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## *Affective Kinesis and Construction of Space in Anchoritic Texts*

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A living body confined to a restricted space is a major aspect of the anchoritic experience. Furthermore, this experience is meant to incite a very intense affective involvement on the part of the anchoress, performing her devotional mission and status of Christ's spouse. Anchoritic texts were composed to the attention of anchoresses with the design to instruct, inspire and accompany the recluse in her chosen path, providing advice on various kinds of issues – from practical matters related to food and dress, to the execution of prayers or ways of attending to one's senses. These writings have attracted critics' attention for many and different reasons, but more recently on account of their "affective stylistics" - textual elements which highlight the performative features of writings designed to elicit both emotional transformation and a legal performance of the recluse's role as sponsa Christi (McNamer 12-14). As Sarah McNamer argues, these texts were meant to be read aloud and, very often, literally performed, serving as a kind of script for the anchoritic reader (14). It seems that the enactment of the prayers, gestures and movements as a means for expressing and inciting deep empathy and emotional identification with the suffering Christ were central to the anchoress' daily practices. Moreover, the function of the performative elements in these texts exceeds the eliciting of a powerful emotional response; it appears to have served a legally performative function by aiding the enactment of a legally valid marriage to Christ (McNamer 14). Such elements of performative character necessitate consideration of the nature of the anchoress's enactment of her role, involving issues such as kinesic expression,<sup>[1]</sup> the understanding of the body as a converging point of cognition and action, and the continuous evocation of a multi-layered reality between the secular and spiritual worlds. This paper considers how issues

of embodiment intervene with the affective and symbolic aspects of the enactment of the anchoritic experience, as presented in the anonymous guide for anchoresses AncreneWisse and two of the texts associated with it. The focus is on how Ancrene Wisse (alternatively Ancrene Riwe)[2]- composed in the thirteenth century by an anonymous author to the attention of female recluses - and two of its associated texts, The Wooing of Our Lord and St Katherine,[3] use kinesic signifiers such as gestures, corporeal mobility and sensorial perceptions as a crucial means for the textual production of both “meaning” and “feeling” (McNamer 10). These elements can also be considered as textual tools for the construction and identification of space/s as distinct spheres of experience, where various performative “textual plays”[4] and means for production of significance are involved. This paper traces three main issues related to the anchoress’s enactment of her prescribed role – the author’s insistence on controlling and channeling sensorial perception and the problematic accompanying this idea; the ensuing importance and role of ritualized kinesis and the construction of distinct spatial spheres of experience as a process of meaning production.

Gestures are one of the most eloquent kinesic signifiers, but when it comes to their textualization one is faced with a challenging and problematic issue. As J. A. Burrow notes in his study on gestures and looks, medieval narratives “quite frequently make reference to gestures and looks, but they do not often describe them in any detail” (182). Burrow explains that “non-verbal signs can be recorded only in their equivalent of indirect speech”, which is not an easy task, since as actions they “vary continuously within their physical limits, and even slight variations . . . commonly affect what they mean” (183). Indeed, the verbal description of a gesture entails the unpacking of a whole contextual set of imbricated emotions and meanings, in this sense gestural signifiers function as dynamic shortcuts, compacted signifiers similar to metaphors for the compression and intensification of meaning they convey. The difficulty of textual rendering of non-verbal signs has been recognized by medieval authors – Geoffrey of Vinsauf, for instance, includes them among the “more difficult and less common” kinds of

poetic description, and the anonymous author of Ad Herennium remarks that writers on rhetoric neglect the subject of delivery, because “all have thought it scarcely possible for voice, mien, and gesture to be lucidly described, as appertaining to our sense-experience” (Burrow 183).

The association of non-verbal signs, sensorial perception and textual description made by this anonymous author posits a cognitive nexus for the exploration of which the anchoritic and hagiographic works offer rich material in the articulation of gestures, movement, senses and their importance for the production of meaning. My discussion relates the issues of sensorial perception and movement to the understanding of the senses articulated in Ancrene Wisse and the two associated texts The Wooing of Our Lord and St. Katherine, and considers in parallel a remarkable iconographic representation of the five senses in the form of a wheel, governed by a human figure, in a fourteenth-century wall painting from the Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough, England.

The issues of kinesis and affective response appear to be inextricably bound in the text of Ancrene Wisse, a guide, or non-formal rule composed by an anonymous author with the intention to help and orientate the spiritual aspirations of women who had voluntarily chosen the vocation and role of anchoresses, without adhering to a formal religious order. Part I of Ancrene Wisse shows particular insistence on kinesis in the performing of psalms and prayers, especially prayers before the cross.<sup>[5]</sup> In this it is remarkable with relation to “earlier rules for anchorites and solitaries known to us”<sup>[6]</sup> which, as R. Ackerman notes, “contain very little about the obligation of daily prayer” (737-8). The most probable reason for this difference is, as Ackermann explains, the fact that while the authors of the other anchoritic writings are addressing recluses with strong religious background, the Ancrene Wisse author is writing for persons entering devotional life without any preliminary spiritual training (738). Nonetheless, this fact does not make less remarkable the performative effect induced by the voicing of bodily movements and gestures in the text, especially given that indications on both recommended and undesirable kinesis abound throughout the Ancrene Wisse. Already

from the opening chapter the association of kinesis and the enactment of the anchoritic identity is being insistently emphasized: “The author had assured himself that each of his charges possessed a copy of her own making of the Office of Our Lady, yet he felt obliged to devote a special chapter, and that the first in his Rule, to instructions for performing the official prayers and private devotions” (Ackerman 738). Ackerman estimates that the devotional practices prescribed to the anchoress would be taking no less than five hours a day and thus form a crucial part of her daily occupations and a major tool for the realization and performance of her specific role (743). The text seems indeed to function as a script guiding literally the recluse’s kinesic performance, providing explicit directions about kneeling, beating the breast, signing oneself with the cross and so forth: “Occasionally, an incipit is cited solely because of the need for informing the anchoress about the devotional gesture to be made at that point” (Ackerman 741).

Significantly, the gestures described in Part I of Ancrene Wisse – kneeling, bowing, crossing, kissing the cross are dramatized later in the text and also contrasted to negatively connoted, but nevertheless extremely vivid and original depiction of acting through gesture in the world outside of the anchorhold. Thus the ritual gestures of manipulating the cross in Part IV acquire a remarkable vehemence as they become part of the anchoress’s arsenal for battle against “the evil dog of hell”:

Therefore my dear sister, do not lie still, or sit either, to see what he will do...But seize the staff of the cross right away, by naming it with your mouth, by drawing it with your hand, by thinking of it with your heart, and order him out sternly...And lay into him with hard blows fiercely on the back with the staff of the holy cross; that is, stand up, stir yourself, hold your eyes and your hands up high toward heaven. Cry out for help...With imploring prayers in your own language, drive your knees sharply down to the earth and lift up the staff of the cross and swing it in four directions

against the hell-dog: this is nothing else than to bless yourself all around with the sign of the holy cross. (154)

Here the cross stands as a focal point of the senses – vision, speech, touch, feeling and thinking are all directed to and subsumed by the gesture of holding and manipulating the cross in what seems to be a quite violent fight with the devil. The anchoress is urged to “swing the cross in four directions” and to bless herself “all around”, that is to perform a rotating movement, which draws a complete circle around her, thoroughly involving the kinesic and expressive capacities of her body.

In Part VII of Ancrene Wisse and in The Wooing of Our Lord kneeling before the cross becomes a vehicle for appropriation of Christ’s suffering by the anchoress, helping her to map the divine presence onto her body and the space of her cell: “My body will hang with your body, nailed on the cross, fastened, transfixed within four walls. And I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die – for then shall I leap from the cross into rest . . . (Wooing 256). Thus the gestures prescribed to the anchoress for the performance of her devotional duties are highly charged with intentionality and significance, and thereby carefully structured and contained. Here affective response is induced kinesically, through the performance of ritual gestures and movements, and organized semantically by the construction of a dynamic, concrete and present space, where the affect and identification are located. This highly structured, fraught with religious meaning performance is contrasted by an exuberant and wanton use of kinesic signifiers in the outside world:

The eleventh cub is fed with gestures, with looks and with signs: like carrying the head high, posturing with the neck, giving sidelong looks, looking scornful, winking with the eye, pouting with the mouth, making taunting signs with the hand or the head, crossing one’s legs, sitting or walking as stiffly as if tied to a stake, looking lovingly at men, talking like an innocent, and lisping on purpose. (Ancrene Wisse 21)

This remarkable passage makes use of gestures and looks to describe a way of being in the world outside the anchorhouse, and the author chooses precisely postural and gestural expressions to depict emotional and mental outlooks like pride and scorn. He refers to them as “semblanz” and “sines” (“signs”) (121), thus adhering to the scholastic tradition, which “considered non-verbal messages as part of a general theory of signs, signa” (Burrow 1) and pointing to the various possibilities for producing meaning out of gesture and mien.<sup>[7]</sup> Here again the performing of gestures is intended to exact certain effect (seduction, for instance) and to provoke action, but this time negatively connoted.

As we saw, the gestures prescribed to the anchoress for the performance of her devotional duties are highly charged with intentionality and significance, and thereby carefully structured and contained. This strictly organized, fraught with meaning performance is on the other hand contrasted to a promised hypermobility in a curious passage in Part II of AncreneWisse dealing with the outer senses:

So it is fitting that anchoresses more than others have swiftness and the light of clear sight. Swiftness because they are now so constrained (“bepinned”); the light of clear sight because now they enclose themselves in darkness here . . . All in heaven will be as swift as human thought is now, as is the sun’s ray glancing from the east into the west in the twinkling of an eye. But anchoresses, shut in here, will be both lighter and swifter there . . . that the body will be wherever it wants to go in a moment (“hond-hwile”). (83)

As a reward for her being blindfolded and “bepinned” in her anchorhold, the anchoress will be endowed with a superior sight and mobility in heaven. It is noticeable that even the measures of time are rendered by means of gesture and related to the senses of sight and touch here – twinkling of an eye, hand-while. The author seems to be creating an association of sensorial perception and bodily expression through mobility and action. The senses as pertaining to the body are

to be contained and made to codify movement and filter spiritual grace, and at the same time to work towards a state of unrestricted mobility. How are these apparently controversial claims to be achieved? It seems that through inciting, exercising and channeling motor capacity in his readers, the anchoritic text works towards enhancing the awareness of this capacity and thus elicits a good deal of conscious attention to this aspect of embodiment in his readers. Through the interplay of the ideas and practices of restriction on one hand and freedom of movement on the other, the text fosters a refined sensitivity to the performance of movements and gestures and to producing significance through them. The enhanced mobility promised in a disembodied vision of life after death is still situated in space (“wide shackles”, “meadows”), which, although large, can be known and depicted, and thus structured and delimited from the other two spheres of sensorial experience – that of the world and of the anchorhouse.

Thus the author delineates three distinct spheres of experience, three different spaces, characterized by different forms and degrees of mobility, kinesic expression and mastery over the senses. The external world is a space involving intense mobility, but one that is often misdirected, characterized by the wantonness of “play” – i.e. exuberant gestures and unguarded use of the senses: “The anchoress and her maid should not play worldly games at the window...” (207). This is also the realm of communal, playful activities, often sexual in content:

The same for place: “Sir, thus I played or spoke in church, joined in the ring-dancing in the churchyard, watched dancing, wrestling and other silly games; spoke thus or played in front of worldly men . . . in church I thought this way, watched him at the altar.” (165)

Although these worldly activities are unlikely to be performed by anchoresses and are probably addressing a larger, lay audience, or else the previous, secular life of the recluses, the warning against proximity with the window of the anchorhold is specifically directed to the anchoress and related to the need for keeping the five



senses, and especially eyesight, in custody. The grim depiction of the eventual consequences of failure to do so is once again marked by an extraordinary mobility, induced by the sense of sight:

“But do you think,” someone says, “that I will leap on him just because I look at him?” God knows, dear sister, stranger things have happened. Eve your mother leapt after her eyes, from the eye to the apple, from the apple in paradise down to earth, from the earth to hell . . . and condemned all her offspring to leap after her to death without end. (68)

Thus the external world is a space characterized by or inducing great mobility, but one that is often misdirected, or wanton and unstructured.

The anchorhold itself presents a kind of a medium or transitional space, busy with kinesic activity on a constrained surface, where the outer senses are to be carefully kept in custody and channeled to fulfill the anchoress’s devotional mission. This place is fraught with significance and hence highly structured and performative. The element of play is removed here, there is no distance, no discrepancy between intention and action which could possibly give a wanton, or unpredictable course to the performed gesture. This is a place of atonement with the anchoress’s own self and God, where her body becomes a performative tool, following closely the script provided for her. This is a highly efficient and at the same time constrained space of action, structured by devotional self-definition and aspiration. Its main characteristic is restrained mobility, but one that is by no means absent – to the contrary, kinesic activity is predominant, but carefully organized.

The imaginary space of afterlife in heaven presents yet another sphere of experience, where curiously enough the intensity of sensorial perception and kinesic expression is restored – it is characterized by unbounded freedom of movement and action, with which the anchoress is endowed before and in a greater degree than anybody else. Here swiftness and clear eyesight are related to thought and form a paradigm for cognition and devotion.

The construction of distinct spheres of meaning and experience by means of kinesic signifiers, sensorial perception and symbolic representation is at its most eloquent in the hagiography of St. Katherine of Alexandria (St. Katherine), one of the texts accompanying the Ancrene Wisse in one of the manuscripts<sup>[8]</sup> and presented by the anonymous author as being of particular relevance to the anchorite's devotional experience (242).

In this text we find once again three distinct spatial spheres, each one characterized as in Ancrene Wisse by specific types of kinesic behavior and use of the senses. The text presents Katherine as a chaste royal daughter, follower of Christianity and living in a world of pagan beliefs and rituals evoked by wanton, erratic and even frenzied gestures and noises. Katherine is distinguished for not taking delight in "any frivolous games or foolish songs", while surrounded by the commotion of "shouting of people, crowd howling and yelling and crying" (263).<sup>[9]</sup> As defender of Christianity, Katherine is summoned before the pagan emperor Maxentius, her fierce adversary and persecutor, who during their encounter is overtaken by wrath verging on folly, losing control of his movements, perceptions and speech: "The emperor rolled his head around in rage like a madman, and burning as he was with fury and wrath . . . had no power over his senses, but began to tremble and did not know what to say" (275). The loss of sensorial and motor control is here related to the loss of the rational ability to speak. To this is contrasted Katherine's remarkable verbal skill in debating against the Roman wise men and her extraordinary courage in withstanding the emperor's attacks. It is notable that Katherine's extraordinary presence of spirit is stimulated by the pain and suffering inflicted on her by the outside world through her senses of sight and hearing, converging in a global perception of wounding: "her heart wounded within . . . she stood still a moment, and lifted up her heart" (263). In contrast to the emperor's, Katherine's bodily movements are carefully controlled and directed, guided by "wisdom and true belief", and marked by a striking formulation of motor capacity: "She armed herself with true belief, and drew the holy sign of the cross on her breast, and in front of her teeth and tongue, and came

leaping forth all inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit . . .” (263). This remarkable reference suggests a movement of exceptional scope and intensity, directly related to rhetorical skill and understood to be triggered by a violent impact on sensorial perception. The action of leaping, preceded by the gesture of crossing - combining bodily movement and displacement as well as rhetorical skill - is prompted by a wound inflicted through the senses (eyesight, hearing) upon their converging point – the heart. Katherine’s leap actually conjures up a miracle – the wheel with iron spikes designed by her torturers to pierce and tear her body is split apart, exploding into pieces: “an angel came flying downward with a sudden swoop . . . and hurled such a blow at [the wheel] that it started to clatter and split apart, to burst and break into pieces like brittle glass . . .” (279). The action verbs are marked by high intensity and related to the performing of acts of faith and inducing miraculous divine intervention. Here cognition, motor capacity and sensorial perception are joined in the evocation of hyper-mobility marked by a total corporeal and cognitive investment. Katherine’s leap evokes a sphere of possibility, which both outstrips and refers to the actual context of enactment. As in Ancrene Wisse, this sphere refers to the domain of symbolization and to the action of producing meaning, where perceptual elements are reconfigured to acquire significance. Katherine’s unrestricted mobility, juxtaposed to the powerful evocation of imminent threat of violent disintegration of her body, produces an effect of sublimation, where the object of the wheel is dissociated from its initial significance of instrument of death and torture to acquire a new meaning associated with extraordinary motility and rhetorical skill.

Thus the text builds on and exploits the disparities and resemblances between spheres of experience delimited by means of kinesic signifiers and sensorial perceptions. Both in St. Katherine and Ancrene Wisse the narrative employs gestures and kinesic expression in their potential for inducing perception and action, and has them construct distinct spheres of cognition and action – the relinquished, the actual and the anticipated, thus linking the spatio-temporal axes of the anchoritic existence into a coherent and meaningfully structured

experience. Both narratives first create and subsequently bridge a gap between disparate spheres of experience, inciting the reader's imagination to work through the differences and the carefully constructed resemblances, thereby producing meaning and emotional transformation through continuous affective enactment.

The five senses are an important element both in the delineation of distinct spheres of experience, as we saw above, and in the construction of a paradigm for cognition and religious enactment. The author of Ancrene Wisse devotes an entire chapter to the senses and their "defense of the heart" – part II titled The Outer Senses talks about the five "wittes", described as "guardians of the heart" (66). The heart here is compared to a leaping wild beast, suggesting exuberance and irregularity at the very center of sensorial and spiritual perception: "The heart is a most wild beast and makes many a light leap out" (66). The five "wittes" are sight and hearing, tasting and smelling, and "euch limes felunge" – "the feeling in every part", i.e. touch (66). They are closely associated with the capacity for knowledge and action:

"I have made an agreement with my eyes,' says Job, 'so that I may not  
misthink.' What is he saying? Do we think with our eyes? God knows it,  
he speaks well. For after the eye comes the thought and after that the  
deed" (71).

All of the five senses seem to point to one common center – the heart. The most important of them seems to be the fifth one – that of touch, designated by the generic noun for feeling – "felunge". As Savage and Watson explain, "for us the sense of touch is confined to the surface of our bodies, whereas for the author of Ancrene Wisse all sensations of pleasure and pain, whichever sense they originate from, are evidently regarded as 'feelings'" (358, note 84 to part II). Indeed, the author considers "felunge" both as the sense of touch and as feeling in general. He treats it with particular attention since this is the sensorial capacity which establishes a direct relation between the human body and that of the crucified Christ:

The fifth sense is feeling (“felunge”). This same one sense is in all the others, and throughout the body; and therefore it needs to be guarded best. Our Lord knew this well, and therefore he wanted to suffer most in this sense . . . Our Lord did not suffer pain in a single place through this sense, but had pain all over, not only throughout his body, but also in his innocent soul . . . (90)

Here touch is seen as the most important sense, the one which is present in all the other senses, ensuring the relations among them and within the body, between the human and the divine body, and between body and soul. It is described both in its singularity as a distinct sense, one of five, and as a generalized phenomenon, controlling the ways in which sensorial information is triggered and processed.

In the tradition of the five senses, touch is considered to be the foundation of all the senses and consequently the closest to the Aristotelian idea of an organic “common sense” (Casagrande and Kleinhenz 318). According to Aristotle, sensuscommunis, or common sense, is a noetic function, a “common central organ of perception in which the separate communications received by the proper senses are combined into a unity” (Casagrande 3). [10] In addition, the common sense has the power to separate and distinguish among the various sensations, and yet it must ensure the coherence of sense perception, combining analytical with synthetical functions (3). It is also noteworthy that in De anima Aristotle defines the sense of touch as the paradigm for the structure and function of the intellect, equating knowing and touching: “The conception of thought as analogous to perception leads Aristotle to define thinking as analogous to touch, the most fundamental of our senses” (Casagrande and Kleinhenz, 321-2). Similarly, in Ancrene Wisse touch is not only the presiding sensual perception, but is also closely related to the faculty of memory as a mnemonic device:

“I have painted you on my hands,” he says . . . People put knots in their belts to remind them of something; but our Lord, so that he would never

forget us, put the marks of piercing on both his hands to remember us”.  
(193)

The idea of the primordial importance of touch as closely related to and often synonymous with feeling, and the synaesthetic relation among the senses, are perceptively analyzed by Casagrande and Kleinhenz in the fourteenth century wall painting representing the “Wheel of the Five Senses” found in the Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough, England. The painting portrays a human male figure, wearing a crown, standing behind a five-spoked wheel which he apparently holds in place with his left hand. The man’s head is turned toward his right as he seems to look over a spider web outside the wheel. Surrounding the wheel, from the figure’s right to his left, at the points where the spokes connect to the rim, are five animals: a spider in its web, a bird with a large eye, a monkey, a cock, and a boar. This unusual painting is considered to be “the first known visual representation of the connections among the five senses” (Casagrande 9). It is remarkable for the importance given to the sense of touch by placing its symbol - the spider’s web - closest to the king’s head; for the human figure, placed outside and presiding over the wheel’s movement, who,

as Casagrande and Kleinhenz observe, is considered by some critics to represent man’s ratio or animus (317); and for the unusual artistic choice of the form of the wheel as a portrayal of the total act of sensorial perception.

There is little unusual in the choice of the animals to depict the five senses, which all, with the exception probably only of the bird, correspond to the animal images given to senses by Thomas of Cantimpré in his Liber de natura rerum (Casagrande and Kleinhenz 311). What is noteworthy however is the positioning of the spider’s web at the highest point on the wheel and next to the sovereign’s head, forming the focal point of his gaze. This evidence according to Casagrande and Kleinhenz, would suggest the greater importance of the sense of touch with regard to the other senses, and thus would be a figural representation of the

Aristotelian concept of touch as the closest to the concept of the common sense (318-9). Under this aspect and given his connection with the senses, the man's figure is seen to possibly represent the intellective soul (321-6). The most interesting aspect of this painting however and that which makes it unique is the wheel. As Casagrande and Kleinhenz point out, the question of what prompted the artist to use a wheel-like image to represent notions of sensation and perception is problematical, because "in the history of painting the wheel of the five senses in the Longthorpe Tower is a sort of hapax legomenon . . . – with the possible exception of the fresco in the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane in Rome" (322). In his reading of the image of the wheel the critic focuses on the notion of synaesthesia, building on the idea that "the circle represents both the individual sense perceptions and the combination and integration of the various sense perceptions" (Casagrande and Kleinhenz 323). Thus the wheel would be the imaged answer to the paradoxical nature of the Aristotelian sensus communis, which both partakes in and subsumes all five senses, presiding over them as their converging center, where all sensorial information is stored and processed. Thus, according to Casagrande, the spokes of the wheel stand for the connection between the individual senses and the common sense, represented by the wheel's hub (9).

Aristotle introduces the simile of the mathematical point in order to explain that "the process of perception, while multiple because it was articulated around the five modalities of the individual senses, is nonetheless unitary and indivisible" and his commentator Themistius in the fourth century expounds on Aristotle's idea by introducing the concept of the point as a center of a circle (Casagrande and Kleinhenz 323-4). By the middle of the thirteenth century these commentaries were already spread in scholastic circles, and "by the end of the thirteenth century the common sense had become firmly and widely established as analogous to the center point of the circle and the relation which the center has with its radii proceeding from the circumference and terminating on it, and vice versa" (Casagrande 9). This idea is the touchstone of the interpretation of The Wheel of

the Five Senses by Casagrande and Kleinhenz as a visual representation of sensation and perception:

As such, it rests on a solid and long-standing literary and philosophical tradition which, from the time of Aristotle, has elaborated the basic act of perception and perceptual integration in terms of the relation between the circumference of the circle and the connecting lines to its central point. The Longthorpe Tower artist, by portraying the circumference as a rim, the five sensorial radii as spokes, and the centerpoint as a hub, has joined that tradition at least on the level of visual expression. (325-6)

The fact that the five animals are placed outside the wheel's rim is also significant, portraying the commonly held Aristotelian conception that "the individual organs of perception are external instruments for gathering external information. Once this has been accomplished, it becomes the domain of the sensus communis, which is an internal sense" (326). According to the authors, "the wheel would be a static representation of the inter-relationship [between the various sensory perceptions], and would not move, for any movement would disturb the balance of these separate but interconnected elements as they are unified ... by the sensus communis" (326).

Casagrande and Kleinhenz read the man's hand poised on the wheel's spoke in the Logthorpe Tower wall painting as imposing stillness, by arresting or even preventing the wheel's movement. In this case the choice of the artist to depict this object associated both with circularity on one hand and with mobility and covering of spatial distance on the other, would seem very strange. The presence of the man's hand could as well indicate the moment just before the wheel is to be set in motion. Either way, the image evokes the possibility both for movement and for its being controlled. The man's figure conveys the idea of control of potential movement as coming from an overarching agency, one that at once transcends and partakes in the phenomenon depicted.



In the anchoritic experience, one that is defined by the very fact of seclusion and immobility, the ideas of freedom and control of movement are a crucial stake of agency. The carefully structured mobility, the alternation of movement with stasis and constraint shapes the anchoritic experience in a way which is crucial to the understanding and the value of the anchoritic vocation and social importance. The physical constraint of the anchorhold and the carefully controlled contacts with the world were supposedly meant to induce a greater capacity and impact of the recluse in the sphere of religious affect, but her spiritual experiences and revelations were mostly meant to remain private.<sup>[11]</sup> Whereas the anchoritic role allowed women access to and authentication of their capacity for religious experience, it was at the same time a matter of anxiety and control by the authority of the clergy.<sup>[12]</sup> By designing the contrasts and interconnections between distinct spheres and spaces of experience precisely in terms of capacity for movement, the Ancrene Wisse author posits the anchoritic experience as a choice and capacity for conscious performance of one's relationship both with the surrounding world and with the concepts of religious devotion. He approaches the phenomena of perception and affect as processes of orienting and producing meaning, thus foregrounding the recluse's agency and responsibility in structuring her experience. The text brings about an experience of alternation between restriction and freedom of movement, within the physically constrained space of the anchorhold but also throughout the spaces of the surrounding outside world and of divine presence, evoked in language and brought to life by the faculty of the imagination. This possibility for experience invests with conscious awareness the recluse's own body, actions and movements, in a way which enhances the perception of motor capacity and possibility for meaning pertaining to her actions. It is this process of continual experiencing and structuring of the anchoress's own body that lies at the core of the enactment of her mission. This happens within the limits of the space she inhabits, which can narrow down to her four walls or dilate to the unboundedness of divine presence.

## Endnotes

[1] By kinesic and kinesis expression I refer to all occurrences of gestures, looks, postures and all indications to bodily movement in the text.

[2] Throughout the paper I refer to the modern English translation by Savage Anne and Nicholas Watson, Anchoritic Spirituality – Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1991). The original Middle English text has been consulted in the edition of Robert Hasenfratz, AncreneWisse (Kalamazoo: Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). Quotes are offered from the modern English translation, with occasional referencing of words or phrases from the Middle English text.

[3] Both texts are included in modern English translation in Savage Anne and Nicholas Watson, Anchoritic Spirituality – Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1991). Page references are to this edition.

[4] Wolfgang Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology (Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993) develops the idea of textual play as a part of his reader-response theoretical approach to fiction. According to his theory, the literary text engages the reader in a kaleidoscopic oscillation between the spheres of referential reality and the imagination, a dynamic process involving the production of meaning and the performance of multiple possible identities.

[5] The recluse's devotional routine is discussed in detail by R. W. Ackerman, "The Liturgical Day in Ancrene Riwe," Speculum, 53. 4 (Oct.1978): 734-744.

[6] Ackerman refers to "The rule for conventional recluses by Grimlaic in the ninth century and the later epistles of Goscelin and St. Ailred" (737-8).

[7] Burrow observes that this tradition drew authority from Augustine's discussion of signa (signs) in De Doctrina Christiana (1 ff.) He also remarks that the Ancrene Wisse author is "using the Latin loanword "sign", here and elsewhere in the treatise, for the first recorded time in English" (47).

[8] Titus MS, for paleographical information see Savage and Watson 41-2; 259-60.

[9] Page reference is to Savage and Watson's edition Anchoretic Spirituality – Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works.

[10] Casagrande Gino and Christopher Kleinhenz, "Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on the Wheel of the Five Senses in Longthorpe Tower," Traditio 41 (1985): 311-327 provide a detailed account of the Aristotelian theory of the senses. Casagrande develops further the notion of synaesthesia as pertinent in the analysis of the painting.

[11] With the exception of the meetings with her confessor, the recluse's contacts with persons from outside the anchorhold as presented by the author of Ancrene Wisse were supposed to be strictly limited in frequency and reduced only to practical matters of strict necessity. The anchoress is discouraged from preaching or proffering any other kind of communication which normally would be of the resort of religious authority (75).

[12] See among others David Aers. "Figuring Forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics". Essays in Medieval Studies. 11 (1994), 4.

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### **First Response**

A highly informative, engaging and well-researched article on the textual anchoritic experience, which I have no hesitation in recommending for publication. The lucid and thoughtful style matches the author's sensitive treatment of the inherent problems of textualizing gesture, issues which are explored through careful critical consideration of Ancrene Wisse, The Wooing of Our Lord and St Katherine.