

BAROQUE REASON

The Aesthetics of Modernity

Christine Buci-Glucksmann

Translated by Patrick Camiller

With an Introduction by
Bryan S. Turner

CONTENTS

Introduction: <i>Bryan S. Turner</i>	1
Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity	37
Part One An Archaeology of Modernity: Angelus Novus	41
1 Angelic Space: <i>Angelus Novus</i> , an Overwhelming Picture	53
2 Baroque Space: <i>Trauerspiel</i> : Allegory as Origin	63
3 Baudelairean Space: A Modern Baroque	74
4 The Space of Writing: The Angel and the 'Scene' of Writing: In the 'Primeval Forest' (<i>Urwald</i>)	82
Part Two The Utopia of the Feminine: Benjamin's Trajectory. 2	91
5 Catastrophist Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of Modernity	97
6 Anthropological Utopia, or The 'Heroines' of Modernity	106
7 Transgressive Utopia: 'Image Frontiers' of Writing and History	110
8 Appendix: Viennese Figures of Otherness: Femininity and Jewishness	115
Part Three Baroque Reason	125
9 An Aesthetics of Otherness	129
10 Salome, or The Baroque Scenography of Desire	144
11 The Stage of the Modern and the Look of Medusa	163
Index	175



SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

Imagine a city with several entrances, a labyrinthine proliferation of squares, crossroads, thoroughfares and side streets, a kind of multibody of the past and memory. In short a baroque town: Rome, Vienna, perhaps Mexico City. Here a *flâneur* is eagerly seeking out the new and the strange scale-games played with reality and unreality. In this theatre the traveller with no homeland and no source of rest meets a venerable old man. 'Who are you?' he asks. 'I am disillusion' (*Yo soy el desengaño*) comes the reply. The man takes him on a tour of this phantasmal city with a thousand faces. They come to a main street, nameless and without end, inhabited by a thousand figures: the Street of Hypocrisy. And there they find a beautiful woman who leaves hearts filled with sighing and desire, a gentle face of snow and roses wrapped in her own aura – the very object of love. The master of disillusion then reveals all: her teeth have been artificially whitened, her hair dyed, her face skilfully made up, and behind the appearances age and death are doing their work. Everywhere in this street of the mighty and beautiful, the world is upside down. Madame Fashion and Madame Death are on the prowl. It must be turned the right side up again: to baffle all the frontiers of the real and unreal, belief and knowledge, world and theatre; to see the world from within.

Such is the great allegory that Quevedo deploys in one of his *Sueños: El mundo por de dentro* ('The World from Within').¹ Such too might be the thoroughly Baudelairean city-allegory, woman-allegory of this book on baroque reason. Several entrances, several facets, several layers of writing:² but always the same stage, the same voyage of modernity in its paradoxes and ambivalences. Our voyage is mainly devoted to the work of Walter Benjamin, which continually refers us elsewhere: to the nineteenth century of Baudelaire and Salome, to the great crisis cultures of Musil, Weininger or Klee, to that baroque region, particularly evident in Barthes or Lacan, which has never ceased to haunt our present age. For baroque reason, with its theatricization of existence and its logic of ambivalence, is not merely another reason within modernity. Above all it is the *Reason of the Other*, of its overbrimming excess. With its help we may perhaps try to see the world *por de dentro*.

Notes

1. For an English translation, by Wallace Woolsey, see *Dreams*, New York: Barron's Educational Series 1976.
2. A first version of Part One appeared as 'Une archéologie du moderne: *Angelus*

28. Letter to Ellen Delp, 27 October 1915, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Letters 1902–1926*, London: Quartet 1988, p. 263.
29. Letter postmarked 13 November 1925, in *ibid.*, p. 395.
30. All quotations from Klee are here translated from the French text in *Écrits sur l'art*, vol. 1, Paris: Dessain et Topra 1973. *Trans. note.*
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 76. On Klee's intermediate world, see the analysis of Jean-François Lyotard in *Discours-Figure*, Paris: Klincksieck 1971, pp. 224ff: 'The problematic . . . is that of an intermediate world, of another possible nature which prolongs creation and makes visible that which is not.'
32. See Richard Alewyn, ed., *Deutsche Barockforschung. Dokumentation einer Epoche*, Cologne 1965.
33. See the discussion of Lacan's decomposition of 'étrange' into 'être-ange', on p. 43 above.

2

BAROQUE SPACE

Trauerspiel: Allegory as Origin

Unlike Christianity and the conservative Judaism of the Book, the mystical-messianic Jewish culture which circulated from 1900 to 1920 throughout Central Europe and the German-language area always referred to a history marked by radical insecurity, an element of instability and catastrophe, a consciousness of rupture and utopianism.¹ As opposed to Christianity, which inscribes redemption within a historical directionality, Jewish messianism invariably conceives of the emergence from the state of exile and oppression – redemption – as a tireless waiting for messianic fulfilment.² There is an infinite separation between present time (*olam hazeh*) and time to come (*olam haba*), which can come to pass only from a series of catastrophes (revolutions, wars, famines . . .). The 'totally new' is as unpredictable as it is sudden. As Scholem writes: 'Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature – this cannot be sufficiently emphasized – a theory of *catastrophe*', of 'the cataclysmic element in the transition from every historical present to the Messianic future'.³

Jewish messianism, then, is characterized by the lack of any idea of historical progress. In its pessimistic-critical vision of reality, the coming of the Messiah, redemption or – in the terms of Lurianic kabbalism – 'restitution of the world' create an unbridgeable gulf between the history of the oppression of the Jewish people and the history of its messianic freedom. From the one to the other, there can only be a qualitative leap, a 'destructive principle' as Benjamin described it.

This central aspect of historical discontinuity, with its utopianism that served as a transition for numerous revolutionary intellectuals in the 1920s (including Ernst Bloch), was initially inserted within a cultural context common to the whole Jewish intelligentsia of Mitteleuropa, from Vienna to Prague, Budapest or Berlin. It was an explosive climate in which neo-romantic critique of 'the illusions of progress' fused with the work of Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Strindberg who influenced the young Benjamin.⁴

Such messianism mostly went together with an 'anarchist' or even nihilist politics which had reached its peak in certain heresies of the seventeenth century, particularly the Sabbatian movement, for which the arrival of messianic time was a question of the present. Not only did Sabbatai Zevi lift prohibitions, reject anti-female taboos and introduce free sexuality: 'Eve could have married several men'; he even proclaimed: 'Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who permittest the forbidden', and preached that 'violation of the Torah has become its fulfilment'.⁵

We find in Benjamin's articles of the twenties on violence the same continual passing between Jewish messianism, centred on the idea of catastrophic rupture, and a 'metaphysical', anti-state 'anarchism' close to Sorel, with an incipient train of thought which borrowed from Carl Schmitt's early analysis of the political as 'sovereignty that decides in states of emergency'. This vocabulary impregnated *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, as it would much later the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. We should be clear, however, that for Benjamin 'the political' was always over-determined and never had an autonomous existence. It was deployed in a network of metaphors and myths, in a plurality of languages which held together its extreme moments of violence and the 'complementary world' of theology, real history and history in its image and its imaginary.

This ascent to the extreme limits first came into play in 'Critique of Violence' and 'Theologico-Political Fragment'. In opposition to the major debates of the time, which treated the political as a rational juridical form (Weber) or an ideal norm (Kelsen), Benjamin reinvested a terrain that was also Freud's – the terrain of 'classical' philosophy and its *primal*, inexorable, state-channelled violence. In such a space, there is room only for an infinitely repeated cycle of 'executive' violence which makes and preserves the law and periodically revives its own origin in the archaic violence of nature, mythical violence thrusting itself forward as 'fate'. Hence the never resolved antinomy of natural and positive law: 'Natural law attempts, by the justness of the ends, to "justify" the means, positive law to "guarantee" the justness of the ends through the justification of the means.'⁶ The two meet up as they stumble over the same blind spot: 'For if positive law is blind to the absoluteness of ends, natural law is equally so to the contingency of means.'⁷ In the end both refuse to see that they are in the thrall of executive violence, the permanent excess of the state principle over legality and norms. This excess is codified and displayed with the reality of a 'right to war' and the 'harder', organized forms of police

and military violence. 'Militarism is the compulsory, universal use of violence as a means to the ends of the state.'⁸

In making visible this state unconscious of the law, Benjamin could open himself in some degree to Bolshevik and syndicalist anti-parliamentarism, even if his real sympathies lay rather with the SRs whom he considered more 'nihilist'. He was also able to take over Sorel's idea of the political 'general strike' as a symbol of messianic violence. Thus the complementary world of theology was seen as a way of breaking the cycles of violence, interrupting the flow of time and establishing justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) as a distinct form superior to law (*Recht*). Only this violence of justice could be said to be a 'purer and sovereign sphere'. 'All mythical, law-making violence, which we may call executive, is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving, administrative violence that serves it. Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred execution, may be called sovereign violence.'⁹

The word sovereign is here used in the strong sense, for the theological 'metaphor' indicates a historical gap or discontinuity which breaks the cycle of catastrophes. We should not understand this literally in terms of religious belief. Even before he began to describe himself as a materialist, Benjamin's encounter with messianic Judaism was an encounter *in and of thought*. Thus in the 'Theologico-Political Fragment', written in harmony with Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* and under the influence of Franz Rosenzweig's recently published *Star of Redemption* (1921),¹⁰ Benjamin rejected any 'political theology', any nationalist possibility of establishing a direct link between state and religion.

The Kingdom of God is not the *telos* of the historical dynamic; it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history it is not the goal, but the end. Therefore the order of the profane cannot be built up on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and therefore theocracy has no political . . . meaning.¹¹

The profane order thus has only one foundation, 'the idea of happiness', and messianic intensity can at most only indicate an impulse towards a free humanity. There is here an irreducible and sustained opposition between 'profane illumination' and 'religious illumination', an acute awareness which only real understanding of the theological can render atheist and profane. For the impulse to happiness which obsesses the religious sphere – that intensity as eternal and fleeting as the Angel – has a meaning only in relation to the excluded of history. The early Benjamin's 'individualist socialism', as he himself described it, therefore involves an *ethical* choice in favour of the 'mass of excluded ones' and a union of minds with

'those who are asleep'. In that historical slumber of anonymity lies a potential for 'revolutionary nihilism'. Between *law* and *justice*, the theological metaphor embodies a critical-utopian distance, a different idea of politics which Benjamin, influenced by Nietzsche, calls 'nihilist'.

Nevertheless, the metaphysical suspensive violence of those years, expressed in the Sorelian idea of the 'political general strike', does not yet define a critical gesture that yields philosophical interpretation. It might be seen simply in terms of a miraculous 'decision', and not of catastrophe as a process of thought and representation revealing the archaeological foundations of modernity. It is really in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, first published in 1928, that Benjamin fully comes to terms, philosophically and historically, with the relationality of Power, as 'power of the King' which always tends towards a state of emergency, and with an allegorical imaginary of a time of ruin and dislocation.

If all allegory shies away from *Weltanschauung* and focuses micrologically on the detail or the fragment – the non-intentional elements of reality as opposed to a whole that is always problematic – the philosophical method of allegory can only be the indirect one of the *Umweg*. As the 'epistemo-critical prologue' to the book explains, 'method is the indirect way: representation as the indirect way'.¹² This *Umweg*, while absorbing Husserl's critique of all historicism or psychologism and the neo-Kantian rejection of philosophy as a closed system of truth, remains no less distinct from the major philosophical positions of the epoch. Insofar as the object exists only in a fragmentary state as a non-intentional but signifying element, interpretative truth can result neither from an intentional, historical phenomenology that recaptures sedimented primal levels, nor *a fortiori* from lived experience in the sense of Dilthey's *Erlebnis*.

Since interpretative truth is actually the 'death of intention', the philosophy of modern art which began with seventeenth-century baroque drama (*Trauerspiel*) immediately situates itself outside the space of the subject, consciousness and intention, outside a philosophy of language whose aim is to break its mimetism, its *magical* aspects, its symbolism resting upon a whole network of 'non-sensory correspondences'. Thus critical language, being confronted with the different levels of signification present in every detail (a feature also of kabbalistic philosophy), seeks to construct that 'excess' past with the present. 'Truth is not a process of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it.'¹³ Interpretation grasps an enigmatic (familiar and alien) reality by building a concrete mass of constellations and significations,

where 'meaning' is never more than the effect of a machinery which condenses time and reveals it by relating it to the present. This concretion defines what Benjamin calls *Jetztzeit* or 'now-time', in contrast to that simple present of presence, the instant as *term* or *passage*, which one finds in philosophies of empty chronology where events are 'lodged' in time.

A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a *conception of the present* as 'now-time' which is shot through with chips of messianic time.¹⁴

Jetztzeit – a German term first introduced by Jean Paul¹⁵ – coincides with genuine actuality, with the past as crux of the present, with that depth of the forgotten which Benjamin tracked down in Kafka's animals and Klee's intermediate creatures. It is an active forgetting, peculiar to memory and the infinite capacity of reopening a past which the 'science of history' claimed to be over and done with. 'History is not only a science but also a form of memory. What science has fixed, memory can modify; memory can work in such a way that the unconcluded is brought to a conclusion.'¹⁶

The approach which awakens the forgotten is therefore archaeological and interpretative: its scanning of historical time bases itself upon an acute consciousness of crisis and catastrophe, making time capable of being seen and thought. This is precisely what theatre does by catalysing an essence of time which cannot be reduced to the physical, mechanistic, empty time of chronology, or to its expression in the event. 'No empirical event can entirely register the determining force of the historical form of time.' But theatre can do this: 'Historical grandeur can be represented in art only in the form of tragedy':¹⁷ and, what is more, in the form of modern tragedy which is the 'drama' of Shakespeare, Calderón and seventeenth-century German baroque *Trauerspiel*. As its name suggests (*Spiel*: playing; *Trauer*: mourning or grief), *Trauerspiel* is really a representation of grief, mourning work taken up in allegory. The generalization of the scopie drive in the Baroque carries to an extreme 'the tension between the world and transcendence'. In the metamorphoses of the body moved by suffering and pleasure, it makes visible the mortal frailty of the human figure caught in the secularization of time. Here, as in *Hamlet*, the dead become ghosts, and that is why *Trauerspiel* exhibits the 'amphibious form' of a time which is neither individual nor purely historical-universal, which is never fulfilled though it is now finite. 'The generality of its time is

not mythical but spectral. It is intimately bound up with the specific mirror-nature of the play.¹⁸ *Trauerspiel* is thus a play of representation upon representation, the generalized mirror stage, drama henceforth destined to be *spectacle*: it envelops death in a time of repetition where the mystical is nothing other than the allegory of a dream-life. 'Its events are allegorical schemas, *symbolic images* of another play.'¹⁹ The performance is divine and absent: the hero no longer dies of immortality as in Greek tragedy; he dies. Whereas in Greek tragedy the sacrifice of the hero – his act of seeing fate – permits the reconstitution of order, *Trauerspiel* represents 'a history of the sufferings of the world', a decadent, Saturnian history of mourning and melancholia.

Where there is shock – historical trauma – interpretation can therefore appear. It arises from within a historical dislocation, a contradiction unrelieved by the Concept and with no messianic resolution, a catastrophic partner standing opposite. In other words, it comes about through the impact of image and thought where politics displays itself at its most naked: in the friend–enemy antithesis, the logic of restoration (philosophy of the Counter-Reformation), the defeat of the vanquished. Any dialectical philosophical study therefore demands that due account should be taken of the privileged baroque moment of modernity. 'The baroque apotheosis is a dialectical one. It is accomplished in the movement between extremes.'²⁰ This philosophy of extremes unfolds in a cultural space marked by the political philosophies of the Counter-Reformation, with their focus on power as 'sovereign power' represented by the King. But it is also a philosophy of modernity, in Heidegger's sense of the term.²¹ As soon as the world becomes 'represented world' or image, the subject as *subjectum* affirms itself in the certainty of a centred Self, of a mastery which at bottom is *sovereign will* before it is proclaimed 'will to power'. In this Cartesian moment the *image* of history, now bereft of its mystical symbolism, makes itself visible insofar as a sovereign presides over representative playing and *decides*. The allegorical space of *Trauerspiel* thus has two sides:

The subjectum side. According to Benjamin, baroque theatre displays the political as sovereign power which decides in moments of crisis, 'states of emergency'. Taking over Carl Schmitt's conception of politics as *sovereign decision* of the state irreducible to any law or norm, Benjamin remarks that in baroque theatre 'the sovereign is the representative of history. He holds the course of history in his hand like a sceptre.'²² In this sense the Prince is the Cartesian God transposed to the field of politics. But this politics, which is sovereignty and omnipotence, develops only on the ground

of *catastrophe*, of 'a discussion of the state of emergency, and makes it the most important function of the Prince to avert this'.²³ It is a vicious circle of the political, where absolute power rises up on the basis of catastrophes, in order to avert catastrophe.

Unlike all legalist philosophies, and unlike the system of modern reason which has seen the state as the site of human emancipation – of the move from 'savagery' to 'civil' nature, 'contract' or reason – the logic of power in baroque drama encompasses its despotic-worldly reality. Here the truth of history lies no longer on the side of law, norm or regulation, but, on the contrary, in the violence of a sovereignty that asserts itself to the extreme in states of emergency in which the political relation is laid bare as one of 'war'.

The side of the imaginary. In the face of such power, the total or totalizing world of 'beautiful syntheses' breaks into fragments. It is the endless fragmentation of allegory as frozen portrait of horror, as enactment of an ultimate difference which displays a world of ruins and materially represents the dead and suffering body. Thus if it is true, as Louis Marin has shown, that against the state sovereign of the seventeenth century Thomas More's utopia wrote a *picture* into discourse – a political image of desire and happiness alien to all ownership, to anything one's own and to any appropriation – then we could say that allegory shows in the black of destructive dispossession what utopianism paints in red, or pink. It follows that state power and state reason are twofold: life instinct (desire) and death instinct (allegorical ruin).

Benjamin sets out to theorize this imaginary. In the chapter on 'Allegory and *Trauerspiel*', he polemicizes against a whole philosophy of art, dominated by the Romantic tradition, which sees the primacy of the symbol in the 'manifestation of an idea', 'the unity of the material and the transcendental object', the language of the Infinite.²⁴ In fact, with the remarkable – and much remarked – exception of Schlegel, for whom allegory was 'the centre of the play and of poetic appearance', Romanticism was 'foreign to allegorical expression in its original' (baroque or even medieval) form. It went along with classical prejudices against the baroque, and above all with that opposition between allegory and symbol which, in Benjamin's view, formed the real starting-point for the negative appreciation of allegory. According to this opposition, which goes back to Goethe's article of 1797 'On the Objects of the Figurative Arts', allegory moves from the 'abstract' general to the particular by means of directly conscious signification: it is therefore utilitarian, conventional and impoverished, since it merely embodies well-known ideas such as Justice or Truth. The symbol, on the other hand, which moves from the particular to the general, is image

(Bild): inexhaustible, infinite, intuitive thought, caught in the opaqueness and irreducibility of a signifier in which the Infinite 'becomes finite'.²⁵

With regard to the dual classical and Romantic tradition, Benjamin embarks upon a real aesthetic and gnoseological reversal by linking up with the whole baroque practice of allegory as *indirect* language. Far from being the mere embodiment of an abstract idea, allegory is 'emotional writing' which proceeds through *figuration* (Bild) and thereby suppresses all the mediations and correlations between the extremes, between figure and meaning. Allegory makes its appearance only where there are 'depths which separate visual being from meaning'.²⁶ As the language of a torn and broken world, the representation of the unrepresentable, allegory fixes dreams by laying bare reality. 'The function of baroque iconography is not so much to unveil material objects as to strip them naked.'²⁷ Through a veritable fragmentation of image, line, graphic art and even language, it breaks up reality and represents time by hieroglyphs and enigmas. It is like the angelic interpreter of the inhuman. As in Klee and Kafka, it brings on stage the reverse side of assertive humanism: 'the individual can appear here only in the form of enigma'. In contrast to medieval symbolism or the beautiful totality of future classicism, allegory anticipates the role of shock, montage and distancing in the twentieth-century avant-garde: it shatters its object and fixes reality by a kind of alienation effect similar to the logic of the unconscious. 'The deep perception of allegory transforms things and works into *writing that stirs the emotions* [*erregende Schrift*]. . . . In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune.'²⁸ With the amorphous fragment petrified like a dream, allegory offers for interpretation its own inescapable ambivalence: 'The basic characteristic of allegory . . . is ambiguity, multiplicity of meaning.'²⁹

Such writing 'that stirs the emotions' completely overflows the linguistic order, for it expresses *mourning as feeling*. But 'how can mourning as feeling find access to the linguistic order of art?'³⁰ — unless it is through the gap between the natural sound of the signifying voice and that other thing which, as we have seen, characterizes the 'cry' of modern man and the 'song' of the Angel: namely, music. In the endless *Trauerspiel* cycle of metamorphoses, natural sound tends towards music and 'the contrast between sound and signification remains something ghostly and terrible'.³¹

This fragmenting of language and representation gives rise to profane appreciation of the Now which is characteristic of allegory: that is, an unprecedented cultural shift in the relations between visible and invisible, tangible and non-tangible. The 'complemen-

tary world' of theology is certainly in evidence, but it is already subordinated to the power of the present, imprisoned by the *play* of images, confronted with a death that knows no immediate redemption: 'The mystical instant (*Nu*) becomes the 'now' (*Jetzt*).'³² Indeed, the whole of nature may be personalized but it can never become internalized: it is there, devoid of a soul, condemned to be a 'dead object' for all eternity. Hence 'melancholy immersion' is a 'bottomless pit', even if it is saved at the last moment by a supernatural force.³³ Dead bodies, ageing body, female body, corpse-body, martyr-body or ghost-bodies: life is never produced except when 'seen from the point of view of death'; as if 'the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse'.³⁴

Long before *modern* art, then, allegory testified to the preeminence of the fragment over the whole, of a destructive principle over a constructive principle, of feeling, as the excavation of an absence, over reason as domination. Only the fragment is capable of showing that the logic of bodies, feeling, life and death does not coincide with the logic of Power, nor with that of the Concept. What are represented in it are precisely the silent (hence music), the new (even if in death), the 'uncontrollable' and profoundly ungovernable catastrophes which, as it were, stage the very action of representation.

Allegory thus consigns reality to a permanent antinomy, a game of the illusion of reality as illusion, where the world is at once valued and devalued. Hence the peculiar seductiveness of the baroque: the primacy of the aesthetic — of appearances and play — joins up with metaphysical wretchedness on the ground of grief or melancholy. The metaphor of the world as theatre expresses this specific temporality of the baroque, an almost choreographic or 'panoramic' temporality, in Cysarz's expression that Benjamin makes his own. In this eternal reflecting of appearances one ubiquitous yet already distant spectator reigns supreme: God. But the gulf between reality and illusion cannot be bridged: theatre now *knows* itself to be theatre.

This explains the 'mule track' which, bypassing the 'sublime and fruitless mountains of classicism', leads directly from medieval and baroque drama to Brecht. In epic theatre, the interruption of the flow of things also becomes a kind of distancing, a refusal of identification: 'This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings.'³⁵

In the seventeenth century, however, the analytic of representation was still caught up in the language of things. The perceptible

world, however profaned and destroyed by the allegorical vision, continued to refer as appearance or dream to a theological 'elsewhere' which signified it. The imaginary objectified itself in exteriority. Only later, with the fragmentation of the world as an act of thought and imagination – in German Romanticism, Nietzsche and Baudelaire – did allegory come to speak of the forgotten, of the buried dead, of the female hidden in the ground. As Benjamin put it:

Melancholy bears a different character, however, in the nineteenth century from that which it bore in the seventeenth. The key figure of the older allegory is the corpse. The key figure of the later allegory is the 'souvenir' [*Andenken*]. The *souvenir* is the schema of the transformation of the commodity into a collector's item.³⁶

The Baudelairean break in modernity makes of the uncanny, which was already at work in German Romanticism, the generative figure of the archaeology of modernity. But meanwhile, between *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) and the materialist approach to Baudelaire, Benjamin's work underwent a philosophical recasting which led to a 'theory of historical knowledge'. Of course, already in 1924 Benjamin had espoused a communist praxis, under the influence of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and of a Latvian revolutionary, Asja Lacis, who was a specialist in children's theatre, a colleague of Piscator and a friend of Brecht. But it was only after 1928 that the 'historical materialist' transformation took place in his methodology of the imaginary. From then on, the 'metaphysical images' of the *Trauerspiel* transmuted into 'dialectical images', and catastrophe into a fragmented *writing* of catastrophe.

Notes

1. For an analysis of this historical and intellectual context, see Michael Löwy, 'Messianisme juif et utopies libertaires en Europe centrale (1905–1923)', *Archives des Sciences sociales des religions*, 51, 1, 1981. [See also, in English, Löwy's recently published book *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe*, London: Athlone Press 1992. *Trans. note.*] On the relationship between messianism and 'metapolitics', and on utopia as a way of 'overturning the classical issues of politics' by the force of its emotional intensity, see the article by Miguel Abensour, 'L'utopie socialiste: une nouvelle alliance', *Le Temps de la réflexion*, 1981.
2. See Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken 1971.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. On this background of the young Benjamin, see the chronology with which Giorgio Agamben opens the Einaudi edition of Benjamin's complete works in

- Italian: *Metafisica della Gioventù*. Cf. Michael Löwy, 'Revolution against "Progress": Walter Benjamin's Romantic Anarchism', *New Left Review*, 152, July–August 1985; and the chapter on Benjamin in *Redemption and Utopia*.
5. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 113ff.
 6. Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, p. 133.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
 10. Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 1st edn, Munich: Duncker & Humblot 1918; and Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1971.
 11. 'Theologico-Political Fragment', in *One-Way Street*, p. 155.
 12. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 28. [Translation modified.]
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 31. On the status of such critique, see Jürgen Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique', in Smith, ed., *On Walter Benjamin*.
 14. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 263. [Translation slightly modified.]
 15. See Franco Desideri, 'Ad vocem Jetztzeit', a paper presented to the Benjamin Colloque held in Modena in 1981.
 16. Quoted by Desideri in *ibid.*
 17. *GS II*, 1, p. 134.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
 20. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 160.
 21. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper Colophon 1977, pp. 115–36.
 22. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 65.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
 25. See Goethe, 'Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst', in *Schriften zur Kunst*, Zurich: Artemis 1954, pp. 122–5.
 26. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 165.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 176. [Translation modified.]
 29. Quotation from Hermann Cohen. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
 30. *GS II*, 1, p. 138.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
 32. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 183.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 231ff.
 34. *Ibid.*, pp. 217, 218.
 35. Benjamin, 'What Is Epic Theatre?', in *Illuminations*, p. 151.
 36. Central Park', p. 55. [The German word *Andenken*, like the French *souvenir*, may refer either to memory of something or to the object – 'memento' or 'souvenir' – through which something is remembered. *Trans. note.*]

AN AESTHETICS OF OTHERNESS

For the state, woman is night, or more precisely sleep: man is waking. She seems to do nothing: she is always the same, a relapse into healing nature. In her the future generation dreams. Why has civilization not become feminine? Despite Helen, despite Dionysus.¹

It was thus through Nietzsche, at a moment in history when the great certainties of the modernist philosophies of Progress were crumbling (Reason, Subject, linear Time, Science of a transparent reality), that something suddenly burst back into labyrinthine existence. An obsessive question already delineated the pain of an absence, of something incommunicable. Why has civilization not become female?

It was certainly a strange question, condemned to repetition without memory. Today, after years of permissiveness and feminization of values, the normalized but ever floating and contested division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' is again being questioned with the same radical intensity as in every crisis culture. Whether the division is held to be biological, social or cultural, it is visibly inscribed within customs and laws. But it is also an uncertain, phantasmic division, more insidious and invisible, which is troubled by the unconscious and woven out of all the imaginaries, all the anthropological utopias of a 'third sex' or of constitutive androgyny. There, as Nietzsche puts it, woman is 'night' or 'nothing'. A space of projection and allegory mingles together the seduction of Helen, the deadly powers of a dangerous otherness, and the proteiform androgyny of Dionysus.

But this night is one of potential desire and pleasure [*jouissance*], the night of an abyss which makes things visible. It is a baroque night – mystical perhaps. For it concerns that non-representable nothing which has perpetually haunted Western philosophy as its 'oriental' Other, its limit, its difference. To this stage femininity has continually been summoned. Weininger, of course, is quite blunt about it: 'fundamentally women have no name'. But others too, from remote times, say the same thing in a more mythical way: in Hesiod, for example, the first woman is already nameless. She is

excluded from the symbolic: with no name, no identity, no being; lacking both essence and existence.

In this missing being of the subject, of desire and its language, woman seems relegated to negative theology, where the nothing that cannot be figured or rationally conceived leaves her with neither language nor voice in the void of a *jouissance* of complete fusion. Is she that word-absence, that word-hole which, like Marguerite Duras's *Lol. V. Stein*, can by turns captivate us or condemn us to the 'sickness unto death', to the stray multiplication of names modelled on the desire of the Other?

Through being so closely linked to nothing – to the primal chaos of nature or desiring passivity – the feminine hangs in suspense in that ambiguous, neuralgic zone occupied by Nothing in the Western tradition. In this respect, the difference is very great with those currents of oriental philosophy (Taoism, for example) where Nothing and the void are dynamic, active elements. If it is accepted as a basic principle, with concrete representations such as the valley, the empty Nothing situates and condenses 'the nodal point woven from potentiality and becoming, where lack and plenitude, the Same and the Other, coincide'.² This vast shape of the void, so reminiscent of Lucretius, which Chinese painting constantly seeks to recreate as a body of colour ('the void is not nothing, the void is colour'), is accepted by the dominant traditions of Western thought only if it is transcended in a stable Being or Creator or, at a later date, in the reflexivity of the Concept as a contradictory otherness productive of a totalizing meaning.

This accounts for the strange reversal in the figures of Nothing. On the one hand, nothing is nothing. Nothingness has no property, quality or identity. Because it cannot be represented or made an object of thought, even if it conditions all thought, Nothing manifests itself only in the most intellectualized or mediated forms: as irony, doubt or negativity in the service of mastery. But on the other hand, Nothing is all. By a kind of heretical-mystical and then baroque conversion, this 'nothing of being' changes into an infinity of ecstatic delight [*jouissance*], a plethora of forms. Consider, for example, the rush of angels in the great baroque paintings of the seventeenth century. Here the angels' aura forces us to look, to lift our eyes, to desire the impossible spiral of an ascending desire foredoomed to the earthly representation of appearances – an *erotics of nothing*. Or take that marvellous text of Saint Denis the Areopagite, which defined for both East and West the matrix of all negative theologies, the point of departure for what Michel de Certeau calls the 'mystical fable'. Since God is absolute and

unknowable Superessence, beyond all properties, essence or difference, he *is not*, or he is Nothing. Love; the chimerical point of fusion in the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the divine, is attained through Nothing, through the mysticism of otherness and the falling away of everything in the most luminous shadow of silence.

But if the feminine is kept too long in the toils of Nothing, one ends up with that long and persistent absence: 'civilization has not become feminine'. Thus the feminine has never ceased to oscillate between the nothing of nothingness and the nothing of *jouissance*, between non-representable Nothing which eludes all form (shapelessness, chaos, lack, matter, matrix) and the nothing of the 'female side of God' (Lacan) or the super-*jouissance* allotted to women ever since Teiresias. At no time, however, has the feminine found a place within the exclusive egalitarian paradigms of the Subject. Without an identity or symbolism of its own, it appears from the beginning as that madness of the body in which the powers of Helen are combined with those of Dionysus; later, it attains the wild *corps à corps* of sixteenth-century poetry, or enters the seventeenth-century theatre of baroque derangement of appearances that was rediscovered by Baudelaire and Benjamin.

In rousing the intellectual and moral resistance of more than two millennia of nihilist metaphysics, Nietzsche placed this symbolic elision of the feminine under the dual sign of Dionysus and Helen, two traversers of frontiers and languages facing a *polis*-state that affirmed itself in a community of values. Again as early as Hesiod, the feminine shifts over to the side of that 'beautiful evil' which knows not the State. Dionysus, that polymorphously perverse god of wine, ecstasy and theatre, of suffering and play, represents precisely an 'anti-system' in the history of the Greek *polis*;³ or, we might say, the condensation point of all the metamorphoses and border-crossings – between animality and humanity, consciousness and the unconscious, male and female, the *polis* and its margins of the foreign and mysterious. A savage hunter and eater of raw flesh, Dionysus summons women from the private space of their conjugal home. In the forest that appeared so primitive in comparison with the *polis*, he seems akin to the figure of the Amazon queen Penthesileia, a virgin so filled with desire that she fell into madness and the eating of flesh. Although he was often held to be an alien, or at least an 'Easterner' from other climes, Dionysus was also the woman-god who orgiastically changed sex and the child-god of reemergent life who played in the mirror.

A single theatrical space stretches from Dionysus to Helen, the first mythical figure of all the eternal feminines. Carried off by Paris, Helen is the symbol of Beauty and appearance, of ornament and

falsehood: she is the 'artistic power' or 'differend' on account of whom the space of war pits men and cities against one another. For she truly embodies that 'tyranny of the Logos' which Gorgias vaunts in his *Encomium of Helen*. If speech clings to passion and turns itself into a magical elixir of love, it is diverted from its real function of establishing communication and ethical consensus in the *polis* and within the realm of philosophy. It is then no more than formidable persuasion (*peithô*), not that fusion of rationality and power, that logic of identity propositions (X is A) which philosophically regulates the political community. Helen is defeated. But she is also innocent, since love binds itself to the look and body of the Other: 'So if Helen's eye, pleased by Alexander's body, transmitted an eagerness and striving of love to her mind, what is surprising?'⁴

Thus if civilization has not become female, despite Helen and Dionysus, theatre and sophistic, this is because language as dialogic consensus begins with a double murder, an elision of othernesses: murder of the multiform body of Dionysus, none of whose shapes can be fixed, identified or comprehended; and murder of the body-sex of Helen as the site of *polemos* or war. In the protean nature of Dionysus, or in the desire-filled, non-veracious plenitude of a body-form which cleaves to itself even in its act of appearing, we therefore see something quite different from the traditional dualist opposition between form and formless matter through which the male-female division operated in Plato and Aristotle.

This proliferation of unfixable forms generating non-identity logics constitutes a permanent deformation of the reality hollowed out by the void. It returns as a kind of repressed content in Western philosophical conceptions of form, haunting the very arcaica of modernity in its allegories of the feminine. In Joachim du Bellay's *Olive* of 1550, for example, the parallel between man-god and deified woman already suggests an imperceptible slippage from the Godhead to the profane Deity. And what should we say of the Uranus figure in the scientific poems of Jacques Pelletier? A reincarnation of Dante's Beatrice, Uranus here holds all the secrets of the science of the heavens and atmospheric phenomena. In all this sixteenth-century poetry, the feminine is the site of knowledge where all the metamorphoses magically operate – witness the 'long and varied changes' that Ronsard attributes to Venus, or the rose-body of Mary that was sung of so much and so quickly lost. It is as if lovers' bodies acquired vegetable or mineral properties, linking up with the great cycle of Nature.

To be sure, the baroque poetry or theatre of the Counter-Reformation abandoned the pagan cosmology of the Renaissance.

But the endlessly martyred or sublimated bodies are still there in excess, until the outer limits are reached in that hallucinatory aesthetic which Octavio Paz discovered in the work of Quevedo.⁵ Such a theatricization of existence bespeaks a veritable 'hermeneutics of desire' (to use an expression of Michel Foucault), where the scenography of drives subjects bodies to energetic thought which does not allow itself to be enclosed merely within the model of representation. This *figural* power of the stagings of otherness (of the divine, the feminine, or death) makes the invisible visible, giving symbolic form to all the realms of nature and supernature in an infinite play of 'correspondences' in Baudelaire's sense of the term. This play offers itself for interpretation in the rhetorical and stylistic figure where opposites join together: in the *oxymoron*. Here the 'poetry of mystical paradox' analysed by Jean Rousset displays its infinite stream of 'inaccessible light', 'luminous fog', 'dark brightness', 'enrapturing horror'⁶ – which meets up with what we might call a distinctively baroque *aesthetic of otherness and amorous paradox*. This marks a discontinuity vis-à-vis the cognitive, dialectical or even ethical otherness of Plato, Hegel and Kant/Lévinas respectively; it thereby rejoins the Kantian notion of the sublime as informal form exhibiting the incommensurability of the heterogeneous Other.⁷

For if all knowledge proceeds through identification (Adorno) or assimilation (Lévinas), it can only effect a neutralization of the Other to the advantage of the Same of traditional ontology. And if all genuine otherness appears only on the ground of a non-synthetic, non-assignable element which destabilizes ego-identity, if it is truly 'forcible entry' or 'wonder', then perhaps it unfolds on a stage other than that of mere ethics and the salvation of the Law. The erotic relation, as paralogical logic or amorous 'paradox', would then be that backless backdrop characteristic of the 'modern' aesthetics of the baroque. Hence its special reception for the otherness of otherness, for the 'quality of difference' which, according to Lévinas, is the hallmark of the feminine.⁸ It should be stressed, however, that this is not the feminine of modesty, mystery and motherhood, but one which is caught up in the surplus materiality of bodies, in an excitation which cracks appearances and consigns them to that deformation and transfiguration of which Deleuze speaks in connection with Francis Bacon.⁹ In this 'germ of tranquil atheism' which marks the seventeenth-century Baroque, the figure is already subject to the order of accident, changeability, precariousness and mortality.

The idea of 'progress' in modernity is governed by the plenitude of reality: the plenitude of the 'great classical form', of a fulfilled

meaning of history corresponding to reality, of Truth as a system and of the Subject as identity and centre. In opposition to this, the baroque presents from the beginning quite a different, 'postmodern' conception of reality in which the instability of forms in movement opens onto the reduplicated and reduplicable structure of all reality: enchanted illusion and disenchanting world, *engaño* and *desengaño*, to repeat Quevedo's great metaphor of the woman-city which opened this book.

Rousset sees the essence of the baroque in this 'interpenetration of forms within dynamically unified ensembles animated by dialectical movement'.¹⁰ This evokes a *startling* interlacement – startling in the strong sense of surprise or chance à la Gracian – of Eros and thought, allegory and an 'untimely' understanding of history. If, in the baroque, history becomes a representation (see Benjamin), representation is itself subject to dramatization or theatricalization of the sensible world in a backward movement towards a missing centre, towards that decentred centre which Pascal, the baroque thinker *par excellence*, placed at the heart of his scientific and religious paradigm. In this world with no centre, no site, no fixed point of reference, 'the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere': 'the fixed point has become a point of view'.¹¹

As it becomes impossible to determine finitude and appearances in relation to any identity reference, any essence or substance, we are left with an infinite regress towards a point that is always slipping away, a pure otherness of figure. The regress carries us towards Eros: the seductive, beguiling theatre of bodies induces an active and dynamic image of Eros, through captivation or rapture, ecstasy divine or human. It is also a regress towards or of history: since it cannot be totalized and mastered, history is acted and frustrated against a background of wars and absolute power. It presents itself as a catastrophe which the great disorder of the world, or the cosmic disaster of the end of the world so dear to baroque poets, is alone capable of expressing in metaphor.

In this dual, 'postmodern' regress of reality, the great founding figures of modernity – the Subject, stability of representation, the Centre, Totality – are undermined from within by a logic of extremes, paradox and non-dialectical neutralization of opposites, such as they appear in oxymoronic writing. At the very moment when 'classical science' was establishing itself – a science which, from Galileo to Descartes and even Pascal, was highly critical of the powers of metaphor – poetry and theatre were asserting the claims of universal metaphor. For a time, the world as representation organized by *ratio* coexisted with the world as *hieroglyph*, when the famous 'metaphor dispute' broke out at the height of the century of

classicism. The relations between image and *ratio* were then fixed in terms that are highly revealing for the archaeology of the modern.

On the one side were those like du Perron, Descartes and Mersenne who attacked metaphor in the name of the new science: 'Metaphor is a petty similitude, an abridged similitude; it has to *pass quickly*; one must not linger on it when it is *too constant*; it is *imperfect* and *degenerates into enigma*'.¹² On the other side was Mlle de Gournay, Montaigne's adopted daughter, who defended the poetic and even epistemological powers of metaphor against the moralists of language, and affirmed discordance or excess in the beautiful; for her, metaphor was 'the art of discerning a conformity in opposites'.¹³

As we know, the debate was eventually settled through the withering of metaphor and, above all, the splitting of scientific from poetic language in a process bound up with the collapse of the old cosmos of resemblances and its ontological foundations. However, the classical *episteme* was not thereby definitively unified. The same century which produced the orderly representative paradigm also yielded a theory of allegories or emblems, of generalized theatre bringing into play that which has been 'made metaphorical'. This is certainly a weighty paradox, and some light is indirectly thrown upon it by those who interpret modernity as a 'world image' linked to the appearance of a representative Subject bearing 'science as a project' (Heidegger), or by those who define modernity in terms of *episteme*. As Michel Foucault has written: 'At the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the period that has been termed, rightly or wrongly, the Baroque, thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance'.¹⁴ The baroque itself is inscribed within the structure of representation that we find in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*: the visible refers us to a reverse side, to an invisible that is at once present and absent. But if thought discards the analogic paradigm for the order of signs and representation, perhaps it should be added that one is talking of scientific thought, a certain philosophical *ratio*, the new forms of knowledge. In any case it is not *all* thought: poetry, and indeed the *topos* of the world as theatre, impose their analogical logic of ambivalence and reversal. At the limits of scientific-representative space, the poet even takes on the 'role of allegory'.¹⁵ Beyond the order of signs, he will rediscover the role of correspondences. In fact, Descartes himself inserted baroque disillusion ('*Life is a dream*') at the heart of the classical *ratio*, even if his methodical doubt used it to undo the old relations between similitude and reality.

There is thus a kind of *metaphorical semantics* (in Hans Blumenberg's fine expression¹⁶) which haunts the representative context

itself, reduplicating the archaeology of scientific concepts in one of *figural*, theological or already secular constellations or configurations. If all representation now plays upon a relation of identity and difference, there is also 'another' difference: the difference of the Other. In this respect, we might say of the baroque what Louis Marin wrote of Pascal: 'Pascal keeps intact the representative model which he *makes metaphorical* outside its own domain. Pascal draws representation into the infinite play of difference.'¹⁷

In opposition to all substantialist ontology (that of Descartes, for instance), Pascal could welcome a thought of *nothing* (scientific vacuum or metaphysical-theological nothingness) and a thought of radical difference. The two come together in the status of the figural, of *figuratives*: 'Figure includes absence and presence, pleasant and unpleasant. Cipher with a double meaning, of which one is clear and says that the meaning is hidden.'¹⁸ Pascal's concept of the figurative is here very close to that 'baroque apotheosis' which, according to Benjamin, takes the form of the blocked dialectic of extremes, dialectic 'at a standstill', frozen in the 'dialectical image'. The logic of an ambivalence which no synthesis can move beyond is inscribed within the very language of difference, of the elsewhere. This language is evidently theological in Pascal, for whom the Name of God is that of the unnameable Other, the true 'degree zero of the proper name' (Louis Marin); the infinite gap and maximum difference which deconstructs the metaphysics of presence, specificity and identitarian appropriation, or even of the subject. For the Pascalian 'subject' is already 'sundered' and consigned to the Other of all its impenetrable simulacra and abysses. It cannot represent itself by reflecting itself in a fixed point, a Centre: it is 'difference without a subject', in Derrida's sense.

But this figural bears *pleasure and displeasure* with regard to the otherness hidden within it. This explains why, in the overembodied universe of the baroque, the almost materialist passion of bodies always oscillates between a cruel, macabre theatre in which the death's head and the corpse prowl around, and an ecstatic and mystical theatre of love in which the sublime and sublimated Eros becomes pure lyricism. [Eros and Thanatos, aesthetic of otherness and ontology of precariousness, unfold in a number of allegories, including the all-powerful one of the feminine and its uncertain, bisexual or asexual, double: the Angel.] Gérard Genette has shown that 'modern thought perhaps invented the baroque as its mirror'; but it may be that it was a distorting or broken mirror. For if convulsive beauty is the hallmark of times of trouble and distress, the allegorization of the feminine may be said to recur in a kind of *modern baroque* peculiar to the arcana of the twentieth century.

We find confirmation of this in the reversal space where the Romantic Schlegel of *Lucinde* meets up with the 'melancholic' and very Baudelairean Proust of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, through an allegorization of the feminine more and more bereft of aura. For the one there is wonderful, vigorous, utopian, androgynous allegory: 'I see here a wonderful, deeply meaningful allegory of the development of man and woman to full and complete humanity. There is much in it – and what is in it certainly does not rise up as quickly as I do when I am overcome by you.'¹⁹ For the other there is the post-Baudelairean allegory of a petrified feminine:

It was indeed a dead woman that I saw when, presently, I entered her room. She had fallen asleep as soon as she lay down; her sheets, wrapped around her body like a shroud, had assumed, with their elegant folds, *the rigidity of stone*. . . . Seeing that expressionless body lying there, I asked myself what logarithmic table it constituted, that all the actions in which it might have been involved, from the nudge of an elbow to the bruising of a skirt, should be capable of causing me . . . so intense an anguish. . . . And so I remained, in the fur-lined coat which I had not taken off since my return from the Verdurins', beside that twisted body, *that allegorical figure. Allegorizing what? My death? My love?*²⁰

Here the fine anarchy of Romantic allegory – Schlegel's 'beautiful chaos of sublime harmonies and interesting pleasures' – has completely broken up. Allegory no longer makes it possible to run through all the degrees of a future humanity in which male and female become alike in a third, androgynous sex; now it figures the death of love and even a death wrapped around in shrouds. The allegory of dissipation and infinite intensity has given way to Quevedo's 'ashes of the sensible' (*serán ceniza mas tendrá sentido*) and 'amorous dust' (*polvo enamorado*).

And yet, the allegorical powers of the feminine hold together and make a comeback that perpetuates a very long history. Already in the first century AD Philo of Alexandria, introducing the Old Testament into philosophy through an allegorical method of symbolic interpretation and exegesis, saw in the biblical Eve the signifying figuration of sense perception. Was 'Adam's offence' not the confusion and division that gripped the mind under the sway of sensory images? It was for this reason that the feminine appeared within a twofold androgynous structure which broke with the feminine as biological genus. Eve is at once woman and female side of man: every human being, qua mind and sense perception, is at once Adam and Eve, within a constitutive androgyny.

The same allegorical power of the feminine as Other is present in the philosophical representation of woman, the *donna gentile* of Dante's verse: 'L'imaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile.' No

doubt this is because she has the understanding of love, *l'intelletto d'amore*,²¹ and because since Dotima in Plato's *Symposium*, via Boetius and Cicero, philosophy has been a female figure. Derrida once remarked apropos of Nietzsche's idea of truth as woman: 'Perhaps woman – a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum – is distance's very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval's cadence, distance itself, if we could still say such a thing.'²²

Thus allegory brushes aside all essentiality, all identity or uniqueness, in accordance with its almost etymological nature: the Greek *allegoria* coming from *allos* ('other') and *agoreuein* ('to speak'). For allegory consists precisely in saying something other than what one means, or in saying one thing so that, by oblique procedures, another thing will be understood. But this *discourse through the other* is also *discourse of the Other*, a vocalization and staging of an otherness which eludes direct speech and presents itself as an elsewhere. Therefore, before allegory became feminine, it embarked on an indeterminate adventure and set its sights on what slipped away from it: on the Most High God. As Origen wrote: 'There are matters whose significance cannot be duly expounded by any human language.' To this failing of human communicative language – a failing vis-à-vis the Other – allegory lends its figural force, its lack of mediations and explicit correlations, its 'emotional writing'. As the Romans held, it is an *inversio* 'which designates one thing in words and another thing, if not an opposite thing, in meaning' (Quintilian).

That this *inversio*, from Baudelaire to Proust, crystallized the decline of aura says a great deal about the strange introduction of seventeenth-century baroque death into the height of modernity. For *petrification* (the stone body, marble body, fixed and frozen body) is a baroque metaphor *par excellence*: so that in the poems of Le Moyne, the dead Litie is already marble, with 'cold and heavy blood'. Death, as an accident breaking the beautiful continuities of time, strips the disguises of love: 'Such an accident makes of Litie a piece of marble. . . . Fear and pain freeze her spirits.'²³

Benjamin is thus absolutely right to insist on the novel aspects of modern allegory bound up with the loss of aura, the internalization of death being a writing experience which reintroduces a figural – an *optisch* – into modernity.²⁴

Although allegory does not give birth to a style in the nineteenth century, its very reappearance in Baudelaire and its later persistence require some fresh consideration – if only to understand the curious *baroque reason* which has been at work in the twentieth century in thinkers as diverse as Benjamin, Barthes and Lacan. One of these, Lacan, has written: 'As someone recently noticed, I am

placing myself – who is placing me? . . . – on the side of the baroque.'²⁵

'Baroque Reason': the term may appear provocative, so greatly has the explaining [*rendre raison*] of reason obliterated the *plurality* of classical reasons and obscured the baroque as a paradigm of thought and writing which overflows conventional models of identity, essence and substantiality. For those who identify reason with its 'long chains', Cartesian or other, it seems impossible that a *ratio* should be stylistic and rhetorical, that it should be permanently at grips with its theatricization and dramatization, that it should act itself out in 'bodies'. But in the baroque, the reason of the unconscious and the reason of utopia present themselves to be interpreted. The baroque signifier proliferates beyond everything signified, placing language in excess of corporality. At the risk of appearing still more paradoxical, we might say that baroque reason brings into play the *infinite materiality* of images and bodies. And this being so, it always has to do with otherness as desire.

Lacan has written that the Baroque is the 'lesser history of Christ', in which his importance is established 'through his body'. By this Lacan has in mind not only the precariousness of the body in the Christian doctrine of salvation, but also the very modalities of the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the Other's body. For if the body of Christ assumes importance only through oral incorporation (the Catholic act of communion/devourment as a sublimated oral drive), it is because somewhere the display of the body evokes infinite *jouissance* and thus defines the Baroque: 'Everything is bodily exhibition evoking *jouissance*.'²⁶ To the exclusion even of the sexual act, obscenity shows itself here at the level of desire – the desire precisely of the All. The same madness presents itself in the *jouissance* of God and of woman: 'The other side of madness is total *jouissance*, imperative and continual; and that appears as woman.'²⁷ Concentrated here is precisely what Lacan calls 'the female side of God', the intersection of divine and female otherness.

It should be made clear, however, that the bodily *jouissance* of the Other remains trapped in a curious asymmetry. Whereas man aims at the 'phallic' *jouissance* of the sexual organ, woman, who 'is not whole', always has in view the additional *jouissance* of the body as such. In other words, 'regulation of the soul through corporeal scopic' – which defines the Baroque for Lacan – is precisely what woman is concerned with. For in the baroque affinity between thought and Eros, she recognizes herself – I recognize myself – as the work of a difference alien to the metaphysics of identity.

By inserting us into the logic of the phantasm, the baroque leads us into the utopian reason of writing while leaving space for the

'principle of sufficient reason'. In allegorical writing, opposites join up and cancel each other, with no unitary hierarchy of the whole. Reality proliferates in all its dissonant, exuberant details, without the form of the 'grand style' ever being able to contain or dominate it. The resistance of the baroque in the modern world is the resistance of a heterogeneous, alien and inassimilable element, ever incomplete, in which 'deformalized' forms achieve a space of purely qualitative movement: thought of the body, or rather, of the generation of space on the basis of movement, the presence/absence of the corporeal.

Only metaphor and figuration, by radicalizing the fluidity of phenomena, are able to accomplish the destruction of the ontologies of high 'modernity' in which the subject and reality are content or substance. The price for this is noted by Musil in his speech on Rilke: 'The spheres of the categories of being, separate from each other in ordinary thought, no longer seem to form more than a single one.'²⁸ This reason therefore 'founds languages', and we can understand why Roland Barthes, like Lacan but from a different point of view, saw in the baroque and the pansemic nature of the image, the site of excess meaning, *obtuse* meaning, a signifier without a signified, which governs aesthetic pleasure. The 'baroque region', from Loyola to Fourier, is the one where 'meaning is destroyed beneath symbol' and 'one and the same letter can signify two contraries'.²⁹ The fact that the 'symbolic' effect of the letter overflows and suspends any logic of meaning accounts for the links between the rhetoric of desire and what Barthes calls '*a baroque semantics*' or '*a topos of the impossible*',³⁰ always stylistically modelled on the oxymoron: the sun here becomes dark.

In Barthes's analyses of Loyola and Fourier, baroque semantics involves a rejection of the great classical dichotomies, descending from the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment, which counterpose subject and object, real and unreal, masculine and feminine. Baroque semantics presents for interpretation a whole 'hieroglyphics' which operates through the deciphering of series and correspondences between all the realms and forms of the universe. Thus Fourier's construction of '*marvellous reals*' follows the stylistic procedures of the seventeenth-century Baroque:

- Totality is made impossible by the writing of a manifold, multiple-entry text (or picture). 'Language, the field of the signifier, presents relations of insistence, not consistence: centre, weight, meaning are dismissed.'³¹

- The permanent excess which eroticizes 'the real' by staging phantasm 'founds meaning on matter and not on concept'. This

materialization or 'corporealization' of the invisible in image issues in the 'imperialism of seeing'.³²

- Detail, as part of the whole (metonymy), is promoted to become *adorable detail*, the promise of happiness: 'Perhaps the *imagination of detail* is what specifically defines Utopia (opposed to political science); this would be logical, since detail is phantasmatic and thereby achieves the very pleasure of Desire.'³³

- There is systematic recourse to a problematic of difference and ambiguity. This *topos* of the impossible thus bears upon the difference between the sexes as such. As Fourier wrote: 'In order to confound the tyranny of men there must exist for a century a *third sex*, male and female, stronger than man.'³⁴ Only this third sex can 'denaturalize' the fixedness of instinct and delineate new epistemological categories of analysis: the space of the neuter, the ambiguous. Fourier's world rehabilitates the ambiguous, which 'is not allowed in our customs', and demands infinite variation of pleasures by asserting their differences. As he writes in *Le Nouveau Monde amoureux*: 'All omnigyny is necessarily sphneistic and every woman a pederast - otherwise these characteristics would lose their pivotal quality which is philanthropy or devotion to the other sex.'³⁵ One could go on forever listing the powers of this 'neuter' which governs all transitions (from childhood to old age) and brings extremes together. Love, that 'hyper-neuter', blossoms at its outer limits: sapphism, pederasty or even incest. The ambiguous, the ambivalent: there is the qualitative value of Fourier's world 'in harmony', the very possibility of all differences!

Benjamin, Baudelaire, Lacan, Barthes: something like a *baroque paradigm* asserts and establishes itself within 'modernity'. Against any idea of self-enclosed language, any logical metalanguage, this paradigm continually appeals to the same tropes and stylistic procedures: allegory, oxymoron, open totality and discordant detail, the real emptied of its superabundance of reality. This whole rhetoric of affects presents difference as excess and 'obtuse' meaning: an aesthetics, but also an underground site where the baroque paradigm touches the paradigm of desire. It is as if the great modern myths of the 'feminine' (Lulu, Penthesilea, Agathe) simply put that impossible difference on stage. One name sums them all up: Salome.

Notes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Nachgelassene Fragmente: Herbst 1869 bis Herbst 1872', in *Nietzsche Werke*, vol. III, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1978, p. 154.
2. François Cheng, *Vide et plein: Le langage pictoral chinois*, Paris: Seuil 1979,

- pp. 21ff. The possibility of identifying man with the void 'is at the origin of the images and shapes' (p. 34), and 'the brushstroke art, *yin-hsien*, is the art of the visible-invisible' (p. 52). This should be considered in relation to Klee's problematic as outlined in Part One above.
3. See Marcel Détienné, *Dionysus Slain*, Baltimore: John Hopkins 1979.
 4. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press 1982.
 5. See, for example, Octavio Paz, *On Poets and Others*, London: Paladin 1992, p. 159.
 6. See Jean Rousset, *L'Intérieur et l'extérieur*, Paris: Corti 1976. On all these questions see also Rousset's classic study, *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France*, Paris: Corti 1970.
 7. On the Kantian problematic of the sublime as a display of the non-representable, as energy sign and anticipation of 'postmodernity', see Jean-François Lyotard, *La pitura del segreto nell'epoca postmoderna*, *Baruchello*, Milan: Feltrinelli 1982; and *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1988, pp. 165ff., where the 'sublime of nature' is seen as something which may be 'without form' (Kant).
 8. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University 1987, p. 36. Lévinas's conceptualization of the feminine as 'the very origin of otherness' has given it a central and quite exceptional position in 'the economy of Being'. See *ibid.*, pp. 85-8, and *Ethics and Infinity*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University 1985, pp. 65ff.
 9. See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT 1992.
 10. Rousset, p. 250.
 11. See Michel Serres, *Le Système de Leibniz*, vol. 2, Paris: Gallimard 1968, pp. 675ff.
 12. On the 'metaphor dispute', see Rousset, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 14. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, London: Routledge 1991, p. 51.
 15. Rousset, p. 63.
 16. On the relations between modernity and 'metaphor' or 'world image', see Giacomo Marramao, *Potere e secolarizzazione*, Rome: Riuniti.
 17. Louis Marin, *La Critique du discours*, Paris: Minuit 1975. Much more could be said about the links between 'Pascal's semiology' and the 'symptomatology' of the subject in which qualities have no substantive foundation (p. 131), nothingness is difference (p. 133) and everything is figure (pp. 139ff.)
 18. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1966, p. 109.
 19. Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1971, p. 49.
 20. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 3, London: Chatto & Windus 1981, pp. 366-7.
 21. On allegory in general, and Dante's use of it in particular, see Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie*, Paris: Études augustiniennes 1958; and *La Tradition de l'allégorie de Philon d'Alexandrie à Dante*, Paris: Études augustiniennes 1987. See also Jacqueline Risset, *Dante ou l'Intelletto d'amore*, Paris: Seuil 1982.
 22. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Éperons*, bilingual edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1979, p. 49.
 23. *Anthologie de la poésie baroque française*, ed. Jean Rousset, Paris: Armand Colin 1968, p. 30.
 24. Benjamin, 'Central Park', p. 52.

25. Lacan, *Encore*, p. 97.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 102. [On Lacan and *jouissance* see also pp. 43, 50. above. *Trans. note.*]
27. *Ibid.*
28. Robert Musil, 'Rede zur Rilke-Feier', in *Tagebücher*, p. 893.
29. Roland Barthes, 'The Spirit of the Letter', in *idem*, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* [a translation of *L'Obvie et l'obtus*], New York: Hill & Wang 1985, p. 100.
30. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, London: Jonathan Cape 1977, pp. 99, 118.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 6 [Translation slightly modified.]
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-6.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
34. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 119.
35. *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 106, 115.