Transcendence and Transgression in Religious Processions

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the phenomenology and semiotics of religious processions. On the one hand, these rituals succeed in congregating several individual agencies, thus helping them to obliterate the frontier between the sacred environment of the place of worship and the profane environment of the space surrounding it. Consequently, in religious processions, subjects experience an enlargement of the environment of the sacred that encourages them to believe in its omnipresence, in the reassuring idea that their entire existence takes place (literally and metaphorically) under the protection of transcendence. On the other hand, "accidents" caused by the persistence of individual agencies within the collective one constantly "threaten" the symbolic efficacy of religious processions: the tentative expansion of the sacred environment into the profane results in a symmetrical expansion of the latter into the former.

This article analyzes the phenomenological and semiotic mechanisms characterizing the tension between rituals and routines as well as the dialectics between their symbolic efficacy and inefficacy. Through what semiotic processes do rituals acquire the capacity of "domesticating" the boundary between an environment of belonging and one of nonbelonging, bringing about a semantic path and a rhetorical strategy of acclimation and tolerance and, therefore, a regime of sedentary belonging? Through what semiotic processes, on the contrary, do rituals lose such capacity, thus turning into simple routines

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or, worse, becoming unable to smooth out the intensity of transition and the extension of distance implied by a boundary of belonging?[1]

This article seeks to answer such questions through an analysis of the phenomenology and semiotics of religious processions.[2] On the one hand, these rituals succeed in congregating several individual agencies (Leone 2010a), thus helping them to obliterate the boundary between the sacred environment of the place of worship and the profane environment of the space surrounding it.[3] Consequently, in religious processions subjects experience an enlargement of the environment of the sacred that encourages them to believe in its omnipresence, in the reassuring idea that their entire existence takes place (literally and metaphorically) under the protection of transcendence. On the other hand, "accidents" caused by the persistence of individual agencies within the collective agency constantly threaten the symbolic efficacy of religious processions: the tentative expansion of the sacred environment into the profane results in a symmetrical expansion of the latter into the former. The collective agency of rituals disintegrates into the individual agencies of routines[4] until subjects not only no longer believe that transcendence extends its protection also over the profane environment but, on the contrary, fear that such protection is fragile within the sacred environment as well. Rituals not only turn into routines but collapse into the reemergence of the insecurity of transition. Acclimation and tolerance turn into invasion and exile. The profane invades the sacred, and the believer feels exiled even in the protected environment of the place of worship. Although

1. For a theoretical introduction to the semiotics of belonging, see Leone (2012). The semiotics of belonging studies the ways in which individuals, groups, or even whole societies construct interpretative habits in order to deal with the natural and cultural environments in which they live. Some signification and communication patterns can turn into rhetorical strategies that crystallize interpretative habits, thus domesticating an environment (meaning, i.e., becomes home, according to the etymology of "domesticating," from Latin *domus* 'home'); some other patterns, instead, can disrupt such habits. These rhetorical strategies can always be analyzed semantically, meaning that they are always embodied in texts and cultural artifacts or situations. However, they also always exert pragmatic effects. The semiotics of belonging categorizes these rhetorical strategies into four main regimes: acclimation, tolerance, alienation, and suspicion. For a detailed description of these regimes, see Leone (2012).

2. See Leone 2005b.

3. For a definition of the sacred in semiotic terms, see Leone and Solís Zepeda (2009) and Leone and Parmentier (2014a).

4. Here it is not meant that accidents and transgressions that disrupt processional habits are tantamount to routines, but that routines often result from such disruption. Whereas in processions a group of individuals becomes a community under the aegis of the sacred and by means of a liturgy that enables the sharing of meaning between the deity and the group, in processional chaos (be it generated by accidents or transgressions) the communitarian agency is violently dispersed into individual agencies whose only possibility of coping with the environment is through routine habits. However, this as most of the phenomenological oppositions evoked by the present essay should not be conceived as monads in a structural dichotomy but as polarities within a range. The "tensive" semiotics of Claude Zilberberg is more apt to describe this phenomenology than the structural semiotics of Algirdas J. Greimas.

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processions systematically involve the movement of the sacred into secular space through a process or ongoing action, in this essay I focus on the phenomenology of crossing the frontier between the sacred and the profane and on its semiotic consequences. Hence, the word "transgression" in the title should not be read morally, as voluntary infringement of a religious code, but rather etymologically: "transgression" is every process that crosses and therefore disrupts the symbolical frontier that liturgy creates between the sacred and the profane, a red line that becomes thinner, the essay contends, when the simulacrum of the sacred is "exported" into the profane environment of the community's urban dwelling.

Synesthesia and Polysensoriality in Religious Rituals

In synesthesia, the activation of a sensory channel A leads to the simultaneous activation of another sensory channel B, according to a code that introduce an equivalence between the elements sensed through A and those sensed through B. For instance, the vision of a purple banner during a Lenten religious procession immediately leads to the synesthetic experience of the smell and taste of the blood of Christ. In polysensoriality, by contrast, the activation of a sensory channel A and the simultaneous activation of a sensory channel B leads to the construction of a new multisensory channel through which both the elements of A and B are sensed. For instance, the vision of a purple banner during a Lenten religious procession and the simultaneous hearing of a dramatic processional song immediately lead to a multiple perception where the frontier between the auditory and the visual data is blurred into a polysensorial perceptual metaphor.

The concepts of synesthesia and polysensoriality, as they have been interdefined in the frame of structural semiotics (Beyaert 2001), might help in formulating a new interpretation of the relation between religious liturgy and popular religiosity, that is, on the one hand, the system of institutionalized rituals that rule the interaction between transcendence and a community of believers and, on the other hand, the multiform and heterodox idiosyncratic variations that, by interfering with this more or less organic whole, give rise to "religious folklore."[5] Christian processions are an ideal example of this kind of relation. The pair of concepts synesthesia and polysensoriality might be ef-

5. Ritual studies have already taken an interest in studying religious processions from the point of view of the type of sensoriality that they entail; for an introduction, see Ashley (2001). According to Kratz (1994, 4), "complexly orchestrated ceremonial performances introduce the analytical challenge of unraveling the intricacies, interweavings, and effects of multiple media, multiple events, and multiple participants and perspectives."

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fective in analyzing the perceptual structure that Christian processions predispose in participants and spectators, as well as in elucidating the regime of religious belonging that manifests itself through such perceptive structure. The essentials of the history of Christian processions are useful to know in order to reconstruct the genealogy of their semiotic structure and to interpret it as rhetorical strategy.

The Genealogy of Christian Processions

The custom of accompanying certain phases of the Christian liturgy with dramatic representations is old (Felbecker 1995). According to the fourth-century Pilgrimage of Etheria, at that time dramatizations portraying Jesus's path to Calvary were already part of the liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem.[6] Afterward, other dramatic representations were introduced into Christian worship and, through historical paths that remain to be investigated, spread toward Western Europe, where dramatic texts associated with the Christian liturgy appeared as early as the ninth and tenth centuries. French monasteries, in particular that of Saint Martial, played a central role in the circulation of dramatic texts performed in churches by confraternities of actors on the occasions of the main events of the Christian liturgical year, such as the birth and death of Jesus. It was probably through the abbey of Saint Martial in Limoges, consecrated to the evangelizer of the Limousin, that, toward the end of the eleventh century, this custom spread in Spain, precisely in the monastery of Ripoll, Catalonia, where it reached the highest degree of elaboration (Felbecker 1995; Twycross 1996; Verdi Webster 1998). The core of medieval and early modern Catholic processions developed from these dramatic representations, whose remote genesis, however, dates back to the first centuries CE and to the

Consequently, several scholars have adopted the concept of synesthesia in order to explain the semiotic functioning of religious processions; see Sullivan (1986, 8): "The symbolic experience of the unity of the senses enables a culture to entertain itself with the idea of the unity of meaning." But this is, perhaps, too static a conception of religious processions, to which Ashley (2001, 13) rightly objects: "His phrase 'the unity of meaning' suggests a static effect, but I would emphasize that impact on the senses is also capable of producing movement, change." The concept of polysensoriality seeks to provide semiotic intelligibility vis-à-vis this second type of phenomena. On the one hand, the idea of synesthesia interprets religious processions as rhetoric strategies that, through producing an illusion of "the unity of the senses," bring about a semiotic path of acclimation/tolerance and, as a consequence, a regime of sedentary belonging. On the other hand, though, the idea of polysensoriality deciphers religious processions as rhetoric strategies that, through introducing idiosyncratic variations in the illusion of "the unity of the senses," shatter the illusion of "the unity of meaning," and the regime of sedentary belonging with it. Put simply, through synesthesia the unity of the senses becomes a sensorial metaphor of the unity of the environment of sacred/profane belonging; through polysensoriality, instead, the disunity of the senses turns into a sensorial metaphor of the reemergence of a frontier between the sacred and the profane. On this aspect of processions, see also Crawley (1919), Buttitta (1981), and Grimes (1987).

6. Egeria (Etheria), *Itinerarium peregrinatio* (Égérie, *Journal de voyage* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997]).

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rhetoric strategies early Christians adopted so as to recollect the most important episodes of the life of Jesus.

Historically, whereas the phenomenological and semiotic structure of ancient and medieval Christian dramatizations stemmed from the introjection of outdoor religious processions inside the religious building, the phenomenological and semiotic structure of Catholic processions from the early modern epoch on arose, by contrast, from the displacement of sacred dramatic representations outside the temple (Portillo and Gomez Lara 1996).[7] On the one hand, inside the temple, such dramatizations could easily give rise to idolatrous or even blasphemous situations; for instance, believers should not mistake sacramental rites—in which, according to dogma, representation coincides with what is represented, the signifier with the signified—for dramatic representations, in which signs are nothing but simulacra (De Marinis 1993). On the other hand, the clergy, above all the mendicant orders, wished to export the mnemonic and persuasive efficacy of sacred drama outside the temple; dramatizations were an effective rhetorical device for evangelization and conversion. At the same time, the church wished to avoid actors, who in medieval and early modern Catholicism had nearly the same reputation as prostitutes (Allegri 1988), becoming an object of excessive attention, which would stain the sacredness of the protagonists of the Christian pantheon by impersonating them (Gusick and DuBruck 2004).

The main phenomenological and semiotic structure of modern Catholic processions results from the tension between these two tendencies: on the one hand, the desire to blur the frontier between the environment of sacred belonging and that of the profane by exporting sacred dramatic representations outside the place of worship; on the other hand, the risk that such dramatic representations, and the sacred along with them, would get contaminated by contact with the profane environment.

The Semiotic Structure of Christian Processions

Through the analytical strategies of textual semiotics, the phenomenological structure of Catholic processions can be described in detail and distinguished from that of analogous religious phenomena (Marin 1967; Flanigan 2001). The direction of movement of the faithful in relation to the place of worship distinguishes religious processions from ritual circumambulations (Leone 2002): whereas the former entails a progressive distancing from the sacred place, the

7. In this article the term *temple* is used to refer to any kind of religious building.

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second merely implies a movement around it. The distinction between procession and pilgrimage is more complicated (Turner and Turner 1978; Turner 1979). The most evident differences concern the relation between the sacred and the profane environment, the distribution of the faithful, the rhythm of movement, and the structure of observation. In religious processions, a simulacrum of transcendence, together with the faithful that transport it, "explores" the profane environment, meaning that this journey of the sacred from church to street and plaza is an extension of the sacred over secular space and an appropriation or encompassment, however fleeting, of that space; in pilgrimages, on the contrary, the faithful go through a profane environment in order to reach a sacred space, where usually a simulacrum of transcendence abides. Pilgrimages are commonly undertaken individually or in small groups, whereas processions are always collective endeavors. Generally, pilgrimages are not exposed to a public, whereas processions are always a spectacle for someone else to observe. In the theoretical framework outlined above, it might be said that pilgrimages manifest an "individual agency," whereas processions embody a "collective agency."

The particular genre of rhetorical strategy called procession can be internally articulated according to some other structural traits. As regards temporality, one can distinguish between extraordinary or occasional processions, such as translations of relics, funerary corteges, or thanksgiving parades, from other processions that are regular or cyclical. As regards spatiality, ritual or ceremonial processions normally occur within the place of worship, without ever crossing its frontiers:[8] for instance, in Christianity, the entrance of the ministers in the Eucharistic liturgy, the procession of gifts on Maundy Thursday, that of consecrated bread on Good Friday, the procession of candles in the baptismal rite, and so on.[9]

Such essential features, together with the other structural characteristics of processions, are at the origin of the ambivalence with which the Catholic Church has generally considered this evolution of sacred drama. The collective nature of processions, their relation with an audience (resulting in their social dimension), and above all their functioning as a communication channel between the sacred

8. But what of the many ceremonial processions associated with royal entries in Spain and elsewhere in Europe as early as "Alfonso XI's triumphal entry into Seville in 1327"? What of Corpus Christi processions from 1246 onward? Well, from the point of view of liturgical taxonomy, these would not be ceremonial processions *stricto sensu*.

9. In these cases, however, liturgists generally claim that the usage of the term "procession" is incorrect. Indeed, according to them there is no actual procession until a transcendent, sacred simulacrum leaves the temple and ventures into the immanent, profane environment (Martimor 1983–84).

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environment and the profane—across the frontiers of the place of worship—have given rise to an ambiguous attitude, to a certain extent analogous to that which has characterized the relation between the Catholic Church and images throughout the centuries (Leone and Parmentier 2014b). Similarly, processions are, on the one hand, effective instruments of evangelization and must be defended against any iconoclasm; on the other hand, like images, they are also dangerous, for reasons that can be evoked through an exemplary case.

Accident 1: Contamination through Multiplication of Agencies

On May 9, 1087, sixty-two sailors from Bari, a populous coastal town of Puglia in southeast Italy, moored at the jetty of their port after stealing the sacred remains of Saint Nicholas, their patron, from the Saracens of Mira, Turkey. On May 8, 2003, like every year, a cortege of several dozen vessels transported a statue of the saint from the eponymous basilica toward the port, reversing the direction of the relic's journey in order to commemorate that episode of virtuous piracy. Whereas in the Middle Ages the theft of the mortal remains of Saint Nicholas and their return to Bari had signified the elimination of the frontier separating the sacred (captive to an enemy civilization) and the city (bereft of its miracle-working patron), in postmodern Bari, the commemoration of that theft performed the annihilation of another frontier, the one between the abode of the saint (the sacred environment of the place of worship) and the city around it (the profane environment of everyday urban life; Leone 2005a). Like most processions, this one too affirmed that, in spite of so many centuries having elapsed, Saint Nicholas still belonged to the city of Bari, just as the city of Bari (and its citizenry) still belonged to the saint.

The tenders contained almost a thousand faithful, while about twenty thousand spectators, standing all along the seafront of Bari, watched the procession. The sky was blue, the temperature high. According to tradition, a generous battery of fireworks, fired from the jetties of the port, was meant to mark the climax of the ritual journey. However, for reasons that are still unclear, after the first series of explosions, which successfully inscribed the joy of the faithful in the sky, the howitzers containing the second series tilted down and started propelling the fireworks toward the sea, only a few meters from the tenders. Subsequently, as the howitzers of the following series were fastened to the second one, they all directed their guns toward the tenders. The religious procession turned into a naval battle. Several tenders were hit and sunk, while others were violently capsized by the massive columns of water provoked by the explosions. Seventy faithful, most of them elegantly dressed, were thrown

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into the water, shaken by waves, hit by debris, surrounded and suffocated by smoke, dazzled by flashes, deafened by bursts, stupefied by the screams of the other faithful, by the exclamations of spectators—"it's a terrorist attack!"—and by the megaphones of firemen (figs. 1–2).

The perfectly orchestrated synesthesia of the procession—in which the sight of the cortege, the sound of fireworks, the smell of incense, and the other sensorial elements were meant to transubstantiate into each other in order to turn the ritual into a perfect rhetorical strategy for reconfirming the unity of the senses and meaning encompassing the citizenry of Bari and its patron saint—abruptly became a cacophonic polysensoriality: the accident broke the symbolic efficacy of the procession and its sacred collectivity into individual agencies entirely absorbed by the quite profane task of saving their own lives. Fortunately, the prompt intervention of the fishermen of Bari averted the catastrophe. All the faithful were saved; some of them were injured, but only a few seriously. The prior of the basilica, questioned by journalists about the accident, replied: "St. Nicholas granted us his grace."[10]

Such a statement sounds slightly comic as it struggles to return to the saint the sacredness that the accident abruptly stripped from him. This case effectively exemplifies the most serious danger implied by the structure of perception in religious processions. Whereas inside the place of worship, liturgy scrupulously regulates the relation between transcendence and immanence, as soon as the simulacrum of the sacred leaves its environment of belonging and undertakes its processional journey through the profane world, it exposes itself to all the risks of unpredictable contamination entailed by the dramatic multiplication of agencies involved in the ritual. The Catholic Church, especially from the Council of Trent on, has reacted to such danger by seeking to export the temple along with the simulacrum of the sacred, that is, through meticulously regulating the liturgy of religious processions. Nevertheless, efforts in this domain have been less effective than efforts to regulate, for instance, the usage of sacred images. Religious processions being created by the collectivity of the faithful, and not by the individual agency of artists, by definition escape rigid control.[11] In spite of the church's producing technical literature such as the "procession handbooks"

10. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors; in the legend of his miraculous saving his ship tossed on the high seas, see Bacci (2009), Wheeler (2010, esp. the chapter on "St. Nicholas at Floodtide"), and Silvestro (2013).

11. Zika (1988) suggests that pilgrimages are traditionally rituals implying a dispersion of power, whereas processions are characterized by centralized control. However, according to Ashley (2001, 32 n. 79) "he oversimplifies the procession by assuming that it always simply 'emphasized the community's celebration of its sacred objects throughout prescribed political space.'" As has been underlined through the exemplary case above, at times religious processions too can become the site of a sensorial (and semantic) dispersion instead of the site of synesthesia and the unity of meaning.

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Figure 1. The Bari accident. Photograph by the author.



Figure 2. Bari accident close-up. Photograph by the author.

(processionals) of the Middle Ages, popular religiosity has continued to manifest itself through heterodox forms, whose main characteristics can be illustrated by two further exemplary cases.

Accidents 2 and 3: Contamination through Personification

The first of these cases is a tragic one. On April 23, 2000, the parish of Camerata Nova, a village of two hundred inhabitants a few kilometers outside Rome, following tradition, staged a sacred representation of the *Via Crucis*. As in every year, the young of Camerata impersonated the characters of the Passion of

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Christ. All had worked out well at the premiere on Good Friday, but the following day, during the second representation, a terrible accident occurred. As a twenty-three-year-old man impersonating Judas jumped with a rope around his neck from a thirty-centimeter step in order to portray the suicide of the traitor, for some mysterious reason—maybe the rope was too short or the jump too enthusiastic—he fatally injured his aorta. He hung there for ten minutes, lit by the spotlights and admired by all the inhabitants of the village—including his own family, probably impressed by the realism of the interpretation. Unfortunately, the tragic misunderstanding was unveiled too late.[12]

The second case, to somehow counterbalance the first, is a comic one. Tragedy author Leonardo de Argensola,[13] who lived in Spain at the end of the sixteenth century, relates that during a sacred representation of the life of the Virgin, staged in the streets of Seville by a confraternity of actors around 1590, he witnessed a scandal. The actress impersonating the Virgin was the mistress of the actor impersonating Saint Joseph. Their sinful union was so notorious that in the scene of the Annunciation, when the astonished Virgin must reply to the angel that she does not "know" any man, the audience received this representation of Mary's virginity, one of the most cherished Catholic tenets, with a loud laugh (Green 1945).

The meaning of these two cases should now be clear: when the sacred is represented by the human body, it runs the risk of being exposed to two dangerous occasions of desecration: death and laughter. They both disrupt the semiotic mechanisms through which the sacred is exported beyond the frontiers of the temple into the profane environment of belonging, resulting in a corresponding importation of the profane into the sacred. When death and laughter enter the environment of transcendence, they turn it into an appendix of that of immanence. The procession ceases to be a synesthetic rhetorical strategy of acclimation and tolerance and becomes, at least if the point of view of the church is adopted, a cacophonic rhetorical strategy of invasion and exile. The sacred is invaded by the profane, and its simulacrum is exiled to the environment of immanence.

12. Paradoxically, the true death of the actor impersonating Judas is a cliché of medieval religious drama. See the *Chronique de Philippe de Vigneulles*, quoted in Enders (2002, 207): "En celluy jeux, y olt encore ung aultre prebstre, qui ce appelloit seigneur Jehan de nissey, qui estoit chappellain de Mairange, lequelle pourtoit le personnaige de Judas; mais, pour ce qu'il pandit tropt longuement, il fut pareillement transis et causy mort, car le cuer luy faillit; parquoy il fut bien hastivement despandus, et en fut pourté en aulcuns lieu prochain pour le frotter de vin aigre et aultre chose pour le reconforter"; the author of the chronicle wisely concludes: "part of every legend is true."

13. Born in Barbasco (Huesca), 1552; died at Zaragoza, 1631.

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The transformation that, mainly due to the multiplication of agencies and the personification of the sacred, liturgy undergoes as it is exported outside the temple through a processional ritual is particularly evident in devotional and votive processions, such as those that in Catholicism celebrate the saints, the Virgin, or the sacrament of the Eucharist. The next section will be devoted to a detailed analysis of the way in which the semiotic mechanisms of liturgy mutate as they are transposed in the rhetorical strategies of Corpus Domini processions.

Corpus Domini Processions: From the Sacralization of the Profane to the Profanation of the Sacred

It might be argued that the entire Christian liturgy is constructed around the Eucharist. The dogma of "transubstantiation"[14] implies the collapsing of any distinction between the Eucharist as expression and as content and the theological illegitimacy of conceiving this sacrament as mere representation. The Eucharist being ineffable, the evolution of its liturgy may be interpreted as an effort to construct a framework of communication and, therefore, communion around such an unfathomable core.

As the French liturgist Aimé-George Martimort points out, all the perceptible signs composing the Christian liturgy share, according to a definition confirmed by the last Vatican Council, the same nature: they are efficacious sacraments as well as perceptible signs. In order to communicate the mystery of the Eucharist, in particular, the Catholic Church has adopted expressive means addressing all the senses. Simultaneously though, it has always sought to harmonize them according to two principles: the synthesis of all sensible elements and their hierarchization.

As regards the first principle, the Catholic Church has continuously tried to guide the evolution of liturgy so that it becomes the pure expression of a transcendent reality, that is, the presence of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, depending on the historical periods and the sociocultural contexts, fluctuations have occurred between a strict adherence to such a principle, a characteristic trend mostly in periods of reform, and a more flexible interpretation of it. Despite these variations, however, all the signs of liturgy have generally been orchestrated around a single communicative project. Countless examples of such evolution can be found in the history of sacred music, religious iconography, ritual gestures, and so on.

14. According to the Catholic doctrine, the bread and the wine used in the sacrament of the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ, not merely as sacramental signs but in reality.

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The hierarchization of sensible elements in Catholic liturgy is evident, above all, in its opposition to the communicative strategy of Protestantism. Whereas the Lutheran reception of the theology of Saint Paul emphasizes the relation between faith and hearing and even the necessity to isolate this last sense in relation to the others,[15] the Catholic Church has never renounced the vast array of communicative possibilities implied by sensorial plurality. Yet, especially after the Council of Trent, it has increasingly bridled such array in a hierarchy where words always occupy a central position (Leone 2010b). The other sensible elements (acoustic, visual, tactile, gustative, olfactory) are arranged around words in order of decreasing theological importance.

Such organization is particularly evident in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Although this sacrament addresses primarily the sense of taste, this sense itself must be denied in order for complete adherence of the faithful to Catholic theology. To this purpose, the taste of bread and wine, for instance, are situated in the middle of a sensorial network that spiritualizes the body of the faithful just as it directs their attention toward the transubstantiation of the body of Christ. The word of the minister guides such displacement, to which all the sensible elements of the Eucharistic liturgy are subordinated. For instance, even the host, this insipid wafer that melts into saliva as soon as it is introduced into one's mouth, helps the faithful to live the experience of spiritual nourishment and to forget the material consistence of bread, that fibrous mass that one must chew, press with teeth and gums, move with the tongue, swallow, and so on.

Knowing the essentials of the phenomenology and the semiotics of the Catholic Eucharistic liturgy is important in order to understand the transformations that such essentials go through when the synthesis and the hierarchization of sensible elements described above are projected beyond the frontiers of the sacred environment of belonging, that is, outside the temple. The feast of Corpus Domini,[16] "the Body of the Lord," was instituted in 1264 by Pope Urban IV's bull *Transiturus*, which sought to institutionalize and regiment a practice that was already quite common in several dioceses, that is, carrying the consecrated host in procession through the streets of a town (Rubin 1991). The Rituale Romanorum, a sort of handbook of Catholic liturgy promulgated by Pope Paul V in 1614, confirmed the legitimacy of Eucharistic processions and promoted them as an occasion on which the faithful could publicly witness, also outside the temple, their adherence to the Eucharistic dogma (under scrutiny during the Protestant Reformation).

15. See the position of Kerényi (1940).
16. That is, Corpus Christi.

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However, the Catholic Church has never been able to fully regulate this type of processions. It managed to impose on them a framework of theological interpretation, which nevertheless was not capable of preventing the transformation of the structure of perception of the Eucharistic liturgy when exported into a profane environment. During the Corpus Domini procession, for instance, vision becomes abnormally predominant. Most faithful end up not taking the sacrament either before or after the procession, because they are content with their entering in direct visual relation with the Body of Christ.

In summary, if the Corpus Domini procession was conceived by the Catholic Church as an occasion for the sacrament to be acknowledged not only in the sacred environment of the temple but also in the profane environment of the streets, such an intention in many circumstances backfired: a rhetorical strategy of acclimation and tolerance gave rise to a semiotic path of invasion and exile. Once in the streets, the Eucharistic liturgy could not control the heterodox tendency of the faithful to turn the sacrament into a spectacle, in which the symbolic power of words is subjugated by the iconic power of vision. Therefore, contact between a simulacrum of the sacred and a profane environment can result not only in a sacralization of the latter, as the Catholic Church has hoped, but also in a profanation of the former. The following section will extend these insights to religious processions more generally.

The Deconstruction of Liturgy in Religious Processions

In most religious processions the principles of synesthesia and hierarchization of sensible elements are subverted and transformed into a new framework of perception characterized by the dispersion of expressive means and the upsetting of the sensorial pyramid. These two dynamics manifest themselves in the most spectacular form in popular religiosity, for instance, in Spanish Catholic processions. As specifically regards the first dynamic, that is, the scattering of sensible elements, it is probably an essential feature of all religious processions, since the transportation of the simulacrum of the sacred outside its environment of belonging implies a sort of sprawl of liturgical signs. This is evident in the modifications that religious processions entail as regards the structure of perception. In the architecture of Catholic churches, for instance, as well as in the way in which liturgy regulates the usage of such architecture by the faithful, this structure is characterized by a topology that is similar to that of classical theater: the point of view of the faithful is opposed to that of ministers, but it remains nonetheless quite homogenous. Within the church, no one is a mere spectator; that is, all are worshippers to some degree (thus, e.g., tourists

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are asked to leave the building during a service). Such uniformity, on the contrary, is completely disrupted in the perceptive structure of religious processions.

A fundamental type of heterogeneity is brought about by duplication of the scenic space: whereas Mass is never a spectacle, religious processions always imply a distinction between a cortege and its audience. Incidentally, this opposition is also one of the foundational elements of the (usually) ideologically conservative and conformist nature of religious processions (Di Nola 1975, 1981; Du Toit 2009). Such an intrinsic type of perceptual diversity also implies a corollary: spectators as well as participants receive a fragmentary perception of the processional flux, although these two partialities are different from each other. Whereas the former can refer the polysensoriality of their perceptive experience to the unity of liturgy, the latter is bound to a partial reception of the procession by the proxemic coordinates characterizing their position in the cortege. Finally, even within these two perceptual regimes, that of spectators and that of participants, the essentially kinetic nature of processions results in continuous variations (and, therefore, potential deconstructions) of its perceptual structure.

Examples of Liturgical Deconstruction: The Spanish *Semana Santa*

The analysis of the perceptual structure predisposed by the processions of the Spanish *Semana Santa* confirms the interpretation proposed above, for instance, as regards the arrangement of acoustic elements.[17] At least three categories of sounds can be singled out. The first is that of purely rhythmical sounds, such as those of drums or trumpets, which can regiment the movement of the faithful. These sounds introduce a certain order in the processional flux but do not contribute to unify the perceptual experience of participants and bystanders, since they disappear as soon as the second category of sounds, that of devotional chants, takes place.

The Miserere, for instance, belongs to this category, as well as the so-called *saettas*, whose name literally means "lightening." Indeed, their perceptual pattern is analogous to that of a flash of lightening that dispels darkness: during the Spanish *Semana Santa* processions, and above all during those in Andalusia, suddenly the cortege stops, everybody keeps silent, and a singer, normally without instrumental accompaniment or else with the sole accompaniment of

17. Although the literature on the Spanish *Semana Santa* is quite abundant, a general anthropological, semiotic, and phenomenological analysis of this religious phenomenon has not yet been carried out. Among the most important scholarly contributions are Mitchell (1990), Nuñez de Herrera (1993), Albaladejo Imbernón (1994), Jimenez Guerrero (1997), Pérez Valero (1997), and Verdi Webster (1998).

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percussions, addresses a *saetta* to transcendence and its simulacra—for instance, the statues of the saints and the Virgin. The *saetta* dispels the emptiness and silence of space by resonating through it like an acoustic lightening.

Whereas in Graeco-Latin religious cultures, lightening was a sign of the wrath of the gods, and as such was imagined as thrown downward from above, in Spanish popular religiosity, the acoustic lightening of *saettas* is a sign of devotion toward the gods, and as such is imagined as directed upward from below. However, the perceptual isolation with which this sign manifests itself, combined with the multiplicity of points of view (or rather, "points of hearing") that receive it, contribute to detach this type of sound from the whole of the liturgy, thus turning it into a spectacle. Furthermore, the virtuosity of the singer and the predominant role of the corporeality of her voice subvert the second fundamental principle of liturgy, that is, the hierarchization of sensible elements: the voice becomes more important than the word.

The third category of sounds provokes the most remarkable subversion in the liturgical order. Whereas in the temple every sound is subordinated to the development of liturgy, the popular religiosity of processions frequently entails anarchic acoustic forms that, often produced by the faithful themselves, can intervene in whatever phase of the cortege: the *matracas* of Castilla y León, for instance (fig. 3), or the little bells that children ring in Easter processions in Puerto Real, near Cadiz.

The tendency to emphasize the corporeality of the acoustic production manifests itself as well in the adoption of instruments with monstrous or exuberant shapes, such as the gigantic horns used on Good Friday in Murcia. Such reintroduction of the profanity of the body in the acoustic spirituality of liturgy is particularly striking in the usage of drums. During *Semana Santa* religious processions in the little village of Híjar, near Teruel (Aragon, eastern Spain), for instance, drums are hit nonstop night and day from Maundy Thursday until Resurrection Sunday (fig. 4). Drums are, therefore, turned from musical instruments into penitential tools stained with the blood of drummers. The anagogic[18] meaning of the processional representation of the Passion of Christ is superseded by the spectacular portrayal of its corporeality.[19]

18. From Latin *anagogicus* (which adapts the Greek ἀναγωγικός), anagogic is what "leads upward," "uplifts." In biblical hermeneutics it designates the interpretative procedure through which the text of the Scriptures, read in the light of the supreme truths, becomes instrument of superior knowledge. The anagogic meaning follows the literal, allegoric, and moral meaning in the traditional classification of the biblical meanings, and concerns the eschatological interpretation of the scriptures.

19. The transgression that the bleeding drums of Híjar introduce in the processional liturgy is different from the one introduced by processional accidents such as the one caused by the fireworks of Bari, for instance. However, at a deeper level and considering the abstract meaning of transgression as infringement of a liturgical

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Figure 3. A *matraca*. Photograph by the author.

The body that the perceptual structure of the Catholic liturgy tends to spiritualize by subordinating the senses, particularly touch and taste, to the word and miracle of transubstantiation dramatically reappears in those religious processions that, especially in the Spanish *Semana Santa*, overturn the hierarchy of senses. One of the most remarkable modifications of this kind concerns the very rhythm of the processional flux. In the village of Villanueva de la Serena, Extremadura, on Easter, the faithful carry a statue of the Virgin outside the temple, running as fast as they can. Hence, slowness and ordered rhythm, traditional in Catholic liturgy, are replaced by a disordered and unstable perceptual pattern, which manifests the euphoria and penitential effort of the faithful but also undoubtedly presents a little hieratic spectacle.

code, in both cases the journey of the sacred into the profane space and its contact with the corporeality of the ritual is subject to (voluntary or unintentional) distortions that end up "polluting" the immaculateness of the sacred. This immaculateness is of course the one conceived by the institutionalization of religion into liturgy and rituals, which represents nevertheless the normative perspective in relation to which the community of the faithful takes shape. The bleeding drummer may not consider himself a transgressor of the liturgical code of the church, and yet his corporeality deflects the attention of the faithful from the anagogic meaning of the Passion of Christ, replacing the symbolical bleeding of Jesus with a material bleeding. From the theological point of view of the church, this replacement can be interpreted only as fetishism. From the perspective of the semiotic analyst, what matters however is not to spouse the semiotic ideology of the church, but to observe how it enters in a complex dialectics with the contrasting semiotic ideology of popular religion. Both ideologies seek to satisfy deep-seated anthropological needs of the *homo religiosus* (the ritual, the orgy).

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Figure 4. Bleeding hand of a drummer of Híjar. Photograph by the author.

Bodily effort and sense of corporeal fatigue play a predominant role in several Spanish religious processions, which upset the spirituality of liturgy by adopting sensorial regimes closely resembling those of play.

From Ritual to Play

When religious processions manifest themselves not so much as rituals but as play, neither the participants nor the bystanders any longer have the impression—as liturgy, on the contrary, would encourage them to believe—that the profane environment of belonging, sacralized by the instantiation of the simulacrum of transcendence, shows itself through a meaning that admits no alternatives and consequently no changes. Instead, both participants and bystanders have the impression that, exactly like in a play, or in that particular play that is a theatrical play, they choose to follow rules that might be modified, overturned, or completely ignored at any time. In simpler words, the feeling of not being able to "step out" of liturgy, which is typical of the sacralization of a profane environment through rituals, is ousted by the impression of being able to "step in and out" of the procession at any time, which is typical of the profanation of the sacred environment through play and especially through irony and parody.

The ways in which different processions in the Spanish *Semana Santa* overturn the perceptual structure of liturgy can be aptly categorized through

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the famous typology of play elaborated by Caillois (1958). The dimension of vertigo, to start with, prevails not only in processional running, which entails the agonistic dimension too,[20] but also in other popular traditions.

Ilinx (Vertigo)

In Castielfabib,[21] near Valencia, on Easter, the young men of the little village cling to one of the four bells of the campanile, that of Saint Guillaume, and swing dangerously, suspended at several dozen meters above the ground (fig. 5). In this vertiginous practice, the intrusion of the corporeality of the play into the spirituality of the liturgy is so striking that the body of the faithful even replaces the liturgical instrument or, at least, merges with it. Oral tradition in the village recounts that once the clapper of the bell broke off exactly as the procession was passing, but luckily Saint Guillaume was as effective as Saint Nicholas in protecting his faithful from the accident.

However, this genre of processional play implies not only a physical but also a theological risk: that of turning the sacralization of the profane environment of belonging into a profanation of the sacred one. The individual, contingent, and disordered perceptual pattern offered by the vertigo of the ritual play replaces the collective, essential, and ordered perceptive pattern predisposed by the liturgy of the religious procession.[22] When in the eighteenth century an enlightened priest wished to stop the dangerous devotion of Castelfabib, the young men of the village kept swinging on Easter, still clinging to the bell, but holding its clapper in one hand, so that the priest could not hear them (thus making the play even more dangerous and less liturgical). This anecdote shows to what extent a corporeal element, introduced in the perceptual frame of a religious procession, might turn into a purely play practice in which the individual feeling of vertigo is completely detached from the collective equilibrium of the ritual and its liturgy. Bells cease to be an acoustic instrument for the creation of a collective

20. One should not forget that *pasos*, the statuary simulacra of the *Semana Santa*, can weigh up to several tons.

21. "Castellfabib" in Valencian.

22. As was stated elsewhere, the present essay results also from participant observation but adopts a strictly etic point of view, which is the only one available to semiotic analysis. What matters is not to peruse the spiritual intentions and convictions of these bell players but to place the semiotic ideology that underlies their performance in the framework of its historical dialectics with the semiotic ideology of the institution. What anthropological need do these players seek to satisfy by introducing vertiginous playfulness in *Semana Santa* rituals? And, on the contrary, what anthropological need underlies the semiotic ideology of the church when it seeks to thwart such playfulness? Again, the task of the analyst is not to side with any of these ideologies but to describe the enfolding of their confrontation. There might be a certain tendency in semiotics to emphasize the status of the code over that of the infraction, paralleled by a certain tendency in cultural anthropology to do the opposite, but these are themselves ideological flavors to be turned into objects of metaanalysis (the passion for order in semiotics; anthropology's passion for disorder).

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Figure 5. The "human bells" of Castielfabib. Photograph by the author.

agency and become a play tool for the amusement of an individual agency (and for the formation of its audience).

Mimicry

Another of Caillois's categories of play, "mimicry" characterizes several religious processions, whose genesis, as it was pointed out earlier, is closely related to the evolution of sacred drama and its transition from inside the temple to outside. Whereas the church has sought to expel the corporeal dimension of drama from processions, for instance, by substituting human impersonators with wooden statues, the aesthetics of popular religiosity has manifested an opposite trend, emphasizing the body and its idiosyncratic sensuality rather than the unity of the perceptual structure of liturgy.

Such tendency is noticeable, for example, in the evolution of the Spanish processional sculpture, whose extreme realism (clothes, jewels, real hair, abundance of blood and wounds, expressivity of the eyes, etc.) might be interpreted as a reaction to the spiritualization of sacred drama. The same propensity to reintroduce the body and its senses in religious processions, thus disrupting the two principles of synesthesia and hierarchization, can be detected in several other popular traditions, which in the Spanish *Semana Santa* frequently feature extreme mimicry and remarkably sensual corporeality.

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In Valverde de la Vera, Extremadura, for instance, the night of Maundy Thursday, some dozen inhabitants give rise to the ritual of *empalaos*, literally "the impaled ones."[23] Hidden in their own house, those who receive the authorization and the honor by the local confraternity that handles the ritual, have themselves trussed up to heavy trunks with thick and coarse ropes, which immobilize their spread arms and crush their naked torsos like the coils of a snake. In the preparation of the penitence, the *empalaos* are assisted by relatives and friends (fig. 6).

Then, from midnight on, individually, they start performing a strange religious procession (or rather, a pilgrimage) through the streets of the village. Barefoot, veiled, a crown of thorns on their heads, heavy chains attached to their torsos, two swords hanging from their backs in the shape of a cross, they wander through the steep and dark slopes of Valverde, at times relieving their bruised feet by dipping them in the cold and dirty water that runs through drainage channels in the middle of the streets. A relative, whose anonymity is protected by a thick blanket covering her head, precedes the *empalao* with a night lamp, helping him to find the way through the village. Women are entitled to a lighter penitential ritual: carrying a heavy wooden cross on one shoulder.[24]

Every time penitents, whether men or women, come across each other or happen upon the stone crosses scattered throughout the village (or the crucifix of the religious procession that meanders through Valverde after midnight as well), they must kneel down. Such movement is particularly difficult and painful for men, who must perform it while being slung up and, therefore, without the help of their arms. As a result, mimicry merges with vertigo, turning the representation of Jesus's walk to Calvary not into a collective anagogic reference to the Christian theology of salvation but into an individual play of equilibrium.[25]

23. I have personally observed most of the contemporary religious phenomena described in this essay. Furthermore, I have often interviewed several of the protagonists of these events. However, adopting a semiotic more than an ethnological methodology, in this essay I focus primarily on the phenomenology of religious processions (on their *intentio operis*, as Eco would put it), whereas I consider the intentions of actors and spectators (*intentio auctoris, intentio lectoris*) as contextual material. As a consequence, I do not speculate on the psychological experience of participants in religious processions or on that of their spectators, but on the structure through which liturgy and tradition seek to codify such experience, and on how involuntary accidents or intentional transgressions discombobulate the perceptual harmony that ritual prescribes. Then, of course, there might be the case of the faithful who interpret a liturgical accident as sign of a more accomplished metaphysical harmony, or on the contrary, the case of the faithful for whom tradition is actually the hypocritical embodiment of moral chaos, but these are nothing but idiosyncratic exceptions that confirm the rule of the dialectics between religious codification and "liturgical noise."

24. The gendered dimensions of this ritual would be worth examining.

25. Yes, each man bears a cross, but he has helpers, kin and friends, to bind and tether him and a kin companion to light his way. Moreover, he is not walking alone but is walking at the same time, in the same way, along the same paths as other men and women of his community. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize how the rather individual performance of the *empalaos* is inevitably alternative to the rather communitarian per-

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Figure 6. Preparation of an *empalao*. Photograph by the author.

Knowledge of the historical origin of this ritual adds an important element to its interpretation. Although the etiology of the *empalaos* is uncertain, it is quite probable that it originated after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 (Vaquero 1984). Through this ritual, *conversos* (Jews who chose to stay and convert to Christianity) could publicly demonstrate their adherence to the new faith. Hence, even historically, the ritual appears more as an individual expression through which the convert can signal her belonging to the environment of the Christian community than a collective expression through which the Christian community can signal its belonging to the sacred environment. In other words, in the processional ritual of the *empalaos*, it is not the religious community that seeks to persuade itself of the continuity between the sacred environment of the temple and the profane environment of the village, but it is rather converts who seek to persuade themselves and the religious community of their belonging to it. This might explain the strong mimicry of the ritual: like in a mimicry play, players continuously state their adherence to a particular role.

formance of the traditional procession. In order to look more like Christ, the penitent must stand out from the crowd and its liturgy.

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Indeed, in the *empalaos*, the penitential mimicry is quite noticeable, for instance, in the way they mimic the ordeal of Christ, reenacting his bodily suffering: during the solitary procession, the rope opens bleeding pustules in the flesh of the penitents and slows the circulation of blood in the torso and arms; at the end, some vigorous rubbing with alcohol will be needed so that the *empalaos* can regain their sense of feeling.

The adoption of the human flesh as the expressive means of the sacred representation implies not only material but also symbolic risks. Both collectivity and visibility of religious processions are completely subverted: as it was hinted at earlier, the *empalaos* perform individual and anonymous processions,[26] a sort of a hybrid between religious procession and religious pilgrimage. The hazardous character of their nocturnal meandering throughout the village brings about a perceptual structure that continuously astonishes spectators and even distracts them from participating in the "real," collective processional ritual.

Furthermore, nowadays the spectacular and somewhat masochist nature of the performance attracts fewer and fewer faithful and more and more curious sadists as well as curious and sadistic tourists. The crowd—year after year more numerous—of the curious spectators who surround the *empalaos*, watch out for them in the streets of Valverde, and track them down along the slopes of the village, transforms the ordered and harmonious perceptive structure of liturgy into a sensorial chaos, where the focus of attention is scattered in such a way that sensorial synesthesia is supplanted not merely by polysensoriality but by perceptual cacophony. A photographer's flash reveals the identity of penitents and, at the same time, undoes the sacredness of their performance (fig. 7).[27]

The wounded, tortured, grazed, and bleeding body is the center of several rituals of the Spanish *Semana Santa*. The perception of spectators is placed in an empathic sensorial space in which the bodies of the faithful are no longer spiritualized by the sacramental action, as in the canonical liturgy, but awaken

26. With reference to the anonymity of the penitents, that they walk at night does not necessarily mean that their identity is not known to fellow villagers. Each person who wants to participate must be authorized by members of the local confraternity. That "spectators" cannot see a man's face does not mean either that villagers do not know who is participating that year. Without a camera flash an outsider cannot tell the identity of a penitent, but that does not mean that insiders need such assistance. The relative who accompanies each penitent wears a blanket to protect "anonymity," but other purposes and meanings are possible. Nevertheless, I intend to emphasize the structural contrast between the visibility of the official liturgy and the (staged) invisibility of the individual performance.

27. Lots of religious rituals inside and outside churches in Spain are photographed and filmed (sometimes at the behest of the clergy). Are they all thereby undone as sacred enactments? To a certain extent, they are.

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Figure 7. The identity of an *empalao* revealed. Photograph by the author.

by the sensuality of popular tradition. In the village of San Vicente de la Sonsierra, La Rioja, for instance, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the members of the confraternity of the *picaos* (literally, the "pinched ones") flagellate themselves during a religious procession. Their heads covered by hoods, they violently hit themselves with a linen whip (fig. 8). Afterward, the resulting swelling is turned into wounds by an assistant, who mops up the bruised backs of the penitents with water mixed with glass chips. Finally, the back is pinched twelve times, each sore symbolizing one of the Apostles. The penitential practice of flagellation, which the medieval church harshly opposed (Flynn 1994), survives in the religious processions of this little Spanish village together with its unorthodox potential for sensuality.

Although the progressive "secularization" of its audience has transformed this tradition into a media and touristic event, it remains a clear example of the way in which the extreme mimicry of processional rituals upsets the typical sensorial hierarchy of liturgy, emphasizing the sensual and even the erotic dimension of the performance, and, ultimately, qualifying it as a mimicry play, whose contingency implicitly denies the essentiality of the sacred. In such rituals, it is not the profane environment of belonging that is eternalized by the visit of the simulacrum of transcendence, but the simulacrum of transcen-

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Figure 8. The *picaos*. Photograph by the author.

dence that, manifested through the human flesh, is made as contingent as the profane environment of belonging.[28]

Agon (Struggle)

The typical bipolar perceptual structure of agonistic play is manifested in religious processions in which one or more confraternities compete over having the honor of better glorifying Christ, for instance, in the rivalry among *blancos, negros*, and *morados* in the *Semana Santa* of Huércal-Overa, near Almeria, that between *coliblancos* and *colinegros* in Baena, close to Cordoba, or the spectacular competition between "white ones" and "blue ones" in Lorca, in the region of Murcia, reminiscent of the perennial rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans.

28. This dynamic has been effectively represented by Luis Buñuel's 1969 movie *La voie lactée* (*The Milky Way*), a scoffing parody of Spanish popular religiosity, as well as by certain passages of José Saramago's novel *Memorial do convento* (1982). An echo of it is also in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830).

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Figure 9. The "execution" of Judas in Aldea de Cuenca. Photograph by the author.

When predominant, the agonistic dimension also turns the perception of the relation between transcendence and evil into a sort of Manichean play in which the Christian theology of suffering and evil is completely obliterated. Evil is personified, transformed into one of the parties of a game and, as a result, attributed the same ontological status as the personification of transcendence that defeats it.

In several Spanish villages, for instance, on Easter a puppet representing Judas is "executed" through a performance in which anthropomorphic imagination not only despiritualizes evil but also entirely distorts the narrative meaning of Judas's treason and suicide. In this regard, one of the most heterodox rituals is certainly that which takes place in the village of Aldea de Cuenca, near Cordoba, where a simulacrum of the traitor is hooked atop a long post and shot by the faithful, all of whom are equipped with their own rifle (fig. 9). Judas dies not out of remorse for having sacrificed Jesus, the incarnation of transcendence, for a modicum of immanent power—the thirty pieces of silver—but because he personifies the defeated party in the agonistic enactment of the cosmic struggle between evil and good.

In this case, too, the transformation of the Christian theology of evil and salvation into an agonistic play bestows a profane aura of contingency on the participants, who seem to be able to dispatch the metaphysical problem of evil

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Figure 10. The "punishment" of Judas in Yepes. Photograph by the author.

with the same rapidity with which they get rid of Judas. The anachronism of using guns as execution instruments involuntarily adds to the parodic effect of the ceremony.

In Yepes, in the region of Toledo, Judas is dealt with less violently. They humiliate him by making him bounce on a sort of tarpaulin (fig. 10). Here *ilinx* (vertigo) joins *agon* (struggle) in the playful representation of the punishment of Judas.

Violent death by burning awaits Judas in Alfaro, La Rioja, or in Estremadura. Here the puppet of the traitor often shows the features of such or such political "evil" character (in 2003, for instance, the Judas of Torremenga de la Vera, Extremadura, had the countenance of Saddam Hussein). Again, the geopolitical topicality of the enactment inevitably diminishes its liturgical timelessness: Judas is no longer the cosmic symbol of the tragic choice by which humans reject the manifestation of the sacred, but a scapegoat of the village's inhabitants' sense of collective belonging to their profane environment (Girard

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1982). From this point of view, the rituals of Judas's execution are all reminiscent of those that, in pre-Christian times, symbolized the expulsion of winter and, therefore, of death outside the perimeter of the village.

Alea (Chance)

The playful dimension of *alea* (chance) underlies what might be called "processional divination": everything in religious processions becomes a sign of the capricious attitude of transcendence toward the faithful. Every moment of the processional cortege is no longer considered as an element of the overall symbolic economy of liturgy but as a particle of meaning that is detached from its context and turned into a basis for superstition. Whereas religious processions are meant to signify the continuity between the sacred environment of belonging of the temple and the profane environment of belonging that surrounds it, processional divination reintroduces the feeling of a discontinuity between the sacred and the profane environments and, therefore, of a boundary separating them.

The accidents that, as it has been shown earlier, inevitably mar the processional liturgy are interpreted not as effects of the inevitable dilution of perceptual order that liturgy goes through whenever it is exported outside the sacred perimeter, but as signs of the revenge of transcendence, as a transcendent invasion of the profane environment in order to chastise it. In other words, by configuring processional accidents as expression of the wrath of transcendence, the faithful unconsciously deny the most profound meaning of processional rituals, implicitly stating that transcendence does not inhabit the village but visits it only in order to either reward or punish its inhabitants according to a logic that is more aleatory than moral.

From Play to Art

Through caricaturing popular religiosity, contemporary Spanish art both reveals and emphasizes the transformation that liturgy undergoes when it is exported into a profane environment of belonging. In such art, both the perceptive dynamics of polysensoriality and the disruption of the sensorial hierarchy are pushed to the extreme, thus turning liturgy first into parody and then blasphemy. The work of contemporary Catalan artist Carles Santos offers a perfect example of this evolution of liturgy in the profane environment (Ruvira 1996, 2001; Santos 1999).[29]

29. Carles Santos (born in Vinaròs, Valencia, July 1, 1940) began studying music at age five, developing with sounds and especially with the piano an approach that would characterize the whole of his artistic and creative

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In his theatrical work, the Catalan artist often adopts expressive elements from Catholic popular religiosity, thus underlining the semiotic principles that determine the transformation of liturgy into spectacle, namely, the introduction of perceptive chaos and the predominance of flesh. In Santos's religious imaginary, this sensorial subversion often results in blasphemy, which, incidentally, he claims as one of the engines of his creativity. In the performance *Caligaverot*, for instance, created by Santos in 1999 and inspired by the Catalan *Semana Santa*, the artist, accompanied by a tenor and a soprano, recites a text in front of a series of six images arranged to form a cross (fig. 11).

A closer analysis of this performance demonstrates the way in which it intensifies semiotic tendencies that are already present in Catholic popular religiosity. The text mimics the phonetics of Catalan, but has no precise meaning. Nevertheless, thanks to the uttering of words like *Deu*, to their repetition, to the combination of sounds, and especially thanks to the background image of the performance, it ends up evoking a blasphemous content. The saintly and sanctifying word that dominates the sensorial orchestration of liturgy is therefore turned into its opposite, that is, into a diabolic word that has no meaning whatsoever, but signifies through the emphasis bestowed on its expressive matter, on the corporeality of the singers' voices. The visual context that orients the reception of the performance intensifies the sensuality of the Spanish *Semana Santa* to a scandalous extent. Flesh, which the church has constantly sought to expel from liturgy and its processional extension, becomes predominant again, to the point that it crushes the sacredness of the ritual. Each part of the cross in the background image is distorted pornographically: the head of Jesus is sensually embraced by a woman with the face of Mary Magdalene, while the crucifix is turned into a sex toy: surrounded by lipsticks, hidden in a slip, used as instrument of sodomy, or even as spike heel.

Other works by Santos manifest the same tendency to merge together the *imaginaire* of Catholic popular religiosity, of pornography, and of sadomasochistic eroticism, whose origin the artist traces back to his musical training. In the graphic installation *La polpa de Santa Percinia de Claviconia*, created in 1995, the nails of crucifixion become the elements of a musical score (fig. 12), or else they crucify the hands of the artist on the staff (fig. 13).

path. Although through his long and swirling career Santos has explored numerous expressive forms, music has always been the thread of his work. In the imaginary universe created by Santos, the piano plays a central role (often embodied by the central spatial position that this instrument occupies in his theatrical plays), evoking contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, it is manifested as an object opposing the artist's freedom; on the other hand, it becomes an instrument of sensual and even sexual pleasure.

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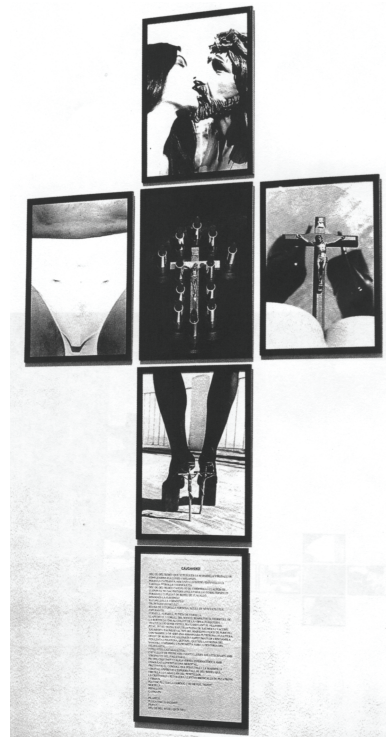


Figure 11. Image from *Caligaverot*, by Carles Santos (1999). Reprinted by permission of the artist.

Carles Santos's opera *Ricardo i Elena* offers his most accomplished interpretation of Catholic popular religiosity and especially of religious processions. It is a complex piece that adopts the whole of the expressive devices created by the artist along his entire career in order to epically narrate his family milieu ("Ricardo" and "Elena" being the names of Carles Santos's parents) through a multifarious array of words, sounds, colors, forms, and scenic inventions. The religious dimension plays an essential role in this family universe, which Carles Santos chooses to evoke in Latin, the language of the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council. However, Santos's Latin is not that of Cicero, but a "dog Latin" that he uses to describe the trivialities of everyday life. For instance, the second section contains a very dramatic solo by the soprano, who interprets Elena, in which she addresses Ricardo as follows:

> Ricarde, prandium confectum est jam.
> Ricarde, multum deficit ad finiendum?

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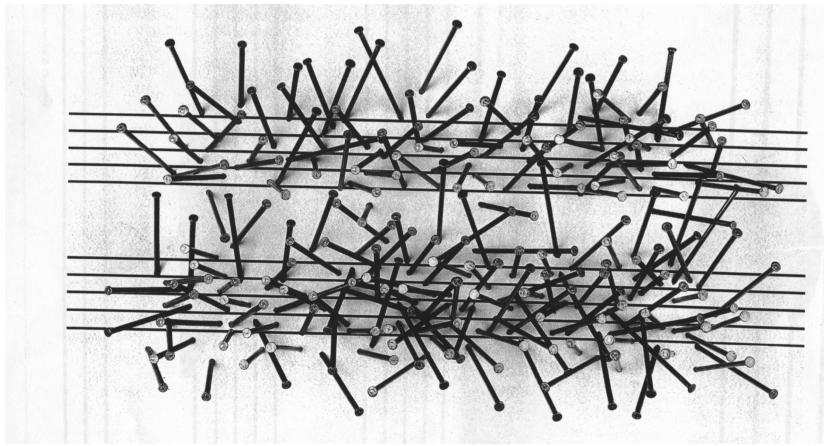


Figure 12. Photograph from the graphic installation *La polpa de Santa Percinia de Claviconia* (1995). Reprinted by permission of the artist.

> Ricarde, circiter hora sexta est.
> Ricarde, moram faciebis valde?
> Ricarde, prandium frigescit.
> Ricarde, volo loqui telefonice cum Barcinone.
> Ricarde, accede in tuorum parentium pharmaciam.[30]

The following sequence evokes the participation of Carles Santos and his parents in the rituals of the Catalan *Setmana Santa* through a hyperbolic parody of processional sounds, gestures, and movements. The sequence perfectly exemplifies the idea that when contemporary theater seizes the expressive forms of Catholic popular religiosity, it does nothing but intensify the semiotic mechanisms that already subvert the sensorial order of liturgy in the perceptual structure of religious processions: polysensorial juxtaposition—without synthesis nor synesthesia—of disparate expressive means, scattering of meaning into blasphemous chaos, and above all, predominance of body over spirit. To confirm this interpretation, at the end of the travesty procession, a bell—the instrument that the church uses to communicate the most important elements of the structure of liturgy inside the temple to the profane environment outside of it—is replaced by two bodies, those of Ricardo and Elena, that swing over the empty stage exactly like the human bells of Castielfabib. The sacred environ-

30. "Ricardo, dinner is ready. Ricardo, are you done yet? Ricardo, it's almost two. Ricardo, how long will it take you? Ricardo, dinner is getting cold. Ricardo, I want to phone Barcelona. Ricardo, call by your parents' pharmacy."

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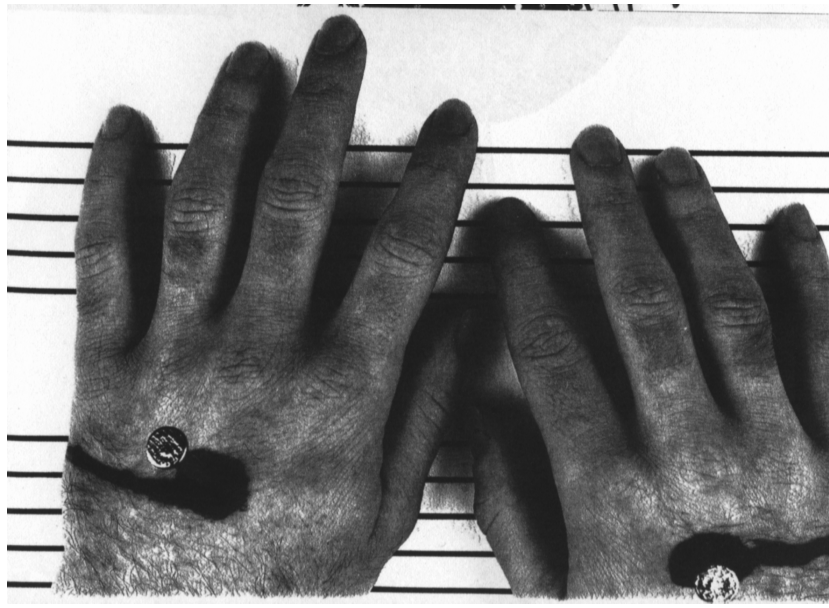


Figure 13. Photograph from the graphic installation *La polpa de Santa Percinia de Claviconia* (1995). Reprinted by permission of the artist.

ment of the temple extends its presence beyond its frontiers in the profane environment of a Catalan family household, but it is simultaneously "profaned" by the human flesh, in a subversion of the semiotic principles of processional liturgy that anticlerical contemporary art pushes to the extreme.

Conclusion

A last case will introduce the theoretical conclusion of this article. According to tradition, an image representing the Virgin was found in Tepeyac, near Guadalupe, Mexico (north of modern Mexico City) in 1531. The first miraculous Christian image of Mesoamerica, it gave rise to the birth and development of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In 1533, a sumptuous procession was organized in order to move this image into the first Mesoamerican chapel built in the Virgin's honor. In order to celebrate such exceptional event, and according to the early modern Catholic ceremonial liturgy for the transportation of relics, the new Christians of Mesoamerica offered to the Virgin a spectacle of *mitotes*, that is, their traditional ritual dances, simulating a battle between the rival local populations of Aztecs and Chichimeca. The battle chiefs wore their ceremonial clothes, while the Aztec "armies"—the Jaguars and the Eagles—donned their

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feather costumes. They started dancing in a circle in front of the church, accompanied by the voices of the elders and the rhythm of two types of drums. Suddenly, an accident disrupted the harmony of the procession: one of the dancers was accidentally wounded by an arrow. Transported in agony before the image of the Virgin, already placed in its chapel, he was miraculously saved.

One of the most gracious images of Mesoamerican colonial art, executed by an anonymous painter after 1653, visually narrates the accident and the miracle (Brown 1999, 21). This painting, in which the architecture of the new church neatly separates the present narrative time of grace from the past narrative time of the accident, perfectly summarizes the relation between, on the one hand, the open environment of popular religiosity and its relation with pre-Christian traditions—a space in which the processional ritual dangerously turns into a playful mimicry of war—and, on the other hand, the closed environment of liturgy. When the procession transports the saintly image outside of its original emplacement, the unconventional, polysensorial forms adopted to communicate the relation between the simulacrum of transcendence and the profane environment that surrounds the temple trigger the disruption of liturgy and the violent reemergence of a frontier between the sacred and the profane, a frontier that manifests itself under the guise of accident and death. By contrast, it is only in the sacred environment of the church, where popular traditions and their polysensorial tendency are substituted by the unity, order, and hierarchy of liturgy, embodied in the hieratic persona of the bishop, that a miracle—irruption of the sacred into the profane world—can restore the perfection of transcendence by eliminating the effects of the accident.

The meaning of the title of the present article should now be clear. Given the opposition between a sacred environment of belonging and a profane one, determining a boundary materialized by various semiotic devices (for instance, in Christianity, the walls of a church), religious processions work as rituals meant to domesticate both the intensity of the transition and the extension of distance characterizing the passage between these two environments. If the religious community is considered as the dynamic subject of such passage, religious processions can be interpreted as rhetorical strategies that, mainly through the semiotic dynamics of sensorial synesthesia and logocentric hierarchy described above, convey the idea that the religious community is able to extend its environment of belonging outside the boundary of the temple, and that this boundary is actually an illusory one: when the simulacrum of transcendence is paraded throughout the streets of the village, the entire village becomes its temple.

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However, since the semiotic machinery of liturgy—because of the multiplication and personification of agencies—is unable to control the perceptual structure of rituals outside of the closed environment of the temple as effectively as it does inside of it, accidents occur in the form of a more or less drastic disruption of both synesthesia and logocentric hierarchy, which end up being supplanted by the opposite semiotic dynamics of polysensoriality and primacy of the flesh. Not only does the boundary between the sacred and the profane environment reappear, turning the sedentary belonging of the faithful into nomadic estrangement, but the rhetorical strategy of tolerance and acclimation (the sacred appropriates the profane) is substituted, at least from the point of view of the religious community as dynamic subject, by an opposite rhetoric strategy of invasion and exile (the sacred is appropriated by the profane). The simulacrum of transcendence, which was transported outside the temple in order to sacralize its surroundings, is profaned by them, lost in an alien environment.

In other words, the transportation of the sacred turns into a transgression of it, according to a phenomenological and semiotic dynamics that is evident, for instance, in the way in which religious rituals become playful routines, through both a reemergence of the idea of meaning as alternative and a despiritualization of the flesh that, as it is clearly pointed out by artistic parodies, dispels the sacredness of rituals and their symbolic efficacy. The (dis)placement of the simulacrum of transcendence reveals the nonemendable character of the boundary that separates it from immanence.

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