Public theaters emerged in 1576 in the city of London. Immediately, a group of antitheatricalists published pamphlets against this new type of theater, criticizing it on the basis of its sensory order. These authors elevated spectacles such as cross-dressing, duplicitous fabrications of the truth, and excessive emotion as sin because of the sensorium, which they claimed allowed these experiences to enter the souls of audience members. This project demonstrates the breadth of this attack, connecting the theater to fears of plague, witchcraft, and recusant Catholicism. Second, it illustrates the connections between this fervor and the unstable religious sensory order established by the Elizabethan Settlement in 1559. Analyzing characteristics of religious practice, such as sermons, prayers, the sacraments, and ornamentation/decoration allows an in-depth comparison of the public theater and the church as polar opposites. The theater promoted a sensory order without any bounds or regulations, while the church fretted over making sure worshippers used their senses properly to interact with the divine. The larger framework of this study is meant to comprehend the role of sensation in thought during the height of Elizabethan society, infused as it was with concepts of the pure and the profane.
SIN, SATAN, AND SACRILEGE: ANTITHEATRICALITY, RELIGION, AND THE
SENSORY ORDER IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Thesis

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Dedication

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Chapter One
Introduction

“A letter to the Lord maier of the citie of London: that whereas their lordships were given to
understand that certaine outrages and disorders were of late committed in certaine places and
Theaters erected within that Citie of London or the suburbs of the same where enterludes &
comedies were vsuallie plaied, and for that the season of the yeare grew hotter and hotter it was
to be doubted least by reason of the concorse of people to such places of common assemblies
there might some danger of infeccion happen in the Citie Their lordshipes thought it expedient to
have the use of the said Interludes inhibited both at the Theaters, and in all other places within
his jurisdiccion And therefore required him accordinglie to take presente order for the stayinge of
the same, charging the plaiers and actors to cease and forbeare the use of the said places for the
purpose of playinge or shewinge of anie such Enterludes or Comedies vntill after Bartholomew
tide next ensuinge.”\textsuperscript{1}

On May 7, 1587, the Privy Council recorded this letter to the Lord Mayor of London. The
councilors demanded that all theaters close for the summer months until St. Bartholomew’s Day
(August 24\textsuperscript{th}), one of the principal festivals on the city of London’s calendar. Supposedly, they
made this decree under the guise of plague prevention. Yet, lurking within this letter are several
indications that this prohibition against theatrical performances involved more than just fears
about disease in the hot summer months. The reference to ‘outrages and disorders… of late
committed in certain places’ suggests that officials closed the theaters because they considered
them uncontrollable disordered spaces, rather than a source of plague.

St. Bartholomew’s Day, a ten-day festival, was significant to Londoners because it
generated enormous commerce throughout the city. The festival often included theatrical
performances. Rather than interfering with established traditions, officials allowed playing
during the festival to guarantee the success of local tradesmen. The Privy Council recognized
that performances enhanced profit margins within the city. The accumulation of wealth
outweighed fears of ‘disordered’ theatrical spaces. Officials made the practical choice to tolerate
the threat of playhouses and allow theatrical activity in the city. This pragmatism reveals the
general attitude of the Elizabethan government toward theater: it was tolerated when it made the
most money, but was condemned on principle because magistrates had a difficult time
controlling it.

\textsuperscript{1} Privy Council Minute, 7 May 1587 in \textit{Documents of the Rose Playhouse, Revised Edition}, Carol Chillington Rutter, ed. (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 40-1.
The growth of the public theaters coincided with an increase in London’s population. Villagers from the countryside flocked to the city as it became a larger commercial trading center than ever before. Scholars estimate that residents of London numbered close to fifty thousand in 1500, growing to four times that many by 1600. In the second half of the century, as many as six thousand people moved to the city annually. By the 1580s, this increased population became a large factor in the governance of the city. Tightly packed buildings and people created an environment that could easily get out of hand. Public spaces like theaters and churches became central sites of tension.

The Privy Council ruled against theaters in 1587, in a climate of anxiety about theatrical productions. Throughout the 1570s and 1580s, English publishers produced many pamphlets against the theater, some of which reflected the city’s ambiguous relationship with the playing profession. Other antiatheatrical polemics were written by religious leaders and actors (sometimes patronized by the City Corporation) who were concerned about the effect of the theater on the attending populace. Such sources raise important questions about the status of theatrical productions in the late 1570s and 1580s. Why were theaters considered wild and unruly spaces during a period known as the height of Renaissance drama? Upon what basis were they attacked? I argue that theaters were attacked primarily as spaces which thwarted the approved sensory order during the Reformation. This argument develops out of a consideration of recent literature on sensory perception.

This argument addresses two main themes. First, to what extent was the attack on Elizabethan theater part of a larger religious debate? Rather than separating theater and religion into two separate spheres of London civic culture, I suggest a strong interplay and relationship between these public spaces that survived the Reformation and continued into the seventeenth century. I argue that the interplay of these spheres often aroused tensions over matters of sensation, as both religious scholars and civic leaders tried to enforce their version of morality onto the public outside of the church.

Second, I propose that polemicists and religious writers constructed the theater and church as polar opposites. As of yet, no project has focused on the full extent of this relationship, especially concerning the appeal of these spaces to the senses. Religious sensory culture, amid

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the turmoil of the Reformation, was under attack from traditionalists and radical reformers. This instability led to questions about other public spaces, and the theater fell under suspicion. Due particularly to its ungovernable sensory aesthetic, the theater became the antithesis of Anglican reformed worship, implying that the theater was diametrically opposed to all that was holy.

Antitheatrical polemicists were the starting point for this research. They argued that the theaters were spaces of idolatry and sacrilege. These authors hailed from a variety of backgrounds. Men like Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday came from the playing profession, attacking their former occupation. Others, like John Northbrooke and John Stockwood, were preachers who thought the theater was an abomination. All of these polemicists addressed a public audience, and more specifically civic leaders, asking them to abstain from attending theaters in hopes of closing their doors for good.

I have also drawn from a series of religious texts, mostly sermons, which describe some of the debates over the sensory order in Elizabethan England. These texts tackle a variety of concerns including idolatry, papal authority, and proper religious practice. Many, like Laurence Deios and John Jewel, wrote in defense of the Church of England. Others, such as Peter White, questioned the decisions of the Anglican Church. Many of these texts were published sermons, committed to the printing press after their presentation to a public audience, sometimes at such illustrious places as Paul’s Cross. As Mary Morrisey has argued, the difference between the oral version of the sermon and the later printed copy must not hinder our use of these sermons. They are simply a different, but similar, version of the original. These religious texts and antitheatrical pamphlets make up the bulk of the primary material I have used in this project. Reflective of similar anxieties and language, these texts demonstrate the close connection between antitheatrical writing and religious discourse prevalent in Elizabethan England.

Theater and Religion in the Early Reformation

Religious practice and theater share a long intertwined history. In the Middle Ages, theater was often used as an educational device or a way of experiencing the divine. As Eamon Duffy indicates, religious plays were “a fundamental means of transmitting religious instruction

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and stirring devotion.”⁴ Often sponsored by lay guilds, cycle plays and morality plays grew in popularity throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a method to teach parishioners the tenets of their faith and the values of living in a Christian society. In the Middle Ages, both the theater and the church were presented as a schoolhouse to edify the people of England with Biblical narratives that provided instruction on virtues and vices. These plays were very popular and became part of the established traditions surrounding religious festivals and holidays.

In the early years of the English Reformation, reformers sought to utilize these plays as pedagogical instruments to teach the public about reformed theology. Paul Whitfield White claims that theater was a useful mechanism of propaganda for the Church of England during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, exemplified in the work of John Bale. This association between theater and reform even continued into the early years of the Elizabethan period.⁵ Rather than suppressing drama, White argues that Protestant leaders used drama, especially amateur drama at academic institutions, to promote “the state’s educational aims and policies.”⁶ As the state and the church increasingly became a solidified unit over the course of the sixteenth century, drama became an important factor in expressing state-sanctioned theology and ideology.

However, both Duffy and White note a shift, beginning in the 1560s and culminating in the 1570s, in which the relationship between the church and drama altered substantially. The Elizabethan government and religious establishment began a program of suppression, specifically targeting cycle plays that no longer fit the approved liturgical calendar of the Anglican Church.⁷ White also argues that in the 1570s reformers increasingly lost control of playing in London as professionals transformed the theater into a business enterprise. No longer did theatrical troupes require patronage.⁸ The opening of public playhouses, which could pack in thousands of spectators, increasingly allowed playing companies to cater directly to the desires of the audiences which paid to see them. Elizabethan reformers lost authority over what was performed on the stage due to the theater’s increasing popularity and financial agenda.

While the theater and the pulpit inherited a shared legacy as sites of indoctrination, that relationship fractured throughout the 1570s. Sermons continued to be used as places of

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⁶ White, 100.
⁷ Duffy, 579-82.
⁸ White, 164-5.
propaganda for Anglican leaders, but reformers lost control over theatrical performances. This development explains why the theater was often criticized with a schoolhouse metaphor, such as in Stephen Gosson’s antitheatrical treatise, *The School of Abuse* (1579). In the minds of antitheatricalists, the theater continued to be an indoctrination method, but one which led its students into the malevolent arms of the devil. On the other hand, they, along with religious writers, emphasized the power of the church to instruct its audiences in a correct pathway to the holy. Yet, this pathway depended on the governance of the senses, and the eradication of the ‘disordered’ theatrical space in the city of London.

A Historiography of Senses and Spaces

Understanding how the senses were used in society over space and time allows historians to enter the cultural world in which the subject of their study lived. My method is heavily influenced by scholars who study the role of the senses in society and history, such as Matthew Milner, Robert Scribner, Elizabeth Harvey, and Wietse de Boer. The goal of these studies, as anthropologist David Howes asserts, is to analyze “the social ideologies conveyed through sensory values and practices.” Unraveling the history of ‘sensory values and practices’ reveals that sensation is not a static process, but one transformed and mediated by culture. By using the senses as an approach, I explore tensions in Elizabethan sensory culture, as they are manifested in religious debates and antitheatrical attacks.

One important theme throughout this scholarship is the integration of mind, body, and environment, what Howes calls emplacement. As opposed to embodiment, which suggests a connection between the body and mind, the emplacement paradigm argues that the sensory world surrounding the body is also an important factor. Alongside the senses, scholars have increasingly turned to understanding the environments in which early modern people operated.

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11 Howes, 7.

This theory has emphasized the connection between scholarship on space and the senses. Emily Winerock, studying churchyards in Early Modern England, “explores how purposefully profane behavior within space claimed as sacred could act as a public protest and mask deeper community tensions.”13 As Winerock demonstrates, value judgments were applied to spaces, often set among some type of moral order. My study will draw on these community tensions by explicating how early modern religious writers thought that the theater, as profane space, directly opposed sacred church space.

Theater and Reformation historians have recently begun to explore the role of sensory environments in the intellectual, perceptive, and emotional lives of their subjects. However, these studies draw upon several decades of scholarship that have increasingly questioned the common assumption that the Reformation was a popular movement for freedom against a tyrannical Roman Catholic Church. These projects have their roots in the social and cultural history of the 1960s and 1970s, and have thoroughly developed how I think about my project’s place within Reformation and Theater scholarship.

Social historians of the 1960s began this journey by emphasizing the role of non-elites in the Reformation. A. G. Dickens anticipated this change when he described one of his objectives as seeking “to depict the movement as it affected ordinary men and women.”14 Several years later, historian John Bossy analyzed imposed conformity across confessional boundaries, illustrating that commoners did participate in and were affected by the reform of the church, in both Catholic and Protestant quarters.15 The studies of Robert Scribner, historian of Reformation Germany, soon followed Bossy by asking how non-elites participated and engaged with reform movements.16 Scribner, a devoted popular historian, was also one of the earliest scholars to

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15 See John Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe,” Past & Present 47 (1970): 51-70 for an articulation of the variety of methods the Catholic Church used to tighten their control over parish churches and the laity throughout the Counter-Reformation. See John Bossy, Christianity in the West, 1400-1700 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) for his description of how religion changed over the Reformation. Especially note that his definition of ‘traditional’ religion counteracts the negative impression that previous historians have had of the pre-Reformation church.
tackle sensation during the Reformation. Focusing on vision, he published several essays about changes to sensual attitudes in the sixteenth century. Popular religion, as exemplified by Dickens and Bossy, prompted scholars like Scribner to examine how mass audiences responded to religious change, in this case through sensory culture.

By the 1990s, the focus of historical scholarship on the Reformation changed from social and political developments to analyzing religious practices. Both Christopher Haigh and Eamon Duffy argued that Catholicism in England flourished long after the Reformation in the hearts of traditional-minded parishioners, through the practices they maintained. More recent scholars have adopted Duffy and Haigh’s questions to analyze the ‘experience’ of the Reformation by often unheard voices. One of these scholars, Matthew Milner, developed a project that analyzed changes in religious practice alongside changes in the hierarchy of the senses: “The foremost aim here is to introduce new considerations offered by sixteenth-century sensory culture to the well-established scholarship on the English reformation. I contend the reform was shaped by the persistence of medieval sensory culture, its ethics and physiological contours.” Like Milner’s book, my project stresses the importance of sense perception to any argument about religious tensions, especially works from the Elizabethan period.

In theater history, the groundbreaking publication of Jonas Barish’s *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981) transformed the debate about Renaissance drama. Barish studied several moments in western history when the theater was conceived of as the bane of civilization. The Elizabethan period was one such moment, addressed in several of Barish’s central chapters. He considered the role of mimicry to be the source of this conflict: “Players are evil because they try to substitute a self of their own contriving for the one given them by God…In this respect they resemble chivalric romances, epic poems, and merry tales, and the attack on them forms part of a wider attack on all fiction, all feigning.” Barish was the first to demonstrate that the dislike of the theater stemmed from something more than just the particular historical situation; a negative

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connotation to feigning was present throughout the changing culture of ‘western’ society. But even more importantly, he demonstrated that this use of space challenged ideal public morality.\textsuperscript{22}

In recent years, theater historians have developed Barish’s important insights. Three studies, in particular, have assisted the growth of my argument. First, Laura Levine illustrated how men wearing women’s clothing on the stage, to perform as female characters, destabilized early modern conceptions of gender. Many antitheatrical writers, all men, were seriously concerned about representations altering physical gender, revealing that they themselves doubted the stability of masculinity in the early modern world. Second, Elizabeth Williamson has written about religious objects used on the stage in the form of props. The use of rosary beads, mitres, and other religious items on the stage discloses the complex relationship between theater and religious icons. She argues that the theater became infused with this religious imagery, opening up concerns about touch and idolatry in the theaters. And third, Matthew Steggle has tackled the theme of embodiment by reconstructing the place of emotions, like laughter and weeping, in theatrical audiences. He considers the role that emotions and affect had on the stage, a role that revealed a strong relationship between the performers and the audience. Polemicists and religious writers deemed this relationship unholy, most likely because it seemed to lead toward incredible passions.\textsuperscript{23} Scholars have yet to fully explore sensation as the connecting thread between these three topics; yet, in all three cases, sensory perception is the crucial factor that makes the theater such a dangerous space, where the acts of the body and the imagination cannot be governed. My project demonstrates that each of these theses can be bound together by considering the impact of sensation in the theatrical space.

The Holy and the Profane

Early modern scholars based the sensory order on the philosophies of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Sensation was not just a method of mediating experience of the world, but a way to physically interact with it. Based on this philosophy, an object or person being sensed

emitted something called *species*—an infinitesimal and invisible form of that object or person. Transmitted through air or water, these essences penetrated a human being through the external senses, leaving a permanent impression upon the mind. While *species* were considered immaterial, their effect was physical, making the sensor more like the object or person they sensed. For a theatrical example, if a spectator witnessed an actor onstage cursing, they would be more inclined to do so themselves. And, over time, if they witnessed many actors making many curses, they would slowly become more and more inclined to participate in such defamatory acts. Early modern writers derived their concerns about the theater and religion from exactly these dangers: the object, action, or person being sensed mixed very tangibly with the soul of the person doing the sensing.

Some writers made attempts to articulate this relationship between the sensed thing or person and the sensor. Anthony Munday, a well-known player who wrote an antitheatrical polemic for the London City Corporation in 1580, claimed: “Whereby a double offence is committed; first by those dissolute plaiers, which without regard of honestie, are not ashamed to exhibite the filthiest matters they can devise to the sight of men: secondly, by the beholders, which vouchsalfe to heare and behold such filthie things, to the great losse both of themselves and the time.” Theatergoers, according to Munday, were just as complicit in the sins of the stage as the actors they watched. Munday confirms that sensation established a detrimental connection between the stage and the audience. In his words, audiences were complicit in the sins enacted by the players because they ‘heare’ and ‘behold.’

Reformers were concerned that exterior sensation tangibly altered the interior makeup of a person. Many of them desired to verify that what happened in the church directly benefited the spiritual life of the worshipper. John Whitgift, Elizabeth I’s favorite Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote in 1583: “Fear and honor is comprehended not only [by] the outward gesture of the body, reverence of words, etc.: but also the inward good will, and reverence of heart and mind, which especially is required of all subjects toward their Princes and Magistrates.” To maintain public

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24 For more on this topic, see Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation*, 23-4.

25 Anthony Munday, *A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and theaters the one whereof was sounded by a reuerend byshop dead long since; the other by a worshipful and zealous gentleman now aliue: one showing the filthines of plaies in times past; the other the abomination of theaters in the time present: both expressly prouing that that common-weale is nigh vnto the curse of God, wherein either plaiers be made of, or theaters maintained. Set forth by Anglo-phile Eutheo* (London: Henry Denham, 1580), 95.

26 John Whitgift, *A most godly and learned sermon preached at Pauls crosse the 17 of Nouember, in the yeare of our Lorde. 1583* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1589), 16.
morality and order, then, the church needed to accomplish the exact same sensory connection that polemicists claimed the theater created. They advised a governed sensory order in the church, meant to cultivate loyal and reverent subjects. Reformers attempted, just as much as theatrical performers, to reach the interiority of their audiences. The sensory order of the church thus became increasingly regulated and governed throughout the Elizabethan period, while the theater offered an attractive escape of pleasure and unrestricted sensation.

Just as reformers and polemicists created a binary in which the theater and church were diametrically opposed, I intend to examine both of these spaces in turn, offering comparisons between the two where appropriate. Chapter Two, ‘The Devil’s School House’ examines the attacks against the theater made by polemicists from the opening of the first London public theater in 1576 until a brief resurgence of biblical drama in 1590. In this chapter, I contend that polemicists constructed the theater intellectually as a space of sin, due to its uncontrollable sensory environment. Not only did polemicists worry about physical sensations, but they also used metaphors to establish the theater’s misuse of the sensory order. This led to concerns about the theater as a space of contagion, from which sin could spread to the rest of the city.

Chapter Three, ‘Sacred Space’ analyzes the religious sensory environment of Elizabethan reform. By surveying how the senses were regulated throughout Anglican religious practices, I argue that the Elizabethan Settlement attempted to tread a middle ground between radical reform and tradition. By rejecting some elements of the traditional sensory order and accepting the rest, Elizabethan leaders sought to teach churchgoers peace and loyalty to the state religion. To do this, they continued a multi-sensory religious environment that retained the general structure and aesthetic of the Catholic liturgy without lapsing into undesirable sensuality. Yet, this unstable accord did not ultimately resolve the issue. A proliferation of opinions challenged the Settlement.

By placing these two public spaces in conversation with one another, I have discovered an interplay that goes beyond a certain group of polemicists’ attitudes. The church sought to govern, while theater companies hoped to provide entertainment in order to earn a profit. Both spaces accomplished their goals by appealing to the senses of their audiences, yet the church was considered pure while the theater sinful. By analyzing these two spaces, I hope to add to the understanding of the sensory order in Elizabethan England, by demonstrating that only through meaning constructed by the senses, did these two spaces become judged as holy and profane.
Chapter Two
‘The Devil’s School House’: Theater as Profane Space

The outraged of antitheatrical polemicists began in 1576. The question of theater’s role in English society was not new; Edward VI and Elizabeth I outlawed theatrical performances respectively in 1551 and 1559 as part of their Protestant reforms. Yet, outrage against drama heightened to new levels in 1576 after the construction of the first public theaters in London. Beginning in that year, a series of polemics was published that aspired to curtail the theater’s influence on London society. The authors of these polemics censured many aspects of performances, but specifically condemned sensation as a primary factor leading audiences to sin and the devil. They suggested that stage-players manipulated the human senses to influence the minds and hearts of their audiences. All of these polemicists considered these sensory engagements to be sinful. Anthony Munday, for instance, wrote in 1580:

“For what is there which is not abused thereby? Our hartes with idle cogitations; our eyes with vaine aspects, gestures, and toies; our eares with filthie speech, unhonest mirth, and rebaldrie; our mouths with cursed speaking; our heads with wicked imaginations; our whole bodies to uncleannes; our bodies and minds to the service of the devil; our holie days with prophanes; our time with idleness…”

In Munday’s critique, the sensual environment drives one to immoral acts: idle thoughts, lies, wickedness, and even to the devil’s service. Munday and his contemporaries emphasized that the theater dragged audiences toward hellfire, slowly but irrevocably. This chapter argues that these polemicists feared the dangers of sensation in the theater, mostly due to their lack of control over it. Their criticism took two distinct lines of attack: first, they denounced the theater’s physical, sensory appeal to modes of external sensation; and second, they asserted by means of sensory metaphors that these physical sensations would infect the commonwealth with moral danger.

27 Elizabeth I, By the Quene. Forasmuche as the tyme wherein common interludes in the Englishe tongue ar wont vsually to be played ... The Quenes Maiestie doth straightly forbyd al maner interludes to be playde eyther openly or priuately, except the same be notified before hande (London: Richard Lugge and John Cawood, 1559), and Edward VI, All such proclamacions, as haue been sette furthe by the Kynes Maiestie (and passed the print) from the last daie of Ianuarij, in the firste yere of his highnes reigne, vnto the last daie of Ianuarij, beeying in the .iiij. yere of his said moste prosperus reigne, that is to saie, by the space of iiiij. whole yeres (London, 1551).
28 1576 was the year when James Burbage and John Brayne founded the Theater in the London suburb of Shoreditch, just north of the city walls. See David Mateer, “New Light on the Early History of the Theater in Shoreditch [with texts],” English Literary Renaissance 36, 3 (Autumn 2006): 335.
29 Munday, 2.
Lust was, by far, the dominant danger on the minds of antitheatrical polemicists. They fretted that the theater had an effeminizing influence on the public. Theatergoers were tightly packed into a space of male and female bodies in very close proximity to each other. The players performed comedies or tragedies, men often portraying female roles. To polemicists, the theater encouraged men and women to transgress what they considered normal sexual practices, leading to impropriety, adultery, and sodomy. Rather than governed individuals, the theater produced a throng of physical bodies—a carnal world without reason that threatened the order polemicists desired. Rather than focusing on the content of plays performed in London, this chapter aims more directly to understand the sensory order which appealed to audiences and worried the theater’s detractors.

The Set

The dangers of the theater were hardly new ideas. From Ancient Greece to the present, antitheatrical writers have visualized the theater as a space of insurrection and subversion. Theaters assisted the spread of infectious diseases; they often encouraged rough behavior; and they could easily be used as political or religious platforms. Jonas Barish, in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, recognized that the theater was routinely scapegoated by almost all societies in which it flourished. Yet, he proclaims that all these reasons are not enough to explain the distrust of it over the course of human history: “the fact that the disapproval of the theater is capable of persisting through so many transformations of culture, so many dislocations of time and place, suggests a permanent kernel of distrust waiting to be activated.”

This kernel was certainly activated in the late sixteenth century, culminating in a type of antitheatricality that went beyond a small group of detractors and instead influenced an entire culture. Between 1576 and 1590, a tension emerged in London society as players became both popular and disreputable. Shifting religious commitments and the influence of Protestant iconoclasm created an environment in which the theater was easily indicted as a place of contagion that sullied its audiences. Yet, the citizens of London thronged towards the theater; the proliferation of public spaces for dramatic performances between 1576 and 1600 reveals that recreational ‘playing’ became a profitable enterprise.

30 Barish, 4.
During this decade and a half, London’s public theaters became flourishing centers of entertainment and civic culture. The plays performed on stage were very different from pre-1576 performances: the moralities and biblical drama popular in the earlier part of the sixteenth century disappeared in favor of tragedies and comedies, often based on the classics. The opening of the first public theaters, the Theatre and the Curtain, both constructed in 1576/77, and their enhanced repertoires transformed the stage into a public institution.\(^3^1\)

These developments triggered the emergence of what I describe as an antitheatrical movement, led by a group of polemicists with a variety of ties to religion and civic governance. I will examine their texts, published between 1576 and 1590. In 1590, biblical drama made a brief resurgence in popularity, but did not retain the spotlight.\(^3^2\) I choose that year as the endpoint for my study, limiting myself to the early polemics against the theater, in order to understand the origins of this attack. After 1590, as many scholars of the theater have noted, antitheatrical polemics only grew in momentum and volume until the closing of the public theaters in 1642.

The writers of these polemics came from a variety of backgrounds. All of the polemicists criticized the establishment of Elizabethan Anglicanism after the settlement of 1559; they believed that the settlement had not gone far enough to reform English religion. Yet, it is inaccurate to label these writers as Puritans. Margaret Kidnie writes of Philip Stubbes, one of these antitheatricalists, that “it becomes clear that his own theological opinions are entirely orthodox.”\(^3^3\) Though many scholars recognize connections between antitheatricality in the late sixteenth century and puritanical ideas of the seventeenth century, these polemicists still supported the Anglican Church. Several of them also avidly wrote and produced plays alongside these polemics, such as Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday.\(^3^4\)

Two distinct categories of people published pamphlets against the theater during the 1570s and 1580s—preachers and recanted players. The first group, the preachers, remained active throughout the 1580s, and wrote some of the earliest polemics in the 1570s. Prominent among them were John Northbrooke and John Stockwood, who published in 1577 and 1578 respectively. These preachers often grouped the theater with other vices plaguing society; dicing

\(^{3^1}\) White, 171.
\(^{3^2}\) O’Connell, 106
and dancing were equally abhorred. John Northbrooke describes what he believes was the main culprit: “Idleness is the master of fables and lies, and the stepdame of all virtue.”

Like many other preachers, Northbrooke insisted that the popularity of plays directly resulted idleness infecting the minds and hearts of their parishioners. Recreation houses, like public theaters, instigated the idleness that Northbrooke feared.

The publication of *The School of Abuse* in 1579 by Stephen Gosson launched the debate beyond ministers and was the first attack against the theater by someone within the playing profession. Gosson gave up playing shortly before the publication of his polemic, retired as a tutor in the country, and later served as a parson of a small parish in Essex. In 1580, a young Anthony Munday penned *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait*, adding to the dialogue against the theater by directly continuing Gosson’s line of argument. Though Munday claimed to be ‘recanted’ from the playing profession, he shortly returned to the industry. Though to us it would appear hypocritical for one such as Munday to be both for and against the theater, he could easily have held these two opposing values without difficulty. By 1582, Gosson published another text, *Plays Confuted*, where he decried Munday’s return to the theater as one “who hath changed his copy, and turned himself like the dog to his vomit, to plays again.”

In 1583, Philip Stubbes published the *Anatomie of Abuses*, an attack against the entirety of cultural life in London, most specifically apparel. I group him as an antitheatrical polemicist because the same arguments against the theater exist in his text, including a specific section devoted to playing. Less is known about Stubbes than the other polemicists, besides a little inventive rumor and his marriage in the 1580s. Yet, the popularity of his pamphlet, republished four times with two issues within the first twelve years of its publication, suggests that Stubbes must have had a vigorous audience of readers.

The style of *Anatomie of Abuses*, with its many

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35 John Northbrooke, *Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra. A treatise wherein dicing, dauncing, vaineplayes, or enterluds with other idle pastimes (etc.) commonly used on the Sabbath day, are reproved by the authoritie of the word of God and auncient writers* (London: H. Bynneman, 1577), 33.
36 See Stephen Gosson, *The trumpet of vvarre A sermon preached at Paules Crosse the seuenth of Maie 1598* (London: V. Simmes, 1598). This was Gosson’s last publication and lists him as a parson at Great Wigborow in Essex.
37 Stephen Gosson, *Playes confuted in fiue actions, prouing that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale, by the waye both the cauils of Thomas Lodge, and the Play of playes, written in their defence, and other obiections of players frendes, are truely set downe and directlye aunsweared* (London, 1582), 57.
38 Kidnie, 1-4.
39 Kidnie, 11.
references to Biblical passages, indicates that religion motivated him. However, for him the theater was only one sin among many.

Finally, writers like Thomas Lodge and Philip Sidney defended the theater (and poetry in general). However, their texts still articulated antitheatrical attitudes. Lodge, who carried out a protracted debate with Gosson that resulted in two published works, merely focused on disputing with Gosson over the specifics of the abuses committed on the stage. Sidney attempted to defend the purpose of theater, but rejected many of the plays performed by his contemporaries. While both authors clearly believed that theater served an important purpose in early modern London, they were also concerned about the type of theater happening in the public playhouses.

These writers lived during a time when theater found itself in a complex relationship with urban power structures. City officials determined the value of the theater on a case by case basis. Sometimes, the theaters were the bane of the city, purportedly causing disorder or the spread of disease; while at other moments officials highly valued theatrical performances for commercial reasons or matters of prestige. The city received the privilege of approval for any plays performed within its limits in a May 1574 patent. Tracey Hill suggests that this patent benefited the city financially, providing them with an opportunity to tax or charge fees for licensing. In the 1580s, tolerance of drama swung back and forth several times, depending on the needs of the magistrates in power. For instance, the City Corporation funded the publication of Anthony Munday’s *A Second and Third Blaist of Retreat from Plays and Theaters* in 1580. Yet, it was difficult for the city to ignore the economic value of theatrical establishments, considering the amount of money that went through the doors of the theater. In 1578, John Stockwood estimated that eight theaters, performing once a week, made about 2,000 pounds combined.

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40 See Thomas Lodge, *Protogenes can know Apelles by his line though he se him not and wise men can consider by the penn the auctoritie of the writer though they know him not*. . (London: H. Singleton, 1579) and Philip Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie. VWritten by the right noble, vertuous, and learned, Sir Phillip Sidney, Knight* (London: James Roberts, 1595). *An apologie for poetrie* was published posthumously in 1595, but was written sometime between 1579 and 1583.

41 Hill, 113.

42 Hill, 110.

43 Munday, 1. This endorsement can be seen on the title page of Munday’s polemic, where the crest of the London City Corporation physically illustrates its approval of the pamphlet.

44 John Stockwood, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse on Barthelme day, being the 24. of August. 1578 Wherin, besides many other profitable matters meete for all Christians to follov, is at large prooued, that it is the part of all those that are fathers, householders, and scholemaisters, to instruct all those vnder their gouernement, in the vword and knowledge of the Lorde. By John Stockwood scholemaister of Tunbridge* (London: Henry Bynneman for George Bishop, 1578), 137.
denounced those who suffered plays and proclaimed that they would answer before God for their allegiance to the theater. But, his point was clear. Theaters made a profit.

Polemicists such as Gosson, Munday, and Stubbes addressed their published works to the general public, hoping to diminish the influence of the theater. During the 1570s, as historian Paul White demonstrates, the theater increasingly entertained and pleased its audiences, rather than providing them with education on morality and religion. He argues that this was due to a shift in funding for performances. Rather than being sponsored by the church, audiences increasingly paid dramatists themselves, inclining players to give audiences what they wanted: sensually-charged performances that lacked moral instruction.\(^45\)

The nature of these audiences remains a murky subject; scholars over the past century have offered limited and unconvincing answers to the question of how London playgoers should be characterized. In the 1930s and 1940s, Alfred Harbage argued that theater audiences consisted especially of artisans, transforming the stage into a ‘popular’ cultural movement. By the 1970s, Ann Cook attacked this thesis, instead claiming that society’s elite dominated the theaters just as they did every other aspect of society. Both of these theses, as Andrew Gurr argued in 1987, oversimplify and neglect to consider the economic diversity represented in the rows of the theater, from the cheapest seats to the most expensive.\(^46\) Gurr provides a startling statistic to support his claim: between the 1560s and 1642 over fifty million visits to playhouses were made by London theatergoers.

It would be too easy to assume that theatergoers did not attend the church. But, no stark divide existed between churchgoers and theatergoers. Most citizens of London attended both church and theater without any serious repercussions in their lives. The public of London, unlike the commentators considered in this study, were not so concerned with the connections between religion and the theater.\(^47\) They were not afraid of attending both with the same vigor, even if their preacher admonished them against it. As I argue throughout this chapter, the theater’s sensory environment convinced people to use it as a form of relaxation and recreation.

\(^{46}\) Gurr, 3-5.
The Theatrical Sensescape

Theaters employed the senses in a variety of ways in order to create appealing performances. Antitheatrical polemicists took exception to the methods those in the playing profession used to engage their audiences. Their outrage would have been much simpler if it only had to do with the content performed on the stage; rather, these polemicists despised how drama created pleasures and escapes for its audiences. Polemicists addressed two distinct elements of the theatrical sensescape: the sensuality of the plays being performed and the concurrent sensuality of audience members. Munday characterized these two elements well: “Whereby a double offence is committed; first by those dissolute players, which without regard of honesty, are not ashamed to exhibit the filthiest matters they can devise to the sight of men: secondly, by the beholders, which vouchsafely to hear and behold such filthy things, to the great loss both of themselves and the time.” Munday confirms an established relationship between the actors on the stage and the beholders in the audience, yet he clearly indicates two distinct problems. The plays themselves were unholy and overly sensual; but, through a perceptive connection plays also incited audiences to replicate the sin performed before their eyes.

Polemics addressed the plays themselves as oversensual and therefore dangerous spectacles to witness. The theater was an artificial space, where citizens of London could imagine a world very different from that in which they lived. It provided an escape from the crowded streets outside. But, this escape was the very reason that polemicists opposed performances on the stage. Actors pretended to be people they were not—a commoner could don the crown of a king, or murder someone in cold blood, just to feed an artificial plot. These performances subverted the natural world as created by God; they went against the word of the Lord and through mimicry, falsified creation. Munday likened players to Satan:

Yet are we so carried away with his unseemly gesture, and unreverend scorning, that we seem only to be delighted in him; and are not content to sport ourselves with modest mirth…unless it be intermixed with knavery, drunken merriments, crafty cozening, indecent juggling, clownish conceits, and such other cursed mirth.

Yet many of these polemicists, as mentioned before, were a part of the playing profession themselves. This self-conscious attitude taken toward their own industry represents the

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48 Munday, 54-5.
49 Barish, 93.
50 Munday, 88.
hypocritical nature of this debate: even though these polemicists agreed that the theater was a space of sin, they were deeply attracted to the fantasies performed on the stage.

The audience was also complicit in this evil. In reaction to beholding the vanity and imitation of the stage, the sensuality of the audience became emphasized as an equally corruptive influence. This sensuality was feared just as much, if not more, than the sensuality of the performances on the stage. Gosson wrote:

   In our assemblies at playes in London, you shall see suche heaving, and shooving, suche ytching and shouldring, too sitte by women; suche care for their garments, that they bee not trode on: Such eyes to their lappes, that no chippes light in them: Such pillowes to ther backes, that they take no hurte: Such masking in their eares, I knowe not what: Such giving them Pippins to passe the time: Suche playing at foote Saunt without Cardes.”

Gosson represented four of the five traditional senses here, all of them alluring people (specifically men) toward pleasure and self-gratification. Touch plays an important role in three regards: violent outbreaks to sit near women, excessive comfort by sitting on pillowed seats, and even the lusty action of playing footsy with nearby ladies. Gender plays a significant role too: women were part of the sensual environment in which a man could lose himself, rather than being active beholders themselves. Hearing, on the other hand, is dulled. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the meaning of ‘masking’ in this context has to do with the deadening of sound. Gosson suggested that the noise of the theater was so loud and rancorous that a person’s awareness became dulled. Sight also plays a role because people were visually attracted to ‘lappes,’ according to the OED a type of apparel. The sensuality and opulence of garments, or the lack of them, made the audience even more complicit in putting on a performance. And finally, even the taste buds are provided with pleasure: ‘pippins to pass the time’ refers to “a seed or pip of any of various fleshy fruits.” Even without a performance, the audience in the theater provided enough attractive sensations to invoke all of the cardinal vices.

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51 Stephen Gosson, *The schoole of abuse containing a plesaunt [sic] inuectiue against poeets, pipers, plaiers, iesters, and such like caterpillers of a co[m]onwelth; setting vp the hagge of defiance to their mischieuous exercise, [and] owerthrowing their bulwarke, by prophane writers, naturall reason, and common experience: a discourse as pleasauent for gentlemen that fauour learning, as profitable for all that wyll follow virtue* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), 17.


The sensescape of the theater, therefore, was a complex environment that kept any who entered it away from reason and common sense by filling their minds with delights and distractions.

**Sight**

Sight, traditionally the most powerful sense in the western philosophy, played a crucial role on the stage. “Looking eyes have liking hartes, liking hartes may burn in lust,” claimed Stephen Gosson in *The School of Abuse*. The connection between sight, the heart, and lust recurs again and again throughout antitheatrical polemics, indicating the important role seeing the theater played in inciting sin. Gazing eyes were often criticized because of the role of material objects, especially clothing, on the stage and in the audience.

Philip Stubbes tackled the question of apparel and its sensory appeal to the eyes. Stubbes articulated the sin of overly sensual fashion in England, arguing that “this sinne of the excesse of Apparel, remaineth as an example of evill before our eyes, and is a provocation to sin, as experience dayly prooveth.” Stubbes justified his hatred for excessive apparel by claiming that one person wearing an extravagant garment provoked others to imitate them. In the midst of the theater, this was even more idolatrous. Stubbes stated:

> I gather by your words three special points. First, that sinne was the cause why our apparel was given us. Secondly, that God is the author, and giver thereof. Thirdly, that it was given us to cover our shame withal, and not to feed the insatiable desires of mens wanton and luxurious eyes?

Apparel contravened God as an author because clothing was given to humankind in order to remove themselves from shame, hence going back to the story of Adam and Eve. Stubbes found clothing heinous which, according to him, brought shame upon the wearer by attracting the gaze of others. He described the eyes of men, specifically, as ‘wanton’ and ‘luxurious.’ Wanton indicates that the gaze toward this apparel was ungoverned and undisciplined, while luxurious more precisely indicated lechery in the early modern period. Thus, the clothing in fashion, according to Stubbes, instilled ungovernable lust into men through the sense of sight.

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54 Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 42.
55 Philip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses contayning a discoverie, or briefe summarie of such notable vices and imperfections, as now raigne in many Christian countreyes of the worlde: but (especiallie) in a verie famous ilande called Ailgna: together, with most fearefull examples of Gods iudgementes, executed vpon the wicked for the same, aswell in Ailgna of late, as in other places, elsewhere. Verie godly, to be read of all true Christians, euerie where: but most needefull, to be regarded in Englande* (London: John Kingston, 1583), 66-7.
56 Stubbes, 74.
The role of women’s clothing on the stage is one which has been discussed at length by scholars, often within discussions of the instability of masculinity. For the purposes of my argument, however, it is important to note the connections polemicists made between vision and effeminacy. In *Plays Confuted*, Gosson argued that “the law of God very straitly forbids men to put on women’s garments.” Young boys on the London stage adopted the clothing of women in order to play female roles. But Gosson compared such an act to staring at the head of Medusa; members of the audience would be arrested by the devil almost immediately upon sight of men in women’s clothing. Munday continued this line of argument by declaring that many young ruffians and harlots became “an object to all men’s eyes.” Objectifying the actor returns us to the mechanisms of sensation as described by Thomas Aquinas. The species emitted by such people would be taken in by the eyes of the audience members and cause physical changes within their souls. As a consequence, they would become more lecherous, more inclined to wear sensual garments, and more willing to commit the kind of heinous or bawdry acts performed on the stage. Men, witnessing a man wearing women’s clothing, would lose their own masculinity in the process, and become inclined toward a variety of ‘unmanly’ behaviors from weeping to sodomy. Thus, in the sensory world of the public theater vision not only played a key role in creating pleasurable experiences, but it also destabilized gender roles and the moral order.

Vision could also communicate material objects of gestures to theatergoers. William Rankins, in *A Mirror of Monsters*, cursed plays because of their props: “A crew of counterfeit companions, such as sometimes were banished the Theaters at Rome, for presenting the vileness of Venetian Courtesans, with their wanton words, and paltry parasites with Apish toyes…” In this context, ‘toys’ could either refer to a physical material object or a gesture. Either way, ‘toys’ get mentioned throughout these texts as attractive sights for audiences. As a prop on the stage or as a gesture of a player, Rankins points out that performers intentionally created attractive sights

57 Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 10.
60 Munday, 51.
61 Levine, 10-25. See page 5 for Levine’s connection between antitheatricality and witchcraft through analysis of King James’ *Daemonologie*. She writes, “Although it *claims* that magic itself is merely a series of representations (figures, illusions, pictures merely formal in nature) it *acts* as if these representations had a constitutive power—a power to alter and unman the male body itself.”
62 William Rankins, *A mirrour of monsters wherein is plainly described the manifold vices, &c spotted enormities, that are caused by the infectious sight of playes, with the description of the subtile slights of Sathan, making them his instruments* (1587), 8.
for their spectators. By describing these sights as ‘Apish’ he suggests that the sensory world of the theater was primitive.

Sight played the largest role in perceiving the content of plays, specifically the tragedies and comedies that antitheatrical polemists all despised. Gosson wrote in *Plays Confuted*: “The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumpes? And lamentations.” Witnessing tragedy on the stage incited uncontrollable passions. He also demonstrated concern that beholding such plays led people to lengthy reveries, taking them away from the reality of their life. He believed such fantasies encouraged wanton behavior. Comedies, of course, were no better for Gosson: “[they] so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vein, that they make us lovers of laughter, and pleasure, without any meaning.” He calls on all of the senses here, but vision certainly played the integral role in audiences perceiving the meaning, or lack thereof, performed on the stage. Gosson brought his reader back to the phrase ‘tickle’—a strange verb which indicates a type of pleasure-making that subjugates the capacity to reason or use one’s logic. By ‘tickling’ the eyes, the fantastical content of these plays stirred the wrong type of passions—passions that lead toward immorality and indecency.

**Sound**

Antitheatrical texts also highlight the auditory sense for its two roles in the theater: the use of instruments to create music and the role of heinous speeches given most often by actors, and sometimes by spectators. In early modern England, music often accompanied plays, presented to the audience by live minstrels. Song and dance occurred during moments of transition, between acts or scenes, or could also accompany the performances. Yet, sound also played a secondary role in the general clamor created by theaters, a clamor that easily extended beyond the theater’s walls into the surrounding city.

Stephen Gosson, for instance, critiqued the use of instruments on the stage by referring to Pythagorean theories about the nature of music: “Pythagoras bequeaths them a Clookebagge, and condemnes them for fooles, that iudge Musick by sounde and eare. If you will be good Scholers, and profite well in the Arte of Musicke, shutte your Fidels in their cases, and looke up

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63 Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, 27. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘dump’ during the sixteenth century was defined as “a fit of abstraction or musing, a reverie.”
to heaven.”\textsuperscript{64} In Gosson’s articulation of the auditory faculty, music should not be the sounds produced by an instrument, like the fiddle, but the heavenly sounds the faithful could hear by leaving behind the mundane world. Returning to Pythagorean ideas of music, Gosson suggested that the holiest sounds were those that could not be heard by the human ear, what Pythagoras described as the harmony of the spheres. In the greater scheme of creation, audible music was base and distracting for Gosson. The quality of music was derived rather from its holiness and purity, instead of connecting with the life of the individual human being. The choice of the fiddle, here, was not just a matter of circumstance; Gosson specifically targeted a popular musical instrument rarely used in the holy space of the church.

Gosson’s concern about the role of music in the theater extended beyond its doors and into the public streets of London. He wrote: “Maximus Tyrius holdeth it for a Maxime, that the bringing of instruments to Theaters and plays, was the first cup that poisoned the commonwealth.”\textsuperscript{65} The contagion of the theater spread through the use of music because sound could emanate outside the theatrical space, into the streets. Melodious sound was a main draw for the public that Gosson envisioned; he criticized any poetic arts for tickling the hearers’ ears and bringing them to delight and the devil.\textsuperscript{66} Gosson worried about the power of the theater to induce people to join the ranks of its audience through its attractive clamor. By the early seventeenth century, this concern was only amplified since a theater was located within two miles of almost every citizen of London.\textsuperscript{67}

Music, however, was not the only way the auditory faculty could disturb the mind. Speech became a second huge distraction from sanctity. As Carla Mazzio has pointed out, early modern people often considered speech a rogue sense, disrupting the traditional order of the five senses as characterized by Aristotelian philosophy.\textsuperscript{68} The play \textit{Lingua}, analyzed by Mazzio, recognizes the power of the tongue and illustrates anxieties about wanton language. The word spoken is the word heard; and according to early modern ideas of sensation, beholders were likely to mimic what they heard in the theaters.

\textsuperscript{64} Gosson, \textit{Plays Confuted}, 41.
\textsuperscript{65} Gosson, \textit{School of Abuse}, 10.
\textsuperscript{66} Gosson, \textit{Plays Confuted}, 38.
\textsuperscript{67} Gurr, 34.
While Philip Stubbes claimed that pride of the mouth was not as sinful as pride of apparel, other polemicists appear to disagree. Anthony Munday, in particular, was extremely concerned about the role of speech in staged interludes. He wrote, “their wanton speeches do pierce our secret thoughts, and move us thereby into mischief, and provoke our members to uncleanness.” The words that issue from the mouths of players were perceived through the auditory sense, directly inciting the mind to mischief. The tendency to reproduce the exact language (and therefore the exact sin) performed by the players infected the soul. Munday also specified his argument even further, attacking the way players used the name of God. Even biblical drama or morality plays were not warranted:

The reverend word of God, and histories of the Bible set forth on the stage by these blasphemous players, are so corrupted with their gestures of scurrility, and so interlaced with unclear and whorish speeches, that it is not possible to draw any profit out of the doctrine of their spiritual moralities.

Rather than judging the theater as a possible instrument of education, Munday claimed that the word of God was disfigured by players, rendering it wholly unlike the original from the Bible. Speeches and gestures falsified it. Even morality plays were corrupted, removing any beneficial qualities from drama, even within the church. Yet, no matter how hard these polemicists tried to convince their audiences, sounds in the theater were one of its major attractive qualities, bringing pleasure and escape to wearied minds.

**Touch**

Touch also created serious implications for the senses in the theater. Unlike vision and sound, touch was more physical and required no distance between the sensed and the sensor. Crowded theaters were unsavory to such polemicists. John Stockwood, an Anglican schoolmaster, took exception to plays at the Theatre and the Curtain in a sermon at Paul’s Cross in 1578:

> Whereas, if you reftore to the Theatre, the Curtayne, and other places of Playes in the Citie, you shall on the Lords day haue these places, with many other that I can not reckon, so full, as possible they can throng, besides a greate number of other lettes, to pull from the hearing of the worde, of which I will speake heareafter.”

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69 Stubbes, 66-7.
70 Munday, 61.
71 Munday, 58.
72 Stockwood, 24.
Stockwood claimed that throngs of people resorted to theaters on the Sabbath, using their day of rest to provide themselves with the pleasure of the theater, rather than hearing God’s word. He thought of these theaters as filled to the brim with spectators, masses of people pressing in on one another, just to hear and see such spectacles. Yet, his argument brings together another point; a crowded space causes touching, often considered one of the most animalistic types of sensation.

To these writers, the sense of touch led inevitably to lust and physical pleasure. Anthony Munday wrote:

Such knacks from time to time [Satan] hath set up, and men have willinglie followed that which they have liked of, and which the pleasure of the flesh hath drawn them unto. Yea, now adaies we see manie that onlie seeke after those vaine delights, counting no time wel spent, but that they consume in beholding of gaudes.\(^73\)

The pleasure of the flesh drew men—note that specifically men were drawn to it—toward vain delights and the consuming of gaudes (definable as a pretense or pastime).\(^74\) What was performed on stage involved too much touching for Munday, with sexual overtones. He suggested that men in the audience, after witnessing the pleasure of the flesh on stage, would mimic those pleasures in their real lives.

Philip Stubbes argued that the fabric of apparel in the theaters made the space too sensual for such a crowded audience. He wrote:

“Doe not both men and women (for the most part) everie one in generall goe attired in Silkes, Velvets, Damasks, Sattens, and what not else? Which are attire only for the Nobility and Gentrie, and not for the other at any hand. Are not unlawful games, playes, Enterludes, and the like every where frequented? Is not whoredome, covetousnesse, usurie and the like dayly practized without all punishment of lawe?”\(^75\)

Silks, velvets, damasks, and satins: he provided four examples of incredibly soft, expensive, and sensual fabrics. He claimed that only the upper tier of society should wear such cloth, but that the lower orders were increasingly taking such apparel to games, plays, and interludes. This connection, for Stubbes, led to whoredom, envy, and usury. The connection between physical touching, especially regarding the pleasure of clothing worn by spectators, and lechery was perceived as one of the harsh realities of theatrical sensory culture. Women were targeted as

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\(^73\) Munday, 87.
\(^74\) Oxford English Dictionary.
\(^75\) Stubbes, 54.
whores for just setting foot in the theater. Their presence, dressed in such pleasurable attire, led men toward sin of the body.

These concerns over lust led several polemists to denigrate the presence of women, not only on the stage, but in the theater itself. In 1579, Gosson addressed an entire section of *The School of Abuse* to the gentlewomen of London, begging them to stay at home: “I have seen many of you which were wont to sport yourselves at Theaters, when you perceived the abuse of those places, school yourselves and of your own accord abhor Playes.”\(^76\) He went on to instruct women on how to wear their clothing, requesting that they make sure it fit before they left the house. He appeared particularly uncomfortable with female desire and its expression in theatrical audiences:

> Though you go to theaters to see sport, Cupid may catch you ere you departe. The little God hovereth about you, and fanneth you with his wings to kindle fire: when you are set as fixed whites, Desire draweth his arrow to the head, and sticketh it up to the feathers, and Fancy bestirreth him to shed his poison through every vein.\(^77\)

Throughout *School of Abuse*, Gosson drew connections between polytheistic deities and the stage, implicating it as a heathen (and non-Christian) art. Cupid’s arrow, Gosson thought, particularly harmed women that attended the theaters, poisoning their bodies. Yet, one must question Gosson’s intention here. Was he really interested in protecting women from sin? Or, was he more concerned that men in the theater would lose control of themselves and lust after women? No matter what, physical proximity between men and women in the theaters was the main culprit—the sense of touch threatened to destroy morality.

The polemicists provided numerous examples of how touch, sound, and sight affected the soul of the theatergoer. Any familiar with Aristotelian sensation will note that two remain to be discussed—taste and smell. Besides several suggestions in secondary literature of eating and smoking in the theaters, these two sensations were rarely put to use to attract audiences.\(^78\) Yet,

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\(^76\) Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 50.  
\(^77\) Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 51.  
\(^78\) Gurr, 36-9. Gurr attempts to piece together how smell and taste worked in the theaters. He indicates that there were always food and drink served alongside plays, often resulting in the need for toilets. Smells existed too—especially the smells of tobacco and garlic. Certain people who attended plays after 1590 would often refer to smelly people at the theater as “stinkards.” Yet, smell rarely appears in the polemics I study. Its absence, I think, occurs because polemists do not need to prove that these smells are bad. Unlike vision, sound, and touch; all of these smells would send audiences away from the theater, rather than bring them toward it.
polemicists did not neglect these two forms of sensation. And along with touch, they used them to explore the evils of the stage in a very different style.

The Senses as Metaphor

Antitheatrical polemicists did not restrict themselves to just physical sensation—they also utilized a variety of metaphors with sensory roots to describe the process of attending plays and the resulting infection in society. In discourse, they engaged with a very different subset of sensations—creating a world of meaning dominated by touch, taste, and smell. Through this rhetoric, the polemicists were able to connect the theater to general fears of plague, debauchery, and even witchcraft.

Taste

Pleasures in the theater were attractive to audiences; polemicists feared that the citizens of London would visit the theater with increasing frequency. But more than that, they feared that the ‘tastiness’ of the theater would attract people in droves, leading to a deviation from holiness and purity. Rather than stating this outright, antitheatricalists created a concept which I will describe as the sensual palate. If plays metaphorically tasted good to their audiences (mostly through the other senses); those participants would be more inclined to return for more. Early modern people considered gluttony, like lechery, a great sensory sin. Gosson described gustatory sins in the theater best: “that which entreth into us by the eyes and eares, muste bee digested by the spirite, which is chiefly reserved to honor God.”79 The key word here is ‘digestion’: the body physically reacts with what it senses, just as food is digested in the body. There is little separation between what is seen, heard, and spoken and the soul of a person. The more a person saw something, the more they become what they see. The colloquialism “you are what you eat” applies to more here than just food. The spirit becomes what it sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches.

However, we rarely receive references about physical eating in theaters. In Plays Confuted, Gosson proposed a theory that may indicate why concerns about food were not such a feature of antitheatrical polemics:

79 Gosson, Plays Confuted, 22.
If we be careful that no pollution of idols enter by the mouth into our bodies, how diligent, how circumspect, how wary ought we to be, that no corruption of idols, enter by the passage of our eyes & ears into the soul? We knowe that whatsoever goeth into the mouth defileth not but passeth away by course of nature; but that which entreteth into us by the eyes and ears, muste bee digested by the spirite, which is chiefly reserved to honor God.80

Eating, therefore, was not as permanent as seeing and hearing, simply because what was eaten was quite physically ejected from the body. Without a clear representation of sights and sounds digested and expelled from the soul, it was assumed by Gosson and others that those sights and sounds remained there and festered. Later in *Plays Confuted*, Gosson even argued that the devil sought to slip down into souls through tasting: “that whatsoever [the devil] would have sticke fast to our soules, might slippe downe in suger by this intisement, for that which delighteth never troubleth our swallow.”81 The devil tempted consumers of these plays by what they perceived as fun and relaxation, just as a consumer of food is enticed by sweets. Therefore, taste was a more potent concern metaphorically, binding beholders of plays to the theater by entering through the other modes of sensation.

Munday used images of charmed drinks and amorous potions to discuss the way the public was lured into the theater, comparing these concoctions with the sins of witchcraft.82 The transformative powers of magic must be considered a potent force in the mindset of these antitheatricalists. As Laura Levine suggests, the world of representation in which these polemicists lived emphasized that signs transformed things. The acts of representation, especially powerful on the stage as actors represent characters from tragedies and comedies, modified the person or thing being represented.83 Therefore, charmed drinks and potions were not such a strange way to conceive of the theater. Like witchcraft, the theater’s use of representations and signs to alter its public made its consumption even more of a transgression.

Of course, this use of taste led polemicists to criticize the theater as an addiction, something which the public began to crave the more they were exposed to it. Munday writes: “They are alwaies eating, & neuer satisfied, euer seeing, and neuer contented; continualie hearing, & neuer wearied; they are greodie of wickedness, and wil let no time, nor spare for anie

82 Munday, 57.
83 Levine, 5-6.
weather (so great is their devotion to make their pilgrimage) to offer their penie to the Diuel.”

Munday clearly thought the theater was an addiction to Satan, caused through the vehicle of sensation. He described this addiction in religious terms: the theatergoer made a pilgrimage to the devil by participating in the idolatrous act of watching foul players commit falsehoods. Towards the end of his text, he added: “to conclude, the principal end of all their interludes is to feede the world with sights, & fond pastimes...” The use of ‘feede’ was particularly apt and expressed the culmination of this rhetoric of consumption. The craving for the theater was caused by an excessive taste, not always a physical taste, but certainly a desire to consume more greedily.

The craving for the theater, in turn, had very serious consequences for religious life. John Northbrooke, a preacher who wrote against plays, dicing, and dancing, was concerned that theatergoers never wearied from the act of playing. His polemic, written in dialogue between a youth and an old man, contains a relevant exchange:

Youth: I tell you trueth, I prayed not, but I have played al this night, that this morning I could scarce hold open my eyes for sleepe, and therefore wasayne for to recouer my soft sleepe this forenoon.

Age: You have herein abused Gods ordinance, and your selfe also. For God made the day for man to travel in, and the night for man to rest in.

The youth was so exhausted from attending plays all night long that he could not attend church the next morning. Addicted to attending plays, people (notably here, the young) were enticed to avoid church on the Sabbath, a big sin in the eyes of reform-minded Protestants. These religious consequences, according to Northbrooke, were a direct result of the theater’s role in society. The young man had little agency in his experience; the sensual world of the theater dominated him because of his addiction. Thus, the sense of taste took on more in these polemics than just typical concerns—instead, it revealed discussions related to consumption, witchcraft, and the effects of addiction.

Touch

Polemicists used touch as a metaphor to enter conversations about plague and disease. The theater itself was conceived of as a disease that spread like a contagion, from one person to

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84 Munday, 69-70.
85 Munday, 115-6.
86 Northbrooke, 9.
the next. Stephen Gosson wrote in *Plays Confuted* that “they that came honest to a play, may depart infected.”\(^87\) Plague was often used as an excuse to close the theaters; during the period of this study alone officials closed the playhouses seven times—August 1577, November 1578, April 1580, July 1581, Spring 1582, May 1583, and May 1586—for reasons of plague.\(^88\) Indeed, since the theater brought together a throng of people, it made logistical sense for city officials to close the plays when they feared an epidemic. And, as the above dates reveal, the likelihood of an epidemic occurred almost every year. Therefore playhouses were in a constant state of opening their doors and closing them again.

Yet, plague did not function as a reason to close the theaters in a literal sense alone. As a source of sin in the city, the polemicists likened the theater to the source of a disease, from whence it could spread throughout the city, carried parasitically through the stained souls of its beholders. Anthony Munday asserted that this infection made itself known in the deathbed confessions of women:

> “Some citizens wives, upon whom the Lord for example to others hath laide his hands, have even on their death beds with tears confessed that they have received at those spectacles such filthie infections, as have turned their minds from chaste cogitations, and made them of honest women light huswives; and brought their husbands into contempt, their children into question, their bodies into sickness, and their souls to the state of everlasting damnation.”\(^89\)

Strong words from Munday on the matter. He made a point of suggesting that women spread these infections to their families, besides just dirtying their own souls. How could such a thing occur unless through sensations? Like a parasite, Munday thought the stain of the theater latched itself onto the beholder, infecting the people encountered by the beholder in the real world. While this infection could spread through the means of any of the five senses, Munday framed this disease as a contagion, transferring through physical proximity.

Polemicists even gave such an infection the power to disrupt and stain the state. Gosson, in particular, fretted over public morality, fearing that if any part of the citizenry debased themselves by attending theaters it would affect the rest:

> “A common weale is likened to the body, whose heade is the prince, in the bodie: if any part be idle, by participation the damage reboundeth to the whole, if any refuse to do their duty, though they be base, as the guts, the gall, the bladder, how

\(^{87}\) Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, 57.  
\(^{88}\) Rutter, *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, 14-5.  
\(^{89}\) Munday, 33.
dangerous it is both to the body, and to the head, every man is able to conjecture."\(^{90}\)

Like Munday, Gosson worried that the sin of the theater could spread like a disease throughout the citizenry. The state itself was a type of body—a body which was just as much endangered by the theaters as the individual soul. No doubt the players were the guts, gall, and bladder to Gosson. But, as he demonstrates, even they had the power to push civic society in a certain direction—what he considered the wrong direction.

The theater did not infect the city alone, although it did take center stage in many accounts of the evils of early modern London. John Northbrooke, for instance, condemned those who did not ‘work’ for their living, claiming that they were part of this plague. He listed many culprits: Russians, Blasphemers, Swingbucklers, Drunkards, Tosspots, Whoremasters, Dancers, Fiddlers and Minstrels, Diceplayers, Maskers, Fencers, Thieves, Cutpurses, Cozeners, Masterless servants, Jugglers, Rogues, Beggars, counterfeit Egyptians, and of course Enterlude players.\(^{91}\) The plague that antitheatricalists described, therefore, involved a whole host of other ‘vagaries’. Like dancers, minstrels, and jugglers, polemicists attacked stage players for being lowly occupations that involved breaking the moral order. They grouped the plague of the theater, then, among larger concerns about public immorality.

**Smell**

Smell, perhaps the least featured sense in these polemics, rarely transgressed its uses. Many of the polemicists, in fact, thought that the olfactory sense aided them in revealing the abuse of the theater. What could be hidden from the eye underneath clothing, or from the ear underneath loud racket, could always be sniffed out. Gosson reported that using one’s sense of smell might be the only way to tell a virtuous play from a sacrilegious performance. He turned to the Roman playwright Plautus for guidance: “Therefore Plautus, in his prologue before the comedy of the captives, desiring to curry favor with his auditors, exhorteth them earnestly to marke that playe, because it shall cast no such stench of impurity into their noses as others doe.”\(^{92}\) Most plays, according to Gosson, exposed the audience to a vile stench, while the

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\(^{90}\) Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, 60.

\(^{91}\) Northbrooke, 50-51.

\(^{92}\) Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, 27.
absence of smell revealed that a play was worthy. Gosson admitted, however, that this situation was not likely; a stench lingered in nearly every play he had encountered.

These thoughts about smell related to anxieties about the devil’s ability to hoodwink people into thinking him pleasant and virtuous. Appearances could be deceiving, touches were blind, sounds were fickle—but the sense of smell was more trustworthy. The devil could not so easily hide his aroma. Anthony Munday wrote: “And therefore he is to be turned out of his case into his naked skin, that his nasty filthy body, and stinking corruption being perceived, he might come into the hatred and horror of men.” For Munday, the devil rarely misled people through olfaction, but mostly through vision and sound. Smell became important when the devil was revealed for his true character, when he returned to his naked skin. Rather than misleading people, or being used to cause addiction, the stench of the theaters alerted those who followed their nose to the corruption.

The stench of Satan also concerned William Rankins, but he connected it more directly with stage plays. Rankins, who enjoyed criticizing the theater through long-winded metaphors, wrote:

> But set we aside this cavelling objector, and view we more narrowly from what spring these serpents first sucked their unsavory sap (for men do then transform the glorious image of Christ, into the brutish shape of a rude beast, when the temple of our bodies which should be consecrate unto him, is made a stage of stinking stuff, a den for thieves, and a habitation for insatiate monsters.) First they are sent from their great captain Satan (under whose banner they bear arms) to deceive the world, to lead the people with enticing shows to the devil, to seduce them to sin, and well-tuned strings, to sound pleasing melody, when people in heaps dance to the devil. But rather seem they the limbs, proportion, and members of Satan.

Rankins referenced a ‘stage of stinking stuff’. The players who created such a stage, he claimed, were just the serpents of the devil. These serpents misled people through vision and sound, but he did not claim that smell functioned the same way. Instead, the stench of the stage allowed Rankins to assert its lack of holiness. Only through that mechanism, could he claim that it was a place of ‘insatiate monsters’.

The sense of smell—like taste and touch before it—provided polemicists with a means to go beyond the physical aesthetic of the theater as an appealing space, and fret about the result of

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93 Munday, 29.
94 Rankins, 4.
that attraction. They believed that such addictions led the citizenry of London away from holiness by corrupting their souls. But, not only the theatergoers in question were affected; the entire commonwealth was subjected to the malady of sin. This theater was nothing less than an apocalyptic space.

Conclusion

God hath armed every creature against his enemy: The Lyon with paws, the Bull with horns, the Boar with tusks, the Vulture with talons, Harts, Hinds, Hares, and such like, with swiftness of feet, because they are fearful, every one of them putting his gift in practice; But man which is Lord of the whole earth, for whose service herbs, trees, roots, plants, fish, foul, and beasts of the field were made, is far worse then the brute beasts: for he [is] endowed but with sense.95

This chapter has explored the nature of the attack on the sensory order within the public theaters of Elizabethan London. It argues that the theater became a profane space because of its appealing sensory order, offering pleasure and entertainment to the London populace. On the other hand, polemicists also considered the theater a place of infection, a metaphorical malady that related the theater with all sorts of heinous acts, including witchcraft, gluttony, and disease. From the outer walls to the center stage, from the audiences to the players, these writers maintained that the theater was the hub of sin and sacrilege in the city.

The above quotation from Gosson reminds us that early modern people conceived of well-governed senses as the primary defense against evil and cruelty in the world. The antitheatrical argument can thus easily be boiled down to a matter of sensation—can human beings separate themselves from beasts and show that they have greater capabilities of knowledge, wit, and reason? Gosson and his contemporaries thought the theater worked against these values, denigrating the mind through an oversensual environment.

The creation of this sensory order was also deeply embedded within religious debates of the sixteenth century. Munday emphasized this quality when he suggested that the theater might lead to the “overthrowe of religion.”96 In the next chapter, we will consider how this conflict over sensation fit critiques of religious sensation related to the English Reformation. By linking this chapter with religious debates, this argument is not isolated to just the theater, but instead it reflects how these polemicists operated within a larger contested sensory culture of the past.

95 Gosson, 24-5.
96 Munday, 46.
Chapter 3
Holy Space: The Church and Religious Practice

Antitheatrical polemicists believed that the theater posed a serious threat to religion. They thought it promoted vanity, idleness, and sin by appealing to the senses of its beholders. Because the theater was a multisensory environment, polemicists internally constructed an image of it that directly opposed the spiritual goodness of the church. John Northbrooke, one of the first preachers to attack public theaters, wrote a treatise in 1577 that contained a dialogue between two characters named Age and Youth. At one point, Age attacked Youth’s claim that he could be a part of the Body of Christ and still attend plays:

I pray you, how can you say that you are gathered together in Christ’s name, when you do all things to the disglory thereof, in breaking of his blessed commandments, by your swearing, drunkenness, idleness, violating the Sabbath day, neglecting to hear his word, and to receive his sacraments, and to resort to the house of prayer with the godly congregation.97

Through Age, Northbrooke articulated his concerns about playhouses as spaces of violation while also stating the alternative: convening in church to hear the word of Christ, to receive the sacraments, and to participate in communal prayer. Northbrooke and other clergymen advocated a worship space restricted in its appeals to the senses, not for a non-sensory space devoid of connections to the external world. Therefore, the church, unlike the theater, was a space of community where the senses were strictly governed so that churchgoers could only relate with what reformers claimed was holy.

In the church, reformers were most concerned about idolatry. Any type of sensation that did not emanate directly from a source of the divine posed serious dangers. Jennifer Waldron, a specialist in Renaissance drama, writes: “For even as they smashed Catholic statues and stained glass windows, Protestant iconoclasts sought to redirect the worshipper’s gaze toward visible, material substances thought to be untainted by human artifice.”98 ‘Untainted’ substances took the form of those things that reformers credited directly to divine creation: the natural world, the human body, and the Bible. Rather than giving oneself up to the fancies of the imagination, as in public theaters, reformers sought to purify their parishioners’ sensory relationship with the world by fostering connections with those things which they thought revealed the truth of the divine.

97 Northbrooke, 9.
While they hoped to steer their parishioners away from idolatry, they believed that sin to be connected with other sins, such as lust. Everywhere, then, both in the theater and the church, reformers and antitheatrical polemicists attacked a sensory order that emphasized connections with the physical world, a world of carnal temptations. This materialist danger worried both groups of writers.

Milner suggests the context in which we are to understand this trend: “Tudor England, in many ways, saw an intensification of anxiety surrounding sensuality and sensory control.” Emphasizing a language of control and governance, Milner discloses an increasing controversy over sensation in religious guides and devotional works. This language, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, spilled over onto the pages of antitheatrical polemicists and reformers who similarly voiced concerns about the senses in public spaces.

This chapter will further explore the notion that, in theological treatises and sermons alike, the public stage was construed as the opposite of the church—as the profane antithesis of the holy. This antithesis hinged, I argue, on the understanding of both spaces as pure and impure sensory environments. I intend to place the discourse about the theater discussed in the previous chapter in the context of religious tensions throughout the Elizabethan period (1558-1603), demonstrating that polemicists constructed concerns about the theater’s subversion of the sensory order in opposition to the reformer’s program of creating a sober and pure space of worship. Yet even here, one must admit that the spatial regime of the English church was more nuanced than in the English theater—Anglican reformers trod a middle ground between reform and tradition, sometimes erring on the side of customs that other religious reform movements rejected completely.

England’s Religious Tensions (1534-1558)

For three tumultuous decades before Elizabeth came to the throne, power in England repeatedly changed hands between Protestants and Catholics. While the focus of this chapter

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100 For the purpose of this study, the Protestants were those people who desired a break from the traditional church and recognized the monarch as the head of the church; while Catholics were those who upheld traditional beliefs and practices, recognizing the pope as the head of the church. This terminology, however, does little to help clear the muddied waters between the varying Protestant and Catholic perspectives that created the uniquely tense religious culture of England throughout the sixteenth century.
will be on Reformation discourse during the Elizabethan period, some understanding of these political transformations is necessary to grasp the context of this religious climate. Rather than strengthening the Reformation’s hold on the country, the events below exacerbated religious tensions to an extreme point, pushing many toward violence and subversion.

Henry VIII, who formed the Church of England, could not have anticipated the crisis he unleashed upon the English state. Beginning as a power play between Henry and the papacy, reform heightened in England after the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which rejected papal power and established the king as head of the church. Throughout the 1530s, two distinct political and religious groups rivaled each other, one headed by Thomas Cromwell which empathized with continental reformers, and the other led by Stephen Gardiner which desired to maintain as much traditional practice as possible. From the beginning, Henry vacillated over introducing a fully-fledged reform movement in England, never fully rejecting traditional religious practices. However, as Milner demonstrates, from the beginning Henry and his advisors were interested in protecting the senses of English subjects. In 1538, during the trial of John Lambert for heresy, Henry declared that he “sought to protect the eyes and ears of ‘his true, simple, and unlearned loving subjects’ from the ‘great and manifold superstitions and abuses which have crept into the hearts and stomachs of many.’” Yet, while Henry’s government asserted the royal supremacy, tried heretics, attacked images, and dissolved the monasteries, several scholars, including the historian Christopher Haigh, have noted how little traditional worship practice changed in England. Cromwell fell in 1540 and Henry spent the remainder of his reign reversing Cromwell’s reforms. The end result, by the time of his death in 1547, was a Church of England that denied papal power, but did not look all that different in terms of doctrine and practice from the traditional church. As Haigh put it: “Henry VIII had died a Catholic, though a rather bad Catholic.” The sensory world of pre-Reformation worship had sustained an attack, but a rather haphazard one that did not doom traditional practices.

The government of Edward VI, Henry’s son, transitioned to a strictly reformed church based on the continental Reformation. During this period (1547-1553), strides were taken to transform the Church of England into a Protestant institution: the first edition of The Book of

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102 Tracy, 189.
103 Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation*, 211.
104 Haigh,167.
Common Prayer was published, marriage of priests was officially allowed, and vestments and ornaments were radically simplified.\textsuperscript{105} However, these reforms did not ferment long before Edward died in 1553 and his sister, Mary I, quickly rose to power in a popular and speedy rebellion. Mary attempted to transform the altered landscape of religion in England back into what it had been before the Act of Supremacy. In her attempts, there were some successes and some failures.\textsuperscript{106} For instance, Haigh demonstrated that parish religion itself was revitalized during the Catholic Restoration, while attempts to reinstate institutions like monasteries or reintroduce images to the worship service generally failed because they had been destroyed once and for all by iconoclasm during the Henrician and Edwardine regimes.\textsuperscript{107}

Therefore, by 1558, religion in England had experienced extreme tensions. Worship had been altered and returned to its former state, jarring and confusing the senses of English parishioners. Milner writes, “With such oscillations, when Elizabeth came to the throne in late 1558 she was faced with a kingdom full of opinions. For her, of course, it was hers that mattered.”\textsuperscript{108} The queen balanced religion in England between traditional Catholic religious practice and the radical reform of Protestant sectarians, later labeled Puritans. Elizabethan reform was not sweeping, instead it was slow and only instituted when necessary. The use and abuse of religious sensory environments became an important concern as Elizabeth’s government tried to keep peace and assert its authority in a kingdom torn asunder by religious anxiety. In the rest of this chapter, I explore some of these debates, indicating their impact on the production of the negative discourse surrounding the public theaters in 1576.

The Carnal and the Spiritual

The introduction featured the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas on sensation, especially their theories about speculation. In this theory, the sensed object emitted essential forms (species) which were physically taken in by modes of sensation (i.e. the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin) and processed in the body, physically altering the makeup of the soul, heart, and mind.\textsuperscript{109} Yet, through the philosophy of Origen of Alexandria, early modern scholars also


\textsuperscript{106} Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 285.

\textsuperscript{107} Haigh, 217.

\textsuperscript{108} Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 285.

\textsuperscript{109} Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 23-4.
believed that two distinct types of sensation were possible: spiritual and corporal.\textsuperscript{110} To early modern reformers, spiritual sensing occurred most often when the senses were directed exclusively toward the holy, while they associated corporal sensation with the lust of the flesh. One of the main points of confusion, beginning with debates between Cranmer and Gardiner, revolved around the nature of spiritual and corporal sensing: could these types of sensation occur simultaneously or did one replace the other?\textsuperscript{111} Reformers attempted to build a church that fostered spiritual sensation, but many places in the city, especially the theater, continued to provide what they considered base and revolting sensory aesthetics. The comparison between these two spaces raised further questions about the use of the sensory apparatus in the church and also raised concerns about the theater’s moral position in the public eye.

Reformers linked corporal types of sensation, especially in ungovernable places like the theater, with carnal acts. When preacher John Stockwood prepared a sermon at Paul’s Cross in 1578, the construction of the Theatre in Shoreditch, just to the north of London’s city walls, disturbed him:

\begin{quote}
I know not how I might with the godly learned especially more discommend the gorgeous playing place erected in the fields, than to term it, as they please to have it called, a Theatre, that is, even after the manner of the old heathenish Theatre at Rome, a show place of all beastly and filthy matters, to the which it cannot be chosen that men should resort without learning thence much corruption.
\end{quote}

Only two short years after the construction of this playing place, Stockwood determined that it was a space that spread corruption. Not only did he conjure up images of fallen Rome’s decay, but he also suggested that the theater was a venue in which terrible things were portrayed. Stockwood, like many other polemicists and preachers, believed the new theaters satisfied little more than lust.

Due to this sensory environment, antitheatrical writers agreed that the theater was a satanic influence on the minds, souls, and bodies of the London populace, directly opposing the Church. Anthony Munday argued in 1580: “Whosoever shall visit the chapel of Satan, I mean the Theater, shall find there no want of ruffians, nor lack of harlots, utterly past all shame.”\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Kathrin Scheuchzer, “‘Eate Not, Taste Not, Touch Not’: The Five Senses in John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments” in \textit{The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England}, Annette Kern-Stühler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 228.


\textsuperscript{112} Stockwood, 74.

\textsuperscript{113} Munday, 51.
Munday, whose polemic was part of a larger attack against London playing groups, characterized the theater as Satan’s chapel. Theatergoers were worshippers at Satan’s altar, gathering together for performances in which they submitted themselves to all sorts of lewd sensory experiences. The theater was considered a carnal space purposed solely for the gratification of the flesh.

Reformers and polemicists alike characterized the church as a sanctified and holy space devoted to spiritual sensation. By attending worship services and hearing sermons preached, churchgoers would find that their lives tended toward ‘spiritual’ delight rather than the carnal delight of the flesh. Gosson defined spiritual delight as “the operation of virtue consisting in a meditation of the life to come purchased for us by the blood of Christ, and revealed for our comfort in the word of God.”\(^\text{114}\) One should meditate on the life God gave one (rather than on imaginative fancies), and rely wholly on the word in the Bible. To be virtuous, one needed to cut out the distractions the imagination created in the theater. If one attended the theater, one was expected to descend into sin and madness; whereas if one frequented the church and did not distract oneself with carnal distractions, one would increase in righteousness. Thus, the theater and the church were envisioned in an age-old religious binary between good and evil.

Even the famous poet Philip Sidney, writing an apology for theater and poetry, was seriously concerned about the types of delights actors evoked on the stage. He noted that actors in comedies “stir laughter in sinful things” when they should not measure their worth by the laughter of the audience. He wrote, “Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent, or present. Laughter, hath only a scornful tickling.”\(^\text{115}\) Like Gosson, Sidney feared that comedies on the stage only attempted to bring enjoyment that was not grounded in any virtue: for instance, laughing at a beggar or at foreigners. Real delight, on the other hand, was fashioned through adhering to a high moral standard. It was not found in emotional reactions, but in a more austere type of contentment. Sidney believed that theater could be used to create spiritual delight, but that current trends and fashions on the stage neglected to do so. Most reformers would have disagreed with him, instead asserting that the church was the only place where spiritual delight could be fostered.

Carnal and spiritual delights were also set apart in terms of gender binaries. Polemicists and reformers considered acts of carnality an effeminizing influence on the London populace.

\(^{114}\) Gosson, *Players Confuted*, 49.

\(^{115}\) Sidney, 38.
For instance, Gosson thought that the theater turned “our wrestling at arms” into “wallowing in Ladies’ laps.”\textsuperscript{116} Writers like Gosson thought that women were dominated by the passions, often associated with the tactile and gustatory senses, and therefore un governable. Entering the theater, thus, purportedly caused the passions of sensible men to be overwhelmed by an undisciplined sensory aesthetic, leading them to lose their manhood in excessive emotion.\textsuperscript{117} The church, tending toward spiritual delight, could return a man to his original state of reason. In 1590, Laurence Deios confirmed this binary by arguing that all devout followers of the Church of England were soldiers in the army of Christ. He wrote, “Although we have sin, yet let us repent and trust in God’s mercy and power, and commit the event to him. Faith prevails with God by prayer…These must be our spiritual armor. These must we put on as Christians: and as men, we must arm ourselves if need require otherwise.”\textsuperscript{118} In Deios’ account, the papacy was the Antichrist, a beast of carnal sensation, while the Anglican stood against it as a holy warrior. The male body, therefore, remained unchanged only through ascribing to the relegated sensory apparatus of the Elizabethan church.

Already two very different spaces take form. On the one hand, these writers articulated a space defined by its carnality, a space which appealed to the senses in physical, earthly ways. On the other, they presented a space cleansed of lust and sin. As the next sections argue, the spiritual ethics of the church were internalized but not devoid of sensory elements. The English Reformation did not advocate asensuality. Instead, it sought to control the senses in order to lead parishioners towards what reformers thought was the truth.

Preaching

Antitheatrical polemicists considered the spoken word in the theater idolatrous primarily because it contrasted with the focal point of reformed worship: the word of God. For instance,

\textsuperscript{116} Gosson, \textit{The School of Abuse}, 16.
\textsuperscript{117} Farah Karim-Cooper, “The Sensory Body in Shakespeare’s Theater” in \textit{The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England}, Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 272. For more on touch’s place in the hierarchy of the senses and associations made between touch and the maternal body, see Elizabeth Harvey, \textit{Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1-14.
\textsuperscript{118} Laurence Deios, \textit{That the pope is that Antichrist: and An answer to the objections of sectaries, which condemne this Church of England Two notably learned and profitable treatises or sermons vpon the 19. verse of the 19. chapter of the Reuelation: the first whereof was preached at Paules Crosse in Easter terme last, the other purposed also to haue bene there preached} (London: George Bishop and Ralph Newberry, 1590), 99.
Anthony Munday declared that speeches in plays compared poorly to the Gospel preached by a clergymen:

But when I see the word of truth proceeding from the heart, and uttered by the mouth of the reverend preachers, to be received of the most part of the ear, and but a few rooted in the heart: I cannot by any means believe that the words proceeding from a profane player, and uttered in scorning sort, interlaced with filthy, lewd, and ungodly speeches, have greater force to move men unto virtue, than the words of truth uttered by the godly Preacher.\textsuperscript{119}

Munday directly compared the church to the theater by emphasizing that they both appealed to their audiences through speech. He claimed that the church was far more beneficial than the theater. He was not alone in this opinion. Munday and other antitheatrical writers admonished their readers to turn their hearts toward God and the church. To these men, only the word of God could counteract the deeply misguided teachings of the theater.

By the 1570s, preaching the scriptures had become one of the primary aims of reformed religious practice. In the early sixteenth century, continental reformers recast scripture, instead of church doctrine, as the highest authority. Martin Luther, for instance, believed that Christ was the sole content of all scripture, both Old and New Testament. His emphasis on \textit{sola scriptura} required all church instruction and practice to be based on passages of scripture. Even the Trinity, infant baptism, and the perpetual virginity of Mary, though not explicitly stated in the Bible, were claimed to originate from it implicitly.\textsuperscript{120} Luther and Calvin’s theology inspired English reformers, who swiftly adapted the importance of scripture and sermonizing to the Church of England. However, both on the Continent and in England, hearing scripture was only part of the word’s substantial properties—other senses were just as important to conveying god’s message. Unlike the speeches given in theaters throughout Elizabethan London, sermons were based directly on a codified document: the Bible.

Because of the rising significance of scripture, scholars of the Reformation have often pointed to hearing as the most important sense in the reformed church. McDermott claimed, “A truly open ear invites the Word to ‘sink’ into the heart’s unseen depth…the spoken ‘Word’ is the ‘summe’ of Christ, and thus while the minister’s speech may seem insubstantial, it actually

\textsuperscript{119} Munday, 64.
\textsuperscript{120} See William Fulke, \textit{A sermon preached vpon Sunday, beeing the twelfth of March. Anno. 1581, within the Tower of London in the hearing of such obstinate Papistes as then were prisoners there} (London: Thomas Dawson, 1581), 26.
possesses God’s weighty ‘substance’ as the embodied spirit.” Hearing established a much stronger sensory tie than that suggested by the mere act of listening. The words themselves, if absorbed properly, sank deep within and transformed the soul into a divine substance. Because of this sensory connection, reformers rejected the theater and approved of the church as places of learning—for they feared that words spoken on the stage would contradict any good done in the church.

Laymen were not given the ability to interpret this scripture unaided; instead, they were expected to receive it from a clergymen. A layperson digesting scripture alone could easily have misunderstood the true message. Hearing scripture, therefore, became an essential process. John Northbrooke argued, “As the curses are great against the condemners and negligent hearers of God’s word, so the blessings are double fold to the diligent and obedient hearer.” The virtuous listener was expected to have an open ear during sermons in a process with significant sexual overtones. The priest planted his interpretation of the word into the very heart of the listener through a process of speculation. Metaphors, such as a “fertile seed” being “planted” through the open ear of the churchgoer and yielding a crop of spiritual goodness within the heart, abounded in early modern texts. The priest took on a traditional masculine role, penetrating his effeminized parishioners with moral goodness. Such a process was meant to internalize the priest’s message in the very heart of his audience and strengthen his authority.

Sermonizing became an important tool in which the Elizabethan government could assert its theology. The 1559 Act of Uniformity mandated weekly sermon attendance. The Elizabethan government suggested that preachers focus on obedience in their sermons. John Whitgift, Elizabeth’s favorite Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote in 1583: “Paul and Peter taught obedience when Nero lived, a cruel Tyrant, and rather a monster then a man, and shall not we obey, command, and teach obedience to her Majesty our natural Prince, a defender of the true Religion of Christ, by whom also we enjoy so great liberty, peace, and abundance in all things.” Opposed by Catholics and sectarians inspired by Anabaptists, Whitgift asked all Anglican preachers to serve the Queen’s religion and uphold it against those who would tear it

122 Cameron, 140-2.
123 Northbrooke, 11.
124 McDermott, 191.
125 McDermott, 184.
126 Whitgift, 9.
down. By emphasizing the verbs ‘obey’, ‘command’, and ‘teach’, Whitgift asks the preachers to convey such messages through the effective auditory faculty.

Yet, sermons engaged more than just the ear; worshippers also used their eyes to watch preachers as they spoke. Reformers tended to distrust the visual faculty during sermons, suggesting that their parishioners should not rely on this sensory capability to discern the truth. Stockwood wrote, “Forsooth, because we fasten our eyes upon the person that speaketh, with the baseness of whom we are nothing moved, whereas if we would, as indeed we ought, consider that God hath spoken.”\footnote{Stockwood, 86.} The physical body of the preacher himself was a distraction to the holy word of God because it reminded worshippers that the words were coming not from a divine being, but a mortal man. Stockwood demanded that worshippers reject this evidence and rely only on God’s presence in the words they heard.

While Stockwood disavowed the role of vision in the preaching of the word, William Fulke did not completely abandon its capabilities. He suggested that the preaching of the word brought forth light in a synaesthetic experience. He wrote, “The candlestick which signifies the Church, upholds the light of the gospel, by the continued preaching of the Ministers thereof…if it cease, then follows darkness, blindness, ignorance, error, and destruction.”\footnote{Fulke, 46.} Unlike the literal vision that Stockwood found distracting in the church, Fulke pointed out that a metaphorical type of vision was brought to the beholder of sermons, through diligent attention to the word of God. This hazy light, a form of spiritual sensation without a corporal counterpart, could cloud the vision of the beholder and allow them to imagine that the words preached in the pulpit came directly from God. Only light produced by the gospel, Fulke claimed, could avert a dystopia of darkness and destruction.

The physical Bible also presented the issue of touching and tasting scripture. Radical reformers, or sectarians, challenged those who thought touching and tasting the Bible could be beneficial. Deios, on the other hand, defended the use of the bible for swearing oaths:

Another is a part of the honor we give to God, when upon just cause in the truth, we call his name to witness: this we do, by laying the hand upon the book of holy scripture. The other is taken in the name of God, that gave his word to the Church, by the promises and threatening that he in it has made unto us: the book is kissed and touched in sign thereof.\footnote{Deios, 123.}
Responding to the concerns of sectarians, Deios revealed that the word of God was more than just something spoken in the Anglican Church. He asserted that the physical Bible, by being touched or kissed, could authenticate oaths or vows through a tactile and gustatory process of sensation. The Bible, being a font of truth, forced people it came into contact with to be honest by a process of speculation. Sectarians, on the other hand, were outraged that this transformed the book into a mystical object of ritual practice. They believed that, in this case, the Elizabethan Settlement had not gone far enough to control and circumscribe the senses.

Scholars have occasionally simplified the dichotomy between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation by remarking that reformers sought a religion of the word, while traditionalists were a religion of good works. However, this opposition only holds up so far. If one possessed a faith in God based on the Bible, then one could perform good works. Cameron writes, “Only the work of Christ had ‘merit’ to save souls; only his sacrifice had any power to take away the penalties of sin; his passion had atoned superabundantly for all human sin, past, present, and future.”\(^\text{130}\) Without the passion of Christ in the depths of one’s soul, one would not truly do any beneficial works, nor would one somehow miraculously receive the ability to go to heaven. Salvation was already given. Stockwood and Northbrooke used this theology in their articulation of good deeds: Stockwood argued that faith came first, then came the giving of alms; Northbrooke claimed that all churchgoers needed to not only listen to sermons but to follow those sermons into action.\(^\text{131}\) In both accounts, the word comes first, but provides the impetus to do good deeds in society.

Therefore, the word of God was understood as an active agent in the lives, minds, and souls of English parishioners during the Elizabethan period. Directly opposed to the wanton speeches given during theatrical performances, the spoken and heard language of sermons and scripture paved a path to heaven and salvation. Though the emphasis of most reformers revolved around the auditory faculty, the word was a synaesthetic and multisensory experience, including the faculties of touch, sight, and even taste. These examples illustrate that unlike the theater, the church was a tightly controlled space of sensation, in which every sensory relationship was questioned to verify that it led the worshipper toward holiness.

\(^{130}\) Cameron, 120.
\(^{131}\) Stockwood, 59; Northbrooke, 15.
Prayer

While scripture certainly inspired reformers when they wrote prayers, the experience of praying was far different from that of sermonizing or reading the Bible. John Stockwood wrote that prayer was used for “assistance against our many enemies, the devil, the world, and the corrupt lusts and wicked affections of our own flesh.” Unlike sermons and the Word, which were primarily used as devices of education, spoken prayers warded off carnal experiences. They could also be used as a totem of protection and healing, a replacement for many traditional practices in which physical objects (such as relics or sacramentals) had the same powers. The enemies Stockwood lists are no coincidence; the goal of intentional prayer was to keep worshippers on a path recommended by scripture.

At the root of Anglican prayer was the same hope of establishing communication between the environment of the church and the soul of the worshipper. A prayer spoken in the church community was heard by all the other parishioners and repeated by them. Therefore, prayer allowed for the penetration of the soul by multiple voices, and the immediate reproduction of that same message by the worshipper. Reformers, however, were concerned that worshippers did not truly understand the prayers or that they simply did not care and were just going through the motions. Stockwood added that one must pray “not with the lips, but with the heart.” Prayer was guided by the liturgy in the external and material world, but was supposed to be internalized, understood, and believed. Prayer, like preaching, needed to physically alter the soul by appealing to the auditory and oral faculties, creating an internalized act of spiritual sensing.

Worshippers needed to have the correct mentality before they engaged in prayer. In 1562, John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, described this disposition by paraphrasing the words of St. Paul: “this was a House of Prayer, where all the people together should devoutly and soberly call upon God.” The Church, in this instance specifically devoted to prayer, was only a profitable environment for the spirit if parishioners earnestly sought the same goals. The word ‘soberly’ especially describes this experience and alludes to a tightly controlled environment as well. Praying, indeed, provided a stark opposition to the loud and raucous playhouses.

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132 Stockwood, 65.
133 Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 86.
134 Stockwood, 66.
135 John Jewel, An apologie or answere in defence of the Churche of Englande with a briefe and plaine declaration of the true religion professed and vsed in the same (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1564), 62.
The Book of Common Prayer, one of the main written products of the Reformation in England, was first authorized in 1549 during the reign of Protestant Edward VI.Rejected during the Marian period, the book was reinstated by Elizabeth, although with several concessions to traditional worship practice. While the book itself was the foundation of prayer and liturgy in England during the Elizabethan period, it was often at the center of controversy, including serious debates on revisions in 1571, 1572, 1584, and 1586-7, all of which were opposed by the Queen. Vestiges of these quarrels appeared in the references to prayer throughout treatises and sermons from the time period. Yet, for the Church of England the book was an immense necessity as it bound all Anglicans together through one common prayer and liturgical experience. Defending the Church of England, John Jewel remarked that common prayer led to common profit.

Intelligibility was a major complaint against traditional worship that caused reformers to create the Book of Common Prayer. Reformers insisted that all prayers in worship services should be understood by the people filling the pews in their native languages. Jewel railed against the traditional use of Latin prayers in worship services: “We pray, as it is meet, in that tongue which every man amongst us doth understand.” In order for the auditory faculty to work properly, worshippers needed to understand prayers rather than hearing an unknown and strange tongue. An open ear receiving words in a language that it did not understand would only create confused messages within the heart. While this was not a particularly new idea, having grounds in several medieval heresies, such as those of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, the need for prayer to be in English emphasizes the direct control over the senses that reformers desired. They did not want parishioners to take home disparate opinions from church spawned from misunderstandings and confusion. They wanted to send home one pure message.

The reading of prayers and liturgy in worship services, however, drew attacks from sectarians who thought the Reformation had not gone far enough. Deios, again, defended the position of the Church of England. The sectarians, he claimed, believed that “prayers read…are

136 Cameron, 284.
137 Cameron, 383.
138 Jewel, 17.
139 Jewel, 17.
140 For more on these heretical positions in the Middle Ages, see Margaret Aston, Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600 (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993).
only for meditation and not for invocation.”¹⁴¹ This assertion undermined the whole premise of the Elizabethan worship service. The power of liturgy and prayer was not for meditation alone, but meant to call the community together for worship. The sectarians doubted the faith of the worshipper who merely recited prayers from a book. Instead, sectarians expected worshippers to be able to craft their own prayers, rather than mimicking their leaders.

Concerns of mimicry again linked the church with the theater. Polemicists feared that uncontrolled sensory connections between audience members and players would lead theatrogoers to mimicking the acts of players in their everyday lives. Murders, sexual transgressions, and irreverence in the theater would inevitably turn London into a disordered city full of cutthroats, thieves, and adulterers. Similarly, Deios thought that uncontrolled prayer espoused by sectarians would lead Christians away from faith and truth: “Again, what would this liberty of every man’s praying in public at his own motion…bring upon the Church? Infinite and intolerable babbling in some and damnable and most heretical petitions in a great number.”¹⁴² In this instance, a lack of an ordered sensory environment in the church would lead many worshippers to walk away with very different ideas on the nature of the divine, directly in contrast to church doctrine. Such policies, according to Deios, led to mass confusion tangibly produced through speech and even heresy.

In direct parallel with the word preached, reformers thought that prayer caused an opening of the heart that aligned directly with the emergence of light. As Deios wrote, “As one candle receives light of another, so even in prayer the heart receives light and heat by means of words heard and said.”¹⁴³ Again, while prayers and liturgy in the Elizabethan Church were often emphasized through the auditory faculty, Deios described a truly synaesthetic experience. Hearing prayers produced light and heat, invoking the ocular and tactile faculties of the worshipper. Yet, prayer and liturgy also provided a common experience, one which was meant to form communities of worshippers across England that not only participated in services, but understood and believed.

¹⁴¹ Deios, 64.
¹⁴² Deios, 64.
¹⁴³ Deios, 65.
The Sacraments

Reformers questioned and regulated the sacraments of traditional worship during the Protestant Reformation. The medieval sacraments that later became distinctive of Catholicism were Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. Each of these sacraments involved a sensory ritual, which Catholics believed imparted grace upon the individual. This notion that sacramental rituals provided grace disturbed reformers, who believed that grace had already been given by God. Cameron writes, “The Reformers insisted that salvation came as an unmerited free gift direct from God, apprehended through the preaching of the Word; therefore any rituals which claimed ‘confer grace’, let alone to ‘win merit’, should have been drastically curtailed or entirely abolished.” Reformers on the continent, such as Luther and Calvin, pushed to redefine the sacraments in a more regulated and controlled way. They no longer were sources of grace, but instead were considered symbols of Jesus’ already made sacrifice.

The ‘good’ sacraments, specifically baptism and communion, represented Jesus’ sacrifice, even though they were considered mere representations and not the real thing. Northbrooke, our preacher turned antitheatricalist, articulated the basic explanation of sacraments in his dialogue between Age and Youth. The youth asks: “Why doth he give us his sacraments?” To which Age replies: “Because they are seals of his promise, that we should not be forgetful of the benefits purchased for us by the precious body and blood of our savior Jesus Christ.” Therefore, the Sacraments, as sensory experiences, did not confer grace upon participants, but instead symbolized the grace they had already received. While reformers objected to Catholic theology, in which sensing these rituals conferred grace, it is curious to note that they did not remove the sacraments entirely. Rather, the sensory component of the Sacraments was still a useful way to engage English parishioners in worship.

Reformed sacramental theology only accepted those sacraments which they considered to have firm roots in the Word of God, such as the stories about John the Baptist and the Lord’s Supper. Therefore, they restricted the sacraments to two: Baptism and the Eucharist. English reformers denied that Jesus was materially present in these sacraments, especially in their concerns about transubstantiation. However, they continued to use these rituals to verify belief in

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144 Cameron, 156.
145 Cameron, 157.
146 Northbrooke, 15.
their congregations. Cranmer, for instance, asserted the importance of a multi-sensory worship experience in the sacraments, especially baptism. However, as Joe Moshenska has argued, Cranmer was poised in 1550, when he wrote a defense of baptism and communion, between “the rejection and the retention of these embodied forms of devotion.” The role of the sacraments involved a compromise between traditional practice and radical Reformation; reformers regulated certain aspects of their sensory aesthetic, while they accepted other aspects. This policy, of course, did not satisfy everyone.

_Baptism_

Typically, the first sacrament that a person received in the Reformed church, just as in the traditional church, was baptism. The work of historian John Bossy has done much to indicate how baptism, an important early rite, became a method for churches, both Catholic and Protestant, to maintain control over their congregations. Infant baptism not only allowed churches to keep solid records of births in families throughout rural and urban populations, but also gave them a method to involve people in the church from the beginning of their lives. Based on the story of John the Baptist, reformers justified this sacrament as symbolizing the grace given through Christ’s sacrifice. Infants, usually, were consecrated in water during a ritual activity that symbolized the child’s emergence into the body of Christ. The waters of the baptismal font, in many ways, evoked some of the celebrated attributes of mystical springs, spas, and wells, as Alexandra Walsham’s research has found. Early modern people invested such water sources with sacred qualities, often as gifts from God that could heal. Similarly, touching the waters of the baptismal font combined the senses of touch, hearing, and vision in a ritual act that symbolized the blessing of the child and their entrance into a community of fellow believers.

The Reformation created a whole host of opinions about baptism, and Anglican practice had its detractors. By the 1580s, the staunch group of sectarians that riled up Lawrence Deios began to accuse the Anglican church of corrupting the rite of baptism. Deios writes:

*They say it is corrupted with the sign of the cross, with godfathers, and godmothers, with the Font, with unlawful and impossible vows of gossips: to these they join purification or*

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147 Moshenska, 37.
149 Alexandra Walsham, _The Reformation of the Landscape_, 469.
churking of women, with their offerings, hasty baptism by Midwives, bishoping and second baptism: by these things, they judge that baptism is corrupted.\(^{150}\)

These sectarians, with an even stronger iconoclastic bent than the Elizabethan church, radically desired to purify the rite of baptism of any visual, auditory, or tactile sensations that were not directly represented in scripture. Traditionally, the sign of the cross was used in the exorcism of the infant before the process of baptism.\(^{151}\) However, using such a symbol, which seemed to be made of nothing more than air, became highly contentious in the Elizabethan period. Deios asked: “Is it so odious to express the figure of that whereon Christ died, without opinion of adding grace, without giving any worship to it, but only for remembrance?”\(^{152}\) Deios’ argument sounds similar to the Catholic defense of many of their rituals. For him, the sign of the cross was necessary to remember the sacrifice of Jesus, which allowed the infant to be given grace. Elizabeth seems to have agreed with him, as she used the sign of the cross occasionally in her administration.\(^{153}\) The Anglicans, treading a middle ground between Catholics and sectarians, were forced to justify both the sensory dimensions they removed from the sacraments and the ones they kept.

The tendency toward infant baptism also caused controversy and led to what Deios described as “hasty baptism by Midwives” and “second baptisms.” Sectarians thought that a woman conferring baptism onto an infant was entirely unjustified. Nor could having a second baptism rectify such a situation. They believed that baptism could only be done properly once. Milner writes about this situation: “There was a real sense of the propriety attached to the touch of ministers, and that female touch in these cases usurped male, authoritative, touching.”\(^{154}\) In other words, female touch did not have the power to create the type of spiritual sensing that reformers desired in this ritual activity.

Godparents were another threat that sectarians thought corrupted Anglican baptism. These people, often with some type of kinship connection to the infant, vowed to bring the child up in the Church. Deios wrote, “They say not (as [the sectarians] allege) that the child shall believe, but that it doth, in way of Sacrament and outward profession, in as much as it is offered

\(^{150}\) Deios, 69.
\(^{151}\) Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 136.
\(^{152}\) Deios, 69.
\(^{153}\) Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 325.
\(^{154}\) Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 326.
to baptism…and is born of parents that are professors of Christian faith.”

Godparents, called ‘gossips’, were considered by these sectarians to be vain and idle professors of the faith, especially since they could not genuinely lead a child toward Christ. These accusations against gossips immediately bring to mind the accusations against players, that their speeches were vain blasphemies against God. In fact, many reformers of the sectarian persuasion argued that godparents did little more than recite a stage-like discourse before the altar. The Elizabethan church had to defend its choice to retain these traditions, to assert that the rite did have spiritual importance.

Finally, sectarians even attacked the font, suggesting that it was not sanctified. They argued that fonts and holy water did nothing to the child being baptized and actively encouraged impiety by appealing to the carnal senses with no spiritual reward. Deios responded: “But what can there be in the font to corrupt baptism, more then in the Church walls to corrupt prayers, and scriptures, and preaching, and all?” If the church as a building was sanctified and holy space, why should the water used in baptism be any different? This example from Deios not only demonstrates that Elizabethan decisions about baptism were sensory in nature, but also reveals how arbitrary this middle ground sometimes seemed. Debates over sensation in the early modern period had little to do with elevating one sense as holier than another, but instead involved a pitched battle to regulate and control the message received through the sensory apparatus by the parishioner.

Communion

The controversy surrounding the Eucharist provoked even more debate during the sixteenth century. Calvin, who particularly influenced English clergymen, upheld that the Church of Rome caused great disservice by suggesting that Jesus was present in the sacraments:

He filleth all places, and is contained in no place, and yet will they at their pleasure place him in the chalice, he was never visible to the mortal eye, and yet will they make him

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155 Deios, 69.
156 The OED confirms that the word ‘gossip’ originally meant godparent. A gossip eventually came to mean an idle speaker, due to the criticism of the role of godparents in baptism.
158 Deios, 69-70.
appear at every knaves request that will do as other men do, I mean pay their ordinary shot, and so doing he shall not only see him but also eat him up every morsel. 159

The issue of transubstantiation was a sensory concern. Through the eyes and the mouth, reformers claimed that Christians were taught to see and eat Christ, feasting on every morsel of the divine. Reformers emphasized what to them was an important distinction: the bread and wine were simply bread and wine, symbols of Jesus’ sacrifice made long before.

Bishop John Jewel of Salisbury agreed with Calvin in his defense of the Church of England (1562), with a few minor variations. He wrote, “We say that the bread and wine are holy and heavenly mysteries of the body and blood of Christ: and that in them Christ himself, the true bread of eternal life, is so presently delivered unto us, that we do truly receive his body and blood through faith.” 160 The important word here is ‘faith.’ Jewel asserted that the true body and blood of Christ could be understood through the sacrament, as long as one was open to faith in the heavenly mystery of the ritual. While one can see a connection to reformed doctrine, it is difficult to assert that Jewel separated himself from the sensory world of the traditional church. Nor did he provide evidence of Protestants separating themselves from ‘superstition.’ Instead, Jewel continued to participate in a long tradition of sensory experience.

Similar to prayer, Jewel insisted that the Eucharist should be a shared activity for any who participated in worship services. It was not something to be withheld from anyone. In particular, he railed against private masses as devoid of moral goodness. 161 He also suggested that before participating in the sacrament of communion, parishioners should prepare themselves mentally for the ritual. He instructed his readers to “lift their hearts toward heaven” in order to receive the upmost benefit. 162 Akin to the arguments of reformers about prayer and the word of God, Jewel demonstrated that the churchgoer must use their senses properly to receive the correct message. They should not be distracted from the holy.

While the Eucharist was typically tasted, a practice grew in the medieval period to allow ocular digestion of the host. These situations were proxy experiences, in which the priest raised the host aloft so that the worshippers could see it. Rather than being physically tasted, the host

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159 John Calvin, A faythfull and moost godlye treatyse concernyng the most sacred Sacrament of the blessed body and bloude of our sauioure Chryst (London: John Day, 1548), 4.
160 Jewel, 15.
161 Jewel, 30.
162 Jewel, 15.
connected with the worshipper through the eyes, washing away vice and bringing forth virtue.\textsuperscript{163} This spiritual sensation allowed worshippers to feast their eyes on the sacrament. Reformers took issue with the elevation because they thought it caused people to put their faith in the Mass rather than in Christ.\textsuperscript{164} The elevation was completely banned in the 1549 prayer book, but was brought back under the reign of Mary. Some Catholics claimed they could spot a Protestant during a worship service by finding those men and women who averted their eyes.\textsuperscript{165} Queen Elizabeth completely prohibited this custom, famously leaving the Christmas mass of 1558 when the Bishop of Carlisle refused to omit it from the service.\textsuperscript{166}

Just like the other aspects of the worship service, communion was a multi-sensory experience. The Elizabethan church attempted to restrict that experience almost completely to an act of the gustatory and tactile sensation. Simultaneously, they removed the mystical aspects of the ritual, suggesting that they merely symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus and were not worshipped themselves.

Ornamentation

Finally, reformers questioned church structure and ornamentation. Just like polemicists conceived of the public theater as an extravagant and embellished space, the church went through a process to make the worshipping more austere and unadorned. Both in terms of the visual, olfactory, and tactile senses, churches were increasingly restricted in terms of décor. Yet, the Elizabethan Church retained more decoration than many sectarians would have liked, treading a middle ground between reform and tradition. This section explores moments when Anglican reformers chose to regulate visual, tactile, and olfactory sensation in certain cases, while also allowing traditional sensory aesthetics to continue in others.

Rood screens were particularly controversial throughout the English Reformation. In the traditional church, the rood screen was an elaborately decorated metal screen that separated the parishioners from the chancel, obscuring but not completely separating their sight of the Eucharist. Often, rood screens were adorned at the top with an image of the crucifixion as a reminder of the sacrifice that made the mass important in the Christian tradition. From the start

\textsuperscript{163} Milner, \textit{The Senses and the English Reformation}, 154.
\textsuperscript{164} Milner, \textit{The Senses and the English Reformation}, 260.
\textsuperscript{165} Milner, \textit{The Senses and the English Reformation}, 276.
\textsuperscript{166} Milner, \textit{The Senses and the English Reformation}, 331.
of the Reformation, reformers implicated these screens as distractions for parishioners that provided them with an opportunity to worship an image rather than the true God. The Edwardine government entirely removed roods from churches, leaving no barriers between the parishioners and the chancel. In the Anglican Settlement of 1559, Elizabeth characteristically trod the middle path, allowing the lower part of the rood (a partial wall) to remain in order to separate the chancel from the nave without inhibiting worshippers’ sight of the Eucharist.  

Elizabeth’s compromise did not settle the matter. In 1581, Peter White, vicar of Eaton Socon, preached a sermon in front of his congregation railing against the presence of a partially destroyed rood screen which was controversial in his congregation:

Which Rood loft indeed wants nothing of its former state, but only the images and uppermost front. The loft being nine foot in breadth yet stands, with the beam where the Rood or Idol did stand, having Tabernacles that sometimes stood upon the Altars placed from the beam aforesaid, downward unto the loft for a Division, and all the neither front downward, remaining as it did in the time of popery.

This rood screen is a compelling metaphor for the Anglican Church’s stance on imagery and decoration. The idol had been removed, the screen partially destroyed, but the remnants of the rood still stood within the congregation. It was not removed because of the long Christian tradition for such structures. White, preaching a sermon about idolatry, clearly hoped to convince the rest of his parish that the screen needed to be removed in its entirety. Even without the image atop it the structure stood as a testament to the old church.

Vestments, elaborate and distinctive clothing worn by ministers during worship services, also caused controversy among Anglicans throughout the 1560s and 1570s. Elizabeth, often erring on the side of tradition, supported the use of vestments in churches to venerate the clergy. Others believed that such garments not only set the clergy apart from parishioners, but the clothes themselves became an object of worship. Laurence Deios, defending the Anglican stance, wrote in 1590: “Outward ceremonies are retained for order, but no part of God’s worship placed either in cross or garment.”

Deios argued against sectarians who did not agree with Elizabeth’s settlement; they feared that crosses, garments, and other ornamentation caused worship to be diverted from the holy toward the specified item. On the other hand, Deios suggested that these

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168 Peter White, A godlye and fruitefull sermon against idolatrie vwherein the foolishe distinctions and false interpretations of the seconde commandement, and other scriptures pretended by the Papists, are plainly and fully confuted (London: Francis Coldcock, 1581), 4.
169 Deios, 92.
items were used not for worship, but only to create order. In the theater, anxieties over clothing align with concerns about the power of representations to alter the things they represent. Levine argues that women’s clothes were reviled on the stage because early modern people believed clothing had some type of effect on the gender and sex of the wearer. A man who wore women’s clothes lost his manliness, and instead fell into a state of uncertain gender.\footnote{Levine, 108-9.} Similarly, the vestments of the church set the clergy apart. Sectarians feared that such vestments would do more than create order, they would convince parishioners to worship the priest.

Unlike vision, sound, and even taste, reformers rarely discussed smell in sermons from the Elizabethan period. It becomes difficult to evaluate to what extent smell was used in a worship service. Milner does his best to point out several ways in which smell certainly existed in churches throughout the Reformation. For example, Anglicans increasingly regulated incense. In 1552, they removed holy oils and suppressed large-scale censings. However, during a plague in 1563, the government encouraged Londoners to perfume themselves with frankincense and juniper during a time of prayer, suggesting that the practice had not died out entirely. Milner writes, “their continued use indicates the fluidity between physical and spiritual health by implying that spirit, whether sentient or not, could be cast out with vapours as a kind of exorcism.”\footnote{Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 314-5.} Smell played a substantial role in the cleansing of the spirit and spiritual sensation, even if reform limited that role.

The olfactory sense of the worshipper in Reformation England would often be offended by a whole host of uncontrollable odors. The dead were still buried in or near churches, sometimes with very shallow graves. The living often brought a horrid and corrupt stench with them. A man in Cambridgeshire in 1598 was accused of such “loathsome farting” that it disturbed the church service. Church floors were not necessarily paved, and rushes were often placed on the floor in order to keep down the smell and mess. Milner writes, “The ambiguity of incense and lack of candles presents the real possibility that English churches at 1600 had a more varied, if not more worldly, bouquet than they did in 1500. If this was the case, while for reformers traditional piety spiritually stank, without fumigators godly religion perhaps offered more actual odours.”\footnote{Milner, The Senses and the English Reformation, 315.} The antitheatricalists’ complaint that the theater was a space of mess and corruption could have just as easily applied to many churches. While the select sermons I have
studied were entirely silent about the olfactory sense, I would suggest that this silence was due to a lack of consistency in the role of smell during the worship service, rather than to a general agreement about how smell should function.

The visual, tactile, and olfactory environment of the church building itself became an issue for all church leaders. Traditionalists argued that images, incense, and vestments did not distract the worshipper but merely added a multisensory dimension to worship. The Anglican Settlement, which created a middle ground between reform and tradition, argued that some of these items could be used without completely distracting the worshipper, but that they needed to be regulated and restricted to provide the church with more control over the worshipper’s experience. Puritans and other sectarians argued that every mode of sensation needed to be curtailed until the worshipper directly experienced God through scripture and the condoned sacraments. Such concerns reveal why reformers were so vocal against the theater; while they grappled with issues in church space to control early modern parishioners, the theater offered ungoverned sights, smells, tastes, touch sensations, and sounds that further distracted from the reformed religious message. Church leaders wanted to uphold their sobriety in the face of these distractions, and ensure their parishioners a pathway to holy and spiritual goodness.

Conclusion

The senses have played an important role in Christian religious practice, beginning with the creation story in Genesis. Originally made in God’s image, Adam fell from grace when he ate a fruit in the Garden of Eden. Sin, within the Christian paradigm, was a monster produced by sensation from the start. Without tasting the fruit, Adam could have theoretically continued in divine bliss, unaware of the carnal world. But by tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree, he fell from grace and necessitated the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament.173

Thus began a story which captivated religious thinkers for centuries. By the time of Luther and Calvin, it was clear that human beings constantly replicated this act of sin, tasting the carnal world around them and finding it attractive and pleasurable. Therefore, reformers and polemicists encouraged their readers to be more mindful of their senses. They instructed a nation in a religion that emphasized a worship space where the word of God, the sacraments, and prayer could happen without distraction. Anglicans controversially continued to tread a middle ground

173 Cameron, 112-3.
between traditional worship and radical reform by allowing crosses, vestments, and rood screens to continue in existence. The Elizabethan settlement was a tender foundation, which mediated a way forward in the midst of extreme opinions. Yet, it also demanded obedience from its worshippers. As sectarian movements continued to grow in England, the theater and the church often found themselves at cross-purposes, due to their rival sensory orders.
Epilogue

The antitheatricalists gained momentum in the first half of the seventeenth century. In 1633, William Prynne published *Histrio-Mastix, the Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie*, a ridiculously large book that reiterated and expanded many of the arguments of the early antitheatricalists, especially their concerns about the sensory order. The sheer volume of this text led Barish to write, “We are dealing, unmistakably, with a megalomaniac.”174 Within ten years of this colossal publication, in 1642, the London government officially closed the playhouses, as the Puritans gained power in England. They reopened eighteen years later, only after the Restoration of Charles II.

This project has argued that the attack against the theaters must be understood within the larger religious tensions of the time period. The sensory order, especially, came into question due to the English Reformation. Reformers scrutinized religious practice, determined to make sure that churchgoers in England received messages that would lead them to salvation. Yet, the theater blossomed during the Reformation precisely because of this unbalanced sensory order. In the 1570s, the Anglican religion had remained in place under Elizabeth for over a decade. Church leaders had nearly stamped out the cycle plays of the past century. And, just as victory seemed possible for reform, public theaters grew throughout the capital city, appealing to a public that desired a less controlled and governed sensory order.

By examining the relationship between the church and theater in the 1570s and 1580s, I have contended that these public spaces directly opposed one another. The church was valued as a site of the holy, a place where the community could come together to collectively pray, learn, and relate with the divine through a multisensory, but regulated, approach. The theater was also a place for the community to learn, but theatergoers used their senses exclusively for recreation purposes. Thus, it is no surprise that the pious and the powerful saw these two spaces in a binary: the church as an organized space of purity and the theater as a disordered space of sin.

At its basic root, this conflict between holy and profane space can be boiled down to an issue about truth and falsehood. The spatial regime of the theater was deceptive, offering tragedies and comedies that were mere fictions. Throughout the Reformation, reformers questioned the practices of the Anglican church, attempting to remove those which appeared to be fictive. The wellsprings of the divine—the Bible, especially—became definitive sources of

174 Barish, 84.
the truth. Yet the Anglicans were more nuanced in their approach than other groups of reformers. Some traditional practices, such as the Eucharist and Baptism, remained in the liturgy relatively unchanged in their sensory dynamics, even where the Bible appeared to describe these sacraments differently. Thus, the process of reform was, in part, a process of truth-making, a truth-making that remained unstable throughout the seventeenth century as numerous other reforms affected the English religious environment.

The story of these antitheatrical polemicists and Anglican religious leaders reflects a changing world, destabilized by the introduction of a more controlled sensory paradigm. Yet, the attempt to destroy the theater was, in the end, a failed effort. Accusations of immorality aside, the sensation in the theater was just too appealing to most of the London public. They desired entry into an imaginative world, appealing to the physical body through the senses, where anyone could be a king or a pauper. Those who did not like it, such as magistrates or religious leaders, needed to become accustomed to the public theater’s presence. It was there to stay.
Primary Sources

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Elizabeth I. *By the Quene. Forasmuche as the tyme wherein common interludes in the Englishe tongue ar wont.usually to be played ... The Quenes Maiestie doth straightly forbyd al maner interludes to be playde eyther openly or priuately, except the same be notified before hande*. London: Richard Lugge and John Cawood, 1559.

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Stubbes, Philip. The anatomie of abuses contayning a discouerie, or briefe summarie of such notable vices and imperfections, as now raigne in many Christian countreyes of the worlde: but (especiallie) in a verie famous ilande called Ailgna: together, with most fearefull examples of Gods iudgementes, executed vpon the wicked for the same, aswell in Ailgna of late, as in other places, elsewhere. Verie godly, to be read of all true Christians, euerie where: but most needefull, to be regarded in Englande. London: John Kingston, 1583.

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