

Mystical Meaning and Anamorphic Form in Narciso Tomé's *Transparente*

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Article abstract

Le célèbre complexe sculptural-architectural dénommé le « *Transparente* », à l'est de la cathédrale de Tolède, a été construit par l'architecte et décorateur espagnol, Narciso Tomé, entre 1721 et 1734. Quelques quarante ans après son achèvement, il était déjà calomnié par un critique très en vue d'art néo-classique, Antonio Ponz, qui lui reprochait de ne représenter que « confusion et barbarisme ». Plus qu'à son tour, il servit de mauvais exemple de la « profusion du style baroque ». Ces détractations proviennent du fait que leurs auteurs considèrent cette structure compliquée comme un simple étalage de virtuosité de la part de son créateur, Tomé. Ces considérations s'avèrent néanmoins injustifiées, spécialement si l'on tient compte du lieu où se trouve cet assemblage détaillé—dans la cathédrale qui représente le Saint siège de l'Espagne catholique. En bref, une telle commande—en ce lieu vénérable—doit être réinterprétée dans l'optique de doctrines théologiques rigoureusement orthodoxes pour parvenir à une nouvelle interprétation mystique et « anamorphique ».

Aux fins d'analyse iconographique, nous reconsidérons ici l'ensemble dans son contexte original, c'est-à-dire comme un ensemble en deux parties : 1. le mur de l'autel arrière sculpté à profusion, qui s'élève du sol, et 2. la « chambre oculus », en forme de coupole, qui le surmonte en angle et dont l'ouverture vitrée et circulaire, l'« oculus », capte les rayons de soleil lourds de symboles. Pour cet exposé, nous avons préparé plusieurs schémas et modèles pour cerner les différents éléments iconographiques du *Transparente*, ce qui nous permet, en outre, de reconstituer les rapports spatiaux qui existent entre chaque élément individuel de l'ensemble du complexe.

D'après cette nouvelle interprétation du *Transparente*, certaines « déformations de perspective » manifestes ne peuvent se « rectifier » que lorsqu'on les regarde vers le bas—par la fenêtre de l'oculus. Après « rectifications », on comprend que ces « déformations » (que l'on perçoit au ras du sol) proviennent d'un exercice calculé de « perspective anamorphique », très pratiqué du temps de Tomé. Nous présentons des arguments géométriques et théologiques appropriés afin de démontrer que la réorganisation nécessaire de la perspective a été réalisée en fait dans un « oeil de Dieu » métaphorique, l'*Oculus Dei*.

Mystical Meaning and Anamorphic Form in Narciso Tomé's *Transparente*

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(para R. S. Ehlers, tracista magistral)

RÉSUMÉ

Le célèbre complexe sculptural-architectural dénommé le « *Transparente* », à l'est de la cathédrale de Tolède, a été construit par l'architecte et décorateur espagnol, Narciso Tomé, entre 1721 et 1734. Quelques quarante ans après son achèvement, il était déjà calomnié par un critique très en vue d'art néo-classique, Antonio Ponz, qui lui reprochait de ne représenter que « confusion et barbarisme ». Plus qu'à son tour, il servit de mauvais exemple de la « profusion du style baroque ». Ces détractations proviennent du fait que leurs auteurs considèrent cette structure compliquée comme un simple étalage de virtuosité de la part de son créateur, Tomé. Ces considérations s'avèrent néanmoins injustifiées, spécialement si l'on tient compte du lieu où se trouve cet assemblage détaillé—dans la cathédrale qui représente le Saint siège de l'Espagne catholique. En bref, une telle commande—en ce lieu vénérable—doit être réinterprétée dans l'optique de doctrines théologiques rigoureusement orthodoxes pour parvenir à une nouvelle interprétation mystique et « anamorphique ».

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In ipso vita erat,
Et vita erat lux hominum:
Et lux in tenebris lucet,
Et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.
—John 1:4-5

The *Transparente* in the east end of the Cathedral of Toledo was built in the years 1721 to 1732 by Narciso Tomé (Figs. 75-77).¹ In his *Viage de Es-*

paña, the celebrated neo-classical critic don Antonio Ponz heartily condemned Tomé's creation, which he thought had only been "conceived to sully eternally (*para fear perpetually*)" the magnificent edifice of the Toledan see:

Everything here is nothing but architectural confusion and barbarism, into which there are seen jumbled to-

1 All the surviving documentary evidence concerning the commission for this structure is assembled and discussed in two articles published by Nina Ayala Mallory: "El Transparente de la Catedral de Toledo (1721-1732)," *Archivo Es-*

pañol de Arte, XLII (1969), 255-88; "Narciso Tomé's *Transparente* in the Cathedral of Toledo (1721-1732)," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XXI (1970), 9-32 (the latter publication is largely a somewhat abbreviated English translation of the *Archivo* piece of the year before).

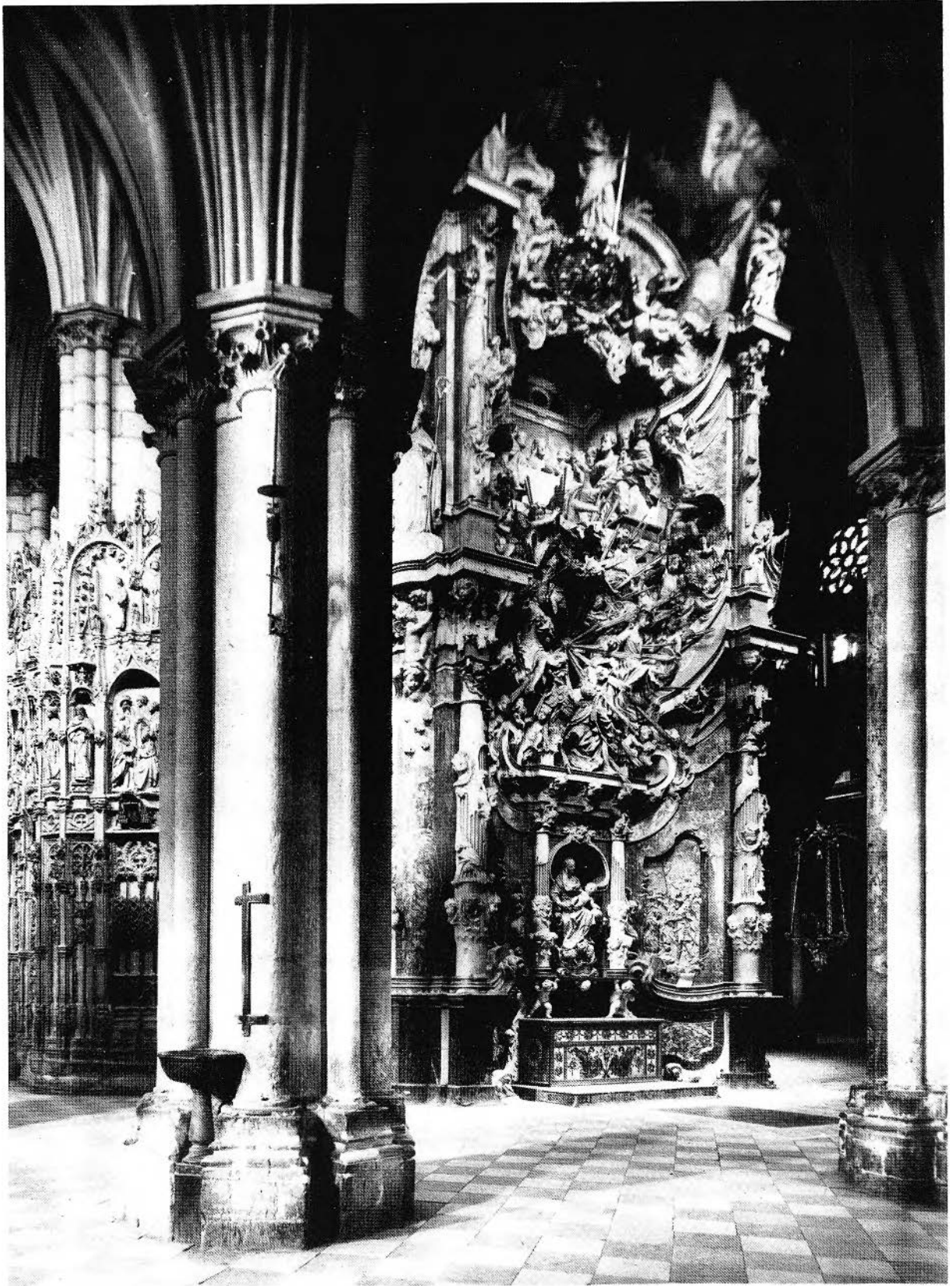


FIGURE 75. Narciso Tomé, *Transparente*: the *trasaltar* (reverse-altar-wall), a detail of the architectural complex situated in the apse-ambulatory of the Cathedral of Toledo; built between 1721 and 1732 (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).



FIGURE 76. *Transparente: trasaltar*, as viewed from the northeast (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).

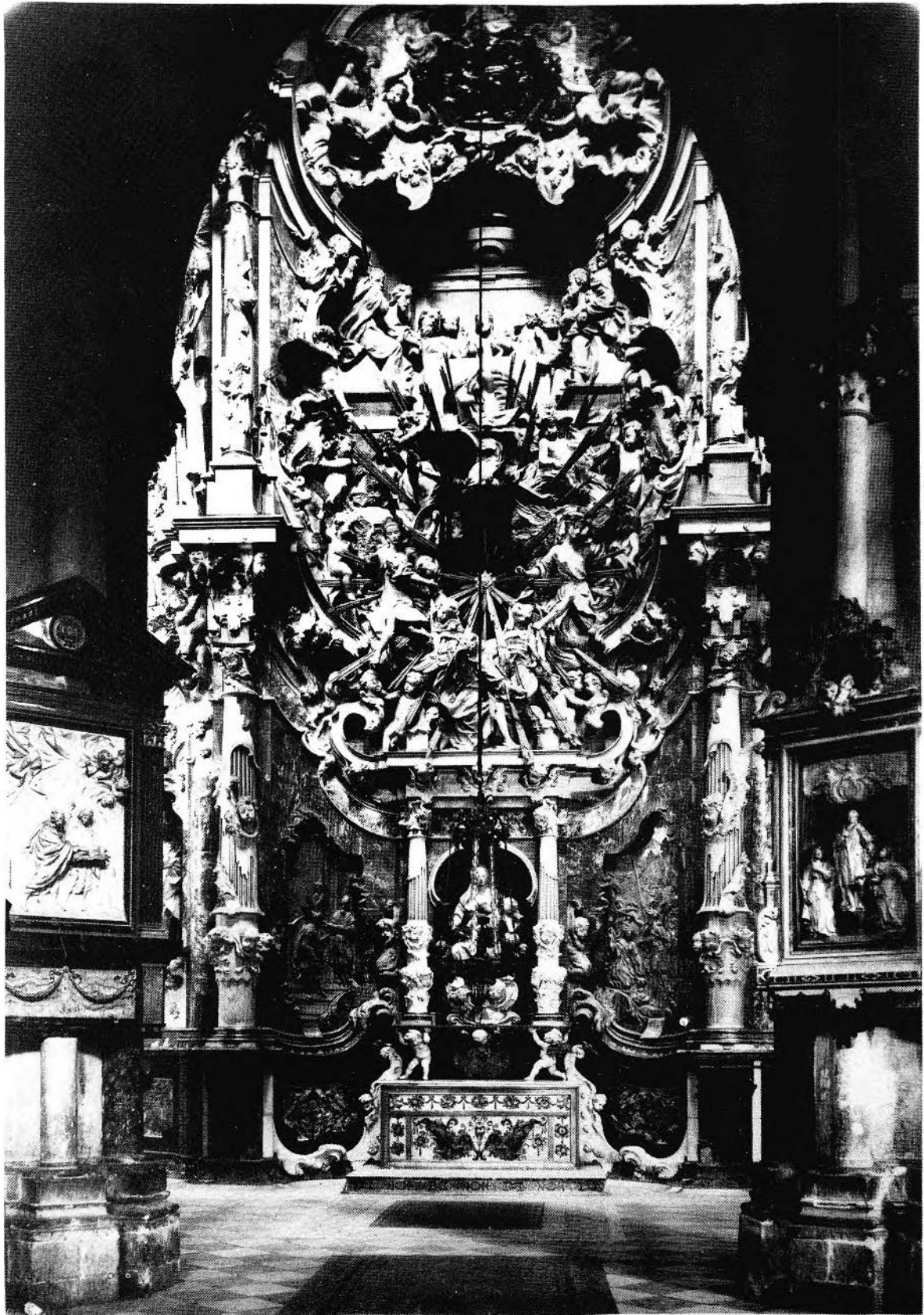


FIGURE 77. *Transparente: trasaltar*, as viewed frontally, from east to west (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).

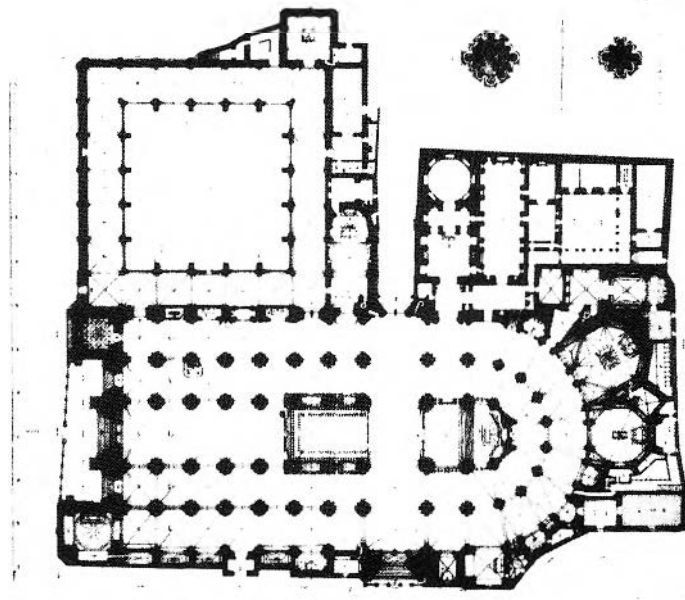


FIGURE 78. Ground-plan of the entirety of the Cathedral of Toledo; the two-part complex of Tomé's *Transparente* is located on a vertical axis at the very top (east) of this plan (Ayala Mallory, "El Transparente," Fig. 3).

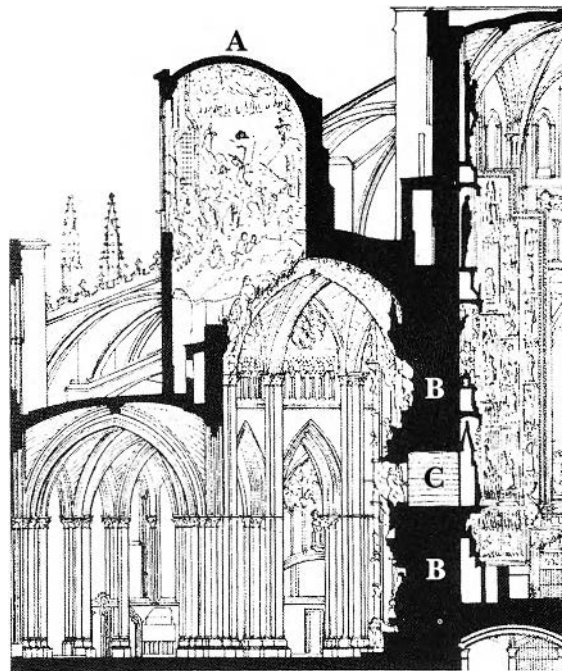


FIGURE 79. Cross-section of the apse-ambulatory of the Cathedral of Toledo, showing the spatial relationships between (A) *cupulillo* and (B) *trasaltar*; the Holy Sacrament would be exposed in (C) the "gloria" chamber, connecting *trasaltar* to *altar mayor*. The *cupulillo* rises from the sub-structure of the "Capilla de San Ildefonso" dating from the Gothic period (Ayala Mallory, "El Transparente," Fig. 5).



FIGURE 80. *Transparente*: side-view, looking upwards to the "Oculus Chamber" (or *cupulillo*) as seen from ground-level (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).

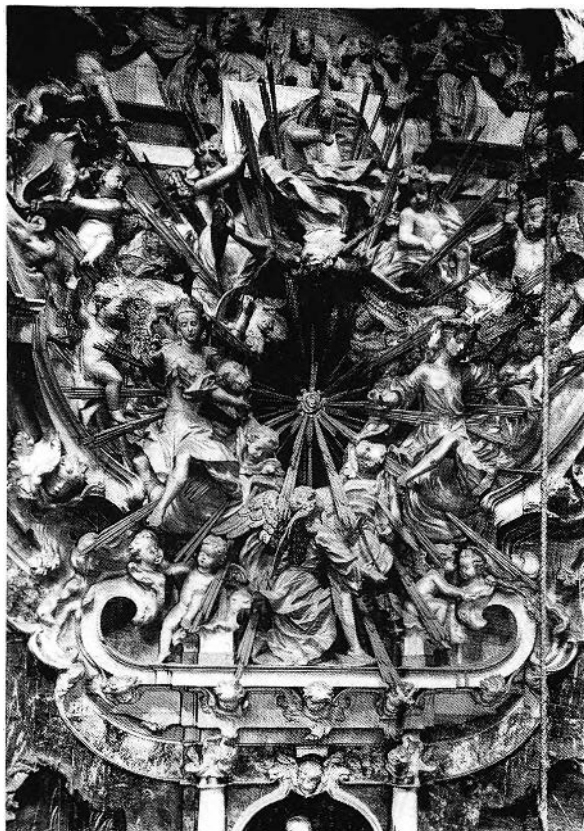


FIGURE 81. *Transparente*: detail of the central motif of the *trasaltar*—the “*gloria*”—including the glazed opening of the *manifestador* exposing the Holy Sacrament; in Fig. 79 = “C” (Photo: Archivo MAS, Barcelona).

FIGURE 82. *Cáliz custodia* (solar-motif monstrance), ca. 1750. Seville, Cathedral (Photo: Archivo MAS, Barcelona).



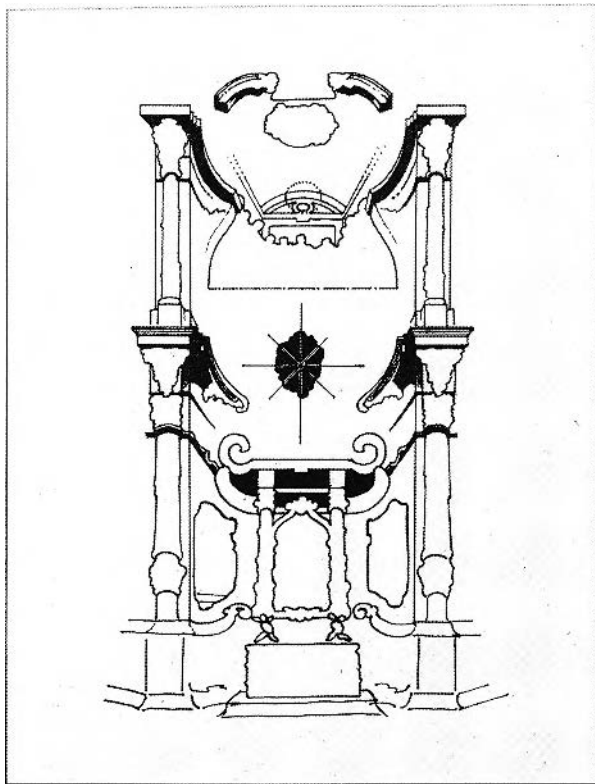


FIGURE 83. *Transparente*: simplified diagram of the purely architectural elements of the *trasaltar* (drawing by R. S. Ehlers).

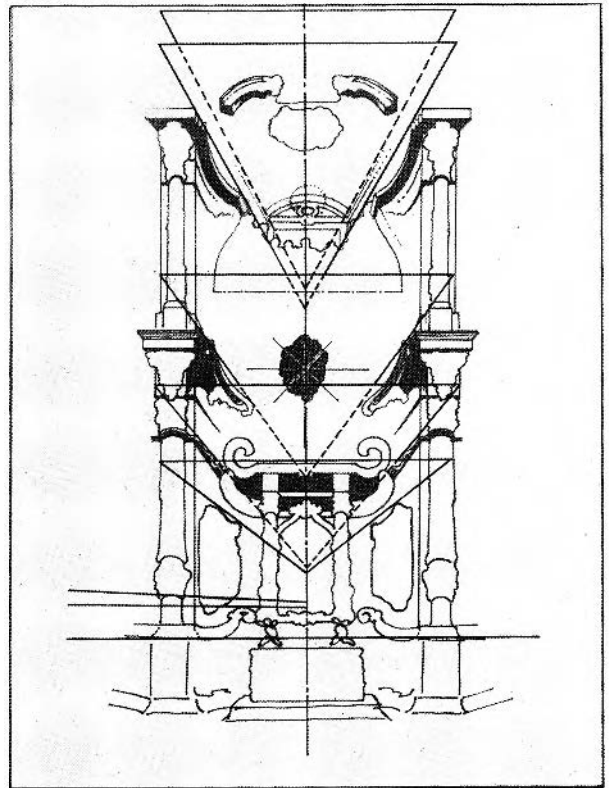


FIGURE 84. *Transparente*: sequential patterns of simulated perspective recessions in the *trasaltar* (drawing by R. S. Ehlers).

FIGURE 85. *Transparente*: patterns and angles of perspective recessions in the *trasaltar*; from the ground-level (Tomb of Adam) to the highest point (base of the Last Supper Chamber), these are, respectively: 1. 90° ; 2. $91-94^\circ$; 3. $127-140^\circ$; 4. 114° ; 5. $150-152^\circ$ (drawing, and calculations, by R. S. Ehlers).

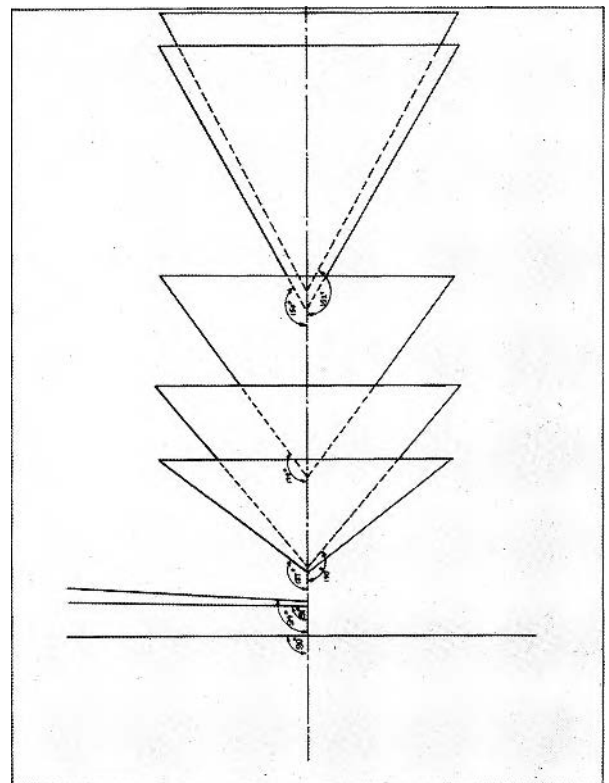




FIGURE 86. *Transparente*: detail of the central motif in the central zone: Virgin and Child holding the Globe of the Earth, with the Fall of Man (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).

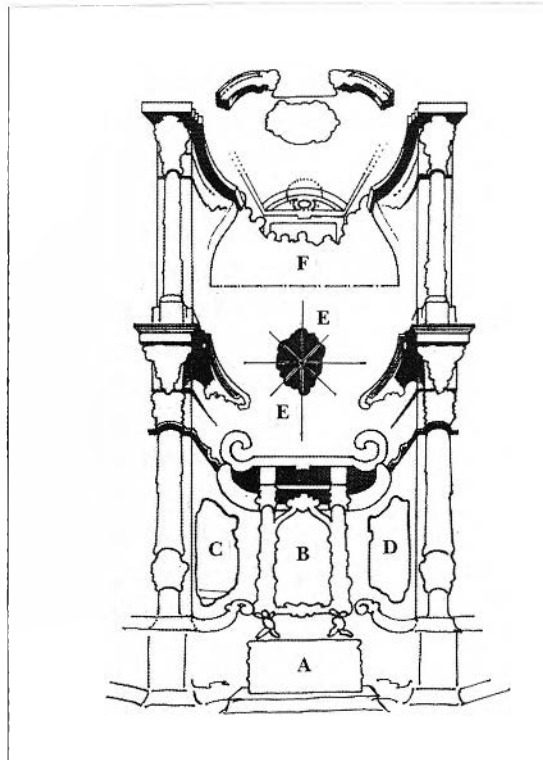


FIGURE 87. *Transparente*: Iconographic Key to the *tras-altar*: A. Tomb of Adam; B. Virgin and Child, with the Fall of Man; C. David (1 Sam. 21); D. David (1 Sam. 25); E. Gloria; F. Last Supper Chamber (drawing by R. S. Ehlers).

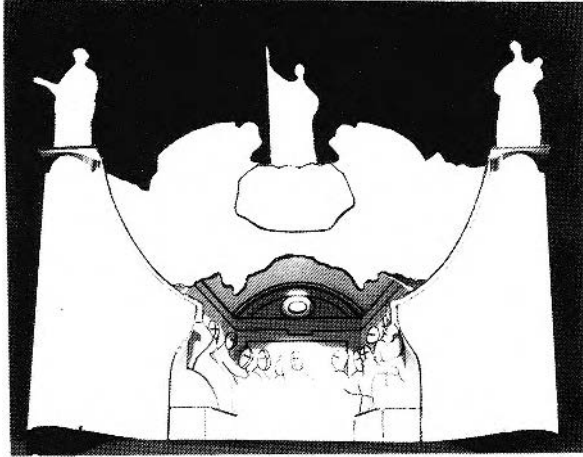


FIGURE 88. *Transparente*: simplified model of the Last Supper Chamber, as if viewed from the ambulatory of Toledo Cathedral at ground-level (cf. Fig. 90). Note the oval light-pattern cast by the masked "miniature oculus" (hidden otherwise by the figure of Faith) that duplicates the shape of the "major oculus" opening in the *cupulillo* (scale-model and photographic set-up by R. S. Ehlers).

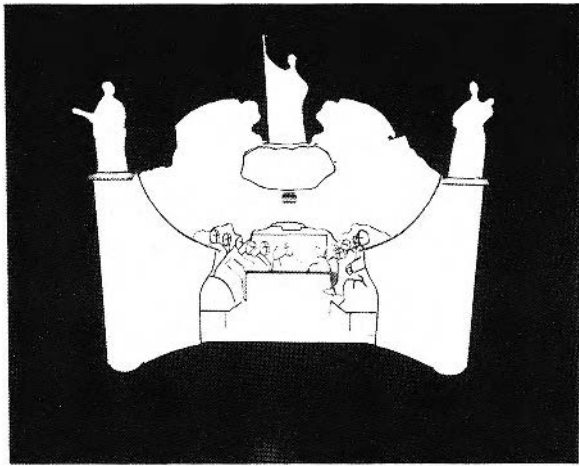


FIGURE 89. The Last Supper Chamber (model) as it would be viewed above from the Oculus Chamber, situated opposite and above it (cf. Fig. 79: cross-section). From this angle the "miniature oculus," corresponding in form and content to the "major oculus," becomes visible (scale-model and photographic set-up by R. S. Ehlers).

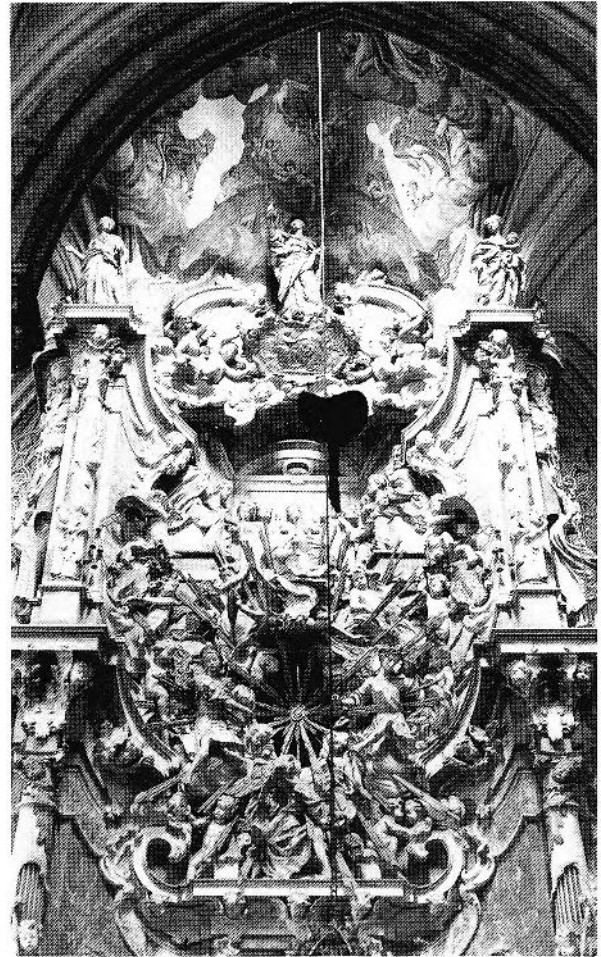


FIGURE 90. *Transparente*: upper part of the *trasaltar*, with Faith (centre), Hope (left), and Charity (right); immediately below the Three Theological Virtues the Last Supper Chamber has been placed, and below this is situated the Gloria; cf. Fig. 87: Iconographic Key (Photo: Archivos MAS, Barcelona).

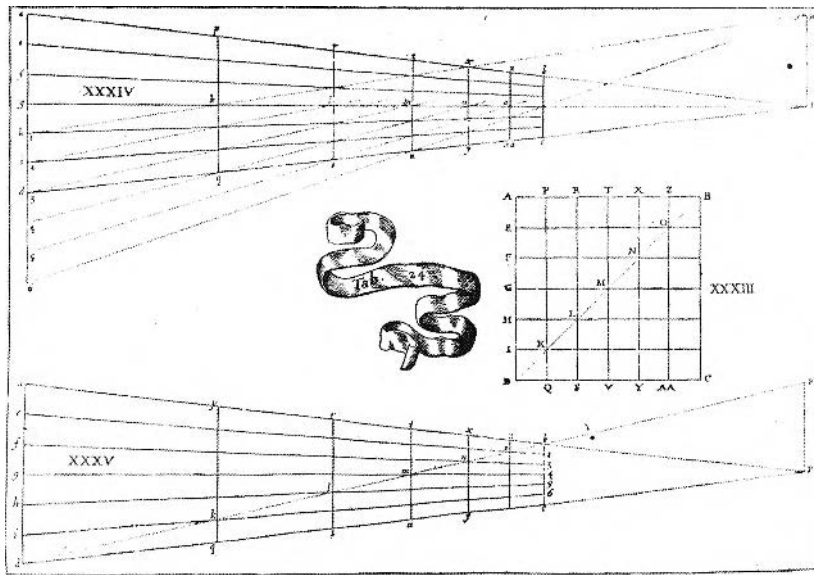


FIGURE 91. J.-F. Nicéron, *Thaumaturgus Opticus* (1646), plate 24.

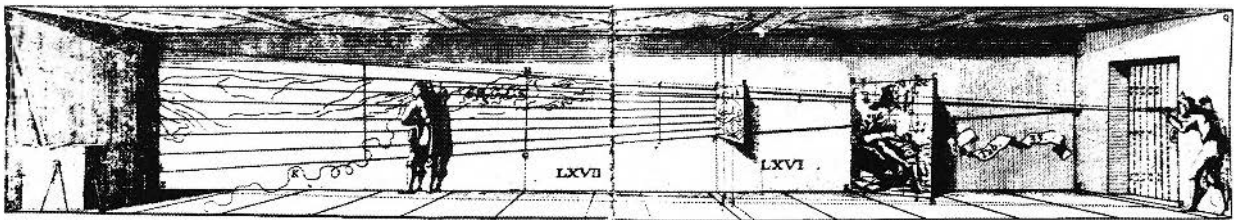


FIGURE 92. J.-F. Nicéron, *Thaumaturgus Opticus* (1646), plate 33.

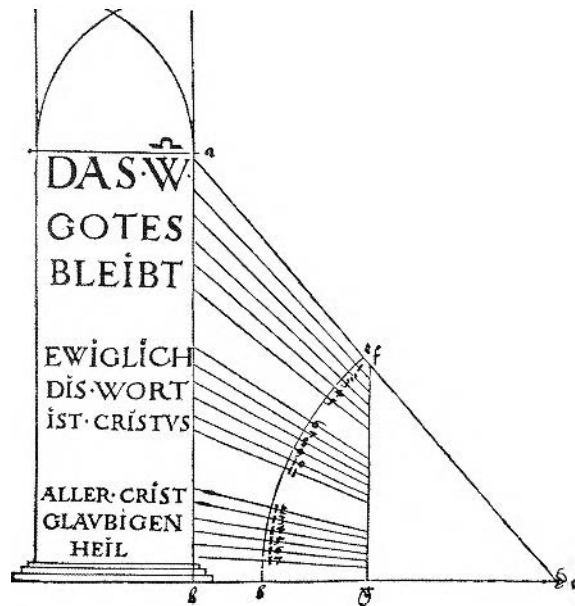


FIGURE 93. Albrecht Dürer, *Underweysung der Messung* (1525), plate 16.

gether some extremely vulgar statues. . . . [Tomé] not only reveals his miserable ability in the chimerical architecture, into which he mounted his “Transparente,” but also in the little cupola (*cupulillo*) above it which he painted.²

As is obvious from this diatribe, the secularized neo-classical critic had little appreciation of the meaning of the complicated Catholic didactic content motivating the complicated structure.

In the strictly structural sense, this is a *trasaltar*, occupying the rear wall of the *Retablo Mayor* of the Cathedral, serving as a supplementary sacramental altar without walls. It is a conceptually-linked *two-art* composition, as is made clear by the ground-plan of the Cathedral and by a sectional drawing of the east end of the building which shows the relationship between the *trasaltar* wall below and the *cupilillo* above (Figs. 78-79). Here we see that the two major components are separated spatially by the curved ambulatory running behind the altar. It is the human viewer below on the floor, therefore, who is to recombine subjectively the two elements, re-forming them into a meaningful whole. Above him, to the east—where the sun, charged with symbolic meanings, rises each morning—there has been placed a sort of super-clerestory with a single small oculus-window (Fig. 80). By implication, here above, there is located another, essential, “second spectator.”

An imaginary line-of-sight passes at about a forty-five-degree angle through the oculus-window, and down onto a centrally placed, highly ornamented, recessed niche placed in the exact centre of the *trasaltar* wall (Fig. 79). As seen on this wall (Fig. 77) the exterior appearance of this central, hemispherical motif is that of a *gloria*, composed of golden rays of light and flying angels (Fig. 81). These agitated overlying motifs cover a pane of glass protecting the exposed Eucharist, the *Santísimo Sacramento*, placed in a *camarín*, buried in the midst of the altar, itself a *manifestador* of the symbolic instruments of the Mass.³ The frontal view of the *trasaltar*, as seen from the ambulatory (Fig. 77), reveals that its silhouette generally conforms to the appearance of a typi-

cally Spanish liturgical instrument known as a “*cáliz-custodia*” (Fig. 82), itself looking like a stylized sun-burst,⁴ having in turn the symbolic meaning of the source of *lux divina*, the figurative representation of divine grace.⁵ In any event, the viewer quickly perceives that this *gloria* is the literal—and spiritual—visual vanishing-point of the entire architectonic composition of the *trasaltar* wall. Additionally, it is simultaneously a reflection and a replication of the underlying theme of the oculus-chamber facing it from above at a forty-five-degree angle (Figs. 79-80). Above and below this iconographic hub there are a number of complementary symbolic motifs.

There are two different ways to read the *Transparente*. The first way is the commonplace “mundane view”—the way the ensemble is read by the earth-bound worshipper. A second mode of perception recognizes what may be called the complementary “super-celestial viewpoint.” The key to the simultaneous, dual nature of the mystically charged iconographic composition of the *Transparente* is the visual fact that, as a whole, the composition of the *trasaltar* wall appears to be curved inward, such as may be more readily observed in a simplified tracing of the purely architectural elements incorporated into the west wall of the ambulatory (Fig. 83).

As George Kubler has observed, “in elevation the entablatures sag at the center to establish a perspective recession”⁶ (Fig. 84). Now, the critical question to ask here is: once we have determined the exact angles of this apparent *progressive recession* (Fig. 85), what kind of a “recessive perspective” construction is this? As it turns out, this is an example of a common Baroque practice known as *anamorphosis*. Its deliberate employment here by Tomé conformed to a particular iconographic tradition which provides the missing key to the overall, dual, simultaneous, symbolic meaning of the *Transparente* as a didactic whole. These observations complement the findings of Nina Ayala

4 I owe this perception to Ayala Mallory (see note 1).

5 The mutual association between *lux corporalis*, or real light, and *lux spiritualis*—the latter being the very image of God the Father—is commonplace in Christian thinking; see V. Nieto Alcalde, *La Luz, símbolo y sistema visual (El espacio y la luz en el arte gótico y del Renacimiento)* (Madrid, 1981), citing fundamental studies on the subject by Panofsky, von Simson, Grodecki, Jantzen, et al.

6 G. Kubler (with M. Soria), *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions, 1500-1800* (Baltimore, 1959), 40. The underlying (and rather simplified) *geometrical* basis of Tomé’s composition—as now finally revealed in our Figs. 84-86—pertains to design principles of great antiquity in architectural practice in Spain; for this traditional “geometrical a-priorism,” see the classic study by F. Chueca Goitia, *Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española*, new ed. (Madrid, 1981), *passim*.

2 A. Ponz, *Viage de España* (Madrid, 1772), I, carta 2.

3 Although unusual in its didactic complexity and symbolic illusionism, Tomé’s massive architectural *conceito* belongs to a Spanish tradition, being most notably preceded by the *manifestador* in the *Retablo Mayor* of the Church of the Escorial. According to Fray José de Sigüenza, the early seventeenth-century chronicler of the Escorial, there the “sagrario está en el cuerpo de la pared metido . . . de la parte del retablo tiene una ventana cuadrada, por donde se ve y toca la custodia de la parte de fuera [y] tiene otra [ventana] que la responde y le da luz y los rayos del Sol desde que nace, y allí tiene una vidriera y luego una reja para la seguridad, aunque el lugar es inaccesible” (J. de Sigüenza, *Fundación del Monasterio de El Escorial*, new ed. [Madrid, 1963], 343).

Mallory, who provides us with an accurate and cogent summary of the individual iconographic elements and motifs making up the fabric of the *Transparente*,⁷ although she does not determine the exact nature of the overall iconographic programme. It is this symbolic scheme which dictated the placement—and the contextual linkage—of the individual components, especially in their sense of revealed hieratic progression. As we shall see, form (including anamorphous distortion) follows symbolic function.

The symbolic programme of the *Transparente* is a compilation of various representations, serving as so many cumulative assertions, all of which allude to the mystery of the Sacrament. Nevertheless, this iconographic programme is anything but obvious. Unfortunately, a written programme has not survived, although such a one may be supposed to have been drawn up by Cardinal Astorga (1656-1734), who had been raised to the See of Toledo on 26 August 1720, and who immediately after commissioned the *Transparente* from Narciso Tomé.⁸ As executed, and even without the written evidence of its assigned programme, the compositional format reveals a hieratic scheme of vertically ascending levels of revelation.

Above the bottom level are the Virgin and Child seated upon a throne of angels placed within an architectural niche (Fig. 86). The infant Jesus, looking up to his mother, points to a golden globe of the earth upon which there is depicted the fall of man with Eve offering the forbidden fruit to Adam. Sorrowfully the Virgin looks down, past the Child and into the eyes of the worldly onlooker placed below in the ambulatory. On the floor is a low-lying altar table, possibly a metaphorical reference to the tomb of Adam. In this case, we have a prefiguration of Christ (literally placed above): “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:45-46); “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one [Christ] who was to come” (Romans 5:14). In this fashion

Mary reminds Christ of her foreknowledge of the coming sacrifice of the Son for the sins committed by Adam and Eve and their progeny. Additionally, therefore, the scene of the fall of man functions as a prefiguration—at the very beginning of history “*sub lege*”—of that future sacrifice of Christ—at the beginning of history “*sub gratia*”—for the redemption of the sins of all men; of course, it is this same great sacrifice which is endlessly reenacted in the celebrations of the Eucharist. This tender scene of implied future sacrifice is flanked by two gilded reliefs, depicting further prefigurative Old Testament parallels to the mystery of the Eucharist: David receiving the bread and sword of Goliath (1 Samuel 21), and Abigail giving David the bread and wine (1 Samuel 25). The relationship of these motifs is again clarified by a diagram (Fig. 87).

Immediately above this pairing of Old and New Testament Eucharistic motifs there is located the “real” Sacrament, placed behind the *gloria* and marked by a radiant sun-burst enframed by the four Archangels—Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael—situated at the four cardinal points of the solar rays streaming from the *manifestador* which receives the *lux divina* falling diagonally from the oculus window (Fig. 81). Thus the *gloria* becomes the ultimate symbol of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Lying above this radiant configuration, the spiritual axis of the composition as seen by the earth-bound worshipper below, there can be seen what appears to be a small, three-walled room containing some figures, a composition again better understood in a scale-model (Fig. 88; cf. Fig. 91). The missing fourth wall of this room opens outwards and is oriented towards the oculus located above and to the other side of the ambulatory. As seen from below (Fig. 88), that is, looking upwards, the nature of the action transpiring in the elevated room is difficult to discern. However, as seen looking downwards from the oculus-chamber above (Fig. 89), the scene becomes immediately legible, because that is the single vantage-point from which the askew perspective of the architecture of this room becomes miraculously “corrected.” From this unique vantage-point, quite inaccessible to us, the scene in the chamber sculpted upon the *trasaltar* wall reveals itself to be a representation of the Last Supper, with a centrally placed Christ in the act of benediction. He looks up to and through the oculus hidden above and behind us, the earth-bound spectators. In the strictly sacramental sense, this scene is another means of reenacting the Eucharist, symbolically represented by the “real” Host reverently placed in the *manifestador* of the *gloria*, located immediately beneath the sculpted eucharistic *Santa Cena*.

7 Ayala Mallory, “El Transparente,” 266-71, and “Narciso Tomé’s *Transparente*,” 14-18. Ayala Mallory also cites some contemporary, largely descriptive, panegyrics on the work; unfortunately, they are not very enlightening on the meaning of the overall sense of the iconographic programme, particularly in its bipartite spatial system.

8 According to Ayala Mallory, “Narciso Tomé’s *Transparente*,” 14, “the author of the program is not disclosed by any source, but given its complexity, one can assume that it was the result of deliberations between the Archbishop and the chapter, Tomé only giving it form.”

At the very top of the *trasaltar* wall, immediately above the anamorphically distorted scene of the Last Supper (Fig. 90), there are three free-standing female figures. In the centre of a broken pediment (again an architectural feature mysteriously “corrected” from the unique vantage-point obtained from the oculus window) there rises the allegorical figure of Faith, flanked by Hope (to our left, holding an anchor) and Charity (to our right, with an infant at her breast). These are the super-mortal, abstract representations of the three Theological Virtues who receive their spiritual sustenance from the divine light penetrating the oculus-chamber. Their presence, partaking of the divine nourishment of the Eucharist, leads us in turn to the state of grace necessary to receive the Sacrament.⁹

From this point in symbolic time and real space we are now led to consider the second and final part of the complex didactic composition of the *Transparente*. The culmination of the upwardly ascending ensemble is found in the oculus-chamber, that which is literally and figuratively *superius* to the structure of the *trasaltar* wall below (Fig. 79). The half-blinded viewer looks upwards from the stygian gloom of the ambulatory into the miraculously appearing, brilliant light streaming through the oculus which is partially masked by the theatrical display at the entrance of the *cupulillo*. About all the viewer can perceive at first glance are four dark silhouettes outlined against the refulgent *lux divina*. These four figures are the prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, each of whom looks down into the ambulatory while grasping a large tablet, each of which is inscribed with their respective prophecies announcing the coming of the Sacrament. On the walls of the oculus-chamber behind them there has been painted a prophetic dream-vision which had been described in the Old Testament and also announced the coming of the Sacrament of the New Testament: “There was a man telling a dream to his comrade; and he said, ‘Behold, I dreamed a dream’; and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to a tent, and struck it that it fell, and turned it upside down” (Judges 7:13).¹⁰

A painted ribbon cites the passage just quoted and, as well, its New Testament counterpart, the celestial vision recorded by St. John which, as it turns out, provides the textual key to the meaning

of the divine apparition of the Eucharist represented in the oculus-chamber. According to the Evangelist (John 6:55-58):

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father [*me vivens Pater*], so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven [*hic est panis qui de caelo descendit*], not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.

The counterpart to the Eucharistic figurations and prefigurations depicted in the oculus-chamber is found to be located in the fresco painted opposite, which rises above the three Theological Virtues and covers the inner face of the ambulatory ceiling, thus connecting the *trasaltar* to the *cupulillo* (Fig. 90). It depicts the apocalyptic vision of St. John as recorded in the Book of Revelation. The painting shows all the elements described in the vision seen on the island of Patmos: the twenty-four harp-bearing, crowned elders prostrated in mute adoration before the *Agnus Dei* and the *Deus Pater* upon his throne holding the Book of the Seven Seals. From the claws of the eagle of St. John there hangs an inscribed scroll which specifically identifies this scene as representing: “*Apocal. cap. 4. ac 10; et cap. 5 v. 6 et 7.*” This textual citation usefully serves to identify the underlying meaning of the oculus-chamber opposite, which is, as always, *superius* to the viewer. Moreover, this biblical citation now informs us exactly *who* is to be found placed *beyond* the glass window facing east. According to Revelation 4:1ff.:

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven [*et ecce ostium apertum in caelo*]. . . and immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one [*Deus Pater*] sat on the throne [*ecce sedes posita erat in caelo, et supra sedem sedens*]. . . and before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal [*ante thronum . . . et in conspectu sedis tanquam mare vitreum simile crystallo: et in medio sedis*—that is, the glass of the oculus itself]. . . and round and about the throne, were four beasts. . . . Those beasts [i.e., the Four Evangelists] give glory and honor and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever.

On the basis of this deliberately-cited visionary text,¹¹ it becomes obvious that it can be none other than God the Father who literally “overlooks” this complex exaltation of the Eucharist, which is a scene *He* spies from his heavenly throne, placed

9 Flanking each tier, to the north and south sides—but *outside*—of the actual composition of the *trasaltar* wall there are two pairs of statues depicting local Toledan saints. The females are below—SS. Leocadia and Casilda—and the two males are above—SS. Eugene (patron of the city) and Ildefonso (patron of the cathedral).

10 S. R. Parro, *Toledo en la mano* (Toledo, 1857), I, 155.

11 These biblical citations also inform us that the *Transparente* additionally functions as an “*Allerheiligenbild*”; according to James Hall (*Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* [New York, 1979], 13), “an All-Saints picture is one of the established ways of representing heaven in art . . . its biblical source is the Book of Revelation.”

far above us—as *He looks down, and through, the oculus-window*, itself like “a sea of glass.” Given this reasonable explanation (actually Tomé’s, not mine) for the previously ignored question of the implied connective iconographic relationship between the *two* parts of the *Transparente*, that is, between the terrestrially-situated *trasaltar* wall and the heavenly-oriented oculus-window, one may now complement Ayala Mallory’s final statement that the scene, as a whole, is *only* “taking place before the eyes of the beholder” located in the ambulatory. To the contrary, if we overlook the ocular participation of the omnivoyant *Deus Pater* as the downward-looking (although to us invisible) “first witness” to this drama of the Eucharist, then we may just assume that, as Ayala Mallory states, the *Transparente*, as a whole, “does not, however, attempt to provide us with a coherent ‘scene,’ or with a system of categories that relates the different parts to each other and to the [merely earthbound] viewer.”¹²

The most prominent and consistent visual clue (another complement to the clearly stated scriptural references just quoted) announcing the ocular, “all-seeing” presence of God the Father, who is the one enthroned above and beyond the oculus-chamber and whose essential role is to serve as the ubiquitous witness to the Triumph of the Eucharist, is revealed by the nature of the progressively upward-tipped cornices of the *trasaltar* wall, particularly as their rate of angular displacement and apparent distortion is directly proportionate to their distance from the earthbound “other” viewer appropriately placed near Adam and Eve (Figs. 83-85). These “distorted” architectural elements are, nevertheless, proportionately “corrected” as they align themselves in an ascending order upon an angle of vision focused from the *oculus Dei*, situated above and to the east (the *oriens* of one’s spiritual orientation), the location of the mystic, life-giving solar-rays, the direct manifestation of God’s *lux divina* as a visible instrument of the infusion of Grace. This type of anamorphic perspective construction, not to mention the concrete means of realizing it, would have been known to Narciso Tomé as this had been a device popularized in various artists’ manuals published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

As Jurgis Baltrušaitis has shown,¹³ perspective anamorphoses (from the Greek words *ana-*, again, and *morphē*, shape; i.e., a reconstructed, or combinatory form) was a logical offshoot from the system of central perspective developed in the Renaissance. In an *ana-morphē* construction (as its

very name implies), the spectator-viewer—whether earthbound or enthroned in heaven—must play an active part in order to conceptually “reshape” the dematerialized image placed before his eyes by the artist. As early as 1584, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo had recognized the essential role of what may be called the “oculus-factor” in the visualization of an anamorphic figure in a passage where he described in minute detail a “method of making an inverted perspective that looks correct *only* when it is observed through a single peephole.”¹⁴ This peephole/oculus, of course, established the location of the single correct positioning of the beholder’s eye, enabling him to perceive the apparition. As described by Lomazzo, the easily recreated method for creating an anamorphic image on the wall of a building (such as a *trasaltar* wall) is to be pursued as follows:

You must place a piece of canvas or board on the wall . . . fasten it to the wall. Then, on the same side of the wall, attach a handsomely designed . . . head of Christ, or whatever you wish to depict, in a frame. It must be covered with a grid of horizontal and vertical lines [thereby making a *quadratura*]. This image must be exactly as high as the board, and it must be fastened on the side to the wall next to the edge of the board. You must then move backwards far enough so that the board attached to the wall is screened by the frame that you have just moved away from, and which projects from the wall. Be sure to stand at a considerable distance from the frame, with your eye exactly opposite the center of it; that is, so that its *optica* [the central axis of the visual pyramid] is precisely centered upon the frame. Then extend out from your eye, on the place where it is, a string from which you will transfer to the board all the squares that are drawn in the frame. They must be copied there.¹⁵

The step-by-step procedures of anamorphic transcription described by Lomazzo are clearly revealed in several illustrations accompanying perspective treatises of the Baroque period. In a plate from such a book, by Jean François Nicéron (*Thaumaturgus Opticus*, Rome, 1646), we first see how a squared grid can be easily transformed into an elongated anamorphic triangle which, when viewed from fixed viewpoint “RP,” again “becomes” the original, or “normal,” rectangle (Fig. 91). This same procedure may now be also used to first form a head of Christ, and then to re-form miraculously this same Holy Visage when it is again seen from the unitary viewpoint. For a large-scale wall anamorphosis, such as that one sculpted upon the *trasaltar* wall of Toledo Cathedral, the artist would again have employed the process described by Lomazzo, which is also conveniently

12 Ayala Mallory, “Narciso Tomé’s *Transparente*,” 20.

13 J. Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses* (Paris, 1969).

14 G. P. Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’arte della pittura*, new ed. (Rome, 1844), II, 174-75.

15 Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’arte*, 174-75.

illustrated in Nicéron's treatise where the French artist rendered the procedures he employed for his anamorphic mural painting of *St. John on Patmos* (Fig. 92).¹⁶

In short, Tomé's *Transparente* is organized within an architectural enframement of anamorphically distorted or bent cornices and pediments, and the individual containing elements are only "corrected" in the all-seeing eye of the enthroned God the Father seated in heaven far beyond His "oculus-surrogate." In practical (rather than symbolic) terms, the oculus-window corresponds to Nicéron's viewpoint "RP," where "the crooked becomes straight." Within his own anamorphic architecture, however, Tomé has situated a number of sculpted "normal" individual figures and vertical columns. As we now see, the angle of curvature of Tomé's anamorphic architectural enframement in fact generally conforms to the rate of progressive enlargements of the inscriptions found in another possible graphic source, an anamorphic print by Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 93). In this example the largest or superior elements are the most distorted and these parts correspond directly and literally to "The Eternal Word of God," appearing in the uppermost register, while in the mid-range register, "The Word of Christ" appears in smaller letters, and so on down to the very bottom of the composition where the viewer's "mundane" eye-level is located. In short, Dürer, Lomazzo, and Nicéron have all provided us with published (and hence widely distributed) demonstrations of anamorphic constructions, all of which employed perspective distortions in order to establish a "higher" kind of Christian-mystical significance.

Such a specifically religious *ars combinatoria* of anamorphic distortions and normal appearing figures and motifs, such as that one employed in Tomé's *Transparente*, is another commonplace in anamorphosing artworks, and this practice is also documented in other old prints, any one of which might have been known to the eighteenth-century Spanish designer. An apposite example, contrasting highly distorted anamorphic divinity to earthbound "normality," is observed in an engraving of 1639 by Johann Heinrich Glaser depicting the anamorphic *Christ with the Crown of Thorns* surrounded by two simultaneous representations of Adam and Eve. They, being "spiritually blind," do not, or cannot, "see" the radically elongated figure of the Saviour in their midst, precisely be-

cause this is the fateful moment in which they choose to pluck the fruit of Original Sin, an act which was inevitably to lead to Christ's great sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. This is of course the same prefigurative point which had been underlined by Narciso Tomé in the representation of the infant Jesus who tenders to the Virgin the terrestrial globe bearing a relief showing Adam and Eve in the fatal act of snatching the forbidden fruit (Fig. 86) which—as in Glaser's print—leads directly to the Passion of Christ and, therefore, to the Eucharistic offering.

To conclude, four other notable examples of Renaissance and Baroque anamorphoses employing such didactic religious *concetti* within specifically architectural settings may be cited in passing. These would include Donato Bramante's stuccoed and painted "false" apse-choir in Santa Maria presso San Satiro in Milan (1483-86); Gianlorenzo Bernini's "Scala Regia" in the Vatican (1663-66); Padre Andrea Pozzo's decorations for the apartments of St. Ignatius in the Casa Professa in Rome (1682) and, above all, his magnificent ceiling paintings for the church of San Ignazio in Rome (1691-94).¹⁷ Given these and the other examples cited here,¹⁸ by now the point will have been made that Narciso Tomé could easily have had at hand a wealth of such instructive illustrative materials, any or all of which appear to have a direct bearing upon what Nikolaus Pevsner calls the "spatial extremism" of the *Transparente*. Such graphic examples provide, moreover, a means of understanding the actual means by which Tomé was enabled to recreate a "pulling of the whole room into one vast, stupefying ornament . . . linked up with large outer columns curved upwards."¹⁹ Nevertheless, as we must now recognize, Tomé's larger purposes were scarcely just "ornamental" in nature. Instead, what we are now able to perceive (as Ponz could not) are the exact visual mechanics—and the

16 It is known, for example, that Tomé first executed a detailed *modello* in stucco, the execution of which took a year to complete (Ayala Mallory, "El Transparente," 263); unfortunately, it is no longer extant, nor are his preparatory drawings (which I presume to have looked very much like Nicéron's reticulated diagrams; cf. Figs. 19-21).

17 For these examples, see F. Leeman, *Hidden Images, Games of Perception, Anamorphic Art, Illusion: From the Renaissance to the Present* (New York, 1976), Figs. 18-27; see there also Emanuel Maignan's anamorphic fresco (à la Nicéron) of *San Francesco di Paola* (1642) in the Monastery of SS. Trinità dei Monti, Rome: Figs. 46-50.

18 In addition to the several published sources already cited (either as books or as printed single sheets), an important contemporary Spanish treatise deserves mention here. In 1715 Antonio Palomino published the first volume—"Theórica de la Pintura"—of his standard work, *El Museo Pictórico y escala óptica*; the second part with artists' biographies, "El Parnaso español," appeared in 1724. In book II, chapter 4 of the "Theórica," Palomino illustrates and discusses (at length) "la perspectiva de techos, que el italiano llama *di sotto in sù*," the procedures of which ("perspectiva mixta") are similar to anamorphic practice: "esta operación se delinean en el cartón, ajustado al sitio."

19 N. Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1963), 257-58.

didactic purposes thereof—of an often misunderstood cultural phenomenon: Spanish mysticism.²⁰ Within this larger context, yet another pos-

20 As is now generally recognized in the scholarly literature, Baroque art in Spain was of an overwhelmingly didactic and/or symbolic nature, for which see: J. Gállego, *Visión y símbolos en la pintura española del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid, 1973); S. Sebastián, *Contrarreforma y barroco: Lecturas iconográficas e iconológicas* (Madrid, 1981). I have myself addressed particular examples of Spanish mysticism in art in recent articles: "Observations on Symbolic Content in Two Early Bodegones by Diego Velázquez," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar*, 1 (1980), 82-95; "'Terebat in mortario': Symbolism in Velázquez's 'Christ in the House of Martha and Mary,'" *Arte Cristiana: Rivista Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte*, LXXII (1984), 700, 13-24; "Antonio Palomino describe el mecanismo de la alegoría barroca: Una rara explicación

sible symbolic reference emerges. Not only is *Deus Pater* the all-seeing "ocular-witness" of the Triumph of the Eucharist celebrated in the *Transparente*; by implication He is also the "Divine Architect" of this magnificent ecclesiastical apparition for this idea was a commonplace in contemporary homiletic publications.²¹

'iconológica' de un ciclo pictórico del año 1701," *Boletín del Arte*, VII (1986), 21-47.

21 For contemporary references to God the Father as "artifice," "constructor," "escultor," "edificador," and, above all, "arquitecto," see the numerous statements (published between 1552 and 1797) gathered by M. del Pilar Dávila Fernández, ed., *Los sermones y el arte* (Valladolid, 1980), indexed on p. 292: "Dios."