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2/2020_text

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Performing the 'absent body': desire for images and replacement bodies in Hispanic sacramental theatre of the Golden Age (1616-1750)

In her chapters on effigies and cult images from *Grammatology of Images*, Sigrid Weigel points out two significant gaps or abysses that have been crucial for the history of Western image making or *imaging* (*Bildgebung*: Weigel 2015, 11). In the first case, the primal scene of the 'empty grave' with its 'absent body' (de Certeau) gave rise to a specific Christian desire for images. In the second case, the dogma of transubstantiation with its an-iconic abstraction led to a proliferation of image production and a devotional culture oriented towards a "substitute-real-contact-presence" with images as "replacement bodies" (Weigel 2015, 218). A concrete artefact from a genre of early modern cultural performance known as liturgical drama reaffirms this epicenter of the absent body: the Spanish *auto sacramental*. Staging the Eucharist in a Corpus Christi play, it is a striking manifestation of the active survival of transformed cult images in the Era of Art (Belting 1994).

The principle of *sacramental representation* (Weidner 2012) emerges as evident from the synopsis of three paradigmatic plays analyzed more closely in a case study as part of the *Iconic Presence* project¹. Iconophily acts as an instrument of political Church discourse of the Counter-Reformation. With its problematic negotiation on behalf of idolatry, it is one of the core themes in many *auto sacramentales*. Furthermore, the supplementary economy of devotional images is one of the constant undercurrents of allegorization in Corpus Christi Drama. It draws its representational strategies from the doubling, veiling and transforming of the Eucharist, due to its function as a representation of the mystery of transubstantiation and the corporeal presence of the invisible living body of Christ in the Host. In *auto sacramentales*, this reflects in a *poetics of transubstantiation* that can be shown on the rhetoric level as well as in the narrative and the performative structure of sacramental theatre (Abel 2019 b). The evidence of figures of prefiguration, double natures, shapeshifting and translucence as in recurring tropes of mirrors, shadows, veils, masks and images as double-sided threshold media make the *poetics of transubstantiation* also the key to the performativity of sacramental theatre.

¹ *Iconic Presence. Images in religions* (2016-2019), project funded by the International Balzan Foundation and partly hosted at the Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin in cooperation of Sigrid Weigel, Hans Belting and Klaus Krüger.

Material implementation of transubstantiation on stage: image transfiguration and shapeshifting in the plays by Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca

The dogma of transubstantiation with its principle of substance transformation reflects directly in early modern dramatic representation strategies. Two specific *auto sacramentales*, *La Margarita Preciosa* (1616) by Lope de Vega and *El verdadero Dios Pan* (1670) by Calderón de la Barca serve as perfect examples for the typical layering of sacramental thinking in Golden Age art. Together they enclose a corpus of liturgical drama from the Iberian Peninsula that spans from the early stage of the genre to a dense and programmatic example of allegorical conceptism at its theoretical climax. On the occasion of this text, I would like to recall how deep the poetics of transubstantiation can go on the material and performative level of Baroque staging. I also want to argue how the omission of sacramental thinking from post-illustration philology and literary history has led to misinterpretations that cannot explain the enigmas of Corpus Christi drama. The Balzan-project context, inspired by Hans Belting's *Image Anthropology* (2001) and Sigrid Weigel's *Grammatology of Images* (2015), focused the research attention to image objects on the sacramental stage and how the performance is centered around them. In the case of the *Margarita Preciosa*, the play operates with four peculiar statues or effigies, and in the case of *El Verdadero Dios Pan*, a painted stage prop turns into a devotional image sculpture of Mary Immaculate. Without going into too much detail, the shapeshifting on the material level determines the actions of the play. The *Margarita* has been canonized as a famous liturgical drama because it was one of the first *auto sacramentales* in which the staging could be completely reconstructed by British and French scholars in the 1950s. This was mainly achieved by Jean-Louis Fleckniakoska who had discovered the *memoria de apariencias*, the appearance report on the stage constructions and decorations, and further archive material e.g. on carpenters' stage-building practice (Fleckniakoska 1954). In the rise of an enthusiastic wave of international theatre studies on the scenic space of the Renaissance, he rebuilt the whole setting in miniature (Fleckniakoska 1963, 234).

What he couldn't reconstruct though, was the interrelation of the statues he describes sometimes as just two, then as four, because he doesn't seem to have viewed them as part of a transformation scene. In his scenic analysis, he first mentions them as part of the stage directions for the stage's lower left side and lists "deux statues en bois qui représentent un homme et une femme morts." (1963, 231). Dressed in black cloth, they stand in a chapel of

mourning. He then cites from the appearance report: “mas a de auer en el otro medio carro abaxo dicha capilla toda enlutada donde aparecen dos estatuas de madera con rostros hermosos” (231). In his interpretation he doesn’t highlight that they have beautiful faces. His study then turns to the upper stage compartment, describing the complex props of the visibilization of the Eucharist with the elevation scene of the Host. Lope here represented the Host as a magical pearl made out of crystal that, when uncovered, gave sight to an Infant Jesus in a glass shrine, as I have already discussed in full detail elsewhere (Abel 2019a). Flecniakoska only returns to the statues after a long passage, without making any reference to what he explained earlier on in his text. He suddenly mentions two other statues in the left upper stage part: “C’est dans cette partie supérieure que se trouvaient deux statues en bois représentant un bel homme et une jolie femme” (1963, 232). Without any commentary he avoids further interpretation and closes his analysis of the findings in the Provincial Archives of Segovia. Taking into account the poetics of transubstantiation with its figures of mutation it becomes obvious from the drama text that the two upper statues represent a temporary earlier stage of form of the two lower statues after their metamorphosis from the living into the dead. The complementarity of literary text, dramaturgical commentary and materiality solve the scene in which the allegory of THE FLESH intends to sell beauty and lust to the THE MERCHANT (a human) in exchange for a precious jewel for THE SOUL (his wife). Lope’s stage directions indicate: “En lo alto se vean dos figuras de hombre y mujer hermosas, y abajo de muertos” (Menéndez y Pelayo 1892, 587). From the course the action takes, at first the protagonists only see the statues above and each pick the one representing the opposite sex:

CARNE:	¿Y vos, no escogéis, hermosa?
ALMA:	Aquel gentilhomme espero.
ENTENDIMIENTO:	¿Y es este el bien verdadero para que Dios te crió?
DESENGAÑO:	Habla necio mercader: ¿Es aquesta falsa hermosa La Margarita preciosa que os pensaba enriquecer? (587)

With the apparition of the DESENGAÑO character (DISENCHANTMENT), THE FLESH escapes from the scene and DISENCHANTMENT reveals the hidden meaning of the statues:

DESENGAÑO:	Alzad, ojos, y mirad lo que la hermosa es.
VOLUNTAD:	De pavón tiene los pies; ¿Hay tan grande fealdad? (587)

The phrase of a peacock's feet (*pavón*) directs the gaze from the beautiful faces of the statues to their now visible horrible feet, a mixture between bird's claws and bones, as the other side of vanity, representing the turning moment. This must be the "emblematic discovery scene" (Hertrampf 2018, 148) when the lower stage compartment is unveiled by the drawing of a curtain and the Chapel of Death reveals the two other wooden statues of the dead. In logical consequence, the upper two statues must by now have disappeared. The figures of the dead are clothed in burial vests (*justillos de muerte*: Flecniakoska 1963, 231). They remain recognizable below as the changed statues from above by their still beautiful faces which have now become death masks. The death masks recall all kinds of effigies supplementing the dead from the colossus to the *imagines maiorum* as Weigel elaborates on them (Weigel 2015, 216-221). It's not only the emblematic tradition and "the national fascination with unraveling the mysterious" (Hertrampf 2018, 148) that shaped the combination of the visual and the verbal in the Corpus plays, it is also the dramatic ritual of the Eucharist that has changed perception. At the beginning of the 17th century and with special insistence in Counter-Reformation Spain, viewers had trained their Eucharistic gaze and were in constant expectation of epiphanies and the intervention of the divine. In Corpus Christi plays, images and objects are dialogue partners and their transfiguration on stage is a mediation device to fulfill the expectancy of *real presence*. The presence of images has its own 'affordance' or formal quality triggering agency that is integrated in the performativity of the play. Where the corporeal presence of the actors and the Eucharistic presence of the Host/body of Christ perform the 'absent body', material images serve as constant markers of a presence that is not yet really real but already leaves a strong impact and provokes agency (Orsi 2016). This might also have been the reason for Calderón to include a statue of a saint in the closing tableau of his auto *El Verdadero Dios Pan*. In the final scene, two pictures of lambs on two altars turn into the Chalice and Host on the left and into a wooden sculpture of the Immaculate Conception on the right, a particular type of the Virgin that can still be seen 'walking' in the Corpus Christi processions in Spain today. Calderón was guiding the affectivity of the viewers through plasticity by including a locally worshipped devotional image in the stage proceedings. Interpreted with Birgit Meyer's concept of *sensorial profiles* (Meyer 2010), he introduces the sensations of individualized prayer to a protective figure and the intense contact with the processional image into the unveiling of the Eucharistic

Miracle. Calderón projects the image-paradigm of Immaculate Conception in its mediality of a cult image into the symbolic-literary image-paradigm of the Eucharist (Lidov 2014). In the sense of “hieroplastic” perception (Lidov 2008), this doesn’t mean competition of presences between the stage replicas of the Eucharistic cult objects and the Madonna; it just highlights the principle of transformation and opens the image space for transmediality and in-between images in the moment of intended liminality. Their dramatic outcome would ideally be the occurrence of real presence in the image as a “highly complex interpenetration of figures of representation” (Poppenberg 2008, 441).

Although scholars like Küpper insist that on the *auto sacramental* stage, the stage copies of sacred objects only had a representational status and that no act of transubstantiation took place in the drama (Küpper 2001, 85), they also acknowledge a relationship of participation between representation and presence. Due to the total episteme of Christian orthodoxy there is a relation of analogy between the sign and the being, making any kind of representation an endless *mise en abyme* of the ever-same truth of the Eucharist (85). And furthermore, Corpus Christi plays were part of a *cultural net* (Küpper 2018) that cross-linked the ritual of Communion, with the Corpus Christi procession and celebrated the theatre performance in the physical presence of the consecrated exposition Host placed next to the stage (Flechniakoska 1954, 14). This is where the spatiality concept of *chora* and the “spatial icon” (Lidov 2017) could be very useful to reduce the artificial boundaries created between the different media of performance. This leads me to the next example of representation strategies that implement ritual patterns of the cult of the Eucharist: the procession as a performative genre of its own and its inclusion in the performativity of sacramental theatre.

The procession as performative element in ritual drama

In performance theory, ritual and drama are based on a collective performance space in which some sort of transmission or contagion takes place to implement meaning through the actions carried out (Fischer-Lichte 2005). Following Fischer-Lichte, the principle of transmission has been conceived differently through the ages, always implying a specific theory of the body that it is based on, and which makes a response to aesthetics possible (Fischer-Lichte 2000, 25). For classical Greek theatre, she shows it to be the theory of body warmth that enables catharsis. Before blood circulation was discovered, this theory was

valid in Europe until the 17th century. For the 18th century, she gives examples for sympathy and empathy as implicit body theories behind contagion in theatre. The premise for the transformative force of any kind of performance is a kind of openness of the human body for external stimuli. This requires a “dislimitation” (*Entgrenzung*) of the body” (Fischer-Lichte 2000, 31), a blurring of the corporeal boundaries. As an example of this permeability, Fischer-Lichte draws on the “white magic” of the so-called abuse of Eucharistic Mass in the 16th century (Fischer-Lichte 2000, 31). In popular mass movements, people went from church to church collecting as much of *real presence* as they could and would even go to lawsuits for the best spots in church from where the best sight of the altar was guaranteed. Felipe Pereda confirms this for 16th century Spain (Pereda 2018), where the ingestion of the Host occurred approximately just once a year and made the devout appropriate the healing virtues of the Host by contemplating it with fixity in the moment of elevation, also known as visual ingestion (*manducatio per visum*) that led to the term *sacramental gaze*. Thomas Lentes and others have analyzed this “Eucharistic gaze” (Lentes 2006) as later being extrapolated to other types of images (Pereda 2007, 122). To better grasp how religious mediation works, Birgit Meyer has coined the term *sensational form* (Meyer 2010), referring to a configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations and bodily sensations. *Sensational forms* have “the double aspect of streamlining or shaping religious mediation *and* of achieving certain effects by being performed” (Meyer 2012, 26). The religious procession with images is a *sensational form* that has its own affordances that prompt a distinct kind of engagement feeding from pictorial devotion and the body techniques of walking and standing (Sprenger 2013). The point here is to understand processions as a media that removes spatial and corporal boundaries. This potential capacity is illustrated on a Mexican painting from 1708, *The Procession of Santa Rosa of Palermo* by Nicolás Correa (fig. 1) which also serves as a sample of the Hispanic cultural net of processional theatre extending from Spain to the Americas and Asia.



Fig. 1/ Nicolás Correa, Procession of St. Rosalia of Palermo, 1708, in: Katzew, Ilona (Hg.): *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Fomento Cultural Banamex, Mexico City, 2017.

It represents the miracle during the plague that struck Palermo in 1625, when the remains of Saint Rosalia were paraded through the Italian city to free it of pestilence. Instead of showing a reliquary, the Mexican artist depicted the saint's statue carried through a city that more resembles Mexico City than Palermo. The painting's date coincides with the consolidation of the devotion introduced by the Sicilian Jesuits in New Spain. It perfectly showcases the "delimitation" (Fischer 2000) or boundlessness between the worldly bodies of participants and the transfigured body of the saint, as well as the mixing of the spheres of physical reality and sacralized space. This is the "space that unites, in one whole, the absolutely concrete nature of the physical media and their ideal heavenly image-idea" (Lidov 2017, 421) and for which Lidov mobilizes the Eastern concept of *chora* as the spatiality which embraces the both extremes of earthly and heavenly realms. All these implications of processions as a *sensational form* of their own make them likely to be a performative element in ritual drama. In this sense, Calderón applies the mediation qualities of a procession as performative genre in the already mentioned sacramental play *El Verdadero Dios Pan*. He creates a procession on stage that displays all relevant characters in the order of increasing significance, accompanied by music, singing, rhythmical walking and the carrying of sacred objects. It is not only a *mise en abyme* of the actual Corpus Christi procession in 1670 Madrid, which by its liminal atmosphere of pictorial devotion had already prepared participants for the theatre performance, but on the level of narrative structure also a chronological succession of the different orders of sacrifice in human history accompanied by their particular iconic/ aniconic cult. Calderón's stage procession culminates in the sacrifice of Christ as its climax and reflects the dramatic ritual of the Corpus Christi

procession in which the walking order of divine personalities and symbols is choreographed in a way that their sacredness increases with each image. The Corpus Christi processional sequence customarily starts with devotional images of saints, then goes over to relics and culminates in the consecrated Host, beginning with anthropomorphic iconic images, turning to aniconic cult objects and finishing with the absolute abstractness of the empty centre of the 'holiest of holies'. The stage directions of *El Verdadero Dios Pan* demonstrate the passing of images and the waiting in expectancy of the revelation of the god PAN's gift, the Christ-figure of this play:

(De los dos carros que han de ser dos jardines, salen divididos en dos coros los músicos, y del uno una pastora trayendo en una fuente un vellón blanco y negro, detrás la Apostasía. Tras él la Sinagoga con otra fuente, y en ella un vellón blanco, y detrás el Judaísmo. Del otro carro sale la Idolatría con otra fuente y en ella otro vellón cuajado de oro, y detrás la Gentilidad. Después la Simplicidad con otra fuente y otro vellón cuajado de flores, detrás Pan, y mientras cantan bajan todos.) (Calderón [1670] 1949, 118)²

This is not the place to go into too much detail as to the significance of each allegory for the plot. In summary, the four religions represented here (irreligiosity/ arbitrariness; monotheism/ bloody sacrifice; polytheism/ idolatry, new Christian world order/ unbloodied sacrifice) enter into competition about who will present the female protagonist of the play, DIANA or LUNA, with the highest gift to win her heart. Of course, PAN, still in his disguise as shepherd, before resurrection, will be the victorious, presenting her with a white living lamb symbolized by the flowers that spring from it. What is striking here, is that each religion is accompanied by their personified cult or, one could say, cult of images, as allegorized in IDOLATRY. The religious allegories carry their respective gifts representing the corresponding forms of sacrifice, which becomes clear at the end of the play. Deducing from the advancing movement of the procession and the following scene where each religion explains their sacrifice in long commentaries, the new order of sacrifice represented by PAN is the commemorative sacrifice of God in human form. Its cult is the belief in incarnation and live or *real presence* which, in equivalence to IDOLATRY being the cult of Hellenistic religion, establishes incorporation as the main attribute of Christian sacrifice and imaging. One could argue that Calderón draws not so much on the liminal qualities of religious processions as threshold media, but on the kinetic qualities of any procession like military or royal parades

² In walking order: (1) Shepherdess (carrying the gift of a black and white lambskin) followed by APOSTASY; (2) SYNAGOGUE (carrying white lambskin), followed by JUDAISM; (3) IDOLATRY (carrying a golden fleece) followed by PAGANISM; (4) SIMPLICITY (carrying a lambskin interwoven with flowers) followed by PAN. [trad. J.A.]

and triumph marches that have a temporal drive and suck the processioners and bystanders into a vortex which in pictures and on stage can only be represented as a horizontal sequence of lined-up figures. By this means, complex socio-historical hierarchies can be represented in a relatively short time span and simultaneously integrated into a choreographed time-space-community. The procession as a performative element in sacramental theatre highlights how performativity can generate and condense meaning in a way word and image alone can't.

Sacramental performance in Sor Juana's *Divino Narciso* as auto-referential anthropology of the Christian image cult

A further example of the sacramental performance explored so far can be found in the auto sacramental *El Divino Narciso* by novo-Hispanic author Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Written in viceroyal Mexico, it was intended to be performed during the 1689 Feast of Corpus Christi in Madrid but was never selected. This play shows a very high level of auto-referentiality to figurative thinking, the employment of allegory and image theory. All the key notions of the primal scene of the 'empty grave', the 'absent body', the desire for images, the negotiation of images as mediators of the divine (Weigel 2015), are touched upon here, almost in the sense of a performative anthropology of the Christian cult of images. In this sacramental play, Christ appears as NARCISSUS who sacrifices himself out of love for his human mirror image and leaves a white flower behind, here the symbol of the Host. Similar to Calderón, Sor Juana also unfolds the image cult instauration as religious mnemo-technique and the changing order of sacrifice from Jewish to Hellenic to Catholic religion. But I will focus on two other aspects that she prominently treats through performativity here. The first aspect is the search for the absent body of Christ on stage. Sor Juana dedicates a whole scene of her play to the missing corpse and the search for it by female protagonist HUMAN NATURE, in the costume of a nymph. In the moment of NARCISSUS' death by immolation in the water well, an earthquake is heard, and the character falls behind the curtains of the stage cart and dies offstage. The scene continues with a solar eclipse, the acted out earthquake and the opening of the tombs referred to verbally, leaving the stage empty. The next scene is entirely dedicated to the lament of the dead. HUMAN NATURE is seen crying and all the nymphs and shepherds with her, accompanied by sad music. It becomes very clear how the play

consciously develops the desire for images and the Christian cult of images out of the search for the missing dead body and the re-enactment of the unfulfilled cult of the dead.

NATURALEZA HUMANA:
[...] Buscad su Cuerpo hermoso,
Porque con los ungüentes
de preciosos aromas
ungirlo mi amor quiere.
¡Sentid, sentid mis ansias;
llorad, llorad Su Muerte! (Cruz [1689] 1998, 168)

After making the point that there is a desire to ritually touch and anoint the deceased body, the search continues, and the verses further emphasize the inaccessibility and invisibility of the divine and the desire to see the absent body.

NATURALEZA HUMANA:
Buscad mi Vida
en esa imagen de la muerte,
pues el darme la vida
es el fin con que muere.
(*Hacen que lo buscan.*)
Mas, ¡ay de mí, infeliz,
que el Cuerpo no parece!
Sin duda le han hurtado:
¡Oh, quién pudiera verle! (168).

Finally, LA GRACIA, the allegory of Grace, appears on stage and asks HUMAN NATURE what she is looking for. The character's reply again uses the semantics of absence and deliberate concealment from sight:

NATURALEZA HUMANA:
Busco a mi Dueño amado;
Ignoro dónde ausente
Lo ocultan de mis ojos
Los hados inclementes (170).

The scene closes with GRACE announcing that NARCISSUS mustn't be searched for among the dead because he's alive. In the following scene the NARCISO-actor appears as resurrected in a completely different costume: "*con otras galas*", "*como Resucitado*" (170) and he and HUMAN NATURE perform a *noli me tangere*-scene, underlining again the desire for real contact and tactile immediacy that is hindered in Christian myth by resurrection.

This is also relevant for the second aspect I would like to emphasize as a genuine performative act of sacramental theatre. The frustrated real contact or bodily access to the divine is a recurring theme in the whole play. At the first stage encounter of the characters of HUMAN NATURE and GRACE, GRACE denies her physical contact because HUMAN NATURE is still in the condition of guilt. This is performed as HUMAN NATURE opening her arms and being left

in empty-armed absence. The impersonated allegory of GRACE gives an anthropomorphic form to the immaterial phenomena of something that comes to be the attribute of a deity and the spiritual energy of salvation economy. It can be read as a visibilization of the “a-visible”, to adopt the term Weigel proposed in reference to Huberman to emphasize a principle lack of potential visibility (Weigel 2015, 11). GRACE as image person instructs HUMAN NATURE in how to obtain grace, which will of course be through the Eucharist. When the final staging of the Eucharist takes place in the last scene, it is only consequent to finally fulfill the desire for “substitute-real-contact presence” (Weigel 2015, 2018) that during the play had been denied several times by both GRACE and the Christ-figure in his long stage absence and the prohibition to touch.

The performativity of sacramental theatre lies in how the theatricality of the Eucharistic is mirrored ritually on stage. The sacramental body of Christ appears on stage in the prefigured double nature of NARCISUS and his reflection image. The visibilization of the Eucharistic miracle on stage parallels the ritual of Eucharistic mass with a transformation scene in presence of over-dimensional replicas of the liturgical objects, Chalice and Host, as will be become clear from the following quote of the closing verses of the play and its stage directions:

GRACIA:
Quedó [NARCISO] en Manjar a las almas,
liberalmente benigno
alimento para el justo,
veneno para el indigno.

(Aparece el Carro de la Fuente; y junto a ella un Cáliz con una Hostia encima.)

Mirad de la clara Fuente
en el margen cristalino
la bella Cándida Flor
de quien el Amante dijo:

NARCISO:
Éste es Mi Cuerpo y Mi Sangre
que entregué a tantos martirios
por vosotros. En memoria
de Mi Muerte, repetidlo. (2090, 184)

The stage directions do not specify further if the resurrected Christ remains on stage, but all the minor characters leave it. Only GRACE and HUMAN NATURE remain in the foreground, and to conclude finally GRACE invites her into her arms: “Naturaleza dichosa, te admito a los brazos míos. [...] ¡no temas, llega a mis brazos!” (186). HUMAN NATURE responds and the stage directions seal the moment of blessing with the indication “*Abrázanse las dos*” (186).

Here the corporal gestures or the body technique of the embrace, mediate Eucharistic or *real presence* without the benefits of speech and mask. It is only a very short moment of the staging and could seem trivial given the banality of hugging from a contemporary point of view. But the long withdrawal of presence and the constant play with stage absence could have suddenly intensified the audience's experience of transcendence through corporeal performance. The play ends with both of them singing a hymn of praise and gratitude to the Sacrament, assumingly in a collective ending where all the musicians and actors join in and encourage the public to do the same. The elevated level of image thinking that Sor Juana de la Cruz dramatized (by implementing image theology through performativity) can be interpreted as an auto-referential anthropology of the Christian cult of images. The sacramental performance she conceived uses the meta-discourse of the image to explicate the representational strategies of the Eucharist. She had developed her iconological understanding not only by being one of the exceptional transatlantic scholars of her time, but also by cross-cultural comparison to pre-Columbian orders of sacrifice.

Corporality and agency with images

Judging from all these examples of materiality and performativity in sacramental theatre one could ask: Did the Eucharistic gaze and its consequences of a greater corporality in image devotion (Weigel 2015, 314) result in an embodiment of all things? What can be confirmed by the case study of Hispanic cult drama is that sacramental patterns trained a predisposition for transformative and figurative thinking and (at least on stage) lead to a corporeal contact with images and ideas. The body here acts as a presence mediator as do images in pictorial devotion. In Golden Age ritual drama there is no contradiction between the presence of the 'image body' and the living body; that is, between the presence effects produced by material objects like painting, sculpture or copies of cult objects and the physical bodies of actors, musicians and the audience. The question of when the performing body is just an image (or a semiotic body) and when it becomes a replacement body for an "embodied mind" to use a term coined by Merleau-Ponty in his *Philosophy of the Flesh*, depends on how strongly the mind-body separation is emphasized in a given moment of cultural performance (Fischer-Lichte 2006, 180). The dualism between body and mind was thought to be dissolved in a more radical concept of presence which had become programmatic in performance and theatre studies since the 1960s and tended to be

ontologized in the academic discussion of the 1990s (Fischer-Lichte 2006, 179). But to scientifically approach Christian cult drama from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance as an expression of mediated spirit possession doesn't seem practicable yet. For the time being, it seems more appropriate to respond with a poem by Sor Juana, who also reflected on image theory in her lyric writing. Her composition "Hablando a un retrato" (*Talking to an image/portrait*) from 1689, the same year the *Divine Narcissus* was published, encompasses the intimate relationship to a devotional image that seems to be more animated and alive than the original it copies. It solves the ontological doubt of *real presence* in the image by an ingenious twist on agency through images. The end section closes with the power over images in human possession:

[...] porque al fin en mi poder
 serás lo que yo quisiere.
 [...] podrás, cuando más terrible,
 decir que eres impasible,
 pero no que no eres mío (Cruz 1994, 66).³

For her time, this was also an indirect commentary on what could happen to transformed cult images and the desire for images in private devotional practices long after the beginning of the Era of Art.

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³ [...] because in my power after all
 You [the image] will be what I desire.
 [...] you can, when most terrible,
 say that you are insensitive,
 but not, that you are not mine [transl. J. A.].

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