

Unseeing the Body with Bodies on the Move: An Epistemology for Bodies through Certeau and Holy Week Processions

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The twentieth-century philosophical and theological turn to the body challenged modern Western conceptions of bodies as closed, independent entities, but it has not halted the objectifying epistemology that produces this understanding of bodies. To reform the perceptual lens that renders bodies into objects, this article develops an alternative epistemology grounded in participatory interaction in lived space. I bring Michel de Certeau's discussion of the practice of walking the city into conversation with my ethnographic study of Lent and Easter at an Episcopal church in the American South. I argue that Certeau's construal of walking as a way of unseeing the city from a voyeur's perspective also generates a way of unseeing the body as a closed, independent object. I apply Certeau's work to my case study of Holy Week processions to show that an epistemology of unseeing enables a perception of bodies as journeys to emerge.

Introduction

In the middle of the twentieth century, when Western philosophers and Christian theologians began embracing Gabriel Marcel's assertion "I am my body"¹ to redress dualistic privileging of human minds over bodies, they instigated an imaginative revolution

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¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Regnery, 1952), 242 (October 23, 1920 entry). See also Gabriel Marcel, "Notes for a Paper to the Philosophical Society," in *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, trans. Katherine Farrer (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 12.

in scholarship about human embodiment. Untethered from its subordinate role as vehicle for the mind or self, the body became free to define human personhood,² to subsist relationally rather than individually,³ to exhibit fluidity and ambiguity rather than closure and solidity,⁴ and to be under construction rather than naturally given.⁵ Bodies oppressed under modern Western and Christian ideologies challenged the domination of healthy, wealthy, white heterosexual masculine bodies as scholars placed black and brown bodies, women's bodies, queer bodies, poor bodies, and bodies with disabilities at the center of reflections on being human.⁶ And bodies beckoned scholars to renovate their conceptions of agency, community, God, and redemption in light of experiences often suppressed in philosophical and theological discourse, including trauma, affect, sex, illness, and body modification.⁷

For all this labor, however, the scholarly turn to the body has not birthed a revolutionary change in how people in contemporary Western contexts tend to perceive bodies. A vision of the body as a static, individual entity bounded by skin and separate from its surroundings

² See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002); and Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas S. Bax, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 60–67, 74–102.

⁴ See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 234–64.

⁵ See, among others, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁶ See, for example, M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); Gerard Loughlin, ed., *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007); and Sharon V. Betcher, "Becoming Flesh of My Flesh: Feminist and Disability Theologies on the Edge of Posthumanist Discourse," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26 (2010): 107–18.

⁷ See, among others, Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014); John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, eds., *Controversies in Body Theology*, Controversies in Contextual Theology Series (London: SCM, 2008).

maintains a firm grip on popular Western thinking. This vision is so customary that a closed, individual body seems empirically obvious, while an unbounded or relational body seems to require a mental leap into abstraction.

The problem is that an objectifying epistemology fueled by a dualistic logic pervades Western thinking about bodies. This way of knowing hinges on three interlocking assumptions: first, the truth of embodiment is best ascertained at a distance from the bodies that one seeks to know; second, the most reliable method for gathering purportedly neutral and comprehensive knowledge is visual perception; and third, distancing plus seeing excises the knower's body from the equation so that true knowledge uncompromised by bodily subjectivity is obtained. When these assumptions define the ideal process for gaining knowledge about bodies, the resulting epistemology renders bodies into objects of minds that have been trained to believe in their own disembodiment. At best, this objectifying epistemological approach promises more than it can deliver to its knowers by basing supposedly accurate, objective information about bodies on contested, nonobjective assumptions; at worst, this way of thinking has helped shore up Western ideologies of racism, imperialism, sexism, and heterosexism (among others) by converting dehumanizing assessments of bodies into supposedly rational justifications for subjugating them.⁸ Under this objectifying epistemology, the scholarly insights gained in the turn to the body can only register as artificial constructs divorced from what seems like concrete embodied life.

Theologians have addressed this epistemological problem in several major ways. Graham Ward takes a discursive route toward embodiment because of how particular discourses always already delimit people's access to bodies.⁹ In *Cities of God*, Ward draws upon the work of feminist queer theorist Judith Butler to grapple with the roles that power and language play in constructing bodies, and he proposes the concept of "transcorporeality" to encapsulate bodily inscriptions

⁸ Several scholars whose critiques of objectifying mechanisms within these ideologies inform my thinking include Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*; and Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁹ See Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 81–116.

and performances.¹⁰ While his work rightly highlights the power-laden conditions under which knowing bodies takes place, Ward does not adequately reckon with the inverse issue: just as bodies may be incomprehensible outside of discourse, as Ward suggests,¹¹ so no human discourse or knowledge occurs outside of human embodiment. By abstracting discursive constructions from bodies, his proposal reinscribes abstraction from actual bodies into his epistemological framework.

Other theologians have argued instead for embodied modes of knowing. In *Let the Bones Dance*, Marcia Mount Shoop employs the category of “feeling” from process philosophy in order to surface the “visceral,” practical knowledge that female bodily experiences of sexual trauma, pregnancy, and mothering generate.¹² In an essay on ethnographic study for ecclesiology, Christian Scharen critiques the possibility of occupying a distant “observer” perspective and appeals to bodily participation as an indispensable means for understanding Christian practices.¹³ While Mount Shoop and Scharen both helpfully approach bodies as knowers rather than as mere objects of knowing, the embodied modes of knowing that they advocate primarily apply to embodied subjects doing the knowing. As a result, Mount Shoop’s and Scharen’s insights provide a way to halt knowing subjects’ objectification of their own bodies, but they stop short of halting a knowing subject’s objectification of the bodies of others.

A third solution that theologians have proposed is to privilege the category of flesh rather than body. In a roundtable article honoring Nancy Eiesland’s work, Sharon Betcher argues that the body’s associations with ableist norms of wholeness and ability effectively circumscribe the bodies of people with disabilities as lacking and thus less than human. She turns to “flesh” in order to retrieve the relational,

¹⁰ Ward, *Cities of God*, 81–96.

¹¹ Ward describes “transcorporeality” by saying, “The body accepts its own metaphorical nature—insofar as it is received and understood only in and through language. Only God sees and understands creation literally.” *Cities of God*, 95. In the following chapter, Ward says succinctly, “Tissue is not text, but there is tissue only because there is text.” *Cities of God*, 115 (his emphases).

¹² Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 8, 11–26.

¹³ Christian Scharen, “Ecclesiology from the Body: Ethnographic Notes toward a Carnal Theology,” in *Perspectives in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward, Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 66 as well as 65–70.

material character of human embodiment without the ableist ideology that burdens the concept of body.¹⁴ In *Poetics of the Flesh*, Mayra Rivera also gravitates toward flesh because she recognizes that the Western legacy of the imperialist “gaze” contributes to the objectification of bodies.¹⁵ For Rivera, flesh illuminates the interconnectedness of all material life in this world in a way that bodies under the weight of objectification cannot.¹⁶ While Betcher’s and Rivera’s reclaiming of flesh is vital for understanding human embodiment, this third strategy sidesteps the epistemological problem that ensnares the body. Rather than treating objectifying operations upon bodies, Betcher and Rivera consign the body to those operations by shifting to flesh. They also risk sacrificing the particularities that shape bodies in their fleshly existence.

Because these theological approaches leave the problem of objectification in Western epistemology unresolved, I am proposing a perceptual shift to reform Western thinking about bodies. In this article, I argue that corporeal knowing requires unseeing the body. By “unseeing,” I do not mean discounting all visual perception of bodies or refusing to look at bodies. Rather, I am advocating a mode of knowing that allows the illusory image of the body as a closed, independent object to go out of focus, if you will.¹⁷ To accomplish this epistemological shift, I will turn to Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. By underscoring interactions between space, power, and embodiment in the ordinary practice of walking, Certeau develops an engaged epistemology that challenges the dualistic logic of objectification. I will show that Certeau’s construal of walking as a way of unseeing the city from a voyeur’s perspective enables a way of unseeing the body as a static, independent object.

First, I will outline Certeau’s theory of walking and elucidate the implications of his thought for approaching bodies philosophically and theologically. Then I will apply Certeau’s thought to a case study from

¹⁴ Betcher, “Becoming Flesh of my Flesh,” 107–8, 110.

¹⁵ Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 126; see also 2, 12–13, 114, 130–31, 133–41, 152.

¹⁶ Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 2, 7–8, 152–58.

¹⁷ Shelly Rambo used the term *unseeing* in an invited lecture she gave at Duke Divinity School on March 7, 2016 entitled “Resurrection Wounds and a Theology of After-Living” to describe an embodied epistemology for perceiving wounds in the context of trauma. My use of the term here is not identical to hers, but they resonate with one another.

ethnographic research on Holy Week processions that I conducted at an Episcopal church in the American South during Lent of 2014. I will demonstrate that unseeing the body allows church members' bodies to be perceived as journeys rather than as enclosed objects through their participation in the processions.

The Difference a Walk Makes: Engaging Certeau's Account of Walking the City

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau seeks to shed light on everyday practices amid modern social, cultural, and economic structures. He critiques investigations into the power dynamics of human life that privilege macrolevel examination of structures of power and marginalize people's ordinary practices because such investigations ignore a crucial fact: people do not merely accede to dominant norms.¹⁸ Instead, as Certeau points out, people use both limits and available materials in ways "that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop."¹⁹ Certeau thus attends to the complex negotiations of power that people undertake each day by exploring the lived texture of ordinary practices.

In this section, I focus on Certeau's treatment of the practice of urban walking because his discussion underscores the role of the body where practice, power, space, and knowledge converge. Though bodies are not Certeau's main concern, embodiment is integral to how he understands walking as a "spatial practice."²⁰ I will demonstrate that the mode of embodiment upon which Certeau's account of walking depends unravels objectifying determinations of bodies.

Certeau begins his reflection on walking in a city, using New York City as his example, by contrasting people's movements along the streets with gazing from above, which freezes a city and its people with an imposing glance. Whether tourists, architects, or people with power, "voyeurs," as Certeau refers to them, adopt a comprehensive, "panoptic" perspective on the city.²¹ They use this abstracted standpoint to construct knowledge of the city according to static structures, places, and norms. From this position of detached existence, they

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xii–xiv.

¹⁹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii; see also xii–xiv.

²⁰ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91, 96.

²¹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 92–93.

thus fail to know the city and its people, even as they presume to know through their gaze, because they are entranced with what Certeau calls the “‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum,” the façade of a reality that they created.²²

Walking, however, draws people into a different relationship with the city. Grounded in the streets, walkers are concretely embedded in the activity of the city’s spaces.²³ Unlike voyeuristic gazing upon the city, walking requires unseeing the city because it entails navigating urban space through time with one’s body. As Certeau says, walkers allow their “bodies [to] follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.” Pedestrians’ bodies interact with city spaces as they walk, thereby turning voyeurs’ “planned and readable city” into “migrational” and “lived space.”²⁴

Although the contrast that Certeau makes between voyeurs and pedestrians may appear essentializing at first, the difference is not a metaphysical schema for classifying particular people or occupations. A person can be a voyeur one minute and a pedestrian the next. His distinction instead highlights different epistemological practices that people can implement: knowing at a distance by gazing upon or knowing up close by being present and immersed. I interpret these differences as arising from the complex combination of a person’s physical position, their social location and position, and how they think and act in those positions. These factors do not determine one’s epistemological practice, but they help frame conditions and possibilities for knowing. Viewing a city from the top of its tallest skyscraper, for instance, may make voyeuristic knowing easier to learn and practice. Additionally, while voyeur and pedestrian are not necessarily the only epistemological options that people can inhabit, Certeau’s appeal to these two modes of knowing is helpful heuristically for illuminating the contours of lived practice and embodiment.

Certeau’s understanding of walking involves a confluence between space and time that contrasts with place. He describes “place” as a construction akin to “map[ping]” that positions materials, people, and sites in separate static locations.²⁵ For Certeau, voyeurs perform the work of place by installing a firm, timeless “order” on a city. Space,

²² Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 92–93.

²³ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 92–93.

²⁴ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93, 96.

²⁵ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 119–22, 117.

by contrast, is place that is disrupted through the participatory activity of people and materials within a shared site. Rather than a void, space is “practiced place,” to use Certeau’s phrase.²⁶ Time is crucial for its emergence and persistence, according to Certeau, because temporary, dynamic interactions give space life. Within Certeau’s framework, walkers perform the work of space by inhabiting particular sites in the city through their practice.²⁷

Certeau employs two analogies that help illuminate how walking creates navigable spaces. He compares walking to a speech act, first of all, as it engages materials, locations, and structures to form a physical “enunciation.”²⁸ Walking is a nonverbal performance that is directed toward “other[s],” which can include people as well as materials among which one travels.²⁹ It facilitates relationships between “a *here* and a *there*” by one’s bodily presence and movement. Certeau likens it to issuing “a series of ‘hellos’” through one’s footsteps.³⁰

At the same time, these “hellos” are not neutral for Certeau. To elucidate the style of power contestation that walking enacts, he turns to military categories of strategy and tactics. According to Certeau, a strategy attempts to assert power on a grand scale by imposing a new order upon an arrangement of relationships.³¹ For pedestrians, the grid-like organization of city streets and utilities exemplifies strategizing as it directs flows and transactions between people, resources, and power.³² Tactics, however, exert small-scale power by “manipulating” present constraints to create “opportunities” within an imposed order.³³ Tactics elude domination by redirecting strategic power toward different ends.³⁴ Pedestrians enact tactical power by “temporarily appropriat[ing]” and unfreezing fixed places through their contextualized mode of interacting with the city.³⁵ Neither reciting the imposed order nor establishing their own order, pedestrians instead open up

²⁶ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

²⁷ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 117, 120.

²⁸ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97–99.

²⁹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii, 33, 99.

³⁰ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 99.

³¹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix, 35–36.

³² See Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 94–96.

³³ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix; see also 36–38.

³⁴ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 22–24, 37–38.

³⁵ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 103, 102.

spaces in which people can live and move amid constraints.³⁶ As they walk, pedestrians can “creat[e] shortcuts and detours,” as Certeau points out, that city administrators could not have anticipated.³⁷ Although the disruptions wrought by walking may lack permanence, they nevertheless reveal the limitations of municipal structures in relation to the everyday knitting of “urban fabric” that pedestrians accomplish.³⁸

At the center of Certeau’s understanding of walking is embodiment. Though explicit references to the body appear sporadically in his discussion, bodily experience defines Certeau’s characterization of the practice of walking. Through the body, a pedestrian forges living connections with spaces. Certeau’s phrase “tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation” captures the dynamism between the body and the ground as a pedestrian’s foot comes into contact with the terrain.³⁹ In that brief encounter, a relational form of knowledge arises between the body and that particular patch of ground, and they lend and receive energy from one another, propelling the body to another patch of earth. The very activity of walking evolves through that contact as the body makes a multitude of adjustments—like posture, balance, and pace—to move with the texture of the terrain. Successive steps carve a path between places through the city, and this bodily movement “spatialize[s],” as Certeau says, transforming static places into dynamic spaces of engagement.⁴⁰ Through the body, the abstract city becomes compressed into concrete, interactive sites connected to one another in time.⁴¹ Bodies on the move thus bring city spaces to life.

On the surface, the body’s integral role in walking seems to imply a corporeal/noncorporeal dualism that distinguishes pedestrians from voyeurs in Certeau’s thought. A closer examination, however, reveals that the difference between these two figures lies in how their modes of embodiment and perception intersect.⁴² When Certeau describes the voyeur seeing the city, he paints a scene in which the body grants

³⁶ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.

³⁷ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 98.

³⁸ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 103; see also 105–7.

³⁹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

⁴⁰ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97; see also 101–2.

⁴¹ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97–99, 101, 103.

⁴² Here my interpretation of Certeau’s work correlates with Ian Buchanan’s analysis of him, in which he says, “In order to have that more comprehensive perspective

the voyeur an almost aerial view from a skyscraper's heights, as well as a sense of pleasure in occupying that position. Although Certeau characterizes this visual "erotics" as a "lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more," he also depicts the voyeur as enjoying bodily liberation from "the city's grasp" through vertical ascent.⁴³ The voyeur's pursuit of "disentangle[ment]" from the city does not disembodily the voyeur; instead, the voyeur emphatically reclaims the body for herself or himself by means of physical elevation.⁴⁴

What seals the voyeur's bodily performance is a particular mode of seeing. By using the gaze to freeze the city into a "readable" and "transparent text," as Certeau says, the voyeur renders her or his own body into a static object to be read like a text.⁴⁵ The voyeur can only escape from others' objectifying gazes upon the voyeur's body by assuming a position above their purview where their bodies can become objects of the voyeur's sight as well.⁴⁶ The voyeur's gaze thus concocts an all-encompassing world of objects predicated upon the fiction that her or his own objectified body can be redeemed by transposing the voyeur to a height that deposes the city and all its pedestrians.

In contrast to the voyeur's objectifying mode of embodiment and seeing, the pedestrian exhibits an altogether different understanding of the body through her or his way of seeing while walking. By "writ[ing]" with the city "without being able to read" their co-created "story," the pedestrian fashions her or his body as neither an object nor subject.⁴⁷ The pedestrian's body is defined by dynamic interaction with the city rather than through static separation.

A form of unseeing seals this bodily performance. The pedestrian inhabits an up-close, in-progress perspective that makes the city as seen by a voyeur blurry and out of focus.⁴⁸ It is not that a pedestrian refuses to see the city with optometrically accurate vision. Rather, the

[of a bird's eye view] an embodied subject . . . is required." Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE, 2000), 111.

⁴³ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

⁴⁴ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

⁴⁵ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

⁴⁶ Certeau tellingly describes the voyeur as "know[ing] only cadavers," which exposes the lifelessness ascribed to the body in voyeuristic objectification. *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

⁴⁷ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

⁴⁸ Certeau uses "blindness" to distinguish pedestrians' perspectives from voyeurs'. *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93. However, I prefer "unseeing" in order to express Certeau's epistemological point without conflating it with ableist rhetoric for visual impairment.

practice of walking disallows a mode of gazing that freezes sights into place. Pedestrians' lived participation in the concrete particularities of the city reorients what and how they see so that corporeal engagement generates their perception.

Through unseeing the city as constructed by the voyeur's gaze, the pedestrian enacts an unseeing of objectified bodies. Walking not only makes the city unreadable but also makes the pedestrian's body and the bodies of others that she or he encounters unreadable. This everyday spatial practice enables bodies to be relational, dynamic agents, blurry and unfinished, defined and perceived through interaction rather than detachment. By walking among one another along the streets, pedestrian bodies have the potential to discern and understand their own and others' bodies more fully as multidimensional, living realities because they participate in one another's embodiment in that shared place and time while also letting one another be different bodily agents on the move. Although street encounters between pedestrians may not automatically prevent one from objectifying the body of another with a voyeuristic gaze, the corporeality of the practice of walking invites pedestrians into a more authentic mode of perceiving and knowing one another as bodies. Within Certeau's logic, then, the up-close, out-of-focus, on-the-move epistemology that the pedestrian incarnates with the city is the way of truly knowing both the city and the bodies of its inhabitants.

By highlighting the significance of embodiment in Certeau's reflections on walking, I have demonstrated that Certeau's work facilitates an epistemology capable of interrupting Western objectifying perceptions that have thwarted the philosophical and theological turn to the body. In order to inhabit an up-close, interactive mode of perception, however, contemporary theologians and philosophers must be willing to let their own bodies descend from skyscrapers to the sidewalks, streets, and dirt where the practice of unseeing can flourish. In the next section, I show a way to make this shift by taking up the tools of ethnography to accompany bodies in their kinesthetic commemoration of Holy Week.

Bodies on the Move: A Case Study of Holy Week Processions

In 2014, I conducted qualitative research at an Episcopal church in the American South to study how church members embodied Lent and Easter. The Book of Common Prayer rubrics have few explicit instructions for what bodies are to do in the liturgies, yet Episcopal

churches often integrate a palpable array of changes into their liturgical spaces and activities for Lent and Easter, which affect how bodies participate in these theologically weighty seasons of confession, self-denial, fasting, repentance, and baptismal reaffirmation.⁴⁹ My study centered on gaining insight into the theological and social significance of actual bodily experiences and activities that shaped the community's liturgical life in Lent and Easter amid these changes.

The parish where I situated my study, which I pseudonymously refer to as St. James Episcopal Church, consisted of several hundred members. Although a majority white, heterosexual, nondisabled congregation, St. James exhibited degrees of heterogeneity according to race, sexuality, age, and disability. Additionally, the parish featured both traditional and innovative changes in its liturgies during Lent and Easter. By attending services and events as a participant observer and conducting interviews with adult volunteers, I explored Lenten and Easter body formation at St. James by analyzing the theological and social dimensions of body postures, movements, sensory influences, spaces, and discourse that constituted church members' personal and communal practices in these seasons.⁵⁰

Holy Week, the last week of Lent, incorporated church members' bodies into a number of rites to commemorate Jesus's final days before being executed and entombed. The practice that framed the week at St. James was processing. I want to focus on the church's Palm Sunday and Good Friday processional practices in this section in order to show how Certeau's theory allows a conception of bodies to emerge that flouts the portrait of objectified individual entities. By participating in these ritual treks at the beginning and toward the end of Holy Week, church members' bodies did not just take journeys; they became journeys.

⁴⁹ See *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David according to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 270–73; and “The Way of the Cross” in Episcopal Church and Standing Liturgical Commission, *The Book of Occasional Services, 2003: Conforming to General Convention 2003* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004), 54–71. For recommended practices for these seasons, see Leonel L. Mitchell, *Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and the Great Fifty Days: A Ceremonial Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1996), 14–90, 111–16; and Howard Galley, *The Ceremonies of the Eucharist: A Guide to Celebration* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1989), 41–64.

⁵⁰ My study obtained ethics approval from the Office of Research Support at Duke University.

On Palm Sunday and on Good Friday of 2014, members of St. James joined members from two nearby churches, and the three congregations together processed through their city's downtown. The Palm Sunday procession involved trekking outside from one church site to the next while waving palm branches to celebrate Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At each church, the ordained ministers took turns praying for blessings upon one another's communities. The Good Friday procession comprised eight Stations of the Cross staged at sites in the neighborhood that signified social and economic inequalities affecting local residents. Members of the congregations took turns carrying a cumbersome, almost seven-foot-tall wooden cross as they walked, and they paused outside places like a homeless shelter, a government social services building, and low-income apartments in order to hear the Gospel accounts of Jesus's condemnation, suffering, crucifixion, and death.

Significant differences set these two processions apart, including the mood, props, and itinerary for each rite. Nevertheless, a few common features shaped the processions. Both liturgies were creative adaptations for St. James's urban context. They took place outside and placed members of the three churches with one another in their neighborhood. Both utilized liturgical materials, prayers, and songs that could be considered out of place in the public spaces of a downtown American city. Finally, both processions consisted primarily of journeying. Although meaningful liturgical practices occurred at the sites where church members stopped, the journey constituted the bulk of each procession.

Aside from a few spectacular elements of these processions, the journeys were fairly ordinary. People walked as they were able and moved together, often in clustered groups, along the sidewalks through the neighborhood. They passed bus stops, motorists, residents, civil and commercial buildings, birds, and occasional weeds and grasses, which generated a panoply of sounds, sights, aromas, and tactile influences.⁵¹ Some participants used canes, wheelchairs, or neighbors' hands to assist their movement, and some moved without forms of assistance. Infant and toddler children rested in adults' arms or strollers, and slightly older children held adult hands while moving their shorter legs quickly to keep up. Everyone navigated uneven

⁵¹ Sensory ethnography informed my participant observation methodology for these rites. See Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009).

pavement and patches of gravel with high heels, sandals, loafers, or sneakers on their feet. They wore various kinds of clothing, including vestments indicating their roles in ministry, skirts and suits for their “Sunday best,” and casual pants, shorts, and shirts in accord with the mild late spring weather. Some processed in silence while others talked with those nearby. They moved at varying paces while generally staying together, waiting for those last in the procession to arrive at each site before initiating the station’s meditations and prayers.⁵² And they completed these treks with people they knew as well as people they had never met before, who had all decided to make these journeys together.

Processing for Palm Sunday and Good Friday clashes with Certeau’s focus on the ordinariness of walking in notable ways. These processions were planned rather than unstructured events. Special holy days rather than everyday activity precipitated these treks. Religious materials and stories punctuated the processions with a distinctive tempo and trajectory that ordinary walks do not usually involve. On any given day of the week, few (if any) people navigating downtown as pedestrians would be likely to trek along the processions’ exact itineraries. And the processions were designed to be communal rites for people to perform together rather than individual practices.

Nevertheless, examining these processions through Certeau’s attention to lived experience in walking allows their embodied texture to come to light.⁵³ Church members made use of the spaces through which they trekked in ways that city planners and other voyeurs would not have intended: the participants connected together disparate places in the downtown area with their movements and by introducing sacred religious materials into a secular arena. Their engagement in those spaces even overflowed the liturgical planners’ strategic determinations of the itinerary, props, and discourse for the rites as the unforeseeable particularities of church members’ bodily presence

⁵² Benedicta Ward’s comment that “the pace [is] set by the weakest and slowest” in Holy Week processions helped me notice the waiting that took place on this occasion. *In the Company of Christ: Through Lent, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter to Pentecost* (New York: Church Publishing, 2005), 23.

⁵³ For Certeau’s engagement with pilgrimage, journey, and bodies, see Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Although those themes intersect with my ethnographic analysis, I have chosen to maintain my focus on *The Practices of Everyday Life* in order to call attention to the ordinary, corporeal dimensions of liturgical processions that tend to be either ignored or abstracted in theological discourse.

and participation brought the processions to life. Church members grounded their bodies in the streets rather than staying inside church buildings, thereby inviting and being invited into a multitude of sensory, spatial, and interpersonal interactions with their shared neighborhood through their liturgical treks. They kept contact with the terrain as they moved, and its shifts between inclines and declines, cracks in the pavement and patches of dirt, and loose gravel and smooth asphalt drew their bodies into a continuous renovation of their movements, balance, gait, direction, and force with each new “hello.”

What is more, important differences from everyday walking in these processions not only enabled rich bodily interactions within the neighborhood that exceed Certeau’s framework for understanding ordinary practices, but they also illuminate vital dimensions of embodiment that Certeau’s discussion of the pedestrian does not explicitly surface. Church members’ bodily participation included vocalizing prayers, Gospel stories, and songs together, along with bearing—and, for the liturgical ministers, wearing—materials given religious meaning that were foreign to the downtown ecology. These elements both drew from and added to the tactile, sonar, aromatic, and visible sense-scape that shaped embodiment for church members and for other occupants sharing those city spaces. Even more significantly, the communal character of the processions generated a host of bodily interactions between church members that an individual walk does not typically produce, and these interpersonal features, like adjusting their bodily movements, singing, and speaking in relation to one another as church members trekked together, allowed the relational nature of human embodiment to become a palpable part of the treks.

Because journeying was the very point of the Liturgy of the Palms and the Stations of the Cross, the ordinary components of the processions in conjunction with the sacred were what gave flesh to the rites. The departure and destination sites were theologically significant because of—and not apart from—the concrete process of trekking along particular paths through neighborhood spaces, with particular people and odd props, and guided by particular Gospel stories. The Palm Sunday and Good Friday processions thus took shape as “spatial practices”⁵⁴ in which church members’ concrete presence infused the sites they encountered and the paths they enacted with bodily activity.

By drawing church members into up-close, dynamic interaction with the city, the processional practices of Holy Week created

⁵⁴ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

conditions for unseeing the city. Church members did not occupy a voyeuristic distance from above, nor did they maintain contemplative detachment from within church walls as they commemorated Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Instead, they entered into the downtown neighborhood and trekked among its spaces and residents in order to incarnate these holy stretches of time and to let these days inhabit their bodies and city spaces. Their Good Friday trek even directed church members' perception toward sites that social and economic structures of power in the United States tend to render invisible or not worth seeing, which opened the possibility for church members to see these sites anew through their presence.

Holy Week processing likewise enabled an unseeing of bodies as independent, static objects for those who trekked. Rather than remaining stationary observers of Palm Sunday and Good Friday, church members took the time to place their bodies in these processions in order to meditate upon the journeys of Jesus's body up to Jerusalem and out to Golgotha. The treks propelled church members toward their neighborhood as well as toward their own corporeality as they felt the ground beneath their feet, vibrations from mobility aids in their arms and torsos, blood pumping through their veins, air currents on their skin, and palms, crosses, and liturgical pamphlets in their hands. The spaces among which they processed grounded church members' bodies in the terrain so that relationship with these spaces defined church members' bodies through an abundance of mundane and spectacular points of contact knit together through time. By embodying these treks, church members opened themselves to a way of perceiving their bodies and the bodies of others as dynamic, relational, and living beings.

When this mode of engagement orients how bodies are understood, journey becomes an illustrative way of envisioning church members' embodiment in the Liturgy of the Palms and Stations of the Cross during Holy Week. While conceiving of bodies as journeys may sound like an abstraction that contradicts empirical evidence, my use of Certeau's theory in this ethnographic analysis shows the abstraction to lie in the notion that church members' bodies could be considered independent entities with firm boundaries unattached to their surroundings in space or time. Only the distorted lens of objectification can produce that false body image. Venturing into the thick of church members' bodily activity in these processional practices reveals the grand and minute immersions and interactions that

arise, change, and dissipate through members' trekking. Constituted by their participation in the downtown spaces with one another in these rites, their bodies cannot but be relational, unfinished generations with blurred boundaries. The journeys that church members traversed with one another in Holy Week, therefore, effectively made their bodies journeys.

Conclusion

Certeau's attention to everyday practices from an up-close perspective provides a fruitful starting point for redressing the epistemological limits that have hindered the turn to the body in philosophy and theology. His analysis lays the ground for perceiving bodies as dynamic realities whose lives are constituted by concrete interactions with spaces as well as with other bodies. The crux of this way of perceiving is a practice of unseeing, in which the simulacrum of readable, objectified bodies goes out of focus so that people's unfinished, participatory corporeality can come into view. By applying this epistemology to my ethnographic study of Holy Week processions, I have demonstrated that unseeing enables bodies to be understood as journeys through church members' participation in these treks.

To conclude, I want to suggest two trajectories for developing further this epistemological reform in order to aid theological engagements with human embodiment. First, I believe that an epistemology of unseeing makes possible a social ethic in which dynamic interactions can deepen embodied discernment and catalyze mutually attentive action between people and spaces.⁵⁵ Yet these possibilities are susceptible to inequitable social determinations in the context of the United States, especially racial inequity, in which the freedom to trek—whether in New York City or on a rural road—tends to be reserved for white bodies, while bodies marked as black or brown endure greater policing of their movements.⁵⁶ In order for an epistemology and ethic of unseeing to flourish in this context without reinscribing white supremacy, unseeing must involve white bodies'

⁵⁵ Highmore also emphasizes ethical implications of Certeau's epistemological approach, specifically for cultural studies scholarship in the wake of colonialism. See Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 8–10, 18, 22.

⁵⁶ I am drawing upon the work of postcolonial theorist Radhika Mohanram here. See *Black Body*, 22. See also Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 13–17, 68–71, 95–99.

surrendering of positions of racial voyeurs. Not to be confused with “color-blindness,” which Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s work unmasks as an illusory idea,⁵⁷ the kind of unseeing I am advocating entails an incarnate social commitment to interrupt racial objectification and the disempowering constraints that it seeks to impose on black and brown bodies, so that all bodies can inhabit generative interactive modes of embodiment with one another amid racial and other interrelated differences.⁵⁸

Second, understanding the bodies of church members as journeys in Holy Week opens up rich avenues for theological and liturgical reflection in light of where the Holy Week journeys culminate: the cross of Jesus. With this destination looming large over the processions—a destination absent from a twenty-first-century city in the American South yet somehow present in the bodies joined to the body of the crucified Jesus on the way to Easter—the treks that members of St. James embodied exhibit an intriguing ecclesiological negotiation of this body, this journey. Church members neither supplanted Jesus’s body with their bodies nor set it aside; instead, they enfleshed the contradiction of trekking through the journey that only he could embody, yet that they could not but embody as people living in him. As they gave voice to his crucifixion story and gathered around a cross at sites connected to injustice in their city, church members performed the truth of their simultaneous union with and difference from him by inhabiting the positions of the friends who betrayed and abandoned him, the bystanders complicit in his execution, and the witnesses who mourned him, while also acknowledging their collective participation in betraying, complying with, and grieving those being crushed by contemporary death-dealing mechanisms before his cross. Church members wove his journey into theirs and theirs into his without erasing or turning away from the historical, political, or sin-wrought space that gaped between his body and their bodies. In this tense convergence and divergence, these trekkers in Holy Week showed themselves to be the body of Christ precisely as bodies who became journeys, in which their difference from the body of Jesus could not

⁵⁷ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 1–4, 25–73.

⁵⁸ Copeland’s “praxis of solidarity” exemplifies what I am recommending. See Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 89–90, 92–95, 99–101, 104–5.

be greater, yet his union with them could not be more incarnate.⁵⁹ Allowing journey to resituate theological perceptions of bodies, therefore, can provide a fresh starting point for discerning the complex dynamics of embodiment in Christology, ecclesiology, and liturgy.

⁵⁹ Several works that inform my thinking here: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology (Student Notes)," in *Berlin: 1932–1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 12 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 299–360; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), §58–59; Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).