

## SARAH GARLAND

### **Second Sight: Reading Twentieth-Century Self-Reflexivity Through the Baroque**

#### 1.

Since the mid-eighties we have seen a cluster of critical motions that seek to bring the style of the seventeenth-century baroque back to our attention, in a variety of media and manifestations. Art-historically, the baroque has returned as a prompt to investigate the history of instrumentality, parody and excess. Robert Harbison suggests in *Reflections on Baroque* that modernist architectural play between spaces and texts might be read as part of a baroque heritage, and Steven Calloway argues in *Baroque Baroque* that the attraction to novelty, artifice and the bizarre in art nouveau and surrealism, be read as a return of a certain seventeenth-century sensibility.<sup>1</sup> The related baroque turn in film history sees its return in mass-market cinema's emphasis on opulence and wonder; here Peter Wollen and Angela Ndalians suggest that Hollywood spectacle cinema, particularly in its science-fiction modes, might also be read as neobaroque.<sup>2</sup> Across disciplinary borders, Omar Calabrese combines film and international fiction in order to suggest that twentieth-century mass culture as a whole has significant crossovers with baroque configurations in the areas of affective excess,

aesthetic gigantism, evocations of disorder and chaos, knots, labyrinths, doubles, and a tendency endlessly to reproduce versions and subversions of other works.

Given this span across forms, genres and periods, the point of view suggested by Moret in the epigraph Severo Sarduy uses for “The Baroque and Neobaroque” seems both wittily evasive and a necessary caution:

It is legitimate to transpose the artistic notion of the baroque to literary terrain. These two fields offer remarkable parallelism from various points of view; they are equally undefinable.<sup>3</sup>

The interdisciplinary neobaroque notwithstanding, the suggestion of an analogy between the baroque and what is conventionally called the postmodern is most established in experimental Latin American literature of the twentieth century because, Sarduy argues, the attention to resemblance in the form of artificiality, parody, pastiche and intertextuality present in the twentieth-century fiction of Sarduy himself, Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges, is the negotiation of a stream which has run through Latin American art since Gongora and Cervantes in the 1600s. As Linda Hutcheon points out in the introduction to *Narcissistic Narrative*, this tradition offers a pertinent cultural critique of the Anglocentricity of literary criticism, problematising both the “post-” and the “modernism” in postmodern fiction, as well as bringing in the wider history of colonial resistance and subversion John Beverley documents in *Against Literature*.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it’s still worth bringing this emptied-out tag to mind—perhaps only as a telling paradox—because the term “postmodern” seems, at present, to give the quickest sense of twentieth-century versions of the conceits Foucault finds in the seventeenth century, where, he writes, formal games “grow out of the new kinship between resemblance and illusion.”<sup>5</sup> In this kind of construction, resemblance is both exciting and disconcerting: “the chimeras of similitude loom up on all sides, but they

are recognised as chimeras; it is the privileged age of *trompe-l'oeil* painting, of the comic illusion, of the play that duplicates itself by representing another play, of the *quid pro quo*, of dreams and visions; it is the age of the deceiving senses.”<sup>6</sup> Both Sarduy’s preface and Lambert’s own tongue-in-cheek summary compound the vertiginous and disconcerting feeling that a comforting resemblance has been usurped by more disreputable, illusionist forms of doubling. This unsettling is used not only by the *trompe l’oeil*, the play within a play, and the *mise en abyme*, but also spreads through the centuries to other doubled forms, which, in their turn, suggest other doubles. To pin these “chimeras of similitude” down to their more obvious tropes, there are those resemblances that imply they have another life (parody, pastiche, the quotation, the intertext, the ghost, the uncanny), those that imply that their life is a mere resemblance, the creation of another (the Chinese box, authorial interjection, and regression *ad infinitum*), and those ideas that either melancholically or triumphantly read resemblance as artifice—namely the suggestions that the world is a stage, that there is an art to behaviour and a truth to disguise, that the world is an unstable mixture, a confused labyrinth, and an impermanent place. These last ideas reiterate the confusion between resemblances; they seem to provide a succinct summary of, for example, the Nabokovian novel, many of Angela Carter’s works, John Fowles’ *Magus*, as well as Borges’ *ficciones*, but I have borrowed them here from Spanish historian José Antonio Maravall’s detailed and seminal explication of what he calls the “guided culture” of seventeenth-century baroque Spain in *Culture of the Baroque (La cultura del Barroco)*.<sup>7</sup>

This confusion is characteristic: reading the postmodern after the baroque, or *vice versa*, there is a nagging feeling that, in Harbison’s words, “we have been here before,” but also that articulating this doubling somehow exposes a lack of rigour.

Threading together the seventeenth and twentieth centuries seems reckless, sophist even; it implies a disregard for the four hundred or so years in between, a glossing over the geographical dispersal of the baroque over multiple European and colonial contexts, an elision between the formal properties of literature, architecture, sculpture and painting, and a blind disregard for the definitional problems of both periods.

Given these very reasonable concerns the comparison can only be on the terms of a loose (but nevertheless productive) likeness, and Lambert's detailed and thorough book ignores none of these objections; but still, despite carefully drawing out the parameters of the debate, unease remains. As he wittily recognises, he is caught up in the same problem that he writes about, namely the fact that "many of the critical descriptions of the postmodern echo—in an uncanny manner, perhaps—this strange anxiety that hails from the original seventeenth-century Baroque: the anxiety over resemblance itself."<sup>8</sup>

To valorise the artificiality of both periods then seems appropriate; it mirrors their aesthetics and thematises the very anxiety that Lambert, via Foucault, suggests characterises both cultures. In that same well-mined passage, Foucault writes that for the seventeenth century "similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error, the danger to which one exposes oneself when one does not examine the obscure region of confusions," and that it comes through to the twentieth century as a warning.<sup>9</sup> The exact resemblance between Pierre Menard's versions of the *Quixote* (which we still read as differing) and the fact that only tenuous resemblances unite the original Don Quixote's vision with everyone else's, undermines both logic and our own ability to wield it. And this, of course, is the point—the moment analogy (as Lambert points out, "perhaps the weakest and most formally strained of all logical relations") is interrogated, it seems both everywhere

and nowhere.<sup>10</sup> There is a built-in bathos to assertions about the baroque because in both seventeenth- and twentieth-century guises it is a form that stands poised to deconstruct itself. The kind of de-centring, de-naturalising reading practised by the post-structuralists is suggested in the seventeenth century by a form that announces itself as already gloriously artificial. Perhaps this is why Borges, in a quotation almost as well repeated as Foucault's, defines the baroque as not only "that style that deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its own possibilities, and that borders on self-caricature," but, after Bernard Shaw, as a deliberate play on the fact that "all intellectual labour is inherently humorous."<sup>11</sup>

This excited feeling of play and the anxious worry about error permeate the secondary texts as well as the primary ones. Part of the agitation surrounding "resemblance" comes from the fact that we are working not with items but with a kind of contagious relationship, a tradition that ritually repeats in each new version the same canonical critical texts (Foucault, Borges, Sarduy, *Las Meninas*, the uncertain etymology of the word "baroque"), and a tradition that finds novelty only in the return—in Menard's *Quixote*. The other part of the concern is that we are dealing with a tradition that tells us about its own tradition of telling us about itself, which we, as critics, must repeat again in order to contextualise our own versions. As Lambert and Harbison imply, it is impossible to ascertain if the resemblance is borne out of our search for it—implicit in Henri Focillon's summary of baroque style in *The Life of Forms* is the suggestion that writing about the historical baroque is itself a formally baroque thing to do:

Baroque forms ... live with a passionate intensity a life that is entirely their own, they proliferate like some vegetable monstrosity. They break apart even as they grow; they tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it, to become as one with all its possibilities. ... They are obsessed with the object of representation; they are urged toward it by a kind of maniacal "similism." ... An interest in the past is awakened, and baroque art seeks models and

examples and confirmations from the most remote regions of antiquity. But what the baroque wants from history is the past life of baroque itself.<sup>12</sup>

The critical knot here is not just that Maravall's list of the tropes of the seventeenth century seems to reflect the plots of many twentieth-century metafiction, but that the way of seeing engendered by the self-conscious forms present in both periods acts irrevocably to change the spectator. Both the (historically baroque) metaphors of an enlightenment and a fall from innocence can be put to work to articulate the fact that once we have learnt to read the self-consciousness of, for example, Borges, Carter, Pynchon, or Beckett, or of John Donne, Cervantes, or Sterne, the doubled look stays with us, throwing into doubt the solidity of other texts that don't otherwise announce themselves as workings on the edge of illusion and disillusion. It also throws us back on our own texts, prompts us into rhetoricity—not only in the more playful and perhaps pejorative sense of the term, but as a claiming of the efficacy of artificial and foundationless persuasion.<sup>13</sup> The drunken, vertiginous feeling that comes with double vision is entirely to the point; this is a discourse that problematises standing firmly, as well as seeing simply.

## 2.

Self-reflexivity finds power in all cultural gestures. However, in the historical baroque the connection of authority to illusion is particularly visible. Most of the large-scale monuments of the Italian baroque are part of a Catholic-sponsored Counter-Reformation spectacle aimed at seducing the prevaricating Protestant back to the Roman faith, and hence, as Argan points out throughout his study, this is a period in which art was generally thought of in terms of rhetoric.<sup>14</sup> The etymology of the word “baroque” is uncertain, but both of the most likely candidates bear traces of a strident will. The history of the word suggests that the baroque is the product of an energy

spent so liberally that it leaves a kind of telling distortion. (The Portuguese *barocco* is a large, irregularly shaped pearl, the result of natural forces flowing in unusual directions, and, as Lambert demonstrates, the logical term “baroco” is the acronym for one of the figures of syllogism.) Baroque style unites extreme formalism and intense desire, it gives a sense of energies in suspension, of process and structure. Indeed, in Heinrich Wölfflin’s influential opposition between baroque and renaissance form, the problem with the baroque *is* this quality of agitation. Each renaissance form, he writes, “has been born easily, free and complete,” “everything breathes satisfaction” and a “heavenly calm,” but the baroque, he maintains, “never offers us perfection and fulfilment, or the static calm of ‘being,’ only the unrest of change and the tension of transience.”<sup>15</sup>

This contrast between renaissance “being” and baroque “becoming” acts as a receptacle for the accusation of decadence clinging to the baroque, as well as, much later, for the twentieth-century valorisation by theorists like Calabrese, Eco, Deleuze and Buci-Glucksmann. For Wölfflin the baroque is both an art of desire and an art that provokes desire:

It wants to carry us away with the force of its impact, immediate and overwhelming. It gives us not a generally enhanced vitality, but excitement, ecstasy, intoxication. Its impact on us is intended to be only momentary, ... a feeling of anticipation, of something yet to come, of dissatisfaction and restlessness rather than fulfilment. We have no sense of release, but rather of having been drawn into the tension of an emotional condition.<sup>16</sup>

The reputation that the baroque has for a kind of vulgarity is also, I think, bound up with this intent to ravish its audience. From the point of view of a canon based on a certain kind of naturalness and ease—an inheritance of the renaissance *sprezzatura* perhaps—baroque art has a definite drama to it, a swagger and an aggression that are anything but nonchalant. In terms of Bourdieu’s findings in *Distinctions* there is also perhaps a sense that many baroque artifacts like the “Hall of Mirrors” at the Palace of

Versailles, or the paintings of Rubens with their grand scale, golden light, myriads of swooning figures, shining angels, and explicit proselytising, are read by an unbelieving twentieth-century audience as trying just that bit too hard. Even those that take the baroque seriously are wary, and rightly so: the twentieth-century reader of these excessive forms looks at the baroque from a position in history where the production of cultural artifacts to persuade their spectator is a particularly loaded issue. In his consideration of baroque forms, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin draws attention to this quality of power and agitation in a more general way, suggesting that, like “all periods of so-called artistic decadence,” “the baroque is not so much an age of genuine artistic achievement as an age possessed of an unremitting artistic will.”<sup>17</sup> His baroque is that of German sixteenth-century drama, but his criticism is nevertheless apposite. Even before he was forced into exile by another culture that demonstrated unremitting will, Benjamin judged the baroque severely, pointing consistently to its authoritarian character.

In the fields of art and cultural history there are solid and eloquent precedents for reading the seventeenth-century baroque as a mode of affectivity and authority, most notable the work of Maravall and Argan. However, most of those commentators who argue for a twentieth-century baroque remain, for the most part, tacit on the matter of fictional and aesthetic persuasion. Seventeenth-century baroque culture is, as Harbison puts it, “consistently remarkable for the value it places on subjective response, aiming to stir the spectator’s emotions actively,” but it also uses forms which ask us to make a second move, to step back and consider the way we have been stirred.<sup>18</sup> The baroque emphasis on moving its spectator, to amaze and astonish and to persuade “extra-rationally” (Maravall’s term), makes it a distant kin to other instrumental forms—to political rhetoric and religious proselytising, but also to erotic



art and the postures of horror and the gothic, as well as to advertising and propaganda. This is perhaps why the different forms seem, in baroque works like those of Rubens, Caravaggio and Bernini, to flow together indissolubly.

Importantly, though, the baroque also intersects with the Enlightenment projects of scientific and rational systematising, and many of its works, like the Bernini examined below, dramatise a sensual response working in tandem with a more calculatedly intellectual mode of engagement. Just as the seventeenth-century poetic conceit is a rhetorical figure which places the poet's skill in front of us through a comparison whose ingenuity is more immediately alluring than its aptness, George C. Bauer tells us that the 1676 audience for Bernini's sculpture marvelled both at the "the exact design, grace, proportion" but also at "the ease of the execution and the chisel used in such a way that one could believe it had been cutting wax instead of marble."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the characteristic move of twentieth-century self-conscious fiction is one which, like Dorothy in Oz, asks us to split our gaze between the diegesis and the mechanisms behind the illusion. As their concern with illusion, doubling and resemblances suggests, part of what these forms share is a mode of persuasion that attempts to work on us twice.

### 3.

This doubled persuasion is made literal in the case of Bernini's sculpture of St. Teresa (1645-1652), in the Cornaro Chapel of the Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. The figures and their background represent a vision which the Spanish Carmelite nun Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) describes in terms of an intense physical ravishment. She writes:

God willed that I should see, at my left side, an angel in bodily form [...] He was not very big, but very beautiful; his resplendent face indicated that he

belonged to that Order of the celestial hierarchy known as Seraphim, whose faces seem to burn with fire. [...] He held a long javelin of gold, with an iron tip which had a flame coming out of it. Suddenly, he pierced me to the inmost fibre of my being with it and it seemed to me that, as he drew it out, he dragged me with it; but I felt entirely consumed by the love of God.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that both in the sculpture and in Teresa's description the desires of the baroque are promiscuously standing in for each other. The seraph doesn't look less like the carrier of God's love than a smirking Eros. The conceit works to grab our attention but also, by making literal Teresa's own metaphors of the body in a traditionally bodiless context, it throws into question the chastity of the nun's rapture, or, at the very least, the decorum of Bernini's analogy. There is a good summing up of the trouble caused by this resemblance in Tom Hayes' article, and a long heritage of debate taking in contributions by Stendhal and Jacob Burckhardt as well as the canonical interpretation by Wittkower and a rather more wry one from Harbison.<sup>21</sup> For that reason, what I'm interested in here is not so much this well-rehearsed interpretive debate, but a second question about Bernini's St. Teresa and a second way of looking at the sculpture.

Pulling focus out into the Cornaro Chapel as a whole gives us a new field of illusion, with its own set of interpretive problems. (The Cornaro Chapel as a whole engulfs the field of vision to such an extent that it is impossible to get its salient features into the single two-dimensional space of a photograph; many of the earliest prints used forced perspective to get everything in.) As well as the hidden window shedding yellow light on the sculpture (Bernini's design) there is a painted ceiling depicting the heavenly realms, as well as an inlaid floor. Moving out to the left and right hand sides of the chapel we encounter a series of busts of the chapel's sponsors, the Cornaro family, behind a pair of *prie-dieux* which strongly resemble theatre

boxes. The puzzle here is that, like the seraph, they don't seem to be paying quite enough attention.

Ecclesiastical art of the baroque period, Wittkower writes, often shows the saints “in a state of devotion and ecstasy, and in this exalted frame of mind they may see visions to which the beholder becomes a party.”<sup>22</sup> This accords with the Council of Trent's recommendations for religious art in 1563 that religious imagery should evoke a mystical empathy, in a similar way to the meditations on visions of hell, Jesus, and the Passion, which, in Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, were designed to work on the senses to transport the devotee. However, including these distracted figures in the Chapel at the altitude of theatre boxes might be thought of as the equivalent to the illusion-breaking pan from a stage drama to its audience. Bernini's decision to show one of the Cornaro fathers reading a book in the presence of divine rapture does nothing to place us unselfconsciously in the space of the miracle. Wittkower rationalises this realistically, arguing that “when standing on the central axis opposite the group of St. Teresa, it becomes apparent that the chapel is too shallow for the members of the Cornaro family to see the miracle on the altar,” and it is “for that reason Bernini has shown them arguing, reading and pondering, certainly about what they know is happening on the altar, but which is hidden from their eyes.”<sup>23</sup> He argues that interpretations of impious theatricality are modish and anachronistic, based on our own agnostic misreading of the Grand Style.<sup>24</sup> If one is to try and retain “those qualities of deep and sincere religious feeling,” which Wittkower argues are the most characteristic aspect of the high baroque, then this second distracted form of spectatorship must also be considered part of the same experience as the more rapt wonder of St. Teresa's devotional audience.<sup>25</sup> What Bernini might be said to give us here is the representation of two forms of attention,

the absorbed one of the kneeling meditant in front of St. Teresa, and the more detached one of the Cornaros.

If, following Wittkower, we take the second distracted form of attention as a discursive one where the Cornaros discuss and read around the vision, an analogy can be made with a certain distanced, critical way of seeing. This kind of doubling of the audience isn't entirely anachronistic either; intriguingly, Robert Petersson tells of Bernini's production for the pre-Lenten Carnival of 1637 of an event called *The Comedy of Two Theatres*, in which, it is said, "the spectators watched not the performance but a reflection of themselves watching."<sup>26</sup> It is also by tracing the history of a similarly split perspective that Ndalianis argues that twentieth-century scientific and technological fictions form a contemporary neobaroque. The fascination with science in the Enlightenment period is also a fascination with the sciences of representation, of perspective, lenses and technique, and, Ndalianis argues, part of the wonder in the baroque is at its technical mastery, both for the new techniques that turned perspectival painting into astonishing illusion, and for the hand behind the depiction. In her discussion of *quadratura* Ingrid Sjöström also stresses this twofold response: "the illusion has the double aim of first momentarily deceiving the observer and then, after the truth has been revealed, of amusing, surprising and impressing him."<sup>27</sup> As early as Pozzo's 1693 perspectival treatise, Ndalianis says, audiences were educated into the double pleasures of both falling into an illusion and taking a more detached stance whereby they considered their own spectatorship and marvelled at the construction of the spectacle before them. In fact, Pozzo states that the distortions which arise when the spectator moves away from the ideal perspectival point of view "should in no way be regarded as errors or disadvantages; on the contrary, they constitute a positive factor," because breaking the illusion allows the

spectator to see the problems which the painter had to overcome to create it in the first place.<sup>28</sup>

From a baroque perspective, then, this double address is not primarily an alienation effect—rather, a case of these forms highlighting their own virtuosity for an enthralled and “knowing” audience. Tracing a path via Tom Gunning’s conception of pre-1907 cinema as a “cinema of attractions,” Ndalians argues that in spectacle film both these addresses, the formal and the diegetic, work towards the audience’s engagement and dazzlement. Just as the reactions of the Cornaro family (by their very presence) designate Bernini’s spectacle of hidden lights, floating saints and illusionary sky as remarkable, consumption of production values and technology is part of the audience’s pleasure in much of Hollywood blockbuster cinema. “A relationship is sealed between representation and spectator, one intent on leaving the spectator in a state of wonder both at the ‘hyperrealistic’ status of the representation, and at the skill and technical mastery that lies behind the construction of the represented spectacle.”<sup>29</sup>

What is remarkable in spectacle cinema is not only the audience’s ability to blend and imaginatively inhabit different media and spatial realms, but to do it in an environment so patently artificial. The kinds of science fiction films Ndalians focuses on are so far from experience they create a doubled ontology—the spectacular surface of the text announces itself as illusion *and* diegesis. Like the seventeenth century *trompe l’oeil*, the impression it makes depends upon us simultaneously reading it as diegetically plausible *and* dazzlingly artificial. This kind of split vision is what also substantiates Paz’s suggestion that there are links between modernist *avant-garde* movements and baroque mannerism. Baroque style splits, he argues, between a high form and a transitional mannerist form. The two modes are entwined in most works—

distinction is a matter of ratio rather than choice—and this, I would argue, gives us something like the double address of St. Teresa. The first mannerist mode concentrates on concepts and conceits, and is “paradoxical, philosophising, and markedly intellectual,” whilst the second, “metaphorical, pictorial and conspicuously aesthetic” mode privileges images and objects of sight.<sup>30</sup> Metaphorically, the modes of reading image or text would move between the poles of the swooning St. Teresa and her wry, aloof, seraph.

Paz argues that the connection between modernist *avant-gardes* and the Spanish baroque is made possible, despite their different backgrounds and traditions, because both are formalisms—in my terms, the “distracted” look is towards the mechanisms which generate the text. Robert Alter’s comparison in *Partial Magic* of seventeenth-century self-conscious fiction with twentieth-century modes suggests a similar thing; self-conscious fiction in *both* historical variants simultaneously acknowledges words are words, whilst still allowing them to set up an illusion.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the opulence of baroque style is a constant reminder of its materiality. Roman Baroque does the work of glorifying the Catholic Church several times over: aesthetically, financially and culturally.

One of the many interesting things here, and a familiar feeling to readers of Borges and Nabokov in particular, is the way that we, as readers and spectators, linger on, even after our fictional belief is unsettled. Our “second sight” is a stoic tenacity, the doubled engagement of readers or viewers who do *not* abandon the text at the moment their attention is brought out of the diegesis, but who shift their attention to the mechanisms that produced the fictional world, and to the form of that world. This shift into dis-illusionment isn’t quite the feeling of betrayal Christopher Nash suggests is part of postmodern theory, but instead, it is a second mode of fascination, and

perhaps even a mode of collusion.<sup>32</sup> As Maravall writes of the seventeenth century, the fluid boundaries between actor and spectator, reality and irreality, serve “not to make the disillusioned individual abandon the world, but rather to teach him or her how to adapt to it.”<sup>33</sup> In some ways, this might be taken as a description of how critical readers can remain fascinated with a work after the initial rapture, or conversely, engage with a text that they have never been convinced by. In narrative forms, or those plastic forms (like the Cornaro Chapel) that use such a large space they force us to consume them over time, minute by minute, one may move between the pull of the diegesis and a connoisseurship or criticism of production—and repeated readings of the same text might encourage this shift. Self-conscious fiction, I would suggest, encourages it even more.

It’s perhaps then not coincidental that science fiction, spectacle cinema, and baroque art enter into both cultic and camp histories, and that self-conscious fiction has been so popular in the university. The dual mode of fascination that I have been arguing for encourages this re-visiting and re-valuing; indeed, Nabokov suggests that “curiously enough, one cannot read a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader. [...] The very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation.”<sup>34</sup> Because broadly realist forms still constitute the aesthetic norm, there is a sense here that aesthetic virtuosity might constitute a form of self-reflexivity, even when the author or spectator isn’t obviously doubled; characteristically, Nabokov turns the usual patterns on their head to suggest that the diegetic illusion is the distraction.

In self-reflexive fiction especially, there is a sense that part of the reader’s persistence after dis-illusion is an acceptance of the persuasive nature of an illusion,

but on a rhetorically more equal footing than in the Classical “top-down” model. Sarduy asserts that the Latin American neobaroque pits its models of authorship against the official one, in order to expose the artificiality of the authoritarian order. For Sarduy’s authors, quotation from a colonising culture, that of the Spanish, is denaturalised in a local Cuban inflection. Set within culture, the disclosure of power within their texts is a disclosure of manipulation, an opening-up of reality for re-composition. Resemblance acts as subversion; it might be said to turn the baroque upside-down and reflect its disillusioning power back against the cultural background. In this respect, the literary baroque, like *trompe l’oeil*, seeks a deliberate kind of rhetorical failure—it goes so far in artifice that it deliberately betrays itself. Of course, in a set of texts that thematise authorship and belief—and here I would include self-reflexive moments in Cervantes, Nabokov, Rushdie, Pynchon and Fowles—this failure is a deliberate and spectacular one. The mannerist principles of “virtuosity of execution,” “highly decorative surface qualities,” “compositional decentralisation and spatial and colouristic complexities,” and “deliberate physical and psychic ambiguities” that Wittkower suggests could not answer to the artistic requirements of the Counter-Reformation, because they “lacked clarity, realism, and emotional intensity,” are those that produce the allure of self-conscious fiction.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.

As most commentators point out, Bernini’s concentration on the whole of a decorative space, the whole chapel, was prefigured by his illusionistic theatre designs that sought to engulf and entrance the spectator. Harbison tells of productions with “such expensive and startling ephemera” as “mechanical devices which simulated storms at sea, heroes raised or gods lowered from heaven in firework-like explosions,” and



brought “real fires and floods” on stage, and Robert Petersson relates the on-stage destruction of purpose-built buildings.<sup>36</sup> In such versions of total theatre and also in his designs for religious spaces, the spheres of the spectacle and the spectator’s space are blended together, to the point that, in the theatre, “the fire which Bernini arranged on the stage during the performance of one of his comedies [...] provoked a stampede of the audience.”<sup>37</sup>

Giovanni Careri’s analysis of the compound space of *St. Teresa* rests upon the idea of the *bel composto*, which, in its turn, provides the centre for Angela Ndalianis’ analysis of science-fiction films, theme-park rides and video games in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*. The *bel composto* is a concept introduced by Bernini’s first biographer, Fillippo Baldinucci, when he asserts that “Bernini was the first to attempt to unite architecture with sculpture and painting in such a manner that together they make a beautiful whole [*bel composto*].”<sup>38</sup> Ndalianis argues that this blending of space is part of the baroque bequest to spectacle cinema. In cinema, she argues, renaissance perspective, where viewers align themselves with a static centre on the canvas, is replaced by the space of the *bel composto*, where sound, widescreen and effects-sequences make a new space, centred on the spectator and joined together by montage into the diffused space of a three-dimensional whole. As with many of the proponents of the new baroque, she makes connections with Leibniz’s philosophy through *The Fold*, Deleuze’s meditation on the baroque and on *Monadology*. The Baroque, in Deleuze’s formulation, “is defined as the fold that goes out to infinity.”<sup>39</sup> Read in this context, Deleuze effectively extends the *bel composto* out into the surface of the universe and infinitely deep into its crevices and pleats. (And here Wölfflin’s concerns about desire and the baroque do seem well founded—

looked at as a unified surface the barely-contained desire in the form and content of Bernini's *Teresa* would ebb out to eroticise its whole environment.)

Ndalianis makes much of the constraints broken by a cinema which attempts, like Bernini's sculpture, to meld together the space between fictional and real worlds, and which takes the active spectator as its constantly moving centre. Wölfflin's conception of baroque artificialities as the "symptoms" of a "decay" that brought about the "disintegration of the Renaissance" are triumphantly appropriated in opposition to a closed, authoritarian Classicist paradigm in a different way by Ndalianis, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Omar Calabrese and Umberto Eco.<sup>40</sup> These readers emphasise the libertarian resonances of the open text, that text which, in dissolving into its parts, frees us from a single, linear reading and sets us loose among a multiplicity of borrowed and subverted words. Eco, for example, notes the multiple focal points of many baroque works, and characterises the historical baroque as a time of defiance where, "for the first time, man opts out of the canon of authorised responses and finds that he is faced (both in art and in science) by a world in a fluid state which requires corresponding creativity on his part."<sup>41</sup> Calabrese, perhaps most succinctly, posits what is at stake in this conceptualisation. His neobaroque is "a search for, and valorisation of, forms that display a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favour of instability, polydimensionality, and change."<sup>42</sup>

On the level of cultural forms this fluid, centreless space translates into multimedia, architectonic productions like Bernini's chapel, or into the combined space of an opera. Each art tends to be "prolonged into the next art, which exceeds the one before," Deleuze suggests.<sup>43</sup> This, as Ndalianis points out, translates rather well into the enveloping space and sound of a spectacle film like *Star Wars*, but also into its production in a world of sequels, video-game tie-ins, theme-park rides, self-referential

jokes, and fetishised merchandise. However, the question here is whether an industrial and aesthetic configuration, that bears such a resemblance to a model where a controlling authority is everywhere, merely exchanges one system of obvious authority for another more insidious one. As Maravall's and Argan's analyses suggest, the evocation of the baroque is not just the joyful re-assertion of an entitlement to imaginative freedom, it also brings with it other, more disconcerting modes of authority. The baroque, as Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque* emphasises, comes out of the renaissance as the first modern social form, what he calls the first "guided culture"—mass, urban, and, despite the seeming flamboyance of the art, conservative. There are clearly significant repercussions, Ndalianis arguing that contemporary mass-market cinema borrows the visual devices of a period that is widely recognised as absolutist, both politically and religiously. "Indisputably," she writes,

the "monarchical" and conglomerate glorification that underlies the imagery of illusionistic paintings such as the S. Ignazio Ceiling (which stresses the glorification of the Jesuit leader and his movement), Cortona's Barberini Ceiling painting (which is a monument to the godliness of the Barberini), or Lucas's *Star Wars* and Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (which are testimonies to the successful establishment of Lucas's effects company *ILM*) has strong ideological connotations.<sup>44</sup>

Tantalisingly, though, the book leaves this thread dangling. What follows here, by way of a conclusion, is an effort to begin confronting these questions about ideology and baroque form by looking at the way that this double address problematises notions of authorship and consumption.

## 5.

Viewing *St. Teresa* as both a call to religious surrender and a virtuoso *bel composto* from the studio of Bernini complicates considerably the idea of a single institutional

Catholic authority. Documents show that the design and the main sculpture is by Bernini's hand, as is the bust of the Cornaro who was still alive to pay for the sculpture, but the other figures were studio pieces. Still, the signature of design suggests we read it as a Bernini, just as its presence in a church, in Rome, suggests we read it as Catholic.

How much of this so-called "excess" is bound up with market-place conditions is a moot point. Part of the opulence of the baroque, like that of the Hollywood spectacle cinema, comes from this mass urban market; in a small feudal community one would know authority without such obvious markers. Paz proposes that the new emphasis on individual style rather than content in the seventeenth century was partly as a consequence of patronage: "as soon as collectors and cognoscenti appreciated the artist's personality more than the subject of his works, *manner* predominated."<sup>45</sup> The number of generic conventions and subjects for the visual arts must have exacerbated mannerism—as with the current marketing of most blockbuster movies as *auteur* pieces, a strongly signed style allows a consumer to sort between resemblances. Given the institutional remit to dazzle, in both Hollywood and Counter-Reformation contexts, manner seems to be as much a function of the market-place as it is of individuality. What a return to the baroque brings with it here is a way of avoiding the simplistic Romantic paradigm of the author as garretted genius. As products of groups and institutions, this god-like singularity never ranges true for film or architecture anyway, nor is it terribly helpful for reading literature by the likes of Borges or Eco, who stress how language has a dual existence both as an individual, internalised cypher and a socially and historically determined construct.

Perversely, there is also a sense that the excesses of baroque might go beyond an easily anchored authorship; this extreme attention to the materiality of construction

means that its products are easily dandified by a reader with mischievous intent, taken out of context and prized for the fragment, the disembodied surface, and the beautiful fetish piece. In narrative forms this kind of Barthesian bliss is far more difficult to maintain, unless one makes a constant effort to give up the pleasures of linguistic sense for a more abstract, atomised pleasure—the sentence tends to win against the word. In the case of Bernini’s *Teresa*, Bauer tells us that “to its countless admirers, the sculpture was a brilliant and proper realisation of the transport of Divine Love;” however, the richness and durability of its material existence also makes plausible Harbison’s more wry, worldly reading of the sculpture as a glorification of earthly riches, lusciously gaudy, a “vulgar and distracting luxury.”<sup>46</sup> The beauty of the “buttery cream” marble seems a stronger suggestion, historically, than the magnificence of the Catholic Church, and it seems that the commissioning Popes understood this, because many of the marbles for Counter-Reformation pieces were removed from Classical, pagan sites.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the virtuosity of the historical baroque is in a grand religious mode, largely alien to a twentieth-century spectator, further increases the space for subversive readings. It is this fall from the heights of devotion that allows for the camp emphasis on excess that Calloway’s Art Nouveau and Derek Jarman’s *Caravaggio* read in the baroque, but also for the wider re-appropriation of baroque tropes by magic realist fiction, where the text repeatedly rehearses this balance on the edge of fictional belief.

Still, when narrative is allowed to do its work, there is a degree to which those novels that come out of the self-conscious tradition of *Don Quixote*, Fielding and Sterne might be said to act out an “argument by design” for the author-god. In something like Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, or John Fowles’ *Magus*, the existence of a controlling author-god is “proved” with each coherent pattern within their glittering

surfaces, whilst the enigmas of the text send the reader repeatedly back into their substance to find other parts of the design, and other affirmations of an over-arching virtuosity. The thematisation of magicians, storytellers and tricksters, as well as the kinds of play with doubled forms I spoke of in the first section of this paper, serve to remind us of this teleology. These baroque and neobaroque texts aren't texts without authority as much as ones where we participate in noticing and experiencing authorship in both form and content.

One of the problems with reading style as a signature of authority is the very diffusion lauded by those who read the centreless, monadic model as liberating. The situation is similar to the one faced by Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, a work which might be thought of as exemplifying Pynchon's version of the dissonant, exuberant, baroque style. All of the paths which Oedipa takes to uncover the mystery of the Tristero, a possibly chimerical communication network for the disinherited, lead back to something else owned or controlled by the multi-national, possibly even multi-ontological, companies of her late boyfriend, Pierce Inverarity. As Oedipa and the reader pick their way through puns, clues and echoes, the book presents us with multiple points of origin, modelling the teleological argument for God, for Inverarity, and for Pynchon. Famously, no single solution ever confirms itself to the reader of *The Crying of Lot 49*, which leaves us with three other alternatives, each of which is a kind monism—this is Oedipa's world, spun together out of her own desire and fear, or it is Pierce's elaborate hoax, or, the metafictional answer, that this is Pynchon's world. As with a Nabokovian world (and Nabokov was one of Pynchon's lecturers at Cornell) the tantalising end of the novel seems to suggest that there is something to be revealed; by withholding the mystery from us it sends us back to the text as a tissue of clues. Pynchon's liberal use of Pentecostal analogies suggests the author-god re-

semblance, just as it thematises the failure of revelation. In all cases, each “coincidence” works as a continual confirmation of the god-like designer of that system. On a second reading, Pynchon’s long, pun-loaded sentences allow for the break in seriality it takes to read the text as cypher, and the reader ends up somewhere between the situation of the band, the Paranoids, and confused detective, Oedipa. As with the seventeenth century’s penchant for incomplete forms, the open text asks the reader to internalise and assist the logic of the plot—to add their will to the formal will of the text.<sup>48</sup>

The problem dramatised by Pynchon’s text is partly about the status of choice: a plenitude that is impressed on us “from above” presents us with only a relative freedom, and it seems significant that the seventeenth-century models for the folded world so highly prized by the neobaroque theorists were brought to fruition by Spinoza and Leibniz, both profoundly religious men. The endless space of neobaroque aesthetics will also work as an allegory for (and, at the point of consumption, a product of) global capitalism, a centreless power that, through sheer diffusion, evaporates as soon as an attempt is made to isolate any kind of formal or stylistic manifestation. Not only is this infinitely diffused power the problem of consumption when art, cinema and literature are capitalist forms, but it is also the problem of authorship, affect, and audience within those forms. The model of authority for both seventeenth- and twentieth-century culture is one of persuasion rather than mandate, with persuasion ultimately the more effective because the will of the baroque provokes our desire from within, and not just emotionally but intellectually too.<sup>49</sup>

The structure which might be felt by a reader of Nabokov’s *Ada* or *Pale Fire* as a fascinating puzzle becomes paranoid fiction for a reader of Pynchon and a

frustrating labyrinth for the reader of Fowles' *Magus*. As with the baroque figures I began with, the balance on the edge of illusion allows us a feeling for virtuosity, but also for sophistry and deception—the uneasy feeling that the text of clues, enigmas and infinite authorial pattern might just be one which bullies us too much. On the other hand, though, neither can these plots be taken as unequivocally fiendish. Theoretically, this omnipresent authority isn't a problem in Bernini's Catholic model—the devotee wills obedience and the reassurance of authority is a comforting one. Nor is it necessarily a problem in the darkness of the cinema, or under the reading lamp, where our purchase of the whole experience at least suggests our desire to be persuaded into illusion. And, if our purchase of a ticket or book offers a kind of consent to enter into a rhetorical relationship, it does not guarantee our attention, or our agreement—"obedience" in this mode can soon be revoked.

As the Latin American neobaroque suggests, within culture the manipulations of illusion performed by self-reflexive texts can work subversively, to remind the reader of the persuasive intent of all cultural communication. Within their texts, however, the paradigm comes closer to monism—the author is everywhere and nowhere, and the self-conscious author grabs both believing and disbelieving forms of our attention. Despite the potential for subversion, self-reflexive forms aren't inherently liberating. If the other content of the text is one which stresses the pleasures of both absorbed and distracted forms of fascination, then a self-reflexivity like Nabokov's sensuous formalism, or Bernini's, or that of a mass-market spectacle such as *Star Wars* or the *Matrix*, might be thought of as doubly deist. The multiple centres of these modes of engagement are evidence of a double fascination whereby aesthetic authority seems to exist, whether you believe its illusions or not.



What a baroque aesthetics of “second sight” argues is that neither centred nor centre-less model is innocent, and, as in the rhetorical model the seventeenth century prized so highly, no authorship comes without the associated problem of power. Even a narrative and visual model that opens itself up to create the spectator as centre does not destroy authority; the devil is preserved in the detail, and even when the illusion of a second universe has disappeared, we still linger to see how it was done. The openness of a work to multiple readings only makes the enigma more durable. Fiction that announces its own fictionality, sculpture that announces its own craft, cinema that announces its own virtuosity, all solicit our participation as much as affective and realistic modes solicit the suspension of our disbelief, and the baroque’s use of both illusory and dis-illusory modes emphasises this double fascination.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Calloway, *Baroque Baroque: The Culture of Excess* (London: Phaidon, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Wollen, “Baroque and Neo-Baroque in the Age of Specacle” (*Point of Contact* 3, 1993), 9-21; Angela Ndaliansi, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Severo Sarduy, “Baroque and Neobaroque” in Cesar Fernandez Moreno, ed., *Latin America in Its Literature* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 115.

<sup>4</sup> John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota, 1993); Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1984), 2. In this longer view, which I share but unfortunately don’t have space to fully explore here, the history of post-modernity would not be just the negotiations of canonical modernism, but the repercussions of the colonial enterprises and the mass religious and cultural forms of Early Modernism. Octavio Paz’ connection of the Spanish baroque with the Anglo-American avant-garde through their common formalism would not just motivate the Argentinean Borges’ citation of the Spanish Cervantes, or Eliot’s American citation of the clergyman John Donne or the Colonial overseer Spenser, it would give real pertinence to the question of why the twentieth century chooses so often to speak through the seventeenth.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 57.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

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- <sup>7</sup> José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). Originally published as *La cultura del Barroco*, 1975.
- <sup>8</sup> Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2004), 141.
- <sup>9</sup> Foucault, 56.
- <sup>10</sup> Lambert, 139.
- <sup>11</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Preface to the 1954 Edition," *A Universal History of Iniquity* (London: Penguin, 2001), 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 16.
- <sup>13</sup> This move into rhetoricity is not just a self-reflexivity, but a kind of contagion of the grand baroque style. Lambert begins his book on the baroque by rehearsing Walter Benjamin's worries, confided to Scholem in 1924 as he was writing *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, his book on the baroque, "it is quite characteristic of baroque style that anyone who stops thinking rigorously while studying it immediately slips into a hysterical imitation of it" (n. pag.). Benjamin's own style never again was as dense as it is in this early work, and certainly, Harbison has suggested that Deleuze is stylistically baroque (Harbison, 219), and Maurice Blanchot has called Foucault's style "grand baroque" (Maurice Blanchot and Michel Foucault, *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone, 1990), 64). I would also suggest that Christine Buci-Glucksmann's *Baroque Reason* (London: Sage, 1994) uses a baroque rhetoric, and that Harbison and Lambert's witty, aphoristic styles owe much to their immersion in the period.
- <sup>14</sup> Giulio Carlo Argan, *The Baroque Age* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).
- <sup>15</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon, (London: Collins, 1984), 62.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 56.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), viii.
- <sup>19</sup> For the rhetorical figure of the conceit see Helen Gardner's introduction to Gardner, ed., *The Metaphysical Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 19; George C. Bauer, ed., *Bernini in Perspective* (New York: Spectrum, 1976), 9.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted by Murray in Wölfflin, 8.
- <sup>21</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 29-30; Harbison, 23.
- <sup>22</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600 to 1750*, (London: New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Wittkower, *Bernini*, 30.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>26</sup> Robert Torsten Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy: Teresa, Bernini, and Crashaw* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 93.

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- <sup>27</sup> Quoted by Ndalianis, 165.
- <sup>28</sup> Sjöström quoted by Ndalianis, 165.
- <sup>29</sup> Ndalianis, 209.
- <sup>30</sup> Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana, or, the Traps of Faith*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1988), 50.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Nash, Christopher, *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 77.
- <sup>33</sup> Maravall, 194.
- <sup>34</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (London: Harvest Books, 1982), 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Wittkower, *Art and Architecture*, 22.
- <sup>36</sup> Harbison, 10; Petersson, 93.
- <sup>37</sup> Wittkower, *Bernini*, 33.
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted by Giovanni Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love, the Art of Devotion*, trans. Linda Lappin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 121.
- <sup>40</sup> Wölfflin, n. pag.
- <sup>41</sup> Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work," in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 52.
- <sup>42</sup> Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, trans. Charles Lambert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xxi.
- <sup>43</sup> Deleuze, 123.
- <sup>44</sup> Ndalianis, 188.
- <sup>45</sup> Paz, 52.
- <sup>46</sup> Bauer, 8; Harbison, 23.
- <sup>47</sup> Harbison, 23.
- <sup>48</sup> See Maravall ch 8; Wölfflin 63.
- <sup>49</sup> Maravall 75; Argan, 20.