

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Monastic Sinscapes, the Bird's-Eye View, and Oppressive Silences

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86t3n2tf>

Journal

Medieval Ecocriticisms, 2(1)

ISSN

2769-7363

Author

Mcloughlin, Nancy

Publication Date

2022-12-01

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Monastic Sinscapes, the Bird's-Eye View, and Oppressive Silences

Nancy A. McLoughlin

WHILE THE MODERN landscape photographer and film-maker often relies upon cranes and planes—products of modern technology—for the purpose of offering viewers a more comprehensive and larger-than-life perspective, late ancient Mediterranean and medieval European monastic thinkers relied on spiritual and rhetorical strategies to create and authenticate similarly comprehensive and rhetorically startling bird's-eye view frames of vision.¹ Early Christian monks pursued such framing as part of their efforts to identify and avoid all demonically, physically, and socially inspired inclinations to sin because they believed such inclinations prevented them from pursuing an untroubled spiritual state necessary for ecstatic prayer.² The strategies these early monks adopted to understand the soul's battle against the temptations lurking in its immediate physical and social surroundings brought into existence the expansive tradition of the seven deadly sins or capital vices. This, in turn, informed the cultivation of the monastic self pursued by European Christian monks throughout the Middle Ages, and influenced medieval Christian European lay understandings of sin and virtue.³

¹ For a history of mechanical approaches to achieving a bird's eye view, which though accelerated by the invention of hot-air balloon travel have much deeper roots in the construction of miniature model cities, see Patrick Ellis, *Aeroscopies: Media of the Bird's-Eye View* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021).

² Rebecca Krawiec, "Monastic Literacy in John Cassian: Toward a New Sublimity," *Church History* 81:4 (2012): 765–95, see especially 780–85.

³ For the influence of the late ancient desert monks on the medieval deadly sin tradition, see Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1952) and Richard Newhauser, *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular*, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 68 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1993), 97–152.

One way that both late ancient and medieval monks rendered the invisible workings of the capital vices or deadly sins comprehensible to practitioners was through the construction of what I am calling “monastic sinscapes.” In these imagined settings, the forces of sin, against which monks demonstrated their virtue and authority, were rendered hyper-visible in a manner that emphasized the distance between the sinful arguments and inclinations presented by demons or personified vices and the virtuous path the monk had chosen to pursue.⁴ These startling and evocative sinscapes force the reading or viewing witness to observe the action depicted from a great distance or height in order to convert the witness to a more virtuous life. This visual perspective suggests a productive comparison with the temporally and technologically disparate way of seeing enacted by aerial photographs of ecological destruction, most famously represented in the works of Edward Burtynsky.⁵

Indeed, these two rhetorically powerful ways of seeing share some consequential weaknesses. Both bird’s-eye view photographs and monastic visualizations of sinscapes offer their audiences a seemingly transcendent form of rhetorically convincing experiential knowledge in part by constructing and silencing “social, colonial, racial and gender Others,” and do so through their tendency to erase or blur into the background the “intimate, embodied, local perspective of those who are subjugated.”⁶ Moreover, these two ways of seeing share as a genealogical root the desire to see the world from above for the sake of understanding connections that are not visible from the individual’s unaided perspective. The cultural anticipation of the aerial perspective preceded and

⁴ For a discussion of how monastic strategies for achieving self-knowledge and projecting moral rectitude interacted with a pre-Christian Mediterranean system which intertwined the pursuit of virtue and power, see Peter Brown, “Asceticism: Pagan and Christian,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XIII: The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425*, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 601–31. For the monks’ dependence upon demons and the demon-filled desert landscape as a means of negotiating their construction of a heroic self, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵ For a photographic overview of Burtynsky’s work, see <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com>.

⁶ Paula Amad, “From God’s-eye to Camera-eye: Aerial Photography’s Post-humanist and Neo-humanist Visions of the World,” *History of Photography* 36:1 (2012): 66–86 at 66–67.

informed the material technologies created to bring this type of vision into fruition.⁷

Paula Amad reflects upon the complex historical roots of aerial photography as she ponders the way that human imagination and institutions have shaped its use. Focusing on the western European roots of the desire to survey the world from the sky, Amad observes that biblical traditions placed humans under constant surveillance by an aerial God and this understanding of divine-human relations influenced early modern European “world landscapes” and “bird’s-eye maps.” Amad suggests that this religious foundation also introduced a utopian-seeking influence into the development of other modes of seeing and surveilling that shaped European attempts to master the world through travel and conquest.⁸ Monastic sinscapes fit into this genealogy.

Significantly, Amad’s approach to the mixed legacy of aerial photographs is also instructive for understanding the value of comparing monastic sinscapes and aerial photographs of ecological destruction because monastic sinscapes suffer from a similar mixed legacy. Indeed, exploring this mixed legacy opens up these monastic texts, in which the nonhuman is muted or demonized, to ecocritical interpretation. In summarizing previous critiques of aerial vision’s contributions to the development of surveillance-based colonialism, Amad pays particular attention to the dehumanizing potential of aerial vision to reduce humans pictured on the ground to objects or targets. She also, however, observes that the airplane fostered utopian dreams of human progress as it offered the body “liberation in flight” and a perspective of the world that was entirely new.⁹

⁷ For how cultural developments anticipated visual technology in a similar manner within the field of cartography, see Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁸ Amad, “From God’s-eye to Camera-eye,” 67–69. For a detailed account between the connection between religious cosmology, European cartography, and violent conquest and colonization, see Sandra Young, “A Singular World: The Perils and Possibilities of the Bird’s-Eye View,” in *Premodern Ecologies in the Modern Literary Imagination*, ed. Vin Nardizzi and Tiffany Jo Werth, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 196–226. For the coincidence of an upsurge in European utopian writings and violent colonization by Europeans, see Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 217.

⁹ Amad, “From God’s-eye to Camera-eye,” 72–73.

For these reasons, Amad suggests the role that aerial photography plays in modern human life and understanding cannot be fully explained by focusing on the dehumanizing distance it inscribes between the air and the ground. The view from the plane has also influenced modern understandings of art, archaeology, deep history, urban reform, and human contributions to ecological devastation.¹⁰ Significantly for ecocritical concerns, aerial photography allows us to see the landscapes over and through which we have built our civilizations and to improve our understanding of our connections to these landscapes.¹¹ Finally, emphasizing that aerial photography is only able to exist and convey information because of material and reading technologies rooted in human institutions, agendas, and culture, Amad calls attention to its plasticity and responsiveness to the imagination that informs it.¹²

Like aerial photographs, monastic sinscapes embody culturally, politically, and technologically particular innovations, and as a result embody the colonial proto-racist and misogynist tendencies of their root societies. As with aerial photographs, it is the seemingly superhuman view from above which gives monastic sinscapes the power to reorient the viewer's self-understanding. For these reasons, monastic sinscapes, which influenced medieval and early modern European art, can dehumanize the inhabitants of their frames in a manner that has been shown to lead to the colonization of those so represented and the destruction of the animals and landscapes with which they are entangled.¹³ Moreover, the intensity with which monastic sinscapes actively construct and silence gender, racial, and ecological Others reflects their reliance upon such othering for the purpose of creating the illusion of superhuman vision for their idealized monastic subject.¹⁴ These imagined sinscapes actively perpetuate

¹⁰ Amad, "From God's-eye to Camera-eye," 71 and 83–86.

¹¹ Amad, "From God's-eye to Camera-eye," 74 and 83.

¹² Amad, "From God's-eye to Camera-eye," 86.

¹³ For a discussion of the ways in which a detached bird's-eye view fostered early modern colonial violence against humans and nonhumans, see Young, "A Singular World."

¹⁴ For a discussion of the way that late medieval artistic portrayals of early monastic figures intersected with approaches to meditation and concerns about reliable truth, see Devna Gallant, "Into the Desert: Demons, Spiritual Focus, and the Eremitic Ideal in Morgan Ms. M. 626," *Gesta* 60:1 (2021): 101–19. For the influence monastic sinscapes exercised on late medieval and early modern art, see Yona Pinson, "Hieronymus Bosch: *Homo Viator* at a Crossroads: A New Reading of the Rotterdam

for the putative unmarked viewer a false perception of spiritual or ethical superiority that is both rooted in a false sense of distance from the surrounding environment and perpetuates systemic injustice.¹⁵ In this respect, monastic sinscapes enact a violent process for extracting a rhetorically constructed ethical self out of a seemingly sinful environment.

Such othering, however, need not be the primary purpose for the creation of monastic sinscapes or its only effects. The particularly vivid and historically influential monastic sinscapes interrogated below embody complex strategies for exploring historically situated understandings of the virtuous self. Read along the grain, these sinscapes were generated as part of a process which, according to the monastic practitioner and historian Columba Stewart, was designed to help monks better understand their place in creation and “relate to other people on the basis of love rather than fear.”¹⁶

Indeed, it is the ability of monastic sinscapes and aerial photographs of ecological destruction to call attention to systemic problems that are not visible on an individual level and then reorient the individual’s relationship to those problems that renders a comparison of their shared shortcomings so important. As Stacy Alaimo posits in her critique of deep sea photography, which could easily be accused of reinforcing “the Enlightenment subject/object divide” and failing to include the perspective of the animals photographed, such photos also might inspire the kind of environmental activism needed to reduce or stop ongoing human damage to these animals and their environments.¹⁷ Aerial photographs and sinscapes are powerful because they can shock an individual

Tondo,” *Artibus et Historiae* 26:52 (2005): 57–84. For the extent to which the creation of a recognizable monastic subject in the late ancient Roman Empire relied upon the creation of gender, racial, and colonial others, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.

¹⁵ For how the belief in a false separation between culture and nature silences socio-natural collectives of peoples, animals, landscapes, and things, see Joni Adamson, “Cosmovisions: Environmental Justice, Transnational American Studies, and Indigenous Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 181–86.

¹⁶ Columba Stewart, O. S. B., “Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 27:2 (2011): 269–70.

¹⁷ Stacy Alaimo, “Feminist Science Studies and Ecocriticism: Aesthetics and Entanglement in the Deep Sea,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, 198–201.

out of their prior understanding of themselves and the world and move them towards more ethical behavior.

Since both sinscapes and aerial photographs rely upon the bird's-eye view as the means of shocking individuals into a reconfigured understanding of ethical behavior, however, both methods of seeing inherently silence other perspectives and subjects. As a result, striking similarities arise between the false perception of spiritual superiority that may be created by monastic sinscapes and the false sense of ecological distance that may be created by aerial photographs of environmental destruction. Bringing the criticisms of these two ways of seeing beyond the individual body's limits into dialogue with each other heightens our awareness of the diverse ways through which humans have pursued distanced vision across many centuries, their oppressive and distorted results, and how we might negotiate this complex tradition we have inherited and continue to inhabit to the extent that the resulting Western European understandings of self, rationality, and political community shape our relationships with ourselves and our surrounding interlocutors, whether these are human, animal, material, or something else.¹⁸

The Monastic View from Above

According to the author of his saint's *Life*, the most famous late ancient Christian monk, Saint Antony of Egypt, attributed the veracity of some of the prophecies of the Greek oracles to the ability of the demons, who informed such seers, to travel at such great speed that they could relate what had just happened to those they informed more quickly than the news would travel to everyone else.¹⁹ Thus, instead of a true ability to

¹⁸ By "something else" I hope to capture the various ways the collective energies or beings of a place assert an influence of how that place is lived and understood as expressed. For the vitality of the Banda landscape, see Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse*, 220–21. For the potential ability of a single organism, whether fictional or not, to organize life and landscapes around itself, see Adam Trexler, "Mediating Climate Change: Ecocriticism, Science Studies, and The Hungry Tide," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, 217. For the co-constitutive role of relationships among beings, things, and places, see Adamson, "Cosmovisions," 184–85, and Young, "A Singular World," 220–21.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the authorship of the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius of Alexandria and how the *Life* departs from the approach to monasticism expressed in Antony's surviving letters, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 23–47, esp. 23–24 and 42.

foretell the future, the seers merely possessed the ability to share news first.²⁰ By his special ability to see this process accurately from what we might call a God's-eye view, Antony then verified his holiness and access to divine knowledge for those who believed that demons could indeed work the way he suggested.²¹ It is worth noting here that Antony's authority is constructed at the expense of the pagan seers, who must be wrong in order for Antony to be right.²²

Significantly, Saint Antony of Egypt, as his *Life's* author, Athanasius, presented him, became the face of desert monasticism and an inspirational hero for late ancient Christians living far from the desert and fully engaged in the everyday cares of life in a rapidly Christianizing Roman empire.²³ As James Goehring has demonstrated and Andrew Merrills has elaborated, the essential truths that monks like Antony derived about Christian wisdom and Christian empire through their larger than life desert struggles with demons reflected back onto all Christians a particular understanding of their own lives and place in the world. The more distant from the comforts of civilization, the deeper into the uncharted desert, the more liberated from normal human psycho-

²⁰ In the *Life*, Antony explains the greater speed of demons with reference to the greater subtlety of their bodies. See Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vie D'Antoine: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index*, 31–33, ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink (Paris, Les éditions du CERF, 1994), 220–29, [I am following the French translation of the original Greek]. For the earliest extant Latin translation of this text, see Athanasius, *Vita sancti Antonii monachi* 31–33, ed. H. W. F. M. Hoppenbrouwers, in *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase: Étude de critique textuelle*, *Latinitas Christianorum primaeva* 14 (Nijmegen: Dekker and Van de Vegt, 1960), 120–24. For a discussion of the complexity of the bodies of demons, see Gregory A. Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16:4 (2008): 479–512.

²¹ For the way that monks depended upon their knowledge of the working of demons to construct their authority, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*. For the way that understandings of demons authenticated late ancient spiritual leaders from multiple traditions, see Heidi Marx-Wolf, *Spiritual Taxonomies and Ritual Authority: Platonists, Priests, and Gnostics in the Third Century C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

²² Brakke discusses this passage in the context of Athanasius's use of Antony's *Life* to discredit paganism. See *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 43–44.

²³ Brakke portrays Athanasius's Antony as a major transitional figure who allows the monk to replace the martyr as the Christian hero and sign of the rising power of Christianity. See *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 23–47.

logical and physiological limits a reported monastic deed occurred, the more fruitfully it informed and inspired every day late Roman Christians and reinforced the influence of what Goehring calls the “desert imaginary,” where monks worked wonders at the edge of the known world. The lay individual’s quotidian struggles with sin, when understood as participating in the battles monks engaged with demons in the distant desert, suddenly were imbued with supernatural and imperial significance.²⁴

Even the famous Christian intellectual, Augustine of Hippo, claims to have been inspired to embrace a more pious and chaste life after hearing of the exploits of Antony.²⁵ Implicitly connecting the bird’s-eye view with a freedom from sin and confusion, Augustine describes those who were able to overcome their worldly desires for the sake of committing themselves fully to God as “receiving wings.”²⁶ That he does so in a book—his *Confessions*—that would be widely read among the religious and the laity in both the medieval period and beyond, suggests why it might seem natural to medieval European Christian intellectuals, who were familiar with both Augustine and Antony, to believe that one must step away to a great distance—both with respect to physical discipline and internal detachment—in order to see clearly what is most important. And per-

²⁴ For the creation of the desert imaginary and how it de-emphasized the important role of urban asceticism in late ancient Christianity, see James E. Goehring, “The Dark Side of the Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33:3 (Fall 2003): 437–51. For the way that monastic feats in the desert served the imperializing programs of early Christian historians, see Andrew H. Merrills, “Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians: Re-Defining the African Periphery in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:2 (2004): 217–44. David Brakke connects this pattern of using the extraordinary heroism of monks to make meaning for the less extraordinary daily struggles of late ancient Christians to a recognition that monks could serve the same function as martyrs. See Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 32. For a longer discussion of this function of martyrs in the early Christian community, see Peter Brown, “Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity,” *Early Medieval Europe* 9:1 (2000): 9–12, and Erin Ronsse, “Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:3 (2006): 283–327.

²⁵ Saint Augustine, *Opera: Confessionum libri XIII*, ed. Lucas Verheijen, O. S. A., Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), VII, 6–12, pp. 121–32. Antony is first mentioned in VIII, 6:34, p. 122. Discussed in Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition,” 265.

²⁶ *Confessions*, VIII, 7:33, p. 124, “pinnas recipiunt.”

haps, equally significantly, in order to act in a manner that would be perceived as virtuous by all.

Indeed, both Athanasius and Augustine wrote their respective works at least in part to assert their own views in the context of particular debates and political struggles with other Christian and non-Christian intellectuals and traditions. For this reason, both texts employ well-established pre-Christian rhetorical techniques to construct a convincing and relevant argument in support of their own theological understanding and authority. Both texts also eventually prevailed over their competitors to become the most influential hagiographical and autobiographical texts in the western European medieval Christian tradition. As a result, both have profoundly influenced western European understandings and artistic representations of the self, interiority, and the pursuit of virtue.²⁷

This influence was mediated by the concerns and received understanding of their readers. We can already see the process of renegotiating meaning happening with Augustine as he co-opts Antony's *Life* as a means

²⁷ For a general account of the place of asceticism in the competition among pagan and Christian philosophers, see Peter L. Brown, "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian." For a general treatment of competitive virtue within the monastic context, David E. Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels: Ascetic Practice and Reflection in the Writings of Evagrius of Pontus," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68:3 (2000): 537–68. For the competitive context, inter-textuality, and growing influence of Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, see Arthur Urbano, Jr. "Read It Also to the Gentiles': The Displacement and Recasting of the Philosopher in the *Vita Antonii*," *Church History* 77:4 (2008): 877–914, and Mary K. Farag, "Pachomius Outside the Shadow of the *Vita Antonii*," *Harvard Theological Review* 111:4 (2018): 516–40. For Augustine's use of classical rhetorical principles to construct his narrative of his own conversion, see Mary Carruthers, "'The Desert', Sensory Delight, and Prayer in the Augustinian Renewal of the Twelfth Century," in *Prayer and the Transformation of the Self in Early Christian Mystagogy*, ed. H. van Loon, G. de Nie, M. Op de Coul, and P. van Egmond (Louvain: Peeters, 2018), 393–408. For the reliance of Augustine's *Confessions* upon pre-Christian literary forms and the texts, use of the Psalms as a model, and contribution to the evolution of spiritual autobiography, see Adam H. Becker, "Augustine's Confessions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Whitman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23–34. For the general influence of Augustine's *Confessions* on eleventh-century autobiographies, see John V. Fleming, "Medieval European Autobiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, 35–48. For late medieval artistic depictions of Augustine's moment of conversion, see Karla Pollmann, "Art and Authority: Three Paradigmatic Visualizations of Augustine of Hippo," in *Augustine Beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality and Reception*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Meredith J. Gill (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 22–32.

of situating his own conversion. Augustine drew upon Antony's reputation to frame his own conversion despite the fact that he did not believe that the type of perfection modeled by the desert ascetics was humanly possible.²⁸ Furthermore, when we look to the early medieval manuscript tradition of Augustine's *Confessions*, we see that although the *Confessions* gained a readership while Augustine was still alive, the manuscript tradition is weak until the central Middle Ages and quotes show that readers consulted the text for their own purposes.²⁹ Even late medieval accounts of Augustine's *Life*, prepared for lay or religious audiences, recounted the connection between Augustine's conversion and his encounter with the *Life of Antony* in abbreviated form.³⁰ For all of these reasons, we do not know if western European medieval readers found significance in Antony's explanation of the way demons used their ability to travel quickly or Augustine's observation that those who adopted the ascetic lifestyle seemed to have received wings. We cannot document with extant texts a conscious participation in a stable and widespread fascination with the bird's-eye view. We also do not know, however, as Mary Carruthers has recently argued, how much of ancient and late ancient rhetorical practices and philosophical ideas were passed on through monastic practice without leaving any manuscript evidence.³¹

All of these concerns highlight the importance to this inquiry of the allegorical sinscapes constructed by the fourteenth-century Cistercian author Guillaume de Deguileville in his popular late medieval French

²⁸ For the context of concerns about ascetic elitism that shaped Augustine's thinking, see Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8–19. For the complications that arose from the monastic claim to be able to transcend the material world and live like angels, see Ellen Muehlberger, "Ambivalence about the Angelic Life: The Promise and Perils of an Early Christian Discourse of Asceticism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16:4 (2008): 447–78.

²⁹ See Gert Partoens, "Manuscript Transmission, Critical Editions, and English Translations," and Eric Leland Saak, "Reception in the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Tarmo Toom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 245–76.

³⁰ Alison Frazier, "A Layman's *Life of St. Augustine* in Late Medieval Italy: Patronage and Polemic," *Traditio* 65 (2010): 231–86, and Carolyn Muessig, "Images and Themes Related to Augustine in Late Medieval Sermons," in *Augustine Beyond the Book*, 140.

³¹ Carruthers, "'The Desert', Sensory Delight, and Prayer," 11.

didactic poem, *Le pèlerinage de vie humaine* (*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*).³² While Deguileville did not situate the action of his poem within the imaginary landscape of the desert, Sarah Kay has argued convincingly that he used his text to engage with Augustine's discussion of the divided nature of the human will. In Augustine's *Confessions*, this discussion immediately follows Augustine's comparison of a successful adoption of the monastic life to receiving wings.³³ Deguileville's text's pre-occupation with flight and the bird's-eye view might reflect that comparison.

Accepting, like Augustine's *Confessions*, that a true bird's-eye view exceeds human capabilities, Deguileville's poem frames its action as taking place within a monk's dream vision of a failed attempt to reach Jerusalem as an embodied soul. The poem repeatedly demonstrates that the soul cannot see clearly no matter how hard it tries as long as it is trapped in the fleshly body and overwhelmed by that body's impulses and desires. The monk-pilgrim's soul only experiences clear perception for the very brief time that a female personification of Reason frees the soul from its body.

Reason temporarily grants this gift to alleviate the pilgrim's despair at his own inability to embrace virtue and avoid vice (ll. 5691–5726). Indeed, soon after Reason places him back in his body (l. 6274)—despite his loud protestations—the pilgrim demonstrates the very lack of discernment inherent in the human condition. He becomes suddenly distracted, and immediately after asking Reason to accompany him on his journey, selects a sinful path upon which Reason cannot enter (ll. 7005–7011).

³² Guillaume de Deguileville, *Le pèlerinage de vie humaine*, ed. J. J. Stürzinger (London: Roxburghe Club, Nichols and Sons, 1893). While I have consulted the French verse text, unless indicated otherwise, prose translations are taken from the English edition, Guillaume de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, trans. Eugene Clasby (New York and London: Garland, 1992). For the popularity and influence of Deguileville's text, see Marco Nievergelt, *Allegorical Quests from Deguileville to Spenser* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), esp. 32–40, and Marco Nievergelt and Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath, "Introduction," in *The Pèlerinage Allegories of Guillaume de Deguileville: Tradition, Authority and Influence* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 1–21.

³³ For a detailed consideration of how Augustine's *Confessions*, *On Christian Doctrine*, and *On the Trinity* may have influenced Deguileville's *Pilgrimage*, see Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 70–94, especially 87 for *Confessions* VIII, 10.

While Deguileville's pilgrim is forced to undertake his journey without the clarity of sight enjoyed by Saint Antony, the lament he offers when first forced back into his body demonstrates that he clearly values the disembodied vision Reason granted him for a short period of time over the embodied earthly experience that belongs to the human state. Moreover, the way that the pilgrim favorably compares his disembodiment to the oppressive captivity the body imposes on him precisely evokes the bird's-eye view. The pilgrim laments:

Pour ce (je) pleure 6297
 Quar maintenant en (i)ceste heure,
 Avant qu'eusse retrousse
 Ce povre cors et rendosse
 Je estoye si viguerous
 Que bien cuidois valoir II
 Je voloie sur les nues

Plus haut que hairons ne grues, 6304
 Je vëoie et entendoie
 Et nul contraire [ne] trouvoie.
 Or est li gien si retourne
 Que mon contraire ai retrouve.
 Le cors m'opprient et abat jus
 Et me tient souz li tout vaincus,
 N'ay vertu par quoy resister
 Je puisse a li ne contraiter,
 Mon vueil outreement perdu
 Ai, ne sai qu'il est devenu,
 Ma force n'est que de celui
 Qui vif en terre est enfoui.
 Aussi com un singe alioquie
 A un bloquel et atachie
 Est, que ne puet monter en haut
 Que en montant tost ne ravaut
 Aussi m'est un bloquel pesant
 Le cors et un retenal grant;
 Il me rabat, quant veul voler
 Et retire, quant veuil monter.
 Pour moi fu, ce me semble, dit
 Ce que piec'a je vi escrit
 Que le cors qui corumpu est
 Et malotruet pesant est

Aggrieve l'ame et si l'opprient
 Què en chaitivaions la tient.

6330³⁴

I am weeping because just now, before I had taken up and put on again this poor body, (6300) I was so powerful I thought surely I was as strong as two men. I could fly above the clouds, higher than the herons or cranes. I could see and I could understand, and I met no adversary. Now the tables are turned, and so I have found my adversary again. The body oppresses me and throws me down and holds me under it, completely vanquished. (6310) I have no strength to resist it and I am unable to oppose it. I have lost my will completely, and I do not know what has become of it. My strength is like that of someone buried alive in the earth. Just as a monkey hitched and tied to a [block of wood] cannot climb up high, and when it climbs up it falls down again right away, (6320) so the body is a heavy [block of wood] and a great encumbrance to me. It brings me down when I want to fly and it holds me back when I want to climb up. For I was told, it seems, what I have seen written a while ago, that the body, which is corrupt and crude and heavy, weighs down the soul and oppresses it so that it keeps it in misery. (6330)³⁵

In this long lament, the pilgrim partakes in what we know is a global and longstanding fascination with the experience and aerial perspective of birds.³⁶ Like so many before him, the pilgrim understands the perspective of birds to be more advantageous than the more grounded and entangled sight of the average human. Moreover, the pilgrim recognizes that having access to aerial vision gives him an uncommon advantage: in his words, the strength of two men.

Unlike those relying on aerial views for the sake of bombardment or surveillance, however, Deguileville's pilgrim only hopes for an advantage over his own human body so that he can avoid sin, attain heaven, and steer clear of the vices that threaten his complete and final destruction as a soul pursuing virtue and heaven. He does not seek to use the strength of

³⁴ Stürzinger, 196–97.

³⁵ *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, trans. Eugene Clasby Book II, pp. 85–86. I have replaced Clasby's translation of *bloquel* ("clog") with the more literal "block of wood."

³⁶ For a brief account of how premodern humans across the globe imagined the bird's-eye view before they had access to the technology of flight, see Richard P. Hallion, *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity through the First World War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–19.

two men to overcome anyone else but himself. Moreover, he seems to understand the acquisition of “the strength of two men” as necessary to his own survival because both his temporary experience with the bird’s-eye view and the knowledge he has gained from reading books have shown him that his body buries him alive in the earth and weighs him down and oppresses him, like the restraints which keep a captive monkey from escaping.

In this sense, the pilgrim’s imagined flight serves as a lived experience that authenticates the cumulative literary tradition, which characterizes the human body as untrustworthy due to its overwhelming inclinations to sin. Confirming the efficacy of allowing the pilgrim’s soul to temporarily soar like a bird above its abandoned body, Reason answers the pilgrim’s lament with satisfaction:

Donques, dist Raison, voiz tu bien
 Que je ne t’ai menti de rien,
 Que le corps est (ton) adversaire
 A tout le bien que (tu) veuz faire. 6340³⁷

Thus says Reason, you see well
 That I did not lie to you about anything
 That the body is (your) adversary
 In all the good that you wish to do.

The level of meaning-making here cannot be overstated. Indeed, if we read the text against the grain, rejecting the idea that the body and soul oppose each other, we can see that this imagined flight foregrounds an account of reality that would not be perceptible from the senses alone and only occurs to Deguileville because of his doctrinal construction of reality, which he describes as being based upon authoritative books like those by Augustine.

Just as Antony asked his audience to imagine how the ability to travel swiftly allowed demons to give pagan seers the false appearance of the gift of foresight for the sake of demonstrating the supremacy of Christianity, the pilgrim’s constructed experience of flight allows him to prove a point which he already wishes to believe, namely that the body and soul encompass opposing wills. He then attributes this argument to Reason for the sake of strengthening its authority. The importance of the

³⁷ Stürzinger, 198. My translation.

vision granted to the pilgrim through his brief escape from his body is emphasized by the conversation that inspired the pilgrim to request such a privilege.

Prior to obtaining the bird's-eye view offered to the soul that had been freed from the body, the pilgrim could not understand how much danger his body posed to himself as a soul seeking virtue. Indeed, he observed to Reason that as far as he knew, he and his body were one and the same (ll. 5929–32). Once Reason has shown the pilgrim his peril, she suggests that the now knowledgeable pilgrim do all he can to hold his sinful body in check by “(d)rinking little and eating little, resting little, working hard” (*Pou aboire et pou amengier, / Pou reposer, bien traveillier*, l. 6370)³⁸ as well as employing “disciplines and chastisements, prayers and lamentations, and the instruments of Penance” (*Deceplines et batemens, / Oroisons et gemiscemens, / [Les] instrumens de penitance*, l. 6373).³⁹ In short, Reason suggests the pilgrim adopt a monastic lifestyle.

The pilgrim, however, does not yet understand the extent of his danger. It is the remainder of the pilgrim's journey which confirms the truth of Reason's assertion that the body constantly works to betray the soul to the dangers of sin and the pilgrim would do well to take shelter in a monastery. This journey begins in disaster and ends in almost utter failure. The pilgrim's deceitful body and the beautifully languid personification of Idleness (*Huiseuse*), the daughter of the deadly vice Sloth, contrive to convince the pilgrim that it is safe to take the path of sin rather than the path of virtue because only a hedge of penance separates the two and the hedge is not very thick (ll. 6719–6890). Once the pilgrim finds himself on the wrong side of the hedge, however, the deadly vice Sloth, personified as an ugly and terrifying old crone (*vieille laidē et hideuse*, l. 7051), prevents him from righting his course by promising to hang him in her noose if he attempts to cross through the hedge. As soon as the pilgrim accepts this defeat, moreover, an army of ugly and violent hag-like personifications of the deadly vices accost him and beat him brutally until he gives up on trying to right his path, loses the staff of Hope, and begins to despair (l. 10700).

As the pilgrim laments, however, the personification of God's Grace calls out to him from a passing cloud (l. 10773) and rescues him

³⁸ Clasby's translation, 86; Stürzinger, 198.

³⁹ Clasby's translation, 86; Stürzinger, 199.

from his attackers (ll. 11221–32). Grace then helps him heal in a pool of penitential tears (l. 11334), and eventually, once he proves yet again that he is still a danger to himself, to enter the Ship of Religion and join a monastery (ll. 12539–42), where a female personification of Obedience ties up his limbs and his tongue so that he can sin no more (ll. 13016–34). In this sense, the pilgrim's experiences, presented to the reader as a tale of woes, further enforce the basic premise of the text, which is first suggested by the pilgrim's brief flight away from his body. Namely, the text shows that the embodied soul cannot help sinning if it is left to its own devices because it cannot even see clearly enough to make good choices in accordance with its best intentions. The soul needs regular sacramental protection, as symbolized by the pilgrim's staff and scrip, repeated rescuing by Divine Grace, and the institutional support of monasticism. All of these work to steer the pilgrim in opposition to his embodied will.

For instance, as prioress of the envisioned monastery, Obedience demands nothing short of full control. She tells the pilgrim, "I will put you in jesses like a falcon" (*Com faucon te metrai es gies*, l. 13000).⁴⁰ And the pilgrim perceives her control as equally violent, observing that it seemed like he had been "tied like a dog on a leash" (*[mis et] lie com[me] chien en lesse*, l. 13044).⁴¹ Thus prepared, the pilgrim awaits the personifications of Illness, Old Age, and Death with the hope that he will be able to finally gain entry into the beautiful city of Jerusalem, the vision of which had initially inspired his pilgrimage. Just as Death is about to separate his soul from his body, however, the bells ring at the monastery where the dreaming monk is sleeping, and he awakes from his visionary journey (l. 13499), which he now presents to all who read the present account.

By beginning and concluding the pilgrim's quest in his bed chamber inside a monastery and emphasizing the extent to which the embodied pilgrim must completely surrender his will to Obedience in order to be saved, Deguileville implicitly attributes the very surety of vision and understanding of the dangers of sin, which eludes the singular pilgrim, to the institution of monasticism. The monk must surrender so much of his will to the monastery in order to acquire its protection that one might compare the pilgrim (who has been tied up by Obedience) to the monkey

⁴⁰ Clasby's translation, 178; Stürzinger, 405.

⁴¹ Clasby's translation, 179; Stürzinger, 407.

tied to a block of wood and to the helpless person buried alive in the earth, which the pilgrim described when he lamented how his body prevented him from understanding and executing his own will. But here, rather than being tied by his own broken and corrupted human will, he is tied by the rules of religion. The surety of these rules is reinforced by Grace when she first presents the pilgrim with the Ship of Religion as an alternative to his continued attempt to reach Jerusalem as a solitary traveler (ll. 12539–12540), and later, when Grace appears to the pilgrim right before he dies to suggest that after Purgatory, he will likely be admitted to the heavenly Jerusalem (ll. 13470–13482). In this sense, it is only because the institution of the monastery does possess a disembodied, aerial, or reliably truthful vision that it is able to provide a safe haven for the pilgrim.

The reliability of the monastic vision, upon which the pilgrim trusts the fate of his soul, rests in part upon stories about monks like those told in the *Life of Antony* and the *Lives* of the saintly founders of monastic institutions and orders. Deguileville had already hinted at this reliance in the pilgrim's initial vision of Jerusalem, which inspired the pilgrim's journey. In this vision, the pilgrim describes the various saintly leaders of monastic and religious orders, as well as doctrinal authorities such as Augustine, as helping their followers climb into the heavenly city of Jerusalem by lending them ropes or ladders or wings (ll. 99–154). Those who try to enter without such help, are cut down by gate-keeping Cherubim (ll. 60–70). Indeed, we know that the lives of the desert fathers, the figure of Saint Antony, and the authority of Augustine were central to the eleventh- and twelfth-century rhetoric of monastic reform that informed the development of the Cistercian order to which Deguileville belonged.⁴²

In addition to celebrating the authority of the sacraments, Christianity's saintly leaders, and the efficacy of the religious life, Deguileville also claims a bird's-eye view perspective for himself as an author by employing rhetorical strategies to help his audience visualize the action he describes from a distance or a great height. One way that he does this participates in a well-developed human tradition of gaining aerial perspective by reproducing in miniature a settlement or city one wants to understand in more detail.⁴³ Reason asks the pilgrim to imagine

⁴² Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 160.

⁴³ For model cities and aerial views, see note 1 above.

the struggles he endures while his soul is misled by his body as if it were occurring within a game of chess. This reference to chess first occurs early in the pilgrim's journey. Indeed, immediately after Reason places the pilgrim back in his body, she comforts him by suggesting that if he is vigilant, he will be able to checkmate his body so long as he knows something about chess (l. 6360). Similarly, when the personified vice Avarice wishes the pilgrim to understand how much she has caused the king and his men to attack the church, she combines two techniques of achieving distanced vision. First, she invites the pilgrim to climb a hill for a better vantage point. Then she invites him to look down upon the action below him as if it were taking place on a chessboard (*eschequier*) (ll. 9169–9172).

While these isolated attempts to reconstruct a bird's-eye view through rhetoric are striking, the poem's structure as a whole also works to the same effect. Indeed, the poem's description of the pilgrim's journey across a social and geographical landscape rife with graphically described and grotesque personifications and networks of sin, also portrays the human condition from the very same distanced and objective perspective the monastic pilgrim sought when he asked that his soul temporarily be freed from his body. By inviting readers to imagine the monstrous personifications of sin the pilgrim meets on his way, the poem issues several invitations to its audience. It invites the audience to share in this seemingly objective knowledge of the widespread and inescapable sinfulness of the world; to acknowledge the fact that what the pilgrim experiences on his journey is indeed sin and not just human life; to witness the difficulties encountered during the individual soul's struggle to extract itself from this spiritually toxic space; and to accept the individual's dependence upon the support of religious sacraments and monastic tradition for spiritual safety.

In other words, to visualize the pilgrim's account as he tells it, Deguileville's readers must imagine the bodily and social desires that they experience in their daily lives as violent and terrifying monsters which exist outside themselves and repeatedly attempt to destroy their souls as they attempt to make their way safely through this world. Such imaginings, which were designed to provoke a visceral as well as intellectual response, could also shape how individuals perceived themselves as eternal souls living in a body prone to sin, how they perceived and interacted with members of their immediate and more distant human communities, and how they perceived their relationship to their sur-

rounding natural and animal environment. In short, these imaginings functioned in the same way as heroic stories about the supernatural deeds of desert monks to inspire virtue and grant meaning to the daily struggle of ordinary Christians to live in accordance with their faith. They valorized the lone individual's purposeful opposition to everything that surrounded "him."⁴⁴

The use of personification in this manner drew upon classical and medieval rhetorical techniques which used images to organize speech for the sake of improving the speaker's and listener's memory, as well as for giving more force to a point.⁴⁵ A long tradition of personifying the virtues and vices in particular as female figures dated at least back as far as Xenophon's depiction of the temptation of Hercules at the crossroads, which likely influenced early medieval culture through Philo of Alexandria's similar depiction of the individual's struggle to avoid vice and pursue virtue as being undertaken by a man who is constantly under the competing influence of one good and one bad wife.⁴⁶ Writers like Deguileville would have been most influenced by Prudentius's adaptation of this tradition in his fifth-century *Psychomachia*, which attempts to create a Christian epic to rival the *Aeneid* by elaborating in grotesque detail upon a violent contest between personified vices and virtues for control of the individual soul.⁴⁷

Deguileville's use of this long-standing tradition of personifying virtues and vices, however, also reflected literary developments closer to his particular time and context. Sarah Kay examines Deguileville's placement of striking personifications in familiar places such as "house, path, hedge, coastline, ship" within a the wider context of fourteenth-century

⁴⁴ The misogyny that runs through Deguileville's text suggests that the pilgrim hero is putatively male.

⁴⁵ For the use of figures to aid the speaker and listener's memory, see Mary Carruthers, "Moving Images in the Mind's Eye," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 287–90. For the extra force personification added to feeling and understanding, see James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ For the connection between Xenophon and Philo, see Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition*, Acta Regiae Societatis Humaniorum Litterarum Lundensis, 72 (Lund: LiberLäromedel, 1975), 21–26.

⁴⁷ For the connection between Philo and Prudentius, see Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 64–65.

French didactic poetry, inspired by the *Romance of the Rose*, which employed this strategy of placing thought in recognizable locations and peopling those locations with dramatic personifications as a means of creating a shared understanding of reality.⁴⁸ According to Kay, during the long fourteenth century, poets worked within a philosophical context in which thinkers celebrated the singularity of each individual belonging to every form and species, and as a result, vigorously debated the nature of the universals which form the basis of intellectual inquiry. Kay argues that the prevalent philosophical valuation of unique individual experience within a culture, which also celebrated divine oneness and divine knowledge of each particular individual, provided an opportunity for poets to experiment with complex understandings of self in relation to the community and the divine.⁴⁹ While they did so in a manner that emphasized individual vision and sensory experience, the way they marshaled ordinary space, textual traditions, and vibrant personifications encouraged their readers to share their world view. The familiar space within which the personifications were set, invited all readers to experience what was related about the personifications as pertaining to the truth of their own experience. In this manner, these poets sought to create authoritative moral accounts of the individual's place in the world based upon rhetorical strategies that magnified the visionary significance of their individual subjective experience.⁵⁰

Constructed from the creative application of a popular literary technique, these personifications set in familiar spaces could influence the lived realities of the inhabitants of the society in which they circulated as well as authenticating the ideas and authority of the authors who created them. We know from other contexts that such use of personifications could activate powerful ecclesiastical and political sensibilities. Renate Blumenthal Kosinski and Daisy Delogu, for instance, have demonstrated that in late fourteenth-century France, the population of imagined spaces by female personifications of ecclesiastical and political bodies played a crucial role in the construction of masculine political identities and responsibilities among factions of a church torn by schism and a French

⁴⁸ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 74–75.

⁴⁹ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 11–15, esp. 13.

⁵⁰ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 3–8 and 12.

kingdom torn by civil strife and war with England.⁵¹ Such personifications also walked about in the world in the political rhetoric and processions of the University of Paris.⁵² In addition to being adopted by the institutions of church, kingdom, and university, personifications of virtue and vice shaped the political portrayal and behavior of royal and aristocratic women.⁵³ Taken cumulatively, these examples seem to ask us how much the power of such politically effective constructions derived from a persistent interest in the literary simulation of the bird's-eye view within the long-standing monastic tradition of the deadly vices available to western European thinkers through the persistent influence of the desert imaginary, the coupling of Antony and Augustine's conversions, and further exploration of the vices through the strategy of personification.

While this question cannot be answered definitively, the fantastic sinscapes Deguileville constructed by placing grotesque personifications of vices in familiar spaces are instructive here as, stylistically, they bear no resemblance to the accounts of fantastic monastic feats that comprised the desert imaginary, which had gained so much popularity in late antiquity and continued to inspire the medieval European imagination. And yet Deguileville's sinscapes and those of the desert fathers are functionally similar in the manner in which they rely upon distance as a means of knowing the self and its surroundings. We also know that monks of the high and late Middle Ages saw themselves as continuing the work of their late ancient exemplars in a different setting. For instance, recognizing that they could not follow their predecessors into the desert, western European monastic reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries replaced this evocative space for solitude, silence, and prayer with the monastic cell or bedroom where they read authoritative works, contemplated, and

⁵¹ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Dramatic Troubles of Ecclesia: Gendered Performances of the Divided Church," in *Cultural Performances in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado*, ed. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta L. Krueger, and E. Jane Burns (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 181–93, and Daisy Delogu, *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

⁵² Nancy McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender: Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

⁵³ Carolyn P. Collette, *Performing Polity: Women and Agency in the Anglo-French Tradition, 1385–1620* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), and Susan Broomhall, ed., *Women and Power at the French Court, 1483–1563* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

wrote.⁵⁴ It is entirely possible that Deguileville's text performed a similar reframing of Augustine's recourse to the example of Saint Antony, the most famous inhabitant of the desert imaginary, as a startling counterpoint to his narrative of his own conversion to an ascetic life, which centers the weakness of the human will. When Deguileville begins his account of his dream vision in his own bedroom and recounts the bird-like out-of-body experience Reason grants to him, he may have been merely amplifying Augustine's very brief identification of ascetic triumph with receiving wings in *Confessions* VIII.⁵⁵

Sarah Kay's reading of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of Human Life* as an expression of Augustinian theology that explicitly engages Augustine's *Confessions* VIII seems to support this interpretation of Deguileville's interest in the bird's-eye view and his construction of allegorical sinscapes as work undertaken in dialogue with late ancient sources that harnessed distanced vision as proof of the ability to discern demons or sin. An early imitator of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* further illustrates how easily one author's sinscape could be transported to another context for the purpose of doing quite different work. In his 1389 extended allegorical poem, *Songe du viel pelerin* (*The Dream of the Old Pilgrim*), Philippe de Mézières, the former tutor of King Charles VI of France, narrated his own imaginary journey from the depths of the Egyptian desert, where he sought the help of the personification of Queen Truth. In the *Dream*, Queen Truth and Philippe travel throughout the entirety of the known world, where they measure the comparative virtue of different peoples, before arriving in France to counsel the king about how he must reform his kingdom in preparation for a renewed crusading movement, which would finally restore Christian control over Jerusalem and its surrounding territories.⁵⁶ Philippe's text, a literary bird's-eye map, acknowledges the importance of the desert imaginary by beginning in the Egyptian desert. It was also written, as Sara V. Torres has demonstrated, in deep engagement with Deguileville's *Pilgrimage*. According to Torres,

⁵⁴ Mary Carruthers, "'The Desert', Sensory Delight, and Prayer," 3.

⁵⁵ I am following Kay's reading closely here. See *The Place of Thought*, 85–87.

⁵⁶ Philippe de Mézières, *Songe du viel pelerin*, edited by Joël Blanchard, with Antoine Calvet and Didier Khan (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2015). For an excellent introduction to Philippe's career and work, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kiril Petkov, *Philippe de Mézières and His Age: Piety and Politics in the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

the *Dream* merely applied Deguileville's inner quest for virtue to politics and extended Deguileville's use of familiar places to the wider canvas of the known world.⁵⁷ Significantly, *The Dream's* centering of Christian Europe within a moralized understanding of the world for the sake of inspiring violent conquest parallels and perhaps anticipates early modern constructions of world maps which emphasized the European map-maker's aerial perspective and dehumanized the inhabitants of places that would then be colonized to the great detriment of their human and nonhuman inhabitants.⁵⁸

Toxicity and Silencing Constructed Others

Deguileville offered his readers a very particular type of knowledge. Like the creators of sinscapes that comprised the late ancient desert imaginary, Deguileville offered his readers an understanding of their relationship to what they perceived to be the most dangerous aspect of their environment: namely, sin.⁵⁹ Moreover, the knowledge of sin Deguileville offered was based upon repeated iterations of rhetorically constructed bird's-eye views, which allowed his readers to see beyond the natural capabilities of their fallen human condition, and as a result, separate their souls from their animal bodies. In order to do so, Deguileville's text recreated an alternative understanding of the body's ecological relationship with the surrounding landscape and its inhabitants—an understanding which suggests that the body colludes with its surroundings for the purpose of leading the rational soul astray. In this sense, the resulting understanding of the danger of sin is structurally parallel to the knowledge of widespread ecological crises that individuals obtain by viewing modern bird's-eye view photographs and films of ecological devastation.

⁵⁷ Sara V. Torres, "Remembered Pèlerinage: Deguileville's Pilgrim in Philippe de Mézières's *Songe du Vieil Pelerin*," in *The Pèlerinage Allegories of Guillaume de Deguileville: Tradition, Authority and Influence*, ed. Marco Nievergelt and Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 153–70.

⁵⁸ See Young, "A Singular World," and Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁹ For late ancient Christian understanding of demons as presenting an existential moral, social, and political threat, see Gregory D. Wiebe, "Demons in Christian Thought," *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (30 June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.8290>.

Like readers of monastic literature on the deadly sins, those who have seen photographs or documentaries depicting environmental destruction may not readily understand their own place with respect to the destruction pictured, especially if they are not intimately tied to the depicted locale. They do, however, come away with a broad understanding of the level of harm and danger posed by the photographed environmental catastrophe that is structurally parallel to the understanding imparted to the premodern audiences acquainted with monastic sinscapes about the omnipresent danger of sin.

Probing this structural parallel provides us with fruitful insights into the strengths and limits of the subject positions created by both rhetorical and mechanical technologies of distanced vision. It is true that photographs have customarily been given more credence as evidence of reality in the popular imagination than monastic imaginings of demon or vice-infested landscapes by all except those whose religious practice necessitates a belief in the ubiquitous presence of demons and sin. Critics, however, have long warned of the need to read photographs carefully. Photographs are both incredibly useful and dangerous because they can easily appear to be the most reliably objective witness to reality available. Despite this appearance, however, these rhetorical products reflect at least as much the technique, creative insight, and selectivity of the photographer as the potential reality of the object portrayed.⁶⁰ One could argue, however, that accounts of the activity of demons or personified vices promoted by a putatively reliable authority may have seemed equally compelling to many late ancient and medieval Christian audiences. More significantly, perhaps, these two traditions of rhetorical distancing, namely, bird's-eye view photographs and monastic works exposing the constant activity of otherwise invisible demons or personified vices, have much to say to each other both with respect to the importance of stepping away to see broadly and the simultaneous pressing need to remember the local and situated nature of knowledge or understanding.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

⁶¹ Donna Haraway's early work explored the local and the situated from a perspective that is not unlike that held by late ancient monks or Deguileville to the extent that it illustrated the networks of influences and connections that situate and shape individual and collective perspectives. See Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989) and *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge,

This tension between the local and bird's-eye view perspective marks critical discussion of large-scale photos and documentaries of environmental destruction produced by artists like Edward Burtynsky. Since the 1980s, Burtynsky's photographs, which were celebrated in the 2007 documentary *Manufactured Landscapes*, have enjoyed widespread critical acclaim for the attention they bring to our current environmental crises.⁶² The bird's-eye view perspective of Burtynsky's photographs allows the viewer to begin to comprehend the larger-than-human scale of global environmental devastation, and ideally, engage in ecologically responsible shifts in attitudes or behavior. These photos, which are described as representing the apocalyptic or industrial sublime by critics, also have the potential to overwhelm the viewer to the point of inaction, especially if the viewer's situation allows them to believe that they are not intimately connected to the devastation in question.

Indeed, Jennifer Peeples has suggested that viewers of these photos, which are framed to encourage the contemplation of the size and scope of the devastation pictured, should ask themselves how their own actions might have contributed to the pictured destruction and what they can do to promote positive change.⁶³ In this sense, Peeples is asking viewers to consciously undo the very distancing the photos create between the viewer and the photographed devastation. This question of individual responsibility, when asked in dialogue with the overwhelming scale of the devastation pictured, places the viewing subject in the same position as Deguileville's pilgrim insofar as that individual is asked to reorient their understanding of themselves and their habitual behavior in response to

1991). Her latest work, however, assumes a global perspective, again in a manner not unlike the approach of late ancient monks to sinscapes because it argues that some localized perspectives must be ignored to address the global ecological crisis. See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016). For a call to begin with local perspectives that uplift the understanding of those most affected by environmental disasters as a starting place for ecological collaboration, see Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*.

⁶² Jennifer Peeples, "Toxic Sublime: Imagining Contaminated Landscapes," *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 5:4 (2011): 373–92 at 377.

⁶³ For an overview of the toxic sublime as a genre of environmental landscape photography that focuses on Burtynsky and explores the problems and potentialities of this type of photography in dialogue with the natural sublime, industrial sublime, and the problem of the invisibility of most toxicity, see Peeples, "Toxic Sublime," 373–92.

the realization that the world is not as they had previously thought and that confronting the newly identified danger is both urgent and beyond their individual capacity.

Additionally, even if viewers question themselves regarding their own role in contributing to ecological devastation, such questions do not necessarily bring viewers into community and empathy with those who are most affected by the devastation pictured. Rather, privileged viewers might respond by adopting “sustainable lifestyles and ‘technical fixes’ such as hybrid cars and solar panels,” while continuing to “live in lightly populated, overconsuming, overmilitarized societies” without realizing that they are still contributing to ecological devastation and its attendant suffering.⁶⁴ Moreover, these bird’s-eye view photographs have been criticized for the way they reduce their human subjects into the toxic backgrounds they capture or present devastated landscapes that are void of human forms. This is in part because the scale of these photographs renders the humans they involve so small that they easily fade into the background and become just another silenced feature of the ruined landscape. This is a problem inherent to the aerial view. It is difficult to see the bird’s-eye view and pay attention to the complexities of individual experience at the same time.⁶⁵ As the use of this technique in Deguileville’s *Pilgrimage* demonstrates, however, the bird’s-eye view has historically been cultivated to privilege the viewing subject in relationship to the landscape depicted in a manner that creates artificial distance between the viewer and the viewed.

Indeed, in some cases, photographers of damaged landscapes, like Burtynsky, purposely exclude human forms from their images so that viewers may develop their own relationships with the devastated landscapes in a manner that erases and silences locals, who are often colonized people of color, for the sake of the viewing experience of wealthy and predominantly white audiences. This exclusive framing, which has a long history in nature photography and landscape painting, also discourages the process of identifying victims and perpetrators, and as a result, may short-circuit calls for ecological justice while simul-

⁶⁴ Adamson, “Cosmovisions,” 180.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of this problem and how it has been exacerbated by the use of aerial photography in warfare for the purpose of annihilating the tiny human forms revealed, see Amad, “From God’s-eye to Camera-eye.”

taneously reinforcing economic and political imperialism.⁶⁶ For all of these reasons, these photos, which call attention to important ecological crises, also construct and silence ecological Others and conflate such constructed Others with the devastated environment in a manner that reinforces the injustices of economic and political imperialism.⁶⁷

Monastic strategies for extracting the aspiring monk from the toxic environment of sin also tend to strip away the subjectivity of humans who invariably populate the sinscapes described. Particularly instructive examples of the silencing of the sinscape's inhabitants may be found in the works of the monastic author John Cassian. Cassian settled in Roman Gaul in the early fifth century as an exile from the eastern Roman Empire after he had become embroiled in political and religious controversy in Constantinople. Interestingly, that controversy centered on the very limits of monastic purity and monastic vision. Cassian's teacher, Evagrius, had been condemned for asserting that monks could attain spiritual perfection during their mortal lifetimes on this earth, whereas orthodoxy required that such perfection could only be obtained in heaven.⁶⁸

From Gaul, Cassian authored two works, the *Conferences* and the *Institutes*. As Conrad Leyser has argued, Cassian used these works to advertise his expertise regarding the famous monastic practitioners of the Egyptian desert and thus establish his authority to shape monastic practice in Western Europe, to which he introduced the Evagrian

⁶⁶ Peeples, "Toxic Sublime," 384–85; Joshua Schuster, "Between Manufacturing and Landscapes: Edward Burtynsky and the Photography of Ecology," *Photography and Culture* 6:2 (2013): 193–212; and Jonathan Bordo, "Book Review Essay/Essai sur un compte-rendu de livre: The Wasteland – An essay on Manufactured Landscapes," *Material Culture Review* 63 (Spring 2006)/*Revue de la culture matérielle* 63 (printemps 2006): 93–94. For selective framing of landscape painting as a practice similar to the construction of the desert imaginary, see Goehring, "The Dark Side of the Landscape."

⁶⁷ I am using the term "Other" here following Amad to emphasize the arbitrariness of the framing and to connect more easily to the medieval sources with the intent of magnifying how this arbitrariness reinforces racial, gender, and sexual identity injustices rather than to minimize the injustices suffered by particular minoritized groups.

⁶⁸ Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition," 271. For a discussion of how this condemnation affected the way stories were told about monastic feats in the Egyptian desert, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 127–56.

tradition of the deadly vices.⁶⁹ While Cassian's treatment of deadly vices was soon superseded in the manuscript tradition by Pope Gregory I's more popular adaptation of this tradition for a non-monastic audience, Cassian's influence as an important voice within Western European monasticism persisted despite the fact that he worked within a vibrant, complex, and hotly contested tradition.⁷⁰ This is in part because Cassian successfully redefined monastic education by placing at its center an intensive reading program focused on reconstituting the monastic self. Moreover, he did so in a manner that was convincing enough that his works were used to teach Latin grammar. Cassian also used classical rhetorical strategies to situate himself as the most authentic translator of the teachings of the desert fathers to western European audiences. These efforts were so successful that the eleventh- and twelfth-century monastic reformers considered him an authoritative representative of the primitive church alongside Augustine and Antony.⁷¹

We can see evidence of Cassian's influence and authority in the monastic authors who consulted his writings as an authority in their own work, as well as in late medieval translations of his work from Latin into French.⁷² Finally, as with Antony and Augustine, his work may have influenced monastic understandings in ways that are not traceable

⁶⁹ For Cassian's attempt to gain authority, see Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism*, 33–61.

⁷⁰ For the relative popularity of Pope Gregory I and Cassian's treatments of the deadly vices, see Elias Dietz, OCSO, "Aelred on the Capital Vices: A Unique Voice among the Cistercians," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 43:3 (2008), 272–74. For the monastic context in early medieval Gaul, see Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ For Cassian's educational program, use as a source text for the teaching of grammar, and strategic rhetorical positioning as a translator for the desert fathers, see Rebecca Krawiec, "Monastic Literacy in John Cassian," 765–95. For his influence in the eleventh- and twelfth-century reforms, see Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 160.

⁷² For Cassian's influence over the Cistercian understanding of monastic friendship, see Brian Patrick McGuire, "Monastic Friendship and Toleration in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Life," *Studies in Church History* 22 (1985): 147–60. For late medieval translations of Cassian, see Martine Pagan, "Les deau traductions en ancien français (XIV^e–XV^e siècle) des *Conférences* de Cassien. Quelles stratégies? Pour quels enjeux?," *Le Moyen Age* CXX:1 (2014): 79–94.

through manuscript evidence.⁷³ Cassian's works are of interest here, however, primarily because they vividly illustrate the way the distancing techniques that could be employed to create sinscapes within the desert imaginary aggressively silenced the humans these sinscapes encompassed.

In his *Conferences*, Cassian narrates the accomplishments of the great monks of the Egyptian desert in a manner which simultaneously illustrates the supernatural virtue of these desert heroes and authenticates the spiritual, social, and political project of monasticism in general.⁷⁴ He does so by drawing on the desert imaginary, which itself was already becoming a powerful religious and political construct. While, as James Goehring has aptly observed, most practitioners of Christian asceticism lived within the bounds of Roman cities, desert monks, who practiced beyond the edges of civilization, disproportionately inspired the imagination of early Christians.⁷⁵ In this respect, the distanced perspective attributed to desert monks was largely rhetorically constructed.

Like Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, Cassian's stories about desert hermits also authenticated monastic claims to spiritual authority with reference to monks' related abilities to perceive the work of demons and see what was happening at a distance. We see this quite clearly in Cassian's story about a monk whose decision to shelter in a cave overnight allowed him to eavesdrop on a congregation of demons. This story is particularly instructive because it shows the extent to which establishing the monastic ability to discern the work of demons at a distance could provoke the erasure of the human agency of those framed as the demons' helpless pawns.

According to Cassian, while resting in the cave, this particular monk overheard a demon boasting to his leader about how he had caused another well-respected monk to fall into the sin of fornication with a consecrated virgin and then marry her. The eavesdropping monk then confirmed the truth of this report by traveling to the location where the sin had occurred and checking the veracity of the demon's report with the

⁷³ Carruthers, "The Desert', Sensory Delight, and Prayer," 11.

⁷⁴ Jean Cassien, *Conférences: introduction, texte latin, traduction et notes*, 3 vols., ed. Dom E. Pichery, OSB., Sources chrétiennes vols. 42, 54, and 64 (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF: 1955–1959). For the way that Cassian presents the supernatural feats of the Egyptian monks as unattainable to the monks of Gaul, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 243–44.

⁷⁵ Goehring, "The Dark Side of the Landscape," 439–40.

locals. He also confirmed his own spiritual insight when he found that the sin had indeed occurred on the very night when he overheard the demons in the cave discussing it.⁷⁶

In addition to authenticating the eavesdropping monk's ability to see at a distance, the confirmation of the fornicating monk's spiritual demise also confirmed the existence of demons, their collaborative efforts against the monastic pursuit of virtue, and the extent to which their success depended upon both the biological urges of the monks and the occasion for sin offered by human society.⁷⁷ According to Cassian, the previously respected fornicating monk had only fallen into sin after years of concerted effort on the part of a demon who had been tasked with causing his particular fall. Clearly the fate and experience of the fallen monk could not be determined by his intention alone. Rather than being a self-fashioning individual in control of his destiny, this fallen monk was actually a porous pawn in a larger battle between good and evil. Despite his best efforts, this monk's demonic adversary had prevailed over him (*praevaluisse*) by inciting him (*inpulisse*) to sin with a consecrated girl and persuading (*persuasisse*) him to marry her.⁷⁸

In falling into sin, the fornicating monk lost his human agency and subjectivity, becoming a part of the background of sin against which the eavesdropping monk proved his virtue. The demon played the monk's inclinations like he was an instrument. From Cassian's perspective, the girl is even worse off. She seems to have never had any subjectivity to lose. In his tale, she functions as a mere tool of sin, an enticing female body used by a demon to prey upon the fornicating monk's weakness. Whether or not this aspiring holy woman consented to the sin that ruined them

⁷⁶ *Conférences*, ed. Dom E. Pichery, VIII, 16, v. 2, pp. 23–24.

⁷⁷ For the fine line between characterizations of demons as internal thoughts or passions and external forces of evil in early monastic literature such as the *Life* of Antony of Egypt, the letters of Antony of Egypt, and the writings of Cassian's teacher, Evagrius of Pontus, see Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition," 265–66 and 269. For a more in-depth discussion of the complexity of monastic understanding of demons, see Gregory A. Smith, "How Thin is a Demon," 479–512. For the role played by demons in the definition of monasticism, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.

⁷⁸ *Conférences*, VIII, 16, vol. 2, p. 24: *adserens post quindecim annos quibus eum iugiter obsedisset tandem aliquando se praevaluisse, ut eum eadem ipsa nocte ruina fornicationis elideret: nam cum quadam sacra puella non solum inpulisse ut stupri crimen incurreret, sed etiam persuasisse ut eam sibimet iure coniugii retentaret.*

both or encouraged the fornicating monk to leave the monastery and marry her is not the concern of Cassian's account. Rather, the significance of the account is found in the boastful demon's claim to the credit for enticing and persuading the monk to sin and abandon the monastery. The demon unites these players in an all-enveloping network of sin from which only the eavesdropping monk has retained his freedom and full agency.

Indeed, Cassian's description of this wide-reaching network of sin, which connected sins committed in one monastery with a remote desert cave, served to authenticate the spiritual practice and skill of the eavesdropping monk who had seen the vision. He stands, much like the hero, Neo, of the popular late twentieth-century movie, *The Matrix*, as the gifted visionary, who alone can see the network of deception that surrounds him for what it is. The monastic hero is the monk who cannot be deceived despite the attempts of his demonic opponents to convince him otherwise. We cannot see him as such, however, unless he is cast against the backdrop of an integrated system of desert and monastery, the demon world that mirrors the material world, and the internal world of the victorious monk's thoughts. This integrated system, which is cast outside the victorious monk to establish his victory, is also the very fabric of what makes him the hero that he is.⁷⁹

When viewed from within the wider monastic tradition, such understanding resulted from and thus established the monk's freedom from the physiological, emotional, and social entanglements that blinded others and invariably led them into sin.⁸⁰ In other words, monks achieved their version of a bird's-eye view by systematically disentangling themselves from the human networks and impulses that led to sin. Doing so allowed them to see doubly at a distance because their practice distanced them as individuals from the cares of everyday human life and their vision of demons at work allowed them to see what was invisible to other humans.

Such perspective, however, was not gained without the aggressive silencing and dehumanization of the inhabitants of the rejected sinscape.

⁷⁹ For the monk's dependence upon the externalized demon as a sign of his spiritual achievement, see Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10:3/4 (2001): 501–35.

⁸⁰ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.

The eavesdropping monk, for instance, only proves the accuracy of his discernment abilities by confirming the shame of his fallen colleague and the collapsing of that colleague into the wasteland of sin. The extent of the eavesdropping monk's virtue is only apparent when set against the other's sin, which in this system reflects the sinner's unwitting cooperation in the designs of demons rather than his own agency and decision-making processes. Cassian does not encourage us to imagine, for instance, that the fornicating monk and the consecrated virgin he decides to marry were involved in a mutually sustaining partnership of love.

In this sense, the erasure of local perspectives performed by the application of sin as a totalizing explanation for all behavior within the monastic sinscape aggressively others and silences those who are depicted as the inhabitants trapped in the social sinscapes created by human society. The desire to avoid such entrapment could lead monks to drastic acts of self-denial and social withdrawal. Cassian illustrates the lengths to which monks would go to avoid entanglement in his *Institutes*, by relating how a certain monk from Pontus responded to a packet of letters from the family and friends he had left behind when he adopted the monastic life fifteen years earlier. The monk from Pontus threw the packet of letters onto the fire out of fear that the letters would evoke memories and thoughts that would undo his monastic fortitude.⁸¹ The monastic project, as described by Cassian, required that at least its heroic practitioners in the desert renounce all contact with those who remained in the land of sin if they were to successfully pursue the truth they were seeking.

The individuals and landscapes silenced in these examples, unlike the locals silenced in Burtynsky's photographs, were either largely imaginary or personally associated with the lives of individual monks. The speculative nature of this literature, however, did not prevent it from having profound effects upon the lived realities of its readers and those around them. As scholars of late antiquity have demonstrated, the construction of monastic sinscapes carried significant political import in the Christianized Roman Empire. While late ancient Christian monasticism, like other ascetic philosophies, promised first and foremost to enhance the spiritual clarity and peace of the practitioner, the claim to virtuous behavior and political authority were too intimately tied together in the

⁸¹ Cassian, *Institutes*, V: 32.1, in Jean Cassien, *Institutions cénobitiques: texte latin revu, introduction, traduction et notes*, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, S. J., Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF: 1965), 240–43.

late ancient Mediterranean to allow monks to pursue their spiritual goals without simultaneously contributing to political discourse no matter how far into the desert they withdrew.

As Peter Brown has argued, early Christian monasticism elaborated upon a well-established discourse about the pursuit of virtue which argued that those who were most able to control their passions were most fit to rule. While much of this tradition measured a person's virtue by their ability to pursue moderation in their enjoyment of the pleasures and necessities of life, the Neoplatonic philosophers, whose readily apparent virtue allowed them to speak plainly before the late empire's authoritarian rulers, established this virtue in part through a voluntary withdrawal from public life. And although Christian monastics practiced a more extreme withdrawal, Brown observes that in many respects late ancient pagan philosophers and early Christian monks could at times be difficult to distinguish from each other and also fulfilled some of the same political roles of intervention.⁸² Indeed, as Kate Cooper has demonstrated, it was the ability of Christian monks' to completely reject sex, whereas their pagan counterparts only enjoyed sex in moderation, that allowed them to claim a greater politically viable moral authority in the late empire.⁸³

Monks went so far to pursue complete independence from the sin of sexual intercourse that they attempted to cure themselves of what they recognized as an understandable human tendency to have erotic dreams, and as Conrad Leyser has argued, Cassian used the nocturnal purity of monks to argue for their fitness to guide public life.⁸⁴ His instructions for how monks could achieve this purity demonstrated the extent to which monks could embrace misogyny for the sake of conquering their own inclinations towards sin, and in the process, collapse the entire category of women into the resulting sinscape.

⁸² For the early development of concepts of withdrawal and demons to the monastic life of the Egyptian desert, see David Brakke, "The Making of Monastic Demonology: Three Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance," *Church History* 70:1 (2001): 19–48. For the relationship between Christian monastic withdrawal and classical philosophical withdrawal, see Brown, "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian," and Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

⁸³ Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁸⁴ Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism*, 50–55.

Cassian infamously claimed that monks could conquer their unconscious as well as conscious desires through their waking vigilance against any thoughts about women. He urged them to avoid recollecting the faces of their own mothers, sisters, female relatives, and even holy women during the day, in order to prevent the devil from turning the traces of these seemingly innocent thoughts towards less reputable women during sleep.⁸⁵ According to this example, even virtuous women may be conflated with a monk's desire to sin. As a result, women as a category become trapped in the sinscape that has been manufactured to demonstrate the virtue of the successful monk.

Stripped of agency and reduced to ciphers for lust, women were deemed almost universally incapable of escaping the pull of the sinful social aggregate that monks attempted so vigorously to reject. While this portrayal reflected rather accurately women's lack of agency over their own bodies in the late ancient Mediterranean, in monastic literature these portrayals also reflected the external projection of male monks' fears of their own desires.⁸⁶ As Patricia Cox Miller has aptly noted, monks most often portrayed women as either prostitutes, in which form they most fully represented the inherent sinfulness ascribed to femininity, or as honorary men, who through supernatural grace had overcome the inherent sinfulness into which they had been born.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cassian, *Institutes*, VI: 13, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, S. J., 276–78. For a comparative treatment of Cassian's discussion of nocturnal emissions, see David Brakke, "The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3:4 (1995): 419–60.

⁸⁶ See Brakke, who notes that attitudes toward women varied among monastic leaders and that some monasteries had female monks, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 182–212. For the ways that Cassian's concerns about the erotic dreams of monks affected medieval thought, see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁸⁷ Patricia Cox Miller, "Is there a Harlot in this Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33:3 (2003): 419–35. Miller's analysis powerfully unpacks the extent to which femininity is completely rejected by monastic texts, but only considers these texts from a cis-het perspective. For possible trans-affirming readings of individuals who lived their lives as male monks despite having been assigned female at birth, see M. W. Bychowski, "The Authentic Lives of Transgender Saints: *Imago Dei* and *imitatio Christi* in the *Life* of St. Marinos the Monk," in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 245–65.

In addition to sorting individuals in accordance with a patriarchally-defined gender binary, early monastic sinscapes also replicated and gave new life to Roman conceptions of race and empire by imaginatively colonizing the African desert in the name of Christian triumph. The monastic withdrawal into the desert, which was undertaken for the sake of battling demons and conquering sin, served simultaneously as an imaginative conquest of the furthest reaches of the world and an extension of Roman attempts at “sociopolitical domination” over its African borderlands.⁸⁸ As Andrew Merrills recounts, Herodotus and subsequent ancient Greek and Roman geographers had performed an imaginary conquest of Africa through their writings. They had done so by reporting the distances traveled into the African interior from known points closer to the Mediterranean and by providing imaginative accounts of the peoples and natural resources that would be found at these distances.⁸⁹

Merrills recounts how the famous late Roman Christian ascetic, Saint Jerome, capitalized on this tradition in his writing of the *Life of Paul of Thebes*. According to Jerome, Antony of Egypt was driven by divine inspiration to travel deeper into the desert than any monk had traveled previously to find Saint Paul of Thebes, who was living alone in a hermetic paradise. During the course of his journey, Antony encountered Christianized centaurs and fauns, who simultaneously serve in this text as symbols of the limits of human civilization and a defeated classical pagan culture.⁹⁰ As Merrills elaborates, early historians of the church, starting with Eusebius, also employed the strategy of celebrating the expansive nature of Christianity and its future world dominion by celebrating the expansion of Christian monasticism far into the desert, where only mythical beings were reported to exist.⁹¹ In this manner, these authors figuratively displaced real Africans by suggesting that the space they inhabited was primarily inhabited by Christian monks and the figments of myth and fantasy.

Monastic authors expressed Rome’s colonizing rhetoric more directly when they depicted some of the demons against which monks

⁸⁸ Brakke, “Ethiopian Demons,” 505.

⁸⁹ Merrills, “Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians,” 223–26.

⁹⁰ Merrills, “Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians,” 217–21.

⁹¹ Merrills, “Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians,” 222 ff.

struggled as either black or Ethiopian, often providing details of physiognomy that would indicate quite clearly that they were associating the demonic they sought to conquer with stereotyped depictions of the inhabitants indigenous to the borders of the Egyptian desert. As monastic scholar David Brakke explains, in depicting demons as Ethiopians, monastic authors mobilized a pre-existing Christian exegetical tradition which associated goodness with light, darkness with evil, and Ethiopians with sin.⁹² They also reinforced problematic Roman stereotypes that associated Ethiopians with lust, as monastic authors were most likely to describe demons as Ethiopians when they were discussing the sin of lust.⁹³

To better understand this aggressive cooptation of Ethiopian identity on the part of monastic authors, Brakke applies Homi Bhabha's theories about the role played by racialized stereotypes in the construction of colonial subjects.⁹⁴ Brakke then makes a three-part argument to explain why monastic authors sometimes portray demons as Ethiopians. First, demons, which we could understand in part as personifications of an individual monk's impulses to sin, are an essential component of monastic identity because monks acquire their virtue by fighting with demons. Second, while demons were largely invisible, adept monks could see them and demonstrated their spiritual discernment through this special sight. Third, as they sought to define monastic virtue in the Roman imperial context, Brakke argues, monks employed "(t)he clearly marked alterity of the Ethiopian demon" to facilitate "the othering of a dimension of the self that the unformed monk must renounce."⁹⁵ In this sense, the way early Christian monastic literature rehearses Roman stereotypes and politics along the monastic borderlands co-opts the identity of Ethiopians for the sake of allowing monks to imagine that they can extricate sin from within themselves, first by recognizing it as something that does not belong to them, and second by wholly rejecting it. In the process, they silence actual Ethiopians within the context of their discourse and relegate them to the desert sinscape.

⁹² Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons," 508.

⁹³ Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons," 513. For a brief summary of more recent treatments of this issue, see Cord J. Whitaker, "Race-ing the Dragon: the Middle Ages, race and trippin' into the future," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 3–11 at 5.

⁹⁴ Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons," 504.

⁹⁵ Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons," 521.

Brakke is not the first to notice the problematic anti-Blackness in ancient monastic literature, although there has been strong resistance until very recently to consider these writings which imply a connection between blackness and sin as racist or proto-racist.⁹⁶ And yet, these portrayals very likely contributed to the “medieval race-thinking” which carried this type of anti-Blackness into the early modern world.⁹⁷ Indeed, medieval Europeans, building on the tradition of the desert fathers among others, also sometimes described the demons they encountered as black-skinned or Ethiopian.⁹⁸ Moreover, as the monastic personifications of the deadly vices, which we see so evocatively portrayed in Deguileville, evolved into morality plays, the anti-Blackness carried by the tradition played out on the stage. As Robert Hornback has observed, early modern plays regularly depicted the personifications of folly and pride in blackface, contributing to a set of premodern ideas about race that in turn influenced the formation of modern racism.⁹⁹

Interviewing the Inhabitants of the Sinscape

That such violent premodern race-thinking, regardless of its source of inspiration, played a role in projects that sought to extract a virtuous

⁹⁶ For a summary of previous interpretations of this proto-racist practice, see Brakke, “Ethiopian Demons,” 502–3. For studies of later medieval texts associating blackness with sin, see Thomas Hahn, “The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31:1 (2001): 1–37, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31:1 (2001): 113–46, Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁹⁷ For the term “medieval race-thinking,” as a means of situating the violent categorization and structural othering of geographically, phenotypically, or religiously minoritized groups of people in the Middle Ages in reference to modern racism while recognizing the distinctions between the two phenomena, see Cord Whittaker, “Race-ing the Dragon,” esp. 6–7.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of the various medieval sources which represented demons as either Ethiopian or black, see Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 79–93. Strickland does not associate this tendency with desert monasticism.

⁹⁹ Robert Hornback, *Racism and Early Blackface Comic Traditions: From the Old World to the New* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 23–25.

monk from a corrupt and oppressive world may cause us to question whether it is worthwhile to explore the way that such traditions interact rhetorically to construct claims to valuable knowledge, especially since the contributions that these works have made to modern racist thinking have already been identified. However, the repetitiveness and adaptability of the strategies of distancing that produce such violent othering, as well as their widespread influence, suggests that it might be necessary to explore the variety of ways that such distancing occurs. Indeed, when examined in dialogue with each other, the oppressive tendencies inherent in monastic sinscapes and aerial photographs of environmental destruction get to the heart of questions crucial to ecocritical inquiry: What exactly and how can we see at a distance? How do we constitute ethical selves and communities when we are unevenly positioned in and surrounded by overlapping networks of what we may experience as environmental and social justice sins? What can we learn from problematic frameworks from the past?

As Adam Trexler observes, seeing at a distance has become a central aspect of global responses to the problems of climate change and ecological devastation. The cumulative effects of climate change do not become readily understandable in a manner that might inform policy making among the most polluting nations unless they are collected, measured, and correlated through scientific measurements. Toxicity also is rarely visible to the naked eye and its effects are often delayed for several years, rendering scientific measurements of such toxicity especially useful in some cases. Science, however, like aerial vision, is created through a multiplicity of complex human actions which in turn shape human understanding and future action.¹⁰⁰ Like monastic sinscapes and aerial photographs of environmental destruction, science co-creates what Joni Adamson calls the “anthropocentric universe” it studies and often does so at the expense of understanding the lived realities and socionatural entanglements of those who are suffering most from the current economic and political order.¹⁰¹ Moreover, as eco-justice movements have come to have a greater voice within ecocriticism so have local perspectives on global environmental problems.

¹⁰⁰ Trexler, “Mediating Climate Change,” 209–11.

¹⁰¹ Adamson, “Cosmovisions,” 182–83.

These perspectives, which Joni Adamson suggests focus on the “multi-scale relationships between species functioning in systems that heretofore have not been considered deserving of the same legal rights and protections as humans,” sometimes elevate a particular geographical feature and the ecosystem it supports to an earth-being whose ecological rights are defended. Such perspectives, though grounded in the local, are also able to incorporate the global discourses of science and economics to the extent that doing so fosters the continued protection and flourishing of the earth-being and those who depend upon it. Adamson posits that such entities serve as a “seeing instrument” for the local inhabitants.¹⁰² As Trexler suggests, literary and scientific attention to the way that an individual animal species organizes local ecosystems may offer a similar kind of localized response to overlapping ecological crises when undertaken in open dialogue with local understandings. At the same time, however, Trexler warns that anthropogenic global warming and other transnational environmental disasters may disrupt such localized understandings because the global processes which drive these crises—namely politics, economics, and the effects of distant human activity on local climates—may pit members of local communities against each other or against potentially useful globalized scientific understandings of ecological changes which are historically and presently linked to colonialism.¹⁰³ Finding ways to reach consensus in this moment is both difficult and urgent.

In this climate of ecological urgency, which requires the cooperation of peoples operating within seemingly incommensurable understandings of nature, science, knowledge, and ontology, it is well worth exploring medieval as well as early modern contributions to what Sandra Young identifies as “an epistemology of detachment.” For Young the long European tradition of fetishizing “the bird’s-eye view” works to “generate the detachment and sense of mastery associated with formal knowledge” and also to bring “the ‘rest’ of the world into the purview of the curious European” in a manner that encourages violent colonization and “the problem of entrenched inequality in modes of habitation and consumption.”¹⁰⁴ Young focuses on instances of early modern cartography,

¹⁰² Adamson, “Cosmovisions,” 181–83.

¹⁰³ Trexler, “Mediating Climate Change,” 218–21.

¹⁰⁴ Young, “Singular World,” 197–99.

like Martin Waldseemüller's World Map of 1507, which relied upon geometry and astronomy for the purpose of framing their syntheses of ancient texts, European narratives of exploration, and cartography. According to Young, this framing cast Europeans as uniquely able to grasp the entire globe in a glance, and as a result supported the development of a pre-Linnaean early colonial racism, which in turn encouraged the incredible violence enacted against colonized peoples and the local environments in which they lived.¹⁰⁵

The idea that the widespread early modern colonial devastation of nonhuman environments could not have been undertaken without having first been preceded by racist violence against the human inhabitants of those environments is explored in great detail by Amitav Ghosh in his account of the relentlessly thorough and heartbreakingly violent manner by which early modern Europeans depopulated and ravaged the Banda Islands over the purpose of maintaining a lucrative monopoly for the Nutmeg trade. Ghosh uses the word "omnicide" to refer to this type of violence which kills everything that could possibly get in the way of trade or European settlement and notes that Europeans enacted this astonishingly horrific violence during the same time that early modern Europeans were writing about utopias.¹⁰⁶ It is this capacity for omnicide, especially when taken together with the realization that a certain level of dehumanization of the inhabitants of a region usually precedes the destruction of the environment which sustained them, that a comparison of aerial photographs of environmental destruction and monastic sinscapes help us to understand.

Photographs of large-scale environmental destruction like those produced by Edward Burtynsky depict omnicide for a distant audience which has likely been inculcated into what Young calls "an epistemology of detachment" and also likely benefits from the uneven distribution of wealth and environmental suffering that characterizes the current global power structure. If members of such an audience interpret the horror framed by the photograph as an ecological sinscape for which they are at least partially culpable and with which they are deeply entangled, the long bird's-eye view tradition will likely encourage them to respond in one of two ways that are not particularly helpful within an environmental justice

¹⁰⁵ Young, "Singular World," 212–19.

¹⁰⁶ Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, esp. 82 and 217.

frame. First, they might strive to address the issue from a distanced and “objective” perspective which fails to integrate any potentially incommensurable concerns of those most affected by the depicted disaster, as demonstrated by the early environmentalist movement in the United States.¹⁰⁷ Second, if audiences in developed nations have been influenced either directly or indirectly by European utopian writings, monastic asceticism, or literary sinscapes, they might respond through their own kind of eco-asceticism by attempting to live a more sustainable lifestyle without truly engaging in the kind of change that would be most helpful to the most ecologically oppressed humans and nonhumans, and also to the planet as a whole.

In this sense, an interrogation of monastic sinscapes may shed important light on the process by which European understandings of self, interiority, ethics, rationality, and legitimate political community were based upon a radical attempt to extract an uncompromised and uncompromising self from a seemingly dangerously contaminated network of physical, social, and spiritual relations which had been rhetorically framed as shocking and alienating sinscapes. The relevance of late ancient monastic sinscapes to interrelated ecocritical questions pertaining both to the colonization of humans and human-nonhuman relations is demonstrated by their reliance upon the dehumanization of particular humans that fall in their frame, namely women and Ethiopians, which was acted out in the distance of the putatively uninhabited space of the desert as a means of distinguishing the monastic hero from the impossibly entangled human condition. While monastic authors often sought to deploy the constructed purity of desert monasticism as a means of challenging Roman imperial hegemony and encouraging the newly Christianized population of the empire to act with physical and social restraint, the rhetorical strategies these authors employed rehearsed the proto-racist and misogynist discourses of empire and colonization that had long been embellished within the ancient Mediterranean and were structurally similar to the distancing discourse of the early modern cartographers and explorers discussed by Young. As Young demonstrates, the distanced dehumanization of the inhabitants of Africa and the Americas these cartographers performed by synthesizing narrative accounts of contact with indigenous peoples with the astronomically and mathematically

¹⁰⁷ Adamson, “Cosmovisions,” 173, and Cheryl Lousley, “Ecocriticism and the Politics of Representation, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, 155–71.

mediated cartographic depiction of the earth as a knowable globe, was understood by early modern Europeans as justification for widespread colonization and its attendant ecological destruction.

When monastic sinscapes are seen from this perspective, the way that Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* advocates for the separation of the soul from the body and its subsequent insulation from all avenues of cross-body mediation between the pilgrim's soul and the surrounding environment is particularly instructive. This is because it explicitly demonstrates how colonized humans and the nonhuman environment are aggressively excluded from resulting constructions of a seemingly rational realm of individual and communal ethics. Deguileville's rhetorical disentanglement of the soul from its embodied state and surrounding environment, like the liberating effects of flight, allowed for an understanding of both the rational human soul and the political and religious communities the rational soul inhabited as being distinct from and superior to the surrounding world and its inhabitants. Indeed, the surrounding environment is silenced when the fleshly body is framed as a vehicle for sin, which, for the sake of the soul's purity, must be violently oppressed like a falcon placed in jesses or a dog tied to a leash. Such violence, as Karl Steel has argued, separated animals as objects of human violence from humans in much medieval discourse.¹⁰⁸

While these comparisons may reflect a limited empathy for the trapped animals described, the violence which the pilgrim's soul invites the monastic rule to inflict upon his body is portrayed as necessary to overcome the violence the body, now associated with animals, would enact against the soul if it were free to do its will. In other words, the body, which has been associated with animals, is constructed as a dangerous enemy which must be aggressively restrained. Moreover, Deguileville implicitly applies the distinction he draws between the rational human soul and animals to relations between different sets of humans in a manner that was common in medieval European thought.¹⁰⁹ In addition to distinguishing the body from the soul by associating the body with animals, Deguileville's *Pilgrimage*, like the late ancient monastic sin-

¹⁰⁸ Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ Karl Steel, "Centaur, Satyr, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012): 257–74.

scapes, also characterizes the body's sinful tendencies as female by suggesting that the body plays Delilah to the soul's Samson (l. 6009), portraying the vices as ugly hags, and suggesting that women rule the place where the pilgrim's soul suffers so much temptation (ll. 7371–78 and 11232–34). Furthermore, his text takes on a political and possibly proto-racist dimension as he identifies the work of the hag-like vices with those who were often cast as Christianity's religious opponents in medieval polemics by disparaging Jews (ll. 5601–2) and Muslims (ll. 91119 and 10175).¹¹⁰ Such oppositions could easily spill over into calls for political violence as Philippe de Mézières' pro-crusade adaptation of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* demonstrates.

Also implicit in Deguileville's boundary work to separate the animal body from the rational soul is the fearful recognition of the sensory environment as a source of sin and danger. The landscape represented by hedges, mountains, valleys, towns, and seashores is where the hag-like vices attack, rendering the pilgrim as helpless as any animal. Indeed, Deguileville rejects the entire sensory world we inhabit as a place where souls are tormented and misled. As Grace explains to the pilgrim, the world is a sea in which all souls swim in accordance with their virtue, with the most virtuous sitting in it winged and upright, preparing themselves to fly away, and the least virtuous swimming upside down and completely covered in water (ll. 426–30 and 11607–52). As a whole, Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* encouraged readers to see their souls in manner that would insulate them from empathetic connection with other humans, animals, and the surrounding landscape. Moreover, this impulse towards protective insulation was already implicitly violent and politicized in a manner that opens it up to the kind of critique that has been directed at aerial photographs and early modern European cartography.

In addition to contributing a historically and theoretically significant example to a growing body of scholarship on the evolution and consequences of the European fascination with the bird's-eye view, however, monastic sinscapes also offer us a glimpse of other perspectives and potential ways of inhabiting the world because they display the cultural work that was necessary to construct the ideals of the virtuous monk and the rational thinker. For instance, Deguileville's poem is rich in descriptions of animal life, weather, human relations, and social foibles,

¹¹⁰ Geraldine Heng, "Invention of Race in the Middle Ages II: Locations of Medieval Race," *Literature Compass* 8:5 (2011): 276–79.

which call attention to the shared status of humans and animals as beings deeply immersed in the sensible world. These observations place the pilgrim firmly within his natural and animal environment and speak to a deep awareness of the complex entanglements and interactions which shape embodied human and animal life. As Sarah Kay demonstrates, moreover, Deguileville's extended allegory is full of paradoxes which point to the complex and porous relationship the soul has with its interfaces with the body, and through the body, the world. Kay argues that following Augustine, Deguileville is interested in puzzling out the way the soul is drawn into the external world by the body and how that external pull affects the will and understanding. Moreover, she suggests that Deguileville dwells upon this problem through a series of paradoxes as a means of encouraging readers to consider the limits of their own understanding of themselves and their relationship to both the external world and the divine.¹¹¹ In this respect, Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* presents an alternative understanding of the human state—one which could be the basis of empathetic interaction among humans, animals, and places—before rejecting that alternative for the sake of enforcing a culturally supported bird's-eye view.

By focusing on the creation of distanced vision, which is what makes Deguileville's *Pilgrimage* and monastic accounts of supernatural feats of discernment striking and convincing, I have been examining a technique for constructing authority rather than the more important message of the text. If we turn to content, then monastic sinscapes and aerial photographs of ecological destruction ask us to engage in careful reflection about existential and moral crises that demand our attention and action as much as they exceed our understanding. For those who have been habituated to "an epistemology of detachment," however, such engagement may need to be correctively directed away from an interiorizing or distanced response.

Some of the critics of Burtynsky's photographs have suggested that documentaries about ecological destruction, which included extended interviews with those most affected, might provide a more even understanding of global ecological crises than striking still photographs, which fade those most affected into the background.¹¹² These interviews

¹¹¹ Kay, *Place of Thought*, 70–94.

¹¹² Xinmin Liu, "Ethical Dilemma in 'Documenting' Manufactured Landscapes in China," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 6:3 (2014): 474–78, and Gerda

invite a more localized perspective into the conversation, although the framing remains problematically distanced. This practice of interviewing the inhabitants, while still problematically distanced in comparison with truly local perspectives, may offer a model for dismantling and rethinking our inherited “epistemology of detachment.” In the case of the long European tradition of constructing sinscapes and other allegorical places where truth may be found, however, we cannot interview the silenced inhabitants of sinscapes, because they are all figments of the author’s imagination and any local knowledge that they might have represented has been either silenced or grossly distorted by the way that they have been framed. We can, however, interrogate the images these authors have constructed with their texts in the same way that aspiring monks and pilgrims were encouraged to question demons and vices when they encountered them. We can ask them where these constructs come from, what historical power relations and silences fostered their development, how relationships among humans and between humans and environments might be imagined differently if the networks so elaborately described in these texts were not assumed to be inherently sinful, and how we might reimagine the seeing subject to undo the violent Othering of people, animals, and earth that these texts set in motion.¹¹³

Cammaer, “Edward Burtynsky’s *Manufactured Landscapes*: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Creating Moving Still Images and Stilling Moving Images of Ecological Disasters,” *Environmental Communication* 3:1 (2009): 121–30 at 125.

¹¹³ For the practice of interrogating thoughts and impulses that monks took from Greek philosophy, see Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition,” 266. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits a similar list of questions for understanding the cultural work done by depictions of monsters. See Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25.

Monastic Sinscapes, the Bird's-Eye View, and Oppressive Silences

Cover Page Footnote

Earlier versions of this argument were presented at the Global Prehumanisms Conference (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2018), the UCI History Stem Studies Reading Group (UCI, 2020), and the Annual Meeting of the Medieval Association of the Pacific (Banff, 2022). I am grateful to participants in both conferences for their encouragement and suggestions. I am also grateful to Tryntje Helfferich and Amy Caldwell for reading previous drafts of this essay, the UCI Women & Non-Binary Associate Faculty Initiative for its support of my research, and the National Endowment for the Humanities for supporting Richard G. Newhauser's 2006 Summer Seminar, "The Seven Deadly Sins as Cultural Constructions," which first introduced me to the medieval deadly sins tradition.