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Edited by Erin E. Benay and Lisa M. Rafanelli

Banner image: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Funerary monument to the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni (detail), Church of San Francesco a Ripa, Rome.
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TOUCH ME, TOUCH ME NOT: SENSES, FAITH AND PERFORMATIVITY IN EARLY MODERNITY: INTRODUCTION

Erin E. Benay and Lisa M. Rafanelli

Abstract

This issue brings together an exciting collection of essays that investigate the collaborative roles of senses in the genesis and experience of renaissance and baroque art. Examining, in particular, the ways in which senses were evoked in the realm of the sacred, where questions of the validity of sensory experience were particularly contentious and fluid, the contributors seek to problematise the neoplatonic imperialism of sight and sense hierarchies that traditionally considered touch, along with smell and taste, as base and bodily. The essays show instead that it was a multiplicity of sensory modalities – touch, sight, hearing, and sometimes even taste and smell – that provided access to the divine and shaped the imaginative, physical and performative experience of works of art. The issue's project thus brings us closer to achieving Geraldine Johnson's eloquent proprosal, that, by revisioning Michael Baxandall's famous 'period eye', we might, in fact, arrive at a more aptly described, historically specific, 'period body'.

Biographical notes

Erin E. Benay is assistant professor of southern renaissance and baroque art at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio. Her research examines the relationship of empiricism and the senses to early modern painting, the history of collecting in 17th-century Europe, and global currents of exchange and mobility in early modern cultural history. Together with Lisa M. Rafanelli, she is the author of *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli me tangere and Doubting Thomas* (Ashgate, 2015). Her publications include essays in *Arte Veneta* and *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions* (Ashgate 2014). Her next book (under contract with Giles) will focus on Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St Andrew* at the Cleveland Museum of Art and reveals the ways in which imperial movement in part obfuscated 'original' locations of production, collection and consumption, in this case between Italy and Spain. Benay's current research project, *Italy By Way of India: Routes of Devotional Knowledge in the Early Modern Period*, will consider how travel between Italy and South Asia complicated the iconological construction of saints' lives.

Lisa M. Rafanelli is professor of Italian renaissance art history at Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York. Her research interests include the relationship of early modern feminist theory to the visual arts, the thematisation of the senses in sixteenth-century European art, and the reception of the European renaissance in modern American culture. She has published essays in *Comitatus, Critica d'Arte, IKON, Mary Magdalene Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to Baroque* (Brill 2012), *Sense and the Senses in Early Modern Art and Cultural Practice* (Ashgate 2012), and *To Touch or Not to Touch? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the 'Noli me tangere'* (Peeters 2013), among others. Together with Erin Benay, she is co-author of the forthcoming book, *Faith, Gender and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art* (Ashgate, June 2015).

TOUCH ME, TOUCH ME NOT: SENSES, FAITH AND PERFORMATIVITY IN EARLY MODERNITY: INTRODUCTION

Erin E. Benay, Case Western Reserve University, and Lisa M. Rafanelli, Manhattanville College

Over the past two decades, numerous conference sessions, symposia and several excellent anthologies have sought to reassess the role of the senses in the genesis and reception of early modern art, challenging entrenched notions about sense hierarchies and the privileging of sight as the primary means of acquiring knowledge. This sensory turn in art historical discourse was signaled by scholars of late medieval art, who first challenged the notion of a 'period eye', and proposed instead that the act of viewing in late medieval and early renaissance society was a necessarily imaginative, multi-sensory process. Their scholarship paved the way toward a more nuanced understanding of non-optical modes of reception in early modernity, while also having profound implications for the traditional gendering of sensorial experience, specifically the association of sight with men and tactility with women.

New avenues of inquiry have emerged of late as scholars have come together from disciplines as wide ranging as art history, the social sciences and cognitive neuroscience to examine these issues. Much of the important work to have emerged from these conversations concerns the broader recognition of the importance of touch, hearing, smell and taste, in addition to sight, in what we now understand to be the 'somaesthetic' experience of *beholding.* Papers presented at two panel sessions at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference (San Diego, 2013) titled 'Faith, gender and the senses in Italian renaissance and baroque art', added to this lively discussion by further exploring how in devotional contexts, sensory modalities and image reception might be further delimited by gender (both of the subject and the beholder). Contributors to this volume of the *Open Arts Journal* continue this dialogue, exploring the ways the senses were evoked, engaged, embodied, constructed, and at times circumscribed, in devotional art and cultural practice of the early

modern period. As the authors of essays in this volume reveal, it is in devotional contexts in particular – where art could arguably inspire the beholder to transcend the sensorial reality of the artwork itself – that questions of sensory engagement can be most contentious and fluid. These complex issues are compounded by the profound and rapid changes in the theological, philosophical and scientific landscape that altered beliefs about the epistemological value of the senses generally in the early modern period, as well as by changes in gender identities, gender roles and gendered spaces. Indeed, as our understanding of how the senses functioned in early modernity grows increasingly nuanced, we must also consider whether in fact the senses can and should be discussed as naturally delimited phenomena – biological imperatives – rather than culturally and historically specific constructs (Classen, 2012).

The ground-breaking work of Jeffrey Hamburger, Michael Camille and Mary Carruthers, among others, upended the traditional hierarchy of sense premised on the primacy of sight and reminded art historians that even according to the scientific theories of intromission and extramission espoused by Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253), William of Conches (1090–*c.*1154) and Adelard of Bath (1080–*c.*1152), vision was understood to entail a haptic, experiential exchange between the viewer and the seen object. Such realisations added 'spatial and bodily means to the perception of the visual' and suggested a greater fluidity between seeing and feeling than was previously acknowledged (Hahn, 2000, p.179). Numerous recent publications have expanded upon these foundations to include the visual culture of the 16th and 17th centuries, demonstrating unequivocally that the five senses functioned far more collaboratively than once understood. Alice E. Sanger and Siv Tove Kulbrandstad Walker's *Sense and the Senses in Early Modern Art and Cultural Practice* (2012) investigates how the faculties of sense were thematised in art and in what ways they were made to function as agents of carnal indulgence, scientific revelation and devotional fervor. Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler's *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (2013) further reveals the degree to which early-modern religious theory and practice 'considered sensation as an interconnected, or even integrated set of experiences', thereby giving rise to profound conflict and difference, particularly during the Reformation period (p.13). In his short and cogent volume, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art*, François Quiviger argues that 'a culture can be characterised through the ways in which it organises the sensorium (the sensory system), and censors

or promotes certain clusters of perceptions at the expense of others' (2010, p.8). These conclusions parallel those of Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, who posit in *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicin*, that human emotions cannot be understood as fixed and unchanging, but rather are brought into being, recognised, controlled and encouraged by social and historical processes (2005, p.15).

This issue builds upon these foundations, while also drawing on recent developments in cognitive neuroscience, which is engaged in re-evaluating how the senses interact on a physiological level. In *Art and the Senses* (2011), for instance, Francesca Bacci and David Melcher reveal the increasing importance – in both neuroscience *and* art and art history – of the effect of other senses on visual perception. 'The idea of one sense dominating over the others has been superseded in favor of the more accurate view that our perceptual system combines the information coming from different sensory modalities into one unified precept' (Bacci, 2011, p.135). Richard Shusterman has usefully reframed this in terms of pragmatist philosophy, suggesting that the 'living, sentient, purposive body' views objects and spaces in a somaesthetic way – elevating, rather than neglecting the body's role in aesthetic consumption (2012, p.3). Thus, as Geraldine Johnson has so eloquently proposed, we may be on the threshold of re-envisioning Michael Baxandall's famous 'period eye', and arriving at a more aptly described, historically specific, 'period body' (Johnson, 2011, p.59).

For medieval worshippers, true vision extended well beyond the parameters of sight, and entailed insight, knowledge and, ultimately, faith (Carruthers, 2006, pp.287–302). Similarly, we now understand that early modern devotees engaged in an act of *beholding* images – that is, not simply viewing, seeing or witnessing images, but instead binding these activities with a multiplicity of phenomenological dynamics in order to interact with the images more profoundly and over longer periods of time. As Allie Terry-Fritsch and Erin Labbie have explicated, this somaesthetic mode of beholding, whether manual or kinesthetic, allows the subject of the work of art to become central to the acquisition of knowledge and certainty (Terry-Fritsch and Labbie, 2012, p.2). Such devotional beholding might be further delineated by three categories defined by Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand in their introduction to the important two-volume anthology, *Push Me, Pull You: Imaginative and Emotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (2011, pp.xxxv–xxxvi). Blick and Gelfand propose physical interaction (requiring physical movement around or through the work of art

or building), purely imaginative interaction (requiring the viewer to complete a meditative or emotional act via the contemplation of a visual image) and performative interaction (a conflation of both types, enabling the viewer or beholder to engage physically and emotionally within a space-mind continuum), as central models for the types of 'viewer' perception and engagement with which the essays collected here are concerned.

In their recent introduction to the anthology *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome* (Ashgate, 2013), Peter Gillgren and Märten Snickare propose that we are now experiencing a 'performative turn' in methodological approaches to humanistic research (2013, p.4). Coined in the 1950s by J.L. Austin, linguistic concepts of performativity revealed the ways in which language does not simply describe, but rather is an active agent in social and cultural change. Judith Butler notably employed this ideology to show how gender identities are 'produced and inscribed through repeated acts and gestures within specific cultural contexts' (Gillgren and Snickare, 2013, p.4 and discussed in Alexander, 2006). Extended to aesthetic theory and art historical discourse, Erika Fischer-Lichte uses this concept to emphasise meaning and experience rather than interpretation, 'phenomenology rather than hermeneutics' (Gilgren and Snickare, 2013, p.5). In many ways this modality offers a corrective to the qualitative, stylistic approach outlined by those like Wölfflin or the iconological directives of Panofsky who identified drama, spectacle and performance with an anti-modernist sentimentality (see, for instance, Panofsky, 1995, p.75). Rather, and as the essays in this volume clarify, the sensorial performance of art – as a durational experience of beholding in a site-specific context – is in many ways quite modern in that it renders passive viewing obsolete. For artists working in the 15th–17th centuries, viewership was not delimited by sight and nor should our interpretation of art of this period be so circumscribed.

Finally, scholars such as Andrea Bolland, Geraldine Johnson and Allie Terry-Fritsch have frequently asserted compelling intersections between the ways in which art was affectively consumed or performed and gender, a topic that we have recently taken up in our book *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art* (Ashgate, forthcoming 2015). In her seminal work on modes of expression of gendered piety in the Middle Ages, Caroline Walker Bynum explicated the ways in which male patrons appropriated aspects of female identity and imagery, thereby teaching us to recognise the fluidity of interplay between gender and modes of devotion. The contributors to this

volume also understand, as Judith Brown has aptly put it, that gender is 'a process in which men and women situate themselves and are situated by others along a shifting continuum that varies according to several characteristics, among them age, class, region, and even, but by no means only, sex' (1998, p.5). In recognising the complexity and variability of gender constructs, we must by necessity also acknowledge that the relationship between gender and the senses is far more nuanced than traditional formulations equating men with sight and women with touch, or women more generally with sensorial experience and moral weakness (as elucidated in the writings of Carl Nordenfalk (1995), among others). A somaesthetic interpretation of 'viewership' in the early modern period also precipitates a reconsideration of such simplified constructs of gender and phenomenological experience. It also compels us to acknowledge the artificial limitations on sensoriality, especially when the experiences of certain people – often, but not always, women – were prescribed and controlled by social conventions or social institutions.

The essays

This issue begins with two essays that are concerned with artists not normally spoken of in the same breath – Albrecht Dürer and Jusepe de Ribera – both of whom consciously problematise sensorial hierarchies and expectations by visually privileging the ephemeral experiences of the flesh in order to deepen the devotional experience of the beholder. As Shira Brisman explicates in her contribution, in one of the final scenes of his 1511 woodcut sequence, *The Small Passion*, Albrecht Dürer depicts the newly risen Christ extending his forefinger towards the head of Mary Magdalen. As a moment of touching, the *Noli me tangere* belongs to a category of representations that attests to the indexical nature of Christ's image. The stain of his face in the *Sudarium* or the imprints of his feet on the mountain of the *Ascension* are testaments to his corporeal presence on earth. Throughout *The Small Passion*, Dürer expands the vocabulary of indexical transfer to a 'haptic theology' and proves the suitability of prints as a language in which to tell the story of God's mark on earth in the form of Christ. Yet at the same time, the subtle undermining of these moments of contact signal Christ's touch as impermanent, a substitute for a more sustained embrace to come. In emphasising the transmission and dissemination of Christ's contact with those in his immediate circle through a visual vocabulary of touching, pressing, hugging and kissing, Dürer also finds a language with which to describe the process of printing itself.

The link between content, style and the performative aspects of making art are also taken up in Itay Sapir's essay. By exploring the limits of visibility in his tenebristic paintings, Caravaggio initiated a revolutionary style that seemingly confronted the limitations of mimetic observation by darkening the peripheries of his compositions and concealing the ideal view first promoted by Leon Battista Alberti. In his essay, Sapir argues that it is Jusepe de Ribera, a painter who is often unfairly labeled a 'Caravaggist', who brings Caravaggio's stylistic and ideological approach to a culmination. Ribera's presentation of martyrs, in particular, create a fascinating play between the saints' tactile experience of their suffering, their complex, often deficient visual perception, and the viewer's limited access to visual information when reconstructing the narrative on the basis of pictorial evidence. Sapir analyses Ribera's creation of mock-tactile textures through purely visual techniques, and the implications of such an artistic method for the hierarchy of the senses and illusory modes of deceit common to much baroque art.

The two essays that follow also recognise the limitations of enumerating and prioritising sensorial experience, while also drawing particular attention to early modern cultural practices that sought to control sensorial agency, in this case on the basis of gender. In her essay, Theresa Flanigan explores these tensions by interrogating the ways in which Dominican Archbishop of Florence Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459; later St Antoninus), urged women to control their senses for the sake of their own virtue. Antoninus' magisterial *Summa theologica* (completed *c*.1454), and his additional spiritual manuals for some of Florence's most elite women, contain instructions for Christian devotion and virtuous living aimed at ensuring the salvation of the soul. Flanigan's essay focuses on his *Opera a ben vivere* (*c*.1454) written for Dianora Tornabuoni Soderini and her sister Lucrezia Tornabuoni de'Medici. In this book, Antoninus prescribes a daily ritual that includes instruction for the custodianship of their external senses, especially vision and speech (his sixth sense), and explains the necessity of sensory control for the protection of the soul, cultivation of virtue and achievement of spiritual salvation. Exactly how Antoninus understands the external senses, their moral potential and their connection with the internal senses, including common sense, imagination, cogitation and memory, is explained in his *Summa* and is contextualised by Flanigan within the broader physiological, psychological and moral conception of the senses to better understand their role in renaissance devotional practice. This analysis in turn may shed new

light on the representational strategies employed by Ghirlandaio in his depictions of the Tornabuoni women in the Cappella Maggiore of Santa Maria Novella.

Like Antoninus, the Florentine Dominican preacher Fra Giovanni Dominici (1355–1419) provides additional in-roads to understanding the complex relationship between gender and the senses in the period, and the perceived needs to limit female sensorial agency. Dominici warned his female reader of the dangers posed by the senses, sight in particular, reminding her of how Eve was led to sin by looking at the apple, Samson by looking at Delilah, and David in looking at Bathsheba. In a related fashion, the Franciscan preacher Fra Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) warned women against what was evidently a common practice, that of running to kiss the altar or the sacred stone, chalice or paten, and reminded his listeners that they were to consider themselves unworthy of such privileges. The sense of touch was often instrumental in obtaining cures, as well as fulfilling ritual requirements such as the kiss of peace and receiving the sacraments and yet, as the words of these preachers warn, the senses, whose site is the body, can be agents of temptation. Catherine Lawless thus examines the ways in which men sought to control women's sensory engagement with the world, and also how holy images were 'sensed' by women in renaissance Tuscany, where small panel paintings could be held, embraced, kissed and even, in a fashion, became one with the devotee in somatic piety – leaving us to wonder if these practices encouraged the very behavior they sought to police.

The next three essays take as their point of departure the sensorial performance of art, and, in so doing, continue to highlight the fluidity of gender dynamics in the period, while also drawing attention to important distinctions between the public and private experience of beholding art. In her essay about the image type known as the *Johannesschüssel* (St John's severed head on a plate), Barbara Baert argues that this iconography channeled the ancient cult of the severed male head into the Christian context and compelled multisensory engagement with the devotional object and the spiritual experience, from gaze and empathy, to tactile and performative activities, including the act of wearing the severed head. The image of John the Baptist's severed head functioned as a visceral reminder of the actual relic of the Baptist's skull and became one of the most important devotional images of the middle ages and early modern era, in both sculpture and painting. Although optic and haptic perceptions of the *Johannesschüssel* offer compelling interpretive models, in Baert's estimation, it is the often-neglected realm of sound and the acoustic relationship between

worshipper and artifact that is most relevant, especially when what is ultimately at stake is the recognition of silence.

Images of the *Johannesschüssel* enabled the beholder to commune optically, haptically and aurally, with the object. This performance was arguably at its most potent in the private realm, where the devotee enjoyed unmitigated access to the divine image. Private devotional art of the early 17th century was similarly subject to such extended viewing, but it also often found its place in the galleries of noblemen and women whose diverse collections were filled with objects that symbolised their sophisticated taste in art as much as they symbolised their acquisitiveness and inquisitiveness as collectors of 'curiousities'. In her contribution, Erin Benay suggests that these domestic settings created permeable boundaries between sacred and secular within devotional compositions, as the unprecedented physical intimacy portrayed in popular religious subjects such as St Matthew and the Angel, the Stigmatisation of St Francis, or Christ's Agony in the Garden reveal. Representations of the latter reminded viewers of Christ's human, corporal suffering and suggested a model of resolve strengthened by prayer. The *Agony in the Garden* appears on the interior of Jacopo Ligozzi's virtuosic *Portable Altar with Carrying Case* (1608), likely a Medici gift presented to the Austrian court in anticipation of the marriage of archduchess Maria Magdalena to soon-to-be grand duke Cosimo II, and the case study at the center of Benay's essay. Adorned with lavish botanical motifs on its exterior, the Altar's potency as a sacred possession was redoubled by the owner's tactile revelation of the portrayal of Christ supported by an Angel contained inside the case. Comprised of wood, oil on copper, and *pietre dure* inlay, it is an object intended to be held, opened, and its meaning internalised by the likely female beholder. Benay argues that Ligozzi's selective combination of sumptuous materials and choice of subject matter – botanical illustration and Christological iconography – allowed the object to appeal to the full sensorium, and therefore to function as efficaciously as a devotional aid as it did as a curiosity among other rare collectibles.

In arguing for a physically dynamic mode of handling, viewing and perceiving the small Ligozzi altarpiece, Benay argues that the owner of such an object would have done far more than consume this precious commodity with her eyes. Instead, as Allie Terry-Fritsch postulates in her essay, the encounter between patron/recipient and object was a somaesthetic one. Terry-Fritsch examines this mode of beholding in her treatment of the Sacro Monte di Varallo in northern Italy. She proposes that the active cultivation of

renaissance pilgrims' bodies and minds at this unusual location contributed to a heightened somaesthetic encounter within the multi-media chapels at the site. The physical performance of viewing at Varallo accentuated awareness in all sensory receptors to activate the prosthetic body and mind of pilgrims, who were physically challenged while simultaneously mentally engaged as they made their way through the steep and winding landscape of the site. Invited to enter into the architectural environments and to touch, smell, taste and hear in addition to view the holy simulacra, both male and female pilgrims recorded the powerful affective bonds produced through such active bodily cultivation and spiritual stimulation. By considering the historical experience of visiting the site, Terry-Fritsch provides an alternative explanation for artistic style at Varallo, which, she argues, must be understood through the somaesthetics of the artistic programme's original viewers. Moreover, the somaesthetic strategies employed at Varallo enabled pilgrims to move beyond traditional gendered performance of the body in devotional contexts, and to assume multiple alternative identities and genders, from the role of a contemporary pilgrim to the Holy Land to that of a Biblical personage (or multiples thereof).

The tensions and misunderstandings inherent in the assumption that female experience may only be situated in a liminal place between riotous abundance and righteous control – between sense and spirit – are at the heart of Andrea Bolland's essay. Although seemingly ripped from a different page of this history, Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *St Teresa and the Angel* for the Cornaro Chapel (1647–52) is perhaps the artist's most sensually charged creation, and the seemingly physical nature of Teresa's ecstasy is today even acknowledged in survey textbooks. In her new assessment of the sculpture, Bolland demonstrates the ways in which Bernini staged this sculptural performance. Teresa herself opened the door to this reading when, in describing her spiritual ecstasy, she admitted that 'the body doesn't fail to share in some of it, and even a great deal'. Yet the balance between sense and spirit in the sculpture emerges somewhat differently when it is viewed (literally and figuratively) in context: as an altarpiece in a chapel where its presentation is structured as a 'performance', complete with spectators/witnesses, and as the central image of the

left transept of Santa Maria della Vittoria – a church whose dedication derives from the power of an image displayed. If the statue group is read as a divine ecstasy *witnessed*, rather than a mystic encounter *experienced*, it engages another discourse, with its own metaphors and meanings. According to Bolland, the saint's swoon has less to do with the erotic pull of the senses than with their absence, challenging an artist celebrated for his ability to transform insensate stone into vulnerable flesh with the task of deliberating staging an inaccessible event.

The authors included in this issue thus contribute to the expanding art historical discourse on the complex processes of *beholding* works of art in the early modern period. In their work, Allie Terry-Fritsch, Erin Felicia Labbie, Jonathan Sawday and others have proposed an 'approach to the construction of the subject who not only *sees*, but who *beholds*, with a multiplicity of phenomenological dynamics at play' (Terry-Fritsch and Labbie, 2012, p.2). Arguing for a mode of perception that sees with the body, 'touches with the eyes, and which synaesthetically transfers affect and cognition through visual encounter', these scholars and those included herein, suggest a system wherein the 'viewer' becomes a beholder who is engaged in a dialogue with the visual image (p.2). By upending antiquated understandings of sense hierarchies and outmoded truisms about the gendering of sensorial experience, this wide-ranging collection of essays sheds new light on the shifting variables needed to fully contextualise the imaginative, physical and performative experience of works of art – issuing a clarion call for continued investigation.

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A TOUCHING COMPASSION: DÜRER'S HAPTIC THEOLOGY

Shira Brisman

Abstract

In one of the final scenes of his 1511 woodcut sequence, The Small Passion, *Albrecht Dürer depicts the newly risen Christ extending his forefinger towards the head of Mary Magdalen. As a moment of touching, the* Noli me tangere *belongs to a category of representations that attests to the indexical nature of Christ's image. The stain of his face on Veronica's cloth or the imprints of his feet on the mountain from which he ascended are testaments to his corporeal presence on earth. Throughout* The Small Passion, *Dürer expands the vocabulary of indexical transfer to a haptic theology and proves the suitability of prints as a language in which to tell the story of God's mark on earth in the form of Christ. Yet, at the same time, subtle underminings of these moments of contact signal Christ's touch as impermanent, a substitute for a more sustained embrace to come. In emphasising the transmission and dissemination of Christ's contact through a visual vocabulary of touching, pressing, hugging and kissing, Dürer also finds a language with which to describe the process of printing itself and the power – and limitations – of a medium both widely reproducible and constrained in its durability as a corporeal substitute.*

Biographical note

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A TOUCHING COMPASSION: DÜRER'S HAPTIC THEOLOGY

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The verb 'to cleave', which is etymologically linked to the German *Kleid* and the English *cloth*, exercises a unique usage in the English language; one meaning of the word *cleave* – to cling, adhere, or hold fast to – is the precise opposite of its other meaning – to part, divide or hew asunder (Kuryluk, 1991, p.179). Something like the oxymoronic behaviour of this word is captured in a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (Figure 1.1), the thirtieth in a sequence of thirty-six prints known as the *Small Passion*, published in 1511 under the title, *Passio Christi ab Alberto Durer Nurenbergensi effigiata cu varij generis carminibus Fratris Benedicti Chelidonij Musophili.* In this version of the *Noli me tangere*, Dürer departs from an iconographical tradition in which the elegantly swiveling, touch-denying Christ turns from the pleading Mary Magdalen, who reaches for her Master in a longing entreat. In Giotto's painted rendition of the scene for the Scrovegni chapel, the space that separates the kneeling woman and swaying man represents the fissure of want, the chasm between the human desire for God and the belief that God can be touched (Hetzer, 1982, pp.43–50). Dürer closes the gap. Following a print by Martin Schongauer (Figure 1.2), in which the hand of Christ

Figure 1.1: Albrecht Dürer, *Noli me tangere*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3663. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

hovers parallel to the hand of Mary Magdalen, Dürer doubles this alignment, ordering all four hands in a seam down the center of his composition.

But whereas *within* Schongauer's print the alignment is ironic – Christ's hand thwarts while Mary Magdalen's reaches – in Dürer's version the irony takes place *between* what the depiction means and what it says, or, more accurately, between what Christ is saying and what he is doing. *Noli me tangere* are the words that Jesus says to Mary when she recognizes him standing outside the sepulchre, where she has just found a heap of linen in place of his dead body. As Jesus' enunciation, the phrase performs a special function in the sequence of the Passion. Whereas other images depict events that happen to Christ, this scene is a visual representation of the words he speaks (Baert, 2012, p.195). In Dürer's print the depicted action goes against the words to which it alludes: the upright protagonist does not recoil from Mary Magdalen's approach but

instead reaches with his forefinger to touch her head at the very moment that he tells her not to touch him.

The deliberate contact within the image is contradictory to the text if the vulgate *Noli me tangere* is translated as 'touch me not', but Jesus' extended finger transmits a powerful theological message when considering the Greek, *me mou haptou*, which can be translated 'do not seek to cling to, or embrace me' (Haskins, 1993, p.10; Bieringer, 2006, pp.13–28). Jesus cautions Mary not to welcome him in a secure grasp because this is not his permanent return – he has not yet ascended to his Father. His appearance to Mary Magdalen outside the tomb affirms his divine status through his defiance of death and acts as a prelude to his ultimate reappearance in the promised time to come. In Dürer's haptic theology, Christ's extended finger both affirms and denies: it verifies his carnal presence and his proximity to man. But at the same time the touch proclaims its transience: it is not an embrace but a promise of return, an installment of a memory and an anticipation that will be felt by all who wait: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Acting doubly, Dürer's depiction of Christ's touch is an enunciation in another sense – not only does it render in ink the meaning of Christ's words, but it also announces Dürer's understanding of the potentials and limitations of the printed medium. The transfer of image to paper through the contact between block and page mirrors the touch by which Christ leaves his impression on the human world – an impression that can be multiplied and widely circulated. But, like Christ's touch, Dürer's print project inscribes a message of its own impermanence. The printed image, marks in ink left behind on a page, is, like all Christian art, a substitute that insists on the presence of someone no longer available. 'There is something inevitably regressive, animistic, or overcompensatory about all modes of mimetic representation', writes Geoffrey Hartman, in an essay on Wordsworth's 'touching compulsion', from which the title of this essay is derived (Hartman, 1977, p.350). The pathetic and bathetic touch of Christ in Dürer's *Noli me tangere* – both a pledge and a rebuff – by allusion to the touch of woodblock to paper describes the very circumstances of its creation and invites consideration of all other instances of touch within the printed Passion series as mirrors of the process of printing, a process which suggests and deflects the human-divine bond.

In following the ordered alignment of hands down the centre of Dürer's page, this paper begins with a discussion of how Christ leaves his mark; it then goes on to show how the printing

Figure 1.2: Martin Schongauer, *Noli me tangere*, *c.*1480/90, engraving, 16 x 15.8cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1961.17.65. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.3: Albrecht Dürer, *Veronica with the Sudarium and Saints Peter and Paul*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3654. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

process imitates Christ's transmission of touch through self-referential instances of touching, kissing and hugging; finally, this paper demonstrates how Dürer's haptic theology finds a perfect expressive language in the medium of prints in which the wide-reaching but indirect contact between artist's hand and viewer imitates the transmission of the divine touch.

First impressions

Corporeality is the condition of fallen humanity. Awareness of the limitations of the human body impedes true spiritual contact with the divine. This is what Adam and Eve learned in the first moments after the fall when they attempted to hide themselves from God. But corporeality is also the condition by which fallen humanity comes to know and love God: through the incarnated Christ, his interactions with man on earth, and the traces of him that remain (Rudy, 2002, p.46). Proof and memory of the divine assumption of human form lie in the indexical marks he left behind: the blood-covered column of the flagellation, the imprint of his knees on the stone in Gethsemane, the sweat of his face on Veronica's veil and the final indentation of dust on the mount from which he ascended. To Christian iconographical history belong two stories of the miraculous transfer of the image of Christ's face to a cloth. By the eastern tradition, Jesus gave the Mandylion to Abgar, the pagan ruler of Edessa, in response to the ailing king's belief in his miraculous healing powers. In the western tradition, the Sudarium of Veronica (a saint whose name means 'true icon') miraculously retained the imprint of his visage. Both of these legends involve a transfer of image to fabric. Cloth, material that clings to the body, operates in the Christian narrative as a synonym for dress or skin and represents the material for visualising God's 'clothing' in Mary's spotless white flesh (Kuryluk, 1991, p.4 and p.179). The transfer of

Jesus' image to surface mirrored the miracle of his incarnation. It also invested certain art objects with a particular power. The early Christian church endorsed the authenticity of *acheiropoieta*, images not made by human hands, which bore the imprint of Christ's face. The efficacy of these icons in offering occasions for contact lay not only in the initial transfer from Christ's body to tangible totem, but also in their proliferation. The availability of a true image of Christ's face to churches far and wide was explained by tales of unmediated reproduction in which one acheiropoietos imprinted itself on another cloth or slab of wood. If the fabric or parchment was folded, the impression could multiply in twos or threes, each copy assuming the miracle-granting powers of the original (Koerner, 1993, p.83). In short, the procreation of Christ's true image operated like a print before the age of prints. Likeness was considered not as a similarity in visual representation but as 'a relationship between form and matter which involved gradations of contact and presence' (Bedos-Rezak, 2006, p.48).

The very fact of Christ's ascension, the return of his body to his father, destabilizes the classification of Christ's manifest image. The imprint of Christ defies the category of art object as a compensatory substitution for the loved-one now lost. Within the economy of artifact as surrogate, the image ordinarily replaces the missing person; but in the case of Christ, the dead regained his body and 'was received up into heaven' (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51). Christ's imprint is not a permanent proxy but rather a down payment, a pledge of the temporarily absent who will return. The image of Christ does not 'fill the lacuna of a lost body' . Instead, it serves as witness to Christ's historical body (Belting, 1998, p.2). Instances of bodily convergence within Dürer's prints refer to the miraculous transfer of Christ's image and to the process by which the ink was deposited on the page. Yet since images of Christ are not full replacements but only reductive traces, the prints are necessarily presented as mere impressions, marks indicating absence.

Kisses and promises: the impact of the Fall

The stained veil and depressions of earth on the mount are signs of the human tendency to fixate on bare markers (Hartman, 1977, p.353). In Dürer's *Small Passion,* however, Christ's imprints are evidence not only that he is gone. Depicting the narrative scenes of Christ's life with instances of pressing, kissing and hugging, Dürer reactivates Christ's touching compassion and redeems it as an ongoing process of transfer. Art involves remuneration, writes Geoffrey Hartman: 'By means of representation the artist steals something from God or steals it back; and so it is almost inevitable that the representation ... invest itself as an autonomous, if alienated, source of value' (Hartman, 1977, p.351). Dürer's images of touching

The inclusion of scenes of indexical impressing in Dürer's *Small Passion* series endows his printing process with authority and authenticity. In mimicry of passion plays, in which the Sudarium was held up to the audience in a suspension of theatrical action, here the presentation of the Sudarium (Figure 1.3) is a caesura in a sequence of narrative proceedings that advance from left to right. A stilled moment that does not correspond to an event within the gospel text, Veronica stands, flanked by Peter and Paul, and holds forth the imprinted cloth. The image is self-reflexive. Centered as a print within a print, the steady gaze of Christ offers a confident analogy between the sheet the saint clutches and the page the viewer holds. Dürer presents another impression of Christ's body in the *Ascension* (Figure 1.4), where Christ's footprints on the mount – inked lines which represent the remains of the pressure of his feet – valorise a medium in which the image of Christ is offered as a memory of a weighted substance left behind (Kantor, 2000, pp.26–7).

suspend the moment of divine-human contact as if the grammatical tense of these interactions were indefinite and unending. Like the classically derived, imperfect verb inscribed on the *tabula ansata* of his 1504 engraving (Figure 1.5), '*Albertus Dürer Noricus faciebat*' – *faciebat*, 'was making' instead of *fecit*, 'made' – Dürer leaves uncertain the limits of his impact, the boundary at which Christ's touch and the influence of his own art cease to be felt. In re-presenting Christ's touch through the language of prints Dürer situates his viewer between sin and redemption.

Figure 1.5: Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504, engraving, 25.2 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3492.
(Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Like the word *cleave* in the English language, which serves both to bind together and to tear apart, the kiss in Christian iconography behaves in a paradoxical way: it both unites and separates man from God. The kiss of the Christian visual tradition inherits from antiquity the formal properties of the *symplegma*: figures that interlock in combat or in love (Steinberg, 1970, p.272). In illustrations of the *Song of Songs* (Figure 1.6), the kiss takes place within the letter 'O' of *Osculetur me osculo oris sui* – 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.' The Virgin and her son embrace as bridegroom and bride, symbolising the union of church and divine (Lavin and Lavin, 2001, pp.34–47).

Figure 1.6: *The Letter 'O' from the Song of Songs*, DMS, Latin 1808, fol.1v, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
(Photo credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Figure 1.7: Albrecht Dürer, *Crucifixion*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3656. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

The kiss is also an image used to describe the mediation of Christ between man and God. The twelfth-century monk Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that the Word of God, or 'mouth', assumed human form when it kissed the flesh. Just as a kiss is shared by the giver and the recipient, so Jesus took on divine and human form as intercessor between the two (Rudy, 2002, p. 60). Within the *Small Passion,* Mary Magdalen's kissing of Christ's feet in the *Crucifixion* (Figure 1.7) and *Lamentation* (Figure 1. 8) demonstrate the more innocent connotations of a kiss as an expression of piety and of human longing for union with God. But it is the *Betrayal* (Figure 1.9) that summons the violent, sexual and severing intonations of the meeting of lips. Juxtaposing the merging of Christ's mouth and Judas' against a scene of more invasive and aggressive contact, Dürer evokes the brutal rift between God and man in the single gash of this kiss.

Dürer has two options for the composition. In keeping with an inherited association of sinfulness with a figure rendered sideways, he could have portrayed Christ facing forward and Judas in profile. But Dürer opts instead for the more dramatic, more tragic tradition in which Christ compromises his frontality to receive the kiss that brings about his capture. Translated to the language of prints, the conjoining of their lips assumes a particular potency: the page with its imprint recalls the memory of this semi-erotic contact which, by virtue of its surface-only nature (what is a kiss if not a promise of further intimacy?), suggests a fuller embrace to come. Yet it is the very moment of this kiss that brings about absence. The kiss seals Christ's doomed fate: his suffering, death and flight from earth.

The pathos of visual representations of Judas' perfidy is that the pressing of lips is inherently ironic and understated. While the two men facing each other in profile manifest the physical act of Judas' betrayal, Dürer renders the emotional and theological impact of this kiss in the foreground of his composition. Pressing Christ and his miscreant to the middleground, Dürer treats the encounter between Peter and Malchus as the immediate subject of the scene. What is described in the gospels as a sudden striking of the apostle's sword against the Roman servant's ear is here envisioned as an entangled brawl. Peter lunges towards his subject, sword mid-swing. Malchus lies supine in a position of sexual subordination. As moralising prints of the period warned, to be beaten on one's back with legs in the

Figure 1.8: Albrecht Dürer, *Lamentation*, *c.*1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3659. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.9: Albrecht Dürer, *Betrayal of Christ*, *c.*1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3643. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

air was to yield to the undesirable posture of defeat. (Figure 1.10) (Moxey, 1989, p.104).

In Dürer's print (Figure 1.9) the servant Malchus's face is twisted in anguish as he blocks a falling lantern from crashing into his head, while he grasps at Peter's cloak with his right hand. No more painful summary of the relationship between man and God can be found than in the contorted posture of this figure who pushes his attacker away while simultaneously drawing him near. This double gesture spells out the paradox of Judas' kiss, as both the need to cling to Christ and the impulse to reject him.

Both Christ and Judas in the middleground and Peter and Malchus in the foreground portray a simultaneous seduction and severance between the coupled figures. Dividing these two groups is a peculiar emblem of union more intimate than either of the two scenes that frame it. At the very moment of the kiss, Christ places one finger inside the closed palm of his other hand (Figure 1.11), a gesture that bares an embarrassing similarity to what is, in modern culture, a lewd hand signal for intercourse. Here Christ's hands perform an interlocking that is more penetrating and secure than the pressing and touching of surface-on-surface observable in other scenes. An unlocking of this

gesture occurs in the *Noli me tangere*, where the hands of Christ and Mary Magdalen together constitute a version of the gesture, in release (Figure 1.12). The clasping of Christ's forefinger in his cupped hand symbolises a potential union breached at the moment

Figure 1.11: Albrecht Dürer, *Betrayal of Christ* (detail), *c.*1509/10, woodcut, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3643. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Eyn liet genant der pöß rauch
Jn der flain weis

Figure 1.10: Anonymous, *Battle for the Pants*, woodcut frontispiece to Hans Folz's poem, 'The Evil Smoke'. (Photo courtesy of the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, 117.7 Eth (24))

Figure 1.12: Albrecht Dürer*, Noli me tangere* (detail), *c.*1509/10, woodcut, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3663. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

of the *Betrayal*. The disassembled parts of this sign in the *Noli me tangere* display Christ's reaching finger and Mary Magdalen's open, receiving palm, two disparate pieces of a whole, waiting to be reunited at some later time.

For every moment within Dürer's *Small Passion* that heralds man's fall from grace there is an affirmation of potential redemption. Judas' *Betrayal* finds a corrective response in Dürer's *Deposition* (Figure 1.13). The kiss is ironic, as we have seen, because it involves a surface contact too superficial to stand for the violent rupture it brings about. The most secure physical bond between man and Christ in the series occurs when Christ's body is lowered from the cross. Dürer's composition departs from the pictorial type in which Christ's body falls in a weightless S-curve. Instead, his corpse slumps forward, 'like the carcass of a slaughtered animal', and droops against the shoulder of his bearer (Panofsky, [1943] 2005, p.143). More intimate than a kiss, the hug demonstrates the moment of pressing and transfer by which the corporeal aspects of Christ – the sweat of his face, the weight of his body – make an impression in the human world, literally, through Christ's indexical marks, and figuratively through the operation of memory.

Figure 1.13: Albrecht Dürer, *Deposition*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3658. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Dürer's permutations on the theme of touching, through representations of kissing, hugging and the gestures of hands, explore the aptitude of prints to stand symbolically for a relationship between God and man. At times the pressing of surface to surface seems a promising expression of the impact of divine touch, but at other times the meeting of planes is inadequate, a superficial mark that fails to offer a more engaged embrace. Another metaphor associated with the printing process is reversal: the image of the engraved block results in a backward impression on the piece of paper. In the *Small Passion* Dürer includes the interchange of front and back in his poetic claim of prints as theological language.

The reversal that introduces the *Small Passion* is a reversal of convention. Dürer begins his series with two striking visions of Eden, striking because in both the *Fall of Man* (Figure 1.14) and the *Expulsion* (Figure 1.15), Eve's face is turned from the viewer. The Fall is a story of visual seduction. God warns Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge because 'in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened' (Genesis 3:5), but Eve is enticed by the tree which appears 'pleasant to the eyes' (Genesis 3:6). Depicting the primal sin offered an opportunity for artists to reenact the moment of the Fall by replacing the seduction of fruit with the seduction of a sensuous nude (Scribner, 1998, p.113). In his engraving of 1504 (Figure 1.5), Dürer had suggested the causal link between the Fall and sexuality by doubling the force of arousal with a spectacularly chiseled Adam and gracefully contrappostoed Eve. In this early scene of balanced beauty Dürer had caught his viewer in the act of looking at – and falling for – the human form. Six years later the tone is different. The first two prints in Dürer's series deny a glimpse of Eve's face. Her head is turned, granting the viewer a sight of Adam's expression, but not hers. Rather than aesthetically induce a reenactment of the Fall by offering contact with a seductive woman, Dürer acknowledges the already post-lapsarian stance of his viewer. Eve's averted expression admits the beholder's knowledge of the events to come. As she turns to him, she deflects the blame to the one who will share in her sin: in a moment Adam's outstretched palm, which now reaches out in protest, will clutch the fruit and eat. The gaze-denying position of Eve downplays the moment of seduction and instead emphasizes, through her turning away, the shame and concealment that are the immediate consequences of their transgression. Within the language of prints, to be confronted with a dorsal image is to be reminded of the method of printing: the image is the deposit of a prototype in reverse. A staged

Figure 1.14: Albrecht Dürer, *Fall of Man*, *c*.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3669. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.15: Albrecht Dürer, *Expulsion from Paradise*, 1510, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3634. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

process of tracing and carving preceded the existence of this print just as versions of this narrative were told before this composition. Acknowledging the place of his story within a serial order, Dürer also acknowledges the education and relative historicity of his viewers: the apple has been eaten, the tale has been told, and now it is up to the beholder to supply the face of the first offender.

In his woodcut series, *The Fall and Redemption of Man*, Albrecht Altdorfer exhibits a thorough digestion of Dürer's rhetoric of presentation and concealment. In the *Fall* (Figure 1.16) and *Expulsion* (Figure 1.17), Eve's is the visage that faces, while Adam's turns away.

With this rearrangement, Altdorfer distinguishes himself from a copyist, whose imitation would entail a reversal of the left and right sides. Instead of a horizontal swap, Altdorfer inverts, engineering a response of opposites whose motion is one of rotating through rather than flipping over. The act belongs to an immersive reader of Dürer's prints rather than a mere admirer of his graphic line. To pull Eve's expression from obscurity to confrontation while burying Adam's with a head-swiveling gaze is to acknowledge that these semicircular adjustments pivot the meaning of

the print. The language of inversion takes on an added meaning when applied to what Milton called 'man's first disobedience', as the language of both the Old and New Testaments describes repentance as an act of revolution – a return to God (Isaiah 44:22, Psalm 90, Acts 3:19, and elsewhere).

Altdorfer's rendition calls attention to the fact that Dürer sets the tone of his *Small Passion* with a flip-flopping of expectation. The spiritual positioning of his audience vis-à-vis the fall relies on the upsetting of an established gender order whereby Eve is the object of the (male) viewer's gaze. Her turn inward not only denies her objectification but also subordinates Adam to her stare. In toppling the social order, Dürer exercises print's language of reversal and acknowledges the medium's participating in a long tradition of narrative retelling. But later on in his account Dürer evokes the language of reversal to reinforce the spiritual order of epiphany by which God appears to man in order to save him. Within the *Small Passion*, the *Annunciation* (Figure 1.18) and *Christ's Appearance to His Mother* (Figure 1.19) frame the period of Christ's mission as mirror images of one another (Hass, 2000, p.186). In the earlier scene, God is delivered in human

Figure 1.16: Albrecht Altdorfer, *Fall of Man*, c.1513, woodcut, 7.2 x 4.8cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.326. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.17: Albrecht Altdorfer, *Expulsion from Paradise*, c.1513, woodcut, 7.2 x 4.8cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Gift of W.G. Russell Allen, 1941.1.110. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.18: Albrecht Dürer, *Annunciation*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3635. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Figure 1.19: Albrecht Dürer, *Christ Appearing to his Mother*, c.1509/10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3662. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

form as the angel rushes in from the left to announce the miracle to the kneeling Virgin. Twenty-seven pages later, this composition is turned around as Mary, poised again in prayer, is interrupted by the arrival of her resurrected son. The directional change is abetted by the mirroring of the angel's gesture of blessing in Christ's opposite hand. Also relocated is the signature of Dürer that falls from the bed canopy to the base of Mary's bookrest. In the replacement of his initials Dürer deliberately inverts his 'D', acknowledging how the world has turned: God is born of woman on earth then bids his final farewell.

Signatures: hand and face

Dürer's autograph often provides a key to his theological message. Sometimes he positions his signature to compare the temporal conditions of his work's making with the historical moment within the image. This is the case, for example, in the *Small Passion*'s *Sudarium* (Figure 1.3), in which Dürer frames Christ's imprinted face with his date and initials, as if to say, 'he leaves his mark, I leave mine'. Other times his initializing asserts his privileged position as witness to a Christological event, as in his *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand,* where Dürer combines his painted self-portrait with an inscribed sign post in a redundant assertion of his presence (Marin, 1995, pp.198–204). In the paired *Annunciation* and *Christ's Appearance to His Mother*, the transposition of Dürer's signature imitates the mirroring of the printing process and symbolically traces the theophany: God's descent from high to low and his reversal of original sin.

Dürer's initials stamp each page of the *Small Passion* but in one of the prints the *iconographic content* serves as a signature for the project as a whole. Throughout the series, transactions between Christ's face and other faces, between his hands and other hands, announce and defend an image behavior pattern whereby his imprint is passed on and becomes available to all. In the *Road to the Calvary* (Figure 1.20), the dramatic tension between Christ's face and Veronica's veil and the breaking of his fall with his hand serve as an anatomical diagram of the entire rhetorical scheme of the *Small Passion*. Compressing the space of Schongauer's composition, in which Christ stumbles under the weight of the cross, Dürer augments it with the presentation of Veronica's veil. Dürer inserts an intermediary object between Christ's hand and the ground, a slab that bears a strong resemblance to the woodcutter's block. The implied simultaneity of face to cloth and hand to block combines two metonymical stand-ins for both God and for the artist, and authorizes the print process as medium of apostolic transfer.

The *Road to the Calvary* conflates a narrative telling with the profession of a symbolic relationship of face and hand to creative action. It is not only that the face of Christ left an indexical mark that affirmed his incarnate presence on earth. Crucial to the understanding of the acheiropoietos is the iconographical history that preceded it. In pre-Christian images, the hand was a synecdoche for God. This was based on the locution in Exodus where God's ruling dominion is referred to as 'a mighty hand' (Exodus 3:19). Moses tells the people that their relationship with God is based on auditory not visual mediation: 'And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice' (Deuteronomy 4:12). The observance of the Old Testament's prohibition against making images was carried out through the symbolic proxy of hand of God for voice of God. The hand was a substitute, signaling the creative force by which divine utterances formed the heavens, earth, and all the earth's inhabitants. Artists portrayed Moses' solitary communications with God at the Burning Bush or during the receipt of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai with an arm protruding from the sky. Christian tradition alluded to this synecdoche

Figure 1.20: Albrecht Dürer, *Road to the Calvary*, c.1509, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.7cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3653. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

as prehistory, finding in the incarnation of Christ justification for the materialisation of God's image in pictorial form. In typologically aware representations of the Exodus encounter, a hand from the sky might deliver the Law to Moses, while his encounter with the Burning Bush might expose to the viewer a vision of the Virgin and Child (Figure 1.22) (Nelson and Collins, 2006, pp.113–15 and pp.271–73).

The analogy is between the shrub with its insatiable fire and the woman who remained 'unconsumed' by intercourse with man. The presence of the Hodegetria in this context suggests that Moses did not understand the events foreshadowed in his encounters with God, but that these clues were made visible signs when Christ assumed human form (Kessler, 2000, p.5). The descent of the divine into the world not only liberated artists to depict the image of Christ, but also vindicated all subsequent representations of God the father. Christian artists often included this iconophilic defense as part of the narrative history of Christianity. For example, in Giotto's paintings for the Scrovegni chapel, God's attendance at the sacrifice of Joachim (an event that precedes the birth of Christ) is indicated by the appearance of a hand in the sky (Figure 1.22), but later

Figure 1.21: *Triptych icon of Moses on Mount Sinai and the Hodegetria within the Burning bush*, from the Chapel of St. James in the Monastery of St. Catherine of Sinai, Egypt. (Kharbine-Tapabor/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY)

Figure 1.22: Giotto di Bondone, *Joachim's Sacrifice, c.*1305, fresco, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. (Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 1.23: Giotto di Bondone, *Baptism, c.*1305, fresco, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. (Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

in the fresco cycle at the Baptism of Christ (Figure 1.23), God the father emerges in full human form.

In his *Road to the Calvary* (Figure 1.20), Dürer elides the old and new pictorial traditions in the single instant in which hand and face make their mark. By underscoring (with the placement of a prop) the hand of Christ at the moment of the transfer of his image, Dürer announces that hand and face are united and made available through the imprint and its dissemination. The woodblock, like the veil, assumes the direct mark of the creator, and transfers this mark to all subsequent impressions.

This claim is further reinforced by a repetition and appropriation of Christ's hand gesture by Mary Magdalen. In the *Crucifixion* (Figure 1.7), Mary's hand presses against the ground to support her dolorous kissing of Christ's feet in imitation of Christ's hand gesture at his fall. The inheritance of her posture from his is made all the more evident in the diagonal rhyming of their bodies across an uncut sheet which shows the printing of four images to a page (Figure 1.24). Next, in the *Noli me tangere* (Figure 1.1) the gesture is reversed and personalised as Mary Magdalen lays her

hand on the vessel of ointment—the vessel which has become her symbolic alter-ego, not only because of the vessel's feminine imagery, but also because Mary Magdalen *is* a vessel, the carrier of a message. She is the first witness to the risen Christ and the first recipient of the apostolic commission: 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God' (John 20:16–17) (Jansen, 1998, p.57). The touch of Christ is transmitted and reconfigured in the form of Mary Magdalen, the first witness of the Resurrection and the voice of the Church, who will tell of the fate of Christ's body and the fulfillment of man's destiny in things to come (Malvern, 1975, p.84). The translation of this gesture describes, through the metonymy of the hand, the history of the image of God: from pre-incarnation, to Christ's bodily existence, culminating in the suspense of his return and the reliance of the transmission of his touch to sustain the memory of his presence. The placement of Mary Magdalen's hand on the pot represents what is possible and what is beyond human reach.

Figure 1.24: Albrecht Dürer, *Road to the Calvary*, *Veronica with the Sudarium and Saints Peter and Paul*, *Christ Nailed to the Cross, Crucifixion*, 1509–10, uncut sheet with four woodblock prints, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-1362.

Figure 1.25: Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait*, 1500, oil on board, Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich. (Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY)

Hand and face are not only metonymies for God: they are also metonymies for the artist. Throughout Dürer's oeuvre he investigates the symbolic value of hand and face as stand-ins for himself. In his silverpoint of 1484, the thirteen-year old Dürer confronts the two challenges of self-portraiture: first, how to render his right hand, which necessarily cannot pose while drawing, and second, how to fix his gaze within the picture, since his scanning eyes cannot look at mirror and page at the same time (Panofsky, 2005, p.16). In this early effort Dürer hides what appears as his left hand (the mirror reverse of his drawing right hand) in the sleeve of his cloak. In another self-image a few years later, Dürer presses his available hand against his seeing eye, calling attention to 'the two traditional centers of pictorial interest in portraiture' (Koerner, 1993, p.5). These youthful sketches culminate in Dürer's most bold endeavor: the Munich self-portrait of 1500 (Figure 1.25). As Joseph Leo Koerner has shown, the daring self-consciousness of this likeness lies not only in the conflation of Dürer's features with Christ's but also in his imitation of the style of a true icon, an image not made by human hands (Koerner, 1993, p.53

and p.84). Uniting face and hand in vertical alignment, Dürer correlates artistic mastery with divine creation: the hand of this artist, which materialises his visage, compares with the hand of God, who brought his own image into the world.

For Dürer, the hand as self-emblem was personal. The 'fame of the beauty of Dürer's hand' (Wölfflin, 1971, p.156) is recorded in the graceful long fingers that clasp the fur of his collar in the Munich self-portrait and in contemporaneous testimonials such as Joachim Camerarius's preface to Dürer's *Proportionslehre* in which he describes Dürer's delicate hands: 'But his fingers – you would vow you had never seen anything more elegant' (Rupprich, 1956, vol.1, p.307). In the *Road to the Calvary*, the pressing of hand to tablet is an insertion of the self more profound than the neighboring tablet inscribed with Dürer's initials. Within the pragmatics of the narrative, the gesture is absurd – the placement of the hand is too gentle to sustain the weight of Christ's body and break his fall. The awkwardness of this breach of realism is even more apparent in the earlier *Large Passion* (Figure 1.26), where Dürer defies the laws of physics in Christ's

Figure 1.26: Albrecht Dürer, *Road to the Calvary*, *c*.1509/10, woodcut, 39.5 x 28.2cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3620. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

unbending arm. In both compositions Dürer takes an artistic risk, jutting into the foreground an emblematic contact that stands for the spiritual effect of the scene. This trick recalls the Peter–Malchus scuffle as exegesis to the Betrayal. Here too one element spells out the emotional impact of another. The narrative content of the *Road to the Calvary* is the collapse of Christ's body under the heft of the cross. The double instances of imprinting – face to cloth and hand to block – signal this as the message to be passed on – the cross *the beholder* must bear. Dürer chooses this moment to make his mark. The mass of Christ's body, its submission to suffering, is what is transferred through the work of art to its audience and what makes an impression on the world.

Between the seams of transmission

Print is a medium that announces, defends and propagates a theophany through mimicry. Though over the course of his career Dürer would produce six different cycles portraying Christ's Passion, the success of Dürer's message about the transmission of divine contact through touch in this particular sequence lies in the circulation and reissuing of *The Small Passion*.

Dürer's Netherlandish Diary, which records the sales he made on a trip begun nine years after the 1511 publication, includes several notes about his remunerations for this series; on one occasion, he sells sixteen copies of *The Small Passion* to Sebald Fischer for four gulden (Rupprich, 1956, vol.1, p.152). The woodblocks continued to be used to issue new editions over the course of the sixteenth century, often omitting the text that had accompanied the images: twenty-two verses of Latin poems by Benedictus Chalidonius (a reuse of a text that had been published in Strasburg in 1507) and, on the verso of the penultimate page, dedicatory poems by Willibald Pirckheimer and Johann Cochläus (Schneider, 2001, pp.302–3). In 1612, the Venetian publisher, Daniel Bissuccio, summoned the blocks to service again, issuing the narrative under the title, *La Passione di N.S. Giesu Christo d'Alberto Durero di Norimberga* (Meder, 1932, pp.129–31; Schneider, 2001, p.284). Instead of the original frontispiece, which had displayed a thorn-crowned Christ seated on a block carved with the initials AD (Meder, 1932, no. 125; Schneider, 2002, pp. 286-7), the introductory image was replaced with an engraving based on a portrait medal of Dürer by Matthias Gebel. Dürer had proffered at the outset the Man of Sorrows, an image of the divine that calls for identification through the imitation of his suffering (Isaiah 53:3). But a century later, it was the artist's own silhouette that introduced the set.

In 1839, the British Museum acquired thirty-five of the *Small Passion's* woodblocks (absenting the frontispiece and *Christ Taking Leave of his Mother*, both of which had been lost) (Bartrum, 1995, pp.41–2). With the permission of the institution's trustees, in 1844 Henry Cole directed the production of a new series based on stereotype copies of the blocks. The injuries to the originals (broken lines and worm holes) were filled in and the two missing compositions were re-engraved (Dobson, 1894, pp.9–13). The afterlife of the pearwood prototypes and the total number of surviving prints related to the series on the one hand affirms the notion that the medium of print fulfills, through images that describe the transfer of bodily trace, the apostolic commission – the injunction to tell the history of Christ's corporeal presence, the impressions it left, and the return it will make in the end. On the other hand, following the sequence of reprints and examining the woodblocks as artifacts speaks to some of the interventions that are hidden in the mechanics of production. Dürer's 1511 publication included a colophon (repeated in the other series he produced in that year – *The Large Passion, The Life of the Virgin,* and the *Apocalypse*) in which he warns potential copyists against the imitation of his

Figure 1.27: Marcantonio Raimondi, *Road to the Calvary*, 16th century, engraving, 12.7 x 9.7cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund, M22480.

Figure 1.28: Marcantonio Raimondi, *Veronica with the Sudarium and Saints Peter and Paul*, 16th century, engraving, 12.7 x 9.7cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund, M22481.

compositions: 'Beware you envious thieves of the work and invention of others, keep you thoughtless hands [*manus temerarias*] from these works of ours' (Rupprich, 1956, vol.1, p.76). Here the metonymy of hand for artistic production is summoned as a slap on the wrist to the fellow members of his trade. Already in 1511, Marcantonio Raimondi would breach the terms of this injunction by issuing an engraved edition of Dürer's compositions (an incident memorialised, with a bungling of historical fact, by Giorgio Vasari) (Vasari, 1880, pp.398–409). In Raimondi's rendition the blank tablets – void of initials and dates – weaken the claims of simultaneity between the impressions made from Christ's body and the origins of the images' authorship. An empty frame anchors the lower right corner in the scene of Christ's fall (Figure 1.27); Veronica, holding up her veil, stands behind a silent prop (Figure 1.28).

The survival of the woodblocks has allowed for the assessment that they were cut by a number of different hands (Dodgson, 1903, vol.1, pp.296–7). The assurance

Figure 1.29: Hans Baldung Grien, *Christ on the Pillar*, 1517, woodcut, 21.8 x 15.3cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.902. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

of the printed image as an indexical mark was thus already operating metaphorically by eliding a gap in production that stood between the artist's design of the image and the carver's whittling away of surface. The interpolation of a process between composing and cutting was quieted by the wide circulation of the *Small Passion,* which appealed to audiences both as a devotional aid and as a representation of the artist's hand. One could almost let go unmentioned this rift in the smooth impression the prints give – that they bear the marks of their maker – were it not that at the time of the *Small Passion's* circulation, another artist was developing a language with which to indicate fissures. In an image carrying the date 1511 (British Museum 1895,0122.233; Hollstein 59), Hans Baldung Grien situates the Christ Child between the arms of his mother and grandmother, his naked body on view for all to see (all parts of the human flesh are there; the probing hand of St. Anne checks) (Steinberg, 1996, pp.110–19 and pp.359–63). Joseph, accustomed to the marginalised spot of an onlooker, peers over a crackling wall. The rifts in this blockade – pressure clefts are what threaten the integrity of wooden blocks – separate those who touch the flesh of Christ from those who gaze upon it. The imminent tearing away of the divine body bubbles violently within Baldung's presentations of the incarnate God. Fissures declare a foreboding sense of rupture and loss (Figure 1.29). Dürer, however, used the analogy between haptic gestures and the printed medium to promote the efficacy of palpation. His narrative style was well understood by recipients who knew of daily devotion – and the handling of art – as an act of touch.

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BLIND SUFFERING:
RIBERA'S NON-VISUAL EPISTEMOLOGY
OF MARTYRDOM
Itay Sapir

Abstract

One of the oft-neglected aspects of early Baroque painting is its critical stance vis-à-vis renaissance's ideal of pure and perfect visibility. The origins of this standpoint can be traced to the art of Caravaggio, but it is the Hispano-Neapolitan painter Jusepe de Ribera who brings it to a culmination of sorts, in a sustained pictorial quest for a novel sensorial pragmatics. Ribera's representations of martyrdom, in particular, create a fascinating play between saints' tactile experience of their suffering, their complex, often-deficient visual perception, and the viewer's limited access to visual information when reconstructing the narrative on the basis of pictorial evidence. In this article, I analyse Ribera's creation of mock-tactile textures through purely visual techniques, and the implications of such an artistic method for the hierarchy of the senses in the devotional context of Neapolitan culture in the first half of the seventeenth century. Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Francis Bacon in The Logic of Sensation and Steven Connor's observations on skin's place in modern culture are brought also to bear on Ribera's epidermal painting and its subversion of ocularcentrism.

Biographical note

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BLIND SUFFERING: RIBERA'S NON-VISUAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM

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The imperialism of sight in modernity, and its subsequent denigration in post-modern culture, are old news by now. Martin Jay's phrase, 'The Denigration of Vision' (1993), has become almost a cliché, and with it the idea that before twentieth-century (French, but read 'dominant') thought dethroned it, sight was reigning, sovereign and uncontested, over the sensorial realm. It is generally assumed by historians that in Western culture, from its origins in ancient Greece to the early modern period at least, sight was the ideal, most immediate avenue to the acquisition of knowledge, the most efficient mnemonic sense (hence the classical art of memory, turning words and concepts into images), and the one that is most susceptible to provoke direct emotional response. The renaissance, in particular, theorized sight as the foremost vehicle for beauty, piety and truth; Leonardo da Vinci's writings are perhaps the most eloquent expressions of that relatively mainstream intellectual position.

A few important attempts have nonetheless been made to develop and historicize the idea that there were, already in early modern Europe, alternatives to sight and to its dominance. In the field of medieval and renaissance studies, Constance Classen's *Color of Angels* from 1998 is a worthy account, though sometimes limited in its scope, of the lost variety of sensorial perception present in Western Culture's not-so-distant past; Classen puts at the centre of her discussion the history of gendered sensorialities, in particular the association of sight with men and the concurrent feminization of touch. While sensorial variety is thus evident, such a gendered vision, needless to say, both substantiates and proves sight's solid historical supremacy. François Quiviger's recent *Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art* (2010) is a more specific study of the multiplicity of sensorial realities and their representations.

However, beyond the well-demonstrated existence of alternative sensorial experiences and hierarchies in early modern culture, I would like to concentrate here on a rather intriguing paradox: the denigration of sight and the search for alternatives to its prevalence,

practised by painters, of all people. After all, painting, long before Clement Greenberg, has been considered the visual art *par excellence*, intent on showing us that aspect of the world that caters to our eyes only; once again, the renaissance is a case in point, as it emphasised painting's mandate of representing the visual richness that surrounds us, faithfully fulfilling Leon Battista Alberti's well-known precept that the painter should be concerned with nothing else but that which can be seen (in Alberti's 1436 Italian version, 'Delle cose quali non possiamo vedere, neuno nega nulla apartenersene al pittore. Solo studia il pittore fingere quello si vede').

The ideal of visual adequacy and transparency that such an approach entails remained dominant for more than a century, and the gradual process of its undermining is a complex story, yet to be fully told by art historians. For the moment, suffice it to say that after decades of mannerist playful, though ultimately lethal, questioning of Alberti's doctrine, the latter's agonising corpse was unceremoniously and definitively slaughtered and buried by the artist who dared to make paintings in which visibility was severely impaired and visual information seriously impoverished: it was Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio who greeted the new century with the pictorial announcement that sight is limited, misleading and suspect, and the fact that he did so as a painter, and not as an image-hating iconoclast, added much poignancy to that statement.

Caravaggio's sacred paintings, in particular, have much to say about the metaphysical poverty of sight – *The Conversion of Saint Paul* (Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo, 1600–1), which suggests that spiritual enlightenment goes hand in hand with concrete blinding, being a typical example. Nevertheless, Caravaggio's art was too concentrated on lofty questions of revelation, incarnation and vocation to find some time for the more pragmatic issues of perception, such as the 'division of labour' among the five senses or the hierarchical order that should, or should not, distinguish between their respective values. And so, while Paul's groping of the void above him does suggest a haptic aspiration substituting for lost physical sight, and while the *Doubting Thomas*' gesture famously opens the space for a fascinating discussion of sight, touch, faith and knowledge (see Most, 2005, and Benay, 2014), these rare episodes remained a rather marginal sub-current of Caravaggio's art, the main concern of which lay elsewhere.

The relative merits of the five senses, and in particular the unrelenting search for alternatives to sight's supremacy, were, on the other hand, at the centre of a slightly later artistic enterprise, that of Jusepe/José de Ribera (1591–1652). Indeed, the

Figure 2.1: Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1614–6, oil on canvas, 174cm x 124cm. (Reproduced with permission)

Hispano-Neapolitan painter supplemented a profound treatment of sensorial pragmatics to the more general spiritual questions of faith and revelation. Ribera's *Saint John the Baptist* now on display in Houston (1614–6; Figure 2.1), for instance, reveals a subtle but significant divergence from Caravaggio's art, precisely because its theme is a typical and frequent caravaggesque one. Ribera's Baptist is shown with a gesture Caravaggio never depicted in this context, rubbing his fingers on each other, thus highlighting the tactile eloquence of skin itself. This seemingly trivial

detail is in fact important as it shows us a person auto-reflexively producing an effect of presence to himself not by looking at his reflection in a mirror, but exclusively by touching. The latter oft–denigrated sense is thus suggested as a possible, even necessary alternative to the now-beleaguered sight, taking into account vision's well-known epistemological merits but also its notorious inadequacies. The protagonist's lost, unfocused gaze, that the wide-open mouth hyperbolically replicates, underlines, by contrast, the concreteness of the touching-and-touched finger and

its simple-but-precious reliability: the cluster of hands is dense, focused and solid – or at least so it seems to the spectator's eyes, the only organ directly addressed by the art of painting, a fact that brings to the fore immediately the paradox at the heart of Ribera's painterly enterprise of contesting sight's prominence.

Probably a more conventional starting point for a discussion of Ribera and the sensorial is the famous series of the five senses personified. The young Ribera created several versions of some of the senses, and the interest these paintings show for the very concrete aspects of human perceptual interaction with the world is literal and obvious. The two allegories of *Touch*, in particular, (Pasadena, Norton Simon Foundation and Madrid, Museo del Prado) are fascinating visual treatments of sight and touch as rival epistemological alternatives: both show an apparently blind person neglecting a painting lying next to him while holding and actively touching a sculpted, classical-looking head. The aporetic character of these images is forcefully enhanced when one remembers that they are themselves nothing more than two-dimensional paintings, offering no tactile gratification to their spectator and hardly any interest to the unsighted. The *paragone* reference, though evidently present, is equally ambiguous: while sculpture is shown as the richer and more satisfying medium, it is only so because of the man's handicap; one could argue that, according to Ribera, sculpture's only use is as 'painting for the blind'.

Some of Ribera's works, while not treating the five senses as their iconographical fulcrum, do directly – iconographically – engage with the limits of sight. A few depict concrete ocular deficiencies: blindness in the *Blessing of Jacob* (Madrid, Museo del Prado, 1637)*,* with the old Isaac relying on touch and being misled by it – a classic biblical *locus* of the sensorial *paragone*; the tired, worn eyes of numerous elderly men like the Prado *Saint Simon* (*c*.1630), or Montreal's *Saint Joseph* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *c*.1635), their eyelids red and their sight visibly dysfunctional; and, perhaps in a more anecdotic mode, the knight of the Order of Saint James, today in Dallas (*Portrait of a Knight of Santiago*, Meadows Museum, *c*.1635), with his spectacles, interestingly using the correction of poor sight as a marker of identity, a proudly exhibited attribute. None of these themes was in itself unprecedented, but their frequent appearance in Ribera's *oeuvre* signals a cluster of interests that can hardly be ignored.

Things become less obvious, and thus more intriguing, when we realize that, even when avoiding the iconographic, direct treatment of sensorial issues, Ribera rarely lost interest in the conundrums of

the senses. On the contrary, the entire trajectory of the artist's career can be plausibly interpreted as a continuous commentary on the shortcomings of sight and on sensorial alternatives, most remarkably the immense potential of touch for our access to everything around us.

Once again, it cannot be stressed enough to what extent this otherwise trivial point about the deficiencies of sight becomes audacious, even auto-subversive, when it is made by a painter, and repeatedly so. In choosing to professionally address our eyes and to use the visual medium as a sole means of expression, Ribera seemed to endorse the authority and importance of sight, while his actual practice did much to undermine those very same principles. Michel Serres detects the same phenomenon much later in the paintings of Pierre Bonnard, where 'the eye loses its pre-eminence in the very domain of its domination, painting' (Serres, 1985, p.40). An even more closely analogous twentieth-century case is the art of Francis Bacon, whose interest in the haptic and in textures – painterly and corporeal, or rather painterly-as-corporeal – is made evident in Deleuze's study of the artist's 'close vision' and non-representative figures-without-figuration ([1981] 2005). Deleuze's 'logic of sensation' – for the latter word 'affects' or 'instincts' are used as synonyms – is, as we will see, a phrase singularly adequate to describe the novelty of Ribera's art. Strangely enough, Deleuze mentions the seventeenth-century antecedents of Rembrandt and Velazquez, but ignores Ribera altogether in his study of Bacon.

The current scholarship on Ribera, for its part, concentrates either on knowledge and the senses or on faith and religion, each aspect ostensibly excluding the other. A rather virulent debate has been raging. On the one hand, we have what one might call the traditional or philological school, led by Nicola Spinosa, author of an authoritative Ribera monograph (Spinosa, 2003), who considers the painter a faithful promoter of Catholic orthodoxy, while generally being content with the painstaking labour of attribution and chronology. On the other hand, there are those rather rare scholars who depict a transgressive, modern Ribera open to intellectual novelties and ready to explore them in paint. While the former camp refuses to consider as relevant anything outside of the paintings themselves and the immediate archival documentation, the latter raises, as does Paola Santucci (1999), the fundamental epistemological question, but too quickly (and in perfect agreement with Spinosa, on this point only) describes Ribera's painting as 'naturalist' and

Figure 2.2: Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Andrew*, *c.*1637, oil on canvas, 146cm x 74cm. (Reproduced with permission)

ignores both its subtle divergences from Caravaggism and the complex treatment of sensorial information that makes Ribera's work so ambiguous.[1]

Indeed, epistemological and sensorial issues are rarely far from Ribera's attention. A relatively indirect, but striking reference to sight's vanity is in the version of *Saint Andrew* now in Houston (*c.*1637; Figure 2.2). The detail of the fish is in itself iconographically banal: Andrew was a fisherman, and this is his traditional

pictorial attribute, also hinting to his new vocation as fisher of men and their souls. But the dead – or dying – fish's eye here is haunting: ostensibly no more than a 'vile jelly', in the famous words of Shakespeare's Cornwall in *King Lear* just a few decades earlier; and yet in humans an organ aspiring for nobleness, the supposedly acute observer of things close and far, the window of the soul. If the depiction of eyes can often be considered as a metonymic statement on sight, this one is decidedly caustic: can a glazed, witless surface really sustain all the symbolic and intellectual weight that western culture has often ascribed to the sense of sight?

1   The attribution of the term 'naturalism' to Caravaggio's art is problematic in itself; see my discussion (2012, pp.187–227).

The representation of Saint Andrew himself is also relevant to the topic of alternative sensorialities. Like many other saints and martyrs, his gaze is directed upwards, to a place invisible to us, spectators and mortals; his sense of sight relinquishes the physical interaction with concrete reality in favour of a spiritual visual experience – visual, but not simply and clearly *visible,* to follow a distinction made by Georges Didi-Huberman (2005; for the complexities of 'vision' in the Spanish Baroque context, see Stoichita 1995). The saint's right hand is haptically absorbed, reaffirming his own physical existence, and reminds us that, while spiritually floating in ethereal spheres, he is also present here and now, his body feeling itself and his surroundings – all that he does not see anymore. The physical concreteness of the saint, teasingly appealing to our hypothetical touching hand in this artefact made for the eye only, is further enhanced by the painstaking representation of skin texture, typical of Ribera. The artist's fondness of older protagonists can indeed be explained by the more varied, articulated surface of their faces, hands and other body parts – human skin, after all, notoriously bears the marks of time, and 'the unmarked skin' is perhaps merely 'the not-yet-marked skin' (Connor, 2004, p.73). Most painters – but not, or not as often, Ribera – strived to represent the glowing immaculateness of young skin, as if 'untouched by human hand, and therefore illuminated by its own light and by radiant, rather than pigmented, colour' (Connor, 2004, p.160). Ribera, instead, frequently opted for emphatically *painted* skins, substituting shades of yellow – 'the colour of aging' (p.164) and of 'the skin corrupted; or of ideal whiteness corrupted into the condition of skin' (p.170) – for the pinkness of healthy Venetian Virgins and saints, or for the greenish hue of Caravaggio's *Bacchino malato* (Rome, Galleria Borghese, 1593–4). The disintegration of facial features is, once again, akin to Deleuze's Bacon (2005), intent on effacing the face (*visage*) and making the head (*tête*) emerge, seeking the flesh, and even the meat (*viande*), that make up the body's seemingly evident visuality and abstract form. Deleuze's term of 'catastrophe' taking place on Bacon's canvases also comes to mind when thinking of Ribera's zones of emphatic painterly materiality.

Indeed, Ribera's fascination with skin textures, and the corollary identification between paint and bodily envelope, beyond their solid historical origins in Venetian painting and specifically in Titian's famously apt rendition of human flesh, partly indebted to the adoption of oil paint, are also a forward-looking sign of modernity, or even modernism. Compare, for instance, the fact that there is very little specific attention to the skin in early medical conceptions of the body, that it often appears in anatomical treatises 'only as that which is to be breached in order to gain access to the hidden innards of the human body', a simple 'screen' (Connor, 2004, pp.10–26), with the statement, by no other than James Joyce, that 'modern man has an epidermis rather than a soul' (quoted in Connor, p.9).

Although the skin 'provides the medium in which the other sense organs are located' (Connor, 2004, p.34), it is in its totality sensitive to touch; it is, in a sense, touch's own 'sense organ'. The modern, or rather post-modern skin, claims Connor, has even become 'unvisualizable' (p.68), perhaps because of sight's traditional high standards. 'Sight is not sight unless it is lucid' (Connor, 2004, p.260), whereas touch is more receptive to epistemological modesty and more accepting of zones of uncertainty. However, vision itself can become a surrogate or close relative of touch, as in Bacon's (or Deleuze's Bacon's) 'haptic eye' or 'haptic vision'; closer to Ribera, in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, writers such as Claude Quillet (1602–61) and the natural philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655, almost an exact contemporary of Ribera) supported atomist ideas insisting on the proximity, via the concept of skin, between sight and touch. Their sensorial theory, originating in Epicurus and Lucretius, 'not only emphasises the closeness of sight to touch, it also speculates that the objects of sight are themselves subtle skins, scoured or scaled away from the surface of visible objects' (Connor, 2004, p.109). Instead of distinguishing matter and form – that is, separating what the skin can touch and what the eyes can see – Gassendi and his followers admitted only different states of matter, dense and dark or fine and subtle (p.268). Nicolas Malebranche, in 1674, also conflated vision and touch in attributing to the former the corporeality and proximity usually associated with the latter (p.115). These ideas, representing an alternative, marginalised philosophical tradition in the seventeenth century, as opposed to the hegemonic Cartesian views, anticipate Merleau-Ponty's comprehension of sight as dependent on contact and, indeed, touch (1968), and Deleuze's concept of sensation as ordered in different levels corresponding to the various sense organs, all communicating in the moment of 'sensation' (2005).

The structural pattern of Ribera's aforementioned *Saint Andrew*, which we can now characterise as following a 'logic of sensation' – an elderly saint, an upwards gaze, active tactility, spiritual vision invisible to the spectator – is repeated again and again in Ribera's works. This pattern is used for other single 'portraits' like Saint Joseph's (in both versions, in Brooklyn and Montreal), and also, in a more complex and intriguing way, in the narrative depictions of the Passion and of

Figure 2.3: Jusepe de Ribera, *Deposition of Christ*, late 1620s, oil on canvas, 127cm x 182cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

martyrdom for which the painter has always been famous – or perhaps notorious. It is in these scenes that ideas about faith, knowledge and sensorial perception pictorially coalesce into a complex, original whole.

The Louvre *Deposition of Christ* (Figure 2.3) is a particularly striking example. The Louvre dates this painting to the late 1620s, while Spinosa's verdict places its creation around 1626. Be that as it may, it is quite obvious that the basic scopic regime that is organizing the composition is still, at this stage of Ribera's career, comparable to the highest point of Caravaggio's tenebrism: a large part of the painted surface is reserved not to a painstaking observation of the visual richness of the world, but to non-articulated, empty darkness whose 'representation' does not require any ocular proficiency.

Ribera's choice, then, is to reduce to a minimum the visual information transmitted to the spectator. Moreover, he further develops the pattern of internal sight relations that Caravaggio more timidly used in paintings such as *The Death of the Virgin* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1601–1605/1606). Not only is the viewer excluded from the hostile visual environment that the

composition creates; the five figures in the painting are hyperbolical representations of the same scopic impoverishment.[2] Of the four living protagonists, three have eyes that are completely invisible under thick shadows, not perceptibly directed anywhere and seemingly not functional. The Virgin Mary is reduced to no more than a silhouette floating in the black space. The figures' clear interest in the supernatural phenomenon in front of them, the lifeless son of God, is expressed in strikingly non-visual ways, not only because their eyes are darkened, but also because their distance from Jesus' corpse is not the potentially totalising, objective distance favoured by Renaissance perspectival norms, but one that is too close for comfort, and that involves the risk of disturbing synaesthetic conflation: both touch and smell are called upon and, given the situation, they could be much more invasive than what sight would involve. Our own

2   The term 'impoverishment' is borrowed from Bersani and Dutoit (1993) who, although using it for a wholly different period (the twentieth century of Beckett, Rothko and Resnais), did go on to write a book on Caravaggio, thus linking the latter's modernity precisely to his informational 'poverty'.

Figure 2.4: Jusepe de Ribera, *Pietà*, 1633, oil on canvas, 157cm x 210cm. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. (Photo: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza/Scala/Art Resource, NY)

spectatorial position, in fact, is similar, in that Jesus' body is almost thrown towards us, invading our space, and hardly allows us the convenient external position that spectatorship would have been supposed to confer.

The Madrid *Pietà* (Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Figure 2.4; see Finaldi, 2003) goes one step further, with Mary Magdalene actually touching Christ's feet with her lips (originally, she was almost as close in the London *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, National Gallery, early 1620s; later on, though, her position was modified and she is now further from Christ's feet. See Finaldi, 2003, p.91). In this work, sightlines are particularly destabilised and, in turn, destabilising for the spectator: the Virgin, like Ribera's aforementioned martyrs, is looking upwards, towards the invisible heavenly non-space outside of the picture's frame; the old man on the right (Nicodemus?) is also staring at a void, but this time it is the monochrome greyish-brown surface within the frame that strangely draws his attention; and the young Saint John is gazing at Mary Magdalene's own act of defiance to sight. Admittedly, these sightlines are presumed rather than evident: Ribera's habit of shading his figures' eyes, thus rendering them

ambiguously directed, is here used for all four of the living protagonists, whereas the only pair of eyes fully illuminated belongs to the dead body they all take great care not to look at.

To go back to the Louvre painting, the man on the right, again probably Nicodemus, is seen in profile and one of his eyes is shown without any shadowy covering, but it is visibly the tired eye of an old man – Ribera, as we have seen, excelled in the depiction of physical decrepitude – and it is not focused on anything clear either. If anything, he seems to stare at the blank gaze of the man in front of him, or at the limited, darker-than-dark space between the latter man's eyes and Jesus' cheek, striving to see a failed act of seeing, the incompetence of the eye.

Thus, the sensorial interaction depicted in the *Deposition* and in the *Pietà* is proposing a new, alternative reading of the hierarchies of the senses, undermining both the norms of Renaissance painting and those of the New Science. It is a strong epistemological statement, though in an opposite sense than the scientific, empiric mindset that scholars like Paola Santucci wish to detect in Ribera's art.

Figure 2.5: Jusepe de Ribera, *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1628–30, oil on canvas, 145cm x 216cm. Florence, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti. (Photo: Finsiel/Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

And here, as elsewhere in the seventeenth century, epistemology is never too far away from theology. To be sure, for Santucci (1999) the scientific stance of Ribera sets him apart from Spinosa's hypotheses on the painter's religious and doctrinal affiliations; and Spinosa, conversely, offhandedly rejects Santucci's attribution of epistemological interests to Ribera as wholly irrelevant to the painter's presumed milieu and context (2003, pp.7–8). What they both ignore is the strong link between some aspects of sacred teachings and contemporary debates on what is knowable and how.

Joseph Imorde (2008) offers us some interesting hints in this direction, even though his relevant study does not discuss paintings, let alone Ribera. Reading some late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century thinkers from all over Europe, such as Cesare Ripa (*c.*1560–*c.*1645), Maximilian Sandaeus (1578–1656), Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621), Cornelius a Lapide (1567–1637) and Jean Dubreuil (1602–70), Imorde shows us the broad circulation of ideas about divinity that is by definition dissimulated, and approachable, if at all, only via traces, images and simulacra – various symbols of the divine being. Imorde's example of an artistic concretisation of this idea comes not from the field of painting, but from what he calls 'sacramental theatre', specifically a complex ecclesiastical installation

that was visible in 1646 in the principal Jesuit church in Rome, the *Gesù*, not too far from Ribera's arena of activity. Four thousand candles, hidden behind a curtain of clouds, created a metaphor for celestial presence: light that was both brilliant and concealed, blindingly strong and wholly indeterminate.

One of Ribera's versions of the *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Figure 2.5), probably painted between 1628 and 1630, reveals how these theological and the epistemological concepts come concretely together in a painted image. In this work, today at the Galleria Palatina in the Pitti Palace, Florence, Ribera's treatment of both aspects is producing a painting that is, in Hubert Damisch's term, 'a theoretical object' (cf. Damisch, [1972] 2002).

The general structure of the composition can be described as somewhat banal: the martyr is enjoying a supernatural glow coming from above, originating in an invisible divine source to which Bartholomew's gaze is directed; the rest of the world, torturers, witnesses, nature itself, is excluded from that visual glory. The two grinning evil men on both extremes of the painting have the typical riberesque eyes, covered in thick shadows. Just like the background figures, they hardly emerge from the dark mass occupying large portions of the painting.

The sculpted head beneath the martyr hints, of course, at an easily deciphered iconographical meaning: the paganism of classical culture, rejected by the new faith. However, its prominence, its location and its modelling, exploiting the light otherwise exclusively reserved to the meriting Saint, recalls to our mind Ribera's interest in the subtleties of sensorial perception, in questioning the status of sight as the privileged vehicle for interaction with the world. Beyond a simple reference to a *paragone* thematic, a corporatist viewpoint that the abandoned, humiliated sculpture could seem to refer to, Ribera here reiterates his paradoxical interest, as a painter, in the sense of touch. This is further emphasised by the fact that Bartholomew's martyrdom is a particularly adequate subject matter for the corporeal, carnal art of Ribera, always fascinated by the textures of the skin and the irregularities of the aging body: although we are spared here the gruesome scene, tradition tells us that Bartholomew was flayed alive.

Ultimately, the impoverishment of sight concurrent with spiritual enlightenment is the most important aspect through which this work unites epistemology and religious spirituality: the light seen by the martyr signifies his final, hoped-for redemption, but its very supernatural character reminds us that physical sight is of no relevance for the following events, where whatever the martyr will see will be overwhelmed by the intensity of that which he is going to feel.

Ribera is sometimes considered a sadistic amateur of terrifying scenes, and while this painting only hints at the pain to come, no such inhibition holds back the painter in a profane 'martyr' scene, *Apollo and Marsyas,* with two somewhat different versions today in Naples and Brussels (respectively Museo di Capodimonte and Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, both 1637; Figure 2.6). Damian Dombrowksi's interpretation of this painting (2009) suggests that it exemplifies Ribera's epistemological and self-reflexive interest, giving us a glimpse of the intellectual depth beyond the painter's common image as an orthodox instrument of clerical, counter-reformation submission. For Dombrowski, the difference in style between the depictions of the two protagonists makes this work an account of

Figure 2.6: Jusepe de Ribera, *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1637, oil on canvas, 182cm x 232cm. Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. (Photo: Scala/ Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY)

aesthetic rebirth: looking backwards from 1637, Ribera recognizes the 'crime' of his early career, the choice of a 'lowly' – namely Caravaggist or 'naturalist' – painting manner, replaced, or at least supplemented later by a lighter, 'neo-Venetian' style.

Ribera's epistemological interest here, however, goes well beyond a retrospective consideration of his own artistic career. Here, in fact, the separation, even dissonance between the senses – touch directly solicited through terrible pain, sight wholly irrelevant for the experience – is not, as opposed to the Christian martyr scenes, alleviated by a spiritual vision and the promise of salvation. Physical sight is again shown to be helpless when the body is martyred, with Marsyas looking in vain for an exchange of gazes, his own visual perception turned upside down just like Caravaggio's Saint Paul. This display of unrequited visuality is supplemented by a scream – after all, it is the sense of hearing that Marsyas offended in the episode preceding what we see. Even more eloquently, the irrelevance of sight to the drama is ironically contrasted with a vain and spectacular artefact of pure visual pleasure, the improbable red cloth enveloping Apollo: anything but realistic object, it is a colourful patch reminding us how seductive, and how fictitious, the object of our visual perception can be. Confronted with the harrowing truth of the lacerated body, sight is no more than a play with colours, a light *capriccio* of no consequence whatsoever.

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DISCIPLINING THE TONGUE: ARCHBISHOP ANTONINUS, THE *OPERA A BEN VIVERE*, AND THE REGULATION OF WOMEN'S SPEECH IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

Theresa Flanigan

Abstract

In circa 1454, the Florentine Archbishop Antonino Pierozzi (later St. Antoninus) composed a spiritual guidebook, called Opera a ben vivere (A Work to Live Well by), *for an elite Florentine laywoman, presumed to be Dianora Tornabuoni. Contained within this book are instructions to his female reader for how to protect her soul from vice and, therefore, 'live well' by controlling her sensual appetite, especially her desire for speech. In this text, Antoninus singles out three types of speech as particularly harmful if performed by his female reader. These sinful types of speech are excessive talk, idle talk (i.e. gossip), and intemperate laughter. This article analyses Antoninus's argument for the regulation of his female reader's sensual appetite for speech by contextualising it within early renaissance penitential culture and relative to Aristotelian and Christian notions about the nature of women.*

Biographical note

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DISCIPLINING THE TONGUE: ARCHBISHOP ANTONINUS, THE *OPERA A BEN VIVERE*, AND THE REGULATION OF WOMEN'S SPEECH IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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So as to take comfort in your charity, that with your strength you accustom yourself to speak little; and when you feel something pulsate within you that you know is not necessary, and even more so when you know that it is damaging, strengthen your sensual appetite (*sensualità*) and keep silent ... When you are in company to converse with others and you feel like talking to some of them, take care not to desire to respond to every proposition; take care, my daughter, to be wiser of the world ... Converse with people as little as you can, and make a good wall around your soul; so that the infernal beasts cannot destroy the good seed that God has planted in the garden of your soul. And at the gate of your mouth place a good custodian, so that, as says a Saint [Bernard?], you do not lose in short time [by] laughing, that which in much time you have acquired [by] crying. Believe me, my daughter, believe me, that these idle words, and this chatter (that which man nowadays does not seem to know how to do anything else, and has no conscience of it) these are things that dry up our souls in such a manner that no sweetness of God is left to sense.

> Antoninus [*c*.1454] 1858, *Opera a ben vivere*,
> pp.132–4.

These lines that prescribe control over one's sensual appetite for speech appear in *Opera a ben vivere* (*A Work to Live Well by)*, a spiritual guidebook composed in circa 1454 by the Observant Dominican friar Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459, later canonised as St Antoninus).[1] When *Opera a ben vivere* was written, Antoninus was Archbishop of Florence (1446–59), a powerful position that placed him in charge of religious life in the city.

As Florentine Archbishop, Antoninus' mission included the pastoral care of Florentine souls (*cura animarum*). This comprised the moral and spiritual education of Florentine citizens, carried out primarily through sermons, penitential rites, and spiritual guidance, such as *Opera a ben vivere*.[2]

Antoninus' *Opera a ben vivere* consists of a prologue and three parts, each containing a series of chapters that are written in vernacular Italian. Part one summarises the didactic intent of the book, which is to instruct its reader on how to live well by eradicating vice, performing good works, and seeking to maintain peace within the soul. Antoninus compares his reader's soul to a garden that must be well guarded, seeded, and well-tended in order to bear fruit. In part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, he provides specific guidance for the cultivation and protection of this metaphorical garden. This includes recommendations for control over the senses, the enclosed garden's 'gates', through which vice might enter and harm the soul, thereby preventing his reader from attaining a good life on earth and in heaven. The third and final part entitled 'Regola' contains rules for the conduct of one's daily life that recall the daily rituals followed by those professed to religious orders, a comparison that Antoninus makes explicit in the text when he tells his reader 'you have taken up the religious life, not through the wearing of a habit but through the manner of that life' (Antoninus, 1858, p.181; Bryce, 2009, pp.46–7; Paoli, 1999, pp.26–7).[3] As a whole, Antoninus' concept of the art of living well (*bene vivere*) prescribes a balance between the contemplative life of prayer and an active life, consisting of the regulation of one's conduct and the performance of good works (*buon opere*) for the spiritual benefit of oneself, one's family, and one's neighbours; and thus for the city's 'communal well-being' (*bene comune*).[4]

According to the prologue of the *Opera a ben vivere*, it was composed upon request and for the 'health of the soul' (*salute dell'anima*) of a woman, who is addressed throughout the text as 'my daughter'

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1   For Antoninus' biography see: da Bisticci [d. 1498], 1859, pp.3–29; Morçay, 1914; and Peterson, 1985.

2   The *cura animarum* was a central mission of the Dominican order, as indicated in the prologue to the Dominican Constitution (1215–37) and in Antoninus' *Summa theologica*, III, XVI, VI, part I, col. 905. See discussion of these texts in Howard, 1995, esp. pp.50–4; and Howard, 2001, pp.495–509.

3   For monastic ritual see: Lehmijoki-Gardner et al, 2005, pp.46–58; Bianchini, 1996, pp.189–204.

4   For Antoninus and the concept of *bene vivere* see: Paoli, 1999, pp.27–31; and Paoli, 2008, pp.90–103. For Antoninus' sense of civic responsibility for the well-being of Florence (his 'civic ethics') see: Howard, 1995, esp. pp.220–2; and Gaughan, 1950. On the relationship between the *bene vivere* and the *bene comune* see: Paoli, 2008, pp.90–4; and Howard, 1995, pp.241–6.

Figure 3.1: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide, approximately 450 cm wide, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

(*figliuola mia*), signaling Antoninus' pastoral role as his reader's father-like spiritual teacher (*maestro di spirito*).[5] An inscription identifies the book's original recipient as a wife of Tommaso di Lorenzo Soderini (1403–85), head of one of the most prominent families in Florence. This unnamed woman was likely Tommaso's second wife Dianora di Francesco Tornabuoni (*c.*1422–62; married in *c.*1441–6), a Florentine laywoman from the ancient and elite Tornaquinci-Tornabuoni clan. A contemporary second copy of *Opera a ben vivere* is believed to have been made for Dianora's sister Lucrezia Tornabuoni (1425–82), who was wife of Piero de' Medici (1416–69; married 1444), the heir apparent to the wealthiest and most powerful family in renaissance Florence.[6]

Images of these significant Tornabuoni women likely appear in the Tornabuoni Family Chapel at Santa Maria Novella painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio between 1485 and 1490. These frescoes depict events from the lives of St John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary as if witnessed by contemporary Florentines. They were commissioned by Dianora and Lucrezia's brother Giovanni Tornabuoni, an affluent banker, whose own image appears in the fresco cycle, along with the documented portraits of prominent male friends and relatives of the Tornabuoni family (Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.266–327). Unfortunately, the identities of

the mature Florentine women who appear in these scenes are not likewise recorded, leading to a variety of interpretations based on a comparison with other presumed portraits of Lucrezia and on a fifteenth-century description of the features of her son, Lorenzo de' Medici. There are no similarly confirmed portraits of Dianora, who likely shared certain features with her sister, making their images even more difficult to discern (Simons, 1985, v.2, pp.121–2, nt.210; Pernis and Adams, 2006, pp.151–3). Both women, however, may appear together as the older females to the far left in the foreground of the *Birth of the Virgin* scene (Figure 3.1). The taller woman in a red dress and blue mantle with an long neck, oval face, thin nose, and short chin has been variously identified as Lucrezia or Dianora (more likely); while the woman in black beside her has been identified as Dianora, Lucrezia, or their sister Selvaggia, who was a nun (Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.298–301 and v.2, pp.121–2, nt.210).[7] A similar black-clad woman with a white veil and wimple appears in the far right foreground of the *Visitation* scene on the opposite wall (Figure 3.2). This figure, wearing either the garb of a nun or a widow, has also been variously identified as Lucrezia (more likely, as she was a widow) or Dianora (never a widow), both of whom were dead when these frescoes were painted, making these images – if they are in fact portraits – commemorative.[8]

This essay presents an analysis of Antoninus' instructions in *Opera a ben vivere* concerning speech, which Antoninus treats as a sixth sense akin to the

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5   For Antoninus' role as a pastor and spiritual teacher see: Calzolai, 1960, pp.23–34; Paoli, 1999, pp.83–139; Paoli, 2008, pp.85–130; and Bryce, 2009, pp.11–53.
6   For ownership of these two versions of the *Opera a ben vivere*, see: Antoninus, 1858, pp.xxxv–xliv; Paoli, 1999, pp.25–6; Paoli, 2008, pp.110–3; for these Tornabuoni women see: Lowe, 1993, pp.9–12; Clarke, 1991, pp.30–2 and 123–53; Plebani, 2002, pp.51–7 and 250–1; Pernis and Adams, 2006 (pp. 25–6 for Dianora).

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7   Instead, Pernis and Adams (2006, p.152) suggest that the woman in light blue in the middle row might be Dianora.
8   For her identification as Lucrezia see: Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.305–6 and v.2, p.12–2, note 210; Pernis and Adams, 2006, p.153; as Dianora see: Plebani, 2002, p.75; Salucci, 2012, p.35.

Figure 3.2: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Visitation*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

traditional senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. In particular, it addresses the social and ethical implications of Antoninus' prescriptions for women's speech as they relate to his mission to care for the temporal and spiritual well-being of his elite female readers, namely Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni, and by extension their families and the Florentine community that Antoninus was called to serve as archbishop. In addition, it will be argued that the Tornabuoni women who appear in the Tornabuoni Chapel frescoes provide exemplars of Antoninus' prescriptions for female speech behaviour in fifteenth-century Florence.

Guarding the senses, protecting the soul

The focus of this essay is part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, which begins by describing the soul as a garden in need of protection, cultivation, and constant care in order to produce the fruit necessary for a good and virtuous life (Antoninus, 1858, pp.93–4). Antoninus identifies four things his female reader must do to attain these fruits of a good life. First, she must seal well and protect the garden of her soul. This is achieved, he tells her, if you 'build a good wall around your soul, and [so] that you care for yourself, [by] making a scarcity of yourself. And keep yourself in the house as much as you can: and guard you senses, as much as you can' (p.98). In order to protect her soul, therefore, his female reader must both limit her public presence and regulate her senses, which Antoninus compares with openings or gateways in the soul's enclosure wall that have the potential to allow external stimuli to enter and affect the moral state of her soul. At the gateways of her senses she is told to place a trustworthy and discrete gatekeeper 'who will not open [the gate] if it is not to one who

is known [or] who comes to be useful and reward the owner of the garden' (p.95). In addition, Antoninus tells his female reader that she must hire a gardener in the form of a pastoral mentor, who is an expert in planting, cultivating, and harvesting, and thus an expert in the care of souls (*cura animarum*), to help her to develop virtue within her garden and keep it free from vice (pp.135–42). Finally, she must maintain personal vigilance over this garden and convey to her gardener (e.g., her pastor through confession) what she believes is bad within it, so that he can root out the bad growth, which is vice (pp.94–6).

After putting forth this easily memorable metaphor of the soul (*anima*) as a garden in need of care (*cura*), Antoninus specifies the particular gateway senses that he considers most in need of protection. He states:

> Now thus, my daughter, we must make this wall around the garden of our soul, in which every day we plant the seeds of good deeds; so that the infernal beats do not destroy it, *we must, with all of our force guard our senses, and especially vision* (vedere) *and hearing* (udire); those [senses] which you can never guard well if [you do] not flee the conversation of men.
>
> (Antoninus, 1858, pp.98–9, emphasis mine)

Thus, Antoninus recommends that, in order to protect her soul, his female reader should literally 'flee' from male conversation, thereby prohibiting her from participation in male public discourse, which in fifteenth-century Florence was central to social and political power – a topic that shall be returned to later in this essay.

According to the aforementioned passage, the two senses singled out for particular attention and

regulation are vision (*vedere*) and hearing (*udire*), a prescription that would seem to necessitate control over one's own eyes and ears respectively. There is no comparable instruction in *Opera a ben vivere* for the regulation of taste, touch, or smell. The text that follows, however, makes it clear that it is not his female reader's own eyes and ears that make up Antoninus' primary concern. In fact, ears are not mentioned anywhere in this text. Rather it becomes apparent that Antoninus is most concerned with the damage his female reader might cause to her own soul and to those around her by not regulating her speech and by 'letting herself be seen' (Antoninus, 1858, p.96). Of these two highlighted 'senses' the one that receives the most attention from Antoninus is speech (some four and a half chapters for speech versus two pages for vision). Speech also receives lengthy treatment in his contemporary *Summa theologica* (also called *Summa moralis*, compiled *c.*1440–54), where an entire chapter is dedicated to this sixth sense. This chapter on speech follows a single chapter that covers all five of the other traditional senses, signaling the importance of the sense of speech in Antoninus' moral theology (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, chs.3–4). In both texts Antoninus discusses at length the virtues and vices associated with speech and its related sensory organ the tongue. His aim in each text is to educate his reader (one clerical and male and one a lay female) on how to identify and practise certain good types of speech and to recognise, detest, and avoid bad speech, all of which would have been considered prudent behaviour and essential for proper penitential performance (Craun, 1997, pp.47–70). When read together, these texts provide a greater picture of Antoninus' views on speech and insight into early renaissance notions about speech in general.

'Sins of the tongue'

Moral discourse surrounding the sins of speech finds its medieval origin in St Augustine's *Contra Faustum* (22.27, emphasis mine), where he defines sin as 'anything *said* or done, or desired that contradicts the law of God' (as quoted in Wenzel, 1992, p.137 and Craun, 1997, p.11). It also derives its authority from the many scriptural references to sinful speech, including: Psalms 140:4: '*Incline not my heart to evil words*' and James 3:6: '*the tongue constitutes a world of iniquity among our members ... inflamed to hell*' – both of which serve in Antoninus' *Summa* (I, II, ch.4) as the exegetical bases for his discussion on how 'undue speech causes much badness'. Many of Antoninus' exact arguments and much of his scriptural evidence regarding the morality of speech in both texts can be traced to 'sins of the tongue' literature inspired by the Fourth Lateran Council's

(1215) call to reform penitential and confessional practice. Specifically, many of Antoninus' notions about speech appear to derive either directly or indirectly from the ninth tract of the *Summa de vitiis* (*c.*1230) by William Peraldus (Guillaume Peyraut/Perault, *c.*1190– 1271), whom Antoninus cites as a source in his *Summa* (I, prologus, cols 5–6).[9]

In this ninth tract, entitled 'On the Sins of the Tongue', Peraldus explains why one ought to guard one's tongue (part I) and he identifies twenty-four specific 'sins of the tongue' (part II). These include (starting with most severe): blasphemy, murmuring, making excuses for sin, making false oaths (i.e. perjury), lying, slander, flattery, cursing, insult, causing controversy (i.e. quarrelling), deriding good people, giving false counsel, sowing discord, hypocrisy, rumor, jactation or boasting (*iactantia*), revelation of secrets, making indiscriminate threats, making false promises, speaking idle words (*otiosum verbum*), talking too much (*multiloquium*), using base or foul talk, scurrility (including: buffoonery, vulgar joking, and inappropriate laughter), and imprudent taciturnity, such as remaining silent when one should speak (Peraldus, *c.*1230; Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.116–28). Peraldus' final section provides some remedies for these verbal sins, many of which also appear in Antoninus' writings. These include telling his reader/listener to: evaluate the potential danger when speaking, consider the tongue's 'nobility', make a 'barrier against the gate of the mouth', speak rarely and say few things, speak slowly with much deliberation, entrust the tongue's care to God, and cloistered silence for monks (*c.*1230). In his study of Peraldus' 'sins of the tongue', Edwin D. Craun has discerned influences ranging from a monastic culture of silence and restraint to Aristotelian discourse on the nature of speech and its 'natural' operation as an instrument of rational cognition and Augustinian sign theory, which considers speech as a cognitive, social, and ethical activity (Craun, 1997, pp.28–9, and ch.2). As will be demonstrated, these influences can also be discerned in Antoninus' texts on speech, likely due to his reliance on this earlier tradition.

The tongue as a 'noble member' in need of protection and regulation

In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus prefaces his discussion of speech with the following statement:

> Now I say this spiritually ... so that with his [God's] help we depart from the bad and we

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9   For Fourth Lateran Council's reforms see: Barratt, 1984, pp.413–4; Boyle, 1985, pp.30–43; for the significance of Peraldus see: Wenzel, 1992, pp.135–63; Craun, 1997, pp.15–7; Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.103–40, esp. pp.128–35,

begin to do good; to be able to always grow in said goodness, and to never fall back into badness, and to be able to arrive at some taste and sweetness of God; [*we must*] *establish good custody and a guard at the gateway of our mouth; and not open it to speak at every thought that pulses our sensual appetite* (*sensualità*), *but to think with much discretion before we proffer a word whether it will cause damage or usefulness.*

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.99–100, emphasis mine)

It is, therefore, necessary to learn to control one's senses and one's sensual appetite for speech in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment and 'goodness' or virtue.

'Antoninus follows this preface with a chapter entitled: 'How, for many reasons, we must guard our tongue well, [so as] not to offend God', in which he addresses the spiritual significance of the human tongue and the justification for its special care, with the aim of convincing his reader of the need for her tongue's protection and control. His reasons consist of a series of 'considerations' sustained by quotations from religious authorities (mostly scripture and scriptural commentary). In general, Antoninus' reasons are intended to support his argument that the tongue is a 'very noble member' capable of causing 'much good and much bad', an idea found in Peraldus' *Summa* and based on the authority of Proverbs 18:21: '*death and life are in the hand of the tongue*' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.103 and 108). He argues that the tongue's control or lack thereof could lead one to either salvation or damnation, making its regulation instrumental to the care of one's soul.[10]

Antoninus begins by asking his reader to consider the positive aspects of speech. He starts with its divine origins, namely how God 'singularly honoured man' above all of his creations by giving him a tongue that allows him to speak intelligibly, a notion that has its roots in Aristotelian natural philosophy (*Generation of Animals*, 5.7 and *Politics*, 1.2). It is a dishonour to God, therefore, if one does not use man's unique gift of speech to laud Him or if one uses the tongue to speak offensive words (Antoninus, 1858, pp.101–3, considerations 1–3). In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, cols 78–80), Antoninus expands upon this consideration by attributing the human tongue's unique ability to speak intelligibly to 'the very nature of the disposition of the mouth and of the tongue'. He, thus, follows an Aristotelian model of analysis that considers the

materiality, form, and (in this case, physiological) circumstance of these two body parts (see Craun, 1997, p.29). Antoninus explains:

[I]t is well-known that the [matter of the] tongue is very fleshy, and ductile, and does not offer a lot of volume here and there, and thence by the mouth, in order that you may intellectually comprehend from its speech, there [must] be nothing hard and pertinacious, but it [must] be properly flexible ... the form should [also] be noted; if the tongue is long and broad and thick, but is more long than wide and more wide than thick, then you may understand, [and] you are able to speak properly, and in length with good endurance

(Antoninus, 1959, I, II, IV, cols 78–80).

In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, col.80) Antoninus describes the tongue as naturally guarded on all sides except for one, which is the opening of the mouth. This he interprets as proof that God desires that the tongue be protected. Antoninus also claims that this God-given natural opening is evidence that complete silence would be sinful – a conclusion not expressed in *Opera a ben vivere*.

In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus lists the 'natural' or proper functions of this gift of speech, which, he claims, was given solely to man so that he can give God thanks and praise, teach what is right, and preach in God's name (Antoninus, 1858, p.114). This interpretation of speech has its roots in Augustine's assertion that 'God created and gave man the gift of the tongue so he could speak, that which to no animal was conceded; with it one must not speak if not for three things, these are: to praise God, preach to others, and accuse the same; and every other word that we make with it, is bad' (as quoted by Antoninus, p.114). Later, Antoninus points out that another divine use of the tongue is to convert others to Christianity, for he claims 'the Holy Spirit above all comes in the tongue more than in [any] other member; and this is elected for the most instrumental act [that is] to convert people' (p.107). In its performance of these divine offices, the tongue has the potential to become an instrument for his reader's personal salvation and for the salvation of others who hear her speak divinely-sanctioned words. The tongue, however, can also be an 'instrument of sin' if improperly used (Antoninus, 1959, I, VII, ch.1, col.515).

As further evidence of the tongue's 'nobility', Antoninus highlights its 'natural function' (in the Aristotelian sense) as the primary organ for multiple senses (Antoninus, 1858, pp.102–3, consideration 3). In addition to its role in speech, the tongue has the

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10 This is quite similar to Peraldus' arguments as analysed in Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.103–40; Craun, 1997, pp.26–37.

ability to taste, which is central to eating, and thus the nourishment and sustenance of the body. As such, the tongue is the only sense organ that both touches and tastes Christ's body and blood through the Eucharistic sacrament, making the tongue's proper function in both speech and taste necessary to the salvation of the soul (Bynum, 1987, p.56). It is, therefore, especially important that the tongue remain 'clear of any blight of sin' because any such 'uncleanliness' or 'pollution' by sinful speech makes the tongue unworthy to receive this sacrament and causes God great displeasure (Antoninus, 1858, p.103, consideration 5).

As a sense organ, the tongue permits external stimuli to enter the body and access the soul's internal senses, which are responsible for emotions, imagination, cognition, judgment, and memory.[11] Guarding the tongue is, therefore, also necessary for protecting the soul's intellectual and psychological faculties, as supported by Proverb [21:23], '*He who guards the tongue, guards his soul*' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.104–6). Antoninus asserts that the tongue's highest office is to manifest the thoughts produced by the intellect that would otherwise remain hidden within the body, which he calls 'the illumination man has within' (p.103). The tongue is, thus, an 'organ of reason', which Antoninus considers the highest power given to man alone of God's creatures; therefore, he says, one should never speak without or against reason, for every word spoken must be justified to God on judgment day (pp.117–9).

Antoninus also identifies the tongue is an instrument of the heart because it allows for the external expression of emotions (or passions). Thus, Antoninus claims that 'good guardianship of the tongue is also great guardianship of the heart'. In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, col.79) Antoninus attributes this idea to Aristotle, claiming that 'the Philosopher [Aristotle in *De Physiognomonica*, 806a] says that those things which are in the voice are the signs of those which are in the soul, [in other words,] the passions'. Speech is, thus, an aural expression of one's internal emotional state. It also signifies one's moral character (or *ēthos*), making speech an ethical activity, worthy of surveillance, judgment, and control. According to Augustinian semiotics, speech is also a social activity because it necessarily involves a speaker who signifies and a hearer who comprehends what is being signified (Craun, 1997, pp.26–37, esp.30–2). This is why sins of speech affect both the speaker and her community.

Next, Antoninus asks his reader to consider the potential dangers caused by the tongue. These dangers, he claims, are revealed by the multitude of sins caused

11 For Antonius's discussion of the internal senses see: Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.5.

by the tongue and the severity of penalties received in hell due to its misuse. Antoninus states: 'So this [tongue] is something by which man sins and for which he is punished, according to divine justice; since the tongue is singularly given penalty we conclude that with the tongue one singularly sins' (1858, p.106) Antoninus cites abundant scriptural evidence to demonstrate that we sin more with our tongue than with any other bodily member and, therefore, the tongue must be the hardest member to control (from James 3:7–8). Rational control over the tongue is essential because 'due to the immediate and unconsidered word man falls many times into anger and intrigue' (Antoninus, 1858, p.109) The importance of controlling one's tongue is further demonstrated by God's commitment to assisting us with the particularly difficult task of guarding this 'noble member', something that can happen only if we ask Him for help. God is, therefore, the 'key to the guardianship of our tongue; thus for us, we cannot guard it without his help' (pp.106–7).

Antoninus concludes this chapter with the following highly suggestive analogies: 'a man with his tongue unguarded is somewhat like a city without a walled fortress and somewhat like a house without a door' and an unguarded tongue is also like 'a vessel without a cover, so that every unclean thing can fall into and enter inside you ... and [it is] as a boat without steering and without a rudder, so that it conducts and leads man to great danger' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.105–6). These analogies suggest that speaking leaves one vulnerable to enemies, 'pollution' by sin, and misdirection. After these lessons Antoninus lists a series of exemplary quotes from scripture, the lives of saints, and the Church Fathers as examples of good guardianship of the tongue (p.109). Such 'copious' and 'striking' visual and textual analogies serve both as exemplars, defined by Larry Scanlon as 'enactments of cultural authority', and as mnemonic devices, intended to capture the reader's attention and make Antoninus' advice stick in the reader's memory for future practical application (Scanlon, 2007, pp.27–36, esp.34–5; Craun, 1997, pp.63–69; Carruthers, 2008, pp.153–94).

The sin of idle talk

After arguing for the importance of the tongue and its protection, Antoninus dedicates a chapter to each of three types of sinful speech about which his female reader must be aware. These are the sins of idle talk (i.e. gossiping), talking too much (or indiscretion), and intemperate laughter (i.e. giggling) – three negative types of speech that are still associated primarily with women today. Antoninus' rationale for choosing to concentrate on these seemingly trivial types of speech

is explained as follows:

> So, I thought to place here in this second part
> the danger that one incurs spiritually due to
> incautiously speaking. And I do not intend to
> speak of things that are very grave, such as
> blasphemies, or perjury, or the like, which every
> man knows are the gravest of sins; but [rather]
> I intend to speak of those things [by] which
> men every day give us much offence and make
> little of it with their consciousness. And this is
> a bad habit: and I intend to show how much
> the saints make of these offences that we make
> with the tongue, [and] of which we are not even
> conscious.
>
> (Antoninus, 1858, pp.99–100)

Antoninus, therefore, chooses not to spend time
on major sins of speech, such as blasphemy (defined
as speaking against God) or perjury (a type of lying by
swearing false oaths) because such grave sins should
be obvious to his reader already. Instead, he desires to
instruct her on seemingly lesser sins of speech, about
which she might be ignorant or which she may consider
too small to be dangerous. Ignorance of any sin and
its potential dangers, he states, is in itself sinful. One
also must guard against minor sins because even they
'impede spiritual profit and divine grace' and weaken
the soul. Moreover, he claims that several small sins can
add up to a grave one and all sins, even small ones, must
be accounted for on judgment day (pp.117-21). Thus, it
is precisely the seeming triviality of these particular sins
of speech that makes them significant.

Antoninus begins with idle talk, which (citing St
Gregory) he defines as 'that which man utters without
any necessity or without any intention of good use'
(p.112). The association of idle words with sin derives
from the Gospel of St Matthew (12:36–7): 'But I say
unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak,
they shall render an account for it in the day of
judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and
by thy words thou shalt be condemned' (Casagrande
and Vecchio, 1987, pp.425–39, quoted on p.425). In his
commentary on this passage from Matthew, St Jerome
(bk. IV, 12:36) defines an idle word as 'one that is
spoken without benefit to both the speaker and the
hearer, for example, when we speak about frivolous
things to the neglect of serious matters, or when we
tell old wives' tales' (Jerome, 2008, p.146). According
to these scriptural authorities, words are judged based
on their degree of utility, necessity, seriousness, or lack
thereof.

Idleness (otiosum) is related etymologically to leisure
(otium), which is the opposite of work (opera) or doing
(facere/faciendo). According to Genesis (3:17), man
is divinely obligated to perform work because God
commanded that Adam and Eve work as punishment
for original sin. Idleness, therefore, becomes a sin akin
to the capital vice of sloth. Work, on the other hand,
has the potential to produce both material and spiritual
fruitfulness and hence profit. Idle talk, therefore,
becomes speaking without fruitful purpose or spiritual
profit (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, col.81; Casagrande
and Vecchio, 1987, p.428). According to Susan Phillips'
study of gossip (a type of idle talk), words were
profitable only if spoken with the intent of contributing
to the moral and social good of the community. Idle
talk was morally unprofitable because it stole time
away from spiritually profitable activities, such as
prayer, contemplation, confession, and penitential
self-examination (Phillips, 2007, pp.63–5; for profit see
Olson, 1989, p.285). In fact, in part three of Opera a
ben vivere, Antoninus instructs his reader to fill almost
every moment of her day with spiritually profitable
talk, including confession and endless audible and silent
prayers, which she is instructed to recite continuously
to keep her mind always on her soul's salvation and her
mouth occupied, with little opportunity for idle talk
(pp.151–99).

Antoninus, however, does little to educate his reader
about what exact types of speech constitute idle talk,
which, according to Peraldus, might include any or all
of the following sub-categories (many of which overlap
with other 'sins of the tongue'): gossiping or whispering
about others, betraying secrets, creating and spreading
rumors, telling tales, talking too much (i.e. chattering),
vain talk, talking without reason, and talking purely
for the sake of amusement (Phillips, 2007, pp.65–6).
Antoninus' vagueness has the potential to make the
reader anxious about any speech that does not have
a clear spiritual, moral, or social purpose. Instead,
Antoninus enumerates the reasons his reader ought to
avoid idle talk, backed by scriptural exemplars, almost
all of which are commonplaces in 'sins of the tongue'
literature influenced by Peraldus' Summa de vitiis (see
Craun, 1997, pp.26–37).

First, Antoninus states that 'the soul of the righteous
is a heaven, in which God can live willingly ... and
consequently one's mouth and tongue is the gate, which
ought not to be opened without grand occasion. As we
do not read [in Psalms 77:23] that the heavens were
ever opened without grand occasion and usefulness'
(Antoninus, 1858, pp.113–4). In his Summa Antoninus
claims that determination of the proper 'occasion'
for speech requires an analysis of the following
'circumstances': 'it is proper to observe in our speech
a multiplicity of circumstances ... that is to say, so that

I may know when to speak and when one ought to be silent, when one has to be silent, when it is expedient to speak, when it is sinful to speak, and when it is grievously worse' (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, cols 83–4). One also must consider: to whom one speaks, where one speaks, when one speaks, how much one speaks, to what end, and the manner in which it is said (See also Craun, 1997, pp.54–6). In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus (partly quoting Augustine) tells his female reader that the only good circumstances for her speech are 'to praise God, preach to others, and accuse the same, and to give comfort to the troubled, or for similar such good occasions' (Antoninus, 1858, p.114). It should be noted that these good types of female speech do not qualify as conversation, which Antoninus tells his reader to avoid. Instead, her words are to be directed at God or another person without intellectual exchange.

Antoninus (citing Psalms 44:2) also says that the tongue must be a 'pen of the Holy Spirit to [be used to] write and speak that which He offers us'. Therefore, one should consider before speaking whether one's words might be offensive to God or against His wishes (pp.114–5). Third, one needs to consider that for all of our words 'we agree to render reason on judgment day' (based on Matthew 12:36, Ecclesiastes 12:14, and Ecclesiasticus 33:14). Antoninus compares the soul to a castle of God with 'the tongue as its gate', therefore, 'as in castles and guarded places nothing can enter you or exit without singular license, thus the tongue must not exit or talk if not commanded and preceded by much reason, as if by a lord and a king' (p.115). The quality and value of all words, therefore, must be rationally considered before they are spoken 'so that they are not later judged in the strict and terrible examination of God' (p.115). Since idle words are those spoken without reason they cannot be justified and, therefore, should never be spoken.

Finally, one should consider that the heart is a 'noble enclosure', like a treasure chest, that contains the treasures of virtue, wisdom, and hope (based on 2 Corinthians 4:7). '[F]rom this we can conclude, that the mouth must never open to display the treasure of wisdom and virtue inside without great occasion: moreover, one must not open it to speak frivolous (*truffe*) and idle words' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.115–6). All words, therefore, are interpreted as natural signs (as in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*) because they express externally the otherwise invisible 'treasures' housed within the speaker's heart and soul. Sinful words, such as idle ones, signify their speaker's lack of reason and moral virtue housed within her soul.

The sin of talking too much
Antoninus' next chapter addresses 'How even good words are those that are spoken with discretion.' In this chapter he describes as the 'sin of talking too much' or garrulity (Antoninus, 1858, p.123).[12] Here, Antoninus informs the reader of the *Opera a ben vivere* that once this type of sinful speech is identified 'our tongue can be more cautiously restrained by us' and he instructs her to practice temperance for good words as well as bad ones because 'even too much good talk is reprehensible' for 'it generates disgust in the listeners', as is figured in Leviticus *'the vessel that has neither cover nor legitimate covering is reputed to be unclean'* (Antoninus, 1858, pp.123–4). According to Craun, 'an unrestrained tongue during social exchanges is dangerous and irritating for the listeners because if they do not judge it carefully they may become complicit in it and their emotions might be moved by its force, words can also cause loss of life or reputation (tongues as swords), and may prompt others to evil' (Craun, 1997, p.51). Moreover, a 'loose tongue' was the opposite of Pentacost, when it functioned to bring truth and salvation to others (p.51).

Antoninus does not explain how much talk is too much, which has the potential to leave his reader anxious about speaking more than a few words. Instead, his brief chapter merely lists exemplary quotations from scripture (mostly Wisdom texts, including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Job), all of which are commonly used to demonstrate the spiritual dangers of verbal incontinence (see Craun, 1997, pp.51–3). For example, Antoninus portrays excessive speech as another sign of a speaker's impoverished moral character, as is figured in Proverbs (10:19), which reads: *'Where there are many words one finds often times a poverty of the spiritual sense'* and by St Gregory's statement that *'too much talking is a sign of soul empty of spiritual virtue'* (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). Antoninus also suggests that verbosity in itself can impoverish the intellect because it causes one to miss an opportunity to hear the wisdom of others, as is demonstrated by Psalm 139:12: *'The verbose man will not be addressed on the earth'*. Moreover, garrulity also impedes the accomplishment of good and profitable works, as indicated in Proverbs 14:23: *'if man desires to have the grace to do the best things, he must say few words'* (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). Too much talk, therefore, is

12   On the sin of 'talking too much' see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.407–23; Craun, 1997, pp.51–3. This sin of the tongue also appears as a vice of women in Antoninus' *Summa* (1959, III, I, ch.25, col.119), under the letter G, where he claims that woman is a 'garrulous gullet' (*garrulum guttur*).

both spiritually unprofitable and another sign of a soul lacking in virtue and wisdom.

Antoninus ends his list of quotations with Ecclesiasticus 19:5: '*He who hates much talk, extinguishes in himself and others much malice*' (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). This passage appears to recommend detestation for verbosity, a remedy for sin proposed by Thomas Aquinas (*Summa*, I, II, q.113, a.5), who defines detestation as an aversion to sin based on rational judgment and willful avoidance in order to change one's behaviour from the bad and towards the good (as recommended in Psalms 33:15).[13] As stated by Antoninus in the preface, the intent of *Opera a ben vivere* was to instigate in his reader such a movement of the will from a desire for the bad towards a desire for the good in order to achieve a more virtuous life and, therefore, to live well (*ben vivere*).

According to Craun, such movement of the will from bad to good was 'crucial to penitential practice' and for the care of one's soul (*cura animarum*) (Craun, 1997, pp.56–71). Ecclesiasticus' words imply that such detestation of 'much talk' has the potential to also cure the souls of 'others' through its ability to extinguish 'much malice', which could cause familial or societal discord, making the detestation of excessive talk instrumental in maintaining personal, familial, and civic well-being. In fact, in his *Regulae Pastoralis* (XIV), St Gregory describes how quickly one can slide down a sinful path from talking too much (*multiloquium*) to speaking idle words (*verba otiosa*) to speaking hurtful words, such as backbiting, and slander (*verba noxia*), all of which have the potential to lead to societal unrest. He concludes: 'Hence are sown thorns, quarrels arise, the torches of hatred are kindled, [and] the peace of the hearts is quenched' (Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.407–8).

Antoninus concludes this chapter on the dangers of talking too much with a lengthy and entertaining story (itself bordering on verbosity) from the 'Legend of St Dominic'. In this tale St Dominic tours his monastery with a demon, who points out the spaces where he profits the most at the friars' expense due various types of intemperance. This includes: too much sleeping in the choir and dormitory, too much eating in the refectory, and too much talking in the parlor (*parlatorio*), which is the space where the demon claims he earns the most. When Dominic asks the demon why he profits so much in this space, the demon replies: 'in this place nothing is said except for idle words, and mundane things, or some whispers; those things that in other places the friars to not have the freedom to

say due to their order of silence'. Finally, they arrive in the chapter room, about which the demon says: 'As much as I can earn in the entire house, I lose it here for confession or for humiliation' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.124–6). The moral of this story is that one gains more spiritual profit from confession or silence than from idle speech, which results in the greatest spiritual loss. It is interesting to note that all of the behavioural models in this narrative are male monastics, not lay women like his reader, suggesting that the story is intended to make a memorable point more than to provide his reader with any direct behavioural role models. This tale might be considered an example of entertaining idle talk if not for the moral lesson at the end. It, therefore, also may have been included to provide the reader with a model for non-idle story telling.

The sins of laughter and jesting

In the final chapter on speech Antoninus states: '[T]o conclude with the sins that one can commit with the mouth, I say that we must flee too much laughter and also certain *giuladri* that are wont to induce others to laugh ... those which the Holy Scripture calls profane; [and] St Paul blames and forbids' (Antoninus, 1858, p.127). This is a reference to St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5:3–5), which reads: 'But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becomes saints: Or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility, which is to no purpose; but rather giving of thanks. For know you this and understand, that no fornicator, or unclean, or covetous person (which is a serving of idols), hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God'. In his commentary on St Matthew, St Jerome (book IV, 12:36) further condemns laughter, stating that 'for the one who repeats scurrilous things and makes people's mouths drop open with loud laughter, and who brings forth anything disgraceful, he will be indicted not for an idle word, but a criminal one' (Jerome, 2008, p.146).

Laughter and the provocation of laughter are typically classified in 'sins of the tongue' literature under scurrility (*scurrilitas*), which is often interchanged with jocularity (*iocularitas*) and associated with lasciviousness, obscenity (*turpiloquium*), and foolish talking or nonsense (*stultiloquium*).[14] Antoninus' term *giuladri* seems to be his play on the term *giullari* (jongleurs or travelling comedians), who often appear in literature on 'sins of the tongue' as synonymous with *stulti* (fools), *scurrae* (buffoons), *mimi* (mimes), *ioculatores* (jesters), and *ystriones* (play actors) (Casagrande and Vecchio, 1979,

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13 For detestation see: Wenzel, 1992, p.138; Craun, 1997, pp.56–71.

14 For these sins see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.393–406.

pp.913–28). Antoninus warns his reader to 'guard against *giuladri*' (which translates literally as 'thieves of sadness') by comparing their behaviour to that of actual thieves (*ladri*) because they 'steal (*furano / furtano*) and make one lose time: which is the most precious and the most necessary thing there is, as is said above; so that who loses time, loses himself' (Antoninus, 1858, p.128). In addition, such 'thieves' might cause one to 'lose the fruit of our holy compunction' (i.e., one's desire for penance and grieving for one's sins) by provoking one to laughter and distracting one from one's spiritual obligation to remain focused on one's eternal salvation (Resnick,1987, p.94).

Antoninus, however, does not condemn all laughter. Instead, he proscribes only excessive laughter, inappropriate laughter, and laughter at profane things. Following Aristotle's notion that laughter was an essential part of human 'nature' and that the 'lack of mirth is more sinful than excess thereof', Antoninus' Dominican forebears Albertus the Great and Thomas Aquinas allowed for laughter in moderation as long as it was governed by reason and performed according to the appropriate 'circumstances', which involved an assessment of aspects such as when, where, with whom, and for what intent (Classen, 2010, pp.33–4; Resnick, 1987, p.98; Olson, 1989, pp.280–4). Scripture itself provides examples of both good and bad types of laughter, as exemplified by contrasting the laughter of Sarah (in incredulity of God's word) with that of her husband Abraham (from joy and wonderment), both of whom laughed when informed of the miracle that Sarah would bear a son at her advanced age. Biblically sanctioned types of laughter include: laughter in joy, amazement, or scorn of evil. While biblically condemned types of laughter include: laughter in incredulity or pride, in scorn or humiliation at a good person's expense, as assertion of power or deception, or in pure levity.[15]

Antoninus (citing Ecclesiastes 2:2) claims that sinful laughter is a vain, erroneous, deceptive, and 'empty joy', suggesting that it is another form of speech devoid of spiritual profit (Antoninus, 1858, p.127). Moreover, he interprets a smile, decadent laughter, and a 'tongue that utters vain and foolish things' as other natural signs of a person's foolish character and dissolute soul. Specifically, Antoninus characterises *giuladri* that induce laughter as 'vile and mischievous' creatures that, when they incite us to laugh resemble 'ugly' monkeys, 'fetid' goats, and demons, which 'defile people into their

dissolution' and displease the sight of God (Antoninus, pp.127–8; see also Casagrande and Vecchio, 1979, pp.913–5). Such an unflattering description would help foster the reader's detestation for and avoidance of such beast-like people and behaviour. This notion that one could read the state (or matter) of the soul through the form the body takes when laughing relates to Aristotelian physiognomic 'science', according to which character was interpreted based on physical appearance. By the fifteenth century, physiognomic analysis was widely recommended by philosophers, political advisors, preachers, and pastoral mentors as a means to interpret the state of one's soul or character, a skill considered necessary for penitential practice and for prudent interactions amongst individuals, especially those of power.[16]

Antoninus also contends with the ancient and popular notion of laughter as a therapeutic instrument (for example, 'laughter is the best medicine'). According to the therapeutic theory of laughter, laughter was thought to ward off emotional distress and the dangers of melancholy, to which women were considered more prone than men. (Olson, 1989, pp.276–80; Classen, 2010, pp.3 and 23–4). Antoninus condemns such therapeutic use of laughter (even in moderation) because he sees it as a distraction, claiming that *giuladri* are:

> comforters of the afflicted in the service of the devil, provoking one to laugh and to lose time; so that one doesn't feel fatigue and the remorse of the conscience for their bad life; and with their songs, in the manner of the sirens, that causes the miserable sinners to fall sleep in the tempest of the sea of this miserable world, so it happens to them when they fall into the inferno. And as happens mostly to many who are infirm, those who must think of the health of the soul and put themselves in order and cry for their sins, to them have come *giuladri* and singers and ballerinas, to pass the time and make their thoughts of death flee; and thus they move the miseries of their sins, and they go from these songs to eternal abandon.
>
> (Antoninus, 1858, pp.128–9)

Antoninus thus interprets bodily infirmity, including 'fatigue' (a possible reference to melancholy), as a sign of a sinful life. Therefore, according to Antoninus, instead of wasting time on profitless laughter, one should spend one's valuable time contemplating the

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15 On the sin of intemperate laughter see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, p.396; Resnick, 1987, pp.90–1; LeGoff, 1997, pp.40–53; Casagrande, 2000, pp.77–105; Classen, 2010, pp.10–11.

16 On the late medieval practice of physiognomy see: Schmitt, 1989, 129–47; Ziegler, 2001, pp.159–82; for Dominican practice in particular see: Denery, 2005, pp.19–38.

'miseries of this world', including Christ's sacrifice for man's salvation, and prepare oneself for one's own death and judgment by God, for 'a great fool is one who laughs at a time of danger' (pp.129–30; Resnick, 1987, p.94). Instead of laughter, he claims, tears are more appropriate for this world because '[a]gainst such laughter, many examples are provided by Christ, of whom, as says St Bernard [*Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem*, LXV], we never read that he laughed, but only that he cried' (Antoninus, pp.129–30).[17] The notion that Christ never cried had become a commonplace in pastoral literature by the fifteenth century. It appears to have originated with St John Chrysostom, who claims that we do not read anywhere that Christ laughed. Rather, he only cried when he looked upon Jerusalem and when he was about to raise Lazarus. (Resnick, 1987, pp.94–100) Such continuous self-reflection and mourning over one's sins were essential to proper penitential practice and to the care of one's soul. Inappropriate laughter, therefore, becomes an impediment to the *cura animarum*.

Finally, Antoninus condemns spiritually disruptive laughter, asserting that it is truly despicable when it occurs in sacred and devout places and when jokers distract from or pervert holy words in order to make others laugh, for this both disrespects God and impedes both the delivery and receipt of his holy office. To make this point memorable, Antoninus narrates a story (which might itself induce laughter) attributed to St Gregory in which a mass was interrupted by an entertainer with a monkey, who played his cymbals and begged for food during the divine office. Upon exiting the church, God struck the monkey dead, an event interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure at such a disruption. Laughter and foolish behaviour, therefore, are especially sinful if they disrupt mass, impede the transmission of the divine word, and threaten clerical authority. Antoninus advises his reader to detest and avoid such spiritually disruptive people, stating: 'if by chance you bump into similar people, who are caught by you as bad thieves ...You must strive [instead] to remain and converse with people who always lead you to contrition and repentance as Christ said (Luke 6:21 and 6:25): '*the blessed are those who cry here*,' however, they laugh in perpetuity' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.131–2).

The trouble with women's speech in renaissance Florence

Idle talk, garrulity, and intemperate laughter, such as gossiping, tale-telling, chattering, and giggling, were

(and still are) often negatively associated with women (i.e. 'gossip girls', 'chatty Cathys', etc.).[18] The origin of woman's association with transgressive talk is located by Antoninus in his *Summa* at the moment of the serpent's verbal deception of Eve (Genesis 3), who in turn, deceived Adam by verbally persuading him to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Wisdom. This resulted in man's expulsion from Paradise, the introduction of original sin, and the physical death of all mankind (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, cols 116–7).

Susan Phillips has demonstrated that idle talk in particular was often identified in medieval literature as 'women's work', a correlation supported by scripture. (Phillips, 2007, pp.61–69; Phillips, 2007a, pp.13–64) In fact, St Paul (1 Timothy 5:13) advises that younger women (especially widows) should be avoided because: 'And withal being idle they learn to go about from house to house: and are not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.' St Paul (1 Timothy 4:7) also advises his addressees to: 'avoid foolish and old wives' fables', thereby associating idle tale–telling with 'old women'. (This is repeated in Jerome, 2008, p.146). Anxiety over social unrest due to women's gossip is made explicit in the chapter of Antoninus' *Summa* entitled 'On the Diverse Vices of Women Alphabetized', where he paraphrases St Paul: 'For [young] women, although they have the appearance of holiness, they have learned to go about from house to house and are not only idle, but also gossips, speaking things which they ought not' to support his claim that behaviours, such as the revelation of secrets, murmuring, and gossip by women can cause a 'chaos of calumny' (*Kalumniarum chaos* [sic]) (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.120). According to Craun, 'deviant speech', such as idle talk or intemperate speaking, 'disrupts the community' by 'violating the fundamental and divinely sanctioned compact on the function of speech it threatens religious teaching and all honest communication between all human beings – all basic social institutions which depend upon trust in the social world' (Craun, 1997, p.45). Phillips, who focuses on gendered speech, further suggests that medieval gossip, especially gossip by women, was considered socially dangerous in part because it built extra-familial kinship bonds and communities amongst women that

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17 For St Bernard on laughter see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, p.396; Resnick, 1987, pp.95–7; Le Goff, 1997, p.43; Casagrande, 2000, p.77.

18 Sandy Bardsley (2006, pp.45–68 and pp.147–9) has shown that late medieval texts on the "Sins of the Tongue" typically contain gendered language in that they construct differing roles for men and women, which continue to influence gender stereotypes in the present day. For the gendering of idle talk (especially gossip) as feminine see: Dalarun, 1994, pp.40–1; Phillips, 2007, pp.61–94 ('janglynge' is the Middle English equivalent for gossip); and Philips, 2007a. For women's laughter see: Trokhimenko, 2010, pp.243–64.

had the potential to undermine the status of men and their public reputations, particularly if women revealed secrets about their husbands or families, or encouraged each other to resist male authority. Phillips also suggests that gossip amongst women may have been perceived as a threat to pastoral authority due to its capacity to take over the male pastor's exclusive role as the hearer of women's confessions. This was both a moral and social threat because unlike other women, pastors were technically bound by vow not to reveal confessed secrets that might cause familial shame or societal discord. (Phillips, 2007, pp.61–9; Phillips, 2007a, pp.119–46) As a preacher and pastor concerned with confessional practice (he wrote a manual on confession), Antoninus would likely have been very sensitive to such a perceived usurpation of pastoral authority.

St Paul (1 Timothy 2:11–14) provides a scripturally sanctioned preventative for such societal chaos, namely women's silence and subjugation. He states: 'Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed; then Eve. And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression'. This idea is repeated in Aquinas' *Summa* (the model for Antoninus' *Summa*), where it is combined with Aristotelian notions regarding male versus female 'nature'. Aquinas (I, q. 92, a.2) states: 'For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because naturally in man the discretion of reason predominates.' During the medieval and renaissance periods women's propensity for sinful speech was often attributed their 'natural' condition as imperfect men, as defined by Aristotle.[19] Scriptural evidence for women's relative imperfection also could be found in Genesis (2–3), the letters of St Paul, and in St Peter's (1, 3:7) characterisation of women as 'weaker vessels'. These pagan and Christian

notions of women's inferiority were interpreted to suggest that women more vulnerable to the sway of their passions than men and less intellectually capable of rationally judging, and therefore, making prudent decisions regarding sinful behaviour – as Eve misjudged the serpent's deceptive words and lacked faith in God's divine order.[20] In his chapter 'On the Diverse Vices of Women', Antoninus explicitly links intemperate speech with female nature, claiming that woman 'by her own nature is a chattering animal' (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.120, under K). Under the letter B, which stands for woman as a 'beastial barathrum' (*bestiale baratrum*), Antoninus asserts that women are 'beautiful and foolish', 'dull' (*insipidum*), and intellectually shallow 'almost [like] children light as a sentence'. Moreover, he comments that '[f]or a woman the practice of philosophy is unknown ... And the natural reason is because woman is in fact more carnal in spirit and spirituality than man, who can be less [carnal]. *This is also the case of the women who converse with men for they appear as it were of another species than men, in the amount of their intellect*' (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.118, emphasis mine). It is no surprise that such derogatory sentiments about woman's inferior intelligence and its expression through speech appear in a text written for male clerics, however, this does not exclude the possibility of a much wider dissemination through sermons and pastoral instruction.[21] Such negative ideas about the female intellect are not stated overtly, however, in *Opera a ben vivere*, which was written at the request of Dianora Tornabuoni, a powerful Florentine noblewoman. Nor do they appear in the copy written for her well-educated sister Lucrezia, who wrote poetry in both the vulgate and Latin and was known to have been a favored conversational partner of the humanist scholar Agnolo Poliziano (Tornabuoni de' Medici, 2001). They do, however, appear to have influenced Antoninus' rules regarding speech contained in part three ('*Regola*') of *Opera a ben vivere*.

Due to their perceived 'natural' weaknesses, women were often barred from speaking much in general, but especially in church, where they had the potential to undermine male clerical authority and distract from the transmission of the divine word of God (like the cymbal-clashing monkey in the exemplar cited earlier). Again, St Paul advises (1 Corinthians 1:34–5): 'Let

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19 Aristotle (*Historia Animalium*, 608B; *Politics* 1.2 /1252B, *Generation of Animals*, 729 A 25–34; 728 A 17ff, 766 A 19–35; and *Physics*, 1) characterises women as incomplete males because matter (equated with women) is perfected by form (equated with men). This rational for female inferiority is repeated in Antoninus, *Summa*, III, I, cap.25, col.118. In addition, Aristotle (*Politics*, 3.4 / 1227b 20) claims that 'silence is a woman's glory', thereby providing a model for the moralising notion of silence as a female virtue. For discussion of the Aristotelian roots of the medieval and renaissance ideas about women's natural inferiority see: Bullough, 1973, pp.485–501; Commo Mclaughlin, 1974, pp.213–66; and Maclean, 1980, esp. pp.15–46.

20 See, for example, Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25; see also: Bullough, 1973, pp.485–501; Commo Mclaughlin, 1974, pp.213–66; Payer, 1977, pp.2–14; and Maclean, 1980, esp. pp.15–46.

21 For the intended practicality and 'preachability' of Antoninus' *Summa* see: Howard, 1995, pp.43–78.

women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law saith. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church'. In his *Summa* Antoninus quotes this same scriptural passage when discussing the appropriate conditions for speech (i.e. when, where, about what, to whom, and in what manner):

> Second to be considered is where one speaks, for in the Church, which is a place of prayer, it is unbecoming to speak of the things in the world ...It is said that here one ought not to dispute one's mind (*parlamenta*), and the apostle at 1 Cor. 14 [says]: *Women should be silent in church. For it is not permitted unto them to speak*: and afterward Paul [says]: *it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*
>
> (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, ss.2 'Where one speaks', col.83)

In fifteenth-century Florence church would have been one of the few public spaces where noblewomen of Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni's status might have been seen and heard on a regular basis.[22] In order to avoid the sins associated with such spiritually necessary yet public exposure, Antoninus instructs the reader of the *Opera a ben vivere* to:

> place oneself in that place where you believe that you will give the least scandal, with your vision or by being seen by others. Guard yourself, my daughter, as much as is possible, that in church you do not say any word that is vain or idle; and as much as you are able, guard your heart from all vain and useless chatter (*spargimento*).
>
> (Antoninus, 1858, pp.165–8, Regola X)

Antoninus also tells his reader that if she must go to church at times other than mass, such as on feast days or for confession, she should 'go [to church] at such a time, when you will find the least number of people' and '[g]o with silence of vain and idle words' (1858, pp.174–6, Regola XII). To further protect her from sinning with her tongue in public, Antoninus tells his reader exactly what she is to say in church. This consists of a lengthy daily meditation and a series of audible and silent prayers (for analysis of the meditation, see Flanigan, 2014). In fact, throughout the third part of *Opera a ben vivere* are 'rules' that instruct

the reader about exactly what manner of speech she is to perform (mostly prayer), when to say it, where to say it, and sometimes even exactly what words to say (i.e. p.157, Regola VI). This includes her speech during her time spent at home, when Antoninus recommends that she recite prayers almost continuously, including while she is chewing her food, 'to accustom yourself to speak as little as you can'. After dinner he tells her: 'retire yourself to your room as soon as you can, and do not attend to anything other than devotions'. While in her room she is told to recite certain silent prayers and examine her conscience until it is time for bed (pp.180–6, Regola XIV). Thus, Antoninus fills his reader's day with spiritually profitable speech and provides her with little chance to speak publically or fall victim to any sins of the tongue.

Outside of the church and home Antoninus recommends silence and avoidance of other people when possible to further escape the temptation of sinful speech. Specifically, Antoninus tells his reader to avoid attending dances, festivals, jousts, spectacles, and other similar entertainments, but if she must go she should prevent scandal by filling her head with thoughts of God and the sound of angels to drown out the sounds of the terrestrial world (pp.170–80, Regola XIII). He also characterises conversational speech as a male activity that Antoninus' reader is instructed to 'flee' in order to protect her soul (pp.98–9). However, if she is tempted to join such conversation she is advised to 'strengthen her sensual appetite and keep silent', but if this is not possible she is to 'take care not to desire to respond to every proposition [...] Converse with people as little as you can, and make a good wall around your soul' (pp.132–4, full passage quoted at beginning of this essay). He, thus, prohibits her from participation in public discourse and intellectual debate, which are gendered male.

The propagation through instructional texts and sermons of negative ideas about certain types of speech associated particularly with women would have functioned as a form of social control by marginalising women's thoughts and words and limiting their ability to participate credibly in oral discourse, which was the primary basis for social, economic, and political power in renaissance Florence. As clearly stated in the passage from *Opera a ben vivere* quoted at the beginning of this essay, Antoninus tells his female reader that in order to live virtuously, and thus to live well (*ben vivere*), she must will herself to avoid the 'sins of the tongue' by keeping silent, refraining from excessive laughter, and if she must resort to speaking, to speak little and judiciously (1858, pp.132–3). Throughout these texts Antoninus portrays a woman's speech as a threat to

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22   For women's public visibility in renaissance Florence, especially at church, see: Aston, 1990, pp.237–94; Tomas, 1992; Randolph, 1997, pp.17–41; Brown and Davis, 1998; Gaston, 2006, pp.331–2; for women's visibility in Antoninus' church of San Marco in particular see: Flanigan, 2013, pp.40–60.

Figure 3.3: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Visitation*, 1485–90, fresco (detail of Figure 3.2). Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

Figure 3.4: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Angel Appearing To Zacharias*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

her own soul, her family's reputation, and ultimately the communal well-being of Florentine society.

Women's speech in the Tornabuoni Chapel frescoes

Reinforcement for these proscriptions on women's speech, both in public and private, can be discerned in visual images, such as Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the Tornabuoni family chapel in Santa Maria Novella. For example, in the *Visitation* fresco (Figures 3.2 and 3.3) one can see men in the background conversing with each other freely, while the Tornabuoni women in the foreground remain silent as they view the biblical event set just outside the walls of what looks to be fifteenth-century Florence. In the adjacent fresco depicting the *Angel Appearing to Zacharias*, Florentine noblewomen again appear as positive and silent role models (Figure 3.4). They stand behind a large pier, apart from the men, and outside the main spaces of the temple and the piazza, in a place where they will likely 'give the least scandal, with [their] vision or by being seen by others' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.165–8, Regola X). These women do not participate in the animated discussions that occur amongst the various groups of men in the piazza, especially those to the left of center. The gestures that signal speech portray male conversation as active (or not idle) and, therefore, rational and profitable in nature. The fifteenth-century women who appear in the *Birth of the Virgin* scene are likewise silent (Figure 3.1 and 3.5). They do not engage in either active conversation or idle talk despite their situation within a private domestic space, specifically a woman's bedchamber, where they would have had little chance of being seen or heard by men.

When women in these frescoes do appear to speak, it is not usually women who are identified as mature, upper-class, or members of the Tornabuoni family. Instead, as in the scene of *Zacharias Naming St John*, mature noblewomen tend to serve as positive exemplars to be emulated against the foil of gossiping secondary figures (often unveiled young women or children), who might serve as anti-exemplars that reinforce the moral message (Figure 3.6). Another

Figure 3.5: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1485–90, fresco (detail of Figure 3.1). Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

Figure 3.6: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Zacharias Naming St. John*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence,

Figure 3.7: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Marriage of the Virgin Mary*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

Figure 3.8: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

example of female speech appears in the *Marriage of the Virgin* fresco in which a mature woman in the left foreground (not identified as a Tornabuoni) has her mouth slightly open to converse with another female figure and the viewer as she gestures toward the main scene (Figure 3.7). Here, this woman performs as a so-called 'commentator figure', whose usefulness in engaging the viewer with the religious scene, and thereby instructing the viewer of its significance, is described in Leon Battista Alberti's treatise *On Painting* (1435/6) (Alberti, 1991, pp.77–8). Rather than being a negative model for women's speech, this speaking woman may be seen as a positive exemplar because she portrays didactic speech – a type of speech permissible to women, especially if it involves teaching other women or children about God or scripture (Antoninus, 1858, pp.113–4). Her speech, however, remains separate

from that of the male commentator, who performs a parallel action in the distance behind her. In all but one of the chapel's frescoes, male and female conversation is strictly segregated. The one notable exception is the *Presentation* scene that depicts a conversation between St Joachim and St Anne. Here, however, Anne appears to be listening, or more precisely taking directions from her male counterpart, rather than leading the conversation (Figure 3.8). Thus, in these frescoes, as in Antoninus' *Opera a ben vivere*, conversation is gendered as a primarily male activity and exemplary women are portrayed as mostly silent.

Sins of speech and female penitential performance

The purpose of the discussion of speech in part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, like much 'sins of the tongue'

literature, was to alter its female reader's inclination away from behaviours that would have been seen as threatening to her own soul and to societal stability. To help her with this process of behavioural modification, Antoninus recommends that his reader seek out a knowledgeable and trustworthy pastoral mentor in whom she can confide and to whom she can confess (see Antoninus, 1858, pp.141–2 and 153–5, Regola III). The new spiritual knowledge imparted via pastoral instruction must be used to examine her own conscience for sin, so she can purify her soul by performing self-confession alone in her room every night before bed and prepare for confession to her pastor as soon as she is able (p.143 and pp.195–9, Regola XVIII). Antoninus, thus, fills his reader's day with spiritually profitable speech, consisting mostly of prayer and penitence. The only sanctioned conversation with a male is with her trusted pastoral mentor, who is trained to assist her in the care of her soul and is sworn not to reveal her secrets. Her thoughts, feelings, and sensual appetite are, thus, able to be monitored and regulated by the Church in order to prevent the damage they may cause to society.

As a whole, the instruction contained within *Opera a ben vivere* was intended to alter the behaviour of its reader by educating her about sins of speech to help her to judge good from bad in order to inform her future prudential course of action (i.e., silence, avoidance, prayer, confession). It also taught her how to regulate her sensual appetite for speech through the development of detestation for and willful avoidance of sinful types of speech to which women were considered most prone. This new knowledge, especially about types of speech that she previously may not have identified as sinful, also would benefit her penitential practice by helping her to identify and desire to confess sins that might have otherwise harmed her soul and impeded her salvation. In addition, it would have benefitted society by teaching her to detest and avoid speech that might threaten the souls and authority of men and, therefore, upset society's 'natural', male-dominated order.

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SENSING THE IMAGE: GENDER, PIETY AND IMAGES IN LATE MEDIEVAL TUSCANY

Catherine Lawless

Abstract

The Florentine Dominican preacher Fra Giovanni Dominici (1355–1419) warned his female reader of the dangers to which the senses, and sight in particular, exposed the soul, reminding her of how Eve was led to sin by looking at the apple, Samson by looking at Delilah, and David in looking at Bathsheba. The Franciscan preacher Fra Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) warned against what was evidently a common practice, that of running to kiss the altar, or the sacred stone, chalice or paten, and reminded his listeners that they were to consider themselves unworthy of such privileges. The sense of touch was often instrumental in obtaining cures, as well as fulfilling ritual requirements. Yet, as the preachers show, the senses, whose site is the body, can be agents of temptation. This essay explores a range of ways in which holy images were 'sensed' by women in renaissance Tuscany. My concern, in particular, is with the relationship between the sense of touch and images, especially small panel paintings.

Biographical note

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SENSING THE IMAGE: GENDER, PIETY AND IMAGES IN LATE MEDIEVAL TUSCANY

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Finally, when you have stayed with her for some time, ask permission to leave, and receive first the blessing of the boy Jesus and of the mother and of Joseph, kneel before them, and take leave of them with tears and deep sympathy.

Johannes de Caulibus,
Meditationes Vitae Christi, p.76

The above quotation, taken from a 14th century Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, which was written for a nun, shows a clear relationship between bodily performance (kneeling, crying), imagination and prayer. It formed part of a growing body of literature from the late middle ages that advised on how prayer should be conducted and how the devotee should imagine scenes of the life and Passion of Christ. This paper examines the ways in which holy images were 'sensed' by women in renaissance Tuscany. It pays particular attention to the relationship between the sense of touch and images, in particular those which could be held, embraced, kissed and even, in a fashion, become one with the devotee, as in the case of somatic piety. In order to shed light on the significance of these cases of affective and somatic piety for women in medieval Italy, I explore the collaborative roles of the senses in the exemplary devotional practice of holy female figures, and the place reserved to the artwork for – and by – pious women.

Medieval piety and the senses

Late medieval penitential piety was characterised by increased lay participation in religious observance, often within new forms of religious life within the home or in communities strongly influenced by mendicant orders. The mendicant orders were often the guides and advisers to an increased bodily identification with the suffering Christ, whose flesh was consumed in the Eucharist. Mendicant piety, itself influenced by Cistercian affectivity, emphasised an emotional involvement with the life of Christ and the Virgin, stressing the need to feel in one's own body the pains of Christ's Passion and the sorrows of the Virgin, and

to perform acts of penitence for the sins committed by oneself and by humankind. This penitential movement was attractive to women, providing spaces for salvation outside the traditional cloister and forms of life more sympathetic to urban and mercantile classes than the traditional earlier medieval model of warriors, workers and clergy. Fearful that such penitential movements could lead to, or shelter heresy, the church, and in particular the mendicant orders, sought to guide and direct such piety (Vauchez, 1993, p.337). Further, the emotional nature of women, understood and accepted as being more labile than men, was seen as being particularly receptive to this type of piety. Daniel Bornstein has shown how gender was important in the construction of late medieval female mysticism, in that women were believed to be more pliant in the receiving of impressions, like wax, due to their cooler and moister humours (Bornstein, 1998, p.176). Women, according to the Franciscan St Bonaventura (1221–74) were more sensitive than men, and thus more able to feel keenly the torture of the Passion:

You will see even more clearly how cruel was the death of Christ if you consider that whatever is more sensitive suffers more. In general, the body of a woman is more sensitive than that of a man; but never was there a body that felt pain as keenly as that of the Saviour, since his flesh was entirely virginal, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin

(Easton, 2002, p.53)

The sources used for this discussion will, for the most part, come from the mendicant tradition and consist of the lives of holy women, usually written by mendicant confessors, or treatises and guides to prayer and pious living composed by mendicants for women. These sources can tell us about the bodily and sensual relationship between women and art objects, although they are usually frustratingly quiet on the pictorial details or qualities of those same objects, devoting considerably less space to art than to the highly coloured and sensual visions and dreams of the women concerned. The artworks were not aesthetic objects worthy of description, but tools in the practice of piety, aimed at helping the devout in their prayers.

References to the 'five senses' occur frequently in the vernacular literature upon which much of this study is based, as it was a commonly accepted category in the middle ages (Goody, 2002). The senses were often conceived as the five portals connecting the body to the soul and through which the exterior world was mediated. The Dominican archbishop of Florence,

Antoninus Pierozzi (1389–1459), in a work of spiritual advice entitled *Opera a ben vivere* and directed to Dianora Tornabuoni (1425–61), a wife and mother, warned that when one is at Mass, one must lock the 'gates of the body', that is, the senses, as it is through these that temptation enters (Antoninus, 1858, p.268).[1] In the binary of body and soul, the former is a carnal trap that imprisons the soul. The senses are agents of the body, thus part of the corrupt mortal flesh, yet the rewards for triumph over the flesh are presented in the language of the senses. As women were perceived as more fleshly than men, and thus particularly sensual, their bodies were believed to need firm regulation and direction (Solterer, 1994, p.129).

The ambiguity with which the body and the senses were viewed can be summarised by referring to the great evangelists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For example, Fra Giovanni Dominici (1355–1419), a Dominican, like Antoninus, whom he knew, warned his female reader, Bartolomea degli Obizzi, widow of the Florentine exile Antonio Alberti, of the dangers inherent in the senses, reminding her of how Eve was led to sin by looking at the apple, Samson by looking at Delilah, and David in looking at Bathsheba. The blind were blessed, because they were saved from sin entering through the portal of the eyes (Dominici, 1860, p.46). Women were to open their eyes to the beauties of God's creation when out in the country, but in the city, where many sinners were, they were to keep their eyes lowered and fixed on the earth. Ears were to be used to hear divine words and doctrine and could be turned sympathetically towards others' miseries. The melody of birdsong could, however, be enjoyed (p.47). Although Dominici believed that the nose did not sin as much as the other sensory organs, he warned that it should not be held high over the sick or leprous, and reminded his audience that Christ did not refuse the smell of Lazarus and instead reproved Martha for not wishing to subject him to the smell (pp.48–9).

The significance of images to devotion was, of course, much discussed by medieval theologians. Gregory the Great's often-cited formulation of images as the literature of the laity was echoed in late medieval mendicant piety. St Bonaventura wrote that a picture is that which 'instructs, arouses pious emotions and awakens memories' (cited in Panofsky, 1953, p.141). Bonaventura's Dominican counterpart, St. Thomas Aquinas (*c.*1225–74) developed the point, commenting that art was didactic in that it taught the person what to venerate, it helped the person to remember, and it

inspired devotion (Thomas Aquinas, 2005). Dominici himself prayed in front of an image of St Catherine of Siena (1347–80) to cure his stammering (Hood, 1993, p.22). The religious image was embedded in a network of devotional practices, beliefs, rituals and behaviours, and in some of which the image was an active participant, for instance, in miraculous activity where it moved, spoke, wept or bled. While such phenomena have been discussed fully elsewhere (Trexler, 1972, 1980; Freedberg, 1989), what has usually, and not unreasonably, been emphasised, is how religious art works were *seen*.[2] However, sight and touch had yet to be distinctly separated according to our modern formulation. They were not so separate in medieval devotion – images could impress themselves on the heart 'like a seal impresses its image in wax', for example (Kleinbub, 2013, p.110). Thus, the sharp distinction between the visual and the tactile is a modern one, and boundaries between sensory experiences (seeing/touching) were more fluid in medieval culture. Indeed, in devotional practice, the experience of an artwork was often part of a process in which the *appearance* of the work itself was of less importance than its use as a mediator between the inner and outer senses.

Women, like children, were expected to be moved more easily by images than by texts. Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) in a sermon in 1494 delivered in Florence noted that 'Children and women respond like plants do, with their bodies, and through physical stimulation. Paintings in churches are their books, and we should provide for them better than the pagans did' (Richardson, Woods and Franklin, 2007, p.213). Savonarola's views on images fit well within the mendicant tradition of reaching out to women, children and the unlettered. The Franciscan preacher San Bernardino di Siena (1380–1444) wrote:

> Note therefore that there are four kinds of letters, each better than the other. The first kind are gross letters for rude folk, as for example, pictures; the next, for men of middle sort, are middle letters, as for example, written letters; and these are better than the first. The third are vocal letters intended for those men who desire actively to busy themselves for charity's sake, pleading and discoursing in order that they may be learned and may teach others, and these excel the first two. Fourthly and lastly come mental

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[1]   On Antoninus' *Opera a ben vivere*, see Theresa Flanigan's essay in this volume.

[2]   Kathleen Biddick has pointed out, for example, that sense and touch were separated only by the 'industrial mappings' of the body in 19th century scientific and medical discourses; Biddick, 1993, p.389.

letters, ordained by God for those who desire to persevere always in contemplation and these are more perfect than the others and exceed them all.

(cited in Hope, 1990, p.560)

This view places emphasis on the role of the mental image, three steps higher than the visual image, and shows how the interior devotional landscape was the most highly valued in mendicant piety.

Lectio Divina, or divine reading, had for a long time held a place in monastic piety. Mysticism, or union with the divine, could be reached by meditation on scripture and its meanings within a literal and allegorical framework. The emphasis on the text expanded, concurrently with the rise of lay piety, to encompass a 'reading' of the image towards the same end: that of achieving unity with God (Jones, 2002, p.38). An example of how a pious woman could move from an image sensed with the eyes of the body to a devotion sensed with the eyes of the mind is found Antoninus' instructions to Dianora in *Opere ben vivere*, when he tells her how she should pray, whether in church or in her own room. He told her to kneel in front of a crucifix, and with 'the eyes of the mind' move from the crown of thorns, to the eyes filled with tears, blood and sweat, to the nose, filled with mucous and blood, and then to the mouth, and to say a certain amount of paternosters and ave marias. She was then to move on to contemplating his hands, and say more paternosters and ave marias, similarly his feet, and then his side, at which point she was to contemplate the pain of the Virgin Mary, predicted by Simeon. Dianora was urged to move over the body of Christ with the 'eyes of the mind', but in front of the physical presence of a crucifix (Antoninus, 1858, pp.169–170).

Performative piety

Anne L. Clark has pointed out how bodily deportment and behaviour, as prescribed in religious and secular literature, and enacted on a daily or frequent basis, shaped religious experience (Clark, 2007, pp.165–89). The Augustinian prioress Maddalena Albrizzi of Como (d.1465), after having made the sign of the Cross at dawn and struck herself three times in memory of the Trinity, would lean towards the image of the Virgin, thanking her for her maternal protection. She saluted otherwise the effigy of St Augustine, considering that it was his rule under which she lived. Later she prayed in front of the image of St Mary Magdalen on a panel ('in tabula expressam'), asking that she be favoured with penitence. Finally, she prayed to her guardian angel, St Michael, and St Gabriel (AS, Maii, vol.III, p.259). Such practices were not confined to Italy, of course,

and powerful models are provided by holy figures in other parts of Europe: Birgitta of Sweden (1302–73) aged twelve, naked in the cold, prayed in front of the Crucifixion, flagellating herself, while her companions slept (AS, Octobris, vol.IV, p.487). Another holy child, Margaret of Hungary (1242–70), when aged four in a Dominican convent, prostrated herself in front of a crucifixion in the form of a cross, and from then on, wherever she saw a cross, prostrated herself and adored it. Her biographer goes on to say that she skipped meals in order to pray in front of the image of the Crucified Christ, which was in the chapter, and always prayed at the altar of the Holy Cross or in front of a depiction of it. Whenever she saw an image of the Virgin she knelt, and gave the Angelic Salutation (AS, Januarii, vol.I, p.516).

The biographer of St Catherine of Siena (d.1380) and ardent promoter of her cult, the Dominican Tommaso Caffarini (1350–1434), wrote of how a pious woman of Venice was converted into a life of piety. The account moves from the sense of hearing to that of seeing, and then from the sense of seeing to the bodily enactment of pious acts. After hearing Caffarini preach about St Catherine of Siena, Maria Sturion (*c*.1379–1399) saw in a painter's shop an image of that saint. Although the image was intended by the painter as a gift for Caffarini, Maria persuaded him to let her have it instead. After acquiring the painting, she began to wear a white tunic over a hair shirt, wishing 'to be dressed entirely in the complete habit of Saint Dominic for love of him, just like the blessed virgin Catherine'. She then had herself depicted in an icon, wearing that habit with some other Dominican saints, 'before the image of the crucified Jesus, holding her heart in her hand' offering it to him (Caffarini, 2005, pp.138–9). Later in the legend, Caffarini adds that 'she had herself depicted in an icon entirely clothed in that habit and thus, by contemplating herself in her cell, she herself satisfied her desire as best she could' (p.148). Another nun in the same convent, Suor Orsa, saw St Peter the Apostle in a vision, 'whose face I recognized easily not only from having seen him depicted in churches, but also from having embroidered it at times' (p.166).

The advice given by Dominici to his devotee Bartolomea degli Obizzi on the use of images in the raising of children follows this religious performativity. He insists that if Bartolomea does not wish to have, or cannot have, so many paintings at home, that the nurse take the children to churches often, when offices are not being said, so that they can see holy pictures. He warns against gold and silver ornament and the more richly decorated images attracting more devotion than the old ones, despite what is represented. Later,

he instructs the making of an 'altaruzzo' or two in the home, under the dedication of the Saviour, whose feast is every Sunday, and to have three or four varied 'dossaluzzi', to make the children like sacristans, and that each feast that a 'little chapel' (cappelluzza) should be adorned:

> Thus the children will be occupied in making garlands of flowers or herbs, and crowning Jesus, adoring the painted Virgin Mary, making candles, lighting and extinguishing them, distributing insence, keeping them clean, cleaning, making the altars ready, composing candles of pieces of wax, of earth; … running to ring all the hours like they hear in churches, they can put on chemises like acolytes, … and shown that which would make them true priests if they learn how to do it.
>
> (Dominici, 1860, pp.146–7)

Although Dominici's instructions were written to Bartolomea and we have no indication of them being preached, there is evidence of such pretend altars being found in Florentine homes. Jacqueline Musacchio notes that in the 1390 inventory of Jacopo del Rosso there was a child's predella (Musacchio, 2008, p.43) and Bornstein concluded that the practice was common, using the bequest of 'a decorated altar that I have at home', as an example (Bornstein, 1998, p.191).

In this advice, touching, cleaning, holding and embracing are all as important as seeing. The religious world of late medieval Tuscany was tactile. The importance of the sense of touch is emphasised by the Dominican Fra Giordano da Rivalto (c.1260–1311) as it is the first one the body has, and that informs all other senses: 'Every animal has the sense of touch, even if it lacks other senses. The sense of touch is not confined to the hands, but is felt throughout the body. When the ear hears, it is because the voice touches the ear, and when the eye sees it is because it is touched by what it sees, and so on' (Giordano da Rivalto, 1867, pp.37–8). But this tactile devotional world was not without its dangers. San Bernardino warned against what was evidently a common practice, that of running to kiss the altar, or the sacred stone, chalice or paten, and reminded his listeners that they were to consider themselves unworthy of such privileges (Bernardino, 1935, p.89). The Episcopal Laws of Florence appealed for women not to rush towards the Host, which suggests once again that this religious fervour and emotion was associated with women rather than men (Trexler, 1971, p.65).

Nevertheless, some theologians sanctioned certain types of tactile devotional activities. Dominici advised Bartolomea degli Obizzi, for example, that if she had

a large cross in her room, she should embrace it repeatedly, to feel the fire for Christ burn in her, and she should bathe his hair with her tears, so as to feel all his love, his passion, her sins, and her misery, if she felt at night her flesh separated from him. She was not to worry about loss of sleep, but rejoice in being so close to her beloved (Dominici, 1860, p.61). The *vita* (life) of the Dominican holy woman Agnes of Montepulciano (d.1317) told of how she 'levitated to the Crucifix and remained there, hanging on it, kissing and hugging it, seemingly clinging to her beloved, so that all can see in manifest fashion the spiritual union of her internal unity with Christ through her embrace with a material image, and so that all can understand the elevation of her spirit as they consider the miraculous suspension of her body'. Her mantle was filled with manna, and a sweet smell was sensed. When the manna, which looked like snow from a distance, was approached, it became apparent that each flake was like a little snowflake in the shape of a cross (AS, Aprilis, vol.II, pp.792–3). When dying, the Servite tertiary Giuliana Falconieri (1270–1341) was unable to receive any food, including the Eucharist. She asked for the Eucharist to be brought to her so that she could kiss it, and, after being refused this by the priest, prayed that a veil be placed over her breast and the Eucharist be placed on that. When this was done, it sank into her breast and was never found. After her death, when her body was prepared for burial, the image of the Host, superimposed with an image of the cross was imprinted 'like a seal' on her breast (Brocchi, 1742, pp.9–11).

Clare of Montefalco (d.1308) represents one of the most complete examples of this kind of internalisation of Passion imagery. When dying she rebuked the nuns of her convent for making the sign of the cross over her, as she had Christ already crucified in her heart. This was in a literal sense – in an autopsy performed by the nuns, the instruments of the passion were found to be engraved on her heart (Menestò, 1996, p.116). Chiara Frugoni has demonstrated the ways in which meditation on the Passion of Christ produced visions in female mystic piety. In particular, she discusses the vision of Blessed Aldobrandesca of Pisa, who was visited by an angel carrying three bloody nails. The vision of three nails could be directly connected to Franciscan piety, as they are first referred to as three in number in the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and are depicted in Nicola Pisano's *Crucifixion* in the pulpit of the Baptistry of Pisa (Frugoni, 1996, pp.104–29).[3]

It must be noted that seeing, particularly in the case of Clare of Montefalco, was much less important than

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3   For Nicola Pisano's pulpit see http://www.wga.hu/ html_m/p/pisano/nicola/1pisa_0.html

feeling. This is even more true of Margaret of Città di Castello (d.1320), a Dominican tertiary who was both blind and crippled. Despite her blindness, she saw the Eucharist within her mind, and images of Sts John the Evangelist and Fortunatus were instrumental in her miraculous healing of a young girl (AS, Aprilis, vol.II, p.191). She too internalised imagery – imagery which she could not have seen – and on her death she was found to have within her three stones on which were found little images (imagunculae), depicting the Nativity, with the Virgin, Child, two animals and St Joseph (AS, Januarius, vol.II, p.191). Margaret of Ravenna (d.1505), another blind holy woman, who also had deformed limbs, healed a crippled boy by telling him to go to the famous image of the Virgin that worked miracles (AS, Aprilis, vol.II, p.163).[4]

Devotional images and the domestic realm

Images mattered in devotional experience and played a role in performative piety, as we have seen. In this section, I discuss more specifically the kinds of artworks that nuns and lay women used in their devotional practice, paying particular attention to small painted panels and winged tabernacles.

Women were encouraged to stay within their homes (Paolo da Certaldo, 1945, p.59) and it was a commonplace in preaching that their appearance even in churches was problematic, with preachers and moralists accusing them of only being there to be seen by men or to gossip (Savonarola, 1845, pp.72–3; Bernardino, 1953, p.312; Randolph, 1997, pp.17–41; Davis, 1998, pp.19–38). The artworks that were touched as well as seen in devotional practice were most often not in churches but in domestic or conventual spaces. The popularity of small-scale panels in Italy was such that it has been compared to the popularity of books of hours in northwest Europe (Schmidt, 2005, p.9).

The types of images that women had access to in their homes or convents included, then, small-scale portable panels or tabernacles, relief sculptures in marble and wood – or less expensive materials such as gesso – crucifixes, and models of the Christ Child or of saints. (Cooper, 2006a, p.290). The fourteenth century saw a proliferation of small painted panels and winged tabernacles intended for personal or domestic devotion. These often depicted the crucified Christ, and/or the Virgin and Child surrounded by saints. David Wilkins has argued 'that touching is

4   Although the source only refers to the image as follows, 'quamdam Deiparae imaginem, plurimis miraculis id temporis celebrem', it may be the sculpted icon known as the *Madonna Greca* which was believed to have miraculously arrived in Ravenna in 1100 and was housed in the church of S. Maria in Porto (Beltrami, 1791, p.53).

crucial in understanding these trecento triptychs. In their museum settings today we can no longer touch them' and has discussed the performance of ritual in approaching such an object, unveiling or opening it, arranging oneself and possibly one's household in front it, at particular times of the day and week, and being drawn into a different, atemporal spiritual world (Wilkins, 2002, p.376). He has also suggested that these images were probably primarily intended for the devotions of women, although probably rarely commissioned by them (p.377). The space of the pious woman was a restricted one and even her visits to churches were to be conducted with care, such were the temptations offered to and by her gaze outside the home.

An example of how these panels may have satisfied tactile as well as visual senses can be found in the diary of the Florentine merchant, Giovanni Morelli (1371–1444). In language reminiscent of the female mystics, he wrote: 'And having calmed my heart and my mind, my eyes turned to the right side of the true Crucified Christ, where, looking, at the foot of the Cross I saw the pure and his holy blessed Mother, who I considered full of the such sorrow and such sadness; and considering that my sins were the reason for such affliction, [...] but considering in the mind the sorrow of that pure Virgin, mother of the pure and precious Son, and considering the many dangers that from the day of his birth he had carried to the last in front of her eyes dead and broken by dissolute sinners'. Like the nun addressed in *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, Morelli related the sorrow of the Virgin to his own life and his sick young son, Alberto: 'and remembering the sorrow that I carried for my son, strongly I began to be ashamed and it was no small time before I rose from prayer [...] rendering many thanks to God and to his blessed Saints, with great comfort, it appearing to me that it had to be done, many times, holding in my arms the panel, I kissed the Crucified Christ and the figure of his Mother and of the Evangelist' (Giovanni Morelli, 'Ricordi' in Branca, 1986, pp.308–11). Morelli also commented that his son, who died in 1406 aged ten, had demanded that the image of the Virgin be brought to him in his bed (p.294).

As shown above, Morelli and his son embraced images. They embraced the material panel or cross that represented the beloved, perhaps little differently from the way in which photographs of loved ones are treasured, caressed, kissed and touched today. Although images could be 'participatory intelligences' (Trexler, 1980, p.71), in that they behaved on occasion like human bodies and wept, bled, sweated, spoke and moved, their holiness was linked to what they

represented, or, in some cases, to the spaces that they occupied. Images did not just represent, they could, in some ways, contain some of the holiness of what was represented (Baschet, 2008, p.42). Image, relic and reliquary could all therefore be appropriated by both gaze and touch, as in the case of a small fourteenth-century panel by the Sienese artist Lippo Vanni (fl.1344–76), where the frame of the central panel functions as both image and reliquary. The central panel shows the Virgin and Child with SS. Aurea and John the Baptist, while St Dominic is depicted on the left wing. This combination of saints has led to the suggestion that the tabernacle was painted for the female Dominican convent of S. Aurea in Rome, a convent for which Vanni painted a large altarpiece in 1358. The size of the panel (49.4 x 45.4cm, when open) means that it could be held and easily transported for devotional practice. The life of the Florentine lay holy woman Umiliana dei Cerchi (d.1219) reveals that an image of the Virgin and Child was instrumental in her devotions, and, at the hour of her death, a 'portrait' of the Virgin that contained a lock of her hair as a relic was placed on her breast, comforting her in death and warding off the devil (Schuchman, 2009, p.383). As Maginnis points out, it is significant that a lay woman had painted images in her room, consisting of one image of the Virgin and Child on parchment and another on panel (Maginnis, 2001, p.16).

Small panels with female donors, depicted alone or with male donors, which may have been used in such devotions, are common. A panel in the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia (Figure 4.1), dating from *c.*1375 and depicting the mystic marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria with the adult Christ,

flanked by St Louis of Toulouse and a Clarissan nun, is one such example. The mystic marriage of St Catherine, where the virgin martyr is united with her heavenly spouse, Christ, is an ideal subject for nuns, echoing their own nuptial union with Christ, but it is also an apt metaphor for the soul's union with God. The scale of the figures is interesting, in that not all saints are painted in the same scale, although they occupy the same space. Louis of Toulouse is considerably smaller than St Catherine of Alexandria, although he is still larger than the kneeling donor figure. This could suggest an attention to the hierarchy of the main subject – the

Figure 4.1: Jacopo di Cione, *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine, with St Louis of Toulouse and a female donor*, *c.*1375–8, tempera on panel, 81.1 x 62cm. Philadelphia, Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, no.6. (Photo: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art)

mystic marriage – a marriage, or union with Christ, to which both Louis (a recent saint, canonised only in 1317) and the donor could aspire to and possibly reach, through penitential practice, before death, or, indeed, the donor could, through witnessing the mystical union of St Catherine be recording or marking her own nuptials with Christ, enacted when she professed as a Clarissan nun.

Touch seems to be given equal status to vision within these images. The joining of hands by the Virgin between Christ and St Catherine shows that this is the mystic marriage. Although St Louis and the Clarissan donor appear to witness the event, their gazes, if we accept the pictorial fictions, can only encompass an oblique view of the event. It is the viewer outside the pictorial space who witnesses both the mystical event and the donor figure. St Louis could be seen as a transitional figure, linking the holy figures of Christ, the Virgin and the virgin martyr Catherine, to his female Franciscan follower, the Clarissan nun. As what we see could not take place in physical and temporal reality, the viewer is joined with the donor and the holy figures in an atemporal relationship. The donor could thus be remembered in the prayers of other nuns of her order, they too followers of St Francis and mystically joined to Christ through their profession.

Small panels were commissioned for nuns, like the Clarissan nun above, but little is known about their placement and accessibility. Some convents had cells, which were furnished with panels, as was the case of the Dominican convent in Murano, where Giovanni Dominici himself advised on the programme (Schmidt, 2005, p.219). Another probable example

of a commission for a Clarissan house is the small panel in the Hunt Museum in Limerick, attributed to the school of Bernardo Daddi, which depicts the Crucifixion with St Clare, and a witnessing Franciscan male donor (Lawless, 2005) (Figure 4.2). Although the panel lacks a female donor figure, the prominence of St Clare suggests a Clarissan context, as the saint was not venerated in the first Franciscan order until the relatively late date of 1340 (Vauchez, 1993, p.418). It has been suggested that it was part of a diptych, with its counterpart being formed by a panel now in the New York Metropolitan Museum (Boskovits, 1984, pp.358, p.611). This depicts the Virgin and Child surrounded by Saints Louis of Toulouse, Catherine, Agnes, Elizabeth of Hungary, and in the foreground, John the Baptist,
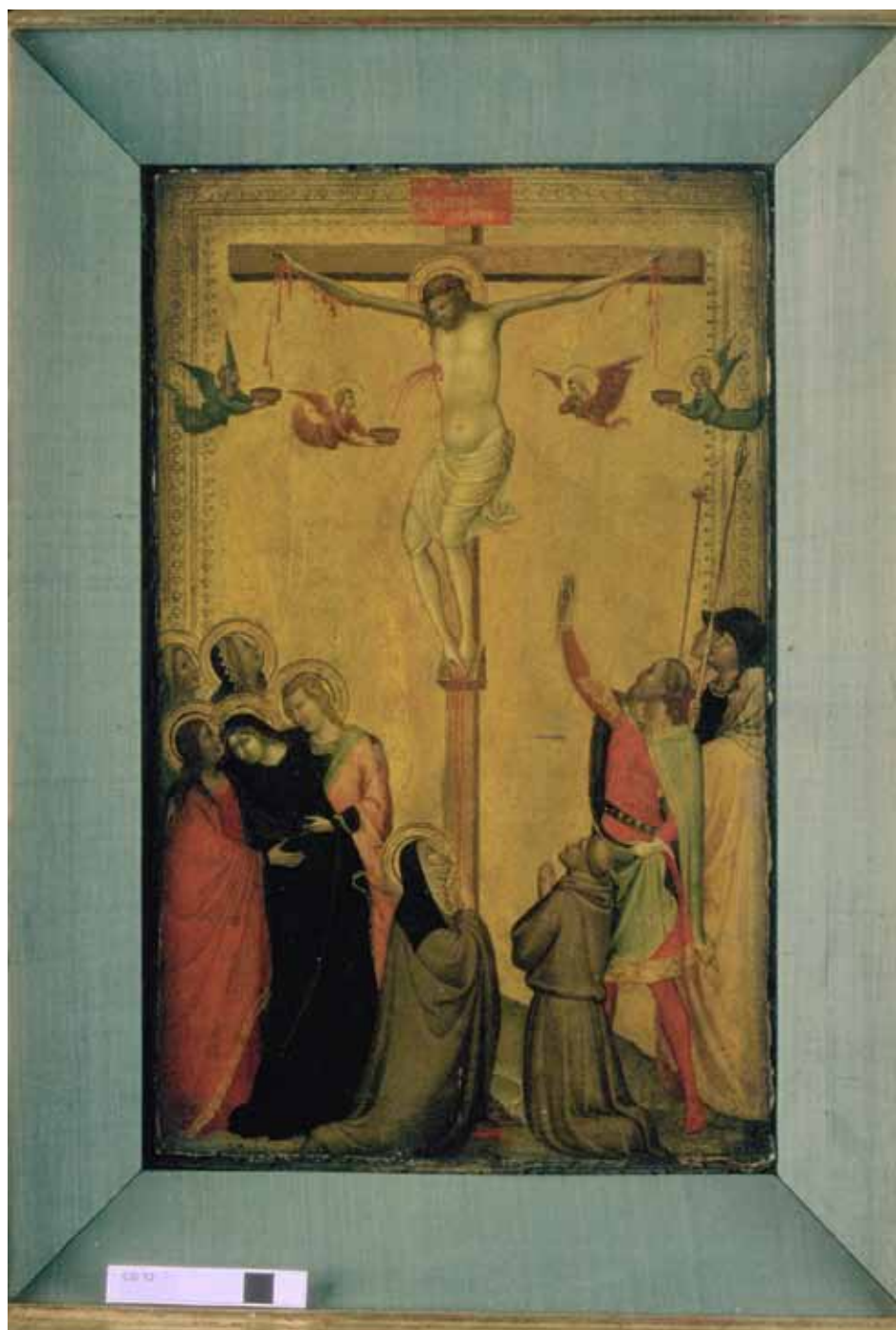

Figure 4.2: Bernardo Daddi (studio), *Crucifixion with Franciscan friar and St Clare*, *c.*1330–60, tempera and gold on panel, 33 x 21cm. Limerick, Hunt Museum. (Photo: Courtesy of the Hunt Museum, Limerick)

Francis, Anthony of Padua and John the Evangelist (Figure 4.3). The affection towards the Christ Child advocated by the author of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* could easily be evoked by this panel, with the Child reaching over to pat the lamb held by St Agnes.

The tangibility of the lamb held by Agnes and the playing attitude of the Child are indicative of an intimate, maternal piety of a kind exemplified by the 'holy dolls' often caressed by both nuns and secular women. For instance, the Vallombrosan nuns of S. Giovanni Evangelista in Florence celebrated the feasts of their founder, Beata Umiltà and her successor, Beata Margherita (Margaret of Faenza), by displaying the doll of the Christ Child that both had caressed when they were alive (AS, Augustii, vol.5, p.845). Klapisch-Zuber cites a number of examples of women receiving such dolls in their wedding trousseau, such as Antonia Rinieri, on her marriage do Niccolo Altoviti in 1486, whose gift was 'a child dressed in fine linen in the

Figure 4.3: Bernardo Daddi (studio), *Virgin and Child with Saints Louis of Toulouse, Catherine, Agnes, Elizabeth of Hungary, John the Baptist, Francis, Anthony of Padua and John the Evangelist*, c.1330–60, tempera and gold on panel, 33 x 20.6cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 41.100.15. (Photo: Art Resource)

Figure 4.4: Bernardo Daddi, *Virgin and Child with Saints and donors*, 1333, tempera and gold on panel, 88 x 97cm (central panel). Florence, Museo del Bigallo. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

image of Our Lord' (Klapisch-Zuber, 1985, p.312). The caressing and embracing of such dolls played a part not only in affective piety, but also, at least for secular women, in performative maternity.

Moving from convent (the institutional-domestic setting) to the *casa*, the shared intimacy of family devotion and the invitation to prayer evoked by holy images is suggested by the 1333 winged triptych of Bernardo Daddi now in the Museo del Bigallo in Florence. In the central compartment, the Virgin and Child are surrounded by fourteen male saints, and flanked by a male and a female donor. On the inside left wing is the Nativity, and on the right, the Crucifixion with St Francis. In the spandrels is found the narrative of St Nicholas rescuing and restoring the little Adeoatus (Figure 4.4). On the outside of the wings is found the popularly invoked saint for protection in childbirth, Margaret, with Catherine, Martin and

Christopher. The scene of Christ recommending his mother to the care of St John the Evangelist could serve as a reminder to the young men of the family of their duties towards a widowed mother or sisters, particularly relevant in a society in which widows' rights often had to be defended (Lawless, 2003, pp.20–39). St Christopher, the giant ferryman who carried the Christ Child across a river, patron saint of travellers and guardian against sudden death, was important in a mercantile society where men often spent years abroad due to trade. Margaret's protection during childbirth ensured her popularity, particularly in domestic settings (Musacchio, 1999, p.142). Catherine was one of the most popular saints of the middle ages and was singled out by contemporary Dominicans Giordano da Pisa (Giordano da Rivalto, 1867, p.332) and Domenico Cavalca (Cavalca, 1837, p.100) as an example of strength and piety.

Figure 4.5: Master of the Infancy of Christ (attrib.), formerly attributed to Jacopo di Cione, *Virgin and Child with donors*, c.1360–65, tempera and gold on panel, 60 x 35cm. Florence, Accademia, no. 8465. (Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, NY)

The interior of the tabernacle presents the Virgin and a playful Child, reaching up to her cheek. Moving with the 'eyes of the mind' from the Nativity on the left, to the Virgin and Child in the centre, to the Crucifixion on the right, the viewer is taken from birth of the incarnate Christ to the moment of his death and is violently reminded of his sacrifice by the blood spurting from his body, the same body that will be consumed in the Eucharist. A more recent and familiar saint than the martyrs of the Roman persecutions is placed at the foot of the cross – Francis – who can act as mediator between the world of the Italian city-state and that of the Crucified Christ. He can also serve, like his friars, as an example of how to pray, kneeling at the foot of the cross, hands joined, head raised in contemplation. The spandrels, showing scenes from the life of St Nicholas in which the saint saves a nobleman's child who had been taken captive and restores him to his parents, is another scene particularly appropriate for a domestic context.

Another male and female donor are found, this time side by side, and beside the Virgin and Child, in the central panel of a winged triptych attributed to the Master of the Infancy of Christ (Boskovits and Tartuferi, 2003, pp.116–21) (Figure 4.5). On the left wing are saints Catherine of Alexandria, John the Baptist, Elizabeth of Hungary and Anthony Abbot. Elizabeth of Hungary, having been appropriated by the Franciscan Third Order, was an ideal role model for a lay penitent woman. Anthony Abbot was popularly invoked against not only St Anthony's fire but a wide range of other illnesses and, in particular, plague. On the right panel, there is the Crucifixion of Christ with the Virgin, St John the Evangelist, St Mary Magdalen, and mourning angels catching Christ's blood. Mary Magdalen is, of course, the penitent saint par excellence, and her pose, clutching the cross with her head pressed against it, is almost a visual example of the devotions advised by Antoninus and Dominici and performed by saints such as Agnes of Montepulciano and Maddalena Albrizzi. The lunettes are occupied by Gabriel on the left and the Virgin Annunciate on the right, thus the very moment

of Incarnation is linked to the material flesh of the Virgin and Child in the centre and the crucified Christ, whose flesh and blood, the very blood being caught by angels, will be consumed in the Eucharist.

Conclusion

These are just a few of many examples of small Florentine art objects which, with their glowing, jewel like colours and shimmering gold backgrounds can easily be imagined as instruments of prayer, leading to contemplation and, in some cases, mystical union with Christ. These art works could be carried, held and kissed, their representations could be internalised, and their presence in the home or convent cell rendered that space holy. In tandem, devotional texts and sermons emphasised bodily compassion with the life, sufferings and death of Christ. Returning to the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, an extract from which forms the epigraph of this essay, we see sprinkled throughout the text invocations to engage the senses. When describing the Nativity of Christ, for example, the author calls on the reader to 'see the delicious food prepared for you here', advising that 'to taste its sweetness you must chew it diligently'. He goes on to ask the devotee to 'kiss the beautiful little feet of the infant Jesus', as well as to 'gaze on his face' (Johannes de Caulibus, 1961, pp.30, 38). The devotee is asked to go to the manger: 'every faithful soul and especially a religious should visit the Lady at the manger at least once daily in the period between the Nativity of the Lord and the Purification, to adore the infant Jesus and His mother, thinking affectionately of their poverty, humility, and benignity' (pp.55–6). One is easily reminded by such examples of performative piety of Dominici's invocations to Bartolomea degli Obizzi to erect her own 'altaruzzo' in the home, of the 'holy dolls' held and caressed by women and of the small-scale intimacy of images of the Virgin and Child for the domestic realm. However, often images were but tools to lead to a higher state of contemplation, in which 'it is suitable for the contemplator to be mute, deaf, and blind' (p.279) so that the soul is lost in union and rapture with the Lord.

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VOX CLAMANTIS IN DESERTO: THE JOHANNESSCHÜSSEL: SENSES AND SILENCES

Barbara Baert

Abstract

The Johannesschüssel*, also called* Caput Iohannis in Disco *or Saint John's head on a platter, is a late medieval/ early modern type of sculpture that was common in parts of Europe north of the Alps. The functions and uses of the* Johannesschüssel *are complex and heterogeneous. In this essay, I focus less on specific case studies, and more on the phenomenon of the* Johannesschüssel*, offering an interpretation of the relationship between these objects and the sensory apparatus.*

Biographical note

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VOX CLAMANTIS IN DESERTO:
THE JOHANNESSCHÜSSEL: SENSES AND SILENCES[1]

Barbara Baert, KU Leuven

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.' The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.

Matthew 14:6–12

That was the movement that struck John the Baptist's head from his body ... it is utterly ancient. In the Orient it is innate to every man. Perhaps it is what first distinguished humans as a species, after the interval when they were part human, part animal...According to current wisdom, being human began with the opposable thumb, which made it possible to pick up a weapon or a tool. But perhaps being human begins with the soul and not the thumb. I don't know ...

Sándor Márai, *Embers*, 2001

During the Middle Ages, the head of St John the Baptist was widely venerated. Mark 6:14–29 and Matthew 14:1–12 tell of John the Baptist's death. Herod has John imprisoned for protesting against his marriage to Herodias, who had been his brother's wife, on grounds of incest. Later, the daughter of Herodias dances at a banquet, and the king is so charmed that he

Figure 5.1. Relic of the skull of St. John (before 1206). Amiens, Cathedral. (Photo: author)

promises to give her anything she might wish. Spurred on by her mother, she asks for the head of John the Baptist. The king grants her wish, and the girl brings the severed head on a dish (*in disco*) and presents it to her mother. John's followers learn of what has happened and bury his body.

The existence of a head relic is mentioned from the twelfth century onwards in letters and registries from the East (Semoglu, 2000, pp.217–33). In fact, after the Fourth Crusade of 1204, what might be called a small deluge of supposed Saint John skulls washes over the West. No fewer than twelve skulls were accounted for by the end of the middle ages (Réau, 1956, pp.431–63; Arndt and Kroos, 1969, p.245). Most popular of these skull relics was undoubtedly that of Amiens (Figure 5.1) (Rückert, 1957, pp.7–36; Pardiac, 1886; Salmon, 1876; Breuil, 1846, pp.3–90; Du Cange, 1665). Brought back from the crusades by Walo of Sarton, it had allegedly been found walled up in Constantinople. The *translatio* legend of Walo has it that the head was originally located on a costly platter with a silver cover, but Walo sold the platter for a lot of money (Arndt and Kroos, 1969, p.245). To this day, the cathedral of Genoa claims to possess this 'original' platter relic made of brown agate (Arndt and Kroos, 1969, pp.252–3).

It is precisely this moment, during the age of the crusades, that the new image type comes into being, simulating St John's head on a platter (Figure 5.2). From the 13th century on, the *Johannesschüssel* was sculpted in wide parts of Europe, especially north of the Alps. The production of these objects reached

Figure 5.2: *Johannesschüssel* in limestone (early 16th century), Cologne, Schnütgen-Museum. (Cologne, Museum Schnütgen, Inv. K 156. Photo: Soetkin Vanhauwaert)

its height around 1500. The phenomenon of the *Johannesschüssel* in the late medieval and early modern period is the subject of this essay. The *Johannesschüssel* is an image type that sprang from both text and relic. It is also an image type that presents death. This death is not an ordinary death; it is the mother of all deaths: the decapitation of the last of the prophets, the *precursor* (*prodromos*), i.e. the Forerunner of Jesus Christ, and the *proto-martyr* (Gauthier, 2012). The functions and the uses of the *Johannesschüssel* are complex and heterogeneous according to the period of their production, to the localisation of any particular veneration and finally, to the medium and/or material in which the object was fabricated. Of course, not all these methodological problems can be treated here; yet, a focus on the way the medieval beholder (and user) of this specific instrument of devotion is mediated by the senses touches upon facets of the larger research questions mentioned above (Vanhauwaert and Geml, 2014). As is to be shown, the *Johannesschüssel* does not only address the sense of sight, but also other senses like the hearing and speech.

In what follows, I will distinguish three levels for interpreting the specific relationship between the sensory apparatus and the *Johannesschüssel*: the relationship between word and image as speech and sight (1), the absorbing gaze and the appeal to the complete sensorium (2) and finally, the phenomenological tension between head and visage that leads to a reflection on the role of silence in the revelation of divine, cosmic truth (3).

1. Word and image as speech and sight

The mystic Gertrud of Helfta (1256–1301 or 1302) describes her vision of John the Baptist: how young and handsome the saint appeared to her, though he is everywhere depicted so gruesomely (Arndt and Kroos, 1969, p.266; Revelationes Gertrudianae, 1875, p.418). The passage is interesting because it tells us that, in the midst of its horror, the appearance of the Forerunner offers her a paradoxical beauty.

The *Johannesschüssel* displays death and horror, sometimes in a more exhibitionist fashion than others. Some heads have open mouths, others protruding tongues. Some have open, staring eyes, others are half-closed. Sometimes the bloody neck is emphasised, while in other instances confronting the face suffices. The suffering visage of the *Johannesschüssel* is ambivalent. It is macabre according to the story of the decapitation, but the expression on its face represents at the same time death by martyrdom, which typologically elevates horror into sacrifice for God. And as Forerunner, the *Johannesschüssel* evokes a 'nobility' that is fitting and equal to Christ.

If the *Johannesschüssel* is aesthetically ambivalent, so is the way it stimulates the viewer's response. How are we to interpret the exchange of glances between a dead head and a living viewer? Can such a head, in other words, have 'active' effects? And are there other senses involved than sight alone?

Many *Johannesschüsseln* bear an inscription. The dish is not only bearer of the head, but also bearer of the word. The borders of the dish possess the perfect tectonics for this purpose; usually they simply report 'CAPUT JOHANNIS IN DISCO', as if the head thereby acquires greater legitimacy. Another frequently occurring inscription is the central pronouncement of the gospels: 'DA MIHI HIC IN DISCO CAPUT JOANNIS BAPTISTAE'.[2] The *Johannesschüssel* is identified here on the basis of the Bible (Matthew 14:8) and the speech that would lead to the notorious beheading. The inscription literally makes the *Johannesschüssel* out to be an interactive object that can be moved from place to place, as we can see in the liturgical and performative uses of the dish. The phrase 'NON SURREXIT INTER NATOS MULIERUM MAJOR JOANNE BAPTISTE'[3] (Matthew 11:11) is also quite popular: we read it on the dish from Cluny, on the papier-mâché exemplar in Leuven (Figure 5.3) and on the ceramic version in the Münster Landesmuseum (Arndt and Kroos, 1969, p.300). *Guillelmus Durandus'* (*c.*1235–96) panegyric on the feast of St John begins with this pronouncement, and it was also disseminated

2 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist'.
3 'Among those born of women no one has appeared who is greater than John the Baptist'.

Figure 5.3: *Johannesschüssel* (*c.*1500), papier-maché (with epigraph). Leuven, Museum 'M'. (© M - Museum Leuven. Photo: Paul Laes)

Figure 5.4: *Johannesschüssel* (13th century, platter 16th century), Naumburg, Domschatzgewölbe. (Bildarchiv der Vereinigten Domstifter zu Merseburg und Naumburg und des Kollegiatstifts Zeitz/photo: Guido Siebert)

in 14th-century hymns, as demonstrated by a manuscript from the cloister of Engelberg: 'Inter natos mulierum, Hic Iohannes vas sincerum Principatum tenuit' (Arndt, Kroos, 1969, p.299; Kehrein, 1873, p.356).[4] The 'Inter natos' phrase is indicative of the comparative link between John and Christ, because the words are those of Christ himself. Because we

simultaneously read and see, Christ and John are woven into a single soteriology.

Another epigraph – 'MERETRIX SVADET, PVELA SALTAT, REX JUBET, SANCTUS DECOLLATUR' – is inscribed on the 16th-century reliquary dish of Naumburg (the head is 13th century) (Figure 5.4). 'The harlot urges, the girl dances, the king commands and the saint is beheaded': these words refer to a sequence of the *In decollatione sancti Ioannis Baptistae* by Godescalc (†1050) (Kehrein, 1873, p.352). The hymn was widespread in manuscript form until well into the middle ages, and thereafter in print, and had an influence on theatre. The 15th-century Afselder Passion Play simply instructs the choir tersely 'Choras cantat: Meretrix uadet' (Grein, 1874, p.28).[5] The Naumburg inscription reduces the narrative to four essences: urging, dancing, commanding and beheading. But dancing, jubilating, speaking and singing are also the sensual share of looking at images – what is more, in the middle ages they actively participated in the process of perceiving and experiencing the visual (Boerner, 2008, p.208).

A *Johannesschüssel* in relief in the Hamburg *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* features the inscription: 'EN QUO PERIT IUSTUS QUASI NON SIT DEO DILECTUS/CUM SIT EIUS PRECIOSA MORS HIC IN CONSPECTU DOMINI' (Figure 5.5). This pronouncement is identical to a widespread sequence that recalls Isaiah 57:1: 'The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart' (Kehrein, 1873, p.452). In the sequence, death in the visage of the Lord is still put forward literally. The epigraph articulates the act of looking at the *Johannesschüssel* as an act of seeing that swells until it is near the face of God, the *beata visio* (Trottmann, 1995, passim). Indeed, the *Johannesschüssel* freezes the fraction of a moment that makes possible an opening to the hereafter. Hence, it would seem that looking at the *Johannesschüssel* likewise channels a longing to see the impossible. The decapitated head must bring us to the visage: *In conspectu domini*.

The *Johannesschüssel* from Hamburg is surrounded by the Four Evangelists. This iconography evokes paraliturgical schemes, like the JHS monogram encircled with rays of light or angels, or similarly surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists (Figure 5.6) (Göttler, 1995, pp.292–5, ills 2–4). Indeed, the sense of sight is the most important liturgical components of the Eucharist. The Johannesschüssel is an important substitute liturgical object during the veneration of the Host. We have literary sources that show the object in Katharinenthal was showed together with the Host during the Corpus Christi procession.

Gazing upon the *Johannesschüssel* and the emphasis on seeing that emanates from this epigraph shows

4   'Among those born of women, this John has the true primacy'.

5   'The choir sings: the harlot urges'.

Figure 5.5: *Johannesschüssel* with epigraphy EN QUO PERIT IUSTUS QUASI NON SIT DEO DILECTUS/CUM SIT EIUS PRECIOSA MORS HIC IN CONSPECTU DOMINI (15th century), Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. (Photo: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg)

Figure 5.6: Master W.A., *Christ monogram* (15th century), woodcut, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina. (Photo: Albertina, Vienna, Inv. DG1930/195, www.albertina.at)

how it is interwoven with the *ostensio,* graphically illustrating the role of blood, sacrifice and the lamb both within and without the liturgical space of dogma. Still, it is nevertheless astonishing that the attentive viewing of a gruesome, decapitated head should fulfil this channelling (Rubin, 1991, p.359). In addition to the fascination for the body part, there are the reconciliation and vulnerability, which according to Miri Rubin, are archetypically connected to the sacrificed body, including the powerful undercurrents of the *Johannesschüssel.* Where the *Johannesschüssel* as *Andachtsbild* allows itself, like Christ, to be taken up in empathy and *compassio,* it does so just as Christ does in *consummatio*.

Beholding the visage of John is a confrontation with the death of the last prophet and the Forerunner or Precursor. What is beheld is in fact the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. The *Johannesschüssel* is an image *im Augenblick des Todes* itself; it is the *Andachtsbild* of the transition to eternity. The ebbing away of breath, mind and soul at the threshold is strikingly depicted in the English alabasters. The curious painting (41 x 33cm) from the collection of Comte d'Oultremont in Saint-Georges-sur-Meuse, attributed

Figure 5.7: Jan Mostaert (attributed), *Painted head of Saint John* (*c*.1526–50), Saint-Georges-sur-Meuse, private collection, Comte d'Oultremont. (© KIK-IRPA, Brussel, cliché KN 11185)

to Jan Mostaert (1526–50), also interprets the drama of death in this way (Figure 5.7) (Vanhauwaert, 2014). John's soul leaves his head, accompanied by weeping angels. John's head is itself weeping. The ephemeral nature of the tear – it has not yet dried – seeks to move the viewer to tears (*Andachtsbild*, *empathia*, *compassio*), but at the same time shows the freshness of the death (or near-death): the fraction of a moment that will soon lead to the crystallisation of the image (Nagy, 2000, pp.388–412). By extension, I believe we can also interpret the *Johannesschüsseln* in the sense of this idea of 'transition'. Also, in Martin Hoffmann's (active in Basel *c*.1507–30) *Johannesschüssel* of 1515 in Strasbourg and Hans Gieng's (*c*.1525–62) *Johannesschüssel* of 1535 (Figure 5.8), for example, confrontation with the gaze, with the ecstasy of death, predominates.

Figure 5.9: Johannesschüssel (last quarter 15th century), Kremsmünster, Stiftssammlungen. (Photo: Bundesdenkmalamt Wien)

Figure 5.8: Hans Gieng, *Johannesschüssel* (1535), Fribourg, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire. (Museum für Kunst und Geschichte Freiburg. Photo: Primula Bosshard)

To the extent that the function of the *Andachtsbild* expanded during the late middle ages, the empathy of suffering seems also to have translated itself gradually into a conscious strategy of the gaze. The viewer was drawn into a form of seeing that transcended mere physical looking. He was conducted in spiritual transport to the invisible visage of God. The physical and symbolic affinities between the faces of John and Christ contributed significantly to this strategy (Kessler, 2000, p.35; Deshman, 1997, pp.518–46).

However, the gaze that emanates from the *Johannesschüssel* is somewhat different from Christ's: John does not look back, or is not all-seeing like the *vera icon*. The *Johannesschüssel* has an 'absorbing' the gaze. This does not mean that the *Johannesschüssel* is

'gazeless'. With its own dead gaze, it channels the seeing of God behind him, after him, even if the eyes are closed, as with the *Johannesschüssel* in Kremsmünster, *Stiftssammlungen* (last quarter of the 15th century) (Figure 5.9) (Schultes, 1993, pp.657–62). Perhaps we should rather speak of a specifically inward-turned gaze. Looking at the *Johannesschüssel* brings about a tumbling into a black hole, into an abyss. Hence, in John's absorbing gaze we can reach that which cannot be seen physically: the indication of the invisible visage of God.

Caroline Schuster Cordone has called the paradoxical exchange of gazes between the *Johannesschüssel* and the viewer the *Mittlerfunktion* (Schuster Cordone, 2003, pp.1–3). Artists would rather depict the dying than the dead. The border between life and death marks the moment at which the *Johannesschüssel* could arise *as image*. In this sense, too, John the Baptist mediating Old and New Covenant is a true mediator. The fraction of a moment taken up by the *Johannesschüssel* in order to be transformed from life to image expresses itself in the iconography of flowing: the still fluid blood from the neck or the still falling tear. Here lies the difference from Christ. Where Christ as living image has become an icon – the *vera icon* – John's iconic image is seized at the moment when he is flung out of time. From this nuclear fuel an incredible energy was released (I call it all-absorbing), an energy that quite fascinated the medieval and early modern individual, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Indeed, the *Johannesschüssel* has a specific impact: the black, devouring orifice, the open wound palpitates, the eye stares, the mouth gapes. The consequence of the inward-turned gaze is the inside-out: tongue, teeth and organs (Vandenbroeck, 2000, p.119). The *Johannesschüssel* satisfies man's old desire for the image prototype that unabashedly makes itself felt in the shock of absorption and abyss. This shock is of course the archetypical *apotropaion* defined in the Medusa phantasm (to which I return later). The *Johannesschüssel*, with its open mouth and open neck, invites us to a 'visual penetration', to a *per-spicere*.

2. The absorbing gaze

Let me examine the open mouth and the open neck more closely. The mouth refers to the entrance and exit of our breath. The open mouth evokes John's final dying breath, the border marked by the *Johannesschüssel*. The mouth is a portal into the dizzying depths of the body. It introduces us to the interiority of the body, which is taboo. Through the mouth, things – including food – disappear, so that it becomes the antechamber of the throat. The mouth, together with the tongue, is one of the organs of speech referring to John's prophetic phrases such as 'Ecce agnus dei'[6] (John 1:29) and 'Ego sum vox clamantis in deserto' (John 1:22–23) (Suckale, 2004, pp.327–40, esp. p.328).[7]

In Hebrew tradition, the head and the mouth are the *loci* of the so-called *rûach*, meaning: breath, wind, speech. Its complex semantic ramifications were used in the Bible for wind, for God's voice and His *spiritus*, for the life breath of humankind (*pneuma*), and for the powerful relationships of prophets with God through the divine 'voice' and 'breath' of inspiration (Lys, 1962, passim). Besides the *rûach*, the tongue is also a bodily *pars pro toto* of the prophet's wisdom. The tongue joins with the fire of God (Isaiah 30:27). The Holy Ghost descended on the apostles in 'cloven tongues like as of fire' (Acts 2:3). The tongue, just like the hand, is the revelation of God (Glazov, 2001, passim). The tongue has the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21). The tongue is 'cleft' – indeed, again, mediator (Benthien, 2001, pp.104–32, esp. pp.110–3). The tongue is the organ of taste (which is also connected to *tactus*) (Korsmeyer, 1999/2002, pp.19–22); hence, it deals with its split form as a sword: it distinguishes good and evil (De Souzenelle, 1991, pp.364–8). Because the tongue speaks, it also has a judicial connotation. Tongue is speech. Thus, the tongue is also connected to the *glossolalia* of the orator and the prophet. Apocryphal legends added to the biblical story that Herodias pierced not without coincidence

the Baptist's tongue with a needle in malice (Combs Stuebe, 1969, p.5). She wounded, so to speak, John's fire of speech and his power of judgment. This legend is believed to date back to the 4th century. The motif became a favourite subject in religious drama (Combs Stuebe, 1969, p.5; Arndt and Kroos, 1969, pp.301ff.; Thulin, 1930). Jerome (347–420) says in his *Apologia contra Rufinum*: 'Because the one did not want to hear (*audire*) the truth, the tongue (*linguam*) (= the truth of the speech) was wronged' (Jerome, 1982, PL23, col.510). John is the tongue, the voice in the wilderness that was not heard. The tongue attaches itself in other words also to the sense of hearing.

Hearing is an extremely primal sense: it is the first and last sense; in principle, it precedes speech (Wulf, 1993, pp.9–15). After all, hearing is the sense that the foetus first masters in the womb: the foetus hears the mother's voice. Since Jewish tradition, the relation between the form of the foetus and the ear is a deep archetype. It is also said that hearing is the last sense to fall away during the process of dying, and with comatose patients the only sense to remain latent.

> In the mother's womb, the child is nothing but a big ear, it receives all the information of the world of archetypes in which it bathes, just as the sounds that reach it from the mother's world. It listens, records, but it does not yet know … As the foetus, the big ear in the mother's womb, is not born before its blood is totally bearer of its breath, its NAME in its origin, the complete foetus in the cosmic matrix, the human being, thus becomes the big ear that hears its NAME; it is ready to be born. Because it knows its name, it becomes word. The heart that is beating to listen. Listening it will see.[8]
>
> (De Souzenelle, 1991, p.351, pp.356–7)

This uterine, foetal character of the sense of hearing is intensely thematised in the life of John the Baptist. Luke 1:5–45 tells how John the Baptist was born to Elizabeth, who was considered barren. Her husband

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6   'Behold the lamb of God'.

7   'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness'.

8   'Dans le ventre de la mère, l'enfant n'est qu'une grande oreille, il reçoit l'information totale du monde des archètypes dans lequel il baigne, ainsi que les sons, qui lui parviennent du monde maternel. Il entend, enregistre, mais ne le sait pas encore … De même que le fœtus, grande oreille dans le ventre maternel, ne naît que lorsque son sang est totalement porteur de son souffle, son NOM (sic) en germe, de même, fœtus accompli dans la matrice cosmique, l'homme devient alors la grande oreille qui entend son NOM (sic); il est prêt à naître. Parce qu'il connaît son nom, il devient verbe. Le cœur que batte pour entendre. Entendant il verra'. English translation: Georg Geml.

Zechariah was the priest of Abijah. The angel Gabriel appeared to him during a sacrifice of incense to announce the arrival of his son John. At John's birth, Zechariah is struck dumb. His lost voice passes into the prophetic voice of his son. Already in the womb, the boy would be filled with the Holy Spirit, said the angel. He would be a prophet in the spirit of Elijah. This is followed by the episode of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and Mary's meeting with Elizabeth. On this occasion, the child, John, leaped in Elizabeth's womb, making her cry out to her cousin Mary: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' (Luke 1:42) (Hüe, 2002, pp.111–30).

At any rate, speech and hearing work together in a knowledge-generating system that precedes the visual-literary epistemology of Plato (429–347 BCE) (Wulf, 1993, pp.9–10). Speech and aural communication belong to an oral culture, in which acoustic mimesis – the passing on of values and insights – predominates over written and hence visible laws. Oral culture is a culture of 'intercession', in which prophets play an important role. For this reason, in certain cultures the tension between speaking and remaining silent is extremely dual and fundamental: it is a tension controlled by the boundaries of taboo (Hahn, 1999, pp.204–31). Here we arrive elliptically at the text of the Gospel in which the incest taboo is pronounced and judged, and which constitutes the occasion for revenge and death, an intuition that Jerome also formulated in his association of *audire* and *linguam*. And if we witness its effects in drama, insignia and epigraphs, then it appears that precisely these archaic laws of communication were singled out. We remember the Naumburg epigraph (Figure 5.4): urging (the voice), dancing (the voiceless that asks to be gazed upon), commanding (the voice), beheading (which leads to absolute 'voicelessness': taboo) (Palazzo, 2012, pp.51–7).

One could view John the Baptist as the last embodiment of the acoustic system of knowledge. His decapitation is in this sense a sacrifice made for the sake of seeing God-become-flesh. In this sense, the *Johannesschüssel* is also metaphorically a mediator: a link between the cultural shifts in the hierarchy of the senses (Paravicini Bagliani, 2002, passim; Nordenfalk, 1976, pp.17–28). The beheading of John the Baptist forms the end of the cry in the desert – a necessary silencing of the *vox* which leaves room for the *Logos*. 'That golden mouth, now bloodless, speaks no longer', says Ambrose (*De virginibus* III 5, 25: 6–31) (Quasten, 1988, p.167). Augustine (354–430), in his 288th sermon, *In natali Ioannis baptistae (De voce et verbo)*, puts the following words into the mouth of St John: "'I am not the Christ, he said, nor Elijah, nor the prophet." And

the question came: Who are you, then? John replied: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord"' (Bastiaensen, 2003, pp.13–26). Because John has to decrease, in order that Christ can increase, an important cycle was recognised in the solstice of June (when the light decreases) and the solstice of December (when with the coming of Christ the light increases) (Baert, 2011, pp.323–66).

Returning to the problematic of the *Andachtsbild*, the *Johannesschüssel* challenges the viewer not only by the (paradoxical) tumbling exchange of glances, but also by a 'sonoric' communication, or more precisely, by the silencing of his voice ('Ego sum vox clamantis in deserto', John 1:22–23). To look at the *Johannesschüssel* is to realise that we can no longer hear his voice. The decapitation has reduced the seat of the vocal chords, the prophet himself, to an acoustic wilderness. The other man, Christ, can at last unveil himself as the true Saviour. This brings me to the third and last problem: the phenomenological tension between head and visage, between platter and veil with an excursion on silence(s).

3. Head and visage: silence at last

In Indo-European semantics, the root of 'head' and 'skull' is also the root of dish, platter, pan and recipient (Root/lemma: (s)kel-1, in http://dnghu.org/indoeuropean.html). Heads and skulls are archetypically speaking hollow tools for keeping liquids in a cultic context. Head and platter are essentially equal. The *Johannesschüssel* is intrinsically a tautology. The relation head-platter is intrinsic. Moreover, without the platter, John's beheading could never have become an image, become 'some-thing'. Or rather, without the recipient that catches the head, bears it and hands it over, the *Augenblick* of the decapitation could not have remained crystallised in the fraction of a moment. The platter is the bearer that has caught up the image and presents it plastically as *memoria*. The platter says: 'it has truly happened' (Böhme, 1995, pp.379–84, esp. p.384). I am 'artifact' now. Also the complicated constructions and deconstructions of the presentation of the mother object – the relic skull in Amiens with its layers of skull, cover, mask, and even an 'inner visage' made of wax inside, illustrate the conceptual 'wrestling' needed to make of the skull a 'bearable' image. In fact, pilgrims did not denote the relic as a head, but as a *facies*, a face.

The addition of wax plays a bizarre role. Georges Didi-Huberman refers to skulls in Jericho and Mycenae that were covered with clay, so that an impression was formed (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.57). According to the author, these death's heads, particularly those where the face has been reconstructed with clay or wax (from

within), served literally as a matrix: the borrowed form, the form of the impression and the modelled form crystallised in one and the same object.

> At this moment, the skull becomes a vessel of an open dialectic game through the three-dimensional invention: game of counter-form and form, game of dissimilarity, of disfiguration and refiguration. Game of the disappearing form (the decaying flesh erases the face) and the forming form (the drying clay sticks on the skull as the plaster in the model or the milk in the cheese mould).[9]
>
> (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p.57)

The wax in the relic of Amiens is not used, as one would expect, to reconstruct the outward appearance of the face. The wax bears the imprint of the secret: the interior of the skull. The anti-secret also becomes an anti-mask. In his essay *Être crâne,* Georges Didi-Huberman expresses this otherwise: 'What's fascinating first on the human skull, is its inside; it is the "cavity of the eyeholes", with its hidden "depth"; it is, in general, all the visible holes' (Didi-Huberman, 2000, p.15).[10] The *facies* of Amiens is the *signum* of an inversive visage, of an 'interior visage'.

Medusa is the archetypal bridge between beheading and face; of making its gaze 'bearable' (Marin [1977] 1997, p.174). This perspective gives rise to several analogies with the *Johannesschüssel* in terms of form, function and phantasm. Like the Medusa, the *Johannesschüssel* thematises decapitation as the genesis of the image. In death itself the image freezes; in a fraction of a moment the head coagulates into an artefact, resulting in the projection of powerful forces. Like the Medusa there is the physical analogy with respect to the face: the open mouth, the eyes of death, the gushing neck and, last but not least, the snakes and hair fanning out from the head. Many *Johannesschüsseln* have pointed tendrils that project on all sides. In the exemplar from Kremsmünster, John's hair has become distinctly serpentine. John's prodigious locks are treated as a typical sign of his prophetic

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9 'Le crâne, à ce moment, devient réceptable d'un jeu dialectique ouvert sur l'invention plastique: jeu de la contre-forme et de la forme, jeu de la dissemblance, de la défiguration et de la refiguration. Jeu de la forme disparaissante (la chair qui, en se putréfiant, anéantit le visage) et de la forme en formation (la glaise qui, en séchant, prend dans le crâne comme le plâtre dans un moule ou comme le lait dans une faisselle)'. English translation: Georg Geml.
10 'Ce qui fascine d'abord, dans le crâne humain, c'est son côté interne; c'est la "cavité des orbites", avec sa "profondeur" dissimulée; c'est, en général, tous les "trous visibles"'. English translation: Georg Geml

'wildness'. Nevertheless, this characteristic will attach itself to the Medusa as genre by the end of the middle ages. With the increasing popularity of the Medusa as a renaissance motif, we notice a soundless osmosis between the *Johannesschüssel* and the Medusa, between his hair and her snakes, between his neck and her neck, between his blood and hers. This is strikingly evident in the tondo painted in/around 1464–68 by Giovanni Bellini, which is now in the *Musei Civici* of Pesaro, but was formerly in the sacristy of San Giovanni in Pesaro.

Like the Medusa, the functions of the *Johannesschüssel* seem to relate to the *apotropaic*. The uses to which it was put were highly stratified according to the various social experiences of religion. With the *Johannesschüssel,* the cosmic mimesis of nature and again the healing rituals come to the foreground. Allow me to touch on the solstice celebrations of June 24, with their excessive dancing and the many local customs and ramifications brought by the motifs of fire, epilepsy and solstice anxiety, described by the French ethnographer Claude Gaignebet. I suggest furthermore that these rituals became a portal as an 'event', a laborious process that must be coupled with fear and dumb astonishment – that is, with the silence or speechlessness (Gaignebet, 1986, pp.351–6). This brings me to the throat as anthropological phantasm.

The throat – *gula* in Latin – in most languages makes use of the sound pattern G-R-G. The word *gorgo* is in fact related to this with derivations in *gurgel, gurguli, gurges, gorge* (Root/lemma: g°er-1, g°er in http://dnghu.org/indoeuropean.html). And even today, the church of San Giovanni in Venice is called *San Gorgo* by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Again, in Indo-European etymology this phonetic root also means 'passage'. The throat is a tube, a tunnel, a passage, a transition. On the basis of this connotation, the throat also reflects the uterus, or the dynamics of what has been 'swallowed up' and can be vomited forth again (*hysteria*) (Kristeva, 1998; Schneider, 1976; Veith, 1965). In this respect it is most telling that the Hebrew word *nepesh,* a word with a wide semantic range that is often translated as 'soul', initially denoted 'throat', the physical *locus* of the life breath and thus related to the meaning of *rûach* (Brotzman, 1988, pp.400–9). To cut the throat of a victim is to fundamentally cut him off from life (Shaw, 1996, pp.269–312, esp. p.273 n.10 and p.305). The exhibitionism of the *Johannesschüssel* concerns the opening of all possible openings, with the tube of the throat being the most obsessive opening of all. With this G-R-G phantasm the *Johannesschüssel* opens the breach with life itself, the connecting tunnel that is now cut off. So I suggest here in fact that the exhibitionist drive in the *Johannesschüssel* channels elliptically,

paradoxically also a fascination for the beginning of life itself ... *inter natos*.

The connection between throat, John, solstice and silence is in fact already anchored in the passage from the first chapter of Luke (1:5–45) mentioned before. When the angel announces to the aged Zechariah that he shall have a child, the old man can scarcely believe his ears, and he becomes mute instead. Indeed, Zechariah will only regain his voice at the moment he writes his son's name on a tablet. The voice of Zechariah is given through the name of his son, 'the voice' of the new prophet Elijah. Jacobus de Voragine also says Zechariah's losing his voice was a fitting analogy, for the voice was born and let the (old) law remain silent (Ryan, 1993, 1, p.329). Silence is truth and recommended to the seekers of that truth (Kamper and Wulf, 1992, p.325ff). There is yet another anecdote. When Paul the Deacon, a monk of Monte Cassino, lost his singing voice, he appealed to St John and begged him to give his voice back, as Zechariah was given his. So it happened, and he sang even more beautifully than before. By way of thanks, he composed the hymn that has been sung in churches on June 24 ever since: *Ut queant laxis resonare fibris mira gestorum famuli tuorum* (Gaignebet, 1986, p.356).[11]

The sacral silence is attributed in several cultures to the divine, to the *epitheton* of God, to the *locus* where God can be encountered, hence to the zone or to a medium that allows the traffic between man and God, between humankind and the world beyond. It is the individual silence of concentration, interiority and meditation (Paravicini Bagliani, 2010, pp.VII–XII; Pillinger, 2012, pp.685–9). But there is also another silence. It is a silence modelled after the cosmos, beyond the Pythagorean order of music and the heavenly bodies (Gaignebet, 1986, p.356). Nature astonishes us with such powerful silences in two ways: the silence of zenith and the silence of solstice.

In archaic Mediterranean culture the moment at which the sun passes the meridian at its zenith is a *mysterium* (De Labriolle, 1934, pp.46–54; De Fraine, 1959, pp.372–83). Midday is the anxious moment of transition, of the motionless hour, when everything is enveloped in a net of light and astonishing quiet (Chevalier and Gheerbaert, 1996, p.358). There is scarcely a shadow. Pan is asleep now and everything and everybody must rest. In the landscape all is quiet, because nature has been struck dumb. The silence acquires the thickness of a holy place; the silence becomes a frightening *Gefühlsraum* (Schmitz, 1981,

pp.264–76), a tempered atmosphere, in which this fear is collectively and intersubjectively experienced. It is precisely in this density that the so-called *mysterium tremendum* arises.

The second silence of the solstice is the 'gorgonian' silence, intangibly terrifying but absolutely necessary in order to allow the greatest and most dangerous mysteries: to tilt, to clear the way for the sun, the portal, the transit. The solstice goes through the cosmic 'throat' which needs the mediation by silence: the *angoisse*, the anguish (Gaignebet, 1986, p.363). This silence is not so much a frightening *Gefühlsraum*, but more of a pause, an interval. This silence is the cosmic standstill (Macho, 1993, pp.104–16).

These reflections become surprisingly concrete in light of the solstice celebrations on St John's day. In Jumièges, the *Confratèrie de Saint Jean*, in fact a brotherhood of masons, celebrated their patron on June 23 and 24 (Gaignebet, 1986, pp.363ff.). The chairman was dressed as a wild man in a suit of green leaves and herbs (*le loup vert*). On June 23, processions were held and before midnight a dinner was held during which complete silence was maintained. At the stroke of midnight, the commencement of June 24, the hymn *Ut queant* was sung. Afterward the participants were permitted to speak freely. The oral mastery of nature also implied the interval of sound and silence.

If we link this back to the multi-sensorial response of the *Johannesschüssel* – speech (tongue), sight (eyes) and hearing (silence) – and its 'embodiment of the acoustic system of knowledge', we now understand that this system of knowledge also implies silence. The interval that possesses the secret of allowing something to pass – the tube, the transit, the throat, the uterus – makes use of cosmic silence in the fraction of a second: just before the turn. The *Johannesschüssel* seeks the vortex of all the senses, but at the end it demands us a vanishing point, an interval, a pause: silence indeed.

> Like a courier who has survived a military defeat and panting has delivered his message, all I want to do from now on is keep silent and remember.
>
> Sándor Márai, *Egy polgár vallomásai*, 1935

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11 'So that your servants may, with loosened voices, resound the wonders of your deeds'. English translation: Matthew D. Thibeault.

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TO HAVE AND TO HOLD: POSSESSING THE SACRED IN THE LATE RENAISSANCE
Erin E. Benay

Abstract

Private devotional art of the early 17th century often found its place in the galleries of noblemen and women whose diverse collections were symbols not only of stylistic taste, but of their owners' exhaustive curiosity. In these domestic settings, boundaries between sacred and secular were permeable, as the unprecedented physical intimacy portrayed in popular religious subjects such as St Matthew and the Angel, the Stigmatisation of St Francis, or Christ's Agony in the Garden reveal. Representations of the latter reminded viewers of Christ's human, corporal suffering and suggested a model of resolve strengthened by prayer. The Agony in the Garden appears on the interior of Jacopo Ligozzi's virtuosic Portable Altar with Carrying Case *(1608), likely a Medici gift presented to the Austrian court in anticipation of the marriage of archduchess Maria Maddalena to soon-to-be grand duke Cosimo II. Adorned with lavish botanical motifs on its exterior, the Altar's potency as a sacred possession was redoubled by the owner's tactile revelation of the portrayal of Christ supported by an Angel contained inside the case. Comprised of wood, oil on copper, and* pietre dure *inlay, it is an object intended to be held, opened, and experienced. This paper suggests that Ligozzi's selective combination of sumptuous materials and choice of subject matter – botanical illustration and Christological iconography – allowed the object to appeal to the full sensorium, and therefore to function as efficaciously as a devotional aid as it did as a curiosity among other rare collectibles.*

Biographical note

Erin E. Benay is assistant professor of southern renaissance and baroque art at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio. Her research examines the relationship of empiricism and the senses to early modern painting, the history of collecting in 17th-century Europe, and global currents of exchange and mobility in early modern cultural history. Together with Lisa M. Rafanelli, she is the author of *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli me tangere and Doubting Thomas* (Ashgate, 2015). Her other publications include essays in *Arte Veneta* and *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions* (Ashgate 2014). Her next book (under contract with Giles) will focus on Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St Andrew* at the Cleveland Museum of Art and reveals the ways in which imperial movement in part obfuscated 'original' locations of production, collection, and consumption, in this case between Italy and Spain. Benay's current research project, *Italy By Way of India: Routes of Devotional Knowledge in the Early Modern Period*, will consider how travel between Italy and South Asia complicated the iconological construction of saints' lives.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD: POSSESSING THE SACRED IN THE LATE RENAISSANCE*

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The Italian renaissance wedding began years before the actual date and was accompanied by pomp and fanfare the likes of which would make even the most indulgent of modern-day brides blanch. Parades, processions, performances, games, and meals accompanied the celebration and ratification of marriage, as has been explicated by Andrea Bayer (2009) and Jacqueline Musacchio (2009). Cassone, portraits, and fresco cycles honoured the nuptial vows. Prior to the event, however, an exchange of gifts marked the progression from courtship to betrothal and lubricated the mechanism by which families became unified. Delicately embroidered belts associated with fertility and with Virginal chastity both, elaborately ornamented jewelry, or maiolica inscribed with Petrarchan verses promised a life of divinely sanctioned love. Evoking the beauty of an absent wife-to-be, or the pain of yet unrequited love, these objects straddled an evasive line – glorifying the communion of man and wife in holy matrimony, while alluding to the baser, sensorial promise of consummation.

To these whimsical gift options may be added those offerings that articulated the financial, material, and spiritual fruits of marriage in more strictly devotional terms. Instead of evoking an absent love, or the political advantage of wedding families, for instance, Jacopo Ligozzi's sumptuous *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* (Figure 6.1; Allen Memorial Art Museum) rouses pious devotion in the viewer. Nevertheless, as William

Hood has suggested,[1] the altarpiece, nestled in its velvet-lined womb, was likely a Medici gift presented to the Austrian court in anticipation of the marriage of archduchess Maria Maddalena (1589–1631) to soon-to-be grand duke Cosimo II (r. 1609–21). Perhaps arriving in Maria Maddalena's Austrian home of Graz on the metaphorical eve of the couple's wedding in 1608, one imagines a multisensory and revelatory unpacking of the precious parcel: the ebonised wood case is festooned with painted flowers, which elegantly encircle a cartouche bearing Christ's monogram and the emblem of the Jesuit order – a cross and heart pierced with three nails. Outfitted with metal handles and a small latch, the floral exterior is easily penetrated to reveal the true prize: a small altar, embellished with *pietre dure* inlay in lapis, colored glass, gilded metal, coral, mother of pearl, and agate (Bacci, 1962, pp.47–55). Weighing about five pounds, the altar could be easily lifted from its carrying case by its recipient and set atop a table. Two lead putti with gilded wings and wreaths rest languidly atop the pediment, looking down at the scene below. At its centre, Ligozzi has painted Christ's *Agony in the Garden* in prismatic, jewel tones on copper; a tiny depiction of Abraham's *Sacrifice of Isaac* appears below the central scene and is painted on a precious piece of lapis lazuli.

Adorned as it is with lavish botanical motifs on its exterior, the Altar's potency as a sacred possession was, I argue, redoubled by the owner's tactile revelation of the portrayal of Christ supported by an angel contained inside the case. Comprised of wood, oil on copper, and *pietre dure* inlay, it is an object intended to be held, opened, and experienced. The Viennese provenance of the Allen altar, coupled with its auspicious date of 1608, signed by Ligozzi in the lower-left corner of the painting, provide compelling circumstantial evidence of the object's intended function. Advertising the merits of Florence's famous hard-stone inlay, the little altar must have been a strategic offering, not unlike other chivalric gifts given to members of the Habsburg court. Although Hood noted this potential function during

1   William Hood, email message to the author, July 16, 2012, and as discussed in two unpublished papers: William Hood, 'A Diplomatic Gift for the Medici Wedding of 1608', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, April 2006; and William Hood, 'A House-Altar by Jacopo Ligozzi', The University of Georgia Symposium on Italian Renaissance Art in Honor of Andrew Ladis, September 2006. Although Hood has found no corroborating textual evidence to support the association of the altarpiece with this particular Medici-Habsburg wedding, I believe this function can be even more firmly argued when the iconographic program, medium, and its appeal to the sensorium are taken into consideration, as I have done in this essay.

Figure 6.1(a): Jacopo Ligozzi, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* (*Agony in the Garden*), closed position, 1608, Ebony, ebonized wood, and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, Overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

his tenure at Oberlin College, no publication yet addresses the complex ways in which Ligozzi's portable altar operates as far more than a harbinger of Florentine craft. In fact it was, I contend, Ligozzi's selective combination of sumptuous materials and choice of subject matter – botanical illustration and Christological iconography – which allowed the object to appeal to the full sensorium, and thus to function as efficaciously as a devotional aid as it did as a curiosity among other rare collectables. As such, and as I will propose, the Allen altar signals a mergence not so much of Habsburg and Medici dynasties, but of the profane and sacred, the material and immaterial. By situating Ligozzi's diminutive and understudied portable altar at the centre of this case study, we might better understand how objects like this one defied typical conventions of marriage and devotional art, whilst

Figures 6.1(b) and (c): Jacopo Ligozzi, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* (*Agony in the Garden*), 1608, open position and removed from carrying case. Ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

simultaneously appealing to a somaesthetic mode of viewing that would have been particularly appealing for female consumers.

Flowers made firm: botanical illustration and *pietre dure*

In order to appreciate the multivalence of such an object, the altar might first be replaced in its case, closing the doors to reveal the emblematic painted garden. Further, it is necessary to reverse the shipping process, thus beginning where this object did: in the Galleria dei Lavori, or the Opificio delle Pietre Dure as it was renamed in the 19th century (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.60). Founded by Medici grand duke Ferdinando I in 1588, the Galleria was organized under the direction of Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627), who oversaw the production of goldsmiths, jewelers, mosaicists, cabinetmakers, embroiderers, and herbalists. Ligozzi had already proven himself invaluable to the Medici under Ferdinando's brother, Francesco I, who invited Ligozzi to join the court in 1577 (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.57). Trained as a draughtsman in Verona, Ligozzi was employed by the Habsburg Court of the Austrian Empire in Vienna prior to his return to Italy and subsequent position as court painter to grand duke Francesco I de' Medici. While in Vienna, he became known not only for his mythological and religious paintings, but also for his illustrations of flora and fauna (Kauffman, 1995, p.197). Executed from life, Ligozzi's botanical drawings and paintings (Figures 6.2 and 6.3) earned the attention of the great Bolognese naturalist, Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), who exchanged specimens and illustrations with the artist for years to come (Conigliello, 2005, p.6).

As David Freedberg (2003), Georgina Masson (1972), Elisabeth MacDougall (1994), and others have shown, such illustrations revealed the collaboration between artists and scientists of the period, and were rapidly absorbed into the cultural contexts of collecting, where botanical and zoological facsimiles stood in place of specimens that collectors were wont to obtain for their gardens and *Wunderkammern*. As Renata Ago and Paula Findlen have shown, the accumulation of natural history specimens into museum-like assemblages, such as that of Athanasius Kircher or Ulisse Aldrovandi, and the artistic endeavors of Federico Cesi's Lincean Academy demonstrated a new attitude toward nature, knowledge, and the visual world (see Ago, 2006 and Findlen, 1996 for example). Printed or drawn illustrations accompanied these collections of 'real' objects, and as Susan Dackerman has explained, did more than simply record observations (2011, pp.26–31). Instead, we might understand Ligozzi's

Figure 6.2: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Dictamus Albus,* sixteenth century, drawing, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

drawings of birds and bulbs as mobile objects, capable of transmitting meaning about the natural world as they were passed among the hands of similarly minded connoisseurs.

Indeed, the cultivation of botanical knowledge and humanistic garden design had long been ingrained in the Medici dukedom, culminating in the publication of numerous specialized studies on flora, and the famous series of paintings of Medici properties and gardens by Giusto Utens for grand duke Ferdinando I in 1599–1602 (Figure 6.4). Claudia Lazzaro has traced a complex relationship between the development of garden design, botanical collecting, and the Medici dukedom (1990). Medici sponsorship of the study of natural history and the practice of horticulture began with the support of Cosimo I the Elder (1389–1464), nearly 200 years prior to the reign of Ferdinando. This included the collecting, translating, and studying of ancient natural histories, including that by Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, and medical-botanical texts by ancient Greek authors such as Dioscorides (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.16). Motivated by this new

Figure 6.3: Jacopo Ligozzi, , *Psittacus Ararauna*, sixteenth century, drawing, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

'scientific humanism', generations of Medici family members merged the study of scientific, specifically botanical texts, with the patronage of art. These commissions took several forms: one manifestation of the dual interest in the study of nature and that of art came in the form of villa and garden construction. During the 15th and 16th centuries the Medici family built, acquired, or renovated numerous villas outside the city centre of Florence. In each of these locations, painstakingly depicted by Utens, garden and landscape design were elevated out of the realm of service and were intended to function as stimulating sites of delight for the mind and body. Another iteration of the taste for scientific and botanical knowledge may be seen in the increasingly naturalistic depiction of flora and fauna in devotional paintings of the period, a point to which I will return. Finally, botanical illustration became an increasingly important genre of other mediums, including that of *pietre dure*.

In each of these instances, the Medici (among other elite families in Florence), encouraged artistic production that reflected their scientific knowledge of the natural world. As such, the display of nature – whether in the form of a garden, botanical illustration, or flower-adorned altarpiece – was clearly part of Medici branding and announced their commitment to the propagation of humanistic learning. Similarly, Lorenzo de' Medici collected carved gemstones and later Francesco I amassed a large collection of rare minerals and semiprecious stones; the

Figure 6.4: Giusto Utens, *Villa Poggio a Caiano*, *c.*1599–602, tempera on canvas, Museo Storico Topografico, Florence. (Photo: Gianni dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY)
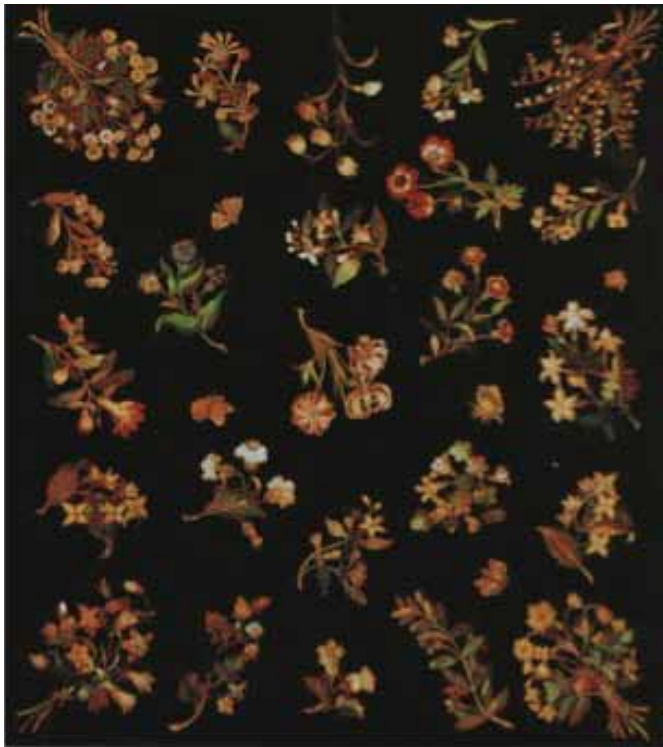
Figure 6.5: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Design for a tabletop depicting flowers*, Galleria dei Lavori, Florence, *c.*1610–20, oil on paper, 78 x 88cm (30 3⁄4 x 34 5/8in), Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence. (Photo: author)

rarity and natural wonder of these rocks and their quasi-alchemical properties suggested a compelling intersection of collecting and knowing the natural world. These two prerogatives seem to converge in finely wrought Florentine *pietre dure*, which combined the natural, mineral 'specimen' with the artistic enterprise applauded in Renaissance culture.

Sixteenth-century *pietre dure* inlay work, or *commesso* was an imitation of *opus sectile*, a technique described by Pliny the Elder himself (Pliny, 1938, p.51). Although early examples of Renaissance stone inlay exhibit abstract designs, Florentine mosaicists quickly achieved astonishing trompe l'oeil conceits. The process began with a model drawing, and was followed by the careful selection of stones (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, pp.59–60). Once the proper variety of colour, grain, and textured stones were selected, they were cut with drills into very thin pieces. These pieces were then fitted into a larger panel of black marble that served as the base. Increasingly drawn from the natural world, the subjects of *pietre dure* made permanent the ever-wilting floral sample and assembled diverse species into a beautiful object d'arte. An elaborate tabletop (now lost) was, for instance, commissioned by

Figure 6.6: Design by Jacopo Ligozzi, assembled by Jacopo Monicca, *Tabletop depicting flowers*, hardstone and gold, 37 x 44 3⁄4 x 63 3⁄4in, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource)

Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II of Hapsburg in 1589 and displayed an array of trophies, birds, landscape, and vases of flowers in rich jaspers (Koeppe and Giusti, 2008, p.172). Celebrated for its seamless rendering of flora and fauna as one, continuous whole, the table was an illusionistic masterpiece that at once heralded the craftsmanship of its maker, Stefano Caroni, and the intelligence of its patron as a collector of art and science.

Jacopo Ligozzi's naturalistic drawings and paintings of flowers, birds, and insects (Figures 6.2 and 6.3) became the dominant new themes in Florentine stone inlay during the late 16th century (Figure 6.5) and would remain popular for over a century thereafter – solidifying the artist's reputation for botanical accuracy and the significance of Florentine *pietre dure* on the international market. Completed in 1621, a tabletop executed by Jacopo Monicca from Ligozzi's design

Figure 6.7: Galleria dei Lavori manufacturer, *Cabinet*, c.1650–75, Ebony, marble, jasper, lapis lazuli and various hardstones, and bronze with gilding, Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum)

(Figure 6.6, now in the Uffizi), features an elaborate scattering of flowers across an ebony ground. The specificity of individual petals implies perfect mimetic transcription – an illusion that it is made all the more impressive when the viewer understands these to be crafted from minute slivers of precious stone. The convergence of this virtuosic medium and its potential to convey accurate information about natural specimens was later epitomised in elaborately inlaid curiosity cabinets made during the last years of the 17th century. An example now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London reveals the enduring influence of Ligozzi's naturalistic flora and fauna, rendered carefully in *pietre dure* panels (Figure 6.7). Individual doors set in the cabinet feature flowers and birds – their brightly coloured petals and wings of different stones offset by the black ground.

Members of the Medici *and* Habsburg courts – including Ferdinando I (r.1587–1609), father to Cosimo II, Maria's betrothed, and Emperor Rudolf II (r.1552–1612) – were also avid collectors of art and science. As Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has shown, the Habsburg court in Prague was a magnet for Johannes Kepler and many other intellectuals including astrologers, alchemists and naturalists (1995, p.196). This interest in scientific advancement was mirrored in the Prague *Kunstkammer*, which included the nature studies of Hoefnagel, Arcimboldo, and Ligozzi. Ferdinando and Cosimo II de' Medici were similarly interested in both the progress of 'scientific' enterprise and the collecting of art, as was evidenced by Galileo Galilei's illustrated *Sidereus Nuncius* dedicated to Cosimo II himself, and by Cosimo II's continued employment of Ligozzi, a specialist in botanical illustration (and on Ferdinando see, for example, Suzanne Butters, 2002, pp.66–75). Ligozzi's *Portable Altarpiece* may thus be situated at the centre of a circle of patrons for whom botanical themes and elaborate inlay held special appeal.

From the moment the Galleria dei Lavori was founded by Ferdinando in 1588, the Medici became inextricably linked to an industry that combined sumptuous, rare, natural materials with the artistic judgment and discernment so valued in the humanist milieu. By sending rare and precious gifts to foreign courts, previous generations of Medici dukes forged a tradition of public relations dependent on craftsmanship. During the late 1570s, for example, Francesco de' Medici (Ferdinando's brother) forwarded porcelain works to Portugal and Spain, where the new medium was met with great astonishment (Giusti, 2002, p.105). Sending exquisite examples of the medium to foreign courts in distant lands became a viable mode of diplomatic expression and the Austrian Habsburgs

had, by the middle of the 16th century, been the happy recipients of numerous such intricately worked objects (Kaufmann, 1994, pp.137–54). Although archduke Charles II (father of Maria Maddalena) did not have the political power or wealth of Holy Roman emperor Rudolf II he was, like the more illustrious members of the Habsburg court in Vienna and Prague, dedicated to the collection of art and to the appreciation of craftsmanship. The archduke was in fact a joiner (Kaufmann, 1995, p.186) and was thus particularly primed to appreciate the fine artistry of the *Portable Altar*. Further, Charles and Maria Maddalena's home of Graz was the location for three important armories, producers of elaborate armor for the emperors. As such, the relevance of good craftsmanship, and the imperial history of collecting finely wrought objects would not have been lost on the *Altar's* likely recipients. The pending marriage of Cosimo II de' Medici to Maria Maddalena in the autumn of 1608 would have constituted an ideal occasion to forward an example of Florentine excellence and artistic skill, and to further cement the first royal dynastic marriage in the Medici family.

The Allen *Altar* is, however, a careful assemblage of media and meanings – and although it has not been recognised as such, is rather distinctly *unlike* other, more typical products of the Galleria. For example, the *Portable Altar* is contained within an unusually extant case, offering additional evidence of how an early modern portable possession might be received, unpacked, and displayed. But in this instance, the case is, I suggest, a meaningful feature of the iconographic program of the *Altar* as a whole. Ligozzi employed the botanical illustrative techniques of his early fame to endow the carrying case of the *Portable Altar* with a veritable bouquet of blossoms, replete with roses, tulips, lilies, an elegantly foreshortened dove of the holy spirit, and two cherubs (Figure 6.1). The floral paintings on the case are set against a black ground, quite obviously reminiscent of the *pietre dure* inlay for which Ligozzi was best known. Alluding to one medium with the use of another, Ligozzi fulfilled his moniker as the new Apelles (Giusti, 2002, p.109). The exterior of the carrying case thus functions as a clever nod both to the more expensive material of *pietre dure* (concealed within the case), and to the practice of botanical illustration that Ligozzi first learned at the Habsburg court. By evoking rather than utilizing the *pietre dure* medium, Ligozzi also entered into a theoretical discourse with the *paragone*, the longstanding debate regarding the relative merit of sculpture or painting to best imitate nature. In this case the draughtsman emulates the effect of stone inlay, proving the painter's

ability to usurp the sculptor at his trade. A further sensorial pun is made through the fragrant allusion to the floral garlands often used to adorn altarpieces during feast days and which became the subject of Flemish still-life paintings during the same decade. Imagining that ambrosial context, the viewer/recipient would undoubtedly be delighted to discover that the painted surface was in fact not cool stone, but wood.

Interior view: fecundity and faith in Ligozzi's *Portable Altar*

The inclusion of naturalistic depictions of flowers and gardens in the context of sacred art in late 16th and early 17th-century Italy performed in two concurrent ways: simultaneously suggesting the empirical documentation of natural phenomena, *and* evoking potent visual reminders about the delicate and fleeting realities of life. Detailed flowers in religious art of the 15th and 16th centuries were often symbolic – according to the Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici for instance, the white rose signified virginity, the red martyrdom (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.19 and more generally, Findlen, 1996). The purple iris was associated with the Virgin and the incarnation of Christ, and of course the white lily signified the city of Florence herself. Taken together, the flower-strewn garden was a common analogy for the enclosed *hortus conclusus* of the Virgin and Child. Depictions of the *Virgin and Child* by Domenico Veneziano (1445, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and Pseudo Pier Francesco Fiorentino (1455–7, Philadelphia Museum of Art) seat Mary and Christ in a garden and include naturalistic and accurate depictions of flowers, while simultaneously evoking the Song of Songs as the basis for Mary's virginal, untouched womb.

Functioning in a similar way to the rose latticework of earlier Renaissance *Virgin and Child* paintings, the floral garland encircles the Jesuit monogram in a fragrant aureole. Unlike those altarpieces, however, Ligozzi has set the devotional image, this time iconic, within a visual framework of natural specimens, illustrating his virtuosic skill and evoking the passage into an enclosed garden. The encyclopedic complexity of his floral choices is indicative of the new attitudes toward collecting and natural history delineated in the first half of this essay. Moreover, as Susan Merriam has recently explained with regard to the Flemish still-life tradition, painted floral garlands represented a trope in which art and nature were cast into competition (Merriam, 2012, p.2). If painted flowers signaled the artist's triumph over nature, they did so precisely because the painter rendered permanent that which was inevitably mortal. This was a theme taken up by

Counter-Reformatory theologians, including the Jesuit-sympathizer, archbishop Federico Borromeo. In his *Musaeum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae* (1625), Borromeo writes that 'when winter encumbers and restricts everything with ice, I have enjoyed from sight – and even imagined odor, if not real – artificial flowers… expressed in painting,' noting that 'their beautiful appearance is not fleeting, as some of the flowers that are found in nature, but stable and very endurable' (cited in Merriam, 2012, p.23). Borromeo's vivid, multisensory evocation of such fictive blossoms was also informed by his attitudes toward devotional art.

Succinctly summarized in his treatise on the topic (*De pictura sacra*, 1624) Borromeo 'nurture[d] belief in obeying…the decrees of the sacred Council of Trent, which impresses Bishops to teach the populace the truth of the Faith and sacred history, not merely with words, but with painting and whatever other representation succeeds in inspiring (*excitare*) the soul and senses of the faithful to the mysteries of religion' (cited in Merriam, 2012, p.21). The senses – including sight and smell – are particularly activated by depictions of minutely rendered flowers.

Not coincidentally, the first known floral garland painting was made for Borromeo's impressive collection in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Figure 6.8) in 1608; at its centre is a tender portrayal of the Virgin and Child in an idyllic landscape. Painted with the astounding detail typical of Jan Brueghel, the garland encircles a framed image; it is an image framed within another, thus implicitly challenging the authority of sight as the parameters of the floral wreath encroach upon the 'real' image (Merriam, 2012, pp.2–4). Ligozzi favoured a similar compositional device, situating the Jesuit monogram in an illusionistic gold frame. Both images recall the draping of real flowers over altars and their adornment of floats in processionals for the Corpus Christi. Since it can be opened, Ligozzi's carrying case also seems reminiscent of a Eucharistic tabernacle. Indeed such a conflation – of floral still life and Eucharistic tabernacle – was to reach its apotheosis later in the century when Flemish artists popularised this type of still life (Merriam, 2012, pp.125–46).

Perhaps a fitting allusion to the virginal chastity of its proposed recipient, it is not insignificant that once open, the Eden of Ligozzi's case gives way to another garden scene, albeit one that is decidedly less fecund. Crossing the symbolic threshold of the paradisiacal exterior, the private devotional image is experienced as one might a precious relic – an analogy that would not have been lost on a member of the Austrian court more generally, or Maria Maddalena in particular, whose

Figure 6.8: Jan Brueghel and Hendrick van Balen, *Virgin and Child in a Garland of Flowers*, 27 x 22cm, oil on panel, 1608, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. (Photo: Dea/Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Art Resource, NY)

Florentine collection of ornately crafted reliquaries (Figure 6.9) would become among the most significant domestic assemblages of this type in ducal record (Chiarini, 2002, pp.77–83, and Sanger, 2014, pp.71–91). Like many reliquaries that featured hinged doors, rock crystal, or other literal or figurative openings, the Allen altar is best understood once opened.

The central devotional image of Ligozzi's altar (Figure 6.10) is an especially intimate depiction of Christ's consolation by an angel in the garden of Gethsemane. Recounted in all four gospels, the Agony in the Garden or Christ on the Mount of Olives takes place immediately after the Last Supper and prior to Christ's arrest (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; John 28:11; and Luke 22:39–46). Accompanied by Peter, James, and John, Christ stops to pray at Gethsemane, asking God three times if it is his will that he should accept the chalice, a symbol of his pending Passion. Ligozzi has

Figure 6.9: Simone Pignoni, *Reliquary of St Sixtus*, 1614, embossed silver, chiseled and carved, partially cast, 36 x 43 x 19cm, Basilica di Santa Maria all'Impruneta, Impruneta. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

favored Luke's version of the episode, in which Christ is comforted by an angel who holds him aloft as he sweats rivulets of blood, his body and soul anguished by prayer. It is only in Luke's gospel that an angel appears to console Christ: 'And there appeared an Angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground' (Luke 22:43–44). Christ's acceptance of his bitter fate is symbolised by the artist's representation of the chalice at the upper left of the composition. The savior's weakened body, draped as it is across the angel's knee, foreshadows his ultimate death and sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Traditionally part of large Passion cycles and a crystallisation of the spiritual struggle between the human and divine sides of Christ's nature, the theme became increasingly common as a subject for small-scale private devotional pieces during the later 15th and 16th centuries (McCluer, 1987, p.101).

Christ's sacrifice has already been predicted – both theologically and visually – by the typological pairing with the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Figure 6.10b) at the base of the altarpiece. Here Ligozzi renders a sacrificial fire at the left of the composition, while the hand of yet another intervening angel stays Abraham's upraised arm. Allowing the naturally occurring veins in the lapis ground to show through the painted surface, the angel seems to swirl in on a bank of clouds. A tiny ram waits at far right, a welcome replacement for Isaac's vulnerable, juvenile flesh. Although lapis lazuli was not an uncommon ground for small paintings incorporated into *pietre dure* conceits, this particular choice might have been influenced by a small, oval lapis painting of 'Cristo nel orto' (Christ in the Garden) by Il Cigoli, now lost, formerly in the Medici Guardaroba. Anna Matteoli has suggested that this painting on lapis was a grand-ducal gift to a relative or foreign prince (1980, p.309 and p.436), and in that way it is also similar to the Allen *Altar*.

Because it is painted on copper, the colours and details of Ligozzi's *Agony* are particularly vivid. Around 1600 painting on copper became a widespread practice and likely reflected a number of factors including changes in connoisseurship, which favoured technical

Figure 6.10a: Detail, Jacopo Ligozzi, *Agony in the Garden*, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* 1608, ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, Overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

Figure 6.10b: Detail, Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* 1608, ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, image: 26.7 x 15.9 cm, overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

virtuosity, advances in the mining and manufacture of copper that ultimately led to its reduction in cost, and most importantly, the potential for dazzling visual effects accomplished with oil paint on a very hard, perfectly smooth surface (Bowron, 1999, p.10). Paintings on copper were treated in much the way precious objects made of ivory, amber, and rhinoceros horn were, and were installed alongside small bronzes, medallions and coins in *Kunstkammern*. Grand duke Francesco I de'Medici collected allegorical and mythological scenes on copper by Vasari (1511–74), Bronzino (1503–72), and Alessandro Allori (1535–1607) and must have appreciated their intimate scale and jewel-like colouring alongside other *objects de vertu* such as reliquaries, rock crystals, nautilus cups and porcelains in the Medici cabinets (Bowron, 1999, p.11). Both the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II (1527–76) and Rudolf II employed Bartholomäus Spranger (1546–1611), who transmitted the technique from Italy to other parts of Europe (Bowron, 1999, p.12). Once more, the Medici dukes and the Habsburg emperors shared a similar taste for the fine quality and curious detail made possible by an unusual and relatively new medium.

Both the *Agony in the Garden* and the *Sacrifice of Isaac* – one painted on copper and the other on lapis

– take place in landscapes, their central protagonists kneeling or standing on the ground. The recollection of the natural environment or garden was an especially important component of *Agony* iconography. In earlier versions of the subject, artists like Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) (Figure 6.11) and Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516) (Figure 6.12) suggested the imagined topography of Gethsemane as a barren desert, the angel as an ethereal messenger. Ligozzi was likely influenced instead by a version of the *Agony* painted by Paolo Veronese in *c*.1583, now in the Brera in Milan (Figure 6.13) (Askew, 1969, pp.292–93). Set in a verdant landscape punctuated by the ruined remains of Corinthian columns, the angel holds Christ's weary weight as God's presence illuminates the foreground in a dramatic spotlight. Christ's physical fatigue is especially palpable as his limp right hand grazes the stony earth. Ligozzi adopts a similarly intimate Christ and Angel relationship in a drawing of the subject dated to around 1608 (Figure 6.14), and in an earlier painting of the same theme, dated to the 1580s (Figure 6.15). Ligozzi's earlier painting of the *Agony in the Garden* (1580s) is in a private collection and appeared in the exhibition *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento* in 1997 (Conigliello, 1997, p.66). In all three cases, Ligozzi

Figure 6.11: Andrea Mantegna, *The Agony in the Garden*, *c*.1458-60, tempera on wood, 63 x 80cm, National Gallery, London. (© The National Gallery, London)

Figure 6.12: Giovanni Bellini, *The Agony in the Garden*, about 1465, tempera on wood, 81 x 127cm, National Gallery, London. (© The National Gallery, London)

Figure 6.13: Paolo Veronese, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1584, oil on canvas, 108 x 180cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

has envisioned Christ's encounter with the angel as a physical, sensorial communion, and as a reminder of the corporal reality of Christ's anguish. But it is only in the *Portable Altarpiece* that Ligozzi excises the lush, vegetal environ in order to focus solely on Christ's mortal collapse. Further, by redacting the botanical fecundity of his earlier versions of this subject, Ligozzi allowed the exterior of the case to function as part of the revelatory viewing and handling process.

Perhaps recalling the Jesuit convictions of Maria Maddalena and her father, the archduke Charles II, Ligozzi's *Agony in the Garden* suggests a visual corollary with verses from St Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In his daily directives, Ignatius advises devotees upon getting up and dressing to 'anguish with Christ in anguish,' while contemplating the episode of the Agony in the Garden (Ignatius of Loyola, 1991, pp.200–3). In the post-Tridentine milieu, such a focus on the somatic, experiential interpretation of *Agony* iconography would have been particularly apropos. This interpretation is further emphasised by Ligozzi's depiction of two angels within the very small space of

the altar. Both the angel that halts Abraham's upraised hand, and the angel that supports Christ's limp body, reiterate the significance of such celestial intervention on earth and confirm the relevance of the corporeal experience of faith and the prerogatives of the Jesuit Order more generally.

The Jesuit Order played an increasingly important role in cult devotion to angels during the last years of the 16th century and the first two decades of the 17th century (Bailey, 2003, pp.243–7; Johnson, 2006, pp.191–5). Prominent followers of St Ignatius, including St Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), were instrumental in the establishment of the Office of the Holy Guardian Angels by Paul V Borghese in September of 1608 (Johnson, 2006, p.192), and in the consolidation of the Confraternity of Guardian Angels (*Sodalizio dell'Angelo Custode*), which began meeting at the Gesù in 1614. Despite their procrastinated formal recognition, believers in the cult of the guardian angels had long sought such validation. St Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–91), Francesco Albertini (1542–1619), and Cornelius of Lapide (1567–1637), all published commentaries on the

Figure 6.14: Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Agony in Garden*, c.1606, pen and brown ink, brown wash, gold heightening, on paper washed in brown; black chalk lines; vertical crease in the right half of the sheet, 33.9 x 44.8cm, Louvre, Paris. (Photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 6.15: Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1580s, oil on panel, 165 x 130cm (65 x 51 1/8in), Private Collection. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

influence of angels in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and on the relevance of angels as divine protectors (pp.194–5).

Such angelic fervor was fueled by Protestant antagonism toward the popular winged guardians. Although Martin Luther could not refute the some 260 references to angels in the Old and New Testaments, it was clear that *guardian* angels – in their roles as intermediaries, and in their potential to subvert the doctrine of Justification via faith alone – were problematic (Soergel, 2006, pp.64–5). If Protestant Reformation theologians sought to actively debunk the validity of angels, Catholic Reformers like Bellarmine recognized the potential to reiterate the *positive* intercessory power of angels; the corporal reality of angels served to confirm faith and eradicate uncertainty via a direct, sensorial experience of heaven on earth. Not yet recognized in this context, Ligozzi undoubtedly knew about and perhaps accounted for this Jesuit-informed interpretation of angels in his *Agony in the Garden*. In the late 1580s Ligozzi painted a cycle of angelic subjects in the Cappella degli Angeli (Chapel of Angels) in San Giovannino, the Jesuit church in Florence (Bailey, 2003, pp.243–4), a project that must have necessitated a familiarity with rudimentary angelology.

Other early 17th-century representations of saints and angels similarly imply direct contact between the

angelic consort as a representative of God, and the mortal devotee.   Depictions of *St Matthew and the Angel* (Figure 6.16), for instance, often dramatised the physical immediacy of the angel's dictation of the Gospel. An even more compelling visual analogy exists in representations of the *Ecstasy of St Francis*. In his enigmatic depiction of the theme, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio emphasises the conciliatory role of the angel, who bolsters the suffering Saint's body and soul (Figure 6.17). Pamela Askew has suggested a typological relationship between depictions of the *Agony in the Garden* and the *Stigmatization of St Francis* and *Ecstasy of St Francis* (1969, p.292); a link that is also highlighted in exegetical and hagiographic sources that proposed St Francis to be an *alter Christus* or 'another Christ', and which delineated the sanctity of angels in the *vita* of Francis. Caravaggio, like Ligozzi, placed unusual pictorial emphasis on the supportive role of the angel in his depiction of St Francis. Bert Treffers and Stuart Lingo convincingly propose that such artistic choices were motivated in part by the significance of angels in Counter-Reformatory Italy (Treffers, 1988, pp.159–60, and Lingo, 1998, pp.195–210). The angel, Treffers argues, represents a sort of bridge between the sensorial

Figure 6.16: Nicolas Régnier, *St Matthew and the Angel, c.*1625, oil on canvas, Ringling Museum of Art. (Photo: Collection of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida, Florida State University)

experience of Stigmatization (in the case of St Francis), and the metaphysical way in which such wounding occurred (Treffers, 1988, p.159). The emotional anguish of Francis on Mount Alverna, like that of Christ on

Figure 6.17: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Ecstasy of St Francis*, *c.*1596, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. (Photo: Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford)

Mount Olivet, recalled the imperative of sacrifice and axiomatic divine love. Both would be apt reminders for a pious bride-to-be and her family.

Such reminders were often issued in the *angelogia* of the period, further emphasizing the way in which Ligozzi's *Agony in the Garden* might have resonated with a female owner. The Florentine cleric Giovanni Maria Tarsi had, for instance, geared his angelology of 1576 toward virginal women; a message that was repeated by Andrea Vittorelli in his 1605 edition. Vittorelli writes that 'the angels strive with greater vigilance and diligence to guard virgins or other chaste people, since these resemble more than others do the nature of the angels themselves' (Johnson, 2006, p.198). In his commentaries on angels, Cornelius a Lapide underscores that 'angelic life is virginity', forging an unequivocal analogy between the purity of angels and that of chaste women. If the visual recollection of angels implicitly evoked associations with purity and chastity, the pious archduchess (or a similarly minded, Jesuit recipient) would have seen in Ligozzi's *Altar* a fitting mnemonic.

Consumed by a private patron in what was likely a domestic setting, pictures such as Ligozzi's small-scale altarpiece or Caravaggio's *Ecstasy,* were viewed differently then were altarpieces found in public churches. In fact, the Ligozzi altar with which the present essay is occupied is hardly an altar at all. It did not serve as a container for relics nor as the backdrop for communion placed atop an altar. As such it, like the Caravaggio painting, is a private devotional image. In his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), cardinal Gabriele Paleotti argued convincingly for the utility of art in the face of Reformation antagonism toward images. Laying open what has been called an 'ecclesiastical justification for collecting', Paleotti established the groundwork for the collection of sacred art outside the church establishment, but he also suggested the means by which art should stimulate the viewer and encourage faith (Schildgen, 2011, pp.8–16). The senses, and particularly those that were traditionally considered more base (touch, smell, taste), resonated in discourses about the manufacture and collecting of devotional art (Benay, 2009).

In his *Discorso* Paleotti was particularly concerned with how objects in private collections, such as that of the Medici or the Habsburg court, might be consumed or enjoyed without the oversight of the bishopric. Paleotti suggests that the first, most elemental level of delight (*diletto*) is generated by the senses – taste, smell, touch and so on (see Paleotti, book 1, chapter 22, 1582 (2012), pp.111–14). This category of *diletto* is followed by the rational, which originates in the senses

but moves into the realm of the abstract; finally, the realm of spiritual cognition, as Paleotti calls it, is born from 'divine light, the medium for faith through which we believe and know things that exceed not only the capacity of the senses but also all human discourse and rational intelligence' (Paleotti, 1582 (2012), p.113)). Thus, any good Christian viewer can experience a work of sacred art on three levels: sensual, rational, and spiritual. As for the sensuous, writes Paleotti, 'this is the most evident to all because having the sense of sight, most noble of all, from paintings we observe the variety of colors, the shadows, the figures, the ornaments, and other things represented, like mountains, rivers, gardens, cities, countryside, and other things that give us marvelous pleasure and recreation' (p.113). Paleotti goes on to suggest that 'spiritual cognition' allows the viewer to see with *occhio purgato*, or with clean or purged eyes. The roles of the other senses are relegated to the periphery of his discourse on cognition and sacred images.

Paleotti's descriptions of 'spiritual cognition', do not place great stock in the physical experience of art. But this assessment seems at odds with much art of the period, which emphasised the saints' direct encounters with Christ, angels, and sources of divine inspiration. Indeed, I contend that Ligozzi's depiction of Christ's *Agony* reflects this interest in the tactile revelation of faith. Paleotti's acknowledgement of the senses in the viewer's cognitive process, no matter how small, is significant and is in some ways similar to the role the senses play in the *paragone* debate of the sixteenth century.

Although Renaissance painters and theorists often cited the tactility of sculpture as evidence of its lesser position in the *paragone* with painting (Johnson, 2011, pp.59–84), such devaluing of touch does not accurately represent attitudes toward the senses at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even in ancient and medieval sources, the primacy of sight was not uncontested and the dangerous powers of illusion troubled philosophers and theologians alike (Johnson, 2002, p.63). Extramission theory, in which vision and touch are linked through an impression of images onto the retina, endured well into the seventeenth century, ensuring a continued link between seeing and touching. Giordano Bruno even suggested that memory is a series of 'carved, tactile statues that could be mentally re-encountered' (Johnson, 2002, p.63). In his *Idea*, published in 1607, Federico Zuccaro described the relationship between perception, intellect, and memory as a process by which images are the origination of ideas that are progressively honed and clarified (Cropper, 2005, pp.125–7). Each

idea or *concetto* enters the imagination and sparks 'a series of mental responses by which the senses are lit up. In turn, the senses bring back information about particulars to the imagination, or fantasy, from whence, through cogitation, they are introduced by the light of the active intellect as universals to the knowing eye of the intellect' (Zuccaro, 1961). The senses, according to Zuccaro, act as foot soldiers, carrying experience to the safe house where they may be stored, mined, remembered. Not coincidentally, Zuccaro was also favorite painter of the Jesuits in Rome, where his frescos of angelic intervention adorn the Cappella degli Angeli in the Gesù. The *Idea* also detailed a theory of 'angelic design' (*disegno angelico*) in which artists actualized 'angelic perception,' enabling angels to function as specific sources of cognitive inspiration (Fiore, 1997, p.89–110).

As an artist might cull from the mental stockpile of images described by Zuccaro, so too would the viewer of devotional art complete a performative act by viewing and recalling parts of a biblical narrative not depicted within the frame of a picture. Similarly, when one imagines early modern devotees engaged in an act of beholding these images – that is, not simply viewing, seeing, or witnessing an image but instead binding these activities with the more tactile, manual act of holding – it is possible to understand the durational, epistemological impact of images with greater profundity. The somatic multiplicity of the subject who 'beholds' versus 'sees' contributes to the way that 'sight becomes central to the acquisition of knowledge and certainty', as Erin Felicia Labbie and Allie Terry-Fritsch have shown (2012, p.2). This distinction might be further extrapolated to imply the other senses as well, for it was in the early modern period that touch, smell, even taste, took on greater empirical relevance.

Although a small-scale portable object was not subject to the same performative viewing as was a large altarpiece or fresco cycle, such objects could operate in similarly interactive ways. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand have usefully delineated three categories of devotional interaction in particular: active physical interaction, purely imaginative interaction and performative interaction (2011, pp. xxxv–xxxvi). Active physical interaction requires physical movement around or through the work of art or building; imaginative interaction requires that the viewer complete a meditative or emotional act via the contemplation of a visual image; and finally performative interaction suggests a conflation of both types, enabling the viewer or beholder to engage physically *and* emotionally within a space-mind continuum. While their rubric is written with the late Medieval pilgrim in mind, it might easily be applied to the consumption of an early 17th-century portable altarpiece.

As previously noted, the *Altar's* light weight – a quantitative factor too often overlooked in the field of art history – makes it especially easy to handle and transport. In this way, it could be experienced in a very literal, direct way as it was manipulated in space. Unlike the bronze statuettes collected for Renaissance *studioli*, which were often turned in the hand (Johnson, 2012, pp.183–98) in a sensory, even sensual manner, it was not, to my knowledge, customary to handle in so intimate a way paintings in such collections (although, in her essay in this issue, Catherine Lawless describes the 'kissing and hugging' of a crucifix by a holy woman in the fourteenth century, the context of such a pious rapture was entirely different). In so doing, a viewer/ worshipper would quite directly behold the image. Moving between spaces intended for epistemological contemplation (the *Wunderkammern*, for instance), and the private chambers or chapel, the altar could thus become the locus of meditational focus in a number of diverse physical contexts. Geraldine Johnson has proven the relevance of such mobility for female collectors in particular, in her important essay on the statuettes owned by Isabella d'Este (2012, pp.183–98). Although the archduchess Maria Maddalena could not yet be deemed a 'collector' in 1608, it was perhaps with this in mind that Ligozzi crafted the unusual *Portable Altar* and the Medici shipped it to the Habsburg court.

A devout daughter to her father, archduke Charles II, Maria Maddalena adopted the militant teachings offered by the Jesuits brought to her court in the 1570s, and was well educated in the arts and sciences (Harness, 2006, p.21). Already a patron of religious art at Graz at the age of 19, Maria's interests were described by the court poet, Andrea Salvadori, who documented her taste for devotional subjects and her name saint, Mary Magdalene (p.21). Her education and familial background uniquely primed Maria Maddalena to understand the intricate merging of naturalistic botanical illustration on the exterior of the case, *and* meditative devotional image on the altarpiece itself. This likely Medici-commissioned gift did not allude to the sensual promise of nascent love, but it must have made an impression on the youthful duchess nevertheless: Ligozzi was among her favorite artists after her arrival in Florence (Chiarini, 2002, p.87).

Indeed, Maria's marriage to Cosimo II merited one of the most lavish weddings in the early modern period (Poole, 2011, p.384, and Bertelà and Tofani, 1969, pp.102–5). Advertising the diplomatic allegiances fostered by their union, a triumphal procession marked the entrance of the bride to the city of Florence on

18 October 1608 (Bertelà and Tofani, 1969, pp.102–7). Such grand-ducal weddings drew from traditions associated with medieval royal entry, the classical Roman triumph, and local festivals and were demarked by ephemeral installations and in the case of Maria and Cosimo II, a grand *naumachia* (mock sea battle) in the Arno. These triumphal marriage celebrations reminded audiences that their ducal rulers were heirs to the glory of Rome, and as such, manifested the most public, spectacular culmination of courtship. Concretised by engravings and etchings of the events, this message could be reenacted by each subsequent viewing of the print, thus forging an intimate reminder of the raucous festivities while imprinting the larger message of ducal triumph on the communal memory of the citizenry.

If her courtship began with small gifts and included the Ligozzi *Altarpiece*, and culminated in a grand marital spectacle the likes of which had not yet been seen, such strategies worked well to ensure Maria's continued dedication to the shared interests of the Medici-Habsburg dynasty. Gifts given in anticipation of marriage could function on an intimate, personal scale, but they also had the potential to subtly, and even subliminally, foster the prosperity of a happy court. Maria's pious devotion and her patronage of the arts continued once she was in Florence. In 1622 she purchased the Baroncelli Villa outside San Pier Gattolini gate, today known as the Porta Romana. Upon the completion of Giulio Parigi's renovations, she renamed the building Villa del Poggio Imperiale (Villa of the Imperial Hillock). Completing her project with the commission of frescos, paintings, stucco work and furniture, she subsequently hired Ligozzi to furnish a series of four Passion scenes (1620–1), which included a now-lost depiction of the *Agony in the Garden* (Hoppe, 2012b, pp.19–25). The inclusion of this subject, possibly the fourth by Ligozzi, indicates the enduring relevance of the theme, perhaps for Maria Maddalena in particular.

Ligozzi also painted an intimate, tenebrist depiction of the *Crowning with Thorns* and an elaborate *pietre dure* prayer kneeling bench with a small version of the *Baptism of Christ*, painted on copper, at its centre, for the newly reconstructed Villa del Poggio Imperiale (pp.337–8). Together, these commissions suggest a continuity of styles and thematic interests that may have begun with one small, precious object.

If Maria Maddalena was in fact the intended recipient of the *Portable Altar*, she would have seen and even felt moved to smell the fictive flowers emblazoned on the cover. Here, painted exterior yields to inlaid interior, where the warmth of wood and stoniness of lapis would have been felt under hand as the recipient unpacked the altar. This portable possession marries the intricacy of a novel medium, the botanical specificity of a delicate specimen, and the devotional fervor of a religious image, creating a virtual cabinet of curiosity on a miniature scale. Like those rooms and repositories, the little altar in its case seems to contain a world of 'wonders in one closet shut', a phrase used to describe Ulisse Aldrovandi's collection (Findlen, 1996, p.17). In so doing, it also renders a vanishing type – that of the portable altarpiece – relevant within cultural lexicons of collecting, where natural history and devotional art, sacred and profane, were stored on the same shelves. By removing the case, Maria Maddalena could enter the garden of Christ's anguish, where she would be confronted with an image at once beautiful in its sumptuous colors and *pietre dure* framing, and sorrowful in its intimate, tactile depiction of Christ's torment. Thus, she could experience the very comingling of joy and suffering intended by representations of Christ's agony. Indeed, by combining the technique for which his workshop was best known, with the experiential piety favored by the court of its presumed recipient, Ligozzi had crafted a pre-marital gift worth giving.

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PERFORMING THE RENAISSANCE BODY AND MIND: SOMAESTHETIC STYLE AND DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE AT THE SACRO MONTE DI VARALLO

Allie Terry-Fritsch

Abstract

This essay examines the somaesthetic experience of renaissance pilgrims to the Sacro Monte di Varallo, a late fifteenth-century simulation of the Holy Land located in northern Italy. It reconstructs how pilgrims once cultivated their bodies and minds to enhance aesthetic and devotional experience to offer a re-evaluation of artistic style at the site. Built by a team of architects, painters and sculptors at the behest of Franciscan friars, the Sacro Monte di Varallo transformed the mountainous terrain of the Val Sesia into a 'true representation' of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The Holy Land was presented to the pilgrim in a series of interactive spaces housed in independent architectural units, each containing life-sized wooden or terracotta sculptures of Biblical figures adorned with real hair, clothes and shoes, and situated in frescoed narratival environments. Pilgrims were led to each architectural site along a fixed path and encountered the Biblical scenes in a strict sequence that was narrated by a Franciscan friar. If the pilgrim engaged in proper performances of body-mindfulness, the site served as a pilgrimage destination that was equally enriching as 'the real thing'. The essay questions how the somaesthetics of experience at Varallo served to enfold pilgrims into multi-sensory, immersive scenarios and thereby allowed pilgrims to activate the art and architecture of the Franciscan campus in personalised ways. Through their physical and mental participation in the works, pilgrims actively constructed the means for the art and architecture of the holy mountain to fulfill and even surpass the power of the real Holy Land.

Biographical note

Allie Terry-Fritsch is associate professor of Italian renaissance art history at Bowling Green State University. Her research examines the performative experience of viewing art and architecture in early modern Italy, with a particular focus on fifteenth-century Florence. Published articles and book chapters include examinations of the viewers of Fra Angelico's paintings at San Marco, Donatello's sculptures in Palazzo Medici, Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas,* as well as the relationship between the beholder and the representation of violence in the renaissance. She is co-editor of *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate, 2012). Terry-Fritsch is currently completing her book manuscript on *Somaesthetic Experience and the Renaissance Viewer in Florence*, an investigation of the ways in which fifteenth-century Florentines actively cultivated their bodies and minds to enhance their experiences of art and architecture.

PERFORMING THE RENAISSANCE BODY AND MIND: SOMAESTHETIC STYLE AND DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE AT THE SACRO MONTE DI VARALLO[1]

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This essay examines the ways in which renaissance pilgrims to the Sacro Monte di Varallo, a late fifteenth-century simulation of the Holy Land located in northern Italy, cultivated their bodies and minds to enhance aesthetic and devotional experience at the site (Figure 7.1: Aerial view of the *Sacro Monte di Varallo*: http://www.parks.it/riserva.sacro.monte.varallo/Epun.php). Built by a team of architects, painters and sculptors at the behest of Franciscan friars, the Sacro Monte di Varallo transformed the mountainous terrain of the Val Sesia into a 'true representation' of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The Holy Land was presented to the pilgrim in a series of interactive spaces housed in independent architectural units, each containing life-sized wooden or terracotta sculptures of Biblical figures adorned with real hair, clothes and shoes, and situated in frescoed narratival environments (Figure 7.2). Pilgrims were led to each architectural site along a fixed path and encountered the Biblical scenes in a strict sequence that was narrated by a Franciscan friar. If the pilgrim engaged in proper performances of body-mindfulness, the site served as a pilgrimage destination that was equally enriching as 'the real thing' (Orvell, 1989).

The artistic patrimony of the Sacro Monte di Varallo has been the focus of art historical attention in recent decades, particularly in discussions regarding the expanding field of 'renaissance art'. The dramatic, and sometimes quite literal, verism at the site, including the real clothing and hair on the life-sized, delicately carved figures and the minute details of everyday life incorporated into the dioramic environments, were classified in the late nineteenth century as charming crafts that appealed to a deeply pious, but largely unrefined group of viewers (Butler, 1888). However, art historians since the last quarter of the twentieth century have re-evaluated the visual aesthetic of the Sacro Monte di Varallo not only as 'popular art' but as a legitimate alternative to the highly praised academic style of the dominant artistic centres of Florence, Rome and Venice. In 1978, Rudolf Wittkower brought serious attention to the implications of such an alternate style, noting that the highly effective and popular art forms exhibited on the holy mountain were not classified as 'high' or 'low' by the original artists or audiences at the site, but rather by a highly biased discipline of the history of art centuries after inception (Wittkower, 1978, pp.175–83). Alessandro Nova has demonstrated convincingly that the polychrome figures and frescoed scenes at the Sacro Monte di Varallo appealed equally to a local, provincial public and sophisticated, courtly audiences from Milan and beyond (Nova, 1995, pp.112–26). Yet, while further art-historical studies have shed light on the potential ways in which devotional practices and politico-economic pressures impacted artistic style at the site, the sculptures and frescoes still remain outside of mainstream discussions of renaissance aesthetic sensibility.

This essay contributes a further consideration of renaissance artistic style on the Sacro Monte di Varallo by reconstructing the 'somaesthetic' experience of pilgrims during the earliest phase of the site between the 1490s and the 1520s. Somaesthetics – a term derived from the combination of *soma*, or body, and *aesthetics*, or sensory appreciation – refers to the practice of cultivating the body and mind to enhance sensory appreciation and creative self-fashioning (Shusterman, 2000a, 262–283; Shusterman, 2000b; Shusterman, 2008). As this essay argues, the Franciscans at the Sacro Monte of Varallo purposefully incorporated somaesthetic strategies into the architectural and decorative design of their pilgrimage site to link the performative body of the viewer to the works of art that were made to accompany these experiences. While the term performative has been used in scholarship to reference a variety of complex citational processes, its use here draws on the tradition of approaching

Figure 7.2: View of the *Procession of the Magi*, *c.*1516, sculptures and frescoes by Gaudenzio Ferrari and assistants. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

the body as 'an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities' to construct identity within 'social temporality' (Butler, 1988, p.521). The founders of the Sacro Monte di Varallo had first-hand knowledge of the pilgrimage itinerary at Jerusalem and comprehended the intense bodily and mental exertion that went into the travel to and experience of the Holy Land. They translated this body-mindfulness into an interactive itinerary that relied on the constituting acts of pilgrims' subjective experience to transfer the sacred power of the original to its reproduction at the Sacro Monte di Varallo.

To activate the body and mind of the pilgrim, the physical performance of viewing at the Sacro Monte di Varallo accentuated awareness in all sensory receptors. The site was designed to physically challenge while simultaneously mentally engage pilgrims as they made their way through the steep and winding landscape of the site. Pilgrims interacted with visual and other sensory environments while engaged in body-mind practices, thus creating the conditions for a heightened somaesthetic encounter. Unlike the experience of today's visitor to the site, renaissance pilgrims were

not forced into fixed viewing positions outside of the chapel proper. Rather, pilgrims were invited to enter into the architectural environments and to touch, smell, taste and hear, in addition to view the holy simulacra. These intimate interactions with the works served to enfold the pilgrims into their compositions and thereby allowed pilgrims to activate the scenes in personalised ways. Thus, the consideration of somaesthetic style at the Sacro Monte di Varallo necessarily takes into account the renaissance pilgrims who were integral to the completion of the work of art. Through their physical and mental participation in the works, pilgrims actively constructed the means for the art and architecture of the holy mountain to fulfill and even surpass the power of the real Holy Land.

Founding a holy land: miraculous signs and performative engagement

To substitute the Sacro Monte di Varallo, a pilgrimage site constructed on terrain untouched by Christ, for the experience of pilgrimage to the real Jerusalem entailed the construction of both a compelling explanation of the site's substitutive sacrality and the

promise of a transformative experience. Fra Bernardino Caimi, the Franciscan founder of the Sacro Monte of Varallo, ensured that his new holy land provided both. In 1478, Fra Caimi returned to Italy from his position as custodian of the Franciscan-controlled Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As a means to address the increasingly difficult conditions for Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, due in no small part to the growing presence of Ottomans in the Holy Land and its surrounding territories, Fra Caimi actively sought a site in Italy that could replicate the experience of travel to it (Wittkower, 1978, p.175; Leatherbarrow, 1987, pp.107–9). According to a late-fifteenth-century inscription on the earliest architectural site at the Sacro Monte di Varallo, dated to 1491, Fra Caimi 'devised the sacred places on this mountain so that he who could not travel might see this Jerusalem' ('Frater Bernardinus Caymus de Mediolano … Sacra huius Montis excogitavit loca ut hic Hierusalem videat qui peragrare nequit'). Apparently, after searching in vain for a site like the Holy Land, he found himself in Varallo, where he 'had hardly got there before he felt himself rapt into an ecstasy, in the which he was drawn towards the Sacro Monte' (Butler, 1888, pp.37–8). At the top of the mountain, he understood 'at once its marvelous resemblance to Jerusalem', and 'threw himself on the ground and thanked God in a transport of delight' (pp.37–8). God clearly had bestowed the grace upon Fra Caimi to discover and understand the special qualities of the place.

Fra Caimi immediately sought and received permission and funding for the building of a 'Nuova Gerusalemme' on the mountain of Varallo. On 21 December 1486, Pope Innocent VIII authorised Fra Caimi to accept a donation of land to build a church dedicated to Santa Maria delle Grazie at the base of the mountain and the New Jerusalem complex on the 'super paretium' (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.4). His first commission on the mountain was an architectural reproduction of the Holy Sepulchre. Shortly after the ground was broken, workmen discovered another clear sign of God's divine grace and unambiguous confirmation of the site's sacrality: as recorded in its later inscription, a stone was found to be 'in all ways similar to the stone that covered the sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem'. The 'miracle of the stone' – the discovery of a sign from God in the exact shape and size of the object that artists were prepared to create – set the stage for the authenticity of the pilgrimage site in material terms. The founder of the Sacro Monte di Varallo had demonstrated both his and the site's extraordinary holiness through an ecstatic experience, which led to a miraculous finding.

Pilgrims soon flocked to the mountain to visit the stone, which was integrated into an interactive architectural space representing the Holy Sepulchre. Within five years, a female pilgrim, Donna Agnese Botta, the sister of Ludovico il Moro's financial minister, was miraculously cured of an illness while at Varallo (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.5). Soon, other pilgrims began experiencing miracles at the site as well. The demonstration of miracles at a pilgrimage site served as unambiguous proof of the authenticity of its holy conduit (Vauchez, 2004, pp.9–14). For non-historical sites like Varallo that boasted neither real things nor real places, miracles were produced through God's grace, combined with proper prayer practices in front of and to specially charged objects. The emphasis on proper sequencing of actions and meditations ensured pilgrims of a legitimate pilgrimage experience, since many devotional practices performed in specific spaces throughout the mountain were in direct imitation of devotional practices in the real Holy Land. Further, as in the real Jerusalem, many of these choreographed prayer actions were rewarded with plenary indulgences endorsed by the pope. Such rewards provided tangible evidence of the official legitimacy of the site.

Figure 7.3: Map of the Sacro Monte di Varallo as arranged in 2012:
http://www.parks.it/riserva.sacro.monte.varallo/map11.html
While the original disposition of the luoghi sancti *has changed significantly, the Holy Sepulchre (43), Crucifixion (38) and Bethlehem complex (5–8) retain their late-fifteenth-century and early-sixteenth-century positions and decoration.*

For a renaissance pilgrim to the holy mountain of Varallo in the first half of the sixteenth century, several interactive multi-media holy places were available for devotional practices. By 1493, the church and convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie were erected at the mountain's base. The church was the mandatory starting point for pilgrims to the Sacro Monte and the site of critical body-mind preparation for the pilgrim's encounter with the architectural sites – called *luoghi sancti* (or, holy places) – on the mountain above (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.5). Since the early fourteenth century, Franciscans held the coveted position as custodians of key Christian sites in the holy land, including the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Cenacle on Mount Zion and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (Wharton, 2006, p.109; Rudy, 2011). Architectural structures representing each of these Franciscan-controlled holy places were included in the Sacro Monte's original layout.

In the southwestern corner of the mountain, the Piazza del Tempio contained the original pilgrims'

fountain and several architectural buildings that housed interactive environments. Unfortunately, much of the original artistic programme of this area, constructed from the last decade of the fifteenth century to the first decades of the sixteenth century, is largely lost. Many of the buildings and the scenes housed within them were either destroyed or repurposed in the Counter-Reformation transformation of the site and in subsequent restoration and building campaigns (Göttler, 2013). Despite these losses, scholars have used archival and material evidence to reconstruct the spatial programme of the original pilgrimage site, that is, the disposition of the early *luoghi sancti* across the Franciscan campus.

Certain spaces bear no material trace of their late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century artistic histories. For example, the structures once housing the representations of the *Garden of Gethsemane, Ascension,* and the *Lamentation/Deposition of Christ* are entirely replaced by later artistic interventions. Other spaces partially preserve their original decoration, albeit in a repurposed fashion. The earliest known frescoes on the holy mountain were painted by Gaudenzio Ferrari inside the architectural structure housing the scene of the *Pairing of the Garments*; the space was repurposed in the first half of the seventeenth century to house

the representation of the *Pietà*, so the original frescoes no longer fully correspond to the three-dimensional narrative currently played out before them (Butler, 1888, p.12; Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.52). In other cases, artistic works from original environments are preserved, although they have been integrated into new environments. The original space dedicated to the *Capture of Christ* on Mount Calvary was completed by 1500 and filled with wooden statues by an anonymous artist. These statues are still extant at Varallo, although incorporated into a seventeenth-century space dedicated to the same theme in 'Pilate's Palace' and completed with further sculptures by Giovanni and Melchior d'Enrico (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.34). Similarly, the wooden statues of the apostles at the *Last Supper* on Mount Zion created by an unknown artist are still extant, although relocated and resituated within an eighteenth-century chapel decorated by Antonio Orgiazzi (Figure 7.4).

The best-preserved artistic spaces from the original artistic programme of the pilgrimage site are found in the architectural complexes representing Bethlehem and Mount Calvary. The Bethlehem complex featured interconnected and interactive artistic environments designed and realized by Gaudenzio Ferrari between the 1490s and 1528. Set at a geographic distance from

Figure 7.4: *The Last Supper*, late-fifteenth-/early-sixteenth-century sculptures of apostles incorporated into eighteenth-century chapel with frescoes and sculptural decoration by Antonio Orgiazzi, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

and below the sites of 'Jerusalem' found at the peak of the mountain, the *luogo sancto* was made, according to Fra Caimi and the other Franciscans at the site, in perfect imitation of the grotto at Bethlehem. The decorated spaces dedicated to the *Nativity* and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* already were completed by the end of the fifteenth century (Figures 7.5 and 7.6), and two further interactive environments representing the *Procession of the Magi* and the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* were integrated

Figure 7.5: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Nativity*, c.1515, Sacro Monte di Varallo.
(Photo: Santuario del Sacro Monte di Varallo)

Figure 7.6: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1513–15, Sacro Monte di Varallo.
(Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

into the architectural complex between 1515 and 1528 (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, pp.16–9) (Figures 7.2 and 7.7). While each of these representations visualised a distinct biblical narrative within a defined space, they also communicated to one another across the span of the entire architectural complex since the spaces were arranged in topomimetic relation to the spatial disposition of the Grotto of Bethlehem. Thus pilgrims were offered an imaginative encounter with both sacred history in the individual scenes and a performative engagement with the physical configuration of space as would contemporary pilgrims to the Holy Land itself.

On the hill above, the structures designated as the Holy Sepulchre and Mount Calvary still retain much of their original, early-sixteenth-century decorative programmes. As mentioned earlier, the Holy Sepulchre was Fra Caimi's first realised holy place on the mountain (Figure 7.8). Constructed by 1491, the physical configuration of space within the Holy Sepulchre at Varallo was based on the aedicula in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Ousterhout, 1981, pp.311–21). The interior featured artistic works by Gaudenzio Ferrari made in the early sixteenth century, including a polychrome statue of the kneeling *Mary Magdalene* and a fresco of the *Angel of the Resurrection* in the atrium of the sepulchre and a
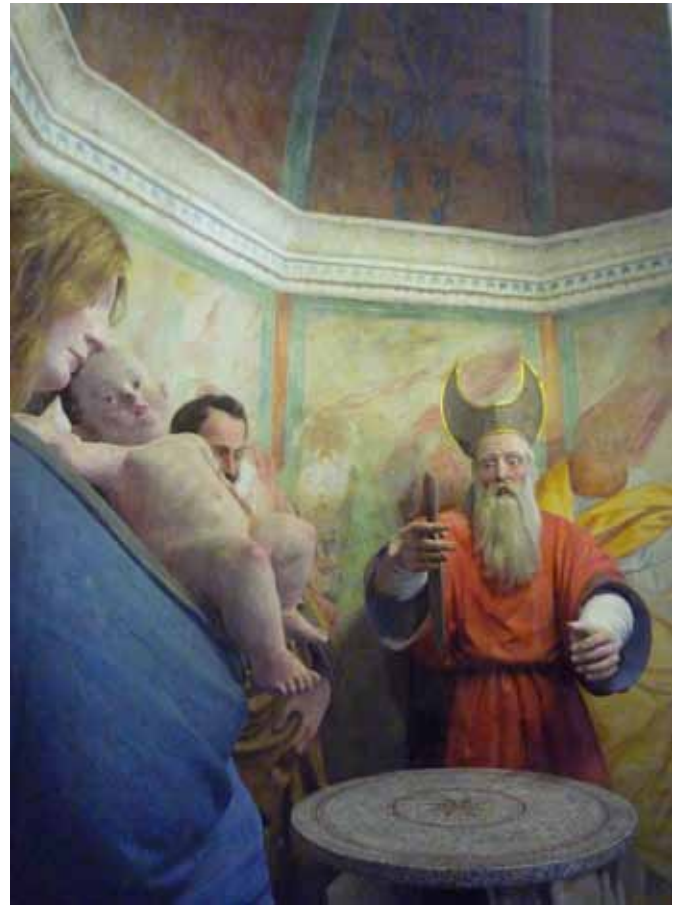

Figure 7.7: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Presentation in the Temple*, 1515–16, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

Figure 7.8: Exterior view of the *Holy Sepulchre*, constructed by 1491, interior decoration by Gaudenzio Ferrari in first decade of sixteenth century; with later additions, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

recumbent statue of the *Dead Christ* placed inside the tomb in the inner chamber. As discussed more fully below, the architectural and decorative complex of the Holy Sepulchre at Varallo was designed purposefully to foster an intimate and affective relationship between the pilgrim and Christ, which culminated in a mental and somatic embracing of the dead saviour. Pilgrims would configure their bodies in relation to the shifting architectural proportions of the building, bend over to accommodate low ceilings, crawl on knees to access the inner chamber, and press up against and even climb into the tomb of Christ.

The scene of the *Crucifixion* on Mount Calvary at Varallo is also one of the three original *luoghi sancti* designed by Fra Caimi (Figure 7.9). Built on the site of an older chapel dedicated to the same theme, the *Crucifixion* features panoramic frescoes, delicately carved and painted sculptures, and a fully immersive environment that encouraged pilgrims to step into and participate in the narrative. The monumental scale of the room, coupled with the continuous frescoes on the curved wall surfaces and arched ceiling, endowed the scene with magnificence. Sculpted figures placed on the three crosses and at their base recreated the scene

of Christ's death in stark naturalism. As Christ bows his head in acceptance of his fate, his battered flesh on the cross visualised to pilgrims his bodily suffering. As Alessandro Nova has suggested, pilgrims once walked into the space and became physically immersed in the scene (Nova, 1995, p.123). Surrounding the pilgrim in 360 degrees, sculpted and frescoed onlookers offered distinct scenarios of emotional responses to the death of Christ. The Virgin mother swoons with arms outstretched, while other mothers painted on the wall behind her and in sculpted form before her protectively clasp their own children close to their bodies. Making his or her way through the chapel – originally from the door to the right of the *Crucifixion* through the scene itself and out the door to the left – the pilgrim configured his or her own body and mind in relation to these mimetic characters and imaginatively inserted himself into the narrative (Nova, 1995, p.123).

Originally, the pilgrims' trail between the various architectural units on the Sacro Monte di Varallo followed topographical cues connected to the disposition and layout of the Holy Land and its monuments. As Annabel Wharton has argued convincingly, the earliest phase of Varallo's sacred

Figure 7.9: Frontal view of the *Crucifixion*, 1510–23, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

space – from the last decade of the fifteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century – was purposefully complex so as to mimetically index the space of Jerusalem as it was experienced by pilgrims at that time (Wharton, 2006, pp.130–1). The paths and chapels of Varallo were 'disordered by geography, marked by incoherence, [and] interrupted by overlap' so as 'to replicate the experience of the pilgrim in a complex space' just as in the real Holy Land (pp.130–1). A Franciscan friar who accompanied the pilgrim resolved the site's illegibility by literally guiding the way to the appropriate chapels in the proper sequence.

The close accompaniment of the pilgrims at Varallo by Franciscan guides mimicked practices performed in the Holy Land itself. As Nine Miedema has described, Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem from the West resembled 'a guided tour as known from modern mass tourism' (Miedema, 1985, p.79; Peters, 1985, p.437). Due to practical reasons, the Franciscan friars in charge of these tours designed the itineraries according to a strict topographical sequence that presented the holy sites neither in correspondence with the Christological narrative nor in alignment with meditative practices such as the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. Pilgrims were forbidden to deviate from the Franciscan itinerary and were not allowed to visit sites on their own. Just as in modern tour groups, many pilgrims experienced 'a certain disappointment at the lack of liberty and at the brevity of their stay in the Holy Land' (Miedema, 1985, p.79). Even though such constrictions were disappointing for many pilgrims to the Holy Land, they were mimicked at the Sacro Monte di Varallo and promoted as authentic practice. As such, the pilgrims at Varallo embraced the guided itinerary in a way unlike their pilgrim counterparts in Jerusalem.

Despite the professed similarities between the real Holy Land and its representation at Varallo, the pilgrim's experience of the simulated *luoghi sancti* on the holy mountain was quite different from and, as some accounts profess, may have been even better than, 'the real thing'. As Georgia Frank has examined, early Christian pilgrims to the real Holy Land confronted landscapes that had been radically altered from their Biblical descriptions (Frank, 2000, pp.98–115). Since dusty voids inhabited the places where Christ and the Apostles once lived, Franciscans recited histories and prayers to verbally explicate the site and to excite the pilgrim's active imagination. Using the 'eye of faith', triggered by a glimpse of the physical place of a Biblical event, the pilgrim was transformed 'into a spectator at, perhaps even a participant in, an event from the Biblical past' (Frank, 2000, p.100). This mode of viewing inspired what Frank has called 'lingering vision', a prolonged

visual engagement with the authentic space that allowed for a personalised, if imagined, recollection of the event (Frank, 2000, p.101). Further engagement was offered through the strategic touching of dirt, images or inscriptions that were attached to the physical site and could afford some form of tactile transfer of the real thing to the pilgrim. For those pilgrims who understood vision itself as a form of touching, the act of looking itself also 'touched' the Biblical past through the pilgrim's gaze (Hahn, 2000, pp.169–96; Camille, 2000, pp.197–223; Hahn, 2006, pp.44–64; Caviness, 2006, pp.65–86).

Fra Caimi had first-hand experience of pilgrims' experiences in the Holy Land, including the difficulties of imagining from a void, thus he designed the Sacro Monte di Varallo not as an imitation of the Holy Land but rather as a 'true representation' of the places there. As opposed to faithfully imitating the material culture (or lack thereof) at the holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the pilgrimage site of the Sacro Monte of Varallo imaginatively reconstructed narrative episodes from the life of Christ and the saints in life-sized environments specifically constructed for pilgrims. The Alpine conditions of Varallo, fundamentally different than the arid climate and landscape of Jerusalem, were incorporated into the physical fabric of the pilgrim's experience and used to create both a rigorous corporeal experience and a delightful, even ecstatic, experience of God's creation on earth. During the day, stunning vistas of the intersections of expansive sky and surrounding mountain peaks, as well as views down into the river valley below, were offered from on top of Varallo's sacred mountain. In addition to the travel to the site itself and the performance of Franciscan body-mind prayers at Santa Maria della Grazie at the base, pilgrims used the daylight hours to visit the chapels, privately meditate, and perform penitence through flagellation and confession (Hood, 1985, pp.302–3). They travelled the ascents and descents of the interconnected pathways of the built environment or rested under the shade of a portico of one of the *luoghi sancti* while admiring the spectacular expression of nature around them. At night, when devotional exercises were practised by the light of torches, the Alpine breezes cooled the air. The torches punctuated the darkened sky and marked the occasion as 'out-of-time', special and important (Grimes, 1996).

Also unlike the experience of the real Holy Land, each devotional space on the Sacro Monte di Varallo highlighted Christ's incarnation as a key feature of its decoration, from the display of his chubby flesh as an infant in the crib of the *Nativity* to his ripped and scourged flesh on the cross. The interiors and

sometimes exteriors of the architectural environments were fantastically populated by life-sized sculptures and filled with details that connected the pilgrims' everyday experiences to those of Christ's, however anachronous they might have been (Wittkower, 1978, p.177). The intense focus on the physical presence of Christ and the saints, displayed through the spectacular realism of the multi-media scenes in ways that were unavailable to the pilgrim to Jerusalem, served as a strategy to substitute Varallo for the real Holy Land by tangibly connecting the pilgrim to the distant Biblical past through 'material stuff' (Bynum, 2011).

This materially-rich variation of the holy land was attractive to renaissance pilgrims for its performative possibilities. Although Franciscan devotional practices – promoted by Saint Francis himself and employed from Saint Bonaventure to Bernard of Clairvaux – already encouraged the active physical and emotional participation of a believer in Christ's life and death, the Franciscan guides at the Sacro Monte di Varallo were able to couple their body-mind cultivation techniques with the built environment of the pilgrimage site to elicit powerful emotional connections between the renaissance pilgrims and the Biblical past (Hood, 1984, p.307). To heighten the devotional experience at Varallo, the Franciscan friars guided pilgrims to touch simulacra during their prayers. For example, pilgrims were encouraged to hold a sculpture of the infant Jesus in their arms in the spaces dedicated to the *Nativity* and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in 'Bethlehem'; later in the itinerary, pilgrims would kneel at the base of the cross, where relics allegedly brought from the Holy Land by Fra Caimi were placed, and rubbed personal prayer beads and other devotional items against them to transfer their holy power (Hood, 1984, p.306; Nova, 1995, p.117; Lasansky, 2010, p.262). Such practices physically implicated the pilgrim within the affective narrative of the multi-media spaces and, at key points in the pilgrimage itinerary, reproduced the actions of contemporaries to the real holy places in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Pilgrims to the real Holy Land routinely rubbed the surfaces of sacred objects and monuments, above all the Holy Sepulchre, to transfer their sacred power to their hands and the objects they held. Although most of the objects at Varallo did not boast authentic connections to the ancient Biblical past, tactile contact with the surrogate bodies and relics provided a tangible means to inhabit the identity positions of Christ's mother, his followers and his prosecutors, as well as to perform the actions of renaissance-era pilgrims to Holy Land sites. That is, the performative engagement with material things –anthropomorphic statues,

inhabited landscapes and concrete objects – fostered an environment in which the pilgrim's body replicated both the bodily performances of Biblical people, such as Mary holding her infant son, and reproduced the experience of accessing contemporary relics, such as the tomb of Christ, in Jerusalem. Thus the site's substitutive sacrality and promise of transformation rested with the participation of pilgrims in actively constructing narratives about the site's material objects and landscape.

Performing the holy land: renaissance pilgrims and somaesthetic devotion

To begin to understand how and why the artistic programme at the Sacro Monte di Varallo was so effective to a late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century audience, the site must be viewed as it originally was intended. That is, any assessment of artistic style at Varallo must take into account the original viewing conditions of the pilgrims, which demanded the full body-mind immersion of pilgrims into the works. To ensure optimal conditions for transformative experiences on the Sacro Monte di Varallo, the Franciscans supplied what Michel de Certeau has called 'strategies' for devotional experience at Varallo, while the pilgrims employed 'tactics' to perform a 'spatial acting-out of the place' (de Certeau, 1984, pp.97–8). Strategies, for de Certeau, are the various methods used by those in control of spaces to regulate and manipulate behaviours within them and tactics are the methods employed by the actual users of those spaces; these users are not in possession of the space, but, nonetheless, they occupy it and manoeuvre through it according to either pre-established rules or by alternative routes (de Certeau, 1984, p.xix). Specific strategies implemented by the Franciscans at the Sacro Monte di Varallo include leading pilgrims in choreographed devotional exercises, imposing a fixed sequence of visitation to the holy places and staging dramatic lighting conditions for pilgrims' somaesthetic encounters within the interactive spaces. Combined with the architectural and decorative programme devised by the site's Franciscan founders, these strategies were designed to foster pilgrims' heightened body-mind awareness in relation to sacred history. Through their tactics of pilgrimage prayer in and among the holy places on the mountain, the pilgrims practised the place and, in so doing, they actualised the possibilities offered by the decorative and architectural programme (de Certeau, 1984, p.117).

In one of the earliest descriptions of the experience of visiting the Sacro Monte of Varallo, dated 29 September 1507, Girolamo Morone, the humanist

and then ambassador of the King of France (and later Grand Chancellor of the Duchy of Milan), explained to the poet Lancino Curzio how his Franciscan guide made a great impact on his reception of the sacred sites:

> And so, at the foot of the mountain, I was met by a priest, a leader of the order, a man both religious and most experienced with the site where the body of Jesus was actually buried. Leading me across neighboring hills – one moment climbing, the next moment with an easy descent – he brought me into individual chapels in which images are exhibited … And he kept assuring me that all these things had been made like the place of the real Sepulchre with the same proportions, the same architecture, and with the same paintings and shapes. Truly, my Lancino, I have never seen anything more religious, more devout. *I have never seen anything that could pierce the heart more*, which could compel one to neglect everything else and follow Christ alone. Let cease henceforth those so-called Roman stations; *let end even the Jerusalem pilgrimage*. This new and most pious work repeats everything,

and *by the very simplicity of the craft and the artless architecture, the ingenious site surpasses all antiquity.*

(Wharton, 2006, p.98)

According to Morone's emphatic praise, Varallo's 'ingenious' ability to incite devotion was based on three primary conditions. First, a Franciscan guide, who had direct familiarity with the sacred sites of the real Holy Land, determined the itinerary, led the devotional exercises and accompanied the pilgrim at all times. Second, due to the geographical location of the site and the spatial configuration of its individual parts, the pilgrim necessarily used his or her body in an ambulatory fashion and often was encouraged to actively configure his or her body in relation to the images and spaces. Third, the overall aesthetic sensibility of the site was pious, simple and perhaps even 'artless'. As Morone emphasised, when the works of art were combined with the choreographed viewing itinerary, the site 'could pierce the heart' and 'compel one to … follow Christ alone'. At the Sacro Monte of Varallo, therefore, Franciscan sensibility, physical activity and artistic engagement provided the means for transformative devotion.

Figure 7.10: Gaudenzio Ferrari, Choir Screen with *Scenes from the Life of Christ*, 1513, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Varallo. (Image in the public domain)

According to a published guidebook for pilgrims, dated 1514, pilgrims to the Sacro Monte of Varallo were required to first stop at the Franciscan church of Santa Maria delle Grazie at the 'foot of the mountain', that is, the base town of Varallo, to perform devotional exercises that purified their bodies and minds (Durio, 1926; Hood, 1984, p.300; Nova, 1995, p.115). Built simultaneously with the first chapels on the holy mountain above it, and completed by 1493, the church was an integral component of the 'Holy Land' experience (Amm. Vescovile, 2003, p.5). Pilgrims entered into the barn-like space of the Italian gothic church to view vividly coloured scenes painted by Gaudenzio Ferrari in 1513 on the monumental choir screen (Figure 7.10). As they looked upward at twenty-one distinct episodes of the joys and sorrows of Christ's life and Passion, pilgrims listened and responded to the verbal cues of Franciscan guides, who exhorted them to get physical with their emotions. As instructed in the devotional tract given to pilgrims at the site, weeping was encouraged as a sign of a pilgrim's sadness of Christ's suffering and self-flagellation was viewed as a means to access Christ's pain (Durio, 1926; Nova, 1995, p.115). Episodes illustrated on the screen provided graphic focus for such meditations, as did the multi-media environments on the holy mountain itself, also created by Gaudenzio Ferrari between 1505–28.

On the mountain above the church, pilgrims channelled this meditative focus to the artistic environments found within each of the *luoghi sancti*. As previously described, the architectural complex representing 'Bethlehem', including its sculptures, figures, and overall spatial plan, is among a select number of structures that largely retains its early-sixteenth-century artistic programme. It thereby provides a material testament of the founders' original aims to combine aesthetic and somatic devotional experience. Renaissance pilgrims accessed the building from a steep path surrounded by trees and a terraced landscape. The entrance led to a massive, dioramic space filled with life-sized, polychrome terracotta statues and densely populated wall murals that stretched from the floor of the room to its high, curved ceiling (Figures 7.2, 7.11–7.13). Constructed between 1519 and 1528, and decorated by Gaudenzio Ferrari, the space presented an awe-inspiring scene of the *Procession of the Magi*.

Viewed frontally, the composition of the scene is arranged from left to right, with life-sized sculptures of three Magi, their attendants and horses horizontally arranged across the space of the room (Figure 7.2). In the

Figure 7.11: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Procession of the Magi* (view of left corner), 1519–28, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

foreground of the lower walls, Ferrari painted colourful crowds of men riding on horseback or processing on foot in unison with the sculpted Magian retinue before them (Figure 7.11). Fanciful scenes of pastoral life filled the middle ground of the wall and, on the curved ceiling, a brilliant blue sky streaked with white clouds stretched upward and over the heads of the pilgrims. Later interventions in the architecture abruptly dissected the frescoed walls to introduce a screened porch from which visitors today must stand to look at the scene. Most likely, the room once was analogous to the scenes surrounding the *Crucifixion* of Christ, which continue uninterrupted in 360 degrees around the room, enveloping the pilgrim within the spatial frame of the scene.

The first magus, dressed in a short-sleeved, gold brocade tunic with red *calzi* and blue boots on the far left of the scene, holds a golden box in his left hand (Figure 7.11). His terracotta face, framed by long brown horse hair and a curled beard, has been painted black to represent his African origins, according to the tradition of the three wise men's origins on the three known continents of the world (Trexler, 1997). The magus pauses to allow his male attendant to unfasten his spurs, an iconographical gesture familiar to Italian audiences since at least Gentile da Fabriano's altarpiece of *Adoration of the Magi*, painted for Palla Strozzi in
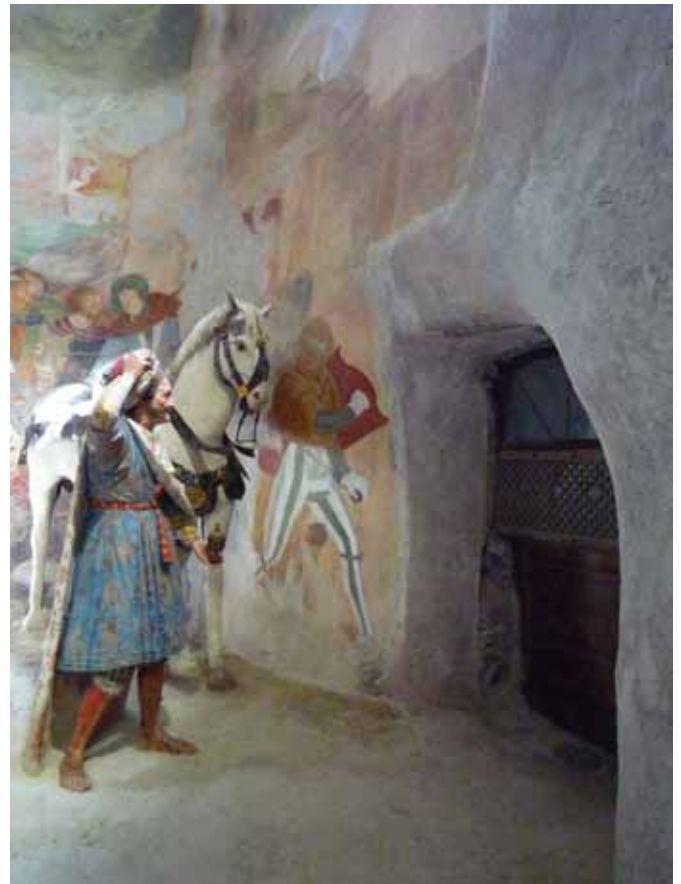

Figure 7.12: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Procession of the Magi* (view of right corner), 1519–28, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

Figure 7.13: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Procession of the Magi* (view from grotto on far right), 1519–28, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

Florence in 1423 (Terry-Fritsch, 2012a). Behind him, another male attendant, again painted black, looks upward toward a statue of a rearing horse, which literally bursts through the left wall. The second magus wears a blue tunic and red cape, and holds his gift for the Christ child in his left hand (Figure 7.2). He looks upward, presumably toward the star that guides them to the newly born Christ child, which is embedded in the ceiling just beyond the right wall. Melchior, the eldest of the three wise men located at the opposite end of the room, guides the entire procession toward the star through an opening in the far right wall, which leads directly to the scene of *Nativity* beyond in the grotto (Figures 7.12–7.13).

Although art historians have called the *Procession of the Magi* – and other multi-media scenes at Varallo – 'frozen' moments in a Biblical drama, the original viewing experience of renaissance pilgrims – at night, in the dark, and guided by Franciscans – activated the scenes and enlivened the figures in a personalised drama that unfolded for the individual participant (Wittkower, 1978, p.178; Wharton, 2006, p.104). Early-sixteenth-century pilgrims had liberal access to the space and were invited to participate in the procession (Nova, 1995, p.121; Lasansky, 2010). They could move in between the three Magi and their attendants, walk beside and touch their horses, and ultimately, complete the procession through the small door and into the grotto, where the pilgrims were encouraged to not only genuflect and pay homage to the Christ child, but to hold him in their arms, just as a loving mother (Figures 7.5–7.6). In this way, the scene was designed less as a tableau vivant, in which the spectator accessed the figures and scenery as though frozen in space, and more as a space activated by the embodied participation of the pilgrim in four-dimensions (Lasansky, 2010, pp.252–3).

Art historians have justly drawn attention to the 'reality effect' or 'hyperreality' of this and the other multi-media environments at Varallo, a reference to both the life-sized scale and mimetic attention given to the sculptures and their settings (Freedberg, 1989, pp.192–200; Nova, 1995, pp.119–23; Panzanelli, 1999; Wharton, 2006, p.101). Yet the aesthetic quality of the works, in particular their level of verism, was significantly tempered by the original viewing

Figure 7.14: Giovanni Tabacchetti and Giovanni d'Enrico, Detail of Christ's encounter with Veronica, *The Road to Calvary* (in daylight), 1599–1600, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

conditions for the *luoghi sancti*, which were often experienced in the near darkness (Hood, 1985, p.302). Lit by oil torches and lanterns held in the hand and lamps affixed to the wall, individual sculpted and frescoed figures of the environments were highlighted at different moments in the pilgrim's experience and were coordinated with the verbal cues provided by the attendant Franciscan guide. The nighttime viewing conditions encouraged focused attention and heightened sensory awareness, as well as enhanced the somaesthetic drama of preambulation in semi-darkness followed by the encounter with one of the *luoghi sancti* (Hood, 1984, p.300).

The artists who created the various multi-media scenes on the Sacro Monte di Varallo anticipated the impact of lighting on the original viewing conditions for pilgrims. As with later Baroque multi-media environments, Gaudenzio Ferrari and other participating artists at the Sacro Monte di Varallo constructed hidden light sources within the various architectural spaces. Openings in walls and ceilings would have allowed sunlight to stream into the spaces during the daytime open visitation hours; at night,

torches would have been used to artificially stream light into the room as well. As seen in the photographs documenting opposing daylight and night conditions in *The Road to Calvary*, the details of the painted backgrounds of the interactive spaces were largely blacked out during these night exercises, save for the crowds of figures pressed against the foreground of the walls (Figures 7.14 and 7.15). The stark contrasts in the painted sky picked up the flickering light of the torches and contributed to the feeling of a spectacular event that unfolded before the very eyes of the pilgrim. In such night conditions, the wall paintings were given atmospheric depth and chiaroscuro through the real-time lighting conditions and those figures pressed to the foreground of the painting appeared as though they had the ability to step forward and into the real space of the pilgrim. In this way, the paintings share affinities with what Otto Demus has called 'icons in space' (Demus, 1976; Pentcheva, 2006, pp.631–55).

Both the lighting and the design of the multi-media spaces drew heightened attention to dual visual modes of artistic realism and artifice, a purposeful aesthetic combination that anticipated the dramatic baroque

Figure 7.15: Giovanni Tabacchetti and Giovanni d'Enrico, Detail of Christ's encounter with Veronica, *The Road to Calvary* (in night lighting), 1599–1600, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

style of Caravaggio and GianLorenzo Bernini. This aesthetic, already found in certain fifteenth-century examples of painting preceding Gaudenzio Ferrari's creations, may arguably be called an early form of 'meraviglia', the artistic principle that later defined Roman and Lombard art of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century (Terry, 2007, pp.38–53). The production of *meraviglia*, or a sense of awe, wonder, or amazement in the spectator, had in large part to do with the ability of the artist to represent the subject visually in a way that both enticed the viewer into a personal relationship with the figure or scene represented through mimetic illusionism and, at the same time, drew attention to the artifice of the work. The aim was to move the viewer by means of the persuasiveness of the craft, yet to do so in such a way as to simultaneously draw attention to the artistic hand that created it. The primary means by which this dual aim was achieved was through the tension between the breathless art forms and the living, sentient body of the pilgrim-viewer.

The mode of viewing inspired by the competing static and dynamic forms within the architectural space, a scene at once activated by the motion of artificial lights and the living, sentient bodies of the pilgrim participants and at the same time emphatically silent and unmoving, was performative. The pilgrim did not view from the outside looking in, as though positioned in front of a painting, but rather was able to participate by physically entering into the scene and becoming part of it. Since the sculptures were created in tandem with, and indeed were designed to interact with, the frescoed onlookers on the walls, the pilgrims were placed in positions to likewise serve as conduits that completed the spatial and psychological connection to the Biblical event.

This mode of active and performative viewing made the distant past accessible not simply through the vivid visual evocation of history, but through the creation of prosthetic memories as well. As Alison Landsberg has discussed, prosthetic memories are intimate, privatised versions of past events that one has not lived through, yet which are formed through first-hand experiences (Landsberg, 2003, pp.144–61; Landsberg, 2004). Prosthetic memories, Landsberg explains, 'are not "authentic" or natural, but rather are derived from engagement with mediated representations … like an artificial limb, these memories are actually worn on the body; these are sensuous memories' (Landsberg, 2003, p.149). In the creation of prosthetic memory, neither a complete nor accurate portrayal of the past is necessary. Rather, most important is the participant's body-mind engagement with scenarios that have the

potential to construct an affective relationship to the past event.

The architectural space housing the Holy Sepulchre at Varallo was structured to foster such affective, prosthetic memories through body-mind practices. Finished under Fra Caimi in 1491 as a reproduction of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the *luogo sancto* strove to improve upon the 'real thing' by providing additional affective scaffolding for the pilgrim through subtle deviations in its architectural form and more explicit deviations in its decoration (Figure 7.8). During the renaissance, pilgrims to the real Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem necessarily spent extended periods of time inside of the church that housed it, since it was customary for the Muslim guards in control of the site to lock pilgrims into the church overnight once they paid their entrance fees (Poggibonsi, [1346–50] 1945, p.16). On certain feasts, pilgrims would be locked into the church for several days at a time. This prolonged visitation often proved to be a distraction from the holy experience as opposed to a benefit, since pilgrims of many different religious persuasions were locked into the relatively small confines of the church at once, including non-believers who set up bazaars on the inside of the locked doors. During their extended stay within the church, pilgrims were assigned to Franciscan guardians who gave them rules of behaviour to follow within the church, including warnings not to shove or push others, deface property, traffic with Eastern merchants, nor waste the evening eating or drinking (Peters, 1985, pp.442–3). That such warnings were given is an indication of the pervasiveness of such conduct. Indeed, travel writers such as Fra Felix Fabri made a point to give detailed accounts of such bad behaviour inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to highlight the difficulties of performing spiritual devotion in the holy city in the late fifteenth century (Fabri, [1480s] 1971, p.106).

The experience at the Holy Sepulchre at the Sacro Monte di Varallo was designed to eliminate such distractions and to highlight the pilgrims' awareness of their somaesthetic engagement with the space in ways that were unavailable to pilgrims to the 'real thing'. As at the real sepulchre in Jerusalem, access to the tomb at Varallo was preceded by two carefully constructed thresholds that were intended to draw attention to the pilgrim's proprioception and a heightened sense of the self in relation to the immediate environs of the *luogo sancto*. The first, accessed from the courtyard plateau representing 'Jerusalem', led the pilgrim into a hemispherical vestibule dedicated to the 'angel of the Lord [who] descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it'

(Matthew 28: 2–3). At Varallo, the 'stone' featured was the miraculous rock found by Caimi's workers when they broke ground for the site. Already within this first space, the atmospheric conditions reflected the site's sacred importance. Windowless and low-vaulted, the vestibule offered a quiet, cool space for the pilgrim to begin his or her focus on Christ's sacrifice (Lasansky, 2010, p.263).

On direct access with the first threshold lay the second, which led to the tomb. An inscription verified that the threshold led to an 'authentic' space that was 'similar' to that of Jerusalem ('SIMILE.E.IL.STO. SEPVLCRO.DE.YV.XPO') (Figure 7.16). As in Jerusalem, access to that space was through a small, shallow door that forced the pilgrim to compress his or her body inward toward itself. In the version at Varallo, the door was even more diminutive, roughly 105 cm or slightly less than three and a half feet high, thus forcing the pilgrim to shuffle through the door with deeply bent knees or even to crawl. The threshold literally brought pilgrim low in a physical manner and in so doing effectively forced the pilgrim into a form of prostration as he or she approached Christ's sepulchre inside the inner chamber. It also created the somaesthetic conditions of *meraviglia*, for once the pilgrim fully crossed over the threshold and was allowed to stand again, he or she immediately was confronted with Christ's battered, lifeless body in the tomb (Figure 7.17).

Veristically carved and painted by Gaudenzio Ferrari in the first decade of the sixteenth century, the wooden sculpture of Christ offered the means to realise the experience of Christ's followers after his body was taken down from the cross and placed in the sepulchre. Unlike the marble slab that covered the interior absence of a body within the tomb in Jerusalem, pilgrims at Varallo's sepulchre were allowed to approach and touch Christ's dead flesh (Hood, 1986, p.301). In the light of a torch at night, the redness of the blood issuing from the wounds on Christ's hands, feet and side signaled areas to touch and behold; his docile face, similarly covered with blood from the violence rendered by the crown of thorns, served as a site for devotional kisses (Figure 7.18). Holes in the hand of the sculpted figure allowed for digital exploration and even penetration of Christ (Figure 7.19). According to Saint Bernard, the crucified body of Christ was an offering to his devotees: 'the head bowed to kiss, the

Figure 7.16: Pilgrim crossing the threshold into the inner sanctum of Holy Sepulchre at Varallo, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

Figure 7.17: Pilgrim entering into the inner sanctum of the Holy Sepulchre at Varallo, architectural space constructed by 1491, wooden figure of the *Dead Christ* by Gaudenzio Ferrari installed in first decade of sixteenth century, Sacro Monte di Varallo (Photo: author)

arms outspread to embrace, the hands pierced to pour out gifts, the feet held fast to remain with us, and the body full extended to spend Himself wholly for us' (de Voragine, [1260] 1969, p.212). Like the Apostle Thomas, who doubted his eyes and needed tactile confirmation of Christ's death and resurrection, so too were the pilgrims allowed access to the physical proof of Christ's bodily suffering (Terry-Fritsch, 2012b, pp.15–37).

One aspect of Gaudenzio Ferrari's sculpture of the *Dead Christ* that largely has been overlooked by art historians is the articulated jointing of the shoulders, which indicate that the sculpture had kinetic potential (Figure 7.18). Other extant sculptures from the original artistic programme of the Sacro Monte di Varallo, such as the apostles surrounding the table at the *Last Supper* (Figure 7.4), also were constructed to facilitate the manipulation of limbs in a variety of poses. The arms of Ferrari's sculpture of the *Dead Christ* in the Holy Sepulchre were able to be moved into alternate positions, including flat beside his body and outstretched as though in an embrace. Such kinetic sculptures were used in Passion Week dramas of the *Depositio Crucis*, which featured wooden sculptures of Christ that were nailed vertically upon a cross and then taken down and placed in a tomb in re-enactment

of Christ's death and burial. One can infer from other documented accounts of late medieval and early modern Italian interactions with such hinged Christ sculptures that certain pilgrims may have approached Ferrari's sculpture in intimate ways, including holding his body or even crawling into the tomb for a full-body embrace. By emphasising the human element of Christ's Passion, his literal death as grasped by a mourner at his tomb, the Holy Sepulchre at Varallo incorporated 'praesentia' into the distant and not easily graspable Biblical past (Brown, 1981; Hood, 1984, p.301). Through the simulated presence of the divine, audiences of believers were encouraged to identify with that past, albeit through counterfeit means (Molinari, 1975, p.101; Newbigen, 1990, pp.361–75).

The multi-media environments of Varallo were intended as scenarios for an experiential relationship to Biblical history. Pilgrims were placed within replicated environments from Christ's life and death, and were asked to assume the identity position of Christ, his mother, family, followers or foes. The pilgrim's prosthetic relationship to the Biblical past was contingent on the ability of the artistic programme to index this history and to draw attention to the pilgrim's own sense of himself at the same time. In this way,

Figure 7.18: Detail of the *Dead Christ*, showing moveable shoulder joint, by Gaudenzio Ferrari, first decade of sixteenth century, Holy Sepulchre, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

Figure 7.19: Detail of the hands of the *Dead Christ*, by Gaudenzio Ferrari, first decade of sixteenth century, Holy Sepulchre, Sacro Monte di Varallo. (Photo: Stefan Fritsch)

the pilgrim was both asked to play a role, as though an actor in a drama, and simultaneously was asked to recognise him or herself in the present (Landsberg, 2004, p.135). The pilgrim's somaesthetic interaction within the decorative programme provided the means by which the pilgrim came to identify with scripture or historical time (Rappaport, 1979, pp.173–221; Goffman, 2007, pp.61–5; Hood, 1986, pp.195–206). At the same time, the mindful manipulation of the pilgrim's body functioned as what the performance studies theorist Diana Taylor has called a 'vital act of transfer' (Taylor, 2003, pp.2–3). That is, it transmitted carefully crafted 'social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through reiterated acts, or what Richard Schechner has called "twice-behaved behavior"' (Taylor, 2003, pp.2-3; Schechner, 1985, p.36).

Pilgrims to Varallo performed devotion through active participation in the *luoghi sancti*. Their actions often mimicked the actions of pilgrims to the real holy land, a strategy to create a somatic memory of the Varallo pilgrimage that was comparable to the real thing. In certain cases of simulated relics at Varallo, such as the impression of Christ's footsteps in the Chapel of the Ascension, the act of touching replicated relics was rewarded with plenary indulgences, just as in the real Holy Land (Nova, 1995, p.124). In addition, however, pilgrims to Varallo were offered a performative space to build further somatic memories that were unavailable to pilgrims to the real Holy Land. Through active immersion in the painted and sculpted environments of the Sacro Monte di Varallo, pilgrims were enticed to personalise the sacred scenes and to build prosthetic memories. The vivid illusionism of the sculpted figures, witnessed in the flickering light of torches against the evening darkness, provided a focus for their mindful prayers as well as a means to physically connect with sacred history. The artistic programme was designed to offer pilgrims the opportunity to experience a heightened somaesthetic encounter with the divine in a way that was different from, and perhaps better than, the real thing.

Conclusion

The framework of somaesthetics has been used throughout this essay to examine the strategies of the Franciscan founders of the Sacro Monte di Varallo and the corresponding tactics of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century pilgrims of the Holy Land experience. Franciscan friars, beginning with Fra Caimi in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, purposefully designed the architectural and decorative programme as a strategy to substitute a site that possessed neither real things nor real places for the Holy Land. By drawing attention to the ways in which the holy mountain relied on pilgrims' body-mindfulness in order to fulfill its promise as a sacred pilgrimage site, this essay analysed some of the tactics of early pilgrims and offered an explanation of the powerful affective bonds that were produced between the landscape, the works of art and the pilgrim-audience. The architectural and decorative programme at Varallo created a frame for pilgrims to act out sacred history; they assumed a prosthetic relationship to this history through their body-mind engagement.

Furthermore, by considering the historical experience of the site, this essay has provided an alternative explanation for artistic style at Varallo, which, as argued here, must be understood through the somaesthetics of the artistic programme's original viewers. The pilgrims to the site were asked to perform body-mindfulness to not only activate the multi-media scenes, but to complete them as well. Such performative engagement with the sacred histories at Varallo fostered the production of authentic emotions and memories of past events. These affective experiences were then authenticated by the Franciscans at the site, who affirmed Varallo's holy connections to Jerusalem and to God himself. The opportunity for such first-hand engagement also provided a key means by which the Sacro Monte di Varallo staged its own success as a pilgrimage site. The active participation in both the prayer practices and the Franciscan touching exercises also brought promise of eternal salvation. Given such a powerful mode of communicating God's grace, it is hardly surprising that, when the Roman Church faced the challenge of the Protestant movement, it turned to the style of *meraviglia* at the Sacro Monte di Varallo to convey its message and developed and promoted new strategies for pious and personalised interaction with the sacred mysteries based on practices at the holy mountain.

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ALIENATA DA' SENSI: REFRAMING BERNINI'S *S. TERESA*

Andrea Bolland

Abstract

Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Ecstasy of St Teresa *for the Cornaro Chapel (1647–52) is perhaps the artist's most sensually-charged creation, and the apparently physical nature of Teresa's ecstasy is today even acknowledged in survey textbooks. Teresa herself opened the door to this reading when, in describing her spiritual ecstasy, she admitted that 'the body doesn't fail to share in some of it, and even a great deal'. Yet the balance between sense and spirit in the sculpture emerges somewhat differently if it is viewed (literally and figuratively) in context: as an altarpiece in a chapel where its presentation is structured as a 'performance', complete with spectators or witnesses, and as the central image of the left transept of Santa Maria della Vittoria – a church whose dedication derives from the power of the image (the* Madonna della vittoria*) displayed above the main altar. If the statue group is read as a divine ecstasy witnessed, rather than a mystic encounter experienced, it engages another discourse, with its own metaphors and meanings. The saint's swoon has less to do with the erotic capacity of the senses than with their absence, presenting a rather different challenge to an artist celebrated for his ability to transform insensate stone into vulnerable flesh.*

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ALIENATA DA' SENSI: REFRAMING BERNINI'S S. TERESA *

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> In short, Bernini has revealed in this location [the Villa Borghese] no less than in other parts of Rome his very great judgment, and especially in the Church of the Vittoria, where he expressed S. Teresa, who, transfixed by her Lord's amorous arrow, falls into a sweet deliquescence, and just as she is seen to be in ecstasy, so she makes him who gazes fall into ecstasy by virtue of the excellence of that great master who made her.
>
> Luigi Scaramuccia, *Le finezze dei pennelli italiani,* 1674, p.18

In the passage above, the artist and sometime art critic Luigi Scaramuccia (1616–80) concludes his discussion of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Roman works with a flourish, singling out for special praise the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52), his sculpted altarpiece for the Cornaro Chapel (Figures 8.1, 8.2). The closing conceit – that the spectator ends up mirroring certain features of the work at which he gazes – was certainly not Scaramuccia's invention, and like many such tropes, it probably reveals as much about the formulaic nature of early modern art criticism as it does about the particular character of Bernini's chapel. Yet his words – which focus on the viewer's response, and suggest that life imitates art – are well-chosen, inasmuch as the viewer's relationship to the altarpiece, and the chapel it is part of, is complex. Looking into the chapel one witnesses, and participates in, an exchange between two modes of seeing – natural, sense-based vision and supernatural, mystic vision.

The subject of the altarpiece is the Spanish mystic and founder of the Discalced Carmelite order, St Teresa of Avila (1515–82; canonised 1622). She is shown in the throes of her most famous ecstatic vision – the so-called transverberation – in which an angel appears and pierces her heart repeatedly with an arrow. Bernini

Figure 8.1: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cornaro Chapel. Rome, S. Maria della Vittoria, 1647–52. (Photo: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

depicts Teresa limply reclining on a cloud, seemingly kept from total collapse by that angel, who holds onto a fold of her drapery. She appears largely shut off from the external, sensual world; her eyes are nearly closed, her mouth but slightly open and her limbs inert. In contrast, for example, to Adriaen Collaert's engraving of 1613, the viewer is not shown the full content of Teresa's vision (Figure 8.3). Yet the nature of that vision is implied – by the angel at Teresa's left (dispatched *by* God), by the gilded representation of light rays behind and natural light above the group (traditionally associated *with* God) and by the Holy Spirit painted in the vault of the chapel itself (one third – so to speak – *of* God). The near absence (or perhaps synecdochal presence) of that divine element – which both completes the narrative and guarantees its significance – engages viewers very differently from Collaert's version; rather than passive spectators, they are active participants in making the partial into a whole.

If the spectator is the medium by which meaning unfolds, his or her relationship with the altarpiece is itself mediated. Most evidently, the view of (or approach to) it is framed by the presence of another audience: the four half-length figures rendered in high relief on each of the lateral walls (Figure 8.4). These reliefs

Figure 8.2: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cornaro Chapel, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, altarpiece. Rome, S. Maria della Vittoria. (Photo: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.3: Adriaen Collaert, *Ecstasy of St Teresa*, engraving, 1613, plate 8 of *Vita s. virginis Teresiae a Iesu*, Antwerp, Johannes Galle, Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library, 1613. (Image in the public domain, downloaded from Archives.org)

portray several generations of males from the Venetian Cornaro family – including, on the viewer's right, the patron, Cardinal Federico Cornaro. Set above the lateral doors of the chapel, hence at the same height as the altarpiece, they are placed at an intersection of the actual architectural space of the chapel and a virtual space suggested by the perspectival reliefs behind them. Set at right angles to the altarpiece, the figures attend to it in varying degrees. The three figures nearest the altar (two on the left, one on the right) are turned toward it, while the others manifest a strange lack of curiosity, an element art historians have explained in various ways (Wittkower, [1955] 1997, p.158; Lavin, 1980, pp.101–3; Warwick, 2012, p.57).

Another mediating element involves the church itself, or more particularly, the juncture of the Cornaro Chapel (which is also the left transept arm) and the apse. This is the intersection at which anyone who visits the chapel 'pivots' – makes a half-turn away from the main altarpiece (the eponymous *Madonna della Vittoria*, destroyed in 1833, now replaced by a copy), and toward that in the chapel. The painting thus consigned to peripheral vision has an importance that is belied by its unimposing appearance. It was both altarpiece and relic: a picture, partially desecrated by protestants, that was carried into the Battle of White Mountain (1620) and credited with the Catholic league's victory (Figure 8.5). It thus signifies the defeat of heresy, but also, obliquely, the power of art (Bätschmann, 1998, p.216). The painting's injuries were inflicted according to a particular logic: the eyes of all of the figures in the painting, save Jesus, were gouged out. This seems meaningful in light of the fact that the painting was a hybrid of the Adoration of the infant Jesus and Adoration of the shepherds, both of which are epiphanies. The viewer is thus implicated in a sort of triangulation involving various kinds of vision, blindness, visibility and invisibility (and implicitly, absence and presence). It is the relationship among those elements that this essay explores.

Figure 8.4: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cornaro Chapel, Cornaro family members, detail of right hand wall. Rome, S. Maria della Vittoria. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.5: Madonna della Vittoria, engraved copy of the altarpiece formerly in S. Maria della Vittoria. frontispiece to Caramuel Lobkowitz, *Compendiosa relatio thaumaturgae imaginis beatae virginis Mariae de victoria*, Prague, Universitas Carolo-Ferdinandea in Collegio Societatis Iesu ad S. Clementem, 1672. Prague: Czech National Library. (Image in the public domain)

Irving Lavin – whose exhaustive treatment of the Cornaro Chapel in *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts* remains the starting point for all further investigation – posits a complex iconographic program in which all elements of the chapel work together to create a eucharistic meaning (Lavin, 1980, pp.77–165). While Lavin does not suggest that the artist authored the theological program, he does presume Bernini to be learned in such matters and well-versed in the writings of S. Teresa. This characterization of the artist's learnedness has deep roots: the artist's son and biographer Domenico writes that the Jesuit Giovanni Paolo Oliva compared conversations with the elder Bernini on spiritual matters to thesis examinations (Bernini, 1713, p.171; Lavin, 1980, p.4; Lavin, 1972, p.160). While Lavin's knowledge of Bernini and of his art is surely unparalleled among modern scholars, every art historian, perhaps especially those who work on the early modern period, risks turning the 'learned artist' of the past into an art historian *avant la lettre*: i.e., into someone who creates meaningful objects using the same intellectual tools and processes that his or her modern counterpart uses to take them apart.

This essay does not attempt anything as ambitious as Lavin's treatment: not every aspect of the chapel is addressed, and Teresa's life story, writings and iconography are not examined in depth. To some degree, Lavin's thoroughness renders this unnecessary, but setting these aside also allows different frames to be placed around the work and, perhaps, different aspects of Bernini's intelligence to emerge. Teresa's writings are rich, highly personal, self-deprecating and at times self-contradictory, as seen, for instance, in her differentiations between various degrees and types of rapture and union. Although these texts are no doubt important for the overall meaning of the chapel, they are less useful for understanding the figural language used by Bernini in his altarpiece. Here, Teresa's writings will be placed within a larger constellation

of texts, mostly vernacular (often translations from Latin or Spanish), on ecstasy and individual ecstatic experiences – all of which give some indication of the general assumptions about mystical encounters with God. While Bernini was no doubt commissioned to represent a particular episode in the life of S. Teresa, the work's significance – in itself and in the context of the chapel – lies in its address of a more fundamental theme: the union of, but also the distance between, the visible and the invisible, the human and the divine.

Visibility and invisibility

A thread that runs through much of the commentary on Bernini's statue involves the *visible* rather than the invisible: the display – taken as either shocking, amusing or transgressive – of an ecstasy that is seemingly more physical than spiritual. The best-known early response is that of Charles de Brosses, in a letter written from Rome in 1739. After describing the swooning saint and smiling angel, he quips that if this is divine love, he is familiar with it (De Brosses, 1799, vol.2, p.334). The earthly nature of Teresa's rapture became a commonplace of Roman travel literature in the centuries following the statue's completion (e.g., Lalande, 1769, vol.3, pp.528–9; Magnan, 1778, vol.1, cols.57–8). Many contemporary readings in fact treat this as self-evident, unconstructed, lying outside the boundaries of historical interpretation (Slade 1995, p.95; Spear, 1997, p.96; Schama, 2006, p.80; Binstock, 2009, p.227, et al.). In this they seem to follow Jacques Lacan's oft-quoted, dismissive statement about Teresa (who is oddly conflated with the Cornaro Chapel statue): 'you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand (*comprendre tout de suite*) that she's coming. There's no doubt about it' (Lacan, [1978] 1995, p.76).

As scholars have long pointed out (either to explain away, or to confirm the statue's erotic qualities), mystical literature itself is often highly suggestive, Teresa's account of her angelic encounter being a prime example. In chapter 29 of her autobiography (here translated from the late sixteenth-century Italian edition), she writes of the event apparently portrayed in Bernini's altarpiece:

> It pleased the Lord that while in this condition [i.e. immobilized by the intensity of the soul's agony] I sometimes saw this vision, seeing an angel next to me, on my left side, in corporeal form, which I do not usually see, except extraordinarily. Even though angels have many times represented themselves to me, I do not see them; rather, they are like the earlier vision I spoke of previously [i.e., an intellectual vision].

> But in this vision it pleased the Lord that I would see him in this way: he was not large, but small and very beautiful, with his face lit up, so that he appeared to be one of the very eminent angels, who seem all aflame, and must be those that are called Seraphim ... Now this one that I spoke of, I saw in his hand a long golden arrow (*dardo*), with an iron tip that seemed to have a bit of fire, and he seemed to pass this through my heart several times and reach my innermost parts (*viscere*), and it seemed to me that in pulling it out he took them with it, and left me entirely aflame with the love of God. And the pain (*dolor*) was so great that it made me cry out (*mi faceva dar quei gemiti*), and so excessive was the sweetness (*soavità*) this very great pain gave me that one cannot wish it to go away. The soul is not content with anything less than God. This is not a corporeal pain, but a spiritual one, although the body also participates in it, and not a little; it is a caress (*carozza* [presumably meant to be *carezza*]) so sweet that passes between the soul and God, that I pray that his Majesty in his goodness allows anyone who thinks that perhaps I am lying to taste it (*lo facci gustare*)

(Teresa of Avila, [1599], 1613, pp.205–6).

Not surprisingly, there is no mention of eroticism in the accounts of the chapel by Bernini's two biographers, the Florentine art collector and writer Filippo Baldinucci (1625–97) and the artist's youngest son Domenico (1657–1723). The two are similar, though Domenico offers a fuller description of the altarpiece: 'He represented the Saint in an attitude of sweetest ecstasy, pulled outside of herself, having abandoned herself, unconscious (*fuori di se rapita, & in se abbandonata, e svenuta*), and near her, an angel – balancing himself with his wings in the air – sweetly wounds her heart with the golden arrow of divine love' (Bernini, 1713, p.83). These terms, as will be seen below, are consistent with the language used to discuss (and particularly to describe examples of) religious ecstasy. Yet there is an almost insistent quality to Domenico's characterization: 'sweetest ecstasy' is thrice amplified, or perhaps refined: *fuori di se rapita, in se abbandonata, svenuta*. The images conjured by these words – a thing divided, an empty husk – are somewhat unexpected, inasmuch as they seem inimical to the solidity of the life-sized marble figure.

It is easy to imagine that this language, downplaying the work's materiality, was penned in response to criticisms of the statue (and the ecstasy it represents) for excessive and indecorous physicality. The earliest

preserved example of this criticism in fact dates to the late seventeenth century: the comment in an anonymous anti-Berninian tract that the artist made her both prostrate and prostituted (Previtali, 1962, p. 58; Gastel, 2013, p.259 n.382; Warwick, 2012, pp.66–7). Yet apart from any general defense of his father, Domenico's metaphors do correspond to (and perhaps make sense of) one of the statue's more striking features: Teresa's drapery, which is voluminous, but decidedly not volumetric. Her hands and feet emerge at intervals around its perimeter, yet the massive folds give little hint of a body connecting them all. The drapery's odd appearance was in fact remarked upon by several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visitors to the chapel (Lalande, 1769, vol.3, p.529; Winckelmann, 1781, vol.2, p.245; Westmacott, 1845, p.463).

Teresa's incorporeality becomes particularly apparent when compared to Bernini's other depiction of a reclining female ecstatic, the *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, completed in 1674 for the Altieri Chapel in S. Francesco a Ripa (Figure 8.6). The drapery in both is equally luxuriant, and in each there is a shallow concavity at mid-torso. Yet in Ludovica, the body covered by that drapery is still clearly articulated, the limbs beneath appearing to be chiastically arranged, as if touched by divine artifice. Her right arm is bent at an acute angle, the hand pressed delicately against the fabric just below her breast. This gesture was frequently used in images of ecstatic saints, and in his iconographic handbook, Cesare Ripa uses it for the figure of *Desiderio verso Iddio,* desire for God (Figure 8.7). His hand likewise rests just below his breast – in this case presumably to avoid the flames that erupt from it, symbolizing the burning desire of the heart and mind toward God (Ripa, 1618, p.133). If Ludovica's heart is on fire, its representation is displaced to the images of flaming hearts throughout the chapel (Careri, 1995, pp.68–9).

Bernini used this gesture earlier, in his memorial monument to Maria Raggi (*c.*1643, Rome, S. Maria sopra Minerva). And judging from one of the surviving sketches for the Cornaro chapel, he also contemplated using it for S. Teresa (Figure 8.8). That sketch differs from the final sculpture in other ways as well: Teresa is shown more upright, and her body twists slightly at the waist. The latter is a subtle version of the *figura serpentinata,* the pose (associated most strongly with Michelangelo) that imbued a figure with grace and with

Figure 8.6: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, Altieri Chapel. Rome, S. Francesco a Ripa, 1674. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.7: *Desiderio verso Iddio*, from Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, 1618. (Image in the public domain, downloaded from Archives.org)

Figure 8.8: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Study for S. Teresa*, Leipzig, black chalk on grey paper, Museum der bildenden Künste, *c.*1647. (Photo: bpk, Berlin/Art Resource, NY)

spirit, and suggested the invisible presence of a living soul (Lavin and Gordon, 1981, pp.88–99, Summers, 1972, pp.283–92). In the final marble statue, however, Teresa's body does not twist in any apparent way, nor does she bring her hand to her chest; that gesture in fact seems to be replaced by the angel's left hand, which holds, or lifts, a piece of drapery between its fingers. By the eighteenth century, that gesture became part into the lascivious reading of the group: the angel's smile is explained by the fact that he uncovers a bit of her breast (Lalande, 1769, vol.3, p.528). More decorously, Lavin suggests that the angel uses the drapery to lift Teresa to heaven (Lavin, 1980, pp.110–11). Bernini used this motif elsewhere in representing an ecstatic saint,

in this case one that is clearly being elevated (Figure 8.9). In the altarpiece of the Raimondi chapel (Rome, S. Pietro in Montorio), St Francis is lifted heavenward by a crowd of angels, one of whom delicately holds up an edge of the saint's hood. Yet that angel, and another to his right grasp Francis firmly by the arms, which would seem to separate the lifting of cloth from the mechanics of angelic elevation. Thus the angel's gesture, and perhaps the related theme of Teresa's seemingly empty garment, may refer to some other aspect of ecstatic union. Before returning to this question, it is useful to explore some seventeenth-century concepts of ecstasy, or union, and to look at other representations of it.

Figure 8.9: Francesco Baratta, from a design by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St Francis*, Raimondi Chapel. Rome, S. Pietro in Montorio, 1640s. (Photo: author)

Embodiment and disembodiment

Returning to Domenico Bernini's description of Teresa, it is likely that his terminology alludes not solely to the disembodied appearance of the statue, but also to the physical and spiritual state of the saint it represents. In addition to the *Life* of his father, Domenico (who for a short stint in his teens was a Jesuit novice) wrote a number of books on church history (Delbeke, Levy and Ostrow, 2006, pp.29–32). In 1722 he published his *Life of the venerable father Giuseppe da Copertino.* Giuseppe (1603–63), a Franciscan friar and priest (and in 1767, saint) suffered many ecstatic episodes, during many of which he levitated, and occasionally even flew. Domenico writes about these in terms analogous to those he used to describe his father's statue of *Teresa.* Giuseppe experienced *svenimenti*, was outside of himself (*fuori di se*), or outside of his senses (*fuori di sensi*), or separated (*alienato*) from his senses (Bernini [1622] 1626, pp.23, 74, 148, 222, 220). Providing a kind of symmetry to these out of body experiences, at the conclusion of the ecstasy, he is said to have returned to himself (*ritornato in sè*). These turns of phrase have modern English equivalents, of course: people are said to be 'out of their minds,' or 'beside themselves' or to 'have come (back) to their senses'. Today these expressions have very little, if any, power as tropes, or figured speech, and even in the early modern period it was possible to use them unselfconsciously. Yet – as will be shown below – when they were used to describe people in the throes of ecstasy, the strangeness of their literal meaning would have resonated.

These characterizations of ecstasy are part of a larger body of descriptions Domenico Bernini uses throughout the text, often quoting from the testimony of actual witnesses. In other episodes of self-alienation, Giuseppe's mouth is partially open yet he does not breathe (p.124), he becomes a dead weight (p.120), his body does not move, even when subjected to painful stimuli, and (most interesting) his immobility is said to make him look like a statue (p.37). The importance of this book – published nine years after Domenico's *Life* of his father, and sixty years after the completion of the *S. Teresa* – is not its singularity or any tenuous connection to Bernini *padre*, but in the fact that its descriptions of ecstasy are entirely typical.

Teresa's autobiography uses some of the same language (for instance her body does not respond to the soul's commands to move, or even to breathe; p.205). Yet as a first-person narrative, it is inherently different from outside accounts. If it explains the meaning and context of these encounters more fully, it can also be sparse with regard to concrete details. Two aspects of the ecstatic experience contribute

to this. First, when the mystic is alienated from her own senses, description of the physical actualities (her own appearance) becomes impossible. (One might look like a statue from the outside, but it is difficult to imagine feeling like one). And second, what the soul experiences in the presence of God is difficult, if not impossible, to express. Teresa's account of her transverberation in fact evinces this. She begins with a concrete description: she *sees* the seraph who visits her; he is in *bodily* form, standing to her *left;* she *sees* the arrow in his hand, which *appears* to have a tip of flame. The description then shifts from observation at a distance to internal, subjective experience: the arrow that enters her flesh leaves her in turn empty, in pain, filled with sweetness, and aflame with love. Both body and spirit are then entwined through the metaphor of a caress (heard or felt) to describe the union of two intangibles, the soul and God. This is where the description *per se* stops, as if words fail. She ends by conceding that the only way one might understand the experience is by having it oneself: the proper symbolic expression of ecstasy is thus ecstasy, not a symbol at all, but the thing itself.

On the other hand, third person accounts – which by far outnumber the subjective accounts of the ecstatics themselves – are more specific in describing the seemingly inanimate body. Like biographical topoi generally, these tend to be variations on particular themes. In almost every text, the insensate body is said to appear dead or almost dead; as evidence of this, some note the pallor of the flesh, the extremely shallow breathing or the near absence of a pulse. In their accounts, the biographers or hagiographers often make reference to the presence of witnesses – usually other nuns or priests, but on occasion visitors such as physicians. Many of these accounts use the same simile employed by Domenico Bernini – that the ecstatic's body is like a statue made of marble, bronze or wood, or a painting, or more generally, an image; it is a lifeless simulacrum of a living body (for instance, Castillo, 1589, p.330; Villegas, 1595, p.206; Razzi, 1593, pp.380, 879; Razzi, 1601, p.106; Antoninus et al, 1606, p.27; Pio, 1615, p.222; Bartoli, 1650, p.106). One of Teresa's late sixteenth-century biographers, Francisco Ribera, uses the metaphor of stone to describe the weight of her body when she was *fuori da se*, as a sacristan discovered when he tried to move her (Riviera, 1622, p.278). As in this episode, the witnesses may become participants, attesting the truth of the ecstasy by attempting to disturb it. These attempts range from mildly amusing to borderline sadistic: hair pulling, nose pinching, piercing with sharp needles and burning with lit candles are among the listed disruptions (Lombardelli, 1586,

pp.32–3; Castillo, 1589, p.331; Silvestri, 1590, pp.35–6; Pio, 1615, p.233; Granata, 1644, pp.462; Frigerio, 1657, p.84).

These accounts are of interest for Bernini's S. Teresa in light of the presence of witnesses, but also with regard to their inattention. One of the 'common sense' explanations suggests that the majority of the Cornaros don't look at Teresa's ecstasy because their line of sight is blocked by the framing columns of the aedicula (Wittkower, 1997, p.158). The question of whether these figures can see anything is in fact a good one, though it has little to do with calculating their angle of vision. Here the ecstatic saint is literally and figuratively a piece of marble; if the Cornaro pay no attention, it is likely because – at least as far as a supernatural vision of God – there really is nothing *to* see. The action, it would seem, is elsewhere.

There is actually a pictorial tradition of including witnesses who are unable to see what is happening. The most familiar and long-lived example of this is in depictions of St Francis receiving the stigmata, accompanied by another monk, usually identified as Francis's friend and follower Brother Leo. The earliest example is the late thirteenth-century fresco in the upper church of S. Francesco, Assisi (Figure 8.10). The major thirteenth-century biographies of Francis (by Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure) do not mention anyone else being present at the stigmatisation. While art historians have advanced various justifications for his presence, no definitive answer has emerged (Gardner, 2011, p.38). The motif continues to appear in images of the stigmatisation – and Leo's repertoire of inattentive or puzzled gestures increases: he sometimes reads, sometimes sleeps, and sometimes shades his eyes from the bright light of Francis's apparition. Whether or not there is an overarching explanation for his presence, it is possible to interpret the unseeing Leo (eyes otherwise occupied, closed or blinded by the light) as a foil to Francis, an emblem of non-comprehension, set in the same landscape but inhabiting a different world. This doesn't necessarily malign Leo; as Teresa implies with regard to her own angelic encounter (similarly, a piercing), it can only be understood through experience. In the Assisi painting, Leo reads words inscribed on parchment but Francis becomes the flesh on which is written a different kind of text altogether. Bonaventure in fact contrasts Francis's stigmatisation with human artifice, invoking the language used in Exodus to describe the stone tablets of the law; the saint carries the image of the crucified Christ 'engraved in the members of his body by the finger of the living God' (Bonaventure, 1978, p.307).

Variants of the 'Brother Leo' character begin to be incorporated into images of other holy ecstatics at least as early as the sixteenth

Figure 8.10: Giotto (attributed), *Stigmatisation of S. Francis of Assisi*, fresco. Assisi, upper church, 1290s. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.11: Domenico Beccafumi, *St Catherine of Siena receiving the stigmata*, oil and gold on wood, 28.6 x 41.3 cm, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, *c.*1513–5.

century, and these eventually divide into different types. The Sienese artist Domenico Beccafumi (1486–1551) stays very close to the prototype in several early sixteenth-century paintings of S. Catherine of Siena receiving the stigmata (Gordley, 1992, p.403). In Figure 8.11 – a small panel (likely from a predella) in the Getty Museum – a Dominican tertiary and two nuns are in attendance at the miracle. Two of these figures, seated behind Catherine, appear at least cognizant that something is happening between her and the altar crucifix, and the other, (the Leo analogue) dozes on a set of steps in the near distance. As in depictions of Francis, she presents a visible contrast to the saint, in posture and degrees of consciousness. A new wrinkle, however, is the use of art works in differentiating the two. Catherine leans forward toward the figure of Christ (which, whatever its function here, is at base a work of sculpture), while the inattentive nun effectively turns her back on an altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Christ child,* set against the back wall. This particular antithesis also implicates the spectator, given that his or her relationship to the depicted altarpiece (and the real predella panel) is counter to that of the nun, and structurally replicates – albeit at a right angle – that of Catherine.

Various dynamics play out in other images of visions and ecstasies as well, often involving – as in the Beccafumi – a triangulation between ecstatic saint, depicted witness(es) and the actual viewer. In some cases, the viewer is privy to what the internal witnesses do not see, implicitly sharing with the ecstatic the otherworldly vision (Figure 8.12). In other cases, the external viewer and internal witnesses are bonded through a kind of shared ignorance: both see that the saint is in ecstasy (often hovering on their own personal cloud), but neither is privy to the actual vision (Figure 8.13). A variant on this theme links spectator and witnesses by the fact that neither sees the vision, and neither can make sense out of the ecstatic, who appears utterly shut off from the world (Figure 8.14). This last image, from Hieronymus Wierix's series of engravings depicting the life of Ignatius Loyola, shows the saint in the midst of an ecstasy that according to the inscription, lasted for a full week. Daniello Bartoli, in the *Life* of the saint published in 1650, writes that Ignatius 'was so fixed on God, that his soul, having abandoned all responsibilities for serving the body, left it with the appearance of a dead thing'; indeed had a weak pulse not been detected, the body would have been buried (Bartoli, 1650, pp.42–3). Here the image comes closer in type to what is seen in the Cornaro Chapel: the saint becomes (at least temporarily) a body left behind, as the ecstatic encounter takes place somewhere else. Its novelty is in depicting rapture as a kind of loss (of movement, of consciousness), rather than a superabundance of spirit that lifts the gaze toward heaven and the hand to the heart.

Paintings and prints depicting ecstasy similarly (though generally without witnesses) had begun to appear by the final decade of the sixteenth century –

Figure 8.12: Hieronymus Wierix, *Vision of S. Ignatius of Loyola on the journey to Rome with two Jesuits observing*, engraving from series on the *Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, *c.*1611-15. (Image in the public domain)

Figure 8.13: Adriaen Collaert, *Levitation of S. Teresa*, plate 17 of a series of 25 engravings on the Life of S. Teresa, Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library 1613. (Image digitalised by Archive.org)

Figure 8.14: Hieronymus Wierix, *S. Ignatius of Loyola in an ecstasy lasting for seven days*, engraving from his series on the Life of Ignatius of Loyola, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, *c.*1611-15. (Image in the public domain)

works similarly lacking narrative 'energy', but (unlike the Ignatius engraving) also lacking a larger narrative context. An example of this is Caravaggio's *Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy* (Figure 8.15), which is either a novel depiction of the stigmatisation (lacking the traditional cross-bearing seraph, and adding a comforting angel), or a less easily categorised encounter with God (Askew, 1969, pp.284–5; Treffers, 1988, pp.146–50; 159–60; Wallace, 2003, p.12). In contrast to previous representations of the saint (whether receiving the stigmata or in the throes of a more generic ecstasy), the narrative is strikingly understated: Francis seems barely to move, the angel is rendered less as an otherworldly apparition than a loving presence, and Brother Leo is doubly removed, by distance and by darkness. It brings to mind Bellori's characterization of Caravaggio's Cerasi Chapel *Conversion of St Paul* (another epiphany) as 'completely without action' (Bellori, 1672, p.207). A common thread in all modern readings is the painting's enrichment of the traditional means (shared wounds; similar cruciform pose) for suggesting Francis's Christlikeness. These include iconographical and formal analogies: Francis and his angelic comforter call to mind the *Dead Christ supported by an angel*, or the *Agony in the garden*, while the background figures (Leo and two others, barely visible) recall the *Annunciation to the shepherds*, the three sleeping apostles and/or the approaching soldiers at Gethsemane.

Yet Caravaggio's *Francis* is not unique. By the late sixteenth century, images of St Mary Magdalen and of St Catherine of Siena show them similarly extracted from their traditional narrative contexts. And within this overall category of images a distinction can be made between those saints who appear to possess volition, and those whose visible reactions to ecstatic bliss range from understated to non-existent – closer to the traditional depiction of Brother Leo than to that of Francis. For example, Orazio Gentileschi's *St Francis Supported by an Angel* (one of several versions by the artist) follows the same general iconographic formula as Caravaggio's, but differs considerably in the interaction between saint and angel (Figure 8.16). Caravaggio's Francis looks cautiously, though one narrowly opened eye, at the angel who holds him, while his right hand appears to edge toward the wound in his side. He even begins to raise his left arm in a gesture suggesting astonishment, presumably in reaction to what he both sees and feels. Orazio's saint, on the other hand, does not move at all: his arms hang limp, knees buckle, and

Figure 8.15: Caravaggio, *Francis of Assisi in ecstasy*, oil on canvas, Hartford, CT, Wadsworth Atheneum, *c*.1594.
(Photo: Nimatallah/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.16: Orazio Gentileschi, *St Francis supported by an angel*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, *c.*1600. (Photo © 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

the angel who holds him leans backward against the weight, his left leg extended to support the sinking body. Viewing the two in terms of the narrative model of the hagiographical texts, Gentileschi's saint is *fuori da sè*, while Caravaggio's has just *ritornato in sè*. Other examples of this type (seemingly soulless bodies, filling – or implicitly extending beyond – the pictorial field), would include Caravaggio's *Ecstasy of Mary Magdalen* (known through copies, such as that in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux), Peter Paul Rubens' depiction of the same subject (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, *c.*1620), Francesco Vanni's *St Catherine of Siena in Ecstasy* (Museo della Badia Benedettina della SS. Trinità di Cava) and

Agostino Carracci's engraving of 1595 after Vanni's *St Francis in Ecstasy*.[1]

The dying and the dead

Art historians who have examined images of ecstasy bordering on death often propose metaphorical readings, in which that apparent death points, through resemblance, to another, more theologically significant,

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1   For an example of Agostino Carracci's print, after Vanni's original (British Museum, V,3.38), see: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1453747&partId=1&searchText=V,3.36&people=104501&page=1

meaning. For example, Francis of Assisi's limp body alludes to that death to the sensory world necessary for rebirth in Christ (Askew, 1969, p.287). Or in Lavin's reading of S. Teresa, she appears in the throes of death (though not dead) in order to suggest a martyrdom, albeit self-generated, of love (Lavin, 1980, pp.114–18; Perlove, 1990, pp.42–3). While it is certainly correct to read these images as figured pictorial language (after all, they are not literally images of the saints' deaths), one might construe the structure and content of that figuration differently. To begin with, the lifeless body of the ecstatic saint *is* a truth of sorts: the image is a literal, or proper, representation of the event as it is experienced by those who witness it. Yet stepping back from the subjective reality of the spectator to the more general understanding of ecstasy, the body that appears dead is a figure for that which is absent: like a synecdoche, it stands for the soul it contained. This parsing of the rhetoric of representation may seem needlessly fussy, yet it is useful inasmuch as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explanations of the ecstatic state often hover uneasily at the boundary between literal and figural.

What does happen during ecstasy? There is no universal agreement in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century sources. Yet a good, if broad, summation is found at the beginning of the long article on ecstasy in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*: 'every true ecstasy is an expression of the need to *see* God, to *live in* God, to *be transformed* into God' ('Extase', 1961, col.2045). The three phrases in fact suggest three phases, beginning with the distance implied by sight and ending with an implosion of subject, object and distance into a single substance. But does this sequence represent a journey outward or – as Teresa's manual of contemplative prayer, the *Interior castle,* suggests – inward? The descriptive language of early modern writers usually points to the former. Beyond the common references to flight and elevation of the soul, there is the violence implied by the term *ratto* (rapture, but also rape), the cries or screams heard at the moment of ecstasy, suggesting a painful rending of soul and body, and even the explanation for the (not uncommon) phenomenon of levitation during ecstasy – i.e. that the body rises upwards in its desire to follow the soul (Pizzuto, 1622, pp.110–13; Bernini, 1726, pp.83, 120, 139, etc; Cepari, 1621, p.224; Yepes, 1622, pp.309–10).

The soul's upward journey is understood as metaphorical, although the implicit physicality of the experience is often acknowledged, and occasionally the possibility of an actual rupture is considered (Salvatore, 1629, p.82; Lisbona, 1605, p.398). After all, Paul's oft-cited statement in 2 Corinthians 12:2 is ambiguous: 'I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up (*raptum*) to the third heaven'.[2] Yet in general the understanding was not literal, ascent being a central (though not the only) figuration of the soul's or mind's journey toward God (Turner, 1995, pp.252–73). At the beginning of his *History, life, miracles and ecstasies of Sor Juana de la Cruz* of 1610, the Spanish Franciscan Antonio Daza attempts to define precisely the terms that he will use in the text that follows:[3]

> Raptures, which the Hebrews call *Turdemà*, which is to say deep sleep, and the Greeks call *estasis*, which means ascent, or flight of the soul (*salita ò volo dell'anima*), not because the soul may exit the body and after that return to it (which it would be a serious error to admit, since it would be both death and resurrection at almost the same point), [but] because in raptures, to whomever they are given, it is in fact as if he were dead or sleeping, which is, according to St Dionysius, a consequence of love, which causes ecstasy in the soul, lifting (*levando*) a man from himself and transforming him into that which he loves.

<p align="center">(Daza, 1616, n.p., my translation)</p>

Daza's explanation of rapture comes by way of the mysterious late fifth- (or early sixth-) century eastern church father known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. His writings – long known in the west through Latin translations and commentaries – became the most authoritative source for mystical theology. By the sixteenth century, Dionysian concepts were in wide circulation, and key ideas regularly appear in vernacular texts, including those of S. Teresa (Girón-Negrón, 2008, pp. 694–9). One of the central ideas is the 'unitive power' of love mentioned by Daza: the idea (found in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine names*, 4:13) that the lover (in this case the ecstatic) is transformed into the thing he loves (God). This grows out of several new testament passages (also frequently cited or alluded to by modern writers), such as Galatians 2:20: 'And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me'. Often, however, such a union is placed in the future, after the subject's death and Christ's second coming. As Paul famously writes, human knowledge of God is imperfect – 'through a glass in a dark manner' – but that vision will eventually become clearer and God will be seen

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2   This, and all further biblical quotations are from the Douay-Rheims translation.

3   The text was early on translated into Italian, French (1614), German (1620), and English (1625). I am using the Italian translation published in 1616.

face to face (*facie ad faciem*): 'Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known' (1 Corinthians 13:12). This reflexive (or specular) formulation is even more tightly constructed in 1 John 3:2: 'when he shall appear we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is'. Explained in these terms (the lover's self-transformation into the beloved), rapture serves as a sort of promissory note for future bliss. Yet this joy is a double-edged sword: a foretaste of eternal paradise that is not itself eternal and that leaves the soul in desperate longing for return, even if by death (Teresa, 1618, p.205, Orsini, 1608, pp.461–2; Capua, 1608, pp.177–8).

This definition of ecstasy presents certain difficulties in terms of theology, but also with regard to pictorial or sculptural representation. As for the former, the apophatic notion of God that is so bound up with mysticism – the belief that one can only know God by negation, by defining what he is not – that it raises the question of just how one becomes like him. For artists, the difficulty is more basic and perhaps more easily surmounted: how does one visualise the union of similitude (as it comes to be called) between an incorporeal being and an invisible human soul? Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians rely heavily on metaphor in describing this transformation, sometimes suggesting that the face of each functions a mirror to the other, and other times emphasizing the necessary inequality of the two (Piergilii, 1640, pp.172–3, 179; Ribadeneyra, 1604, pp.232–3). A much repeated trope has the soul essentially swallowed by the immensity of God, like wine poured into a sea, or (eucharistically) drops of water poured into wine (Jacopone da Todi, 1617, p.948; Herp, 1546, p.54r; Arfio, 1600, p.228). The angel's flame-like drapery in the Cornaro Chapel may allude to the ardor of divine love (Lavin, 1980, p.111), but arguably not even Bernini could approximate the strangeness and power of such a metaphor.

Yet Christian painters and sculptors had long faced the problem of conveying the essential similarities of God and man, most pointedly when dealing with the opposite end of biblical human history – Genesis rather than Revelation. While Genesis 1:26 has God creating man in his own image and likeness (*ad imaginem et similitudinem*), since the patristic period those terms were understood as applying to the invisible soul rather than the visible body. The resemblance between God and Adam's soul is clarified in the second iteration of the creation story, in Genesis 2:7. The most intimate moment between the creator and his creation (up to that point simply a statue modeled out of moist earth) is when God breathes into the face of Adam, imparting

his own spirit to make Adam into a living soul. In a very general sense, artists since the late middle ages used their proper (unfigured; 'natural') language of visible bodies, to affirm this through negation: the dissimilar appearance of God and Adam suggests that the qualities they share lie elsewhere, in the invisible soul. One of the brilliant features of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel *Creation of Adam* (1508–12) is that while the bodies maintain the traditional contrast of age and type, their similarity is suggested by poses that subtly mirror one another. That of God displays a fluent grace while Adam's suggests the tautness of newly inspirited flesh, yet both twist at the torso, with limbs alternately extended forward and pulled back. As touched upon earlier with regard to the *figura serpentinata*, the body's movements were considered, among other things, signs for the presence of a soul (in Latin, *anima*; hence to have a soul is to be *animated*, to move; lacking that, one is but a *corpus* – a body, literally a corpse) (Delbeke, 2012, pp.35–6, 50–1). Thus Michelangelo suggests life – using means that were by 1500 already well established – but also introduces a language to convey the fragile (in fact, soon to be severed) union of similitude between man and God.

Returning to the representation of ecstatic union, in a sense the group of images discussed above (by Caravaggio, Gentileschi, Bernini and others) intertwine elements of the Michelangelesque and pre-Michelangelo solutions. If the saints' bodies appear lifeless, it demonstrates (through negation) that their souls are elsewhere, presumably in union with God. Yet it can also be argued that the poses of these inanimate (or at least unanimated) bodies suggest the likeness between the two invisible entities whose ecstatic reunion occurs 'offstage'. While the God that is encountered by the Christian soul is presumably the triune deity of father, son and holy spirit, the written accounts often specify interactions with Jesus (Teresa, 1618, p.182; Villegas, 1595, p.419; Razzi, 1593, p.327). This makes sense for any number of reasons, not the least of which being their shared incarnation: Christ experienced the world they inhabit and experienced it as they do, through the senses. Indeed, a sensual (comm)union with Christ was already part of their ritual life through the transsubstantiated bread and wine of the Eucharist.

Also like humans, Christ died, at which point, according to scripture, he gave up the ghost (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). The separation of spirit or soul from body is akin to that of soul wrenched from the body of the ecstatic (Tomasi, 1669, p.40). While art historians have pointed out the similarity of Teresa's pose and expression to depictions of the swooning virgin Mary in various passion scenes,

Figure 8.17: Annibale Carracci, *Pietà*, oil on copper, 41.3 cm x 60.7 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, *c.*1603. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.18: Correggio, *Lamentation*, oil on canvas, 157 x 182 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, 1524–5. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Figure 8.19: Anonymous printmaker after Maerten de Vos, *Instruments of the Passion*, engraving, 137 × 101 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1550 to 1600. (Photo: Image in the public domain)

National Gallery).[4] The starting point for these images is certainly Correggio's *Lamentation*, painted *c*.1525 for the Parmese church of S. Giovanni Evangelista (Figure 8.18). Correggio's painting is among the earliest to use the swooning virgin motif in a pietà (as opposed to a deposition), and while the pathos may seem a bit overplayed to modern eyes (the art historian Anton Boschloo writes of a 'sfumato di sentimenti'), the vulnerability of the two figures is still striking (Boschloo, 1998, p.57). The fainting Virgin's resemblance to Christ has received ample scholarly attention, yet Correggio's depiction of Christ himself also departs in various ways from tradition. It was not common, for instance, for him to be shown with both mouth and eyes partially open (though a notable exception is Raphael's Villa Borghese *Entombment*). These may function as signifiers of the immediate narrative past: a record of his final pain and struggle recorded on the flesh that is left behind. While these details are not grisly, they are nonetheless laden with pathos: the open mouth out of which came a great cry as Christ's soul departed (he *expiravit – expired,* or literally, *exhaled*) and the eyes still half-raised, as if looking toward the father whose mercy he implored his final moments (Mark, 15:34, 37). Even the depiction of Christ's hands serve as reminders, albeit of a more horrific sort: the fingers on one or both slightly contract, as if re-formed by the spikes they endured.

it is also possible that Bernini's statue is meant to evoke the other conspicuously unconscious body in those paintings, that of her dead son (Gould, 1986, p.108; Lavin, 1980, p.118; Perlove, 1990, pp.42–3). Since in many of these scenes Mary and Christ closely echo each other in pose and expression (or lack thereof) one could argue that it's a meaningless distinction: to evoke one is to evoke the other (Hamburgh, 1981). But the similarity of Teresa's pose to that of the dead Christ (rather than that of his fainted mother) is a point of central importance for understanding Bernini's altarpiece in terms of seventeenth-century constructions of ecstasy. Annibale Carracci's *Pietà* of *c*.1603 in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Figure 8.17) is a one of several paintings by him in which Christ and Mary are shown similarly distressed, each with head fallen backward, mouth open and flesh drained of colour (two other important examples are in Parma, Galleria Nazionale d'Umbria, and London,

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4   For the National Gallery painting, see: http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/annibale-carracci-the-dead-christ-mourned-the-three-maries; for that in Parma, see: http://www.parmabeniartistici.beniculturali.it/galleria-nazionale-di-parma/galleria/deposizione-con-la-vergine-e-i-santi/.

All of these elements are present in Bernini's statue of Teresa, including a partially clenched right hand (something not found in swooning Virgin images). It is of course possible to read them generally as signs of Teresa's devotion and a desire (not uncommon among mystics) to experience Christ's pains and humiliations. Yet this particular combination of features points back not just to Christ of the gospels, but to a particular image type (the Pietà) and a particular point in the passion narrative. The image conjured by Teresa's pose and expression is not one of Christ's physical or emotional suffering, but of his insensate body, the 'detachable' outer garment of his humanity. This analogy of soul's flight into ecstasy and the temporary exile of Christ's soul is structurally apt and is also hinted at by the number of biographers and hagiographers reporting ecstasies in which their subject remained *fuori di se* for three days before finally returning to themselves (for example, Razzi, 1593, p.600; Antoninus, et al, 1606, pp.27–8; Ribadeneyra, 1604, p.180). This idea also illumines the angel's unusual gesture in the altarpieces of the Cornaro and Raimondi chapels. Textile imagery is woven throughout the gospel accounts of the passion – the sudarium, the seamless garment, the divided cloak and the veil of the temple – and artists exploited its metaphorical potential in various ways. An early example is Giotto's Scrovegni *Crucifixion*, in which Christ's empty robe held by the Roman soldiers formally parallels both Christ's dead and Mary's fainting bodies. By the sixteenth century, that same idea is compressed into two figures – Christ and a weeping angel who displays his garment – in Moretto's haunting *Man of Sorrows* (Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo). And an even more radically reduced example is found in the *Instruments of the passion* designed by Marten de Vos, where the sudarium placed above Christ's robe suggest the image of his body on the cross (Figure 8.19). There is no doubt of a theological significance to this pairing, one that deserves attention it cannot receive here. What is worth underlining, however, is that Bernini figures the absence of Teresa's soul (from her body, from the spectator's sight) by quoting elements of Christ's similar state, and by using a textile trope associated with Christ's empty flesh. And at the same time, these elements evoke the identity with Christ that allows her blissful, albeit temporary, union.

Unlike the 'natural' reading of Bernini's Teresa as in the throes of sensual ecstasy, the essay posits that the saint is shown in a way that suggests she is alienated from her senses, not present at all. While this reading need not (and considering the history of the statue's reception, probably *can*not) banish eros, it should

complicate it by admixing the ideas of absence, distance and – the potent concommitant of both – desire.[5] Putting aside the question of whether anyone ignoring the obviously erotic is in denial (Schama, 2006, p.125; Binstock, 2009, p.227), one still may ask why the artist would take such a seemingly indirect path. To provide at least a partial answer, it is necessary to return, briefly and finally, to the frames around Teresa: the Cornaro Chapel, and the church of S. Maria della Vittoria.

The power of images
Although the church of S. Maria della Vittoria is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, its name also refers to a work of art: its former altarpiece, a vandalized painting held to be instrumental to the Catholic victory in the Battle of White Mountain on 8 November 1620 (Giordano, 1991, pp.179–212). The damaged image was found near Prague by Domenico di Gesù Maria, the Spanish-born definitor general of the Italian Discalced Carmelites. In June 1620, Domenico had been dispatched by Pope Paul V to serve as 'spiritual advisor' to Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, who, in an alliance with the Holy Roman Emperor, was leading the army of the Catholic League against the Bohemian Protestants. Domenico ended up playing a more active role in the military expedition, displaying his damaged image to intensify the commanders' hatred of the protestant heretics, and assuring them of divine protection for the overmatched Catholic forces. He was also present at the battle, and toward its end (which occurred around two hours after its beginning), he accompanied Maximilian to the battlefield, holding aloft his crucifix (affixed to a pole), and wearing the vandalized painting suspended from a cord around his neck. According to early sources, rays of light and balls of fire burst forth from the image (Caramuel Lobkowitz, 1655, p.344; Filippo della SS. Trinita, 1668, p.386).

Upon Domenico's return to Rome in December 1621 (after taking the image 'on tour' to various European cities), Pope Gregory XV granted permission to install the venerated painting in the discalced Carmelite church of S. Paolo (afterward rededicated to S. Maria della Vittoria). On Sunday, 8 May 1622, it was set within an architectural shrine (bedecked with all manner of gems, precious stones, gold and silver) and ceremonially processed from S. Maria Maggiore to S. Paolo, a journey punctuated by cannon fire from Castel Sant'Angelo and memorialized in 'souvenir' prints sold along the route (Anonymous, 1622, pp.4, 5, 10; Caramuel Lobkowitz, 1655, pp.394–7; Bernini, 1711,

5   In a future study, I will return to the theme of desire, as both represented in, and invoked by, early modern religious art.

vol.4, pp.602–5 [reproducing the account of Biagio della Purificazione]). The image apparently continued to work miracles after its placement above the church's main altar (Filippo della SS. Trinita, 1668, p.434).

This is important to remember inasmuch as the image itself is underwhelming: small, difficult to see and – at least judging from its copies – not of particularly high quality, even discounting the damage inflicted on it. If today the story of the image is something of a historical footnote, in 1647, when Bernini began work on the Cornaro chapel, it was arguably the most significant element of the church. It certainly received the lion's share of attention in guidebooks, and in 1644 John Evelyn noted that the main altar was 'infinitely frequented for an Image of the Vergine' (Panciroli, 1625, pp. 329–34; Totti, 1638, pp.268–9; Rossi, 1652, pp.270–1; Evelyn, 1955, pp. 239–40). Thus when Bernini received the commission, he was in the position of competing with the image on the main altar. While the work was not much of a challenge in terms of its artistry, its accrued meanings – triumph over iconoclastic desecration, over an opposing army, over heresy itself – made it impossible to dismiss.

While miracle-working images were not uncommon in early modern Rome, the *Madonna della Vittoria* was unusual. For instance, no claim could be made for its antiquity, no lineage to St Luke; in its subject matter and (from what one can tell) in its style, it was 'modern'. And, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, in a basic sense the painting's subject matter is vision: first and foremost the natural vision (and consequent adoration) of the supernatural God incarnate. Yet the actual painting's defacement complicates the issue of vision. The act of vandalism calls attention to the painting's materiality, by breaking through its surface and breaking the spell of its pictorial illusion. Specific types of damage inflicted on images, such as marking out eyes, have been interpreted as a means to rob the figure depicted, or even the painting itself, of its vitality or power (Freedberg, 1989, pp.415–6; Selbach, 2010, p.161). Here that power presumably lies in its status as an image: its potential idolatrous allure. It is ironic that in an apparent attempt to disrupt the practice of improper adoration (*idolatria*), the iconoclast – by blinding those who gaze upon Christ – effectively destroys a depiction of proper adoration (*theolatria*).

Bernini's chapel takes up a number of these issues – especially vision, both external (the eyes of the body), and internal (those of the soul). Teresa is in a mystic union – as close as one comes before death to seeing God face to face, as he is. Her bodily eyes, however, are nearly closed, reversing the traditional depiction

of a heavenward gaze.[6] While it seems that Cornaro family members should be directing their gazes toward the miracle over the altar, the majority of them pay no heed (and as Margaretha Lagerlöf has noted, the family members themselves – with the exception of Federico – seem blinded by the lack of drilled pupils; 2012, p.14) Following the logic of the texts cited earlier, this is not surprising. An ecstatic saint is by definition *fuori di sè*; were the Cornaro to gaze intently at S. Teresa, they would only be seeing the material remains of the ecstatic soul, the garment – as the angel's gesture suggests – of flesh. Bernini's statue of Teresa is essentially a rendering in stone of a body that would, according to the topos used by hagiographers and theologians, itself appear to be a stone statue. If the altarpiece is meant to represent more than simply a body (albeit a body watched over by an angel) it does so only obliquely, in the golden rays behind her, lit from the window above. While these rays have been read as divine radiance descending into the material world, they may also emanate from (serve as synecdoche for) the unrepresentable union of God and soul. Ecstasy is, after all, the *flight* of the soul, an upward movement.

Although the placement of donor portraits at right angles to the altar and altarpiece is standard in funerary chapels, it can serve as an emblem of the necessarily indirect relationship between the mortal human and eternal God. The actual spectator has a more direct view of the altarpiece, but his or her access to its meaning is no less oblique. The perspectival relief behind each set of portraits – constructed (more or less) for a viewer standing in front of the chapel – provides a glimpse into a barrel-vaulted chamber three bays deep (Figure 8.4). Although the nature of these spaces is still open to debate (the nave or a transept arm of a church?) there is a structure on the rear wall of each that seems purposefully ambiguous: an architectural element effectively cut in half by the juncture of the actual lateral wall and the fictive opening. It appears to be the limitations of fixed perspectival vision (rather than simply the cropped composition of the panel) that prohibit the viewer from seeing the whole. Whatever it may represent – an ornate passageway or perhaps the frame of an altarpiece – it also serves as the perch for an angel,

6   Although it is most closely associated with Guido Reni's seventeenth-century saints and sibyls, the motif is found a century earlier in Raphael's *S. Catherine of Alexandria* (London, National Gallery), and – not coincidentally for Reni – the *Ecstasy of St Cecilia* for San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna (Bologna, Galleria Nazionale). Bernini used it early in his career in the *Anima beata* of 1619 (Rome, Palazzo di Spagna) and *S. Bibiana* of 1624–6 for the eponymous Roman church.

either meant to be real (perhaps placing the Cornaro in heaven) or marble, and thus a work of sculptural art, within a space both artful and artificial.

The illusionistic reliefs could be said to reiterate, in miniature, the visual logic of the chapel itself. The right-angle relation of the viewer to the relief (and the structure it appears to contain) mirrors that of the Cornaro to the chapel's altarpiece; what is visible in that fictive structure suggests a broken pediment, like that over the altarpiece; both contain an angel that serves as a hinge between the visible and the unseen (or unseeable). The arrow-brandishing angel above the chapel's altar is the only figure who unmistakably reacts to Teresa's ecstasy (the wry smile that was so suggestive to certain eighteenth century viewers). Arguably, much of the power in the chapel derives from what is not shown, left in suspension at the heart of a space that otherwise comes close to sensual overstimulation.

Conclusion

As this paper has suggested, Bernini's means (and perhaps, at least partially, ends) in the chapel constitute a deferral of meaning, a part that points to a larger whole. The argument is perhaps counterintuitive in that it makes the central elements what is considered the ultimate example of the Baroque (for better or worse) into a sort of understatement, a rhetorical demonstration of the limits, but also the unlimited powers of art. Bernini's personal motivations for choosing such a strategy have not really been discussed here – perhaps a glaring omission, given what must have been personal and professional challenges in the wake of Urban VIII's death in 1643 and the failure of his project for the towers of S. Peter's (McPhee, 2002, pp.165–89). Yet in Domenico Bernini's biography of his father there is one anecdote that suggests a convergence of the sculptor, sculpture and (at least by implication) spectator (Bernini, 1713, p.48). In this passage (evocatively used by Frank Fehrenbach in his discussion of Bernini's negotiations between the material and immaterial), Domenico echoes his own earlier description of Teresa and (no doubt incidentally) rounds out Scaramuccia's words in the text used as this essay's epigraph (Fehrenbach, 2005, p.30). While in the service of Urban VIII, Bernini was struck down by a nearly fatal illness, caused by his ceaseless labours – especially the physically taxing work of carving marble, in which 'he was so fixated that he seemed in fact ecstatic (*così fisso, che sembrava anzi estatico*), and in the act of sending through the eyes the spirit (*spirito*) to render the stones alive'.

Gian Lorenzo's fixation – suggesting both engrossment and fixedness, immobility – and his intent gaze (presumably *facie ad faciem)* connote ecstasy, which makes sense inasmuch as ecstatics were described as both still and as engrossed. Yet the artist seems to play both roles in the ecstatic encounter: like God breathing the *spiraculum vitae* into his work of sculptural art (Genesis 2:7), Bernini attempts to send forth his own enlivening *spirito* into a stone body. The notion of a statue obtaining true life by facing the gaze of its creator seems dangerously close to a parody of the standard topoi of ecstasy. It also speaks to the difficulties of portraying such ecstasies: the closest a non-ecstatic might come to witnessing union was through the seemingly lifeless simulacrum left behind. And those twice-removed from the miracle must make do with is a lifeless statue *of* a lifeless statue. Yet, as Domenico Bernini's and Scaramuccia's words suggest, that statue may nonetheless possess something close to immortality, in the quasi-eternal fame bestowed on it by the artist's imagination and touch. It is perhaps a kind of consolation for the viewer standing before the Cornaro chapel, poised midway between the blinded witnesses in the church's altarpiece and the unseeing witnesses in the chapel.

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FINISHING TOUCHES: AN AFTERWORD
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Abstract

This conclusion reflects on the major findings of the essays in the issue.

Biographical notes

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FINISHING TOUCHES: AN AFTERWORD

Alice E. Sanger, The Open University, and Siv Tove Kulbrandstad Walker, Independent Scholar

The sense of touch in cooperation or in competition with sight is explored in countless works of renaissance art, as we have seen. Antoniazzo Romano's *The Virgin Invoking God to Heal the Hand of Pope Leo I* (*c.*1475, National Gallery of Ireland) (Figure 9.1) offers an especially poignant depiction of the tactile revelation of faith. As an exposition of a miracle in which eyes, hands and desire play vital roles, it distils in one image a range of tensions produced in the relationship between faith and sensuality in early modernity.

Reminiscent of a Byzantine icon, this painting is dominated by the three-quarter-length figure of the Virgin, dressed in brilliant blue and set against a gold background. She is, it seems, an apparition or image, which, as an inscription along the parapet in front of

Figure 9.1: Antoniazzo Romano, *The Virgin Invoking God to Heal the Hand of Pope Leo I*, *c.*1475. Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel, 110.8 x 77cm. (© National Gallery of Ireland)

her explains, pope Leo encountered during prayer.[1] The Virgin's motioning hands seek God's intervention but her eyes are unfocused. God is portrayed in the upper left corner, a tiny, half-length figure, poised on a cloud, who transmits his divine will via his gesture. He is looking past the Virgin to the two diminutive figures depicted in the painting's lower zone. Here Antoniazzo interprets the outcome of the miracle – Leo is having his severed hand reinstated by an angel. The pope's mutilation was self-inflicted. As the Golden Legend relates, Leo had cut off his hand to punish himself after it was kissed by a female worshipper during Mass, an act which 'aroused in him a violent temptation of the flesh' (de Voragine, 1969, p.231). The episode offers a reminder, should we need it, that touch – the traditional signifier of which is, of course, the hand – is the sense most intimately identified with sexual desire. While Leo had found it necessary to cut off the offending body part,[2] the actions of divine hands are shown in this image to perform its restoration.[3]

Antoniazzo's painting is suggestive of the many ambiguities that surround haptic encounters, and the contested place of touch in the realm of the devotional, but also, more generally, of the potential power of the image to make the sacred present. It is well known that St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas, and others, praised the didactic benefit of art as an aid to memory and discerned its power to stir religious passion and encourage faith, but believed that the process of beholding an image moved from an initial level of *sensory* engagement to a richer *spiritual* understanding. Nevertheless, 'religious seeing' is about powerful forms of embodiment, deeply anchored in the incarnation of Christ and the miraculous motherhood of the Virgin (Morgan, 2012, p.54). The stories of their lives, their hopes and torments, epitomised in devotional art and pious practices, embraced an iconography that celebrated the epistemological merits of the senses of sight and hearing, but importantly also that of touch;

the latter, according to our modern appreciation, including a variety of bodily sensations, mediated by receptors in the skin, the joints and in underlying soft tissues, such as movement and warmth (Quiviger, 2010, p.105).

Thus, the tensions and delights engendered by the yearning for tactile encounters in early modern devotional acts or sacred art, signalled in this issue's title, have been shown to be key to its investigations. The contributors, all activists in art history's 'sensory turn', have examined artifacts, prints, paintings, sculpture, spiritual guidebooks and what we today qualify as installation art. Their enterprise has been prompted by the ambition to problematise the neo-platonic imperialism of sight and sense hierarchies that traditionally considered touch along with smell and taste as base bodily senses. Rather, they show that it was touch, as well as sight and hearing, and sometimes even taste and smell, that provided access to the divine.

In the essays by Theresa Flanigan and Catherine Lawless, proscriptions on female devotion, as elicited from spiritual guidebooks – including Florentine examples composed by St Antoninus and Dominici – are particularly highlighted and explored. Such texts, composed for women of high social rank (Antoninus's was dedicated to Dianora Tornabuoni), played active roles in shaping ideals of piety, locating deep religious feeling as an essential component of femininity.

A prominent early modern view that women were easily influenced and particularly sensitive was rooted in Galenic theory, which held that females were constitutionally cooler and moister than males.[4] But this greater sensitivity might, as St Bonaventura (1221–74) supposed, make women especially able to bond emotionally with Christ's suffering.[5] Devotional texts and sermons stressed the need to feel the Holy Family's pains and torments in one's own flesh and bones, yet their purpose was not simply to indulge the senses but also to delimit and contain them. Such manuals poetically likened a woman's life to a sensuous garden abundant with flagrant flowers and fertile fruit easily identifiable with the *hortus conclusus* of Mary. The garden protected by walls and free from sin was a powerful metaphor for virginity, an ideal to emulate by womankind. Similarly, Christian teaching often imagined the senses as garden gates or apertures to be secured so temptations of the flesh and evil thoughts could not enter to hijack the soul, so it was recommended to

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1   IMAGO CORAM QUA ORANDO LEO PAPA SENSIT SIBI MANUM RESTITUTAM; on this painting see, Howe (1984) pp.417–9; Couzin (2007) pp.129–54; National Gallery of Ireland, online, http://onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/id/11495

2   'And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell …' (Mark 9:43).

3   Antoniazzo's interpretation of the Virgin's miraculous intervention develops the account supplied in the Golden Legend, which nevertheless emphasises the roles of divine hands: '… Leo had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, entrusting himself wholly to her care. And she appeared to him at once, and with her holy hands restored his hand to him' (de Voragine, 1969, p.231).

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4   Galen of Pergamon: Greek physician and philosopher in the Roman empire (129–*c*.200/*c*.216 AD). For a summary of this theory, see Battersby ([1989] 1994), pp.40-1.

5   See Lawless in this volume, p.62.

women to stay at home behind the closed doors of the senses. Archbishop Antoninus exhorted that women should neither look nor be looked at; they should attune their ears to the word of God and practise silence. Speech - to Antoninus a sixth sense - has the tongue as its operative organ (the latter being, of course, equally instrumental to the perception of touch and taste). His interest in controlling women's behaviour through their speech served patriarchal authority, limiting or preventing their ability to communicate within the wider world. While the men of the Tornabuoni family take centre stage in Ghirlandaio's scenes with a public or political tenor, its female figures appear 'in the wings', passive and with lips sealed (Figures 3.2 and 3.6). But, in contrast, Flanigan argues, women are allocated more space and seem to be more physically involved and conversational in scenes in which the Virgin is the protagonist (Figures 3.1 and 3.9).

Painted images of the Virgin and Child, alone or in scenes with St Elizabeth, John the Baptist and other holy figures, depictions of Christ's Passion and of mystics in the throes of spiritual revelations, generated a visual imagery of powerfully tactile signs that inspired affection and identification. Women's responses to these representations show the extent to which their faith was expressed through the sense of touch and the performative, according to Catherine Lawless. The religious fervour ignited by pious artworks compelled female beholders to publicly and openly kiss and caress statues and pictures in churches. In the home or convent (the domestic and domestic/institutional setting),[6] behind the doors that shut them off from external 'sense pollution', secular women and nuns would be able to indulge their senses in devotional activities in front of small-scale religious paintings. Children and family members might be invited to participate in services that could involve the washing of hands and the ringing of bells and other manoeuvres that appealed to the full sensory spectrum.

A specific instance of devout performativity in the baroque *palazzo* is postulated in the essay by Erin Benay. Jacopo Ligozzi's stunningly beautiful portable altar (Figures 6.1a, b and c) performs as a spiritual aid by engaging the sensorium of the beholder. The refinement of its velvet-lined carrying case adorned with Florentine *pietre dure* inlay, showing exquisite botanical motifs, draws viewers nearer to the stories depicted inside it – Christ's *Agony in the Garden* and Abraham's *Sacrifice of Isaac* – to urge their imaginative

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6   On convents as 'domestic/institutional', see Hills (2009).

and affective involvement in traumatic biblical events. The manipulation of the altar and the revealing of these emotive scenes, is almost akin to the solemnisation of a religious rite in which the object and its images become active celebrants.

The meanings generated by sacred art are produced by its iconography but also by its contextual framework: the relationship between composition, locale and spectator. The Cornaro chapel in S. Maria della Vittoria in Rome offers a complex and highly-charged case in point. In this lavishly adorned baroque environment a collection of elements are put into play, which have at their centre Bernini's sculpted group of St Teresa and the lustful seraphim (the subject of Andrea Bolland's essay, see Figures 8.1 and 8.2). In the vicinity of the altar, several male figures rendered in high-relief provide a permanent audience to the scene, although some of them look elsewhere. The constituent parts produce a space in which engaging with the sculpture involves multi-directional viewing that enrol the visitor into becoming an active participant in a quasi-theatrical form of devotion.

At the art installations at the Sacro Monte di Varallo, discussed by Allie Terry-Fritsch, that performative potential meant total immersion. The site, created to replicate and transfer the sacred power of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was a counter-reformatory enterprise spurred by the ambition to make the experience available to a vast number of the faithful who could not make that journey. This environment, designed to amaze and fascinate, used the virtuoso *meraviglia* style for its landscaping, architecture and tableaux, which featured life-size sculptures of saints and biblical characters with real hair and wearing period clothing. The many figures of Christ, featured at various stages of his earthly existence, were infused with lifelike qualities in order to stimulate a close and loving relationship between the pilgrims and the Saviour. Visitors to the site were encouraged to dress up and perform in a strictly stage-managed exercise akin to a passion play, which activated the sacrality of the site.

We have been shown how the devotional capacity of sacred art was promoted through direct appeal to the senses. But as Johannes de Caulibus explained, 'images were but tools to lead to a higher state of contemplation, in which it is suitable for the contemplator to be mute, deaf and blind' (*Meditationes Vitae Christi*, quoted by Lawless p.71). Bodily powers could, therefore, lead the beholder into a disembodied realm of divine recognition, an orbit in which absence, silence and blindness mediate the difficult, stoney path

to salvation, as St Augustine (354–430) suggested in his *Confessions*.[7]

Religious ecstasy is a remarkable physical and mental state, which expresses a mystical union with the divine, and is often understood as brought about through intense sensual excitement. Many readings of Bernini's *St Teresa* see the saint as in the throes of orgasm. However, Andrea Bolland proposes a very different interpretation based upon seventeenth-century understanding of this kind of religious frenzy. Witnesses of the ecstasy of mystics from that time reported that the ecstatic body appeared insensate and almost dead, like a statue carved in grey stone, a gloomy reminder of a living person. Interestingly, Ignatius Loyola's hagiographers describe that he looked totally lifeless during such experiences. In the case of St Teresa, the animation suggested by the drapery is apparently not provoked by any sign of movement in the mystic's body. Teresa's rapture, Bolland argues, is shown as a kind of loss: she is alienated from the senses in an 'out of body' experience.

Absence and presence are interwoven themes in Shira Brisman's essay. She demonstrates how imagery of Christ's life from Dürer's *Small Passion* woodcut series mediates between the human and the divine. The prints that feature instances of touch sought or performed during Christ's experience on earth – physical contacts of bodies, hands and lips – record not only the traces of these happenings but also the moral mark that he imprinted upon mankind. These physical signs and the Saviour's virtuous teachings are likened to the medium of graphic art and its indexical nature, to the contact between block, ink and paper – the multiplication of the image and its dissemination to a large audience. A single print or a whole series (in the case of the *Small Passion*, relatively small-scale works), privately owned and viewed, might thus translate into different levels of theological understanding and multifarious nuances of devotional engagement.

In the scriptural scene (John 20:14–17) that the iconography of *Noli me Tangere* illustrates, Mary Magdalen is reported to be the first person to see the resurrected Christ. Christ, who tells her not to touch or hold on to him, is most often portrayed as swaying away from her, avoiding physical contact. However, in Dürer's print (Figure 1.1), his stance is still and he nearly caresses the Magdalen's forehead with his outstretched right index finger while she reaches her open right hands towards him. By placing their both hands one above the other but at a distance, Brisman suggests that Dürer might have wanted to indicate their ultimate reunion, not possible at that moment, that would be realised at a later date. The opposite is the case in the engraved scene of *The Betrayal*, in which Judas's and Christ's lips meet in the deceitful kiss. Here closeness ushers in absence: Christ's martyrdom, the end to his human existence and his egress from this world.

The materiality of the work of art is also central to essays by Barbara Baert and Itay Sapir, which dwell, albeit in different ways, on embodiment and disembodiment in renaissance and baroque visual culture. John the Baptist, Christ's cousin and forerunner, is a point of connection between their essays. 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness', John the Baptist had proclaimed.[8] The *Johannesschüssel* – the representation of John's head on a platter (and the subject of Baert's essay) – would seem to settle on the silencing of that cry. Functioning as a kind of surrogate relic, the *Johannesschüssel*, and particularly its cruder examples, must have produced both fear and fascination, as three-dimensionality and polychromy were made to manifest in particularly graphic terms the horrific spectacle of the severed head. But, Baert's approach – that includes reflecting on the Indo-European etymology of 'throat' to uncover a wide semantic range including tube, tunnel, passage, transition, uterus, even soul – leads her to the view that 'the exhibitionism of the *Johannesschüssel* concerns the opening of all possible openings, with the tube of the throat being the most obsessive opening of all' (p.83). Beholding this object, she argues, might channel a quasi-mystic process, allowing the devotee to transgress the object's sanguinary ghastliness to address a yearning to see the invisible, the face of God.

Ribera's *John the Baptist* (Figure 2.1) offers a view of the youthful saint in the wilderness. According to Sapir, this work is emblematic of the painter's obsessive questioning, rather perplexing for a visual artist, of the limitations of sight, in order to favour the cognitive virtues of touch. The unfocused gaze, open mouth and the rubbing of hands in the *St John* picture suggest patterns that the painter repeated many times over to emphasise the shortcomings of vision to spiritual insight. This work does not show the violence for which Ribera's work is known, and, in which the appeal to the haptic is perhaps most pronounced. To Sapir,

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7 'It was to the inner part of me that my bodily senses brought their messages ... with my bodily powers I had already tried to find him …' (1961, Book X, p.212).

8 Isaiah 40:3, Matt.3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23, and discussed by St Augustine (Sermon 293, 1-3; L 38, 1327–28), see: te-deum.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/st-augustin-on-st-john-baptist.html (accessed 10 January 2015).

Ribera's robust and carnal art, his passionate brush and exacting treatment of hands and faces in works of male protagonists (saints and mystics) undergoing deep spiritual experiences, torture and martyrdom, further insist on touch as an epistemological alternative to sight. Ribera's attention to the texture of skin, the large tactile organ of the body, such as in the aged St Andrew (Figure 2.2), draws attention to the potentiality of sight as the 'embodied eye', a form of touch.

After the disturbing viewing of representations of physical suffering and its outcomes, we take refuge in the apparently tranquil landscape of Titian's *Noli me Tangere* (Figure 9.2) to close this reflection. Titian's painting of the resurrected Saviour and his most faithful female follower, Mary Magdalen, would seem to bring us back to a more conventional hierarchy of the visual and the tactile.[9] The impact here differs from that produced by Dürer's haptic theology. This composition exudes intense sensuality and eroticism, and stages, in a dynamic way, an exchange between vision and touch. Christ's beautiful, elegant, naked body with only hips, groin and shoulders draped in his almost transparent shroud, is presented as a tangible object of desire thanks to Titian's artifice, and, simultaneously, a phantasmic apparition, due to the lightly teetering stance, in which Christ's feet seem hardly to touch the ground. His lower body sways away from Mary as she tries to touch him with her right hand, while his torso leans slightly towards her as their eyes meet. The Magdalen's kneeling pose seems to bind her emphatically to the earth. The consuming passion she feels is accentuated by her long, loose locks and her red dress spread out on the grass, suggestive of her bleeding heart at the moment of separation from the beloved. The tall tree that divides the composition in two might be an indication of Christ's impending ascension to heaven, and the Magdalen's occupation of the realm of the sensory and the worldly, rather than that of the spiritual and the divine. In the encounter between sight and touch, sight is the favoured sense. Unlike St Thomas who was privileged to touch Christ's wounds in order to believe (see, for example, Caravaggio's *Incredulity of St Thomas*, Potsdam),[10] the Magdalen must see to believe when her urgent, instinctive desire to touch is forbidden.

The case studies in this issue have dwelt on a range of ways that the senses were 'evoked, engaged, embodied, constructed, and at times circumscribed, in devotional art and cultural practice of the early modern period' (Benay and Rafanelli, p.2). An outcome of these

Figure 9.2: Titian, *Noli me Tangere*. Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 91.9cm, National Gallery, London. (© The National Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Samuel Rogers, 1856)

explorations must be a fuller understanding that senses are not naturally finite and delimited, and that their meanings are historically contingent. Next steps in terms of the wider project of sensory culture studies of this period should lead us to probe still further the impact of class, gender and place on the cultural construction – the defining, redefining and delimitation – of senses. Were/are men and women subject to different senses in different ways according to these characteristics? And, if the sensorium is conditioned by gender might it also conceivably be viewed the other way round? How far are gender and spirituality staged, shaped and performed in relation to our sensibilities of the senses?[11]

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9   On this work, see especially, Rafanelli (2007).
10   Further reading on this work includes Benay (2014).

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11   The authors are most grateful to Helen Hills for her comments on the questions emanating from this issue.

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