

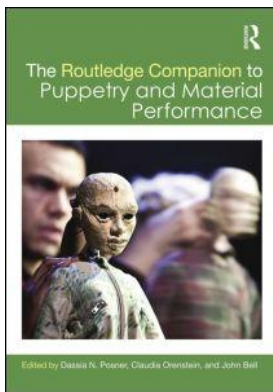
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance

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Relating to the Cross

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch16>

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Published online on: 15 Jul 2014

How to cite :- Debra Hilborn. 15 Jul 2014, *Relating to the Cross from: The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch16>

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Relating to the Cross

A Puppet Perspective on the Holy Week
Ceremonies of the *Regularis Concordia**Debra Hilborn*

In the Holy Week ceremonies described in the tenth-century guide to monastic living called the *Regularis Concordia*, the medieval congregant would encounter a cross that sings, is wrapped in cloth and buried in a tomb, and finally disappears over the course of the week's observances. The medieval cross, as an object of study, has been interpreted from countless perspectives in a variety of disciplines. Perhaps the most powerful sign in medieval Europe, probably only surpassed by the Eucharistic host in the later Middle Ages, the cross was also a material object.

Andrew Sofer, in *The Stage Life of Props*, suggests a heavily phenomenological method of studying props that concentrates on the object's reception as a physical entity, in addition to considering its signification to the audience. Sofer proposes what he calls a material methodology, which explores "not only the three-dimensionality of objects as material participants in the stage action, but the spatial dimension (how props move in concrete stage space) and the temporal dimension (how props move through linear stage time)" (Sofer 2003: 2). He attempts to lift the theatrical prop from the page and as far as possible explore its physical life in performance. This approach can certainly be applied to the cross as it is used in the *Adoratio*, *Depositio*, and *Elevatio Crucis* (the Adoration, Deposition, and Elevation of the Cross) – rituals that provide a through-line to the Holy Week observances, in which the object is adored on Maundy Thursday, deposited into the altar on Good Friday, and removed and placed in its usual position before dawn on Easter. Here the cross is by no means a flat or static figure, but a three-dimensional one that is moved within the spatial configuration of the church and undergoes a transformational journey in linear time.

However, Sofer acknowledges that such concentration on a featured object from a text carries the danger of creating an obstructed or distorted view of the whole. And by looking closely at the Holy Week ceremonies of the *Regularis Concordia* it becomes apparent that it is *the conversation between the cross and the celebrants* that is fundamental to the meaning of these observances. Thus, while I incorporate Sofer's emphasis on the material and spatial qualities of the object's journey, I wish to study this particular early medieval cross as an object that can primarily be defined by its

relationship with its manipulators. In other words, I analyze the cross as a “performing object” or a “puppet.” I use both of these terms interchangeably. As I detail below, in matters of definition I hew most closely to Stephen Kaplin’s “puppet tree” (1999), a model of classifying puppets and performing objects that focuses not on the differences in their physical properties but rather charts a spectrum of relationships between object(s) and manipulator(s).

This “puppet perspective” enables me to think about the *Regularis Concordia*’s Holy Week observances as a locus where humans and cross perform in tandem to create meaning and to provide an emotional and spiritual experience for the early medieval congregation. It will demonstrate how even during the early medieval period, when anxiety surrounded the use of three-dimensional figures, a sacred experience could be created for orthodox monastic communities through the manipulation of a material thing. And it will highlight the ways in which, within a document carefully and systematically dictating the behavior and practices of tenth-century monks, a performing object might uncover space for an individualized experience of Christ’s crucifixion.

Some medieval attitudes towards performing objects

At the outset I acknowledge that my use of the terms “performing object” and “puppet” to describe the *Regularis Concordia* cross is anachronistic. The expression “performing object” can be traced to classifications in the influential twentieth-century semiotic studies of puppetry – particularly Frank Proschan’s much-quoted “The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects,” in which he defines performing objects as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance” (Proschan 1983: 4). And in looking at the historic evidence for puppetry in England, Ian Lancashire argues that the first English puppet play on record took place in 1431, centuries after the period under examination here (Lancashire 1979: 127).

Furthermore, both the creation of puppets and their performance are exceedingly problematic to early medieval teaching about idolatry. Although writing that approved and even exalted artistic creation did exist, there was a definite tension involved in the act of medieval image-making, particularly in the early Middle Ages. Fear of idolatrous behavior prevented the widespread creation of three-dimensional figures until the twelfth century (Camille 1989: 36). Michael Camille cites as influential Hugh of St. Victor’s conception of a “hierarchy of creativity,” in which the works of man rank the lowest, below the works of nature and the works of God, because “any maker appropriates God’s creation in making any image” (Camille 1989: 39). Thus, all human works are simply recombinations of God’s raw materials, or, in the case of representational imagery, merely a reflection of the divinely created world.

In the case of puppet *performance*, the tension extends further to what Victoria Nelson describes as “the perceived sacrilege in animating the inanimate” (Nelson 2001: 50). Here the maker not only recombines or reflects what has already been created by God but is heretically attempting to “play God” by giving it life. As many puppet scholars have explored, our historical fascination with puppetry is in large part due to the existential dissonance it engenders, particularly through the seeming

ability of the puppet operator to bring life and movement to the inanimate form. As Steve Tillis describes it, “the puppet pleasurablely challenges the audience’s understanding of object and life” (Tillis 1996: 115). Life-giving powers in medieval Europe, however, were strictly within the purview of the divine. Camille explains that the creators of Gothic-era automatons, for example, were seen as “overstepping the proper paths of human knowledge” and exhibiting an illicit desire to play God (Camille 1989: 250). As Nelson summarizes: “Over the long span of the Christian Middle Ages, a sharp distinction had been drawn between the contrived mechanical wonders wrought by humans and the authentic wonder of *mirabilia*, God’s true miracles” (Nelson 2001: 49). Thus, the idea of the cross acting as a puppet, relying on human voices and hands to give it life, would, it seems, have been quite contradictory to the worldview cultivated by early medieval theologians.

Late medieval objects, although operating in a significantly different context, can point us to continuing tensions amassed around image-making and image performance and also provide dramatic illustration of performing crosses within the church walls. The “Rood of Grace,” for example, was a crucifix at the Abbey of Boxley in Kent, England, whose corpus was made to bleed and to move in various ways by concealed mechanical means – a subterfuge that supposedly fooled the congregation at Boxley until its discovery, display, and destruction by eager Protestant reformers (who decried the worship of images that were by this point firmly embedded in the Catholic Church) in 1538 (Butterworth 2005: 123–126). Whether the congregation was actually fooled, or if this was an embellishment to the accounts added by the reformers, is not clear. For many of the same reasons that the Protestants smashed the “Rood of Grace,” other early reformers of the Catholic Church wrote scathing diatribes against the *Adoratio*, *Depositio*, and *Elevatio Crucis* ceremonies I discuss here. Much of their focus is simply on what they consider the idolatrous nature of the *Adoratio Crucis*, as in Barnaby Googe’s translation of Thomas Kirchmayer’s *Regnum papisticum*: “Then flat upon the ground they fall and kiss both hand and feet, And worship so this wooden God, with honour far unmeet ... ” (cited in Tydeman 2001: 79–80). However, their writings also register great outrage over the fact that in the ceremonies the cross or crucifix cannot move or “live” without human intervention, as in William Barrow of Walden’s remarks on the *Depositio* and *Elevatio Crucis* before his execution: “Thys I wotte welle, that on Goode Fryday ye make many goddys to be putte in the sepukyr, but at Ester day they can not a ryse them selfe, but that ye moste lyfte them uppe and bere them forthe, or ellys they wylle ly styлле yn hyr gravys” (cited in Thomson 1965: 134). Here Barrow hits the reformers’ anxiety over this liturgical performance on the head: it necessitates the hands of men to resurrect these dead objects, creating the illusion of godly power but lacking a true miracle. Strikingly, William Barrow of Walden’s final words come the closest of any medieval source to describing the cross of the *Regularis Concordia* as a puppet.

The cross as puppet

Of course, the use of the cross in the *Regularis Concordia* fits quite easily into a contemporary understanding of “performing objects” and “puppets.” Frank

Proschan's definition of performing objects, cited in part above, goes on to describe them as:

... images [that] are "created, displayed, or manipulated" in performance; that is, they may be mobile or stationary, permanent or ephemeral. They may, but need not, have movable parts or members. If manipulated, they may be moved directly (as are most masks) or by some mediating device or mechanism (as are many puppets). If displayed, they must then be incorporated into a performance by the indexical words or gestures of the performer calling attention to the image or certain of its part or properties.

(Proschan 1983: 5)

The breadth of Proschan's definition alerts us to the fact that a "performing object" does not necessarily have to look like what one might imagine is the typical Western idea of puppet: a somewhat realistic human or animal figure, manipulated, perhaps via strings, by an operator who remains out of view. And, in fact, attributes of the cross in the *Regularis Concordia* are immediately recognizable in Proschan's definition: the cross is both displayed and manipulated directly; it is incorporated into the ritual by "indexical words" and gestures; and the celebrants call repeated attention to the cross and its properties, all of which I will detail more fully below. Proschan's work is useful for placing the cross firmly within the world of performing objects, but I look to an even more recent and expansive definition of puppetry to further elucidate how the cross was made to live and to mean in performance.

Stephen Kaplin's characterization of puppetry draws on both Proschan's definition and that of Henryk Jurkowski, for whom a puppet is characterized as a "speaking and performing object [that] makes temporal use of physical sources for its driving powers, which are present beyond the object" (cited in Kaplin 1999: 29). Kaplin argues for an inclusive definition of puppet that classifies an object according to its relationship to its manipulator. For him, it is "the complexities of this relationship and its 'constant pulsation' [that] define puppet performance" (Kaplin 1999: 29). By highlighting the interaction between the object and the manipulator, this understanding of puppetry opens up new ways of considering how meaning is generated by puppet performance. Kaplin's definition allows us to go beyond merely analyzing particular qualities of the object to considering what is created and expressed by the relationship between object and manipulator.

Thus, while acknowledging that puppetry was a foreign concept to the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic community (although not necessarily absent from the medieval church), I contend that it is the complexity and the "constant pulsation" of the relationship between the celebrants and the cross that enabled the monastic congregation to see Christ crucified, to witness his body entombed in the sepulcher, and to fully experience the evidence of his resurrection on Easter Day. This does not mean that all the celebrants were manipulators, or puppeteers, in the sense that they physically moved the object or gave it a voice. Although there was a kind of communal activation of the object in these ceremonies and the transformation of the object into the body of Christ was ultimately completed within the imagination of the congregants, it seems that specific individuals were designated to aid in the

process. These particular celebrants acted almost as guides whose role was to outline the structure of the internal drama to take place within each participant. It was their direct physical manipulation of the object, their proximity to it, their standing in as the site of signification that gave life to the cross at particular points in the ceremony. As the identities of the cross and the celebrants evolved, it was these celebrants' physical relationship to the cross that guided how the object was to be understood by those participating.

Visualizing the object in context

The cross was an all-pervasive feature of monastic life. Barbara Raw notes that for the monastic community, its image was "visible everywhere they went: in the refectory and chapter-house; on shrines, bookcovers and portable altars; in the shape of pectoral and processional crosses" (Raw 1990: 40). The cross was also the site of individual devotions: many of the prayers that monks recited during the public worship of the cross were also utilized privately, and some specifically indicate that they are to be delivered in front of a crucifix (Raw 1990: 58). It is out of this veritable landscape of crosses that the cross of the Holy Week ceremonies emerges and gains its exceptional status.

It is difficult to reconstruct the physical details of the object that would have been used in the tenth-century ceremonies because none of the extant documents are explicit. We can conclude that the object was a cross and not a crucifix, as is indicated by the use of the word *crux* rather than *crucifixus*. This distinction is extremely important and separates the observances as found in the *Regularis Concordia* (which used a cross) from later versions of the ceremonies that utilized a crucifix with a corpus (a figure of Christ's body attached to the cross). Elizabeth Parker (2001), looking for evidence in continental Europe that might shed light on the nature of the ceremonial cross in England, finds that the practices in the fourteenth-century *Liber ordinarius* from Essen, Germany, can be traced back to the continental observances that shaped the *Regularis Concordia*. Also extant from Essen, and dating from between 972 and 982 and thus contemporary with the *Regularis Concordia*, is a jeweled processional cross with a preserved corpus attached. Although, as already stated, a cross, not a crucifix, was used in the ceremony as recorded in the *Regularis Concordia*, it is tempting to surmise that a jeweled cross, or a *crux gemmata*, was used in English monastic practice. This is even more conceivable if one considers Ian Wood's (2006) theory that eighth-century Anglo-Saxons imagined the true cross (the actual physical object on which Jesus was believed to have been hung) to be jeweled. Wood argues that this conflation of jeweled cross with true cross reflects the descriptions of pilgrims to Jerusalem who perceived the precious reliquary that held the supposed remains not as a container but as the cross itself. If so, the use of a jeweled cross would have heightened the experience of an encounter with the true cross that plays so significantly into the Holy Week observances.

Parker also surmises that a processional cross would have been used in the ceremonies of the *Regularis Concordia*. A processional cross of the tenth to twelfth centuries might have been the size of the "Cloisters Cross," now in the collection of the



Figure 16.1 The Cloisters Cross: English; twelfth century; walrus ivory; 22 $\frac{5}{8}$ " \times 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ "; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1963. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Reproduction of any kind is prohibited without express written permission in advance from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Metropolitan Museum of Art. At approximately 23 inches by 14 inches, the celebrants would have been able to carry it easily, it would have fit into the sepulcher constructed on or near the high altar, and it could have been removed and returned to its normal position during the *Elevatio Crucis* (Parker and Little 1994: 13). The small scale suggests an intimacy that reflects the private, communal nature of the ceremonies and the close bond between the celebrants and the object.

The cross speaks

At the beginning of the *Adoratio Crucis*, two deacons carry the processional cross – as we might picture it, a jeweled cross, 23 inches by 14 inches, covered with a veil at this point in the service – before the altar of the Cross, leaving some space

between it and the altar and holding it aloft, one on each side. They begin to sing the *Improperia*, or the Reproaches (the *Regularis Concordia* does not record the entire observance, indicating the singing of the Reproaches by the first words of the verse, “*Popule meus*,” or “Oh my people,” but an analogous version can be found in its entirety in the *Sarum Missal*, which was used widely in England later in the Middle Ages).¹ The Reproaches begin: “Oh my people, what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I afflicted thee? Reply to me. Because I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, thou has prepared a cross for thy Savior” (cited in Tydeman 2001: 70), and the celebrants speak for Christ while at the same time holding up the cross. Thus, the ceremony opens with the celebrants providing a voice for the object and indicating, by their proximity to the object and its placement between their bodies and voices, that the sound is coming from the cross. This reception is reinforced by the *Regularis Concordia*’s instructions that two sub-deacons standing before the cross are to respond to the words; it is almost as if the object has sung to them.

The activation of the object by the celebrants (the singing of the words of Christ) begins the process by which the congregation is able to experience the Crucifixion. The operators are in clear view, but the focus during the Reproaches is clearly directed towards the object, both in its central position in front of the altar, its being held aloft, and its framing by the voices and bodies of the deacons. Here the deacons give voice to the cross very much like a puppeteer would give voice to a puppet or an object. The cross is made to sing Christ’s words, and the congregation is able to hear him from the cross, beginning the conflation of Christ with the cross that will play out even more forcefully in the *Depositio Crucis*.

The cross as the body of Christ

After the *Adoratio Crucis*,² the cross is again taken up by the deacons who bore it aloft during the Reproaches, and it is again transformed. The deacons wrap the cross in a “napkin” – a piece of cloth meant to signify a shroud – and the object is carried from the altar of the Cross to the high altar, where “there shall be a representation as it were of a sepulchre, hung about with a curtain, in which the holy Cross, when it has been venerated, shall be placed” (Symons 1953: 44). These actions – carrying, wrapping, and placing in the sepulcher – definitively inscribe the object as the body of Christ.

This double vision of cross and body that the rite engenders is reinforced, in part, by aural components of the ceremony so that the congregation is employing multiple senses within these rituals. In particular, certain verses in the *Pange lingua*, the sixth-century hymn by Venantius Fortunatus sung during the *Adoratio Crucis* (as rendered in John Mason Neale’s 1851 translation), suggest an anthropomorphizing of the cross:

Bend, O lofty Tree, thy branches,
Thy too rigid sinews bend;
And awhile the stubborn hardness,
Which thy birth bestow’d, suspend;

And the Limbs of Heaven's high Monarch
Gently on thine arms extend.

(Mitchell 1965: 125)

However, the conflation of the cross with Christ's body was not unique to the Holy Week ceremonies. In Hrabanus Maurus's ninth-century collection of figure poetry, *In honorem sanctae crucis*, the cross represents an underlying cosmic pattern that is reflected in all of the other images of the work so that the shape of the cross seems to undergird all that is spiritual. As Celia Chazelle explains, "*In honorem* insists that the crucified Christ blessed not merely the cross, but its form, a blessing proclaimed in the Bible. ... Apparently, therefore, a visible repetition of the form of the cross may be considered sacred" (Chazelle 2001: 115). Particularly striking is Poem I, in which Christ's body is represented, arms outstretched, but without a cross behind him; the effect is an explicit melding of the body of Christ with the shape of the cross. But while in Poem I of *In honorem* it is the shape of the cross that seems to appear behind the body of Christ, in the *Depositio Crucis* the opposite effect occurs: it is the body of Christ that appears from the shape of the cross.

Perhaps the most prominent melding of the cross with Christ's body occurs in the "The Dream of the Rood," the Anglo-Saxon poem in which a narrator tells of a dream he or she has had of a speaking cross that recounted its experience of Christ's crucifixion. Within the poem (translated by Kevin Crossley-Howard), the cross speaks directly, describing the nails piercing its wood and the blood of Christ flowing over it:

They drove dark nails into me; dire wounds are there to see,
The gaping gashes of malice; I did not dare retaliate.
They insulted both of us together; I was drenched in the blood
That streamed from the side of the Man, when He had set His spirit free.

(Mitchell 1965: 129)

Thomas Hill goes as far as to speculate that the anonymous author of "The Dream of the Rood"

had witnessed or participated in a ceremony similar to the one described in the *Regularis Concordia*, that he was struck by the symbolic association implicit in the ritual, and that a source of the symbolic pattern at the center of the poem was thus some version of this quasi-dramatic ritual.

(Hill 1993: 300)

The "temporal contract"

A consideration of the cross from a puppet perspective begins to suggest the complexity of the reception that would have been involved in the ceremonies. Andrew Sofer's idea of a "temporal contract" that is created between the object and the audience within the space of the performance is useful to employ here. Sofer explains his construct as follows: "Like a character, a theatrical sign is not a semantic given but a temporal contract between actors and audience, in which identity is

superimposed on a material object. Such a contract is tenuously constituted in time and thus subject to moment-by-moment renegotiation for the duration of performance” (Sofer 2003: 56–57). Within the temporal confines of the ceremony, the cross as an object and as a “thing-in-itself” becomes the body of Christ for the congregation. The performance of the cross enables the monks to have a unique and affective experience of the Crucifixion in that it allows them to hear Christ’s voice and see Christ’s body. This effect fits well the purpose of the representational liturgy of the *Regularis Concordia* established by Nils Holger Petersen. Petersen makes a connection between the *Regularis Concordia* and a prayer written by the Benedictine monk Anselm of Canterbury in which Anselm mourns not having been present at Christ’s crucifixion to suffer the intense spiritual emotion of the event. Petersen’s conclusion is that certain portions of the document allow the congregation to experience what Anselm had missed: they enable the monks “to be witnesses, to be present at the events, although this would have been thought to take place in a spiritual way, outside historical time” (Petersen 2003: 113).

The *Elevatio Crucis*, the removal of the cross from the sepulcher on Easter morning “before the bells are rung for Matins” (Symons 1953: 49), marks the completion of the contract. When the cross is put back, it regains its identity as “cross.” As the *Regularis Concordia* states, “The sacrists shall take the Cross and set it in *its proper place*” (Symons 1953: 49) (my italics). While still having considerable resonance as an object, the cross becomes again one of the many other crosses in the landscape of the monastic community. After being put back, it remains a sign of Christ (a sign which would have varying emphases throughout the Middle Ages) but not necessarily a representation of his body.

In some ways the temporal contract relieves the tension involved in the veneration of an object within this ceremony. What – or whom – the monks are led to perceive, through the manipulation of the celebrants, is Christ himself, the body and the sacrifice it would be proper for early medieval Christians to worship – not the “thing-in-itself,” a brilliant jeweled object that would not be considered worthy of veneration (Camille 1989: 207). Camille cites Thomas Aquinas’s distinction between idolatry and *latría* (the worship due to holy images) as summing up a long-standing theological approach. Aquinas describes the two paths the mind can take towards an image: “one indeed towards an image as a certain thing; another, towards the image in so far as it is the image of something else” (cited in Camille 1989: 207). It is the second movement which is necessary for proper worship of the cross: “we must say that no reverence is shown to Christ’s image, as a thing – for instance, carved or painted wood: because reverence is not due save to a rational creature. It follows that reverence should be shown to it, in so far only as it is an image” (cited in Camille 1989: 207). It is precisely the puppet-like manipulation of the material object that achieves this orthodox result: it presents to the congregation an experience of the meaning (the body) behind the image.

The necessity of establishing this “temporal contract” with the monastic audience becomes even more apparent on Easter Day. The final reference to the cross is a revelation of its absence. During the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, three monks representing the three Marys go to the sepulcher and are told by a fourth monk, representing the angel at the tomb, that Christ is risen. The fourth monk then lifts the veil of the sepulcher to reveal that the cross inside has vanished and all that remains is the linen

it had been wrapped in. When the empty sepulcher is displayed, the congregation is meant to recall the body of Christ that had been placed there two days earlier. Indeed, if the cross hadn't become the body in the previous ceremonies for the congregation, if it had simply remained a "cross," one would not be able to register its absence. In fact, the cross is clearly present in the community, returned to its "proper place" as the *Elevatio Crucis* dictates, *but it has lost its association with the body*. Another way to look at it: with the temporal contract broken, the body is, indeed, missing. It is this breaking of the contract that allows the monks to witness the event of the resurrection, the pinnacle of their sacred history.

This interpretation of the Holy Week ceremonies leaves open the possibility of heterogeneous responses to the object, varying according to the internal life of each congregant. Performances with objects always result in some amount of space between the stylized movement or crafted expression of the puppet and natural movement and expression – a space, as with the example of the cross, which can be extremely vast. At the same time, it is a space that invites the participation of the audience: the spectator has the active role of filling in the movements, of making connections, of smoothing out rough edges or jerky motions. Spectators are called to be active, placing themselves in the "cracks" in the creation. The gulf between actually seeing Christ on the cross and the experience that is suggested by the manipulation of the cross in the *Regularis Concordia*, an object without a realistic figure of Christ attached to it, gives agency to the spectators and allows them to exercise their imaginative powers. The celebrants manipulating the cross provide an outline, but the transformation of the object into the body of Christ ultimately must be completed within the spectator. Robin Bernstein has referred to particular material objects as "scriptive things" – objects that "broadly structure a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable" (Bernstein 2009: 69). Although the *Regularis Concordia* was a document meant to codify and control the life of monastic communities, the performance with the cross produces fissures, albeit small, into which individual interpretation might flow.

A "puppet perspective"

As I've begun to explore through this discussion of the *Regularis Concordia* cross, a puppet perspective can bring a holistic approach to the study of ritual objects, emphasizing the importance of the object's spatial and temporal journey, how it is moved and manipulated, who does the manipulating, where the manipulators are located, and their kinesthetic relationship to the object. It is a methodology that allows the historian to think about how the appearance of life and agency in a material object was both *created* and *perceived*. A puppet perspective can align itself with the move in art history towards thinking about the material and performative qualities of objects and, at the same time, consider these objects as part of a combined human and nonhuman matrix of materiality and meaning.

There are myriad objects from the Middle Ages that might be considered from a puppet perspective: crosses, reliquaries, *palmesels* (wooden figures of Christ riding a

donkey that were pulled through towns on Palm Sunday), and “Thrones of Wisdom” (wooden statues of the Christ child on his mother Mary’s lap), just to name a few. In addition to the performances of objects, there are also devotional performances from the Middle Ages in which the performer was activated (or stilled) in part by an object. Elizabeth of Spalbeek, for example, was a thirteenth-century Flemish laywoman who enacted the Passion of Christ every day at each hour of the liturgical office. From the *vita* recording her movements, it appears that Elizabeth’s performance was inspired in large part by her meditation on a diptych (a two-sided, possibly folding image) of the crucifixion. Elizabeth herself behaved much like a puppet, residing in states of absolute stillness and collapse when not performing, needing literally to be carried to her bed by her mother and sisters. While she performed, her movements appeared so astounding to her audience that it was almost as if something, or someone, were moving her.

It is clear from recent scholarship on medieval objects that a truly interdisciplinary dialogue is in progress. “Objects,” “things,” and the material world, in general, are garnering greater attention from medievalists of numerous disciplines who have been increasingly drawn to ideas from the fields of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and thing theory.³ Ways of thinking and methodologies from the field of puppetry could be productively added to the conversation. Humans, material objects, and experiences of the divine are inextricably intertwined in the European Middle Ages. A puppet perspective helps us to look back and explore more fully how these elements interact and resonate at the heart of medieval worship. Conversely, the anxiety and debate around proliferating material objects in the Middle Ages can point us forward; studying medieval performing objects might help us to clarify and contrast the ways in which contemporary puppetry both opens space for working through our relationship with the material other and, at the same time, provides audiences with miraculous experiences of wonder and delight.

Notes

- 1 By featuring Christ lamenting to his people who have crucified him, the *Improperia* lays blame on the Jewish people for the Crucifixion, a sadly common theological stance in the Middle Ages and beyond. Although this chapter focuses on the possibilities for individualized response through performance, it is necessary to remember that these kinds of rituals were meant to instill doctrine and thus would have been instrumental in constructing social attitudes and beliefs, including anti-Semitism.
- 2 Pamela Sheingorn explains that the Adoration of the Cross was based on the liturgy of Jerusalem where “the impact of the *Adoratio* arose from physical contact with the actual wood used in the Crucifixion at the same season of the year and in the very place in which the Crucifixion was believed to have occurred” (Sheingorn 1987: 13).
- 3 Two recent symposia entitled “Speculative Medievalisms,” held at King’s College London (January 2011) and The Graduate Center, City University of New York (September 2011) and organized by The Petropunk Collective, are among the evidence of the increasing popularity in medieval scholarly circles of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology (OOO), and related philosophies and scholarly approaches. Although my inquiry here is concerned with the subjective experience of material objects in performance, OOO and other related theories are provocative (and both resonate and interestingly clash with theories of puppetry and performing objects) in their insistence on the autonomous “life” of a

material thing beyond human perception and control. They also begin to suggest a fascination with a sense of unknowable otherness or thing-ness that a material object might represent in both content and form.

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