁴ By representing saints in rich array, images not only validate sinful lives, but they also conceal the error of worldly living that surrounds them. Thus, they not only “bring simple people to think erroneous things about Christ’s life,” but they also prompt laypeople themselves toward sinful living.¹¹⁵ The image’s materiality overwhelms its iconography with the result that it conveys (incorrect) theology and thus moves the devotee to vain contemplation and action, rather than to proper devotion.

At its core, *Ymagis* argues that laypeople see elaborately decorated images differently than they do simple images. In their study of material possessions in contemporary urban culture, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton assert, “One of the most important, but unfortunately most neglected, aspects of the meaning of things is precisely the ability of an object to convey meaning through its own inherent qualities.”¹¹⁶ The authors use John Dewey’s distinction between recognition (when we experience a thing and interpret it as something we already know) and perception (when we experience a thing and realize its own inherent character) to argue that “the object imposes certain qualities on the viewer that create new insights.”¹¹⁷ Dewey’s perception sounds remarkably similar to Bacon’s model of visual perception, which maintains that a certain level of meaning is inherent in an object itself.¹¹⁸ Dewey’s recognition/perception distinction also resonates with the central argument of *Ymagis*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 84. Original: “colour wiþ þer owne cursed life by þis false peyntingis; and herfore þei lyen on seyntis, turnyng þer lif to þe contrarie to counfort men in worldly pride and vanyte and lyknyng of her wombe and ezen and oþer lustus.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Original: “bryngen þe symple puple in errour of Cristis lif.”

¹¹⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 44-5. The authors cite John Dewey’s conclusions as expressed in *Art As Experience* (1934; New York: Minton, Balch, 1958).

¹¹⁸ As cited by Suzannah Biernoff in *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 82.

The author of this treatise argues that the rich decoration of images conveys the idea that those individuals they represent, often saints, “lived in wealth of this world and desires of the flesh.”¹¹⁹ It is not the iconography, but the rich materiality that communicates a fleshy meaning that validates pride, vanity, and lust. The image’s connotation is no longer humility; instead, the gold and jewels turn its meaning toward worldly desires. The image’s materiality moves the viewer from recognition to perception, from an interpretation of the sign to an interaction with the material image itself.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton note that “in all cases where actual physical objects become associated with a particular quality of the self, it is difficult to know how far the thing simply reflects an already existing trait and to what extent it anticipates, or even generates, a previous nonexistent quality.”¹²⁰ This is a problem with which the *Ymagis*’s author struggles. The objects he describes not only provoke inaccurate theological ideas, but they also move the body to improper devotional deeds, a concern I also observed in *A Tretise of the Miraclis Pleyinge*. In *Ymagis*, the author claims that people are drawn to these images and give them offerings rather than “visit and help” their neighbors with alms.¹²¹ The author, anti-clerical in many respects, argues that images are simply one of the clergy’s many (apparently, very effective) ways of obtaining the alms that fund their richly endowed lives.¹²² But other arguments in the text suggest that another fault of excessively material images is that, like performance, they prompt people to behave in equally excessive ways. He blames images for leading men on pilgrimage, a practice he associates with “promoting lechery, gluttony, drunkenness,

¹¹⁹ “Images and Pilgrimages,” 84. Original: “lyued in welþe of þis world and lustus of þeire fleyshe.”

¹²⁰ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *Meaning of Things*, 28.

¹²¹ “Images and Pilgrimages,” 84.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 85.

extortion, wrongs, and worldly vanities.”¹²³ He argues that people are “deceived by vain trust in these images” and that this trust leads them to “firmly cling stroking and kissing these old stones and pieces of wood.”¹²⁴ He deems these devotional gestures inappropriate. In addition, the author suggests that worship of these images leaves a person vulnerable to the devil,

And also the devil can physically injure such simple fools, and when they make blind promises to visit such pieces of wood, and give offerings trusting that they will be helped by them, he ceases bodily torment because he now holds power over the soul because of this lack of trust in God, and trust in these images.¹²⁵

Trusting in images provides the devil with access to the body and the soul, which suggests that devotion with and before images somehow physically and spiritually opens the devotee to sin. It is also noteworthy that when the author criticizes those priests appointed to hear confession and assign penance who tell the laity to give alms to images, he also disparages their “long cursed prayers and trilling of curious song [grete cnakkyng] in men’s ears,” almost as if the material excess of the images has insinuated itself into the bodies of these priests and caused them to worship in similar excess.¹²⁶

The language of this treatise demonstrates that concerns directed at images did not solely focus on lay misinterpretation of representational features, but also had to do with their effects. As David Freedberg suggests, the history of iconoclasm traces a fear of the

¹²³ Ibid., 86. Original: “mayntenynge of lecherie, or gloterie, of drunkenesse, of extorsions, of wrongis, and worldly vanytes.”

¹²⁴ Ibid., 87. Original: “disceyuyd by veyn trist in þes ymagis”; “cleuen sadly strokande and kyssand þese olde stonnes and stokkis.”

¹²⁵ Ibid. Original: “And also þe fend kan anoye in bodyliche rude foolis, and when þei maken blynde byhestis to seke sichliche stokkis, and offre in triste to be releuyd by hem, he cessis of bodyly turment for he has now power in þe soule bycause of vntrist þat þei han to God, and tristen in þes ymagis.”

¹²⁶ Ibid., 86. Original: “long cursed preyeris and grete cnakkyng of curious song in menes eeris.”

“endless variety of behavior...images arouse and provoke.”¹²⁷ I would argue that the material presence of certain images and the effects of this materiality on lay users provoked medieval anxiety. In some cases, rather than arguing for image destruction, medieval writers attempt to contain the objects that surround them. For instance, in her effort to discern how lay responses to images were “contoured by the appearance of the object, the words they heard, the texts they read, the lives they led,” Sara Lipton examines the trajectory of one phrase (“the sweet lean of his head”), versions of which recur fourteen times in medieval texts dating from 1127 to the fifteenth century.¹²⁸ This particular phrase refers to the crucifix and, in some cases, may have been used by preachers to direct attention to a crucifix that was physically present. Lipton concludes that this survey of “writing about looking” reveals “a rich and complex dialogical relationship among text, reader/viewer, and object,” and that “writing was a means by which some clerics sought to balance the promise and the dangers of vision, to resolve the paradoxes inherent in the devotional image, to assemble isolated impressions into a significant whole, and to create meaning out of tension and contradiction.”¹²⁹ In other words, texts could function to control material devotional images, which, on their own, contained the potential for misreading.

But Lipton also asserts that these texts reveal how “the objectness of the crucifix was an integral aspect of its meaning” and notes how different authors are affected by an image’s distance, height, or material accessibility.¹³⁰ *Ymagis* reflects one author’s reaction to the “objectness” of devotional images. So, too, the “objectness” of the parish

¹²⁷ Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 12.

¹²⁸ Sara Lipton, “‘The Sweet Lean of His Head’: Writing About Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 80, no. 4 (October 2005): 1173.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1200; 1175.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1201.

church constituted an integral aspect of its meaning. I argue that this “objectness” served to foreground the body in visual piety and continue the “way of seeing” embodied in performance literacy. Simon Shepherd notes that “phenomenology suggests that audiences vicariously ‘live’ or experience the play through the act of watching, for that act has kinaesthetic effects which can affect the ‘tactile’ space.”¹³¹ Performance materially engaged the lay body in the pageant world and invited that body to live the space of the cycle pageants kinaesthetically. The parish church, a space similarly oriented by material means, invited laypeople to see devotional images with their bodies and to experience them kinaesthetically as they would images in performance. As I asserted with reference to funeral processions, interaction with material objects did not have to be gestural, such as the kissing and holding described in the *Ymagis* treatise, in order for it to access performance. This interaction could take place through strictly visual means. The material space of the medieval church encouraged exactly this kind of seeing with the body.

Performance Literacy and the Parish Church

The most prominent architectural feature of medieval—and twenty-first-century—York is its Minster.¹³² The York Minster is the largest extant Gothic structure north of the Alps. According to the dimensions provided in the Minster Visitors’ Department pamphlet, the cathedral’s overall length is 518 feet, the breadth of its transepts measures 249 feet, and its central tower rises 197 feet high. Although the

¹³¹ Shepherd, *Theatre*, 106.

¹³² York’s Minster is both a cathedral, a term that denotes the principal church within a bishop’s diocese that houses the episcopal throne, and a Minster, which denotes a church attached to a monastery. The cathedral is dedicated to St. Peter and is often referred to in medieval wills as the cathedral church of St. Peter.

Minster stands on the site of a seventh-century church begun by King Edwin, construction of the current Minster began in 1220. Its architecture is typically divided into three periods: Early English Gothic (1220-1260) mainly constituted by north and south transepts; Decorated Gothic (1280-1350) represented by the nave and chapter house; and, Perpendicular (1361-1472) corresponding to the choir, most of the Minster's eastern arm, and its central tower.¹³³ The Minster project consumed medieval York, with its wealthy citizens donating money for, and its craftsmen producing, the windows, sculpture, carving, and stonework. The Minster was also the location of the tomb of Richard Scrope, archbishop of York from 1398 to 1405 and locally celebrated for his martyrdom after being executed for leading an insurrection against Henry IV.¹³⁴ As Barrie Dobson reminds us, "The 'concourse of people' who came to worship at Scrope's tomb serves as a reminder that the most formally hierarchical church in northern England was at the same time the centre of the most striking manifestations of popular religion and piety."¹³⁵ In addition, Dobson notes that the numerous bequests to the fabric of the Minster from men and women of all economic levels "testify to a general commitment to the mother church of York."¹³⁶ The cathedral constituted a central character in the lives of York's medieval laity. Laypeople interacted with and helped sustain the Minster's material space of devotion.

¹³³ Pamphlet entitled "Welcome to York Minster," released by the Visitors Department of St. William's College (2005).

¹³⁴ A number of wills from York include bequests to the head of Richard Scrope, which was kept as a relic at his shrine near the city's Clementhorpe neighborhood, and these attest to the strength of his cult in the city and diocese. Examples of these gifts include Katherine de Craven's 1418 bequest of a small striped gold girdle to Scrope (BI Reg. 3 fols. 613r-v), John Dautre's 1458 bequest of one of his funeral torches and a set of coral beads (rosary) to the chapel of Richard Scrope, which he specifies as standing outside the city wall (BI Reg. 2, fols. 413r-414r), Isabell Bruce's 1477 bequest of jewelry to the "capiti Ricardi Scrope" (BI Reg. 5 fol. 17v), and Alison Clark's 1509 will that specifies "an old noble [is] to be disposed about the onowrmentes of the holy man, Buschop Scrope" (D&C Reg. 2 fols. 82r-83v), transcriptions mine.

¹³⁵ Barrie Dobson, "The Later Middle Ages, 1215-1500," in *A History of York Minster*, eds. G. E. Aylmer and Reginald Cant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 108.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

What is therefore striking visually about York, even today, is the vast number of parish churches dotting the town and standing in the Minster's shadow. At its peak, York contained over forty parish churches, though only fourteen of these survive today.¹³⁷ The only standing church with features that are certainly pre-Conquest is St. Mary's, Castlegate, currently a museum, which contains structural components dated to the eleventh century.¹³⁸ St. Mary's gives us an idea of the ongoing renovations to parish churches throughout the Middle Ages. Although originally built as an unaisled structure, St. Mary's first aisle was added in the twelfth century and its second in the thirteenth. The current exterior dates to the fifteenth century, the period when York's most elaborate parish churches were built.¹³⁹ Most of the older parish churches went through periods of renovation similar to what we find in St. Mary's. St. Michael-le-Belfry, located, as its name suggests, in the shadow of the Minster's bell tower, was the last medieval church built in the city. This church, designed by the cathedral's master mason John Forman, was completed in 1537.¹⁴⁰

Both York's Minster and its many parish churches offered laypeople devotional spaces with rich materiality. Although, as its dimensions suggest, the Minster is an expansive space, it still engages the bodies of those who enter it. Particularly during Mass or other liturgical ceremonies, the sounds of bells, singing, and chanting reverberate through the bodies of those who stand in the nave. The Minster is filled with altars, commemorative plaques and statues, and would have been painted top to bottom in the

¹³⁷ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *The Central Area*, 2. The city lost five churches in the fourteenth century, but still retained forty parish churches in the sixteenth century. This meant there was one church for every 200 of the city's inhabitants. See Claire Cross and P. S. Barnwell, "The Mass in its Urban Setting," in *Mass and Parish in Late CAP Medieval England: The Use of York*, eds. Barnwell, Cross, and Rycraft (Reading, UK: Spire Books, 2005), 23.

¹³⁸ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *The Central Area*, 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Middle Ages. There are also a number of donor images in the Minster, some of these in the form of painted glass windows. As I noted in the Introduction, one donor window in particular, the Bellfounder's window (c. 1330), reminds the viewer of the donor by showing various images of his trade—bell casting and tuning. This window is located in the north aisle of the nave, the second window west of the transept arm. Although visible, it is physically located far above any viewer's head and extends further upward towards the heavens. The window does not remain fixed in the lay space, but seems to reach toward God. Thus, the window does not place the donor it represents in the nave among the lay congregants, but instead, as it extends toward heaven, places him closer to God. The material window accentuates a physical distance between image and viewer, and it therefore constructs a strong visual and material association between the donor and heaven, and, thus, between the donor and heavenly peace in the afterlife.

Although the Bellfounder's window does not create a particularly strong material connection between viewer and image, I recognize that other images in the Minster do indeed physically engage the lay body. For instance, a roof boss in the nave depicts Christ's ascension and situates the spectator in a very specific devotional posture. The soles of Christ's feet are centered in the boss, with the faces of the apostles and the Virgin arranged around them.¹⁴¹ Even within the Minster's large space, the boss is clearly visible to a person standing in the nave and looking up. The layperson's viewing experience of this object is constructed in such a way that it physically replicates the postures of the original witnesses to the event, and, perhaps, the posture of the actors and some

¹⁴¹ The present boss in the Minster is a reproduction made from John Browne's drawing of the fourteenth-century original. For an image and description of the boss see Clifford Davidson, *York Art*, 100.

spectators at the performance of the *Ascension* pageant. But it is the image's placement, as opposed to its materiality, that produces this effect.

As I discussed in relation to pilgrimage, this image illustrates the difference between situating the layperson as actor and situating her as an embodied viewer. The roof boss positions its viewer as a participant, and while this iconographic choice may deepen the visual experience offered to the devout viewer, it also clearly controls the visual piety. Applicable here is Sarah Lipton's suggestion that certain clerical texts attempt to contain "the multiplicity of possible approaches to the crucifix" by controlling or redirecting the way laypeople looked upon the object.¹⁴² Like these texts, the Minster's roof boss attempts to direct the lay viewer's gaze and posture, and, therefore, to control his/her devotional experience of the image. The layperson "witnesses" the Ascension, but in a very specific way. In contrast, performance literacy emerges out of a viewing posture constructed through a material encounter. As a lay tactic of consumption, performance literacy offers an open, transformable way of seeing oriented in terms of the individual viewer's bodily experience. The small spaces of York's medieval parish churches created greater possibilities for this type of embodied interaction than did the Minster space. By analyzing the materiality of the parish church as a manifestation of performance, and therefore the visual piety before its images as a recurrent practice of performance literacy, we can reveal the multiplicity made available through that space.

I argue that the Minster and the smaller parish churches operated along a continuum of viewing experience. My analysis relies upon my own encounters with these spaces and their artistic features, rather than solely upon descriptions and analysis of their dimensions and iconography. As with studies of performance, encounters constitute

¹⁴² Lipton, "Sweet Lean," 1202.

evidence. Despite our best efforts, a live performance experience is never fully captured by words or images. And yet, just as theory helps us gain access to the live performance encounter, it also allows us to engage other material encounters. When we apply performance literacy to a stained glass window, we recognize that while its iconography, placement within the church, textual references, and artistic style all convey meaning, so too does its very objectness.

Like the Minster, the parish church interior extended out to the viewer through sculptures, hammerbeams, painted windows, carved bench ends, vestments and altar cloths, liturgical vessels made of silver and gold, candles, and other decorations. This materiality within a small space implies accessibility in ways that the spacious Minster, although it too was filled with sculptures, carvings, textiles, and other material objects, could not. The parish church interior's tactility suggests viscosity and, I would argue, this viscosity intimates "humanness." The act of filling parish churches with material objects may have reflected a lay desire to recreate the bodily connection between image and viewer that was experienced in performance, and thus to connect with God through Christ's, and the viewer's own, humanity.

All Saints North Street in York is a relatively small parish church and therefore an exceptionally material devotional space.¹⁴³ Gazing upon its painted windows constitutes a more physically engaged act than what I described occurring in the Minster. A viewer standing in the nave can see the facial expressions, details in clothing and gesture, and individual brush strokes in the images. Material immediacy is also promoted by other medieval features in the church. Fifteenth-century hammerbeams in the nave and chancel

¹⁴³ As Barnwell notes, "All Saints' stands in the middle rank in the 1524 Lay Subsidy" and therefore suggests that, by the end of the Middle Ages, this parish was average in terms of wealth. Barnwell, "Four hundred masses," 60.

ceilings are carved in the form of large angels that extend out over worshippers in the space. The size and color of the hammerbeam angels located in the chancel may have made them visible even to some of the laity standing in the nave. Medieval commemorative monuments, such as a fourteenth-century engraved stone grave slab, also appear throughout the church. The potential for materiality within this space increases exponentially once we consider that in the Middle Ages parish church interiors were brightly painted. In addition to the high altar in the chancel, during the Middle Ages there were at least four additional altars in the church: an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the north choir or chancel aisle; one to St. Thomas the martyr in the north nave aisle; one to St. Nicholas in the south chancel aisle; and an altar to St. James the Great in the south nave aisle.¹⁴⁴ There were also at least eight chantries in All Saints between 1324 and the English Reformation.¹⁴⁵

The laity experienced Masses performed in a parish church such as All Saints much differently than they did those performed in larger churches or the Minster. As Eamon Duffy notes,

Since the end of the twelfth century it had been customary for the consecrating priest to elevate the Host high above his head immediately after the sacring (the repetition of the words of institution, “Hoc est enim Corpus Meum” which brought about the miracle of transubstantiation) for the adoration of the people.¹⁴⁶

To signal the sacring and Elevation, a bell was rung to warn worshippers to look up from their prayers. On Sunday the late medieval lay congregation was separated from the ritual

¹⁴⁴ Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 75-7.

¹⁴⁵ A chantry was an office established for a priest in a specific chapel or altar within a church. The priest’s duty was to offer prayers and Masses for the souls of its founder and any others whom the founder named. See Clive Burgess, “For the Increase of Divine Service: Chantries in the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 46-65. For information on chantries in York and, specifically, All Saints North Street, see Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 70-77.

¹⁴⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 95. “Hoc est enim Corpus Meum” translates to “This is my body.”

of Mass by the rood screen—which divided the high altar from the nave. But, as Duffy contends, we should interpret the rood screen as,

both a barrier and no barrier. It was not a wall but rather a set of windows, a frame...solid only to waist-height, pierced by a door wide enough for ministers and choir to pass through.... Even the screen's most solid section, the dado, might itself be pierced with elevation squints, to allow the laity to pass visually into the sanctuary at the sacring.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, although the rood screen physically separated laypeople from the Elevation, this structure did not obliterate their visual access, and, perhaps in some ways, sensually heightened the liturgical moment. In addition, Miri Rubin describes how churches developed lighting and special effects, such as a machine that caused sculpted angels to descend from the roof, in order to heighten the visual encounter with the Host.¹⁴⁸ Accounts from the later Middle Ages of laypeople running from church to church to see the Elevation as many times as they could in a day indicate that, despite the presence of the rood screen, laypeople still gained visual access to this sacred moment.¹⁴⁹

Although the smaller parish church would have offered laypeople closer proximity to the Elevation during High Mass, parishioners also attended daily Masses, or “low” Masses, at side altars like those established at All Saints.¹⁵⁰ These altars provided laypeople with more materially oriented encounters with the Host. According to Duffy, the “short ceremonies celebrated at altars, ... far from being concealed behind screens and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 112. See also Aylmer Vallance, *English Church Screens* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons; London: B.T. Batsford, 1936).

¹⁴⁸ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 49-63. Duffy notes that the effectiveness of the large veil used during Lent to completely conceal the high altar from the laity “derived from the fact that it obscured for a time something which was normally accessible.” See *Stripping of the Altars*, 111.

¹⁴⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 97-9.

¹⁵⁰ In *Stripping of the Altars*, Duffy notes that although a rich array of altars and chantries is usually associated with larger churches and cathedrals, “even small churches had their quota of altars for the celebration of gild and chantry Masses, all crammed into the nave” (113).

out of earshot of the worshippers, were often within arm's reach."¹⁵¹ These altars were adorned with fabrics, images, books, and, above all, candles, which only compounded their material effect.

The small size of All Saints also makes the devotional experience before individual images extremely intimate. For instance, the Pricke of Conscience window (Figure 1), whose iconography is based upon an anonymous fifteenth-century poem of the same name that recounts the events of the final fifteen days of the world, is a remarkably material object.¹⁵² The lights in the window read from the bottom left to the top right, with each light devoted to one of the fifteen days. Each panel includes at the bottom a short text summarizing the part of the poem it represents. The first panels show the destruction of the earth, with scenes of the seas rising and falling, earthquakes, and fires. The second half of the window presents mankind's reaction to this devastation and its inevitable fate. The fourteenth light represents the death of all humankind, and the final light shows the stars falling and the world burning. All these images are easily visible to anyone standing before the window.

The parish church, like funerals, provided laypeople with opportunities to memorialize themselves through visual means. For instance, the hammerbeams in the chancel of All Saints, as well as a seat with a misericord, were donated by the Gilliot family.¹⁵³ A number of windows in All Saints, including the Pricke window, were donated by parish families. In his 1429 will, Reginald Bawtre left 100s to the fabric of

¹⁵¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 112. He also describes how these side altars made use of the rood screen "as the backdrop" for the Mass (113).

¹⁵² *The Pricke of Conscience*, ed. Richard Morris (Berlin: A. Asher, 1863; London: Philological Society, 1863).

¹⁵³ Barnwell, "Four hundred masses," 81.

All Saints for a new window in the south the part of the church.¹⁵⁴ It appears that this window was split with the Blackburn family, who also donated the window depicting the Corporal Acts of Mercy.¹⁵⁵ Historians believe the Pricke window was donated by the Henryson and Hessle families, who were among the urban elite of the period.¹⁵⁶ Members of the donor family appear in the bottom lights (Figure 2).

Important urban families often sat nearer the high altar in side chapels, and these spaces developed into high status areas of the church.¹⁵⁷ As Katherine French notes, “Seating arrangements shaped the laity’s experience of the liturgy and show that they did not consider themselves to be an undifferentiated or homogeneous group.”¹⁵⁸ As important York families who may have sat in the north chapel or chancel aisle when at Mass, the Henryson and Hessle clans may have chosen to place their window in this area of the church in order to mark with their images the space where they typically practiced their devotions. Duffy notes that donating torches to the high altar could function as “a sort of proxy for the adoring presence of the donor close by the Sacrament.”¹⁵⁹ So, too, a window in the north chancel visually recalls the donor’s physical presence at Mass. One of its primary functions was to remind the parish community of the donors and their presence in, and contributions to, the parish church. In her analysis of venerator images, Schleif writes, “One message the figures could convey to the viewer was that the

¹⁵⁴ Reginald Bawtre, 21 Nov 1429, proved 21 Nov 1429 (BI Reg. 2 fols. 572r-v).

¹⁵⁵ Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 81. Clara Barnett, “Memorials and Commemoration in the Parish Churches of Late Medieval York,” 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 1997), 326.

¹⁵⁶ *Guide to All Saints*, 10.

¹⁵⁷ Barnwell, “Four hundred masses,” 77; French, *People of the Parish*, 170-3.

¹⁵⁸ French, *People of the Parish*, 162. French analyzes the English parish church’s “architecture of community,” focusing particularly on churches in Bath and Wells, and suggests the ways in which design relates to social and devotional functions. For instance, she writes, “As the laity filled their nave with pews, chapels, and side altars, they shaped the route of the liturgical processions and compelled the clergy to acknowledge their social concerns, while caring for their spiritual ones” (155). See *People of the Parish*, 142-74.

¹⁵⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 96.

venerator was in some way responsible for the work—possibly by financing it out of private capital or administering communal funds. The images likewise served to memorialize the persons represented, and reminded the living to pray for their souls.”¹⁶⁰ Those who looked upon the Pricke window would not only recall the family itself, but also their physical attendance at services and, thus, their devotional commitment to the parish and to God. Like the cycle performance, the image uses a visual association to layer sacred connotations onto the families.

Painted glass windows were prepared in a number of stages, as glass pieces were cut and then painted with pigment, using different types of brushes, quills, or needles, depending on the desired effect. Glaziers painted the main outlines first and then added washes, highlights, and other detail features later. Although church windows are technically two-dimensional, as Richard Marks writes, “from at least the twelfth century the external surface was painted to reinforce shadows and give a three-dimensional effect to the medium.”¹⁶¹ Glaziers used a range of techniques in order to achieve a number of different effects. But this medium’s visual aesthetic can only be understood if we place these windows within the larger context of the church space they inhabit. Marks contends, “Stained glass is an architectural art and cannot be fully comprehended in isolation from its monumental framework.”¹⁶² The spatial relationship created between window and viewer contributes to the image’s meaning. The Pricke window and the Bellfounder’s window resided within very different physical contexts, and the variation between these certainly led to differences in how they functioned within visual piety.

¹⁶⁰ Corine Schleif, “Hands that Appoint, Anoint and Ally: Late Medieval Donor Strategies for Appropriating Approbation Through Painting,” *Art History* 16, no. 1 (March 1993): 2.

¹⁶¹ Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, 36. Marks reviews the glazier’s craft on pages 31-40.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 51.

Both of these windows are located physically within church aisles and therefore in the lay space, but they are oriented in relation to the viewer's body in very different ways. As I have already noted, the Bellfounder's window hovers above the devout spectator, while the Pricke window exists alongside the viewer. Many adult viewers could stand next to the bottom lights of the Pricke window and look into the eyes of the donor images; the rest of the window extends upwards from this point of material contact. Rather than reaching toward God and away from the spectator, the figures in the Pricke window inhabit the viewer's devotional space and kneel alongside the lay viewer's body. This window does not stretch toward the heavens and beyond reach, but remains materially united with the nave. The glass images thereby secure for the donor family a perpetual, physical place within All Saints' lay community.

Windows placed in the intimate space of the parish church could also mark bodies, as well as space. Although gazing upon the Minster window generates a physical experience, the nature of that experience is to direct the viewer away from the material earth toward contemplation of heaven. It is similar to the experience of hearing music while standing within the cathedral. The sound fills the body, but it is somewhat distant from the listener since it emerges from a space far removed from the listening body. Likewise, the Bellfounder's window does not foreground the visual experience in an immediate material connection between viewer and image. Viewers find relevance in the image because they can relate to the individuals pictured in the window, who are engaged in earthly work. But the figures, high above the viewer's body, seem already to have left the earth and thus no longer find themselves trapped in the visceral concerns that plague the viewer. On the other hand, the images at the bottom of the Pricke window situate the

donors in their earthly bodies with their fleshy concerns. Figure 2 shows the middle figure in the window's center donor panel. The brush work in the eyes and hands, the expressive facial features, the folds in the gown, and the window's thick leading all assert this object's material presence. This window might have functioned in ways similar to those of the actor's body. As in the York *Crucifixion*, the accentuated materiality of the window creates a continuum between image and lay viewer. By making the donor materially, as opposed to just visually, present in the space, the image foregrounds the viewer's physical presence before it and embeds the image into her body. Like elaborately material funeral rituals, this image constructs a synaesthetic memory of the deceased for those who look upon it.

Donor images were intended to allow a person to stand before sacred moments perpetually. As Schleif writes, "The pictorial arts allowed the faithful the unique opportunity to continue in devotion, striving for divine benevolence even after death!"¹⁶³ The window not only created this effect visually, but also recreated it materially. The window offers the donors the same material viewing experience practiced in performance, allowing them to remain physically present at and be part of rituals in the church.¹⁶⁴ In light of this possibility, we might add another layer to our interpretation of

¹⁶³ Schleif, "Hands That Appoint," 2.

¹⁶⁴ All Saints offers us one additional way to consider the visual piety generated by the material image. During the Middle Ages, All Saints was home to an anchorite who lived in a house attached to the south aisle of the church. The most famous anchoress who lived alongside All Saints was the early fifteenth-century visionary Emma Raughton, whose politically significant visions of the Virgin Mary are recorded in the pageants of Richard Beauchamp. Today a squint, or small opening, that served as the anchorite's window into the church still remains in the church's west wall. It was through this squint that she watched and, therefore, visually participated in the Mass and other services. Several male and female anchorites lived in medieval York. In a number of the wills that I studied testators left money or devotional objects to anchorites living in the city. For instance, Bracebrig gave money to a hermit in the chapel of St. Katherine, to anchoresses at All Saints Fishergate, St. Margaret Walmgate, and to another in the churchyard of All Saints North Street (488v). The presence of an anchoress adds another dimension to donor images and, specifically, to how testators imagined these images would be consumed by viewers. The anchoress functions as a perpetual eye. The relationship between the anchoress and donor images warrants further

lay donations. Although these gifts were required as part of the congregation's duty to its church, they were also a way to accentuate the devotional space materially and thereby engage bodies in pious memorial seeing. For the person who could not afford a perpetual image like the Pricke window, the parish church space still provided a forum for creating memory spectacularly and sensually. The arrangements outlined in wills include activities and posthumous donations related to churches. These might be as simple as torches before altars, particularly at the Elevation of the Host, and the sounds of liturgical rites and bells, but they might also include donations of images, altar clothes, vestments, chalices, silver plate, and liturgical books. In some cases, the material result of someone's death might create a sudden sensual overload within the church space—a visual and visceral “pop” that reverberated through the bodies of fellow parishioners. We might compare this visceral “pop” with the one generated by the combination of props, costumes, and effects listed in the *Last Judgement's* 1433 inventory. This spatial effect, like the funeral rituals, allowed the deceased to recreate live presence in the church space and, thereby, may have embedded a memory of the testator in the flesh of those who entered the church.¹⁶⁵

consideration. For information on Emma Raughton see Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 203-6; Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914), 155; *Pageant of the Birth, Life and Death of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, K. G., 1389-1439*, eds. Viscount Dillon and W. H. St. John Hope (London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1914).

¹⁶⁵ In the next phase of this project, not only do I intend to increase the number of wills that comprise my source material, but I also plan to pay more attention to the gender of testators. Using parish and testamentary evidence from other regions in England, Katherine French has argued for “the importance of the parish as an institution that assisted female visibility” (158), and she concludes that “differences between men's and women's giving practices suggest that women used their notions of home economy and domesticity to act out their piety. Women's gifts to the parish reflected the relationships they had to their material goods and household possessions. For much of their lives, they could not count on being able to liquidate their material assets, and, consequently, their identification with objects—both as signs of their domestic skills and their gender—seems stronger than men's” (160). I would like to see if her conclusions are relevant to lay giving practices in York. See Katherine L. French, “Women in the Late Medieval English Parish,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds. Mary C.

Material Props of Devotional Life

Although I have focused on the materiality of the actor's body, theatre also accentuates materiality through onstage props.¹⁶⁶ Props may not only establish continuity between the stage space and the spectator's own space, they can also reinforce the actor's physical presence in the material world. The spectacles presented in York's pageants operated in this fashion—securing the actor and spectator within a material continuum—but these pageants also accentuated this relationship by displaying props in specific ways. In doing so, not only do the pageants reinforce the human materiality of the sacred characters, and thus their shared humanity with the audience, but certain props in the cycle performance also suggest the memorializing power of devotional objects.

Sarah Beckwith has persuasively argued for the importance of work as a theme in the York cycle,¹⁶⁷ and onstage props reinforce this theme. As Kathleen Ashley notes, the York pageants' references to labor and to the tools associated with that labor function reflexively to allow the audience to meditate on the idea of "worthy work."¹⁶⁸ Props, which offer the audience material proof of craft labor, play an important role in

Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 157-73. On this topic, see also French, "'I Leave My Best Gown as a Vestment': Women's Spiritual Interests in the Late Medieval English Parish," *Magistra* 4 (1998): 57-77. Kathleen Kamerick offers a brief survey of East Anglian wills and considers the evidence of art in the parish church that these contain. See *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 84-105.

¹⁶⁶ For a study of stage props see Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ Sarah Beckwith, "Making the World in York and the York Cycle," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 254-76; *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁶⁸ Kathleen Ashley, "Sponsorship, Reflexivity and Resistance: Cultural Readings of the York Cycle Plays," in *The Performance of Middle English Cultures: Essays on Chaucer and Drama in Honor of Martin Stevens*, eds. James J. Paxson, Lawrence M. Clopper, and Sylvia Tomasch (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 17-9.

concretizing this meditation. For instance, in *The Nativity* Joseph comments on the neglected stable roof,

And if we here all night abide
We shall be exposed to the elements in this place,
The walls are down on each side,
The roof is torn open above our heads (14.15-18).¹⁶⁹

Similarities between the material concerns of the play's inhabitants and those of York's residents are reinforced by the scenic props. Likewise, the actual ropes and boards used by the soldiers in *The Crucifixion* not only highlight the connection between the work enacted in the play and the profession of the actors, but they also materialize the staged action for the audience. In discussing functionality, Stanton Garner, Jr. describes how

Equipment is defined as such in reference to the tasks or assignments to which it is subordinated; the hammer exists 'in order to' hammer the nail.... In normal use, the materiality of equipment recedes from explicit awareness in the course of being used.... When usefulness is subverted, however (the individual piece of equipment is damaged, something essential to the completion of the task is missing, or other things stand in the way), the equipmental object becomes obtrusive.¹⁷⁰

By showing the results of the incompetent use or neglect of tools (the roof's shoddiness) or by presenting tools engaged in unworthy work (Christ's crucifixion), the pageants bring the actual use of these props into the spectator's "explicit awareness."

Consequently these props, as Ashley notes, function reflexively.

But the very materiality of props allows them not only to reflect back on or signify their everyday uses, but also simultaneously to establish phenomenological links with the actors and, thereby, the audience. Garner argues that "props constitute privileged

¹⁶⁹ Original: "And yf we here all nyght abide / We schall be stormed in þis steede, / Þe walles are doune on ilke a side, / Þe ruffe is rayued aboven oure hede."

¹⁷⁰ Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 113.

nodal points in the scenic field, asserting a powerful materiality and a density both semiotic and phenomenal.”¹⁷¹ Although the thatched roof, ropes, and boards that appear in the pageants “bear a burden of signification,” they also serve “as vehicles through which both actor and character operate intentionally in the material sphere.”¹⁷² Garner asserts that “the availability of objects allows the actor to claim a place in a material world, to interact with it in terms of human intention, and to emerge as a physical presence in the field of performance.”¹⁷³ Props reinforce the materiality of the actor and, accordingly, the bodied similarity between actor and spectator. In so doing they reinforce not only the humanity of the sacred characters, but also the human similarity between those characters and the audience. When Joseph complains about the broken roof, the pageant defines him as intimately human. When the soldiers handle the ropes and boards in *The Crucifixion*, not only is Christ’s humanness reinforced, but also the humanness of the soldiers and their actions. Interaction with objects constitutes human interaction—not simply representation—and thus the applicability of these actions and their corresponding theology materialize as part of the spectator’s own world and her experience within it.

One particular prop in the York cycle attaches further devotional meaning to this material relationship and, I assert, ultimately contributes an additional pious element to performance literacy. A three-play series related to the death of the Virgin appears at the end of the cycle: *The Death of the Virgin*, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, and *The Coronation of the Virgin*.¹⁷⁴ This series appears between the pageants *Pentecost* and *The*

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷⁴ Originally there were four plays in this series, but *The Funeral of the Virgin*, the “Fergus” play of which the Masons asked to be relieved, does not survive. For work on contemporary staging of these plays see John McKinnell, “Producing the York *Mary* plays,” *Medieval English Theatre* 12 (1990): 101-23.

Last Judgement. The Death of the Virgin offers spectators a lengthy mourning ritual. The play opens with a “Hail” series as Gabriel addresses the Virgin and informs her that Christ is calling her to join him. When Mary tells the disciples of her imminent death, at first they express grief at her departure, but after Mary’s coaching, they come to terms with her death. The play’s action is devoted more to how humans respond to a sacred event than to the event itself. With Mary’s help, her maids and the disciples learn how to respond piously to her impending death and, thus, to grieve properly,

Ah, John, son, that this pain was past!
With good heart all you who are here
Pray for me faithfully together
For I shall leave you very soon (44.115-8).¹⁷⁵

In addition, Mary asks Christ to show mercy on all “men that are placed in jeopardy in storms or in sea / And wisely intend to awake my honor, / And then call my name in that need” (44.137-9), as well as on “All who are in trouble or in need and call me by name” (44.144).¹⁷⁶ She adds,

And women also in their childbirth,
Now, in particular, help them,
And if they die in that fear
To bliss readily then bring them (44.147-50).¹⁷⁷

In these ways, the play offers spectators clear lessons on grief and Marian devotion that York’s laity would have found useful and applicable to their personal lives. Presumably,

¹⁷⁵ Original: “A, John, sone, þat þis peyne were ouere-paste! / With goode harte 3e alle þat are here / Praies for me faithfully in feere, / For I mon wende fro you as faste.”

¹⁷⁶ Original: “men þat are stedde stiffely in stormes or in see / And are in will wittirly my worschippe to awake, / And þanne nevenes my name in þat nede”; “All þat are in newe or in nede and nevenes me be name.”

¹⁷⁷ Original: “And women also in þare childing, / Nowe speciall þou þame spede, / And if so be þei dei in þat drede / To þi blisse þane baynly þou þame bringe.”

the missing “Fergus” play—which presented the Virgin’s funeral—continued this theme in relation to Mary’s body.¹⁷⁸

The next play uses a stage prop to develop Marian devotion in a material direction. *The Assumption of the Virgin* begins with a lengthy monologue from Thomas—the same “doubting Thomas” that the audience had already met in the Scriveners’ pageant, *The Incredulity of Thomas*—in which he reiterates the story of Christ’s life and passion, as well as discusses his own struggle to find a way of life after the ascension. *Incredulity* presents Thomas as the absent and therefore doubting disciple, but in *The Assumption of the Virgin* he fulfills the role of eyewitness. After Thomas’s monologue an angel chorus appears singing a nine-line “Rise” series (beginning with “Rise Mary, thou maiden and mother so mild,” 45.105) followed by a four-line “Come” series (beginning with “Come chosen childe,” 45.114), both directed at the Virgin. The angels command her to rise and “Come up to the king to be crowned” (45.117).¹⁷⁹ The words “rise” and “come” reinforce Mary’s *physical* assumption and thus her human reality. Next, Thomas expresses amazement at the Virgin’s resurrection and assumption and offers her his own “Hail” series. After a brief exchange, Mary tells Thomas to go to the other disciples and “Go tell them truly you saw me ascending” (45.162).¹⁸⁰ When Thomas says he is doubtful that they will believe him (“For they do not pay attention to the tales that I tell,” 45.164), Mary replies,

I shall show you
A token true [token trewe]
Very brightly colored,

¹⁷⁸ For work on this missing play see Ruth Evans, “When a Body Meets a Body: Fergus and Mary in the York Cycle,” in *New Medieval Literatures*, eds. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 193-212.

¹⁷⁹ Original: “Rise Marie, þou maiden and modir so milde”; “Come vppe to þe kyng to be crowned.”

¹⁸⁰ Original: “Go saie þem sothely þou sawe me assendinge.”

My girdle, lo, take them this sign (45.166-9).¹⁸¹

After Thomas takes the girdle and thanks her, Mary reinstructs him (and the audience) in devotion to her by reminding him that all who find themselves in despair or peril should pray to her for intercession on their behalf. The 1415 Ordo paginarum describes this pageant as “Mary ascending with a crowd of angels, eight apostles, and Thomas, the apostle of India, preaching in the desert.”¹⁸² Therefore, it seems likely that Mary physically ascended as part of the stage action, perhaps in similar fashion as Christ did in the *Ascension* pageant.

Constituting part of the pre-existing Assumption story tradition, the Virgin’s girdle was layered with theological history and significance.¹⁸³ Andrew Sofer reminds us that when props appear onstage they “bring their own historical, cultural, and ideological baggage with them,”¹⁸⁴ and this was certainly true of the girdle. More than a sign, the girdle, a “token trewe,” functioned as an object within a longstanding tradition. But Sofer also reminds us not to let the material presence of the onstage object “dissolve into the materialist analysis” and cause us to “lose sight of how objects worked, and continue to work, on stage as part of a discrete theatrical event.”¹⁸⁵ The girdle’s appearance in the

¹⁸¹ Original: “For to my tales þat I telle þei are not attendinge”; “I schall þe schewe / A token trewe / Full fresshe of hewe, / My girdill, loo, take þame þis tokyn.”

¹⁸² Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 709 (23).

¹⁸³ The story of Mary’s assumption is described in an apocryphal book attributed to John the Evangelist. *The Golden Legend*, a collection of saints lives compiled around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine, provides us with one version of the Assumption narrative that gives Thomas a different role in the action: “Thereupon Mary’s soul entered her body, and she came forth glorious from the monument and was assumed into the heavenly bridal chamber, a great multitude of angels keeping her company. Thomas, however, was absent, and when he came back refused to believe. Then suddenly the girdle that had encircled her body fell intact into his hands, and he realized that the Blessed Virgin has really been assumed body and soul.” See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, vol. 2, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 82.

¹⁸⁴ Sofer, *Stage Life of Props*, 17.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

pageant amounted to a “material stage event”¹⁸⁶ that accomplished important devotional work. More so than words such as “rise” or “come,” this material prop phenomenologically places Mary and Thomas firmly in the same bodied, material realm that the audience inhabits. Over the course of the play, the girdle’s “objectness” becomes strongly associated with the Virgin’s bodiliness. This relationship is particularly reinforced when the disciples wax poetic about the girdle’s material use, which they describe as intimately connected with the Virgin’s body.

Peter: It is welcome, indeed, from that worthy person,
 For it was customarily used to encircle that worthy virgin.
 James: It is welcome, indeed, from that lady so radiant,
 For her womb was wrapped with it and wore it to good effect.
 Andrew: It is welcome, indeed, from that healer of sin,
 For she wrapped it around her as blossom so bright.
 John: It is welcome, indeed, from the key of our people,
 For about that holy one it went very well (45.274-81).¹⁸⁷

These lines give the object a physical history that serves to fix it as something that emerged from the bodied, material world before appearing onstage.

Scoville writes that “the plays of Thomas explore the limitations of human language and the functions thereof...pointing the way to an incarnational rhetoric.”¹⁸⁸

The Assumption continues the notion of doubt begun in *Incredulity*, but in the place of the absent material body it substitutes a material object. Therefore, not only do props accentuate the bodily continuum between actor and spectators, but in this pageant a material object is given the status of human flesh—a status achieved through its initial

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸⁷ Original: “Petrus: Itt is welcome iwis fro þat worthy wight, / For it was wonte for to wappe þat worthy virgine. / Jacobus: Itt is welcome iwis from þat lady so light, / For hir wombe scho wrappe with it and were it with wyne / Andreas: Itt is welcome iwis fro þat saluer of synne, / For scho bende it aboute hir with blossome so bright. / Johannes: Itt is welcome iwis from þe keye of our kynne, / For aboute þat reuerent it rechid full right.”

¹⁸⁸ Chester N. Scoville, *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12.

use by and union with Mary's human flesh. The disciples' physical response to the girdle attests to its holy "fleshiness." Immediately after the lines cited above, Peter says, "Now kneel we each / Upon our knees," to which Jacobus adds "To that gracious lady" (45.282-4).¹⁸⁹ We obviously do not know how this moment was staged and what physical and visual relationships the play established between devotional gesture and the girdle. But because this moment appears immediately after the eight lines in which the disciples welcome and describe the girdle, it seems likely that the devotional gestures were staged in reference to the object. The girdle prompts the same devotional responses that the Virgin's body would generate if present—or, if we look back at earlier pageants, the same types of physical reactions that Christ's present body provoked. The object does not replace the Virgin, but functions instead as an extension of her material, bodily presence.¹⁹⁰

Garner argues that when placed within a material *mise-en-scène*, "the body emerges in a new capacity: as a site of agency within a field of things."¹⁹¹ The girdle offers the disciples—and by extension the lay spectator—devotional agency through objects. The pageant portrays this agency in action. Letting a prop invade—and perhaps overtake—the pageant's devotional space adds another layer to the lay spectator's visual piety. The object reinforces the fleshy materiality of which the actors/characters are

¹⁸⁹ Original: "Now knele we ilkone / Vppone oure kne"; "To þat lady free."

¹⁹⁰ Ruth Evans also recognizes the way this play associates the girdle with Mary's body, but she argues that the pageant "sexualized" the girdle with the apostles treating it "almost as a fetish, dwelling on its proximity to Mary's body" (210). See Evans, "When a Body Meets a Body," 209-11. Although I believe that if a degree of fetishism is at work in this pageant it more likely relates to the girdle as a devotional object, rather than as a sexualized object, Evans' reading offers another possible interpretation of the prop that may have contributed to visual piety in performance. These readings need not be mutually exclusive, since a variety of medieval practices involving saints' relics might be interpreted as simultaneously devotional and sexual in nature. See Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and James Bentley, *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics* (London: Constable, 1985). For a collection of primary hagiographic sources see Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁹¹ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 88.

composed and therefore reminds spectators of the humanness of the stories they see. This humanness is further underscored by the fact that girdles are familiar objects, as attested to by wills and inventories, and therefore the prop is perceived by the audience in relation to their own personal experiences with girdles. But, in addition, the girdle gives the audience a “way of seeing” with their bodies that is focused on familiar memorial objects. Such objects do not merely signify those they represent, but through their material presences they constitute visible and material extensions of those people into the sensual world. This aspect of performance literacy is immediately applicable to private devotional practices.

Performance Literacy in the Home: Encounters with Domestic Art

By the later Middle Ages, material devotion extended beyond the parish doors and into the streets and homes of laypeople. Artisans produced a vast number and range of devotional images for the laity, both in England and on the continent. As Richard Marks notes, works of art were imported into England throughout the late medieval period, “but by the early sixteenth century, books, altarpieces, devotional images, painted cloths, textiles, ceramics, plate and armour were flooding into England on an unprecedented scale.”¹⁹² These images were used in many different environments and for many different purposes. Although some objects eventually made their way into the church through testamentary bequests, many others passed through different hands while remaining in the domestic space. The available private images, no longer exclusively designed for wealthy patrons, included a wide range of objects that varied greatly in cost

¹⁹² Richard Marks, “An Age of Consumption: Art for England c. 1400-1547,” in *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547*, eds. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 15

and quality. Although some items were personally commissioned, such as Books of Hours, others, such as alabaster sculptures or small painted images, were sold off the shelf. This array of images contributed greatly to a late medieval piety that, as Duffy writes, “responded vividly and immediately to the visual.”¹⁹³

I alluded above to an important aspect of performance literacy which is that it offered a layperson the devotional agency to create pious encounters in virtually any setting she desired. The proliferation of devotional objects characteristic of the late Middle Ages has been interpreted as a response to the lay desire for more control over and access to their own spiritual development. Susan Foister notes that the elusive and flexible nature of private medieval devotion makes it difficult to define and reconstruct, but that medieval laypeople often grounded these practices in images: “the availability of a physical image would serve to sharpen and intensify the experience: imagery and images were inseparable from the devotional process.”¹⁹⁴ The popularity of personal, domestic images may reflect a lay desire to bring a more material devotional encounter into the home. Sometimes laypeople temporarily brought images from the church into their homes for specific ritual purposes. In her study of changes in practices surrounding reproduction during the Reformation, Mary E. Fissell lists many different types of objects kept in churches or religious houses that women borrowed during childbirth, such as girdles, necklaces, relics, crosses, rings, and staffs, and she argues that “domestic and devotional worlds intersected in such objects.”¹⁹⁵ Pilgrims’ souvenirs offer another

¹⁹³ Eamon Duffy, “Late Medieval Religion,” in *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547*, eds. Marks and Williamson, 65.

¹⁹⁴ Susan Foister, “Private Devotion,” in *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547*, eds. Marks and Williamson, 334.

¹⁹⁵ Mary E. Fissell, “The Politics of Reproduction in the English Reformation,” *Representations* 87 (Summer 2004): 54.

example of sanctity moving by material means. Pilgrims purchased badges and other souvenirs as proof and mementos of their journey, but also because they believed that these objects had therapeutic powers acquired by touching the relic, shrine, or image they commemorated. The market for such objects grew and developed steadily from the twelfth century onwards, and Brian Spencer notes that at all the major pilgrimage sites “the souvenir content of the pilgrim trade appears to have become preeminent by the fifteenth century and to have been extended to include alternative expressions of commemorative piety, such as religious pictures, statuettes of saints, votive figurines, candles and candleholders, as well as secular and heraldic badges, bells, whistles and other knick-knacks, which had nothing to do with the shrine concerned.”¹⁹⁶ Although these objects were acquired on pilgrimage, they sometimes served broader devotional needs, particularly because they were often relatively inexpensive objects. As Spencer suggests, for many with little to spend on devotional images, “large pilgrim signs or purpose-made panels, triptychs, altar crosses, and free-standing figures, all of pewter, might serve, like the ivory or enamelled equivalents of the rich, as aids to devotion in the home.”¹⁹⁷ Devotional images took many forms and served all levels of the medieval lay population. The materiality of extant objects helps us begin to grasp the elusive quality of lay private devotion and examine it as a material process of bodily engagement.

Wills from York are filled with bequests of rosaries, rings, religiously decorated tapestries and silver plate, crucifixes, and other religious images (often referred to with the simple, but not particularly specific, term “ymaginem”). Foister reminds us that terminology was not consistent among late medieval wills and inventories; thus scholars

¹⁹⁶ Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London: Stationery Office, 1998), 5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

must resort to guesswork when attempting to determine the specific material characteristics of the domestic art in circulation. She writes, “Use of words sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between paintings and sculptures, and it can be hard to decide, from written evidence only, when a painted cloth becomes a picture in the modern sense.”¹⁹⁸ She lists a number of terms used for images that appear in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century inventories including: “costryngs” (a common type of hanging), “hanging paynted,” “pageant” (Foister suggests that it denotes a smaller type of painted hanging), “ymage,” “table” or “tabelet,” and “picture.”¹⁹⁹ The entries that are most useful are those that indicate the subjects represented in the images. But laypeople who owned few religious objects did not need to use this level of specificity in their bequests, nor did those who appraised their estates need to include such details in their inventories. Only in instances when an individual owned a large art collection was specificity usually included by scribes and often only for the practical purpose of differentiating among objects.

In rare cases, a layperson might use location to differentiate among objects or images listed in his or her will. In her 1546 will, Annas Thomson, a York widow, gives a “painted cloth hanging in my hall with one pieta upon it,” “one painted cloth hanging at my bedside having upon it one Image of our Lady,” and “one of the little painted cloths that hang in my bed.”²⁰⁰ But we derive most of our evidence about image location within homes from inventories. Almost all English inventories begin with a standard preface and

¹⁹⁸ Susan Foister, “Paintings in Sixteenth-Century English Inventories,” *Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 938 (May 1981): 274.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 274-5.

²⁰⁰ Annas Thomson, 5 Oct 1546, proved 21 Oct 1546 (D&C Reg. 3 fols. 16r-v): 16r. Original: “paynted clothe hanging in my halle having one pieta upon it”; “one paynted clothe hanging at my bedside having upon it one Image of our Ladie”; and, “one of the lityll paynted clothe that hang in my bed” (transcription mine).

then a note about the amount of cash on hand. They then work their way through the deceased's house, listing the objects found in each room.²⁰¹ The terminology used for rooms includes: "aula," interpreted as a large general purpose room used by family and employees; "camera," which roughly corresponds to a living space for the master and mistress of the house and thus usually includes the bedding, but sometimes includes dining furniture; and, "coquina," or kitchen. Following these rooms, the shop or work rooms, chapel, outhouses, and other spaces appear, when applicable.²⁰² Although some images might become associated with specific rooms—such as painted tapestries in the aula or camera—as Foister notes, medieval inventories suggest that laypeople kept images in all of their rooms.²⁰³

As with wills, the level of detail used to describe images in inventories varies. In addition to painted papers, decorated pillows, rings, and rosaries, the 1446 inventory for Thomas Gryssop, a York chapman, includes fourteen images ("Et de xiiij imago") valued at 7d.²⁰⁴ Painted "hallings," or wall hangings, are particularly common objects found in York inventories, and many of these entries contain descriptions of their subjects. The 1440 inventory for John Collan, a York goldsmith, includes "an old halling with the Trinity three yards long 3d. Another with an image of Saint George and of the blessed Mary 4d.... A tester with an image of the blessed Mary 6d.," all found in the parlour. This inventory also lists "a hanging cloth with an image of the blessed Mary of mercy

²⁰¹ P. M. Stell and Louise Hampson outline the standard format for English medieval inventories in *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese 1350-1500* (University of York, unpublished transcript), 3-7.

²⁰² Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 5-7.

²⁰³ Foister, "Paintings," 278.

²⁰⁴ Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 155. My transcription from original (Thomas Gryssop, 1446, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Dean and Chapter of York, Original Wills, 1383-1499). "Chapman" means either dealer or peddler, which means there is a chance that Gryssop may have sold images.

8d.” in the great camera.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, the 1485 inventory of John Carter, a York tailor, includes discouragingly vague entries under the aula for “A striped halling 1s. 8d. Another painted cloth 6d. Another painted cloth 6d. Another painted cloth 8d. Another painted cloth 6d. Another painted cloth 1s. 4d. Another small painted cloth 3d.”²⁰⁶

Those laypeople wealthy enough to have private chapels often had extensive collections of religious images, and their inventories and wills often contain a large amount of descriptive detail. For instance, the 1468 inventory of Elizabeth Sywardby includes, under her chapel, a large collection of books and images. The books include a missal, a psalter, a Latin *Vita Christi*, and a number of books in English, such as a book called Revelations of St. Bridget, a *Vita Christi*, and another noted as being by Rolle. The images in her chapel include an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Sorrows (valued at 1s. and bequeathed), an image of John the Baptist (valued at 1s. and bequeathed), a painted pax (valued at 3d.), a small painted cloth showing the descent from the cross (valued at 3d.), a small painted cloth with Jesus (valued 2d.), and a painted head of John the Baptist (valued 3d.). Her inventory of jewels includes rosaries, an Agnus Dei, necklaces, and rings. Unfortunately, although Sywardby likely lived in York—she asked to be buried in York at the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Bishophill—because York’s Register of Freemen lists no one by the last name Sywardby we cannot connect her family to a specific craft. But in addition to her aula, camera, chapel, and kitchen, the appraisers also take inventory of a brew house, store room, and granary. This may indicate that she was a widow and maintained a brewing business, a common industry for

²⁰⁵ Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 314-5. For original inventory see, John Collan, 1440, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Dean and Chapter of York, Original Wills, 1383-1499.

²⁰⁶ Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 287. For original inventory see, John Carter, 1485, York Minster Library, Probate Jurisdiction, Inventories, L1(17)6.

medieval women, both married and widowed, to pursue.²⁰⁷ Although we can only guess at her (or her husband's) profession, she clearly dedicated a large amount of money to religious images and objects.

Ownership of religious images and objects was not specific to the laity. The inventories of many members of York's medieval clergy attest to their use of personal images in devotional practice and often contain the most detailed lists of domestic religious art. The 1449 inventory of Thomas Morton, a canon in York, includes a lengthy list of religious images and objects, among them: a tapestry with arms of the Archbishop Bowet of York; another tapestry showing the arms of St. Peter in the middle; a large chest containing many different "towels" of work; an ornamented chasuble made of gold cloth; a frontal and a reredos of stained work for the altar, red and blue in color with an image of the blessed Mary and Saint John; a small table lined with ivory carved with various images; a silver bowl with a base and a lid with an image of Michael; and, a bowl with a lid and an image of the blessed Mary.²⁰⁸ The 1452 inventory of William Duffield, another canon from York, includes: a cross of gold with bones of the saints on

²⁰⁷ For evidence on the role medieval women played in extending the range of household economies, see P. J. P. Goldberg, "Household and the Organisation of Labour in Late Medieval Towns: Some English Evidence," *The Household in Late Medieval Cities Italy and Northwestern Europe Compared: Proceedings of the International Conference, Ghent, 21-22 January*, eds. Myriam Carlier and Tim Soens (Leuven: Garant, 2001), 59-70; P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). For work on women and brewing, see Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); "The Village Ale-Wife: Women and Brewing in Fourteenth-Century England," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 20-36. There is also a chance that Sywardby was a single homeowner. As Sarah Rees Jones argues, "women as homemakers were a significant feature of the later medieval townscape whether they 'owned' or rented their home, and whether they were married or not. Despite a cultural preference for male heirs, families seem to have been anxious to provide homes for female relatives as well. . . . Homes provided security and status and, for some, the means to earn a living. The independent control of that home thus empowered some women. It provided them with a small alternative to economic dependence on a man" (211). See "Women's Influence on the Design of Urban Homes," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, eds. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 190-211.

²⁰⁸ Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 159-70. For original inventory see Thomas Morton, 1449, York Minster Library, Probate Jurisdiction, Inventories, L1(17)44.

the back; a number of pieces decorated with roses; ewers [pitchers with wide spouts] with a Catherine wheel, weighing 15 and a half ounces; a number of chalices and patens that have inscriptions and images noted; various badges, rings, belts, a pendant; and an illuminated psalter and other books. He also bequeaths a covered silver bowl with an image of the Trinity on it.²⁰⁹

Testamentary evidence suggests that some members of the clergy conceptualized performance and personal religious imagery as supporting the same devotional program. On August 2, 1446, William Revetour, a chaplain in York, made his will, to which he added a codicil nine days later. The will was proved on September 3rd of the same year. Revetour's will has received a fair amount of attention from theatre scholars because he bequeaths play texts as well as props for a Corpus Christi pageant. The *Records of Early English Drama* volume devoted to York includes elements of the will directly related to performance, but the will as a whole reveals something about the way in which this chaplain may have considered drama and material objects as components of the same program of religious instruction.²¹⁰

Revetour's will is standard in many ways and replicates the model that I outlined in reference to Bracebrig. The chaplain wishes to be buried in his parish church of St. John the Evangelist at the end of Ousebridge in York. He leaves money to the fabric of this church, as well as to various religious and charitable institutions in the city. Among his bequests we find gifts of money to the four orders of mendicant friars (20s. to be

²⁰⁹ Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 192-223. For original inventory see William Duffield, 1452, York Minster Library, Probate Jurisdiction, Inventories, L1(17)17.

²¹⁰ William Revetour, 2 August 1446, proved 3 September 1446 (BI Reg. 2 fols. 137v-138v). The entries related to Revetour are included in Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 68. Alexandra F. Johnston's article "William Revetour, Chaplain and Clerk of York, Testator," *Leeds Studies in English* 29 (1998): 153-71, contains a Latin transcription of Revetour's will followed by a modern English translation.

divided evenly), the poor in York’s monastic hospitals, the lepers in the suburbs, recluses, various canons and chaplains, the nuns in the house of St. Clement, and the guild of St. Christopher.²¹¹ Near the end of the will Revetour leaves the guild of Corpus Christi “a certain book called the Creed Play with the books and banners belonging to it” [quemdam librum vocatum le Crede Play cum libris & vexillis eidem pertinentibus].²¹² His next bequest is a play about Saint James the Apostle in six “paginis”—either pages or pageants, according to Alexandra F. Johnston—which he gives to the guild of St. Christopher (“Et gilde sancti christofori quemdam ludum de sancto Iacobo Apostolo in sex paginis compilatum”).²¹³ In the codicil, Revetour bequeaths a gilded crown and a girdle with gilded and enameled bosses to the girdlers of York for their play on Corpus Christ (“Item lego zonariis Ciuitatis Ebor ad ludum suum in festo corporis Christi vnam coronam auricallcatam deauratam & vnam zonam cum Boses deauratis & enameld”).²¹⁴ From these entries we can infer that chaplain Revetour not only found religious drama to be an efficacious tool for devotion or instruction or both, but that he found its *performance* efficacious as well. He not only donates dramatic texts, but also performance props—banners, a crown, a girdle. This suggests an interest in the material presentation and performance of these texts.

These entries are useful on their own, but when placed in the context of the entire will they allow us to identify an emphasis on materiality that pervades many of his bequests. Revetour, like many priest and clerics, bequeaths a large collection of religious imagery and objects in his will, including books. He gives Alice Bolton “one book

²¹¹ Revetour, 138r.

²¹² Revetour, 138v; transcription and translation Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 68 (746).

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

treating the Lord's Prayer and the Prick of Conscience in English." Among the other book bequests we find one on the gospels and lives of the saints in English, a small Bible with "interpretation" [interpretione], and a glossed psalter.²¹⁵ Like other testators, he donates vestments to altars, money to the lights before images in chapels, and candles to churches. In addition, Revetour bequeaths a number of personal devotional images. He leaves Katerine Tutbag "an alabaster crucifix" [crucifixum de alabastre], "a large primer with seven pictures" [vnum Primarium largum cum ymaginibus intus septem] to his god-daughter, and to John Bolton "a large Bible roll with images on one side and a Latin table of the Lord's prayer on the reverse" [magnum Rotulum tractatum de Biblia in Latina cum ymaginibus ex vna parte et de Tabula oracionis dominice in latina ex altera parte].²¹⁶ Revetour's bequests clearly indicate his promotion of private lay devotion and, particularly, devotional practices with religious images and objects.

As the wills above demonstrate, in addition to building commemorative memorials within churches, medieval laypeople and clergy left their personal religious objects and images to churches, friends, family, and fellow guild members.²¹⁷ As I concluded about *The Assumption of the Virgin* pageant, the girdle not only serves to trigger the memory of the Virgin in her absence, but, if we assume that the staged devotional responses of the disciples were in some way directed at the object, it also functions as a material extension of the Virgin's body. Medieval York's residents deployed objects in a similar fashion. Some bequests were simple, while others included specific details about how the objects should be used. For instance, in Thomas Wod's

²¹⁵ Revetour, 138r-v. Transcription from Johnston, "William Revetour," 161; translation 169.

²¹⁶ Revetour, 138v. Transcription from Johnston, "William Revetour," 165-7; translation 171.

²¹⁷ For an excellent survey and analysis of the memorials built in parish churches by the medieval residents of York see Barnett, "Memorials and Commemoration in the Parish Churches of Late Medieval York."

1490 will he gives to Trinity church of Kingston upon Hull, the parish church where he is buried, one of his best beds of Arras work,²¹⁸ under the condition that they lay this bed yearly over his grave (in the north aisle of the church) at his Dirige and Masse perpetually and that this same bed be hung yearly in the church on that feast of St. George Martyr “among other honorable beds” and that at other times it remain with his cope of gold in the revestre, the room in the church where vestments were stored.²¹⁹ Sometimes the testator specifies that the object is for remembrance. The 1542 will of Katheryne the Countes of Northumberlande, widow of the Earl of Northumberland, includes a bequest to her daughter of “a gold ring to remember and pray for me.”²²⁰

Many of these bequests are objects that had contact with the testator’s body in some way, such as the many rings, pendants, necklaces, beads (usually interpreted as rosaries), and girdles donated in York wills. The word for girdle, “zonam,” might in some cases be better translated as belt. Either way, these represented objects worn on the body and therefore linked to the layperson’s flesh, and they were bequeathed by and to both men and women.²²¹ For instance, Beatrix, wife of Thomas Santon, a citizen and draper in York, bequeaths to John Haliwell, her clerk and relation, “one small girdle ornamented

²¹⁸ “Bed” is a misleading term because it typically refers to bedding rather than to a bed. A number of bequests use the term “Arras work” to indicate a rich tapestry fabric of a style associated with Arras, France. Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 349; 347.

²¹⁹ Thomas Wod, draper and alderman, Hull, 3 November 1490, proved 25 Nov 1491 (BI Reg. fols. 402v-403v): 403r. Original: “among other worshipfull beddes” (Transcription *TE* 4: 60).

²²⁰ Katheryne the Countes of Northumberlande, widow of the Earl of Northumberland, 14 October 1542, proved 9 November 1542 (BI Reg. 11 fols. 638r-v): 638v. Original: “a rynge of golde to remember and pray for me” (Transcription *TE* 4: 168).

²²¹ In my survey, I found mention of girdles in the following wills: Robert Sauvage (1391); Beatrix Santon (1405); Katherine de Craven (1418); John Aldstanmore (1434); William Revetour (1446); Agnes Mannell (1482); Robert Pynkne (1489); John Colby (1494); Agnes Maners (1494); Dame Jane Chaumerleyn (1502); Robert Lassals (1508); Richard Burell (1509); Alison Clark (1509); Alison Sothill (1509); Alice Blackaye (1525).

with silver letters.”²²² The fact that a large number of bequests were objects worn on the body suggests that these donations function in a similar memorializing way as does the girdle in *The Assumption* play. Particularly in the case of expensive objects that layperson wore or took with them to church on a regular basis—decorative crucifixes and religious jewelry, unusually ornate rosaries, Books of Hours—other people in the parish community may have come to associate these devotional objects with the people to whom they had previously belonged.²²³ I would also assert that an object’s legacy of ownership was likely passed down along with the object itself, thereby perpetuating these personal associations during the generations that followed. As “fleshy” objects—devotional “props”—this paraphernalia may have functioned as extensions of their owners and established not just visual, associative memorials, but material, bodily ones as well. As in performance, materiality extends the mnemonic into synaesthesia.

Medieval testators also commonly donated clothing and jewelry to religious images. A common practice in the Middle Ages was to dress images in layers of clothes and accoutrements—part of the devotional materiality the *Ymagis* author finds so distasteful. For example, in addition to giving rings to friends and family, Katherine de Craven, a York widow, bequeaths,

To adorn the image of Our Lady in the Minster of St. Peter, York, my best girdle and one set of best beads with gold necklace, and to St. John of Bridlington another girdle of the next best. Also to the shrine of St. William of York, a girdle of black and gold, and to St. Richard Scrope a small striped gold girdle. Also I bequeath to adorn the image of

²²² Beatrix, wife of Thomas Santon, citizen and draper, York, 10 March 1405, proved 15 Mar 1405 (BI Reg. 3 fols. 246r-v): 246v. Original: “1 parvem zonam ornatam cum litteris argenteis” (Transcription and translation mine).

²²³ See the quotation about lay devotion included in my Introduction (page 11) in which an Italian observer notes the rosaries and books women carry with them as they say their prayers and attend daily Mass.

Our Lady in the chapel of St. Mary's abbey, near York, one
set of amber beads with a gold clasp.²²⁴

A number of testators in York similarly leave personal objects associated with their bodies to images in the Minster or parish churches, or to individual saints' shrines or relics. The visual layering these donations created replicated performance viewing practices. During the performance of the cycle, spectators not only saw the biblical story, but they also saw the contemporary allusions made throughout the pageants, as well as the actors, the characters they played in the pageant, the role/s they had in the community (civic offices, guild associations), the set design on the carts, and the civic background against which these were placed. Throughout each pageant, spectators navigated these multiple visual layers, while also engaging them as both entertainment and devotion. Over the course of the cycle, or even a single pageant, by moving different veils across the performance lens, viewers slipped into and out of embodied viewing positions (I am a witness at the crucifixion; I am before an image of the crucifixion; I am before a dramatic version of the crucifixion; I am a spectator at a play; I am standing on my street; I am a citizen of York; I am a member of the Christian community). Performance suggested that just as various social and sacred identities remained present simultaneously in the visual devotional field during the pageant performances, by placing an object associated with his/her identity onto a religious statue, the donor could constitute one of the layers coalesced within the image and be remembered in the pious practices that occurred before the image.

²²⁴ Original will Katherine de Craven, 20 July 1418, proved 28 Jan 1419 (BI Reg. 3 fols. 613r-v): 613v; transcription and translation Cooke 1913: 314-317. Cooke's transcription of the Latin is: "Item lego ad orantum ymaginis de domina in Monasterio Sci Petri Ebor optimam zonam meam & 1 par precum optim' cum monili aurea, et Sco Johi de Bridlyngton aliam zonam tunc meliorem. Item lego ad feretrum Sci Willi Ebor unam zonam nigram deauratam et Sco Rico Scrope zonam parvam striatam deauratam. Item lego ad ornatum ymaginis de domina in capella Abbathie beate Marie iuxta Ebor I par preculum de l'aumb cum firmaculo aureo."

Like the Virgin's girdle, these objects operated as extensions of the owners. Clothes, rings, rosaries, and girdles—like the stained glass donor window—not only placed the owner's identity within a visual devotional field, but they also placed testators physically at the devotional site. The *Assumption* pageant implies that the Virgin's fleshiness rubs off onto the girdle, an object, which in her absence remains on earth as an extension of her bodily presence. Thus, the cycle, in some ways, validates the Virgin's "fleshiness" and associates it with material devotional practices. Placing material extensions of laypeople onto religious images not only perpetually placed donors in religious spaces such as parish churches, but may also have validated both the bodies to which these objects referred and, perhaps, those bodies that gazed upon them. As Caroline Bynum asserts, "The attitudes and practices of religious specialists in the late Middle Ages, and the reverence they won from a wide spectrum of the population, assumed the flesh to be the instrument of salvation....[T]he cultivation of bodily experience as a place for encounter with meaning, a locus of redemption, is not 'flight from' the body."²²⁵ Laypeople could sanctify, but never escape their bodies; nor would they wish to. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, pageants like the *Harrowing of Hell* and *The Last Judgement* show the dead recovering their earthly flesh at the end of time. The notion that the flesh that you inhabit on earth is the same one that accompanies you to the final judgment is confirmed in a variety of theological texts.²²⁶ Material devotional objects, like the material space of the church itself, suggest that the laity were attempting to foreground their bodies in devotional experience in order to create more deeply embodied viewing experiences of the type generated by performance. This

²²⁵ Caroline Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (August 1995): 15.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-27.

experience may also have functioned to sacralize the viewer's flesh—the same flesh that would return on Judgment Day.

The parish church constituted a space that the laity could control by endowing chantries, establishing chapels, donating large images (glass windows and sculpture) or smaller objects (rings and rosaries). As Katherine French has noted, the lay congregation could exert influence over the liturgy by changing the interior design of the church and, thus, its processional patterns.²²⁷ Color sequences for vestments and altar apparel were virtually nonexistent in the medieval church and, as Claire Cross and P. S. Barnwell point out, “the usual procedure was to employ the best or newest vestments and altar hangings available, regardless of colour, for the most important feasts of the church and then to use worn or older vestments for the lesser ferial, or ordinary, days.”²²⁸ They also note that “it seems that no great effort was made to match vestments with altar hangings.”²²⁹ Therefore, those who had great means could exert considerable influence over the look, feel, and experience of their parish space for those who entered and worshiped within it. Those with lesser means could use candles and torches to manipulate the liturgical experience. Although the laity are often described and analyzed as “passive” spectators at the liturgy, I have demonstrated that the parish church's material space offered them a number of opportunities to construct and cultivate the kind of embodied viewing experience that I would characterize as active and participatory.

²²⁷ French, *People of the Parish*, 155.

²²⁸ Cross and Barnwell, “The Mass in its Urban Setting,” 40.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

The “Everyday Body” in the Medieval Home

I interpret not only the parish church, but also the home as a devotional environment over which the layperson exerted influence by using material objects. The home offers us an opportunity to explore the intersections between devotional ways of seeing in performance and in the everyday. Personal religious images and objects functioned in a number of different ways for York’s laity—as symbols of status, as devotional reminders, as repositories of wealth, as extensions of familial identity. As I did for the parish church, I will examine how these objects inspired ways of seeing that evoke the viewing experience of laypeople in performance. I focus on two specific devotional objects used in the home—alabaster sculptures and a Book of Hours—which suggest ways that performance literacy may have influenced object-centered lay devotional practices.

John Schofield identifies three spheres of activity that developed within the medieval urban house—commercial, domestic, and service.²³⁰ And, yet, as Sarah Rees Jones points out,

the separation of working from living space was subtle and gradated because some productive work, such as carding and spinning, was clearly conducted in the living space of the main house, and inventories from craftsmen’s houses suggest that a wide variety of working implements and stores might be left in rooms described as parlors or chambers.... [T]his spatial segregation facilitated a conceptual separation not so much between domestic and working accommodation, as between the kind of work that could safely and quietly be done in the house as part of

²³⁰ John Schofield, “Urban Housing in England, 1400-1600,” in *The Age of Transition: The Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600*, eds. David Gaimster and Paul Stamper (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), 140-1. For work on developing a methodology and theory of the late medieval house and household in England, see Jane Grenville, “Houses and Households in Late Medieval England: An Archaeological Perspective,” in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 309-28.

domestic life and the heavy, noisy, and dangerous work that could not.²³¹

In addition, Jeremy Goldberg reminds us that there could be more than one industry associated with a household and that wives may occasionally have managed businesses independently from their husbands. He notes that this was particularly the case in households where the husband was involved in building crafts, usually performed on-site rather than in a workshop located within the home. He therefore argues that,

we must understand households as organic units for the purposes of the organisation of labour. The perception that households were composed of heads and dependents, who necessarily engaged in the same work activities as that of the head, is in part a product of reading poll tax returns and guild ordinances as mirrors of social practice.²³²

The domestic space's fluidity was critical to how it functioned for families. The home was a space of negotiation, in which multiple identities and associations co-existed.

But, as Felicity Riddy notes, the medieval household was also associated with particular forms of intimacy. She writes,

Intimacy is regarded by some historians...as a marker of modernity. This chronology does not seem to be borne out by the medieval meanings of the word 'homly,' the native equivalent of domestic, which suggest that the home, whether or not it was also a workplace or a shop, was understood as an intimate sphere in which private identities were formed. The meanings of 'homly' cluster round ideas of familiarity, closeness, affection, privacy, intimacy, and everydayness.²³³

Riddy examines instances of "homly" language in texts such as *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* to demonstrate

²³¹ Rees Jones, "Women's Influence," 192.

²³² Goldberg, "Household and the Organisation of Labour," 69.

²³³ Felicity Riddy, "Looking Closely: Authority and Intimacy in the Late Medieval Urban Home," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, eds. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 217.

that the term was “part of the complex of love, closeness, and domestic living.”²³⁴ She identifies the kinds of everyday familiarities associated with the home and argues that in late medieval English texts “looking after ‘the concerns of the household’ means servicing the demands of the body: eating, sleeping, washing, getting dressed and undressed, preparing the food and clearing it away; raising the children; tending the sick and the dying.”²³⁵ She concludes that “home understood the body as needy, vulnerable, hungry, cold, growing up and growing old, and endlessly leaky” and coins the term “the everyday body” to describe “the body understood in this way—the body in the home.”²³⁶ This definition of the body in the home has clear connections with how the laity may have drawn upon performance literacy in their domestic devotional practices.

Riddy’s “everyday body” is exactly the kind of body most accessible to performance literacy—a body aware of its flesh and its accompanying fleshy desires. For the clergy, this “everyday body” may have seemed trapped in its fleshiness and thus in need of the means to transcend that materiality. Augustine and the author of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* imply as much. But for the layperson, this body connected her to a Joseph who complained about the broken roof, to a Virgin who used a girdle, to a savior who suffered and died on a cross. This “everyday body” could be sacralized by associating craft with sacred events. It was sacralized through the performance of a cycle that oriented meaning in relation to it. So, too, this body, and the mundane activities and spaces with which it was associated, could be sacralized via devotional objects that foregrounded the flesh in visual piety. Performance advocates a visual piety oriented in terms of the body, but not trapped or fixed in its fleshiness. Objects that functioned

²³⁴ Ibid., 218.

²³⁵ Ibid., 222.

²³⁶ Ibid.

through a similar material aesthetic could likewise validate the “everyday body” through visual piety. This very characteristic may have contributed to their popularity among the laity.²³⁷

Alabasters

Although alabaster was used for many different kinds of sculptures, including altarpieces and tombs, by the late medieval period a large market had developed in small mass-produced panels carved in high relief. These were usually stocked ready for sale, rather than made to order, and sold in private shops or at market.²³⁸ Evidence situates the production of alabaster carvings in England simultaneously with performance of the York cycle, beginning as early as 1340 and ending around 1540.²³⁹ Although Nottingham appears to have been the major center of alabaster production in England, there are references to carvers in a number of cities, including York, and specific evidence in the Register of Freemen of York shows eight alabastermen and two “marblers,” who may have worked alabaster as well, active in the city from 1456 to 1525.²⁴⁰

Alabasters were reasonably priced, attractive, and colorful, qualities that stimulated great demand for them throughout England and abroad. In addition, a significant number of them were kept as private devotional images in the home. Foister indicates that late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century inventories “reflect the

²³⁷ For work on the development of an idea of “one’s own body” and its relationship to sacrality, see Alain Boureau, “The Sacrality of One’s Own Body in the Middle Ages,” *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 5-17.

²³⁸ W. L. Hildburgh, “Folk-life Recorded in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings,” *Folklore: Transactions of the Folk-lore Society* 60, no. 2 (1949): 252

²³⁹ Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters: With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), 13-17

²⁴⁰ F. Collins, ed., *Register of the Freemen of the City of York from the City Records, 1272-1558* (London: Surtees Society, 1896), 177; 183; 185; 187; 194; 213; 246.

proliferation of English alabaster sculpture.”²⁴¹ My survey of wills uncovered a significant number of alabaster bequests, indicating that these sculptures played a prominent role in the city’s late medieval visual culture.²⁴² Richard Marks notes that alabaster carvers “produced work for the cheaper end of the market,” and records from the borough of Nottingham, as well as York probate evidence, reveal that individual panels could cost as little as one or two shillings.²⁴³ Panels kept in the home were often placed in wooden housings with two doors that could be opened and closed. Some of the citizens of York who produced, performed in, and attended the cycle, surely purchased these alabasters. In the York wills that I reviewed, those people who donated alabasters to individuals or institutions are identified as: merchant, chapman, priest, mariner, chaplain, prebentery, baker, wolman, widow, glover, and knight. Ownership of these images by artisans and merchants makes alabasters an excellent focus for a study of the pious practices York’s laypeople constructed for themselves in relation to performance.

Carved alabasters and York’s cycle of plays operated under similar principles of visual composition, to borrow Pamela Sheingorn’s phrase.²⁴⁴ Both genres concentrate on

²⁴¹ Foister, “Paintings,” 275.

²⁴² The bequests of alabasters in the wills I reviewed included those of John de Whettlay (1390), Nicolai de Schirburn (1392), Matilde Benetson (1392), Isabella Hamerton (1432), John Raventhorp (1432), Alice Grymmesby (1440), William Revetour (1446), John Clerke (1449), Cecilia Overdo (1453), Robert Est (1467), John Fell (1506), and Sir John Gilliot (1509). Significantly, Revetour, a chaplain, also bequeathed play texts and props. He left the Creed play to the Fraternity of Corpus Christi and the play of Saint James the Apostle to the Saint Christopher guild. Unfortunately, neither of these plays has survived. He also bequeathed to the Girdlers of York a gold crown and a decorated girdle “for their play in the Corpus Christi feast” (ad ludum suum in festo Corporis Christi) (BI Reg. 2, fols. 137v-138v).

²⁴³ Marks, “Age of Consumption,” 22. In the *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, Volume 3, ed. S. G. Johnson (London and Nottingham: Bernard Quaritch and Thomas Forman and Sons, 1885) a number of cases that appear to involve alabasters are cited. An April 1492 action for the detinue of household goods prices a head of Saint John the Baptist at 5 shillings (22). A January 1500 Appraisalment of goods lists six heads of Saint John the Baptist as worth 8 pennies (74). The 1402 probate inventory of John de Scardeburgh lists an image of Mary Magdalene in alabaster as worth 2 shillings. See Stell and Hampson, *Probate Inventories*, 53.

²⁴⁴ In “The Visual Language of Drama: Principles of Composition,” Sheingorn specifies a number of visual principles that she identifies in both medieval art and drama, including framing, juxtaposition, and recapitulation.

similar themes in Christian history. Although covering a range of sacred subjects, both primarily focused on the Passion of Christ and the Joys of the Virgin. Both likely followed visual conventions in style and iconography in order to present compressed images of these events in small, unrealistic spaces. Like many media, alabasters often offer the viewer a position from which she can engage the represented action as a visual witness. This is the case with pieces originally installed in churches, as well as those used in homes. For instance, a fifteenth-century Ascension panel offers the lay viewer the best possible position from which to view the sacred moment (Figure 3). The viewer is placed directly in front of Christ, thus able to see all characters in the alabaster easily. As with York's *Ascension* pageant and the Ascension roof boss in the Minster, I would identify sacred witnessing as this alabaster panel's theme. The orientation of the figures in the panel consciously directs the viewer's gaze up to the feet of Christ, thus situating the user as a member of the community present at the sacred event. Like other visual media, alabaster panels offered their owners devotional encounters defined by sacred witnessing.²⁴⁵

The Ascension alabaster shows the Virgin and the apostles clustered around a platform, looking up at the feet of Jesus, the only part of his ascending body still visible. Two angels are shown to the left and right of his feet, swinging censers. The Virgin and St. John the Evangelist stand on either side of the platform, facing one another. An apostle and St. Philip stand behind the Virgin, while two apostles stand behind St. John. In the front, SS. Peter and Andrew kneel facing one another. St. James the Great and an

²⁴⁵ I recognize that we cannot suggest an "ideal" position for the alabaster viewer that remained consistent for every interaction with the piece. The viewer may have stood in various locations with respect to an image placed in the home. The perspective of the performance viewer was variable in much the same way, and therefore both genres offered laypeople opportunities to construct conscious viewing positions for themselves before sacred images.

apostle kneel behind Peter. SS. Jude and Simon kneel behind Andrew. Visually, it is easy, and even enticing, to see the image in the alabaster as duplicating the staging of the York cycle's *Ascension* pageant. All the characters in the pageant appear in the alabaster: Peter, Andrew, James the Great, John, the Virgin, Jesus, and the two angels. In the majority of *Ascension* alabasters, as in the example I have selected, John and the Virgin appear in the foregrounded center of the image, facing one another. In York's play these two characters speak to one another as Jesus is ascending, so it would make sense in performance to place them facing one other in a central spot on the pageant wagon. It would also make visual sense to have all speaking actors arranged in the center of the stage, with non-speaking actors placed on the sides. A central raised platform, like the one depicted in the alabaster, also seems like an ideal place for Jesus to stand while he delivers his lengthy monologue before ascending. He might then be raised by ropes around his shoulders into the stage sky painted above or lifted by the platform on which he is standing.²⁴⁶ It is not my intention to prove that the staged image replicated the alabaster image, or vice versa, but in order to understand how a lay person imagined this event, we must recognize which images were in popular circulation. For the lay person who saw this alabaster daily, it might be easy to ignore the platform lifting Christ and see instead the familiar *Ascension*, sans machinery. In the same way, a live and dynamic *Ascension*, dramatically enacted each year, might embellish the everyday alabaster with a similar "liveness."

²⁴⁶ The 1433 inventory for *The Last Judgement* describes the raising machinery as, "A brandreth of Iren þat god sall sitte vpon when he sall sty vppe to heuen With iiij rapes at iiij corners" (Johnston and Rogerson, *York*, 55). Something similar may have been used in the *Ascension* pageant, as well as in the *Assumption of the Virgin* pageant.

The Ascension panel focuses the viewer on a moment of live action—Christ’s feet are just leaving the frame as all the spectators look up. Many alabaster images similarly depict moments of “activation.” In a Harrowing of Hell carving, Jesus grasps the wrist of Adam and strides forward, leading the souls from the Hellmouth. Carvings of the Resurrection often show Christ stepping out of the tomb, his foot pressing down hard on the shoulder of a sleeping soldier.²⁴⁷ An extremely active Betrayal carving compresses many actions into a single moment—a standard medieval visual technique—but it is still remarkable how many instances of holding, striking, stepping, and grabbing this image contains (Figure 4). These alabasters distill a sacred story down to its most important or significant moment. The panels present this moment, often the climax of the story, as a pause in the action. Like religious performance, these alabasters allow viewers to witness enlivened sacred moments.

There are also alabaster examples in which the user’s position of visual witness is maintained but the moments represented seem largely static and therefore appear less like pauses in a performance. The head of John the Baptist was the most popular alabaster image kept in the home, as is clear from the number of wills in which it is mentioned.²⁴⁸ Most of the ninety-seven extant examples of the severed head of John the Baptist follow the same general pattern that is found in Figure 5.²⁴⁹ A large image of John’s head appears in the panel’s center, usually on a dish or platter, with his soul in human form

²⁴⁷ For analysis of this image in medieval art and drama, see Sheingorn, “Moments of Resurrection,” 111-29.

²⁴⁸ According to Cheetham, the first reference to a Saint John Head alabaster appears in the May 15, 1432 will of Isabella Hamerton, the widow of a merchant and chapman (BI Reg. 3 fols. 345v-346v). She bequeaths a number of images. She gives John Branthwate, a chaplain, a number of items and among them are “unum lapidem alabastrī, secundum formam capitis Sancti Johannis Baptistae” (346v, my transcription). Other bequests of John Heads appear in the wills of Alice Grymmesby (1440), John Greyn (1524), John Fell (1506), Johanne Holme (1488), and Mawde Shawe (1532).

²⁴⁹ Images of additional Head of John the Baptist alabaster panels are reproduced in Cheetham’s 1984 catalogue, numbers 243-256.

pictured above it. The soul is sometimes held in a cloth by two angels, as in Figure 5, but in other examples it appears as a naked figure kneeling in a mandorla. An image of Christ appears below John's head. In early alabasters Christ is represented by the saint's emblem, the Agnus Dei, while in later examples Christ himself appears as the Man of Sorrows. Almost every John the Baptist alabaster shows St. Peter standing to John's right and St. Thomas Becket to his left. St. Peter was the patron saint of York, so his inclusion in these alabasters strengthens the local connection. Cheetham notes that although the figure to the left is often identified as Thomas Becket, he could also be St. William of York (archbishop of York from 1143-54).²⁵⁰

This image offers an ideal position for contemplation of John's face, immediately after decollation and at one of the moments for which he is best remembered. André Vauchez points out that the face of a saint was considered a reflection of his virtue and that contemplation of that face was thought to be enough to prompt conversion.²⁵¹ The image provides a private opportunity for the user to meditate on John's death and, perhaps, to even imagine him or herself as the person to whom John's head was handed. The angels at the top look out at the viewer, thus reinforcing her inclusion in the scene. But although this image reproduces a position of witness for the viewer, it does not interact with performance images in the same representational way that I identified with the Ascension piece. And yet, the performance representation of John may suggest the specific characteristic that made this image of the saint a highly popular one for domestic use.

²⁵⁰ Francis Cheetham, *Medieval English Alabaster Carvings in the Castle Museum of Nottingham* (Nottingham: Art Galleries and Museums Committee, 1962), 49.

²⁵¹ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 435

John the Baptist appears in York's baptism play. This pageant includes only four characters: John, Jesus, and two angels. It opens with John speaking to God, but as the action continues, John begins preaching to the play's audience. He announces that the Savior who comes will bring baptism by fire and spirit, and reminds listeners that if they live a clean and sinless life God will dwell in them. The play thus conflates the medieval audience with the crowd that first heard John's words. Next, an angel appears and tells John that Jesus will soon arrive and that John must baptize him. John expresses doubt and fear that he is not "able to fulfill this deed certainly" (21.60-1). The angel tells him to be obedient, but also warns him that when he baptizes Christ the heavens will open and the "holy ghost shall be sent down" (21.67).²⁵² John continues to struggle with his own role in the incident. After Jesus enters, John asks that he be baptized instead, explaining that since a rich man would not beg at the door of a poor man, it is not right for Jesus to come to him for a blessing. Jesus replies that righteousness is not only "fulfilled in word but also in deed" (21.130).²⁵³ John finally agrees, but is still timorous about physically touching the divine—whether Christ or the Holy Spirit. He says that he trembles and asks for God's help in this "werk" (21.147). After baptizing Jesus, who then announces that all who are baptized and believe will "come to blisse" (21.163), John appears confident and promises to spread this message of baptism and salvation for the rest of his life.

It is clear that the alabaster and dramatic images of John the Baptist interact differently than do the Ascension images. Although the alabaster and play do not imagine the same moment in John's life, as part of a common visual culture these images existed in conversation. The pageant eventually presents Christ's baptism, but this action

²⁵² Original: "abill to fullfill þis dede certayne"; "holy gost schalle doune be sente."

²⁵³ Original: "fullfillid in worde but also in dede."

constitutes a relatively small part of the play. As in *The Ascension*, human witnessing dominates the play. John, characterized as both humble and courageous, expresses confusion, struggles to understand what he hears, and shows fear when called by God. But by the play's end, John proves to be an exemplum of proper witness and service to God.

Henk Van Os argues that art of devotion does not convey theological ideas or didactic intention, but instead reveals “what the pious patron had learned to regard as the most important moments of God’s redemptive relationship with him.”²⁵⁴ The alabaster and dramatic images of John the Baptist highlight John’s humanity, and I contend that it was this characteristic which the laity found particularly efficacious in their personal devotions. The pageant not only represents John’s humanity—particularly his struggle to control his very human (fleshy) emotions—but, like the other pageants, it places the spectator in a bodily relationship with John and therefore allows her to generate devotional meaning through that physical similarity. John’s struggle becomes the spectator’s own struggle, vicariously experienced through the actor. By focusing on John’s humanness, the pageant teaches the spectator that she—like the saint—should resist fear’s attempt to overpower faith.

The alabaster also makes John’s humanity the devotional focus, not only in its representational choices, but also through its materiality. Like the windows in All Saints North Street, the unique quality of alabaster sculpture is not captured in photographs and only becomes apparent in a live encounter, where it invites an embodied viewing experience similar to what I identified in live performance. Alabaster images combine color and dimensionality in a strikingly “live” way. In the John’s head panel, the angels

²⁵⁴ Van Os, *Art of Devotion*, 12.

at the top extend toward the viewer, necks thrust out and tense, holding John's spirit almost two inches out from the frame. At the bottom, Christ the Man of Sorrows also leans approximately two inches out and forward, toward the viewer. Alabasters offer a three-quarter image that creates an aesthetic of live movement. Carved in high relief, the figures emerge from the background and seem to move toward the viewer. The paint is still evident in enough examples to give us a sense of their mimetic brightness. As I have noted, York's parish churches and Minster overflowed with medieval images, and the bright color of alabaster altarpieces would have been just one component of the kaleidoscope that the laity encountered in these spaces. But when the lay user opened this panel's wooden housing in her home, this color would have activated the image, accentuating both its materiality and the viewer's physical presence before it.

I would argue that the composition and materiality of these images—even when they show relatively static scenes—generated an experience of embodied witnessing similar to the kind offered during performance. Rather than suggesting depth through receding planes, alabaster panels present an extreme form of high relief sculpture that moves into the spectator's space. In Figure 5, almost the entire bodies of the angels at the top of John's head are visible as they reach out to the viewer—meaning the sculpture's form extends out almost fully from the background—and the small wooden box frames only accentuate this quality. The three-quarter feature of alabaster carving not only creates a perceptual quality of live movement, but it also allows the image to enter and claim the viewer's space. The panel fixes the viewer as a bodied witness by drawing a phenomenological connection between the material presence of the spectator and the dimensional materiality of the sculpture. The image's materiality, like the actor's body in

performance, foregrounds the viewer's body and, thus, defines the devotional viewing that takes place before it as an encounter between live bodies. The alabaster space is "bodied" and invites the viewer to see its devotional meaning with her material body. In the case of John, this means thinking about his humanness and how he, like the viewer, struggled with fleshy emotions. These emotions are not deemed wholly inappropriate, but reinterpreted as integral parts of an individual's personal salvation history. By encouraging laypeople to access their bodies in devotional seeing, in a way similar to what I identified in performance viewing, alabasters forged connections between sacred images and the "everyday body" of the home.

Both alabaster carvings and the cycle performance could also serve to layer secular space with devotional meanings and associations. I have already established different ways that the cycle performance inscribed meaning onto the city space through ritual and action. All performances transform space, but as I have demonstrated, the annual cycle sacralized the civic space through performance. Religious performances did not create sacred space simply by presenting religious imagery in front of homes and businesses; instead, performances placed the actor's physical presence *within* the city space and thereby engaged the materiality of the city in a lived encounter. As Simon Shepherd asserts, "senses of rhythm and space have bodily impact on audiences, and...such impact is part of the mechanism whereby theatre, through the theatricalised body, engages with its cultural context."²⁵⁵ The cycle performance does not simply represent civic space as a devotional site, but it instead shows bodies engaging civic space devotionally. Spectators encounter the space as a pious practice, and this experience remains embedded in their bodies.

²⁵⁵ Shepherd, *Theatre*, 76.

Domestic alabasters may also have participated in sacralizing space. As I mentioned in the Introduction, a craftsman may have chosen to place an alabaster image in his home that was related to his guild's pageant in order to perpetuate on a more daily basis the sacred association reinforced in the annual performance. This placement might also function to remind the "everyday body" at work of its continuing sacred value. But the way in which the materiality of these pieces physically engaged domestic space may also have validated the home as a devotional site. In his study of contemporary popular religious art, Morgan notes, "material culture of religion is widely understood to sacralize space, to delineate in spatial parameters the site or point at which the holy is manifested and made to communicate to believers the crucial signifiers of their identity as believers. The sacred is therefore experienced as invested in a place."²⁵⁶ Alabasters were different from smaller pieces of devotional art owned by the wealthy, such as ivory diptychs, that could easily travel with their owners.²⁵⁷ Alabasters were too unwieldy to move frequently and would likely have found a permanent location in the home and have become associated with that space. Private ritual or prayer before alabasters may have marked the home as "holy." But the materiality of these sculptures also created a visual effect of moving into and thus embodying the space surrounding them. In this way, like actors, these images physically engaged the space as a pious practice and validated it as a devotional site. In doing so, these images also validated the activities taking place within that home. Alabasters forged connections with professional and private spaces, and the bodies that inhabited them in both work and leisure, and thus sacralized the different aspects of life in which laypeople engaged their "everyday bodies." These images

²⁵⁶ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 182.

²⁵⁷ One such diptych is only 20.3 X 9.5 cm (Van Os, 11, Plate 1), while the Ascension alabaster I have described is 49.2 X 34 cm.

generated multiple layers of meaning specifically because they functioned in an active relationship with the physical bodies and material spaces surrounding them.

Books of Hours

Devotional books, particularly Books of Hours, invite us to consider lay devotion as a material practice. The Book of Hours came into use in England in the late thirteenth century and functioned as a prayer book for the laity. As Jeremy Goldberg notes in his study of lay book ownership, testamentary evidence reveals that such books, “works specifically designed for lay use and easily the most numerous of service or devotional books in lay hands, became increasingly popular as the fifteenth century wore on” and that they “represent the only books regularly noted in the wills of artisans.”²⁵⁸ His survey of registered wills from York between 1321 and 1500 reveals that Books of Hours accounted for a high proportion of all texts mentioned.²⁵⁹ Less complex versions of breviaries and psalters, these books are organized around the hours of the Virgin and usually begin with a calendar of saints’ and feast days, then include prayers to the Virgin and saints, the seven Penitential psalms, the Office of the Dead, and other liturgical offices.²⁶⁰ Certain prayers, such as those said at the Elevation of the Host, are often in the vernacular. Although many follow this model, until they were printed Books of Hours were not standardized, and owners often personalized them in any number of ways based upon individual desires. For this reason, although laypeople used them in public spaces,

²⁵⁸ Goldberg, “Lay Book Ownership,” 185.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁶⁰ The *Horae Eboracenses* offers a model for the medieval Book of Hours based upon the York Use. See *Horae Eboracenses: The Prymer or Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, According to the Use of the Illustrious Church of York, with other devotions as they were used by the lay-folk in the Northern Province in the XVth and XVIth centuries*, ed. C. Wordsworth (Durham: Surtees Society, 1920)

such as parish churches, individual needs informed their functions. Books of Hours were devotional objects over which laypeople exercised a degree of control.

Mark Amsler employs the term “affective literacy” to describe “ways we develop emotional, somatic, activity-based relationships with texts as part of our reading experiences.”²⁶¹ He argues that “gestures of reading, and representations of gestures, reveal some of the somatic interplay between medieval readers and texts, how reading practices maintained and transgressed the borders of bodies and texts.”²⁶² Primarily concerned with gestures toward texts, such as kissing, marking, or voicing when reading, Amsler suggests that these activities could blur distinctions between orthodox and heterodox literacies. In this context, Amsler describes how the material page was assimilated into the reading situation, forming “the ‘hinge of reading’ linking reader and text,” and he suggests that the ways in which medieval “readers” manipulated a book’s material objectness—such as by holding it, skipping through it, marking it—constituted “strategies of medieval literate technology.”²⁶³ These physical reactions are performative, but I would argue that a book’s materiality not only prompts physical reactions, but could also make the viewing of that object an embodied experience. By foregrounding a book’s material aspects, its owner could physically interact with that book without even having to touch the pages.

Two surviving Books of Hours are generally associated with medieval York. The first, the Bolton Hours (York Minster Library MS Additional 2), usually dated to the

²⁶¹ Mark Amsler, “Affective Literacy: Gestures of Reading in the Later Middle Ages,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001): 83.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 84; 96.

early fifteenth century, is the more widely known and studied of the two.²⁶⁴ A small book of 210 folios, the Bolton Hours includes forty-seven full-page illuminations, twelve historiated initials, a number of other images, and elements that indicate the individualized nature of its devotional project, such as images of Saint William of York and Richard Scrope. If I wished to compare dramatic and painted representations, the illuminations in this book would offer me a number of interesting opportunities for such an analysis, since many of these images present biblical or apocryphal moments that were also dramatized in the cycle. These include soldiers apprehending Christ (34v), the Maries mourning Christ's death (35r), the Annunciation (35v), the Nativity (36r), Christ's Resurrection (36v), and his Ascension (37r), which, as in alabasters, represents the event in mid-action with Christ's feet at the top of the page. The most interesting image related to the cycle is the final illumination in the book. A full-page image, titled at bottom "Last Judgm^t at domestdai," appears on folio 208r. The image shows Jesus displaying his five wounds, with two angels on either side heralding him. Below are two groups of naked figures, one group filing into the church and the other walking into a Hellmouth. As with the Ascension alabaster, it is enticing to imagine this illumination as closely related visually to the final pageant in York's cycle. Although it might be possible to find overlap between details in this image and the pageant's 1433 inventory, I find it more

²⁶⁴ The contents of this book are described in Neil Ker and A. J. Piper, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 787-90 and Kathleen L Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490*, vol 2 (London: H. Miller, 1996), 119-21. For analysis of the function and use of this manuscript, see especially Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg, "How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et. al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 217-36 and Felicity Riddy and Sarah Rees Jones, "The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domesticity, Piety and the Public Sphere," in *Household, Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, eds. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakke and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), forthcoming. The relationship between this book and the York cycle is analyzed in Pamela M. King, "Corpus Christi Plays and the 'Bolton Hours': Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century York," *Medieval English Theatre* 18 (1996): 46-62.

useful to consider these images as expressions of a common devotional program and as evidence that both private texts and public drama participated in the visual dissemination of that program.²⁶⁵

Like alabaster sculptures, Books of Hours offer scholars an opportunity to examine the materiality of visual culture. As is the case with all medieval manuscripts, this book has a devotional materiality that only becomes obvious in a live encounter. The gold edgings of the pages and the gold leaf of the illuminations do not sit on the page like reproduced images in modern books, but impart a three-dimensional quality that moves out to the reader/viewer. The images are painted on parchment sheets, animal skin that has been defleshed, stretched, and scraped smooth. Touching these highly decorated pages communicates a fleshy material presence of both texts and images. But a second book from York, commonly called the Pavement Hours, offers an even more compelling example of devotional materiality, as well as access to the ways that performance spectatorship may have influenced this materiality.

The Pavement Hours (York Minster Library Manuscript XVI.K.6) is dated to about the same period as the Bolton Hours, circa 1420. Larger than the Bolton Hours, it measures 215x162mm, with writing space of approximately 150x108mm.²⁶⁶ Although portable, this was not a pocket-sized book, but a distinctly visible object that, even when

²⁶⁵ Interest in medieval literacy has greatly increased, specifically the study of exactly how literate the laity were in respect to the Latin liturgy and the written vernacular. See particularly the essays in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003). Also, Paul Saenger, "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society," *Viator* 13 (1982): 367-414; G. Caie, "Lay Literacy and the Medieval Bible," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 3, no 1 (2004): 125-144; Kathryn A. Smith, "The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion," *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 72-92; *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication. Papers from the Third Utrecht Symposium on Medieval Literacy, organized by the Pionier Project Verschriftelijking, Utrecht, 7-9 December 2000*, eds. Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

²⁶⁶ Amelia Adams, "Evolution of a Manuscript: Text and Image in the Pavement Hours," (MA thesis, University of York, 2004), 1.

held in the hand, would be noticed by other worshippers. Not nearly as lavish as the Bolton Hours, the Pavement Hours contains thirty-seven pages with border decorations and twenty-nine historiated initials. Like the Bolton manuscript, it also shows evidence of local use in such inclusions as a prayer to Richard Scrope and dedications to the relics of York Minster cathedral and the Church of All Saints, Pavement, in York—notably, the location of the final station in the performance of the cycle plays—contained in its calendar. Additionally, as Amelia Adams notes, the urge for personal adaptation may be evident in the manuscript’s original production, since a number of folios at the end of each gathering were left blank.²⁶⁷ Some of these pages were later filled with texts and prayers, while others remain bare, presumably to accommodate the additions that continued throughout the fifteenth century. In addition to these textual additions, eight images were inserted into the manuscript, most of which are sewn onto the top edges of the folios on which they appear (Figure 6).²⁶⁸ These insertions often cover texts and do not usually relate clearly to the matter over which they are sewn. The Pavement Hours exemplifies the complexity of medieval visual culture, a culture that, as I have suggested, provided a range of opportunities for individuals to create unique devotional practices through material means. I posit that these images operated through performance literacy in a number of ways. Not only did they reproduce the kind of seeing with the body that was central to cycle performance viewing, but they also allowed the book’s reader/viewer

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁶⁸ There are other medieval manuscripts that contain images sewn or pasted onto the pages. For instance, Jeffrey Hamburger describes examples of this devotional practice in relation to Veronica images and pilgrimage badges. He argues that “the [Veronica] images inserted in the margins of missals underscore the Veronica’s claims to concrete physical presence, a presence associated with both the original relic and the consecrated Host” (Hamburger 1998, 332). He cites three specific manuscripts as illustration: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MSS 26; an addition to the Westminster Psalter, London, British Library MS Royal 2. A. XXII; and, London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 209. For descriptions of these manuscripts, see Nigel Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts I-II* (London: Harvey Miller, 1982-88), vol. 1, pages 136-40; vol. 2, pages 49-50 and 101-5

to physically and materially insert herself into the devotional moments of the manuscript, an insertion that mimics live performance viewing.

I use the pronoun “she” throughout this analysis of the Pavement Hours for convenience sake only. I would actually argue that this book likely had multiple simultaneous or consecutive users and that these were likely of both sexes. A similar claim has been asserted in respect to other Books of Hours. For instance, although Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg suggest that the Bolton Hours was commissioned by a mother under the assumption that it would be passed down along her family’s female line over the course of generations, these scholars also suggest that this book may have simultaneously served as a family book with additional social functions.²⁶⁹ When considering the visual piety related to the Pavement Hours’ insertions, we must keep in mind that different readers, other than those who originally inserted these images into the book’s pages, would have been among their users.

The first instances of insertions in the Pavement Hours occur as a cluster (Figure 7). A sixteen-line-high image of Saint Clare is sewn across the top margin of folio 26v, thereby placing it over the final folio of the prayer *Salve plaga lateris* and facing the opening lines of the prayer said at the Elevation of the Host. Inserted between folios 26 and 27 is a large leaf, almost the size of a full folio, which contains an image of SS Anthony, George, and Roche. As Adams notes, this grouping of saints is uncommon and most likely reflected the individual desires of the owner. She indicates that “this sort of image would most likely have been bought from a market, and it is reasonable to assume that on commissioning the purchaser asked for this particular grouping of saints.”²⁷⁰ The

²⁶⁹ Cullum and Goldberg, “How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughter,” 217-36.

²⁷⁰ Adams, “Evolutions,” 39.

third insertion in this cluster is found on folio 27r where a small, three-line-high monogram of Jesus, IHC enclosed in a heart, is sewn in place of the opening letter of the prayer recited at the Elevation of the Host (“Ave jesu Christi, verbum patris, filius virginis, agnus dei, salus mundi, hostia sacra, verbum caro, fons pietatis”). This is the only insertion completely sewn into the manuscript and the only one that appears integrated into the existing design of a page.

This collection of insertions appears at the moment in the liturgy that was most important to the layperson, the Elevation of the Host, suggesting that the owner felt the need to inscribe or mark this moment materially as part of her pious practices. Although, as Adams points out, Saint Clare might have been associated with the Host because she composed a prayer to the five wounds of Christ and was particularly devoted to the veneration of Passion events, the trio of male saints is not obviously related to this liturgical moment.²⁷¹ I suggest that the manuscript’s owner chose to mark this moment in the liturgy materially with an image that she found efficacious in her particular devotional life and thereby restructured the moment as a personal, visual encounter. By doing so, the user emulates in private devotion the focus on the visual that had come to be emphasized in the liturgical service.

Most of the other insertions occur in isolation. The third saint image is of a female saint holding a book and accompanied by a small animal (Figure 8). The subject of this nine-line-high image has not been positively identified, though Adams posits that the animal is a lamb and the saint Agnes. It is sewn into the top of folio 106r and over the prayer to the Name of Jesus, which also appears on folio 84r. The image’s border pattern is different from the manuscript’s other images, and therefore it is likely to have been

²⁷¹ Ibid., 38

purchased loose from a disassembled manuscript.²⁷² The next saint insertion is a sixteen-line image of Saint Christopher carrying the Christ child, which is sewn across the top margin of folio 108v and over the prayer said at daybreak (Figure 9). I propose two possible functions for these insertions, both related to performance viewing practices. I have already discussed the layered viewing practice that performance promotes and how residents of York may have simulated a similar visual layering by donating domestic images to churches and personal objects, such as rings and girdles, to religious statues. Placing images over texts likewise duplicates this common characteristic of late medieval lay devotional viewing, which often required laypeople continually to navigate and hold in their minds multiple levels of meaning during devotional practices. Mary Carruthers's work on medieval memory aids has revealed the sophistication of medieval texts and images, and the many different layers of interpretation that a single text or image might invite users to contemplate simultaneously.²⁷³ By placing images over texts, the owner of the Pavement Hours does not reduce the value of the text or excise it from the devotional encounter; instead, this practice highlights and embellishes the textual moment, echoing the devotional viewing experience learned in performance. The Pavement Hours insertions, by means of which the user can literally lift and lower images and thereby lift and lower ways of devotional seeing, reproduces the layered viewing that the cycle invokes.

²⁷² Ibid., 41

²⁷³ Mary Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Ductus*, or, Moving Through a Composition," in *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, eds. Mark Franko and Annette Richards (Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000); *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory and Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); "The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 881-904.

But, in addition, as with clothing and jewelry donated to religious images, these insertions reveal a desire for a material presence at specific sacred moments. There are images throughout the manuscript that were part of its original construction, but the users and/or owners of the book purposefully placed the insertions at specific textual or liturgical sites. In some cases, these may have functioned as bookmarks or placeholders for important liturgical moments to which the book's users might want to return easily. For instance, the cluster that occurs at the Elevation prayer likely served to mark, and provide quick reference to, that important liturgical moment. In addition, the female saint image's location in the manuscript might indicate the significance of the prayer over which it is sewn. Adams argues that

the repetition of this prayer suggests one of two options: either the prayer was of very great importance and was included twice at the owner's choice, or it was mistakenly repeated as part of a scribal error. In the case of folio 106v [*sic*], it is likely that the owner placed the Agnes image here knowing that the same text appeared earlier in the manuscript. Therefore, covering the text here would not interfere with the use of the text.²⁷⁴

I would amend this conclusion to argue that the prayer's importance is signaled by its reiteration and that the image's placement, rather than suggesting that this second version of the text is somehow unnecessary, marks the prayer for the user so that she can locate it easily. The image does not erase the second copy of the prayer, but instead highlights its value to the user.

The image of Saint Christopher carrying the Christ Child might function similarly. Christopher was a common subject of wall paintings and stained glass, and similar depictions are found in York parish churches, such as All Saints Pavement and

²⁷⁴ Adams, "Evolutions," 41

Holy Trinity Goodramgate. As with the female saint insertion, Adams argues that the different border style suggests that the image was purchased from a vendor. As the protector of travelers, Christopher had particular appeal for merchants involved in seafaring expeditions. If such a merchant used this Book of Hours, he likely felt a special relationship with and need to frequently turn to the prayer that this image marks. But, perhaps more significantly, both of these images materially insert the book's user into these devotional moments. If purchased by or for a female user, the image of the female saint holding a book physically mirrors the reader herself and thereby sews her presence into the book's pages. If another of the manuscript's users was a merchant, the image of Saint Christopher may have functioned to stitch his profession—and therefore himself—into a devotional context. The insertions not only mark specific prayers, but they also thread into them the material presence of the book's owners.

Materiality is located not only in the images themselves but, as with the alabasters, in the physical relationship they construct between image and viewer. As I have indicated, the female saint and Saint Christopher images may reflect the lay owner's desire for perpetual physical presence at specific devotional moments of the liturgy. The cluster of images at the Elevation prayer might function similarly. Inserting images that one can touch, and therefore with which one can interact, immediately highlights the reader's physical, bodied presence and serves as evidence of the owner in the landscape of the devotional book. This relationship is further illustrated by two Passion image insertions that may have been acquired on pilgrimage journeys.

The first is a fifteen-line-high image of the *Arma Christi* sewn along the top margin of folio 44v (Figure 10). The Latin text that accompanies it indicates that this

image functioned as an indulgence token that granted 6755 years off from Purgatory: “who sum euer deuoutely behoildith these armys of criste haith vi^m vii^c lv yer per-.”²⁷⁵

This insertion appears at the Gradual Psalms before the opening of the Psalms of the Passion. As Adams notes, pilgrims often recited the Gradual Psalms while traveling to Jerusalem. This choice of manuscript location, coupled with the fact that writing on the back of the parchment indicates previous use, suggests that the image may have been acquired on pilgrimage. The other Passion image, a narrative scene of Christ before Pilate, is sewn along the top of folio 45r, facing the *Arma Christi* and overlaying the opening folio of the Psalms of the Passion. Like the *Arma Christi*, the back of this image also shows evidence of previous use (Figure 11). I would suggest that due to its placement, it too may have been purchased while on pilgrimage, either at the same time as the *Arma Christi* image or during a different journey.

These insertions may enact a desire by the owner to recreate her physical presence at a sacred moment, in this case, pilgrimage. If we assume that these images were acquired on pilgrimage, then they mark the Passion Psalms with material evidence of the owner’s journey. These images (themselves pieces of flesh) place the devotee physically, materially at a sacred moment, just as performance places the devout spectator physically, materially at biblical moments. They use the flesh of parchment to stand in for the flesh of the pious viewer. The book’s prayers and devotional program is visually situated in relation to that presence—gazing on the text now occurs in respect to the insertions and, therefore, the owner’s body. The owner alters the text and thus arranges for meaning to accumulate around and through her material presence. And, because these insertions are not sewn entirely onto the folios, they offer the manuscript’s users a way to

²⁷⁵ Transcription from Ker and Piper, *Medieval Manuscripts*, 729 as cited by Adams, “Evolutions,” 45.

interact physically with and enter the devotional text (Figure 12). Adams states that “these insertions form an independent meditational focus that, while linked to the themes found throughout the manuscript, forcefully supersedes the text. The dominance of the insertions makes them the focus of attention, drawing interest away from the textual contents to these separate devotional images.”²⁷⁶ Alternatively, I would assert that these images engage the body in the textual contents as much as they may refocus the eye away from the textual material. The unique materiality of these insertions fixes the viewer as a material presence and allows her to have an embodied encounter with the devotional program constructed in the book. They allow her to mark her bodied presence *in* the book and to interact as an embodied viewer *with* the book. They structure the viewing of the book in relation to the owner’s physical presence within it. As in live performance, these insertions enhance visual piety by emphasizing the lay body’s material presence.

The Pavement Hours insertions reveal different ways that medieval laypeople could enrich their devotional life by introducing and manipulating images as part of their private practices. Figure 12 illustrates how these insertions offered physically engaged encounters that may mirror the kinds of encounters witnessed during the cycle performance. Lifting and lowering an image, a seemingly ordinary practice, could evolve into a lay ritual that, under specific circumstances, signified an extraordinary act. Such a ritual could remain lodged in the layperson’s body, where it might merge with the viewer’s performance literacy to form an alternative pious practice. One insertion in particular offers an especially subversive opportunity for this material interaction. The insertion sewn into folio 94r shows the Face of Christ surrounded by the four symbols of the evangelists and an inscription reading “Hail sacred face of our Redeemer on which

²⁷⁶ Adams, “Evolutions,” 50.

shines the divine look” [Salve sancta facies nostri redemptoris in qua nitet species divini], the first line of the prayer to the Holy Face of Christ (Figure 13). Adams indicates that this image is placed over a prayer by Augustine that was intended to protect its devotee from harm.²⁷⁷ Devotion to the holy face was popular during the Middle Ages, particularly those practices surrounding Veronica images, which were named after the woman whose cloth was reportedly impressed with the face of Christ on his way to Calvary. These images of Christ’s face, oftentimes in the form of mass-produced prints and badges, offered pious viewers a face-to-face divine encounter. The 1432 will of Isabella Hamerton of York, to whom the earliest known bequest of an alabaster is attributed, includes a bequest of “unam Veronicam Romae.”²⁷⁸ Jeffrey Hamburger argues that the late medieval popularity of the Veronica reflects “a process by which vision, once cloaked in subtle distinctions between corporeal and intellectual sight intelligible only to a spiritual elite, became the standard by which all religious experience was authenticated and in which all, in turn, could participate.”²⁷⁹ The Pavement Hours insertion presented its medieval viewers with this kind of participatory experience of gazing upon the face of Christ, but it accompanied this practice with an additional performative possibility.

The Face of Christ insertion allows the viewer not only to gaze upon Christ and mentally imagine his returning gaze, but also the opportunity to lift and lower the image; this action reproduces the priest’s liturgical gesture during the Elevation of the Host. As I have mentioned, Miri Rubin notes that engaging the body in pious rituals destabilizes meaning. Similarly, Mark Amsler analyzes a painted face of Christ in a Book of Hours,

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 47.

²⁷⁸ Isabella Hamerton, BI Reg. 3, fols. 345v-346v. Bequest appears on 345v.

²⁷⁹ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 320

worn away because of repeated touching and kissing by the book's owner, to suggest that,

a lay reader who kisses Jesus's face in a book of hours traces a kind of presumptive act which transmutes the textuality of the text. This sort of pious reading is a very personal piety and an intimate literate experience. One or many lay readers' kisses on the page poach on the clerical authority to approach the page and control the hinge of textuality in liturgy and worship.²⁸⁰

By lifting the Face of Christ insertion, the lay user replicates the sacred liturgical moment, but, in this case, the fleshy image is made Christ. The insertion allows the devotee to manipulate, lift, lower, and touch God, but it is performance that enables this lay ritual to accumulate pious meaning. The same act—lifting a material object that represents Christ—occurs in a number of the cycle's plays, as well as in other medieval performances. After Christ's birth in York's *The Nativity*, Mary recites a hail series and, the lines suggest, lifts the infant Christ (“Son, since I am a simple subject of yours, / Allow, sweet son I pray thee, / That I might take you in my arms / And in these humble garments clothe you,” 14.64-67).²⁸¹ As Chester Scoville argues, “This lifting of the Christ child may have had mnemonic resonances with the Mass.... Mary's elevation of the Christ child into visibility may have had an effect reminiscent of that of the elevation of the Host.”²⁸² Symeon enacts a similar hail series and elevation of the child in *The Purification* (17.354-410). As an embodied medium, performance shows lay bodies interacting with God physically, which not only validates the pious quality of these

²⁸⁰ Amsler, “Affective Literacy,” 97. Michel De Certeau also discusses how readerly activities “poach” on the author and text. See *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 170-6.

²⁸¹ Original: “Sone, as I am sympill sugett of thyne, / Vowchesaffe, swete sone I pray þe, / That I myght þe take in þe armys of myne / And in þis poure wede to arraie þe.”

²⁸² Scoville, *Saints and the Audience*, 66. Gail McMurray Gibson makes a related point about East Anglian drama in *The Theater of Devotion*, 166-8.

encounters, but also offers lay viewers a means to perform visual piety privately. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, there are cases, such as this, when different devotional body rhythms may interact to form a new rhythm of piety. The embodied performance viewing experience is informed by the liturgical viewing experience, and, through a material image, develops into a potentially unorthodox element of lay visual piety.

This image returns us to the element of consumption at work in lay visual piety. David Morgan contends that “consumers [of mass produced images] do not mindlessly conform to patterns of consumption established by producers but appropriate the product to their own uses and needs, thereby preserving a degree of agency or self-determination in the construction and maintenance of their worlds.”²⁸³ The Face of Christ appears in a circle that visually resembles the eucharistic wafer, and this creates a powerful opportunity to transform its devotional function. Accounts of laypeople running from church to church at the Elevation reflect the intense desire that many laypeople felt to see and be physically present before the Host. As Rubin notes, within the late medieval religious culture “the ways of access to Christ’s body and its uses and abuses were constant sources of tension and conflict as the body was packaged, used, experienced, touched, carried, smelt and contemplated. Multiple and on-going appropriations make up the tale of the reception of the Eucharistic symbol.”²⁸⁴ The Face of Christ insertion may be the site of such tension. As opposed to the (perhaps) orthodox intentions for this image, this insertion’s placement in the book suggests what Michel De Certeau might call

²⁸³ Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 134.

²⁸⁴ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 82.

its “secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.”²⁸⁵ This image’s complete range of functions emerges from the ways in which its owner might engage with it and, thus, transform its meaning through individual agency.

But consumptive agency is also socially determined. De Certeau argues that “the autonomy of the reader depends on a transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine his relation to texts.”²⁸⁶ The same is true in respect to our relationships with images and objects. Agency emerges in response to social forces. I have argued that performance offered laypeople a form of visual piety oriented in terms of their bodies and that it thereby helped to transform the ways in which laypeople saw objects and images. This transformation could be interpreted as the continuation of a movement toward a more visceral faith that began among mystics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Caroline Bynum argues that mystical writing from this period focuses on a desire for encounters with God and that “such desire is not only *for* bodies; it is lodged *in* bodies.”²⁸⁷ The connection between body and desire found in these texts not only entered later medieval writing, such as love poetry, but it also invaded lay pious practices.²⁸⁸ As I have demonstrated, the York cycle’s texts and its performance prompted spectators to see *with* their bodies. The Face of Christ insertion may reflect a further development in this continuum of embodied visual piety.

²⁸⁵ De Certeau, *Practice*, xiii.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁸⁷ Bynum, “Why All the Fuss,” 26.

²⁸⁸ In *The Visual and the Visionary*, Hamburger argues that many of the devotional practices that emerged in lay culture during the later Middle Ages, particularly in respect to images, such as the Veronica, developed out of the early practices of women living in religious communities: “female piety—even if not ‘normal’ by medieval, let alone modern, standards—in many respects proved normative, not least because the pastoral care of nuns paved the way for the care of the laity which, following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, increasingly preoccupied the Western church. Lay piety was, to a large extent, female piety: women served as models of religious conduct, not only in hagiography, but also in the home” (18).

In his study of theatre and pleasure, Simon Shepherd considers how scripts control the performing body. But he also identifies cases when “the author’s script invites the performers to take control” and argues that the stage business that occurs in those instances constitutes a “gap” in the text.²⁸⁹ He suggests that these gaps supply the audience with pleasure because spectators find delight in “the sheer extent of what can be produced out of the original familiar starting point.”²⁹⁰ I have argued that certain devotional objects created opportunities for orienting lay visual piety in terms of the body and, thereby, offered medieval laypeople greater agency within private devotional practices. I would argue that while the iconography or representational quality of these images and objects control the viewing body, the materiality of these objects, by reaching out to the user, creates a “gap.” In this physical gap energy is transferred between object and viewer, and new meaning is generated. Because the viewer’s own body fills this gap based upon its own individual experiences and rhythms, this mode of visual piety is fundamentality unstable and variable. Like the performance image in the *Crucifixion* pageant, an object’s materiality creates possibilities for misinterpretation and resistance.

I recognize that much of my argument is speculative, but, as I have demonstrated, the medieval discourse surrounding art and drama concentrated on materiality, in many cases tracing anxiety about religious images back to their material qualities. The unease articulated by these writers attests to the powerful experiences generated by devotional images. I am not suggesting that all people experienced these objects in exactly these ways. By defining performance literacy as a tactic of consumption I have, in essence, characterized it as a flexible tool. I would therefore echo Claire Sponsler’s suggestion

²⁸⁹ Shepherd, *Theatre*, 55-6.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

that consumption was “indeterminate and open to conflicting understandings, with the effects on individuals being more plural than singular.”²⁹¹ But, like Sponsler, I would also argue that hypothesizing possibilities opens up ways of imagining agency and multiplicity within the visual devotional practices of the late medieval laity.²⁹²

Afterthoughts: A Medieval Preoccupation in the Twenty-First Century

In a recent article published in the *Journal of Visual Culture*, W. J. T. Mitchell argues that there are in fact no visual media. He maintains that the term “visual culture” is inexact and that all media are hybrids or mixed-media.²⁹³ To refute the claim that painting is a visual medium, Mitchell suggests that materiality, and therefore the sense of touch, is an inextricable feature of painting. He writes,

A painting is a handmade object and that is one of the crucial things that differentiates it from, say, the medium of photography.... But what is the perception of the painting as handmade if not a recognition that a non-visual sense is encoded, manifested and indicated in every detail of its material existence....The non-visual sense in play is, of course, the sense of touch, which is foregrounded in some kinds of painting (when ‘handling’, impasto and the materiality of the paint is emphasized) and backgrounded in others (when a smooth surface and clear transparent forms produce the miraculous effect of rendering the painter’s manual activity invisible). Either way, the beholder who knows nothing about the theory behind the painting, or the story or the allegory, need only understand that this is a painting, a handmade object, to understand that it is a trace of manual production, that everything one sees is the trace of a brush or a hand touching canvas. Seeing painting is seeing touching.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 163.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ W. J. T. Mitchell, “There Are No Visual Media,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 2 (2005): 257-8.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

An object's materiality can convey its own level of meaning to its viewer if that viewer is receptive to it. By bringing materiality into his discussion, Mitchell seems to argue that we replace the term "visual culture" with what I would call "sensual culture." In using a "sensual culture" model, we would recognize how

one sense seems to activate or lead to another, most dramatically in the phenomenon of synesthesia, but far more pervasively in the way, for example, that the written word appeals directly to the sense of sight, but immediately activates audition (in subvocalization) and secondary impressions of spatial extension that may be either tactile or visual – or involve other, 'sub-theoretic' senses such as taste and smell.²⁹⁵

In effect, Mitchell asks us to return to a medieval approach to vision and media, one that incorporates the entire sensory effect of an image into our discussions of its function, use, and meaning.

In many ways, the discourse and practices with images in the later Middle Ages do not reveal medieval visual culture, but medieval sensual culture. Time and again, writers reference the body in their texts about seeing, whether they discuss looking at mental images, dramatic performance, or devotional objects. (As I described in the previous chapter, this theoretical approach relates to medieval visual theory.) By doing so, these authors implicate touch—as well as the other senses—in reception. Lifting the Face of Christ insertion in the Pavement Hours is indeed performative; the intentional "doing" of that act can be interpreted as a form of performance. But even if the layperson only looks at the image, its materiality calls attention to her body. She therefore sees the parchment as a material object and has an embodied encounter with that image. Just as in performance, only the eye need be engaged in order to activate the body in seeing. Even

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 262.

if the layperson never actually lifted the Face of Christ insertion, just by looking upon it she was having a sensual encounter with a fleshy image of God. Regardless of what she does, the image touches her. As with “visual culture,” perhaps rather than “visual piety” we should identify medieval laypeople as engaged in modes of “sensual piety.” Religious performance offered its spectators only the most overt occasion to practice such a full-bodied devotion.

In his 2005 article in *PMLA*, Stephen G. Nichols writes, “the number of books, films and other media that have appeared in the last few years with medieval or early Renaissance themes is amazing.... While the image of the Middle Ages evoked in popular culture varies from credible to wildly fanciful, the range, success, and in some instances controversy of such works attest to their timeliness and to the general public’s prodigious appetite for the material.”²⁹⁶ He argues that a similar medieval revival can be found in the rich supply of recent interdisciplinary works on the Middle Ages that “share a concern for figuring the historical context of the medieval phenomena they address as at once different from our own period and, because of that difference, the better able to engage with it.”²⁹⁷ My conclusions about performance, materiality, and visual piety in the Middle Ages contribute to current discourse about the performance of religion and the power religious images hold over the body. In a forthcoming article, I compare the language used in *A Treatise of Miracles Pleyinge* to the language employed by critics of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*.²⁹⁸ I demonstrate that the medieval anxiety about how

²⁹⁶ Stephen G. Nichols, “Writing the New Middle Ages,” *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (March 2005): 423.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 424.

²⁹⁸ “The Material Bodies of Medieval Religious Performance in England,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): forthcoming.

religious performance images engage the spectator's body remains with us and that, as in the Middle Ages, this engagement is defined through its materiality.

As I have written this final chapter, the riots in Europe instigated by political cartoons depicting Muhammad are mentioned almost daily in news coverage on television and in newspapers. We are surrounded, and in some cases frightened, by evidence of the power that religious imagery holds over bodies. The current "popular" interest in medieval culture—particularly its religious aspects²⁹⁹—offers us opportunities to explore continuations between the Middle Ages and our current "sensual culture." Perhaps taking a "sensual" approach—a medieval approach—to images can help us understand and better negotiate the conflicts that arise within our own religious visual culture.

²⁹⁹ I am thinking particularly of recent movies such as Gibson's *Passion* (2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), *Tristan and Isolde* (2005), and also Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and its 2006 film version. I have noticed a similar peak in interest in the Middle Ages reflected in theatre. For example, *The Mysteries*, directed by Brian Kulick and performed in January and February of 2004 at the Classic Stage Company in New York City, combined a selection of pageants from the York, Wakefield, and Chester cycles with texts by Mikhail Bulgakov and Dario Fo to create a "modern" mystery cycle. Sarah Ruhl's *Passion Play, a cycle*, produced at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 2005, used the passion play motif to examine three moments in world history. Also of note is Anne Bogart and SITI Company's production of *Death and the Ploughman*, a Middle High German poetic dialogue written by Johannes von Saaz in 1400. I discuss how SITI Company's performance style highlights the medieval themes of this text in "Anne Bogart and SITI Company's *Death and the Ploughman*," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (October 2005): 512-4.

FIGURES



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

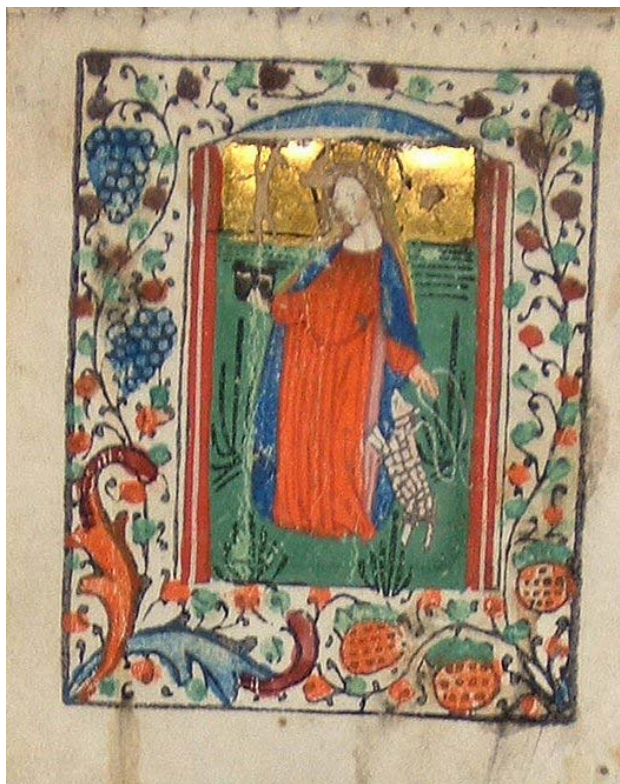


Figure 8 (top) and Figure 9 (bottom)

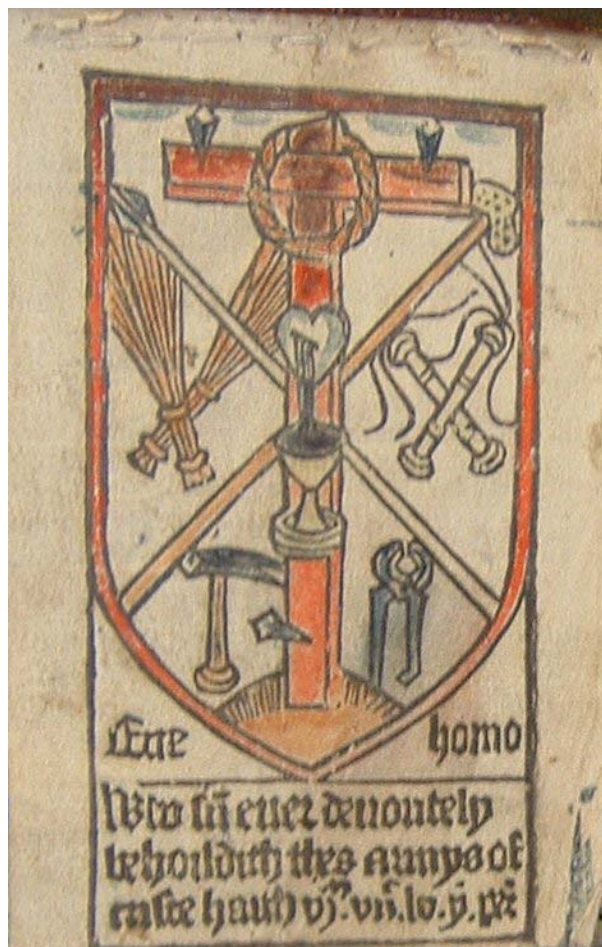


Figure 10

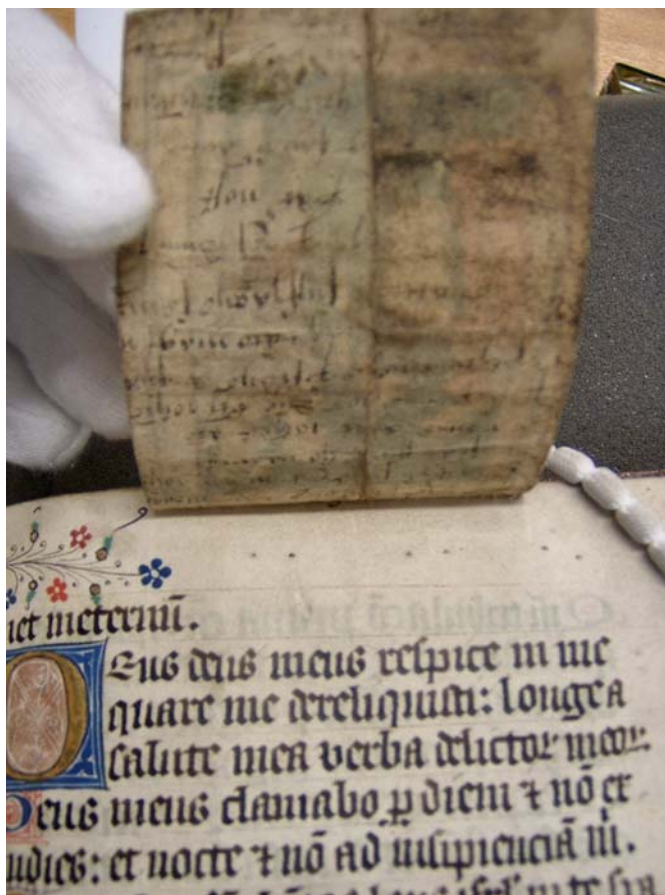


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

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