

FROM PARALLAX TO THE SPECTACLE **BY JL MARZO**

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During this time we have together we are going to try to establish a series of correspondences, moving in a number of directions. First of all, a correspondence between the Baroque conception of the world and our own idea of it. In second place, we will try to link the context and causes of the birth of the Baroque theory of parallax in astronomy, to the theories and practices which emerged in seventeenth century Europe, which in our day –as then– have come to make up what we now call the spectacle. The method we are going to follow does not hide its direct debt to Baroque methods themselves. We are going to travel through allegories (something very Catholic indeed!). So there will be no answers (something very Catholic as well!), but rather certain points of confluence which in principle seem to function as miniature engines, conscious of the fact that perhaps they have no real importance in the overall machinery of the world.

It should be also noted that the gender we use when we talk about the Baroque is mainly masculine, since the Baroque culture didn't even think about the existence of a feminine thought. Moreover, it established and regulated social and political misogyny that still rules most of today's cultural behaviours. As a suggestion, it would be very interesting to bridge the Parallax theory –the consciousness of relativism– with some of the Italian women painters in the 17th century –like Artemisa Gentileschi– who were able to develop subtle interpretations of the masculine painting of that moment (more or less encrypted for security reasons) and questioning the mainstream readings of religious tradition and history as well as the role that women have been forced to adopt.

To begin, let us suggest that the end of the general conception of the ancient world, which pervaded through a good part of the Renaissance, had much to do with the appearance of new instruments that were able to objectify, or socialize, the thoughts of humans. The instrument, both apparatuses and lenses created at that time, took on a status which set the foundations of what we now call modern society. With the instrument and the machine, the Baroque scientist is able to discover, paradoxically, what he was trying to demonstrate had been lost: the still image; the idea of the centre, the vision of something focussed and diaphanous, an immutable, essential, starry heaven. While on one hand he dedicates himself to the task of demonstrating that the world is movement in itself, that there do not exist central factors to which we can appeal to explain neither things nor ourselves, that there is no fixed element

at all in the universe, on the other hand he discovers in the instrument the possibility to raise our perception of things, both microscopically and telescopically. This contradiction is the axis upon which Baroque culture pivots, and one of its main legacies to our own culture.

One of the problems that lead to the theory of parallaxes in astronomy, especially by the hand of Kepler, was that of appearance. This question could seem rather trivial in our days, though in the 17th century the ability to specify with precision what "really" could be seen, represented a challenge that was difficult to meet and understand. Up to this time, the lack of a technique applied to the observations of the world and the stars, converted these disquisitions into abstract debates whose analyses were carried out deductively, in general terms. It is with the appearance of Baroque technology that the necessity to define and situate with precision is legitimated as a necessary model in the certification of theories. What is more, from that moment on, it is practically impossible to discern between the analysis of the theories in themselves and the analysis of the means used to demonstrate them. Within the same theory that Galileo laid out concerning the movement of stars, was the description of the very instrument used to refute existing hypotheses: the *perspicillum* (from the Latin *perspicio*, make manifest), or telescope. It is in the Baroque, and above all thanks to Galileo, that the concept of science initiates a new phase of development, one that can be called instrumental.

As we have said, Kepler asked himself to what degree the vision we have of the stars is not contaminated by our own position, by our own perspective. Undoubtedly, Kepler was a fine contortionist. He began to perceive the possibility of looking at the planets from other points of view, points that were not our own. Thus, as an equation that would allow us to calculate and modulate the real distances and movements of the objects in the cosmos, he came up with the theory of parallaxes. Parallax is the apparent displacement of an observed object due to the change in the position of the observer. If we are able to correct the optical defects of distance and size derived from our particular and singular position as observers, we might be able to form an objective map of the universe, so Kepler deduced. With Galileo's telescope, all of these questions were amplified. And further on we will see to what degree they have continued to expand until our days. We could take this a step further: these questions represent the very movement of present-day culture.

Thus the problem set forth concerning parallaxes is that of appearance, how we see things and to what degree this vision responds to the reality of the object. It is curious to observe how the majority of debates that take place in the 17th century are not centered so much on the exact truth of the world, but on the degree of reality available in what is seen. To be sure, a world such as

the Baroque which is suddenly made subject to movement and velocity can only with difficulty establish theories of the immutable. The great majority of metaphysical theorists, with Leibniz at the fore, go to great efforts to explain something as immovable as the existence of God.

The Baroque era raises a new problem: how can I be sure of what I see? Science (or Natural Philosophy as it was then known) will try to give immediate answers in the form of corrections, but the question raises a series of problems that science cannot penetrate. How can I be sure that I and those around me are how I think we are? The theory of parallaxes uncovers a fertile field in the ethical and social reflection of the moment. When astronomers establish that our vision of the stars is corrupted due to our own position in the galaxy, they quickly come to derivations concerning how we observe and perceive the most everyday aspects of the universe: things, persons, actions, decisions, and attitudes that surround us and influence our lives. The Baroque period inaugurates the era of probabilism, of relativity, and with it the era of the search for consensus. For if each of us has a completely partial vision of everything, as is said, it will be necessary to create a common ground where certain collective norms of communication and objectivization can be founded. To this, eventually the name illusion will be given, spectacle, as soon we shall see. The fundamental problem of Baroque thought is the fact that the relations between subjects and objects, between who sees and who is seen, has become an essential issue, in a way that is fully problematic though tremendously suggestive.

Things, objects, are no longer still. They move, wander, pulsate, whether according to physical laws or not, yet they do so. They are no longer static symbols that exist in function of a superior norm. They are simply allegories, autonomous points that look upon the world from "their point of view". The object becomes a mobile form that cannot be fully captured. When we perceive it, we look upon it and see it blurred, as if a digital "morphine" effect. Or better yet, like when we take a snapshot of a racing car speeding past: we sense the car, we know it is a car, yet its form is distorted, fleeing forward.

Our camera was in principle prepared to capture objects fixed in one point. We should regulate the velocity of obturation (exposure speed) and the aperture of the diaphragm to capture the car just how it is in reality. This is what the theory of parallaxes is based on. However, the Baroque man who did not have a camera, wondered to what point the blurriness of the object, the lack of definition of it is *his* problem, a problem of his own inability to capture the entire form of things in detail. And then he says: if what I look at, I cannot see as I should because of its velocity, shouldn't I too put myself in movement to obtain more perfect images? The Baroque thinkers take a step beyond their own limits and possibilities. They discover that running at the same speed as

the car it is possible to take perfect photographs. Just like in the Atlanta Olympic Games, where television cameras could be seen installed on steel tubes moving parallel to the athletes on the track. As the disco strobe lights freezes and isolates for a fraction of a second our silhouette within the magma of the space, thus creating a narrative of our displacement based on ellipsis. There is nothing more Baroque than a Steadycam, mounted on an apparatus of correcting counterweights, allowing us to observe anything in movement with perfect visibility.

Gilles Deleuze has analyzed with particular subtlety this question of the transformation of the relations between object and subject in the Baroque era, though always with an eye on our days. He came to ironically propose a new terminology. The new object would be an *objetil*, an object projectile, phantom-like, fugitive. The subject that adapts to the new situation would be a "super-ject", a super subject to the degree that it must be prepared for brusque shifts in speed and direction, according to the interest of whoever guides it. The objectile recalls the Baroque world but also our own, "when the fluctuation of the norm substitutes the permanence of a law, when the object is situated in continuous variation".

It is indeed intriguing to observe how the twentieth century has shown to what degree the thinkers of the 17th century established the idea of the world we now contemplate. The investigations that were carried out on the atom are extraordinarily revelatory in this sense. Strictly speaking, no one has seen an atom, as it cannot be seen. As Werner Heisenberg showed long time ago, when we try to illuminate an atom with a photon in order to observe it, the atom automatically is displaced; it begins to move, not allowing it to be seen still. The existence of the atom is indicated by deduction, after the observation of certain parallel phenomena. The essence itself of matter is invisible for us, as we cannot completely capture it. And was it not Leibniz who said that we can only have perceptions of things, but not complete images of them?

For its part, the transformation of the object refers to a correlative transformation of the subject. The subject, the super-ject (term that Deleuze borrows from Alfred Whitehead), is structured in respect to its point of view. The point of view, says Deleuze in *Le pli* (or *The Fold*), "is not exactly a point, but a place, a position, a site, a "lineal focus". It is called a point of view to the degree that it represents variation. This is the foundation of perspectivism. The subject is whatever reaches the point of view, or is more or less installed in the point of view. The point of view does not vary with the subject; it is the condition for which an eventual subject might grasp a variation (metamorphosis); or, something equals X (anamorphosis). . . . It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition for the truth of a

variation to be presented to the subject. This is precisely the same idea as Baroque perspective".

This circumstantial conjunction that the subject discovers in its desire to capture objective visions of things which are in constant movement, brings with it a new picture in the relations with the world. The necessity of the Baroque to identify a mobile universe, to actively participate in velocity (as the only possibility to begin to define what cannot be seen) generates the spectacle, the notion of the necessity of participation for whoever wishes to share in the world. We shall soon see how this links up with Baroque creation.

But before, I do not want to leave out a fundamental aspect of this new subject-object relation. The Baroque search for any equalizing relation between them can only occur from a vertex, as Leibniz and Pascal call it, and no longer from a central perspective. From a vertex we search out the meaning or sense of a centre. From a determined centre. It is no longer an essential centre, hierarchical, external, nor is it internal either, in the sense of a site where a permanent balance might exist. This new centre is taken up contractually, in a given space and time, within a concrete variation. The illumination of this centre, as if dealing with a mobile focal point, organizes vision circumstantially. Light becomes a great machinery, now making up part of the apparatus of the same object that illuminates. To be able to move the spot of light as quickly as the object itself effectively obliges us to participate in the object itself. The centre that is not permanent is always denied. The deal we have made with it, was made to be broken.

Yet to speak of parallaxes also obliges us to speak of the machines that correct or, depending how we look at it, create them. It is well known that the Baroque instrument *par excellence*, the telescope, shows great similitude with the reality projected by the modern media machine. In the modern camera, parallax also defines the optical difference between the vision of an object through the camera's lense and the vision we have of it through the sight. Thus both the problem of the Baroque machine and our own one is based on questions of optics, of appearance.

The control of the telescopic sight and the control of the lense. The sight is the optical implement that socializes all of the mechanized unity, it is the public component of the apparatus, shaking our hand and inviting us in. The sight enables us to participate in the visual universe that the camera captures. And of all the possible views, we chose only a few determined ones. The lense, however, is inaccessible within, isolated in its own vital casing. Its utility contractual function (contractual, since we can always change the lense) is nevertheless the basis of the camera's existence and reason. The control of the lense eventually allows us to control what is "really" focussed upon. The

sight is only an optical transmission of the image that the lense captures. Thus the parallax that occurs in the social photography machine is basically a technical-political problem. Who controls the lense? And what mechanisms do we have so that we as observers might arrive to this control?

These questions were already set forth more or less in this way in the 17th century by a good number of artists, especially in Italy. It is through the studies of optics and parallax, arising with the telescope, and the analyses carried out in the *camera obscura*, that Baroque artists applied all of these general perceptions to matter and to their own aesthetic concepts. The very machines used triggered an efervescent commotion in the mind of many artists. The machines, to a great degree, generated new visions. From here arose the technique of anamorphosis, running directly parallel to parallax in artistic creation, the most extreme example of the Baroque vision of representation.

Anamorphosis is the technique in painting, drawing, and sculpture which offers the viewer a deformed and confused image, or a normal, finished one, depending upon the point where it is to be seen from. One of the first examples where we can find it is in Michaelangelo's *David*. The disproportion of the immense hands in relation to the body is due to the fact that the statue was done to be placed on top of a high column, which was why the Florentine artist applied certain optical effects that the vision of the spectator would correct from below. Anamorphosis literally flooded the ceilings, walls and domes of the majority of European Catholic churches during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. It was the identity mark of Baroque art and its most emblematic characteristic.

Anamorphosis is born from the reality of conceiving spaces as a whole, as an infinite continuum. To the degree that the spectator is incited to understand the space in its entirety, it becomes necessary to establish all of the details in function of this general vision. Anamorphosis allows us to convert (correct) all details so that they participate in the general function designed by the architect.

Anamorphosis depends upon the perspective we situate ourselves from. The total loss of centrality is due to the fact that the infinity of points of view of the gazing subject is equally proportional to the infinity of points of image that a "centered" vision can offer. For the variation occurs on both sides. This is the essence of the paradox that we observe in the Baroque architect. When we look forward, we see the image centered; on the other hand, if we look at space as a continuous whole in movement, establishing a visual vanishing point, this image becomes anamorphic in relation to the point of view that we adopted previously, yet centered in function of the general architectural space. Leibniz spoke of chords (as when playing a musical instrument) to define the

encounter with "centered" vision. These chords, for him, were not still, yet, in contrast, dynamized, able to transmit themselves together with other chords, attracting them, reappearing and combining to infinity, as Deleuze has suggested.

The space of the church is a continuum of details that interact between themselves. All of them make up an illusion of reality, yet since the details are "real" in themselves, the illusion itself is reality. This is the fundamental idea of the Baroque spectacle and the modern spectacle: the question of the relation of appearance between details and the overall whole.

The Baroque period is the time when the discourse of verisimilitude, of appearance, is posited in a radically different manner. Both in the field of political communication and in that of the search for one's own image, the debate revolves around the way in which things should be expressed, in the way of creating credibility, of projecting realities.

Basically, the Baroque develops two new interpretations: on the one hand, it questions the idea of central perspective, and on the other it puts the concept of identity as a reflection of the universe on the agenda. This takes place in an atmosphere of tremendous confusion and contradiction, given that this is also the moment when the mechanisms of power as we know them today established themselves across the board for the first time. Mechanisms which were still represented in medieval terms but which were legitimized in a different way: on foundations laid by political science, on the nomination of and therefore on the estimation of the common will. This contradiction of different strata in a single context led to the emergence of completely unknown differential responses and/or patterns of behaviour.

The Catholic Baroque period knows that God is dying, for which reason it discovers that God is not God, and has never been God. It places individuals on an empty plain which will rapidly be utilized by the renewed organs of power, such as the Church. The appearance of modern science and the Protestant Reformation, with its discourse on the self, made up the triad of questions to which the Church had to adapt itself.

The Church reacted –under the guidance of the Company of Jesus, the Jesuits– by establishing new mechanisms which guaranteed certain limits but which also provided a certain leeway when laying out a general map for society. The Council of Trent between 1545 and 1563 established a whole series of norms which would become the canon of a whole new lifestyle: representation, the spectacle. For the first time, newness was legislated as such. Laws were stipulated which ensured control over the new in the field of representation, the only pillar of support for a morality which –as was the case with Catholic

morality at that time– knew that it lacked social legitimacy. The new was no longer interpreted in terms of a specific morality but as something which was and appeared to be without any sort of morality whatsoever and which required urgent identification and labelling: "a thing is beautiful to the extent that it is clear and evident", wrote Giulio da Fabriano. The same that Kepler will say later: "Objectivity is what you can see".

The doctrine of the Baroque Church was perfectly aware that a sea of change was taking place in the way that people were relating to reality. Moreover, the Church itself was propagating analyses which tended to fuse doctrinaire dogma with freedom to reason, as was the case with the theses of the Jesuits, who also tried to simulate understanding of the mechanisms, which is what happened in the *compositions of place* by Saint Ignacio de Loyola; or, for example, in the emergence of the *probabilism* propagated by the Dominicans, designed to analyse legitimate choices. The unitary perception of reality gave way to a fragmentation of experience and to an interest for all that which was not central, or even natural. It was not in vain that one of the most obvious features of Baroque cultural production was its desire to reflect the artificial, the specific, the strange, the abnormal, the monstrous. To cease looking at God entailed looking at oneself and discovering our own differences in others. This is the spirit that moves the Baroque period.

Most creators and thinkers towards the end of the 16th century and throughout almost all of the 17th, question the central perspectivist order, and begin to hint at the need to establish new psychological and spatial relationships in order to make way for the concept of "continuum", of a mental and physical deployment which would be capable not only of integrating expressive desires but also –and above all– of integrating the differential perceptions of individuals. The Church, faced with such a challenge, voiced considerable doubts, as this did not at first appear to be the most suitable way of settling the shifting control and power bases at the time. It goes without saying that it soon came to feel that the new ideas were the perfect arena for endorsing a new political therapy: in the area of representation. In place of illusion, the individual "recovers" his ability to participate and his legitimacy, leaving "sterile" autonomist positions to one side. The spectacle –the great all-absorbing urban designs, the *chiaroscuro*, multiple or false perspectives (anamorphic), the *trompe-l'oeil*, stage lighting– invites the individual to participate in magic, a magic which is symbiotised in the political message. As long as he is participating, he does not think about himself. Juan Antonio Maravall has written: "There is a genuinely Baroque wish to manage social patterns of behaviour by provoking the suspension of individual awareness by having recourse to the exaggerated, whose effect is reinforced by the disproportion existing between the extent of the expense and the brief duration of the sought-after pleasure. In this sense, ostentation in a culture

based on appearance acquires intrinsic value inasmuch as it contributes in an efficient manner to the formation of attitudes and the suppression of potentially adverse trends in opinion".

The illusion of the publically deployed spectacle comes within the jurisdiction of the law, in this case the political law, of verisimilitude. According to this, a religious discourse, for example –which can be accepted only with difficulty by a self which is beginning to be aware not only of his personal autonomy but also of his lack of social support– is easily projected. The universe of representation settles the question of legitimacy thanks to its own presence, by the fact of being there and offering a dynamic which is all-embracing, all-absorbing. The spectacle legitimizes itself by bringing heaven down to earth. We are dealing here then with a political response to a situation which is dangerous for the powers that be, given that reality –as in the Baroque case– takes on a profile which has a certainty that can scarcely be found in previous eras. The interest of Baroque artists in facing reality, albeit through the use of ecclesiastical doctrines, led to the latter conceiving of the formers' works as two-sided representations: the real and the virtual: that which is seen and that which it translates, thus creating paradoxes and allegories between the real and the artificial.

The Baroque spectacle is defined by its continuity, by a succession and overlapping of painting, sculpture, ornament, architecture, urbanism, rite, festival, politics, and so on. It is defined by its overall appearance. The successive anamorphoses are integrated one into the other creating a whole, a general acceleration that creates a universe in movement, impossible to centre. As Deleuze has written, on the extreme ends of the chain of Baroque creation, "the painter has become an urban planner, and we are witness to the prodigious development of a continuity of the arts, in amplitude or in extension: a fitting together of frames, each overwhelmed by the matter moving through it. This extensive unity of the arts forms a universal theatre that transports air and earth, as well as fire and water. Within it, sculptures are the true characters, and the city is a scenography where the spectators themselves are painted or sculpted images. Art, in its totality, becomes *Socius*, social public space, inhabited by Baroque dancers".

Nevertheless, the system of the spectacle, based on verisimilitude as an end and not a means, with its creation of omniform image and word, going beyond the supposed reality of these, is not just a circumstantial technique but an entire world: "It is not only a theatre but is also a church: the spectacle is not a collection of images, but social relationships between people conditioned by means of images", said Guy Debord, referring to current spectacle. The contradiction of a tautology: the spectacle defines reality and this definition defines unreality in its turn. When all that is lived moves in the direction of

representation, there is no real life, because no other life appears real. According to Debord, "The victory of the spectacle lies in the fact that nothing appears to be real until it appears in the spectacle, despite the fact that the moment it appears it loses any reality that it might have".

The spectacle of verisimilitude. Not a verisimilitude in the sense of an urgency to make us understand, but certainly based on the premise that there is an obligation to understand. Under the mantle of happiness, of the good, of consensus, of the democracy of interests, of inclusion and participation. Greil Marcus has pointed out: "As Debord drew the picture, these people were members of democratic societies: democracies of false desire. One could not intervene, but one did not want to, because as a mechanism of social control the spectacle dramatized an inner spectacle of participation, of choice. In the home, one chose between the countless variations of each product on the market [...] the spectacle dramatized an ideology of freedom". In other words, the spectacle does not just offer a discourse in order that we not think about freedom, it theatricalizes everything that exists in order to make it legitimate again, bringing it back in touch with its own roots. The Baroque era discovered the possibility of creating reality in illusion. In this sense, Yves Bonnefoy has indicated the complex position of Baroque theatre: neither illusion nor consciousness raising, but the utilization of illusion to produce being, constructing a place of hallucinatory Presence, or "reconvert the nothing seen into presence", given that it is assumed that God has created the world out of nothing. Deleuze has written that, "for a long time the world is treated as a popular theatre, dream or illusion, dressed as Harlequin, as Leibniz says; but what is truly Baroque is to do something within illusion itself, or bring to it a spiritual presence that returns to give its pieces and fragments a collective unity. The Baroque era knows perfectly well that it is not hallucination that fakes presence, but it is presence that is hallucinatory."

The spectacle is an enterprise of socialization, of vital ordering, with its eagerness to influence normatively those areas where the norm is in danger of not being interiorized or of being rejected. The French doctor-psychiatrist Renaudin wrote in the mid-19th century: "The more stubborn the madman becomes in the face of any kind of rule, the more necessary it becomes to wheel him around everywhere in a methodical fashion which will lead him in the direction of a normal existence and which sooner or later will end up becoming necessary to him".

In the face of this reality engendered by imagery, artists are deploying imagery engendered by reality. The limit, the borderline, where the two meet, is very faint and difficult to define. It would appear to be found in the very idea of verisimilitude. Gianni Vattimo suggested that "when compared with the historicity created by the scientists [and politicians], there is an apparent no-

historicity of the artist; the artist cannot teach his ways of inventing and producing to others, as he himself cannot fully account for them". This being the case, no reproduceable model for truth can be accepted in the world of art. This is why figures like Bernini or Borromini will have no followers; we are dealing here with languages which are so interiorized that they can only be understood in their own verisimilitude, in the specific applications of their intentions. In a world of relative selves, it may only be expressed in highly specific contexts, at particular times and in particular places, as is the case with Bernini, but above all with Borromini, with his more than precise works. The abstract concept of language disappears to make way for art as an adverbial –not as a substantive or adjectival– situation. Yet, does this occur at the price of non–collective understanding?

Where the specific is concerned, verisimilitude and illusion allow themselves to play with the real, with the spectator, while accepting the subjectivist nature of experience. The plausible is engendered on the basis of autonomy and not on the suppression of the latter which was what those in power, the Baroque church, intended. Artists discovered the lack of verisimilitude in central perspectives, which is why they reacted with multiple visions more in accordance with a relativist worldview, based not so much on sensual experience as on the formulation of the expression of the latter. An expression which was conditioned by the possibilities for reception generated by the discourse. In this way, the image was and was not at the same time. The meeting point is none other than a credible image in which the truth of both one and the other can establish some kind of common point of reference. The self generates, deploys its projection having previously incorporated the perceptive. It not only creates, rather it selects more than anything else (what Leibniz calls a *chord*). When it chooses, it converts the creative act into interpretation itself. The visual spectacle it broadcasts includes its own spectacle on which its own genesis is based, in order to settle the choice of imagery. This is the reason for the feeling of tautology in modern thought as established round about the 17th century, but also for the suspicion that the relation established is relative, given that our own discourse and the variations in the contexts in which we express it are not unidirectional: "The object and the subject," Lyotard wrote, "are formed together along the two poles of the perceptive field... Vision has no place on a line which puts the seer and the seen in contact with each other, but belongs in a field of visibility full of glimpsed lateralities... So reality is not expressed by a phrase such as X is like this, but by one which says X is like this and is not like this. An inconsistent description – relative to negation – is what corresponds to the assertion of reality. This lack of consistency characterises the form of the possible", the form of the credible; a world of parallaxes.

This questioning of the borderline between personal expression and the urgency of communication simultaneously questions that which is real and multiple and that which is natural in the objective sense of the word. "Rhetoric mixes the true with the probable; both aspects can be converted into a means of convincing the spectator. This is where illusionism comes in, technique, to achieve an effect and a subjective impression of reality", said Bialostocki about Baroque social sleight-of-hand.

In a representative concept of life –of "all of life", as can be observed in the galleries of social monsters in 17th century Spanish painting– perception is understood not as a prosthesis available on certain occasions but as a general body, as an organism which supplies information about life and makes it experienciable. Life, susceptible to being represented from many different points of view, all of them legitimate ones, introduces verisimilitude itself into the field of the para-moral, of that which is distanced from central discourses. This perception is not only a feeling of attraction towards the different but also towards "the other" experience itself, at first indescribable. Its describability logically involves a credible appearance: in representation, it is nominated, interpretable. This contradiction is the fundamental principle of both Baroque and modern language: the paradox of multiple thought and the gestation of representation as the means by which the multiple becomes homogenized.

This process of globalization, the reduction of everything until everything is included, is closely linked to the "dual vision" introduced by the Baroque world, which suggests that the complete image of a saint and the vision of the same is the spectator's supernatural experience. The spectator is introduced "into" the vision; he is not invited to take a look from the outside. The improbable and the unlikely become plausible, truly convincing. This, in fact, will be the effect that lies behind the need of artists to proclaim their personal autonomy, their idiosyncratic personalities. The fact of describing oneself, strategically capturing the experience of others, implies one's own spectacularization of the relation, a possible area of debate between opposing parties. To grasp the idea of the total Baroque work, it is necessary to enter fully into this universe. Bernini sets out to offer this point of entrance, granted free of charge. You do not have to pay. The spectator is already a constituting part of the conglomerate. To communicate –in this universe of verisimilitudes– means involving the listener in such a way that he enters a universe that is "other" than his –a virtual universe, a virtual reality. The urgent and imperious need of the individual, modelled instantly by power as an opening for a political discourse. A special moulding based on a defence of territorialisation, of fitting into a framework.

With the spectator as part of the spectacle the existence of illusion can be socially legitimized. In the same way a magician invites someone from the

public to come up on stage to help him in his act. Undoubtedly, the person who goes up does not do so to "help him", nor to confirm that there is no trick –which is what it is assumed he has been called for– as evidently he is not going to see it. In reality, he is there to socially legitimize the illusion and the trick, in order to naturalize and consensuate the illusory.

In the same way, the current world of communication and the spectacle rests directly on this mechanism to legitimate its existence: the trials shown on television where the spectators and jury are a consubstantial part of the images; the commercial telephone sales shows on tv whose principal characters are the false public that appears on the screen; the images of OJ Simpson on the freeway, images not only of his vehicle and the police, but also of the groups of people who watched the chase live; the canned laughter on television; and so on.

But let us return for a moment to the 16th century. The main measures adopted by the Council of Trent, which tried to dictate the artistic practice of the Counter-Reformation, consisted of the following: "no image will be represented that suggests a false doctrine or which might lead those who have not received an adequate education into dangerous errors" and: "images must be suitable both in their parts and as a whole with regard to the stories which they are describing and to the places in which these take place". In other words, artists must tailor their work to suit the premises of a reality imposed by political rhetoric. The universe is conceived as a series of historical divisions, some of which are barren. Any discourse which tends to shy away from these marked divisions is not accepted. Confusion is elevated to the rank of Public Danger Number One. A confusion which is defined by a lack of objectivization in the public spectacle. In this way, and for the first time, censorship acquires those characteristics which have made it what it is today. In this case we are dealing with a previous censorship which –as we have already indicated– legislates the new before this actually appears. The preventative nature of ideologies is based on this attempt to make a precocious discovery of *difference*, just as the violent nature of institutions is based on the confirmation of this *difference*. The dogma of representation is thus based on the persecution of confusion, given that the latter reveals and uncovers the established mechanisms of the ruling classes. The political condition of confusion is to unmask the silence of power by provoking a reaction from the latter, obliging it to necessarily make transparent those policies for which it has conceived ordered territories.

In the Baroque theatre of representation, light is the element by means of which the lack of any kind of centre is illuminated, the way in which artists transform doctrines into individual allegories, trying as they do so to "obviate" the Tridentine rulings. Anamorphosis, foreshortening, optical tricks, all attempt

to resolve this imposition/lack of centre which is so tragic –not because it is pessimistic, but because there is no doubt that the circumstances of the above-mentioned centre are a direct result of the latter's uselessness.

Light becomes the general mechanism of performance, being an element which in itself consists of relativity. However, light is used not only as an apparent phenomenon, but is also expressed as the element which illuminates that which has previously lain in shadow: it shows the mechanisms, but in doing so it also includes the doctrine of "nothing left out". It is therefore hardly surprising that the Baroque church or the current institutions of control immediately applaud this reading, given that it makes it possible for everything to be representable, susceptible to be illuminated. As everything may be reflected, the field of political action spreads by means of light to cover all orders of life. The Enlightenment understood this technique perfectly, applying it to the social sciences, to jails and hospitals.

Reality itself becomes spectacle, an accumulation of techniques and representative, controllable devices. Baroque artists generated a model of communicative freedom, defending its verisimilitude –its own self-reference– in the face of the canon of established truth, but it also opened the doors behind which power was hiding itself behind the illusion of representation.

This conception and reality of personal verisimilitude (a typically Baroque paradox) was defined as *decorum*. Decorum, as it was formulated by the Baroque essayists once the Church had taken charge of the matter, was the art of making painting conform suitably to its location and its theme. A biblical or historical episode could not be painted unless it made use of those elements – such as clothes, buildings, races, characters– which tradition had handed down to us. In the same way, it was not possible, according to the rules of decorum, to place a picture or a sculpture in a place that was not "exactly right", when it came to understanding the painting or for conferring meaning on the place selected. The notion of decor in fact obscures a political argument: it is the only way to profer a certain degree of reality on the spectacle. Detail legitimates illusion. If all of the space of the Baroque church is illusion, detail should be fixed with total objectivity and rigor so that illusion might always be an accumulation of fixed realities, there to appeal to when the spectacle becomes too "unreal".

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how the sense of many sculptures, mouldings, paintings, portraits, and interior volumes on the walls of a Baroque church are incomprehensible, and even laughable, when they are approached straight on. They only seem to have meaning and life in function of the space surrounding them. Central vision kills them, forcing them to lose all meaning.

This is the irony of an object that dies when looked upon straight on and lives when fleeing away, when it participates in collective illusion.

When this notion is analyzed in detail, it is not difficult to see certain connections with our own present day. If decorum was understood in the Baroque period according to moral and pedagogical guidelines, today it is necessary to view it in the light of the representational order of the individual. How do I express myself in a way which is true to my nature –natures– when I also have to be aware of the importance and specific nature of each context?

In reality, the discourse concerning decorum has been more apparent in the creative debate –not only the artistic one, but also in the field of advertising– than we have been aware. Consideration of the adaptation of the message to the medium and to the place has played a large part in the artistic expression of recent years. Moreover, they would appear to have been the main touchstones of most analyses. In the same way that the people of the Baroque period know how necessary anamorphosis was when positioning statues in the upper regions of churches, contemporary art has incorporated these same optic –and ethical– corrections, in order to elicit a greater understanding on the part of the spectator. The move of creative practice over to the media, to the street, using urban, advertising mechanisms, suggests that this is precisely what has happened. The importance of establishing parities between a certain will to expression, and a context has led to a practice which logically follows a path of confusion, paradox and irony, knowing that no truth can be established outside territorial disciplines. Current artistic knowledge knows itself to be insecure as far as its foundations are concerned, given that what autonomy it has is weak in comparison to other interpretative systems, making it *permeable to non-artistic norms* as a consequence, and available for reinterpretation within the framework of an extra-artistic synthesis with representations that have no theoretical relation with artistically based knowledge. This same lack of limits is without a doubt an endless source of *heresy*.

The self which wants to speak, cannot do so in the abstract, and cannot do so either by restricting itself to just one context; rather it must be aware of the existence of many contexts and of the many and varied expressive impulses to be found in oneself. Thus, verisimilitude cannot be conceived as a fixed communicative structure either, but rather as a sheaf of infinite variables. This is the tragi-comedy of our times: we do not need to build strategies to talk, because we ourselves are strategic devices –we are living parallaxes.

(English translation: Jeffrey Swartz and Matthew Tree)