

**Baroque and Post/Colonial Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa: The  
Aesthetic Embodiment of Unreason**

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## **Introduction: Une littérature-monde baroque**

The mysteries of mimicry had a special attraction for me. Its phenomena showed an artistic perfection usually associated with man-wrought things. [...] Consider the tricks of an acrobatic caterpillar (of the Lobster Moth) which in infancy looks like bird's dung, but after molting develops scabbly hymenopteroid appendages and baroque characteristics, allowing the extraordinary fellow to play two parts at once (like the actor in Oriental shows who becomes a pair of intertwined wrestlers): that of a writhing larva and that of a big ant seemingly harrowing it.

--Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (124-5)

## **Introduction: What does “baroque” mean?**

I choose to open with this first-person quotation of Vladimir Nabokov for several reasons. First, the nature of the work, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, in which these few lines appear strikes me as particularly relevant for the questions that arise in relation to representation and reality, specifically with regard to the temporal mutability of both. The autobiographical text, which was initially published in 1948, reappeared in a revised edition in 1966 after Nabokov was able to unearth personal and historical documents thought to be lost after the Bolshevik Revolution, his father's assassination, and the appropriation of his estate by the new communist regime. The notion that one can re-visit one's autobiography is interesting in the sense that an autobiography initially is a representation of one's life as lived in reality (up to a certain point, obviously, and therefore by nature incomplete), and so re-visiting an autobiography implies both a change in the representational material, but also necessarily a change in reality as time has altered the circumstances and perception of the work's re-composition. This relationship to time, the always-changing face of reality, and the continuous attempts at self-inscription made by humanity within this time in an effort to transcend it (think of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*) reveal the “truly temporal predicament” that lies at the base of Baroque allegory and irony (Chambers, 80).

Before going any further into the relationship between Being and Time (c.f. Heidegger), let me come to my second reason for opening with this quotation, which should be obvious given the title of this dissertation, and that is the inclusion of the word

“baroque.” It is often the case that particular works or certain artists will be referred to as “classic” with little thought to what this term signifies, both aesthetically and historically, and without so much as a fleeting glance at its theoretical counterpart: “baroque,” a term which is generally brandished as almost as superficially as the other, though its occurrence is more rare. A mere triviality, when one encounters the ascription “classic,” there is generally little investigation as to what it means, but if asked to define classic, a suitable definition would prove to be quite elusive. At best, one might conjure up images of an American automobile from the 1950’s, or perhaps a vague impression of ancient Greco-Roman architecture, but all in all, the word itself, would mean very little. And so it would seem also for things that are seemingly randomly tagged as “baroque.” Yet what makes the baroque as important, as intriguing, as influential, if not more so than its highly esteemed and almost pejorative Siamese twin “classic” is that though it often appears as a superfluous side note or peculiar afterthought, the meaning of which is almost irrelevant, it actually means a great deal more than one thinks.

Which brings me to my third reason for choosing this particular quotation: it seems that the definition of the term baroque is contained within the way that it is used and its descriptive effect; as such, baroque provides its own auto-definition. There is for instance, in the description of this particular moth larva, the notion of a metamorphosis, a shedding of one skin and a changing into something else. But even more provocative is the outcome of this transformation (from resembling bird dung to having sprouted “scabby” appendages and acquired certain baroque characteristics): that the creature is now able “to play two parts at once,” mimicking its own assault and thereby insuring its own protection from potential predators. Ironic as it may seem, it is in a state of total vulnerability and apparent powerlessness that the “extraordinary fellow” finds itself the most powerfully defended. Furthermore, one might extrapolate that the larva not only appears this way, but in so appearing, like the oriental wrestlers to which Nabokov refers, actually *becomes* something other, its own anamorphic doubling, and in this respect, the description provides an operative definition for the preceding ambiguous and seemingly undefined “baroque characteristics” that the larva develops. My fourth and final reason for choosing to open with this quotation may appear, and not altogether inappropriately,

as somewhat of an afterthought, but, the sentence structure itself in which the word and its own definition appears is itself quite baroque in its characteristics: a minute attention to detail that almost overwhelms the content of the expression, a combination of seemingly unrelated ideas (moths and oriental wrestlers), and a complexity of style that requires the reader to “look again” to make sure s/he has understood the meaning of the words just read. In this sense, one might say that the baroque not only defines itself here, but constitutes its own demonstration as well.

### **A. How the Baroque Ended up in Africa**

The world of human life appears to us as an influx of sensory perceptions, a barrage of signs, signals, and stimuli, from which our conscious minds then construct a simplified order or image in which to operate logically. This processed version of the world is what we commonly understand as reality: a composition of systems that define and designate cognitive categories for the things we encounter between waking and sleeping. Artists have always tried, through a variety of techniques including the mixing of registers that depicts a profound and unexpected otherness that seems to extend beyond the work itself and provide a fleeting glimpse of the incomprehensibility of being in the world. This simulation of the utterly real experience of existence, using a diverse set of strategies and artistic techniques such as trompe-l’oeil, mise-en-abîme, allegory, anamorphosis, and other forms of imagistic or literary illusionism that engage the observer, spectator, reader on a visceral level to momentarily elucidate the utter ambiguousness of being, is one of the fundamental aspects of baroque art. This “baroque art” is the central concern of my thesis, though not in the historically limited sense of the artifacts of a particular socio-historical period, namely the religious arts of late and post-Renaissance Europe; rather, I interpret baroque broadly, as an aesthetic construct that was birthed posthumously in the mid to late nineteenth century, which can be applied either retroactively to the historical Baroque, or contemporaneously to a “modern baroque” that appears in various ways in the nineteenth century, or to various forms of expression from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, often dubbed “neo-baroque.”

The overall form of the dissertation itself might be considered baroque in many ways, beginning with the dual focus of “Baroque and Post/Colonial Sub-Saharan



Francophone Africa.” As such, it can be read elliptically, having two foci around which the discourse revolves. One of these foci is of course the idea of the baroque, which I approach critically, taking into account the numerous, and not always concordant aesthetic and philosophical discourses that have created the problematic concept of a baroque “thing.” The second of these two foci is African literary and cultural productions, and included in this, the theoretical treatments of African literature through which I carve out a space in which the baroque as such can be quite useful. And possibly one of the most pertinent notions that arises in between these two foci is that the baroque, or the idea of a certain “baroquisme” in African literature comes not from the outside imposition of a Western theoretical construct as seems to be the case in the theoretical constructs of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Rather, it is the invention of African intellectuals who see it as a critical apparatus that, with its emphasis on the non-rational, affective, and performative role of art, may bear more resemblance to what some might consider “indigenous” modes of criticism.

The baroque has recently become a topic of interest in certain cultural and intellectual discourses, especially as it relates to contemporary society and a discussion of a “neo-baroque” mentality as a characterization of some of the bizarre aspects of the global consumer culture of the 1980’s, 90’s and beyond. There is, for example, Omar Calabrese’s *Neo-baroque: A Sign of the Times*, which conducts an analysis of popular American and European culture against the backdrop of the historical baroque to define a general form that manifests itself in diverse ways in the cultural expression of our current epoch. There are also numerous theorists who have theorized various forms of neo-baroque in Latin American culture, a sample of which appears in the January 2009 issue of the *PMLA*.<sup>1</sup> Yet in this discussion of a universal (neo-)baroque aesthetic in the

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<sup>1</sup> The January 2009 issue of the *PMLA* vol. 124 no. 1, the section “The Neobaroque and the Americas” (pp. 127-88) provides several exemplary investigations of the various forms that this neo-baroque assumes, including Lois Parkinson Zamora’s analysis of a postcolonial neo-baroque in Latin America, which both stems and departs from a Colonial Baroque heritage in former Spanish colonies, and a thrice-removed form of expression, which she terms “brut barroco” (127-42); William Egginton’s interpretation of George W. Bush’s political self-representation in terms of baroque strategies of representation (143-9); Ronald Greene’s analysis of Haroldo de Campos’ extreme neo-baroque poetry (150-5); Monika Kaup’s depiction of a baroque style in contemporary Cuban visual culture (156-71); Salvador Oropesa’s discussion of a

twentieth and twenty-first century, Africa does not come into play. Granted, Africa did have a history of colonization that was very different from that of the Americas, but the general neo-baroque cultural form, which is not a return of the baroque but a new manifestation of the baroque aesthetic spirit, need not necessarily be limited to geographic areas in which there was some initial seventeenth-century historical Baroque presence. My hope in elaborating a theory of the baroque in contemporary African literature and culture is to first speak against the exception of Africa from the rest of the west in the consideration of a late twentieth early twenty-first-century “neo-baroque” as Africa is very much a part of the modern world, and second to shed light on the culture and politics of modern Africa through a study of the origins of modernity in a time which we have posthumously called “baroque.” Looking at the baroque in this way clarifies some of the fundamental elements of a baroque mentality that focuses on the body, the passions, and a language that defies logic and reason, operating in the paradoxical domain of multiple meanings and the subversion of dichotomies through the suspended tension of opposites such as self and other, reason and madness, fiction and reality. In so doing, I intend to push the baroque further as a theoretical concept, not only in the ways we think about Africa and African literature, but also in the way we think in general.

The idea of the baroque in African literature is not an entirely new concept; it seems to arise indirectly, as did the concept of negritude in the early to mid-twentieth century, coming to it from the diaspora. As early as 1981, René Ménénil identified “quelque chose de baroque dans notre esthétique” speaking of fellow Antillean writers (*Tracées*, 222), and in 1990, Édouard Glissant put forth the notion of a “baroque mondialisé,” not only as an aesthetic, but also as a way of being-in-the-world (*Poétique de la Relation*, 93). Recognizing the trans-Atlantic linkages that are a very profound part of African consciousness (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*), a handful of scholars turned an eye specifically toward sub-Saharan Africa at an international colloquium in the late 1990’s and posed the question explicitly in their pioneering work: *Nouvelles écritures*

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queer neo-baroque in Mexico (172-9); and an interview with Carlos Monsiváis concerning the neo-baroque and popular culture (180-8).

*francophones, vers un nouveau baroque?* My dissertation answers this question with a resounding yes. There is indeed a pervasive presence of different “formes de baroque” (Paré, 112) in francophone African literature from the late twentieth century, which represents not only a vision of contemporary African reality in all of its baroque excess and contrast, but of what one might also call “global modernity.”

With the recent introduction of the concept of “littérature-monde” into the field of francophone studies, there has been much discussion and debate as to the theoretical and material implications of this paradigm shift. At the heart of the manifesto “Pour une littérature-monde en français,” which was first published on March 15, 2007 bearing the signatures of forty-four writers who use the French language as a vehicle for creative expression, is the desire to get beyond the dichotomy that has been erected between metropolitan France and other French-speaking parts of the globe often referred to under the umbrella of “la francophonie.” Given the recent success and recognition that writers from outside of France have received in France and abroad, the supporters of the manifesto, which include names such as Edouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Boualem Sansal, Abdourahman Waberi, and others from around the globe, advocate putting an end to this differentiation between French and francophone literature and the creation of a world-literature in French. Likened to a “Copernican revolution,” this change entails the return of the world and of an inclusive anti-totalitarian globalism that has long been missing from French literature. The hyphenated term “littérature-monde” is itself compound, or better complex, as it entails not only a global approach to literature, but also a conception of literature connected with the world it depicts and in turn creates. It is precisely in this respect that I see the particular promise of developing a trans-historical and trans-cultural construct of the baroque to discuss African literature *in relation to* the literatures of the world, and the world of literature.

### **B. An Existential Baroque**

In order to reach beyond mere literary analysis and extend the implications of the African baroque to the socio-political and cultural arenas that are so inextricably bound to both the thematic and praxis of African literature, I have had to begin with a detailed and sustained exposition of the specific historical context of the baroque. Thus, I begin in

chapter one by defining what I mean by baroque, both in artistic representation and in culture and politics. This definition of the baroque, which tends at times to be obscured by what the baroque *is not*, is grounded on the basic premise that the baroque, identified by Michel Foucault in *Les Mots et les Choses* as that pivotal transition between the Renaissance and classical episteme, is characterized by representational and rhetorical strategies that draw on the morbid-erotic and corporeal imagination to represent “reality” as an irrational, chaotic encounter of conflictive forces. The aesthetic particularities of a baroque painting, image, or text aim to re-produce the act of representation itself, thereby driving a wedge between what is taken as reality and appearances, and it may be helpful to think of Corneille’s *L’illusion comique* for the way that theatrical representation is *mise-en-abîme*: the spectators experience a play within a play within a play, thrice removed.<sup>2</sup> Beyond merely constituting an art form such as the fruition of Renaissance art (as that theorized by nineteenth-century art historian Jacob Burckhardt and his student Heinrich Wölfflin), the baroque reflects a deep-seated cultural phenomenon that influences the art of the times. Accordingly, in *Culture of the Baroque*, José Antonio Maravall defines baroque culture as “a long period of a profound social crisis, whose very existence allows us to comprehend that century’s specific characteristics” (19). Thus, with the help of baroque theorists such as the aforementioned theorists and also Jean-Claude Vuillemin and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, I outline the fundamental elements of a baroque episteme or mentality, which delves into the murky realms of unreason and the imagination to portray a post-Copernican world that has lost its center.

The historicizing impulse that at once seems so prominent in the opening chapter serves only as a pretext for the subsequent (and coincidental) de-historicization that follows, as defining a precise Baroque historical period proves to be a problematic endeavor in and of itself. Indeed, for Foucault, the baroque is a relatively brief transitional period at the dawn of the seventeenth century, whereas for Vuillemin, it lasts

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<sup>2</sup> See Patrick J. O’Brien’s discussion of “The Empty Grave: *L’illusion comique* and the problem of meaning,” which conducts a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of Corneille’s staging of a play within a play within a play—the magician Alcandre’s diving revelation of Pridamante’s son Clindor (who himself has become an actor and is playing his role in a theatrical play)—and the restorative social function of theatrical performance. Patrick O’Brien, Ph.D. thesis, *Shimmering Space: Theatricality in Pierre Corneille’s L’illusion comique and Le Cid*, University of Minnesota, 1987 (pp. 17-26 and 114-132).

from the late sixteenth to the mid eighteenth century, a much more broad historical formulation, and this is a point of discord that I choose to leave in suspense. This is not to say that the historicity of the baroque is of no importance. Quite to the contrary, in fact, for I continue to argue in the chapters that follow that there is a particular socio-economic and political reality that coincides with the baroque aesthetic manifestations I describe, and the initial formulations of Baroque culture that I undertake, whether from the long or short view of a baroque “century,” serve as an under girding to what ensues. Thus, in chapter two, I continue to build on these basic notions of the baroque as an anti-rational art which arises in response to, or in concert with, a general atmosphere of political, economic, social, and psychological unrest or uncertainty, and in so doing I shift my focus from the Early Modern period to the nineteenth century, a point at which, interestingly enough, Foucault recognizes a second major epistemic shift toward what he proposes is a thoroughly modern mindset. Yet I show in relation to this particular historical moment, which Foucault posits at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that one might also take a similarly “long view” of the advent of modernity, which lasts much longer, throughout the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth.

Interested in elucidating some of the particular material and artistic characteristics of a “modern baroque” that Christine Buci-Glucksmann extrapolates in the context of Walter Benjamin’s social criticism and the poetics of Charles Baudelaire in *La Raison Baroque*, I develop a broad theory of the baroque that encompasses both art and critical theory, as well as material socio-economic realities of late or high modernity. In 1935, Castilian philosopher Eugenio d’Ors theorized the baroque, not as an isolated occurrence, but as a recurring trans-historical undercurrent and a *human constant* in modernity, citing nineteenth-century artists such as Goya, Rimbaud, and others along with representatives of a historical Early Modern baroque style. And Wolfgang Drost’s 1950 article “Baudelaire et le Néo-Baroque” provides further evidence to support a baroque aesthetic at work in the arts of nineteenth -century France. Frederic Mauro’s 1963 contribution to an international colloquium on the baroque (“Y a-t-il une économie du baroque?” ) constitutes a *point de départ* for understanding distinct social, political, and economic circumstances of a modern baroque, which I further develop through an examination of

Friedrich Nietzsche's proto-existentialist and anti-historical philosophy, a philosophy which I propose might also be considered baroque in its own right. The reason for discussing the complex interaction between art, culture, and theory in terms of a modern baroque is to anticipate a development which I take up in my third chapter on the Latin American neo-baroque, and even more explicitly in chapter five in terms of the post-colonial African baroque: namely that art and art theory, politics and political theory become inextricably intertwined in modern and post-modern manifestations of baroque cultures. Finally, the historical specificity that receives so much attention in these expository chapters serves as a backdrop for my analyses of a contemporary global baroque art and culture as a means of illuminating specific political, economic, psychological and, of course, aesthetic elements of the baroque.

The simultaneous and opposite impulses to historicize and de-historicize at the same time, rather than an internal contradiction, constitute a conscious effort to bring into question the notion of linear time altogether, which has so often been a determining factor in socio-historical and cultural anthropology.<sup>3</sup> As such, historicity itself is thrown on its head by the very idea of the baroque in its historical and material specificity, which is nonetheless encompassed by an a-historical or trans-historical theoretical aesthetic. Gilles Deleuze's *Le Pli [The Fold]* represents a recovery of a baroque philosophy, which Deleuze identifies with the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz. Interestingly enough, Deleuze spends a significant amount of time discussing the emblematic baroque form of the Fold in terms of the work of late nineteenth-century French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, which illustrates a potential way in which Deleuze's stated aim to stretch the baroque "beyond its precise historical limits" might be attained (33). For myself, and I think this would also be true for Deleuze, the baroque represents a particular historical complex of social, philosophical, and aesthetic factors, which can also be extrapolated into a set of quasi-universal characteristics that are extremely useful for investigating the relationships and interconnections between philosophy, art, literature, society, and culture.

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<sup>3</sup> See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

In addition to Deleuze's notion of the baroque Fold, I appropriate several other Deleuzo-Guattarian theoretical constructs through which I formulate my understanding of the baroque, including the rhizome and *lignes de fuite* [lines of flight], as these notions are construed in their schizo-analytical treatment of contemporary global capitalist society and thought, *Mille Plateaux*. The *ligne de fuite* reveals itself to be particularly applicable to a baroque aesthetic, one that relies on subtle aesthetic strategies to trick the spectator into seeing something else, something more, for the *ligne de fuite* represents a sort of theoretical escape route, a *différance* (in the Derridian sense) of meaning, which is always also elsewhere: a reserve of potentialities that remain partially concealed in the cracks or lacuna of a work of art. Another key construct in *Mille Plateaux* is that of the rhizome, which is also somewhat of a destabilizing agent. The rhizomatic relationship is a lateral, transversal relationship that does not seek to root itself in terms of a singularity but, rather, espouses plurality and connections between different points and stratifications (multiple layers of meaning). The multiplicity of competing perspectives that rhizomatic relation implies is particularly useful for understanding a baroque aesthetic, which embraces ambiguity, contradiction, and incongruity. Édouard Glissant recovers the particular notion of the rhizome in his theorization of a *Poetics of Relation*, specifically in terms of Antillean identity which, arising out of the deterritorialization of the Atlantic Slave Trade and successive waves of immigration, cannot possibly arrive at any singular rooted conception and must rely, rather, on "relational poetics" to express a hybrid and polyglot form of subjectivity.

These theoretical constructs come to the fore in Chapter three as I argue that the baroque reappears, but transformed in the context of its Latin American adaptations. This is an important theoretical step in situating the baroque as a phenomenon that is not limited to Western Europe, and in many ways its adaptations to a Latin American "third world" context prefigure the ways in which the baroque will emerge in postcolonial Africa through the ideas of cultural mixing, re-composition of multiple fragmentary identities, and subversive political and aesthetic engagement. In many seventeenth and eighteenth-century Spanish colonies, the baroque forms of religious and political edifices were often appropriated or contaminated by indigenous practices, a practice which

Monika Kaup describes, employing the Deleuzo-Guattarian vocabulary used to describe the work of Franz Kafka, as “a process of becoming minor.” Minor in relation to other perceived “major” cultural forces, those of the colonizers, the New World Baroque of the colonial period will be reincarnated (much in the same way as for Deleuze and Buci-Glucksmann, the historical baroque serves as a point of departure for an investigation of a modern baroque in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century art and thought) in the explicitly political form of a “contraconquista” or conter-conquest in the artistic and theoretical works of modern Latin American intellectuals Aléjo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, and others. This New World Baroque marks a concerted effort to re-construct an autonomous, hybrid Latin American identity in terms of an aesthetic and cultural expression of a “mestizo” (*métis, métissé*) or mixed worldview (c.f. Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Inordinate Eye*, chapter 3). From Lois Parkinson Zamora’s invocation of a neo-baroque aesthetic in the work of Argentine writer Jorge-Luis Borges, I move into a discussion of the neo-baroque in contemporary society in terms of Guy Debord’s “Society of the Spectacle,” which involves the substitution of spectacular representation for reality. I further elaborate this particular aspect of the baroque and its social correlative of a collective and individual expression of identity through the re-appropriation of aesthetic imagery and the social performance of the self. These performative socio-political conceptions lay the groundwork for chapter five in which I undertake a detailed analysis of the political economy of the African postcolony, precisely in terms of a theory of baroque auto-representation. Furthermore, it is through the notion of identity performance that I engage in a discussion of the baroque in the francophone Caribbean, in the context of *créolité* and what Édouard Glissant describes in *Poetics of Relation* as a globalized baroque, which is not only an art or style, but produces “a being-in-the-world” (78), and I provide a glimpse of how this appears in literature through Christiane Ndiaye’s excellent analysis of feminine baroque characters in the novels of Haitian writer Émile Ollivier.

Together these three chapters provide a broad backdrop of the baroque in its diverse cultural and aesthetic applications, from the Early Modern period to the present. Through a genealogical approach to the different aesthetic, political, and cultural



manifestations of the baroque, from Early Modernity to post-modernity, my ultimate aim is to extend the notion of the baroque to the literature and culture of postcolonial Africa. As different as these historically and culturally specific manifestations of the baroque may be, there is nonetheless a consistently recurring theme, namely the absence of any absolute standard for determining what is real and the corresponding experimentation with various modes of representation that play on a blurred distinction between real and imaginary, authentic and artificial, and reason and unreason as an expression of the utter uncertainty of human being and of human society. It is as such that the baroque opens up as a concept at once historically fixed and at the same time trans-historically relevant, for there have been arguably as many manifestations of a “baroquisme” in art and culture as one can imagine; yet I propose that there is a particular globalized manifestation of a baroque way of thinking and being that appears in different ways in art and culture throughout the world. This “neo-baroque” is a fundamentally existential phenomenon that exists in the world in different ways in different times and in different places with little, if anything, that can be distilled or defined as its core essence, except perhaps for its utter lack of essence. And its existence has been acknowledged to varying degrees in the art and culture of Europe, the Americas, and only very recently of Africa in the twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries. In the second and third parts of my dissertation I identify specific stages in the development of this global baroque phenomenon in the literature and political culture of post-colonial Africa.

### **C. A Relational Baroque**

Before proceeding to a discussion of a postcolonial baroque in African literature, I undertake, in chapter four, a general overview of the development of African literature over the course of the twentieth century. It was in the cultural melting pot that characterized 1920’s Paris that something we might term African consciousness emerged onto the scene of modernity, a consciousness that was linked to poetry, jazz, surrealism (itself in many ways a recuperation of numerous baroque aesthetic traits and tropes), and a politics of cultural encounter that Amadou Ly identifies later in the work Aimé Césaire as (oxymoronically) a “pur baroquisme” (see Appendix A). Thus the baroque that eventually appears in postcolonial Africa, like its European and Latin American neo-

baroque counter-parts, has a long history, rooted in the tradition of nineteenth century colonial exoticism which, when Africa began to express itself, was incorporated and transformed in order to express not a return to a lost paradise of a mythical Africa, but a new, hybrid vision of Africa complicated by its interactions, tragic as they were, with the Western world. I trace this development, which gradually builds over the course of the twentieth century, from Césaire and Senghor and their predecessors in the 1920's that Christopher Miller discusses in his book *Nationalists and Nomads*, through the decades of de-colonization with representatives such as Eza Boto (first pseudonym of Cameroonian writer Mongo Beti), Camara Laye, and Ferdinand Oyono, and finally to the days of independence, beginning with Ahmadou Kourouma, and the infamous Yambo Ouologuem, not to mention the pioneering work of authors such as Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Ousmane Sembène. In addition to outlining the traces of the postcolonial baroque in these works, this brief excursion into the origins of African literature helps to contextualize the significance of the prefix “post” in post-colonial African literature, a simultaneously temporal and non-temporal indicator, the ambiguousness of which is particularly well-suited for a baroque theoretical approach.<sup>4</sup>

In chapter five I focus on establishing the literary and political stakes of a theory of the baroque in postcolonial African literature, taking as my starting point Joseph Paré's book *Écritures et discours*, in which he identifies particular “formes de baroquisme” as an element of the African novelistic aesthetic. I build on his conception of a subversive baroque representational strategy in Congolese writer Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire*, highlighting the politicization of literature that a baroque aesthetic encapsulates and indeed augments through the notion of the power of representation to re-create alternative realities. This notion finds its material manifestation in the African postcolony through the participatory involvement of the masses in ratifying the power fetish of any given dictatorial regime, a participation that can also be highly subversive, as Achille Mbembe illustrates in his treatise *De la postcolonie*. Based on what Mbembe identifies as a

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<sup>4</sup> Anne McClintock notes the ubiquity of the prefix “post-” in her article, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” which “signals [...] a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical ‘progress’” (*Social Text*, 1992, no. 31/32, p. 84-98 at 85).

“baroque character” of the spectacular and often obscene political manifestations of postcolonial despots whose power is more a matter of representation than of reality, and corresponding “baroque practices” on the part of the people, which paradoxically subvert the power structure through ambiguous gestures that both ratify and empty the power fetish of any meaning. I propose that the performance politics of power and its subversive counter-practices in the African postcolony are played out in literary representations in particularly striking and meaningful ways. These subversive baroque practices are enacted in *Le Pleurer-rire* through a linguistic subversion that valorizes popular discourses and seemingly “vulgar” modes of expression, as well as through a formal subversion of the novelistic genre that calls into question the authorial (and authoritative) position of representation itself. I also identify and elaborate these two levels of subversion in Mbembe’s *De la postcolonie* itself, in the way he makes use of “official” media sources such as newspaper articles and theoretical texts, as well as numerous references to the novelist Sony Labou Tansi, who is also known for his critical portrayal of, albeit fictional, African dictators. In so doing, Mbembe plays with official disciplinary discourse, by introducing the subversive elements of fiction and political satire into his discussion of the postcolony.

My literary analyses of the baroque in postcolonial francophone Africa focuses primarily on the novel, and there is a good reason for this as Paré presents the novel as a privileged genre that is best able to articulate and relate the realities of the postcolonial francophone African experience (21). Nonetheless, among other areas, including theater and film where I envision a certain baroque to be no less present, it is in theoretical discourses, to which as I allude in the work of Nietzsche, Benjamin, Glissant, Foucault, Deleuze, and of course Mbembe, that a critical function, aiming to suggest possibilities rather than to deduce certainties is embodied. What Mbembe does in including “le romancier” Sony Labou Tansi in his analysis of the African postcolony, is to propose alternative ways of studying African realities through aesthetic rather than purely sociological approaches. In so doing, Mbembe demonstrates how to go beyond merely reading a work in terms of social realism that interprets art as a portrait of reality, and to look at the work itself for what its modes of representation imply about that particular

reality. It is in this latter sense that a baroque theory of representation proves extremely useful.<sup>5</sup>

Building on the notion of subversive baroque practices, in chapter six I undertake an analysis, of Sony Labou Tansi's writing, focusing on his 1979 novel, *La Vie et demie*. Through a detailed analysis of the text, its themes, and its characters, I discuss the particularly baroque elements in the novel's form and in the recurring themes of death and life, as well as sexuality and power relations, all of which inform a particularly macabre, yet strangely hopeful, perception of humanity. I also discuss the way that Labou Tansi's manipulations and adaptations of standard French, much like those of Ahmadou Kourouma, enact a semantic disruption that is characteristic of a baroque aesthetic. Furthermore, I note the various baroque strategies that are developed in Sony Labou Tansi's writing to perform, for example, the *mise-en-abyme* of reality in representation, and as such the text can be read as an embodiment of a subversive resistance in writing that refuses death. One aspect of the baroque that I highlight in *La Vie et demie*, which is hinted at earlier through Ndiaye's reading of Ollivier and present to some degree also in Buci-Glucksmann's discussion of Baudelaire, is the central role of the feminine which embodies a superior anti-logic or un-rationality emblematic of the baroque. It is the question of baroque femininity that motivates my choice of novels in the final chapter in which I focus on two female African novelists, Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul, and the ways in which their writing constitutes a challenge to the limits of rationality and reason through and literary representation—and a positive appropriation—of a kind of baroque madness.

In chapter seven I engage the notion of baroque madness as it is depicted (and enacted) in the works of two female novelists. Beginning with Camerounian Calixthe Beyala's 1988 novel *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, I illustrate a kind of baroque contrast that

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<sup>5</sup> This is what Mbembe, writing with Susan Nuttall, calls "new *critical pedagogies* [...] of writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making..." as the expression of a profound need to rethink the way we think about Africa and what it might mean to *be* African. This new scholarship of the creative practices that continually reshape the forms of African life (as much as they do life in any other area of the globe) requires a mixing of registers—popular, scientific, theoretical, aesthetic—in order to account for the "worldliness of African life in general and of the African metropolis as a compositional process that is displacable and reversible by the act of reading and deciphering" ("Writing the World from an African Metropolis," *Public Culture* 2004, 16(3): 347–372 at 352).

appears in Urban Africa between two visions of the world: namely the illusions of modernity and its heralded “progress,” which are confronted with the destitute and often grotesque realities of poverty and a kind of social imprisonment. The sense of having nowhere to go is foregrounded in the way that the text represents a dialogue between two imprisoned women. In addition to depicting the madness of the imprisoned protagonist Tanga and her interlocutor Anna-Claude, who together share their stories to pay homage to “la femme inconnue,” Beyala’s text also enacts that same subversive transfer and ultimate dissolution of identity between interlocutors, imposing an imperative upon the reader who in turn shares in the experience of madness and the dissolution of the self that constitutes Anna-Claude’s transformation in the text: all of our names shall be Tanga. In Senegalese Ken Bugul’s first novel *Le Baobab fou* (1984) and her first “truly fictional novel,” *La Folie et la mort* (2000), I delve deeper into the forms of unreason, irrationality, or madness that characterize the baroque aesthetic, both as they appear in the textual structures of these women’s works and in their content, in the roles and functions of their female protagonists. These texts similarly portray the madness of modern society through the eyes and actions of their characters. Yet, more than that, in *La Folie et la mort*, madness is simulated in the very form of the text, which often refuses logical narrative structures, thereby rendering in abstraction the effect of non-rational subjectivity and re-producing an immediate sensory impression akin to that of cinematic representation. The effect of this textual viscosity extends beyond the limits of the semantic forms to render in images a composite representation of Africa, and offers a therapeutic experience of becoming through the rapture of the reader’s visual sensibility by the apparent madness of contemporary society.

The destabilizing and de-contextualizing narratives of post-colonial African authors, who are acutely aware of (and transmit this awareness through their stylistic innovation) the vast complexity of an unfathomable network of relations and interactions that have created and continue to re-create Africa, represent a series of images that I read as a baroque spectacle through which reality can be glimpsed and experienced on a meaningful level. This baroque aesthetic of combination and innovation reflects a human creative spirit that operates in the folding and unfolding of multiple layers of meaning,

thus depicting through the confluence of worlds—Occident and Orient, life and death, dream and reality, madness and reason, fact and fiction, and innumerable states of being in-between—the practical, social, and political materialities that are themselves the very foundation of this baroque vision and experience of the world, if only in their paradoxical and infinitely complex impressions, a fundamentally aesthetic experience of reality that in terms of *appearing*. Unlike appearance, appearing is relational and involves, indeed, requires the spectator's response, which may be as infinitely variable as the subjects in their various modes of appearing.<sup>6</sup> With its multiple sources of inspiration, including European literary modernity from Baudelaire to the surrealists and the nouveau roman, the African baroque is infused with the richness of African oral traditions, folktales, mythologies, cosmologies, and conceptions of human being and the world that wrought the discourse known as negritude and portrays a layered palimpsest of the present in the fracturing light of multiple pasts.

I have selected texts of several canonical authors from West and Central African countries, each with its own very unique colonial and postcolonial history and culture. Reading the particularly bleak political culture of Cameroon through Achille Mbembe's political theory and again in Calixthe Beyala's novel; the complex, trans-national identity politics in fictional renderings of the two banks of the Congo by Henri Lopes and Sony Labou Tansi; as well as gender, religious, and generational differences in Senegal addressed by Ken Bugul, I investigate some of the issues that not only face African societies, but global society as a whole. Through the examination of literary and theoretical texts, my project offers critical insight into socio-economic crises and political and cultural conflicts of Africa in a global and trans-historical context and proposes ways to comprehend the aesthetic and ideological responses for dealing with such conflicts. By bringing together the different examinations of the modern baroque in Africa, in relation to Europe and the Americas, I hope to open doors for further study of the baroque as a rich cultural and aesthetic complex that creates new opportunities for intercultural, interdisciplinary dialogue on art, politics, history, and theory through the common notion of the baroque. The broad (and not always un-paradoxical) theorization of the baroque

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<sup>6</sup> See Martin Seele, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

that opens up and is sustained throughout this dissertation allows for a more concrete understanding of the cultural and psychological motives behind the culture of global modernity, past and present. These combined perspectives *appear* to varying degrees in the African baroque artwork, and the trans-national and trans-historical cultural aesthetic device of the baroque allows Africa to appear on the world scene, not as a “*cas à part*,” but as one of many players in the game of modernity.

### **In-Conclusion: in-conclusion**

I do not claim in this dissertation to conduct a comprehensive or conclusive analysis of every area of baroque historical, aesthetic, or cultural theory, and even less to catalogue the numerous examples of baroque art in Early Modern Europe or even in France. Nor do I presume to offer an absolute or definitive discussion of francophone African literature. Rather, in engaging selectively with the aspects of baroque theory that I find most intriguing—namely the notions of representation and unreason—and in highlighting examples of baroque art, theory, and practices from different times and places that might serve to punctuate and clarify these points, I hope to have arrived at a functional definition of the baroque through which to engage in a particular scholarly dialog on contemporary African literature and culture. And in somewhat baroque fashion, although each section of each chapter aims to treat a particular element or function of the baroque in a particular context and is relatively complete in the scope of its argument and in its thematic unity, there is a sense in which it only obtain its full meaning when read as part of a larger whole. Consequently, each chapter ends, somewhat ambiguously, with an “in-conclusion,” which serves less as a final summary or exclamation point than as a *ligne de fuite*, a segue into what comes next, hopefully drawing together the disparate parts of my discourse on the baroque and Africa into the semblance of a whole.

## **Chapter I. The Early Modern Baroque Interruption: Anamorphosis and Unreason**

Amis, je trouve en la raison  
Pour vous et pour eux fruit contraire,  
La medecine et le poison.

-- Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*

Les perles irrégulières existent, mais le Baroque n'a aucune raison d'exister sans un concept qui forme cette raison même.

-- Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli*

Il faut donc se garder de prêter à la lecture l'obscurité qui est celle du lecteur, et éviter de croire à la gratuité et à la folie d'un texte ou d'une œuvre parce que nous sommes trop superficiels et pas assez raisonnables pour en comprendre toute la profondeur et tout (sic) la raison.

-- Benito Pelegrín, "Typologie des écritures *baroques*"

### **Introduction: From the Renaissance to the Baroque**

In *Les mots et les choses* Michel Foucault traces the development of a thoroughly modern *épistémè* of the nineteenth and twentieth century, different from the preceding "pensée classique" of the Enlightenment, which in turn marks a break with the Renaissance worldview and its emphasis on "resemblance." The Renaissance mode of interpreting or representing the world consisted in a retrieval of ancient classical values, one in which words and things were linked by resemblance: art was intended to imitate or mirror reality as closely as possible, and even within the material world things large and small resembled each other through convention, emulation, analogy, or sympathy.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the Renaissance mind was one that resided in neo-platonic forms and perfections. However, at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, Foucault remarks a discontinuity, a shift in European rationality away from resemblance and toward a new classicism in the order of representation. The new cognitive re-structuring of reality consists of a symbolic order of representation in which "les signes du langage n'ont plus pour valeur que la mince fiction de ce qu'ils représentent. L'écriture et les choses ne se ressemblent plus" (62). According to Foucault,

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter II of Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966) entitled "La prose du monde" which outlines these "four similitudes" (pp.32-40).



at this point in the history of Western thought, meaning exists solely within a closed system of signs whose value corresponds only to that “fiction” (not resembling *anything* in the real world) which any given *word* recalls or represents. This particular disjunction between expressive forms and their content, between representation and the not unproblematic concept of an independent “reality” will be a central concern of mine in elaborating a theory, steeped in, yet going beyond Foucauldian structuralism, of a baroque epistemology and aesthetics.

Let us briefly examine one of the figureheads of modern philosophy in order to concretize this particular idea. Seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes, in the second book of his *Méditations* (1641)<sup>8</sup>, after coming to a profound doubt of everything including his own existence, rejects the Aristotelian idea that he is a “rational animal” because of the problems related to defining “ce que c’est qu’animal, et ce que c’est que raisonnable...” (249).<sup>9</sup> Rather, Descartes posits the primacy of thought or the act of thinking or reasoning as something distinct from physical being in his well-known formulation: *cogito ergo sum*. In Descartes’ consideration of his being, he begins not with his body, for he feels as if the corporeality of his physical being might be a fabrication of his mind, but with “les pensées qui naissoient ci-devant d’elles-mêmes” (249); and from these thoughts he is able to conclude: “Je n’admets maintenant rien qui ne soit nécessairement vrai: je ne suis donc, précisément parlant, qu’une chose qui pense, c’est-à-dire un esprit, un entendement ou *une raison*, qui sont des termes dont la signification m’étoit auparavant inconnue” (251). Having removed all external stimuli and thus the

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<sup>8</sup> I have used here the nineteenth-century manuscript of René Descartes’ *Méditations Métaphysiques* as they appear in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Tome I. Paris: Victor Cousin chez F. G. Levrault, 1824. (229-350).

<sup>9</sup> From the English translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysica* as it appears in *The Works of Aristotle* vol. VIII. Trans. J. A. Smith and W.D. Ross. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908). Aristotle writes (ca. 350 B.C.E.): “[t]he animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings” (980b). Herein one remarks a dualist conception of man as a rational (and creative) being of a higher order who still must contend with the animal passions, urges, and desires of a physical, bodily, “animal” existence. According to Aristotle, the two faculties that distinguish humans from other animals are the ability to reason (*logos*) and the capacity for art (*tekhnē*). In ancient Greek thought, the *logos*, from which “logic” is derived, translated into Latin as *ratio* and then into French as *raison*, also means “word” or “language,” indicating the fundamentally verbal nature of thought or reasoning; whereas *tekhnē*, from which we get our word “technique,” implies a skill or craft, essentially the process involved in creating or rendering some form or thing. Therefore, a human is that creature which skillfully makes or creates things, and which uses language or words to reason and communicate.

possibility of error and illusion that such “artifice” affords, Descartes deduced existence from an innate capacity for thought, relying solely on the faculty of cognition: thinking, knowing as the qualifier for what it means to be rightly human. In an effort to quell the dubious influences of the outside world and avoid all potential error of empirical sensibilities, the primacy afforded by Descartes to the *res cogitans*, an essentially isolated interior “being,” ushered in the Age of Reason, also known as the Enlightenment or the “Siècle des Lumières,” and the notion that the world could be known, or perhaps intuited, by the mind alone. While sustaining the basic premise that *reason* is at the core of human existence, Descartes’ rejection of the Aristotelian conception of man as a “rational animal” illustrates the kind of “pure reason” divorced of corporeality provides the philosophical backdrop against which baroque aesthetic forms could emerge as a staging of that very disconnect: it is no longer certain whether what we know or think we know corresponds to any objective “reality” beyond our own frame of reference.

One might read the mind/body split that emanates from Cartesian rationalism as a point of departure for baroque representation that aims precisely to enact the illusory effects of the senses, even augmenting the illusion through an elaborate staging that ultimately obscures the “real” within the forms of representation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Foucault goes on to elaborate specifically the elements of this baroque sensibility:

Au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, en cette période qu’à tort ou à raison on a appelée baroque, la pensée cesse de se mouvoir dans l’élément de la ressemblance. La similitude n’est plus la forme du savoir, mais plutôt l’occasion de l’erreur, [...] c’est le temps privilégié du trompe-l’œil, de l’illusion comique, du théâtre qui se dédouble et représente un théâtre, du quiproquo, des songes et visions ; c’est le temps des sens trompeurs ; c’est le temps où les métaphores, les comparaisons et les allégories définissent l’espace poétique du langage. (65)

Foucault recognizes the “baroque” moment of epistemic rupture as a transition between two very different cognitive orderings of perception, a veritable break with the concept of “ressemblance” and a re-ordering of language couched in obscurity of metaphor,

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<sup>10</sup> In the introduction, I made reference to Corneille’s *L’Illusion comique* (1636), which is perhaps the most striking example of this kind of baroque illusionism. Another example to consider is Spanish painter Diego Velázquez whose tableau, *Las Meninas* (1656), Foucault analyzes in detail in the first chapter of *Les mots et les choses*, and which we will discuss later on in this chapter.

allegory, and the illusory power of representation before its being “classified” into the Order of “la pensée classique.” Understood thusly, the baroque reflects the kind of empirical illusionism that was a central concern of Descartes, but without vacillating to the other extreme of isolated rationalism. Rather, the baroque seems to embrace—even celebrate—the uncertainty and ambiguity of sensory experience, finding within the clefts of rupture and discord, occasions for new ways of seeing, and consequently of knowing as well. Foucault’s assertion raises two important questions regarding the notion of the baroque. First, what is the actual status or value of this ambiguous event between the Renaissance and classicism, which has been called “baroque,” rightly or wrongly (“à tort ou à raison”)? And second, what exactly is the relationship between this “baroque” moment and the ensuing “âge classique” that, according to Foucault, would continue to dominate the French mindspace for the ensuing two hundred years? In the next section of this chapter, I will turn my attention to these two questions in order to arrive at a working definition of the historical and aesthetic concept of the Baroque.

#### **A. Baroque: word or thing?**

Let me begin by referring back to the second epigraph at the outset of this chapter. It is taken from the chapter of Gilles Deleuze’s *Le Pli* (1988) entitled “Qu’est-ce qui est baroque?,” which is a philosophical investigation, with respect to Leibniz, of the quintessential form or “concept”—the Fold—that he considers the paradigmatic concept of the “baroque.” Deleuze writes: “Pour nous, en effet, le critère ou le concept opératoire du Baroque est le Pli, dans toute sa compréhension et son extension: pli selon pli” (47). First, the qualifier “pour nous” (for us), appears to situate Deleuze within a group of what one might call “baroque” thinkers, on par with Leibniz and perhaps also Descartes and others, despite the fact that he is writing in the late twentieth century. Second, noting the reference to Mallarmé’s “Pli selon pli,” Deleuze defines “ce qui est baroque” as that which is necessarily multiform, both hidden and manifest within the material or ideological folds of art or discourse, extending to infinity between the folds of the soul and of matter, between the inside and outside, the high and the low; it is the movement of successive foldings and unfoldings that create textures and that veil and unveil the irregularities of comprehension within the incomprehensible. For Deleuze, the baroque is

not merely folded; it is revealed in the Fold itself.<sup>11</sup> Deleuze's project is to define the *concept* of "baroque" as a necessary step in positing its existence. He writes:

Il est pourtant étrange de nier l'existence du Baroque comme on nie les licornes ou les éléphants roses. Car dans ce cas le concept est donné, tandis que dans le cas du Baroque il s'agit de savoir si l'on peut inventer un concept capable (ou non) de lui donner l'existence. Les perles irrégulières existent, mais le Baroque n'a aucune raison d'exister sans un concept qui forme cette raison même. Il est facile de rendre le Baroque inexistant, il suffit de ne pas en proposer le concept. (47)

Deleuze's question regarding the "existence" of the baroque seems to echo Foucault's subtle disclaimer in his assertion that the baroque is some *thing* that is rightly or wrongly evoked by the *word* "baroque." The reason behind the rapprochement made by Deleuze between the baroque and an irregular pearl is due precisely to the ambiguous etymology of the word. The word "baroque" is either derived from the Portuguese *berrueco* (from the Latin *verruca*, meaning "wart"), which came to identify an irregularly shaped pearl; or from a roundabout and somewhat absurd syllogistic form involving one general positive proposition (symbolized by the letter a) and two partial negative ones (each symbolized by the letter o) hence the name *baroco*.<sup>12</sup> In an article on the baroque entitled "Baroque: le mot et la chose," Jean-Claude Vuillemin remarks three more potential origins of the word "baroque": from the Italian word for fiscal fraudulence, *barochio*; from the Spanish words for large granite cliffs, *berrueco*, or peninsular deserts, *berrocales* (13). Whichever the case may be, it is clear that the word "baroque" is an

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps it would be helpful here to entertain a concrete example from Michèle Clément's *Une Poétique de crise: poètes baroques et mystiques (1570-1660)* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1996), in which he outlines the formal characteristics of baroque poet Jean de la Ceppède's *Les Théorèmes*, citing "La cohérence ou le pli baroque," as an inter- and intra-textual strategy, a "pli textuel" that constructs a syntagmatic reading beyond the closed form of each individual ode or sonnet and unites the collection in an overall unity. Also, a slipping effect creates a double reading in which "[l]a lecture paradigmatique se trouve donc ici coïncidente avec la lecture syntagmatique" (252-5). Similarly, in *Rome 1630: l'horizon du premier baroque*, Yves Bonnefoy remarks: "...le Bernin comme le témoin sur le plan de l'art de cette foi qui focalise l'espace par la présence, et déploie la durée humaine, mais en même temps la recourbe, comme en spirale, dans l'unité du divin – je dirai, *par définition*, que c'est cela le *baroque*..." (18).

<sup>12</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, "What is Baroque?" in *Three Essays on Style*, Ed. Irving Lavin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, (p. 19).

enigma, a word derived from numerous *impossible*<sup>13</sup> generic verbal forms; it is a word that without a “concept opératoire,” such as the Fold, has no reason to exist.

Does the baroque in fact exist, or is it merely a word? The posthumous origin of the term “baroque” in the discourse of nineteenth-century art historians in relation to its standard “classical” counterpart, is a well-documented fact. Vuillemin again astutely notes that while the baroque fell into general disfavor as a retrospective descriptor for the Early Modern period immediately following the Renaissance, the term “classical” was more widely accepted to the point of becoming synonymous with the French seventeenth century (14). Perhaps this is more or less an unconscious (or conscious) result of the baroque’s sketchy etymology and ambiguous signification. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Wölfflin published *Renaissance und Barock* (1888), a work that analyzes the baroque style in the architecture of post-Renaissance Europe. According to Wölfflin, the baroque was “the style into which the Renaissance resolved itself or, as it is more commonly expressed, into which the Renaissance degenerated” (Wölfflin, *Renaissance*, 15). Following the rebirth of ancient classical values and a neo-platonic humanism that flourished during the Renaissance period, the degenerate view of the baroque was commonly accepted. Wölfflin notes the definition of the term in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (published in France between 1751 and 1772): “baroque, adjectif en architecture, est une nuance du bizarre. Il en est, si on veut, le raffinement, où s’il était possible de le dire, l’abus... il en est le superlatif. L’idée du baroque entraîne avec soi celle du ridicule poussée à l’excès” (Wölfflin, *Renaissance*, 23). Like an irregular pearl for jewelers, or like an argument that yields only a partial conclusion for logicians, the baroque for art historians, in the words of Erwin Panofsky, “came to signify everything wildly abstruse, obscure, fanciful, and useless...” (“What is Baroque?” 19). Is it any wonder why some, especially in the French tradition, would prefer the term “classical” to describe the relics and achievements of the “Grand Siècle?” Later on, we will see some

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<sup>13</sup> Impossible worlds, according to Deleuze are the range of possible worlds, which because of inherent contradictions (in one world Adam is a sinner, in another he is not), cannot possibly *exist* in the same space-time; hence their “impossibility.” In the baroque, these impossibilities appear together. See Deleuze, *Le Pli*, Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1988 (79).

evidence that the two appellations are, if not synonymous, at least co-existing, at times, even within the same work.

Foucault's intellectual history of the period clearly falls under this last category as he tends to favor by and large "l'âge classique" rather than the dubious appellation "l'époque baroque" in his characterization of the two-hundred-year period following the Renaissance and continuing into the middle of the eighteenth century. If he inserts the baroque as an afterthought to mark the transition between the two, this is due in part to the fact that under the reign of Louis XIV and following the institutionalizing of intellectual and aesthetic practices by Cardinal Richelieu and the Académie Française under Louis XIII, seventeenth-century France represents a case that is distinct from the rest of Europe during that period.<sup>14</sup> Vuillemin recognizes this French exception, citing Annick Benoit-Dusauso and Guy Fontaine's *Histoire de la littérature européenne*, which states: "l'Europe du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle est baroque [...] mais la France de Louis XIV est classique" (Vuillemin, 14).<sup>15</sup> The religious and political circumstances of the period may help to clarify the historical dominance of classicism in the French intellectual tradition. It is with reference to a Foucauldian link of knowledge and power that Vuillemin explains the overall neglect concerning the investigation of a baroque aesthetic or even further a baroque *épistémè*, to use Foucault's term, while discussions of the triumph of classical reason in seventeenth-century France have flourished. He states: "C'est à l'efficacité de l'esthétique baroque de surprendre, de donner à voir pour émouvoir, que sera particulièrement sensible l'esprit de reconquête de la Contre-Réforme comme le sera celui de la monarchie absolue. Ce ne sont certainement pas l'Église et l'Absolutisme qui inventèrent cette esthétique" (17). A baroque aesthetic practice would have been

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<sup>14</sup> In *La main de Richelieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), Christian Jouhaud discusses the formative role of Richelieu as a figure or symbol of political force in the centralization of power in France under Louis XIII and as an emblem of baroque power operating in the shadows behind an elaborate façade. See especially his chapter II, "Habeas Corpus" (49-84), which deals specifically with the Cardinal's self-representation as a solidifying agent for the absolute monarchy following "La journée des dupes" in November 1630, a pivotal moment in the movement towards what would later be seen as the unbridled classicism of Mazarin and Louis XIV.

<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth look at the specific history of the classical/baroque relationship in seventeenth-century France, see Victor Lucien Tapié's *Baroque et classicisme* (Paris: Plon, 1957), esp. chapters II and IV. And more recently, Claude Gilbert-Dubois, *Le baroque en Europe et en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995) discusses the French Baroque in relation to the rest of Europe.

employed against the major institutions of the Church and the State by political resisters and religious dissidents (Vuillemin notes the Jesuits in particular), although it was later appropriated and employed by these institutions themselves as a means of mass psychological control.<sup>16</sup> The oppressive (or, in turn, subversive) affective force of a baroque aesthetic, it would seem, is a possible reason for its minimization or minorization in intellectual discourses on seventeenth-century France, still considered by many scholars as a “classical age.”

It seems that, historically, there has been a tendency among scholars to maintain the conception of the baroque as perhaps nothing other than classical art with a few distinguishing “irregularities,” “bizarre nuances,” or “useless fancies,” a strange cancer from which France somehow stayed more or less immune. In as much as Vuillemin recognizes the tendency of historical discourses on seventeenth-century France to “classicize,” he finds in the underdog baroque a much more intriguing and useful construct:

Pour le regard prétendument historique, qui rêve de revenir au temps d'émergence de son objet, l'estampille 'baroque' n'a peut-être aucun sens mais, au contraire, pour le regard actuel, l'hypothèse 'baroque', en tant qu'outil heuristique forgé au présent pour appréhender le XVII<sup>e</sup>, a toutes les chances de se révéler éminemment fructueuse (15).

This “double regard” on the past is perhaps more revealing of present prejudices—the exaltation of progress, order, linearity, and above all, reason—than anything particular to the seventeenth century itself.<sup>17</sup> Vuillemin concurs that this apparent bias is due in large part to “une certaine pratique de la raison du regard actuel [qui] a cependant souvent

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<sup>16</sup> See José Antonio Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), where he discusses the predominant social characteristics of baroque culture under new centralized national monarchies as “A Guided Culture,” “A Mass Culture,” “An Urban Culture,” and “A Conservative Culture” in which the urban masses are influenced by conservative propaganda to maintain the status quo and the hierarchical power structure. (chapters 2-5).

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Jean-Pierre Chauveau's *Lire le Baroque* (Paris: DUNOD, 1997), which undertakes a discussion of the baroque mainly from a literary perspective, opens by presenting the notion of the baroque as an “Invention du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” an ideological rapprochement motivated by a similar cultural climate of crisis in modern society, particularly after the tumultuous decade of the 1940's. Our current epoch “marquée par tant d'inquiétudes et de bouleversements...”, saw its own reflection in the baroque “peintures, décors, musiques, poésie et autres ouvrages de l'esprit, styles et manières d'être.” (p. 9).

masqué les raisons de son [le baroque] élaboration conceptuelle” (15). He notes, in much the same way as the baroque style of the Jesuits and other marginal groups was an affront to the institutional dominance of Church and State, the originators of baroque thought in the Academy, as a contestation against classical orthodoxy, came from the areas beyond France’s borders, in the margins of the power relations of the French University: Heinrich Wölfflin in Germany, Eugenio d’Ors in Spain, and the Swiss-born Jean Rousset. Although the baroque is now generally recognized in discourses on Early Modern France, it is often with reservations, usually limited to an abbreviated parenthetical note, much like Foucault uses it, between the Renaissance and the glorious tradition of French classicism. This sublimation of the baroque, which, as Deleuze so aptly points out, is so easily achieved in the absence of an underlying concept that gives the baroque its *raison-d’être*, is clear from Foucault’s depiction of the baroque: in the same breath as he posits the materiality of some *thing* baroque, he explicitly relegates the baroque to the status of a mere *word*, a word denoting (whether rightly or wrongly) an indistinct and ambiguously defined historical phenomenon, a *point d’interrogation* that he merely glosses over, opting rather to discuss the much more “real” phenomenon of “l’âge classique.” However, as Vuillemin perceptively remarks, this “regard prétendument historique” is not as intellectually useful as the more historicist applicability of a retrospective glance into the past through the idea of the “baroque hypothesis.” But not wishing to disregard the merit of the “classical” epithet, Vuillemin recognizes that “[la notion du ‘classicisme’] traduit simplement l’effort *baroque* pour imposer un schéma fixe et sécurisant au dynamisme irrépressible de cette ‘branloire pérenne’ constatée par Montaigne” (21). This reference to Montaigne’s rather vulgar characterization of the Early Modern world as a perpetual shaking movement where “[t]outes choses y branlent sans cesse [...] et du branle public, [...] la constance même n’est autre chose qu’un branle plus languissant” (*Essais* III, 2) illustrates quite poignantly the allure of supplanting the apparent chaos and constantly writhing and shifting movement of the turbulent baroque period in human history with a classical order.<sup>18</sup> Classicism renders the

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<sup>18</sup> It would be an unfortunate oversight not to mention here Mikhaïl Bakhtin’s study on *L’oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance*, trans. Andrée Robel



baroque palatable, so to speak. Likewise, it seems as if Foucault is performing a similar rhetorical move in *Les mots et les choses*, where he describes the initial baroque moment of epistemic rupture, where thought or reason no longer dwells in an imagistic resemblance of words and things, but rather in “[d]es jeux dont les pouvoirs d’enchantement croissant de cette parenté nouvelle de la ressemblance et de l’illusion [où] partout se dessinent les chimères de la similitude, mais on sait que ce sont des chimères...” (65). Yet this moment of uncertainty regarding the status of the real with respect to illusion, a time when the power of representation to distort and replace (re-present) reality was put into play, quickly gave way to a new dominant order of reason, the *épistémè* of “l’âge classique” in which “ce pouvoir propre de la représentation de se représenter elle-même” (80) is translated into the power of representation to represent power itself. As soon as the baroque appears on the scene of Foucault’s “history,” and with it all of the ambiguity and occasion for error and *tromperie* involved in the question of representation, it rapidly disappears beneath the monolithic system of classical representation, which, through convention, is able to maintain the privileged status of representation while suppressing the possibility of any other *mis*representation that such an ambiguous condition allows.

Foucault toes the line in this sense, gesturing at the baroque while negating any real potential therein. There is still one very interesting and subtle nuance in Foucault’s depiction (and dis-regard) of the “baroque” moment of transition that begs to be extrapolated. Precisely at that point in the history of thought where words no longer resemble the things they represent, where resemblance in fact occasions error, where words (the *logos* or “reason”) have experienced a slippage into an other order of symbolic representation rather than direct relation (although Foucault ultimately consigns these qualities to the “classical” *épistémè*), in an extremely baroque fashion, he divorces the

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(Paris: Gallimard, 1970), which discusses primarily Rabelais’s “grotesque realism” in *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* (first published around 1532) that parodies official discourse in a carnivalesque fashion and employs explicit and obscene bodily references as the occasion for popular laughter. However, Bakhtin notes the repression of this popular comedy under the “*stabilization du nouveau régime...*” in which “Les genres élevés du classicisme s’affranchissent entièrement de toute influence de la tradition comique grotesque.” Yet, he remarks how the tradition still persists in a curious phenomenon whereby Rabelais’s characters become heroes in certain “fêtes de la cour,” masquerades, and ballets between 1622 and 1638 (pp. 108-9, also 112-114).

*word* baroque from the baroque *thing* or “event” identified in Europe between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a juncture that inaugurates the earliest stages of modern thought. Tellingly, this divorce of the word from the thing that it (no longer) resembles is precisely the shift in consciousness that Foucault attributes to the “baroque” period in question, a period in which words contain their own referents, operating through metaphors and, of course, allegory to express their estranged and obscured meanings within a closeted universe where everything is always and only a question of representation. Herein lies perhaps a very latently subversive juncture in Foucault’s acknowledgment and dismissal of the baroque, for he mentions the baroque oddities within the grander *épistémè* of so-called “classical” representation of identity and difference, signaling the occasion for error afforded by fallacious resemblance. Whether France of the seventeenth century and a few decades both before and after is at any given point more baroque than classical, or vice versa, depends, it would seem, on how one looks back at the past from the present, and Foucault apparently errs on the side of tradition with his “classical” choice. After all, what is baroque, in its own right, other than classical art with a few distinguishing irregularities, bizarre nuances or useless fancies? But, undoubtedly as a result of the intellectual and cultural climate in which he was working, Foucault seems to leave the question of the baroque folded over within classicism itself as the backdrop, the source, or perhaps even the unsightly and silent underside of the classic.

Claude Gilbert Dubois’s *Le baroque en France et en Europe* (1995) marks an attempt to rehabilitate the notion of the French baroque, recognizing that his work “s’inscrit néanmoins dans une perspective éprouvée, et propose des modalités d’analyse et d’investigation du baroque qui, si elles ne prévalent pas en France, se sont exprimées depuis longtemps, avec constance et pertinence, dans d’autres pays européens” (1).<sup>19</sup> In

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<sup>19</sup> For a very thoughtful reading of the entrance of the baroque into French thought, read Claude-Gilbert Dubois’ “Repenser le baroque français dans un cadre européen” in *Le baroque littéraire: Théorie et pratiques, Actes du colloque* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990), 57-74, esp. 60-62 and 65 where he makes the argument that “le baroque reste bien le ‘refoulé’ du classicisme” but concludes nonetheless that the most staunch figures of French “classicism”—Richelieu, Descartes and Corneille—are also those most emblematic of a French baroque, the difference being a national bias for classical perfection that excludes “baroque” as something foreign, other, incomplete (70). Dubois concedes that French literature in

order to understand the baroque that has been so long denied in French literary and cultural history, Dubois proposes the necessity of reintegrating the style evoked by the word baroque into its particular historical context. He writes:

Extrait de son contexte historique, le mot ne peut être utilisé que comme adjectif caractérisant des attributs formels. Rendu à son contexte d'historicité, il prend corps et, comme substantif, ne renvoie pas seulement à des formes d'expression, mais aux substrats sociaux et politiques qui ont permis la production de ces formes. Le baroque n'est pas seulement une manière de se montrer, mais une manière de s'organiser. Il y a une idéologie baroque, des formes philosophiques et politiques de la relation baroque au monde. (2)

The question of defining a baroque style or *épistémè*, or even a “concept opératoire” such as the Fold, necessarily requires a historicist investigation of the socio-political reality and psychological modalities of which baroque art is the expression. Thus, Alain Mérot remarks in his *Généalogies du baroque* (2007), “[l]es Français sont-ils les mieux placés pour parler du baroque? Peut-être, car pour eux ni le mot ni la chose ne vont de soi” (10). Without a recognizable baroque tradition (etymological or aesthetic) independent of classicism, the baroque in French thought takes on an estranged character as something indistinct, even abject, in its intriguing repulsiveness, begging to be noticed beside and within the canonical classical tradition. How might one explain this strange difference?

### **B. Classicism and Baroque *différance***

Turning once again to Gilles Deleuze's *Le Pli*, we find a characterization that seems to directly follow Foucault's positing of the baroque as a moment of rupture, of turning away, a transition from the *épistémè* of “resemblance” of the Renaissance toward a new “classical” tradition. However, there is one important difference in Deleuze's depiction here: while he posits a definite beginning for his understanding of the Baroque, there is (unlike in Foucault) no immediate end in sight. Deleuze writes:

Nous pouvons mieux comprendre en quoi le Baroque est une transition. La raison classique s'est écroulée sous le coup des divergences, impossibilités, désaccords, dissonances. Mais la raison Baroque est l'ultime tentative de reconstituer une raison classique, en répartissant les

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all its variations from 1580 to 1815 represents nothing other than a distinctly French brand of European baroque, recognizing that “les variations peuvent servir à mesurer le degré de baroquisation” (73).

divergences en autant de mondes possibles, et en faisant des impossibilités autant de frontières entre les mondes. (111)

The dissolution of “la raison classique,” which for scholars of French literature must be understood in the sense of Renaissance classicism and not the classical tradition of the seventeenth century, cedes to a new Baroque “reason.” For Deleuze, the Baroque is a transition (as in “transient” or “transitory”), which attempts not to reconstitute a classical order by resolving the discords or “impossibilities” in the perception of the world but to embrace the contrasts and conflicts, thereby making them numerous, independently limited potential worlds. The baroque exists as the embodiment of contradiction. Deleuze further describes the baroque transition as the melodic lines of classical order blurring into a new harmony that harmonizes even the most dissonant extremes, therein producing “une florescence d’accords extraordinaires, lointains [...qui] ne pouvait être que temporaire” (112). The impossibly suspended tension between distant extremes that defines “la raison Baroque” for Deleuze is the kind of estranged dissonance, the marked contrast between high and low tones and tempos, that one remarks in Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons* (1725), which combines such diametrically opposed sound-imagery of summer and winter into a harmonic whole.

Such a view affords a far more diverse experience of the work (and of the world) as artifice—representation rather than resemblance—and thus there are multiple coinciding interpretations and experiences of that representation, which is where we again approach the “impossible worlds” of Deleuze’s “Baroque reason.” In terms of the specific aesthetic qualities that manifest this baroque mentality, Wölfflin’s later work, *Principles of Art History* (1915), marks a valiant effort to crystallize the baroque aesthetic defined in his earlier work as the decline of Renaissance art. In this work, Wölfflin differentiates the baroque from the classical aesthetic on five major axes: first he identifies a development from a linear style to “painterly” representation, which makes things appear limitless by merging tangible elements together to create “the apprehension of the world as a shifting semblance”; second, he notes a development from plane to recession, which emphasizes the overall spatial depth of an image as opposed to a series of recessed planes, a “radically different mode of representation”; third, Wölfflin

mentions a development from closed to open form, marked by a relaxation of rules that require a work to be a “finite whole”; fourth, he recognizes a development from multiplicity to unity, which rather than “a harmony of free parts” is “a union of parts in a single theme”; and lastly, he defines a movement from absolute to relative clarity in which “[c]omposition, light and colour no longer merely serve to define form, but have their own life,” the emphasis resting not on the veracity of representation but in the overall effect of the aesthetic experience. (Wölfflin, *Principles*, 14-16) In this formal description of the baroque aesthetic, one remarks an overriding sense of holism and a taste for the living, moving impressions captured in an image as opposed to fixed and static forms.<sup>20</sup> For Wölfflin, the baroque is far more an art of decoration than of imitation. There thus emerges a general picture of artistic representation—in painterly layers, spatial depth, openness of form, holistic unity, and *relative* clarity—that illustrates a far more complete and complex, detailed vision of the world that, although its understanding is subject to the confines of representation, pushes at, and beyond, the limits of representation. The baroque attempts to depict this very tension, between what is visible and what might be rendered thus, in art.

Returning to two of Foucault’s analyses of artistic representations in *Les mots et les choses* for further illustrations of the baroque aesthetic, we note that they offer a further illustration of the baroque aesthetic—one in painting and one in literature—but that neither is explicitly designated as “baroque,” even if both fall in or near the historically designated baroque “transition” at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the very first chapter “Les suivantes,” Foucault analyzes the 1656 painting by Spanish artist Diego Velásquez, *Las Méninas*. With painstaking detail, Foucault creates a verbal image of Velásquez’s piece, describing what is in fact a painting of a painter painting a portrait of something *hors-scène* that resides in the empty space outside the painting

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<sup>20</sup> In *Formes baroques au théâtre* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996), Pierre Brunel further elaborates the distinction between classic and baroque styles, proposing that they are two distinct operations of a single historical epoch that is neither entirely classical nor baroque: “On peut considérer encore, comme ce même critique qu’au même moment – qui n’est donc ni le moment du Baroque ni le moment du Classicisme, mais le moment de la coexistence des deux -, le Baroque et le Classicisme sont ‘comme deux formes de respiration du même organe social : le baroque formel, défini par l’enflure et l’abondance, est une manière de remplir l’espace, de l’occuper... le classicisme, défini par la sobriété, est une manière de concentrer...’” (44)

itself—a space that the spectator would usually occupy. It is only in a dim reflection of a mirror located in the center background of the canvas that one is able to see the reflection of what one assumes are the king and queen who are the (absent) objects of the gaze of the courtiers and of the painter that appear in the painting. What this painting illustrates, aside from manifesting the aesthetic qualities of a painterly style, depth, openness of form, holistic unity and a relative clarity identified by Wölfflin (Wölfflin only briefly discusses the princess in this painting in *Principles*, 46), is in fact a *mise-en-abîme* of representation that depicts the act or phenomenon of representation itself, an embodiment of what Foucault refers to as the power of representation to represent itself in the baroque. The infinite play of the gaze, reflection, perspective, and subjective engagement call into question on so many levels the limits between the characters in the painting (and in the painting within the painting), in the mirror, and in the unrepresented space outside the painting—the very subject of the painting within the painting—such that one gets the impression of the fading demarcation between reality and illusion, actuality and artifice: any and all judgment remains suspended in the nebulous domain of what Foucault calls “pure représentation” (31). Although Foucault does not explicitly label *Las Méninas* as a baroque work, it seems clear that his discussion of the painting as an illustration of the separation of representation from any direct resemblance to actual things (the very point he discusses more fully in the third chapter aptly entitled “Représenter”) serves as the backdrop for his entire analysis of the classical and eventually the modern *épistémè*.<sup>21</sup> In the chapter “Représenter,” which is the point at which Foucault references the baroque transition (see above), he moves away from the realm of the plastic arts that has traditionally dominated discussions of a baroque aesthetic, citing Cervantès’s famed novel *Don Quixote* (published in two parts in 1605 and 1615) where the disjunction

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<sup>21</sup>In *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 79-90, Gregg Lambert discusses Michel Foucault’s “baroque thesis” in relation to a postmodern sensibility, taking his point of departure from an analysis of *Las Méninas* and the notions of rupture and representation in *Les mots and les choses*, which “often functioned as the emblem of the European cultural and philosophical movements that were loosely gathered under the name of ‘post-structuralism’ in the late 1970s through the middle of the 1980s [...and] assimilated under the name of ‘deconstruction’” (80-1), concluding that the same kind of shift in consciousness which marks the disjuncture between past and present that is the baroque moment—“the moment that the being of representation is ascribed to the degree that it shines, that it becomes visible, and that it makes this visibility understood in terms of an unfathomable form of power that now underlies the postmodern spectacle of culture” (90).

between words and things is perhaps more immediate—precisely because of the ways in which the hallucinatory perceptions of the erring protagonist create a new ordering of perception based purely on subjective interpretation. As in *Las Méninas*, there is no absolute signified thing that grounds the meaning of the artistic rendering; rather there is only representation, and its representation—the representation of representation.

Cervantès's *Don Quixote*, according to Foucault, is emblematic of the Early Modern shift in consciousness:

...puisqu'on y voit la raison cruelle des identités et des différences se jouer à l'infini des signes et des similitudes; puisque le langage y rompt sa vieille parenté avec les choses, pour entrer dans cette souveraineté solitaire d'où il ne réapparaîtra, en son être abrupt, que devenu littérature; puisque la ressemblance entre là dans un âge qui est pour elle celui de la déraison et de l'imagination (62).

Because of all of these effects of language leaving the comfortable abode of a close resemblance to the things of the world and entering a solitary existence of self-proliferating significations, which marks the inauguration of the “abrupt being” of representation that was to become literature, *Don Quixote* incarnates the new-found liberty of expression in an age of “la déraison” and “l'imagination.” Much in the same way as Wölfflin posits the inherent life of contour and color, no longer subservient to form in baroque painting, Foucault remarks a similar reversal in that “*Don Quichotte* dessine le négatif du monde de la Renaissance [...] les similitudes déçoivent, tournent à la vision et au délire; les choses [...] ne sont plus que ce qu'elles sont; les mots errent à l'aventure, sans contenu, sans ressemblance pour les remplir (61). They represent as many “impossible” experiences of the story as there are readers. At this “baroque” turning point, things are just things, words are just words, and as a paradoxical result, words have a newfound power. They are free to explore those previously unapproachable domains that generally lie dormant in the depths of the human (un)conscious and only appear in the ecstatic experiences of unreason (*la déraison*) and of the imagination. In this brief age of unfettered representational potential, words run amuck like *Don Quixote*'s protagonist, creating fanciful visions by the sheer act of their representation in a vacuous fictional universe (the book/the mind) that words have opened up to more fantastic elaborations, for there is no anterior resemblance to any absolute exterior order

of things.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Foucault identifies two novel characters that enter onto the stage of modernity at this critical juncture: namely, “le poète” whose affective word-play uncovers and then reconvenes the dispersed and fragmented significations of things through the labyrinthine channels of the imagination; and “le fou” whose sustained deviance in his embodiment of *la déraison* conjures up the experience of a primordial or “savage” being.<sup>23</sup> Granted, these two characters have long existed in society since Antiquity and possibly before, but for Foucault they are important because “le face à face de la poésie et de la folie” marks “une nouvelle expérience du langage et des choses” which appears “[d]ans les marges d’un savoir qui sépare les êtres, les signes et les similitudes...” (63). I will discuss the idea of “la folie” and “la poetique” in more detail, but let it suffice to say that along these “margins [or fault lines] of knowledge” are where, according to Deleuze’s depiction of “Baroque reason,” the impossible worlds bump up against each other and create a new, dissonant harmony.

In *Marges de la philosophie*, the text of philosopher Jacques Derrida’s lecture given to the Société française de philosophie in January 1968<sup>24</sup> defines “la *différance*” (to which I have alluded in the heading of this subsection) as an anterior temporization or “espacement,” neither active nor passive, neither a word nor a concept, which generates the differences between a thing and its sign. For Derrida, the distance or difference (whether real or abstract) between a thing or “presence” and its sign, the sign being precisely a “présence différée” or representation of the absent thing or presence, is only possible because of *différance* (9). It is with reference, and in opposition, to Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* that Derrida relates *différance* to pre-ontological non-being, stating: “Ce qui

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<sup>22</sup> Along these same lines, in *Formes baroques au théâtre*, Brunel states, “Il existe donc bien une forme des choses. Le théâtre baroque ne cherche pas à la reproduire, car il sait combien elle échappe à la simple *mimèsis*. Il met en question le monde pour la retrouver. Il la voile pour la dévoiler” (19).

<sup>23</sup> In *Les tréteaux de Saturne : Scènes de la mélancolie à l’époque baroque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2003), Patrick Dandrey discusses the madness of melancholia as a fictional universe, which shows marked similarities with the work of the poet: “Le fou devient acteur sans le savoir de son propre théâtre intérieur ainsi ‘extériorisé’ par la fiction... en détruisant la fallacieuse cohérence sous l’effet d’une contradiction interne à son aberration... irréductible à son fantasme” (191). And furthermore, “Meilleur poète celui qui, tel un fou ou un mime, sait extraire de soi les passions et les sensations qu’il projette sur son public” (202).

<sup>24</sup> For the complete transcription of the talk, including introductions, questions and comments, see its original publication in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* LXIII “Séance du 27 janvier 1968 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), pp. 75-101. The text I will refer to here appears in Derrida’s 1972 publication *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Édition de Minuit) pp. 3-29.



s'écrit *différance*, ce sera donc le mouvement de jeu qui 'produit', par ce qui n'est pas simplement une activité, ces différences, ces effets de différence" (12). Less a definition than a performance of this *différance*, the text of Derrida's "la *différance*" puts into play "ces effets de différence" in the way that the phonic difference between "différence" and "*différance*" cannot be detected by his audience but is visible to his readers in the form of a visual trace—the letter *e* or *a*. This sensory *décalage* is the result of an initial speech-act— "Je parlerai donc, d'une lettre" (3)—that introduces a "dérèglement" between sight and sound, between speech and writing, between sensibility and intelligibility.

Etymologically as the present participle (*différant*) of the French verb *différer*, derived from the Latin infinitive *differre* (defined as "to temporize"), which when given the nominal ending *-ance*, *différance* implies neither an active nor a passive spacing, but an underlying presence of potential energy. Regarding *différance* Derrida asserts: "la *différance* n'est certes que le déploiement historial et époqual de l'être ou de la différence ontologique. Le *a* de la *différance* marque le *mouvement* de ce déploiement." (23) The ontological difference to which Derrida refers is the difference, which in English can be *neither* audibly nor visually distinguished, between a passive nominal "being" (*être*) and an active present participial "being" (*étant*). The inaudible *a* of *différance* as an interrogation of the difference between language and meaning (between what *is* and what *is being* communicated), or between "les replis de la matière" and "les plis dans l'âme" for Deleuze, signals that *différance* underlying the being of language proper, an awareness of which was first conceived in the baroque. For, inasmuch as Derrida finds that "il a pu paraître nécessaire" to introduce this letter *a* of *différance* in the course of "l'écriture sur l'écriture, d'une écriture dans l'écriture," *différance*, which is "ni un mot ni un concept" but a "*faisceau*" or "sheaf" (a bundle composed of multiple parts), reveals above all what is intrinsic to writing itself, namely its representation (3). The writing on writing or writing *in* writing depicted by the trompe-l'oreille of *différance* that Derrida refers to as "une grosse faute orthographique" (3), creates the suspended tension in the "play" of *différance*, a "no-thing" marked by a word that is not a word, and illustrates precisely the disjuncture between words and things (and even of "words" with words themselves) that has been shown to be of a baroque style of "pure representation," which

exists solely in its capacity to approach the limits of existence in representation through the invocation of the non-presence of absolute referentiality within a given system of meanings.

As we move towards a notion of the baroque that is increasingly distant from the traditional imagery of baroque architecture, painting, or even literature, we approach a plausible definition of a properly baroque *épistémè* as the existential awareness of temporal difference in being (noun) and being (present participle) translated into representation through stylistic maneuvers that resist absolution. Hence, Deleuze's definition: "[l]e trait de Baroque, c'est le pli qui va à l'infini" (5), of which "[l]e dépli n'est donc pas le contraire du pli mais suit le pli jusqu'à un autre pli" (9). The baroque has no reason to exist without a founding concept such as the fold and the "unfold," which together continuously re-define and simultaneously un-define the baroque work as a constantly shifting anamorphic being-in-itself, in and beyond its auto-representative modalities. The "déploiement époqual" or "epochal unfolding" alluded to by Derrida's *différance* can thus be understood as (nothing but) the unfolding of historical being (in the sense of a Heideggerian *Da-sein*), in which the letter *a* (the archaic trace of *différance*) marks the movement itself of the unfolding.<sup>25</sup> Might I therefore suggest that the baroque "thing," that ambiguously defined historical period which we have rightly or wrongly identified by the word "baroque," with such representative works as *Las Méninas*, *Don Quixote*, or myriad other poems, paintings, and pieces of sculpture or architecture is but the "a" of a more profound *différance*, the visible trace of that "rupture essentielle dans le monde occidental" identified by Foucault in the early seventeenth century, where "il ne sera plus question des similitudes, mais des identités et des

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger's 1927 *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*, following in the anti-tradition of radical nineteenth-century thinker Friedrich Nietzsche, seeks to reframe the question of human being by separating human existence from the capacity of a single, unified subject to reason. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger critiques the Cartesian *cogito* as an anterior faculty of being and not the *a priori* foundation of being, delving into a phenomenological approach: actually being "in time" is the inherent meaning of being itself. Heidegger takes a more humanistic approach to "being in a world," asserting that the meaning of being derives not from an abstract ability to think or reason, but from the actual physical presence of *Da-sein* or "being there" in the world, in time, with others, thus establishing the notion of embodied cognition, an awareness of being as such. From the theoretical void (or Nothingness) of pre-ontological existence, Heidegger locates the meaning of being in being itself: "in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being;" this involves "being in the manner of an understanding being" (10).

différences” (64)? Perhaps, one need not understand *différance* as such, for Derrida concedes that in thinking *différance*, “la pensée se tient dans un certain rapport nécessaire avec les limites structurelles de la maîtrise” (7), but rather one might sense the difference that arises from the performative referent “*différance*” as an illustration of the slippage between signifier and signified, or better, between signifying and signification, and the difference between a thought and its (oral or written) representation. It follows that perhaps the difference between classical and baroque that has preoccupied many thinkers of the baroque is merely an effective difference resulting from a more fundamental *différance* which one might accurately describe as “baroque” in the sense that it is the underlying energetic impulse out of which a “classical” stasis may arise.

There appears a more fundamental *différance*, in the sense of an “epochal unfolding,” that is behind the apparent difference between what has rightly or wrongly been called “classical” and “baroque.” Consequently, if the baroque work is that which puts into play the effects of difference that stem from an underlying *différance*, then the idea of an “epochal unfolding” that produces difference and its effects, is in no way better suited for actual investigation than through a baroque *épistémè*; according to Vuillemin, this *épistémè* marks “la première étape de la modernité” as “une prise de conscience du problème de la maîtrise” (Vuillemin, 20). For Vuillemin, the baroque is far less an aesthetic than a philosophy, which entails a much less stable vision of the world upon which classificatory significations have been imposed. He states: “le ‘baroque’ trahit moins une certaine manière (formelle) qu’une manière certaine (philosophique) de penser non seulement le monde mais aussi ses rapports avec l’individu qui l’habite” (19). While he acknowledges the generally accepted “*baroquisme*” of the French theatre of Rotrou and the arts in general of the epoch of Louis XIII in the early seventeenth century, he identifies the aesthetic qualities of a baroque stylistic—ambiguities and oxymoronic subtleties, the chimeras, illusions, and trompe-l’œil mentioned by Foucault—as reflecting a far more profound disjuncture in the modern scientific consciousness. These works merely attempt to reproduce or *represent* the “effects of difference,” the letter-trace *movement* of the baroque “*différance*” that is the inaudible unfolding of history. Thus, Vuillemin situates the rupture of a baroque *épistémè* between Copernicus’s *De*

*revolutionibus* of 1543 and Newton's *Opticks* of 1704, during a period when the representation of the world according to new scientific principles was nothing as it appeared to the eye.<sup>26</sup> It was a time, according to Vuillemin, in which “voir ne rime plus avec savoir” (19), in which the disjuncture between words and things was mirrored in all areas of representation through ambiguity and anamorphosis and, one might also say, in which these perceived differences were not mere difference, but rather *différance*—a production or creation of differences.

Though a certain understanding of the precise historicity of the baroque has merit for outlining the particular cultural, aesthetic, and epistemological implications of the concept, is not my primary concern, since it depends in large part on one's interpretation of what *is* baroque. And what's more, it does seem that recent scholarship, even in the traditionally “classicized” field of studies on Early Modern France, is moving towards a more general acceptance of the baroque and the complex socio-cultural and political ramifications that such a view affords. For example, in *D'un Temps d'incertitude* (2008), Benito Pelegrín provides a period designation of the baroque that vaguely corresponds to Vuillemin's historical definition of a baroque *épistémè*, although lagging by a few decades on either end, as he writes:

Cette large et centrale époque baroque, avec son aurore glacée du Maniérisme et le crépuscule rose et mousseux du Rococo, du dernier tiers du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle au milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup>, entre Classicisme renaissant et Néo-classicisme préévolutionnaire, est située plus largement entre deux grandes secousses, la Révolution française en aval (véritable rupture) et la Renaissance et ses grandes découvertes en amont (7).

Even within this period, I do not pretend to identify the aesthetic subtleties that might distinguish Mannerism and Rococo from what is considered the Baroque proper, but it would seem that in some respects, the French Classical tradition has been usurped by an extended baroque “transition” between bookend classicisms, much in the same way that the Baroque in Germany designates a large historical period roughly between 1580 and

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<sup>26</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the specific scientific principles behind the aesthetic expressions of the Baroque arts, see Severo Sarduy's *Barroco*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1974), which deals sequentially with scientific and corresponding artistic expressions from the periods prior to, during, and after the baroque period.

1750.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps there is still a very subtle *baroque* underlying even the great playwrights of the French golden age: Corneille, Molière, and Racine are now being recast in light of the baroque,<sup>28</sup> which is why Pelegrín prefers to speak of a “*Baroque dirigé français*” as opposed to the generally accepted habits of a professed “Classicisme” (262). What might this renewed fervor for the baroque, even as it appears within classicism itself, imply? I propose that it offers a more complex understanding of the interwoven palimpsest of civil society, culture, and religion in which the work of art reflects the multiple influences of a rapidly changing and expanding worldview filtered through the human experience of being in historical time.

In *Culture of the Baroque (La cultura del Barroco, 1975)*, José Antonio Maravall discusses the baroque specifically as a “concept of epoch,” stating: “[b]aroque culture emerged not from influences or character but from the historical situation” (13).<sup>29</sup> He identifies this historical situation in Spain specifically as an “epoch of interesting contrasts,” and although he describes the baroque as “having its center of greater intensity and fuller significance between 1605 and 1650” (4), he identifies a longer “baroque century [that] was a long period of a profound social crisis [of which t]he result is conflict, or rather, a generalized situation that we can designate as *conflictive*” (19-20). There is undoubtedly an interesting historical phenomenon underlying the perceived tension between the classicality and relative baroqueism of artistic expressions from the broader Early Modern period, as Vuillemin implies: “Dans la multiplicité de ses

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<sup>27</sup> See Alain Mérot’s *Archéologies du baroque*, (9-10) in which he discusses the broad historical conception of the baroque in contrast to the French designation of the period characterized simply by “bad taste” within a grand “classical” period. For more on the “exception française,” see also Jean-Pierre Chauveau’s *Lire le Baroque*, (14-15).

<sup>28</sup> Eugenio d’Ors, author of *Du Baroque*, trans. Agathe Rouart-Valéry (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), for whom the classic and the baroque are “eons” or “historical constants,” contrasting spirits or styles stressing, respectively, the eternal and the ephemeral, appeals to the existence of the Baroque “jusque dans les esprits considérés comme les plus foncièrement classiques au cours de la tradition française: baroque relative de Poussin, de Racine, Molière, Montesquieu ou Voltaire; et il n’y a pas à dire—de Corneille et de Pascal” (92). See also Pelegrín’s small sections in *D’Un Temps d’incertitude* devoted to each of these three great “classical” playwrights: “Racine baroque” (110-113), “Molière” (232-238), and “Corneille” (238-243), along with many more sections that deal in specificity with particular works by each. Also, Mitchell Greenberg’s *Baroque bodies: Psychoanalysis and the Culture of French Absolutism* (2001) discusses the works and socio-historical context of Molière and Racine, as well as representations of Louis XIV’s “corps glorieux” through a baroque perspective.

<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Eugenio d’Ors proposes that the baroque is specifically “un style de culture,” an art that represents a certain set of cultural values and practices of any given time (*Du Baroque*, 91).

manifestations esthétiques, le ‘baroque’ trahit une mentalité, dessine l’image anamorphique d’une sensibilité” (20). The anamorphic image of a mentality or mindset (though Foucault would perhaps balk at the use of such a term) depicted by baroque art is inextricably tied to an acute consciousness of social, material, ideological, and historical circumstances. Thus, based on the recognition of a “general crisis of society” that marks the baroque period, Maravall attributes determining characteristics of particular “*mentalités*” of the baroque epoch to a variety of fields in a complex social matrix. He states:

It is in this way that the crisis economy, monetary upheavals, credit insecurity, economic wars, and (along with this) the strengthening of seigniorial agrarian landholdings and the growing impoverishment of the masses foster a feeling of being threatened and of instability in one’s personal and social life, a feeling that is held in control by the imposing forces of repression that underlie the dramatic gesticulation of the baroque human being and permit us the use of such a name (6).

Although Maravall is writing with regard to the specificities of the baroque in Spain, the general baroque character that he describes—the material crises motivated by ideological conflicts between the Protestant Reformation and the reactionary Counter-Reformation, as well as conflicts between faith and scientific reason, Ancient and Modern ideals, for example, even the disjuncture between the world and its image—existed in more or less distinct material and historical manifestations in all countries of Western Europe, and even beyond.<sup>30</sup> We see in Maravall’s depiction the specific socio-cultural factors of an epoch that set the stage for a baroque *mentalité* or “sensitivity” which, according to what Vuillemin has proposed, is revealed in the diverse aesthetic manifestations of the baroque. The specific divergences, discords, and dissonances (Deleuze’s “impossibilities”) that brought about the breakdown of classical reason and the subsequent baroque conglomerate consist of an ensemble of economic, political, theological, and epistemological shifts, which engendered the precarious condition of uncertainty or “undecidability” that is the hallmark state of the “baroque human being.”

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<sup>30</sup> See Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*: “Baroque culture thus extended to the most varied manifestations of social life and human works, although different manifestations predominated in different places...” (10). For specific differences, see Trevor Aston, ed. *Crisis in Europe: 1560-1660* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

Thus, Marvall remarks, “[t]he gruesomeness, violence, and cruelty so evident in baroque art were rooted in that pessimistic conception of the human being and of the world and which they, in turn, reinforced” (162). From this depiction of the baroque, one can glimpse the interplay between art and life, reality and representation, and the kind of theatricalization of existence that might, depending on one’s perspective, be considered at the same time either “classical” or “baroque.”<sup>31</sup>

It is in this regard that Vuillemin’s “baroque hypothesis” is eminently fruitful for a historical investigation of the *épistémè* of “the first stage of modernity,” an *épistémè* that is perhaps one only in the way in which its manifestations constantly resist attempts to concretize its existence as such because its operation is always in search of something “new” or something “other” into which it might evolve; the baroque mind is a reflection of the overall instability and temporality of baroque *being*. Thus, the baroque is only a “transition” or a temporary state in the non-linear sense that, whether for a long or short historical time span, is constantly unfolding and folding under the implicit and contrary notion of a classical stabilizing repression. These are the “effects of difference” of an epoch where opposite forces cohabit the same space. The impossible tensions of a classical order broken apart by crisis and conflict are reconfigured through the embodiment of classical reason in its decomposition, and classicism reappears as a stabilizing “translation” of the constantly moving mass of baroque “effort.”

In a perceptive essay on Wölfflin’s art history entitled “The Classic is the Baroque,” Marshall Brown summarizes Wölfflin’s “cyclical view” of art history, which focuses on a single transformation, that of a flowering Renaissance classicism into “the late style of the baroque, which is initially seen as classicism gone to seed and in later writings as the fruit of classicism” (Brown, 90). When Wölfflin was writing during the early twentieth century, the baroque was beginning to shake off some of the purely negative connotations of a decadent abuse or ridiculously excessive style, bad taste, or a flower that had lost its splendor, sewing seeds into the winds. Rather, the baroque was

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<sup>31</sup> See Maravall’s *Culture of the Baroque*, chapter 9 entitled “The Social Role of Artifice” (225-47); see also Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Le Baroque: profondeurs de l’apparence* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1973), pp. 159-80 for a discussion of how “la vie s’impose comme manifestation et comme spectacle” in Early Modern French society.

seen as the fruit coming from the fertilized flower of classicism. Erwin Panofsky shares this view, stating: “the Baroque is not the decline, let alone the end of what we call the Renaissance era. It is in reality the second great climax of this period and, at the same time, the beginning of a fourth era, which may be called ‘Modern’ with a capital M” (88). Maravall concurs that “we can characterize the Renaissance, with all its purity of precepts, as the first manifestation of the subsequent baroque” (7), and he continues, citing Hatzfeld: “‘wherever the problem of the baroque emerges, the existence of Classicism remains implicit’” (8). It seems that the baroque as a phenomenon cannot exist without the alterity that a contrasting classicism affords. For Brown, “[t]he baroque is at once the opposite of the classic and identical to it, later and simultaneous, cancellation and fulfillment” (106). The relationship between the classical and the baroque aesthetic can be understood as two sides of the same “epochal unfolding,” two different expressions of the same plant—the flower and the fruit—two simultaneous yet opposed perspectives through which to view the world and the human subject. In art, Brown remarks Wölfflin’s distinction that “classicism ‘represents things as they are,’ while the baroque represents them ‘as they seem to be,’ even though this appearance ‘never coincides with the form of the object’” (Brown, 91). Hence, the baroque is that mode of representation that exists solely as representation, divorced from any “resemblance” with the thing itself.

The view of the baroque aesthetic of appearances detached from the world of objects, as a “‘system of form-alienated signs’” (Brown, 99), clearly coincides with Foucault’s interpretation of the shift or essential rupture that marks the baroque period realized in the face-off between the proliferation of meanings enacted by “the fool’s” deranged ramblings and the allegory in the poet’s abstract significations that hint at “l’autre langage [...] sans mots ni discours [...] cette situation ‘à la limite’—posture marginale et silhouette profondément archaïque—où les paroles trouvent sans cesse leur pouvoir d’étrangeté et la ressource de leur contestation” (63-4). It is also important to consider Foucault’s implicit or explicit situation of the baroque as the backdrop of classicism, the deconstructive moment of *resemblance* that allows for the construction of a new order of representation. The baroque is that almost imperceptible *différance* that



allows for the effects of difference and identity that are the basis of the classical *épistémè*. It is the momentariness of baroque art as “an art of flux—of time” (Brown 101) which allows for the possibility of establishing a fixed and stable order based on distilled classical forms. Brown remarks that the perceptible difference between the classical and the baroque is minimal (like an *e* or an *a*), but that the effect produced is profound. What marks the baroque is the embodiment of the estranged meanings of words, a new experience of language (in the general sense of representation) and things that traverse the spectrum of affective response, from the grotesque to the sublime, an art that expresses the entire gamut of highs and lows of human being. Brown concludes that “the classic *is* the baroque” in an ontological sense, for “*the classic does not exist*” (107); “when the classic comes to life it always does so in a belated baroque language of turmoil and self-division” (108). The baroque usurps the classical, rational form in its “becoming,” and infuses it with living energy, rendering its existence somehow other, corrupted, less than perfect, even insane, but more closely human.<sup>32</sup>

### **C. Baroque (Un)reason**

Regarding the principle qualities of a baroque cultural aesthetic in contrast to the classical, Maravall remarks on the apparently anti-rational nature of its expression in which one might recognize the image of madness or unreason, stating that:

Adjectives such as *irrational, unreal, fantastic, complicated, obscure, gesticulating, unrestrained, exuberant, frenetic, transitive, and changing* are frequently taken as the expression of the characteristics assumed by any manifestation of baroque culture; they are contrasted with such adjectives as *logical, restrained, real, clear, serene, and calm*, which would denote a classical posture (207).

Continuing in the vein of attempting to precipitate the baroque from its classical solution, in his first major work, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1960), the title of which also reveals the generally accepted bias of “l'âge classique” in lieu of “l'époque baroque,” Foucault endeavors to write a history of the ways in which madness has been

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<sup>32</sup> Giancarlo Maiorino. *The Cornucopian Mind and the Baroque Unity of the Arts*, indeed reasserts the distinction made by Werner Weisbach regarding baroque art as “a style of being” and “a style of becoming,” thus creating an art that “probe[s] into the shapelessness of the ever-unfolding matter of life amidst an open universe without ends in sight” (2-3).

constructed in Western civilization. In the first chapter, he starts with a description of the way in which, in the second half of the fifteenth century, the theme of madness replaces that of death as the experience of the void (*le néant*), noting that “[l]a folie c’est le déjà-là de la mort” (26). This morbid fascination translated into a pathology of the mind, that is to say madness in the character of the waking or living dead, recalls all sorts of grotesque and fantastic imagery of ghouls and zombies, terrifying monstrosities that are already present in the early Renaissance in the forms of gothic symbolism.<sup>33</sup> And it is precisely this horrifying vision of madness that is at the foundation of “l’expérience classique de la folie” (27-8). In the Early Modern imaginary, Foucault points to Jérôme Bosch’s painting *La Nef des fous* (ca. 1510-15), with a subtle reference also to Rimbaud, in order to illustrate the movement of madness from the margins of society—“la Nef des fous, étrange bateau ivre qui file le long des calmes fleuves de la Rhénanie et des canaux flamands” (18)—to its very center in “l’Hôpital des Fous” at the dawn of “l’âge classique” (53). This movement from the margins to the center, from outside to inside, defines the evolution of the concept of madness itself, as Foucault notes, from “une forme relative à la raison, [... où] folie et raison entrent dans une relation perpétuellement réversible qui fait que toute folie a sa raison qui la juge et la maîtrise” (41) toward being “une des formes mêmes de la raison [... où] la folie ne détient sens et valeur que dans le champ même de la raison” (44). Foucault sees this interiorization of madness as the foundation for what he terms “le grand renfermement” and the institutionalization of madness during the classical age, noting the prevalence of madness in literary works from the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (with reference to *Don Quixote*, *King Lear*, and the work of Rotrou).<sup>34</sup> They represent “un art qui, dans son effort pour maîtriser cette raison qui se cherche, reconnaît la présence de la folie, de sa folie, la

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<sup>33</sup> In *Du Baroque* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), Eugenio d’Ors recognizes the *Barocchus gothicus* as a particular manifestation of a baroque spirit, noting “de telles autres manifestations couronnées par le développement du ‘gothique fleuri’, espèce baroque type, traduction rigoureuse et fidèle de l’*éon* baroque” (124).

<sup>34</sup> Whether the “grand renfermement” described by Foucault is a historical reality or an invention, the prevalence of madness in the social consciousness of the age is a striking indication a preoccupation with the human mind, and incidentally, of the human body as well. For example, one can note the publication of Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, which describes and attempts to explain through a theory of bodily humours, the causes and symptoms of depressive mental illnesses.

cerne, l'investit pour finalement en triompher. Jeux d'un âge baroque." (47) The baroque plays on the notion of madness within reason, and of reason, and through this recognition it is able to reach beyond the madness to find its own modes of understanding ("entendement") as *unreason*. For Foucault, "La folie, c'est la forme la plus pure, la plus totale du *quiproquo* [... ] la folie est le grand trompe-l'œil dans les structures tragico-comiques de la littérature préclassique" (51-2). Pre-classical in the limited historical sense of that brief interlude prior to the supposed French classicism of the seventeenth century that Foucault espouses, one sees in Bosch's painting as well as in the great dramatic works of the time, the aesthetic particularities of baroque art noted by Foucault in *Les mots et les choses*—chimeras, illusions, quid-pro-quo, trompe-l'œil—which are this time tied directly to the theme of "la folie." For Foucault, the baroque investment of madness within reason itself was not only evident in art and literature (recall the characters of "le fou" and "le poète"), it is also "[c]e monde du début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle [qui] est étrangement hospitalier à la folie" (55). In the baroque, madness or unreason is an integral part of reason itself, as the internal boundaries of reason; it is accepted and entertained as such, and as a result arrives at its own reasonable resolution as madness "within reason." Foucault again states:

Maitrisée, la folie maintient toutes les apparences de son règne. Elle fait maintenant partie des mesures de la raison et du travail de la vérité. Elle joue à la surface des choses et dans le scintillement du jour, sur tous les jeux de l'apparence, sur l'équivoque du réel et de l'illusion, sur toute cette trame indéfinie, toujours reprise, toujours rompue, qui unit et sépare à la fois la vérité et le paraître. Elle cache et manifeste, elle dit le vrai et le mensonge, elle est ombre et lumière. Elle miroite; figure centrale et indulgente, figure déjà précaire de cet âge baroque. (53-4)

The unreasonable (*la déraison*) resides in the margins of knowledge and the depths of the imagination and finds its expression in the baroque liberty of representation, making use of madness and allegory as means to convey the hidden power of language and reason (*logos*), re-presenting the "thing" where it is not. Smoke and mirrors, grand illusion, the baroque is always an art of effects, of semblance, and while it may appear as "madness," it is only the somewhat distorted, hyperbolic, or extreme reflection or representation of reason.

Accordingly, in *La folie du voir: De l'esthétique baroque* (1986), Christine Buci-Glucksmann elaborates the intricacies of a baroque aesthetic with corresponding epistemological groundings based explicitly on the immediacy of “seeing,” which involves “la duplicité de la Voix (cri) et du Voir dans l’écrit” (21).<sup>35</sup> Although her analysis, as her title suggests, focuses largely on the visual, I believe that the general theory can be applied to sensory perception in general, and this notion can be translated into various textual strategies that give image and sound to the words of a text, stressing the intentional bias of looking obliquely at something that at face value may appear plain and mundane.<sup>36</sup> Thus, like the sensory *décalage* in Derrida’s performative *différance* (his discourse on/as *différance*), Buci-Glucksmann elaborates “la folie du voir” in terms of the art of the Opera as a particularly baroque incarnation.<sup>37</sup> She states: “[q]uelque chose comme la scène primitive du baroque: l’Opéra. Cet espace où le Voir et la Voix s’échangent, se ‘musicalisent’, se croisent en écho, un rien parlant, une dramaturgie des passions” (22). The Opera can be seen (or heard) as baroque in the effect of sensory disruption, an exercise in synesthesia—inasmuch as one can see a voice and hear a vision—an overlaying of simultaneous (complementary or conflictive) perceptions, which is at the heart of baroque art.<sup>38</sup> Buci-Glucksmann proposes the baroque axiom from the notion of the Opera where precisely voice and vision cohabit the same space, and the effect of sensory disturbance that temporarily suspends reason persists in the play between the two in a hybrid state. She states: “la Voix doit précisément *représenter* le texte, le ‘faire voir’ par l’écoute, le mettre en scène et en corps. [...] *Être, c’est Voir*: en

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<sup>35</sup> In *Le baroque littéraire français*, Bertrand Gibert echoes this statement regarding the doubling effects of a baroque aesthetic: “Dès les origines de la poésie baroque, on peut dénombrer toutes sortes d’effets de miroir et d’échos entre le matériau phonique, la structure poétique et les effets sémantiques” (191).

<sup>36</sup> Think, for example, of the unrelenting poetic effect espoused by the endless succession of alexandrine verses in the works of Molière, Racine, and Corneille for example, and the ways in which the sensory effect can at times overwhelm the verbal content of a play or scene.

<sup>37</sup> See also Buci-Glucksmann, “L’Opéra des manières” in *Le Baroque Littéraire: Théorie et Pratiques, Actes du Colloque*, pp. 11-18. Giancarlo Maiorino’s *The Cornucopian Mind and the Baroque Unity of the Arts* (University Park and London: Penn State University Press, 1990) also demonstrates the interconnectedness of various art forms in the baroque aesthetic experience.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Moser confirms this perspective of the baroque as a sensory disruption: “Au cœur du baroque se trouve alors l’expérience subjective d’un envoûtement transmis par les sens, d’une entrée radicale dans une phénoménalité englobante capable d’ébranler le sujet en déstabilisant nos systèmes de repérage cognitif et d’orientation éthique, en nous exposant d’abord à l’intensité des perceptions sensorielles” (“Résurgences et Valences du Baroque,” 13).

cela, l'œil baroque s'installe dès l'origine dans un nouveau partage du visible, qui accorde au regard un 'optikon' ontologique, une portée épistémologique et esthétique" (29). In the baroque, being is seeing; vision (or sensory perception more generally) is the ontological priority at the basis of being; the visible in the sense of representability is what exerts its aesthetic or epistemological "presence."<sup>39</sup> Citing Nicéron's 1638 work *Perspective curieuse ou magie des effets merveilleux*, Buci-Glucksmann notes that in the baroque there appear "toutes sortes de figures difformes, qui estant veues de leur point paraissent dans une juste proportion"; these are the anamorphous figures that become "une véritable mode scientifico-artistique à l'âge classique" (41).<sup>40</sup> The baroque is once again shown to be an art (and a science) of effects, of "le paraître," which is not the mere chaos of excess or the monstrous phantasms of the imagination and unreason, but rather the appearance of deformity or disorder that follows its own internal rules based on the convergence of perspectives. The baroque, more than anything, is itself a process or procedure which, like *différance*, lends to the effects of difference their being and perceptibility.

Nicéron's philosophy embodies the duplicity of a baroque vision in its "articulation tout ambiguë d'un voir difforme et 'sans raison' et d'une autre raison 'raisonnée'," and thus Buci-Glucksmann provides the portrait of baroque masking and metamorphosis that "ferait coïncider ici science et leurre, raison et sans raison, en une loi toujours déviée, prise de biais" (43). Accordingly, she echoes Foucault in concluding that, "[I]a 'chose' y est vouée au paradoxon visuel, à la perte de qualités fixes, à une privation permanente de substance, au corps fictif" (43). In the baroque mind and in

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<sup>39</sup> Perhaps it is useful here to recall Descartes' *Méditations* in which his vision of the empirical world as existent or as a kind of divine trickery is dependent first and foremost on his rational knowing of his own thinking subjectivity (*cogito*); the world then appears as it "is" from this initial cognitive moment.

<sup>40</sup> Chapter 8 of Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque* analyzes "The Technique of Incompleteness" of baroque art as anamorphous "whereby with a play of reshaping and distortions performed upon the object one strives to make the object, at first glance, disappear or, better, to make it approximate in appearance or resemble a very different thing; then when the eye of the spectator contemplates it from a determinate point of view, it reestablishes itself in the sensible form of its own reality." And in relation to the science behind the art: "It was the application of a calculated knowledge that, although it partook of natural magic (inasmuch as it was a manipulation of natural expedients that were difficult to grasp), was at the same time a rigorously geometric knowledge. Therefore it came to constitute an area where the baroque and rationalism approximated one another." (223)

baroque arts, a thing is never quite completely either what it is or what it seems, for it is always also what it is and what it *appears* to be—how it is represented.<sup>41</sup> Buci-Glucksmann further expounds on the importance of sensory representation and its reception for the baroque:

... le baroque se développera au dix-septième siècle et dans la première moitié du dix-huitième dans un monde où le voir et le jeu des apparences relèvent d'une science perspectiviste et optique de la nature qui maîtrise le réel, le soumet à sa mathésis, le rend douteux dans son existence sensible, et le construit dans ses possibles visuels (35).

Also promoting an extended version of the baroque, this passage highlights once again the theme of a baroque “temps d’incertitude,” where the real is placed in doubt by new scientific theories that seem to defy sense perceptions (the crumbling of “classical reason” noted by Deleuze) and reconstructed in terms of its different visual (incom)possibilities. We also see the connection between trends in art and in scientific discovery that Buci-Glucksmann ascribes to the baroque as occupying “une double position: scientifique et rhétorique” (40). She states: “[i]l y a donc un voir qui est effet de savoir et qui relève de cet expérimentalisme visuel que pratiquera le dix-septième siècle,” and thus, “[l]a perspective fonctionnera à la fois comme science de la vue et art de la grande illusion...” (41). The key to understanding Buci-Glucksmann’s baroque, which involves both an epistemological and an aesthetic component, is the term “effet,” for unlike Vuillemin who recognizes that in a baroque *épistémè* “voir ne rime plus avec savoir” (seeing does not resemble knowing), for Buci-Glucksmann, seeing is an *effect* of knowing. What one knows to be real or orchestrated spectacle influences what or *how* one sees or hears. Thus, the (incom)possible world one sees and hears is dependent upon the particular way of knowing to which one has subscribed, one’s point of view, perspective, or bias, one’s visionary or auditory experience of words and things.<sup>42</sup> It is

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<sup>41</sup> Benito Pelegrín remarks in “Typologie des écritures baroques” that “même s’il n’est pas exclusivement verbal, l’esprit se manifeste essentiellement par le ‘concepto’, le ‘mot’, apparence, surface, qui est le seul témoignage d’une réalité intime: le paraître est la seule manifestation de l’être” (89).

<sup>42</sup> In *Le baroque littéraire français*, Bertrand Gibert supports the conception that, “Le baroque est un art démonstratif, qui cherche à séduire et impressionner par des moyens visuels, y compris dans le langage. La formule de la ‘peinture parlante’ (*pictura loquens*) est particulièrement vivante dans sa pratique littéraire : ‘donner à voir’ y est un des maîtres mots de la poésie et de l’éloquence.” (165)

therefore a way of looking and listening, a way of *reading* that is baroque: “Ce regard-là, se soutenant de ce qui s’y dérobe, se dérégplant dans le jeu de ses apparences, ce regard de biais, tissé des crevasses du mourir et de l’oubli, était baroque” (18).

As an illustration of this “other look” that is marred by the cracks of death and forgetting, Buci-Glucksmann outlines “la scène du voir” of the baroque through Mario Bettini’s 1642 sketch of *l’Anamorphose de l’œil du cardinal Colonna*. This image recalls a certain emblematic “regard double et dédoublé” of the baroque in that the reflection of the eye in the deforming contours of a cylindrical mirror reveals a second eye, larger, and misshapen. These two eyes, the first of which does not actually look but is only the surface that permits the second reflected eye to appear, the second being open to the turpitudes and terrors of the world, present “l’allégorie de la Vision” (46), the seeing of vision, or might I also add, the sound of hearing. In Bettini’s *l’Anamorphose de l’œil*, the two eyes operate as a metaphor for the Early Modern world that is torn between opposing perspectives: the “classical” eye that does not really look but only observes the order of its own projection (the word-world it constructs), and the “baroque” deformity that *is* that very projection and which sees not only itself but also all the world illuminated by the limits of its seeing, hearing, and sensing by the “other meaning” (purely rhetorical rather than hermeneutic, allegorical as opposed to actual) that words and images depict. Might I propose then, that the “baroque hypothesis” is a similarly deformed and confused figure that must be viewed obliquely in order to apprehend its (de)regulated form, for in thinking or writing of or on the baroque, one must necessarily not already intuit another or “other” way(s) of seeing the past and the present that include recognition of one’s sight as the projection of a blind gaze? One must first stop seeing things as they are made to appear in order to visualize what they might be. The baroque consists of a proliferation of interrelated historical events—religious and political transformations, extreme artistic innovation and scientific invention—reaching every degree of human civilization, both macrocosmic (in the exploration of the entire surface of the globe by European explorers) and microcosmically (in the increased interrogation of every aspect of human society, psychology, and spirituality through unrepressed representation); and all of this is around the central void of the recent past, long forgot. For this reason, its manifestations or

effects can seem overwhelming and difficult to discern when viewed head on. Likewise, baroque theory (or theory of the baroque), rather than achieving a conclusive and static image of the past (like the “classical” imposition of classicism), only renders the incomplete anamorphosis of a genuinely baroque vision of constant change and the mimesis of nothing that lies behind the technical rhetoric of words.

Buci-Glucksmann writes: “Produire des *effets* qui créent des *êtres* et engendrent des *affects*: la procédure exclut d’identifier le baroque au désordre sans principe, à l’excès anarchisant” (*Folie*, 49). The “(dé)règlement” peculiar to the baroque is not merely disorder for its own sake, it is a sensual destabilization and re-ordering of perception based on spectacular dramaturgy of the passions that deviates into the multiplicity of its constituent harmonies. According to Buci-Glucksmann the baroque involves the perversion of “une loi par son usage” (61), and citing Walter Benjamin’s *Origine du drame baroque allemand* (1928), she reinforces the idea of subversive applications and adaptation of aesthetic rules: “le langage baroque est ébranlé par la rébellion de ses éléments” (62). The baroque image of the highs and lows of human being is constantly usurped by the overwhelming dissonance along the entire range of emotions from the sublime to the obscene. For this reason, the baroque is characterized as anamorphosis (“change-up” or “changing again”); it is always incomplete, begging to be viewed or heard from yet another angle and overflowing the bounds of understanding or “entendement” (like *différance*) into the domains of the imagination and unreason where knowing cannot obtain as such but is only an effect of the horrific and terrific vision—in short, hearing the sensory barrage that is unfiltered perception. Being in the phenomenological and transitory sense is once again at the heart of baroque instability, for as Buci-Glucksmann argues: “Tout au plus s’agirait-il [le paraître baroque] d’une morphé sans substance, au-delà de l’essence et toujours référent à une techné, à un artefact” (50). Pure movement above (or below) essence, a pre-ontological *différance*, the baroque appearance refers to a “techné,” the other defining characteristic of the Aristotelian man, a technique or process of production that renders some thing out of the no-thing-ness of raw material. Buci-Glucksmann writes : “[e]n suspens, [la techné] manifesterà dans son plein le mouvement quasi spiraliq̄ue du vide qui l’anime” (50), and



“le baroque construit *une mimétique du rien*” (49). The process of becoming or rendering—“produire des effets qui créent des êtres”—of baroque art (*tekhné*) performs the very mise-en-abîme of language that the Foucauldian rupture with Renaissance *ressemblance* outlines in which words do not recall things but only the absent no-thing that necessitates the deferred presence of re-presentation, (the *différance* that produces differences); and in the proliferation of signs another image or “vision” is created, not the vision of verbal representation, but, either allegorically or through the kind of deranged reflections of unreason, a different vision of the very nothingness that unfolds into multiple and different meanings of beings.

Precisely because of this inherent contradiction between what it is and what it cannot possibly be, baroque reason is an affront to reason, pushing at the limits of logic and language to un-cover or dis-cover the animating life, the becoming, the “effort” or “esprit” in a work of art. As Eugenio d’Ors will proclaim in *Du baroque (Lo Barroco)*, (1935), “l’esprit baroque s’écrit désespérément: ‘Vive le mouvement et périsse la raison!’” (104). Baroque art sounds the death knell of reason by elaborating the almost endless possibilities of occasions for its error. Couched in an analysis of “une esthétique de l’altérité,” Christine Buci-Glucksmann defines baroque reason in *La raison baroque* (1984): “le terme peut paraître provocateur, tant le ‘rendre raison’ de la raison a effacé la pluralité des raisons classiques et occulté le baroque comme paradigme de pensée et d’écriture qui excède les modèles convenus du penser, la logique de l’identité” (184). In its quest for absolute certainty and classical perfection, Enlightenment rationality served only to efface the plurality of reasons recomposed in a dissonant harmony of Renaissance ruins, replacing the multiplicity of techniques for rendering something true to form and the diversity of perspectives with the monolithic Order of representation, all the while suppressing any aesthetic and epistemological variations of “baroque” irregularity as unworthy divergences or differences from a static ideal. But the baroque over time has proven resilient, the unreasonability of its “reason,” being that Vision which the baroque eye “sees” or apprehends in its entirety, exposes language and its limits. Buci-Glucksmann is thus able to define baroque reason, stating that “la raison baroque met en œuvre une *matérialité infinie*: celle des images et corps” (*Raison*, 184). From this, one

may conclude that Baroque reason, in as much as it defies rationality as the appearance of madness, chaos, and difference or as the reflection of the internal limits of logic, order, and identity, is a material, corporeal reason that inhabits the body and the world in the non-finitude of its constantly evolving material existence. Thus, in *La raison baroque*, Buci-Glucksmann concludes: “[l]e signifiant baroque prolifère au-delà de tout signifié, mettant la langue en excès de corporéité” (184). Baroque language is a language that goes beyond its own static form; it inhabits the margins that lie outside of the confines of a conventional understanding of life in and of the body as a sort of “body beyond,” which speaks in living words. By interweaving the theories of Foucault and Buci-Glucksmann, I hope to show that a baroque *clair-obscur* madness existing within reason (raw Voice)<sup>43</sup> or of an “other” allegorical sense (pure Vision), impart an understanding that is not a rational, linguistic, logical knowledge (*logos*), but rather a sensual, rhetorical, technical *knowing* (*tekhné*) that is itself a process of coming to *see* what cannot be seen.<sup>44</sup>

### **In-conclusion: Baroque and Baroquisme**

Let it suffice to say the Baroque, when thought through, demonstrates far more than a mere historical period, or even an aesthetic style, perhaps more akin to a mobile *Zeitgeist* that continually reappears, manifesting a tremendous drive for change. Because of this baroque proliferation beyond the classically construed category of the historical Baroque aesthetic, *mentalité*, or *épistémè*, the term “baroquisme” has been coined, derived from the Spanish *baroquismo*. Eugenio d’Ors was undoubtedly one of the first critics to really think the Baroque beyond the limits of a mere historical period (and many more have followed in this line of thinking thereafter); accordingly he defines a trans-

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<sup>43</sup> The notion of Voice that I am elaborating in relation to Buci-Glucksmann’s theory of Vision in the baroque is similar to the Lyotardian conception of the *phônè* that is the animal or infant sound of voice prior to, but also in conjunction with language and words, or what he terms the *lexis*. See Lyotard, *Lectures d’Enfance* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), “Voix” pp.129-153.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, the notion of rendering the invisible visible is mentioned in Giancarlo Maiorino, *The Cornucopian Mind and the Baroque Unity of the Arts*, in his discussion of the *non-finito* of Michelangelo’s *Captives* as a sort of proto-baroque. Referencing Heidegger, he states: “Michelangelo’s *non-finito* enacts the classical process of *aletheia*, as truth ‘emerging into unconcealedness’ of a reality in which the technical ‘shaping’ of the creative act brings knowledge ‘out of concealedness’” (25). Expressing vitality at the expense of beauty, Michelangelo was in Paul Klee’s words “a transformer of styles who should have ‘baroquized’ the Gothic” (27). Robert Harbison’s *Reflections on Baroque* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) similarly credits “Michelangelo’s impatient deformations of Renaissance prototypes” in the development of the baroque (vii).

historical phenomenon: “Et le Baroque, esprit et style de la dispersion, archétype de ces manifestations polymorphes, en lesquelles nous croyons distinguer chaque jour plus clairement la présence d’un dénominateur commun, la révélation du secret d’une certaine *constante* humaine” (74-5). Interestingly, that baroque stylistic, unfettered by the specific historicity of the baroque epoch, what one might properly call “Baroque,” reveals a fundamental paradox in that the multiple and polymorphous nature of its manifestations and the proliferating movement that resists distillation of any one “essence.” And it is perhaps this very paradox itself—the tension between static and dynamic perception, between life and death, between the constant urge to see (or hear) something else than what is immediately there, the ontological difference or *différance* that unfolds the being of time itself—that is the “human constant” which seeks to find words or colors or sounds to represent itself, and which inevitably tends toward plurality, anamorphosis, and unreason in the expression of the ultimate impossibility of absolute existence: the baroque is always in relation to, becoming—something else. As such, the baroque, or *baroque* rather, exhibits a universal appeal as a mode of subjectivity that exhibits an anti-rational form of reason, a corporeal logic that implicates the sensory perception and reception of a work and accounts also for the technique involved in the process of production. The baroque, quite distinct from the “humanism” of the Renaissance, embodies a style, a culture, and an *esprit* that both in its expressive content and in its formal (de)constructions is perhaps more human in its embrace of the uncertainty and the potential for error at the core of existence. Thus, recalling what we have seen from Brown’s analysis of Wölfflin’s baroque aesthetic, we can state that the work moves, breathes, and has its *being* in the baroque.

## **Chapter II. Modern Baroque Disruptions and the Allegorical**

From the point of view of the baroque, nature serves the purpose of expressing its meaning, it is the emblematic representation of its sense, and as an allegorical representation it remains irremediably different from its historical realization.

–Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

### **Introduction: Baroque Permutations**

Baroque: is it a word, thing, or airy nothing that somehow precedes being; an aesthetic cultural expression, a historical period, *épistémè*, or *mentalité*? Or is it something other, related to *différance*, a biased gaze that reflects the madness of reason, a trans-historical constant, an “esprit” (the breath of inspiration or expiration), or a style—a *manière* that revels in and reveals the incomplete and utterly transitory nature of human existence?<sup>45</sup> Robert Harbison’s *Reflections on Baroque* (2000), which focuses mainly on architectural expressions, sees the Baroque as “an episode in the history of art, or of religion, or of absolutist politics or of consciousness more generally” (vii); above all, however, Harbison understands the Baroque as the oddity that illuminates the norm by the playing out of a disruptive impulse, “a frank exhibition of energy and escape from classical restraint” (1). In his book he traces extremely diverse manifestations of baroque style or technique, from the traditional Early Modern European churches and palaces to eighteenth-century monuments of the “colonial Baroque” in Mexico and various “neo” or “pseudo” baroque structures in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and culturally distant China and Japan, concluding with a reflection on baroque art in the twentieth century from cubism and Picasso to 1950’s American automobiles.

Yet, before moving too far, it would seem that in the interest of giving the baroque its due, one runs the risk of turning baroque into a catchall term for all sorts of non-conventional, bizarre, or otherwise strange aesthetic and cultural expressions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> These all refer to the various discussions of the baroque undertaken in the previous chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Indeed Benito Pelegrín discusses this phenomenon in his essay, “Typologie des écritures baroques,” in *Le Baroque Littéraire: Théories et Pratiques* (Paris: 1990, pp. 85-94), stating: “A voir le Baroque partout, on risque de le situer nulle part,” and “Si on relevait le nombre d’œuvres qualifiées ces dernières années de ‘baroques’ par la critique journalistique ou présentées comme telles par leurs auteurs, l’oubli dans lequel

However, if we differentiate carefully the “insincere practitioners, designers who treated it as a set of conventions and no more” (Harbison, 226) from that which I see as more fundamentally baroque—namely, energetic representations of disruption that mark a shift in consciousness—then the baroque retains both its theoretical usefulness as well as its socio-aesthetic and politico-cultural allure.<sup>47</sup> To reiterate, the baroque need not merely be discarded as a “useless fancy,” for the incomplete and fragmented (or folded) view of the world and human being is capable of rendering the sensual, affective intricacies of existence through the play of the passions that overflow words with feeling and flux. My working hypothesis that the baroque is a constant movement of renovation, or making new again, means that it is also a gesture of continual farewell. In this sense, the baroque embodies a paradoxical creation *and* destruction, expressing the irresolvable tension between the spiritual and material, the eternal and the ephemeral, the sacred and the profane, the rational and the “insane,” the living and dying that drives and defines human being.<sup>48</sup>

Recalling the way in which the present can cast a shadow on the past, one can see how the baroque emerged, first as a serious aesthetic construct and later as a much more complex psycho-cultural phenomenon, only in the latter half of the nineteenth century with Jacob Burckhardt and his student Heinrich Wölfflin, eventually gaining ground in the writings of such baroque theoreticians of the early twentieth century as Benedetto

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elles sont justement tombées suffirait à montrer comment combiner ce mot, par un plaisant renversement baroque dans sa première signification française péjorative à servir de prétexte à tant de textes insignifiants... on a inventé un Catalogue fourre-tout, un bric à brac fait de bric et de broc, baroque, cela va de soi.” (85) He continues to elaborate “l’esthétique étique” of the baroque from an analysis of the work of Baltasar Gracián, which is “rationnelle folie...,” a paradoxical representation that illustrates the multiple ways in which “La raison du monde est si supérieure, son ordre est si subtil, que notre folie est trop grande pour en mesurer toute l’exacte raison et la parfaite harmonie” (93).

<sup>47</sup> The collection of essays entitled *Résurgences baroques*, edited by Walter Moser and Nicolas Goyer (Brussels: La lettre volée, 2001), which includes pieces by Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Mieke Bal, Michel Maffesoli, and others, is a book that envisions “le baroque comme un réseau de relations multiples qui ne cesse de s’étendre et d’imprégner la culture contemporaine entre la littérature et le cinéma, la peinture et les arts du spectacle, l’image et la parole, ou encore l’esthétique et la politique” (7).

<sup>48</sup> In chapter 9 of *Les mots et les choses*, entitled “L’homme et ses doubles” (314-54), Foucault discusses this contradictory dimension of modern man in the nineteenth century in terms of an awareness of its transcendental qualities as a historical being that surpasses finite existence, yet which is at the same time caught up in its own finitude: “un doublet empirico-transcendantal qu’on a appelé l’homme” (330). The self-awareness and paradoxical construction of the human being is one of the markers of a “modern baroque” appearing in the nineteenth century.

Croce, Henri Focillon, Walter Benjamin, and Eugenio d'Ors. By the mid-twentieth century, critics such as Jean Rousset, Marcel Raymond, Franco Simone, and Allan Boase began to introduce the baroque into the domain of literary scholarship, and from there the baroque idea burgeoned in the 1970's and 1980's, with thinkers such as Deleuze, Maravall, and Claude-Gilbert Dubois, into a novel and viable field of critical discourse on art, politics, religion, culture, and life in general. As Jean-Pierre Chauveau perceptively remarks in *Lire le Baroque* (1997), the apparent *baroquismes* that are the responses to ideological crises of the Early Modern period share a striking resemblance to various cultural and representational strategies in the High Modern or "postmodern" eras, which are themselves plagued by certain (though sometimes unclear) epistemological shifts. He cites this affinity as a possible cause for the renewed interest in the baroque in the late twentieth century (9). This may very well be the case, but it is nevertheless important to investigate the lead-in to this "event" that begins earlier; a discerning eye might recognize a second major baroque disruption, perhaps most remarkable (or at the very least, most overtly theorized<sup>49</sup>) in France at the end of the nineteenth century, following nearly a century of social and political upheavals that began with the 1789 revolution. Perhaps one reason why the notion "modern baroque" of the late nineteenth century is so heavily biased toward French cultural and artistic expression is a compensatory measure that is the result of a French under-indulgence in the baroque during the purported "âge classique." We must, however, be wary of making too hasty a rapprochement between past and present for as Pelegrín cautions, also recognizing the eerie similarities between our distant epochs, "dans *rapprochement* il y a *rapprochement* et *ment*, [...] le passé ne peut être la règle pour l'avenir ni l'expérience du présent" (266). But inasmuch as Vuillemin sees the baroque as a heuristic tool for apprehending the past, might we not ask whether this new, de-forming gaze upon the past alters accordingly our

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<sup>49</sup> Here I am referring mainly to Buci-Glucksmann's identification of a "modern baroque" in Baudelaire's work, as well as other writers, including Guy Scarpetta in *L'Artifice* (1998) and Wolfgang Drost's article "Baudelaire et le Néo-Baroque" in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6:37 (July-September 1950), pp. 115-136, which discuss a baroque trait in Baudelaire's work. However, I intend to show in this chapter and the next that beyond this one case, there is a much larger "baroque" phenomenon that may not necessarily be limited to France at the end of the nineteenth century, which then continues to expand into a global baroque or "neo-baroque" movement of the twentieth century.

perceptions of the present state which that past has spawned? I propose to investigate whether the development of “baroque thought” over the last two centuries has represented not only an effort to reevaluate the origins of modernity, but also to embody a retrieval of the very principles under consideration, and thereby revitalize the baroque. This baroque disruption therefore marks a self-conscious reinvestment in re-representing the vision of baroque modernity on a more explicit theoretical scale. For evidence of this modern baroque retrieval, I turn again to Foucault’s history of Western thought in conjunction with Buci-Glucksmann’s discussion of a “modern baroque” in Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, as well as a reading of Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy and Mallarmé’s poetics as the moment in which baroque thought was given its voice.

#### **A. The long/late nineteenth century: l’Autre Baroque**

Eugenio d’Ors is very much the pioneering theorist of the baroque as a trans-historical and inter-cultural phenomenon. This view stands in contrast to that of other baroque theorists in two fundamental ways: first, in the extension of the baroque beyond a specific (Western European) cultural phenomenon; and second, in the valorization of the baroque as something more than a mere degeneracy of classical aesthetic perfection. Jean Rousset crystallizes this first view in his *La littérature de l’âge baroque en France*, stating:

Le baroque baigne une époque de la culture européenne d’une lumière qui n’appartient qu’à lui, il la plonge dans un état de sensibilité qui la révèle à elle-même, il lui impose une image de l’homme paré, multiforme et inconstant qu’il est seul à avoir élaborée avec tant de pureté, il la marque d’un accent original, fait de gravité tourmentée et d’allégresse sensuelle dont nul autre ne sut réussir le contradictoire dosage (252-3).

Benedetto Croce’s characterization of the baroque as a degenerate or pathological style, the decadence of which is manifested only in some rare cases of architecture and the plastic arts limited to seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe would corroborate this view of a baroque style “belonging” solely to Europe. However, in contrast, d’Ors re-defines the baroque as a historical constant, a recurrent mode of cultural expression which has re-appeared “dans les régions les plus diverses, tant en Orient qu’en Occident;” and in periods as distant as the Alexandrian empire, the Counter-Reformation, and the

nineteenth-century *Fin de siècle*. Far from representing a malady or degeneration of classical perfection, the baroque is a constant evolution in opposition to, and in relation with classicism, only deemed sick, ugly, crazy, decadent, or inferior in the sense that it is different and difficult to grasp, representing a virtual enigma, which as d’Ors was writing during the inter-war period, “représente aujourd’hui un des thèmes esthétiques les plus intéressants et les plus actuels.” (78-9) It is useful here to read the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* baroque, as it is construed by d’Ors, through the analysis of the advent of a truly modern *épistémè*, beginning with a moment of rupture at the dawn of the nineteenth century (very specifically 1795-1800, in the period of “la terreur”<sup>50</sup>), as outlined by Foucault in the second part of *Les mots et les choses*. The one hundred year difference between one fin-de-siècle and another is not a negligible temporal gap, and I am not proposing that the historic juncture at the end of the eighteenth century, marked by massive nationalist revolutions and the seeds of abolition, which indicates a major ideological shift away from a monarchal Order of centralized power, is in and of itself baroque; for the baroque, as previously defined, is an “event” that takes place in the domain of representation. Similarly, that which is baroque at the end of the nineteenth century is the culmination of a number of changes, which manifests itself in the fabric of language.

In contrast to the classical concepts of “Parler,” “Classer,” and “Échanger,” which form the triumvirate of socio-political, biological, and economic foundations of the classical *épistémè*, Foucault discusses the evidence of this epistemic rupture on all three levels in terms of “Travail,” “Vie”, and “Langage.”<sup>51</sup> I will elaborate briefly. First, in term of economics, he notes the transition from exchange values based on a purely

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<sup>50</sup> In a way that very much resembles the baroque penchant for theatrics, a notion which I will develop further in Chapter 3, and especially in Chapter 5, Daniel Arasse, in his work, *La Guillotine et l’imaginaire de la terreur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), analyses “Le théâtre de la guillotine” and the dispensation of death as a political spectacle (pp. 111-17). One might see in the period known as “la terreur,” a reinstatement of certain baroque methods of political mise-en-scène, not solely in terms of court society and the aristocracy, but extended to the entire population.

<sup>51</sup> The notions of classical rhetoric, classification of life, and commodity exchange value are discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6—“Parler”, “Classer”, and “Échanger”, respectively—of *Les mots et les choses*, and they are briefly summarized in the second, third and fourth sections of chapter seven, “Les limites de la représentation,” (233-249). The modern correlatives of these classical constructs are all discussed in detail in chapter eight, entitled “Travail, vie, langage.”



representational monetary system to the determination of worth based on the measure of the work of production—in short, the advent of labor-capitalism and the global economic system based on profits gleaned from exploitative labor. Second, he discusses the movement from a representational classification of natural organisms based on their natural appearance to a hierarchical taxonomy of beings derived from certain central organ functions (the kingdoms, phyla, classes, orders, etc...) and the conditionality of life—the development of the biological sciences in contrast to non-organic matter. In this new way of organizing the natural world, names do not represent the organisms in question, but they describe, or inscribe, their position in the scientific hierarchy of beings. Lastly, Foucault remarks an interesting linguistic shift, which is the result of the confrontation of world languages and the development of a “grammaire générale” that recognizes the expressive content of the pre-verbal utterance, which precedes the signifying function of the Name. In a sense, words become subsidiary to what they express. This development, Foucault argues, places the family of humanity on an even level as fundamentally linguistic beings, and spawned an interrogation into the material of language, its sounds, and its universal significance that would lead to the poetic and philosophical innovations at the end of the nineteenth century, which I will show to be the signs of a modern baroque.

What all three of these shifts realized in the advent of the organizing categories of labor, life, and language, was a greater awareness of the intrinsic temporality of the human experience within a larger network of determining historical factors, which Foucault refers to as a “mutation... de l’Ordre à l’Histoire” (232).<sup>52</sup> He elaborates on this moment of radical change in which “[l]a constitution de tant de sciences positives,

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<sup>52</sup> To clarify this movement that Foucault characterizes as a shift from Order to History, in the context of the baroque, it is helpful to consider what Roland Barthes writes about the work of Racine in a chapter, “Histoire ou littérature,” in *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), in which he characterizes Racine’s work beyond its language or its style, in the context of its historical production or *functions* with reference to Lucien Febvre, as a testament or record of “les faits de mentalité collective” (144). He expands on this idea with the intent of interpreting the function of the literary institution based on a reading of the work as “le signe d’un au-delà d’elle-même,” in which the critique seeks to understand the hidden “signifié,” namely, the precise socio-historical epoch (147). He concludes his study by identifying a notion of the historically conscious subject in Racine’s work: “un être pleinement subjectif, pleinement historique” (157), which is the very theme that emerges into plain sight in nineteenth-century literature and social sciences, according to Foucault.

l'apparition de la littérature, le repli de la philosophie sur son propre devenir, l'émergence de l'histoire à la foi comme savoir et comme mode d'être de l'empiricité, ne sont qu'autant de signes d'une rupture profonde" (233). Generally speaking, these developments in artistic and scientific discourse mark an investigation into "[l]es limites de la représentation," seeking some other form of understanding that, prior to representation, lies somewhere beyond its epistemic range in the imprecise and immeasurable concepts of work, life, and language, all of which embody a definite relationship to representation, while simultaneously pushing beyond in their temporal nature or historicity. Thus, regarding this single "profound rupture" to which these epistemic changes refer, Foucault asserts: "Dans tous les cas, le rapport de la représentation à elle-même et les relations d'ordre qu'il permet de déterminer hors de toute mesure quantitative, passent maintenant par des conditions extérieures à la représentation elle-même dans son actualité" (250). The relation of representation to the interior weight of its own historical development—its becoming— in as much as this "historicity" always remains beyond of the limits of representation, is, according to Foucault, what characterizes the modern *épistémè*. In the modern mind, everything is recognized in its historical contingency, even human being itself; and every system, even the system of representation, i.e. words, becomes an object of representation.

Accordingly, Foucault notes that these three particular developments in the human sciences mark a moment of historical rupture, stating: "Cet événement un peu énigmatique, cet événement d'en dessous qui vers la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle s'est produit dans ces trois domaines [Travail, Vie, Langage], les soumettant d'un seul trait à une même rupture, on peut donc maintenant l'assigner dans l'unité qui fonde ses formes diverses" (254). Yet, much in the same way as Foucault failed to note that the baroque rupture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century did not simply dissolve into classicism but continued to reassert its disruptive energy throughout the century and into the next, he only hints at the possible ways in which the development of positivist sciences expressing new certainties through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth might entail a sustained interrogation of human being in the world, which, as we shall see, would assume the form, primarily, of experimentations with or within language. In

this respect, Foucault does recognize an important consequence of the initial epistemic rupture. Noting that the development of the “positive sciences,” the apparition of literature as such, the emergence of historicity into the field of thought, and the preoccupation of philosophy with itself were all signs of a profound rupture and detachment of discourse from representational signs and the necessary preconditions for the recognition of the self-reflexive concern in language for its own “being,” he states: “[l]e langage n’est rentré directement et pour lui-même dans le champ de la pensée qu’à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle” (316). To bolster his argument, Foucault offers two competing perspectives on the question of being and language: one from the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, whose insistence on a language that speaks itself, stands in stark contrast to the second, German-Polish philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and the immortal speaking subject of *Ecce Homo*.<sup>53</sup> However, despite this fundamental difference, there exists a striking similarity on the level of a preoccupation with language that Foucault recognizes: “avec Nietzsche, avec Mallarmé, la pensée fut reconduite, et violemment, vers le langage lui-même, vers son être unique et difficile” (317). In the work of these two emblematic writers, the “word” *is* the “thing.” The question of words representing things has shifted to include the things, the cognitive substances that are words themselves. Thus, in much the same way that existence is at the center of Cartesian thought, Foucault proposes the anti-Cartesian notion of the being of and through language: “je suis ce langage que je parle et où ma pensée se glisse au point de trouver en lui le système de toutes ses possibilités propres, mais qui n’existe pourtant que dans la lourdeur de sédimentations qu’elle ne sera jamais capable d’actualiser entièrement” (335). Hence the paradox on which modern thought operates is a *movement* in and across the limits of thought and representation, which focuses on the ontological difference/*différance* of being, of being the subject and object of a determining language that itself has the double role of being both significative and demonstrative. That is to

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<sup>53</sup> I will further discuss these two notions in the final section of this chapter.

say, language conveys a verbal semantic meaning as well as a second level of performative, phonemic meanings.<sup>54</sup>

Regarding this estranging movement or rapprochement between the known and the unknown (or unknowable) that takes place at the outer limits of representation, Foucault asserts: “plus fondamentalement, la pensée moderne s’avance dans cette direction où l’Autre de l’homme doit devenir le Même que lui” (339). This model of being is very close to Pelegrín’s reflexions on the specific socio-political and psychological symptoms of baroque culture: “l’infiltration insidieuse de l’Un par l’Autre, l’impact effritant le monolithisme compacte des théories catégoriques [... c]’est cela le Baroque pour moi” (266). The difference, precisely, between the infiltration of the “Other” in the Early Modern baroque and the conscious movement towards that “Other” near the end of the nineteenth century is, as can be clearly seen from the two above assertions, is strictly a matter of point of view. For Pelegrín, the “One” is infiltrated (passive voice) by the “Other,” whereas for Foucault, the “Other” must become (active voice) the “Same” as the one. The exact difference is very perceptibly noted by Buci-Glucksmann in *La raison baroque*, where citing Benjamin (“[I]’allégorie baroque ne voit le cadavre que de l’extérieur, Baudelaire le voit de l’intérieur”), she concludes that this shift in perspective marks a turning point at which “[I]e baroque se fait moderne” (80).<sup>55</sup> The cadaver as a symbol of the “Other,” one’s own death or madness in the sense of “le déjà-là de la mort” (see in Chapter I, “Baroque (Un)reason”), and its relation to the self or the “Same” mark the difference between the “modern baroque” and the Early Modern baroque in the way that this “otherness” to vitality and reason is perceived, not as some exterior force of divine wrath or judgment, but as the inherent decay that is always already at work within the world, the mind (“l’esprit”), and the body itself. In the Early Modern Baroque, the self or subject was perceived as affected or afflicted by the horrors

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (New York: Verso, 1998), Walter Benjamin describes this dialectic function of the baroque in terms of allegorical language, stating, “For allegory is both: convention and expression; and both are inherently contradictory” (175). Baroque allegorical language says what it is conventionally, while at the same time expressing, through performance or presence of language itself, something else, something other.

<sup>55</sup> For a relatively thorough discussion of the baroque in modernity, see Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, which discusses Walter Benjamin’s “baroque angel of history,” the backwards moving angel that leaves destruction in its wake, in the context of Baudelairean modernity (pp.67-76).

of death, madness, and the “Other” from the outside, whereas at the end of the nineteenth century, this selfsame “Other” of death and madness, of physical and psychological decay and decadence is recognized inherently within the very nature of the subject as an intrinsically temporal being.

The imminent experience of death and madness in the Early Modern baroque was an experience of its “infiltration” into the confines of life and reason, and an awareness of its presence at and inside the margins of experience. However, the “modern baroque” is not merely an awareness of this “other;” it is the inevitable and sustained *shock* of *experiencing* death and madness as an integral part of life and reason. In *L’Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, Foucault notes how in the nineteenth century the liberation of “le fou,” following the “grand renfermement” of “l’âge classique,” marks a point at which madness can communicate with non-madness. He states: “Libéré, le fou est maintenant de plain-pied avec lui-même [... d]ans la folie, l’homme tombe en sa vérité: ce qui est une manière de l’être entièrement, mais aussi bien de la perdre. La folie ne parlera plus du non-être, mais de l’être de l’homme, dans le contenu de ce qu’il est, et dans l’oubli de ce contenu.” (534) Consequently, one can say that madness in the nineteenth century no longer corresponds to “le déjà-là de la mort” and non-being, but rather reveals the truth of man’s inherently morbid being: a living/dying contradiction of madness and reason, simultaneously within and beyond his own scope of understanding. And in this sustained tension of opposites, between Self and Other, we see that which is perhaps most properly baroque in the late nineteenth century and beyond. Buci-Glucksmann discusses “une esthétique de l’altérité” in *La raison baroque*, focusing on the notion of *allegory* from the Greek *allegoria*, which plays on the notion of the “other” (*allos*). She states: “l’allégorie consiste précisément à dire *autre chose* que ce que l’on veut dire, ou encore à dire une chose pour en faire comprendre une *autre* par des procédures obliques. Mais ce *discours par l’autre* est aussi un *discours de l’Autre*, mise en voix et en scène d’une Altérité qui échappe au discours direct et se donne comme un ailleurs.” (182) Allegory, which, as we have seen earlier from Foucault, as well as from Walter Benjamin, is an essential element of baroque representation; and as Buci-Glucksmann asserts, it is also very much a part of a “modern baroque” discourse or language that always reveals an-other meaning in and

by its own application or *mise-en-scène*.<sup>56</sup> In the context of the Foucauldian rupture and the invention of a modern *épistémè* in which man and language are simultaneously subjects and objects, both the tools and objects of inquiry, I propose that the performative power of language, its rhetoric and *poesis*, as opposed to its purely representational capacity, marks a second “baroque” turning point in the history of Western knowledge. With an eye turned to the aesthetic, philosophical, and political contexts of the late nineteenth century, we see some of the modern manifestations of a very “baroque” backlash of uncertainty that reposes on the “being” of language regardless of authorship, indicating an ideological response to the false pretenses of positivism. One might therefore posit that the late nineteenth century witnesses the birth of the baroque that was still only an art of conception, an unarticulated phantasm in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The so-called “Other” that remained concealed in baroque anamorphosis recognizes itself consciously as other in itself and is able to articulate itself in such a way that its otherness is made manifest in the nineteenth century. No longer madness *within* reason, the modern baroque is even more fundamentally baroque in that it portrays the madness *of* reason or, rather, the reason of madness.

### **B. Life and Death and a “Modern Baroque” Economy**

Much in the way reason and madness seem to continually preoccupy the baroque mind, I would not be the first to recognize the intensity with which the contrast (or conflict) between Life and Death also figures into baroque art, for as Panofsky perceptibly comments: “[t]he contrast between Life and Death plays a formidable role in Baroque iconography” (75). As I alluded to in the previous section, this interplay becomes all the more intense at the end of the nineteenth century in what I have begun to

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<sup>56</sup> The fourth section of Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is completely devoted to the idea of “Allegory and Trauerspiel” (Trauerspiel is literally translated as “sorrow-play”) in Germany’s baroque tragedy. Buci-Glucksmann’s chapter “L’espace baroque” in *La raison baroque* (pp. 53-73) reads Benjamin’s Trauerspiel as an enactment of mourning and melancholy that allegorically represents “une histoire des douleurs du monde” (63-4). In the context of “une logique du pouvoir poussé jusqu’à sa réalité despotique-mondaine,” the response of baroque allegory is to de-construct the real through indirect language, “une écriture émotionnelle,” which appears where there is “un abîme entre l’être figuré et la signification” (66-9). Thus, in the fragmented language that results, “la logique des corps, du sentiment, de la vie et de la mort, ne coïncide pas avec celle du Pouvoir, ni avec celle du Concept,” and the world and its misery is broken down by the ambiguity between “real” and “illusion” in the play of representation that is the baroque experience “du monde comme théâtre et du théâtre de monde” (71).

call the “modern baroque.” In *L’homme devant la mort* (1977), French historian Philippe Ariès situates the union of Eros (eroticism, life, vitality) and Thanatos (death, morbidity) in the Baroque age, stating:

C’est au fond de l’inconscient, aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles, que quelque chose de troublant s’est passé: là, en plein imaginaire, l’amour et la mort se sont rapprochés jusqu’à confondre leurs apparences. [...] À la fin du XVIe siècle et pendant la première moitié du XVIIe, à l’époque baroque, un monde encore inconnu d’émotions et d’imaginaires a commencé à bouger. Mais les remous ainsi provoqués ont tout juste atteint la surface des choses, et les contemporains ne s’en sont pas aperçus. (386)

According to Ariès, baroque art, which he discusses in relation to the scientific fascination with human anatomy and the dissection of cadavers, begins to confuse or confound the opposing drives of life and death in an imaginative and provocative portrayal of human passions. However, he remarks that this erotico-morbid body phantasm remained latent, only apparent to the discerning eye, emerging later with more relative clarity in the arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

“L’inspiration est innocente et spirituelle, mais la réalisation, le style, les gestes trahissent les émotions inavouées, provoquées par le mélange de l’amour et de la mort, de la souffrance et du plaisir, ce qu’on appellera le sadisme. Du XVIe au XIXe siècle, on observe une remontée du sadisme, inconscient aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles, avoué et délibéré aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles.” (363)

The emergence of an erotic violence, the agonizing pleasure of morbid “jouissance” so consciously explicit in the works of the Marquis de Sade, represents the second stage of a psychological development that began a century before Sade in the arts at the time of the Baroque.<sup>57</sup> The notion of “blissful rapture,” the pleasure or relief taken in the intensely affective experience of pain and death illustrates the contrast of baroque life between a rejoicing celebration of human creativity and exuberance and a melancholy brooding over its flawed fatality, which for Panofsky is a hallmark quality of baroque art (“What is

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin, *op cit*, likens allegory to sadism, stating that, “the sadist [...] humiliates his object and then – or thereby – satisfies it. And that is what the allegorist does in this age drunk with acts of cruelty both lived and imagined.” (184-85)

Baroque?” 68 & 75).<sup>58</sup> Yet this psychological rift appeared with a certain subtleness characteristic of the deforming anamorphic gaze of the baroque point of view, and only in the late nineteenth century in the writings of Baudelaire and others does this theme become immediately visible.

Let us remember that Buci-Glucksmann's *La raison baroque* is explicitly concerned with the phenomenon of a “modern baroque” from Baudelaire to Benjamin, which thus can be said to span a historical period from approximately the mid 1840's to the late 1930's. Eugenio d'Ors recognizes the several manifestations of a modern baroque during the period from Baudelaire to Benjamin, noting the *Barocchus romanticus*, which culminates after a brief period of positivism and is visible in the art and culture of the period at the end of the nineteenth century. Similarly, “*Le Barocchus finisecularis* est celui de Wagner et de Rodin, de Rimbaud et d'Aubrey Beardsley, de Bergson et de William James, celui des architectes et décorateurs dont l'œuvre était alors taxée de ‘modernisme’ ou ‘décadence’.” This late nineteenth-century baroque also reappears, according to d'Ors, in the art of “l'Après-Guerre” after World War I (128-9). For d'Ors, and certainly for the purposes of my argument, the baroque itself does not constitute a particular style. It is rather composed of multiple styles, like a meta-aesthetic generative force that contrasts and relates to different reproductions of “style,” often called classical, as he reminds us: “le style baroque peut renaître, et traduire la même inspiration par des formes nouvelles, sans la nécessité de copier littéralement” (91). D'Ors anticipates my argument that the baroque *mentalité*, which delves into the arts and sciences to discover the otherness at the outer limits of life and reason, is that driving force which produces styles across space and the ages, styles which reveal a certain “human constant” of the existential nature of being that is fundamentally baroque.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Maravall also confirms in *Culture of the Baroque* that, “[t]he experience of death and the lifeless corpse was the material utilized to enter into the experience of life and of the living human being” (65). I should point out the allegorical significance of this notion of finding life in the experience of death in relation to the death and resurrection of Christ, which extends its implications to all humanity: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39, NIV).

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it would be useful here to mention the advent of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century, which was itself explicitly concerned with questions of death, desire, the unconscious, all of which lie beyond the scope of “reason” as previously understood, but which nevertheless begin to appear as fundamental elements of human being. For readings on the psychoanalytic and the baroque see Mitchell



In elaborating the notion of the baroque (or baroqueisme) as something beyond (or perhaps beneath) a mere artistic style or scientific endeavor, reflecting a more profound psychological orientation and motivation, it is important to consider the impact of particular social and cultural contexts as Maravall does in his *Culture of the Baroque*, or as Frederic Mauro does in “Y a-t-il une économie du Baroque.” Mauro discusses the notion of societal influences and indicators of the baroque in terms of “une économie du baroque,” which he contrasts with “une économie baroque,” thereby continuing in the vein of a double vision or dual understanding of the baroque. The former concept is clearly predicated on the notion that economic conditions—depression, globalization, production crises, etc.—were at the material base of baroque society. Beyond merely identifying an economy of the baroque, which is defined by actual socio-economic factors that pervaded the era(s) during which “Baroque art” as it is generally conceived was being produced, Mauro also proposes the more profound concept of a *baroque economy* which, like the art it spawned, is an economy of striking contrasts between extreme luxury, waste, and excess, on the one hand, and the most destitute depravity on the other—contrasts that were geographically delineated between urban and rural milieus. According to Mauro, the economic downturn of the sixteenth century fostered a “retour à la terre” and the necessary revitalization of a rural economy, which manifests itself in “l’art de l’imagination, du goût pour des formes plus proches des formes naturelles, du mouvement de la vie, du décor, de la cérémonie, s’opposant à la logique froide, lucide, statique, géométrique de la pensée et du goût bourgeois” (15). Within this view there is a necessary contrast between the material depression and the extravagant displays of wealth by the elites of what Mauro proposes is “[l]e dirigisme, politique économique baroque” (17). Mauro furthermore identifies a second historical period that exemplifies a baroque “typologie” in nineteenth and twentieth-century France, offering the hypothesis that the period of romantic expression from 1815 to 1850, “épris d’imagination, de sensibilité et de passion,” represents a baroque moment; but more interestingly still,

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Greenberg’s *Detours of Desire: Readings in the French Baroque* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984); also the anthology edited by Timothy Murray and Alan K. Smith, *Repossessions: Psychoanalysis and the Phantasms of Early Modern Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

musings that from 1900 to 1914 and during the “grande dépression” from 1873 to 1896—a periodization that corresponds to d’Ors’ Fin-de-Siècle baroque —“avec ses nouvelles tendances poétiques ou picturales par exemple, pourrait être, après le romantisme, un nouveau baroque” (16). More than anything else, Mauro proposes a series of questions for thought. I will discuss the relative “baroqueness” of French Romanticism a bit later on, but what I find most intriguing in Mauro’s analysis of an economy of the baroque, be it in the sixteenth or nineteenth century, is the correlative notion of a baroque economy, which he differentiates from the former, both in the historical and in the typological sense. Thus, Mauro is able to define a structural and a conjectural definition of a baroque economy: structurally, it is that point at which a new economy is in a stage of “take off” or “décollage” and, as he states with respect to modern “pays sous-développés ou en voie de développement,” it comprises “les bizarreries d’une économie qui se cherche encore”; further, he conjectures: “Si le baroque est une forme du contraste, rien de plus baroque que les contrastes, que les contradictions—pour employer le langage marxiste—d’une économie en dépression” (17).<sup>60</sup> Specifically in terms of the late nineteenth (and also of the twentieth) century, one must look for such signs of apparent contrast between luxury and poverty, the kind of contrast that one might very easily associate with the oppositional imagery of beauty and banality that appears so prominent in the decadent poetry of Charles Baudelaire.

As Guy Scarpetta duly notes in his book *L’Artifice* (1988), Baudelaire’s poetics represent a suspended tension between romanticism and a modern or *neo*-baroque.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, in an article entitled “Baudelaire et le Néo-Baroque” that appears in the summer of 1950 in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Wolfgang Drost discusses specific

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<sup>60</sup> This notion of a baroque economy, which relates to an “exode rural” that began in France around 1850 as a consequence of the industrial revolution, will prove particularly pertinent later on in Chapter 5, which deals with the notion of a socio-political and aesthetic baroquisme in postcolonial francophone Africa, especially as it pertains to the striking contrasts between modern, urban spaces of opulence and luxury, and other spaces (even within the urban sphere) where life adheres much more to agrarian, pre-industrial forms of existence.

<sup>61</sup> Guy Scarpetta, *L’Artifice* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1988) contains a chapter, “La poudre de riz et le péché originel” (231-41), which is an analysis of Baudelaire’s poem “Éloge du maquillage,” in which he discusses specifically the duality of the natural-artificial feminine in Baudelaire’s poetics as an illustration of a more general aesthetic suspension between, and evolution from, Romantic to Baroque artistic expression.

affinities between the “modern” aesthetic outlined by Baudelaire in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (1863) and the Baroque aesthetic theory of Roger de Piles who lived and wrote during the second half of the seventeenth century, when it was the classical rather than the baroque aesthetic that was most in vogue. Drost recognizes the similarities between these two art critics, Baudelaire and de Piles, in terms of several key aesthetic elements including the importance of color to rendering art living and dynamic as well as a reaction against “naturalist” artistic subservience in favor of a “realism” that makes ample use of exaggerations or hyperbole to render a work more forceful. To make this point, Drost cites Baudelaire: “l’irrégularité, c’est-à-dire l’inattendu, la surprise, l’étonnement sont une partie essentielle de la caractéristique de la beauté” (116). Baroque art is beautiful, precisely because of its irregularities and imperfections that affect the observer with surprise and awe. Furthermore, Drost identifies the stress placed on “le tout-ensemble” or what Baudelaire terms “l’unité d’impression, et la totalité d’effet” above any excessive focus on minute “incorrections,” focusing rather on the multiplicity of details, the overall “sympathie” of a work of art, which is for both de Piles and Baudelaire (and citing the latter), the “condition *sine qua non* de la vie” (116-18).<sup>62</sup> Although Drost concedes that the two may only be tenuously linked by the intermediary figure of Denis Diderot, recognizing that Baudelaire may never have actually read any of Roger de Piles’ work, the resemblances between Baudelaire’s aesthetic and the Baroque aesthetic delineated by de Piles are so strong that he asserts that the two critics are in fact engaged in the same cause against classical and neo-classical stasis, stating that the word “romantisme” often employed by Baudelaire to differentiate modern art from its neo-classical counterparts is synonymous with the baroque in that the aesthetic traits it exemplifies for Baudelaire are generally associated with the baroque (120-21). To this end, Drost proposes that although in the art of the time there was no explicit “neo-baroque” to oppose to the neo-classicism that had reemerged in 1780, Baudelaire recognized in the works by nineteenth-century “romantics,” especially that of Eugène

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<sup>62</sup> In *Le Pli*, Deleuze also states, regarding the expressive value of variations and variety in the baroque perspective: “[c]e n’est pas une variation de la vérité d’après le sujet, mais la condition sous laquelle apparaît au sujet la vérité d’une variation” (27).

Delacroix, the bizarre, poignant, terrifying, and melancholic aspects that were some of the defining characteristics of baroque art; for this reason, he might be considered “le Roger de Piles du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle” (131). This nineteenth century return of the baroque, which Drost describes as “la fusion du romantisme et du baroque” is not only identified by Baudelaire in certain French Romantic painters but also, to the degree that his poetics exemplify a point of convergence between Romanticism and the Baroque--as Scarpetta has proposed--and a “modern baroque” for Buci-Glucksmann, Baudelaire’s work itself constitutes an explicit recovery (and extension) of the baroque literary aesthetic.

Buci-Glucksmann’s analysis of the modern baroque and Baudelaire is heavily steeped in the writings of Walter Benjamin, from his 1928 treatise *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to his later writings that dealt explicitly with Baudelaire, nineteenth-century Paris, and modernity. In a chapter of *La raison baroque* entitled “L’utopie catastrophiste,” Buci-Glucksmann specifically discusses the feminine as “allégorie de la modernité” using Benjamin’s recuperation of Baudelaire. Noting the way in which particular attention is given to the “corps prostitué” in its artificial trappings, she writes: “Dans ce baroquisme des corps féminins, l’allégorie se donne donc dans son interprétation moderne [...] le statut du corps féminin comme corps à la fois réel et fictive, permet de différencier l’allégorie moderne de l’allégorie baroque” (124).<sup>63</sup> The congealing of reality and fiction in Baudelaire’s poetics is not an isolated occurrence; his modern “decadent” peers include, among others, Edgar Allen Poe whose fantastical work coincides with that of Baudelaire, according to Buci-Glucksmann, in the articulation of “la notion même de la modernité” (75).<sup>64</sup> The nineteenth century resurgence of elements

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<sup>63</sup> The two-faced nature of Baudelaire’s poetics, the co-habitation of life and death and death in life that appears highly eroticized throughout *Les fleurs du mal* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1972) in poems such as “Remords Posthumes” (XXXII) and “Une Charogne” (XXVII), which depict the contrast of a beautiful yet putrid corpse of the prostituted body of modernity between bestial and angelic, sublime and profane, is indicative of the modern decadence of a world in which even the bodies of human beings become means of production, both of capital, and of desire. For a portrait of abject femininity, read Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur: essai sur l’abjection* (Paris : Seuil, 1980).

<sup>64</sup> In *A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), Walter Benjamin also notices the profound influence of Poe on Baudelaire in particular and on modern literature in general (42). Interestingly, in my interview with Dr. Amadou Ly concerning the baroque and the origins of African literature, he specifically mentions the “fantastic” tales of Edgar Allen Poe among other influences on African literature beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing into the early twentieth century, especially in the cultural “melting pot” of Paris in the 1920’s (See Appendix A). Although I have neither

of a baroque aesthetic, which Drost depicts as the artful juxtaposition of sensualism and realism through “[l]’imagination créatrice” (132), is a phenomenon that takes place in the philosophical and aesthetic sphere, but that is also the reflection of a very specific social, cultural, political, and economic reality. Maravall notes that in the baroque conception of “the sickness of a society” there was a general sense of pessimism, for although the social malaise could be remedied by human intervention, that same attempt to remedy “can also worsen a situation” (Maravall, 21-2). For Buci-Glucksmann the “baroque moderne” of Benjamin, in which she recognizes the influence of both Baudelaire and Nietzsche, as well as French modern revolutionary Louis Auguste Blanqui, attributes “cet éternel retour” of the baroque to “un monde ‘sans Dieu’” and “une dévalorisation des valeurs,” highlighting the productive and destructive force of alienated human beings in a “[d]uplicité historique, et tout autant psychique, où Éros et Thanatos voisinent” (81). Life and death have never been so close as in the baroque, and the fascination with the living corpse of a decadent modernity in Baudelaire’s poetic economy indeed emphasizes a very real political economy of erotico-morbid desire in the nineteenth century, to which we will now turn our attention.<sup>65</sup>

Decadence, or decay (etymologically), which can also be read as a de-cadence or irregularity in the recurrent rhythm of modernity, was experienced in almost every facet of late nineteenth-century culture through the radical changes in urban living, industrialization, and mass (re)production. This decadence appears in Baudelaire’s poetic musings on the modern metropolis of Paris that is the site of exquisite cultural, artistic, and personal splendor inasmuch as it reveals the dark underside of a cadaverous social,

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the time nor the expertise to exhaustively explore the apparitions of an American baroque à la Poe of the nineteenth century (a century in which the United States experienced its greatest internal conflict in the Civil War), I find one particular piece by the American painter Charles Allan Gilbert to be especially revealing of the baroque contrast of life and death, sensuality and morbidity that is a pervasive theme in the works of both Baudelaire and Poe. Gilbert’s 1892 painting *All is Vanity*, a trompe-l’œil in which the image of a woman in front of her vanity is also the image of a skull. In its brilliant optical illusionism, this image recalls the baroque aesthetic and the morbid sixteenth and seventeenth-century Dutch “Vanitas” paintings, and provides a striking visual (double) image of life and death, the beautiful and the grotesque of baroque poetry.

<sup>65</sup> In fact, Benjamin provides Baudelaire’s description of modernism, which contrasts the typical political heroism with “subjects from private life which are heroic in quite another way.” And he elaborates this distinction: “The spectacle of elegant life and of the thousands of irregular existences led in the basements of a big city by criminals and kept women.” (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet*, 78)

moral, and aesthetic decay. This conflicted view of the world is also embodied in Nietzsche's philosophy in which he describes his own existence in the form of a riddle that would have him already dead while still living, stating that he is "at the same time a *decadent* and a *beginning*" (*Ecce Homo*, 222). Relapse and decay, intermingled with life and passion—a striking point of commonality between Nietzsche's work and that of Baudelaire are symptoms of a kind of decadence that is at the core of Nietzsche's understanding of philosophy since Socrates. This bifurcated vision of the self and society is the basis for Nietzsche's project of a "revaluation of values," which involves above all else "the know-how, to *reverse perspectives*," stemming from an interior experience of one's own mortality (*Ecce Homo*, 223). Such was the case for the Early Modern Baroque, and likewise it is also a determining factor in the nineteenth-century emergence of a modern baroque. Nietzsche's attacks against philosophical idealism find their ideological counterpart in Karl Marx's materialist critique of capitalism and class inequality, which was influenced by the French thinkers Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and also indicative of a profound rupture with previous systems of thought and production. In an 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge entitled "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing," Marx writes: "The state everywhere presupposes that reason has been realized. But in just this way it everywhere comes into contradiction between its ideal mission and its real preconditions" (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, 14). Like Nietzsche, Marx has a clear vision of the decadence and decay of a society in which "reason" does not relate to reality, and thus, in a way that foreshadows Nietzsche's project of a "revaluation of values," he sees the necessity to "develop new principles to the world out of its own principles," a task that involves a reform of consciousness that "put[s] religious and political questions into self-conscious human form" (14-15).<sup>66</sup> Marx's view of the political, religious, social, and

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<sup>66</sup> I suggest that one of the principle ways that these political, religious, and economic concerns take a "human form" is through the kind of baroque artistic production that Benjamin attributes to Baudelaire: "Baudelaire was fond of placing his theses in the context crassly, in a baroque illumination, as it were" (*Charles Baudelaire*, 75). Baudelaire critiques modernity through characters in his poems, which embody and act out specific human consequences of larger social, political, and cultural contentions. (See for example his prose poem "Les fous" in *Le spleen de Paris*, XII). In a similar fashion, Benjamin adopts and expounds on Baudelaire's poignant critique, especially concerning commodity fetishism and fashion in relation to aesthetic re-production as a "prostitute[ion of] the living body to the inorganic world." See his discussion "Grandville or the World Exhibitions" in *Charles Baudelaire* (pp. 164-6).

cultural upheaval as a correlative of a perceived economic crisis recalls the baroque complex of crises discussed by Maravall in terms of a general “sickness of society.” The dual conception of humanity as both the solution and the problem in society illustrates the very nature of baroque human being as an antithetical force of both life and death, at once the same and “other,” a paradox which becomes ever so much more explicit in the consciousness of certain nineteenth-century artists and thinkers.<sup>67</sup> The Baudelairean fascination with the prostituted body and the dual image of its detached, morbid sensuality and artificial beauty finds its philosophical counterpart in the life-affirming fatalism so prominent in Nietzsche’s philosophy as I will show in this next section, for both embrace a modern baroque psychology of contrast and contradiction as the double embodiment of those powerfully human drives of life and death in a tenuous process of becoming.

### **C. Dionysus and Baroque Becoming in Theory**

Friedrich Nietzsche is noted for his distaste of all things “German” as well as his staunch stance against the Lutheran “Christianity” that was a principle part of state culture. He was, however, a great admirer of French culture. In his last work *Ecce Homo*, written in 1888 before his mental collapse on January third of the following year but unpublished until 1908, Nietzsche explains the tenets of his philosophy with a posterior glance at his own life as the psycho-spiritual context for his works, perhaps anticipating the notion of embodied cognition that would materialize in twentieth-century existentialist philosophies. He claimed to “believe only in French culture,” citing his “love” for Pascal and his admiration for Montaigne as well as the representatives of the French baroque: Molière, Corneille, and Racine (243). Friedrich Nietzsche was admittedly a fervent advocate, not only of French “classical” culture, but perhaps even more so of the late French Romantics, whom he described as the “closest relatives” to the

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<sup>67</sup> Benjamin indeed notes, “with Baudelaire, in the ‘death-loving idyll’ of the city, there is decidedly a social, and modern sub-stratum. The modern is a main stress in his poetry. As spleen he shatters the ideal (‘Spleen et Idéal’). But it is precisely the modern with always conjures up prehistory. That happens here through the ambiguity which is peculiar to the social relations and events of this epoch. Ambiguity is the figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic is at a standstill. This standstill is Utopia, and the dialectical image therefore a dream image. The commodity clearly provides such an image: as fetish.” (*Charles Baudelaire*, 171)

venerable Wagner, stating that Charles Baudelaire was “the first intelligent adherent of Wagner anywhere” (248).<sup>68</sup> At the same time as Wölfflin was writing the first major aesthetic treatise on the notion of baroque after Burckhardt’s 1865 work *Der Cicerone*, Nietzsche was espousing a philosophy bearing some striking resemblances to the “anti-classical” art of movement, life, and harmony that Wölfflin describes as baroque and that Baudelaire recognized in the works of several nineteenth-century “Romantic” French artists.<sup>69</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche construes his own philosophy as a reflection on “reason in reality” brought on by sickness and pitted against an idealized vision of German classical education that teaches idealism rather than an understanding of reality. He states: “I began to reflect on this fundamental unreason of my life—this ‘idealism.’ Only my sickness brought me to reason.” (242) The “reason” to which Nietzsche refers is nothing like the dialectical synthesis of Hegelian reason; rather his “reason” is instinctual, embodied, accepting of human life and mortality, a consciousness of *being*. He writes: “[a]ccepting oneself as if fated, not wishing oneself ‘different’—that is in such cases *great reason* itself” (231). The contrast between the relative “unreason” of purely rational German idealism and a much more reasonable investment in reality, in being human (perhaps all-too-human) and marred by fatality and fluctuation, is made quite clear in his very first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). In this book, which was heavily influenced by Richard Wagner’s music, the young Nietzsche describes an aesthetic tension between the Apolline or Apollinian spirit, which is defined in terms of plastic forms, stasis, and perfection, and the disruption of a Dionysiac or Dionysian spirit of music and intoxicated movement. Regarding the relationship between the two, he states: “Apolline consciousness only hid this Dionysiac world from them like a veil [...] Thus, wherever the Dionysiac broke through, the Apolline was suspended and annulled” (21 & 27). Nietzsche’s understanding of the (recurring) Dionysiac interruption of the Apolline status

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<sup>68</sup> Regarding the love-hate relationship that Nietzsche had for Wagner’s work, which at times was a source of great inspiration and at others the subject of harsh criticism, see “Nietzsche Contra Wagner” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 661-83.

<sup>69</sup> Another interesting recuperation of the baroque is that of a group of nineteenth-century composers including Sergei Rachmaninov, Ferruccio Busoni, and Franz Liszt whose rearrangements and interpretations of Bach’s works illustrate the renewed interest in, but also active engagement with, baroque art.



quo is strikingly similar to the way in which I have theorized the notion of Baroque, which temporarily suspends certainty, be it in the plastic arts, literature, philosophy, or the sciences, through the introduction of musicality, pluralism, movement, and rhetorico-sensory devices for saying or showing something other.<sup>70</sup> In the section of *Ecce Homo* devoted to “The Birth of Tragedy,” Nietzsche elaborates a “Dionysian philosophy” which one might very well call his own, based on a psychology of tragedy that involves “[s]aying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems [...] saying Yes to opposition and war; *becoming*, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*” (273). Through Nietzsche’s “reason in reality,” his philosophy of *being* and of *becoming*, of life in the body, the conflict and dynamism of a life-affirming fatalism, baroque expression enters into modern discourses on language and philosophy.

The baroque always represents a dual image: first, it appears in the dissident and disruptive baroque art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was co-opted and controlled by state and religious structures making use of the shocking power of representation to guide the masses toward a conservative culture; it also appears in the sustained ambiguity of its expression of the ever present conflict between earthly and the spiritual forces, the sensual and the horrifying, the sublime and the grotesque. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche’s philosophical bludgeoning of idealism can be interpreted as an explicit attempt at getting beyond dualistic notions of reason and madness, Self and Other (or Good and Evil), in order to bring these apparent opposites into a new discordant harmony. Discussing the nature of his professed task of the “*revaluation of all values*,” Nietzsche writes: “the art of separating without setting against one another; to mix nothing, to ‘reconcile’ nothing; a tremendous variety that is

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<sup>70</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the section “Allegory and Trauerspiel,” Walter Benjamin explores the relationship between the language of romanticism and that of the baroque, referencing Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* as the work that represents a distinction between romantic “frivolous opera” and Wagner’s “tragic” *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which “had its preparatory stages in the baroque” (212). Benjamin describes this impoverishment of the baroque as such: “Because he [the spectator or critic] does not sense the Dionysian depth of music, he changes his musical taste into an appreciation of the understandable word-and-tone-rhetoric of the passions in the *stilo rappresentativo*, and into the voluptuousness of the arts of the song” (212). Although the romantic opera has less depth than the baroque *trauerspiel*, which is the primary subject of his work, Benjamin notices that both artistic movements share the same goal of reviving artistic expression: “Both, romanticism as much as baroque, are concerned not so much with providing a corrective to classicism, as to art itself” (176).

nevertheless the opposite of chaos—this was the precondition, the long, secret work and artistry of my instinct” (254). Nietzsche’s philosophy is at its base a Dionysian art, following in the multiple moments of musicality rather than along the contours of fixed form, and presenting a worldview that corresponds to that sensory inundation. Thus he states that Dionysus “presents the essence of everything that appears in a way that is immediately intelligible, for he has command over the chaos of the Will before it has assumed individual shape, and from it he can bring a new world into being at each creative moment, but also the old world with which we are already familiar as phenomenon” (“The Dionysiac World View” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, 122). In *La raison baroque*, Buci-Glucksmann sheds light on the appeal of the Dionysiac for Nietzsche’s thought: “Dionysos, ce déjà pervers polymorphe. Dieu du vin, de l’extase, Dieu du théâtre, de la douleur et du jeu, celui qui figure précisément dans l’histoire de la polis grecque un ‘anti-système’ [...] entre la bestialité et l’humanité, la conscience et l’inconscient, le masculin et le féminin, la polis et ses marges, étrangetés et mystères.” (167-8) Buci-Glucksmann reads Dionysus as perhaps the personification of the baroque spirit of eternal contradiction and passionate pursuit of pleasure even in pain, that intense being that occupies a liminal space between madness and reason where Same and Other communicate in a sustained tension, which is only approached ecstatically through the rapture of music or intoxication, or the poetic disembodiment of signification. Nietzsche understands his task in much the same way, regarding himself as a “*Doppelgänger*” or having “a ‘second’ face in addition to the first” (225). His purpose is “[t]o communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs”; his is the Dionysian task to express “[t]he art of the *great* rhythm, the *great* style of long periods to express a tremendous up and down of the sublime, of superhuman passion” (265). In this we see the baroque inspiration of extreme human passions, life and death, the “being-there” of man (*Ecce Homo*) that is always also elsewhere inhabiting new forms of language and pressing beyond the limits of representation to show, as Nietzsche boasts, “what could be done with language in general” (265). Nietzsche’s philosophy makes an art of logic (a *tekhné* of *logos*), a technology.

Nietzsche's work embodies that disruptive force that presents as many new impossible worlds and paradoxical constructs as there are creative moments, bringing into being the baroque language that had theretofore been limited solely to artistic representation. At the end of the nineteenth century, one might say that with Nietzsche the baroque enters explicitly into the domain of philosophical discourse as a self-reflexive technical logic that in the Early Modern Baroque had only been deployed in the arts and sciences, never employed explicitly as a means to understand humanity and language. As such, the baroque becomes itself as other, as a written (visual and auditory) discourse that makes human linguistic reality much in the same way as theatrical performance structured socio-political reality in the Early Modern world. Hence, the emergence of language into the field of thought that Foucault situates at the end of the nineteenth century can be seen as a motif similar to the emergence of representation into the field of representation, that is as a novel form for expressing the same inspiration, that of a crisis in values and an epistemic shift. In much the same way as the task of baroque representation was to draw attention to the act of representation itself and that unrepresentable drive or desire that accompanies such an act, the "modern baroque" mind is preoccupied with the linguistic performance of language, using language to illustrate the presence of language as some thing, and thus, that inescapable urge to signify that is an inherent part of human being.<sup>71</sup>

The Baroque, therefore, re-manifests itself in the nineteenth-century through a reinvention of the baroque, which speaks of and by another language, the language of unreason and of a performative poetics, and which expresses an allegorical significance that cannot be otherwise put into representation. The language of the Dionysiac speaks itself as a baroque anti-logic, another order that is the domain of the poet and the madman. To reprise Foucault: "La folie parle le langage du grand retour [...] le retour lyrique par une fulguration instantanée qui, mûrissant d'un coup la tempête de

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<sup>71</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin remarks the affinities that exist between baroque and romantic expression in the nineteenth century in terms of allegory: "This, at least, is the lesson to be derived from the musical philosophy of the romantic writers, who have an elective affinity with the baroque..." (213), and he expounds on the notion that this allegorical expression is tied to the complicity of language, music, and script in the creation of a visual, and tonal experience of the word.

l'achèvement, l'illumine et l'apaise dans l'origine retrouvée" (*Histoire de la folie*, 536). In the nineteenth century, the madman and the poet speak the same language, a language seeking to combine Self and Other and to understand the madness and death that pervade life and logic in modernity. Investigating what could be done with language in general was very much the task of poet Stéphane Mallarmé, whom Deleuze describes in *Le Pli* as, "un grand poète baroque" (43). Mallarmé's "Crise de vers," which first appeared in September 1895, states quite frankly: "La littérature ici subit une exquise crise, fondamentale," and in this crisis in representation he recognizes "le fait d'actualité" that in the "Fin de siècle" there is "une inquiétude du voile dans le temple avec des plis significatifs et un peu sa déchirure" (5). The metaphor of the tearing of the veil refers to the crucifixion of Christ, at which point the veil in the temple that separated the court from the inner dwelling place of God was torn; in giving voice to the folds and tears in this veil Mallarmé implies the breakdown of the barrier between the sacred and the profane and an interpenetration of the real world and "l'au-delà"—that other sphere that forever eludes representation. This folding and tearing of the fabric separating the human from the divine (or sublime) represents a rupture in the mind of nineteenth-century man, symbolized in the "death of God" for which Nietzsche is so well remembered. In much the same way as Deleuze invokes "la crise et l'écroulement de toute Raison théologique" as the entry point of the baroque focus on the imperfect nature of human being, he cites Nietzsche and Mallarmé as forces through which "il a fallu que la Raison humaine s'écroule" (*Le Pli*, 90-91). Whereas God in the baroque became an irrational force, in modernity, man became irrational and God became impossible. The purported "death of God" in the new baroque disruption of the nineteenth century and modernity is emblematic of the crisis in representation and the emergence of language into the field of thought in so far as "God" as a Name or representable entity is lacking. There is only no "God" because there is no more idealism, no more "Pure Reason." Modern consciousness in the nineteenth century has shifted toward corporeality, and thus any experience of God in the modern world will be a profoundly human experience of the void, of a "mad" world apprehended only through what language at its performative limits can allude to—everything all at once.

Thus, Mallarmé is well set to notice the “crise” of the *fin-de-siècle* specifically as an occurrence within language, a rupture with poetic representation that had theretofore been viewed as the symptom of a general atmosphere of economic, political, socio-cultural, and philosophical crisis. In lieu of the structured metrical line of the alexandrin verse, Mallarmé proposes a new, strange “vers libre” which enabled language to represent something else altogether: “une moyenne étendue de mots, sous la compréhension du regard, se range en traits définitifs, avec quoi le silence” (10). The intentionally abandoned hanging signifier of “le silence” in this line (the un-heard accompaniment to the definitive arrangements of words) demonstrates the very essence of Mallarmé’s “acte poétique” which, in performing the presence of language, gives sound to silence, a baroque art par excellence, for it makes language manifest through its own *mise en abîme*.<sup>72</sup> Referring to Mallarmé and Nietzsche in *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault characterizes this novel phenomenon in and of language thusly: “les mots deviennent texte à fracturer pour qu’on puisse voir émerger en pleine lumière cet autre sens qu’ils cachent; enfin il arrive au langage de surgir pour lui-même en un acte d’écrire qui ne désigne rien de plus que soi” (315). Unlike the classical baroque experience of language and the power to represent representation, the modern baroque experience of language is one that deconstructs itself in order to represent nothing but itself, the being of language; in so doing, language represents infinite potential. Language itself, more than a mere Name or representation, approaches in its full effect the nature of the divine and the transcendent that is as much a part of God as it is of man. In so doing it becomes baroque in the sense that it provides the opportunity to, as Mallarmé states, “[o]uïr l’indiscutable rayon – comme des traits dorent et déchirent un méandre de mélodies: ou la Musique rejoint le Vers pour former, depuis Wagner, la Poésie” (“Crise de vers” 11). Hearing the unspeakable in the nineteenth century is the equivalent of seeing the invisible

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<sup>72</sup> Roland Barthes expounds on this notion in *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953 & ’72) in his essay “L’écriture et le silence,” in which he writes: “Mallarmé, sorte de Hamlet de l’écriture, exprime bien ce moment fragile de l’Histoire, où le langage littéraire ne se soutient que pour mieux chanter sa nécessité de mourir. [...] veut créer autour des mots raréfiés une zone vide dans laquelle la parole, libérée de ses harmonies sociales et coupables, ne résonne heureusement plus. [...] Cet art a la structure même du suicide : le silence y est un temps poétique homogène qui coince entre deux couches et fait éclater le mot moins comme le lambeau d’un cryptogramme que comme une lumière, un vide, un meurtre, une liberté.” (55)

in the Early Modern baroque.<sup>73</sup> At the fin de siècle, Mallarmé seems to echo the cry of Nietzsche in more ways than one, from his high esteem for Richard Wagner to his criticism of scholastic Idealism and exaltation of instinct and “le magique concept de l’Œuvre” (14). But above all he, like Nietzsche, is concerned with “une existence d’art” that one might call baroque because of the way in which the musicality of the Dionysian spirit exerts its creative energy in a multiplicity of meanings that paradoxically brings new worlds into being at the same time as it recalls the old.

This poly-significative potential of music is what leads Suzanne Clercx to write in *Le baroque et la musique* (1948): “C’est dans la musique, vraiment, que le Baroque trouve son incarnation idéale. C’est là que pleinement, sans entraves, il est baroque. [...S]es combinaisons sont innombrables et il lui est loisible de reculer et d’accroître indéfiniment les conceptions du temps et de l’espace.” (219) Music is that art form that most easily accommodates the openness of form, the spatial (and temporal) depth and layers of meaning that are some of the defining qualities of Baroque art, qualities that do also appear in the plastic arts and in literature. However, in the nineteenth century, with poets such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé, this musicality infuses the very fabric of words so that they speak the immediate sensory language of infinite possibilities that lie in the hinterlands of logic and reason in unfettered *poesis*. Thus, Mallarmé writes of the power of the lyric verse:

Le vers qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme incantatoire, achève cet isolement de la parole: niant, d’un trait souverain, le hasard demeuré aux termes malgré l’artifice de leur retrempe alternée en le sens et la sonorité, et vous cause cette surprise de n’avoir ouï jamais tel fragment ordinaire d’élocution, en même temps que la réminiscence de l’objet nommé baigne dans une neuve atmosphère (16).

What Mallarmé accomplishes in isolating and ultimately silencing words in their banal significations, is the revelation of their inherent beauty as things, as sounds, as sensory

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<sup>73</sup> Here I would like to interject a brief note on Arthur Rimbaud whose poetics (and later his poetic silence) perhaps more than any other illustrate the spirit of cultural revolt, aesthetic genius, and political incorrectness proper to a great baroque poet. Accordingly, in *Le Temps des assassins: Essai sur Rimbaud* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2000), first published in English in 1946, Henry Miller writes about how the young Rimbaud would inscribe the words “Mort à Dieu” on the doors of the church, but “il se révélait être plus près de Dieu que les princes de l’Église” (143), noting also how “[t]out ce qu’il entreprenait était étrange, baroque et *inouï*” (129).

objects themselves, and this sensationalism, this simultaneously murderous re-birth of meanings, is that which is ultimately baroque in his poetics in that it is the embodiment of an epistemic and cultural shift in the late nineteenth century.

The music that is so alive in Mallarmé's verses and Nietzsche's lofty prose are both manifestations of the shift or rupture in the modern *épistémè* of the nineteenth century, which marks a reincarnation of the baroque spirit in the affective force of language speaking/writing itself otherly (allegorically) in the immediacy of its musicality, its Dionysian spirit. Precisely because one cannot grab hold of it, the "effectiveness" of baroque language finds its source in the musicality and affect of its "mise-en-scène," which demonstrates the ambiguity and movement within and underneath words themselves. In the nineteenth century, the "face-à-face" of poetry and unreason asserts its inextricable presence within the folds of discourse as the artistic being of language, which in its musical lyricism reveals the "otherness" of discourse: its silence. And in the folds of this new language, the otherness of man, his madness, and morbidity appear as the embodiment of human being in its infinitude at the limits of love, life, and logic that compose the finite space of human nature, work, and speech. The epochal unfolding of modernity in the late nineteenth century, characterized by the paradoxical dual action of a living death or dying life, and embodied in the kind of poetic innovation and the sensory "word-beings" described and practiced by Mallarmé, constitutes a conscious revival of the inspirations at the core of baroque being in contradiction. This epistemic and aesthetic shift signals a return of the transcendental and the otherworldly into the arts and sciences theretofore dominated by classical empiricism; it marks a juncture at which a new baroque consciousness of sensual realism appears in modernity, exemplified by the death of Order and static rationality in favor of History and transient inconstancy exemplified by the modern baroque spirit of Nietzsche's proto-existentialist philosophy and Mallarmé's poetics of musicality. This baroque turning point in and towards history marks a moment of significant rupture in which old and new ideas are again forced into a tense dialogue as an age, standing on the threshold of globalization, arrives at a point of reckoning with the unknown Other, and this Other becomes an inalienable part of the Self--philosophically, politically, and poetically.

## **In-Conclusion: Baroque in the Twentieth Century**

It is important to make the distinction that the baroque is not something “separate” but rather something that operates simultaneously “within” yet in opposition to more mainstream modes of expression and understanding. From its shadowy representations in the Early Modern period to its posthumous birth in the nineteenth century, it seems clear that the baroque does not adhere to traditional conceptions of temporality or categorizations of space; it is a movement within and across such material and psychological boundaries. In an essay entitled “Pour une histoire pervertie” in *Résurgences Baroques*, Mieke Bal discusses a kind of frustration when faced with a baroque image because of the way it resists definition, which can both discourage and elicit a supplementary effort to think about “la signification de la difficulté de voir.” For Bal, this near resignation and ancillary effort to think what the difficulty of apprehension might itself entail symbolizes “un rapport inverse entre le présent et le passé qui inaugure le mouvement oscillant que je conçois comme une histoire culturelle opérant en sens inverse, une histoire perverse dans le sens étymologique du terme. Cette histoire, je l’appelle ‘baroque.’” (61) We might then understand baroque as a necessary involvement of the past and the present, each exhibiting reciprocal effects that sometimes escape our vision, in a way similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s “ligne de fuite.”<sup>74</sup> Yet when this *ligne de fuite* itself is thought, the underlying temporality of history, and the ontological difference of an “epochal unfolding,” can be glimpsed in its relative obscurity. Thus, Bal states: “il est difficile de saisir le baroque—parce qu’il nous englobe. Nous sommes *dans* le baroque” (64). The inversion or “perversion” of history represents an alternative reading of time and space that disrupts and subverts divisions and linearity in favor of a “*regard cyclique sans aboutissement*” that confronts rational orders with the reality of

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<sup>74</sup> In the Introduction to *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari define “lignes de fuite” in contrast to lignes d’articulation ou de segmentarité” (both of which make up the rhizome), the former being more akin to “des mouvements de déterritorialisation et de déstratification.” He continues: “Les vitesses comparées d’écoulement d’après ces lignes entraînent des phénomènes de retard relatif, de viscosité, ou au contraire de précipitation et de rupture.” (9-10) As such, the baroque might be understood as a de-stratification of history, which places different times (and spaces) in dialogue, but not to positively signify *anything* in particular, rather to disrupt *everything* in terms of the absolute totality of linear history and narrative progress. I will further examine this particular notion in Chapter III “New World Baroque and a New Baroque.”



bodies and being, and which proceeds much more organically and analogically, like a Deleuzian rhizome operating underneath the surface, spreading and manifesting itself in different areas of thought, art, and culture.<sup>75</sup>

Above, I have shown how the artistic innovations of French Romanticism may recall a sort of pre-baroque mannerism or proto-baroque of the Early Modern period out of which a veritably baroque cultural expression eventually emerged. In much the same way as the baroque fruit of the flowering of the Renaissance was fertilized by Michelangelo's (in)formal experimentalism, the modern "baroque" of Baudelaire and the later writings of French symbolist poets such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé, as well as Nietzsche's revolutionary philosophy, were fertilized by the French Romantic tradition and the socio-economic crises that plagued post-revolutionary France and Paris during the nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps it was because France was unable to fully experience the exuberance of baroque spirit under the Absolutist regimes, first under the Cardinal Richelieu and then under Louis XIV, that the art of the post-revolutionary nineteenth century figures so prominently along the lines of baroque inspirations among French artists.<sup>77</sup> It seems clear that from the middle of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, there exists a baroque event in the sense of an epochal unfolding,

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<sup>75</sup> In the Introduction to *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), Deleuze and Guattari define the literary concept of the rhizome as a way by which "l'un fait partie du multiple," elaborating certain approximative characteristics of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, a "rupture assignifiante" or an "antigénéalogie," and the principles of cartography and of decalcomania (or layered tracing, like a palimpsest) (pp. 13-21). This notion will also be explored more fully in the next chapter.

<sup>76</sup> I have elsewhere studied the deconstructed versification of Baudelaire and Rimbaud in relation to the personal troubles and the political crises of 1848 and 1871 (la commune de Paris), in an unpublished paper "Crisis Poetics: the Poet in Paris." Also in this vein, see Robert St. Clair's paper entitled "Au Cabaret vert de la démocratie: Etude d'un alexandrin profané chez Rimbaud" (presented at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Nineteenth-Century French Studies Colloquium in Salt Lake City, October 23, 2009), in which he examines the way in which Rimbaud anticipates a kind of free verse within the accommodations of traditional Alexandrine verse form, enacting a subtle poetic subversion, which entails specific socio-political corollaries. In a conversation about his article, Robert affirmed that this could indeed constitute a specific kind of baroque aesthetic practice.

<sup>77</sup> In addition to the affinities between baroque art and certain French Romantics noted by Wolfgang Drost in "Baudelarie et le Néo-Baroque," le Salon des Refusés between 1863 and 1886 for nineteenth-century visual artists, most of which were part of the impressionist movement whose works were judged to be of "mauvais goût" because of "excessive" erotic, political, or stylistic content and thus unfit for the Académie des Beaux Arts, represents one such example of a subversive return of baroque values in art and culture. In *Généalogies du Baroque* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), Alain Mérot restates the opinion expressed by René Huyghe that Impressionism itself represented a "resurgence du 'vitalisme' baroque" (105).

which is manifested in economic changes, mass cultural movements, and political revolutions, and which appears both in a recuperation of the baroque in art (particularly in France, but also elsewhere in the world) and also in an explicit iteration of the baroque aesthetic in theoretical discourses.

The pairing of theory and practice, which was the case for Baudelaire whose art criticism and whose artistic creation reveal a baroque undercurrent, is also apparent in Nietzsche's philosophy (which is not lacking in aesthetic quality) and in Mallarmé's poetry (which itself is not devoid of theoretical reflection). What these cases show is that the modern baroque is very much an event that takes place within language, both in its application and its explication. While Foucault conceptualizes the rupture in the nineteenth century and its manifestation in the phenomenon of *language* in the writings of Nietzsche and Mallarmé, he does not investigate the idea thoroughly, only noting it as a passing fad, much like the baroque moment in the first half of *Les mots et les choses*. Yet, when read in conjunction with his *Histoire de la folie*, where Foucault gives more recognition to the madness of reason in the art and writings of Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Artaud, all coming after Sade and Goya, one can perhaps more readily glimpse the other side of the coin, the irrational passions and desires that exist simultaneously in and around modern science and reason and with which reason must contend.<sup>78</sup>

There is an other story to be told here, that of "une histoire pervertie" of modernity, which is less the (hi)story of rationality, order, and progress than that of

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<sup>78</sup> Eugenio d'Ors recognizes Goya as "un peintre baroque" (Du baroque, 81), and one needs only look at his *Courtyard with Lunatics* (1793-94), *The Witches' Sabbath* (1797-98), or his celebrated *Saturn Devouring his Children* (c. 1820) to note the play of light and shadow, metamorphosis, and the pervasiveness of death and madness that characterize a particularly baroque sensibility. Also, Beatrice Fink writes of "Corps sadiens, décors baroques" in *Corps/Décors: Femmes, Orgie, Parodie, Hommage à Lucienne Frappier-Mazur* (Amsterdam: Éditions Rodopi B.V., 1999) pp. 81-93, and in this article, she explains the ways in which Sade's writing represents "la pointe extrême de la logique du désir et une écriture que la mise en scène du roman noir rend baroque" (83). Within this "théâtralité" of Sade's "montage scénique," Fink remarks a fundamentally subversive element in that "le modèle non-fictif a beau être absorbé, il est subverti, voire perverti par un discours qui le transmute en machine de guerre dirigée contre l'ordre existant" (86), and this subversion/perversion takes place at the level of language in what she calls "cette rencontre du voir et du dire," which illustrates a complicity between "corps" and "décor" (bodies as objects) that serves to "permuter le voir en un tout-voir érotique" (89). Furthermore, this mise en scène is paralleled by a "mise en discours" of the obscene or transgressive word imagery, constituting a "subversion langagière," specifically "une défiguration du langage gallant où le glissement des signifiants désémantise le langage canonique" and thus, "le tout-dire provocateur vise à démanteler ce qui étaye l'édifice classique tout en l'adoptant et l'adaptant" (92).

passions, disruptions, and decadence. Accordingly, Foucault concludes his work on the history of madness, not with the triumph of reason in modernity, but to the contrary with the prominent achievements of “madness” within reason. He states:

Ruse et nouveau triomphe de la folie: ce monde qui croit la mesurer, la justifier par la psychologie, c'est devant elle qu'il doit se justifier, puisque dans son effort et ses débats, il se mesure à la démesure d'œuvres comme celle de Nietzsche, de Van Gogh, d'Artaud. Et rien en lui, surtout pas ce qu'il peut connaître de la folie, ne l'assure que ces œuvres de folie le justifient. (557)

One might suppose that these two works of Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* and *Histoire de la folie*, form a sort of classical/baroque dyptich in much the same way as Marshall Brown classifies Wölfflin's two works *Principles of Art History* and *Renaissance and Baroque* respectively as “classical” and “baroque” (95). I would not be the only one to recognize a certain “baroquisme” in Foucault's writing. Maurice Blanchot writes in *Michel Foucault tel que je l'imagine* (1986), commenting on the reaction of Roger Caillois to the manuscript of the then-unpublished *Histoire de la folie*: “Le style de Foucault, par sa splendeur et sa précision, qualités apparemment contradictoires, le laissa perplexe. Il ne savait pas si ce grand style baroque ne ruinait pas le savoir singulier dont les caractères multiples, philosophique, sociologique, historique, l'embrassaient et l'exaltaient” (11). Perhaps Foucault's work reveals more of the baroque than what relatively little attention is given specifically to the word or thing called “baroque” might suggest. Therefore, in much the same way as the Early Modern baroque encompasses a much broader historical phenomenon than those few decades at the dawn of the seventeenth century, inhabiting the same space as classicism, I propose that even in France, during the ensuing centuries (though often with little recognition as such), the “baroquisme” of late or high modernity near the end of the nineteenth century, of which Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Benjamin, and others are representative minds, also extends well into the twentieth century in the domains of art, history, psychoanalysis, literature, literary theory, and culture in general. I will discuss further in the next chapter this modern baroque, which infests like vermin the decadent corpuses of modernity, subverting and recreating new orders of life in the folds of an incumbent historical

positivism that can be viewed as perhaps nothing more than a contrite attempt at feigned certainty through which baroque disruptive aftershocks continue to reverberate.

### **Chapter III. Global (Neo)baroques**

We view a façade, a spectacle, a canvas, a screen, in whose glance the Baroque reflects upon itself. Caught in history, guaranteed by nothing but its own death, this sensibility extracts a sense of being from a continual dialogue with its limits.

-Iain Chambers, *Culture After Humanism*

[Q]u'il y a une 'naturalisation' du baroque, non plus seulement comme art et style, mais comme manière de vivre l'unité-diversité du monde; [...] et qu'en ce plein-sens encore, le baroque 'historique' a préfiguré de manière étonnamment prophétique les bouleversements actuels du monde.

-Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*

### **Introduction: Toward a (Post) Modern Universal Baroque**

We have seen the baroque evolve and traverse time, finding its incarnation in nineteenth-century modernity, and it has exerted its influence on history in the perversion of positivist historicism, infiltrating twentieth-century society, both as a theory and as a practice. There seems to always be a double movement in baroque evolution. For example, the breakout of the baroque in language in the nineteenth century drew much of its innovative techniques and thematic content from the Early Modern Baroque, yet more than a mere extension or recovery of the baroque attitude defined by its multiple impossibilities and sustained tensions in a world of representation, the baroque returns in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrate a self-conscious reinvestment of these principles in theory and practice, which exponentially increases the effectiveness of the baroque ensemble to disturb or disrupt the singularity of meaning and of experience. Cuban poet and critic Severo Sarduy explains the difference between the Early Modern Baroque and the subsequent (neo)baroques in terms of subjective psychology. In his essay "Une nouvelle instabilité," he writes that in a world of new Copernican cosmology "l'homme du premier baroque [...] se sent glisser [...] où tout s'est élargi, déformé, anamorphosé pour se reporter dans le tracé monstrueux des ellipses—et dans leur double rhétorique, qui rend la poésie illisible, contournée, comme ces amas de lignes où les

figures n'apparaissent que *de biais*." In contrast, "l'homme d'aujourd'hui" finds himself afloat in a post-Newtonian universe "parti d'une première explosion et, à partir de là en expansion violente, sans limites, sans forme possible: une course folle de galaxies vers nulle part, à moins que ce ne soit vers leur propre extinction 'hors' de l'espace et du temps" (in *Le baroque littéraire*, 35-46 at 36). The image of the neo-baroque, therefore, is not that of a duplicitous world of disjointed reality and theatrical representation, but one of insatiable emptiness endlessly emitting material—a monumental galactic de-centering, which further separates perceived reality from the new "scientific reality" to the point of the virtual annihilation of the former. The evolution of the baroque from the Early Modern period and a world that does not resemble its representation—a world of representation where nothing is as it seems—becomes in the late nineteenth century a world *as* representation, where *representation*, specifically language or words, is all that there is. And furthermore, these representations, if we follow Sarduy's logic, are constantly shifting and expanding to the point of meaninglessness.

As interesting and timely as a baroque aesthetic theory may have been in the early twentieth century for d'Ors, Benjamin, and other baroque theorists whose work was contemporaneous with the aesthetic manifestations of a modern baroque culture, this is perhaps even more the case for the latter twentieth century as baroque theory and criticism has grown steadily during recent decades, coinciding with various aesthetic manifestations of a neo-baroque. One example of this is the French poet and critic Yves Bonnefoy whose 1970 publication of *Rome 1630: L'horizon du premier baroque* clearly implies, by the title of a "premier baroque," the presence of a second baroque or subsequent (neo-)baroques. Also, Christine Buci-Glucksmann remarks an affinity for "baroque reason" among certain intellectual figures of the twentieth century. Although she appears to disagree with d'Ors concerning a broad resurgence of a baroque "style" after Baudelaire at the *fin de siècle*, she posits the presence of "*un paradigme baroque*" in modernity that operates "contre toute possibilité de clôture du langage," making use of procedures such as "allégorie, oxymoron, totalité ouverte et détail dissonant, réel vidé de son trop plein de réalité" in a rhetoric of affects that allows the vision of "la différence comme excès et le sens 'obtus': une esthétique" (*Raison*, 189). As representatives of this

baroque paradigm in modernity, which involves thinking and theorizing supra-logically in terms of aesthetics, Buci-Glucksmann names psychoanalyst and philosopher Jacques Lacan and philosopher-critic Roland Barthes, whose works had a profound impact on French and international philosophy and culture during the intellectual ferment of the “trente glorieuses,” (roughly 1945-1973) and well into the 1980’s. Their work continually resists the conceptual limits of language through affective and erotic polemics and an aestheticization of language and the world. To this short list, might we not also add Michel Foucault, if not only for the oft-overwhelming and feverishness complexity of his literary style, then for the thoroughly counter-modern quality of his work, which is concerned with matters of power and of the tools of language and representation that either support or subvert that power—words such as “raison” or “folie” for example? And what of Jacques Derrida whose demonstration of *différance* embodies the baroque duplicity and *trompe-l’oeil* (or *trompe-l’oreille*) in language, which has become as much a part of theory as of art, to the degree that creativity and criticism are intertwined if not indistinguishable in some cases?<sup>79</sup>

Omar Calabrese’s book, *Neo-baroque: a sign of the times (L’età neobarocca*, 1987), analyzes the contemporary manifestations of a neo-baroque “spirit of the age” in television, movies, contemporary fiction, and video games, taking his point of departure in the scientific models and cultural forms that influence daily life. Taking specific aesthetic qualities such as disorder, complexity, and distortion as poles of his analysis, Calabrese finds the fundamental expression of a baroque worldview or “mentality” of radical change or disruption in a common *form* behind the different manifestations of neo-baroque cultural production. (xi-xiv) What is particular to the new twentieth-century

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<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, in an essay entitled “Algebras, Geometries and Topologies of the Fold: Deleuze, Derrida and Quasi-Mathematical Thinking (With Leibniz and Mallarmé)” in *Between Deleuze & Derrida* (New York: Continuum, 2003), Arkady Plotnitsky notes the importance of the Baroque in the Deleuzo-Guattarian geometrical, or topological, approach to knowledge in its proliferating spatiality (103), and he proposes that the movement from a vertical Baroque fold in Leibniz’s monadology to a more horizontal fold or “fan” in Mallarmé’s textuality brings both of these notions closer to Derrida and his analysis of writing (107). Mallarmé’s baroque language, which Plotnitsky calls a “textual, inscriptive algebra” is “investigated by Derrida by means of his algebra or calculus of undecidables and shapes this algebra” (110). If Derrida is involved in the same investigation and textual practice of language (or writing) as was Mallarmé, it is possible to read in Derrida’s deconstructionist theory the same kind of baroque fold, concerned with the being of language, that was the constant preoccupation of Mallarmé’s poetic art.

baroque, or “neo-baroque,” can be thought in terms of an exponential increase in complexity as well as a certain self-reflexive consciousness that, due to technological development, were not conceivable in the historical time of the classical baroque. Much like baroque theatricality, it is precisely the proliferation of appearances in a void that characterizes modern spectacle, but the difference lies in the technology and the all-pervasiveness of mass media that penetrate and occupy every domain of life both public and private, practical and theoretical, artistic and scientific, thus instilling and maintaining a constant separation between things and their imagistic representation. And indeed, in addition to these baroque aesthetic practices Calabrese identifies “a philosophical substratum” from which they derive. He defines this as the application of an artificial language, or “a theory of signification that reveals its own paradoxes (such as representing the unrepresentable).” Thus, Calabrese states:

[I]t is within the language itself that we must seek the means for arriving at that *quid* [...] that will permit successive approximations. But as soon as the operation has been made into a ‘style,’ it can be inverted. It then becomes possible to *construct* approximation as an *aesthetic effect* by means of language.” (158)

Calabrese further describes this approximative character of the baroque application of language to itself and its propensity for “negative values” in terms of the concept of Nothingness. He asserts that throughout the history of philosophical and aesthetic thought since the seventeenth century, nothingness “has always maintained its baroque character,” remarking on its reappearance in film and music during the 1970’s as well as in the philosophical expressions of these times. Referring to Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard, he muses: “Is Nothingness in the sense of indefinition, then, another characteristic of the neo-baroque?” (170).<sup>80</sup> Above all, the baroque is a mode of seeing (or more broadly, of sensing) and being in the world and in time, which is always somehow incomplete, shifting, or otherwise beyond our reach, even though it is still perceptible in its overwhelming totality.

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<sup>80</sup> See also in Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s *La folie du voir*, section V. II “La longue-vue rhétoricienne: Figures du rien,” in which she postulates: “Le rien sous toutes ses formes, dans toutes ses langues (*il niente, la nada, le Nichts*, le vide, la vacuité, le néant, l’abîme...), n’a cessé d’obséder tous les baroques” (171).



What arises from this understanding of the baroque, and especially the neo-baroque as an aesthetic and philosophical expression of the negative, of Nothing, and the necessarily ironic implication of itself in its own paradoxical auto-reflexivity, is a conception of the baroque that very closely approaches something one might call “postmodern.” As Jean-François Lyotard writes in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (1986), “le ‘post-’ de ‘postmoderne’ ne signifie pas un mouvement de *come back, flash back, ou feed back*, c’est-à-dire de répétition, mais un procès en ‘ana-’, un procès d’analyse, d’anamnèse, d’anagogie, et d’anamorphose, qui élabore un ‘oubli initial’” (126). Lyotard’s postmodernity is not the beginning of another something after modernity; rather, “[l]e postmodernisme ainsi entendu n’est pas le modernisme à sa fin, mais à l’état naissant, et cet état est constant” (30). First, the “nascent state” of modernity recalls Panofsky’s definition of the baroque as the birth of Modernity.<sup>81</sup> And second, the “constant” nature of Lyotard’s postmodernity recalls d’Ors’s understanding of the eternal baroque “eon” that operates within and in opposition to classicisms in history as an “other” look “back” at the nascent state of modernity, the (re)birth of a baroque negation, mutation, or distortion that “forgets” modern or classical rules.<sup>82</sup> In the next three sections of this chapter, I will begin by looking at the neo-baroque in the Latin American context, where the notion has been theorized in some length and depth, specifically as it relates to a New World Baroque imported from the colonizing powers of the Iberian peninsula. From there I will move into an analysis of various forms of baroque resurgences in the context of global (post)modernity, paying particular attention to the manipulation of language and sensory imagery that characterizes our contemporary “Society of Spectacle” as elaborated by Guy Debord. Lastly, taking my inspiration from

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<sup>81</sup> Also, in *The Inordinate Eye*, Lois Parkinson Zamora remarks in relation to Argentine writer Jorge-Luis Borges and the neo-baroque that the notion of “‘belatedness’ has been taken as a post-modernist position avant la letter, but it was Baroque before it was postmodernist, and when it was Baroque it was not a statement of belatedness but of participation” (260).

<sup>82</sup> In his essay “Notes sur le syncrétisme, le baroque et la postmodernité” in *Résurgences baroques* (56-60), Maffesoli proposes the notion of a “*Barocchus postmodernicus*” à la d’Ors, elaborating the complexity of existence in contemporary urban societies that are a baroque combination of difference and “unicity,” a turbulent and organic sociality of “une harmonie conflictuelle” that survives in the suspended tension of heterogeneous complementarity.

Édouard Glissant's description of a "baroque mondialisé," I will define the baroque as a "universal" phenomenon, specifically as it relates to the francophone world.<sup>83</sup>

### **A. New (World) Baroque**

One area where the advent of the neo-baroque over the course of the twentieth century is particularly evident, and also where there is a considerable link between its manifestations and those of the Early Modern Baroque, is in Latin America. Much of Latin America experienced its own particular version of the Baroque under Spanish colonization during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and later the appropriation of various European forms and their adaptations to local cultural practices during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries became a mode for creating and expressing autonomous Latin American cultural and national identities. Lois Parkinson Zamora's brilliant book *The Inordinate Eye* (2006), which is perhaps the most definitive study of the baroque phenomenon in Latin America, proceeds with an in-depth discussion of the intermixing or "métissage" (*mestizaje*) of indigenous and European colonial forms in the creation and representation of a complex and contradictory Latin American cultures. This is not merely a process that takes place at the moment of encounter but rather one of fermentation and distillation that takes place over time. Thus, Zamora opens her study with a discussion of the intensely visual nature of pre-Hispanic representation in Mesoamerican sculpture and architecture and in the Aztec codices of the sixteenth century, the "painted books" as they were called by Spanish invaders. She first notes one

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<sup>83</sup> Mario Sancipriano discusses the notion of "L'image 'universelle' dans l'oeuvre d'art" in the collection *Esthétique baroque et imagination créatrice* (Tübingen: Narr, 1998), 279-96 in terms of a fantastic universality that differs distinctly from conceptual universality. In that it resembles a Jungian collective unconscious, Sancipriano understands the "universal" baroque image as residing not so much in a monolithic system of signification, but rather in the domain of language, namely of symbols, metaphors, and allegory, which open up a hermeneutical space for the elaboration of a plurality: "les universaux" (286). Also, Peter Davidson's *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), defines the baroque in Early Modern Europe and in the Americas as a large-scale movement of cultural turmoil that transgresses national and regional distinctions and represents a universal aesthetic for "dealing with reality" (pp.12-13). This can be seen in the movement of the Baroque from a purely religious art of the Counter-Reformation as in the works of Caravaggio, mixed with the mythological portraits of Carracci or Poussin to the paintings of landscapes and scenes everyday life undertaken by Velásquez or Rembrandt as the Baroque spread to the furthest corners of Europe. These diverse manifestations, which range from extreme theatricality to naturalist realism are above all concerned with the human passions that arise from the multiple experiences of living in the world. See also Claudette Sarlet's article "Nouveau baroque: baroque universel?" in the anthology *Nouvelles écritures francophones: vers un nouveau baroque?* (pp. 13-25).

very fundamental difference between the psychology of indigenous peoples and that of the Europeans: whereas the former regard the image as presence (or “resemblance”), the latter view it as re-presentation of absence (10, 15). Similarly, Serge Gruzinski’s *La Pensée métisse* (1999) opens with a reference to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century art historian Aby Warburg who, on a trip to New Mexico in January 1896, commented on the resemblance of “primitive” Latin American culture to the psychology of the Renaissance (8). However, the encounter between these two perspectives, much like the moment of epistemic rupture cited by Foucault as being “baroque,” yields a much more complex and self-conscious worldview (in terms of representation and its potential for both creation and annihilation of “reality”), which is most evident in the religious images and iconography found in New Spain, in which a kind of religious syncretism is evident. For example, Zamora identifies the different layers of representation and the incorporation of “pagan” cultures—an aspect similar to the European religious baroque—but this tendency is amplified in the colonies as seen in the co-existence of sibyls and saints and the incorporation of the Virgin Mary into a pre-existing natural cosmology (39-40). Zamora notices a similar phenomenon in the Aztec codices preceding contact with Europeans and after their arrival. The precontact codices represented both communal and cosmic history in a way that tended to conflate time and space, emphasizing the overall movement of history, whereas in postcontact codices the incorporation of European notions of linearity and differentiation rapidly contaminated this view, yielding a veritably inordinate re-presentation of “contradictory ways of seeing” that came to be emblematic of the “colonial Baroque” style in Latin America (71-2).

In his article “The Corporeal Image and the New World Baroque” (2007), William Egginton proposes that the classical baroque and the neo-baroque across Europe and Latin America compose a complex that he calls by the neologism of “coloneobaroque,” a combination of colonial baroque and neo-baroque that emphasizes the relation between the different times and spaces of its resurgence(s). The coloneobaroque transcends time and space, yet Egginton argues that it is nonetheless “historically and philosophically informed by the specific problems of Euro-American

modernity” (108). The coloneo-baroque as such affords the opportunity to examine the colonial baroque in its European and Latin American forms on a continuum with the neo-baroque resurgences that appear throughout Latin America and the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>84</sup> Egginton cites the Brazilian theorist Irlemar Chiampi to establish that the Baroque aesthetic is that of the Counter-reformation, while the Neo-Baroque is, “the aesthetic of counter-modernity.” And citing Monika Kaup, Egginton identifies the source of this counter-modern conceptuality in a twentieth-century “‘crisis of Enlightenment rationality [which] opens the way for the rediscovery of an earlier, alternate rationality and mode of thought (baroque reason) that had been repressed and vilified.’” (108) Expanding on this descriptive rapprochement between the *countering* aspects of both the baroque and neobaroque, Egginton highlights the paradox of the baroque aesthetic, which is simultaneously “the imperial imposition of continental norms and forms of control” and “the potential construction of ‘differentiated cultural identities’” (108-9). This duality also applies to the commodification of culture in a globalized modernity, and he mentions “the illusionism of Hollywood cinema and the spectacle of the fashion industry” as modes of production against and within which “art and literature that deploy the minor strategy of the baroque” function through a symbolic refusal of the “identification necessary for mass commodification” (122). This art, literature, and theory, he adds, challenge any absolute standards of beauty or desirability by “attacking the foundational distinction between the unquestioned base reality and its multiple representations” by going “beyond the mere excitement of affect to affect the core of our being, since they leave us with the uncanny sense that this core is at play in the world of representations” (123). Once again, it is through the manipulations of the senses that the (neo)baroque, in its representational excess, reveals a dual image that can

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<sup>84</sup> In the January 2009 issue of the *PMLA* vol. 124 no. 1, the section “The Neobaroque and the Americas” (pp. 127-88) provides several exemplary investigations of the various forms that this neo-baroque assumes, including Lois Parkinson Zamora’s analysis of a postcolonial neo-baroque in Latin America, which both stems from a Colonial Baroque heritage in former Spanish colonies and departs from it. She terms this thrice-removed form of expression, “brut barroco” (127-42); William Egginton’s interpretation of George W. Bush’s political self-representation in terms of baroque strategies of representation (143-9); Ronald Greene’s analysis of Haroldo de Campos’ extreme neo-baroque poetry (150-5); Monika Kaup’s depiction of a baroque style in contemporary Cuban visual culture (156-71); Salvador Oropesa’s discussion of a queer neo-baroque in Mexico (172-9); and an interview with Carlos Monsiváis concerning the neo-baroque and popular culture (180-8).

at first appear as another monument to colonial imperialism or the culture of global commodification, while at the same time making visible the invisible otherness of its being inside of the folds and creases of such monuments. The bizarre details and subtle manipulations that subvert the classical unity of the composition are what give the baroque its distinctive character.<sup>85</sup>

In her insightful article “Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Aléjo Carpentier,” Monika Kaup specifically discusses the adaptation of the European Baroque by local artisans in the Spanish colonies who molded the colonial forms to suit indigenous purposes and the way this “minorization” relates to the neo-baroque. For Kaup, the New World Baroque differs from the European Baroque precisely in the respect that it runs counter to the hegemonic practices of Absolutism and the counter-Reformation, representing a “rebellious American offshoot” (112). Kaup’s understanding of the subversive practice involved in implementing baroque forms in the New World proceeds from the Deleuzo-guattarian notion of “becoming minor,”<sup>86</sup> which is the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that takes place in the New World baroque as “the expressive forms of decolonization are *folded from* the colonizer’s forms” (115-16). She describes the “Baroque dynamism, disruption, and excess [...] as a symptom that the Baroque embodies the process of genesis of new forms and identities,” which is a continually de-stabilizing re-creation that she refers to as “the process of becoming minor” (128). The process of becoming minor must be understood, not as the work of a minority population viewed as distinct from the majority culture, but rather as a literature “qu’une minorité fait dans une langue majeure” (Deleuze & Guittari, *Kafka*, 29). Extending the metaphor to the plastic and visual arts and religious and cultural institutions, the Latin American minor baroque is the expression of a minority culture or cultures, notably those of indigenous populations, within the majority culture; hence the

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<sup>85</sup> One example of this might be the way in which Caravaggio, on his final work *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (1608), signed the letter f in the blood flowing from John’s severed head, an act of defiance, which may have been his particular way of leaving his mark and exercising his subjectivity in a world in which he is otherwise subjected the whims of religious and political authorities. See Keith Sciberras and David M. Stone *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood, and Malta* (Valletta, Malta: 2006, p.93).

<sup>86</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975); a minor literature necessarily involves three qualities affecting language through its deterritorialization, infusing it with an intrinsically political element, and imparting a sense of collective or communal value (29-31).

notion of *métissage* or *mestizaje* is not merely one of side-by-side entanglement, but of the becoming of something other within the culture of colonial heritage.

The neo-baroque, especially as it is expressed in the New World, builds upon this counter-tradition of the baroque becoming minor. Thus, Kaup identifies the origin of the neo-baroque in the work of a group of Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals, including Cubans Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima, Mexicans Octavio Paz and Gonzalo Celorio, Brazilians Haroldo de Campos and Irlemar Chiampi, as well as Martinican Edouard Glissant, who in the 1950's began to elaborate on the lasting influence of the baroque in Latin America, turning it from an instrument of conquest into one of *contraconquista* or counter-conquest (110).<sup>87</sup> As such, the subversive, anti-hegemonic social and cultural differentiations of the New World Baroque become more explicitly and overtly apparent through the invention of hybridity and the expression of composite and contradictory postcolonial identities. Kaup claims that these initial theorists of the New World Baroque “understand the irony of engaging the expressive forms of the Spanish colonizers to construct a postcolonial identity” (113), but what makes this concept of complicity so interesting is the way in which it challenge[s] standard assumptions in postcolonial discourse about the dichotomy of cultures of colonizer and colonized” (115). Like the complicit involvement between colonizer and colonized and a sustained tension between conquest and counter-conquest that mirrors the long recognized conflict between Reformation and counter-Reformation of the

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<sup>87</sup> For specifics regarding the contributions of some of these theorists, see Zamora's *The inordinate Eye*. In chapter 3 she discusses the three Cubans—Aléjo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy—in relation to French Baroque painter François de Nomé. Also, in chapter 2, she recognizes a recuperation of the visual language of the Aztec codices and an affirmation of autonomous identity in the modern paintings of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera as a manifestation of a New World Baroque spirit (77). Chapter 4 provides a depiction of the “Baroque self” in Frida Kahlo and Gabriel Garcia Márquez, which shares some affinities with the “fractured view of the self in Montaigne and Pascal” (p. 186). See also the chapters “Baroque and anti-baroque: Octavio Paz” (51-8), “Literature, taxonomy and ‘The New World’: Severo Sarduy” (120-9), and “The baroque return: Aléjo Carpentier's *Concierto Barroco*” (130-8) in Gregg Lambert's *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004). See also, Ronald Greene's analysis of Haroldo de Campos' poetics “Baroque and Neobaroque: Making Thistory” in *PMLA* 124:1 (January 2009), 150-5, and for Glissant, as well as Daniel Maximin, see Dominique Chancé, *Poétique Baroque de la Caraïbe* (2001).

baroque, the neo-baroque reflects a similar cultural, discursive, and political site of subversive complicity between the postcolonizers and the postcolonized.<sup>88</sup>

Of the initial theorists who can be viewed as the harbingers of the neo-baroque, Cuban essayist Aléjo Carpentier is by far the most widely discussed. Zamora traces the origins of his “transcultural theory of the New World Baroque” back to the 1927, when he was profoundly influenced by the massive cultural undertakings of Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera and Clemente Orozco, as well as by the work of Mexican writer and diplomat Alfonso Reyes (124). In a 1967 essay entitled “We All Have a Baroque Style,” Carpentier compares the vivid realism and expanse of Mexican muralists’ representations to his own literary style (as well as that of Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, and others), which exhibits a similar penchant for extensive elaboration and detail characteristic of a baroque *horror vacui* (120). Thus, the baroque makes the jump from the plastic arts to the literary, and in his essay “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” (first published in Spanish in 1975) Carpentier discusses the socio-cultural implications of the baroque as the hybrid symbiosis of being a *criollo* (a Latin American of European descent, similar to the French “créole”). Carpentier cites “the awareness of being Other” as a fundamental element of a baroque style that arises from a state of baroque being, stating that “the *criollo* spirit is itself a baroque spirit” (100). Furthermore, Carpentier recognizes the roots of the twentieth-century baroque in postcolonial Latin America, not only in a recovery of the colonial baroque, but in the work of certain writers from the fin-de-siècle. He specifically mentions two figurehead poets of “el modernismo,” Nicaraguan Rubén Darío and Cuban José Martí, who both wrote much of their work around the end of the nineteenth century (although Darío continued to write until his death in 1916) and who were both greatly influenced by post-Revolutionary French culture and

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<sup>88</sup> Perhaps, again it is useful to think of this baroque relationship in terms of “lignes de fuite,” for as Deleuze and Guattari assert: “Il y a rupture dans le rhizome chaque fois que des lignes segmentaires explosent dans une ligne de fuite. [...] On fait une rupture, on trace une ligne de fuite, mais on risque toujours de retrouver sur elle des organizations qui restructifient l’ensemble...” (16). The de-stratification and de-territorialization of the ligne de fuite can always reveal to new forms of re-stratification and re-territorialization, and as such the rhizomatic progression of the baroque involves a constant movement between rupture/subversion and restoration/complicity, a notion which I will elaborate in the context of the African Postcolony in chapter 5, from an analysis of Achille Mbembe’s “Aesthetics of Vulgarly” in *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Romanticism. Regarding their work, Carpentier poses the rhetorical question: “What, then, is modernism, especially in its first stage, if not extremely baroque poetry?” (106). The conscious break with romantic idealism that signals the return of the baroque in Europe at the fin-de-siècle that I alluded to in chapter II, exemplified most notably in the work of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and later in the philosophical writings of Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin, can be read as a parallel development of the neo-baroque in the New World.<sup>89</sup>

The explicit, renewed interest in the artistic production of the historical baroque period is one of the defining and differentiating characteristics of the neo-baroque. In a chapter on Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, whose work appears as the inspiration of Foucault’s preface to *Les mots et les choses*, Zamora proposes that the neo-baroque of Borges “engages Baroque self-consciousness self-consciously” (240). Indeed, whereas Early Modern Baroque architects, painters, playwrights and poets had no precedent, that is no expressed aesthetic theory by which to define their work, twentieth- and twenty-first-century practitioners of the neo-baroque have a wealth of precursory artistic models as well as a well-established tradition of baroque aesthetic theory. Far from a mere recuperation of antique baroque forms, Zamora cites Chiampi in arguing that the neo-baroque constitutes ““an intensification and expansion of the experimental potential of the Baroque ... now accompanied by a powerfully revisionist inflexion of the ideological values of modernity”” (241). Despite the fact that Borges seems to dis-identify with the baroque that his contemporary Latin American writers were embracing, rejecting “the ornate style of his youth” and adopting a much more cerebral (as opposed to impassioned) approach to writing, Zamora nonetheless remarks that “his narrative

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<sup>89</sup> Zamora indeed notes the affinity between the recovery of the baroque by T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, Oswald Spengler, and Eugenio d’Ors and by Latin American writers such as Alfonso Reyes, García Lorca, Jorge Luis Borges, and others, following a post-Romantic reaction against an Enlightenment rationality that had become oppressive. She also recognizes in Rubén Darío’s incorporation of Spanish Baroque poet Luis de Góngora in his 1896 work *Prosas profanas* [Profane Prose], an “early stage in the Latin American recovery of the Baroque [that] resembles European avant garde movements in several ways: in its aesthetics of defamiliarization, its artifice and counterrealism, but not in any ‘countermodern’ political or social agenda” (286-8). However, if one looks carefully at the work of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud, though both were politically engaged to varying degrees at early stages in their career (the 1848 revolution and the 1871 Paris Commune, respectively) their later works, especially, are much more self-reflexively concerned with art than with any particular social or political agenda.



structures remain Baroque exercises in balance, counterbalance, contradiction, compensation, and sustained ambiguity,” thus illustrating how Borges’ explicitly anti-baroque can in fact represent a kind of baroque (239).<sup>90</sup> For example, while refusing to adopt indigenous forms as one’s own in the style of Carpentier and other proponents of the New World Baroque, Borges expanded and amplified this appropriative technique by including “cultural and historical materials everywhere, real or imaginary” (239). The massiveness of Borges’ literary undertaking is itself represented in the colossal and labyrinthine architectures he creates, such as “The Library of Babel,” an infinite and immeasurable structure analogous to the universe, which is nonetheless detailed in specific mathematical measurement and simultaneously juxtaposed with the relative brevity of the text itself.<sup>91</sup> Indeed Zamora notes the ironic parody in Borges’ literary creation, as well as his use of *trompe-l’oeil* and construction of “verbal objects,” as testaments to “the capacity of language to create visual images” (241). Borges writes in order to create illusory spaces and temporalities that confuse any reality (or dream, or spectacle) within a maze of multiple levels of narration; one particularly successful strategy for obtaining this effect is *mise en abîme*. Referencing baroque classics such as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* or Corneille’s *L’Illusion comique*, in which there is a theatrical effect of doubling through the convention of the play within a play, Zamora identifies Borges’ tactic of inscribing a book within a book as a means of “textualizing” the reader, implicating him/her in the narrative. The effect does not stop with the reader, however; through the *mise en abîme* of the book and the reader, the entire world is textualized, and

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<sup>90</sup> In fact, in the prologue to his collection of poems entitled *Ferveur de Buenos Aires*, re-published in 1969, he states, “Je n’ai pas récrit le livre. J’en ai mitigé les excès baroques, j’ai limé des aspérités, j’ai biffé des sensibleries et des imprécisions et, au cours de ce labeur parfois agréable et parfois gênant, j’ai senti que ce jeune garçon qui l’écrivait en 1923 était essentiellement – que veut dire essentiellement? – le monsieur qui à présent se résigne ou corrige.” (in *Oeuvres Complètes* [Paris: Gallimard, 1993] Tome I, p. 5) However, I believe that Zamora’s point is well-argued in that, despite this conscious rejection of a baroque style that was in vogue (both in theory and practice) in the early twentieth-century (both in Latin America and in Europe), Borges’ work still retains an extreme complexity and an auto-reflexive concern for language, characteristic of a baroque (or neo-baroque) mentality.

<sup>91</sup> This text, which is part of the collection *ficciones* [*Fictions*] opens with an epigraph from Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and, like the library described, defies description in its hybrid mixing of genres, its multiple narrative and meta-narrative levels, the inscription of infinity within the infinite. The evident self-implication of the text as part of the fiction (yet simultaneously outside it) make it an outstanding example of a neo-baroque edifice. See the text “La Bibliothèque de Babel” (in *Oeuvres Complètes* Tome II, pp. 491-98)

thus understood as text, with all the hermeneutic possibilities for experiencing different realities implied therewith. (265-6). This practice gets at the core of the neo-baroque, which is its ability to exert an influence on reality, not only in the present experience of rapture invoked by a work of art, but also in a reinterpretation of the past. As Zamora suggests with respect to baroque originality, it has a capacity to “‘influenc[e] one’s precursors’” (260). As such, the neo-baroque is not only a return of the baroque in late modernity, but also a re-invention of the baroque, past and present. The reverse causality of a re-visionist literary undertaking that seeks to recuperate past materials and perspectives and to alter them through re-cycling and re-invention (the act of taking a second look), destabilizes the reader and his or her reading, literally placing reality into the abyss of non-being, or of Nothingness, and leaving only *ficciones* (fictions) to account for the world.<sup>92</sup>

The marriage of description and criticism as well as the implication of reality in representation—both practices that are implicit in Borges’ work—are also important elements of Carpentier’s New World Baroque. He notes the essential relationship between the world and its representation, remarking that “the description of a baroque world is necessarily baroque, that is, in this case the *what* and the *how* coincide in a baroque reality” (“The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 106).<sup>93</sup> The baroque style of the New World, therefore, is inextricably linked to a state of being: a world that is fundamentally baroque in its complexity and in the multiplicity of perspectives it produces can only be represented through a baroque style—a style that represents itself and every possible combination of the imagination as a new reality. The active engagement with “major” religious and monarchical forms in the differential process of “minorization” emblematic of a baroque creative spirit during the colonial period, therefore, has as its correlative the modern or neo-baroque representation of a Martí, Darío, a Carpentier, or a Borges which operates in, but pushes at the limits of,

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<sup>92</sup> For a brief and focused discussion of Borges’s view of fiction and history, see Gregg Lambert, “The baroque conspiracy: Jorge-Luis Borges” (*The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, 111-19, esp. p. 118).

<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari propose in *Mille Plateaux*, that “Il n’y a pas de différence entre ce dont un livre parle et la manière dont il est fait” (10).

nationalism and the global neo-imperialism of the twentieth century. And both of these historical moments are in dialogue, as Egginton proposes, through the transnational and trans-historical complex of the coloneobaroque, constantly re-creating reality, past and present. The paradoxical ambiguity of this aesthetic expression across the seas and centuries is made relatively clear in a quotation of Carlos Fuentes, recalling a conversation with Carpentier, which Egginton reproduces:

The Baroque [...] is the language of people, who, ignoring truth, seek after it eagerly. Góngora, like Picasso, Buñuel, Carpentier, or Faulkner, *did not know: he encountered*. The Baroque, language of abundance, is also *the language of insufficiency*: only those who possess nothing include everything. Their horror of vacuity is not gratuitous; it is due to the certainty of the fact that one is in emptiness, that one lacks security. (111)

The juxtaposition of the great Spanish Baroque poet Luis de Góngora with modern “baroque” painters, filmmakers, and writers illustrates quite well the continuum of the baroque mentality. Furthermore, the description of baroque language (whether, visual, verbal, or cinematic) as double—a language of abundance and a language of insufficiency—illustrates not only the aesthetic dimension of a proliferation of words and/or images out of an apparent emptiness, but also the very real social and political dimensions of both baroque and neo-baroque art: namely, the confrontation of excess and lack, power and powerlessness, the lack of any absolute certainty, the illusionary nature of dominant political structures and cultural norms which are themselves merely the officially sanctioned spectacles of a baroque façade.<sup>94</sup> In the late twentieth century, as we shall see in this next section, the multifaceted reappearances of the neo-baroque by artists, writers, and intellectuals mark a counter-current to modernity that is recognized around the globe as an aesthetic style, and even more as a cultural *mode-d’être* in terms

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<sup>94</sup> As one example, Egginton cites Angela Ndaljianis who remarks the “dominant neo-baroque logic” in contemporary entertainment media, which although they operate mainly through spectacle and sensory experience (like the baroque), they express specifically late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century concerns having to do with multimedia and conglomerate corporate interests: “The neo-baroque combines the visual, the auditory, and the textual in ways that parallel the dynamism of seventeenth-century baroque form, but that dynamism is expressed [...] in technologically and culturally different ways” (“The Corporeal Image and the New World Baroque,” 119).

of dominant cultural forms, as well as subversive resistance to oppressive hegemonic political and aesthetic limitations.

### **B. Baroque and *The Society of the Spectacle***

In his book *L'Artifice* (1988), which is an extension of his 1985 work *L'Impureté*, Guy Scarpetta discusses the return(s) of the baroque, in terms of both cultural content and aesthetic techniques, stressing that it is not a backwards return *to* the baroque; rather, “c’est le Baroque lui-même qui revient” (22). The notion of a return of the baroque in modernity, according to Scarpetta, is contingent on the degree of separation from nineteenth-century ideologies of positivist utopias. Scarpetta’s depiction of the baroque as a kind of “anti-romantisme” recalls the way in which Nietzsche’s aesthetic criticism often lauded the creations and techniques that were generally construed as “romantic,” seen in his admiration for the French Romantics, Wagner’s romantic opera, and Baudelaire; though the work of these artists in particular tended to push at the limits of romanticism toward an “anti-romantic,” or perhaps “post-romantic” conception of the subject’s inextricable relation to a morbid modern society, only finding redemption in art and poetic language as a creative and critical force to counter “reality.” This transformative aesthetic of a new, and often grotesque, realism is a hallmark of baroque art (See Chapter II “Life and Death and a ‘Modern Baroque’ Economy”). As representatives of this baroque in modernity, Scarpetta cites Proust, Faulkner, Fuentes, Picasso, and others whose work exhibits the seductive eroticism and playful entrapment in language and society and illustrates the move away from the individualist and idealist utopias of romanticism (22-3). Scarpetta provides a list of eight pertinent qualities of baroque art, in which we can see the clean break with romantic ideals: maximal heterogeneity, proliferation of ornament, monstrosity, an “art de la *chair*,” seduction, trance or “mouvement fiévreux,” transversal imagery, and hyper-theatricalization (24-5). Running through Scarpetta’s discussions of the baroque in art is only one constant, which is that his analyses continually traverse boundaries between genres, both formal and aesthetic, seeing recurrences of the baroque in novels, film, sculpture, poetry, painting, and architecture in aesthetic movements as disparate as surrealism, cubism, dadaism, modernism, and postmodernism, though he clarifies that today’s neo-baroque often has

little to do with a particular kind of “désinvolture ‘postmoderne’” (310).<sup>95</sup> Similarly to d’Ors’s conception of human or historical constant, Guy Debord’s view of baroque art also encompasses a broad range of artistic expressions: “Du romantisme au cubisme, c’est finalement un art toujours plus individualisé de la négation, se renouvelant perpétuellement jusqu’à l’émiettement et la négation achevés de la sphère artistique, qui a suivi le cours général du baroque” (*La Société du spectacle*, 146).<sup>96</sup> Rather than vacating the baroque of any real significance, the elasticity of the baroque aesthetic creates a space in which, as Scarpetta rightly notes, “Picasso dialogue avec Rubens et le Greco, Warhol avec Baudelaire, Fuentes avec Cervantès, Welles avec Shakespeare, Ruiz avec Calderón” (310), a dialogue that I intend to show is also open to contemporary African writers such as Henri Lopes, Sony Labou Tansi, Boubacar Boris Diop, Ken Bugul, and Calixthe Beyala.<sup>97</sup>

The import of such a dialogue is not merely to distinguish aesthetic correspondences in the works of great artists, but also to elaborate a particular societal understanding that underlies such forms of representation that I have qualified as belonging to a baroque style. The first epigraph in this chapter, taken from Iain Chambers’ *Culture after humanism*, reminds us of the relationship between the baroque world and contemporary society, in which reality is often supplanted by purely spectacular displays and out of which it is possible to negotiate a new sense of life or of

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<sup>95</sup> Buci-Glucksmann seems to concur: “Au plein du réel qui gouverne et gouvernera une certaine idée de la modernité ‘progressiste’ (plénitude de la ‘grande forme’ classique, plénitude d’un sens de l’histoire rempli et adéquat au réel, plénitude d’une vérité comme système et d’un Sujet comme identité et centre...) le baroque opposera dès l’origine une toute conception du réel ‘postmoderne’” (*Raison*, 173).

<sup>96</sup> Particularly, with respect to surrealist art, Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999) opens with a chapter “Look: Large and Baroque” (pp. 3-12) in which she defines the surrealist “new way of looking” with its “contradictory tendencies,” its illusionism, and the sustained tension of “*l’un dans l’autre*” in relation to a baroque aesthetic, discussing the various links, both implicit and explicit between the two. Jacques Audibert, in his article “Court coup d’œil sur le baroque” in *Études Cinématographiques* 1:1 (pp. 5-11) also notes the way that certain baroque forms “touchent au surréalisme,” and hearkens back to the hermetic baroque poetics of Mallarmé (10-11). Ibra Diene remarks on the baroque of surrealist writers, stating: “J’ai fait souvent des rapprochements avec la littérature africaine, surtout avec la poésie africaine, et ici particulièrement cela est possible avec la poésie des femmes dont les thèmes sont également le saugrenu, le vulgaire, et peut être même, disons-le, ce qui est quotidien. Alors, est-ce que les surréalistes développent aussi un certain baroque dans leur écriture ? Je pense, oui, dans la mesure où leur point de départ c’est peut être de détruire l’intellect pour réhabiliter l’imagination en passant par évidemment un bouleversement du langage poétique.” (See Interview, Appendix D)

<sup>97</sup> This will be the argument advanced in depth in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

being from its very negation. If there is an essential quality to the baroque, it is precisely the more specific relationship between reality and illusion. In *Le Baroque: profondeurs de l'apparence* (1973), Claude-Gilbert Dubois analyzes the spectacular displays of power that were essential to the baroque monarchies of Early Modern Europe, describing “une éthique de l’illusion” in the festivals of the early seventeenth century which functions through the representation of presences that are, in reality, absent and thus allegorizes those objects through their aesthetic images. An ethic of appearance dominates the social scene. Dubois writes: “[l]a vie s’impose comme manifestation et comme spectacle” (159) ; and expanding on this thought, he continues: “il y a cette attestation d’une manière d’être, dont l’expression est spectacle de cette existence” (163).<sup>98</sup> It is clear how a political ethos or lack thereof, can indeed be fundamentally aesthetic in nature, precisely in the very baroque nature of the representation of power. Dubois describes how, in the baroque period, “[c]ette alliance du spectacle et de la vie politique, puisque le théâtre est un moyen de publier une idée politique et d’agir sur les consciences par le moteur de l’admiration ou de la terreur, connut une vigueur particulière pendant les périodes de frénésie et de changement” (169). The kind of propaganda here described by Dubois is not limited to theatrical representations on the stage, for in the classical baroque period, the reigning metaphor is “La vie est un théâtre” (179), making the whole of society into an arena for spectacular displays of wealth and power to keep the people subdued and confirm the place of power:

[À] la limite, elle [la vie civile] est une célébration, qui s’adjoint un rituel: ‘pompe’ accompagnant les actes de la vie officielle, utilisation du ‘décor’ de la rhétorique pour la transformation du discours en panégyrique, cérémonial théâtral des ‘entrées,’ des ‘sorties,’ accompagnées de gestes et de mots – les mots de théâtre – qui sont comme le sublime du rituel protocolaire (159).

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<sup>98</sup> In Debord’s *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Verso, 1990), first published in French in 1988, he indeed notes the spectacle’s “rapid extension over the last twenty years [since 1968]” (4), and attributes it to various forms of spectacular power: “Spectacular power, which is so fundamentally unitary, so concentrated by the very weight of things, and entirely despotic in spirit, frequently rails at the appearance in its realm of a spectacular politics, a spectacular justice, a spectacular medicine and all the other similarly surprising examples of ‘media excess’” (6).

In the Baroque period, Dubois recognizes the organization of appearances as a political strategy, which essentially creates the “truth” of social reality through ritual performances.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, Guy Debord discusses the contemporary structuring of reality through representations in *La Société du Spectacle* (1967), the premise of which is that the machinery of modernity operates through the proliferation of imagery that usurps the function of reality such that “tout ce qui était directement vécu s’est éloigné dans une représentation” (3). He clarifies the concept of Spectacle, saying that “Le spectacle n’est pas un ensemble d’images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images” (4). In what seems eerily reminiscent of the baroque notion of the world as theatre, Debord’s spectacle is also a mediation of human life and interaction through representation (social, cultural, and political) in and by social institutions, especially the mass media and democracies. This representation usurps and becomes a substitute for reality.<sup>100</sup> According to Debord, “l’origine du spectacle est la perte de l’unité du monde” and that what remains is a fragmented abstraction assuming the form of a spectacle whose very “*mode d’être concret* est justement l’abstraction” (15). Interestingly, Debord defines the baroque as the point at which “le temps historique qui envahit l’art s’est exprimé d’abord dans la sphère même de l’art,” and he maintains that this art is the expression of the times: “l’art d’un monde qui a perdu son centre” is also characterized as “*l’art du changement*” (145). It is here that the modern spectacle that Debord defines

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<sup>99</sup> According to Jean Rousset, *La littérature de l’âge Baroque en France* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1954), “Cette époque, qui a dit et cru, plus que toute autre, que le monde est un théâtre et la vie une comédie où il faut revêtir un rôle, était destinée à faire de la métaphore une réalité; le théâtre déborde hors du théâtre, envahit le monde, le transforme en une scène animée par les machines, l’assujettit à ses propres lois de mobilité et de métamorphose. Le sol semble vaciller, les maisons se transforment en boîtes à surprise, les murs s’ouvrent comme des portants, les jardins et les fleuves prennent part aux jeux de la scène, deviennent eux-mêmes théâtre et décor” (28). This notion will also be elaborated in chapter 5 in relation to Achille Mbembe’s analysis of the political culture of the Postcolony.

<sup>100</sup> Along these same lines, and in a way that rings harmonically with Benito Pelegrín’s analysis of the Baroque in *D’un temps d’incertitude* (2008), Jean Baudrillard’s *L’Échange impossible* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), outlines the double bind of contemporary society, based on the impossibility of exchange in a world dominated by uncertainty and self-contained systems. His analysis of the economic sphere, which, “prise dans sa globalité, ne s’échange contre rien,” extends the same “inéquivalence” to the political, juridical, and aesthetic spheres, all haunted by their own illusion and impossible to exchange against *anything*, only Nothing; and metaphysically, also with a wink to Nietzsche, he states, “les valeurs, les finalités et les causes que nous circonscrivons ne valent que pour une pensée humaine, trop humaine. Elles sont irrelevant au regard de quelque autre réalité que ce soit (peut-être même en regard de la ‘réalité’ tout court).” (11-15)

comes very close to my definitions of the baroque, first in the sense of a loss of unity or centeredness in the world, and also in the pervasive spectacle and artifice which, deployed to fill that vacuity, find their fundamental expression in art. The subject/spectator lives in a world of calculated illusion, and the affinity between the predominance of “la scène” in the baroque culture, a society of spectacle whose expression is constantly mediated by the language and rhetoric of “l’écran,” quite possibly represents one of the most striking affinities between distant baroque and neo-baroque epochs.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps less indicative of baroque art style than of a baroque mentality (one which foregrounds representation more than any other mode of interaction), twentieth-century spectacle appears as a paradoxical space in which art risks total disappearance in the face of a constant barrage of simulated and mass-produced representations. Scarpetta remarks upon this tension:

La fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle pourrait bien être la scène d’une lutte, entre cet art baroque que j’évoque et un art ‘néo-classique’ [...q]uelque chose comme un écho à distance de ce qui s’est joué il y a deux siècles, – à cet époque, justement, qu’on nous presse de toutes parts de commémorer, et qui est celle qui entérina la mort du Baroque historique (311).

The idea that the historical Baroque was subsumed by a subsequent classicism preoccupied with establishing regimes and regimented order in both art and society is clear, and Scarpetta also seems to propose a similar antagonism at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> This antagonism can be read in concert with the commodity

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<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, Scarpetta remarks in the case of modern televisual media that a rhetorical strategy of appearances produces the effect of (effective) truth: “la ‘vérité du spectacle,’” is a relative truth that nonetheless pretends to absolute authority (*L’Artifice*, 26).

<sup>102</sup> Debord presents a different interpretation of the baroque, suggesting that, “[l]’importance, parfois excessive, acquise par le concept de baroque dans la discussion esthétique contemporaine, traduit la prise de conscience de l’impossibilité d’un classicisme artistique: les efforts en faveur d’un classicisme ou néo-classicisme normatifs, depuis trois siècles, n’ont été que de brèves constructions factices parlant le langage extérieur de l’État, celui de la monarchie absolue ou de la bourgeoisie révolutionnaire habillée à la romaine” (146). He seems to imply that “baroque” art (understood very broadly as “not classical”) has been a historically indomitable force only briefly glossed over by ultimately futile attempts and an impossible classical ideal. Among these seemingly infinite “non-classical” artifacts, I think that there are far fewer, and more exceptional cases, which call particular attention to their stylistic innovation and acute cultural insight that merit the appellation of “baroque,” and which may have as much to do with the historical and cultural



fetishism remarked upon by Walter Benjamin in the early twentieth century in contrast with the heroic notion of “l’art pour l’art” (see Chapter II “Life and Death and a Modern Baroque Economy”), a point that Debord’s notion of spectacle as that grand-scale cultural re-production of imagistic commodities makes even more emphatically.

The outlook is not as bleak as Debord’s Spectacle might imply. Indeed, in his book *La contemplation du monde: figures du style communautaire* (1993), social and political theorist, Michel Maffesoli provides an alternative vision of a subversive baroque strategy, which involves a kind of social embodiment of the spectacle in a “postmodern” communitarian style that is a mode of existence through aesthetic practice. Maffesoli writes :

Il semble que le baroque quelque peu touffu dans lequel nous vivons nous incite à une telle démarche, et plus qu’à des propositions générales et abstraites, nous invite à porter notre attention sur ce ‘concret le plus extrême’ (W. Benjamin), dont tous les éléments, si minuscules soient-ils, entrent en interaction pour donner la société complexe que nous connaissons (15-16).

First, one notices that Maffesoli describes contemporary society as a “baroque quelque peu touffu,” and, second, inspired by Benjamin, he qualifies a *style* of living that involves an attention to the most concrete details, which together comprise our contemporary social complex. Maffesoli further elaborates a novel “subjectivité de masse,” which is progressively contaminating every domain of social life:

Celle-ci donc ne repose plus sur une raison triomphante [...m]ais on peut la déceler dans l’émotionnel, dans le sentiment partagé et la passion commune, toutes valeurs dionysiaques, qui renvoient au présent, au ‘hic et nunc’, à l’hédonisme mondain. C’est cela même que fait ressortir le jeu des images et leur dissémination virale. (23)

Accordingly, the “viral dissemination” of images, which one can read in parallel to the abstracting tendencies that characterize the Spectacle in its usurpation of reality, inspires a minute attention to the present, the passions, to concrete existence as a kind of counter-measure, a way to re-appropriate aesthetic imagery through bodily comportment, dress,

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circumstances of reception or critical interpretation of a given work as with the actual conception or production of the work itself.

décor, and language in an individual and collective *mise-en-scène* of existence.<sup>103</sup> In a sense, the new “mass subjectivity” is the social embodiment of the Spectacle, a performance of concrete being that re-incorporates imagistic material into the forms of daily living, re-ascribing it a symbolic value and thereby subverting the Spectacle’s power to dictate “reality” through its own re-enactment.<sup>104</sup> In this way, Maffesoli writes, “l’irréel, sous les diverses composantes [...] est le meilleur moyen de comprendre le réel, c’est-à-dire ce qui se donne à vivre dans l’efflorescence du tragique quotidien.” (23). Basing his thought on baroque organicity and sensualism and “une esthétisation croissante de l’existence,” Maffesoli recognizes “les grandes caractéristiques d’une éthique de l’esthétique [...] d’une effervescence qui n’est pas sans rappeler celle du Baroque” (202). Subversive and impassioned performance of the self in opposition to structural norms and the exaltation of feeling over form—these practices of concrete self-stylization represent the appropriation of the forms of modern Spectacle (those of the power of appearing) and their reconfiguration in order to re-create as many versions of “reality” as there are actors on the scene.<sup>105</sup>

The return of the baroque, as Scarpetta puts it, and as we’ve seen in the development of the Latin American coloneobaroque complex, thus appears in a very

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<sup>103</sup> One such example is argued quite forcibly by Denilson Lopes Silva in an essay “Les esthétiques contemporaines de l’artifice: du néobaroque au camp” in *Résurgences baroques* (Bruxelles: La Lettre Volée, 2001[157-73]), which investigates as paradigmatic of a “neobaroque” expression, the “camp” aesthetic of the homosexual community in the 1970’s and 80’s: the theatricalization of political and social subjectivity through the subversion of gender norms.

<sup>104</sup> Walter Moser, “Résurgences et Valences du Baroque,” defines it as, “Performance collective manifestant une nouvelle sensibilité et socialité qui se développe dans les niches de la vie moderne, ou performance solitaire du spectateur en interaction esthétique avec une œuvre d’art” (13).

<sup>105</sup> In *Aesthetics of Appearing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), Martin Seele defines this kind of aesthetic perception in terms of appearing: “To perceive something in the process of its appearing for the sake of its appearing is the focal point of aesthetic perception, the point at which every exercise of this perception is directed, however it might otherwise unfold” (24). Seele notes the pragmatic qualities of this aesthetic perception in terms of an active or “interpretive perception that allows a *different* appearing to emerge,” which then makes it possible for both past and future to be made present, and “in this way, moreover, aesthetic perception can be widely open to acquaintance and knowledge, interpretation and meaning” (35-6). The “appearing” of phenomenal reality is contrasted to its “being-so,” where in appearing, “by no means are all the phenomenal properties addressed that are in fact *attributed* to a given object at a particular point in time. Rather, it is a matter of simultaneous and momentary *appearing* of appearances.” (45-6) As such, aesthetic perception attuned to the appearing of an object or objects allows for a more complex, though more fleeting, comprehension of the object’s appearances as a sort of play. This concept of appearing is fundamental, I believe, to understanding the notion of the baroque spectacle of reality.

broad and diverse array of spaces and times, from d’Ors’s “fin de siècle” to the surrealists and the *avant-garde* during the interwar years, followed by the radical “experimental art” of the sixties, of which the social and aesthetic mutations continue to appear (in new media and elsewhere) into the twenty-first century. Far from implying that the baroque is everywhere in these time periods, I will venture to conclude, as Stephen Calloway has shown, that the baroque is ever-present in the twentieth century (a “historical constant,” d’Ors would say) even though it may not be always visible everywhere.<sup>106</sup> One area, however, where it is particularly visible is in cinema, and to show that I will focus mainly on French New Wave Cinema of the late 1950’s and 60’s.<sup>107</sup> The French New Wave is not an isolated phenomenon, as Alain Mérot remarks in *Généalogies du Baroque*: “Les années 1950-1960 virent l’engouement pour le baroque atteindre des sommets—un baroque maintenant élargi à toute l’Europe et à tous les phénomènes culturels” (96). Indeed, the fascination with the baroque during the decades after World War II is evident in theory and criticism, as well as in the arts, among which none is perhaps as emblematic of a baroque creative spirit as cinema with its innovative techniques of representation and corresponding socio-political viewpoints. As evidence of the baroque in the French New Wave, one can look to the first issue of the journal *Études Cinématographiques*, which

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<sup>106</sup> Stephen Calloway’s *Baroque Baroque: the culture of excess* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994) examines the excess of Western culture in each decade of the twentieth century, pointing out the ways in which baroque style of excess appears distinctly but continuously throughout. Perhaps it would be useful here to consider the baroque in terms of a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome that dwells continuously beneath the surface and reappears at moments when the historico-cultural “mood” is right. For Deleuze and Guattari, “à la différence des arbres ou de leurs racines, le rhizome connecte un point quelconque avec un autre point quelconque, et chacun de ses traits ne renvoie pas nécessairement à des traits de même nature, il met en jeu des régimes de signes très différents et même des états de non-signes” (*Mille Plateaux*, 31). The rhizome, that operates on multiple plateaus or layers is thus the (im)perfect analogy for the movement of spatial and temporal de-territorialization and re-territorialization that characterizes the baroque in its twentieth-century resurgence, particularly with respect to art forms that engage in the process of “becoming minor” as previously described. This baroque production, which is both akin to and separate from *the Baroque* of Early Modern Europe, is characterized by a rizomatic relativity in which words and worlds proliferate and slide (*glisser*) along multiple surfaces to no end, penetrating laterally beneath the surface, and popping up anywhere, not taking root in any one space or place, but proceeding through space and time in an interwoven *casuistry* of effects, which include theoretical, political, psychological, rhetorical, cultural, and aesthetic.

<sup>107</sup> Timothy Murray’s *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), treats specifically, among other questions pertaining both to baroque and digital modes of representation, the intersections between an Early Modern baroque philosophy of psychology and inherent notions of time and memory that are embedded in modern cinematic (and other visual art) productions.

appeared in 1960 in Paris and was entitled “Baroque et cinéma.”<sup>108</sup> In the Forward to this inaugural publication of this journal, co-editors Henri Agel and Georges-Albert Astre state that their aim is not to bring together already existing publications on the subject, nor to uphold a particular school of thought, but rather to “traiter des problèmes du cinéma en relation avec la culture elle-même” (*Études* 1:1, 4). They further stress the fascinating and seductive powers of the screen and the many “représentations confuses, de mythes et d’émotions quasi organiques,” the effect of which “vient vite à tirer son principal attrait d’un viol peu honorable parfois, de notre sensibilité” (*Études* 1:1, 3). In its appeal first to the immediacy of the senses and emotions, and in a coup of our conscious sensibility (being absorbed by the audio-visual imagery), a principal trait of cinematic representation (as well as those that appear on the TV screen) recalls the “rapt des yeux” that Buci-Glucksmann invokes with respect to a baroque aesthetic in *La Folie du voir* (15). And later on she writes,

Au-delà de cet art de tromper les yeux, magnifié par toute une interprétation de la postmodernité en termes d’effets de surface, de trompe-l’œil (cf. Baudrillard), [...] la stratégie baroque, plus subversive et plus folle, tentait le passage du visible à la Voyure, par l’exhibition d’une loi soumise à ses variations / déformations / perversions (*Folie*, 209).

The baroque understood thusly operates not through the visible, but through the process of making visible (in)visibility itself—the act of seeing something be seen, for which Buci-Glucksmann employs the neologism “Voyure.”<sup>109</sup> Cinematic art exerts a formidable power upon the spectator in its capacity to affect the spectator with an overwhelming synesthesia of visual and auditory effects (in a similar fashion as opera during the classical baroque period); cinema can be characterized as “baroque” especially when it makes conscious introduction of variation, deformation, perversion, and distortion in its

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<sup>108</sup> Timothy Murray also recognizes two pioneering French theorists of cinema, Roger Leenhardt and André Bazin, who often identified cinema with baroque styles and techniques (*Digital Baroque*, ix-x).

<sup>109</sup> Perhaps here it would be helpful to take as an illustration Louis Marin’s discussion of Caravaggio’s painting, which Iain Chambers comments on in *Culture after humanism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), stating that “the ‘idea’ of painting [...] is replaced by the act of painting where ‘the moment of sight erupts within representation’” (Chambers, 84).

representational techniques, which shock and induce an awareness of that very representation.<sup>110</sup>

French New Wave cinema does just that in an effort to subvert the apparatus of “spectacular” representation that pervades modern media representations, thereby undermining any one dominant media discourse with a counter-expression of multiple stylistic possibilities, both through cinematic techniques and in terms of conceptions of the social self. For example, Jean Luc Godard’s 1965 film *Pierrot le fou* recounts the tragic love affair of Ferdinand, alias Pierrot, with his girlfriend Marianne; the lovers are forced to abandon society after they are somehow implicated in a violent crime that seems political in nature in that it is marked by repeated references (almost like a flashback) to the Algerian War for Independence. At a point relatively early on in their flight, Marianne recounts her lover’s philosophical musings in which he urges that no one should ask which comes first or next, words or things, thus voicing a disjuncture between the world and its signs that is continually reinforced by overt references to the film itself in the appearance of a film extra, spectators, and actors taking on the role of actors. Pierrot and Marianne live their life on the run, like modern nomads, rejecting all social roles and codes for a clandestine life of passion, idleness, and adventure that is in no way lacking in reflection on the meaning of life, love, and death. Oddly enough, the part of the

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<sup>110</sup> Scarpetta’s analysis of a modern cinematic baroque includes Luis Buñuel, Orson Welles, Raúl Ruiz, and Peter Greenaway among others (*L’Artifice*, 186-206). Concerning Luis Buñuel, who is well known for his surrealist and avant-garde short film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), made with Salvador Dalí; however his last film *Cet Obscur objet du désir* (1977), strikes me as particularly interesting with respect to the baroque, for the way that it portrays the love-hate relationship between a man who becomes obsessed with a harlot, a re-creation of the Pierre Louy’s erotic novel *La femme et le pantin* (1898), which again hearkens back to Baudelaire’s baroque modernity. Timothy Murray’s *Digital Baroque* includes a chapter on Greenaway’s work in relation to Deleuze (pp. 111-133). And in the issue of *Études Cinématographiques* (Paris, 1960), entitled “Baroque et Cinéma,” Jean Mitry’s “essai d’approximation à propos d’Orson Welles” (pp. 73-79), discusses this filmmaker’s work, not as baroque, but in its *appearing* baroque: “On peut parler du baroque dans les films d’Orson Welles mais non du baroque des films d’Orson Welles” (78). However, I would suggest that in its appearing baroque while not “being” baroque, as in the case of Jorge-Luis Borges, there is indeed a certain baroquism. For example, Welles’ *Don Quixote*, filmed off and on for roughly 15 years beginning in 1957, but not compiled and released until 1992, re-creates Cervantès’ fabulous tale of the knight errant, but in the modern era, including his arrival in an urban center and his encounter with the filmmaker who thus implicates himself in the drama. This subtle inclusion, which in no way alters the tale itself, reveals a fundamentally, perhaps neo-baroque *mise-en-abîme* of reality in representation, operating much in the same way as Borges’ fantastical criticism of Pierre Ménard’s transcription of a fragment from *Don Quixote* creates an illusion of critical depth merely by displacing the story into the current epoch (“Pierre Ménard, auteur du ‘Quichotte’” in *Oeuvre Complètes* Tome I, pp. 467-75).

plot where they settle into a strangely utopian setting in an isolated sea-side abode--until ennui sets in and they move on--is narrated as “chapitre huit, une saison en enfer,” an obvious reference to Rimbaud which builds upon an already baroque intertextuality: the film opens with an anecdote on baroque painter Diego Velasquez. The total negation of society, which is embodied in the main character’s revolt to the point of his accidentally killing Marianne and then blowing his own head off with two rolls of dynamite, as well as a negation of cinema as such, enacted in the film’s reflexive self-parody, mark this film as an example of Godard’s baroque cinematography.<sup>111</sup> Making seen the unseen, or the illusion of something equivalent only to Nothing, is at the base of the modern Spectacle, and the intended economic, socio-political, cultural, metaphysical, or cinematic effect of the Spectacle depends on the capacity to affect, in its appearing, the spectators’ reactions and receptions, making sight and sensation the space of creation. When the language and imagery of Spectacle are appropriated, as is the case with certain filmmakers, and also individuals and communities who perform their own spectacle of daily living, this sensual space of creation is opened up to encompass a variety of (un)realities, and the world becomes the spectacular baroque play of its numerous representations.

### **C. “D’un baroque mondialisé” : métissage, and créolité**

In its paradoxical formulation as an unreal Spectacle that supplants daily existence, and as a very concrete counter-practice of performing reality through the same mechanism of aesthetic appearing (both in art and in social performance), the return of

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<sup>111</sup> Godard’s 1969 film *Le Gai Savoir*, an obvious homage to Nietzsche, is an overtly political dialogue between two characters, one male and one female, in which there is no action save for the filming of a dialogue, which is continuously broken up by the splicing of sounds, images, artworks, and texts (also the case in *Pierrot le fou*) represents a baroque technique of mixing genres, like the Opera, but different in that the generic mixing is intended to draw attention to itself as such and to representation itself. Timothy Murray’s chapter 3 “The Crisis of Cinema in the Age of New World-Memory: The Baroque Legacy of Jean-Luc Godard” (*Digital Baroque*, pp. 85-110) discusses Godardian cinema in particular and New Wave’s critical innovations in general in relation to new media representations where Murray recognizes the enormous influence of a new Baroque, in that both share a “sensitivity to a crisis of property that links the new and the old” (87). Murray analyzes the political legacy of cinema after Godard as a “political reality grounded in continual cinematic deliberation on the grounding concepts of ‘être’ and ‘avoir’ themselves” (108) and such cinematic representations can confront dominant social and cultural codes through techniques and images that insist on “the political and artistic valence of relationality” (110). See also Vlad Dima’s forthcoming article in *The Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, “The Aural Fold and the Sonic Jump-cut: Godard’s (Baroque) Sound.”

the baroque in the twentieth century mirrors a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of subjectivities and collectivities on the stage of global modernity. From the striking observation in *La Pensée Métisse* concerning an affinity between Latin American culture in the late nineteenth century and the psychology of the Renaissance (above, “New (World) Baroque”), Gruzinski elaborates a theory of contemporary social and cultural “mélanges et métissages” on a global scale: “[c]et idiome planétaire est aussi l’expression d’une rhétorique où l’hybride permettrait de s’émanciper d’une modernité condamnée parce qu’elle est occidentale et unidimensionnelle” (35). The planetary idiom to which Gruzinski here refers consists of a heterogeneous urban cosmopolitanism in which diverse deterritorialized populations come together as a global community in the affirmation and celebration of their differences, thus creating a new, vibrant hybridity of mestizo identity.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Gruzinski stresses the counter-modern nature of this planetary idiom, remarking that it exists purely as opposition, “pour se démarquer d’un langage à la mode ou d’idéologies qui occupent un espace grandissant” (35). Acknowledging that in this oppositional, and often detouring vein, the postmodern critique has in some cases “visé juste,” Gruzinski cites Édouard Glissant’s *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) as an example of the way in which “des créateurs, artistes, et écrivains, apportent sur les mélanges du monde des éclairages nouveaux que ne fournissent pas toujours les sciences sociales” (35-6). I will demonstrate here that this “other” way of approaching postmodern collective identities through a fundamentally aesthetic engagement with the world and society represents a thoroughly *baroque* mode of cultural orientation and expression, which operates through uncertainty and ambiguity in its linguistic and existential forms and tends toward heterogeneity, plurality, and disorder in appealing to the senses rather than logic, looking not for a root but rhizomatic relations. This aesthetic way of being, which resembles Maffesoli’s “style communautaire,” often

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<sup>112</sup> I will discuss the notion of *métissage* or “the mestizo mind” (the English translation of the title Gruzinski’s text) in the specific context of the French Antilles as one particularly evident manifestation of the phenomenon. Cultural mixing or *métissage* is in no way limited to the Latin America or the Caribbean where such discourses have been in vogue for quite some time; rather it is a global trend, which appears primarily in urban centers and megalopolises where generations of multicultural populations have developed inter-cultural and intra-cultural social practices and identities in which the dichotomy between homeland and host country no longer apply. Paul Gilroy discusses this condition in terms of the notion of “conviviality” in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

runs contrary to the fundamental constructs of society as, according to Gruzinski, it carries certain definite connotations “dont il convient de se méfier comme de la peste” (36). Impurities, imperfections, and incompleteness are principle qualities of the “‘mixed’ mind,” which exists in opposition to monolithic modern epistemological constructs such as absolute certainty and rationalist clarity.

Like a virus, the baroque spreads through the fabric of modernity like a contaminating infection, morphing and mutating until the hybrid “mixture” is apparent in every area of life, as Gruzinski duly notes: “Reste que le phénomène du mélange est devenu une réalité quotidienne, visible dans nos rues et sur tous nos écrans” (37). From urban landscapes, which juxtapose monumental constructions of a modern epoch with the dilapidated buildings of another social sediment, to media representations in which official and alternative discourses appear in a correspondingly skewed manner, the phenomenon of intermixing builds on the notion of a play between such striking contrasts, creating moments of tension that inspire new styles, expressions, and affirmations of cultural differences. The second epigraph to this chapter, taken from Glissant’s *Poétique de la Relation*, uses the term Relation to describe the phenomenon “d’un Baroque mondialisé” as a “naturalization” of the baroque, which exists not solely in opposition, as was the case in the counter-Reformation, but rather purely *as* opposition. Glissantian Relation can be seen as a postmodern de-constructive mechanism in that it calls attention to the necessary binary oppositions that constitute the fundamentals of modernity. Notions of self and other become combined in a hybrid subject-objectivity, and art and science coincide in a worldview that reveals the basic narrative assumptions that underlie both factual and fictitious representations of “reality.” Relation involves the acceptance or embracing of contrast and ambiguity, of movements and multiplicities, which in the global modernity of the twentieth century appear naturally as the inevitable consequence of cultural circulations.<sup>113</sup> This generalized condition of Relation, one might suppose, is the “naturalization” of the baroque to which Glissant refers.

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<sup>113</sup> Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, defines the concept of Relation as a particular way of living “le vécu de la Relation,” which grows out of a negative experience of the abyss or “de la fréquentation du gouffre,” and which from this initial negation grasps the totality or “le Tout” and liberates knowledge in terms of Relation as “connaissance partagée” (20). Glissant further defines Relation in terms of the Deleuzo-



First, Glissant distinguishes a “‘détournement’ baroque” in the Early Modern world from the notion of imitation and absolute truth espoused by the sciences of the Enlightenment: “[l]’art baroque fut une réaction contre la prétention rationaliste à pénétrer d’un mouvement uniforme et décisive les arcanes du connu” (91). More importantly, noting how “[l]’art baroque fait appel au contournement, à la prolifération, à la redondance d’espace, à ce qui bafoue l’unicité prétendue d’un connu et d’un connaissant, à ce qui exalte la quantité reprise infiniment, la totalité à l’infini recommencée,” Glissant recognizes that this “art de l’extension, va concrètement s’étendre” throughout the world, identifying Latin American religious art as the first stage of this “mouvement de la mondialisation du baroque” (92-3). According to Glissant, the global baroque ceases to be merely an art “a contrario” and becomes naturalized in creating (and constantly re-creating) its own innovative vision of the world—a world of Relation—to which it then agrees. Glissant’s baroque vision of Relation derives from the abyss that separates the worlds of the Black Atlantic, out of which an infinite variety of possible combinations arise in the effects of cultural, linguistic, and stylistic “métissage.” For Glissant, it is through *métissage* that the baroque becomes “naturalized” in that it is marked by “le contact proliférant de ‘natures’ diversifiées [qui] ‘comprend’ ou plutôt il donne avec ce mouvement du monde.” In this sense, the baroque is no longer simply a reactionary aesthetic or philosophy but “la résultante de toutes les esthétiques, de toutes les philosophies,” a hybrid ensemble that does not merely affirm an art form or aesthetic style, but much more profoundly provokes “un être-dans-le-monde,” which derives from “la totalité quantifiée de toutes les sortes d’être-en-société” (93). This baroque being-in-the-world, of Relation to the world, of

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Guattarian rhizome and the notion of circular nomadism, a notion that he identifies, at least implicitly, in the foundational literary works of civilization from the Old Testament, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, The *Ennead*, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, all of which affirm the notion of revelatory wandering [*errance*] for the community (28). As more recent examples of this phenomenon, Glissant cites medieval troubadours in the same breath as Rimbaud for whom “l’errance est vocation, qui ne se dit qu’en détours. C’est l’appel, et non pas encore la plénitude, de la Relation” (27). He further identifies Frantz Fanon’s trajectory from Martinique to Algeria as a contemporary example, stating: “C’est bien là l’image du rhizome, qui porte à savoir que l’identité n’est plus toute dans la racine, mais aussi dans la Relation. C’est que la pensée de l’errance est aussi bien pensée du relative, qui est le relayé mais aussi le relaté. La pensée de l’errance est une poétique, et qui sous-entend qu’à un moment elle se dit. Le dit de l’errance est celui de la Relation.” (31)

moving and adapting with the world is simultaneously a conscious and concrete adaptation to a scientific era of “incertitudes rationnelles et fondatrices,” where different conceptions of Nature or “reality” are relativized in a fashion that is very reminiscent of Deleuzian impossibility. The resultant heterogeneous plurality and apparent dis-order, which Glissant ascribes to the “plein-sens” of the baroque, rise up in contrast to any dogmatic classicism of singular order or absolute certainty espousing the kinds of contradictory notions that modern epistemology has a tendency to look on with disdain.

To further reinforce the way in which the historical baroque prefigured the global (neo)baroque that Glissant identifies, and to clarify the privilege accorded to aesthetic consciousness as a social ethos, I turn first to Anna Paolo Mossetto’s essay on “Arabesque virevolte, fondu enchaîné dans le roman antillais contemporain: sous l’œil d’Édouard Glissant,” in which she recognizes distinct similarities between the influential aesthetic forces in France under Henri IV and Louis XIII and in the Antilles between colonization and de-colonization. She states:

Il s’agit dans les deux cas, de mondes en formation où le rôle moteur est joué à l’origine par des modèles artistiques extérieurs (l’Italie pour la France ancienne; la Métropole pour les pays d’outre-mer), non sans provoquer d’après sentiments contrastants: d’admiration et de rivalité, d’émulation et de refus (78).

One has to think of Early Modern France in relation to the influence of Roman art and language (Latin) in much the same way as former French colonies feel toward the cultural and linguistic influence of the Métropole. When read in this light, the notion of “créolité” takes on a new meaning. Recalling Cuban writer Aléjo Carpentier’s depiction of the *criollo* spirit as a “baroque” spirit in its creative, symbiotic “otherness,” the alternative aesthetic and ideological constructs of Glissant’s “baroque mondialisé” are explicitly present in the famed manifesto of French-Antillean identity, *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989), written by Martinicans Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant.<sup>114</sup> This work exalts the “richesse bilingue refusée” of the French-Antillean

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<sup>114</sup> Here, also, I should point out Dominique Chancé’s groundbreaking work *Poétique baroque de la Caraïbe* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), which explores the influence of Carpentier’s baroque on the earlier works of Édouard Glissant and Daniel Maximin, both from Martinique. Chancé has also posed the question

subject, which persists “en douleur diglossique” (25). Again, we see an actual parallel between the Antillean condition in (post)modernity and the baroque world of Early Modern Europe, which exists in the confluence of oppositional linguistic and cultural conditions—between French and Creole in one case, and between the Italian (Latin) heritage and budding Francique or Frankish languages in the other, the latter considered a “vulgar” degeneration of the Latin tongue.<sup>115</sup> Rather than the affirmation of one influence and denial of the others, the baroque *mentalité* attempts to unite the two in celebrating the potential of difference. We read a similar movement in *Éloge*:

La Créolité est une annihilation de la fausse universalité du monolinguisme et de la pureté. Se trouve en créolité ce qui s’harmonise au *Divers* en direction duquel Victor Segalen eut son formidable élan. La Créolité est notre soupe primitive et notre prolongement, notre chaos originel et notre mangrove de virtualités. (28)

The reference to fin-de-siècle explorer, ethnographer, poet, and critic Victor Segalen, which appears alongside references to Glissant, Haitian writer Frankétienne and Guadeloupean-born Frenchman Saint-John Perse, does much to further the understanding of Créolité as an inclusive movement that does not seek merely to oppose European influence but to embrace the baroque contrasts that were already coming to the fore a century prior in the context of a global counter-modern societal ethos.

Reminiscent of Maffesoli’s communitarian (baroque-like) style of an identitary, cultural, and political ethic that functions in terms of an “aestheticization of existence,” *Éloge* affirms that “il semble que, pour l’instant, *la pleine connaissance de la Créolité sera réservée à l’Art*” (29). And, as the quotation from Glissant at the head of this chapter remarks, the global baroque phenomenon exists “non plus seulement comme art et style, mais comme manière de vivre l’unité-diversité du monde,” and this “manière de vivre” aesthetically is at the core of that which “nous déclarons être le vecteur esthétique majeur de la connaissance de nous-mêmes et du monde: *la Créolité*” (Bernabé et al., 25).

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regarding the work of well-known Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau in “De *Chronique des sept misères* à *Bibliographie des derniers gestes*, Patrick Chamoiseau est-il baroque?” *MLN*. 118, (2003): 867-894.

<sup>115</sup> Beginning with l’ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts in 1539 forbidding the use of Latin in favor of French languages, to the founding of the Académie Française nearly a century later in 1637 to establish Parisian French as the norm, linguistic opposition played a foundational role in the formation of a sovereign French national identity.

Créolité involves an inherent Relation between the subject and his world, an *existential* aesthetic (re)birthing-with or “*connaissance*” [co-naissance], a creative and re-generative being-in/of-the-world through art. Probing further into this notion, Christiane Ndiaye’s article on Haitian writer Émile Ollivier entitled “Ollivier: Le baroque au féminin” is particularly revealing. Ndiaye remarks, in contrast to Carpentier’s conception of the baroque and the marvelous real, that a “nouveau baroque” in Antillean literature involves a “nouveau réalisme,” which, although it shares many similarities with magical realism, is marked by a decisive break, as it is more concerned with “une certaine production romanesque de l’actualité haïtienne (et caraïbéenne, plus largement)” (61-2). Indicative of this new baroque realism are, in Ndiaye’s analysis, the feminine characters in Ollivier’s novels. Unlike the life-giving, nurturing figures of hope embodied by the women in novels by Stephen Alexis, Jacques Roumain, and René Depestre, “chez Ollivier, les personnages féminins semblent être plutôt complices de la *mort*” (63). However, this does not represent a tragic pessimism; rather, it suggests a baroque complexity which, in the case of Eva Maria in the novel *Mère-Solitude*, is crystallized in a particular dress described as baroque in its composition from numerous “découpures” including two- and three-dimensional objects. Furthermore, Ndiaye notes that “cette folie descriptive déborde de la robe pour atteindre le corps même du personnage,” a fact that once again underscores the dynamic play between being and appearance in the baroque. (Ndiaye, “Ollivier,” 65) The proliferation of heteroclitic components worn and embodied by Eva Maria also reflects a baroque image of the world, which Ndiaye elaborates in terms of the character’s struggles: “Le monde est devenu un labyrinthe (une jungle) où l’on se déplace sans cesse mais pour revenir au point de départ” (68). Sliding underneath a vast matrix of social stratifications, Ollivier’s feminine characters thus embody the baroque *trauerspiel* of an ultimately futile existence in which there is no other end but death. Yet in their very being, they reveal a fundamental illusionism that can be read in terms of their femininity, the world in which they live, and the text itself, namely the inadequacy of signs and the incommensurable gap between appearances and some extant reality that remains forever veiled in mystery. The baroque aesthetic, therefore, elucidates this semiotic fault line in the way it represents itself, both through its characters, and as a

text itself. Ndiaye states: “En fait, le baroque déconstruit les *récits* ‘sensés’ pour fabriquer des *images*... En faisant apparaître l’incongru du réel, ces textes exposent le mensonge de tous les discours qui s’efforcent d’y mettre de l’ordre et qui prétendent éclaircir les mystères” (69). In this sense, we can understand the baroque aesthetic as a denunciatory mechanism, a refusal of any pretense at explaining away contradictions and paradoxes, offering rather a series (or layers) of images that, although incapable of representing reality, make reality *appear* as it is, in all of its relative and incongruent opacity.

The definition of an Antillean baroque poetics proposed by Dominique Chancé in his book, *Poétique baroque de la Caraïbe* (2001), is consistent with Ndiaye’s reading of Ollivier’s work. Chancé writes :

[L]e baroque est la poétique d’auteurs qui s’interrogent profondément sur l’ordre du monde, sur la loi, sur le chaos et qui préfèrent aux classifications et aux catégories dont ils ont pour une part hérité, une mouvance, une prolifération, un entrelacs, des figures hybrides, contradictoires, inachevées et éphémères que l’on a pu à juste titre appeler baroques (Chancé, 8).

Rather than an acceptance of categories, limits, or fixity, the baroque aesthetic relates a vision of the world in its chaos, movements, and inconsistencies, a notion also present in *Éloge de la Créolité* and which characterizes Créolité in the same shape-shifting movement of “*le monde diffracté mais recomposé*” that appears only by “l’intuition profonde, la connaissance poétique,” an impalpable existence, which is tantamount to “Vivre une question” (27). The idea of living a question is central to the baroque spirit and is translated in many different ways into texts, as Ndiaye again notes with respect to Ollivier:

[L]’univers ‘baroque’ est fait de questions sans réponses (ce que le style d’Ollivier traduit par l’abondance de phrases interrogatives, notamment). La vie peut être spectaculaire, elle se donne beaucoup à *voir* (et à décrier: l’esthétique baroque se construit, entre autres, à partir de descriptions très élaborées)... mais très peu à comprendre. (68)

The baroque aesthetic, which aims not to arrive at definite understandings, but rather at multiple imagistic renderings, is not only a “poetic” or stylistic measure; it also represents a mode of being which, through the very juxtaposition of such contrasts, succeeds in

subverting the myth of monolithic modernity, both in reality and in representation. In order to more fully grasp the relation between a text and the reality it creates through baroque representation, Anna Paolo Mossetto's discussion of "Arabesque virevolte, fondu enchaîné" in the Antillean novel is enlightening. Among certain aesthetic traits that, according to Glissant, "relèvent du 'baroque à l'ouvrage'" (Mossetto, 87), such as heterogeneity, polyphony, mixing of genres, styles and structures of suspense, linguistic decoration, etc., Mossetto mentions "l'oralité feinte" of these texts that operates through a "prolifération de la parole" in an attempt to imitate ordinary oral discourse of the Creole-French-speaking Antilles (84). This "trompe-l'oreille" of Antillean novelistic discourse performs the same *mise-en abîme* of language and reality through representation as a baroque "trompe-l'œil," simulating the reality and perception of heteroglossic social discourses. Mossetto also argues that this technique can actually go a step further, as in the case of Xavier Orville's *Laissez brûler Laventurcia*, which reveals in itself "*l'écriture feinte*," or "la fiction de l'écriture" (86). This auto-subversion of the text itself, performing self-erasure as a mirage, a fiction, or as something not there, functions as an *anéantissement* or annihilation of discourse and thereby exceeds the formal limits of representation by representing its own negation. It is precisely in this regard—in *not* representing any (one) thing, in sustaining the question and the ambiguous relation between what is and what appears—that Mossetto discerns the capacity of literature to serve, again with reference to Glissant, "comme véritable instrument de découverte du réel" (87).

Beyond the instrumental calculations of sociological reasoning, ethnographic cultural studies, or any kind of statistical analysis seeking to arrive at any rational, rooted explanation or certainty, the investigation of what it means to *be* a "creole," "métis," "hybrid" (in) society depends on how one envisions and engages in the play of appearances in/of society. The mosaic or kaleidoscopic image espoused by *Éloge* is an image of the "planetary idiom" to which Gruzinski refers; its heterogeneous plurality resists the formal constraints of rational representation, and therefore, its ambiguous reality of shape-shifting uncertainty and of always being "other" becomes a question for the anamorphic and allegorical sphere of a baroque aesthetic practice. In this sense,

Antillean reality bears resemblance to the baroque vision of modernity in the fundamental uncertainty regarding existence, reality, and rationality, which motivates a new way of interpreting the world and human being. In Chancé's words : "une interrogation profonde sur l'ordre du monde, sa folie, sa démesure [...] nécessite une 'nouvelle mesure'" (8). Reality is perceived as something vast and far more complex, both in cosmology and in human psychology. It appears in its totality as something wholly unreasonable, and the only way to approach it is through a refusal or abandonment of the limits of logic and reason, resulting in "l'éclatement, une esthétique anti-classique, du décentrement et de l'entrelacs, de l'archipel et du 'tout-monde', dirait Édouard Glissant, auteur lui aussi de cet espace créole en mouvement" (Chancé, 56).<sup>116</sup>

### **In-Conclusion : The baroque in Africa?**

The Caribbean space of Creole movement and métissage is only baroque in its creation as a baroque artistic expression. The aesthetic practice that differentiates baroque from classical is precisely an implicit resistance to stability that insists on suspending contrasts; this gives the baroque work its affective energy and tension. The Renaissance mind was one occupied by tensions: political tensions between a Holy Roman Empire and emergent nation states, linguistic tensions between Latin and various Romance Languages, and religious tensions between Christianity and paganism, all of which created a conflicted image of the world and human being, are behind what Erwin Panofsky describes as "a real problem, inherent in Renaissance art from the outset" (25). In response to the conflicted humanism inherent in Renaissance art, Panofsky defines the Baroque attitude "as being based on an objective conflict between antagonistic forces, which, however, merge into a subjective feeling of freedom and also brought forth the modern landscape in the full sense of the word" (38). This being the case in the baroque moment of epistemic rupture near the turn of the sixteenth century, the aftershocks of which reverberated well into the eighteenth, I propose to examine the contemporary

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<sup>116</sup> Not only might one consider Glissant's novels to be exemplary of this baroque aesthetic, as this is in fact the primary focus of Chancé's analysis of Glissant's work, but his theoretical works also exhibit a tendency toward *poeisis*, for example, the way he hyphenates antonyms such as "unité-diversité" to propose a paradoxical juxtaposition of logical defiance. In fact, the subtitle of his 1997 Gallimard publication of *Traité du tout-monde* is "Poétique IV," thereby inviting the reader to engage with a generally theoretical work on a poetic or aesthetic level.

global baroque phenomenon as representing the extension of the self-conscious “modern baroque” disruption that first appeared around the end of the nineteenth century and continues to operate into the first decades of the new millennium. The “fin de siècle” in post-colonial Latin America and colonial francophone Africa (the case of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV) exhibited extreme signs of a world in contradiction, caught between (en)countering cultures—those of European colonists and those of indigenous populations—resulting inevitably in varying degrees of intermixing or *métissage*, which is perhaps what recalls most the society and psychology of the Renaissance as noted by Gruzinski.<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps the relative reticence among francophone scholars to engage a discussion of the baroque in former French colonies, as opposed to the relative exultation thereof in the correspondent Hispanic context, reflects a lingering distaste for the baroque. Nevertheless, in recent years, the notion of a baroque return in francophone literature has begun to appear in academic discourses, first in relation to the Caribbean, which shares more cultural similarities with Latin America, but also in francophone Africa.<sup>118</sup> In the next chapter, I will examine the history of African literature, bearing in mind what we have seen thus far concerning the particularly baroque moments over the course of the twentieth century, with an eye toward the “baroquisme” in the infinite play of art reflecting life and life reflecting art with the power to change reality through its fiction in the countermodern aesthetic practice of postcolonial francophone literatures. Focusing on the historical, political, cultural, and literary phenomenon of African culture over the

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<sup>117</sup> In *L'Empire Triomphant, 1871-1936* (1988), Gilbert Comte makes a similar claim about Africa stating: “L’Afrique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ressemble étrangement à l’Europe du Moyen Age, telle qu’elle émerge des vieilles chroniques, ou même en pleine Renaissance du *Journal d’un Pierre de L’Estoile*” (23).

<sup>118</sup> The notion of a “nouveau baroque” in francophone literature was the subject of an international colloquium held in Dakar in May 1998, at which scholars from fifteen countries on three continents convened to theorize the baroque in literature from throughout the francophone world. The resultant anthology, *Nouvelles écritures francophones: vers un nouveau baroque?* ed. Jean Cléo Godin (Montréal: Les presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2001) brings together different perspectives on contemporary francophone literature from Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, and Belgium. In the “Présentation” Jean Cléo Godin traces the initial hypothesis to a presentation given by Amadou Ly of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop at a seminar in Montréal. Not only was the idea of a “nouveau baroque” in francophone literature initially that of an African scholar, and a significant number of the articles pertain to African literature, the members of the organizing committee of the colloquium also apparently “avaient d’abord en tête, en proposant d’examiner les ‘nouvelles écritures’ aussi bien que le ‘nouveau baroque’, la littérature d’Afrique noire” (10).



course of the twentieth century, I will qualify what one might identify as particularly baroque or proto-baroque moments of epistemic and aesthetic rupture in the development of African and diasporic consciousness in and outside the discourse of “Négritude” in modernity.

I do not by any means pretend to equate postcolonial literature (or Négritude for that matter) with baroque art, nor do I propose that a “baroque” work cannot also be considered “classic” in its own right.<sup>119</sup> Rather I view the oppositional framework of the classic and baroque as a useful tool, not only for apprehending the distant past of Early Modern Europe, or the various neo-baroque manifestations on both sides of the Atlantic, but also for characterizing the complexity of the crisis of postcolonial African cultures.<sup>120</sup> Explicitly linking the baroque to the postcolonial, Iain Chambers cites Paul Carter’s *The Lie of the Land* (1996), which discusses the baroque movement of return as a historical and political poetic:

As such, Paul Carter continues, the Baroque announces: ‘a counter-tradition within Western reason, and we have suggested that this counter-tradition is intimately implicated in the poetics of colonization – and thus, perhaps, in the continuing critique of Western Logos that will characterize the emergence of a post-colonial polity and poetry’ (Chambers, 88; Carter, 302).

The “baroque” works of postcolonial African literature and their historical predecessors that I will discuss in the following chapters, share certain affinities, both in representational style and effect and in the real politico-cultural power that is put into play by the aesthetic practice and production of the works themselves, reveal a recurrent

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<sup>119</sup> In his essay “The Classic is the Baroque,” Marshall Brown cites Wölfflin: “classicism ‘represents things as they are,’ while the baroque represents them ‘as they seem to be,’ even though this appearance ‘never coincides with the form of the object’” (91). However, when the thing and its appearance coincide, that artwork can no longer be baroque, which leads Brown to the paradoxical conclusion, again with reference to Wölfflin, that “baroque has its classicism too” (92).

<sup>120</sup> In the introduction to a collection of essays *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, eds. Richard Werbner & Terence Ranger (London & New Jersey: Zed Books, Inc., 1996), Richard Werbner foregrounds the political state in the current crisis of postcolonial Africa, citing four main reasons: first, the ‘retreat’ or transformation of the state; second, the importance of violence and state genocide; third, the re-appropriation of the state, assimilation and political hybridity; and fourth, a change in identity, and the stereotyping and occult imagery of the postcolony (7). Werbner also argues that in this political domain, the subject plays a formidable role in his/her complicit relationship to power, stating with reference to Mbembe that “the divide between official and unofficial collapses into the *baroque* style of political improvisation in which everyone indulges” (2, my emphasis).

human constant that is in direct relation to the concept of the Early Modern baroque epoch in a kind of coloneo-baroque continuum of countermodern analogic, poetic, and political re-creation.

## **Chapter IV. From Colony to Postcolony: Building the African Baroque**

La lecture de nos productions littéraires auxquelles il faut ajouter celle d'auteurs de la Caraïbe et de l'Amérique Latine m'a amené à penser qu'il se jouait quelque chose de baroque dans notre esthétique. Autrement dit, j'ai cru remarquer que le baroque était une des catégories—fonctionnelle dans la pratique, éclairante dans la théorie—de notre esthétique

--René Ménil, *Tracées. Identité, négritude, esthétique aux Antilles*

### **Introduction: Colonialism, Renaissance, and Baroque in Africa**

Africa is as much an ideological construct as a geographical location: a reality and a representation. Because of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, “Africa” has been spread over much of the four continents that verge on the Atlantic, and as a result of ensuing European colonization, the continent itself has been the site of rapid and radical introduction (or interruption) of modernity. Embedded within both the Slave Trade and the colonial project is a certain reliance on the notion of rationality or reason. Inasmuch as reason has been used to define human beings, its absence also serves to define that which is not human. For Aristotle, *logos* or reason was that which separated man from beast, and reason has also played a fundamental role in defining the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. Interestingly, the Enlightenment in Europe coincided with the discovery of darkness in the Dark Continent. Exploration of Africa, and the subsequent mass exportation of slaves to work in New World colonies and eventual colonization of the continent by European nations were all supported by racist ideologies that dehumanized Africans and thus legitimized their exploitation.<sup>121</sup> The results were socially, culturally, and environmentally devastating.

In the first of a two-volume comprehensive study of French territorial expansion in Africa, *L'Empire Triomphant, 1871-1936* (1988), Gilbert Comte states: “L’Afrique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ressemble étrangement à l’Europe du Moyen Age, telle qu’elle émerge des

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<sup>121</sup> I am referring specifically to the Enlightenment ideology of racial purity and superiority exemplified by philosophers such as François Bernier in the late seventeenth century, and Voltaire in the late eighteenth century whose theories of racial divisions supported the idea of the inferiority of the African race, which then served as a philosophical justification for cultural, economic, and political domination of the African continent by European powers. For more on the history of racialized subjectivity see *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000).

vieilles chroniques, ou même en pleine Renaissance du *Journal* d'un Pierre de L'Estoile" (23). The reference to Pierre de L'Estoile's *Journaux*, which consist of personal accounts of the reigns of French monarchs Henri III and Henri IV, depict a tenuous contrast between popular and elite culture in Renaissance France, an image that bears a striking resemblance to African kingdoms in decline (such as that of the Songhai, which encompassed the remnants of the Mali Empire), suffering from the effects of centuries of internal and external conflict motivated by intercontinental trade.<sup>122</sup> The colonization of Africa in the nineteenth century marks the apogee of a grand-scale cultural catastrophe in which the dominant civilization of Western modernity succeeded in gradually supplanting pre-existing ways of life indigenous to Africa, its ancient Empires, and Arab colonization. Employing the same strategy abroad that post-revolutionary France had used at home to consolidate its status as a unitary national entity by the suppression of regional differences a century earlier,<sup>123</sup> the new Third Republic, building on the bases established under the Second Empire at Saint-Louis and Dakar in modern day Senegal, moved to create a hegemonic empire of French culture over its occupied territories in French West Africa. Comte describes the French conquest of l'Afrique Occidentale Française during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, beginning with captain

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<sup>122</sup> John Thornton's work, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (1998) describes how after the initial African resistance to European coastal invasions, the subsequent relations between African and European kingdoms were "largely peaceful and commercial" (43). Arguing against the commonly accepted vision of early intercontinental exchange as exploitative or unbalanced, Thornton states that trade was not need-based but driven by profit for both sides: "Both partners sought an 'administered' trade, under state mechanisms like competition in the hope of securing maximum revenue from commerce" (54). Even the Atlantic Slave Trade, he argues, was already a well-established commercial enterprise within African cultures in much the same way as early Greco-Roman economy rested on the ownership or control of people rather than land, and the increased demand for slaves to work in New World plantations stimulated the development of the slave trade and also "widespread holding of slaves." (74). The picture Thornton paints of early Afro-European trade relations is one that operates on the principle of complicity with foreign powers, where the question becomes a cold calculation of cost and production for ruling elites on both continents with little regard for the value of human life.

<sup>123</sup> Bertrand Barrère's report to the Comité du Salut Public in 1792 expressed a profound need to expand the influence of Parisian French culture into the outlying regions in order to replace what he saw as oppression by nobles and clergy with a single linguistic and cultural allegiance to the Republican ideals expressed in the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme." In *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), Frantz Fanon perceptively notes the same phenomenon in the French Antilles, stating: "À l'école, le jeune Martiniquais apprend à mépriser le patois" (15), and a similar approach was employed vis-à-vis indigenous languages in the colonial French education system in Africa, as Alice Conklin notes in *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 79).

Gallieni's march inland from Dakar toward Sudan, which succeeded in either pacifying or defeating numerous indigenous groups, including the Ouolof, Dogon, and Bambara kingdoms that existed across the Sahel.<sup>124</sup> This again was also accomplished with varying degrees of complicity by African elites who, albeit somewhat reluctantly, entered into treaties granting colonial France rights to the lands and rivers in exchange for a false promise of autonomous sovereignty. Once again, Comte cannot resist the metaphor relating nineteenth century Africa to the Middle Ages, stating how the peace established in colonial West Africa "abaisse des tyrans insatiables, pareils à ceux de l'Europe médiévale dans l'anarchie des temps obscures" (64). Oppressive policies would continue as pacification shifted southward toward the coastal regions, encapsulating the Kong and Koulongo kingdoms with the pursuit of rebel leader Samory Touré into the northern regions of modern-day Côte d'Ivoire, which was simultaneously being infiltrated from the south by Marcel Treich-Laplène and Gustave Binger (Comte, 69-96). French colonial influence extended southward in its conquest of Dahomey and west of the Niger toward Lake Tchad, while Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza was busy expanding inland and northward into French Equatorial Africa into the current Central African Republic and Tchad from modern-day Congo and Gabon (Comte 109-147).

Interestingly enough, it is out of these purported "Middle Ages" that the African Renaissance emerged in full force, seeking new forms of expression to describe and account for the modern African experience. The Black Renaissance of the twentieth century marks the start of a concerted effort to recuperate the heritages of African peoples that were either crushed under the weight of colonial conquest and/or drowned in the Atlantic Slave Trade. In his book *The Black Renaissance in Francophone African and Caribbean Literatures* (2008), K. Martial Frindéthié traces three distinct stages in the development of black thought in francophone African literature on the continent and in the diaspora.<sup>125</sup> The first stage is what he refers to as an ontological, theological, and

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<sup>124</sup> For a thorough study of pre-colonial African civilizations, see Cheikh Anta Diop's *L'Afrique noire pré-coloniale* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960).

<sup>125</sup> Jacques Chevrier's *Littérature nègre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1984) similarly divides African literary production into three distinct periods: before national independences, the decades around independence, and after. Also, Pius Ngandu Nkashama's encyclopedic work *Les années littéraires en Afrique, 1912-1987*

teleological legacy of universal Negro history, which affirmed a fundamental biological difference of the Black man and established a liberation theology for the future freedom of the Negro race. This first stage coincides with the advent of Négritude, a movement in which Frindéthié sees a fundamental difference between the Antillean Négritude of Césaire (he calls it a Négritude of impossibility) and Senghor's African Négritude of compossibility. Precisely because of the fundamental difference in the experience of the Black subject in Africa and in the New World, the latter case being far more extreme in terms of the extent of deterritorialization and dehumanization, Frindéthié recognizes that Césaire's imagined Black community is impossible with the white man's world and the vestiges of the slave-plantation system (59). On the other hand, because of the portrayal of the colonial system as a "mission civilisatrice"<sup>126</sup> bringing education, infrastructure, and economic prosperity to the Dark Continent, and because of the degree to which Senghor himself benefited from this system, his African Négritude was couched in terms of a compossible relationship with Europe (61).<sup>127</sup> However, in spite of this key divergence, the literary and cultural phenomenon of Négritude operated, in both cases, within an ambivalent, i.e. conflicted, relationship to Western philosophical thought and a somewhat romanticized valorization of the traditional mode of African communication, which Frindéthié terms "griotism." Identifying Négritude as a "metaphysical collage," Frindéthié recognizes first and foremost the enormous influence of Nietzsche's

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(Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1993) traces in great detail the history of African literature of all genres beginning with the 1912 publication of Massyla Diop's novel *Le réprouvé* and continuing into the present day.

<sup>126</sup> In *A Mission to Civilize*, Alice Conklin examines this tendency to humanize the French Empire through education and public works, which sought to elevate the indigenous Africans from their primitive state so that they could partake in the "superiority of French culture" (1), although she does note an implicit element of coercion in the French approach to "civilizing" Africa.

<sup>127</sup> Senghor's Négritude was inherently tied to the adaptation or assimilation, rather, of the French language and the rationalist ideology that went along with it by African peoples who could then become equal but different, as Black Frenchmen. Regarding this specific "glissement" in French colonial discourse regarding the status of its African subjects, see the chapter "Almost But Not Quite French: The 'Indigenous Elite,' Mimicry, and Authority" in James E. Genova's *Colonial Ambivalence, Cultural Authenticity, and the Limitations of Mimicry in French-Ruled West Africa, 1914-1956* (esp. pp. 204-13), which describes the paradoxical position of the "évolués," or those Africans who had assimilated the French language and culture to a significant degree, in trying to maintain a sense of cultural authenticity. This political reality mirrors the limitations of Négritude ideology in that African subjectivity cannot be find its fullest expression in an unadulterated and foreign language. Cultural Négritude, like political Independence, requires compromises.

*Übermensch* or Overman, “an unconventional hero” who “abhors the rules of any binding contract” (19), in the Haitian Indigenist movement of the late 1920’s and early 1930’s as well as in the ensuing Négritude of Césaire and Senghor.<sup>128</sup> Other philosophers, including Marx, Hegel, Bergson, and Frobenius are also mentioned in their appropriation and adaptation by the ideology of Négritude, the major pitfall of which, according to Frindéthié, is an elitist stance “which affirmed the superiority of the French literate black over the non-literate,” as exemplified by René Maran’s 1921 novel, *Batouala: un vrai roman nègre* (34). This solitary example nevertheless reveals a negative trend in Négritude thought, namely the re-inscription of “griotism,” a dominant, essentially masculinist, intellectual, and hegemonic discourse which, rather than subvert the modernist topos of a singular rational subjectivity, creates an oppositional, yet critically restricted, resistant black voice that “can speak of only *one* body, *one* reason, *one* ethic” (Moira Gates cited by Frindéthié, 75).

According to Frindéthié, the second stage in the development of black African and diasporic consciousness, that of the post-Négritude era, illustrates the difficulties of breaking free from the grip of griotism in the decades marked by efforts of de-colonization. Among the representatives of the continuation of an essentialist discourse of blackness, he recognizes first and foremost Fanon’s psychoanalytic interpretation of the “black French’s neurosis,” which is reiterated in Mudimbé’s recuperation of the “schizophrenic protagonist” who “conforms to the psychoanalytic discourse of griotism, whereby he or she is a sick subject to be cured” (93). He argues that first-generation African woman writers such as Aminata Sow Fall and Mariama Bâ also fall prey to the ingrained ideology of griotism, recognizing that “[i]n the name of a blind loyalty to ancestral culture and allegiance to authenticity, the black woman’s struggle for emancipation has remained trapped in negritudist doxology” (123). Furthermore, Frindéthié recognizes the discourse of Créolité as fundamentally flawed in its conception: even as it moves “beyond blackness,” Créolité fails to transcend the problematic of the deterritorialized subject’s nostalgic longing for a mother country espoused in Césaire’s

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<sup>128</sup> For a more specific overview of Négritude, see René Dépestre’s *Bonjour et Adieu à la Négritude* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1980).

*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). Frindéthié argues that Créolité is therefore “a mimetism of Negritude [that] wants to be to the Caribbean what Negritude wanted to be to the Negro in general” (106) and, in this sense, it represents yet another essentialist version of identity based on shared language (Creole) as opposed to a shared racial characteristic (Blackness). Although I agree with Frindéthié to a degree, there are some elements of Créolité that set it apart, just as there are some distinct qualities of Négritude that potentially escape from the political and epistemological impotence of Pan-African modernism (what Frindéthié has termed “griotism”) in the specific context of the Black Renaissance.<sup>129</sup>

The third movement that Frindéthié identifies, beginning in the late 1990’s in the works of two Ivorian women novelists—Fatou Keita and Regina Yaou—but also in the works of Guadeloupean Maryse Condé and Algerian Réda Bensmaïa, is a literary trend that at once identifies and subverts the dominant discourse of griotism.

Indeed, there lies [...] a blasphemous gesture in the direction of the sacred, a joyous engagement with the interdicted that paradoxically disturbs the fundamental immobility of the *socius*, causing it to move indefinitely into the field of the inadmissible, thus jeopardizing the rigid authority of patriarchy, which, faced with the impossibility of a hitherto caressed transcendental ambition, henceforth, has to settle with a quasi-transcendental dream (Frindéthié, 126).

Frindéthié’s notion of the “quasi-transcendental dream” derives from a Derridian inclusive binary that recognizes the impure within the very position of purity and the difficulties involved in attempting to dissociate “errors” from “correctness.” Thus, as Frindéthié remarks, “within the edifice of pure interiority, the signs of exteriority are already present” (126). The key to this inherently subversive mode of representing this paradoxical postulation is a critical approach to hegemonic discursive modes that are

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<sup>129</sup> In the first case, see specifically the last section of chapter III “‘D’un baroque mondialisé’: métissage and créolité” in which I describe that baroque poetics of French Antillean writers and a corresponding “manière de vivre” that derives from a baroque vision of the world. I will discuss the idea of a baroque undercurrent in the margins of what I deem to be classical Négritude in the first section of this chapter. Similarly, I would propose that the Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*, though it does enact a “griotic” discourse in a sense, portrays an acute skepticism with regard to traditions and the idea of “authenticity,” specifically the ways in which traditional practices (polygamy, for example) have been perverted and coopted within a new culture of modernity. See the chapter of Obioma Nnaemeka’s book, *The politics of (m)othering* (New York: Routledge, 1997) entitled, “Urban spaces, women’s places” (pp. 162-91).



reified by a certain ambivalence with respect to the subject position (simultaneously within and outside the power structure) and an ambiguity relating to the production and reproduction of subjectivity always through language. The compromising engagement with the vulgar and the profane (that which is not “correct”) is what gives these texts their subversive power to shock and destabilize the rational order of patriarchy in particular, and domination in general, by transgressing the boundaries of absolute purity and marring the status of the transcendental by plunging it into the mire of materiality. As opposed to the first two stages of the Black Renaissance, I propose that the latter, in its transgressive techniques that engages the spectator’s social or political consciousness through disruptive juxtapositions of words, sounds, and images exemplifies a fundamental characteristic of a baroque aesthetic practice in African literature. In the three sections that follow, I will discuss particular works from each of the three stages of the Black Renaissance identified by Frindéthié, identifying particular linguistic, stylistic, and thematic elements that one might qualify as baroque. In no case do I propose that any particular stage or moment of this “Renaissance” is exclusively “Baroque”; rather, I read a metaphorical distinction between representative styles and strategies that indicate baroque lines of flight or slippage within more classical discursive movements.

Looking at two particular moments in colonial African literary expression—one coming in the 1920’s, prior to the celebrated discourse of Négritude, and the other marching on its heels in the 1950’s leading up to national independence—I will show how different, more complicated and often paradoxical versions of African consciousness emerged in collaborative competition with notions of an essential black self (and nation) espoused by a somewhat romantic/exotic vision of “classical” Négritude writing, favoring a de-constructed, much more ironic and deeply ambivalent approach to French/African colonial relations. This other form of expression of African consciousness within a larger dominant discourse of Africanity resembles a sort of proto-baroque slippage or *fuite* in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, operating in the field of language through aesthetic practices that will become more defined in the stylistic and linguistic innovations of certain postcolonial writers. Thus the postcolonial baroque that appears in African literature of the late seventies, eighties and nineties, is prefigured by a few key

“proto-baroque” moments over the course of the twentieth century: one occurring in the 1920’s, a second in the 1950’s, and then its full-blown manifestation at the end of the 1960’s. These *baroquismes* in African literature indicate a phenomenon appearing principally in the domain of language and representation, which expresses a fundamentally altered view of the world and the (African) subject through baroque aesthetic practices.

### **A. Baroque Traces: underneath Négritude**

“Négritude” is the word that first comes to mind when one engages in any discourse on francophone Africa and the diaspora, especially when entertaining the notion of a “Black Renaissance.” The historical dominance and ideological influence of Négritude are incontestable. First, it is important to note the global nature of this Renaissance, a black counter-cultural movement associated with Pan-Africanism (although I wish to avoid classifying the diverse manifestations of black thought and consciousness under a single epithet), which took place at the intersections of political activism and literary innovation and was bound by varying degrees of complicity to dominant institutional structures.<sup>130</sup> In the Anglophone world, the influential work of W.E.B. DuBois, from his involvement in publishing writers of the Harlem Renaissance to his affiliation with socialist/communist politics and his ambivalent relationship with the increasingly institutionalized stance of the NAACP which he had helped found, exemplifies at once the paradoxical construction of black consciousness and its continual struggle for recognition and autonomy within the literary and political arenas. Similarly, the work of Marcus Garvey, founder of the UNIA-ACL (Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) in Jamaica, who was at odds with DuBois regarding the degree to which the Negro race could actually emancipate itself from racist oppression and gain social equality with the dominant white race (Frindéthié’s *négritude* of impossibility), was simultaneously a work of political action and of literary expression against (yet also a part of) the principal modes of oppression. The triangular

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<sup>130</sup> See the address given by Maryse Condé at the joint meeting of the Comparative Literature Association and the African Literature Association in March 1998, “O Brave New World,” published in *Research in African Literatures* 29:3 (fall 1998), pp. 1-7, in which she discusses this movement as the first signs of “a positive globalization” (2).

trajectory that the Anglophone “Pan-African” movement between the New World (Harlem, Jamaica), Great Britain, and African nations (Ghana, Liberia), which was heavily influenced by black consciousness of former slaves in the New World, is mirrored in the encounter of francophone intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean in Paris and the development of what I see as a counter-modern mode of political action and literary expression that would eventually become what I call the classical ideology of Négritude.<sup>131</sup> What both movements share is the legacy of a genuine attempt at material and ideological liberation from racism through political and discursive negotiation against (but always within the limits of) the power structure. Thus, African literary expression from former French West and Central African colonies in the decades around national independence, owing so much to the Afro-centrist ideologies espoused by Caribbean and African intellectuals of the late 1930’s, was nevertheless poised in a precarious position because of a (perhaps necessary) over-reliance on Western political and philosophical discourses that were incapable of accounting for the profoundly oppositional stance necessary for the socio-cultural and psychological emancipation of colonized Africans.

The difficult negotiation between the privileged place accorded to “French” identity the less prestigious and more crudely defined construct of the “francophone” subject is an open debate in academic discourses.<sup>132</sup> Keith L. Walker’s book *Countermodernism and Francophone Literary Culture* (1999) addresses the issue of this

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<sup>131</sup> In the first chapter of her book *Black Paris: The African Writers’ Landscape*, entitled “An Uneasy Collaboration: The Dialogue between French Anthropology and Black Paris” (19-42), Bennetta Jules-Rosette discusses the surge in African consciousness in Paris following the famous Dakar-Djibouti expedition undertaken by French anthropologist Marcel Griaule with surrealist Michel Leiris and others, which was fueled by new publications—Paulette Nardal’s relatively short-lived *Revue du Monde Noir* in the 1930’s, and Alioune Diop’s much celebrated *Présence Africaine* (founded in 1947). Jules-Rosette offers an inside look at the experience of the African subject (understood in the broad diasporic sense). As the title of the chapter suggests, Jules-Rosette recognizes “the uneasy collaboration between the *Présence Africaine* movement and French intellectuals” (40) in the tension between Western anthropological interests in Africa and a nascent emancipatory négritude ideology of Africans on the other.

<sup>132</sup> For example, the manifesto, “Pour une littérature-monde en français,” which was first published on March 15, 2007 bearing the signatures of forty-four writers who use the French language as a vehicle for creative expression, signals the need to go beyond the dichotomy that has been erected between metropolitan France and other French-speaking parts of the globe often referred to under the umbrella of “la francophonie.” I will take up this notion more fully in Chapter V.

precarious position, theorizing “the Francophone Condition” as a condition in between two opposite poles, something simultaneously “*the same but different.*” He writes:

Especially during its insurrectionary beginnings in the 1920s and 1930s, African and Caribbean francophone text production posited a consciousness that ironized its position within European civilization, examined the liminal spaces of cultural hybridity occupied by the colonized subject, and systematically expressed its sameness (i.e., humanity), as well as its difference (i.e., culture) (93).

For Walker, the experience of cultural identity formation in (former) French colonies as a matter of performance that takes place on the stage of language and literature marked by a “constant unhinging of relationships, voiding of meaning, and rejection of language as adequate,” which he describes as a “game of slipknot” (94). Slipping between the dominant structures of language, logic, and reason, the poetics that would later be labeled “Negritude” reflect a consciousness of being “other.” Walker calls this “a *deromanticized modernism* in which metaphor is illustrated as literal and lived experience; in which the melting pot of generalized correspondences is deconstructed into its constituent differences...” (94). Within Négritude, one can identify both the traits of romanticization intended to appeal to Western conceptions of the African other, as well as the contrasting notion of a more brute deromanticized representation that directly confronts such limited ideological constructions. In this latter sense, might we not also say that the “countermodernism” of francophone literature as an inscription of and reaction against romantic ideals that remains nevertheless rooted in the realities of modern life, is in fact a very “baroque” condition? For in the post-romantic modernity differences are not annihilated but rather accentuated in a baroque suspense, like the oppositions between the morbid and the erotic, the real and the artificial woman in Baudelaire’s poetics; so the differences in francophone literature between self and other, center and periphery, métropole and colonies, are also de-constructed into their ever-multiplying and differing relationality.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibra Diene, in speaking of the baroque in terms of an aesthetic of the everyday in contemporary Senegalese women poets, specifically Kiné Kirama Fall, notes the influence of a certain literary tradition, namely that of surrealists such as André Breton, Guillaume Apollinaire, as well as Léopold Sédar Senghor: “Les surréalistes comme les dada avaient pour ambition de détruire le langage de la littérature pour faire du langage quotidien un langage littéraire, et ça c’est une entreprise baroque évidemment...” (See Appendix

In *Négritures: Les écrivains d'Afrique noire et la langue française* (1993), Jean-Claude Blachère identifies a “négrification” of French by African writers in order to translate “l'être-nègre” and contest, all the while operating within the confines of, the hegemony of the French language and political culture of France. He cites Senegalese Ousmane Socé's 1935 novel *Karim* as an example of a stylistic that penetrates lexicography, syntax, and narrative techniques (116). Although Blachère focuses mainly on the deviation of African literatures or “négritures” in what he calls “des néo-romanciers” of the 1980's, paying particular attention to the works of Ahmadou Kourouma and Sony Labou Tansi that run counter to the “modèle classique” of canonical French literature, he also recognizes the historical continuity of this tradition in key works such as Socé's *Karim*, and he even calls for a concerted look at the early African literature of the 1920's for an image of the linguistic “décentrement” that he sees as a fundamental aspect of Negro-African literary expression (245).

A glance at the first chapter of Christopher Miller's book, *Nationalists and Nomads* (1998), may help us to elucidate some of the rhetorical and political links between early African literary production in the 1920's and that of the “néo-romanciers” of the 1980's to whom Blachère refers, and which I identify as baroque experimentalists. In the first chapter, Miller explains the difference between “Involution and Revolution” in the discourses of black identity that arose in Paris during the two decades after World War I. Heavily influenced by Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, the notion of an oppositional (pan)African identity was emerging in a small yet vibrant black community in Paris. The origins of “authentic” francophone African literature have traditionally been traced back to 1932, a year which saw the appearance of *La revue du Monde Noir*, founded by Martinican Paulette Nardal and Haitian professor Leo Sajou, and the one-time publication of the Marxist-surrealist

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D). Similarly, Professor Amadou Ly remarks “une filiation très forte de notre littérature [la littérature africaine] à ses débuts avec la littérature américaine parce que la littérature haïtienne a connu son renouveau avec la littérature américaine, et la littérature martiniquaise et guadeloupéenne également avec le contact américain,” concluding that, “vraiment Paris à l'époque est un *melting pot* [...] les jazzmen, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, tous ces gens là, Duke Ellington, c'est vraiment, d'ailleurs, dans la poétique de Senghor. Et c'est le jazz, le jazz c'est à dire le refus encore une fois de l'harmonie pure, de l'harmonie claire...” (See Appendix A).

journal *Légitime défense* led by Martinican René Ménil. However, in breaking with the conception that French-African literature prior to this date represented a perhaps too subtle critique, veiled by an apparent acceptance of colonialism and even expressing an admiration and desire for assimilation—René Maran’s *Batouala*, Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne’s *Les Trois Volontés de Malic* (1920) and Bakary Diallo’s *Force-Bonté* (1926), for example—Miller identifies a wealth of other sources that have been insufficiently studied. Miller’s aim is “to contribute to a more inclusive vision of the literary and intellectual history of francophone Africans” (10).<sup>134</sup> Thus, in his analysis he includes lost or neglected literary texts such as Massyla Diop’s 1912 novel *Le réprouvé*, which appeared in 1925 in serial form in the *Revue africaine artistique et littéraire*; newspaper articles, which were a “frequently used medium of the proletarian veterans” in both France and Africa; and lastly, the ambiguous category of “other miscellaneous works of scholarship” because “we do not know of all the texts written by Africans in all domains of inquiry” (21). If ample time and energy are devoted to an investigation of some of these “other” franco-African texts, as does Miller, one can glimpse a picture of an emergent discourse of “blackness” that is far more radical, complex, and either ambiguously or overtly anti-colonial than the ensuing literary and cultural phenomenon of “la Négritude.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Taking the case of René Maran’s *Batouala, véritable roman nègre* (winner of the 1921 Prix Goncourt), Keith Walker recognizes a subtle inscription of dissent against French colonialism in the preface to a text, which by and large “reinforces the colonialist textualization of Africa,” an illustration of the way in which Francophone literature “slips the knot” by identifying with the *mère-patrie* on one hand, while encoding its subtle subversion on the other. (*Countermodernism*, 26). Interestingly, Walker identifies the roots of this “denunciatory tradition” before the well-known works of Aimé Césaire and Léon Gontran Damas, even before René Maran, in the work of Haitian intellectual Anténor Firmin who in 1885 published *De l’égalité des races humaines*, a reaction to Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau’s 1855 publication, *L’Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (20).

<sup>135</sup> Such scholarship is underway in Walker’s revalorization of Maran’s *Batouala*, which illustrate a more subtly inscribed resistant stance in the sense of slipknot, or *lignes de fuite*. Also David Murphy’s article “Birth of a Nation? The Origins of Senegalese Literature in French” in *Research in African Literatures* 39:1 (spring 2008), 48-69 discusses the two early texts by Diallo and Diagne in addition to earlier works dating back to the mid-nineteenth century written by members of a dominant métis population, Léopold Panet, Abbé David Boilat, and others. Murphy’s argument is that while such texts appear pro-colonial at first glance, they exemplify a far more profound ambiguity, regarding the colonial project from the hybrid position of a métis of black elite social class and thus portraying a vision of a modern Senegalese nation that is in accordance with this vision of French assimilation and the conservation of indigenous cultural heritage. Furthermore, he recognizes within each representative text different subtleties that cannot be reduced to a canonical continuum of Senegalese nationalist literature that emerged under the direction of

Miller's discussion of a pre-Négritude expression of autonomous black identity focuses on the work of another Senghor, Lamine Senghor, a former *tirailleur* from Senegal who fought for the French army during World War I and then returned to Paris where he began a very active political life during the 1920's. Miller notes that Lamine Senghor's political activity illustrates the tense and ambivalent relationship between African intellectuals and the communist party, whose ideals went hand in hand with Africans' desire for a liberation of the masses from colonial domination, but whose practices often perpetuated the racist mechanisms of oppression that were at the base of the colonial project. Thus, when Lamine Senghor broke with the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1925 to found his own radical group, the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre (CDRN), which became widely popular among black Parisians, his literary-political work began to take the shape of a much more radical ideology that represents a crucial pre-figuration of the central concepts of Négritude literature and politics. In 1927, the year of his death, Lamine Senghor published two issues of the CDRN newspaper entitled *La Voix des nègres*, founded the new Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, with its own journal entitled *La Race nègre*, and wrote the revolutionary and overtly propagandistic anti-colonial novella *La Violation d'un pays*. Miller's discussion of this novella and of a particular piece from the journal *La Voix des nègres* outlines a form of ideological resistance that, citing Paul Gilroy's description of the web of interaction on all sides of "the black Atlantic world," is the expression of "a counterculture of modernity" (Miller 28). This counterculture of modernity, or what Keith Walker refers to as "counter-modernity" in francophone literary culture, signals a moment of acute disruption in colonial Enlightenment ideology that had, until then, remained relatively uncontested.

Before being subsumed in the classical Négritude of the modern griots such as Senghor, Césaire, and others, the radical pre-négritude revolt of the 1920's marks a necessary break from occidental rationality that in many ways prefigured the later aesthetico-political revolts of many postcolonial writers, continuing in the trend of a

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Senghor's Négritude, for they originated as "by-products of colonial violence and domination" and thus express a view limited by their position within the imperial structure.

duplicitous baroque complex of foreshadows and aftershocks. What is particularly interesting in this movement is that before francophone black consciousness became the literary and political culture of Négritude in the work and philosophy of prominent figureheads Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Léon Damas, the work of Lamine Senghor and his contemporaries, as Christopher Miller points out, stands out in stark contrast to the “less radical, more descriptive, and more essentialist” Négritude that would exalt the beauty and clarity of the French language for expressing a romanticized vision of a universal black culture and identity (37). Miller recognizes two key innovations in the ideology of *La Voix des nègres* that are remarkably absent in the subsequent Négritude movement. First he identifies the central tenet of a movement that promotes “the liberation of blacks *by themselves*,” a rejection of European organization that “demolishes the myth on which French colonialism had based itself: the association of colonialism with enlightenment and progress” (31). And second, he notes a “deconstruction” of the racialized French vocabulary through the appropriation of “Le Mot nègre” in an article of *La Voix des nègres* by that very name—a word identified as “le gros mot du jour”—as an expression of autonomous African identity: “nous nous faisons honneur et gloire de nous appeler Nègres, avec un N majuscule en tête.” According to Miller, this conscious appropriation and cleaning up of a “dirty” word “suggests a *rehabilitation of blackness through language*” (33). The ultimate failure of enlightenment rationality and its racist discourse that pitted a logical European subject against the passionate yet morally depraved savages was nowhere more obvious than in the intermingling of self and other represented by the African *Tirailleurs* living in post-World War II France after having helped liberate it from a common enemy (this would happen again a quarter of a century later). Furthermore, the conscious appropriation of the language of the colonizers in order to turn it against itself by making something abject or debased into the very fundament of beauty and pride is a rhetorical move that harks back to Nietzsche and the nineteenth-century French late romantics and symbolists whose counter-discursive movement employed notions of the vulgar, the obscene, the *refusé* in



an aesthetic reversal that illustrates the beauty of the grotesque through the affective shock of innovative/revolutionary artistic representation.<sup>136</sup>

There is indeed a grim irony and a paradoxical depth in the affirmation of selfhood through the appropriation of self-depreciating rhetoric as a form of valorization. In confronting the sacred tenets of civilization and moral superiority through the brutal juxtaposition of profanity, the absolute fades into a quasi-transcendental dream/reality in which the vulgar brute is better in its abject beauty. The fundamentally baroque element of the political, ideological, and aesthetic revolt from which Négritude later evolved as the complacent classical counterpart is envisioned in a linguistic orientation that, recalling the words of Glissant, functions as a “contournement” or a “détournement” of meaning through the appropriation of the “vulgar” word “nègre” in an affront against notions of the sacred purity of the subject. The resultant destabilization of social codes and mores confronted with the impurity and otherness that exist already within its discursive bounds indicates a pre-figuration of the ambivalent baroque subject that will appear more distinctly in the thought and style of later postcolonial writers. Rather than existing as the by-products of colonial violence and domination, these documents of a radical cultural expression exhibit the discursive counter-violence that creates new spaces of negotiation as it critically deconstructs the formal bounds of opposition. Unfortunately, as both Miller and Frindéthié point out, the actual discourse of classical Négritude in the thirties and forties does little to move beyond a simply oppositional stance and, in fact, under the guidance of father figures Césaire and Senghor, it is reabsorbed within the dominant discourse that creates a romanticized vision of Black African subjectivity within the Western (white) model of the rational, masculine, absolute, and universal self,

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<sup>136</sup> Richard Terdiman’s *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* uses the example of the prose poem as an example of symbolic resistance in nineteenth-century France. He writes: “Specifically, by turning the language of dominant discourse *against itself*, the prose poem devised a strategy for counter-discourse which could begin to situate the oppressive character of the dominant itself [...T]he locus and the means of critique are to be found *within* the realm of the dominant, but at its most distant edge, its point of greatest fragility” (270). A poignant example appears in Arthur Rimbaud’s ravings in his “livre de damné,” *Une saison en enfer*, in which he pronounces “je suis une bête, un nègre” and, in the same motion affirms his place outside of the social order as an outcast whose work nonetheless proves that “this beast, this *nègre*” has mastered the master’s language and is therefore in a position to condemn the merchant, the magistrate, the general, the emperor as “faux nègres,” who have drunk “d’une liqueur non taxée, de la fabrique de Satan.” (Rimbaud “Une Saison en Enfer” in *Poésies* [Paris: PML, 1995], pp.115-146 at p. 122)

which Miller dubs “comfortable accommodationism” (40). It would appear that, in much the same way as the baroque moment of confrontation was suppressed under a neo-classical absolutism, the radical innovation of pre-négritude assertion of difference was consumed in the tide of modern academism, complacency, and an acceptance of the stability of the literary and political status quo in lieu of real revolutionary literary and political activism.

### **B. Baroque Bodies and Classical Books**

This retrograde motion away from conflict and opposition is what Miller describes as “involution,” and for me it appears much like the classicization of the baroque that occurred in France over the course of much of the seventeenth century.<sup>137</sup> However, as we have seen in Chapter III, the baroque cannot be so easily suppressed, and its return in art and criticism during the politically and culturally turbulent nineteenth century, as well as its recurrent manifestations in the “spectacular” society of the 1950’s and 60’s are but two examples. Africa and the African diaspora are not excluded from these movements, and it is precisely in the aftermath of another grand-scale cultural catastrophe, in the years following the Second World War, that we see a resurgence of such confrontational rhetoric as the pre-négritude thought of Lamine Senghor and others, and in the 1952 publication of Martinican psychologist Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Miller, 41). In this first major work of Fanon’s, Miller recognizes the extreme disjuncture existing between two worlds, that of the white colonizing power and that of the colonized black subject, which are forced by historical circumstances into an

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<sup>137</sup> Amadou Ly expounds on just such a baroque aesthetic in the work of Aimé Césaire, (which he also extends to that of Léopold Senghor) as a refusal of a classical rationalist aesthetic “Césaire est pur baroquisme. Parce que le baroquisme, c’est quoi? Encore une fois, c’est quelque chose qui tient de la chèvre et du chou, qui n’est ni chair ni poisson, ni figue ni raisin, c’est à dire quelque chose qui met ensemble des choses a priori jugées, réputées, incompatibles selon l’esthétique, disons, classique.” (See Appendix A) However, he also notes that there is a tendency to return to a formal classicism, even within this spirit of revolt: “[A]vec les auteurs, peut être même qu’on a un peu poussé à le faire, genre Camara Laye, *L’Enfant noir* est un ouvrage bien écrit, bien léché, tous les écrivains qui l’ont fait, même si dans leurs écrits il y a toujours une part de révolte, une part du refus de cette normalité-là. On a même ça chez Cheikh Hamidou Kane qui est très classique. Bon, mais Senghor déjà, il a beaucoup de classicisme, ce qui a connu un retour avec Mongo Beti, un certain classicisme, même dans la contestation d’un classicisme formel.” (Appendix A) It is precisely this ongoing tension between baroque and classicism that gives a certain theoretical import to the notion of baroquisme, in its various and varying forms and degrees in African literature.

untenable societal relation. The context of French colonialism, which even more extreme in French Algeria, informs Fanon's psychological analysis of the condition of the colonized, of "l'âme noire," which Fanon understands as "une construction du Blanc" (11). Fanon describes a psycho-existential complex resulting from the "mise en présence des races blanche et noire," which operates first on the level of economic inequality and which is then translated into an interiorization, rather than remaining the mere "épidermisation de cette infériorité." Fanon argues that the alienation of the black colonized subject constitutes an existential deviation in that survival depends on the assimilation of the culture and identity of the colonizer; essentially, it involves wearing a white mask (8-9). In the first chapter, "Le noir et le langage," Fanon identifies the intrinsic link between speech and existence, implying that the alienation of the black subject is the result of a certain necessity to speak (and write) in a foreign tongue in order to function in a society steeped in the colonial ideology of French superiority. Thus, the colonized subject's tendency to speak a simplified French vernacular—creole or "petit-nègre"—solidifies his or her status as a metonymical child, an incomplete subject in need of instruction. And according to Fanon, the infantilization of the colonized person when addressed by a French person in "petit nègre" serves as a reminder that s/he is "celui-qui-parle-le-petit-nègre" and is therefore less civilized than the proper French-speaking elite. (24-5) Fanon's critique of this psycho-linguistic schism between colonizer and colonized, and the linguistic inadequacy and social inferiority legitimized and propagated by the colonizer's acceptance of "le petit nègre," marks an important point of contention for African writers: the invention of an alternative to "proper" usage of the French language, an intermediary state between French and "le petit nègre" which might allow for a more subversively complicit negotiation of identity for the colonized.

Fanon's work is indicative of a radical revitalization of African consciousness, adopting a confrontational and revolutionary position towards colonial presence in Africa in the 1950's with a concerted movement toward de-colonization and a reaction against the increasingly evident fallacy of the French *mission civilisatrice* and its proclaimed

ambition to extend “les droits de l’homme” throughout the lands of its colonial empire.<sup>138</sup> Struggles for the affirmation of an independent black subject--and nation in some cases, such as Algeria--were bound to violence, while others, by and large the whole of French West and Equatorial Africa continued to work in concert with the colonial *Patrie*. To illustrate this split in the francophone world, I will focus attention on questions of language and representation in two separate literary works from the late colonial period in French sub-Saharan Africa. In Guinean Camara Laye’s *L’Enfant noir* (1953) and Cameroonian Ferdinand Oyono’s *Une vie de boy* (1956), I will theorize competing conceptions of identity for the colonized subject and corresponding textual practices, which support and/or successively break down the binary opposition between French and “petit nègre.” These textual practices in turn mask or reveal discursive and existential spaces in which a complicitous alternative identity of the French-African subject can emerge that foreshadows the postcolonial condition that I see as being emblematic of a baroque worldview. The difference between the two discursive approaches to colonialism can be best expressed as the distinction between what I identify as “classical” complacency in representation and a more fundamentally subversive “baroque” aesthetic practice. In the former, there is a clear link to the assimilationist discourse sympathetic to the colonialist “mission civilisatrice,” which participates in the involutory aesthetic and ideological shortcomings of a politically stunted “griotic” discourse of Négritude; whereas in the latter, critical ironic undertones pervade the text to a much greater degree, giving it the subversive literary and socio-political qualities of a more profoundly

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<sup>138</sup> In *Black Paris*, Bennetta Jules-Rosette describes the coincidence of this period “when the foundations of the French empire began to shake” (49) with the first of four Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs (1956, 1959, 1966, and 1973), which was held in Paris on September 19, 1956. She remarks on the ideological tension between employing physical (i.e. violent) or aesthetic means to achieve political liberation, noting that it was in fact the latter, following the lead of Senghor, which won out in the end (Jules-Rosette, 61). James Baldwin’s essay “Princes and Powers,” written for *Encounter* magazine recalls this critical event, which was attended by almost all of the literary and political figureheads of the trans-Atlantic Black liberation movement (including Césaire, Senghor, Richard Wright, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, and countless others) to investigate the relation between politics and culture in the search for a resolution of the current crisis of Negro civilization, still under the thumb of European colonialism and racism. Baldwin describes “the great variety of heritages, experiences, and points of view which the conference had brought together under the heading of this single noun [Negro],” with varying degrees of criticism toward imperial domination and of the place of Negro peoples within this power play. He concludes, citing the speech of Richard Wright, with the idea that “it marked, in fact, the beginning of the end of the European domination” (160 & 169).

confrontational and revolutionary, albeit quasi-transcendental depiction, of the colonized subject in relation to the world of colonialism.<sup>139</sup>

Working in the era dominated by Négritude, African literature just prior to independence already exhibits visible signs of moving beyond the movement toward a more open discourse on the ambivalent position of the black subject in colonial society. In order to more clearly see the distinction I am making between what I have called “classical negritude” and its “baroque” counterparts, I will turn by way of example to two representative texts by French African writers that illustrate (explicitly or implicitly) the kinds of tensions (or lack thereof) emblematic of classical and baroque discourses of Africa. The first is celebrated French/Guinean author Camara Laye’s 1953 novel *L’Enfant noir*, a canonical text in francophone literature, which has been subjected to much scholarly attention and criticism. *L’Enfant noir* is the autobiographical account of a young Laye’s childhood in colonial Guinea, which he spends between his father’s workshop compound and sojourns to his mother’s native village. Traditional images of African life dominate the first four chapters of the book, after which Laye begins to recount his experiences at school: “J’ai fréquenté très tôt l’école. Je commençai par aller à l’école coranique, puis, un peu plus tard, j’entrai à l’école française” (81). There is very little in Laye’s account that actually pertains to his formal education as his memory is strongly affected by the social hierarchy of an adolescent pecking order between upper and lower classmen and the disciplinary cruelty of “le maître.” The irony of his early education comes to the fore in his mention of “le fameux certificate d’études qui, en fin de compte, devait nous sacrer ‘savants’” (87-8). It is clear from the quotation marks

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<sup>139</sup> Frindéthié, *The Black Renaissance*, expounds on a theory of “The African Critic as a *Griionist*,” a physical combination of the words “griot” and “ironist,” which illustrates the complex juxtaposition of African culture with the Western literary tradition, the fabrication of a hybrid “reality,” and the “quasi-transcendental dream” that nonetheless extends into the domain of universality through its utterly human contrasts of beauty and profanity. Frindéthié’s Griionist is an ambiguous character that is “committed neither to the center nor to the periphery, but only to modes of becoming, to lines of flight” (176). The Griionist always engages with an ironic glance of reservation and a two-toned discursive strategy that remains suspended between affirmation and sedition, and in this sense s/he retains an ambiguously detached status, that of “self-conscious actors, always suspicious of any absolutism” (177). The indistinct counter-position and subversive complicity implied by the Griionist’s approach are very much at the heart of the question of baroque language, a duplicitous *relation* with existence and the intangible force that drives its unfolding.

around “savants” that the young Laye questions the ultimate end of this foreign education that is imposed upon him, and the conflict between the older and younger students, which ends with a heroic intervention by Laye’s father, takes center stage in the narrative drama, after which the story turns to the traditional coming of age ceremonies in his Malinké culture.

In contrast with the confusion surrounding his introduction to Western culture through education, the young Laye’s appreciation for the mystico-magical elements of his traditional upbringing is evident in his admiration for his father’s secret little black snake, which his mother tells him is “le génie de ton père” (15) and which, according to his father, is, “le génie de notre race” (17). Laye is also fascinated by his mother’s ability to assume the form of her totem, the crocodile, whereby she has the privilege of approaching, without fear of harm, the river during the rainy season when it becomes filled with “[d]es crocodiles partout menaçants,” for, as he remarks with childlike lucidity, “le totem ne peut se dévorer lui-même” (79-80). Although he recognizes that his maternal uncles living in the village of Tindican share this same power, he apparently never learned what his own totem was, stating almost whimsically: “Le monde bouge, le monde change; il bouge et change à telle enseigne que mon propre totem—j’ai mon totem aussi—m’est inconnu” (80). This is the first and last reference to his totem. Still, the text makes clear that the young Laye participated in, though his enrollment in school did not allow him to complete the regular coming-of-age ceremonies of the Malinké people: first the “cérémonie des lions,” in which the youths’ courage is tested by taking them into the forest and surrounding them with the imitated roars of lions; and then the ensuing ritual of circumcision in which the boy becomes a man through a painful rite of passage. These events are described in great detail, the first of which Laye describes as “enfantin” (119), recognizing, however, that the effect of the lion ceremony—inspiring fear and uncertainty—is not at all childish, and that it is “la nécessaire préparation au douloureux rite de passage qu’est la circoncision” (122). Laye’s account of his childhood seems caught between a somewhat bewildered attachment to the individual value of his French education, mixed with twinges of nostalgia at the progressive estrangement from his Malinké cultural and communal identity. In a particularly revelatory passage early on,

Laye states: “Bien que le merveilleux me fût familier, je demeurai muet tant mon étonnement était grand” (16). Whereas the young narrator excels in his Western education despite the mysteries associated with the politics of social comportment, he shows relatively little interest in engaging wholesale with his own familiar cultural heritage, participating almost out of a sense of obligation or a detached curiosity.<sup>140</sup>

There is a sharp contrast between representations of traditional Malinké society and young Laye’s Western education, especially in the first eight chapters of the book before he leaves home to further pursue his education in Conakry. However, *L’Enfant noir* does not critically engage either the world of his ancestors, instances of which he describes with an almost naïve fascination, or that of colonial education, which he encounters in much the same way, with cautious admiration. The two worlds meet in rare instances and only through subtle juxtapositions of a more symbolic order that do not support any sustained reflection or critique, as in the example of Laye’s unknown totem.

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<sup>140</sup> The stunned silence of Laye concerning his native culture may be explained in part by some questions surrounding the authorship of the text, as Adele King remarks in *Rereading Camara Laye* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), Building on decades-long suspicions regarding the authorship of *L’Enfant noir* and Laye’s second and vastly different (both in style and tone) novel, *Le Regard du roi*, King presents a strong case that *Le Regard du roi* was written in large part by a Belgian and former Nazi cooperator, Francis Soulié with almost total independence from anything Laye himself did, and *L’Enfant noir* was in fact co-authored by a group of four people, including Soulié and another Belgian and former Nazi collaborator, then editor at the Plon publishing house Robert Poulet who helped Laye with the intricacies of French grammar, and two women, Aude Joncourt and Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux, the latter of which was instrumental in connecting Laye to the Ministère de la France d’Outre-Mer. King also notes how Laye’s first truly post-colonial novel *Dramouss* (1966), continuation of the story of *L’Enfant noir* that was well received by African and some French critics for its political message, “can be read as a fictionalized autobiography,” and she points to a specific passage that elusively describes Laye’s involvement with two French women who introduce him to many people, one of whom solicits his collaboration for the consolidation of the French-African Union. King recognizes that “[c]areful reading of *Dramouss* suggests that Laye had been groomed for a role supporting French colonial policy for some time. Exactly how he was discovered was not clear, but the novel suggests it was through one or several women, including an older woman with influential contacts and a young woman who was his lover.” (41-46). However, King recognizes that, unlike *Le Regard du roi*, which represents a mythical and almost surrealist vision of Africa through the eyes of a European explorer (a vision that is itself quite suggestive of Soulié’s own distanced perception of Laye’s Africa, *L’Enfant noir* is at least partially Laye’s story, however many times revised or edited by the voices of others. She cites a statement by Laye that he rewrote the manuscript of *L’Enfant noir* seven times, and he also reported in a 1954 interview with Radio France that because he had to “adopt a certain tone in the novel [...] some of his memories of Guinea could not be used” (24). Whether or not these accusations are entirely or even partly true, Abiola Irele, “In Search of Camara Laye” *RAL* 37:1 (spring 2006), pp.110-27 argues that the evidence is inconclusive, Christopher Miller makes a good point in chapter 4 of his *Theories of Africans* (1990), proposing that in traditional (oral) Mande society, the notion of collective vs. individual authorship would have made the collaborative effort of writing seem like a natural extension of collaborative story-telling (114).

His own cultural heritage and traditions are presented as interesting bits of information that require no real investigation, seen already as the vestiges of a disappearing past. For example, as he is leaving for the capital city of Conakry, where he will enroll in a technical school, and saying goodbye to the people he had known since his “plus tendre enfance,” Laye remarks: “ce fut comme si soudain je prenais congé de mon passé même” (158). The willful yet somewhat nostalgic abandonment of the past for the promise of a Western education inscribes Laye’s attitude within the discourse of the “civilizing mission,” for which the “primitive” traditions of the past represent mere elements of consumption by a public eager for images of the exoticized other who is the passive recipient of this “civilization.”<sup>141</sup>

A particular instance in which Laye’s vision of the world turns more and more toward modernity, accompanied by an almost patronizing description of traditions, appears during the prelude to the rite of circumcision. Laye describes the event not with the emotional intensity of a youth undergoing a rite of passage into manhood; rather, he reflects on the paradoxical nature of a joyous celebration clouded by the anxiety of the impending circumcision. In the midst of the celebratory atmosphere the dancing youths are presented with gifts that add to the festivity. Amidst the traditional gifts being given the other boys, the young Laye is presented with “un cahier et un stylo” by his father’s second wife. He is initially confused by the gift but later recognizes his second mother’s good intentions in that the notebook and pen were the signs “d’une occupation qui, à ses

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<sup>141</sup> Though *L’Enfant noir* was initially celebrated and heralded as a literary masterpiece in Europe, receiving the Prix Charles Veillon in 1954, the text received rather ruthless condemnation by both French and African critics for presenting an impossible vision of colonial Guinea in which the inherent problem of colonial relations and cultural confrontation is ignored, or perhaps suppressed. Mongo Beti’s critique of the text that appeared in the journal *Présence Africaine* in 1954 condemned Laye as a colonial sympathizer who paints an unrealistically idyllic portrait of African life, consisting of snapshot images of age-old traditions and lacking any critical stance vis-à-vis colonialism. Though Mongo Beti, then writing under his real name, Alexandre Biyidi, pays a backhanded complement to Laye’s sensibility, “une sensibilité peut-être maladroitement exploitée,” he identifies “la monstrueuse absence d’envergure et de profondeur” and “une certaine tendance au romantisme de mauvais goût” in a book which presents “rien [...] qu’un petit bourgeois européen n’ait déjà appris par la radio, un reportage de son quotidien habituel ou n’importe quel magazine de la chaîne France-Soir.” (419-20) Less a personal attack on Laye, Beti’s criticism of the book emblemizes a particular political perspective of a time in which stereotypical images of Africa such as those presented by the media and an anthropological curiosity about “primitive” African cultures are considered counter-productive to an agenda of African emancipation and autonomy espoused by the African intelligentsia, a reality, which Adele King describes in *Rereading Camara Laye*, how Laye “was not part of the group around Alioune Diop [...] and was not accepted by the African intelligentsia” (30).



yeux, passait celles du cultivateur ou de l'artisan" (131). The devaluation of traditional occupations in favor of the bourgeois lifestyle characteristic of the colonial "évolué" is not only a notion Laye has obtained from his early schooling, but is also apparently supported by Laye's "second mother" and possibly others in the community.<sup>142</sup> In this sense, it is quite possible to read *L'Enfant noir* as a valorization of the colonial model of the "petit nègre" (so harshly critiqued in Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs* only one year prior) in need of the colonial father to raise him or her out of the infantile traditions of an archaic cultural identity that is intriguing on its surface but admittedly no longer of any real value.<sup>143</sup> The general image in Laye's novel is one of a young African male infatuated with European education and its presumed opportunities, an infatuation that is personified in the character Marie with whom the young Laye falls innocently in love in Conakry: "Elle était métisse, très claire de teint, presque blanche en vérité, et très belle [...] à mes yeux elle était belle comme une fée!" (182-3). This apparent infatuation with the white woman (or her approximation: "presque blanche") and her culture is what Frantz Fanon critiqued in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, in his chapter "L'homme de couleur et la Blanche." He describes "ce désir d'être tout à coup blanc" which impels the colonized subject to seek the affection of "la Blanche" by proving that he is "digne d'un amour blanc," and in so doing "épouse[r] la culture blanche, la beauté blanche, la blancheur blanche" (51). This relationship helps to explain why Laye's work was so brutally criticized for portraying an overly simplistic view of French-African colonial relations: not only is he in love with the almost white Marie, he is besotted by "la femme/civilisation Blanche," and he seems to buy into the same limited vision of the Négritunist African soul and the realization of its expression through "la langue blanche" of the French colonial mistress.

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<sup>142</sup> A similar instance appears when the young Laye is about to depart to Conakry to pursue his education, an event that is attended and eulogized by several griots. Laye describes the effect of their flattery as a distraction from his worries and also a confusion, which leads him to muse: "sans doute sommes-nous si habitués aux hyperboles des griots, que nous n'y accordions plus attention" (Laye, 162-3). One of the most respected traditions seems superfluous in the face of a different world for which Laye is headed, and in which he has already been, in a sense, for quite some time.

<sup>143</sup> On the contrary, Miller argues in *Theories of Africans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), that the idyllic seduction and mythical idealization of *L'Enfant Noir* reveals a cultural authenticity in that it greatly resembles the Mande oral tradition (124).

Regardless of the convoluted complicity involved in its fabrication, *L'Enfant noir* represents a complex, yet unequal juxtaposition between a timeless and universal caricature of the black colonial subject who desires assimilation and “Frenchness” above all else and a tribute to a disappearing cultural heritage that nonetheless neglects to critically engage the antagonistic colonial relationship that drives these two conflicting narratives. Still, this does not detract from its artistic merit of Laye’s text.<sup>144</sup> *L'Enfant noir* is indeed a classic text, for it presents a static ideal, a processed fiction of Africa and the African subject that denies reality for the sake of a narcissistic attraction to the transcendental ideal of “la Blanche.”<sup>145</sup> Yet even within the classical rigidity of *L'Enfant noir*’s stylistic rigor and representational efficacy, it is possible to see the traces or blockages where baroque *fuites* may have otherwise appeared; particularly in a stifled voice overruled by the confusing and competing voices and mechanisms of the novel’s (re)production. Thus the book appears to be somewhat disembodied; it has been subsumed by estranged Western words that provide a well-executed, but decidedly skewed exaction of a romanticized ideal of colonized existence. Arriving at the city, the young Laye confesses his double existence between two cultures—“j’étais ici et j’étais là; j’étais déchiré” (169)—statement which only hints at the internal struggle of his apparently flawless enjambment of these two different worlds.<sup>146</sup> Only when one reads the novel for what it is *not*, examining the sentences to uncover the untold story of

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<sup>144</sup> Adele King also shares this view, remarking that *L'Enfant noir*, though politically pre-packaged and stylistically altered is still Laye’s story, and even the apparent indiscretion concerning *Le Regard du roi* does not preclude that Laye offered some of his own suggestions for the text. Thus, King concludes that if these two works of African fiction were classics before, they should be classics now.” (173-4) And, even Mongo Beti recognizes that Laye is “un authentique poète” (“L’Enfant Noir” *Présence Africaine*, 1954, pp. 419-20).

<sup>145</sup> In this sense, *L'Enfant noir* conforms to the mythical portrait, described by Albert Memmi in “Portrait du colonisé,” of a “regard lancé sur le colonisé, qui n’aurait fait qu’adoucir la mauvaise conscience du colonisateur” (119), to which he contrasts: “le portrait réel du colonisé [qui] est fonction de cette conjonction” between “la mystification colonisatrice” and “ces conditions concrètes, génératrices de carences” (121).

<sup>146</sup> Within the changes imposed by modernity and its technological advancement, there is an attempt to preserve, or adapt, his ancestral heritage, which is apparent in Laye’s occupational choice to be an engineer, a modern equivalent to his caste vocation of blacksmith. It is clear that a simple return to the past is impossible, but perhaps there is room within the changing present to carve out a space where traditions can survive, to a degree, in some form or other.

colonial violence that tears the subject and society in two--only then can one glimpse the *other* story that might be hidden somewhere else, off the page.

In contrast, the 1956 novel *Une vie de boy* by Cameroonian author Ferdinand Oyono writes the pages absent from Laye's text and recounts with arduous criticism the violent trauma of colonial relations in francophone Africa. Unlike Laye's manicured autobiography, the poignant critiques and satirical sores are left open in Oyono's fictional creation, which ironically represents a more realistic depiction, in a baroque allegory, of the African colonial condition. Like *L'Enfant noir*, *Une vie de boy* tells the story of a young boy coming of age in a French African colony. However, the difference is in the way that Oyono's text represents the interaction between Western and African worlds in a way that accentuates the conflict between modernity and tradition in the field of colonial relations, rather than further encoding the dominant ideology of colonialism. This difference is apparent in the use of either the definite and the indefinite article to qualify the stories of *L'Enfant noir* and *Une vie de boy*: in the first instance it *the* story of the black child growing up between indigenous traditions and Western education in colonial French Africa, while in the second it is *an* account of a boy whose life constitutes a negotiation of identity between two diametrically opposed cultural perspectives. Whereas *L'Enfant noir* appears as a somewhat distanced and disembodied account of "the black child," a figure of colonial rhetoric that perpetuates a negative stereotype of the infantilized colonial subject, *Une vie de boy* immediately contextualizes itself in a specific cultural nexus of a particular historical epoch—colonial Cameroon. The text, though in French, is packaged as the two notebooks of Toundi's personal journals, reportedly written in Ewondo, a trade language of central Cameroon; this detail points to a linguistic subtlety that embodies the tensions and contradictions between colonial and indigenous cultures. This tension is clear from the very beginning of the pre-text, which takes place in neighboring Spanish Guinea; an anonymous first-person narrator is roused by drumming and embarks on a voyage to the place where Toundi lies dying. His very first utterance is a question: "Que sommes-nous? Que sont les nègres qu'on dit français?" (Oyono, 13) The act of questioning the relationship between being at the same time "nègre" and "français," even as he is lying on his death bed in the narrative

framing of the story, illustrates an awareness of the fundamental paradox of the French colonial *mission civilisatrice* that colonial African subjects were considered to be members and citizens of the French Empire, yet at the same time were not accorded rights or social status equal to those of their white colonial counterparts. Toundi's journals, intimately recounting his experiences as an indigenous houseboy for a colonial administrator, are presented to the reader in translation, a discursive move of dissociation that pre-figures in many ways the linguistic modifications of postcolonial writers who understand their task as translating their own stories and languages into French.<sup>147</sup> The story thus presents Toundi's life (after death) and the disjuncture between two coexisting yet completely separate worlds, which was initiated, as was the case in *L'Enfant noir*, by his encounter with French education and the French language. Toundi explicitly links the concept of reading and writing with "cette manière de Blanc" which he finds intriguing (15). Toundi's fascination with the ways of the Whites actually leads to a dispute with his father that ends up forcing him from his home to live at the Catholic mission in the capacity of "boy," or servant, to Father Gilbert. In contrast to "l'enfant noir" whose father is endowed with the mystical power of foresight with the help of a small magical black snake, Toundi's biological father "avait la magie du fouet" (17) which he used on his son, making him a more fatally flawed character in the *trauerspiel* revealed in *Une vie de boy*.

*Une vie de boy* is no doubt a tragic story, from its opening with the powerful scene of the discovery of Toundi's moribund body by a group of vacationers in the neighboring Spanish Guinea to Toundi's increasing disillusionment as he slowly uncovers the ugly truth of French colonialism in the narrative told in flashback. This disillusionment occurs primarily after the death of Father Gilbert, who had given him the

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<sup>147</sup> The inscription of another language, even as a mere suggestion, is a key element of the African text as remarks Kwaku A. Gyasi in *The Francophone African Text: Translation and the Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006). Writing about the works of Ahmadou Kourouma, Sony Labou Tansi, Herni Lopes, and others, Gyasi proposes: "Rather than simply a reflection of local color or regionalism, the African words, accents, rhythms in African novels are essential to their structure and their philosophical, sociological and literary import. By introducing these features, these African writers deconstruct the form of the French novelistic genre and subvert Euro-centric discourse to produce their own personal styles and counter-discourse" (16). This counter-discursive move appears, for example, in the song of Ondua, the "joueur de tam-tam," which is specifically presented in translation (Oyono, 47), as well as dialogue written in the creolesque "petit nègre" (p. 40), in order to accentuate the different levels of linguistic and, by extension, social functions within a highly differentiated society.

baptismal name Joseph, when Toundi becomes the “boy” of the colonial Commandant of Dangan. It is while negotiating between the physical and psychological spaces of his double identity, mirrored in the schism between the “quartier indigène” and the spaces occupied by “les Blancs”—including the school, the hospital, the prison, M. Janopoulos’s social club, and his master’s residence—that Toundi becomes aware of the overt racism and segregation of French colonialism.<sup>148</sup> This other world of the whites becomes personified in the character of the Commandant’s wife, whom he simply calls “Madame.” His initial impression of Madame is one of biblical proportions as she is described in words reminiscent of the Song of Solomon: “Ma main appartient à ma reine aux cheveux couleur d’ébène, aux yeux d’antilope, à la peau rose et blanche comme l’ivoire” (74). This glorified image of “la Blanche,” a physical fascination that is shared by other inhabitants of the *quartier indigène*, encapsulates Toundi’s desire to be a part of the white world, a domain in which he does not yet realize he has no place except on the margins. What distinguishes *L’Enfant noir* from *Une vie de boy* is a constant undercurrent of ironic self-deprecating remarks in the latter, which show an awareness on Toundi’s part that in aspiring to be like the Whites, he is acting in complicity with the racist discourse of colonial domination. These remarks also confront and profane the transcendental myths of the French civilizing mission to the savages, notably through repeated references to the Whites as wild animals (elephant, panther, snake, etc.), and descriptions of their behavior, which lead the reader to question who are the real “savages” in the text. The first case appears immediately after Toundi expresses his fascination with the writings of Father Gilbert and “cette manière de Blanc”; he introduces himself and his lineage, stating: “Je suis Maka par ma mère et Ndjem par mon père. Ma race fut celle des mangeurs d’hommes. Depuis l’arrivée des Blancs nous avons compris que tous les autres hommes ne sont pas des animaux.” (16) This statement at once recalls not one, but two distinct

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<sup>148</sup> In spite of this separation, there is a perceptual *va-et-vient* between the two, as Toundi remarks: “Bien que Dangan soit divisée en quartier européen et en quartier indigène, tout ce qui se passe du côté des maisons au toit de tôle est connu dans le moindre détail dans les cases en potopoto. Les Blancs sont autant percés à nu par les gens du quartier indigène qu’ils sont aveugles sur tout ce qui se passe.” (107) See also the passage in the church when Toundi recalls sitting with the other *indigènes* in the nave of the church, whereas “les Blancs ont leurs places dans le transept,” and watching the flirtations going on between the men and women (53-4).

cultural heritages for Toundi, presenting a pluralist vision of Africa that confronts the colonialist reduction of the homogenous *indigène colonisé*. Furthermore, when juxtaposed with the savage notion of “des mangeurs d’hommes,” the recognition of the French “mission civilisatrice” and its project to instill “les droits de l’homme” in the populations of the colonies enacts a subtle irony that exposes the absurd caricature of “primitive,” “uncivilized” Africans as terrible monsters who eat other people as well as the pretentious assumption that it was the Whites who had taught them otherwise. This move is emblematic of the way in which Toundi (and by extension Oyono) appropriates the “white way” of writing precisely in order to contest it, using language and its descriptive power differently in order to reveal the false assumptions of Western “civilization” and present an alternative African discourse through a critical and confrontational style that “writes back” to the colonizer.<sup>149</sup>

A second example of Toundi’s “writing back,” occurs in his first encounter with “Madame,” the news of whose arrival had for him seemed “une grosse blague tant elle était inattendue” (72). However, when she does come, after having touched her hand, Toundi is overcome by a mixture of affection and embarrassment: “Désormais ma main est sacrée, elle ne connaîtra plus les basses régions de mon corps” (74). This gesture speaks to the complex of inferiority, dirtiness, and promiscuity characteristic of early European depictions of Africans, for in stating that he will never again touch the nether regions of his body, Toundi simultaneously elevates Madame (a symbol of the absolute splendor of French culture) to the status of a pure and perfect object of admiration while denigrating her for having touched his hand that heretofore had been in contact with his body parts. In confronting or contaminating the sublime with the profane, as Frindéthié has noted, Toundi’s gesture subverts the social hierarchy, and the abomination of the sacred deconstructs the rigid divisions of colonial absolutism in favor of a more relativist

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<sup>149</sup> This notion is generally espoused in relation to postcolonial literatures, for example Bill Aschcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989). However, I propose that it is present even earlier in colonial literatures, as well as in some of the confrontational rhetoric in early négritude thought such as Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939).

and “quasi-transcendental” other-world.<sup>150</sup> The irony is particularly poignant as Toundi later uncovers the illicit affair between Madame and the prison manager, Monsieur Moreau, who is described as “l’Eléphant blanc,” a reversal of the false conception of the *indigènes* as wild animals (94). The ensuing disintegration of Madame’s physical attractiveness and her psychological well being illustrates a growing disenchantment with the “manière de Blanc” as Toundi begins to further see the human, i.e. dirty, promiscuous, savage side of his colonial master and mistress.<sup>151</sup>

From the initial description of Toundi (“Il était déjà une charogne avant d’être un cadavre” [14]), the reader is confronted with the grotesque realism of a decaying body—possibly also a metaphor for a moribund African continent ravaged by centuries of exploitation. In exemplifying an acute morbidity that recalls the baroque emphasis on the human body, *Une vie de boy* can be read as a baroque allegory that enacts the sorrow-play of Africa’s demise, from the introduction of the kind colonial father (Gilbert) to his replacement by the order of the Commandant, and the accompanying loss of tradition and residual melancholy that eventually leads to Toundi’s self-alienation, exile, and inevitable death. Oyono’s staging of *Une vie de boy* as a posthumous reading of the recently deceased Toundi’s personal journals enacts an intensely temporal performance through the *mise-en-abîme* of the text itself, a move that implicates and draws the reader/spectator into the action, thereby simulating the baroque effect of disturbance, “étourdissement,” or disruption. As Iain Chambers notes in *Culture after Humanism* (2001), “[i]t is this realization ‘of a truly temporal predicament’ that so profoundly animates the Baroque dissemination of allegory and irony” (80). It is the biting irony of Toundi’s account and the allegorical significance of *Une vie de boy*’s being-in-time, as it points ahead in many ways to the styles and themes that will be adopted by later “postcolonial” writers, which make the text a “baroque” work of art. The historico-material specificity of the text in its critical engagement with the conflictive socio-political environment and the skewed

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<sup>150</sup> This encounter is shortly followed by an intense story session in the “quartier indigène” in which “Mekongo, l’anien combattant” tells of his encounter with a prostitute, “une vraie blanche, cheveux couleur de la barbe de maïs, yeux de panthère, les fesses comme une pâte collée au mur” (89-93).

<sup>151</sup> Relatively early on, in a conversation with Sophie, while seated with the baggage in the back of the Commandant’s pick-up on the way to an outlying village, Toundi notes “Les bonnes manières de Blancs, si c’est seulement pour entre eux, merde alors!” (60).

power relations that constitute its precipitating force reflects a certain necessary ambiguity characteristic of human being in a world that is itself composed of multiple impossible worlds, mediated by the conscious creative act.<sup>152</sup> Whereas a baroque work multiplies such instances of existential angst or uncertainty, in a classical work they are the absent para-text that is constantly begging to be born, largely suppressed by the weight of a linear narratological development. While *Une vie de boy* does follow a progressive diegetic structure, the forward movement of the protagonist is couched in a retrospective point of view, thanks to which the reader is already aware that Toundi's story is the story of his death and that the narration is moving to an inevitable endpoint. Consequently, the reader is unburdened by the question of what the ultimate outcome is going to be and is free to engage the story as a whole to discover the subtleties and subversive undertones in the language, the spaces, and the characters that animate the text. And the text itself illustrates Toundi's flight, both literally and figuratively, in the sense that it leaves open the question of what will become of his text, which remains intact to recount the tragic story of his demise, only as a result of his death-bed decision to flee the hospital (ironically referred to as the "Crève des nègres") and to take his slim chance of flight into Spanish Guinea where his journal, along with his moribund corpse, will be found and read by another.<sup>153</sup>

### **C. Le Devoir de violence: the postmodern/postcolonial problematic**

The 1920's and the 1950's mark two pivotal moments in the history of African literature that prefigure the postcolonial baroque, which came into its own with the publication of two major works in 1968: Yambo Ouloguem's *Le Devoir de Violence* and

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<sup>152</sup> For example, Toundi describes an unforgettable scene in which M. Moreau is whipping two Africans suspected of having stolen from M. Janopoulos, manager of the exclusive "Cercle européen," a scene that foreshadows in many ways his own untimely end. As Toundi observes the brutality, he recognizes the inherent contradiction and hypocrisy of colonialism: "Je pense à tous ces Blancs qui veulent sauver nos âmes et qui nous prêchent l'amour du prochain. [...] Je me demande, devant de pareilles atrocités, qui peut être assez sot pour croire encore à tous les boniments qu'on nous débite à l'Eglise et au Temple..." (115) It is Toundi, not as a passive observer, but as an active critic who, through his ironic wit, makes visible the impossible relationships that define this particularly conflictive society with a boldness described as "la folie des grandeurs" (120). This type of engagement is what ultimately lands him prison.

<sup>153</sup> I will take up the notion of the work itself as the material result of the story it tells in more depth in Chapter VII in terms of Calixthe Beyala's 1988 novel, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, specifically with regard to the way the text that apparently results from its own narration constitutes an escape or a Deleuzo-Guattarian *ligne de fuite*.



Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. These two texts, because of their singular innovativeness, are particularly interesting for the consideration of the problematic categories of postmodernism and postcolonialism as they pertain to African literature, as well as how these notions relate to the baroque.<sup>154</sup> As I move toward the post-colonial era, I think it important to recall the implication of the colonial within the post-colonial, as Tim Woods remarks in *African Pasts: Memory and history in African Literatures* (2007): "Whilst colonialism did exist in historical fact, it may not be relegated simply to history; for memory, there can be no 'before' or 'after' the colonial age: the colonial is in the postcolonial" (20-21). Richard Werbner rightly recognizes in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, that "[t]he *post* in postcolonial is a marker of dynamic complexity: posted with both hands, not one" (4). The double-vision of the baroque aesthetic described by Buci-Glucksmann can be invoked to characterize the difficult negotiation of post-colonial rhetoric, as well as elements of a postmodern stylistic embodied in Frindéthié's "Griironist." The particular convergences and divergences of postcolonial and postmodern theoretical discourses, not only as they relate to African literature, but also to the larger global web of political interactions, have been the subject of lively debate among contemporary scholars and critics. First of all, in *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* (2000), Ato Quayson suggests an integral link between postmodernism and the postcolonial, arguing that "[p]ostmodernism can never fully explain the state of the contemporary world without first becoming postcolonial, and vice versa" (154). He understands postcolonial discourses as providing the socio-cultural specificities that are lacking in the philosophical and linguistic abstractions of

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<sup>154</sup> Professor Amadou Ly notes this pivotal moment in African literature, stating: "Ouologuem c'est plutôt l'iconoclaste. C'est quelqu'un qui dit "vous-mêmes, vous me cassez les oreilles avec votre art nègre. Votre art nègre est une construction qui n'existe pas. Votre négritude je ne m'y reconnais pas." C'est quelqu'un qui conteste. Mais Kourouma a ouvert la voie à des gens comme Sony Labou Tansi, comme, je ne sais pas, Tchicaya U' Tam'si, comme tous ces auteurs-là qui, actuellement d'ailleurs, se manifestent dans la littérature qu'ils appellent là-bas, en France, le mouvement de "la migritude," c'est à dire au fond des poètes africains migrants qui ne se reconnaissent pas dans l'Afrique, qui ne se reconnaissent pas par l'Europe, qui sont dans l'entre-deux. Donc il y a une nouvelle tentative de secouer encore l'institution par Kourouma qui introduit dans le roman ce qui relève de l'Histoire, ce qui relève de la mythologie, ce qui relève des croyances traditionnelles populaires, et surtout aussi une sorte de baroquisme langagier où on fait une création dans les langues africaines, en particulier le malinké et le français." (See Appendix A)

postmodernism, seeing the two ideologies as reciprocal physical and metaphysical components of a counter-modern critique.

Similarly, but perhaps more critically of postmodernism, in an essay entitled “Circling the Downspout of Empire,” Linda Hutcheon argues that what differs between postmodernism and postcolonial (as well as feminist) discourses is that the latter “have distinct political agendas and often a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the post-modern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action” (168). In a later article, “The post always rings twice: the postmodern and the postcolonial,” Hutcheon reflects on the discursive limits of postmodernism in reference to a museum exhibition in Toronto from 1989 to 1990, entitled “Into the Heart of Africa,” which presented a collection of African artifacts procured by Canadian missionaries and military personnel near the turn of the century in the historical context in which they were taken/received. However, Hutcheon remarks that while the exhibit was “postmodernly deconstructive; it was not postcolonially oppositional” (222). In order to be postcolonial, Hutcheon argues, the exhibit would have had to “make a judgment about the effects of colonization” and not only present these effects: “What from a postmodern perspective might be read as irony or ambiguity becomes, from a postcolonial one, evasion” (223-4). For a postcolonial stance, it does not suffice to challenge the dominant narrative voice of Western History with an ironic postmodern challenge of plural perspectives on the historicity of African artifacts; rather, there must be direct confrontation, sign-posting the postmodern rhetorical devices and making clear their intended effect of the discursive challenge. In this sense, one may understand the postcolonial as that which is self-consciously post-modern, deconstructing with a purpose that goes beyond criticism to propose alternative modes of re-construction.

Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem’s infamous inaugural publication, *Le Devoir de violence* (1968), provides a powerful example of a rhetorical performance that goes beyond mere recollection or representation of Africa, to expose and exploit the complex post/colonial relations that make up Africa, African literature, and African politics. In his essay, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?,” Kwame Anthony Appiah explains a similar point of contention between the two discourses of

postmodernism and postcolonialism, paying particular attention to Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*. While Appiah notes the similarity between the two in terms of the function of the prefix "post" as a space-clearing agent (348), he marks a very important distinction in Ouologuem's work:

"Because *Le Devoir de violence* is a novel that seeks to delegitimize not only the form of realism but the content of nationalism, it will to that extent seem to us, misleadingly, postmodern: misleadingly, because what we have here is not postmodernism but postmodernization; not an aesthetics but a politics, in the most literal sense of the term" (352-3).

The conscious political action of "postmodernization" that Appiah attributes to *Le Devoir de violence* is what makes it part of a poignant postcolonial critique; "and its post-," he writes, "like that of postmodernism, is also a post- that challenges earlier legitimating narratives" (353).<sup>155</sup> Ouologuem's text, divided into four parts, reconstructs "la véritable histoire des Nègres," not just the violent drama of the first half of the twentieth century, but beginning much earlier in the thirteenth century (9). In presenting "La Légende des Saïfs," Ouologuem writes almost seven hundred years of African history, not as a glorification of pre-colonial African civilization, but as an account of "la domination exploitatrice" of "l'empire Nakem" over countless other chiefdoms and minor tribes. Consequently, upon the arrival of French colonialists, Ouologuem writes, "le colonialiste, depuis longtemps en place, n'était autre que le Saïf, dont le conquérant européen faisait—tout à son insu!—le jeu" (31).<sup>156</sup> Thus, colonization is not portrayed as a domination of

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<sup>155</sup> For Chris Bongie, the "post/colonial" is neither a material reality nor an ideological hypothesis, but a third space of constant negotiation between colonial and anti-colonial narratives of a failed (or continual) de-colonization that cannot escape the residual scars of colonial violence in the construction of modernity. He writes: "The violence of modernity is one to which the entire world has been *consciously subjected*, but it is, ironically enough, only in the wake of this violence and as an unending supplement to it that the hybrid world of post/coloniality can emerge" (*Islands and Exiles*, 15). Similarly, in his book *Packaging Post/Coloniality*, (2005) Richard Watts states: "Inasmuch as it is possible to identify a postcolonial aesthetics and politics and distinguish them in their forms from those of a globalized practice of literary postmodernism, an important part of the project of the works that collectively appear under the heading of postcolonial literature is to represent the shades of gray in a world that had previously been divided between black and white" (119).

<sup>156</sup> In the preface to *The Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, which is a revised version of the preface to the 2004 re-edition of *Le Devoir de violence*, Christopher Wise describes Ouologuem's close contact with the historical situation that inspired the first part of his novel, namely the Tidjaniya Islamic empire of Toucouleur El Hadj Oumar Tall (Nakem in the text) which consolidated its rule over the Dogon (inscribed in the text in the anagram N'Godos) in the nineteenth century. Ouologuem himself was a Dogon whose

Blacks by Whites but, rather, as a game of complicit power-playing, “l’alliance entre Blancs et Noirs” which, in the second section of *Le Devoir de violence* ends with the rescue of Blacks from Saïf’s tyranny by the Whites: “[l]a négraille, sauvée de l’esclavage, accueillit, heureuse, l’homme blanc, qui, souhaitait-elle, lui ferait oublier la cruauté de Saïf...” (41). Ouologuem’s fiction, which in fact paints a more realistic picture than the historical (fiction) accounts created and disseminated by Europeans and their African collaborators, thus represents a more complex version of French-African history, marred by the repeated ups and downs of false liberations.<sup>157</sup> The complicity of black and white power relations in furthering a certain centuries-long “devoir de violence” of subjugating Africans, as well as a style of composition that enacts a similar violence through a distorted mirror, are some of the defining “baroque” characteristics of this work of post/colonial African literature.<sup>158</sup>

In his book *Against the Postcolonial* (2005), Richard Serrano begins with a discussion of this text as a “postmodern parody of the postcolonial.” His is a work that illustrates both a radically ironic style of writing that in problematizing postcoloniality as such expresses a harsh critique of colonialism and also some of the inherent biases that reappear in the ambiguous condition construed as “post/colonial.” One such example is in the third section of the novel, “La Nuit des Géants,” in which Ouologuem denounces an “art nègre,” which he characterizes as “[t]rève de redondances infécondes et anachroniques, voilà l’art nègre baptisé ‘esthétique’ et marchandé — oye! — dans

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family had cooperated with Tall for their own advantage. (viii-ix) One can read, for example, the account given by Sankolo: “tous les ‘morts’ des six derniers mois étaient, comme lui-même, zombies: morts-vivants, asservis et utilisés comme main-d’œuvre gratuite par Blancs et Noirs...” (Ouologuem, 114).<sup>157</sup> Concluding the section titled “L’Extase et L’Agonie,” Ouologuem recounts a visit of “le fils de Saïf” to Paris upon this occasion, which resembles that of the son of the king of Assini, Prince Aniaba, to the court of Louis XIV centuries prior in which Louis XIV said to him, “il n’y a donc plus de différence entre vous et moi que du noir au blanc.” This statement is reprised by the governor general to the son of Saïf in order to mark the solidarity of royalty, thereby extending the implication that “Maintenant [...] c’est de l’identité d’une nature royale qu’il s’agit entre l’Afrique et nous.” (43) Appiah also notes, in a way that echoes “the pitfalls of national consciousness” depicted by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the positioning of a postcolonial national bourgeoisie that assumed the role of the departed Western oppressors. (“Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” p.353). Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des indépendances* is precisely about the disillusionment with a false, or unfulfilled national independence.

<sup>158</sup> Bernard Mouralis, in his article on Ouologuem’s *Le Devoir de violence*, which appeared in 1987 in *Nouvelles du Sud* No. 5, (pp. 63-74) notes that Ouologuem’s work was heralded, among other things for “l’exubérance baroque de la narration” (64).

l'univers imaginaire des 'échanges vivifiants'!" (110). Appearing in the wake of the publication of such controversial representations of Africa from writers such as Camara Laye who were too tightly associated with French metropolitan culture and ideology, *Le Devoir de violence* seeks to go beyond such crass caricatures that propagate false images of Africa and pacify the guilty consciences of its exploiters.<sup>159</sup> However, Ouologuem goes further than merely critiquing; *Le devoir de violence* actually embodies its critique by enacting a discursive violence *against* this skewed vision of a postcolonial compromise.

Initially heralded as the first truly "authentic" African novel, *Le Devoir de violence* received short-lived praise, as Ouologuem was quickly accused for having plagiarized passages from numerous other literary works, thus perpetuating the scandalous rumors that seemed to continually surround African fiction. Richard Serrano cites Christopher Miller's *Blank Darkness* (1985) in arguing that the degree of "perverse" sophistication with which Ouologuem lifted or paraphrased passages from other texts ultimately dismantles the binary of authored and quoted discourse, making questions of direct quotation and narration irrelevant. Serrano argues further that extremely subversive political implications lie in the "nasty details" of these unacknowledged references, which resist notions of the "authentic" universal African experience sought after by proponents of a postcolonial paradigm. (18-19)<sup>160</sup> Serrano cites the specific example of a

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<sup>159</sup> Appiah notes in particular the ways in which Ouologuem's work differs, both in form and in content, from the early realist (not realistic) and nationalist works of Laye and Achebe, which "authorize a 'return to traditions' while at the same time recognizing the demands of a Weberian rationalized modernity" ("Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" p. 349). As another example, the *Anthologie de la poésie nègre*, edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor and prefaced by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphée Noire*, which first appeared in 1948 and again in its fourth edition in 1969 following the 1966 Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs in Dakar, though often confrontational in its overt treatment of the themes of racism and oppression, exemplifies a literary complicity that is not far removed from the international political machinery of Françafrique (c.f. François-Xavier Verschave) and the alliances Ouologuem describes between France and African kings. For a brief account of the 1966 Congress, see Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris*, (67-70).

<sup>160</sup> Appiah remarks how, from the get-go, Ouologuem's text is subversive in that its claim to recount the "véritable histoire des nègres," echoes Andre Schwarz-Bart's 1959 Holocaust novel, *Le Dernier des justes*, "echoes [that] are surely meant to render ironic the status of the rulers of Nakem as descendants of Abraham El Heit, 'le Juif noir'" ("Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" pp. 350-1). The idea of anything being veritable, pure, or isolated is put into question by Ouologuem's compositional technique. Christopher Wise, in the preface to *The Yambo Ouologuem Reader*, takes up the issue of plagiarism, arguing in a manner consistent with Ouologuem's own claims that it was the editorial staff of

passage from *Le Devoir de violence* relating the recovery of the body of a German soldier from the Yamé River near the end of the First World War (Ouologuem, 144), a passage that bears an uncanny resemblance to a scene in Guy de Maupassant's "Boule de suif," in which the body of a Prussian soldier is found in a river during the 1870 invasion of France. Noting how "Ouologuem's irony works in several directions all at once," Serrano first recognizes the historical impossibility of a German soldier being found in the African Sahel, then points out that the reference to Maupassant reminds readers that German soldiers would have been found in France, not only in 1870, but twice more thereafter during both the First and Second World Wars. In this sense, according to Serrano, *Le Devoir de violence* "mocks one of the most pious moments of French national history by overtly borrowing from a text already more than a little ambiguous in its depiction of that moment," a moment which, not without irony, was the precipitating cause for the colonial expansion of the French Empire into the inner reaches of Africa. Furthermore, Serrano notices that this juxtaposition "implicitly invites a comparison of the French colonization of the Sahel with the German invasion of France," thus portraying the French colonizers as also colonized in their own right. (Serrano, 25)

Not only does Ouologuem's ironic pastiche enact the kind of "postmodern" discursive violence that de-constructs the dominant White and Black, (post)colonial discourses, Serrano remarks that it is also a critique of (or perhaps an homage to) earlier African writers such as Camara Laye, whose aesthetic and political assimilation of (post)colonial cultural and economic influences is reflected ever so ironically in Ouologuem's textual appropriations: "*Le Devoir de violence* is the simulacrum of a text constructed through a methodology that he attributes to his fellow African writers (or their ghostwriters)" (28). Still, his work demonstrates a sustained masking of its criticisms, which leads Serrano to conclude that "Ouologuem *seems* to be whatever the critic wants to see" (22), a kind of literary chameleon whose undisclosed citations and distortions simultaneously reveal and conceal the multiple, competing, and sometimes

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Éditions du Seuil who had omitted quotation marks around certain passages, offering the explanation that "the unusual nature of Ouologuem's borrowings [...] may have led the novel's editors to conclude that simply deleting references to [Graham] Greene, Maupassant, etc. offered to them the easiest solution to the creative problems his manuscript posed" (xiii).

contradictory points of view in Ouologuem's text. The deliberate irony of Ouologuem's work resides in the anamorphic representation that is one thing, yet again always something else when viewed (or read) from a different angle, for the entire textual collage that ensues does anything but present a single, ideologically coherent narrative, let alone anything that might begin to resemble "a veritable history." It constitutes, rather, a very baroque ensemble of competing perspectives that all together shock and disorient the reader with the kind of aesthetic violence for which baroque art is so well known.<sup>161</sup> In typically postmodern fashion, that which is shown to be false is also undoubtedly true, for as Serrano astutely observes, Ouologuem "constructs universals in such a way that they collapse upon themselves—and upon other universal pieties that they resemble" (30). *Le Devoir de violence* is an authentic African text in its very *inauthenticity* that debunks the postcolonial myths of a recuperation of "authenticity" or "tradition" (34). The idea of a singular "authentic" Africa is an invention of Western geography and geopolitical demarcations, which does not take into account that plural and polyglot African cultures have been evolving over centuries in contact with each other and outside influences. There is no purity, only contamination, and the innumerable shades of gray that exist in between. Ouologuem's violence is carefully embedded and disguised so as to appear out of nowhere, unexpectedly and continually, like literary guerilla warfare. In violently confronting the West with its own alienated image, mutated and re-appropriated in an inappropriate rhetorical form of subtle embedded citation, or in-citation, Ouologuem goes beyond the question of material or psychological de-colonization. Rather, he recognizes the material and historical residues in postcolonial Africa that remain steeped in colonial ideology (just as the postmodern is always still in some ways modern), and by deploying a *griironist* approach (borrowing Frindéthié's term), he is able

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<sup>161</sup> This fundamentally subversive mode of representation—ways of saying "autre chose"—is characteristic of a baroque aesthetic practice, an idea about which Serrano himself muses in an essay, "Calixthe Beyala: griotte postmoderne ou plagiaire," which discusses the notion of textual appropriations by Ouologuem and Beyala, likening it "l'emprunt fabriquant" of baroque architecture in Rome (338). Just as the appropriation of the ruins of the Roman Empire created a new art and architecture for a new city and a new Europe, Serrano describes how modern literary canons (from Europe and elsewhere), as well as indigenous mythology and oral traditions, are being re-appropriated and innovated in ways that render questions of authority and ownership (and also plagiarism) utterly ridiculous, bringing together bits from abroad to depict a mosaic image of post/colonial post-modernity.

to simultaneously operate within those contingencies while exceeding their limits through a subversive post/coloniality that puts all certainties into question.<sup>162</sup>

In the final, brief section of the novel, titled “Aurore,” the European Henry engages in a dialogue with Saïf. Over the course of the preceding section, “La nuit des géants,” Henry holds various titles, including “abbé,” “doyen,” and “évêque” and, along with the ethnologist Fritz Shrobenius (a reference to the early twentieth-century German explorer and racist ethnographer Leo Frobenius) and the governor Vandame, he experiences the violence of the European colonization of Africa.<sup>163</sup> Henry tells Saïf how, the previous day, he had stepped into a cinema to see the film *Zamba*, which claimed to be inspired by the story of Nakem-Zuiko (in fact, it is a 1949 film about a boy lost in the African jungle who is adopted by and later rescued from a gorilla named Zamba). Henry enters the theatre “en pleine tuerie,” does not understand what he sees, and is confused by the intrigue of the film. Still he watches and arrives at the following conclusion:

Mais pour tous, la force de frappe reste essai sur soi-même, bien moins pour exprimer une vision sanglante du monde que pour parvenir à un accord imminent entre la vie et le monde. Ici, ce qui importe, c’est que, toute vibrante de soumission inconditionnelle à la volonté de puissance, la violence devienne illumination prophétique, façon d’interroger et de répondre, dialogue, tension, oscillation, qui, de meurtre en meurtre, fasse les possibilités se répondre, se compléter, voire se contredire. (199)

Henry sees violence (the representation of violence) as an opportunity to see beyond a singular, simplistic vision of the world, as there is an implicit violence in every

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<sup>162</sup> In *Les Damnés de la terre*, in the section “De la violence,” Frantz Fanon discusses decolonization as “toujours un phénomène violent” in which one dominant “species” of man seeks to replace another “species.” Fanon views this confrontation as “un programme de désordre absolu” that results from the confrontation of two antagonistic forces. (29-30) Within this chaos, Fanon recognizes that “[p]arce que les décolonisations ont revêtu des formes multiples, la raison hésite et s’interdit de dire ce qui est la vraie décolonisation et ce qui est une fausse décolonisation” (45).

<sup>163</sup> These three characters represent the major axes of the colonial project (religion, science, and politics) that I think Ouologuem wants to implicate by showing how the French “mission to civilize” is a violent and horrific farce. One particularly poignant instance occurs in the seventh part of “La Nuit des Géants” when, “Pendant les quatre années de la guerre, années d’affolement, de terreur, de joies qui font rire, de rires qui font peu, il sema la bonne parole du très doux Jésus parmi les indigènes frappés de panique au bruit des explosions des obus et des éclats de grenades...” ; a grim chaos in which “[p]our la première fois de mémoire d’Africain, le soleil ardent du mois d’avril, par la folie des hommes, avait peine à percer la couche épaisse de fumée de l’incendie” (140). Mammadu Badikko provides a specific analysis of the century-long terror (up to the present) of European influence and meddling in Central Africa in his book *Françafrique: l’échec, L’Afrique postcoloniale en question* (Paris: Nubia, 2001).



encounter, and it is precisely in this capacity for prophetic illumination through forcing possibilities into dialogue, even contradiction, that reveals the true nature of existence. This scene can be read allegorically as a confession on Henry's part of his unknowing involvement in the destruction of Africa; the cinema, which he enters in the midst of ongoing violence, serves as a metaphor for Africa, a place in which he feels disoriented and out of place, but having gone in, he has to stay and watch. This scene is particularly revealing of baroque psychology, not only in the cinematic representation, which is far removed from Henry's actual experiences in the African Sahel, but also in the implication of the reader/spectator in his or her engagement with what is read as a kind of unavoidable *devoir de violence*. Indeed, in the tension created by the violent juxtapositions between conflicting historical narratives and literary traditions that come together in the novel, the reader is disoriented, affronted by the violent style and content, but s/he must stay and watch, so to speak. This intentionality on Ouologuem's part begs the question of the role of the reader in propagating a certain kind of discursive and ideological violence that was, and still is, very much a part of the literary culture of francophone Africa. The reader, in a sense, is also a post/colonizer.

This tenuous complicit power dynamic between Africa and the West is illustrated in the chess game between Henry and Saïf in the closing scene of the novel in which both sides continually seek recourse to violence. In play is a viper hidden in a flute, which is intended to kill Henry, and over the course of their discussion, which is a game of conscious hide-and-seek, Saïf is made aware that Henry knows of the lethal ruse. Still, neither can back down, and the chess game comes to symbolize life in which all the pieces are deployed, as Henry explains: "pour sauver la tête du roi – votre conscience – pièce immobilisée" (204). All is intended to save the king, and it is precisely because of the position of sovereignty that life is reduced to a power-play, "une confrontation fraternelle" between the two sides in which "chaque joueur est un objet fonctionnel dont le joueur est le jouet de l'enjeu" (205). The game is out there, and it is a violent game, which makes each player a toy. There is no other option but to play. And in the final pages of the text, the narrative also becomes a play, a dialogue between Henry and Saïf, stripped of the artificial trappings of a descriptive plot, that proceeds in a back and forth

of rhetorical and actual chess moves. And in a typically baroque fashion of *non-finito*, there is no endgame. Rather, the narrative resumes with the dawning of a new day, and “Dans l’air, l’eau et le feu, aussi, la terre des hommes fit n’y avoir qu’un jeu” (208). With what is perhaps a reference to French aviator and explorer Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s 1939 memoirs, *La Terre des hommes*, which recounts his travels over Africa and his crash and survival in the Sahara desert, Ouologuem clearly states that life is only a game; but what’s more he makes it quite clear, from beginning to end, that he is playing, borrowing, referencing, and making connections. Ouologuem’s *Le Devoir de violence* performs this necessarily violent game in his tactical maneuvering that transgresses the boundaries between European and African literary sources and modes of composition, putting into practice what Henry says: “Il faut avoir l’art de se tromper intelligemment, en brouillant les pistes” (204). In this respect, his work of “muddying the waters” ushers in the next generations of postcolonial writers who will devise their own linguistic and rhetorical strategies of literary illusionism in order to gain acceptance, even notoriety, in the world literary landscape still always dominated by Western aesthetic and ethical standards, while simultaneously undermining the validity of those standards through their contamination with various traces of the profane, the irrational, the white-masked other that exists within the sacred order of Western logocentrism.

### **In-Conclusion: A Ruptured Continuity**

What these unexpected stylistic and thematic literary juxtapositions of post/colonial writing accomplish is the kind of *mise-en-relation* of differences that characterize a Glissantian “baroque mondialisé,” not only as a style of representation, but a more profound “manière de vivre” enacted through the performativity of the work. It is also important to recognize the stages in its development, stages in which the violent subversive undertones of an African neobaroque are already hinting at their presence, operating in the cracks of the system in and around the beautiful yet sedated art of classical Négritude and serving as a testing ground for various mixtures of agreement and dissent that would later come to characterize postcolonial African literature. In his work *Les nouvelles voies de la littérature africaine et de la libération* (2001), Michel Naumann characterizes this period from 1950 to 1970 as a reaction against the poetic and holistic

Négritude of Senghor, influenced by Baudelaire, and Rimbaud, the surrealist writings of André Breton and Paul Éluard, Harlem Renaissance poets, and steeped in German romanticist philosophy. These are the same influences that I have identified as the precursors of an African baroque aesthetic, which shows that the line (or smudge, perhaps) between baroque and classical is in some cases a very fine (or blurry) one. Naumann asserts that this classical Négritude “fut critiqué au nom d’une *négritude* non essentialiste, moins fondée sur une philosophie que sur la tragique expérience des peuples africains,” which sought nonetheless to glorify and rehabilitate Africa through the transmutation of the word of the traditional griot. (26) Though it may share many of the same literary, cultural, and political influences, the baroque (non-essentialist) negritude does not simply represent a philosophy or *an* aesthetic, but rather combines multiple, competing, complementary, and contradictory elements in a story of life (and death). For Naumann, this movement announces the advent of a new literature, dubbing it “une littérature voyoue” to illustrate a further distancing from a rational “*logos* instrumentalisé” in order to depict a more universally human experience of modernity, of a “vulgar narco-economy” that is embodied in the apparent madness and perverse violence that ravages “[l]e continent [qui] a souffert comme nul autre de l’unification négative du monde accomplie par l’Occident” (7-9). However, far from taking an Afro-pessimist stand, Naumann recognizes that in “L’État socio-politique du pays [qui] est une émanation mortifère et corruptrice du non-être,” and that the new African literature adopts a therapeutic function of psychological, or psychosomatic healing, operating as a talisman or a fetish via “des dynamiques pré-linguistiques,” and representing “un geste défensif contre l’aliénation [... par] l’appel d’une communauté alternative et un acte de dévotion envers un Dieu libérateur” (12-14).

In this “nouvelle littérature voyoue,” which shares many of the stylistic traits of Claude Blachère’s “négritures” referred to at the beginning of this chapter, I see the signs of the baroque spiritualism that Louis Dupré remarks in *Passage to Modernity*.

Characterizing the Baroque as “The Last Comprehensive Synthesis,” Dupré notes:

[D]espite tensions and inconsistencies, [there is] a comprehensive spiritual vision of Baroque culture. At the center of it stands the person, confident

in the ability to give form and structure to a nascent world. But—and here lies its religious significance—that center remains vertically linked to a transcendent source from which, via a descending scale of mediating bodies, the human creator draws his power [...] The tension between the two centers conveys to the Baroque a complex, restless, and dynamic quality. (237)

The sensualist, spiritualist quality of “la littérature voyoue” reflects this tension between the human and the divine, which is nothing like a detached and pious spirituality, but rather rests on a relation of the human body with the divine. Naumann reads this tension in the writings of Congolese writers Tchicaya U Tamsi and Sony Labou Tansi, in whose work “le *verbe* et l’être se rejoignent” (16). It is not a question of a Renaissance *ressemblance* between beings and their Name (in the sense of a defining essence), but rather of a dynamic and creative being that resides in the power of the Verb and its ability to create not only the self, but the world surrounding it. The new baroque aesthetic in African literature is an active postcolonization with a will to create, as exemplified in *Le Devoir de violence* through Sankolo’s account of his sufferings at the hands of the slave-traders: “En ressuscitant, tous les opprimés ont sauvé l’essentiel d’eux-mêmes. Le vent les regarde, le silence les écoute. Le ciel est noir indigo, et je me découpe sur un fond d’azur tombé des nuages. Je donne des ordres, ma parole a la puissance du Verbe.” (121) Words are the sole recourse of the oppressed, but in them lies immense power. This kind of verbal *action* situates the baroque aesthetic of African literature in the expression of the unfathomable space between the being-creator and the being’s creator, and the proliferation of terrifying images and violent confrontations that fill that void of existence. Stylistically, it appears as the constant bumping up against of the transcendental with the non-transcendental, which Naumann recognizes in Sony Labou Tansi’s work as “un flot de métaphores étranges, d’hyperboles et d’oxymores, une forêt dédalienne de symboles, un gueuloir rabelaisien qui subvertit le français dans ses rythmes tumultueux, ses translitérations [...], sa violence et qui défèque sur l’injustice du monde” (19). How might one characterize such an excessive and horrific style of representation, which depicts and embodies the horrific excess and apparent madness of society, if not as baroque?

The particular problematic that I will discuss in the chapter that follows, paying special attention to Sony Labou Tansi but also to other writers of a “nouvelle littérature,” which has been defined as “baroque” in the way that it negotiates the relationship between reality and representation.<sup>164</sup> The descriptor of “baroque” invites a situated reading of African literature and culture; historical and geographical contextualization reduces the tendency to exoticize or in other ways set Africa apart as a strange case, while still holding to the particularities of African representation. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the baroque is an aesthetic of (counter) modernity, and Africa is in no way excluded from the changing dynamics of global twentieth- and twenty-first century realities. Reading and writing Africa in terms of the baroque, both in literature and in the daily activities that are represented and often exaggerated in literature, is a way to paradoxically concentrate on the unique situation of a geographical zone that historically has been the site for the most rapid and radical introduction of modernity, yet without isolating it from the network of relations in modernity with which it is undeniably associated. I maintain that it is possible to read what Naumann calls “les auteurs voyoux [qui] semblent à la fois en rupture et en continuité avec leurs aînés” (21), not as the end of the African Renaissance, but rather as a baroque fruition, a second climax, and a new beginning for African literature. Bearing in mind the complex political implications and rhetorical presuppositions of postmodern and postcolonial discourses, I will carve out an emergent space for dialogue within and against both of these discourses in the theoretical space of a baroque aesthetic, which characterizes the ambiguous position of Africa and African literary representations participating in postcolonial postmodernity while simultaneously subverting its orders to say something other.

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<sup>164</sup> See *Nouvelles écritures francophones: vers un nouveau baroque?* ed. Jean Cléo Godin (Montréal: Les presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2001), which treats especially and among other francophone literatures, the novelistic and poetic productions of African writers from the seventies, but especially of the eighties and nineties. In this collection, one particular work may be especially useful for our reflections here, Thécla Midiohouan-Gbikpi's essay, “Créations baroques et littérature fantastique chez Olympe Bhély-Quenum” (132-42), which looks at a trilogy of novels from 1960, 1965, and 1979, in which the baroque, understood as an estrangement, is read in the ambiguous *va-et-vient* between reality and the unreal, fantastic, or marvelous other-world, thus begging the reader to “*se situer dans un monde reel ou surréel,*” and in so doing, the work participates in the creation of that (sur)reality (133).

## **Chapter V: Baroque Aesthetics and Politics in Postcolonial Africa**

Ce qui le définit [le sujet postcolonisé], c'est sa faculté de s'engager dans des pratiques baroques, foncièrement ambiguës, mobiles et révisables par principe, même là où existent des règles écrites claires et précises.

-Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie*

... la stratégie discursive qui présente des traits de baroque au-delà de sa luxuriance est portée par une lame de fond subversive. Parce qu'elle rend possible cette mise en opposition, elle permet de décrire cette anté-politique.

-Joseph Paré, *Écritures et discours dans le roman africain francophone post-colonial*

### **Introduction : Getting past the posts, into the baroque**

Introducing a collection of essays, *Les littératures africaines de langue française à l'époque de la postmodernité* (2004) Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink analyses some of the fundamental questions pertaining to African literature in the postmodern era, beginning with Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances*, both published for the first time in 1968, because they were the representative echoes of a profound disillusionment following the granting of formal independence by a colonial France that remained deeply implicated in the political and economic affairs of new African nations.<sup>165</sup> In the introduction to *Les littératures africaines de langue française à l'époque de la postmodernité*, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink notes that the concept of 'postmodernity' in African thought and literature is radically different from its understanding in Western literary criticism, which is generally preoccupied with deconstructing meaning. In contrast, postmodernity in African literature is very closely associated with postcolonialism, as shown in my analysis of Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* in the preceding chapter. As such, Lüsebrink remarks: "Les littératures africaines, en l'occurrence de langue française, ont ainsi donné une inflexion

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<sup>165</sup> For in-depth discussions of the neo-colonialist influences that are at the base of this disillusionment, see François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris : Stock, 1998); also, Mammadu Baadikko, *Françafrique: l'échec : l'Afrique postcoloniale en question* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

spécifique à cet ensemble de théorèmes à la fois esthétiques et épistémologiques que l'on englobe sous le terme de 'postmoderne'" (7). The major components of this postmodern critique, including a questioning of the fundamentals of modern thought such as the autonomous subject, an ontological concept of culture and the notion of progress, along with the monolithic unities we call History, Society, Nation, Reality, are challenged in a significant and culturally specific way. Lüsebrink identifies four major axes of this critique: first, "*les rapports interculturels*" between African and European literatures that highlight a complex of dependence, appropriation and dissociation by African writers; second, "*l'interculturalité textuelle*" that reconsiders the relationship between African and European, as well as colonial and postcolonial, and oral and written cultures, arriving at a heterogeneous and multi-linguistic conception of culture that necessarily transgresses territorial boundaries of colonial and national divisions; third, "*les rapports intergénériques et intermédiatiques*" that place literary and artistic expressions in contact with performative modes such as song, dance, and theatre, as well as with new technological media such as the press, photography, and film; and fourth, "*de nouveaux thèmes à partir de nouvelles réalités*" that engage social, political, and cultural realities of globalization, new forms of civil conflicts and violence, fatal diseases, and new forms of political, mental, cultural, religious, and linguistic resistance to globalization and modernity (Lüsebrink, 8-11). African literature in the 'postmodern' epoch represents itself and the reality from which it derives in terms of its complexity, which cannot be read in relation to any given "reality," for any such singularity is increasingly obfuscated by mechanisms of cultural production and representation in which the work itself is also entrenched. Thus, the underlying formal element that Lüsebrink identifies in this 'postmodernity' of African literatures is "*une écriture ayant rendu infiniment plus complexes les rapports à l'histoire, à l'identité, et à la langue*" (12). Part of this complexity is a critical engagement embedded within representation itself, and as such, African literature of the post-independence decades participates in the ongoing (re)iterations of postcolonial and postmodern discourses of African "reality." It is precisely this threshold between the critical and the aesthetic that I would like to explore

in more depth here, specifically in terms of baroque representation as it relates to the political sphere.

In “Postcolonial Postmodernity in Henri Lopes’s *Le Pleurer-Rire*,” Koffi Anyinefa recognizes a perceived inadequacy of postmodernism as a “Western discourse,” but also the limitations of the alternative “authentic” discourse of postcolonial theory—a specifically Anglo-American discursive tradition dealing with nations formerly under the direct rule of the British Empire, an experience which, both in colonial administration and in the transition to independence, was vastly different in francophone Africa—as another potentially destructive discourse of pretending to universalism and theoretical ambiguity (9).<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, Anyinefa identifies the value of each theoretical position, proposing that both are indeed capable of inhabiting the same text and that one need not privilege the postcolonial approach over the postmodern or vice-versa. Rather, he envisions a dynamic complementarity between the two theoretical discourses for engaging the rhetorical and material components of African literature, addressing positive socio-political agendas, material realities, and constructs of agency through active criticism and deconstruction of existent discursive and cultural significations. Accordingly, Anyinefa proceeds to distinguish several postmodern devices in Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* (1982), including a “postmodern conception of the novel that formally and thematically questions all coherent and homogeneous systems” (12). As instances of particularly postmodern strategies, he notes the multiplicity and discontinuity of narrative voices in the numerous paratextual interruptions and intertextual parodies that occupy the text itself, as well as the autoreflexivity of a narrator-writer embodied in the dictator Bwakamabé’s exiled ex-cabinet Chief (a double of Henri Lopes, himself the former prime minister of then Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo, from 1973-75), which in turn furthers the erasure of boundaries between fiction and reality on which *Le*

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<sup>166</sup> For essays concerning postcolonial theory and its relation to African fiction, see Samba Diop, ed. *Fictions Africaines et Postcolonialisme* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002); also a more general investigation of the two notions of “la francophonie littéraire” and “la théorie postcoloniale” is Jean-Marc Moura’s *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005); and the insightful essay by Anjali Prabhu and Ato Quayson, “Francophone Studies / Postcolonial Studies: ‘Postcolonizing’ through *Relation*” in *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, eds. H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 224-34.



*Pleurer-rire* so firmly insists in an epigraph on the first page taken from Boris Vian: “Les quelques pages de démonstration qui suivent, tirent toute leur force du fait que l’histoire est entièrement vraie, puisque je l’ai imaginé d’un bout à l’autre” (Anyinefa, 12-13 & 17). He mentions Linda Hutcheon’s term “historiographic metafiction” as a particularly useful mode of representation for reading Lopes’ novel in that it incorporates literature, history, and theory in a way that illustrates “‘a self –awareness of history and fiction as human constructs,’” and which constitutes the grounds for rethinking both “‘the forms and contents of the past’” (11-12). Indeed Lopes’ text does demonstrate this theoretical awareness of its own story as Anyinefa astutely notes concerning the various paratextual commentaries by the “editor” of the text, as well as the “Sérieux Avertissement” that ironically condemns the text as “une offense au bon goût,” With respect to literary norms.<sup>167</sup> While these subversive formal and thematic tropes of ‘postmodern’ character are not specific to African literature, Anyinefa underscores the “sociolinguistic reality” (even to the point of vulgarity) of the text as a distinctly postcolonial strategy, yet he also recognizes the implications of a “heterogeneous linguistic situation” as “corresponding to another postmodern transgression: the questioning of social and artistic frontiers in the work of art” (15). It is in this last sense that I see the cooperative promise of postmodern and postcolonial discourse, namely in the latter lending concrete historical, cultural, political, and linguistic material to bolster the critical stance of the former. Ultimately, Anyinefa concludes that it is of no importance whether a text is qualified as “postcolonial” or “postmodern,” stating that “the conceptual tool that best elucidates the text” is what matters (18). I maintain that the notion of the baroque emerges in response

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<sup>167</sup> The offensive quality of the text, which Lopes ironically points out, is that “ce style d’homme de la rue ne pourra séduire l’amateur du bel art. Si, à la rigueur, c’est ainsi que l’on parle dans nos rues, ce n’est pas ainsi qu’on doit écrire” (Lopes, 11), demonstrating a willful break with literary and linguistic conventions. Furthermore, in another paratextual insertion (an ongoing correspondence between the author and a fictional editor), Lopes preemptively confronts accusations of plagiarism such as those leveled against Ouologuem some years earlier, stating: “On me signale que ce passage rappelle monsieur Benoist-Meschein [an imaginary author],” and he critiques “les avocats de l’auteur, ignorants du droit de l’artiste à recourir au collage et préférant s’en tenir à la froideur de leur logique cartésienne, vont pousser les hauts cris et s’empresse d’accrocher en scapulaire à mon cou l’ardoise infamante des plagiaires.” In a backhanded and rather vindictive gesture to appease his imaginary assailants, he states: “Je ne dérobe rien à monsieur Benoist-Meschein, je lui rends hommage. Olélé, bonnes gens, voilà, avec ma révérence, mes guillemets tout à la fois ouverts et refermés.” (Lopes, 154-5).

to African literature, as a conceptual tool capable of negotiating the complex web of interactions between realities and their representations (and representations of those representations) that define a global epoch that is both postcolonial and postmodern, but neither one nor the other entirely. The game of masking and unmasking, and the reconstruction of meaning through complex aesthetic constructions, a poetic consciousness that envisions an other reality beyond the bounds of reason, and a world that presents itself purely in representational form, creating its own doubles in the shifting spaces of the play of appearances, are elements of a baroque aesthetic that are at work in the postcolonial African novel. In this chapter, I will look specifically at the ways in which the baroque operates in the postcolonial African novel, but also a correspondent political reality, which is described by Achille Mbembe in his book *On the Postcolony*.

#### **A. (Dis)Locating the Global Baroque : Nations and Novels**

In the midst of a nascent world in a state of taking off or “décollage,” the subject—small and insignificant in the grand scheme of cultural production, national politics, and global economic influences—assumes the role of giving form to the barrage of signs and sensory information that compose reality. This is how I envision the baroque in postcolonial Africa, a carving and rendering of form amidst chaos that takes place not so much in painting, sculpture, and architecture (as in the first Baroque), but in novelistic discourse and its relation to the everyday. As the title suggests, in his book *Écritures et Discours dans le roman africain francophone post-colonial* (1997), Joseph Paré analyses, the discourse of the post-colonial novel from francophone Africa, discussing the way in which the novel genre has become the most commonly practiced literary form after the colonial era because it is the most appropriate vehicle for francophone African writers to realize formal and thematic innovations and to communicate the worldview of a new African citizenry following national independence (21). These particular innovations draw from two distinct aesthetic axes: one is the incorporation of traditional African forms such as “des principes de l’orature” into the novel; the other is a “transfert analogique” of other, foreign, or Western mechanisms, such as “le polémico-fantastique, la parodisation, la métadiscursivisation et le recours à des formes de baroquisme” (97). While several of these discursive strategies, particularly that of parody, appear to be

linked to notions of postmodern theory discussed here above (a theory of which Paré makes little or no mention at all), it is moreover the last element—the “formes de baroque” —that I find particularly intriguing.<sup>168</sup> First, it is important to note the fundamental duality or duplicity in the structure of the post-colonial francophone African novel, a precarious positioning between two poles, the one African and the other Western, that clearly reflects the hybrid reality of post-colonial political and cultural reality. This hybrid reality—a kind of social and aesthetic *métissage* if you will—manifests itself both thematically and aesthetically in many novelistic representations of post-colonial Africa as the expression of a real, lived tension between traditional socio-ethnic cultural and linguistic organizations and the modern identity constructs of artificial nations and global superstructures that supplant (and supplement) these previous individual and communal demarcations.<sup>169</sup>

Sensing the limitations of a purely nationalist identity construct competing with these global forces, Paré clearly rejects the concept of “national literatures,” opting for a broader characterization of meta-national literatures. He cites two celebrated novelists, Malian Massa Makan Diabaté and Ivorian Ahmadou Kououma,<sup>170</sup> whose work, while clearly set and defined in the context of a particular national identity, draws from the Malinké aesthetic and verbal forms, which traverse and interpenetrate national boundaries, cohabiting and disturbing political delineations and thus de-emphasizing the

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<sup>168</sup> In his essay (in *Nouvelles écritures*, pp. 47-63) on the baroque and postmodern aesthetic in the work of Ivorian novelist Maurice Bandaman, Pierre N’Da also notes that the baroque and the postmodern are related by the fact that they both embrace a certain form or style of rupture, transgression, and subversion, which in Bandaman’s work “rappelle curieusement le style baroque et l’écriture postmoderne des grands romanciers de notre temps” (47).

<sup>169</sup> The historical context of the Cold War illustrates precisely the kind of supra-reality in and against which African states had to define themselves in the decades following independence. See Zaki Laïdi, *The Superpowers and Africa: The Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960-1990*, trans. Patricia Baudoin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), which describes the competing influences of US and European liberal democracy and capitalism versus a Soviet-sponsored socialism in the development of African nations. Interestingly, in the “sérieux avertissement” of Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-Rire*, he mounts a critique against “des forces obscures,” which are seemingly subversive ideologies amongst African peoples, and the note explains the choice of the word “obscure” because there was no consensus on whether the culprits are “imperialists” or “communists” (10). It is simply a question of negotiating some kind of autonomous or quasi-authentic African identity in between the influences of foreign super powers.

<sup>170</sup> Both of these authors have been theorized in the frame of a “nouveau baroque,” the first by Mamadou Bani Diallo of the École Normale Supérieure de Bamako who specifically engages the notion of comic “desacralization” as a means to transcend the ambiguity and complexity of the world depicted in art (154-62), and the second is mentioned (in passing) by both Godin and N’Da.

concept of nationalism and nationality as the sole dominant political ideology (Paré, 29). Conversely, national constructs are also susceptible to ruptures from within, as Lopes illustrates in *Le Pleurer-Rire*, when political unrest is attributed to ethnic differences: “Il expliquait le coup d’Etat par l’ethnologie et divisait le Pays en trois zones et autant de tribus principales. Notre histoire [...] n’était depuis l’indépendance, rien de plus qu’un affrontement entre ces trois groupes [...]” (Lopes, 29). This meta-nationalism that operates within a national context but pushes beyond these borders, both from the inside and from the outside, and systematically disrupts the fundamentals of national discourse, finds its representational corollary in the concept of meta-discursivisation, which implies a cohabitation of fiction and theory in the same text, destabilizing the narration from within with auto-reflexive critiques and commentary. As such, the novelistic discourse not only represents the tensions of two distinct layers of social stratification, but also enacts a similar discursive stratification through an auto-reflexive intra-textual tension. Critical interjections, such as those that appear throughout the text of Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* in the form of a fabricated correspondence between the writer and his editor, serve as an estrangement of the fictional representation; hence fiction is represented as an object of representation within representation itself in much the same way as the nation becomes an object of discussion within meta-national context of transnational ethnic or other group identities.<sup>171</sup> Its claim to authority is dissolved in the competing perspectives it portrays within itself. Paré explains: “Les réflexions qui introduisent les ruptures avec la fiction portent justement sur la problématique de la création romanesque pour se constituer comme un méta-discours dont l’objet est le discours premier” (123). The political and aesthetic innovations of these meta-discourses concerning both the nation and the novel illustrate on two different levels a fundamental tension that is intrinsic to the post/colonial condition of contemporary African realities and their representations

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<sup>171</sup> Beyond merely ethnic differences, a modern trend of identification beyond nationalism among urban youth is discussed by Tshikala K. Biaya in “Jeunes et Culture de la Rue en Afrique Urbaine,” (in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Filip de Boeck and Alcinda Honwan, pp. 12-31) noting the ways in which youth create alternative social spaces for group identification, often negotiating between an ultra-modern self-styling and the recuperation of more traditional practices such as dance, drink, and performance, creating a new cultural aesthetic through which an ambivalent and parodic *mise-en-scene* of the body enacts a kind of social violence against the status quo in and against which these youth are positioned.

that is emblematic of a baroque *détournement* in the *mise-en-relation* of some thing with its other.<sup>172</sup>

Explicitly linking the literary and the political (or real), Dominic Thomas' chapter on Lopes in his book *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa* (2002) discusses the subversive political implications of *Le Pleurer-rire* in the context of Achille Mbembe's postcolonial political theory and Lopes' own experience as a high-ranking government official under three separate regimes in the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) between 1969 and 1981. Thomas cites the polyvocality of the numerous paratexts in the text, noting how they reflect "the manner in which colonial/postcolonial, official/non-official, and insider/outsider constructs are not independently formed but rather mechanically clash in a mutually constitutive dynamic" (94). This clashing of contrasting perspectives combined in the discourse of the novel illustrates the complexity of the postcolonial baroque. And, it is precisely through such contrasts, not only in terms of style, but in the form as well, that the novel depicts and enacts its subversion. Thomas notes in the same way that the novelist (and the novel's novelist) resists and subverts political conventions of postcolonial African governance, *Le Pleurer-rire* also "resists and subverts novelistic convention while ultimately affirming its faith in the novel as an effective mechanism for the exploration of postcoloniality" (94). On the one hand there is a material necessity to function within the

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<sup>172</sup> Another case worth noting here is Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop's first novel *Le Temps de Tamango*, which represents a text, reconstructed 95 years in the future (in a utopian socialist republic in 2063) from the notes of a narrator, also included in the text, recounting the events of May 1968 in Senegal. In an interview, Professor Papa Gueye expounds the notion of baroquism in relation to this text, stating: "Maintenant, la spécificité de Boris Diop, c'est que dans l'utilisation du cadre historique et de ces éléments, il s'attache à détruire la référentialité de ces éléments là pour en créer d'autres qui ne dépendent cette fois-ci que des personnages libres et autonomes qui retrouvent leur réel et leur substance uniquement dans le cadre du récit, c'est à dire dans le cadre de ce qui est raconté par, et on verra, plusieurs auteurs, par le narrateur et plusieurs narrateurs. Donc c'est ça que j'ai appelé l'histoire fictive, c'est à dire, ce n'est plus l'histoire réelle, même transformée qui se retrouve dans le cadre romanesque selon les canons classiques, mais c'est beaucoup plus une invention liée à une imagination qui prend prétexte d'une histoire qu'elle cherche à subvertir, et à transformer, et à laquelle elle substitue sa propre histoire, et cette fois-ci l'histoire d'une réalité romanesque, l'histoire j'allais dire d'un personnage complètement narratif donc l'histoire littéraire." And also, comparing Diop to Montaigne, "C'est ça la complexité du baroque aussi, c'est-à-dire, le texte que je lis est plus complexe que la réalité qu'il évoque. C'est un aspect important du baroque littéraire, parce que vous savez, Montaigne, la manière d'écrire de Montaigne, il y a un processus chez Boris, c'est cette tentation, c'est l'entassement et l'accumulation du style par rapport aux choses qu'on rend." (See Appendix C)

limits of modern constructions such as the nation or the novelistic genre in order to participate in the productive mechanisms of global modernity. Yet, on the other hand, these limits are constantly surpassed, or subverted rather, by complicating the cultural and literary interpretational modes (the novel, the nation, the narrator) which, while essential to those very constructions become extremely forceful and critical counter-currents when fragmented or deconstructed. This imperative for subversive complicity—a kind of “devoir de violence discursif” if you will—and the tendency to deflate the distinction between reality and representation (fact and fiction) by implicating one in the other, are what I find most “baroque” about the postcolonial African novel.

What is most intriguing about this new form of baroque is that it is a theoretical tool devised by francophone African intellectuals themselves to analyze and discuss formal and thematic innovations of the post-colonial franco-African novel where other theories, such as postmodernism and postcolonialism (beyond mere historical or literary appellations), are found lacking.<sup>173</sup> In this theoretical shift toward the baroque, one can perceive a movement away from a re-inscription of “minor” literatures within a “major” discursive tradition such as the involutory “packaging” of African literature by Western publishers and critics alike. By inscribing the work and its own critique within the work itself, such baroque representations of historiographical metafiction are able to exact a directed criticism against the society portrayed in the work, while masking these intentions with humor, parody, and aesthetic innovation. This marks a resistance to critical appropriation of African literature by various academic discourses, which acts as a continuation of the false de-colonization of Africa that led to a new indigenous authoritarianism described in Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-Rire* as “l’environnement néocolonial,” an ongoing charade of alienation and oppression in which the principle powers have shifted from the white “*Oncles*” to the new revolutionary leader, “*Tonton*” (18). The play on words, from “*Oncle*” to “*Tonton*,” reflects a similar masking of the same reality with a more palatable and familiar appearance: hence replacing colonial with the false

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<sup>173</sup> Joseph Paré of the Université de Ouagadougou, Amadou Ly, Papa Gueye, and Ibra Diène of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Pierre N’Da and Logbo Blede of the Université de Cocody in Abidjan, and other professors from African institutions whose work appears in the anthology *Nouvelles écritures francophones*, are some examples. See also the texts of interviews reproduced in the Appendices.

positivism of post-colonialism, a state (and a discourse), which has yet to realize its full potential, does little to give voice to the beautiful complexities and intricacies of contemporary African literature.<sup>174</sup> Perhaps the readiness of African intellectuals to employ the baroque, as opposed to (or in addition to) the discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism, resides in the fact that, historically, the baroque has been discounted and “minorized” by French intellectual discourse, and as a result, it constitutes a discursive frame that has a historical foundation that runs counter to the dominant practices of cultural production of *la Mère-Patrie*. Consequently, utilizing a theoretical framework like the baroque, post-colonial African literature seems to consent to the tendency of French discourse to assimilate its francophone diasporic expressions into its own tradition, an integral part of “packaging post/coloniality” according to Richard Watts, all the while reserving a place *within that very tradition* that has typically been construed as deviant, or even distasteful.

Hence, the baroque represents a strategic moment in critical discourses on Africa and African literature, which I will explore in more depth in the remainder of this chapter, for as a theoretical construct it embodies precisely the necessary ambiguities to discuss political structures such as the nation and aesthetic genres such as the novel in an African context, while remaining globally and historically grounded in a tradition of counter-modern mentalities. As such, even more than other theoretical approaches that remain tied to the “post,” the baroque lends itself to the discussion of globalization and meta-national trans-discursivity not only in space, but also in time. What better tool might there be for the advent of a “littérature-monde,” which is likened to a “Copernican revolution” in its de-centering of metropolitan dominance and an end to the differentiation between French and francophone literature in favor of the creation of a world-literature in French? The language in the manifesto “Pour une littérature-monde en français,” which was first published on March 15, 2007, bearing the signatures of forty-

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<sup>174</sup> For the ongoing problems associated with the lingering effects of colonialism in its altered, “neo-colonial” forms, see John K. Marah, “Kwame Nkrumah’s Continental Africa: A Dream Deferred but Not Forgotten,” *Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Ama Mazama (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 17-31, esp. 18, which discusses Nkrumah’s important work, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), which is a takeoff from Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1939).

four writers who use the French language as a vehicle for creative expression, and which signals the need to go beyond the dichotomy that has been erected between metropolitan France and other French-speaking parts of the globe often referred to under the umbrella of “la francophonie,” itself seems to recall elements of a profoundly baroque psychology. It speaks not only of “l’effondrement des grandes ideologies sous les coups de boudoir, précisément... du sujet, du sens, de l’Histoire, faisant retour sur *la scène du monde*” (my emphasis), but also of “les somptueux portails d’entrée du monde dans la fiction” that are those initial forays into the global literary imagination from the mid 1970’s on. The evocation, first, of the “scène du monde” and, second, of the entrance of “le monde dans la fiction,” illustrates the very tension between reality and its representation or “le référent” which is disjointed in the baroque mind. Furthermore, the emphasis given to the “effervescence,” repeated three times in the short text—“effervescence des mouvements antitotalitaires,” “effervescence romanesque et poétique,” and “effervescence créatrice” in relation to “la tâche de donner voix et visage à l’inconnu du monde – et à l’inconnu en nous”—indeed seems to indicate a kind of baroque proliferation of words and of worlds that opens up the field of reality to those un-real faculties of the imagination and non-rational experimentation and the creative powers they wield.

In its hyphenated ambiguity, the term “littérature-monde,” conjures the specter of a Glissantian *Tout-monde*, which is the space of relation between subjects and the world.<sup>175</sup> In an interview published in the collection *Afrique Tout-monde* (2003), Glissant explains the difference between “mondialisation,” understood as the essentially Western socio-political and economic forces of globalization, and a “Tout-monde enfin réalisé [...] un tout-monde complet et total,” which represents an oppositional way of thinking, not in terms of singularity, but in terms of “une poétique de la mondialité [qui] est le contraire de la mondialisation” (13-14).<sup>176</sup> This poetic vision of the world, not as a

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<sup>175</sup> In *Traité du Tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), Edouard Glissant proposes this multiplicity of being “par élargissement la racine en rhizome, qui ouvre Relation...” (21), and specifically, its relation in/as language: “L’imaginaire irradie et se refait dans l’emmêlé du Tout-monde. L’emmêlement des langues `a son tour nous est rendu lisible par la langue don’t nous usons: notre usage de la langue ne peut plus être monolingue” (85-6).

<sup>176</sup> In an essay entitled “What was Post-Modernism?” John Frow gives an accurate definition of a postcolonial world system, stating: “The result of this new speed and flexibility of capital is neither a



reduction by a one-world order grounded in seventeenth-century ideologies of an interior nation state to its (inferior) other as Glissant points out, but as “le sentiment que son imaginaire et l’imaginaire du voisin se touche, se complète, se change mutuellement,” opens up spaces in between for the negotiation of plurality and ways “pour vivre réellement nos diversités” (14). What is interesting with regard to the notion of “littérature-monde,” then, is precisely the way in which literature, with its creative (re)defining potential, operates as the principal vehicle for the expression of such a poetics of globality and thinking the self only in relation to countless other selves in a poly-cultural *tout-monde*. And it is this tension between a totality of the world and the multiple fragmented or folded images that compose it, that makes contemporary African literature identifiable with the baroque aesthetic practice of maintaining openness and incompleteness by rendering a world that is itself unpredictably and constantly changing.

### **B. “Nouveau Baroque” and baroquisme in *Le Pleurer-Rire***

Although the manifesto of “littérature-monde” is a relatively recent phenomenon, it would be a mistake to assume that the practices described therein are singularly a twenty-first century development. Much to the contrary, the movement toward a critical literature of the world has been building, as I have shown in Chapter IV, since the early twentieth century and has only now fully emerged into the limelight in its postcolonial baroque flourishing. Interestingly enough, the baroque itself also represents a moment in history when the “whole-world” first appeared on the scene through intercontinental exploration, and one must also think of early texts that begin to bring the world into focus (albeit with a rather strong dose of exoticism) as the naïve beginnings of a much more relational, naturalized baroque world-literature today (c.f. Glissant).<sup>177</sup> Joseph Paré

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colonial order of direct domination nor a neo-colonial order of indirect domination of one nation-state by another, but a world system—which we might call precisely ‘post-colonial’—in which dominance is exercised by international capital through the agency of dominant nation-states and regions but in large part independently of their control” (149). This kind of postcolonial “mondialisation” stands in contrast to the mondialité of an other order of postcoloniality, the daily practices of populations acting in the uncontrolled *fuites* of a postcolonial political economy.

<sup>177</sup> One such example, of course, is William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in its treatment of the relationship between the civilized Prospero and savage Caliban as worlds collide in colonial encounters, which was re-worked by Aimé Césaire in *Une Tempête* (1969) and punctuated by Caliban’s recurrent cry of “Uhuru” the Kikuyu word for “freedom.” Césaire’s play reifies the master-slave dialectic and redefines the relationships between dominant and dominated groups for twentieth-century globality. One might also consider John

begins his discussion of “formes de baroque” in the post-colonial African novel with a reference to Bakhtin’s *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, in which the baroque novel is conceived as a kind of pathos, seeking to “se trouver et de se réaliser dans ce qui était étranger,” and thus the baroque is neither more nor less than a strategy of disguise, a masquerading of reality in estranged material surroundings (Paré, 112). If I may recall Jean-Claude Blachère’s “négritures” of African néo-romanciers who depart from the classical models of French writing (chapter IV “Baroque Traces”), what better tool than the baroque to qualify the expression of African thought that has come to inhabit the strange forms of French language and literary culture as the principle vehicle for its own creative potency?

The baroque, as we have seen, is characterized by a new relationship to reality and an epistemic shift, and the nature of this relationship is one that brings the very notion of reality into question through the all-encompassing presence and predominance of representation. Once again citing Bakhtin, Paré remarks that the baroque novel is “une encyclopédie des aspects du littéraire de son époque, et même de toutes les connaissances [...] possibles et unimaginables” (112). Accordingly, it is within the domain of representation that “reality” comes to encompass and include those areas that were originally beyond the scope of reality: the domains of the imagination and even further, the unimaginable. This is apparent in the novel through the juxtaposition of reality and irreality, an inherent tension Paré remarks in post-colonial African literature that is evidenced by various “scriptural audacities” that function in between “l’acte de traduire la réalité [...] et celui de livrer les rêves, les craintes, les peurs paniques” (35). Paré thus defines a “pathos existentiel” that affects not only the novelistic subject, but the novel itself, which is subject to the very same “conditions de production”—those of a complex and oppressive postcoloniality—resulting in a representation of reality that is very much one of “laideur et inquiétude.” (45-6) Accordingly, both in its form and its content, the post-colonial francophone African novel subscribes to an aesthetic

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Maxwell Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), which is a radical re-adaptation of Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*, and which not only disrupts and disfigures the plot of the story, but also the notion of the story itself as it presents the text as the writings of a lonely and isolated Friday, stranded on the desert island of urban England.

“démaîtrise”—described as a descent into madness or “le tracé de l’itinéraire vers la folie”—which functions in terms of the subject’s relation to “savoir” and “pouvoir” (Paré, 47).<sup>178</sup> Paré does not end with a purely negative figuration of the post-colonial African novel and the reality that it necessarily depicts; rather he identifies an aesthetic practice in the language of the text itself that constitutes a deconstructive maneuver and attempts to explain “la rationalité qui gît au cœur de l’irrationnel” (61). It seems clear that this particular thematization of the novel recalls the “baroque unreason” described in my first chapter where madness becomes an integral part of rationality.

Much like in the baroque, this madness also has its double in death or the negation of life as such. Paré cites Ahmadou Kourouma’s influential novel *Les Soleils des indépendences* as an illustration of the general disillusionment with the (neo-colonial) replacement of one form of domination by another after national independence was granted to former French colonies. Paré identifies, first and foremost, a certain existential grounding of the novel, which represents a two-fold vision of “la situation du Noir”: on the one hand, a “zombification” (which is no doubt a reference to Ouologuem’s “zombies morts-vivants” enslaved by the forces of modernity [Ouologuem, 114]) that was the result of colonization and ongoing neo-colonial exploitation; and on the other hand, a plurality that necessarily reflects the multiplicity of specific experiences and circumstances that each writer recreates (Paré, 45). Thus:

Autant l’individu est marqué, dès le départ par une espèce de non-vie,  
autant la communauté elle-même se révèle être une sorte d’anti-société.  
Sous cet angle, la démaîtrise appelle non seulement un espace de  
géologie irrationnelle mais aussi un mode discursif particulier  
d’actualisation où se manifeste une certaine hystérie. (Paré, 58)

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<sup>178</sup> Professor Papa Gueye also notes this kind of aesthetic “démaîtrise” in Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Le Temps de Tamango*, which, both in the text’s formal (its complexity and apparent disorder) and narrative (the apparently irrational choices made by the protagonist N’Dongo) elements, represents a kind of madness, which is not madness in a purely negative sense (the lack of reason or order), but in a transcendent sense: “La folie sage est une représentation ironique de la sagesse, c’est à dire, c’est cette folie simulée qui est posée comme un masque. Nous avons cela dans la culture africaine, dans les romans africains. C’est quand la marginalité affichée constitue la voie la plus sûre pour accéder à une vérité non-partagée ou non-révélee, ce qui fait que le fou pour la communauté c’est le premier à accéder à un vrai qui n’est pas encore partagé.” (See Appendix C)

The combination of death and madness, of the negation of life and an overabundance of hysterical energy operate not only as a powerful depiction of the denatured ambivalence of postcolonial society, it also represents a discursive modality to confront and contest these forms. Thus, both in its tragic irony and its discursive innovation, which borrows heavily from the Malinké tradition, *Les Soleils des indépendances* expresses and embodies what Paré calls a “radicalization of the novelistic project” which, in its structures and thematic, is thoroughly baroque.<sup>179</sup>

When Paré discusses the *baroquismes* in Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* (and he chooses to examine the “contamination” of postcolonial novels by baroque traits, not as “baroque en tant que tel,” but rather in terms of “baroquismes”), he underscores the fact that unlike the baroque of Early Modern Europe, which was an expression of torment and agony, “[d]ans le contexte littéraire africain le recours à des formes de baroquisme sert d’avantage à rendre manifeste le caractère hybride de l’œuvre littéraire et la vise subversive que permet cette stratégie discursive” (114). As an example, he points to the presence of “la voix de l’homme de la rue” in *Le Pleurer-rire*, which speaks through “radio-trottoir” with a parallel narration of the unfolding of political events, a counter-current that interprets reality with a “manque de réalisme” that occasionally assumes “une dimension fantastique” (Paré, 117). I will return to the notion of the fantastic in the next chapter. But the subversive element that Paré highlights is linked to the “mosaic of voices” in postcolonial African texts, which assumes numerous forms through local, popular, ethnic, or other verbal expressions. This “mosaic of voices” represents the confrontation of two (or more) distinct logical frames, namely that of the power structure and that of a more horizontal, inherently plural counter-discourse existing on the outskirts of officialdom that does not represent a real contest to the power of the dictatorial regime, only a temporary relief from its dominance. This notion appears specifically as “radio-

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<sup>179</sup> Kourouma is considered one of the first practitioners of a linguistic baroquisme, as noted by professors Amadou Ly (Appendix A); and Ibra Diene states: “Des écrivains comme Ahmadou Kourouma avec *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, appariassent comme être tout à fait originaux, mais en réalité Ahmadou Kourouma c’est la culture mandingue. Il a tout simplement repris la culture mandingue qu’il a peut être pu présenter avec un certain aspect caustique ; étant littéraire, il a peut être une belle plume, il a su peut être bien transcrire plutôt que de bien créer. En réalité, la plupart des proverbes, des jurons, des choses qui sont dans le texte sont des choses qui existent déjà dans la culture mandingue.” (Appendix D)

trottoir” in *Le Pleurer-rire*, and it does not constitute a direct confrontation or opposition to power, but an alternative articulation of the power structure that exists and plays coextensively with it. This other voice, or other voices, represents an alternative to “la folie du dictateur” through a process of re-articulation that permits the bodies of those voices to “vivre autrement ce présent désarticulé et chaotique,” thereby existing in accordance to the power structure, but in a different way (Paré, 120-1). I will agree with Paré that the subversive hybridity (read in terms of inter-cultural *métissage*) of the postcolonial African novel is very much a baroquish manifestation of reality and the unreal, fiction and fact blurred by the presence of representation itself, but I will go a step further to say that in its grotesque caricature of suffering, madness, and death (non-life), it is even more thoroughly baroque.<sup>180</sup> I find certain resemblances between Paré’s discussion of the world created by the African novelist and that of the baroque to be quite interesting and also beneficial for an understanding of the place of the Postcolony and its literature in the modern global web of interrelations. First, the destitute picture of Africa painted by francophone post-colonial novelists and illuminated by Paré’s analysis is a vilified, denatured caricature of the world meant to engage in a polemical debate with post-independence socio-political realities. He states:

Dans la mesure où la description que les romanciers proposent de l’Afrique post-coloniale est justement un concentré des rêves avortés, des conflits, des contradictions de toutes sortes mettant aux prises les dirigeants et leur peuple, la stratégie polémique apparaît comme le moyen de mettre en relief cette situation de formation et de confrontation de groupes antagoniques (99).

This discursive strategy essentially succeeds in what K. Martial Frindéthié has termed exchanging a “transcendental reality” for a “quasi-transcendental dream” (see the Introduction to Chapter IV): a deplorable social condition of Africa is represented (and to some extent exaggerated) in order to clarify the contrasts that exist in postcolonial Africa between relative excess and destitution. Recalling that an integral part of this aesthetic practice described by Frindéthié is the “blasphemous gesture” that confronts normative

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<sup>180</sup> I will make this case explicitly in the next two chapters in terms of Sony Labou Tansi’s *La Vie et demie*, Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, and Ken Bugul’s *La Folie et la mort*.

social structures with the unsightly otherness that is the product of their exclusion; the limits of knowledge and power are delineated and (un)defined in a way that allows for alternative discourses to arise in addition to categorical and hierarchical conceptions of social existence. These alternatives, as we have seen in the case of *Le Pleurer-rire*, do not necessarily constitute transcendental solutions, but may be considered parallel fictions (or dreams), the purpose of which is to cope with the chaos and disorder of dictatorship. Consider that perhaps the dream and the reality are the other way around, or interchangeable, in which case the transcendental dream is exchanged for a quasi-transcendental reality. Clearly in the baroque work, this is a question that is raised repeatedly, and in either case the result is the moment of encounter between one and the other, identity and difference. The “baroquisme” of postcolonial francophone African literature discussed thus far, both within the discursive limits identified by Paré and beyond, is an aesthetic of a sustained tension of opposites, functioning in a nebulous zone between fiction and reality (and between locality and globality), and making use of various textual and paratextual strategies to further obscure this distinction and distort the order of things.

In order to proceed, it is essential to further understand the notion of reality and representation in terms of the baroque and how this relates specifically to the politics of the Postcolony. In his insightful analysis, *De la postcolonie* (2000), Cameroonian political economist Achille Mbembe mounts a critique of power structures in postcolonial African nations based on the system of single party rule that has been in place, at one point or another, in most African nations since gaining independence.<sup>181</sup> In a chapter entitled, “L’esthétique de la vulgarité,” Mbembe describes this political situation as an economy of death, writing: “Mais en postcolonie, il est surtout *une économie de la mort*. Ou, précisément, il libère un espace de plaisir dans la façon même dont il produit la mort: d’où ces applaudissements frénétiques qui, au même degré que les balles étouffent le cri des condamnés.” (160) Mbembe here describes the abuses of power that take place

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<sup>181</sup> I refer you to Victor T. Le Vine’s *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 202, where he discusses the phenomenon of one-party regimes in thirteen sub-Saharan African nations that were former French colonies that came about before, immediately after, or within five years of independence.

under such despotic governments, specifically citing instances in which the bodies of citizens are appropriated by “His Excellency the Enlightened Guide of the Nation” to dance and play a part in the creation of a festive atmosphere for the express purpose of garnering support in praise of the president and/or public officials in the “parti unique.”<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, Mbembe details how the physical bodies of private citizens are not only subject to coercion to take part in these simulated festivities, but can even be, if they are deemed a threat to the established order, sacrificed on the public execution post as a memorial inscription and demonstration of the rule of absolute power, the “commandement.” (158-9) We have already seen the thematization of death by Ouologuem, which is echoed by Paré’s analysis of the “zombification” portrayed in postcolonial literature, but what is most interesting is the way in which death (or non-life) functions here as an occasion for pleasure in the celebration of death which, though horrific, is a moment of collective relief. Precisely because of the orchestrated spectacles that create public adoration as a means of legitimizing the power structure, there is a lack of individual autonomy and civil liberty, which can be suspended according to the personal whims of those figures in power (be they presidents, ministers, or local officials). Hence, the “economy of death” in the Postcolony is as much a figurative use of language as a literal description, since it implies, above all else, the economic and political non-life of the country’s citizens.

Mbembe immediately qualifies this assertion about the economy of death, by which power operates in the Postcolony through excessive manifestations of its irreproachability, inducing a collective exhilaration at events where death is performed for public pleasure, as being a particularly baroque characteristic. He writes, “Et c’est ce

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<sup>182</sup> In “Necropolitics.” trans. Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003), 11-40, Achille Mbembe presents a generalized theorization of the limits of the Foucauldian concept of “biopower” as the ability “to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (12). In contrast, Mbembe elaborates the notions of “necropolitics” and “necropower,” essentially defining a politics of terror that operates (from plantation societies and colonies to localized populations within the territorial confines of nation-states) through “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations,” concluding that “Politics is therefore death that lives a human life” (14-15). Furthermore, he describes the effects of necropolitics and necropower as “a permanent condition of ‘being in pain,’” in which “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (39-40).

qui lui donne son caractère *baroque*, c'est-à-dire cet art excentrique et grotesque de la représentation, avec son goût pour le théâtre, sa poursuite violente de la dérégulation jusqu'à l'impudeur" (160).<sup>183</sup> Mbembe's use of the term "baroque" in the above citation may at first appear out of place or, at the very least, to be a gratuitous use of the word. However, his association of "baroque" with the postcolonial masquerade of self-adulation and vain narcissism that is continuously played out (and replayed) in the public sphere through spectacular demonstrations by the elite and their control over the masses in their dominion could not be more a propos. Mbembe describes this continual re-creation of meaning as such:

[L]a postcolonie étant une pluralité chaotique, il est pratiquement impossible d'enfermer signes, images et traces dans la fixité et l'inertie. Voilà pourquoi ils sont constamment repris et utilisés, aussi bien par ceux qui commandent que par ceux qui sont supposés obéir, dans des opérations de refabulisation du pouvoir. Voilà également pourquoi la postcolonie est le régime par excellence du simulacre. (148-8)

Mbembe gives numerous examples of the ways in which popular actions play with the fluid infirmities of signs and significations in postcolonial political discourses. Speaking specifically of the way in which the masses re-appropriate the corporeal virulence of the power fetish and tarnish its image with crude and vulgar references to other types of bodily activities ("[l']obsession des orifices, des odeurs et des organes génitaux [qui] dominait donc les configurations togolaises du rire populaire" [145]), Mbembe postulates the existence, à la Bakhtine, of a *homo ludens* postcolonial (147). I see the baroque in this context as a very deliberate insertion in the text, a fact supported by its italicization in the original French version and his reuse of the word (although in a vastly different sense) in the same chapter some twenty pages later. In the Postcolony, the baroque is extremely rich not only as a descriptive agent of the character of the Postcolony, but even more so as an aesthetic modality that encapsulates Mbembe's argument for the subversive complicity of the political subject in the Postcolony's power-play (as we shall see in the

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<sup>183</sup> Postcolonial authors who, in verbalizing the crude, grotesque and vulgar aspects of postcolonial existence, also employ this aesthetic of vulgarity, representing the graphic obscenity that is a part of real life, Ahmadou Kourouma is particularly infamous for the use of violent profanity in his writing, embodied in his last two novels by the crass child narrator Petit Birahima. See Kourouma, *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000) and *Quand on refuse on dit non* (2004).



next section), with far-reaching implications for postcolonial African writers whose work can also be characterized as baroque. In the ensuing section, the notions of political, textual, and theoretical subversive complicity will be discussed in greater detail both on the level of daily existence, but also within the domains of literary representation and theoretical practice in terms of Mbembe's view of the Postcolony and an embodied baroque style of self-representation.

### **C. The baroque Postcolony: power, politics, and performance**

Before moving any further into a discussion of the complicit yet highly subversive baroque literary discourse of francophone Africa, I will first discuss what I and Mbembe agree is a distinctly baroque element of reality in the Postcolony. First, if we recall Panofsky's definition of the baroque attitude as a feeling of subjective freedom resulting from the merger of antagonistic forces in which the human figure becomes so debased as to constitute a mere "staffage" that could ultimately be dispensed with altogether (Panofsky, 38, 51), then the insignificance and ultimate impotence of the postcolonial subject faced with the banality of power and the logical impossibility of the world that has no external rules or orders would seem appropriate. The subjective experience of freedom in the face of the baroque world's inherent contradiction and human beings' ultimate insignificance therein relates specifically to Mbembe's Postcolony through the economy of death that trivializes human life but contrastingly allows for the experience of pleasure in the aestheticization of existence, or the ethic of appearances that structures the representation and hence, the experience of socio-political reality.<sup>184</sup> In the Postcolony, representation is very much a central aspect of everyday existence. Thus, when Mbembe writes of "cet art excentrique de la représentation," he is not writing about art as a detached object hanging in a museum or standing on a pedestal. Rather, "cet art," with its penchant for the theatrical, is a more engaged process, a performance aesthetic that presents power in its *mise-en-scène*. To this baroque art of representation, Mbembe

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<sup>184</sup> Mbembe discusses this notion further in "Aesthetics of Superfluity" *Public Culture* 16:3 (2004), 373-405, describing the tension between "the liquidation of tradition and its substitution by a culture of indifference and restlessness that nourishes self-stylization," using the term "superfluity" not only as aesthetic excess that hypnotizes and paralyzes the senses, but also as "the dialectics of indispensability and expendability of both labor and life, people and things" (374). In the place of life there is a semblance, an act, a baroque façade.

accords a certain “obscene” quality (in the sense of excess), which functions as a stylistic of power through its appeal to the imaginations and fantasies of the subjects caught up in the fanfare that reinforces the parade of power in the Postcolony: “[I]’ obscénité, ici, réside dans cet expressionisme que l’on peut juger macabre, mais qui, en définitive, est une stylistique du pouvoir, dans son empressement à se loger dans les arcanes de l’imaginaire” (160). This “stylistic of power” (*stylistique du pouvoir*) operating in the Postcolony is a reincarnation of a particularly baroque mode of political action.<sup>185</sup>

Herein lies the stylistics of power, a “real” institutionalized power that expresses itself and exerts its authority primarily through auto-representation, the primary sphere of influence being therefore the domain of the imaginary. In Mbembe’s Postcolony, there are a number of common practices that involve lining the main boulevards with citizens for seemingly banal events, such as the visit of a foreign minister or a presidential motorcade, to create the festive atmosphere of public spectacles, which “font partie de cette permanente démonstration publique de grandeur qui distingue peut-être le Cameroun des autres postcolonies de l’Afrique sub-saharienne” (161-2).<sup>186</sup> Regarding

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<sup>185</sup> See Chapter III “Baroque and *The Society of the Spectacle*.” Also, Mitchell Greenberg’s *Baroque bodies: Psychoanalysis and the Culture of French Absolutism* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), especially the first two chapters, “Molière’s Body Politic” (22-61), and “Classicism’s Pornographic Body” (62-110) for a discussion of Absolutism in the French “grand siècle” and the links between sexuality and power in the politics of spectacle grounded in the materiality of the body (both the “corps glorieux” of the leader and those of the citizenry). See also Joan DeJean’s *The Reinvention of Obscenity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), which discusses the role of obscenity for Molière—which she argues can also be extended to Flaubert and Baudelaire (3)—not only as a representation of sexuality or issues of censorship, but as “a veritable social phenomenon, a force capable of unleashing and even of helping define society’s newfound need to censor the representation of sexuality” (19).

<sup>186</sup> In as much as such excessive, obscene displays of power may be a distinguishing characteristic of the Cameroonian political economy, they are also very much present in other postcolonial African nations as well. For an example in Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* which parodies the political regime in his native Congo, the political importance of appearances is made clear in a scene where the dictator is preparing for the visit of foreign dignitaries, he states “Donnons au moins l’impression à nos hôtes que le Pays est bien organisé et qu’il aime son Chef, sacrédédieu” (85). Similarly, the obscene orgiastic scenes that accompany a public festival for the populace at the Lac de Lamartine, an impressive spectacle that proves “le maréchal... n’était pas seulement un grand chef d’état, mais aussi un artiste et un metteur en scène de tout premier plan,” an exemplary display that “les écrivains africains... dont les pièces de théâtre et romans se complaisaient dans un ton pleurnichard et subversif” ought to follow (93). Lopes’ own work, ironically, falls squarely in this latter category of artistic representation. Furthermore, this spectacular charade is manifest on the level of everyday visibility in the impressive structures of the capital city: “Devant ce spectacle de gratte-ciel et de béton, le citoyen de Moundié déclare que le Tonton-là, vraiment, il travaille et qu’il a bien mérité de la patrie.” (58), and this material facade is carefully planned right down to the

one such instance, the return of the “chef de l’État,” President Paul Biya, from a visit to the United Nations, Mbembe writes:

La mise en scène qui l’avait accompagné marquait seulement un instant de la dramatisation d’un mode spécifique de domination mis en place au début des années soixante, qui a eu le temps de se routiniser, et qui a inventé ses réflexes, l’objectif étant, à chaque occasion, d’utiliser un événement banal [...] et anodin [...] dans le but de produire un surcroît de prestige, de fiction et de magie. (162)

The specific mode of domination or “stylistique du pouvoir” that has been put in place in the Cameroonian Postcolony is precisely an art that makes fiction from fact by creating a grandiose event out of the most insignificant (in terms of international political impact) occasion. Though such manifestations are physical and material phenomena, their significance is purely fictitious: a magic trick that seduces the imagination to wonder and amazement, and implicitly, acceptance. In this sense, the power of the presidential party, which garners its support and legitimacy from the citizenry, is but a charade or illusion, an orchestrated spectacle of “spontaneous” public adoration that is actually erected through coercion. Although this power acts through imaginary means, Mbembe shows that it still exerts a real influence, primarily in the way it aims to control the bodies of political subjects: “Dans ce grand univers de l’auto-adoration qu’est la postcolonie, les groupes de danseurs réquisitionnés pour ces performances témoignaient, chaque fois, de la place centrale qu’occupe le corps dans les procédures du commandement, de la soumission et du simulacre” (170). For the sake of festivity, subjectivity is suspended as the citizen is not simply a spectator to the fantastic representation of power, s/he is coerced into participating as a body-object in the procession itself. Life in the Postcolony is fundamentally a theatrical performance under the disorienting effect of power’s quotidian *mise-en-scène* and hence a negation of life as such, owing to the way that representation of eccentric and grotesque proportions invades the entire space of social experience, imposing itself on the imaginations of the general

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President’s attire : “Un président qu’on voit deux fois avec le même costume n’est pas pris au sérieux. Faut pas plaisanter avec le pouvoir” (67). The oft-repeated “Faut pas plaisanter avec le pouvoir” juxtaposed with scenes that are clearly more akin to “plaisanteries” than anything resembling serious, is an ironic reminder that power, not to be toyed with, is itself a mere game to be played.

population through obscene, because disproportionate (Mbembe, 163), appropriations of the human body for the purpose of performance, wherein is found the Postcolony's particular "caractère *baroque*." Politics in the Postcolony is, in fact, nothing as it seems; its primary mode of influence is *representation*, a stylistic of power in the place of power proper.<sup>187</sup>

The precise nature of the theatrical economy of death that Mbembe recalls to characterize the violent political ethos of the Postcolony, which functions through a certain amount of enjoyment or *jouissance* in the active production of death, is very much a material manifestation of a particularly baroque phenomenon: the morbid eroticism identified by Ariès as arising in the baroque age and developing into the more explicit and more familiar literary manifestations of a Sade or even a Baudelaire (Chapter II "Life and Death and a 'Modern Baroque' Economy"). Panofsky notes how in the baroque "conflict between opposite impulses," pleasure and pain come together in subjective intensification as the pleasurable experience of pain or, "a painful conflict resolved in a pleasurable issue" (68). In this sense, death need not necessarily be understood as a negative phenomenon, as in the ending of life, but as an occasion for collective relief, an overcoming of life's conflicts and tensions. Likewise for Mbembe's Postcolony, there is an economy of real and figurative death of a subject's agency and a celebration of the moment of death through orchestrated festivity, acting out the dehumanizing whims of power's decrees, a kind of enactment resembling a baroque allegory of death. In the specific context of the lived reality, the postcolonial African subject can take pleasure in the economy of death that seems to dominate the Postcolony by creating spaces and occasions to negotiate the meaning of life.

Mbembe states in his introduction "Le temps qui s'agite," that the lives of these subjects consist of a quotidian performance in a world that continually confronts them with the very forms and possibility of their own deaths. He writes: "Ce 'vivre au monde concret' n'est pas seulement le champ où se déroule pratiquement leur existence. C'est le

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<sup>187</sup> This is not to say that there is a complete absence of power in the Postcolony. Power (the threat of physical force, imprisonment, etc) exists, however it exists precisely as a threat, as a potential that manifests itself primarily through exaggerated representation, rarely emerging from behind the metaphorical curtain.

lieu où ils en font l'exercice, c'est-à-dire procèdent à la mise en jeu de leur vie et à l'affrontement avec les formes diverses de leur mort.” (34-5) To the extent that it infuses the substance of daily living, the constant presence of death affords a degree of subjective freedom (albeit limited by the real conditions of the economy of death) through the removal of the dread of death. Death is lived as a daily experience and therefore cannot pose any threat to life, and consequently it can be fully experienced and collectively celebrated as the final release of life's tensions to which the minor deaths of day-to-day strife serve as a preamble. Mbembe asserts that this is the subjective experience of, and engagement with, the politics of appearance, specifically in terms of the body and performance in the play of power: “le corps du sujet postcolonisé proteste de sa loyauté, dramatise sa subordination et ratifie au passage l'existence d'un inquestionnable institué, afin, précisément, de mieux jouer avec celui-ci et le réviser au premier détour” (179). First, I find it important to note Mbembe's use of the adjective *postcolonisé* (postcolonized) in place of “postcolonial” to refer to the subject, which seems a mindful continuation of anti-colonial rhetoric used by early advocates of decolonization such as Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi who analyzed the oppressive power binary of colonizers and colonized.<sup>188</sup> Clearly, Mbembe is trying to situate subjectivity in the Postcolony in similar terms, by relating the plight of the masses of subordinated, “postcolonized” subjects to the oppressive politics of physical and ideological domination employed by the single-party regimes of the “postcolonizers.” The continuous violence of modernity, colonialism, and neo-colonialism persists in the Postcolony in such a way that allows for a hybrid post/colonial perpetuating supplement to a generalized power structure that contributes to the arrangement while subtly altering its form through parody and play (in ludic exultations of the power fetish, for example). In this mode, we can turn our attention to the second, more complex notion of the body's dramatization of loyalty and feigned subordination in upholding the power façade, thus legitimizing its claim to

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<sup>188</sup> See specifically Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1962), [*The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004)]; and Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 [1965]), for more current reading, see *ibid*, *Decolonization and the decolonized*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of MN Press, 2006).

ultimate and unquestionable authority, for the express purpose of *playing along with* power, to allow for its revision or modification. It is in the notion of playing *with* (not against) power that Mbembe moves beyond a binary conception of power struggle, which rests on a certain intimacy or “une intime tyrannie” that links the postcolonized subject to the postcolonizing power.

In the very way that power is acted out through the implied participation of its subjects in the festive play of power-ratifying ritual, the subject adopts a similar authoritarian attitude to life, which reproduces the obscene elements of the State in the minute details of daily life (Mbembe, 178). In this fashion, at the same time as the subject is complicit in the ritual confirmation of power, s/he is also capable of nullifying its effect by emptying it of its significance, precisely, through paradoxical practices (*conduites paradoxales*) that show support with one hand but subvert the order with the other. These paradoxical practices, which Mbembe dubs “baroque practices,” are at the base of subjectivity in the Postcolony:

Ce qui le définit [le sujet postcolonisé], c’est sa faculté de s’engager dans des pratiques baroques, foncièrement ambiguës, mobiles et révisables par principe, même là où existent des règles écrites claires et précises. Ces pratiques simultanées et apparemment contradictoires consistent à ratifier le statut de fétiche que revendique violemment le pouvoir d’État. Et, dans le même mouvement, à se réserver la possibilité d’amender – y compris en puisant dans les langages, les signes et les symboles officiels eux-mêmes – les lieux de plausibilité et les temps de validité de cette ratification. (Mbembe, 179)

Mbembe characterizes the ambiguous practices of the postcolonized subject, which simultaneously ratify and reify the power structure through participatory subversion (mixing praise with mockery), as “baroque practices.” This notion involves a somewhat ambivalent view towards power and its overthrow. Although such practices involve overtly acting in support of power and assuming its oppression, through everyday practices that repossess not only the attitudes and forms of power’s representation but also the very language, signs, and symbols that sustain it, they effectively reduce the spectacular display of power to the level of a quotidian performance. The aim is not to defeat or destroy the power structure but, rather, to bend and distort it so as to assert the

livingness of the people who, though they live in the repressive socio-political conditions of a coercive regime, are able to wrest the occasional pleasure from the experience of events (though often painful) in which power comes into play. In this fashion, the very same demonstration in which shows of citizens' bodies (both their number, and the intensity of their festive engagement) reinforce the domination of the ruler, also constitutes a banalization of the spectacle itself when the characteristic obscenity and unreason of power become familiar elements in routine, daily occurrences. Accordingly, Mbembe writes: "le corps qui danse, mange, boit, s'habille, [...] s'engage dans un rituel de confirmation, [...] fait preuve de la prodigalité à l'égard du pouvoir d'État d'une part; et d'autre part sape l'univers officiel de sens et, parfois l'oblige à fonctionner dans le vide: dans l'impouvoir" (179). Power and powerlessness (*le pouvoir et l'impouvoir*) converge in a very baroque moment of suspended opposition. The ultimate lack of power of the subject under the absolute authority of the dominant party, precisely because of its extreme reliance on representation, can quickly flip-flop into impotence on the part of the party through subversive modifications and bodily practices of the citizens on whom the spectacle relies for support. The objective effects of this power reversal, however, are fleeting, affording merely moments of enjoyment before the spectacle itself shifts shape, and the invention of new subversive adaptations becomes necessary. This aesthetic practice takes on a life of its own through a baroque psychology of embodied performance in the political arena of the Postcolony where both sides play an integral role in the creation and realization of the political party—*la réalisation de la fête politique*. In Mbembe's Postcolony, the focus is less on the objective status of who is in power and who is under that power (for power is purely the imaginary product of a process of representation) than it is on the *subjective* experience of power and the occasional celebration it affords (regardless of the reason or lack thereof) that can provide a temporary resolution of the conflict between opposing classes in the festive atmosphere of complicit conviviality and collective powerlessness that define the Postcolony.

### **In-Conclusion: Political Aesthetic Agency**

The question I will engage now is how this baroque politics appears in literature, first on the level of its representational content, and second on the level of its stylistic

incorporation of the participatory subversion, the allegorical performance, trompe-l'oeil, or anamorphosis of a baroque aesthetic practice. In terms of Mbembe's text itself, I will engage in a series of questions on the exact nature of Mbembe's "baroque practices" in terms of writing a "power of stylistics" and the implications of a baroque aesthetic in postcolonial literatures to account for the heterogeneity and contradictions of lived experience in the Postcolony. Mbembe states in his Introduction: "Tout au long des études qui suivent, nous nous sommes efforcés d' 'écrire l' Afrique,' non pas comme une fiction, mais dans la dureté de son destin, sa puissance et ses prolixités, sans prétendre parler au nom de qui que ce soit" (38-9). Mbembe expresses a desire to get beyond the myths and negative portrayals of Africa as a strange monster on one hand, bestial and terrifying, and an object of experimentation for modern political science on the other (7-8). He also wishes to account for the experiences of African subjectivity (against its subjection) that validate the particular and distinctive traits of the world in which she/he lives:

Il est un sujet d'expérience et un sujet valideur pas seulement dans le sens où il est une existence consciente ou encore parce qu'il a une conscience perceptive des choses, mais encore dans la mesure où son 'vivre au monde concret' passe aussi – et est évalué – par ses yeux, ses oreilles, sa bouche, bref sa chair, sa corporéité. (38)

Although this is a general comment about the African subject (or perhaps more generally, the human subject), I believe that Mbembe is also referring, in a sense, to himself and his own project to "write Africa" not as an abstraction but as a subjective experience of "living in the concrete world."

Mbembe clarifies this project in "African Modes of Self-Writing," which discusses the philosophical shortcomings of attempts to narrate African identity or "Africanity" between a nationalist-Marxist construction of liberation (and the corresponding "neurosis of victimization") and a nativist position that oscillates between identity and difference in either a universalistic affirmation of African humanity (just like everyone else) and a particularistic reassertion of a glorious (and unique) African past. Mbembe identifies the weaknesses of both of these conceptions with respect to a historical and material reality (stressing the question of *being* and *time*) that is far more



multiple and fragmented but that is nonetheless governed by a “perverse” power structure of autochthony (263). He identifies a general “state of war” based on a politics of sacrifice and expenditure, a “Dionysian violence” whose chief aim is to abolish “the very idea of a debt owed to life.” This newfound freedom then “becomes part of the new African practices of the self” as a kind of religious affectation in which “divine power is mimed or staged,” constituting a “process of reinventing the self and the polis.” (268-9) Accordingly, in a move that surpasses the notion of a cohesive narrative identity, or even a pluralist “capacity to generate as many stories as possible in as many voices as possible,” Mbembe reposes on the notion of practice or performance in concluding: “[o]nly the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans *stylize* their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the Africa present is made” (272-3). The African text, I propose, needs to be looked at in these same terms as a “stylization of the self,” a way of writing that must combine disparate, intersecting, even contradictory textual practices in order to perform the same kind of *stylistic* function necessary to account for the “thickness” of the African literary and theoretical present.

The thickness of the African present is constantly struggling against its reduction, like a baroque complexity that refuses to be confined to a singular point of view, much in the same way as Glissant’s “mondialité” relates to and opposes the influences of “mondialisation.” Mbembe’s (de)construction of Africanity, a project to “write Africa,” falls into this kind of multi-centered paradigm. In his review of *On the Postcolony*, “Achille Mbembe and the Postcolony: Going beyond the Text,” Jeremy Weate critiques Mbembe for, among other things, his failure to move beyond textualism and engage with the complexities inherent in his theorization of an autonomous African subjectivity. Weate’s major reservations about Mbembe’s project range from its ambiguous relationship with Western theoretical discourse and previous work on Africa by African scholars, to its ambivalent stance on resistance. But ultimately, despite Mbembe’s attempt to situate his project on autonomous theoretical ground, Weate concludes that the problem comes down to an inability to get beyond the institutionalized framework of intellectual, i.e. textual discursive practices, and thus Mbembe’s text “falls prey to its own form of complicit conviviality” (Weate, 38). Yet, amidst all this negativity, Weate

exhumes one particular grain of theoretical promise from *On the Postcolony*'s cadaver, which is Mbembe's notion of "baroque practices." Although he sees it as a grave misfortune that Mbembe does not explicitly elaborate the concept of "baroque practices" to a greater degree, citing it as "a theoretical cul-de-sac" (37), Weate does recognize the theoretical importance of the concept in its extra-textual dimensions:

Mbembe's "baroque practices" move underneath and subvert the "written and precise rules" of state power. [...] The fluid bodily practices involved in affirming power in order to modify it are therefore the gateway to the "other form of writing" that Mbembe has sought all along. [...] Mbembe introduces a writing of the body. (Weate, 35)

Weate's acknowledgment of the theoretical importance of the concept of "baroque practices" in Mbembe's text is fundamental to my own vision of a baroque aesthetic and its function in postcolonial literature. Contrary to what Weate espouses in his critique, I propose that Mbembe's text does indeed incorporate an number of baroque practices in its writing which--far from "falling prey" to complicit conviviality-- demonstrates the paradoxical power of this form of latent resistance. In so doing, rather than objectively theorizing "baroque practices," Mbembe's text embodies the subjective feeling of these practices, both representing and "living" in the concrete world, and thus it is able to "write Africa" in its contrasts, eccentricities, and subtleties.

There is an inherent problem in any attempt of a postcolonial writer to write from an African perspective because the "African perspective," at least in the last four hundred years, is always affected, in some degree, by its relationship to Europe and the Western World, which was (and is) a relationship of (neo)colonialism. Mbembe encounters this problem in his desire to launch his theoretical treatise *On the Postcolony* from autonomous ground, yet he cannot do so for he must engage Western discourses, be they existential, phenomenological, or otherwise, in order to give his project credibility. Weate remarks Mbembe's problematic relationship with Western theory, contending that Mbembe oscillates between using them "as by turns friend and foe" (30). In a sense, Mbembe faces a double bind in that he must, on one hand, rely on those Western discourses that are germane to his project, yet on the other hand, the very fact of engaging with those discourses affects any attempt at theorizing "the *possibility of an autonomous*

*African subject*” (Mbembe, 14). Undoubtedly, the African subject is forever marked (both physically and intellectually) by the aftershocks of colonialism. Likewise, any attempt at written discourse is marked first by linguistic colonization by French, and then by theoretical colonization, for the written record in any discursive field is predominantly European property. Mbembe moves beyond this problem by proposing “different modes of discourse, *a different writing*” (14), which, I propose, involves a fundamentally ambivalent relationship to the powers of textual canons and exemplifies a literary form of the baroque *practices of stylistic* participatory subversion.<sup>189</sup>

The precise nature of this different writing is a question that Weate raises in his review of *On the Postcolony*, for at no point is it ever made abundantly clear what Mbembe is talking about. However, if we take a close look at “L’esthétique de la vulgarité,” we notice that Mbembe makes reference to numerous European and American sources, some of which might have been written by “African” writers living and publishing in the West. One also notices that, along with numerous references to indigenous sources (especially *Cameroon Tribune*), he makes repeated note of the fictional works of late Congolese author and dramaturge, Sony Labou Tansi (notes 2, 17, 26, 27, 43, 77). On the surface, citing the words of “le romancier” serves to accentuate

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<sup>189</sup> In response to his article on “African modes of Self-Writing,” entitled “On the Power of the False,” Mbembe seems to provide an image of what such a critical stylistic practice might entail. He describes a complex reality of “Multiplicity and Proliferations,” characterized by creative assimilation of foreign ideologies (religious and political) in which the universal becomes subject to the particularities of African life, whereby he concludes 1) the necessity of discourses on Africa to account for the “heretical spirit” of the relationship between Africa and the Western world that has been one of falsification on both sides; 2) that a “radical uncertainty is at the heart of contemporary processes of identity formation in the continent” in which “reality and fable reflect each other, thereby transforming the very identity of the original and its referents. [...] Reality is erased, recreated, and duplicated, [i]t is this power of proliferation (and its ability to obliterate the notions of truth and falsehood, of the real and the unreal, of the visible and the occult) that characterizes contemporary African experience, which is at least original, if not unique” in “an absence of sharp ruptures, a nonlinearity, and everywhere the swirling chain of fragmented events in which everything else is engulfed”; and 3) that because of this strange “reality”, “there will always be a part of the sign [that is Africa] that escapes the prison of our discourse,” and to “enrich the discourse so that this accidental sign can be represented as closely as possible [...] requires developing a technique of reading (*lecture*) and writing (*écriture*) that would also be *an aesthetic of opening and encounter*”, taking into consideration “discourses outside of the social sciences *stricto sensu*,” which necessarily involves “a way of reading (*lecture*) the archives of the present,” not only textual, “but also visual, sung, painted, and narrated” representations that “come out of a particular practice of everyday life and constantly *feel* and nurture that life” (639-40 my emphasis). Radical uncertainty, nonlinearity, fragmentations, multiplicities, an aesthetic register of experience, and an appeal to the senses rather than reason: these, effectively, are the tenets of a baroque aesthetic practice.

certain points in his text, such as the quotation (oddly missing in the English translation) that appears immediately beneath the chapter heading “L’esthétique de la vulgarité,” which clearly illustrates the theme of the chapter: “...L’Afrique cette grosse merde où tout le monde refuse sa place. Un merdier, un moche merdier, ce monde ! Ni plus ni moins qu’un grand marché de merde.” (139) The words, quoted from Sony Labou Tansi’s *L’Anté-peuple* (1983), are the damning cry of a teacher who is facing wrongful imprisonment for a crime he did not commit, expressing his utter powerlessness in the face of the bureaucracy and false accusations from which he sees no escape. Furthermore, leading up his characterization of the economy of death in the Postcolony, Mbembe quotes Sony’s depiction of the citizens as “ces diamètres de viande puant le vin et le tabac, ces diadèmes de gueules, ces yeux morts, ces rires et ces visages” (158). By using dramatic renderings of the physical condition of the Postcolony (the powerlessness of the human subject, characterized as stinking meat) from Labou Tansi’s political parody *La Vie et demie* (1979), Mbembe is himself appealing to the imaginaries of his readers, thus demonstrating the stylistic of power of the Postcolony at the same time as he is describing its function; Mbembe makes use of an aesthetic of vulgarity. However, on a deeper level, I propose that the deliberate intermingling of fact and fiction in Mbembe’s analysis/construction of the Postcolony is, in fact, an example of a “baroque practice” of participatory subversion in the sense that, while his text ultimately supports and gives credibility to the theoretical, sociological, and political discourses of which he makes use in elaborating his theory, he is at the same time undermining their assumed authority by situating them on a more or less even playing field with a mere work of fiction. In a paradoxical fashion, Mbembe plays *with* the power of various textual corpuses, as his own text both entertains and subverts the absolute authority of the written word, illustrating a “power of stylistics” in his ability to relate Africa through the affirmation and modification of Western discourses. In this way, Mbembe’s baroque practices are a fitting mode for accounting for the ambiguities and differences in Africa’s unique discursive position. Not only is Mbembe writing about the power of powerlessness—the baroque practices of imitation and appropriation of power’s obscene modes of representation that simultaneously affirm and subvert that power—he is also

incorporating such practices into the body of his text, presenting the fact of fiction (through his use of Sony Labou Tansi's texts) and the fiction of fact (as reported by official media). In so doing, Mbembe not only describes the baroque character of the Postcolony in its imaginary "magical" power, he also participates in the order of affirming and modifying the imaginary power of the text through his own kind of "baroque practices" in terms of discourse itself. In the way in which it is employed by Henri Lopes, Achille Mbembe, and numerous other African writers, the baroque is an aesthetic and theoretical device that slips and slides in and out of the formal and thematic nooks and crannies of discourse, operating in the infinite multiplication and proliferation of perspectives that open up in and between the real and figurative conditions of postmodernism and postcolonialism.

## **Chapter VI: Sony Labou Tansi Writing Africa Baroque**

“And this sanctuary with multiple sides (sexual and religious of course, but also political and poetic), we will see it emerge again [...] but evoked this time in all of the splendor of its composite and baroque architecture.”

--Nicolas Martin-Granel, “*Le quatrième côté du triangle*”

### **Introduction: African-World Fictions**

As seen in the previous chapter, Achille Mbembe’s use of Sony Labou Tansi’s novels to accentuate his critique of the material politics of the Postcolony and to encode a subtle subversion of literary politics in his own work *On the Postcolony* is particularly enlightening when one considers that Sony’s work has proven to be a unique and interesting case of postcolonial African literature<sup>190</sup> and perhaps *the* paradigmatic example of the baroque in postcolonial African literature. In fact, Professor Amadou Ly, has characterized *La Vie et demie* with the superlative “baroquissimo,” and it is specifically with respect to this concept of the extremely baroque conveyed by the Spanish “baroquissimo” that I will direct my attention to Labou Tansi’s text.<sup>191</sup> It is my opinion that this use of the Spanish hyperbole is not accidental, given that the baroque, or

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<sup>190</sup> See *Sony Labou Tansi ou la quête permanente du sens*, eds. Mukala Kadima-Nzvji, Abel Kouvouama, et Paul Kibangou (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), and *Francophonie Littéraire Africaine en Procès: Le destin unique de Sony Labou Tansi*, eds. Drocella Mwishu Rwanika & Nyunda ya Rubango (Ivry-sur-Seine & Yaoundé: Silex / Nouvelles Éditions du Sud, 1999).

<sup>191</sup> Amadou Ly was among the first to theorize African literature in terms of a baroque aesthetic. His talk, entitled “Baroquissimo: *La Vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi et *L’Ogre-empereur* de Kompany Wa Kompany comme œuvres paradigmatiques d’une nouvelle écriture dans le roman africain” was presented in Montreal. When I asked him specifically about that talk, he replied: “[J]’ai fait une recherche sur le baroquisme et j’ai proposé ce “baroquissimo” parce qu’il me semblait effectivement que la littérature africaine était en train de se détacher de sa mère, la littérature occidentale française [...] Donc il m’a semblé qu’il fallait trouver de nouveaux paradigmes, de nouveaux ordres définitoires, et j’étais frappé par le fait que lorsque la littérature émergeait de l’oralité qui était à la rencontre entre l’oralité africaine et la littérature occidentale, notre littérature, il me semblait, était en train d’émerger et de se détacher de son modèle occidental rationaliste, clair avec beaucoup de livres, roman, littérature, roman-théâtre, nouvelles, etc. catégories bien précises, et dans le roman ou dans le théâtre tel genre, tel aspect, telle période comme on dira la poésie, le romantisme, etc. Et donc, moi, il me semblait que notre littérature était en train de procéder à une sorte de *mixing*, une mixture de tout cela pour créer quelque chose qui soit spécifique et qui emporte aussi un modèle de base, un modèle souche que constitue notre littérature orale, en particulier, les contes, les contes fantastiques, les contes de fées, entre guillemets, les contes héroïques, l’épopée, la légende, le mythe. Tout cela, nos littérateurs étaient en train de le récupérer et de l’insérer pour créer quelque chose qui leur soit spécifique mais qui, aussi, donne du souffle au livre au roman...” (See Appendix A)

neo-baroque rather, has been a theoretical trend in modern Latin American discourse for quite some time before appearing in discussions of francophone diasporic literature in the 1990's. Joseph Paré investigates the similarities and differences between postcolonial literatures from Latin America and Africa as well, noting that the two continents share in a quest for re-territorialisation after colonialism in which the writer seeks to reconcile with his/her public by writing in and for the “peripheral” cultures of former colonial territories all the while engaging in a dialogue with the literary corpus of the colonizers. Paré identifies the fundamental difference between African exploitative colonization and Latin American colonies of “peuplement” (settlement), yet he cites Sony Labou Tansi's work as a bridge between the two vastly different experiences of “le Tiers-Monde” (22-3).<sup>192</sup>

In, “De l'intergénéricité comme forme de baroque dans le roman de Sony Labou Tansi,” Josias Semujanga brings the two continents and traditions together through a discussion of the concept of *tropicalité* in *La Vie et demie*, in which “la *tropicalité* fonctionne comme une métamorphose baroque où le jeu intertextuel demeure très dense et varié [dont] le processus parodique consiste à s'emparer des clichés discursifs pour les renverser et les relativiser” (203). Semujanga is careful to first conceptualize the baroque generally, and in contrast to a “style dit classique, caractérisé notamment par l'ordre, l'équilibre et l'harmonie des formes,” stating that, “le baroque se caractérise au contraire par le gout d'effets contrastés, le merveilleux, le fantastique, le surprenant et l'irrégulier” (202). He then goes on to say that “le phénomène lui-même [du baroque] basé sur l'idée de l'irrégularité des formes se retrouve à la base de l'écriture des textes littéraires du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” focusing on “l'éclatement” and “le mélange” of genres as fundamental aspects of “le *baroquisme éternel*” (203), which is something quite reminiscent of Eugenio d'Ors. Semujanga's discussion of the baroque in Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* is based

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<sup>192</sup> According to Dr. Joseph Paré of the Université de Ouagadougou, the connection with Latin America is essential to understanding the baroque in Africa and in African literature. Paré says, “Je pense que tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la question du baroque, ou ce qui peut s'apparenter au baroque, que moi je décris comme des formes de baroquisme, sont nécessairement tous ceux qui voient une forme de relation, de similitude, entre l'évolution des cultures africaines, et l'évolution des cultures de l'Amérique centrale, parce que l'Amérique centrale est une société qui a vu passer plusieurs types de civilisations, et ces types de civilisations ont fini par influencer d'une manière ou d'une autre sur la civilisation originelle” (see Appendix B).

on the notion of la *tropicalité* as it has been employed by theorists such as Georges Ngal, Jacques Chevrier, and Siméon Osuzua to describe the adaptation of the French language to accommodate the emotional and linguistic particularities of African expression. Beyond that, however, Semujanga continues: “Plutôt que d’y voir un phénomène africain au sens sociologique du terme, il est plus juste de considérer les procédés de la *tropicalité* comme un lien transdiscursif et transculturel entre l’Afrique littéraire et l’Amérique latine” (204).<sup>193</sup> While Semujanga is not suggesting that Sony Labou Tansi was directly involved in the Latin American literary movement of *tropicalité* of the 1970’s, he nevertheless expands the notion of *tropicalité* in Sony Labou Tansi to include a transdiscursive and transcultural strategy, which involved “une incorporation parodique des clichés sur la vie dans les pays tropicaux où la modernité côtoie la tradition dans un mélange hétérogène” (204).<sup>194</sup> Thus, it is in the subversion of stereotypes and cultural clichés that *La Vie et demie* parodies dominant discourses and participates in their deconstruction in favor of a more pluralist and polyvocal vision of the Postcolony. One must be wary not to extend too far the universality of the postcolonial counter-discursive movement, be it in the form of *tropicalité*, *baroque*, or both, for an inherent part of its subversive force is its reliance on particular material realities. However, it is precisely in this tenuous nexus between the specificity of locality and a universalizable countermodernity of a “littérature-monde,” between incorporation and innovation of literary traditions, that one can situate Sony Labou Tansi’s baroque corpus.

As such, *La Vie et demie* engages specifically with the realities that affect African life and discourse, comprising both an ethical and an aesthetic confrontation with dominant cultural and representational ideologies. These, of course, are closely identified with Négritude, and Semujanga notes that Sony Labou Tansi’s *tropicalité* “est révolte contre les lieux communs de la Négritude auxquels elle s’oppose en abordant le réel sous

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<sup>193</sup> This link is apparent in many of Labou Tansi’s works in the choice of names he assigns to his characters: Estina Bronzario in *Les Sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez*, for example; and in *La Vie et demie*, several characters have names that are a mixture of African sounding names and Latino names: the Guide’s predecessor is Oscar de Chiaboulata (33), the lieutenant-colonel Dikrabane Faustino (56), the chief of the Guides black forces Graciana Orlando (67).

<sup>194</sup> Semujanga notes that “le tropicalisme est, dans le contexte latino-américain, un mouvement artistique et littéraire qui tire son nom d’une oeuvre d’art, *La tropicalia* d’Oiticica, exposée au Musée d’art moderne de Rio de Janeiro en 1967” (204).



ses multiples facettes et contradictions” (206). The fact that Semujanga remarks the baroque among other discursive traits, including “le réalisme merveilleux et fantastique,” further reinforces the bond between Latin American postcoloniality and the African literary experience, inasmuch as the former is itself described by Carpentier as an analogous element of the baroque in his essay “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” (1975).<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, Paré expounds upon the idea of the marvelous and the fantastic in terms of what he calls “le polémico-fantastique,” a polemical engagement with power that assumes a new dimension as its grotesque realism is interpenetrated and augmented by the pervasion of a fantastic imaginary that is capable of transcending the banality of quotidian existence through creative renderings of a different kind of world: “un monde de valeurs inverses [...] du choquant, de l’antithèse, des contrastes violents” (101). *La Vie et demie* depicts the monolithic unities of an absolutist dictatorial regime and a dominant official discourse that were central aspects of a neo-colonial ideology specific to francophone Africa that was subtly entrenched in the doctrine of Négritude. However, operating through subversive tropes such as parody and irony, the text attacks stereotypical depictions such as government incompetence, the bestial image of Black sexuality as portrayed by Western exoticism, even linguistic conventions, thereby systematically confronting and deconstructing these myths with tragi-comic hyperbole and a rhetoric of alterity that remains firmly rooted in the common diversity of material and bodily existence.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> In *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (New York: Routledge, 1998), Brenda Cooper discusses magical realism in the Anglophone context as that vision of the world, which combines sacred and profane imagery in a reality that is infused with super-natural elements, and as such, entails a hybrid vision of the world, a vision that transcends ordinary sight. She states: “The goal of the third eye is to have the confidence to perceive the system and the humility to recognize that the vision of structure is mediated by the eye, in complex, but not altogether random ways. It is to dream of a better life and to embrace art and literature as part of this dream. It is to embrace the uniqueness of the fictional dream’s poetry, language and logic.” (14).

<sup>196</sup> In her article “De la permutation des mots et des choses dans *La vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi” (*Présence Francophone* 52 [1998], pp. 51-68), Christiane Ndiaye specifically addresses the way in which Labou-Tansi’s writing style “(re)prend partout du matériel sémiotique ou discursive avec le but précis de le retravailler pour lui donner d’autres significations” (54, my emphasis).

### A. “Writing Africa,” writing the body en “chair-mots-de-passe”

It is in terms of the body, specifically with regard to its grotesque and fantastic dimensions in *La Vie et demie*, that I would like to situate my discussion of Sony Labou Tansi’s “baroquisme” by recalling the notion of an economy of death described by Mbembe in the Postcolony that gives it its particular “caractère *baroque*.” A very poignant illustration of this eccentric, violent, and grotesque theatricality appears in the opening pages of *La Vie et demie*, in which the political dissident Martial, along with his entire family, is being tortured in the *Chambre Verte* (a locale that reinforces the theatricality of the event)<sup>197</sup> of the Guide Providentiel, dictator of the fictional Katamalanasia. The execution is conducted through an excessive and complete dehumanization of the family, reduced to “neuf loques humaines,” brought before the Guide who, while “le sang coulait à flots silencieux,” immediately buries a large knife in the throat of “la loque-père” before returning to his plate of meat. With the very same knife he proceeds to cut out of a large chunk of meat, which he then eats as “les quatre loque-filles, les trois loque-fils et la loque-mère” look on, motionless. The depiction of the family members as “loque-personnages” is significant in the way that it endows them with an indeterminate identity between subject and object in the form of human wreckage joined contrastingly with a *trait d’union*. This juxtaposition of life and death, the same one found in Ouologuem’s “morts-vivants” and in the “*living dead*” of Mbembe’s Postcolony (note 11), is accentuated in Martial’s ensuing torture, described in gruesomely erotic detail: “le Guide Providentiel lui ouvrit le ventre du plexus à l’aîne comme on ouvre une chemise à fermeture [...] les tripes pendaient saignées à blanc, toute la vie de la loque-père était venue se cacher dans les yeux [...] la loque-père respirait comme l’homme qui vient de finir l’acte d’amour...” (12-13) The spectacularization of the torture scene with eroticized imagery accentuates a bizarre union of pleasure and suffering (Eros and Thanatos) particular to the baroque. It takes the modern form of Sadism, which is specifically concerned with power and domination, and which is also a

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<sup>197</sup> The offstage room where actors often congregate before, after, or between scenes is often referred to as the Green Room.

fundamental element of Mbembe's Postcolony where pleasure is derived from the way in which death is produced and re-produced.

The scene continues: "le Guide Providentiel enfonça le couteau de table dans l'un puis dans l'autre œil, il en sortit une gelée noirâtre qui coula sur les joues et dont les deux larmes se rejoignirent dans la plaie de la gorge, la loque-père continuait à respirer comme l'homme qui vient de finir l'acte." It is at this point, when red blood and black "tears" from blinded eyes meet in a symbolic juncture of life and death, Martial finally speaks: "Je ne veux pas mourir cette mort." He repeats this refusal even after taking several bullets to the brain from a revolver. (13) After a brief hiatus to finish his dessert and fruit salad, le Guide returns to interrogate Martial as to which death he would prefer, pointing a pistol to Martial's forehead and firing two shots before Martial answers with the same refusal to die this death. Le Guide resorts to cursing and beating the body repeatedly before it is severed in two at the waist, and "les tripes tombèrent avec le bas du corps, le haut du corps restait là, flottant dans l'air amer, avec la bouche saccagée qui répétait la phrase" (14). Finally, Martial's body is completely dismembered and ground up into pâté and stew to be served to his surviving family members for lunch the following day. When one of the "loque-fils," Jules, refuses to eat, his throat is slit and his blood mixes with the dishes on the table. His body, too, is then made into pâté and stew and served to the remaining family members, and this slaughter continues until only Chaïdana and Tristansia remain, having eaten the pâté and stew made from their family's corpses for seven days. The simultaneity of eating and killing, and the incidental intermixing of life-sustaining nourishment and death, grotesquely parodies the "politique du ventre" (Paré, 120) of the Postcolony in which a dog-eat-dog, kill-or-be-killed bodily political ethos serves as a necessary means to support a totalitarian dictatorial regime.

The same body that is the site of political domination, however, is also that of subversion as Boniface Mongo-Mboussa notes in his article, "Sony Labou Tansi: la question du bas matériel et corporel," which analyzes the notion of the *carnavalesque* through the lens of a Rabelaisian popular vulgarity. Mongo-Mboussa defines "carnavalesque" historically as "une forme de résistance à la culture officielle de l'église" during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, an obscene and blasphemous spectacle of

eccentricities and disguises in which the hierarchical social order is dissolved through “un rire ambivalent qui est à la fois joyeux et sarcastique” ; as a result, “il n’existe plus de frontières entre les acteurs et les spectateurs, tous ses participants sont actifs” (136). With reference to Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais and Dostoïevsky, Mongo-Mboussa notes that this phenomenon is translated into literature as a “carnavalisation” and, in the same way that Semujanga’s “tropicalité” appears in an African context borrowed from a Latin American literary context, he claims that the carnivalesque in Sony Labou Tansi’s work is based on intertextuality (noting the influence of Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez), and on the Congolese cultural foundation of indigenous Kongo theatricality. Thus, he identifies in Labou Tansi’s novels a carnivalesque thematic in the successive “intronisation/détrônisation” of the Guides Providentiels, one after the other, that animates the chronology, a constant movement between opposite states that finds its “alter ego” in the juxtaposition of “mort/naissance” in such a way that “la mort devient la vie et inversement” (141).<sup>198</sup> This is most apparent in the way that the “deceased” Martial is more of a menace dead than alive, his martyrdom not only inspiring various revolutionary resurgences and acts of resistance to the Guide’s power, but also traumatizing the Guide with hallucinations of his upper body reappearing in various situations that essentially leave the Guide paralyzed and unable to function. After completing the execution of Martial and his family, the Guide takes the sole surviving family member, Chaïdana, as a concubine. However, he is driven to madness by visions that leave him sexually crippled:

Le Guide Providentiel allait consommer son viol quand il vit le haut du corps de Martial : les yeux avaient poussé, mais la blessure au front, ainsi que celle de la gorge restaient béantes. Le Guide Providentiel se précipita à son PM et balaya la chambre d’une infernale rafale qui tua tous les gardes qu’il disposait comme de vieux objets de musée... (SLT, *La Vie* 23)

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<sup>198</sup> Additionally, Amadou Ly talks about the interpenetration of life and death in *La Vie et demie*, which he traces to Congolese mythology, in which there is often a *va-et-vient* between parallel worlds of the living and the dead: “il n’y a pas véritablement cette séparation entre le monde des vivants et le monde des morts.” (See Appendix A) Semujanga, “De l’intergénéricité,” also discusses the concurrence of Kongo and biblical mythology in the text (*NEF*, 213).

The Guide's physical impotence is a revealing sign of the tenuousness of his political power, and even his attempt to restore his dominance through the use of his weapon further erodes his power as he lays waste to his own palace guards. Mongo-Mboussa remarks that Labou Tansi's exploitation of the body makes "la problématique du bas matériel et corporel (manger, boire, copuler) apparaît[re] comme une démarche de subversion" (141). In the excessive attention paid to the body and its various functions, Labou Tansi undermines the cold calculated logic of any supposed "sound mind," replacing it with a far more unpredictable, yet infinitely more understandable ante-logic (in the sense of anterior) of bodily being—"une manière de se tenir le ventre avant la tête."<sup>199</sup>

Mbembe also notes the central importance of the ability to eat, drink, and be merry as integral parts of the kinds of spectacular festivities that serve to seduce the people into ratifying the power of postcolonial despots, discussing this particular scene from *La Vie et demie* as an example of how subversive renderings of the lewd, dysfunctional, or grotesque body constitute occasions for popular laughter and (at least temporary) respite from power's domination (146-7).<sup>200</sup> This is indeed the case in *La Vie et demie* where, despite the fact that le Guide Providentiel is made crazy by his desire for Chaïdana's "corps formel," unfortunately "ses 'tropicalités' ne répondaient pas à l'appel de leur maître," and as a result, she becomes convinced that "le Guide Providentiel n'était qu'un pauvre guignol d'impuissant qui se limitait à pratiquer l'amour avec l'index et le majeur" (55-6). Eventually the information becomes part of the public discourse as "le petit peuple et les Gens de Martial commençaient à officialiser l'impuissance sexuelle du Guide Providentiel" (57). When the Guide is perceived as a floundering sexual failure, his human status seems to trump his political power, and Mongo-Mboussa describes this strategy as "un acte de rabaissement carnavalesque qui le [le Guide] réduit au rang de simple citoyen" (143) The body in its carnavalesque tropicality that parodies power by

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<sup>199</sup> Sony Labou Tansi, speaks here of his own writing in *L'Autre monde* (Paris: Revue noire, 1997), p. 77.

<sup>200</sup> See also Patrick Corcoran's article, "Black Humour: *La Vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi," in *Laughter and Power*, eds. John Parkin & John Phillips (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 187-207, in which he discusses the importance of humour and a tragic-comic absurdity that borders on madness as a subversive political strategy (esp. p. 196). Interestingly, the black humour was that which was traditionally attributed to the melancholic disposition in medieval physiology.

confronting it with the image of its own humanity—“l’exploitation du bas materiel et corporel comme une forme de subversion totale” (Mongo-Mboussa, 144)—is the baroque figure *par excellence* in the Postcolony for its ability to adapt, mimic, confront, contort, and masquerade itself as something fantastically other.

In this way, the refusal of the Guide’s nether regions to respond to his will can be read as a figuration of corporeal rebellion against a formal power structure (or belly holding itself above the head as Sony might say). It is precisely in terms of the body and its relationship to power as both an object for oppression and a vehicle for fantastic performative escape that Eugène Nshimiyimana situates Sony Labou Tansi’s writing in the tradition of carnivalesque bodies imagined by Rabelais, García Marquez, and others.<sup>201</sup> He describes the way in which Sony’s bodies assume an extra-corporeal dimension: “plus que de simples motifs narratifs, ils deviennent des nœuds de signification où l’écriture s’attache à cartographier le monde l’infinité de ses possibilités de réalisation” (88-9). For example, the reappearance of Martial’s upper body symbolizes a form of resistance of a body that will not cease to exist, no matter how extreme the modes of bodily oppression. Nshimiyimana also notes that “le mnémotope n’est point investi d’une volonté de mémoire, ne répond à aucun geste d’ordre politique visant la matérialisation de la mémoire. Il est involontaire, il n’est pas institué pour la conservation d’un passé qui risquerait de se perdre. Son rôle consiste à abolir l’écart temporel entre l’actuel et le révolu.” (95) Martial’s mutilated body resuscitates a traumatic memory in the Guide in a way that repeatedly re-presents the past by making the past present, and as such, defies not only the political power of the Guide, but also the natural order of material plausibility. Accordingly, Martial’s “dead” body’s apparent psychological dominance over that of the Guide’s “living” body, manifested in his inability to perform effectively, reverses the power dynamic and illustrates the power of powerlessness that occupies a central place in Labou Tansi’s writing itself. In the words of Paré, this fantastic line of flight from life to a life-beyond opens up the possibility “d’accorder une

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<sup>201</sup> Nshimiyimana’s article is entitled “Les corps mythiques de Sony Labou Tansi: figuration et ‘mnémotopie,’” *Études Françaises* 41:2 (2005): 87-97, which discusses the extra-corporeal dimensions of bodies in Sony Labou Tansi’s texts, as present sites of inscription of past traumas.

autre possibilité de vie aux morts et transcender ainsi, par le biais de l'imaginaire, l'un des aspects de la condition humaine" (105).

It is important to note the ways in which the body functions as more than just a figure within the text. As Caroline Giguère remarks in her article, "*La vie et demie* ou les corps chaotiques des mots et des êtres," the body also functions as figurations of the text itself in "l'écriture du corps [qui] va au-delà d'une thématisation du corps pour investir poétiquement les signifiants de la corporéité" (96). According to Giguère, the massacred and mutilated bodies of Martial and of Chaïdana that survive their own deaths incarnate an anti-rational logic of madness that finds its correlative function in linguistic dismemberments and a reincarnated French syntax. The effect of this corporeal and linguistic de-construction, a "[c]ohérence dans l'absurde, à l'exagération d'une violence qui dépasse l'entendement répond la persistance surnaturelle des corps détraqués à survivre, en bouts, en morceaux, en mots" (Giguère, 98). This "other logic," moving from stasis to motion as a representation of the process of becoming fragmentary marks a baroque trend toward performing allegory that reaches beyond the realm of symbolism to actually embody that other (in) representation. Giguère states: "l'écriture sonyenne déplace la représentation classique du corps [...] Les images créées par l'utilisation du champ lexical langagier pour décrire le corps, et celles des signifiants corporels pour multiplier le sens des expressions, ont toutes deux pour effet d'augmenter la charge des mots et de leur insuffler une 'vie et demie'" (103-4). Labou Tansi's bodies (both in and of the text) are not classical representations of symmetry and purity; his bodies are complex baroque figurations that represent something more than themselves, an other level of significance. The baroque is very much an art that distances things from their appearances, to the extent that representation itself can actually become a primary mode of existence. Thus, a baroque aesthetic functions in terms of profoundly human categories of experience, which are ultimately based in the body. As Marshall Brown writes, "[u]nderneath form lies feeling, and the primacy of the body lies in its role as the medium for understanding and communicating human emotions" (98); and later, he cites Wölfflin:

“In the baroque, ‘the body breathes’” (104).<sup>202</sup> In so far as the baroque is an art that expresses the highs and lows of human emotion, it is also an art of the body as the seat of the subjective, i.e. lived, experience of those emotions.

An important distinction to make at this point is the one between the body or bodies *in* the text and the body *of* the text. Martin Seele’s *Aesthetics of Appearing* theorizes the anthropological faculty of sensing things such as works of art in the way they appear.<sup>203</sup> He analyzes the extra-textual elements of texts as the “body” of texts, asserting that “[the text’s] artistry lies in the creation of a language that is receptive to our imaginative projections—an instrument that wants us, the readers, to play it according to the musical score of its letters” (130). Thus we see that texts themselves, no longer the fixed and immutable forms of authority and discursive power, are in fact subject to revisions based on their appearance to the mind of the seemingly powerless reader. Accordingly, an attentive reading of postcolonial African texts might reveal a subtle subversion through the apparent choices of language, the “different” writing to which Mbembe refers, which is practiced to a more immediate degree in the textual-linguistic subversions of postcolonial writers such as Henri Lopes, Sony Labou Tansi, and others.<sup>204</sup> Seele refers to this type of strategy as “an inconspicuous presence of *language*[, which] reveals itself in its play; it shows the readers how they are players of this play” (131). The carnivalesque collapse of spectator and actor (or in this case of reader and text) highlights the performative aspect of the text.

It is precisely this “mise-en-scène” of the literal and physical body in *La Vie et demie*, which does not correspond to reality but to an excessive and absurd representation that mounts a poignant critique of reality, wherein lies the ethical dimension of its

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<sup>202</sup> See Marshall Brown’s essay on Wölfflin, “The Classic is the Baroque” in *Turning Points: Essays in the History of Cultural Expression* (pp.88-113).

<sup>203</sup> To reiterate, a baroque aesthetic is essentially an aesthetic of appearance. As Marshall Brown states in “The Classic is the Baroque,” citing Wölfflin: “classicism ‘represents things as they are,’ while the baroque represents them ‘as they seem to be,’ even though this appearance ‘never coincides with the form of the object’” (Brown, 91). For more on Martin Seele’s *Aesthetics of Appearing*, see my Chapter II “Baroque and *The Society of the Spectacle*.”

<sup>204</sup> It is appropriate to note the rapprochement between these two particular authors, as Sony attributes his work to Lopes’ influence in the dedication of *La Vie et demie* “à Henri Lopes aussi, puisque en fin de compte je n’ai écrit que son livre.” In addition, I will study such baroque textual linguistic strategies in the works of two female authors, Ken Bugul and Calixthe Beyala in chapter VII.



aesthetic. In portraying a semblance of madness and chaos, both in the bodies (and the words that act in the text in their stead) that nonetheless follow their own internal orders, they confront the insanity of the Guide's dictatorial regime, along with its forms of discursive absolutisms, censorship, parading behind a façade of a reasonable authority.<sup>205</sup> It follows, as Giguère has astutely noted, that Sony's text is infused with bodily images and references that perform an "éclatement sémantique," which engenders a corporeal, i.e. visceral, experience of the text rather than a purely rational understanding of its logolexical significations. Accordingly, *La Vie et demie* is able to represent a (textual) body that is far more complex and obscure in which "le mot de passe acquiert par cette addition de chair le statut de stratégie charnelle: le corps devenant le lieu d'un encodage" (101). Of course, the "mot de passe" to which she refers is that mentioned in the author's foreward of *La Vie et demie*. It is here in the paratextual space that precedes and frames the text that Labou Tansi situates his work in an economy of death by defining his historical period as "une époque où l'homme est plus que jamais résolu à tuer la vie" (9). Secondly, he shows his awareness of his project in terms of previous discourses on Africa but defends his project through an appeal to the harsh reality of life, stating: "Et à l'intention des amateurs de la couleur locale qui m'accuseraient d'être cruellement tropical et d'ajouter de l'eau au moulin déjà inondé des racistes, je tiens à préciser que *La Vie et Demie* fait ces taches que la vie seulement fait" (10). Labou Tansi's assertion of his art imitating life at once places him in the political and discursive arena of a number of literary and philosophical works that have emphasized a bestial and grotesque caricature of Africa as a fictional object of intellectual consumption. However, his work is "different" in that it approaches such depictions with a subtle humor for "l'absurdité de l'absurde" that shows exactly how these images are at once true and false, appropriating the obscene stylistic of power and thus revealing its ultimate vacuity. As such, Sony

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<sup>205</sup> This is precisely what Joseph Paré refers to in *Écritures et discours* when he writes, "la stratégie discursive qui présente des traits de baroque au-delà de sa luxuriance est portée par une lame de fond subversive. Parce qu'elle rend possible cette mise en opposition, elle permet de décrire cette anté-politique." (119-20) The ante-politic described are the silent expressions and the hidden actions (what goes on in the Green Room before the actors appear on stage), and a baroque discursive strategy represents this vulgar, obscene, mundane, yet extraordinary side of existence in the way the bodies in and of the text itself are (de)constructed.

Labou Tansi accomplishes the contradictory task of writing his Africa through what he calls “chair-mots-de-passe” (passwords-of-flesh) which, in their embodied reception, create an image of Africa that is an image of “living [or dying?] in the concrete world” in all of its contrasts between sublime grotesquerie, significance and indifference, pleasure and pain, power and impotence, fantastic and mundane, and in these contrasts there lies the undeniable subjective experience of existence and its quotidian performance.

**B. *La Vie et demie*: “Radio-trottoir” to “Roman-trottoir”**

Labou Tansi performs the baroque practice of participatory subversion in the body of his text (the metaphors, figures, and expressions that tropicalize it or color it African) in a powerful stylistic that simultaneously affirms and distorts the mechanisms through which power functions. The medium available to the writer is that of language, which carries with it all the social and political baggage of literacy, French education, and (neo)colonial practices. However, in the way Labou Tansi manipulates words, he is able to practice the same (but converse) powers of stylistic horror employed by the power spectacle, deconstructing its rhetorical dominance and penetrating its illusionism to open up baroque pathways or lines of flight to escape beyond the limits of representation. For example, there is a kind of crass humor employed in the desecration of the written work inasmuch as its usefulness is illustrated in the subversive activities of Martial’s supporters, which center around the distribution of tracts. These tracts appear to have little effect beyond incurring the wrath of the Guide’s oppressive regime. In one instance, when the use of the word “enfer” is outlawed in an effort to curb the popular trend of referring to the nation of Katamalanasié by that name, Martial’s supporters place in the bed of the Guide’s second successor, Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père, “quatorze kilos de tracts où était écrit un seul mot: enfer” (133). It seems to be of little importance what the words in the tracts are, but the mere fact that they are—their *being*—exemplifies an act of resistance and revolt. The relative banality of words, which points more to the way they mean something (or nothing) rather than what they mean, is made clear in the statement regarding the inscription of “héros national” on the tomb of Kapahacheu, the Pygmy who nurtured Chaïdana’s children in the forest and who in fact died defecating his guts out [“il chia tout ses intestins avant de mourir en criant ‘l’enfer!’” (120)] after being forced to eat

a military uniform. The empty and disembodied nature of words in the hands of those in power is summed up in the rather ironic statement: “Les mots sont souvent plus morts que les morts, à moins qu’ils ne mentent” (124). This one sentence reflects the insignificance of words that are even more dead than the dead, having nothing to do with truth or reality as it were, but at the same time having the power to create a new reality, a new truth, that of representation, much like Martial’s dead beyond dead body. Thus, although Kapahacheu was brutally killed, the inscription, which was intended to gain the favor of the beautiful Chaïdana, speaks more truth than a lie, for indeed Kapahacheu is a national hero.<sup>206</sup> But the irony and ambiguity is that he is a hero for the “other” nation, the subversive people’s nation that lives within and underneath the artificial nation of the repressive dictatorship.<sup>207</sup>

Christiane Ndiaye’s article “De la permutation des mots et des choses dans *La Vie et demie*” identifies precisely the difference between a “réception destructrice” and a “réception productive” in the way that words are employed, in the former case by the power structure, and in the latter by countless other modes of popular collective creativity (55). Against the trend of standardization that transforms cultural objects and signs into “déchets,” the practice of re-inscribing significance to these voided signifiers by introducing them into other contexts—a process which takes place both on the level of the diegesis as well as in the novelistic structure itself—illustrates the resurrecting power (bringing words back from the dead, in a sense) of creative verbal permutations and semantic reinterpretations. This is the task to which Labou Tansi’s text sets itself, enacting that schism between reality and representation as it represents a world of fiction that is nonetheless truthful to reality, while “reality” in the novel, to put it bluntly, appears merely the fiction created by the *dictature* of Katamalanasie. It is in precisely this way that it embodies the baroque complicity of subversion. For example, in refusing to

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<sup>206</sup> We are told that Kapahacheu’s name means “Coeur tendre,” and it is more than a little ironic that the Guide Providentiel’s first successor takes for himself the name of Henri-au-Coeur-Tendre.

<sup>207</sup> This split will concretize in the final chapters of *La Vie et demie* when thirty dissident sons of the Guide secede and form an independent rival nation of Darmellia under the guidance of their grandmother Chaïdana. However, this material manifestation of an “other nation” is ultimately insignificant as fratricide effectively destroys both: “Les deux pays n’étaient plus que des cadavres qui se battaient dans le vide” (183).

die the death dispensed to him by the Guide, Martial takes on another life in death, that of the martyr, which then sparks an entire movement of social upheaval and rebellion, further fueled by the hallucinatory reappearances of the decrepit “haut-du-corps.” Furthermore, the effect of Martial’s words, a kind of defacing graffiti found written in various places in a strange indelible black ink, was to create a myth of Martial who appeared to have escaped death, which inspired “un secte des Gens de Martial qui refusaient de mourir, et qui entraient tous dans la curieuse mort de Martial” (86). Citing an instance when Henri-au-Coeur-Tendre ordered his guards to open fire on a group of university students protesting “les politisations inconditionnelles des diplômés,” the ninety-two dead “entrèrent tous dans la mort de Martial.” After that, “Nombreux étaient maintenant ceux qui voulaient mourir la mort de Martial pour avoir l’occasion de repasser dans la vie après la mort.” (86-7) I must point out the allegorical aspects of this passage in which there are striking parallels to the crucifixion of Christ and his return to life leads to a virtual wave of martyrdoms as Martial’s followers seek to emulate his example.<sup>208</sup> This parallel is made even more explicit by the utterance—regarding the excrements that are repeatedly found on the tomb of the recently deceased Guide (“on donna à Martial ce qui était à Martial et au Guide Providentiel ce qui était au Guide Providentiel” [86]), which very closely resembles Jesus’ exhortation to “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22:21). This idea directly confronts the notion of absolute political authority with the notion of another reality (be it the “kingdom of heaven” proposed by Christ or the “vie et demie” implied by Martial), which exists on another hermeneutic level of seeing the world and understanding *human* language differently, as tools to manipulate.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Amadou Ly sees in this figuration, and in the way that *La Vie et demie* borrows from a variety of aesthetic, political, even religious source materials, a kind of baroque: “Bon, oui, il y a une dimension, et je vous l’ai dit, c’est ça le baroque, j’allais dire, chercher dans la littérature traditionnelle congolaise, chercher la matière d’idéologie dans le marxisme, chercher aussi, vous avez parfaitement raison, dans la mythologie chrétienne. Martial, effectivement, est une figure de Christ.” (See Appendix A)

<sup>209</sup> Christiane Ndiaye, “De la permutation des mots et des choses,” notes the way in which Sony’s work indicates the role of literary creation in relation to reality: “...dans le monde postcolonial, les politiciens, autant que les écrivains, sont avant tout *conscients* de la *maniabilité* de l’Histoire et des traditions et dont on sert librement pour fabriquer des *mythes* de teneur *idéologique*” (57). Both are engaged in the creation of fictions—the one that seeks to empty all significance from being and from language, and the other that

The question of the human condition, beyond that of the Congo or even Africa, is foregrounded in Labou Tansi's work.<sup>210</sup> Ndiaye also points this out, particularly in the way that Sony draws not only from African sources for his textual composition, citing "la tradition biblique" in the scene where Martial along with his family is first brought before the Guide with the words "voici l'homme" (Ndiaye, 59). This utterance, oft-repeated in the text each time a supposed dissident is brought in for punishment—the doctor Tchi for having helped Chaïdana escape to the Hotel *La Vie et Demie* (41), Layisho for distributing subversive literature (79)—refers to the biblical "ecce homo" with which Pontius Pilate introduced Christ to the crowd during his trial. According to Christiane Ndiaye, the allegorical rapprochement between Christ and Martial's martyrization illustrates that the moribund reality of Africa represented in the novel can be generalized to the rest of humanity: "l'humanité s'est engagée depuis bien longtemps dans la 'situation honteuse' où elle se trouve aujourd'hui" (59). Labou Tansi's work is effectively a reorganization of thought as he portrays not only Africa, but the world, implicating not only the corrupt dictatorships on the continent, but also "la puissance étrangère qui fournissait les Guides" in a complex web of global interactions.<sup>211</sup> What Labou Tansi does in his writing is assemble words and signs from everywhere in the world and in history, putting them together in novel juxtapositions through a kind of transformative recycling that creates "le déplacement de sens effectué" (a displacement of actual meaning) and the need to then reinvent or search for new meanings "dans le foisonnement de l'imaginaire" (Ndiaye, 54). This conglomerate effect of numerous

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seeks not only to restore significance to the world and the words that occupy it, but to fill (even overflow) these with a marvelous surreality (Ndiaye, 54).

<sup>210</sup> See the interview conducted by Bernard Magnier in 1983, which appears in the assemblage *Sony Labou Tansi: Paroles inédites* (Montreuil-sous-Bois: Éditions Théâtrales, 2005) under the title "Je voudrais qu'on me laisse faire le théâtre pour l'humain" (pp. 71-3).

<sup>211</sup> For example, the allusion to Jean Calciun and invention of apocalyptic killer flies, which permitted him to "gagner la douzième guerre contre la Katamalanésie et la puissance étrangère qui fournissait les guides" (90 [and again on pp. 118, 174]), and earlier, the deployment of "trois mille bérets, formés par des officiers d'une puissance étrangère" (61). There is even the instance of a "colonel américain chargé de [la] sécurité personnelle [du Guide] (5). The Guide also speaks directly of foreign interests of "des Espagnols qui incitaient les voisins d'outrageantes provocations, des Français qui se battaient pour le permis de prospection en mer" (18), and there is the involvement of the ONU and a secret investigation of several deaths from paralysis (65). Furthermore, the mysterious "noir de Martial," referred to as "d'un noir d'encre de Chine" (16, 19, 125), is perhaps a reference to Maoist communist politics (generally denoted by the color red) as they are adapted to Africa.

voices creates a truly baroque effect of an overwhelming totality in which the constituent parts can only be discerned, deliberately and imaginatively, within the whole of the work.

Hence, it is that the operation of cultural “métissage” is carried out in Sony Labou Tansi’s text in that Western and African traditions are not held at a distance, but rather intertwined and multiplied in a complicit relation that mirrors the temporal and spatial inextricability of worlds in the global era. That is to say that spatial orientations of East and West, North and South, First and Third Worlds are dissolved in the unicity of a complex “tout-monde,” where Africa assumes center-stage. Similarly, time is also redefined along these same lines, as the structure of the text follows a disjointed chronology that flashes back and forth with bits of the story (both past and future) that relate on a thematic or topical level. As the narrative proceeds from its point of departure in the murder of Martial—“C’était l’année où Chaïdana avait eu quinze ans” (11)—toward the conclusion when Chaïdana’s great grandsons are engaged in a cataclysmic war that threatens to destroy everything, there are several references to events predating Chaïdana’s adolescence: from the anecdote relating the rise to power of Chaïdana’s deliverer, docteur Tchi, under the Guide’s predecessor (33), the Guide’s own history as a menial “voleur de bétail” who faked his own death to be absolved of his crime (25), and even the pre-historic civilizations of the aboriginal Pygmies (89). Even more common, perhaps, are the interjections of the future within the narration, as spaces and relationships tend to hold more sway than chronology: from the foreshadowing of Jean Calcium and his flies of destruction (89) to the recounting of the death of Layisho the fisherman who rescued Chaïdana, who was kept captive for 86 years during which time he wrote with his own blood “sur des tonnes de papier” (83)—the same “homme en cage” who will be observed by Patatra, the son of the Guide Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père and Chaïdana-aux-gros-cheveux years later (131).<sup>212</sup> This temporal *décalage* in the narrative tissue emphasizes an important theoretical orientation that Ndiaye remarks in terms of the labels “postcolonial” and “postmodern,” which are often ascribed to Sony’s

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<sup>212</sup> Layisho’s writing marks an interesting form of resistance to the silence imposed upon him by the removal of his tongue (86 & 136), for the words written in blood reflect a much more enduring account of his suffering than any words he might have uttered during his lifetime.

work. She writes: “La logique du ‘pré-’ et du ‘post-’ est une logique réductrice digne des Guides Providentiels: elle ne rajoute presque rien au matériau d’origine qui demeure le ‘colonial’ et le ‘moderne’” (67). In *La Vie et demie*, as in its theoretical criticisms, it is not a question of before or after, but rather an attempt to get beyond rational and linear logic to paint a more faithful, if frustrating, picture of a modern/colonial world and humanity engaged in the struggle to surpass its limitations and redefine itself in terms of the relations that exist in and between multiple overlapping realities.

These multiple layers of spatial and temporal being in *La Vie et demie* reveal a much more full sense of the world and the word, through the corporeal embodiment that serves as the point of departure for any relationship in the text. Eugène Nshimiyimana remarks: “Si le corps est si important dans le roman sonyen, ce n’est pas tant par sa dimension symbolique que par sa relation au temps et à l’espace. [...] il est l’espace du temps qui passe et demeure comme il est du temps dans l’espace de la chair.” (97) The body is primal and primordial; places and periods are linked to the bodies (both of the Guides, and of the dissidents) and the way in which these bodies interact. Thus, “les corps sonyens inaugurent une mise en procès des mots qui transcende les projets idéologiques du roman engagé” (Giguère, 106). Underlying logic, prior to the *logos*, Sony’s novelistic project is to bring these tenets of Western civilization and rationality into question via an anterior logic of the body that begs for a multiplication of meaning based on the productive reception of signs and symbols, both in the text, and with his text itself. The constant play between words and their meanings in Sony Labou Tansi’s work exemplifies a baroque aesthetic strategy that embodies the political ideology of playing along with the intent to undo. Rather than proposing a new fiction for a better reality, *La Vie et demie* reveals the chaotic reality of being and of language that underlies the notions of fiction and reality altogether. Accordingly, one might read *La Vie et demie* precisely as that demonstrative or performative act of speaking the bodies of words, expressing their other, hidden meanings shrouded in silence.

It is interesting to note the typically baroque fashion with which the writer, Sony Labou Tansi, is himself implicated in the text he creates, much in the same way the (masked) presence of writer/politician Henri Lopes appears in the text of *Le Pleurer-rire*.

The revolutionary character of Martial, after suffering his martyrdom at the hands of the Guide, communicates via the written word, a creative expression that spreads through the dissemination of countless tracts, even to the work of Layisho, “l’homme en cage [qui] voulut écrire pour briser l’intérieur, s’y perdre, s’y chercher, y faire des routes, des sentiers, des places publiques, des cinémas, des rues, des lits, des amis” (82). One can read in the physical death of Martial (and in the imprisonment of Layisho), as well as the aftershocks made by his words and their subsequent embodiments, the correlative non-life of the writer himself who sacrifices experience in the world for the creation of another world in text, which will in turn create a proliferation of other subtexts and paratexts that give a certain corporeality to a world that would otherwise be lost to the transience of mere words. Writing as a way to escape death, or rather, to be able to choose one’s death, perhaps not physical death (as Sony Labou Tansi indeed died in 1995), but at least to resist total annihilation by leaving behind words infused with bits of flesh, this is the task of representation to which the baroque writer is called.

Less concerned with rendering reality than performing it, *La Vie et demie* exemplifies a baroque post/coloniality, a conscious rhetorical strategy that situates itself simultaneously within and without, through a blurring of the lines between the body and its extension, text and paratext, and in so doing illuminates various textual, corporeal, and existential strategies of subversive complicity for the postcolonized subject. The textual nature of this innovation marks an important juncture in the development of African writing in that there is less emphasis on the recuperation of a lost African oral tradition within a Western aesthetic framework, but rather the adaptation of life to a new form of communication—the text. The African text, however, goes beyond the merely literary to encompass the textual fabric of daily living. Whereas Henri Lopes accorded a central significance to the trope of a “radio-trottoir” in his novel, by which official discourse was transformed into alternative (oral) discourses of reality,<sup>213</sup> Ndiaye highlights the development of a “roman-trottoir” in Sony Labou Tansi, a popular form of writing that

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<sup>213</sup> This trope also appears in *La Vie et demie* as “Radio-on-dit” (152-3), a popular form of disseminating alternative, and generally subversive points of view relating to the governing power structure—in this instance the violent rhetoric of the guide Jean-Coeur-de-Pierre against the secessionist movement of the chaïdanisés.



records these alternative significations of officially sanctioned signifiers (words) in body-texts. In an interview by Bernard Magnier, when asked about the literary richness of the Congo, Sony replied “C’est un foisonnement”; however, he does not limit this to figurehead postcolonial writers, or to their legends, but goes even further to state: “Et là, dans les rues, à Brazzaville, c’est plein de livres. On ne les voit pas, ils ne sont pas publiés, il n’y a pas de droits d’auteur, mais si tu écoutes les gens, ce sont des livres.” (*Paroles Inédites*, 55-6). It is clear that the books to which he refers, whether written or unwritten, exist in the minds (and in the bodies) of those who live in the modern world and absorb its multiple messages through a “réception productive” which they then recycle to create their own unique way of looking at and being in a world that is itself a novel embodiment of orality that incorporates countless other “books” of experiences that are daily opened up and read on streets and sidewalks of Africa and all around the world.

### **C. Baroque femininity in the Postcolony**

With as much emphasis as has been placed on the body, I cannot ignore the question of gendering, which divides and separates bodies into two distinct camps according to the nature of their sex. In *L’inscription féminine: le roman de Sony Labou Tansi*, Drocella M. Rwanika discusses, among other things, Sony’s non-conformist writing as “‘une langue et demie’ qui situe parfois son texte à cheval sur le français canonique et quelque chose d’autre” (16), citing the use of the vulgarity, neologisms, and a certain rapport with orality as ways in which his text exceeds the limits of classical representation. Similarly, Sony’s inscription of the feminine appears as multi-faceted and complex as his poetic language, which paints a portrait of the woman between traditional roles and those necessitated by the forces of global modernity, and of course the numerous hybrid permutations that derive from the confluences of these roles. One cannot ignore the fact that in *La Vie et demie*, the primary driving force of the narration is the female protagonist, Chaïdana. The rhythm of the story follows her from the very beginning (“C’était l’année où Chaïdana avait eu quinze ans” [11]), through generations and to the end when her great-grandchildren, “les chaïdanisés,” begin to die, one after the other in a world reduced to ash by war and likened to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (178, 189). While it is made abundantly clear that these men die, the

procreative force of Chaïdana's body and the influence of her daughter's written words remain eternally present as the primary driving force that keeps the narration—and the nation—moving forward.

Chaïdana is the character who seems to defy death. First of all, on the brink of womanhood, Chaïdana is confronted with the abject condition of ultimate powerlessness: violently orphaned from her family, and then taken as a bride (although the marriage is never consummated) by the Guide Providentiel. Furthermore, she is plagued by the traumatic memories of the tortures, deaths, and the ingestion of her family members, which she relives each evening and noon, having become “cette loque humaine habitante de deux mondes: celui des morts et celui des ‘pas-tout-à-fait-vivants’” (17). Her condition of having a corpse inside herself, an incorporation of the other (“Ils m’ont mis là-dedans un corps et demi...” [22]), stands in stark contrast to the diminutive “haut du corps” of Martial and embodies the lived contradiction of Sony's human subject who is literally poised between two worlds—the one dead, and the other, not quite alive—like something in gestation. Much as Sony's language remains suspended between French and that intangible, ineffable “quelque chose d'autre,” Chaïdana is the figure par excellence of the melancholic state of morbid (yet erotic) femininity that calls to mind the baroque fascination with pathology.<sup>214</sup> She is seemingly beyond life, an existence that is resumed in her later reflection that “Chacun est dans sa mort... C'est peut-être moins moche, leur mort” (64). Furthermore, the mutated living-dead bodies of Martial and Chaïdana, at once grotesquely real and fantastically mythical, are emblematic of a baroque style, as they occupy a space within and beyond the ordinary in a terrifying marvelous reality, which Chaïdana unleashes as she uses her body as a subversive weapon of destruction and death.

In “Les corps mythiques de Sony Labou Tansi: figuration et ‘mnémotopie’,” Eugène Nshimiymana discusses the body as it relates specifically to power, and he notes that “le corps de la femme [...] devient le lieu privilégié de la violence et des sévices

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<sup>214</sup> Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), for example, indicates a fascination with pathology, not only from a medical standpoint, but as a humanist inquiry in to the nature of human emotions and passions, including desire and the death drive.

sexuels” (94). Similarly, Rwanika shows that beyond merely depicting women in their different roles, Sony creates sensual women who are active and assertive in their sensuality (89); furthermore, he maintains that these sensual women are capable of exercising their agency in society in dangerous ways, such as through political prostitution or through the character of the militant “femme maquisarde” (124, 131), Chaïdana being an example of both of these. It is still important to note, however, that the violence and death that takes place in the woman’s body through her sexuality is not something inherent in the feminine, but rather a reflection of the non-life of the power structure “qu’on appelait la vie avec trois V,” namely: villas, voitures, vins, [et] femmes (36). If life is reduced to the consumption of material objects (women included), then the death that annihilates such a life indicates a reversal of these rules, such that killing becomes a way of giving life, or rather of killing the non-life that is merely a simulacrum. Life is something to be found only in death, and Chaïdana is a perfect example of the way in which sex and violence converge in the body of the abject feminine.<sup>215</sup> From her room in the Hotel *La Vie et Demie*, Chaïdana uses sex and the allure of her young and desirable body as a means to entice and kill several high-ranking government officials by “l’amour au champagne,” a few weeks after which they mysteriously die (49). Her political prostitution through the willful exploitation of her own body-as-object/subject illustrates a subversion through a manipulation of desire of the male power structure based on sexual domination of women by men, and a powerful reversal of the perverted social control of the Guide Providentiel for whom sex was also considered a means of subjection. However, where the Guide failed in his attempts, Chaïdana succeeds, not once, but twice as she changes her identity—not once but several hundred times in total—after a murderous hiatus in the Hôtel *La Vie et Demie*, returning once again to torment the Guide.

Not only does Chaïdana use her feminine power to dispense death in an attempt to overturn the economy of death that dominates the Postcolony, she also uses it to create

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<sup>215</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, in which she approaches abjection through various depictions of the feminine. She states, “But it is especially with prostitutes and nymphomaniacs, who are nevertheless tackled with fascination if not with a certain amount of sympathy, that we are presented with a wild, obscene, and threatening femininity” (167). I will further develop this notion in the next chapter.

life outside of it. Following her foray into political prostitution, Chaïdana is beaten, raped, and beaten again by her (deceased) father, and then raped repeatedly by “treize cascades de miliciens, soit un équivalent en hommes de trois cent soixante-trois,” leading her to conclude: “La vie est morte, l’homme est devenu pire qu’un animal” (73). Dehumanization is apparent initially in the fact that she is raped and beaten by a dead man, and furthermore in the excessive brutality of the act that follows. The perpetrators are not men, just as she is not a woman; in both cases, they are reduced to bodies, and in all cases, it is the body that suffers. She is rescued by Amedandio and taken to live with a fisherman Layisho, and from this trauma and the attempt to de-humanize her through the appropriation and penetration of her body, Chaïdana, after eighteen months and sixteen days, gives birth to triplets—a girl and two boys whom she names after Layisho, giving them the first names Chaïdana, Martial, and Amedandio. It is at this point that Chaïdana assumes the role of the *maquisarde*, living clandestinely and writing subversive literature against the regime of the Guide.

It is here that the text in conjunction with a certain conception of corporeality again comes into play in Sony Labou Tansi’s work. The morbid resurrection of Martial’s mute “haut-du-corps” assumed the form of textual resistance, exemplified in the collective inscription by three million young men of the phrase “Je ne veux pas mourir cette mort” in black paint all over the city of Yourma. This revolutionary act of collective defiance spawned the counter-attack of “La guerre contre le noir de Martial” (44-5), and in spite of the efforts of the government to suppress this outbreak, “la couleur de Martial continuait à vivre ici” (63). It is in this same vein that Chaïdana’s later resistance plays itself out, as the titles of her works illustrate the link between the body and the word: her *Receueil de sottises au crayon de Beauté*, *Mémoires d’un démon*, *Bouts de chair en bouts de mots*, *Les mots font pitié*, and *Mon père s’appelait Martial* are distributed by Amedandio and spark a veritable outpouring of artistic expression in literature, music, and painting according to “la méthode et la vision chaïdaniennes.” She is censored, however, and the whole artistic community of Katamalanasié must go underground. (76-9). In contrast to “les mots [qui] ne disaient plus ce qui disent les mots, juste ce que voulaient les hommes qui les prononçaient,” the words of Chaïdana, as well as those of

Layisho and “le noir de Martial” express something more: they are not simply words, but words of flesh and blood that hold their meaning and something more. The words themselves, it seems, begin to take on life, but still more than life: a life and a half. Eternal, immortal, they often cannot be erased.<sup>216</sup>

Although Rwanika recognizes the important and heroic qualities of Sony Labou Tansi’s feminine characters, she nevertheless holds Sony accountable for the sexist language used to portray women in his novels. In a chapter of her book *Danses de la parole* (1996), Christiane Ndiaye elaborates on this seemingly sexist representation of women in Sony’s work. She puts forth the argument, based on a quotation from *Les Sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (“les femmes aussi sont des hommes” [Ndiaye, 90]), that although Sony’s work “tient effectivement un langage sexiste” in which “les femmes sont souvent représentées comme des objets de consommation, [...] elles ont une dimension merveilleuse et une fonction diégétique qui diffèrent généralement de celles des personnages masculins” (113). Ndiaye argues that the representation of women as objects is a function of Sony’s grotesque realism that parallels the representation of men as bestial slaves to their corporeal needs and carnal desires. However, this realism extends beyond realism into the domain of the marvelous to become a “réalisme merveilleux” through the functions of these female characters whose actions within the oppressive sexist system rise above or escape along certain lines of flight that are essentially those of a creativity fundamentally feminine in nature. This creativity appears as a function of the feminine creature whose physical attributes are often described in elegiac terms. When Chaïdana looks at herself in the mirror, for example, “c’était un corps parfaitement céleste, avec des allures et des formes systématiques et carnassières, des rondeurs folles, qui semblaient se prolonger jusque dans le vide en cuisante crue d’électricité charnelle...” (42). Accordingly, Ndiaye states: “La fonction de plusieurs de ces personnages féminins représentés comme de ‘merveilleux’ objets de consommation est donc de mieux faire ressortir le manque d’humanité de ceux qui exercent le pouvoir et

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<sup>216</sup> For instance, the writing of Martial on Chaïdana’s hands and that which covers the walls of her hotel room “étaient, comme ceux de ses mains qui n’avaient plus quitté les gants, parfaitement indélébiles” (67); also, the word “enfer,” engraved on the forehead of the guide Jean-Coeur-de-Père, cannot be removed, even surgically, as it seems to have tattooed the bone (139-40).

qui réduisent l'existence du peuple à une existence sous-humaine, animale" (103). Let us recall, once again, that the masculine hero Martial is sexually neutered in that he is merely an "haut du corps," an inverted copy of the Guide ruled by his "tropicalités," whereas not only does Chaïdana possess her body, she has "un corps et demi." Thus, women are also men in that they share in the sensuo-sexual savagery of human society, while at the same time transcending this deplorable condition through the marvelous physical beauty and verbal creativity (les écrits de Chaïdana) which, although they may not ultimately transform society into something different, are nonetheless able to create within a grotesque reality the dream or the (perhaps fleeting) vision of something more marvelous.

Thanks to the creative and procreative power of the feminine, Chaïdana's resistance lives on in her death through her namesake born of her gang rape. While Amedandio died shortly after birth, and Martial dies in exile in the forest under the care of the Pygmy Kapahacheu, Chaïdana (the daughter) survives an onslaught of paralysis to carry on her mother's legacy. Here she is infused with the knowledge of the forest and all its wonders: "La forêt du temps, la forêt de la vie" (101), introduces her to floral saps (les sèves) of all kinds that can kill or heal and words with the power to bring rain or luck, all of which "Kpahacheu versait [...] dans la cervelle creuse de Chaïdana" (98). This elementary knowledge of the world, of life, and of time that Chaïdana receives from Kapahacheu is contrasted with the world outside, that of the city, which Chaïdana tries to explain to him using the word "enfer" that her brother Martial screamed repeatedly as he died. This "enfer" is described as "une bête [...] qui vous mange vivant, et mort vous laisse tomber" (95); "le maudit pays des morts qu'on enterre," is the place where "ils ont mis des frontières jusque dans les jambes des gens" (96), where "les hommes sont des cailloux" (97). The contrast between a natural life-world and that of the city is evident from the opening page of the novel, which begins: "C'était au temps où la terre était encore ronde, où la mer était la mer—où la forêt... Non! la forêt ne compte pas, maintenant que le ciment armé habite les cervelles. La ville..." (11). The forest is seen as lost paradise, a garden of Eden, and the city, in contrast, and the civilization it represents is the problem, in habiting peoples' minds with reinforced concrete. So Chaïdana

(referred to as “Chaïdana-aux-gros-cheveux” to differentiate her from her mother) decides to go after it: “Je prendrai la ville avec mon sexe, comme maman” (99). In effect, she does so by marrying the Guide Providentiel’s successor, Henri-au-Coeur-Tendre, who is driven mad at the first sight of his bride who appears to him covered in a strange “sang noir,” which the reader recognizes as the “noir de Martial” (125). Henri-au-Coeur-Tendre is assassinated in the asylum by his quarter-brother who then assumes power under the name Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père, inheriting along with the nation, “la Toute Beauté Mère de la Katamalanasié,” Chaïdana. The son born of their union, Patatra, who rules under the name Jean-Coeur-de-Pierre, abstains from sex except for one week each year, “la semaine des Vièrges,” during which he indulges his carnal desire with fifty virgins, each time creating a televised spectacle ironically called “Le guide et la production.” The result of his annual indulgence is “les deux mille petits Jeans” whose names are designated by the letters of the alphabet, and later by numbers (148-9).<sup>217</sup> Of these children, thirty of them agree to stay in the adjacent city Darmellia, formerly the “pays des pygmées,” with their grandmother Chaïdana whose reprimands of her son’s “abus de pouvoir” and his “croisades sexuelles” (150) lead him to disown her. The feud between mother and son takes written form, starting with an exchange of letters and culminating in Chaïdana’s 452-page history of tyranny and revolt in Katamalanasié, which concludes that “l’enfer correspond à la mort de la Vie” (152). This last text represents the double of *La Vie et demie* itself—a baroque technique of embedding or re-enacting the moment of representation itself, further obfuscating the distinction between real and fictive worlds.

Ultimately, civil war breaks out between the thirty “chaïdanisés” and those who remained loyal to the Guide Jean-sans-Coeur who succeeded his father Jean-Coeur-de-Pierre after assassinating him. However, Jean-sans-Coeur is forced to flee due to an

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<sup>217</sup> The absurdity, due to a deficiency in significance by the repetition of these names: Jean Coriace, Jean Calcaire, Jean Crocodile, Jean Carbone, Jean Cou... Jean Convexe, Jean Case, Jean Crabe, Jean Carburateur, Jean Canne-à-sucre, Jean Vérole, Jean Veto, Jean Vocabulaire, Jean 93, Jean 76, Jean 1461 to name but a few, illustrates a kind of stylistic excess of a baroque proliferation that is ultimately devoid of meaning. One might also read these names, as well as the striking similarity between the names of the Guides as a parody of the royal lineages of Early Modern France from Henri, III, IV to Louis XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, etc.

assassination plot orchestrated by his mother, who then assumes the throne under the name Victoriana-au-Coeur-Sacré in order to “faire la guerre de son oncle, donc sa guerre contre les trente bâtards de Patatra” (159-60). The war between these two factions, far from a war between right and wrong, good and evil, is the vision of “l’enfer,” of the moment in which Life is dead (“l’enfer correspond à la mort de la Vie”) and is portrayed in all its apocalyptic horror, for in the interest of vanquishing their foe, the thirty dissenting “Jean de la série C” contribute to the desecration of the forest and the destruction of life by building iron mines and petrochemical plants to support their war. The war escalates as Jean Canon creates flies that are able to cause “autant de ravages dans le camp ennemi que n’en auraient causé dix années de guerre classique” (167). The war against Darmellia recurs sixteen times, each provocation followed by a retaliation of Jean Canon’s minuscule perversions of nature, and although Jean Canon and his brothers eventually vanquish in their war to end all wars (“notre guerre c’est pour la paix” [176]), this is secondary to the destruction wrought by the war itself (“la guerre c’est la guerre” [174]). The overwhelming reality of pain and destruction and death, the conclusion that “l’homme a été créé pour inventer l’enfer” (177), eclipses any sense of victory, and the “chaïdanisés” in turn succumb to the inevitable, dying off one by one. There is no escaping death, there is only the condition of “la déshumanisation générale” (40) in a world where “on est entré dans la guerre pour la guerre, on se bat comme des bêtes sauvages[, o]n se bat comme des choses” (185). It is only through the kind of subversive complicity embodied by the character(s) of Chaïdana, in the way they deny their own life for the sake of something potentially greater, only through this kind of de-subjectification in living one’s death do the allegorical lines of flight begin to appear in the baroque *trauerspiel* of *La Vie et demie* where truth lies not in words but in their bodies and the memories they contain—as the novel’s leitmotif, “mon corps se souvient,” attests (192). Eugène Nshimiymana remarks that these bodies in Sony Labou Tansi’s texts, since they function simultaneously between the past and the present, become, “l’espace du temps, de l’écriture et de la mémoire” (90). He states: “Lieu de mémoire par excellence, le corps, traversé par l’histoire et son récit qui le veut témoignage, se situe aux confluent de l’archive, du document et du monument, pour n’acquérir aucune autre dimension que



celle dictée par l'événement" (97). Chaïdana's body-texts as a "*lieu de mémoire*" contains the scars and inscriptions of the violent abuses of her past and serves as a living reminder not only of transgression, but of the ways in which one's body and one's words can be recast as instruments of resistance.

### **In-Conclusion: Can men be women too?**

The general trend, which appears on so many levels throughout Sony Labou Tansi's work, and which is what qualifies it as particularly baroque to my mind, is precisely the ways in which he creates new combinations to unlock new meanings in words and in the things (Africa, politics, human beings, society, language) that these words represent. First of all, Africa is portrayed as the mysterious, tropical land of the primordial forest and the Pygmies, as well as the set on which the modern drama of war and mechanization plays itself out. Similarly, human beings are portrayed as those mortal creatures who succumb to infinite permutations of death, but who also seem to continue to exist in a life beyond—the bodies, the memories, and immortal words that they leave behind. Thirdly, on the level of society, there is the depiction of a real and global power structure in which life is regimented by the laws and decrees of the Guides in complicity with certain "puissances étrangères" that intend to enforce order through interdictions and imposing limits on speech (in a way reminiscent of Orwell's New-Speak)<sup>218</sup>; this image is contrasted with the fluid, morphing, and chaotic practices of a human population, the spirit of which is impossible to contain by any material or physical means.<sup>219</sup> And lastly,

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<sup>218</sup> Specifically, there is the scene in which le guide Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père attempts to silence dissent by interdicting, first the word "enfer," but later, "[I]a liste des interdits s'allongea rapidement et on arriva à une forêt d'interdits, où les gens crevaient mangés par le lion de la cruauté" (135), which illustrates the impoverishment of language when used as a means to control expression. For an interesting discussion of the aporia of Orwellian New-Speak and its overcoming through a kind of love-writing, see J.F. Lyotard's June 21, 1985 letter to David Rogozinsky, which appears in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (125-37) in which he states, "On lutte contre la cicatrisation de l'événement, contre sont classement sous la rubrique des 'enfantillages', afin de préserver l'initiation. Ce combat est celui que livre l'écriture contre la Novlangue bureaucratique" (129).

<sup>219</sup> For example, society is described as "une épave que même la forme humaine avait fui [...] Simulacres sociaux, simulacres d'amour. Duperie" (37), and in contrast to this "déshumanisation générale," the reaction is "Le désordre" epitomized in a scene where the police are trying to subdue a crowd, and in that crowd the perpetrator is impossible to find as everyone assumes the responsibility, sowing confusion among the authorities by shouting "c'est pas lui, c'est moi" (39). The pursuit continues as "tout le monde fuyait, les vivants, les morts, les près-de-mourir, les va-pas-s'en-tirer, les entiers, les moitiés, les members,

the words themselves that are used by the authorities and the masses alike embody a contradiction in form, utterly devoid of meaning in the former case (reduced to mere simulacra), while in the latter case, words become veritable weapons and instruments for creating new meanings and new realities.

Perhaps the disjuncture that appears between appearances and a more marvelous reality is most striking in the difference between the masculine and feminine as I have just discussed. In *La Vie et demie*, men are generally monsters, and if they are not, they are rendered monstrous by the power structure, as is the case for Martial, the muted Layisho, and even the thirty dissident chaïdanisés who eventually contribute to the destruction of the world on a scale comparable to, if not more devastating than, that of the Guides and their resolution to kill Life. In contrast, women are portrayed ultimately as life-givers, even insofar as they themselves participate in the death and destruction (especially in the case of Chaïdana's "amours au champagne) that is the deplorable human condition portrayed in the novel, for it is through them that (pro)creative Life is restored. This Life is specifically tied to nature as it arises from Chaïdana's daughter having the knowledge of the forest imparted to her by her Pygmy friend Kapahacheu, yet beyond a mere contrast between man/culture and woman/nature, Sony's femininity involves a crossing over of nature into the domain of culture in the way that Chaïdana brings life (both real through her offspring and artistic through her writings) back into the deadened domain of Katamalanasie. When asked specifically about the feminine, Sony Labou Tansi clearly outlines the difference he sees between a male-dominated society and the (often unrecognized) power of the feminine, stating: "Notre planète est mal gérée. On paie les ingénieurs pour qu'ils foutent des conneries dans la nature, et on ne paie pas les femmes qui élèvent des enfants. C'est tragique, quand même, ça!" (*Paroles Inédites*, 63). Clearly, there is a distinction between the man-made "conneries," which modern civilization prizes and rewards, and the much more important, natural function of creating new life, which is seemingly taken for granted. Whereas this statement may on the surface appear sexist, as it seems to imply that women's role in society is simply to raise

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les morceaux [...] Des régions humaines fuyantes criaient 'Vive Martial' et leur mare était inhumaine" (40-1). The mass is impossible to subdue or control despite the most violent efforts.

children, there is a much more subtle and complex reverence and respect for this capacity that is infinitely more valuable than the buildings and bridges representing nothing more than obstructions and foolishness erected at the expense of the natural world. It is this enduring naturalism of the feminine that borders on the divine in its marvelous transcendence over nature and its miraculous creative mystery that makes Sony Labou Tansi's feminine characters the epitome of a baroque worldview by bringing the human into relation with the spiritual and the surreal.

Nicolas Martin-Granel remarks an important evolution in Labou Tansi's novels, which moves further and further away from the death-worlds depicted in his early works, including *La Vie et demie*, to approach a much more overt femininity in his later three novels, beginning with *Les Sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez*. According to Martin-Granel, the ensemble of these later works "evokes an 'other' world, within a utopic geography that redraws a new sentimental topography (*carte du tendre*), as if magically cleansed of the shame of sex: this world now repositioned under the empire of the feminine and divine, dominated by the love of women, is written in the first person plural, the 'we' of the original community" (70).<sup>220</sup> This shift in writing style from a third person singular to a first person plural that is definitively feminine marks an evolution in the author's relationship to writing, which encodes not only a more explicit involvement with the subversive feminine creativity of Chaïdana from *La Vie et demie* but also, for Martin-Granel, duplicates "the author's own activity, the Other of fiction" (71). Indeed, what happens in Sony Labou Tansi's writing is a movement to the inside, not only of his feminine characters, but of his own fictional universe as well, and Martin-Granel uncovers an important transitional period between these two vastly different approaches to the novel, in four separate pieces of unpublished work equivocally entitled *Le quatrième côté du triangle*: Sony's unfinished novel, a collection of poems, a short story, and the beginning of a diary. From these texts, one can postulate, and Martin-Granel

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<sup>220</sup> I must note the parenthetical reference to the "carte de tendre" in this quotation, which seems a clear reference to Madeleine de Scudéry's work *Clélie: histoire romaine* from the mid-seventeenth century, which is characterized, among other things, by a topographical representation and a baroque style and sentimentality. This is not a negligible detail, as I will propose precisely this kind of baroque femininity in Sony Labou Tansi's work, but also in the work of contemporary African women writers in the next chapter.

indeed does so, that Sony Labou Tansi moves from the position of the writer trapped in the real world (which explains the general pessimism of his first three novels obsessed with the inescapable “état honteux” in which humanity is trapped) to the position of the writer liberated within a new world of fiction, a fiction that is intensely invested in its poetics as a new way of naming a new reality. Sony Labou Tansi shifts his focus from the vocation of writer, specifically to that of a poet, and in so doing, he engages in a non-Euclidean poetics that is reflexively concerned with both poetry, and poetics. (75-6)

The eloquent argument proposed by Martin-Granel implies that the new Sonyen poetics that emerges from these four fragments under the enigmatic title *Le quatrième côté du triangle* and develops into the novelistic style of *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* and his subsequent works, represents woman “endowed with a third dimension that saves humanity’s honor: in addition to her head and her haunches, she has a heart, better a poem...” (81). And it is specifically with reference to this new poetic style that Martin-Granel invokes (in the epigraph with which I open this chapter) the “composite and baroque architecture” of Sony Labou Tansi’s work (81). The elements of this baroque style that I have discussed thus far in this chapter in the context of *La Vie et demie*, from verbal to the corporeal engagement with signification and the suspension of reality to elucidate alternative visions and experiences of life and death and what it means to be human, appear to burgeon explicitly in his later works through the conscious shift toward an explicitly feminine (and communal) narration. Woman, the baroque incarnation par excellence in his earlier works in the *enjambement* of two worlds—the real and the marvelous, the political and the poetic, the material and the spiritual—emerges in the forefront in such a way that further exacerbates the baroque effect of his texts, for the feminine character becomes not only the narrative driving force of the text, but also the literal driving force: she is no longer merely a narrated agent of change, but the narrating force, the narrator, and the narration itself.

Martin-Granel astutely notes how this seismic shift in the narratological perspective of Sony’s work reflects an equally prolific re-orientation of the writer-self, proposing that along with the feminine usurpation of the narrative voice in the text, Sony himself in fact undergoes a profound identity change and becomes, in a sense, that very

feminine other that moves to the fore of his writing.<sup>221</sup> Thus, it appears that the inscription of the feminine in Sony Labou Tansi's novels becomes just that: beyond merely a *de*-scription of the marvelous feminine (who can also be a man as Ndiaye shows), who is at the same time so much more in her marvelous transcendence of man's savage state, the feminine is actually inscribed in the text, and in the flesh that makes up the text (that primarily of the author) such that "she" in fact circumscribes both and becomes that poetics of a new reality that is "we" in a world mediated by "her" words. Martin-Granel shows specifically how this transformation occurs by quoting Sony Labou Tansi's "avertissement" to the unfinished novel *Le quatrième côté du triangle*: "Je choisi [sic] d'être Africain(e) au benefice du moi universel" (the "e" of "Africaine" appears crossed out in the original manuscript). From this profession, he concludes that Sony "had already crossed the threshold of fiction," confusing himself with his female character, thus prefiguring the movement toward "a gender neutral 'we'" (85). He goes on to describe the way "Sony innovates against a background of classicism," reworking his own early written material into the new framework of the feminine freed from the objectifying look of a man (86), and in so doing, adds a new critical dimension to his work (and to his world), that of the obscure fourth side of the triangle, which dissociates things and dis-places meanings into a zone of purely baroque poetics. Thus, Martin-Granel concludes that the new style that arises from the experimentations in *Le quatrième côté du triangle* is an overcoming of the material limitations that are so evident from his earlier works through a reinvention of himself as "the first person, but behind a feminine mask" and the consequent creation of a narrative universe that gets beyond the dialectics of sex and power of humanity's shameful, fallen state through the poetics of love that are inherently part of the marvelously feminine. (94-5)<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Reading the Sony's works against the *hapax* (a singular literary occurrence) of *Le quatrième côté du triangle*, Martin-Granel notes the ways in which Sony begins to invest himself in his fictional creation, and through an ironic twist of the Rimbaudian phrase "je est un autre," develops a way of writing the world through the innovative perspective "elle sommes nous," thereby assuming a subaltern pole of a dynamic reflexivity that amplifies the feminine voice and implies himself and anyone who is a member of the communal "nous" in the world spoken (or written) in/by that voice. (83-4)

<sup>222</sup> Also in this respect, Buci-Glucksmann's "baroque paradigm" is inherently linked to language of desire and an allegory of the impossible paradox of something other/more than man (a Nietzschean *uber-mensch*).

It now seems that in invoking the baroque in Sony Labou Tansi's work, it is not merely a question of a particular repertoire of stylistic or even thematic tropes and strategies, but rather an overarching reorientation of the subject and consequentially of the world that is that subject's creation, not only in terms of the text, but in the textual fabric of existence as well. Sony Labou Tansi's representation of the feminine and the power of poetics in the case of Chaïdana in *La Vie et demie*, can be seen as a kind of foreshadowing of the feminine of representation that will come to fruition in his later work as he embraces the non-classical, four-dimensional geometry of a fully feminine poetics. This feminine presence that is ever shifting in between visibility and invisibility in *La Vie et demie*, as Chaïdana (both of them) is always present, but seemingly impossible to possess, both sexually in the sense that the Guide is unable to engage in sexual intercourse with her (her appearance is like a mirage), but also physically in that her movements in and out of clandestinity, never allow for the burning question "Où est-elle?" (repeated ten times by the Guide, pp. 33-46) to be answered. Her feminine character thus operates like an anamorphic baroque gesture that only appears when viewed obliquely, a human *trompe-l'oeil* that shifts subtly in and out of existence like an immaterial fourth side of the triangle, embodying the linguistic fourth dimension of Sony Labou Tansi's pluri-signifying baroque poetics. As I proceed into the next chapter, I will explore specifically the notion of an ephemeral baroque femininity in body and in language as it relates to the universal subject of the communal "we," and the correspondent reorienting poetics of reading and writing "her" world, through a study of the works of Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul.

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Quoting Fourier, she specifies the Dionysian character of baroque being: "*un troisième sexe male et femelle et plus fort que l'homme*" (*La Raison baroque*, 188).

## **Chapter VII: The Mad Feminine and the African baroque**

One manifestation of schizophrenia as everyone knows is the movement from reality toward fantasy, a progress which not infrequently takes the form of distorted and fragmented representation, abstract formalism, an increasing preoccupation, even obsession, with pattern and design for their own sakes—especially patterns of a baroque, enormously detailed character—to the (virtual) exclusion of representative “content.”

--John Barth, “Life Story”

La Raison c'est la folie du plus fort. La raison du moins fort c'est de la folie.

--Eugène Ionesco, *Journal en miettes, Chocs*

Tout est fiction et imaginaire  
Nous faisons les fous seulement  
Pour nous amuser  
Avec ou sans raison

--Ken Bugul, *La Folie et la mort*

### **Introduction: Baroque Madness and the African Metropolis**

In a special issue of the journal *Public Culture*, Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall engage some of the primary concerns associated with representing Africa through a case study of the urban center Johannesburg.<sup>223</sup> The title of their contribution, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” implies two initial foci: first the place of the metropolis in contemporary African society, and second, the position that the African metropolis holds with respect to the world. In fact, their opening sentence poses a paradox, proposing that what follows “is, and is not, about Africa,” and as such their reflection constitutes “an exercise in writing the worldliness—or the being-in-the-world—of contemporary African life forms” (347). Acknowledging the inadequacies of contemporary discourses on Africa, Mbembe and Nuttall cite first the inescapable

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<sup>223</sup> While Johannesburg is the particular example they develop, the implications extend to other African metropolises and cities around the world as they revisit the philosophy of urban space “in the context of African cities, which also help us to revise our readings of cities elsewhere” (361). Though the specifics of their analysis of Johannesburg are very insightful, it is the overall implications of ideas that they express with regards to the African city in general that are of the most interest to me here.

timeliness of “the *creativity of practice*” or the complex processes of social and societal self-composition and invention, which always precede any formal knowledge produced about them. They also point out the over-emphasis on the social sciences of anthropology and development studies for studying African urban realities and a “crisis of representation” that affects the human sciences in general: namely the “loss of the virtues of curiosity and astonishment at what the (African) world might be.” Mbembe and Nuttall insist that Africa be read “in the same terms as we read everywhere else” and not as “an object *apart from the world*.” (348-51) These statements about contemporary African reality and its representations recall the Antillean discourse of Édouard Glissant and other Creolists who argued that the expression of Creole consciousness was not a matter that could be grasped by the social sciences but, rather, was “reserved for the domain of art” (see Chapter III “‘D’un baroque mondialisé’: métissage and créolité”). Similarly, one can read Mbembe and Nuttall’s call for “new *critical pedagogies* [...] of writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making...” as the expression of a profound need to reconsider the way we think about Africa and what it might mean to *be* African. This new scholarship of the creative practices that continually reshape the forms of African life (as much as they do life in any other area of the globe) requires a mixing of registers—popular, scientific, theoretical, aesthetic—in order to account for the “worldliness of African life in general and of the African metropolis as a compositional process that is displaceable and reversible by the act of reading and deciphering” (352). The African city is not a fixed object of inquiry. Rather, Mbembe and Nuttall characterize the city’s fabric as “an expression of an aesthetic vision,” where questions of subjectivity, reason, and sensation are continuously re-articulated, not as absolutes, but in terms of its leakages or “*fuites*.” Referencing the Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology, they assert that like this fluid vision of the city’s shifting social, ideological, political, and aesthetic spaces, Africa also “can be better understood in terms of its extracanonial leakages, its lines of flight, its borderlands and interfaces.” (353-4) One of the primary spaces in which the traces of such lines of flight appear, both with regard to the African city and



Africa itself and expressed in their subjectivities, is in the domain of art and, particularly of literature.<sup>224</sup>

There is a reason for the relative privilege of the city as the zone in which modern African and global subjectivity expresses itself. In a chapter on “The Post-Colonial African City” in his *The African City: A History*, Bill Freund remarks: “...as colonial rule passes out of memory [...] a large percentage of all Africans today are town dwellers. This places them in a pattern which is discernable on every continent” (142). There are two important elements to note in this statement that specifically relate to the vision expressed by Mbembe and Nuttall regarding the African metropolis. First, the fact that colonialism is increasingly a matter of history rather than memory implies that the modern African metropolis, which is one of the most visible constructions of the colonial enterprise, is no longer remembered as such, and therefore can be more easily perceived as a reality pertaining to Africa as opposed to a foreign (European) imposition. Secondly, the reality of the African metropolis is one that is more or less immediately lived by the vast majority of African people, and in this way the massive urban populations of Africa experience a reality that is similar to that of urban populations around the globe. This lived metropolitan reality, Mbembe and Nuttall propose, is one in which “distant geographical, social and cultural worlds [come] into contact” (360). This vision of movement and contact does not only exist in the evident domains of commercial exchanges, developmental infrastructures and technologies, legal, educational, and political mediations. “[The city] also comprises actual people, images and architectural forms, footprints and memories; the city is a place of manifold rhythms, a world of sounds, private freedom, pleasures, and sensations” (360). Rather than analyzing the concrete structures of the African (global) metropolis, Mbembe and Nuttall emphasize the more impalpable qualities (though arguably more “concrete” in their human

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<sup>224</sup> Sonja Darlington makes the case that Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, in addition to presenting a manifesto for the civil and human rights of women and children, constitutes a “fictional theorizing” in which “issues of knowing, being, and becoming intersect with issues of subjectivity, sexuality, and identity” (“Calixthe Beyala’s Manifesto and Fictional Theory,” *Research in African Literatures* 34:2 [41-52 at 52]). This kind of theorizing through literature is precisely what I understand Mbembe and Nuttall advocating in terms of “new critical pedagogies”: making use of the novel, for example, as a powerful tool for gaining insight into the subjective experience of African metropolitan forms of living in particular, and the implications that extend to larger questions of global human society.

character) of the city's embodied social and cultural existence. They propose a duplicitous image of the city: that of "the *surface*, in the ephemeral and the visible (shop fronts, shop windows, café terraces, street cars, automobiles), in the display of the commodity with or without its aesthetic veil," which is juxtaposed with "an *underneath*." With what appears an obvious reference to Benjamin's depiction of the *flâneur* (the casual stroller or loiterer) in nineteenth-century Paris (c.f. Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century"), they depict the twenty-first-century African city thusly:

Beneath the visible landscape and the surface of the metropolis, its objects and social relations, are concealed or embedded other orders of visibility, other scripts that are not reducible to the built form, the house façade, or simply the street experience of the metaphorical figure of the *flâneur* (363-4).

The city, thus understood, epitomizes the conflicts and contrasts, the juxtapositions and ambiguities of a modernity that is constantly in dialogical competition with its other, an "other modernity" that can be construed as baroque, for it *appears* underneath, in the cracks or leakages of the illusory forms of commodification as the underlying agitations of daily life that reveal different "orders of visibility."<sup>225</sup> Such an "other look" at the city enables a glimpse of its temporality as a process of composition or of *becoming*, with the primary emphasis placed on the role of the subject in creating the practices (the theatrical "scripts") that continually (re)define the culture(s) of the African metropolis and of Africa.

Recalling the culture of the baroque, which José Antonio Maravall defines among other things as an "Urban Culture," the blithely extravagant excesses of the elite classes are contrasted with the destitute poverty and growing discontent of an increasingly urban population, and the city itself became the stage on which such contrasts were displayed. It was the place of the formation of new baroque monarchies and architectural expansion,

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<sup>225</sup> One specific example of this phenomenon is noted by Filip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwan in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*: "These youth move in worlds governed by rules, norms, ethics and moralities that seem to have broken quite radically with all kinds of pasts, with the neo-colonial dictates of the mimetic but also with the ambiguities of the multi-layered palimpsestual meanings that the postcolonial context generates. These youth environments may be hybrid in actual make-up and composition, but they deny, or have become totally unaware of the conventions of their own hybrid historicity; or they knowingly reject it, in a radical denial of the palimpsestual overdrive with which late postcoloniality confronts them on a daily basis." (11-12).

while at the same time serving as home to increased crime and banditry. (Maravall, 119-20) Aside from an increase in criminal activity, baroque culture is also characterized by overall laxity in both professional and sexual relations: “[p]rostitution and gambling were also on the increase as an antisocial expression, and, participating in a protest they didn’t even try to formulate, well-to-do and noble youths ran away to be swallowed up in a vagabond existence” (46). The general depiction of the baroque world described by Maravall is that of a diseased world: “Wars, famines and plagues, cruelty, violence, and deception dominate the society of human beings and are a threat everywhere” (154-5). The images of corruption and perversion described by Maravall in the baroque city provide a solid backdrop for Baudelaire’s decadent (baroque) modernity against which dramas of the flâneur, as well as the sickly, the poor, the widow, and above all, the prostitute are played out. This rather dark image of the city also appears in the contemporary African metropolis. In the introduction to *Urban Africa: Changing Contours of Survival in the City*, AbdouMaliq Simone identifies an extreme shift in social values away from a traditional valuing of personal stability, mutuality, and social balance toward a modern culture of individuality and materiality (1). Motivated both by changing economic and environmental determinants, rampant urbanization results in a community is gradually divested of traditional social roles and mores, and there is an emergence of a kind of social and cultural nebula in which clear social distinctions are increasingly difficult to make. As such, urban Africa shares many similarities with the baroque city as the site of cultural transformations, most visibly in marginal social activities, but also manifestly in new forms of artistic expression.<sup>226</sup> In this chapter, I will examine novelistic renditions and re-creations of urban spaces by two African woman novelists in order to show that they do not simply constitute a pessimistic portrayal of a diseased social body in an urban wasteland, but rather reserve and reveal the *fuites* or lines of flight in the

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<sup>226</sup> Maravall asserts that, “[t]he gruesomeness, violence, and cruelty so evident in baroque art were rooted in that pessimistic conception of the human being and the world and which they, in turn, reinforced” (162). Though I agree that baroque art has as its point of departure a certain material reality, I differ regarding art’s role in reinforcing a pessimistic conception of the human being. Rather, in representing the gruesome violence and cruelty in all of its horror, there is a cathartic effect incurred through the act of representation. Violence in art is a way of working through negativity in order to arrive at new possibilities of aesthetic experience, and the textual analyses of this chapter will elucidate this regenerative process.

spaces of creation and creativity that are as much novelistic as social aesthetic practices. Thus, inasmuch as the city often appears as the site of a negation of life in the sense of Mbembe's "économie de la mort," it is from within this very Nothingness that infinite possibilities for actualizing new forms of individual and social existence arise, not only for Africa in the text, but in the world as well. I will begin with an analysis of Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala's work, focusing on the novel, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, as a text that both represents and embodies certain distinctive elements of a baroque aesthetic--namely, a de-centering activity, suspension of certainty in relational ambiguities, and *mise-en-abîme* of the act of representation itself--, all within a larger project of reclaiming the power of the un-rational through the representation and encoding of madness in the text.<sup>227</sup> Secondly, I will look at madness, specifically its modern form of social or societal schizophrenia as it is outlined by Deleuze in order to elucidate the kind of positive madness that operates in both Beyala's work and that of Senegalese writer Ken Bugul in her first purely fictional novel, *La folie et la mort*. In so doing, I will show how there is a particular kind of feminine writing at work in these texts, what Beyala calls "lunatic writing," which reaches beyond the text to affect the reader in a uniquely baroque fashion.

#### **A. *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* : The prostituted body-text**

Like Aminata Sow Fall and Nafissatou Niang Diallo before her, Calixthe Beyala's work illustrates a paradoxical continuation of, and rupture with, a preceding literary movement. She is part of what Odile Cazenave calls "a new generation of female African novelists" which she characterizes as "femmes rebelles." In her book of the same title (*Femmes rebelles*), Cazenave discusses the work of Calixthe Beyala, Angèle Rawiri, Véronique Tadjo, and other third-generation African women writers whose work is marked by a distinctive shift away from that of an earlier generation of African women writers such as Aoua Keita, Mariama Bâ, Awa Thiam, whose writing is primarily concerned with the image of the African woman and of the particular social and cultural

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<sup>227</sup> Aside from the madness of the main characters in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, I am also referring to the notion of "lunatic writing," espoused by both Beyala and Werewere Liking, as a textual practice, not simply to write about madness, but to write madness itself.

issues that influence and, in some cases, determine the personal and professional trajectories of these women, both as subjects and as writers (Cazenave, 6). While this is still a primary concern of the third generation of women writers who share the same disillusionment with the societal and intellectual practices that continue to dominate postcolonial Africa, their expression is more openly critical of society, not only regarding notions of race, sex, class, and family traditions, but also the systemic cultural framework in which these particular issues are couched. Cazenave points to the theoretical treatment of earlier African women's literary works, which have tended to marginalize women's writing within a male-dominated canon, and shows that the resultant third-generation African women writers have written as much in reaction to these exclusionary intellectual practices as to the exclusionary social and political practices of patriarchal societies.

In order to respond to the marginalization of women and of women's literature by male critics, women writers started to systematically favor certain kinds of female characters that are typically marginalized in African society. By taking this alternate route, they have created a privileged gaze and a greater space from which to freely express criticism of their society. (Cazenave, 10)

Through an ironic reversal of discourse, which one might qualify as a sort of "postmodern" stylistic mechanism, younger African woman writers have tended to gravitate toward the extremely marginal character—the foreigner, the prostitute, the mad woman, in short, the "other"—in order to appropriate that position of marginality from which to speak more fully of the experience of marginalization (both in its particularity and in its generality), wherein lies the overtly subversive political element of their writing.<sup>228</sup> Cazenave indeed notes that in the works of these new women writers "feminine speech has become more aggressive, more insistent, within an autorepresentative mode that has become more and more complex." For Cazenave, the importance of this new rebellious feminine voice lies in "the exploration of cultural zones that until recently have been either taboo or dismissed as unimportant" and in a "reflection on the hidden mechanisms that explain the increasing instabilities of modern

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<sup>228</sup> Valérie Orlando also finds that "African and Caribbean female novelists use the madness of their protagonists as a thematic state through which to articulate the sociocultural, historical, and postindependence constraints that women have had to endure from the latter part of the twentieth century to our present time" (*Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls*, 65).

Africa.” Secondly, this voice also represents an alternative to traditional forms of masculine authority and thus entails novel possibilities for engaging the specific social and political difficulties that plague many postcolonial African societies. (Cazenave, 4) It is precisely these revolutionary socio-political implications of a radical feminine/feminist voice that further explain Sony Labou Tansi’s conscious choice to adopt the feminine narrative voice as his own in his later works as a way to confront social injustices and propose new creative modes of working through, and going beyond, both cultural and literary limitations.

Indeed this evolution of the African women’s novel, inasmuch as it is an evolution or continuation of the expression of African women’s subjecthood, marks a distinctive break with earlier generations of women writers, especially in its embrace of the marginal, the grotesque, and the abject as powerful narrative mechanisms for articulating a poignant socio-cultural critique.<sup>229</sup> Building on the work of their predecessors who established a clear vision, through their testimonial writings, of the African woman seen from the inside, African women writers of this third generation are able to express a more radical social and ideological position vis-à-vis societal norms in part through rebellion against their literary “matronage.” This rupture with tradition also appears thematically in Beyala’s work through the depiction of a monstrous image of the mother. In her article in the anthology *Nouvelles écritures francophones : vers un nouveau baroque ?*, Mary Jean Green states that Beyala’s first two novels (*Tu t’appelleras Tanga* and *C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée*) depict a grotesque portrait of the mother and that, differently from earlier writers such as Mariama Bâ, “la représentation de la mère en monstre destructeur ou mère dévorante correspond à un moment de rupture radicale dans une société où une génération de filles se rend compte de l’impossibilité de reproduire la vie de leurs mères” (395). Primarily concerned with the troubled mother-daughter relationship, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga* sets up an allegory of larger societal

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<sup>229</sup> Julia Kristeva makes mention of the figure of the prostitute and the nymphomaniac as “a wild, obscene, and threatening femininity [...] dark, abominable, and degraded power when she keeps to using and trading her sex” (*Powers of Horror*, 167-8). Indeed, this abject femininity that embodies a paradoxical incarnation of life and death is a powerful sexual and rhetorical figure, the implications of which appear not only in Beyala’s female protagonists, but in her textual practice as well.

problems relating to gender, sexuality, family, power, and the radical transformations of social and cultural roles in rapidly modernizing postcolonial Africa. The scene for this staging of modernity and its polymorphous ruptured representations is not just the city, it is a particular underside *underneath* of the African metropolis: the slum or “bidonville.”

Beyala states in an interview with Bennetta Jules-Rosette on July 27, 1990:

If one speaks to me about Africa, I can't talk about the Africa of traditions, so-called beauty, lyricism, and pastoralism. I was born in a bidonville. That was my world. For me, that's Africa. For many, Africa is the world of air-conditioned cars, beautiful clothes, and *boubous*. Not for me. I saw those people pass by at a distance. For me, Africa is also the Africa of tomorrow where cultures mix and blend. It's the Africa where children make toys from the refuse of civilization. That's my Africa... (in *Black Paris*, pp. 202-5 at 203.)

Beyala's depiction of Africa is intensely focused on the urban milieu, which is increasingly common among younger generations of Africans for whom the city is the dominant social reality. For Beyala also, traditional pastoral Africa is at best a fading memory. Romanticized ideals of “Mother Africa” are absent in the wake of the contrasts and contradictions of the urban milieu in which images of excess and luxury are glimpsed in a passing car or advertisement, but this is merely an appearance that skims across the surface of the deeper, compounded misery of the poor, the excluded, the children who create toys from civilization's waste products.

The first-person narrator, Tanga, recounts her own childhood, a childhood that was destroyed by successive traumatic events. Of particular interest is the episode with “l'arracheuse de clitoris,” which she describes with melancholic detachment: “le temps passait, je m'habituais à cette partie de moi qui s'était absentée” (24). Later she accuses her mother of driving her cheating father mad—“Ma mère l'avait entraîné dans la folie” (49)—and she describes her family as “ces fous,” corrupted by a madness from which she is not exempt (“Je devenais folle moi aussi” [50]). In this (un)familial situation, Tanga is raped by her father who then poisons the child, and the lie perpetuated by her mother to defend her father—“l'éternel conte de l'enfant venu on ne sait d'où, de la gamine perverse” (51)—proves true as she, followed by her sister enters into prostitution to

support her mother.<sup>230</sup> All of this leads to the grotesque condition of childhood, through generations, which she describes as “enfance mutilée” (35), “enfance égorgée” (100), or the ambiguous condition of “l’enfant mort-né” (131). The vile caricature of unwanted sexual relations, and the resultant unwanted children is not the fault of the child; rather, Tanga attributes this deplorable state to the parents who look to their children as a way to better their own condition, and she describes her own role, paradoxically, as, “l’enfant-parent de ses parents” (34 & 35). The abject childhood that Tanga portrays reflects life in general where there is no such thing as childhood and is crystallized in several poignant examples that Tanga provides of life in the fictional bidonville of Iningué. Among the tragic stories of each nameless child who is known only as “le fils de...” or “la fille de...”, I find that of “le fils de Tchoumi, l’enfant aux mains fendillées jusqu’aux poignets” to be particularly forceful. Beyala writes, “à l’heure où les ‘Blacks climatisés’ relèvent pressement les vitres de leur voiture congelée, vous pouvez le voir, vous le reconnaîtrez. Il avance lentement, tassé sous un sac de mil ou de maïs, ne répugnant pas à enfoncez ses pieds rongés par la vermine dans les ordures” (74). This juxtaposition of the relative social ease and destitution in Africa—the power of the “Black climatisé” over the equatorial sun contrasts vividly with the tragic caricature of the abject monstrous child plodding through filth—illustrates the baroque contrast of a highly contradictory or conflictive society.<sup>231</sup>

If Beyala’s work depicts such contrasts and contradictions, it also embodies them, creating new streams of consciousness from the leakages of modernity and combining oppositions in order to render a complete, albeit schismatic, rendition of African reality

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<sup>230</sup> The theme of rape and prostitution is portrayed as hereditary, as Tanga tells of her own mother’s birth, “née d’un miracle” (41), which was the result of rape, after which, Tanga’s grandmother, an Essoko princess named Kadjaba Dongo gave herself up to the sexual advances of countless men (42). Rejected by her mother, Kadjaba, and raised by her grandmother, at the age of thirteen Tanga’s mother self-inflicted a sort of rape by forcing palm nuts into her vagina and then removing them one by one. The union of Tanga’s parents is described as, “cette rencontre qui m’avait détruite en même temps qu’elle m’accouchait” (45).

<sup>231</sup> Another example of such contrast between the illusion of beauty and a grotesque reality, which Tanga sees clearly in its entirety is given in the contrast between life and its disjointed representation: “Et j’ai toujours tout regardé. Aussi bien l’affiche publicitaire représentant la jeune femme en mini-jupe, jambes croisées, cigarette au sourire, que la vieille dame aux chevilles desséchées qui patauge, pieds cornés, dans les vomissures du marché.” (20-21)



and African subjectivity.<sup>232</sup> *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, represents itself as an interrupted monologue by Tanga with her Jewish-European interlocutor, Anna-Claude, who both share a common prison cell, and the narrative structure proceeds as a disjointed intertwining of each of their past (and present) life stories. From the very first utterance in the text (“Je vais mourir, femme. Les Blancs meurent aussi, tu sais? Plonger dans la mort comme dans la vie...” [Beyala, 9]), it is clear that we are in a zone of non-life, or “une économie de la mort,” where the distinction between living and dying is often difficult to determine. Their presence in the jail cell, and the absence of life it entails, levels the playing field and immediately undoes the binary opposition between black and white, first in terms of a shared femininity, and secondly, in the shared prospect of death: “Dans la cellule, ce n’est pas la vie” (Beyala, 71). In a chapter of her book *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls* entitled “Rooms and Prisons, Sex and Sin,” Valérie Orlando describes the way in which “Both Anna-Claude and Tanga claim their otherness as a means of survival [as t]he cell becomes a reflective space allowing a dialogue to emerge from this otherness—the marginalization—that brought them to be imprisoned” (135). In this prison cell, which may very well be a metonym for the female body, or the world at large, “un pays où tout, même l’air, est prison” (Beyala, 105), Tanga recounts the fragmented memories of her life and the constant undecidability of who her “self” might be. Tanga sees herself as a complex identity, always double, referring to herself as a “femme-fillette” (26) and, later, as “pute-enfant” (106); she recalls walking through life (or is it death?) taking “des pas de femme ou de charogne” (98). The ambiguity of this literal *trait d’union* (hyphen, literally translated “unifying trait”) effectively undoes the dichotomies that exist on so many levels of parent/child, living/dead, subject/object, not to mention (post)colonizer/(post)colonized, and the *mise-en-relation* of Self and Other in a sustained tension that reflects an equally bifurcated vision of the urban space (outside)

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<sup>232</sup> Early on in the text, as she lives the life of a young prostitute, Tanga experiences the signs of a society of contradiction in terms of a disjointed perception of sexuality: “Flux d’images contradictoires. Fesses publiques – seins maternels. Chambre sordide – couches familiales. Mélange visqueux récusé par la tradition mais qui suinte par tous les pores de la ville.” (19) Denied by tradition, but nonetheless ever-present in the city, seething out of its pores from a dark underside, the signs of raw sexuality are divorced from the inevitable consequences of giving life, and as such, sex becomes a simulacrum of death, a negation of life, which manifests itself throughout the text.

of the cell. This duality of being or representing two things at once marks a particularly baroque aesthetic ambiguity.<sup>233</sup>

In addition to depicting the despair and poverty of her Africa, that of the bidonville, Beyala is also portraying her “Africa of tomorrow” as that space “where cultures mix and blend” (quoted above), where people from different races, continents, and social classes come together. The temporal dimension of Beyala’s Africa, the schism between present and future, is of particular interest, especially when considering that the slippage between opposites is incorporated into the very structure of the text which, in the use of the personal pronouns “je” and “tu” is of a highly dialogic or relational nature, making it difficult to determine who is occupying the subject position at any given point of the narrative through a sustained ambiguity that persists right up through the end of the text. The madness that is so integral a part of Beyala’s feminine characters in the text also finds itself expressed through the text in the narrative disjunction that results from two first-person narrators, each of whom addresses the other in the second person, and who are each in turn also narrated at times in the third person (Beyala, 39-40). In *Lectures d’Enfance*, Jean-François Lyotard comments on the temporalizing function of an address to a second person:

En s’adressant à *tu*, *je* attend une phrase à venir, où les deux noms seront en position inverse sur les pôles de la destination. –Cette disposition est le noyau de la temporalité au sens phénoménologique... [qui] est transformée en temps chronique ordinaire ou objectif (celui des sciences, et notamment de l’histoire-*Histoire*), par le passage de *je* et *tu*, et de leur temporalité d’attente et de mémoire, à la troisième personne. *Toi* comme mon futur maintenant, *moi* comme ton passé maintenant, devenons des *eux* alors, – pour moi qui raconte actuellement. (135)

The inscription of “I” and “you” in the text, also inscribes a certain conception of temporality, namely that of a delay arising out of the *event* (in the phenomenological sense) of interlocution, which is then transformed into a chronological narrative: an

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<sup>233</sup> Interestingly, Anna-Claude embodies a similar contradiction in the hyphen connecting her feminine name (Anna) with the ambiguously masculine or feminine name Claude, as well as the fact that she is French and Jewish, a historically volatile combination. And similar to Tanga, she is also reportedly insane, imprisoned for having been an “Élément subversive et incontrôlable” after having paraded day after day in the streets with a sandwich board that read: “Où sont nos enfants? Égorgés par un boucher!” (16).

“histoire-*Histoire*” or story-History, a notion to which I will return. In addition to a temporalizaion of the story, the “tu” holds that ambiguous function of simultaneously addressing Anna-Claude and the reader of the text, thus acting as a performance that begs the engagement of the spectator.<sup>234</sup> Thus, as Tanga invites Anna Claude, “Donne-moi la main, et désormais tu seras moi [...] mon histoire naîtra dans tes veines” (18), the effect produced is that of contact (also between the reader and the book); through a touch, Tanga creates another being: her story. Her statement, “L’histoire doit être” (131), speaks allegorically, not with the logic of words, but rather with a language of affects and of feeling. In *Lectures d’enfance*, Jean-François Lyotard employs the Aristotelian term *phônè* to describe this other voice: “La *phônè* est l’affect en tant qu’il est le signal de lui-même... Toutes les bêtes ont la *phônè*, puisque toute sont affectables, ou, plutôt affectuelles. Les animaux humains l’ont aussi.” (134) The *phônè* is the purely affective cry of the animal, the human animal, the child, which is uttered into the void of silence, having no designated sense or external referent. The vocal violence of the *phônè*, which is in-significant, is contrasted (again borrowing an Aristotelian term) with the voice of logic or reason (*logos*) and the *lexis*, an articulated voice that communicates a symbolic relationship between words and some other thing or things. Speaking of the subject, Lyotard writes : “Avec la *phônè*, ils manifestent ; avec la *lexis*, ils communiquent, répliquent, débattent, concluent, décident. Ils peuvent raconter.” (135) Although it is the lexical content of Tanga’s story that communicates meaning, the story manifests the animal cry of Tanga on a non-logical level, through a non-rational phonological and corporal exertion in the vibrations that pass between Tanga’s and Anna-Claude’s intertwined fingers and consciousnesses, an effect which the reader thus recreates for him or her self in relation with the book. Furthermore, the different levels of narration complicate the story, which although told by Tanga, includes insights from Anna-Claude and her own story; their two perspectives are thus intertwined, along with the stories of the many whose lives have intersected theirs in a kaleidoscopic perspective that strikes the reader with its fractal representation of an overwhelming totality. This totality in

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<sup>234</sup> Recall Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s characterization of the baroque aesthetic as a process: “Produire des effets qui créent des êtres et engendrent des affects...” (*La folie du voir*, 49).

which clear delineations are ever lacking can be read as a state of madness in which “I” is literally an “other” or “others.”<sup>235</sup>

The overlaying of voices, as well as the constant hum of the (in)human voice (the *phônè*), enacts a kind of textual effect of madness, which is a constant presence in the novel. Indeed, Valérie Orlando notes that madness is the precipitating factor in the imprisonment (and eventual death) of both Tanga and Anna-Claude, yet there is a redemptive *fuite* in this very madness through an annihilation of the self that allows for rebirth as other. As such, “Beyala’s novel ends with two women fused through their feminine essence by madness” (139). Rather than losing themselves in the madness that results from a world composed of impossible contradictions, they embrace that very madness and in it find themselves—together. The intense identification stemming from recognizing in each other the extreme otherness of being a mad woman allows Tanga and Anna-Claude to find a common understanding in their madness, and thus, “‘madness functions as a metaphor of the female condition and [woman’s] alienation’” (Orlando quoting Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi, 139).<sup>236</sup> Madness therefore, is not merely a starting point, it is also an endpoint, a cyclical subterfuge in which words and worlds collide, and chaos gives way to lucidity.<sup>237</sup> Thus, the statement near the end of the novel where Tanga declares, “L’ILLUSION, C’EST MOI / LA FOLIE, C’EST MOI” (186), represents an actualization of the desire she expresses at the very outset of the novel: “J’irai trouver la folle. Je fermerai mon parapluie sous la pluie et l’ouvrirai dans le désert. J’irai trouver l’enfant verrouillé dans l’innocence. Il voyagera dans ma mémoire : ‘Je suis toi, tu es

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<sup>235</sup> This is consistent with what Odile Cazenave remarks in the recent works of younger African women writers in which, “the initial principle of empathy and privileged communication in the articulation of the ‘I’ has been retained and refined—by the use of polyphonic narrative voices, by the insertion of one or several designated narratees who may or may not be known by the narrator...” (10). Therefore the “I” implicates a plurality of voices and creates the effect of multiple (mad) subjectivities.

<sup>236</sup> This notion of the feminine Other, a non-rational femininity, finds its theoretical counterpart in Luce Irigaray’s *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*: “Donc la femme n’a pas un sexe. Elle en a au moins deux, mais non identifiables en uns. Elle en a d’ailleurs bien davantage. Sa sexualité, toujours au moins double, est encore *plurielle*.” (27) Reversing the negative conception of femininity as the absence of a sex organ, Irigaray affirms the inherent plurality of feminine sexuality, which in turn engenders a counter-rationality that operates in terms of multiplicity and relation: “La femme ‘se touche’ tout le temps, sans que l’on puisse d’ailleurs le lui interdire, car son sexe est fait de deux lèvres qui s’embrassent continûment. Ainsi, en elle, elle est déjà deux – mais non divisibles en un(e)s – qui s’affectent.” (24)

<sup>237</sup> Madness is indeed an escape, an escape from a more terrifying madness, as Tanga recalls fleeing one of her numerous patrons: “Je sors au soleil, fuyant ce lieu de fou, sauvée par ma propre folie” (103).

moi, nous sommes un.” (9) Drawn to madness, Tanga desires to enact the apparently illogical gesture of opening an umbrella in the desert, of finding the mad woman, the child, and becoming one with an-other, a non-rational mode of being that is summed up in the perversion of the Cartesian *cogito*: “J’existe donc tu seras” (188). This process of becoming other through madness that is represented both in and by the work reenacts a fundamental element of a baroque aesthetic.<sup>238</sup> Beyala herself asserts in her interview with Bennetta Jules-Rosette that “What I have written about is madness.” However, madness, although possibly a negation, is not considered negatively. Rather, much to the contrary,

It results from an excess of intelligence in a world where many people have lost their identity and their sense of self [...] a sort of intellectual and spiritual superiority. When no one else understands what’s happening in the world, when no one analyzes what’s going on, the person who does understand goes mad [...] a very special madness that results from the intelligence of people who have a clear vision of things in a world where everyone closes their eyes. (Beyala in Jules-Rosette, 204)

Madness, thus understood, is not a deficiency of reason, but an over-abundance of reason: a baroque excess that seeks, not a logical resolution of contradictions, but their sustained tension which represents reality more fully in all of its extra-real or sur-real dimensions, a phenomenon both comforting and extremely horrifying.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The statement “J’existe donc tu seras” in particular can be read as a statement regarding Tanga’s story and Beyala’s text, an externalization of the self as another, similar to the move in D’Aubigné’s preface to *Les Tragiques*, “L’auteur à son livre” in which he urges: “Va Livre, tu n’es que trop beau / Pour estre né dans le tombeau / Duquel mon exil te délivre...” (v. 1-3). It is as if the birth of the work (tu) arises from the death, real or figurative, of the author (je). In his contribution to *Nouvelles écritures francophones: vers un nouveau baroque?* Emmanuel Matateyou discusses Calixthe Beyala’s work and a “nouveau discours féminin” in terms of its ambiguous position “entre l’oral et l’écrit-cercueil” (372-82), which implies the act of writing as a kind of coffin or figurative death. And in this essay, Matateyou proposes that Beyala’s writing “s’en ressent tant au niveau de la forme qu’au fond” (373).

<sup>239</sup> This notion of madness as something positive, a kind of superior wisdom—“Je vais dessiner le plan de la sagesse dans la folie” (Beyala, 121)—is supported in an interview I conducted with Professor Amadou Ly, in which he cites the examples Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* and the folk tale “Sarzan” recorded in Birago Diop’s *Les Contes d’Amadou Koumba* to support the notion that, “Oui, chez nous ici, la folie est ce qui vous ouvre des mondes fantastiques, ce qui vous libère de votre enveloppe de simple mortelle limitée dans le temps, dans l’espace, dans la connaissance, et qui vous ouvre des perspectives incroyables.” (See Appendix A) Also, in my interview with Professor Papa Gueye, he states regarding Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Le Temps de Tamngo*, “Oui, c’est ça, il atteint une sagesse supérieure, et que la folie n’était ici qu’un tremplin, mais aussi une perception de l’autre. Parce qu’en fait, ce qui est important, c’est l’autre qui perçoit N’Dongo comme déréglé, du point de vue sociale comme du point de vue littéraire,

The madness that expresses itself through the narrative disjunction of the text also appears through the a-chronological narration of events, which proceeds non-linearly through the events of Tanga's life, giving the effect not of a unified story but of several united stories. One such example appears in the case of Tanga's father, whose death is recounted near the beginning of the narrative (19). The amorous encounter that conceived Tanga is presented in flashback (45), followed by the traumatic incident of her rape by her father (50, 100), and Tanga later relates an indefinite instance of being beaten by her mother while her father looks on (146). All of this amounts to an ordering of events that does not submit to a logical temporality (literally all taking place post-mortem) but rather an affective temporality in which events follow a different kind of non-rational ordering of episodes all tied together through the fragile thread of Tanga's narration. These are examples of what Beyala calls "lunatic writing." As a specific example of lunatic writing, Beyala describes the way that temporality is inscribed in the text, and in daily life as well:

In African bidonvilles, everyone has a clear vision of the future. They always speak of tomorrow. For these people, the present and the past don't exist. That's crazy. Everything is conjugated in the future tense [...] and this language reflects a moment of loss. And when you try to understand the present with this language, you go mad. Life in the bidonville denies the present because one lives on hope. Everyone thinks that they're in transit to a better tomorrow [...] So you conjugate verbs in the future tense. And it's in that space between the present and the future that lunatic writing develops. (204-5)

In *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, the first instance of loss is a loss of freedom, which appears explicitly in Tanga's imprisonment but also recurrently in the words depicting the numerous losses: that of her father, her virginity, her clitoris, her child, her childhood, her lover, her womb—the list is virtually endless. As a result of these absences, the story takes place in the inventive space of the future tense in numerous expressions of the hope for some (other) thing that will be, something different from the past she recounts in a

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parce qu'à l'intérieur du roman son personnage l'interprète souvent comme quelqu'un qui est cinglé. Mais la fin de l'itinéraire de N'Dongo confirme, en fait, que c'était quelqu'un qui possédait une vision supérieure qui devait détruire les normes établis, se construire, mais surtout avoir une réalité vivable." (See Appendix C)

negated present.<sup>240</sup> The juxtaposition between a grotesque reality and a kind of illusory dream world is also a recurrent theme of the text, and one particularly significant manifestation of it appears in Tanga's vision of a better life, an image that seems to come from a television show, magazine ad, or some other Western invention. The dream of "ma maison, le jardin, le chien, la pie au bout du pré, des enfants" is repeated six times (74, 76, 104, 108, 120, 122). This idyllic and idealistic image of a happy life reflects the complex negotiation between African daily living and the various myths of modernity that exploit the past and exalt the notion of progress toward a better tomorrow: "le rêve c'est l'imagination branchée sur demain" (77), states Tanga. Yet it is precisely such an illusory dream that motivates her to "adopt" the maimed beggar, Mala, and become his "maman improvisée" in an attempted performance of "motherhood" that is a reaction against her own mother's neglect and cruelty and perhaps also an attempt to cease being an indeterminate femme-fillette.<sup>241</sup> Ironically, it is still this relationship, and the pursuit of this dream, that eventually leads her to a counterfeiting ring that results in her imprisonment, death, and rebirth in/as (an)other.

Tanga's Africa, caught between an irreconcilable dream and reality, is a monstrous Africa of contradiction and oxymoron. Anna-Claude experiences this same Africa. Her madness results from a failure to find the idyllic and noble people that she has imagined exists, a people she describes in a pastiche of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) as not having produced "celui qui n'a pas inventé le poudre, l'idiot qui n'a pas distillé le soufflé du canon, celui qui résiste à la folie et ne pond pas derrière sa table des théories sentencieuses, celui qui ne s'enorgueillit pas de connaître la horde des abjections" (150). Believing that this superior race is incarnated in the person of Ousmane, a figment of her deluded imagination, Anna-Claude is distraught to find,

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<sup>240</sup> Tanga states: "Dans mon pays, le passé s'est fermé, le future aussi. L'identité s'est arrêtée à la frontière entre hier et aujourd'hui. J'écris quelquefois au ciel pour lui demander la recette du rire" (Beyala, 144).

<sup>241</sup> After a particularly intimate scene in which Tanga cleans Mala's nails, combs his hair, tells him a story, watches him sleep and wake up, and then gives him food before he leaves smoking a cigarette, he later presents her with a gift, a drawing of "une maison avec une pie au bout du pré," and she exclaims, "J'existe. Un cadeau certifie ma naissance." (178) In this way she is able to be born again out of the death into which she was born of her parents. "Je voulais que l'enfant aille jusqu'à la mort de l'enfance et qu'il renaisse, dépouillé de parents" (167). Her conscious decision to embody maternal love in the absence of any biological determinants proves more powerful, as she finds her love returned, and as a result, the relationship she establishes certifies her existence.

however, that “Le peuple d’Ousmane N’EXISTE PAS” (150). Tanga’s Hassan does indeed exist, but the shared future she dreams of proves just as unattainable, for Hassan " était de cette Afrique qui se mariait sans se marier, qui divorçait sans divorcer, cette Afrique domino, le cul entre deux chaises, qui revendiquait la négritude d’un côté et pourchassait les frigos et les gazinières de l’autre” (29).<sup>242</sup> Though Tanga’s personal story paints a grotesque caricature of poverty and misery in an African slum, always contrasted with mythical constructions of false hopes, it expresses a universal yearning. Her story is bigger than either Tanga or Anna-Claude, a universal story of the human experience of suffering, loss, and a need to love and be loved, which often moves unseen in and underneath “l’Histoire” with a capital H, taking on a life of its own so to speak, in Anna-Claude (and also in the reader):

A chaque pas dans la connaissance de Tanga, elle ramène vers elle des temps déshabités, des pratiques oubliées, façonnées sous le règne de la haine. Elle se dit qu’elle se trouve à la frontière de l’éternité et qu’il lui appartient de léguer aux hommes les ferments de l’Histoire, afin de peindre, en hommage à la femme inconnue, des fresques d’amour (95).<sup>243</sup>

Her story is a forceful critique of the dangers of modern society’s “reign of hate” in which subjects are often subjected to inhuman conditions, conditions which are perhaps most extreme and most visible in Africa but are no less present elsewhere. What Tanga and Anna-Claude together hope to accomplish in telling her story is not an alternative history, but the ferments of History, “le souffle viable de l’Histoire” (116), the manifesting cry of the nameless, the speechless, the dispossessed that so often pass unnoticed, giving them a common name: *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*. One such example is the

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<sup>242</sup> The stylistic device of oxymoron is a particularly interesting construct in baroque poetry, functioning as a negation of itself, and as such, operating as a *ligne de fuite*; Pierre Brunel notes in *Formes Baroques au théâtre* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996): “Il est à la fois emblématique de l’œuvre baroque, et étrangement lisse, neutre, évanescent, n’étant défini que par des caractérisations négatives : ‘éclaire sans flamme, oiseau sans nuance, poissons sans écaille, et brute sans instinct naturel’. Le monstre en qui l’on avait cru reconnaître la figure vivante de l’oxymoron, devient l’inverse, dans un jeu prolongé de soustractions. Ainsi, effervescente, l’œuvre baroque peut-elle être aussi ligne de fuite...” (129)

<sup>243</sup> Again, recalling the plurality of Irigaray’s femininity, Tanga, in telling her story, is in fact telling multiple stories, painting frescos of love in homage to the unknown woman, depicting the multiplicity of perspectives that lie in the ferments of History. In *Rome 1630: a l’horizon du premier baroque* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), Yves Bonnefoy remarks: “...la fresque révèle aussi combien sont fortes, et même sur un esprit qui se déclare contre elles, les suggestions de l’avant-garde baroque quant à la souplesse des formes et à la prédominance de l’infini des couleurs” (105).



European Camilla, introduced as the generic “la Femme” (120), who has her own tragic story: “née de parents alcooliques [...] elle avait passé son enfance ballottée de famille en famille” (119). Her fate similar to that of the children Tanga describes as “tous ces enfants qui naissent adultes, [...] ces enfants veufs de leur enfance” (76). Camilla further elaborates the universality of human suffering, remarking : “Les indésirables, chez vous on les utilise, chez nous on les enferme, on les parque” ; she then gives the examples of “un asile psychiatrique, une maison de repos, un centre de correction, un orphelinat” (128). Although the story of human suffering and powerlessness (and the dreams and illusions that keep the balances from tipping) appears similarly the world over, it just happens that Africa, particularly Beyala’s Africa, is where these contrasts are left out in the open to die in plain sight, not having had the experience of a century-long “grand renfermement” on the long road to modernization.<sup>244</sup>

Tanga’s story and Beyala’s text illustrate the numerous tensions between Africa and modernity, reality and representation, subject and subjected, and self and other in the postcolony. In her death, she lives on in Anna-Claude who assumes her identity, telling the guard, “Je suis elle” (185), and later accusing Tanga’s mother of murder: “votre fille, c’est moi [...] Vous nous avez tuées madame” (202). The coexistence of life in/as death, the impossible social contrasts, the play between reality and illusion, the effect of madness, the dissolution of the subject in the language of the other, and the unity of difference as two women are fused into one makes *Tanga* a baroque monument to the human plight. In her article “Le Baroque au féminin,” Christiane Ndiaye writes, “En fait, le baroque déconstruit les *révélés* ‘sensés’ pour fabriquer des *images*...” (Ndiaye, 69).<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Here I refer to the idea expressed by Foucault in *L’histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* that the insane and other abnormal or undesirable members of society were locked away so as to be restored to reason, sometimes by extremely cruel measures. See also the section of Chapter I of this dissertation: “Baroque (Un)reason.” In *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, there is a complicit relationship in such misery, seen in the way Tanga embraces her suffering, annihilates herself, goes insane, and through this loss is reborn anew, as well as in the way that Anna-Claude finds herself by being the recipient of Tanga’s story. Similarly, the character of Camilla represents a material example of making misery work: “Camilla avait su prendre ses arrangements avec la souffrance, pactiser avec elle. Face à ses labyrinthes, au vide sidéral de l’absence, elle avait su planter autour de l’arbre à chagrin l’ordonnance de la survie” (125).

<sup>245</sup> Similarly, in D’Aubigné’s preface to *Les Tragiques*, he expresses the intent of his work, which will appear like a villain, “Et monstra hideux, effronté, / De la façon non du langage, / La mal-plaisante vérité.” (v. 22-24),

Tanga's story manifests the grotesque, unpleasant, and tragic truth of society in the language not of rational discourse (*la lexis*) but in the embodied affective cry of madness (*la phônè*), and Beyala uses the affective language of "lunatic writing" to paint the frescoes of love and life, however marred by tragedy, death, and decay, along the vanishing lines of time and history. Thus, even though Tanga's corporeal existence is overwhelmed by the powers that subjected her to imprisonment, she resists and negates those forces through the exercise of her subjectivity, the effect of which is to create another being embodied in her story. Tanga's subversive femininity illustrates a powerful baroque practice: she does not refuse the madness and death that surround her and consume her humanity but, rather, embraces both, and in succumbing to the annihilation of her-self, she emerges reincarnated in Anna-Claude.

One can extend the proliferating effect of Tanga's story to the material space of the book, which, each time that a reader takes it in hand, causes her story to be born in an-other, again and again. Accordingly, the text continually re-enacts its own representational devices; it performs its own kind of baroque *mise-en abîme* of representation to the point that the reader identifies with Tanga's madness, death, and rebirth. Furthermore, the continual push that Tanga feels to tell her story as the narrative itself is unfolding illustrates what Iain Chambers calls the "truly temporal predicament" that so profoundly animates the Baroque dissemination of allegory and irony" (*Culture after Humanism*, 80). Time is enacted through the telling of the story of the story in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. Tanga's story unfolding itself in her story implicates the reader in the narrative action, and as a result, the reader takes an active part in pushing the story along, literally helping Tanga to unfold it with the turning of each page. Much like the way in which representational time and space are enacted in the painting of the painter making a painting in Velásquez's *Las Méninas* in which, as Foucault has shown, the spectator enters into the frame of the artwork (see Chapter I "Classicism and baroque *différance*"), so the reader finds in the experience of Beyala's text that he or she is (or will be) called Tanga, as the title suggests. Velásquez's painter appears to paint the person looking at the tableau from the outside, and Tanga transmits her story into the flesh of her interlocutor, the reader, who is complicit in the process of becoming other, with her. In so doing, the

book of fiction becomes an embodied reality through its baroque staging of representation.

### **B. The Madness of Civilization and its Baroque embodiment**

Before proceeding to Ken Bugl's novel, *La Folie et la mort* and the similarities that exist between her text and Beyala's, I will briefly expound on the idea of madness that I see at work in their writing and that I identify with a baroque sensibility. Senegalese writer Ken Bugul's inaugural publication, the autobiographical *Le Baobab fou* (1984), takes up the question of madness by portraying a world that is thrown upside down, or at least it appears so in the eyes of a disoriented subject. The "Histoire de Ken" follows a brief pre-history, which takes the form of a third-person narrative memory of Ken's childhood, her family, and her village and ends with a scene of a child inserting an amber pearl into her ear. Ken's story then opens with a first-person account of this introduction of foreign material into her own ear, a gesture that E. Nicole Meyer, in her article "Silencing the Noise," reads as a parallel to "the forcing of French culture onto the Senegalese," which causes an initial rupture and later becomes incorporated into her being (192). Meyer proposes that this foreign object blocks some of the outside noises, effectively silencing the world around her, but it also precipitates a loud internal humming sound, a kind of psychological static that "interferes with the verbalization of her identity" (192). The muffling of sound by the insertion of the amber bead into the young Ken's ear and the alienation that this act implies is again reproduced in the overwhelming noise of silence is what Ken experiences on the plane as she departs "vers la Terre Promise," as the loud hum of the engines are intermittently dulled by the ears popping with the changes in altitude. Similarly, upon her arrival in Belgium, she attends a catholic school, which she recalls as "un immense bâtiment de style baroque, et silencieux" (Bugul, 40). This silent immensity again depicts the contrast between a void and a proliferation of images, such as the scene in an airport where she closes her eyes "pour mieux *imager* mon labyrinthe intérieur à travers les dédales d'un monde connu seulement par désespoir, par vide affectif et par manque de forêt sacrée" (38). The overwhelming power of blind vision (her internal labyrinth over a world known only through absence) or the noise of silence is what Ken ultimately expresses in her writing,

an act that is inscribed in the latter part of the text as Ken begins to retrace the steps that led her to her bifurcated vision (or lack thereof) of herself. Meyer perceptively notes: “Once Ken voices and hears her own inner language, she no longer seeks recourse in the language of others [... thus] Ken Bugul shows us all the potential of silence, the shared language of every human.” (199)

Ken Bugul’s book marks an attempt to find herself amidst the overpowering noise of Western culture, which she experiences in hallucinating excesses of sex, drugs, music, dancing, dinner parties, luxury, opulence, coupled with the relative silence of her own culture. In *Countermodernism*, Keith Walker describes a state of “cultural schizophrenia” that results from “competing sets of expectations and cultural values” (173-4). Such a cultural schizophrenia surfaces in Bugul’s text through the numerous juxtapositions of African and European cultural phenomena among and in between which Ken is trying to negotiate her identity. She gives one poignant example of wanting to see herself in a blinding reflection that only obscures:

Le mouvement noir né en ces années-là aussi ne me convainquait pas. Il reflétait [sic] le stéréotype du mouvement occidental. C’était encore une forme d’aliénation, tout cela avait été fomenté par le Blanc, pour mieux camoufler ses ravages et faire dévier le Noir d’un vrai éveil à une conscience depuis que des oracles avaient trouvé l’idée de négritude que le Blanc noya dans l’embryon sous ses applaudissements. (88-9)

For Ken, the cooption of negritude by a cultural elite associated with Europeanized or romanticized African ideals represents an exacerbation and continuation of the colonial project in Africa, which created “la distorsion des esprits pour engendrer la race des sans repères [,et qui] avait fait de la plupart de nous des illogiques” (85). The initial denial and subsequent repression of what one might call autonomous African consciousness, subsumed within the false ideologies of colonialism and an illusory, neo-colonial replication of negritude are the conditions in which an alienated false consciousness of cultural schizophrenia arises. Ken becomes increasingly disillusioned with a society that continually refuses to acknowledge her subjectivity, unable to see beyond, and repeatedly

reminding her of the simple and obvious fact: “*tu es une Noire*” (120 & 123).<sup>246</sup> She is critical of Western constructions of her racialized identity, as well as the way in which negritude has failed to fulfil its promise of emancipation, exemplified in her critique of le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, about which she states:

Ce fut une immense fête en hommage à la racine, mais le contexte historique de l’aliénation dévia de l’essentiel. L’Afrique avait besoin d’une saga émotionnelle. Ce qui restait du Noir fut étalé dans un spectacle de divertissement entre vaincus et vainqueurs, dans cette participation au processus de la marche de l’histoire de l’humanité. (149)

In all of these instances, we see (or hear) the noise, the spectacle of Western culture and the relative silence of a subsumed, co-opted, and vanquished Africa. Ken Bugul directs a harsh critique toward what she sees as the neo-colonial black elite: “Le Festival fut le symposium de l’homme noir néo-colonial entretenu. La mère d’Afrique subit l’assaut de la coopération qui ne faisait qu’enliser le Noir de plus en plus dans les bouleversements psychiques insondables.” (150). The result of her alienation is a splitting or possibly splintering of the self and a descent into madness, which Walker characterizes thusly: “Her madness unfolds as an alternative space of exploration and cogitation as she experiences the splitting of the self through the wrenching experience of exile and cultural interaction peculiar to the postcolonial period” (187).

Ken’s madness is the result of her exile and the silent loss of her African identity, embodied in the loss of her mother. Both literally and figuratively, this initial loss of her Mother (Africa) leads her to search for her replacement identity elsewhere: “Je n’avais rien et je cherchais toute l’enfance dans toutes les situations que je vivais dans le pays du remplacement où je m’abandonnais dans le tragique depuis le départ de la mère” (177). The quest for her “other” self actually begins much earlier than her physical displacement to Europe, first in the (noisy) experience of “l’école française,” contrasted with the

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<sup>246</sup> One might read in these statements a reference to Ousmane Sembène’s 1966 film *La Noire de...*, which is the story of a young Senegalese woman, Diouana, who is brought to the south of France by a family for whom she had worked in Dakar in the capacity of a nanny. Her virtual imprisonment in their house, and the failure of her “hosts” to recognize her humanity underscore her subaltern and dependent position as “somebody’s black girl.”

silence between her and her mother: “La mère et moi ne nous parlions jamais” (129). She recalls that “Le grand fossé se creusa. L’éducation traditionnelle s’empêtra. La génération façonnée par l’école française entra dans la solitude, face à la famille traditionnelle” (146). In this solitude, living alone in a city, playing the role of “l’assimilée,” she discovers “un monde aux multiples contradictions,” and she adapts her life accordingly: “j’aimais la vie par suicide” (169). In a world of impossible contradictions, the only way to survive is through death, and for Ken, this involves leaving, taking her scholarship and going to Europe, a move which, rather than alleviating her anxiety and alienation, deepens her melancholy and results in the double consciousness of cultural schizophrenia. (Walker, 186)

It is interesting to note some of the links between the way in which schizophrenia appears in twentieth-century aesthetic and theoretical treatments in relation to the baroque fascination with melancholia.<sup>247</sup> Patrick Dandrey writes in *Les tréteaux de Saturne: Scènes de la mélancolie à l’époque baroque*:

C’est assurément l’âge baroque qui porta à son apogée la sombre mode des afflictions ténébreuses et des bizarreries inspirées, immédiatement suivie du reflux que symbolise le classicisme français... depuis le déclenchement des conflits de la religion, après 1560... il n’est pas exagéré de dire qu’être mélancolique fut à la mode. (16-17)

Although it might be an exaggeration to imply that schizophrenia is “à la mode” in modern society, there is a definite theoretical vein which seeks, if not to valorize the psychological condition of the schizophrenic, then to at least vet it of some of the pathological negativity which it has been ascribed by modern psychiatry. This is indeed one of the primary concerns expressed by Gilles Deleuze in the essay “Schizophrénie et société,” which appears in the collection *Deux régimes de fous*. In this essay he outlines a notion of schizophrenia as a vacillation between two conflicting states which are,

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<sup>247</sup> Melancholy is itself a common baroque trope. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the section “Trauerspiel and Tragedy,” (pp. 138-58). For a discussion of “Melancholy and colonial space,” See Iain Chambers, *Culture after humanism* (86-89). Also, in *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000), David Punter discusses the postcolonial text, in a way very reminiscent of Freudian psychoanalysis, as a site of “Mourning and Melancholy, Trauma and Loss,” saying that the literary remembering undertaken by postcolonial writers constitutes a work “to collect together some images of postcolonial loss, to attempt a temporary re-collection of that which has been scattered” (128). See also, Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005).

however, never separated one from the other. First, there is the state that he refers to as “les machines-organes” in which “le schizophrène fait une machine fonctionnelle avec des éléments derniers [venus de différentes machines préexistantes], qui n’ont plus rien à voir avec leur contexte, et qui vont entrer en rapport les uns avec les autres à *force de ne pas avoir de rapport...*” (18). As such, schizophrenic activity operates according to another logic--an anti-logic, really--which, according to Deleuze is the appearance of the unconscious “pour ce qu’il est: une usine” (17). This factory fabricates meaning (in the sense of relation) through the simple force of desire, which establishes a non-localizable link and “une fuite généralisée, non-sens proprement schizophrénique” (19). This intense manifestation of unconscious activity that fabricates links between disparate entities to make them work together is contrasted with another state, that of “le corps sans organes,” which is described as a catatonic stupor of “rien qu’un corps plein comme une molécule géante ou un œuf indifférencié” (19). The idea of the “corps sans organes” is theorized in depth by Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille Plateaux* (185-204) as a limit which cannot be surpassed, and he provides the examples of “le corps hypocondriaque,” “le corps paranoïaque,” “le corps schizo,” “le corps drogué,” and “le corps masochiste” as incarnations of a movement toward self annihilation which can never be completely actualized. In *Le Baobab fou*, the young Ken embodies all of these dispositions at one time or another, in her downward trajectory into sex, drugs, prostitution, and self-alienation. Similarly, Tanga also expresses this feeling of being no more than a (child’s/woman’s) body, and in contrast, she undergoes a transformation: “Pour ne pas prendre en héritage la haine et la violence, il est nécessaire de transformer le corps en machine” (71). This tension between mechanistic activity and utter resignation is what characterizes Tanga’s madness, which is also illustrative of the tension between her dying in the prison cell and the feverish attempts to tell her story, combining the different elements of her life/death into the semblance of something whole. It is in the endless struggle between these two poles that one experiences the schizophrenic delirium, which Deleuze describes in terms of a transience, a passage, or a becoming: “sous les hallucinations de sens, sous le délire même de la pensée, il y a quelque chose de plus profond, un sentiment d’intensité, c’est-à-dire un devenir ou un passage” (21).

For Deleuze, the schizophrenic condition is not purely an individual pathology ; rather, he asserts, “tout délire est de la politique et de l’économie,” and I will add *de la culture* as well (25). If the discourse of madness or schizophrenia cannot be divorced from particular socio-historical conditions, the schizophrenic detachment Deleuze describes as “perte de réalité,” is merely the appearance of “quelqu’un qui vit proche du réel à un point insupportable” (26).<sup>248</sup> Thus schizophrenia is a process in which the subject experiences “une rupture, une irruption, une percée qui brise la continuité d’une personnalité, l’entraînant dans une sorte de voyage à travers un ‘plus de réalité’ intense et effrayant, suivant des lignes de fuite où s’engouffrent nature et histoire, organisme et esprit,” always pushing at the limits of the self and of society (26-7). Along these same lines, Ken in *Le Baobab fou* experiences both the intense and frightening disintegration of her self as well as the enlightened perceptions that result from the simultaneous annihilation and inflation of what Deleuze calls “une percée vers ‘plus de réalité’” (25). What can be read as either a negation (“no more reality”) or an addition (“more of reality”), the ambiguity of the expression “plus de réalité” is fitting in that the experience of the schizophrenic is in fact both: an overwhelming proliferation spewing forth from an annihilation. The analogous experience in *Le Baobab fou* is that of the complications that arise in Ken’s psyche from the deafening of her traditional home life and the loss of her mother. In her attempts to find herself, Ken experiences the schizophrenic contradictions of a postcolonial society, both in her physical displacement to Europe and in the emotional and psychological displacements she undergoes as a result to secure an identity in the midst of conflicting cultural practices. In fact, Ken embodies these very contradictions, becoming in a sense a representation of herself, saying “j’avais joué le personnage du clown avec désespoir” (180). She is a Black woman (une Noire), a fact that cannot be ignored; yet she finds ways to make herself “white” (“se faire ‘toubab’” [138]) through education, cultural assimilation, and arguably in a kind of passive

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<sup>248</sup> This is what Foucault shows in *L’Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*: that madness is the production of the social, political, or medical discourses of a given time. Furthermore, Deleuze states: “Si la schizophrénie apparaît comme la maladie de l’époque actuelle, ce n’est pas en fonction de généralités concernant notre mode de vie, mais par rapport à des mécanismes très précis de nature économique, sociale, et politique” (“Schizophrénie et société,” 27).



accommodation of the European fantasy of the pacified, exoticized black woman.<sup>249</sup> This kind of social performance in the absence of a concrete conception of her “self” is the precipitating cause of her alienation and the process of cultural schizophrenia through which she eventually *becomes* other.

In an interesting postface to Léo Navratil’s psychoanalytic text, *Schizophrénie et art*, Evelyne Sznycer discusses certain linkages, theoretical as well as practical, between baroque and mannerist art and schizophrenia. She identifies baroque dance as a beneficial psychotherapeutic treatment because they apparently share “une stratégie commune, propre à résoudre des contradictions sociales et politiques avec une teinte d’humour” (324). This common strategy involves a masking of the self in order to negotiate certain social realities; thus reminiscent of a dancer at a baroque masquerade ball, “derrière un déguisement, le schizophrène peut manoeuvrer sur la scène où il se confronte à la réalité sociale” (329). As in a baroque spectacle of self-representation, the schizophrenic dons a mask in order to confront a reality experienced in the horrifying and paradoxically vacuous or overflowing sensation of “plus de réalité.” The specific mask that Sznycer describes bears a kind of empty and artificial smile, the description of which I find eerily similar to that of Da Vinci’s famed *Mona Lisa*: “Il s’agirait d’un étirement partant des deux coins de la bouche, qui soulèverait à peine les joues, tandis que les yeux seraient hagards et le corps figé dans son ensemble” (329). This mimic of a smile, void of any expression, mirrors a kind of baroque artifice such that, “le schizophrène excelle dans l’art de la feinte [... il] se trompe-l’oeil, et drôlement bien” (333). By extension, one can read Ken’s mimesis of “the white man’s” mannerisms as a survival mechanism, a way to confront a social reality from behind a mask and play a part in the baroque spectacle of modernity. Much like Sznycer notes the beneficial outcome of this participation in baroque dance among schizophrenic patients, it is also a necessary step for Ken to overcome the conflictive forces that are the underlying cause of her divided self.

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<sup>249</sup> This idea refers directly to the Fanon’s analysis of the complex relationships that develop in and between colonizing and colonized peoples in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), especially chapter two, “La femme de couleur et le Blanc.”

An interesting corollary to this calculated performance or simulation of reality, a ballet of gestures that marks the schizophrenic's mannerisms (or baroquisms), is that of a barrage of signs in which "les pulsions sont investies dans les mots, dont le rapport aux représentations d'objets est négligé" (331). A proliferation of words in the absence of a concrete referent proves particularly à-propos for the notion of madness or cultural schizophrenia: as in the case of Tanga, where telling her story to Anna-Clause provided the ultimate medium for her escape (*fuite*) from the confines of her "self," so for Bugul it is through the textual re-inscription of her self as an "other" that she is able to render herself coherent within the contradictions engendered by her cultural schizophrenia. Walker explains this mutation as "The process is the discovery of self through alterity – through one's otherness and through the others who have made you an 'Other'" (195). The baroque doubling of the self and other is also present in the text itself, which inscribes the act of its composition at the disparaging point when Ken decides to "repasser [sa] vie" (128), a process of re-memembering and re-collecting that eventually leads her to the point of self acceptance. This process bears some striking resemblances to a schizophrenic disposition to de-construct the fabric of reality in order to re-constitute it in a different way. Sznycer notes with reference to Freud: "le psychotique, après avoir fui la réalité, la reconstruit autre qu'elle n'était" (330). One can read Bugul's text as precisely this kind of therapeutic performance, an imitation of too-overwhelming experience of reality that must be re-constructed according to a different order and in a schizophrenic space of masking that enables the sustained engagement with contradictory conceptions of the self and society.

Much like the salvation afforded by the of telling of her story in Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, the text of *Le Baobab fou* represents a way out of death (or even in death) through madness which is not a violent insanity but a positive schizophrenia, a madness that sees the world for what it is, and then goes beyond that to something *more* (or no more) *of reality*, The ambiguous annihilation or inflation of reality implied by the idea of "plus de réalité" accurately describes the paradoxical notion of death and rebirth that appears both on the levels of narration and material production of Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* and Bugul's *Le Baobab fou*. Both protagonists arrive at a point of

total dissolution, lost in madness with no recourse, and both of the texts enact a form of self-performance that provides a redemptive exit from that madness. About her own experience of becoming other, author Mariétou Mbaye, who chose the pseudonym Ken Bugul (meaning “personne n’en veut” or “nobody wants” in Wolof) states: “Becoming Ken Bugul was like a rebirth. I could then continue to live thereafter. Had I not become Ken Bugul, I would have ceased to exist.” (319)<sup>250</sup> This passage of self re-creation undertaken by Mariétou Mbaye in becoming the “other,” Ken Bugul, (thereby entertaining the schizophrenic experience of having plural selves) is inscribed in her autobiography through Ken’s journey whereupon she arrives at the point of madness and death—“J’étais à l’ultime étape[sic] où il n’y avait plus que le suicide pur et simple”—yet is saved by her lucid madness in a silent revelation that everyone is in the same worldly situation:

La tête de la femme m’avait fait comprendre sans un mot. Tous les locataires de cet immeuble vivaient des situations analogues ou pires encore, dans les vies tourmentées. L’implacabilité du destin, quand elle était amorcée, poursuivait sa trajectoire incontrôlable. (178)

Ken identifies here with another anonymous woman, and realizing that the world is mad, that civilization in all of its rationality rests on the absurd premise of unreason, allows Ken to catch a glimpse of the world beyond her singular existence, a vision which, though horrifying, affords comfort in its commonality, and as such, she is able to accept the other that is also one (of many) parts of herself. Similarly, *Le Baobab fou* represents an intimate account of one individual’s experience of this madness of civilization, but also embodies the process of traversing its unreal dimensions (the writing of the text itself and the creation of the “other” that is Ken Bugul) and arriving at a more complete, albeit chaotic, fragmented, disjointed, schizophrenic image of reality.

One might already notice certain affinities between the process here described and the creative enterprise of a baroque aesthetic: a process of becoming that seeks to bring together contradictory or impossible realities through representational techniques that baffle and confuse the spectator and ultimately reveal a more fundamental affective truth

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<sup>250</sup> E. Nicole Meyer analyses different meanings of this chosen pseudonym, and the possibilities of “what” it is specifically that “nobody wants” (“Silencing the Noise,” 196-7).

regarding the world and the subject in relation to it. Claudette Sarlet's article "Nouveau baroque: baroque universel?" in the anthology *Nouvelles écritures francophones: vers un nouveau baroque?* (pp.13-25) investigates the literary history of the baroque concept, with specific attention paid to the oft-neglected novelistic genre, concluding with a reference to an article by Romuald Fonkoua that describes the relationship between literary production and political dereliction in many African nations between 1980 and 1990. Sarlet writes,

Le lieu de l'écriture devient le chaos, l'absence et la vacance du politique. Puisque le pouvoir est dénué de sens, l'écriture se situe du côté de l'irréel, de la folie. Dans le processus de déstructuration sociale que vit l'Afrique, la "nouvelle" écriture [du nouveau baroque] est celle pour qui la nécessité est d'abord d'écrire. [...] Puisque la société réelle est intenable et indicible, l'écriture s'échappe vers un en-dehors spatio-temporel, où règnent le burlesque, la truculence, le fou rire et le rire fou, l'onirique côté cauchemar, la fable et l'impossibilité d'une narration logique. (25)

Accordingly, the baroque aesthetic that appears in African literary texts represents a coping mechanism for existing in a society that is experienced as a schizophrenic disjuncture. Rather than attempting to revert to a simplified mode of expression that ignores or suppresses these contrasts, writers such as Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul have found innovative ways of internalising the madness of civilization through a novelistic style and practice that not only embraces and incorporates such contrasts in its expressive content and narrative form, but to a greater degree embodies the process of a schizophrenic trajectory toward a fuller, yet paradoxically voided rendition of reality through the experience of a (textual) re-production of the self. What results is an art form that represents and re-enacts a transformation of the self, and by extension, of the societal constructions that determine what the "self" might be: a fundamentally baroque creation of new kind of being-in-the-world.

### **C. Baroque Pictures in Prose: *La Folie et la mort***

The baroque is an art that mixes genres, and the evolution of a baroque aesthetic from visual theory to literary theory is interesting in the respect that the latter relies heavily on the visual as a mode of representation, creating images out of words within or beyond the stories traced by the words themselves and adding additional layers of

allegorical significance to a text. Baroque visual and textual arts, which act upon the spectator through representational strategies of *trompe-l'œil* and *mise-en-abîme*, effectively erase the distinctions between reality and representation or illusion, thereby creating a distorted perception akin to momentary madness (in the sense of a suspension of logic and rationality) and affording a kind of second sight capable of apprehending (if not comprehending) the fundamentally non-rational orders of existence. In the text, the effect of an apparent madness attests not only to an aesthetic transmutation of visibility of pictorial arts into the literary domain, but also a critical engagement with a postmodern, postcolonial, and baroque reality that is suspended in a complex and ambiguous social, political, and cultural relation. Thus, the madness that a given text enacts in terms of its characters as well as its formal and structural elements reflects a certain madness of society or of civilization, and it is this multi-layered baroque madness that I will examine in Ken Bugul's appropriately titled novel, *La Folie et la mort*.

*La Folie et la mort* (2000) is considered Ken Bugul's first work of complete fiction, thus marking an evolution in her writing from an autobiographical mode to what might be considered "pure" creation. In addition, the novel's form is a unique combination of genres, which ends up resembling more an absence of genre. It is written in prose, yet it lacks the traditional paragraph structure of a typical narrative, reading at times like fragmented verse, or even prose poetry. In this sense, it approaches the poetic, and one might argue further that it enacts a certain kind of mad visibility or the madness of vision typified by baroque arts (c.f. Buci-Glucksmann, *La Folie du voir*). The text opens with the brief tercet:

Il fait nuit.  
Une nuit noire.  
Une nuit terriblement noire.

And this dark night immediately finds its place in the precise yet ambiguously descriptive phrase: "Dans ce pays sans nom, sans identité, enfin un pays fantôme, absurde, ridicule et maudit comme il y en avait un bon nombre sur ce Continent, la décision était prise: --Il faut les tuer." (11) The relative emptiness of a terribly dark night in a nameless, "absurd, phantom country like so many on this Continent" is then flooded with the noise of the

radio, announcing the various signs of human tragedy taking place on the Continent: civil wars, displacements, disappearances, homelessness, Rwanda, and the national decree pronounced by “le Grand Timonier [...] à la tête de notre cher et beau pays” that “tous les fous qui raisonnent, et tous les fous qui ne raisonnent pas, donc tous les fous, doivent être tués” (12). An anonymous dialogue ensues, which brings the world into focus : the mention of Chechnya leads to the interrogative generalization : “Ce sont des pays musulmans, islamiques, fondamentalistes, islamistes, intégristes, terroristes, rétrogrades, non?” to which the interlocutor replies, “Pour Sam et ses complices, ces pays, et les gens de ces pays ne comptent pas” (12-13). The radio interrupts again, and is then silenced while the discussion continues, turning toward the more pressing matter of the Great Timonier’s decree that all crazy people be killed.

The explosion of sonic imagery is accompanied by an acute visualization that emerges out of the “dark night,” giving rise, as it were, to the entire world enfolded in the microcosmic universe of a room, like the divinations of a magic lantern. Among other things, this opening scene serves to contextualize the story about a nameless country on a continent we can only assume is meant to be Africa (though it could very well be anywhere in the world) within a complex web of global interactions, which is neatly reduced to the conflict between Sam (who no doubt refers to Uncle Sam<sup>251</sup>) and his accomplices, as well as a lengthy list of countries whose precise names and locations are of little importance—“vers Caucase, vers Daghestan, les djan, zan, tan et consorts”—except for the fact that they represent the Muslim/Islamic/fundamentalist/Islamist/terrorist/backwards “other.” This violent global reality is easily dismissed, as easily as one turns off the radio, after which the world is again plunged into the initial darkness: “il fait toujours nuit. Une nuit noire. Une nuit terriblement noire...” (15). Less novelistic than theatrical, or perhaps cinematic, like the curtain left drawn before the

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<sup>251</sup> The powerful Sam is portrayed sporadically throughout the text, usually with biting irony at his indifference toward the world. For example at Mom Dioum’s friend Fatou Ngouye’s marriage to Mor Lô, a foreign “mari fantôme” who never appears to claim his bride, Fatou is given a radio by which she hears the news going on throughout the world, including the bombardment of Chechnya, and she wonders, “Qu’avait fait Sam de sa grande gueule et ses dictats?” (24). Also, a long series of negative attributes Mom Dioum ascribes to the city, including “De la folie. De la mort[,]” ends with, “Sam avec sa viande hachée aux hormones,” which is a pretty obvious jab at the fast-food industry as an agent of a global (American) modernity (34-5). And regarding Sam’s total complacency to African problems, see pp. 80-81.

actors take the stage, or the blank screen at the cinema on which the opening credits appear, this scene effectively draws the reader into the action of the text. The absence of description stimulates the imagination to anticipate and create a visual image of the scene filled by the noise of the radio and two rambling characters whose identities are as nondescript and unimportant as the country they live in. The final three lines of the anonymous opening dialogue—the defensive “Je ne suis pas fou,” followed by the suspicious retort “Tu as intérêt,” and the final warning “Fais attention à toi”—speak directly to the reader who is left to wonder if perhaps s/he might also be considered “crazy” (a constant question for the characters throughout the novel as well), considering that craziness after all is left undefined aside from its two contrary qualifiers, reasoning or not reasoning: “Il faut tuer tous les fous, ceux qui raisonnent et ceux qui ne raisonnent pas” (14).

Up until this point in the novel, there has been only the dimly audible sounds of disembodied voices, but slowly, even those are silenced: “cette nuit terriblement noire avait fait taire la raison, fait étouffer les éclats de rire, les contes chantés et dansés, au cours desquels les liens se tissaient dans les jeux d’allusion et d’illusion, de la vie et de la mort” (15). The particularly baroque element in this participatory introduction to the text, which begins again (and again) with the same dark night, “Il fait toujours nuit...” (repeated on p. 15 and again in the imperfect tense on p. 21), is that of a Voice (or concert of voices) that fade in and out of an enveloping silence as if slowly waking from a dream. In her elaboration of the baroque aesthetic, *La folie du voir*, Christine Buci-Glucksmann cites Paul Celan regarding the synesthetic aspects of baroque art in the creation of “une ‘Voix de regards’” (17). The voices that continue to re-emerge throughout the text from the imminent darkness in the initial pages of *La Folie et la mort* engender a kind of gaze coming from the invisible, imagined possessors of those voices. Again, with respect to the baroque artwork, Buci-Glucksmann, citing Paul Cézanne, depicts this effect as “une Beauté radieuse et jouissante surgie de la lumière du noir[, et à] ce moment-là, ‘il y a devant vous un grand Être de lumière et d’amour, l’univers vacillant, l’hésitation des choses’ [: l’impression] que le tableau te regarde, qu’il n’y ait ‘que les couleurs et en elles de la clarté’” (17). In a similar fashion, the reader of Bugul’s text is transformed into an

object of its gaze. The relative obscurity of the opening pages, animated by the voices hidden within it, reveals the latent gaze of light and color produced by the reader's stimulated imagination. In this case, the novel impresses itself upon the reader such that the reader feels its projected voices and the accompanying images they relate. Thus, when Ken Bugul's protagonist, Mom Dioum, pays a visit to her old friend Fatou Ngouye in the village, and she introduces herself, or is introduced, merely as a (disembodied) voice ("C'est moi, c'est moi, dit une voix dans un souffle" [15]), the effect is one that speaks to the reader, and along with the voice, there is a being with a gaze that is produced. After Fatou identifies the voice, "C'est toi Mom Dioum," not only do the two characters in dialogue pass into being, but an entire village comes to light as family relations emerge out of the landscape, either in person or in conversation. But even more glaring is the larger world that comes into focus simultaneously, through the factors that influence daily happenings in the village: the desire to emigrate to Europe, ancient Islamic ritual appropriations, neighbors, and the city with all of its modern contraptions. The immediacy with which these images are produced, either through dialogue or a narrative style that is not far removed from the dialogue, resembles the way in which a play would enact the visual world through the words of the actors. In the space created by voices, an immensely rich field of vision opens up in which people and places come into *being*, which is also enacted in the particular stylistic "voicing" of the text in its overtly rhythmic form.<sup>252</sup> However, I would like to go a step further in proposing that *La Folie et la mort* can, and perhaps should, be read as cinema insofar as the rhythms and juxtapositions of short and long passages in the text simulate the deliberate cuts, pans, and camera angles of cinematographic montage. Through the "jumpy" short shots of textual interjections juxtaposed with long shots "panning" descriptions, the immediacy of the dialogue, as well as a very visual verbal style that focuses on colors and movements, Ken Bugul's text enacts the visuality of a cinematic baroque aesthetic.

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<sup>252</sup> Regarding the notion of voice, in an interview with Jeanne-Sarah de Larquier, Ken Bugul states that she writes with "her French," the way she hears it and learned it, through rhythm, and "For this reason, my writing is bothersome, even distasteful, because I put sonority and gestures into it, even if it is only through repetition" (*Emerging Perspectives on Ken Bugul*, 319-30 at 328-9).



Perhaps more immediately evident than the visual elements of the text, a notion to which I will give more attention later on, the aural components are perhaps more striking. Orality appears in the way the text proceeds, not as a narratological development of descriptive paragraphs, but rather as a dialogical progression interrupted by descriptions—sometimes simple sentences, sometimes strings of sentences, sometimes only fragments—and with an abundance of questions that elicit responses to keep the dialogue and, consequently, the action moving forward.<sup>253</sup> The effect of this recomposition is one that simulates the fragmented insanity of an incoherent postcoloniality, but not in a negative sense. Rather, the work represents its own madness (the chaotic conversation created by the overlapping disembodied voices of the radio and the anonymous interlocutors discussing the madness of the world and humanity in the opening scene, for example) in addition to that of its characters, as a depiction, or, an embodiment of a “more of reality” in the Deleuzian sense ascribed to the schizophrenic. There is an interesting narrative split that further emphasizes the schizological character of modern African existence. The reader finds out through Mom Dioum’s confession to her friend Fatou that, after having left her village to live in the city, she feels out of place; in order to re-integrate into society, Mom Dioum has decided to undergo a ritual lip tattooing to restore her sense of identity and belonging.<sup>254</sup> Thus, at the point where Mom Dioum finds herself alone in the hands, or between the big thighs, of the *Tatoueuse* (“une grosse femme qui lui martelait les chairs de la bouche” [38]), and as she experiences the intense pain of the ritual, another story unfolds in the interim. Mom Dioum’s friend Fatou and her cousin Yoro head to the city in search of Mom Dioum, whose disappearance

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<sup>253</sup> The constant presence of the radio (the window to a larger world of events, both important and utterly banal) throughout the text of *La Folie et la mort* further reinforces this recourse to orality as a textual strategy. The radio also plays a central role Ousmane Sembène’s film *Moolaadé* (2004), a film in which a group of women are refusing to let some young girls be subjected to the painful ritual of excision or female circumcision; ultimately, their radios (seen as the agents of modern corruption) are confiscated and destroyed.

<sup>254</sup> The theme of urban alienation is a fundamental element in Bugul’s *Le Baobab fou*, but also of a number of African works that depict a physical and psychological disjunction between village life and the urban environment, as well as the points of influx between the two, either in Europe or in Africa. For example, Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë*; also Ivorian filmmaker Fadika Kramo-Lanciné’s *Djeli* (1987), which paints a vivid picture of the schism between life in the modern metropolis of Abidjan and in a Mandingue village.

following her ambiguous statement to Fatou that she was going to “se tuer pour renaître,” leads her family to conclude that she has returned to the city. The city is described as a wasteland:

Le désordre avait affecté le mental des gens et avec la permissivité sur l’ouverture des bars, des maisons closes, des tripots clandestins, sur la prostitution, l’alcool, le bruit, les gens s’abrutissaient de plus en plus et ils n’avaient plus de notion de quoi que ce soit. Que c’était beau. Surtout les tas d’immondices. (51)

This description mirrors that given earlier by Mom Dioum of her experience in the city, compounding the generally pessimistic portrayal of the urban milieu as the locus of modern individualism and a psychology of isolationism. Mom Dioum laments this loss of connectedness: “Mais de nos jours, cette conception du voisinage avait presque disparu. Surtout dans les villes. Les gens pouvaient habiter ensemble pendant des dizaines d’années sans se fréquenter, sans même se saluer.” (17) Many of the same themes from Bugul’s first novel reappear in Mom Dioum’s brief first encounter with the modern world, yet in altered form: the Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres is replaced by the conférence de la Francophonie, where she works as a hostess, exchanging her charms for “ce petit emploi temporaire,” and she discovers that despite the fact that she is in her native country, she feels alienated and corrupted. “Elle découvrit la pollution des âmes et de l’atmosphère” (27). Ultimately disillusioned, Mom Dioum returns to her village, only to find that it, too, has changed, and in order to overcome her feeling of alienation, she wishes to experience the ritual lip tattooing, which, as she shares with Fatou, represents a kind of re-creation of herself: “je veux me tuer pour renaître” (28).

The juxtaposition between life and death (and of life in death) that is also a common theme in Sony Labou Tansi’s *La Vie et demie*, as well as Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, a trope that constitutes a fundamental part of a baroque aesthetic. The contrast often appears in Baroque painting and poetry in the colors red and black. For example, any number of Caravaggio’s or Peter Paul Ruben’s tableaux depict a central character draped in the red folds of a cloth against a dark backdrop, and the first book of D’Aubigné’s *Les Tragiques* is filled with images of blood and fire (red) and death and tombs (black). Interestingly enough, also, in Bugul’s *La Folie et la Mort*, the *Tatoueuse*,

the agent of Mom Dioum's symbolic death and rebirth, has two bags in her possession, which contain two small pieces of cloth, one red, and one black, and as she is about to begin the tattooing process, she removes a black "corne de boeuf" from her sac and a "corne de bouc" wrapped in red cloth. (31-32)<sup>255</sup> The intense imagery and symbolism inscribed in the text further contribute to a heightened sense of vision or of the visual that supercedes and transcends the purely semantic contents of the text.

The links to a cinematic aesthetic in *La Folie et la mort* are also embedded in the story which, as Jeanne Garane remarks in her article "From the Screen to the Page," is an adaptation of a 1971 film by Ababacar Samb-Makharam, entitled *Kodou*. Garane comments on the way that Bugul does not merely reproduce or incorporate certain scenes from African films wholesale, "but instead she modifies them or echoes them [...] to examine the ways in which such 'recombinations' relate to her vision of a mad postcolonial world where fragments of traditional practices are often misused to victimize the desperate and unsuspecting." (Garane, 258)<sup>256</sup> This idea is particularly intriguing in several respects. First, the postcolonial world is mad; it consists of a recuperation and misuse of fragmented traditions in an alien context of modernity, continuing the cycle of violence instituted by colonialism and neo-colonialism. Secondly, this mad fragmentation and foreign re-composition is mirrored in Ken Bugul's textual strategy as she essentially incorporates both traditional oral literature (in the dialogic progression of the text that often follows the form of question and answer like a traditional folktale) and the modern "oral literature" that is cinema in the context of her writing.

For example, in the story that unfolds in the suspended time of Mom Dioum's transformation, though the city has been portrayed a destitute site of corruption, "Fatou Ngouye et Yoro étaient émerveillés par les gens de la ville" (53). Ironically, upon their

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<sup>255</sup> Another work worth noting in this context is Flora Gomes's 2002 stunningly visual and aural musical film release *Nha Fala (My voice)*, which chronicles the journey of Vita, a young girl from Guinea Bissau who becomes a musical star in Paris. The climactic point of the film is her return home where she stages her own funeral, saying that she must die in order to save her mother, and later on, "pour renaître il faut accepter de mourir."

<sup>256</sup> Garane's article appears in the collection *Emerging Perspectives on Ken Bugul*, eds. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Jeanne-Sarah de Larquier (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), pp. 257-75. She mentions specifically the Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety's final two short films, *Le Franc* and *La Petite vendeuse de Soleil*, which appear in various forms in *La Folie et la mort*; I will discuss a scene in which the latter film is quite clearly reprised.

arrival, their initial impression is one of awe and wonder at the marvels of technology and mass society, but it isn't long before their bewildered amazement is shattered by a harsh reality: they are accused of theft and almost instantly handcuffed and, in spite of their pleas of innocence, they are taken away to the *poste de police*. This scene of the unjustly accused "voleur/voleuse" echoes the opening scene of Djibril Diop Mambety's film, *La Petite vendeuse de Soleil* in which a woman is accused of theft and promptly ushered off to prison where she raves to no avail until the main character Sili miraculously negotiates her release. She is later shown wandering the streets, described by Sili as having gone mad ("devenue folle"). With its overt reference to Mambety's film, this particular scene in the novel once again marks the visual intentionality of Bugul's textual practice. And similar to, and even worse than, the fate of the nameless woman in Mambety's film, the stories of Fatou and Yoro follow a tragic downward spiral that reinforces the image of the city as licentious and corrupt, where the agents of order are described as having the opposite effect: it is "L'uniforme qui semait la terreur partout" (65). Fatou is taken by the "Chef" to his villa where she is eventually raped ("Dépucelage violent. Viol d'une vierge. Elle est complètement déchirée" [69]) and later abandoned in a hospital, apparently left for dead. She is rescued by some Catholic sisters, but salvation remains out of sight. Fatou becomes a domestic servant for a priest who "baptizes" her; however, the narrator remarks that "[I]l confondit baptême et autre chose et viola presque la jeune fille" (73). As a result of her repeated "baptisms," Fatou becomes pregnant and is sent away. Neither civil law nor religious law has proven merciful or just. At this point, she thinks of her friend Mom Dioum and, in contrast with her wish to die and be reborn, Fatou says: "Tout ce que je veux maintenant, c'est mourir pour toujours" (77). Her wish is granted. After she finds out the fate of Yoro who himself had been taken as a "domestic servant" (a euphemism for a sex slave) by a military man, and who is now about to make a trip across the ocean to Atlantite where his ambiguous future occupation is likely to entail more of the same: "de telles pratiques sexuelles [qu'il n'avait jamais imaginé] pouvaient exister" (98, 104), she runs away into the marketplace. Again, the frenetic cry of "Au voleur!" rings out, and Fatou Ngouye, for no apparent reason, is suspect. The angry crowd has no pity for the pregnant young woman. She is doused with flammable liquid, and while her

radio plays the sound-bites of the timonier's refusal to acknowledge a popular uprising, citing his sole capacity to defend the country against the threats of imperialism and terrorism, a lit match is thrown, and "Fatou Ngouye brûlait comme si elle était du bois sec" (109).

Fatou's tragic story doubles and foreshadows Mom Dioum's own eventual martyrdom as the narration takes a jump back to the scene of the *tatouage*, which has been seemingly suspended during the narration of Fatou's entire ordeal but which is soon interrupted as Mom Dioum, unable to stand the pain of the ritual, runs away, thereby committing an unpardonable transgression. The gravity of her choice to abort the sacred ritual is expressed in the metaphorical description of her choice to flee as death: "Mom Dioum venait de mourir" (116). Having interrupted the process of her dying to be reborn, she appears suspended in a kind of interstitial realm that opens up to extra-real and fantastic dimensions as she is rescued in the forest by an albino who then marries her, and who, she later finds out from a magical old woman, is actually a savage beast who will undoubtedly one day devour her. The woman gives her three stones to help her in her attempt to escape to a village, and upon her arrival to the village, she must make a choice, as the old woman had said, but of what she is unsure.<sup>257</sup> After experiencing what one might interpret as the deranged hallucinations of a mad woman, the choice she must make, it turns out, is a choice between death and madness (itself also a form of death after the Grand Timonier's decree that all crazy people be killed, whether they reason or not). Thus, Mom Dioum comes to a rather inconclusive conclusion:

Elle savait qu'elle n'était pas folle. Et là, elle savait qu'elle était considérée comme folle, qu'elle avait l'apparence d'une folle. Elle serait considérée comme folle, partout. Donc il n'y avait plus de résistance. Elle était obligée d'accepter sa folie. Elle allait vivre avec sa folie. Ou bien était-elle réellement folle? (134)

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<sup>257</sup> Ada Uzoamaka Azodo describes this fantastic journey as a symbolic death and Renaissance, an alternative mode of accomplishing the re-integration of herself that she was unable to do through the ritual tattooing ("Ken Bugul and the African Imaginary," in *Emerging Perspectives on Ken Bugul* [pp. 223-56]). Furthermore, the mystico-magical elements in this part of the story, which greatly resemble some of the fantastic elements recounted in the Malinké "Epic of Sunjata" (recorded by D.T. Niane [Longmans, 1965]) for example, stand in stark contrast with the grotesquely realist depiction of the city in the demise of Fatou Ngouye.

Her only certainty, that she knows she is not crazy, is itself uncertain, as, after her “reasoning” with herself about accepting her craziness (which itself is a mere appearance), she still wonders whether she is not really crazy. In sum, craziness seems to be all that there is. Reason is shown to be merely an illusory masking of another kind of craziness, as if to state that there is no alternative. In the end, her “craziness,” which is more an acute lucidity of the horrors and social injustices that plague the world than true madness, ultimately lands her in an asylum, where she is able to share her story with her newfound boyfriend Yaw (who, after having witnessed a brutal perversion of a sacred ritual, is perhaps really insane). Over the course of the narrative, Mom Dioum is able to share only bits and pieces of her story, “mais sa vraie histoire, elle ne pouvait la raconter à personne” (28). Similarly, the way in which Mom Dioum’s story, an unspeakable story (of madness and death?) that she can tell to no one, is represented in the text in the form of fragments, disjointed episodes, or one-line interjections that provide snapshot images of her experiences and as such only hint at what the full events of her “true story” might be. After Mom Dioum finally shares her story, which reveals the gruesome and intimate details of the masquerade of power, corruption, and excess at the foundation of society, Yaw is overcome with horror, realizing that her sordid tale is linked to his own as Mom Dioum reveals: “Toi aussi tu as vu, participé involontairement à la mascarade comme des millions de gens dans nos pays” (226). Yaw then strangles her, and the male nurses find him later that night in the hospital morgue: “[il] souriait de toutes ses belles dents en continuant à chanter, devant le corps refroidi de Mom Dioum” (227). Together, they are the image of madness and death, the only two outcomes of an impossible postcolonial world system.

### **In-Conclusion: Creating baroque escapes**

The images of the African (and the global) metropolis represented in the texts studied here portray the horrors of individuals lost in the currents of modern institutions and practices. Ken Bugul’s *La Folie et la mort* mounts a critique of modernity in its most magnificent manifestation: the Metropolis. It presents a strong case against the pretended rationality of modern civilization, which appears as utter chaos and insanity in comparison to Mom Dioum’s lucid madness. The city is an illusory paradise, merely a

thin veil over the horrors of its vain materialism. Yet, rather than advocating the false hope of a return to the source, Bugul emphasizes finding new ways of negotiating identity and meaning in a world that has gone completely mad. Thus, the point at which Mom Dioum decides to abort the ritual tattooing and effectively denounce the saving force of tradition that up until that point had given her a sense of hope for recovering her sense of identity, makes a poignant statement about where the individual can find a place in (between) society. Her facial mutilation from the aborted return to tradition illustrates the two-faced nature of such attempts. But beyond merely portraying a grotesque caricature of the African city and a disfigured African traditionalism, the death and madness of the world that are presented and mirrored in the text extend by implication to a global network of international exchange and transnational enterprise, and of the crime and politics (which at times can be difficult to differentiate) that occupy the contemporary “postcolonial” and “postmodern” world. On a positive note, her being caught halfway between tradition and something else (call it modernity), also halfway between being dead and reborn, signifies a position of power, namely the power to *choose*. In being neither one thing nor another entirely, the subject is in a position to be anything at anytime, a condition that is mirrored in the composition of the text that falls outside of the categories of prose, poetry, or even cinema. Thus the redemptive element among all this madness is in fact madness. When the bounds of reality disintegrate into various forms of fictions, and the subject is lost in them, infinite possibilities for creating one’s own existence, one’s own “reality” at any moment out of the inventions of the mind.

As such, Mom Dioum’s “death” and “madness” represent a process of becoming very similar to that which is depicted in Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*. This movement out of a death-world and onto a higher plane of consciousness of “la folie sage” represents a means of escape, both for the individual and for the community. This escape is not entirely comforting. The African baroque is such that the world appears as fiction, and within this world of inventions and imaginary fabrications, the subject must also create fictions to survive. Thus the creative works of baroque authors, and filmmakers not only help to render more concrete, albeit often in abstraction, a vision of the intertwining

fictions that narrate the mechanisms of modern society, they also act in accordance with a certain baroque practice, demonstrating the power of creative agency. Whether fashioning the self through the forms of daily existence, or creating an object-work of art, it suffices to traverse death, to accept its inevitability, to experience madness, and in so doing, get beyond the constraints of reason and “just life” to a new way of seeing and being in the world. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo quotes Ken Bugul from an interview with Renée Mendy-Ongoundou that illustrates this tension in a very detailed and concrete social agenda:

Non, l’Afrique doit mourir pour renaître. Il faut qu’elle ferme ses portes pour se retrouver et renaître autrement. Nous devons rester entre nous, consommer local, regarder des programmes africains... Ceux qui survivront à cette mort symbolique repartiront sur des bases nouvelles sur lesquelles nous allons recomposer avec le monde, fixer nous-mêmes les prix des matières primaires. Sinon, seuls les autres profiteront de la mondialisation. (Azodo, 228)

I think one can safely say that in Bugul’s formulation of a new Africa, the woman plays a central role, as the emphasis on local micro-economics, which correspond to a micro-politics of the home (in the extended sense of traditional African societies) in an effort to bring change from the ground up for people in their everyday living. Moreover, this acute social consciousness and awareness of the kinds of grand-scale political and economic practices, all under the umbrella of Western rationalism and (neo-) colonialism, that are responsible for the death and exploitation of African countries, and the converse psychological orientation that is necessary to be born again into a new other form of global existence are encoded in Bugul’s novelistic project: “La folie peut être un choix, une approche de la liberté” (182). Bugul’s work represents the kind of “new critical pedagogies” necessary to generate new spaces of expression in the African metropolis, where the liberated subject (whether male or female) is empowered through a revolt against the laws of reason to contribute to the collective death and rebirth of global society.



## **In-Conclusion: Lines of flight to follow**

### **Introduction: What lies ahead**

In this dissertation, I have tried to expand the notion of a new baroque or baroqueisme in postcolonial African literature, taking my point of departure in literary analyses that identify various elements of a baroque aesthetic at work (or at play) in novelistic, theatrical, poetic, and cinematic representations of Africa. Beyond contributing my own analyses to those that have already been done, I have explored in depth the complex notion of the baroque in order to more fully grasp not only the instances of an aesthetic anomaly that has been associated with a baroque-like style of writing, but also the social, cultural, and political implications of this particular stylistic. In so doing, I have had to move patiently through half a millennium of world art history and criticism, making stops at important historical and cultural instances in which baroque representation appears. In addition to Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*, Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy*, Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*, and Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire*, the literary works that I have chosen to analyze in depth, Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie*, Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, and Ken Bugul's *La Folie et la mort*, were selected for the ways in which each elucidates the role of unique elements of a stylistic baroqueism as markers of material conditions of post-colonial African culture which I interpret as signs of an African baroque. These three works span the last two decades of the twentieth century and the threshold of the twenty-first. In that they also cover the vast geographical expanse of francophone sub-Saharan Africa, from Senegal to the Congo, I deemed them the most representative works for this project.

Nonetheless, as a final in-conclusion, I would like to take some time here to very briefly go over some other works that appear either in the margins of this dissertation and perhaps in the mind of the writer or reader as he or she works through the text. I hope that this discussion can contribute to a greater appreciation of the idea of an African baroque, as well as of the role that African literary representation (and literature in general) plays in our understanding of the complex postcolonial and postmodern world in which we

live. Perhaps the literary representations of this neo-baroque world civilization can also be read, understood, and further critiqued as the great monuments of modern genius—like the works of Michelangelo, Bernini, Nicolas Poussin, Montaigne, d’Aubigné, Cervantes from another time—for the way they represent the incomprehensible human condition that rests forever suspended between the immediate and the indefinite, the moment and its infinity. In the sections that follow, I will touch on a few other examples, not with the intention of adding to the list of literary case studies of an African baroque aesthetic, but rather, in order to show that the baroque is in fact a far-reaching theoretical and aesthetic construct that can be applied more generally to African authors, literary works, and genres from diverse cultures and time periods.

#### **A. Traces of some other works**

In addition to the works discussed in this dissertation, there is still more that can be discussed here in relation to a baroque postcolonial African (and global) reality, and the way that baroque strategies of representation portray and embody the unreason of its contradictory appearing, creating opportunities to survive, physically and psychologically, in the economy of death created and sustained by the inhuman forces of the modern spectacle and globalization. To begin with, there are other works by the authors I selected that are equally baroque in their compositional traits and themes. For instance, Sony Labou Tansi’s entire literary corpus, taken as an ensemble as Nicolas Martin-Granel aimed to do in his article “Le quatrième côté du triangle,” would reveal numerous veins of baroque detours to explore. To give but one particular example, Sony’s novel, *L’anté-peuple* (1983), represents in his typically hyperbolic and rather crass writing style a hallucinatory tale of oppression and subversion in which a schoolteacher, Dadou, is wrongfully imprisoned for a murder he did not commit. After his covertly orchestrated release, he is forced into exile, from which he escapes with his lover Yealdara to the other side of the river where he finds shelter in a village of fishermen. When the authorities eventually arrive, he again takes flight, and Yealdara later discovers him in the city where he is acting as a “fou,” engaging in collective resistance against the society and the status quo. As in Bugul’s *La folie et la mort*, craziness is not as much an affliction as a semi-conscious choice, a means of evading

death through adapting to an alternate form of (anti-)social existence. The clandestine community of crazies operates on another plane of irrationality and is indicative of ambiguous “baroque practices” described by Mbembe, which like a baroque aesthetic, operates through the appearance of chaos or unreason, behind which lies a different, latent form of organization.

One particular literary instance that, because of time and space constraints, I was not able to discuss in any significant detail in this dissertation, but which I still find important to mention, is the work of Ivorian writer Ahmadou Kourouma. His first novel, *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968) represents, along with Ouologuem’s *Le Devoir de violence*, a new beginning for francophone African literature, and it stands out as an exemplary work of the baroque aesthetic that I have theorized here. This book’s noteworthiness lies in its repeated mention in the interviews that I conducted with African scholars on the topic of the baroque in African literature that appear in the Appendices of this dissertation, but I would like to briefly mention that his later works also exhibit, in extremely interesting ways, the characteristics of a baroque aesthetic practice. In Kourouma’s *Allah n’est pas obligé*, winner of the 2000 Prix Renaudot and the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens, and his unfinished chronicle of the Ivorian civil conflict, *Quand on refuse on dit non* (2004), there is a continuation, and perhaps an amplification, in the linguistic baroque of Kourouma’s earlier works. In both of these two novels, the child narrator, Petit Birahima, recounts in his broken French (the modern equivalent of “le petit nègre”) his experiences of and critical insights on the civil war in Liberia in the former, and the breakout of civil war in Côte d’Ivoire in the latter, in which he participates in the capacity of a child soldier. Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the deterritorialized “machine de guerre” in *Mille Plateaux*, as well as Mbembe’s discussion of transnational war machines in his article “Necro-politics,” provide an interesting theoretical framework from which to approach the question of a mobile transnational political economy of violence and death. Furthermore, in *Allah n’est pas obligé* there is a narrative inscription of the writing process that is particularly intriguing from the standpoint of a baroque aesthetic, as the dictionaries, including the Larousse, the Petit Robert, as well as Harrap’s French Dictionary and *L’Inventaire des particularités*

*lexicales du français d'Afrique noire*, are actually obtained and used by Petit Birahima at the end of the story (233). Similarly, at the outset of *Quand on refuse on dit non*, the author/narrator inserts himself and his text(s) into a contextual reality, stating: “Ceux qui veulent savoir plus que ça sur moi et mon parcours n’ont qu’à se taper *Allah n’es pas obligé*, prix Renaudot et neuf autres prix prestigieux français et internationaux en 2000, et traduit dans vingt-neuf langues étrangères...” (18). In this fashion, the fictional content of these two books, which is very much inspired by the actual reality of regional conflicts and international interests in his native Côte d’Ivoire and its neighboring countries, is blended with facts in order to augment the sense that fantasy and reality are not two mutually exclusive categories. The idea of documentary fiction, in Kourouma’s and others’ works, offers new perspectives for the study of the baroque in African literature.

Kourouma’s fellow Ivorian author, Jean-Marie Adiaffi, is another case worth mentioning here. In his first novel, *La Carte d’identité* (1980), the protagonist Mélédouman is imprisoned for not having his “carte d’identité” (identity card), a condition that renders him non-human, or at the very best, a non-citizen in the eyes of the colonial government. Hailing from a tradition of Agni royalty (a principal ethnic group of southeastern Côte d’Ivoire) that has been undermined by a new colonial government, Mélédouman finds through his quest for his identification papers, a much deeper sense of embodied historical and cultural identity. Thus Adiaffi’s text takes up the question of a complex or contradictory identity that is also at the fore of Oyono’s *Une vie de boy*, while calling into question, at the same time, the disjuncture between what’s real and what’s merely a representation: Mélédouman the human being, versus Mélédouman printed on an identifying piece of paper. While Mélédouman is in prison, he embarks on a journey of initiation to discover himself in the fantastic and hallucinatory visions of a mythical past. His imaginary voyage into the depths of African consciousness stands in stark contrast to the pervasive dehumanization represented in the text through the maltreatment he endures at the hands of his captors. Furthermore, the text calls into question the notion of real identity by showing the disparity between who Mélédouman is (or is not) perceived to be on paper (an administrative identity) and who he is in his body and mind, thanks to his cultural heritage and ancestry. In so doing, the text represents a critique of

colonialism and modern conceptions of the individualized “self,” as well as a more far-reaching interrogation of the notion of physical and spatio-temporal limitations and the ability of human consciousness to transcend the imprisonment of the material world.

Adiaffi’s 2000 publication, *Les naufragés de l’intelligence*, again depicts the suspension and obfuscation of individual and collective identities within modernity as the protagonist, a police detective, is submerged in the violence and corruption of African politics and para-politics, where the lines between crime and justice are practically nonexistent. The experience the loss and alienation that pervades the accounts or lawlessness that rules the city at the hands of the “escadrons de la mort” (death squads) is again contrasted with seemingly divinatory visions of a new future, which at times appears in poetic fashion as an adapted retrieval of an idealized past, positing a new way of collective life. This juxtaposition of a grotesque present condition with a fantastic dream of an alternate or future reality, as I have shown in Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, invokes a particular form or baroque “madness” or unreason that defines the subject in crisis, which also inhabits the poetics of Adiaffi’s works. This unreason is not only apparent in the characters and their fantastic and hallucinatory perceptions, but also in the way that Adiaffi’s texts themselves defy order and logic by breaking with traditional rules of genre and narrative arrangement, a compositional practice that he terms *nzasa*, meaning paradoxically, “genre without genre.” The literal derangement that occurs in Adiaffi’s composition, chronology, and characters holds up a folded, mosaic mirror to the polymorphous distortions that inhabit postcolonial realities.

In his essay, “Le baroque et l’esthétique postmoderne dans le roman négro-africain,” Pierre N’Da discusses the baroque elements in the writing style of a younger Ivorian novelist, Maurice Bandaman, placing him in the illustrious company of Sony Labou Tansi, Ahmadou Kourouma, Jean-Marie Adiaffi. N’Da remarks that:

[D]ans la construction romanesque, le décroissement générique ou l’amalgame des genres et l’association d’éléments disparates sont des procédés qui rendent manifeste le caractère baroque des oeuvres de cet auteur africain, tout comme l’usage, dans la[sic] même espace discursif, de différents types de parleurs: le langage soutenu et stylisé, le langage populaire et le langage grossier ou vulgaire (*Nouvelles écritures francophones*, 52).

For all of the cases mentioned, the particular “baroquisme” that manifests itself in their works is the incorporation of something else, something strange, something other, both in the form and the content, which incites a vision of a world redoubled and rendered infinitely complex. In his essay, “Sur les identités baroques,” Jean-Cléo Godin also recognizes this apparent incongruity in “un mélange du religieux et du profane,” which he remarks in the religious inscriptions on the cars-rapides that animate the streets of Dakar, and which, I might add, is no less prevalent in the taxi-cabs on the streets of Abidjan (*NEF*, 109). Godin further notes that this is in many ways similar to the practice of European or North American Catholics adorning their automobile with a statuette of Saint Christopher. What is most interesting to note is the rapprochement that Godin is making between cultures, specifically that of francophone Africa and his native Quebec, and the way in which, in street culture as much as in literature, the signs of a “baroque identity” appear in the minute space inhabited by God and man at the same time. Godin goes on to mention several African writers whose work exhibits this kind of passage “de l’absolue Grandeur des origines à la misère de l’homme des temps presents avec un cynisme un peu cruel” (*NEF*, 111), including Kourouma, Adiaffi, Sony Labou Tansi, Henri Lopes, Cameroonian Mongo Beti, Congolese Maxime N’Debeka and Tchicaya U Tamsi, and Guineans Williams Sassine and Tierno Monenembo. Godin analyzes specifically *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, *La Carte d’identité*, Mongo Beti’s *L’Histoire du fou*, as well as Senegalese Ibrahima Sall’s *Les routiers de chimères* and Léo Faye’s *Passion pour une fille caméléon-ara*, making mention of Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Traces de la meute* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* as well.<sup>258</sup> In addition, I should note the Guinean writer Williams Sassine, Congolese author and philosopher Valentin Yves Mudimbé, and Beninois author Olympe Bhêly

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<sup>258</sup> I go into a relatively in-depth discussion of the baroque in Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Le Temps de Tamango*, as well as some of his other novels in an interview with Professor Papa Gueye, reproduced in Appendix B. Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure Ambiguë* is also mentioned in some detail, and a number of other titles come up in my interview with Professor Amadou Ly, reproduced in Appendix A.

Quenum.<sup>259</sup> These are but a few examples of prominent literary works that have been, or have yet to be fully theorized in terms of a baroque aesthetic.

### **B. Performance, poetics, and story-telling**

Though I have paid most attention to the novel genre in its multifarious forms, there are still other kinds of African literature that are no less relevant for my study of the baroque. Let it suffice here to mention a few examples from the genres of poetry, folktales and, of course, theater, that would readily lend themselves to a study of the African baroque aesthetic. First of all, poetry as a genre has existed in Africa long before the arrival of the first Europeans on the continent. Furthermore, it was one of the principal modes of literary expression of the negritude movement, with Césaire and Senghor and their cohorts. And a number of contemporary African writers have embraced the poetic genre, to the point of incorporating it into other modes of literary expression. There are numerous examples of African writers whose work transgresses generic boundaries in the incorporation of dramatic and verse forms in works that are generally designated as novels. Ivorian writer Charles Nokan's *Violent était le vent* (1966), for example, inserts poetic stanzas to punctuate the narrative of a young boy's coming to age. Jean-Marie Adiaffi's *La carte d'identité* and *Les naufragés de l'intelligence*, similarly, contain interjections of verse in the narrative structure. Cameroonian novelist and playwright Were-were Liking wrote the novel *Orphée-Dafric* (1981) as a love story that reads like an epic poem.<sup>260</sup> Her push toward a broader view of the novel genre is made abundantly clear from her 1983 publication, *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* to *La mémoire amputée* (2004), which are subtitled "chant-roman," a willful elimination of the traditional distinction between prose and poetry, which implies that her novel is intended to be read (or sung) like a song. One more writer whose work breaks the rules of genre by working over and between the spaces inhabited by prose and poetry is Véronique Tadjo. Her 1990 publication, *Le royaume aveugle*, is remarkable in its

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<sup>259</sup> See Victor O. Aire's essay on Sassine (*NEF*, 231-41), Lahuka Anyikoy Kasende's study of the baroque in the novels of Valentin Yves Mudimbé (*NEF*, 257-69), and Thécla Midiohouan-Gbikpi's analysis of "baroque creations" in the novels of Beninois author Olympe Bhély Quenum (*NEF*, 132-42).

<sup>260</sup> Karen Bouwer analyzes this particular work in the way it recuperates and expropriates Greek mythology and enacts a temporal split between the past and the present as an indication of its baroqueism ("*Orphée-Dafric* de Werewere Liking" in *NEF*, 396-403).

interweaving of poetic and short prose pieces, crossing over literary genres while also traversing temporal and spatial demarcations in an effort to provide a full understanding of the rich cultural heritage of African peoples. This kind of mixing of genres is what Josias Semujanga refers to, in terms of Sony Labou Tansi's work, as "l'intergénéricité," remarking that "une oeuvre baroque s'écarte de façon excessive des règles génériques à partir desquelles se conçoit l'équilibre du modèle" (*NEF*, 202).

In addition to the poeticization of the novel, there are a number of writers whose poetry is noteworthy in and of itself. For example, Sony Labou Tansi is known, or wishes to be known, more than anything for his poetic production, insomuch as he identifies himself first as a poet (Martin-Granel, 75). Sony's verse, like his fiction, is infused with irony and verbal creativity, de-structures language and poetic form, and breathes the breath of human emotions associated with great baroque writers (see *Acte de respirer* in *L'atelier de Sony Labou Tansi*, vol. 2). Adiaffi has also published a collection of poems, *D'éclairs et de foudres: chant de braise pour une liberté en flammes*, which I find particularly indicative of a baroque representation of violence, chaos, suffering, and death mixed with a creative dynamism and the rhythms of life and love that point toward a future of hope. One more volume of poetry that I must mention is Tchicaya U Tamsi's *Le ventre; le pain ou la cendre*, which is so innovative in its style and confrontational in its content that Joël Planque has likened this poet to Arthur Rimbaud in his book entitled, *Le Rimbaud noir: Tchicaya U Tam'Si*. Furthermore, Ibra Diene has done a study of several contemporary Senegalese women poets, including Kiné Kirama Fall, Ndèye Coumba Mbengue, and Fatou Ndiaye Sow, whose work he describes as "un baroquisme du conformisme" (*NEF*, 420-8).<sup>261</sup> With these examples, I am merely scratching the surface of the wealth of African poets and the breadth and depth of their production, but I only wish to provide some evidence of the prevalence of a baroque aesthetic in African poetry that may be a starting point for future study.

Another form of expression that dates back to the oral traditions of pre-colonial Africa, and which has found its way into the literary domain, both in its incorporation into other genres and in its development as a literary genre on its own, is that of the

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<sup>261</sup> See also my interview with professor Ibra Diene, reproduced in Appendix D.



folktale or *conte*. The genre of the folktale in and of itself appears on the surface to contain a quite baroque mixture of magical and fantastical content in an overarching realist, or realistic, narrative framework. The serious moral and social overtones that animate each tale are rendered memorable and entertaining through an art of story telling which, in its fabled use of animal caricatures and mystical villains and heroes, strikes the chords of the most intimate of human sensibilities. Upon reading texts written by African authors, one will often find explicit or sometimes subtly inscribed elements of African oral traditions, in the form of proverbs and folk tales, laced throughout the text (Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are but two prominent examples). Such elements of oral traditions are of particular interest when one considers the baroque period as the time not only when theatrical representation was extremely prominent, but also when longstanding oral traditions were being recorded in the forms of folktales and fables. In France, Jean de la Fontaine and Charles Perrault are the two writers who are generally accredited with the transcription of this rich oral tradition. Similarly, if one looks at the emergence of African literature, one sees an intense interest in the oral tradition, which appears not only in the inscription of myths and proverbs in many postcolonial novels, but also in the volumes assembling the folktales and fables from different countries and regions in Africa. Ivorian Bernard Dadié's collection, under the title *Le Pagne noir*, and Senegalese Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Ahmadou Koumba* are but two prominent examples. The resemblances in some of the themes and morals of these oral traditions from vastly different areas and epochs are striking.<sup>262</sup> For example, the parallelism that exists between the tale, "Le Pagne noir," and "Cinderella"—a wicked stepmother, a happy child-slave, an impossible task, and a miraculous godmother/ghost-mother who intervenes in the interest of the child—raise all

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<sup>262</sup> Sylvie Rockmore discusses "Les transformations d'un conte : de *Leuk-le lièvre* à *Brer Rabbit*," noting the various repetitions and adaptations of what is essentially a common theme (the weak vanquishing a stronger opponent) that appear across different regions of West Africa as well as a somewhat modified resurgence of these stories in the American collection of *Stories from Uncle Remus* (NEF, 270-83).

sorts of interesting questions about a set of potentially universal cultural values and practices.<sup>263</sup>

One last literary genre that is firmly rooted in traditional African cultures is that of drama or theatre. The ways in which the performative aspects of the baroque texts I have studied re-enact realities, as well as their own representation of those realities, offers a powerful construct that I would like to situate more immediately in a brief discussion of contemporary African theatre. One particular aspect of African theatre that differs from typical Western drama, which Suzie Suriam remarks in her essay “Nouvelles formes de la contestation dans le théâtre d’Afrique noire francophone,” as a carryover from traditional African theatre is the dissolution of the clear division between stage and spectator: “la scène et la salle” (*NEF*, 304). In *Le théâtre négro-africain et ses fonctions sociales*, Bakary Traoré also notes this very important distinction between African and European theatre in terms of the inherent social function of a type of performance that seeks to be part of reality in that it transposes daily life onto the stage with the express purpose of affirming and perpetuating the community: African theatre, he writes, “est un théâtre qui se veut réel et au service d’une cause” (19). African theatre is integrated into the very fabric of daily life, maintaining social balance through the enactment of communal concerns or conflicts and, as a result, the role of the spectators implicated in, even invited to participate in the play, is central to the performance itself. This inclusion of the audience is often enacted by the creation of a fictive audience within the play or directions for a particular arrangement of the real audience members in and around the stage; in the latter case, actors will often address the audience directly, thereby facilitating their interaction. One of the best-known practitioners of this kind of theatre is Werewere Liking, whose therapeutic “théâtre-rituel,” such as *Une nouvelle terre* and *La puissance de Um*, is designed with the specific intent of alleviating social tensions and anxieties through the mimetic experience of collective dramatization. This impulsion

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<sup>263</sup> While there has been much study of folktales and their structural and thematic similarities (c.f. Vladimir Propp’s 1928 *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, or the work of Alan Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore* [2007]), a study of these ideas in the context of a trans-cultural and trans-historical baroque aesthetic would be particularly interesting.

toward the *being* of the work of art—in this instance, the play—is but one instance of the way in which African theatre enacts a kind of baroqueism.

A striking example of baroque theatricality in postcolonial African drama is Bernard Dadié's 1973 play, *Papassidi maître-escroc*, which is read or performed like a Molièresque farce (echoing themes from *Tartuffe* and *Le malade imaginaire*) and which, at the same time represents a kind of meta-discourse on theatricality and censorship in its somewhat self-reflexive theatricalization of the drama that confronts the main character, Aka, who is himself a writer facing censorship by government authorities. Dadié's play is emblematic of a style of performance that is harshly critical, yet also very subtle in its encoding of subversion so as to avoid the very mechanisms of oppression that are the subject of its critique, which are embodied in the character of the "master-extortionist," Papassidi. Through the *mise-en-abîme* of reality in the play, a strategy that is quite commonplace in seventeenth-century baroque theatre, Dadié's farce plays on a confusion of the real and the fictive which enables him to represent volatile situations behind the veil of comic entertainment. The work of Sony Labou Tansi, most notably his famous play, *La parenthèse de sang*, is known for this kind of highly ironic and subversive treatment of serious social and political issues, literally laughing in the face of danger in its farcical treatment of the oppressive practices of Congolese dictatorial regimes. Fellow Congolese dramaturges Sylvain Bemba, for his 1979 play *Un foutu monde pour un blanchisseur trop honnête*, and Tchicaya U'Tamsi, for his 1977 play *Le Zulu*, should also be counted among those whose work exhibits tendencies toward the extravagant and profane stylistic of a baroque aesthetic.

Even more than the Molièresque or Cornelian baroqueism of some African theatrical production, there is an interesting disjuncture between the text and its performance that I find particularly emblematic of a new baroqueism in African theatre. Professor Logbo Blede of the Université de Cocody has written an essay on the art of totality in African theatre based on *Le soleil noir point* by Ivorian novelist and playwright from the first generation of postcolonial African writers, Charles Nokan.<sup>264</sup> Blede remarks an aesthetic of rupture, specifically in terms of a "pouvoir d'interpellation des

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<sup>264</sup> See Logbo Blede, "Le soleil noir point, rhapsodie pour un théâtre total?" *NEF*, 347-52.

écritures de rupture [...] dans leur rapport au sens et aux genres” (347). Very much like the linguistic modifications employed by many postcolonial novelists, poets and playwrights, Nokan’s work also uses the power of interjection or interruption to destabilize seemingly stable conceptions such as logic and genre. Blede analyzes the baroque irregularities in the structural and aesthetic disorder of *Le soleil noir point*. This disorder disrupts the dramatic continuity of the piece, mixing the order of reality with the fantastic and upsetting conventional orientations of time and space by vacillating between France and different regions of Côte d’Ivoire in seemingly random fashion. Nokan’s play is not theatre in the traditional sense, as it obviously does not adhere to concepts of classical unity, contains no stage directions and is presented as a series of non-dialogical “tableaux.” In this sense, Nokan’s play is purely textual, yet Blede notes the pictorial quality of the text’s tableaux, stating : “[Nokan] choisit la structuration en tableaux pour leur pouvoir de créer une atmosphère différente ‘à chaque fois’, en rompant la linéarité trompeuse” (351). Breaking with traditional generic and logical constructs allows for Nokan’s text to portray multiple, even contradictory images of Africa, which brings Blede to comment on African theatre as “[a]rt de la totalité [...] reconnu comme une image simple, mais une image tout aussi complexe, qui mêle merveilleux, fantastique, fantasme, chant, danse, chorégraphie, mime... réalité?” (352). It is in its totalizing respects, as an art of paradox, of merging antagonistic forces between imagination and reality that Charles Nokan’s *Le soleil noir point* is considered a “baroque” work of art.

Another contemporary Ivorian playwright who seems to diverge significantly and in quite interesting ways from the traditional conception of theatre is Bernard Bottey Zadi Zaourou. What is most remarkable in Zadi Zaourou’s theatre, an art form to which he has given the name Didiga, meaning “art of the unthinkable,” is that in reaching toward the un-rational, perhaps supra-rational in order to represent and communicate the human condition, it approaches an aesthetic of baroque style and complexity. In her reading of Zadi Zaourou entitled “Le Didiga ou art de l’impensable,” Nataša Raschi discusses the ways in which Didiga, which has its roots in traditional Bété oral culture, “rappelle immédiatement la notion de Baroque, par son instabilité et son ambiguïté, sa tension vers l’indicible et l’illusion [...] et surtout par son refus de toute règle et contrainte” (*NEF*,

284). What is perhaps most striking in this creative form is the dissociation of the play from a text or script. Indeed, just as Nokan does with relatively minimal textual directions in his “tableaus,” Zaourou seems to go a step further from the text by actually beginning with a performance in the creation of his plays and treating the text on equal footing with the language of the instruments, voices, and corporeal gestures of the actors and musicians. With an emphasis on the *mise-en-scène*, the communal practice of staging a play as an integral part of the theatrical production constitutes a distinctively modern African form of baroque, which Raschi further discusses in terms of the narrative, symbolic, and rhythmic dimensions of Zaourou’s 1984 play, *Le secret des dieux*. Certainly, there is more that can be said about African theatre, its creation, performance, and reception in relation to the baroque, including recent plays by Africans living in France, including José Pliya and Koffi Kwahulé, but that will have to be left for some another time.

### **C. “African” Cinema**

The notion of the performative that is so central to African theatrical production, and which animates other literary genres from novels to poetry, also extends into the domain of African cinema. It is not difficult to remark instances of a baroque aesthetic in African cinema, of which I will be able to provide only a brief overview of films that I find particularly relevant. First, I would like to note that in the third section on “L’Intentionnalité filmique” of his doctoral dissertation, *Discursivisation et Intentionnalité dans le cinéma d’Afrique Noire Francophone*, Justin Toto Ouoro discusses the baroquisme of African cinema, concluding:

Ainsi, à l’image du baroque colonial, le cinéma africain est, pour la plupart du temps, un mélange de genres où différents discours se croisent pour caractériser le sujet filmique. C’est le cas d’Ibrhahima Dieng dans *Le Mandat*, du charretier dans *Borom Sarret* où le syncrétisme religieux constitue la référence spirituelle. Ces deux personnages qui ne manquent pas une seule heure de prière musulmane, arborent fièrement à leurs bras des amulettes qui sont aussi le signe de leur appartenance aux croyances traditionnelles. Il s’est agi dans ces cas de figure de réaménager l’armature de la religion musulmane de sorte à y intégrer des éléments de la tradition pour se sentir en harmonie avec la tradition et la modernité. (I.3)

Here Ouoro is speaking of two films by the “father” of African cinema, Ousmane Sembène, highlighting the way in which his films incorporate a mixture of traditional and modern thematic and stylistic devices as a sign of a certain baroque. In addition to Sembène’s films, Ouoro also mentions Dani Kouyaté’s *Keïta! L’heritage du griot* (1994) as a film that enacts the discursive strategy of a baroque aesthetic through its subversive content and the reterritorialization of the cinematic genre in Africa. Ouoro also considers Ivorian director Henri Duparc’s *Rue Princesse* (1994), a film that centers on the theme of prostitution, both in the literal and in the figurative sense, to be emblematic of the baroque for the way that it disguises an ambient reality—a strategy highlighted in Buciu-Glucksmann’s discussion of the modern baroque in Baudelaire.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, Ouoro recognizes Roger Gnoan M’Bala’s *Au nom du Christ* (1993) for the way that it parodies and re-appropriates elements from Catholicism within a traditional African context, which represents not simply a syncretistic adaptation, but a baroque reconfiguration that is reminiscent of the type of subversive practices associated with the New World Baroque in Latin America.<sup>266</sup> As I have shown in terms of literature, there are both stylistic and thematic elements of the baroque aesthetic in African art that also reveal particular socio-political aspects of contemporary culture that in and of themselves can be characterized as baroque. What I find particularly relevant for a discussion of Francophone African cinema are the ways in which the social and political are embedded in cinematic representations of Africa and its position within a transnational network of political, economic, and cultural forces, and how film acts as a deconstructive agent of both societal and aesthetic codes, that is to say the aesthetic engagement with social and psychological existence that I have identified with the baroque.

To see the political side of the transnational in African cinema, one can take the recent example of Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako’s 2006 film, *Bamako*, which stages a critical, documentary-style mock trial of global institutions such as the IMF and World Bank that are seen as propagating the economic oppression of African

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<sup>265</sup> I refer the reader back to Chapter II of this dissertation, the section entitled “Life and Death and a ‘Modern Baroque’ Economy.”

<sup>266</sup> This particular notion is discussed in chapter III of this dissertation, the section entitled “New (World) Baroque.”

nations. Although a decisive conclusion is never reached in the film itself, it represents through a variety of testimonial accounts the intensely complicated nature of contemporary global society, all the while reserving a privileged position for the individuals whose voices create and carry the film's intrigue. The uncommon relationship established between the global and local contexts in the film are what make its imagery and its message so striking, and there is a subtle irony in the fact that the global financial institutions that are the object of the film's critique are representative of the same kind of international economic system that has allowed Francophone African cinema to flourish over the years, thanks to subsidies from French and European cultural and government institutions. Hence, the film demonstrates a kind of embedded subversive complicity with dominant transnational power structures that I find emblematic of a baroque aesthetic practice. It is also interesting to note that in *Bamako*, the filmmaker or documentarian is implicated in the action through the presence of the video camera on screen. The cameraman is initially barred from the hearings but manages to sneak in, a fact that, in addition to executing a poignant *mise-en-abîme* of the film itself, imparts a degree of authenticity to the action, as if the spectator now finds him or herself with privileged access to the scene inside. This self-conscious stylistic choice in the filming of *Bamako* underscores the political message of the film with an aesthetic doubling that calls into question the role of representation and access to information in the creation of modern African reality, thereby highlighting the inherently representational aesthetic dimension that is at the base of social constructions.

Two more of Sissako's feature films, *La Vie sur terre* (1998) and *Heremakono, En attendant le bonheur* (2002), are also noteworthy for the way in which the film appears suspended between documentary reporting and fictional creation. And one might read this internationality on Sissako's part as a play on the naïve tendency of Western audiences to view African films as representations of "real" African life. A few examples of African films that testify to this intermixing of "the real" with/in the reel and all of its myriad derivations of fantasy and imagination include a number of films generally referred to under the heading of "Return to the Source," include Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuuni* (1982), Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (1987), or Abdoulaye Ascofare's *Faraw*

(1997), which represent traditional, “realistic” African settings, but are very much infused with fantasy, magic, and dream imagery, which creates the spectacular images and plot lines of the films.<sup>267</sup> Justin Toto Ouoro remarks on this lack of a clear generic distinction in African cinema as a reflection of the hybridity and complexity of both the African and the human condition:

Dans la réalité, la notion de genre ne présente pas un intérêt significatif pour l'étude du cinéma africain. En dehors de la distinction globale généralement admise entre film de fiction et film documentaire, comédie, drame, burlesque, mélodrame, fantastique, film d'aventure et film historique cohabitent dans un même espace discursif pour témoigner de l'hybridité de l'être du Noir, voire de la complexité de l'existence humaine. (I.3)

African cinema seems to resist classification inasmuch as the realities (both real and imaginary) that inspire its creations cannot be clearly defined or delineated, which is why the notion of the baroque may provide a particularly useful tool for approaching an art form that defies logical boundaries and rational limitations.

One exemplary film, which plays with and mixes different aesthetic registers in its portrayal of African complexity is Senegalese director Moussa Sene Absa's *L'extraordinaire destin de Madame Brouette* (2002). *Madame Brouette*, a detective story that reconstructs the intertwined narratives of the principal characters through police investigations, is particularly interesting in many respects.<sup>268</sup> First, the representational medium is again a central concern of the film as the story being told is the combination of testimonies and witness accounts given to police and in front of the cameras and microphones of local news agencies. There is also a recurring trope, which plays well of the notion of mixing genres and aesthetic registers in the context of oral traditions. As the drama of the investigation plays itself out in a modern African city, the camera periodically pans over to an adjacent group of characters who recount a parallel narrative

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<sup>267</sup> For an insightful and critical reading of some of the problematic categorizations and taxonomies related to African Cinema, see Stephen Zacks, “The Theoretical Construction of African Cinema” in *African Cinema: Post-colonial and Feminist Readings*, ed. Kenneth Harrow, (pp. 3-19).

<sup>268</sup> The notion of the baroque and detective fiction, with the multiple intertwined narrative lines and the play between masking and revealing details that is necessary to the suspense of the (post-mortem) action of the investigation, and having its origins in the nineteenth century with Edgar Allen Poe, is worthy of study as well.



in the style of a Greek chorus, re-interpreting the action in terms of traditional African mythology and folklore. It is this kind of aesthetic mixing or *métissage*, which pulls from a variety of geographical and historical traditions that is characteristic of a transnational baroque aesthetic practice. There is also a very poignant element of social commentary in *Madame Brouette* that cannot be ignored as hot-button issues of religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, and social difference are treated seriously, but with an ample amount of humor, and are seamlessly embedded in the individual situations of the film's characters. Of course, questions of economic poverty, political corruption, and the erosion of familial relationships are at the forefront as the primary factors that contribute, albeit indirectly, to Madame Brouette's love relationship that ends in bloodshed.

Of course, these contemporary filmmakers owe much in terms of their aesthetic thematic elements, not only to the pioneers of African cinema such as well known Senegalese directors Ousmane Sembène and Djibril Diop Mambety, Ivorians Désiré Écaré and Henri Duparc, Burkinabe Idrissa Ouedraogo, and others, but also to the influence of the French New Wave as well as other American and European filmmakers whose work has had a profound influence on the cinematic and cultural landscape of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note, as I have done in terms of the francophone African novel, that African filmmakers who engage with preexisting aesthetic traditions do not do so merely as passive followers adapting a general framework to the particularities of an African social and cultural context. Rather, their work often engages critically with traditions, innovating and improving through the mixture and infusion of traditional African and other aesthetic elements. Thus, the problematic notion of what constitutes properly "African" cinema is rendered somewhat decipherable when one considers that the notion of Africa itself is a geo-political construct of Western colonialism, which one cannot possibly consider in isolation.<sup>269</sup> The aesthetic transmutation and polyglot enrichment, which mirrors the political and cultural hybridity,

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<sup>269</sup> For an interesting summary of the idea of what constitutes, and purportedly what does not constitute, African cinema proper, see Jonathan Haynes' treatment of Cameroonian director Jean-Pierre Bekolo's films: "African Filmmaking and the Postcolonial Predicament: *Quartier Mozart* and *Aristotle's Plot*" in *African Cinema: Post-colonial and Feminist Readings*, ed. Kenneth Harrow, (pp. 21-43).

be it positive or negative, of postcolonial francophone Africa, is one way in which such films can be read through the critical and aesthetic lens of the baroque.

To cite but one example, Sembène's award winning film *La Noire de...* (1966), which stylistically resembles the work of New Wave directors such as Jean-Luc Godard or François Truffaut, adds a new dimension to the classic jump-cut between scenes as the film "jumps" repeatedly back and forth between Diouana's life as a domestic servant on the beautiful Côte d'Azur in the south of France (which includes a passing remark about Cannes where Sembène's film would later be shown) and her reconstruction of the events in her native Dakar that led her there. The film's jumping back and forth between France and Senegal reflects critically on the close political and cultural ties between the two nations, illustrating a cosmopolitan awareness and transnational scope that is so readily apparent in Sembène's work. Djibril Diop Mambety also engages the question of global transnationalism in his work *Touki Bouki* (1973), which to some degree parodies Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) as it tells the story of a youth who, along with his motorcycle and his lover, travels around in an effort to get to Paris. The circularity of their journey is a remarkable indictment of the illusory notions of modern progress that have left many African nations underdeveloped and poverty ridden. Again, the critical engagement with transnational globalism, both in terms of aesthetic traditions and socio-political realities in African cinema, marks a fruitful point of inquiry for questions of transnationalism in art and society.

In addition, there are many films that portray similar yet unique engagements with the notion of transnationalism in contemporary African culture, both in terms of their socio-political content and their aesthetic qualities. Films such as Burkinabe director Pierre Yaméogo's *Moi et mon Blanc* (2003) and *Pièces d'Identités* (1998) by Congolese director Mweze Ngangura actually deal explicitly with transnational identities and relationships as they follow the characters through their experiences of France and Burkina Faso, and Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, respectively. Similarly, Henri Duparc's *Une couleur café* (1997) chronicles the lives of Africans living in Paris and the complexities that go along with the transpositions of cultures, one within another. Through the physical and emotional displacements of characters whose lives are

composed of numerous competing, and sometimes contradictory, conceptions of the self and society, questions about a shared colonial past and an equally entangled post-colonial present are specifically addressed in the context of real-world situations. For this reason, I find film to be a particularly forceful conduit for elucidating and grounding some of the theoretical implications of transnational theories, of which the baroque is clearly one. African cinema has initiated a transnational aesthetic and cultural dialogue between Africa and the Western world, which has in turn re-introduced the Western world to itself as a critical reflection of its global modernity that is the outcome of a centuries-long expansion of Indo-European culture in the world, first through colonialism, and now in terms of the neo/postcolonial interactions that govern the economic and political realities of nations that can no longer be considered in isolation one from another. As such, African literary and cinematic productions represent one important facet of the invaluable contribution that so-called “minor” cultures have made to the “major” world-culture of transnational globalization.

**In-Conclusion: The end is the beginning**

At this point, it may seem that there are more questions left unanswered than answered, which only proves that this emergent field of the African baroque is something that is still in need of much careful attention, study, and elaboration. I have been able to provide only a few examples from different literary genres, theatre, and cinema that help to clarify the far-reaching implications of the baroque as a cultural and aesthetic theory for discussing African artistic production. Having devoted considerable space in this dissertation to a comprehensive survey of pre-existing theories and applications of the baroque, both in and outside of its historical context, I have been able to direct my attention to a small sample of the numerous artistic creations that exemplify what I have called the African baroque. As such, and perhaps fittingly, this dissertation can only be read as an unfinished work, which leaves many corners of the canvas untouched. My purpose has been to lay a solid groundwork for future endeavors, opening up multiple lines of flight that could potentially be pursued in an ongoing discussion of the richness and complexity of African artists and their work.

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## Appendices : Quatre Conversations sur le Baroque en Afrique

**Appendix A :** Entretien avec Professeur Amadou Ly, Département de Lettres Modernes à l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop à Dakar, Lundi, le 20 juillet, 2009.

IJ: J'aimerais vous poser quelques questions d'abord sur la première présentation que vous avez faite à Montréal où vous avez présenté un article sur *La Vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi, et un autre ouvrage, *L'Ogre-empereur* de Kompany Wa Kompany. Tous deux, non seulement, ont été écrit par des écrivains congolais, mais vous les avez identifiés comme les oeuvres paradigmatiques d'une nouvelle écriture que vous avez intitulée "baroquissimo." Quelle était la date de cette présentation ?

AL: Je ne suis pas en mesure de vous le dire. Il faudrait que je consulte... non mais parce que vous savez, nous ici justement nous sommes une civilisation de l'écrit, et c'est pourquoi le baroque, et on le verra tout à l'heure marche beaucoup. Nous ne sommes pas dans la rationalité occidentale de garder les choses, les dates les lieux, ... C'est vous-même qui me rappelez l'intitulée de ma présentation parce que c'était une communication parmi des dizaines, vous comprenez. Mais effectivement, c'était dans une période où nous avons d'abord été en coopération avec l'Université de Montréal, et j'ai été le premier missionnaire aux études ; c'était quand même aux années 90, et je vous dirais la date plus précise tout à l'heure, aller là-bas dans le cadre d'échanges puisqu'il y avait des collègues dont vous connaissez Jean-Cléo Godin de Montréal qui venait ici, et nous, nous allions aussi là-bas, et je faisais une mission d'enseignement pour initier un peu les jeunes Montréalais, les jeunes de l'Université de Montréal, à la littérature africaine, qui commençaient seulement à connaître cette spécialité avec Cléo Godin, des autres etc. Et donc, j'ai fait une recherche sur le baroquisme et j'ai proposé ce "baroquissimo" parce qu'il me semblait effectivement que la littérature africaine était en train de se détacher de sa mère, la littérature occidentale française, parce que nous sommes dans le cadre français, mais on peut ajouter la littérature anglaise, oui, parce qu'il y a aussi du baroquisme dans la littérature anglaise, et on peut en parler avec mon collègue du département d'anglais, Ousmane Sène en particulier. Donc il m'a semblé qu'il fallait trouver de nouveaux paradigmes, de nouveaux ordres définitoires, et j'étais frappé par le fait que lorsque la littérature émergeait de l'oralité qui était à la rencontre entre l'oralité africaine et la littérature occidentale, notre littérature, il me semblait, était en train d'émerger et de se détacher de son modèle occidental rationaliste, clair avec beaucoup de livres, roman, littérature, roman-théâtre, nouvelles, etc. catégories bien précises, et dans le roman ou dans le théâtre tel genre, tel aspect, telle période comme on dira la poésie, le romantisme, etc. Et donc, moi, il me semblait que notre littérature était en train de procéder à une sorte de *mixing*, une mixture de tout cela pour créer quelque chose qui soit spécifique et qui emporte aussi un modèle de base, un modèle souche que constitue notre littérature orale, en particulier, les contes, les contes fantastiques, les contes de fées, entre guillemets, les contes héroïques, l'épopée, la légende, le mythe. Tout cela, nos littérateurs étaient en train de le récupérer et de l'insérer pour créer quelque chose qui leur soit spécifique mais qui, aussi, donne du souffle au livre au roman, parce

que le roman tel qu'il est pratiqué en occident en particulier, c'est quelque chose de vraiment invraisemblable, quelque chose de très conventionnel avec, en septembre, en France, la rentrée littéraire avec, comprenez, les grands éditeurs, et l'on désigne quelques prix ceci, prix cela, mais c'est purement artificiel. Donc nous, avec notre convergence, avec notre modèle littéraire traditionnel, et avec d'autres modèles comme la littérature latino-américaine, tous ces gens là, qui ont créé quelque chose qui m'a semblé relever du baroque ou du baroque.

IJ : Donc, si j'ai bien compris ce que vous avez dit, c'est un peu que le baroque se trouve dans un mélange des genres, la poésie, les romans, les contes, et aussi dans un mélange de pratiques esthétiques, le romantisme par exemple, l'oralité traditionnelle...

AL : le surréalisme, l'oralité traditionnelle, oui..

IJ : D'accord, et donc également dans un mélange de différentes traditions littéraires, vous avez mentionné, par exemple, la France et un certain écartement avec la littérature de "la patrie" disons, et aussi des relations avec l'Amérique Latine. Que connaissez-vous de cette question du nouveau baroque dans les littératures de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes ? Et quels sont les rapports, soit convergents, soit divergents, entre ces deux mondes de l'Afrique et l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes où, justement, il y a un fort rapport ? Par exemple dans les années 30, il y avait Aimé Césaire de Martinique et Léopold Sédar Senghor de Sénégal, deux grands amis, mais bien qu'ils étaient d'accord sur certains faits, il y avait aussi des divergences. Donc ces rapports, justement, dans le cadre des baroques aujourd'hui, où voyez-vous le rapprochement entre l'Afrique et le 'nouveau monde' des Caraïbes et de l'Amérique Latine ?

AL : Bien, je serais plus à l'aise avec les Caraïbes peut être que l'Amérique Latine, c'est parce qu'aussi, il y a des traditions locales. Bien sûr, il y a la tradition "d'origine espagnole," puis rapidement brésilienne, portugaise donc, c'est une tradition littéraire qui vient d'Europe et qui se greffe aussi avec les amérindiens, les indiens, et puis l'apport des noirs, donc c'est une mixture également un peu complexe, mais qui en tout cas, grosso modo, fait une part importante, disons à l'irrationnel, seulement, la perspective occidentale des choses dans le traitement de l'espace, du temps, des personnes, des caractères, des rapports des individus avec la nature, etc. Ça c'est quelque chose qui est, avec le fantastique parfois, ça c'est ce que l'Occident depuis le Moyen Âge a perdu, grosso modo, mais qui est en train d'émerger curieusement dans les littératures Harry Potter, et tout ça, c'est le retour à une certaine tradition qui se trouve au-delà du réel, on ne peut pas dire surréalisme, mais un trans-réel. C'est une dimension dont l'Europe, disons, s'était un peu amputée, mais elle se rend compte maintenant avec la situation actuelle, des angoisses de l'humanité quant à sa survie ; l'on se rend compte qu'on ne peut pas être seulement une rationalité pure. Maintenant avec les Caraïbes, en particulier avec Césaire, n'oublions pas que Césaire quand même appartient à quatre civilisations, grosso modo : la civilisation caraïbe pure, la civilisation africaine, la civilisation française, et la

civilisation hellène, ou gréco-latine. Césaire est un gréco-latin extraordinaire qui connaît les mythes anciens déjà...

IJ : Oui, tout à fait.

AL : Je ne veux pas trop aller dans cette direction. Il va donc essayer de se créer quelque chose en faisant une sorte de mixture, de mélange, de salade avec ces différents apports, et dans ces différents apports, il y a la part très fondamentale dans la civilisation française, de la mythologie grecque et latine qui est très importante, mais aussi dans la civilisation française, la part importante du surréalisme qui est, au début du vingtième siècle, une remise en cause fondamentale de ce qui constitue le substrat de la culture occidentale, à savoir la raison, le rationalisme. Donc il se lève, avec les Bretons et tous ces gens là, pour dire nous récusons parce que nous vous haïssons vous et votre identité. Nous réclamons, n'est-ce pas, du cannibalisme, bref. Donc le refus de ce rationalisme va être le moyen pour lui d'intégrer ce qu'il a de la tradition, tout un ensemble de mythes qu'il y a autour du requin ou bien autour du colibri, ou bien... parenthèse d'ailleurs, il y a ce roman de, c'est pas Glissant mais l'autre, Chamoiseau, surtout le roman tout récent, *Les neuf consciences du malfini*, c'est cet oiseau là qui dans leur mythologie là-bas exerce une caractéristique et certaines propriétés. Donc, vous voyez, Césaire va mobiliser ce fond caraïbe, mobiliser l'héritage africain ancien et nouveau puisque, par Senghor, il va reconnaître un Africain et découvrir l'Afrique historique ou l'Afrique même du temps du mythe en convergence avec quelques éléments de la mythologie grecque. Il va créer quelque chose qui va lui créer son propre style. C'est là où va se trouver le baroque dans la mesure où nous allons avoir une construction qui ne sera ni une cathédrale gothique, ni une cathédrale normande, ni une cathédrale romane, ni quelque chose de bien définie, mais quelque chose qui va être fait de bric et de broc, qui va être un ensemble cohérent, beau, mais beau de ses laidures et de ses boursoufflures, de son non-respect des formes du parallélisme. C'est un parallélisme asymétrique, le refus de la symétrie parfaite. C'est là que va gésir, c'est là que gît, à mon avis, l'origine du baroque tel qu'on a retrouvé dans la littérature des caraïbes chez Césaire. Même chez ceux qui contestent Césaire, encore une fois comme les Glissant, les Chamoiseau, les tenants de la créolité qui vont dire "nous ne nous réclamons pas de l'Afrique," etc. ; ils vont quand même, eux aussi, ne pas composer selon des règles esthétiques déjà créées par eux, servis et prêts à penser, selon le modèle occidental. Donc c'est là qu'il faut chercher, à mon avis, une recherche beaucoup plus fine, beaucoup plus pénétrante et composante qui vont créer un style nouveau dans lequel on va reconnaître : tiens, ça c'est le... ça a l'allure, même si ce n'est pas réellement, ça a l'allure d'un mythe d'origine de l'Afrique. C'est une réutilisation vraiment très différenciée et épurée de tel mythe. Par exemple le mythe de l'ogre Lorcus, vous connaissez, dans *Ces âmes miraculeuses*, ou bien dans *Et les chiens se taisaient* de Césaire, au début, il dit, "bien sûr il va mourir l'hirondelle, mais s'il meurt demain ça ne sera pas sans avoir fait clair pour tout le monde que tout ton pacte est un pacte de cancer," l'Occident, n'est-ce pas ? Il va montrer le mythe de l'ogre. Et l'ogre est très ancien dans la littérature occidentale: "La petite poussette," etc, etc. Il va reprendre ça et le mettre dans un coin. Donc, il faut, pour le retrouver, je crois, d'abord, il

faut une histoire extrêmement, en tout cas, extrêmement informée avec toutes ces différences, les quatre tenants de la littérature: la littérature africaine, l'histoire africain, la civilisation africaine en générale, la civilisation gréco-romaine, la civilisation française, et la civilisation caraïbe. Voilà les quatre fondements de l'esthétique du baroque chez Césaire.

IJ: Donc vous identifiez justement qu'il y a du baroque chez Césaire?

AL: Césaire est pur baroque. Parce que le baroque, c'est quoi? Encore une fois, c'est quelque chose qui tient de la chèvre et du chou, qui n'est ni chair ni poisson, ni figue ni raisin, c'est à dire quelque, chose qui met ensemble des choses a priori jugées, réputées, incompatibles, selon l'esthétique, disons, classique. Quant au baroque en architecture, si mes souvenirs son exacts, il est né en réaction à un classicisme qui prônait, où vraiment les choses sont très claires, très nettes, très définies, quelque chose comme, par exemple, le jardin, le jardin français, le jardin classique, dans lequel vous avez un miroir. C'est ça qui est la rationalité pure en matière d'esthétique, d'art, de littérature etc. En matière de littérature, c'est quoi ? C'est encore une fois, ça c'est un roman, dans le roman il faut qu'il y ait un personnage qui fasse ceci, qui fasse cela et qui meurt à la fin, ça c'est une tragédie, non ce n'est pas une tragédie, c'est une comédie, c'est une tragi-comédie : la bataille du Cid, parce qu'il y a des règles esthétiques qui remontent à Aristote et dit "il faut que," prescriptif, "il faut que," comprenez ? Donc le baroque vient dire "on en a assez tout ça" et d'ailleurs, comme vous le savez, en matière de littérature comme en matière d'art, tout progrès se fait contre ce qui le précède. C'est comme ça. On dit non, on va... celui qui fait ça, bien, mais moi je vais, au lieu de continuer à faire des choses comme ça, [il dessine deux lignes parallèles], moi je vais faire des choses comme ça et puis comme ça, ça va aller dans tous les sens [il dessine trois lignes divergentes et inter-croisées] parce que l'homme n'est pas pure rationalité, le monde n'est pas rationnel, et ailleurs, il donne un argument en disant, on ne rencontre nulle part dans la nature une forme géométrique pure. Ça n'existe pas. La nature ne crée jamais la forme géométrique.

IJ : D'accord. Donc, en quelque sorte, le baroque est un refus de la rationalité pour quelque chose qui est plus naturel, plus humain, pourrait-on le dire ainsi ?

AL : Plus naturel, plus humain, plus pan-humain. D'ailleurs, un des efforts de Césaire, ce rendez-vous du donner et de recevoir, ce rendez-vous de cette civilisation de l'universel ne pourra exister que si elle comporte des apports de chacun. Si le monde entier vient et apporte pour dire qu'on va bâtir la cité idéale de demain, et que moi on connaît alors j'ai quelque chose dans mon coin, mon tout petit élément. Si on me dit, "tu n'as pas le droit de mettre ton élément," il n'y a pas de civilisation de l'universel. Donc la civilisation de l'universel, c'est un compromis et une construction dynamique et solidaire. Voilà, donc c'est dans ce sens-là, il faut réfléchir, et c'est pourquoi Césaire encore une fois, bien qu'il se soit battu contre la France colonialiste, bien qu'il se soit battu contre l'Occident, n'a jamais aussi renié totalement l'Occident, donc il pense que l'homme est universel et que

tout est digne de respect s'il vient de l'homme, pourvu seulement qu'on y aille avec un peu de sympathie, un peu de compréhension.

IJ : Senghor, également n'a jamais renoncé totalement à l'Occident, et vous avez mentionné cette civilisation de l'universelle. Donc pour revenir à l'Afrique, et justement, si on veut commencer avec Senghor, où si on veut aller avant lui, dans les années 20 par exemple, où il y avait les bouleversements à Paris entre les deux guerres, et où les intellectuels haïtiens se rencontraient avec des anciens combattants de l'Afrique. Est-ce qu'on pourrait tracer le baroque depuis ce moment-là, au début du vingtième siècle, qui coïncide, justement, avec l'avènement du surréalisme que vous avez mentionné ? Est-ce qu'il y a là dans la littérature africaine les débuts du baroque ? Et cela-continue-t-il, non pas une continuité d'une ligne fixe, mais plutôt est-ce qu'il revient encore dans des différentes périodes ? Par exemple dans les années 50 où il y avait les premiers romans africains qui étaient sortis de Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, et encore dans les années 60 avec ceux de Cheikh Hamidou Kane et Ousmane Sembene ?

AL : Bon, pour Paris, conventionnellement, oui, mais n'oublions pas tout même, encore une fois, que cette littérature africaine a surgi de la rencontre entre les Haïtiens et les Négro-Africains, mais il y a une dimension importante que vous oubliez : les Négro-Américains. Cela est capitale dans cette naissance de littérature africaine, et déjà, à mon avis, si on revient un peu au début de cette littérature noire-américaine, ce qu'on va voir, mais aussi dans la littérature blanche-américaine ; ce sont quand même les contes fantastiques de Edgar Allen Poe, n'est-ce pas ? Mais si vous lisez aussi les premiers écrivains, Laurence Dunbar et ses prédécesseurs. Mais je dis aux gens, c'est curieux, et à mes étudiants, l'année où Dunbar meurt, Léopold Sédar Senghor naît, c'est 1906. Ça c'est quand même intéressant. Mais il y a une filiation très forte de notre littérature à ses débuts avec la littérature américaine parce que la littérature haïtienne a connu son renouveau avec la littérature américaine, et la littérature martiniquaise et guadeloupéenne également avec le contact américain. Et maintenant, tout cet ensemble rencontre l'Afrique en France ; vous voyez, il y a les États Unis, l'Amérique disons, l'Amérique latine, et les Caraïbes, l'Afrique, tout ça se rencontre en France. Ça fait un *melting pot*, vraiment, Paris, à l'époque est un *melting pot*. Vous connaissez, je ne vais pas élaborer là-dessus, les jazzmen, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, tous ces gens là, Duke Ellington, c'est vraiment, d'ailleurs, dans la poétique de Senghor. Et c'est le jazz, le jazz c'est à dire le refus encore une fois de l'harmonie pure, de l'harmonie claire avec la création du Séville, la création du swing, la création de quelque chose, comment vous appelez ça ? vous avez tac tac tac, tac tac tac, tac tac, au lieu d'avoir les trois.

IJ : Un rythme irrégulier ?

AL : Un rythme irrégulier, mais en matière de jazz, il y a un mot, il y a quelque chose qui fait que c'est irrégulier. Donc voyez, ils font ça peut être parce que c'est une vieille forme nègre qu'ils ont gardé dans leur création etc. Bien. Alors donc, cette naissance de cette littérature, effectivement, c'est Paris, c'est un moment privilégié dans l'histoire, un

moment magique où vraiment dans un pays colonial qui est la patrie du rationalisme avec les Descartes et tous ces gens-là, il y a la conjonction aussi de ses gens là avec des alliés objectifs, beaucoup qui sont des surréalistes, des communistes, tous ces gens qui refusent la société telle qu'elle est organisée, qui veulent autre chose, même déjà Baudelaire, ensuite Rimbaud, ensuite Lautréamont, tous ces gens-là, et dans les suspects trente, il y a beaucoup de gens qui ont réuni pour cela, et pour Baudelaire c'est d'en faire aussi d'importe, prolonger au fond de la vie pour qu'il y ait du nouveau, de la surprise. Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, tous ces gens-là qui ont voulu quitter la centralité et explorer les marges pour découvrir ce qu'il y a [...] par rapport à l'autre. Donc cette sympathie, cette ouverture aux autres, a été formidable dans l'éclosion de cette littérature. Maintenant, une fois que cette littérature est née, est-ce qu'il y a eu des moments ? Bien sûr il y a eu des moments, il y a eu une réaction très forte de l'institution contre ces fantaisies là, et il y a eu une sorte de retour à la normalité. Vous savez, avec les auteurs, peut être même qu'on a un peu poussé à le faire, genre Camara Laye, *L'Enfant noir* est un ouvrage bien écrit, bien léché, tous les écrivains qui l'ont fait, même si dans leurs écrits il y a toujours une part de révolte, une part du refus de cette normalité-là. On a même ça chez Cheikh Hamidou Kane qui est très classique. Bon, mais Senghor déjà, il a beaucoup de classicisme, ce qui a connu un retour avec Mongo Beti, un certain classicisme, même dans la contestation d'un classicisme formel. Et puis, paf ! En 1968 c'est reparti avec Kourouma.

IJ : Et Ouologuem également ?

AL : Ouologuem, c'est 68, aussi. Ouologuem c'est plutôt l'iconoclaste. C'est quelqu'un qui dit "vous-mêmes, vous me cassez les oreilles avec votre art nègre. Votre art nègre est une construction qui n'existe pas. Votre négritude je ne m'y reconnais pas." C'est quelqu'un qui conteste. Mais Kourouma a ouvert la voie à des gens comme Sony Labou Tansi, comme, je ne sais pas, Tchicaya U' Tam'si, comme tous ces auteurs-là qui, actuellement d'ailleurs, se manifestent dans la littérature qu'ils appellent là-bas, en France, le mouvement de "la migritude," c'est à dire au fond des poètes africains migrants qui ne se reconnaissent pas dans l'Afrique, qui ne se reconnaissent pas par l'Europe, qui sont dans l'entre-deux. Donc il y a une nouvelle tentative de secouer encore l'institution par Kourouma qui introduit dans le roman ce qui relève de l'Histoire, ce qui relève de la mythologie, ce qui relève des croyances traditionnelles populaires, et surtout aussi une sorte de baroque langagier où on fait une création dans les langues africaines, en particulier le malinké et le français. Moi, à mon avis, je crois que, au fond, pour résumer tout cela, le mouvement littéraire universel est caractérisé par des allers-retours entre une normalité et une entropie, une recherche d'entropie : extrême normalité et recherche d'entropie. Et on va de l'un à l'autre n'est-ce pas, selon les époques. Nous sommes actuellement, par exemple dans une époque où certainement le mouvement initié par Kourouma est en train de s'épuiser, et les gens sont à la recherche d'autres modes. Bon, il y a des gens avec leurs expériences originales comme les Boubacar Boris Diop, *Doomi Golo*, [*Les Enfants de la guenon* en français] qui vient d'être traduit en français, comme Ken Bugul avec cette histoire, *La folie et la mort*, et puis tous ces gens, des



jeunes écrivains qui sont en train de créer des choses, comme Fama Diagne Sène qui a écrit une nouvelle sur la folie, sur ses expériences de la folie. La folie existait déjà depuis *La Plaie* de Malik Fall [1972], qui est un roman qui est resté malheureusement inconnu, et qui traite l'expérience de la marginalité de la folie. Il y a beaucoup de jeunes écrivains comme ça qui naissent, qui se manifestent dans une recherche aussi, dans une sorte de recherche sur le baroque, qui n'est pas seulement, disons, spirituel ou bien culturel mais qui est une recherche d'une autre chose qui n'est pas encore bien défini ou bien qui va paraître peut être dans la décennie qui va venir, à mon avis.

IJ : Donc voilà, nous sommes arrivés jusqu'à présent, jusqu'à nos jours quoi. Donc, où est-ce que vous voyez le baroque, surtout à partir de 68, et peut être encore plus évidemment à partir de la fin des années 1970, c'est en 1979 je crois qu'est apparu le roman, *La Vie et demie*, et pendant les années 80... ? Le baroque se situe-t-il entre quelques années précises ?

AL : Je comprends bien le sens de votre question. Vous savez, bon, si l'on dit que le baroque se situe dans une période bien précise entre 1979 disons et 1999, dates comme ça, cela veut dire deux choses : ou bien c'est un mouvement conscient, qui est né consciemment de la volonté des gens qui ont créé ça à partir de 1979, ça a fonctionné, puis en 1999 quelque chose a fait que ça ne fonctionne plus. Donc c'est quelque chose d'une construction a priori, une volonté. Est-ce que c'est comme ça ? Je ne crois pas. Maintenant, l'autre chose que cela pourrait vous dire : à partir de 1979, mais remparé, parce que c'est quelque chose qui existe, je vous dis, dans la littérature orale ; les genres aussi ça existe parce qu'il y a le barde, il y a le mythe, il y a la légende, il y a l'épopée, il y a les devinettes, il y a les proverbes. Mais, ce qu'il y a ici sont des constructions volontaires de l'auteur qui refuse cette fragmentation en genre, c'est comment dire gentiment, cette séparation, et qui fait une sorte de salade à partir de différents éléments. Donc ce que ça peut vouloir dire d'autres choses à part cette construction volontaire, ça veut dire que c'est quelque chose qui s'est produit en 79 qui a fait que, bon, un individu, et puis deux individus, puis trois individus, puis une foule ont créé quelque chose en se démarquant de ce qui est l'existant, dès que, ma foi, ça va, ça vient, ce n'est pas quelque chose qui est généralisée ; pendant que ça existe, il y a d'autres constructions continues, classiques, "normales," etc. Et que jusqu'à 1990 ça continue parce que les éléments qui avaient présidé à sa naissance n'ont pas disparu. Et je crois que, parler en toute objectivité, on ne peut pas dire que le baroque a disparu. Ce qu'on peut dire c'est que les premiers créateurs dans un mouvement qui naît ont un peu plus de chance parce que c'est quelque chose de vierge, ouvert ; dès qu'ils ont créé, ça devient de plus en plus difficile d'être original, de créer quelque chose de nouveau. Donc il y a peut être actuellement un certain répit, une certaine baisse, parce que le public ne l'aime plus, et c'est leur raison, parce que les éditeurs disent que ça ne va pas, parce que les écrivains ont des tâches plus urgentes à faire. Mais je ne crois pas que ce soit le cas. Il y a par-ci par-là des créations tout à fait respectables, tout à fait intéressantes qui peuvent se rattacher à ce baroque. Mais ce n'est plus aussi fort qu'au moment où, par exemple, nous tenions ce colloque sur le baroque. Donc il va falloir faire un document très serré,

très sérieux dans le corpus à partir duquel on peut déterminer aussi les conditions socioculturelles qui rentrent tout à la création, voir quelles sont les raisons objectives qui peuvent justifier une baisse du baroquisme, ou bien simplement avoir un corpus simple, ou bien en gros une vie réduite vraiment à la dette en attendant encore que quelque chose fasse repartir ça dans une décennie, dans deux décennies, dans cinquante ans.

IJ : Il faut voir.

AL : Voilà, il faut voir.

IJ : Parlons maintenant spécifiquement de *La Vie et demie*. C'est un roman que vous avez lu et que j'ai lu et que j'ai même étudié. La question de "survie" est quelque chose qui est très présente dans le roman. Il y a une situation politique et sociale qui est représentée dans le roman comme très difficile. On pourrait même dire que c'est une "économie de la mort," une idée que j'emprunte de Mbembe. Mais à partir de cette misère, c'est dans la mort même qu'il y a le renouvellement de la vie. Vous avez déjà mentionné le baroque au niveau langagier chez Sony Labou Tansi, est-ce qu'il y a aussi un niveau thématique ?

AL : C'est à dire que, oui. Bon, il faut d'abord se placer dans la perspective de la situation politique qui, ça vous le savez, c'était la dictature, c'était l'absence de règle, et c'est la mort parce qu'il y a la dictature. C'est les tontons macoutes quoi, en somme ; puis les droits... ou bien... bon. Alors la vie se trouve dans la mort, comme vous avez dit, la mort de Martial, Martial qui refuse de mourir d'ailleurs, qui constitue, maintenant, qui passe du stade résistant au stade du concept ou d'idée. Et c'est ça qui fait qu'il va survivre, se survivre. C'est quelqu'un qui s'est sacrifié, qui se sacrifie un peu sur l'autel de la lutte pour la liberté et qui va donc accéder au statut de héros national, genre Lumumba, genre ces gens-là. Il va devenir un concept et on va se battre pour cette idée-là. Donc ce que l'auteur cherche en acte, c'est à montrer, qu'au fond, il n'y a plus de l'au-delà d'une certaine oppression, il n'y a pas autre chose que la mort pour survivre. Il n'y a d'autres formes d'oppression que la mort, c'est un peu paradoxal, un peu étonnant, mais puisque ce sont des zombis qui sont là et des gens morts qui sont vivants mais ils sont morts, ils n'existent pas au sens étymologique du terme "exister." Ils n'existent pas, ils sont là, ils sont enfermés, engagés, emprisonnés. Donc par rapport à cette libération, la mort est une action, un refus de, même si ça dépose sur la mort, le refus en soi suffit pour donner une existence, dire bon, "l'homme révolté," genre Camus. Alors, donc, il faut aller chercher dans la mythologie congolaise. Dans la mythologie congolaise ce que signifient ces concepts de vie, de mort ; dans la mythologie congolaise ça a des significations très précises. Par exemple dans le Mvet, Vous connaissez le Mvet ? Le Mvet c'est un genre littéraire proche de l'épopée, du mythe, mais en Afrique Centrale, Congo Zaïre, etc., etc. Dans le Mvet, c'est un récit qui montre des mondes parallèles, des personnages qui circulent entre trois mondes parallèles : le monde des dieux, le monde des morts, le monde des vivants, un peu comme dans la mythologie grecque, il y avait les enfers, un peu comme Dante a repris dans *La Descente aux enfers* et tout ça. Et donc il y a les trois mondes dans cette conception qui ne sont pas très séparés, et Senghor y vient

dans sa poésie, il n'y a pas véritablement cette séparation entre le monde des vivants et le monde des morts. Et c'est pourquoi là-bas, peut être la mort est beaucoup moins redoutée que dans le monde occidental ou dans le monde musulman, où ça signifie la fin en tout cas d'une certaine... Là-bas il des possibilités d'aller-retour. Il faut chercher un peu comme ça. Et un peu comme chez les Yourouca au Nigéria, par exemple dans *Le Monde s'effondre*, les enfants qui meurent et qui reviennent, etc. Donc avec les Martial, Chaïdana, et puis toute cette, comment on appelle ça, cette ligne de guides-là, les providentiels, comment ils s'appellent, ils ont des noms, Jean Cœur-de-Pierre, Jean, bon, voilà. C'est pour dire qu'il y a une re-naissance, n'est-ce pas, de chacun ; si vous mourez, vous ne disparaîsez pas, vous revenez. Donc c'est peut être pour ça qu'il faut chercher. Il y a donc cet aspect de la mythologie congolaise traditionnelle. Il y a maintenant aussi la dimension peut être purement politique comme pouvoir, côté du marxisme, ce que je pourrais appeler *oblativité*, c'est à dire la propension de l'individu à se sacrifier, une certaine dimension, une certaine dignité de l'homme qui l'amène à vouloir se sacrifier pour les autres, une certaine oblativité, donc, qui va déboucher sur le mythe du héros. Donc je ne peux pas aller plus loin que ça. Dans *La Vie et demie*, c'est sûr que pourquoi, d'ailleurs, on dit "vie et demie."

IJ : C'est bien au-delà.

AL : C'est au-delà de la vie. Au-delà de la vie, il y a encore de la vie. Voilà, c'est bien comme ça que je crois que, si vous chercher dans les mythes...

IJ : Je voulais aussi vous demander s'il y a un rapprochement allégorique entre cette mort et ce retour à la vie, et par exemple, dans la tradition chrétienne où il y a vraiment une focalisation sur la mort du Christ, qui est enfin retourné à la vie, qui retournera encore...

AL : À la fin des temps, le messie et tout ça. Le messie, oui oui, le mythe du messie, oui il y a une attente dans *La Vie et demie*. On attend quelque chose, peut être Godot, peut être le messie. On attend. Bon, oui, il y a une dimension, et je vous l'ai dit, c'est ça le baroque, j'allais dire, chercher dans la littérature traditionnelle congolaise, chercher la matière d'idéologie dans le marxisme, chercher aussi, vous avez parfaitement raison, dans la mythologie chrétienne. Martial, effectivement, est une figure du Christ, parce Christ, quand même, ça fait combien d'années depuis qu'il a été crucifié, mais il s'entête à vivre, il est encore vivant. Il est vivant, il dit toujours, "je suis vivant," il dit "nul ne vient au père que par moi." Pour lui, il faut passer par la mort pour exister, n'est-ce pas. Bien qu'il ait peur de la mort, il dit "mon père écarte de moi cette souffrance," etc. Mais il dit en même temps au gens, "non, il faut que j'y aille parce que c'est mon destin et que la finalité a voulu que je meure sur la croix pour être sauvé, donc il faut que je meure pour continuer à vivre éternellement." Et donc il y a là, également, une dimension christique dans la figure de Martial, et dans la figure au fond de certains.

IJ : Ce qui m'intéresse surtout c'est, disons, les rapports ou la relation entre la littérature et la réalité, c'est à dire, la façon dont l'un influence l'autre, et peut-être vice versa, donc,

dans cette idée de *La Vie et demie*, de se sacrifier et de cette manière de revenir encore à la vie comme une idée, moi je pense peut être à Che Guevara ou Bob Marley, et vous voyez toujours les images, et ici au Sénégal, c'est les Sérigne Touba, Sérigne Fall...

AL : Sauf que ces gens-là ne sont pas morts les armes à la main. Mais c'est un peu la même chose, là c'est purement religieux. Mais, vous avez parfaitement raison, l'humanité a besoin de créer des héros, de toute façon, l'humanité ne peut pas vivre sans figures emblématiques, sans des icônes, soit des paradigmes, ou soit aussi des référents. Bon, effectivement, j'ai parlé tout à l'heure de Lumumba, on parle du Christ, on parle de Che Guevara, on parle de, peut être chez les anarchistes, Bacu Ming, on parlera de je ne sais pas, Commandant Massoute, chez les Afghans. Chaque peuple se crée. En France, ils ont Jeanne d'Arc, ils ont Napoléon, ils ont certains hommes emblématiques. Mais c'est une construction purement fautive, Napoléon – construction fautive, Charlemagne – construction fautive. Donc l'humanité au fond crée des individus, même en absence, on lui fabrique quelque chose qu'il lui fallait, de spéciale, etc. Donc, j'ai l'impression, en tout cas, concernant le cadre du baroque en particulier, par rapport avec le culte du héros, le héros dans cette littérature-là, c'est souvent d'ailleurs un antihéros. Justement, pour ne pas faire comme eux, c'est un antihéros, c'est un personnage du peuple qui est appelé à connaître un destin de façon, peut être, parfois involontaire. Il est projeté dans des événements malgré lui, et ma foi, il fait face et acquiert un statut inattendu, un statut surprenant qui fait donc un contraste avec le héros canonique tel qu'on connaît dans la littérature du Moyen Âge, Perceval, l'œuvre, Arthur, etc. dans la littérature anglaise, française aussi du Moyen Âge : Roland, ce n'est pas un personnage qui est prédestiné à être un héros, il est un héros souvent inattendu. Maintenant pour la réalité, je vais vous recommander la lecture de deux ouvrages sénégalais, non trois, le premier c'est un ouvrage que j'ai reconnu comme étant baroque : *Passion pour une fille caméléon-ara*. Vous savez ce qu'est un ara ? C'est un perroquet avec un beau plumage, alors il tombe amoureux avec un étant caméléon et ara, donc c'est un personnage ambigu. C'est un ouvrage qui a été écrit par un jeune militaire dont le nom m'échappe pour le moment [Léo Faye]. Lisez Fama Diagne Sène, *Le Chant des ténèbres*. Bon, lisez, pour le cadre purement social, si vous voulez maintenant des éléments sur la vie sociale sénégalaise, deux romans : il y a *Bayo*, de Soxna Benga, et puis *Le Crépuscule des vanités* d'Amadou Tidiane Wone. Ces deux ouvrages vous montreront l'évolution de ce pays à travers des personnages qui vivent des éléments, ça même, c'est en marges, même si vous avez la chance de voir des choses qui vous intéresseraient...

IJ : Ce sont des ouvrages que vous caractériseriez comme baroques ?

AL : Oui, il n'y a pas de problème. Pour cela, vous verrez que c'est très dans votre perspective...

IJ : La question du personnage ambiguë, surtout le trait d'union, parce que ça apparaît aussi dans *L'Ogre-empereur* de Kompany Wa Kompany, aussi chez Calixthe Beyala où le personnage se réfère en tant que femme-fillette, ou d'autres formes, et les zombis, les

morts-vivants. Quelle signification accorderez-vous à ce tiret en tant qu'élément de mettre ensemble de différentes... ?

AL : Oui, c'est la jonction de choses a priori réputées contradictoires, qui ne peuvent pas aller ensemble, dans un cadre purement rationnel. Dans un cadre purement rationnel, ce sont des choses qui ne peuvent pas aller ensemble : mort-vivant, caméléon-ara, etc. C'est une volonté de sortir, à mon avis, toujours, de cette rationalité desséchante, parce que le rationnel est desséchant. C'est ce que disent tous nos écrivains, et en particulier nos grands poètes, Césaire et Senghor. Le rationnel c'est quelque chose, c'est une durée qui est claire, on voit des choses d'une façon précise. C'est pourquoi Senghor par exemple n'aime pas le jour, parce que la nuit les choses sont escomptées floues, et ça favorise un peu la communion avec le monde extra-, sur-réel, sur-naturel. Et donc je crois que c'est une manière de créer un personnage avec une personnalité complexe, une personnalité double, et là vous devrez chercher dans un dictionnaire des symboles, des mythes, la gémellarité, les jumeaux, le double...

IJ : ...dans le titre, *Le Pleurer-rire*, de Henri Lopes, par exemple...

AL : Alors, ça vous explique donc que c'est une personnalité plus riche et complexe, plus en rapport avec les croyances universelles, dans les croyances universelles, parce que là, au fond, le rationalisme nous a coupé avec une part importante de notre héritage traditionnel, nos croyances dans la capacité des hommes à changer, ce que Senghor appelle de façon très intéressant, "l'instabilité des étants." Ça veut dire que Les étants sont instables en Afrique : vous n'êtes pas homme pour être homme définitivement, vous êtes homme, mais dans certaines circonstances, à travers certaines formules, vous pouvez vous transformer et devenir un oiseau. Si vous avez le savoir, vous faites des incantations, vous devenez un oiseau. Et donc on passe d'un état à un autre, etc. Ça permet une plus grande richesse, une plus grande mobilité dans le monde, un contact plus approfondi avec le monde, le monde concret et le monde de l'abstrait, du surréel, etc. Donc c'est un enrichissement, c'est quelque chose qui paraît contradictoire, qui paraît inadmissible pour quelqu'un qui utilise sa simple rationalité. Mais c'est par ailleurs un enrichissement extraordinaire. C'est un peu comme Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Donc voilà, vous êtes deux personnalités qui coexistent dans une même enveloppe et qui peuvent se manifester dans un sens et dans un autre. Je crois que ça c'est ça, c'est de la dimension...

IJ : C'est l'irrationnel, c'est l'imaginaire, c'est le fantastique.

AL : C'est l'imaginaire, mais c'est le fantastique.

IJ : Vous avez mentionné, vers au début, la question de la folie. Il y a des connotations négatives dans la civilisation rationaliste occidentale, la folie ce n'est pas normal...

AL : Oui, chez nous ici, la folie est ce qui vous ouvre des mondes fantastiques, ce qui vous libère de votre enveloppe de simple mortel, limité dans le temps, dans l'espace, dans

la connaissance, et qui vous ouvre des perspectives incroyables. Deux exemples, je ne parle même pas de Macamoun de Rabelais qui est un fou, mais un autre exemple c'est le fou de Cheikh Hamidou Kane dans *L'Aventure ambiguë*. C'est lui qui est le plus lucide de tous les personnages parce que c'est lui qui est sorti, qui a vu et qui est revenu complet. Samba Diallo est sorti, il est revenu, mais il est revenu métamorphosé par l'extérieur. Lui il est revenu enrichi et plus convaincu encore d'être dans le vrai, ce qui justifie son habillement. On dit qu'il portait quoi ? Une valleuse militaire sur un boubou traditionnelle : personnalité ambiguë double. Voilà. Et puis ce qu'il dit, "maitre ils sont devenus fous en occident." Vous vous rappelez dans *L'Aventure ambiguë* ? "Mais ils sont fous ces gens ! La voiture a cherché l'homme. Ils ont tout construit, il y a de la voiture partout, le fer le fer le fer ! On ne peut pas entrer en contact. Quand je suis arrivé à Marseille, je suis resté des jours, on ne peut pas entrer en contact avec le sol, avec le sable !" Nous sommes des êtres, comme dit Senghor, nous sommes des hommes de la danse, dont les vieux prennent vigueur en frappant le sol dur, nous sommes des descendants d'Anté. Vous connaissez Anté ? Ly mythe dans [...], d'Hercule, il a lutté contre un géant en Lybie, un Lybien, c'est un Africain qui s'appelle Anté. Le mythe d'Anté, ça veut dire "fils de la terre," et Hercule ne pouvait pas le vaincre tant qu'il touchait la terre, sa mère lui envoyait de la force, comme dans les Mangas actuels. Vous voyez, les Mangas, on donne la force. C'était la même chose. Et donc pour vaincre Anté il a dû le maintenir en l'air et l'étouffer en l'air. Voilà. Oui ? Nous sommes donc... c'est ça : il le dit, 'ils sont devenus fous, ils n'ont plus de contact avec la terre mère.' Bon, ça c'est le premier, et c'est lui qui fait les fins à l'antiquité de Samba Diallo en lui donnant le nom qui va libérer l'âme de Samba Diallo, qui va connaître le cheminement vers Dieu dans le dixième chapitre du livre, à la fin, c'est un petit chapitre que personne ne comprend. Alors, deuxième chose, deuxième élément, je dis donc Samba Diallo, mais l'autre fou...

IJ : Il s'appelle justement 'le fou'...

AL : Dans *L'Aventure ambiguë*, oui, il est le fou, parce que bon, vous savez, par hasard, Cheikh Hamidou Kane a donné des noms comme si c'était...

IJ : Un jeu d'échecs...

AL : Voilà, comme l'a dit le professeur camerounais qui disait que c'était un jeu d'échecs. Mais donc, l'autre fou est dans *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* qui s'appelle "Sarzan." C'est un jeune du Mali, un certain prince d'ailleurs qui est allé faire la guerre en France, et il est revenu avec le grade de Sergent dans l'armée coloniale française. Il était Sergent, et les gens l'appelaient Sarzan parce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas dire Sergent. Il est revenu donc remettre en cause les traditions en disant vos croyances-là c'est du n'importe quoi ; il a renversé les autels, les masques et tout ça, il a tout foutu en l'air, et il est devenu fou comme ça. Et c'est quand il est devenu fou qu'il est devenu lucide et clairvoyant, et il a sorti ce poème de Birago Diop que tout le monde connaît en Afrique, "écoute souvent les choses que les êtres." Vous connaissez ça ? Dans les poèmes de Birago Diop, il y a un poème qui s'appelle "Souffles." [il récite...] C'est ce monde

double-là celui des vivants et celui des morts ne sont pas séparés et il faut être attentif à ce qui nous entoure pour entendre la voix des ancêtres qui nous parlent à travers les arbres à travers la flamme, à travers l'eau, à partir de là. Donc c'est pour dire que la folie est valorisée.

IJ : Je pense surtout à Ken Bugul, *La folie et la mort*. C'est quand elle devient folle justement, que vraiment, les choses commencent...

AL : Fama Diagne Sène, *Le chant des ténèbres*, c'est aussi une femme qui devient folle et qui devient lucide dans la folie. C'est dans la folie qu'on voit. C'est la folie qui permet de voir, et c'est pourquoi Césaire dit « nous nous réclamons de la folie flamboyante. » Sans la folie, on ne peut pas voir. Ça c'est très occidental par certains côtés avec Salvador Dali et ces gens là qui disent que 'je n'ai pas envie d'être bien dans ma tête, je veux être fou.' Ce que d'ailleurs l'autre, Roland Barthes, disait 'je comprends malheureusement il est impossible d'être fou. La folie est ce qui est souhaitable pour être vraiment un bon écrivain. Ne me trouvant pas être fou, et bien au moins je dirais, je suis névrosé.'

IJ : C'est plus acceptable pour l'Occident, d'être névrosé.

AL : Voilà, je n'ai pas la possibilité, hélas, d'être fou, c'est dommage, je ne peux pas y accéder, et bien, je vais me contenter alors d'être névrosé, mais il faut quelque chose de spécial pour pouvoir être productif, pour pouvoir être intéressant. Donc, je crois que c'est ça. Le baroque est un sujet passionnant, parce qu'au fond, c'est tout ce qui refuse le modèle unique, le standard, tout ce qui dit qu'il nous faut aller au-delà, profiter de la diversité du monde, de la richesse du monde. Je crois qu'une des œuvres les plus baroques c'est le *Baghavad Gita*. Ça ce n'est pas ici en Afrique, c'est en Inde, le mythe indien des origines là-bas. C'est trop compliqué. C'est le mythe des origines de l'humanité, la théogonie, la théomachie, c'est très compliqué, les mythes grecques, les mythes nordiques...

IJ : Donc, voilà, pour essayer de clore un peu cette discussion, le baroque consiste à puiser dans tous ces éléments du divers, les mythes par-ci par-là, les genres, la vie elle-même, l'imaginaire, le fantastique, la folie, la mort, la vie, l'entrecroisement des mondes, de prendre tout ça pour essayer de créer une image qui se situe dans le présent. Donc ça puise les histoires pour essayer de donner une forme ou des formes au présent qui dépasse cette idée qui vient de l'Histoire et de notre position dans l'Histoire sur une ligne tout juste avec sa chronologie, ses héros et ses mythes, pour en faire...

AL : La "diversalité." Traduire la diversalité. Il y a un concept actuellement qui fait fureur, cette diversalité. Non pas la diversité, mais la diversalité. C'est à dire au fond l'acceptation que le monde est divers, que les hommes ne peuvent pas être réduits à un certain modèle, en particulier le modèle occidental, et il y a de plus en plus de remise en cause, même en occident de cette vision du monde. Je disais à mes étudiants, c'est l'Occident qui a créé le monde, ce n'est pas Dieu qui a créé le monde. Dieu a créé la terre

et il a créé les hommes, mais c'est l'occident qui a créé le monde, parce qu'il a conquis, l'Europe est sortie d'elle-même, elle est allée en Amérique, elle est venue en Afrique, elle a nommé les océans, elle a nommé les continents, elle a donné ses langues, elle a imposé ses lois, elle a imposé ses religions, etc., elle a colonisé le monde. Mais il y a toujours une résistance, effectivement, un combat pour maintenir le divers, parce que la vie c'est le divers. Même si les gens s'inquiètent un peu de ces espèces végétales qui disparaissent, de ces animaux menacés par ceci cela ; inconsciemment, c'est qu'ils se rendent compte que ces disparitions vont créer la fin de la vie, parce que cette interrelation, cette interdépendance des hommes, des animaux, des plantes, etc., le cycle même de l'eau, tout ça, est mêlée, et c'est quelque chose d'extrêmement complexe et chaque élément a une place, un rôle et une dignité, et la disparition d'un certain élément risque de le remettre en cause, parce que c'est vu de l'ensemble.

IJ : C'est ce que disait Sony Labou Tansi, "C'est une époque où l'homme se met à tuer la vie."

AL : Voilà, l'homme tue la vie, c'est un peu ça, effectivement, et ma foi, si les Green Peace et tout ça s'agitent, certainement ils ont perçu, effectivement, que la petite herbe qu'on risque de détruire pour extraire de l'or ou l'uranium, ou bien l'animal qui risque de perdre son habitat sauvage, etc., ces éléments-là sont aussi indispensables à la perpétuation de la vie que l'être humain lui-même... Le baroque est aussi une sorte d'éloge du divers, une éloge à la diversité. C'est en fait ça.

IJ : Est-ce qu'il y a un élément didactique à ces éloges à la vie qui sont plutôt des œuvres baroques ? Est-ce que ça peut démontrer, non seulement au niveau esthétique, mais peut être au niveau pratique, des façons de vivre... ?

AL : Pratique, au niveau pragmatique, oui, exemplarité, des façons de vivre, des façons de percevoir le monde et le divers, il y a une certaine volonté de témoignage, au moins, sinon de pédagogique, au moins de témoignage. Il faut dire la vérité. Donc il y a, effectivement, une dimension idéologique au baroque, parce qu'il s'expose comme un témoignage sur d'autres potentialités, d'autres modalités d'exister qu'on néglige, et le monde peut être plus riche pour l'humanité, moins dangereux parce que plus respectueux de la diversité.

IJ : Merci beaucoup.

AL : Je vous en prie. Bon, j'espère avoir apporté quelques réponses à vos trucs.



**Appendix B** : Entretien avec Professeur Joseph Paré, Ministre de l'éducation secondaire, supérieure et des recherches scientifiques, Lundi, le 3 août, 2009.

IJ : Ce qui m'intéresse surtout par rapport à vos recherches sur l'esthétique dans le roman africain, c'est cette mention que vous avez faite du baroque, ou des 'formes de baroque,' effectivement. Et vous avez mentionné ça dans l'œuvre de Henri Lopes, *Le Pleurer-rire*. D'abord que pouvez-vous me dire à propos de cette idée du baroque dans le roman africain ? Comment êtes-vous venu à poursuivre cette voie de recherche vers le baroque ?

JP : Je pense que tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la question du baroque, ou ce qui peut s'apparenter au baroque, que moi je décris comme des formes de baroque, sont nécessairement tous ceux qui voient une forme de relation, de similitude, entre l'évolution des cultures africaines, et l'évolution des cultures de l'Amérique centrale, parce que l'Amérique centrale est une société qui a vu passer plusieurs types de civilisations, et ces types de civilisations ont fini par influencer d'une manière ou d'une autre sur la civilisation originelle. Donc, à partir de ce moment, on peut effectivement considérer que le baroque, tel qu'il s'est manifesté dans la culture latino-américaine, les contacts que les cultures africaines ont eus avec cet occident, peuvent nous amener à penser que ces cultures peuvent être marquées par des formes de baroque. En effet, quand on prend un peu la production littéraire de quelqu'un comme Henri Lopes, sur lequel j'ai travaillé, sur lequel je me suis penché, je me suis aperçu que sa production littéraire était une espèce de *melting pot* qui se construisait sur la base de sa culture originelle, mais aussi des éléments importés de la culture occidentale, des éléments de l'esthétique occidentale intégrés. Mais cette intégration ne faisait pas que nous nous retrouvions avec quelque chose qui est simplement plaquée, mais donnant naissance à quelque chose de nouveau et de totalement propre à la littérature africaine qui devient non plus, pas simplement une littérature qui retrace ou qui met en exergue la culture africaine, mais aussi des éléments d'autres cultures qui sont transformées ainsi. Donc ce qui m'a mené à penser au-delà du baroque ou du baroque, c'est que l'émergence de ce baroque était liée à des processus de recyclage d'un certain nombre d'éléments ou de certaines façons de penser l'esthétique.

IJ : Donc, quand vous mentionnez l'Amérique centrale, par cela vous entendez par exemple les Caraïbes ?

JP : Les Caraïbes, l'Amérique centrale, et même les Antilles ont influencé énormément la production littéraire africaine, tout comme la culture africaine a influencé cette production littéraire parce que la plupart de ces gens sont d'abord des gens qui sont partis du continent de l'Afrique et qui gardent encore des éléments, des réminiscences de la culture africaine dans la façon d'exprimer l'art, de produire l'art.

IJ : C'est très intéressant cette idée de *melting pot*, de mélange, de recyclage. Parmi les éléments fondamentaux de cette idée de baroque dans la littérature africaine, vous

mentionnez par exemple le polymorphisme dans le roman africain, et dans la petite section sur le baroque, vous parlez justement dans *Le Pleurer-rire*, d'une mosaïque des parleurs, donc, c'est-à-dire qu'il y plusieurs voix ?

JP : Oui, avant moi, il y a quelqu'un qui avait parlé, je pense que c'était un chercheur français qui avait travaillé là dessus, il avait considéré *Le Pleurer-rire* comme une espèce de « patchwork, » et une espèce de mosaïque de paroles, de parler parce que, autant vous avez dans *Le Pleurer-rire* quelqu'un qui sait bien s'exprimer en français, vous avez la parole du bas peuple, et cela qui tente de s'exprimer dans un français approximatif, mais en fait ce qui se passe c'est que l'auteur réussit à restituer ces multiples types de discours de sorte que la production devient un discours social. L'ensemble des parlers qu'on rencontre dans la société, les façons de parler qu'on rencontre se retrouvent dans le livre. Donc, le livre devient le lieu d'une espèce de discours parlé des parlers de la société, mais ces parlers de la société ne sont pas utilisés simplement parce qu'ils reflètent des manières de parler, mais ils reflètent aussi l'ensemble des contradictions qu'il y a dans la société africaine. Donc ce « patchwork » est à la fois, du point de vue langagier, quelque chose, mais aussi un reflet de la manière dont les sociétés africaines sont actuellement, des sociétés en construction où se rencontrent, se croisent, se tissent de nouvelles relations, se tissent de nouvelles manières de parler, se tissent de nouveaux rapports entre les gens ; et vous ne pouvez pas prétendre être dans cette société sans adhérer d'une manière ou d'une autre à ce discours. Et on ne peut pas dire que ce discours appartient seulement aux gens du bas peuple parce les gens passent d'un discours à un autre : le directeur de cabinet quand il se retrouve dans le quartier populaire essaye de parler comme les gens du quartier populaire. Donc on ne reste pas, quand il est avec les autorités, c'est un autre discours qu'il tient. Donc, vous voyez, les gens passent d'un état à un autre, toute la mobilité des individus qui traduit aussi les rapports qu'il y a au sein de la société : on n'est pas tout simplement en haut, on est aussi des gens qui appartiennent à d'autres communautés qui sont en bas. Donc, tout ce discours est aussi une façon de voir comment la société elle-même évolue.

IJ : Et dans ces différents niveaux sociaux, est-ce qu'il y a une certaine manière de représenter les personnages aussi, comme disons, les personnages à plusieurs faces, à plusieurs niveaux dans le fait qu'ils se métamorphosent petit à petit pour se situer dans ces différents discours sociaux ?

JP : Évidemment, les gens sont des acteurs sociaux, et comme la société africaine est ainsi faite qu'on a plusieurs types de relations : quand je suis ici j'ai des relations officielles de travail, mais quand je vais chez moi et que les gens de mon village viennent me voir, c'est d'autres types de rapports. Et ce sont ces différents types de rapport, et ces différentes formes de relations humaines qui font aussi la caractéristique de ce baroque littéraire. Ce n'est pas un baroque qui est construit une fois pour toutes, c'est un baroque qui se construit et se déconstruit.

IJ : À plusieurs reprises ?

JP : À plusieurs reprises.

IJ : Vous avez aussi parlé dans votre ouvrage de l'idée de la métadiscursivité, c'est-à-dire, un discours sur le discours ?

JP : Alors, ça c'est une, je me suis aperçu que certaines productions romanesques africaines étaient plutôt des productions métadiscursives dans ce sens que le discours littéraire avait un autre objectif. Si vous prenez par exemple, quelqu'un qui a déjà fait ça, c'est Mongo Beti l'avait commencé dans un roman *La Ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle*. Il l'avait fait. Et la production discursive devient le lieu d'interrogation et le lieu de réflexion sur l'état, donc on tombe sur une ruse, et on arrive à un moment donné à réfléchir sur les êtres et l'évolution de la société elle-même. Si vous prenez dans certains romans, il s'agit de se demander quel est le rôle et la place de l'intellectuel aujourd'hui dans la société africaine ? Est-ce que l'intellectuel c'est celui qui est allé prendre le savoir, qui est revenu, et qui est simplement là, qu'il est dicible ? Ou bien est-ce que l'intellectuel c'est celui qui peut aider sa société à avancer ? Et c'est ça le dilemme que l'on rencontre la plupart du temps dans certains romans, notamment dans le roman de Valentin Mudimbé. Les Valentin Mudimbé, ses intellectuels sont des gens qui ne peuvent pas aller au-delà de ce qu'ils ont pu recevoir et revenir dans la société et par leurs connaissances faire avancer la société elle-même. C'est pourquoi ses intellectuels se trouvent dans une situation difficile, voir impossible. Quelqu'un qui l'a essayé aussi c'est bien sûr le roman qui a été écrit par le Sénégalais, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë*. Voilà, parce qu'il s'agit de voir comment l'intellectuel qui est de retour va être le vin, parce que la Grande Royale elle dit quoi ? Envoyons des enfants à l'école pour qu'ils puissent apprendre à savoir lier le bois au bois. Donc ça veut dire que ces enfants, une fois à l'école doivent revenir et permettre à la société d'avancer. Mais malheureusement l'intellectuel qui est dans *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Samba Diallo, ne réussit pas quand il revient. De la même manière, quand vous avez dans un certain nombre de romans, ces intellectuels qui reviennent, qui n'arrivent pas à faire avancer la société. Dans *Le jeune homme de sable* [Williams Sassine], effectivement, pourquoi l'auteur a donné ce titre à son roman ? C'est parce que tout simplement, le sable s'est quelque chose, on ne peut rien construire là-dessus. C'est inconsistant. Et ce jeune homme qui est parti étudier, qui a le savoir, et qui revient, mais finalement il n'arrive pas à faire lever quelque chose à partir de là.

IJ : Moi, d'abord ça me fait penser à Fanon et ce qu'il a dit à propos des intellectuels dans *Les damnés de la terre*.

JP : *Les damnés de la terre*, oui.

IJ : Et également, ça me fait venir à l'esprit une question par rapport à l'écrivain, le romancier, par exemple, africain, qui écrit en général, dans la langue française, ce qui est vraiment pour la plupart du public africain, quelque chose qui est plutôt inaccessible,

dans le langage, mais aussi dans le fait que les romans qui sont publiés ne sont pas vraiment dans les moyens pour la majorité de la population.

JP : Oui, les gens ne peuvent pas acheter. Oui, ça c'est une autre question qui est au-delà de ce que l'on peut mener comme analyse des œuvres. Là c'est une autre question qui relève de la sociologie de l'ouvrage : est-ce qu'un ouvrage publié par un écrivain africain, quel que soit son intérêt, touche d'abord le public africain auquel il est destiné ? Non. Maintenant, est-ce que cela répond à une logique ? Oui, parce que tous ces écrivains, d'abord ont été formés dans la langue française, ils ont été éduqués en langue française, donc ils ne peuvent qu'écrire en français, mais tout en écrivant en français, on trouve là-dedans des traces de leur Africanité, et c'est ça qui est important, parce que ce qui importe ce n'est pas que l'œuvre soit écrite en français, mais qu'on trouve des traces de notre Africanité dans l'œuvre. Ça c'est une question d'esthétique. Maintenant la question esthétique, effectivement, elle est résolue, mais la question de l'accessibilité du plus grand nombre à l'ouvrage n'est pas réglée, et donc ça c'est une question sociologique qu'il faut régler parce que la plupart des gens sont analphabètes, c'est écrit dans une langue que les gens ne comprennent pas, les livres ne sont pas à la portée de n'importe qui, donc ça pose énormément de problèmes de sorte que le public potentiel de l'écrivain africain ne reçoit pas son message. Donc c'est pourquoi quelqu'un a pu dire que c'est une littérature de paradoxe : c'est une littérature qui s'adresse à des Africains, mais la plupart des Africains ne peuvent pas y accéder, donc c'est paradoxal.

IJ : Dans ce paradoxe, est-ce qu'il y a du baroquisme dans le fait que l'on écrit pour un public qui n'est pas vraiment là, c'est un public qui est, disons, imaginaire ? Et aussi, dans les traces de l'Africanité ?

JP : Oui, forcément, quand vous avez un écrivain qui essaye de produire quelque chose, il va mettre dans son œuvre des éléments d'esthétique qu'il va mettre ensemble. Toujours l'idée de patchwork. Il va mettre ensemble pour que cette œuvre soit le reflet, traduit d'une certaine manière des groupes auxquels il s'adresse en particulier. Forcément, sans le faire exprès, le baroquisme marque la production de tous les peuples colonisés, que ce soit en Amérique Latine, que ce soit dans les Caraïbes, tous ces peuples font d'une manière ou une autre du baroquisme. Parce qu'ils font des emprunts qu'ils vont réaménager et l'adapter à leurs modalités. Si vous prenez la création de certains écrivains, prenons Ahmadou Kourouma. Ahmadou Kourouma a vraiment transformé. Quand il dit par exemple, dans *Les Soleils des Indépendances* "Il y a une semaine qu'avait fini Ibrahima Koli." Fini ? En français, ça n'a pas de sens, mais pour les Malinkés, ça a un sens. Il y a deux façons d'annoncer la mort chez les Malinkés, on dit qu'il est parti ou qu'il est fini.

IJ : Donc avec ce deuxième niveau de connaissance culturelle...

JP : Voilà. Quand on dit que quelqu'un est parti, ça veut dire qu'après lui, il y a des gens qui sont restés. Il a laissé des enfants, il a eu progéniture, il est parti, il a rejoint les

ancêtres. Tandis qu'on dit que quelqu'un est fini chez les Malinkés, ça veut dire qu'il n'a pas eu d'enfants dans sa vie, et c'est le cas de Fama. Fama n'a pas eu d'enfants, il est parti, il est fini ; donc lui, sa vie s'est arrêtée, tandis que quelqu'un qui est parti. Et il a traduit carrément le malinké en français en disant, "il n'a pas supporté un petit rhume" parce que chez les Malinkés, on ne viendra pas vous dire que quelqu'un est décédé, quand quelqu'un est malade et est décédé, on vous dira qu'il n'a pas supporté son rhume. C'est la façon de vous dire que la personne est décédée chez les Malinkés. Donc finalement, c'est cette façon de dire chez les Malinkés qui va s'intégrer dans l'usage du français, transformer totalement l'utilisation que l'on fait de la langue française et donner en détriment, en définitive, quelque chose qui est propre à Kourouma, mais qui relève d'une forme de baroquisme. Pas du baroque, mais du baroquisme, ce sont des tendances vers le baroquisme.

IJ : Bon, j'ai une question qui va essayer de vraiment pousser plus loin cette idée du baroquisme, et je ne sais pas si vous seriez d'accord, mais généralement, le baroque, on le voit comme une période historique en Europe qui a eu lieu après la chute de l'Empire Romain, le Moyen Âge, puis après il y a eu une Renaissance de la culture qui dans ses différentes manifestations européennes, s'approprient des ruines de la civilisation Romaine qui est en même temps mélangée avec les nouvelles cultures qui sont en train de naître—celles des français, des espagnols, des catalans, des italiens, des allemands. Donc, je me demande si vous y voyez un parallèle entre ce qui a eu lieu à l'époque historique dite "baroque" et ce qui est en train de se produire en Afrique ?

JP : Oui, c'est pourquoi moi je parlais de baroquisme, justement, parce que les sociétés africaines, comme j'ai mentionné dans un de mes articles, sont des sociétés de l'entre-deux. Elles sont à la fois modernes et sur les traditions, mais elles sont obligées de vivre en empruntant à ce qu'on appelle la modernité occidentale. Donc des éléments de la tradition subsistent, il y a un substrat traditionnel auquel est venu s'ajouter des éléments de la culture occidentale. Et l'exemple le plus édifiant a été au Congo avec le mouvement religieux messianique ou, effectivement, on a essayé d'imaginer des églises noires avec des Jésus noirs, et on a pris la base de la religion africaine auquel on a ajouté les éléments de la religion occidentale.

IJ : C'est à peu près le même phénomène qu'on trouve dans les Caraïbes et en Amérique Latine avec le catholicisme et le vaudou qui se mélangent...

JP : Voilà. Donc on a eu ça au Congo et l'importance de ce mouvement messianique au Congo, c'est qu'eux ils ont largement contribué à la lutte anticoloniale et à l'indépendance. Maswa par exemple, André Maswa. Jusqu'à présent il a des maswanistes au Congo, et c'était autour des années 40, André Maswa a été considéré comme un prophète, et donc il y avait, il y a eu, et jusqu'à présent, ses ascètes disent qu'il va ressusciter un peu comme le Christ va ressusciter, et jusqu'à présent ils sont dans l'attente du retour d'André Maswa.

IJ : Et dans les années 80 et 90, cette même idée a plutôt pris la forme d'une littérature africaine où vraiment vous voyez, comme par exemple dans *La Vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi, il a la mort de Martial qui refuse de mourir et qui est une sorte de figure christique.

JP : Oui, la mort, c'est une façon de revenir à la pensée africaine concernant la mort. En fait l'Africain ne connaît pas la mort. Ce que nous appelons la mort, qui est la disparition physique de l'intéressé correspond à une autre vie parce qu'on passe du monde visible au monde invisible. Donc ce n'est pas une fin en soi, c'est un passage. La mort n'est pas une fin. Dans la pensée, dans la philosophie africaine, ce n'est pas une fin, la mort n'est qu'un passage, de sorte qu'on est passé d'une étape à une autre, on est passé d'une vie terrestre à la vie où on rejoint des ancêtres, les esprits où on devient comme eux un esprit. Donc l'homme ne meurt pas, l'homme passe à une autre étape. Donc on n'a pas besoin de pleurer quelqu'un qui est mort ; on doit être heureux parce qu'il est passé à une autre étape qui est plus spirituelle.

IJ : J'allais justement vous demander s'il y a un élément spirituel ou religieux au baroque, et il me semble que la réponse est oui.

JP : Oui, la réponse est oui, on peut trouver des éléments religieux, religieux baroques, par exemple avec le mouvement messianique comme j'ai dit tout à l'heure ou encore dans la philosophie, dans la pensée africaine de la mort, comment on appréhende la mort. C'est pourquoi les gens ne peuvent pas comprendre que nous organisons des funérailles. Les funérailles chez nous ce n'est pas venir s'asseoir, nous chantons ce que la personne a fait dans sa vie et nous pensons qu'il a accédé à une autre vie. Donc les funérailles ne sont qu'un rite de passage, ce n'est pas une mort.

IJ : J'allais vous demander, suite à ce que vous venez d'exprimer, s'il y a peut être un parallèle entre cette façon plutôt baroque de percevoir le monde avec l'esthétique qui se prend plutôt du côté de l'irrationnel, du mystère, de l'ambigu, du paradoxe, est-ce que cela est plus en coïncidence avec les croyances, les mentalités et les idéologies qui sont plus autochtones à l'Afrique traditionnelle au lieu de l'esthétique classique de la logique pure et de la linéarité ?

JP : Non, il faut dire que, dans son évolution, l'Africain est pris dans un dilemme. Ce dilemme est apparu lorsqu'il y a eu la rencontre entre la culture africaine et la culture occidentale. Il a fallu effectuer des choix. Il n'était plus possible de retourner en arrière, il n'était pas possible non plus de rompre définitivement avec cette culture occidentale qui s'imposait à nous. Il fallait réussir alors à ce moment à trouver le juste milieu qui allait nous permettre de continuer à vivre, tout en intégrant des éléments culturels venant d'ailleurs. On a pris au mieux, parce que les cultures ont ceci de particulière, c'est qu'elles survivent toujours aux attaques qui leur sont imposées. Par exemple, ce n'est pas pour critiquer qui que ce soit, les Américains sont arrivés en Amérique, ils ont conquis l'Amérique, mais est-ce qu'ils ont fait disparaître les Indiens ?

IJ : Pas tout à fait.

JP : Pas tout à fait. La culture indienne existe d'une manière ou une autre, même si elle s'adapte au monde moderne qui l'environne. Les cultures africaines vivent aussi, ou ont vécu aussi cela. Donc il est évident que cette production qui est d'abord ces formes qui se manifestent dans la littérature sont aussi l'expression de la construction d'une nouvelle culture africaine, pas une culture qui se base sur l'africanité parce qu'elle n'existe plus, mais une culture qui essaye de concilier ce que nous étions et ce que l'autre nous a apporté, et ce que Senghor a appelé la civilisation de l'universel.

IJ : Il y a un élément assez important qu'il ne faut pas négliger ici en parlant du baroque, et c'est l'élément politique que vous mentionnez surtout chez Henri Lopes ; vous mentionnez par exemple la subversion dans sa pratique esthétique. Est-ce que c'est une qualité particulière aux stratégies représentatives du baroque ?

JP : Non, c'est à dire que c'est, en fait, le baroque met en travestie, parce que l'écrivain est dans une position sociale de faiblesse. L'arme qu'il a c'est son écriture, c'est sa capacité de créer des œuvres, donc il va utiliser cette arme-là pour dépeindre négativement ceux qui tiennent le pouvoir, et à partir de ce moment, justement, le baroque devient un moyen de subversion, parce qu'il ne peut pas s'attaquer directement à ceux qui ont le pouvoir ; s'il le fait, il va avoir ces gens contre lui. Donc il les dépeint négativement, et à partir de cette façon de décrire les gens, il va faire de la subversion. Par exemple, quand vous prenez dans les ouvrages de Henri Lopes, souvent les hommes politiques sont dépeints très négativement. Ce n'est pas parce qu'il ne les aime pas, mais c'est pour lui l'occasion...

IJ : Il en est un...

JP : Il est un homme politique, mais les hommes politiques qui n'ont pas d'idéaux pour la construction de leur pays. Donc quand ils arrivent au pouvoir, par exemple dans *Le Pleurer-rire*, celui qui est arrivé au pouvoir son objectif c'était se remplir les poches. Voilà, quand il va en mission, il ramasse tout le budget et il s'en va avec, et puis quand il revient si vous voulez faire un coup d'état et puis c'est tout. Non, l'homme politique négatif est dépeint comme étant un être vulgaire avec peu d'instruction, et quand on demande par exemple dans *Le Pleurer-rire* au chef d'état, bon quels sont vos passe-temps favoris ? Il dit qu'il n'a pas de passe-temps, on lui dit quels sont vos hors-vie, il dit qu'il n'a pas d'hors-vie parce que, lui, il travaille tout le temps etc. Donc, on montre qu'il n'est pas très intelligent, c'est quelqu'un qui est grossier et vile. Donc ce personnage qui s'intègre, qui est disproportionné dans un univers baroque que l'auteur essaye de construire harmonieusement, il est comme quelqu'un qui n'est pas tout à fait à sa place. C'est comme s'il devenait une tâche d'huile sur une page de papier. Donc finalement, en le mettant comme ça, ça permet de subvertir et de créer de la subversion autour de ce

personnage et autour de ce qu'il fait pour montrer qu'en réalité c'est un grossier personnage, ce n'est pas un homme politique.

IJ : Je vous remercie...



**Appendix C : Entretien avec Professeur Papa Gueye, Département de Lettres Modernes à l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop à Dakar, Mardi, le 21 juillet, 2009.**

IJ : Je aimerais, justement, vous poser des questions par rapport à l'article que vous avez présenté au colloque « Nouvelles Écritures Francophones » en ce qui concerne un nouveau baroque dans les littératures africaines. Vous avez parlé du roman, surtout celui de Boubacar Boris Diop, notamment *Le Temps de Tamango*. Ce dont vous parlez spécifiquement c'est d'une sorte de transformation du récit historique ou de la fiction historique en histoire fictive, n'est-ce pas ? Comment est-ce que vous voyez la distinction entre ces deux façons de percevoir le monde, en particulier, la réalité historique par rapport à la création d'une autre réalité à travers la production et l'interprétation romanesque que fait Diop dans cet ouvrage ?

PG : C'est à dire, je voulais vous rappeler que *Le Temps de Tamango* est une œuvre qui est publié en 1981, donc il y a bientôt une trentaine d'années, et c'est à une période où la littérature africaine, de manière générale, et la littérature sénégalaise, de manière particulière, avait adopté une forme d'écriture devenue presque classique, c'est à dire, parce qu'éprouvée depuis la fin de la colonisation du point de vue des formes d'écriture et modalités d'écrire, éprouvée aussi du point de vue du contenu c'est à dire des thématiques qui sont abordées. C'était généralement ce qu'on appelait la vingt postcoloniale, c'est-à-dire celles qui s'intéressent aux problèmes de l'Afrique une fois indépendante. Et au Sénégal, beaucoup de romans avaient déjà brodé un peu sur le thème de la gouvernance politique, sur les régimes politiques, sur la contestation de certains mouvements, soit les syndicats ou les étudiants. Et Boris, en publiant son roman, en composant le roman—parce que je rappelle même dans le livre que j'ai eu un long entretien avec lui, j'ai eu la chance de le connaître et d'avoir eu un entretien avec lui parce que je me propose toujours de faire une étude générale de ses cinq romans, ça c'est une parenthèse—donc en écrivant son roman, Boris semblait, par des stratégies respectées, utiliser l'histoire politique du Sénégal comme thème de son roman ; parce que nous voyons que dans la fiction il s'agit essentiellement de l'histoire politique qui avait bouleversé le pays, le monde aussi, mais le pays. Il y a essentiellement les événements de mai 68 qui sont présentés, mais les événements de mai 68 comme un aspect de la contestation du régime politique qui était en place. Et donc, en brodant un peu sur des événements historiques relus par une fiction romanesque, il semblait respecter certaines traditions. Mais c'est dans la manière de respecter cette tradition où se situe tout le subterfuge qui mène vers la destruction de l'Histoire comme fiction. Alors, l'Histoire comme fiction signifie tout simplement que, donné un cadre global vérifié par l'histoire réelle comme discipline, les événements politiques de mai 68, le contexte de l'Afrique indépendante, et peut-être néo-colonisée, ça c'est le cadre de l'histoire, ces éléments servent donc de nourriture immédiate à la fiction. C'est ça qu'on appelle la fiction historique, et elle a une histoire dans la littérature française, puisque le roman historique comme vous le savez très bien, dans la littérature française, a une histoire ; elle est très ancienne. Elle est très ancienne dans la littérature française. Et donc, elle obéissait à certains canons qui voulaient que le reflet ne soit pas respecté, mais qu'il soit transformé

par un regard particulier qui revit les événements historiques, ou, à travers un héros, acteur principal qui est ressuscité dans la fiction avec un autre nom, ou même quelquefois avec le même nom, par exemple que l'on peut trouver chez certains écrivains comme par exemple Stendhal, Balzac, et autres. Donc il semblait le respecter. Il y a des thèmes, des événements, des personnages ou des références qui s'intègrent dans une histoire réelle et qui sont transférés dans le cadre romanesque par une fiction qui les réutilise qui les transforme. Il respecte cette fiction historique. Maintenant, la spécificité de Boris Diop, c'est que dans l'utilisation du cadre historique et de ces éléments, il s'attache à détruire la référentialité de ces éléments là pour en créer d'autres qui ne dépendent, cette fois-ci, que des personnages libres et autonomes qui retrouvent leur réel et leur substance uniquement dans le cadre du récit, c'est-à-dire, dans le cadre de ce qui est raconté par, et on verra, plusieurs auteurs, par le narrateur et plusieurs narrateurs. Donc, c'est ça que j'ai appelé l'histoire fictive, c'est-à-dire, ce n'est plus l'histoire réelle, même transformée qui se retrouve dans le cadre romanesque selon les canons classiques, mais c'est beaucoup plus une invention liée à une imagination qui prend prétexte d'une histoire qu'elle cherche à subvertir et à transformer, et à laquelle elle substitue sa propre histoire, cette fois-ci l'histoire d'une réalité romanesque, l'histoire, j'allais dire, d'un personnage complètement narratif, donc l'histoire littéraire. C'est ça qu'il fait. C'est cette seconde réalité qui prétend respecter la première histoire mais qui, en réalité, est une invention tout à fait autonome qui revient pour détruire les bases de l'histoire mais en les lisant, en les relisant, en plus les déformant par ce qui est le point de vue du personnage tout à fait fictif. Ce n'est que la thèse de Boris Diop, et il le dit quelque part ; c'est qu'en fait, le réel est tout à fait complexe. Il ne peut donc, dans le principe du reflet, être coulé dans le cadre d'un récit ou d'une histoire littéraire. Et la meilleure façon de rendre le réel c'est de le poser comme quelque chose qu'on ne peut pas figer dans une histoire et de lui substituer la réalité d'une imagination autonome et sans bornes.

IJ : Donc, pourrait-on dire, d'une certaine manière, que le récit qu'il invente, qui est l'histoire fictive, est plus réel, plus réaliste que la fiction historique parce qu'il ajoute ce niveau de complexité qui dépasse les formes classiques ?

PG : Il est beaucoup plus complexe. Il est beaucoup plus réaliste du point de vue de la narration, du point de vue du roman. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il y a une sorte de réorganisation de l'histoire selon une conscience qui souhaite la revivre autrement, même en prenant prétexte des acteurs. Donc, c'est ce basculement entre une référentialité certifiée et une conscience libre qui utilise la référentialité comme matière ; c'est ce basculement qui rend possible les dérives de l'histoire, et ces dérives de l'histoire constituent en réalité une histoire fictive parce qu'elle trouve sa complexité, sa cohérence, sa réalité, donc son essence littéraire, dans le cadre, tout simplement, du récit. Une fois déclenchée, elle est complètement coupée de l'histoire du passé. Vous savez que Tamango, on va nous dire vers la fin, qu'en fait, malgré tous ces efforts là, que Tamango c'est un personnage qui est en Afrique du Sud, après avoir passé par Tamango chez Mérimée, parce que Mérimée a fait une nouvelle qui s'appelle « Tamango », après nous

avoir fait comprendre que c'était un ancien vendeur d'esclaves. En fait, on y reviendra, il n'y a pas de certitude et de cohérence des personnages et de leurs caractères.

IJ : Et c'est cela qui fait que l'œuvre soit caractérisée de baroque ?

PG : Alors, ce qui peut faire les caractéristiques patentes baroques de Boris, et renvoyant à un aspect du baroque classique qui est l'exubérance et la mutation, c'est en fait cette polyphonie et cette instabilité des modalités du récit romanesque. C'est aussi cette absence de certitude, l'incertitude et l'incohérence des destins des personnages. Vous savez les personnages dans le *Temps de Tamango*, ils n'ont pas de destin cohérent. Le personnage qui est raconté à un moment donné, il se substitue à celui qui le raconte pour se raconter lui-même, apostrophé, interpellé, celui qui le racontait. Il peut passer d'un destin tragique à un destin honorable, toujours dans le même drame narratif. Donc, il n'y a pas de cohérence de destin. Il n'y a pas non plus de cohérence de leur caractère, de leur propre être. Or, il y a une sorte de mouvement de leur caractère, de mouvement de leur destin. Il y a aussi un subterfuge de leur caractère qui mène vers la complexité et qui renvoie à l'exubérance baroque. Et donc, cette mutation, ce mouvement, et cette captivation exagérée, c'est-à-dire, quand il s'engage pour un objectif, il s'engage complètement jusqu'à faire corps avec ce qu'il cherche et ce qu'il regarde, et ça renvoie aussi à un aspect du baroque, effectivement. Ce qui fait que le baroque est à deux niveaux. Il est au niveau des caractères du récit, dans leurs mouvements généraux. Il y est aussi, au niveau des personnages, dans leur fabrication, dans leur être littéraire ; parce que le personnage, il est fait dans le récit comme il est, et comme il est, il renvoie effectivement à une sorte de, j'allais dire, de portrait baroque.

IJ : Comme ça, il donne corporéité et corpo-réalité à ces personnages ?

PG : Leur réalité, j'allais dire, d'être fictif, ayant un caractère, présentant une sorte de mouvement de mutation, de transmutation, et qui font que nous retrouvons ces aspects liés à l'exubérance, au mouvement, mais à l'instabilité.

IJ : Et cette instabilité se reflète également dans l'instabilité de la narration ?

PG : C'est exactement cela, parce que la narration n'est jamais portée et assumée de manière continue par un seul narrateur, et l'interprétation, ce que j'appelle l'écriture critique, l'interprétation du narrateur, que le narrateur fait du lecteur ou du personnage qui le suit, ce sont tout simplement l'inscription dans l'œuvre de Boris de modalités complexes qui consistent à vouloir poser une question fondamentale qui est que la perception de l'histoire que je lis moi lecteur, c'est-à-dire, le regard que je dois porter sur l'histoire. Ce regard-là peut me donner une compréhension de lisibilité sereine, mais elle est toujours à refaire, elle est toujours instable et incertaine. Donc, la perception du texte, elle n'est jamais figée. Elle est dans une construction complexe qui va du postulat que ce que je lis est plus complexe que la référentialité. C'est ça la complexité du baroque aussi, c'est-à-dire, le texte que je lis est plus complexe que la réalité qu'il évoque. C'est un

aspect important du baroque littéraire, parce que vous savez, Montaigne, la manière d'écrire de Montaigne, il y a un processus chez Boris, c'est cette tentation, c'est l'entassement et l'accumulation du style par rapport aux choses qu'on rend. Ce qu'on retrouve chez Montaigne, il n'y a pas d'ordre, c'est à dire l'organisation du désordre, comment le désordre est organisé, mais organisé selon la référentialité du récit qui l'apporte, donc du texte qui le dit, ce qu'on trouve dans les essais de Montaigne, parce que l'intitulé n'est pas en harmonie avec le contenu. Il passe du coq à l'âne, c'est à dire qu'il passe d'une histoire inachevée à une autre qui commence. Il articule, enchevêtre des histoires. Nous retrouvons cela à travers l'alternance du récit référencé du roman et les notes du second narrateur, qui va se retrouver finalement d'ailleurs comme un personnage. Donc ce phénomène d'accumulation, d'interchangeabilité, c'est-à-dire on échange, on passe du statut de narrateur à celui de personnage et du statut de personnage à celui de narrateur, constitue, en fait, des phénomènes de transmutation qui marquent le mouvement.

IJ : Vous avez mentionné que l'œuvre est plus complexe que la réalité qu'elle évoque. Je pense au tableau baroque de Velasquez...

PG : Oui, vous l'avez évoqué. Malheureusement je ne connais pas ce tableau, mais je connais l'architecture baroque, j'ai visité des palais avec les dessins en France qui reviennent de la période baroque, les façades de châteaux, etc. Vous savez, le regard interprétatif porté sur les œuvres d'art baroques, l'architecture baroque, est un regard qui est fasciné parce que, tout simplement, c'est un regard qui retrouve à l'intérieur même de l'œuvre beaucoup plus qu'il n'y avait.

IJ : C'est ça, justement. Le portrait auquel je réfère est un portrait d'un peintre qui est en train de peindre un portrait de quelque chose qui est en dehors du tableau. C'est-à-dire, quand je regarde le tableau, je vois le peintre qui fait face à moi et qui peint, et je vois l'arrière fond de la toile, et derrière le peintre, il y a toute une scène...

PG : On représente ce qui n'est pas visible normalement, ce qu'il y a derrière la toile. Voilà, en fait ; c'est le même. Vous avez exactement raison, c'est le même phénomène que l'on voit ici. C'est l'arrière plan du récit. La question des points de vue. Ce qu'il y a derrière la tête du narrateur, et aussi, les têtes des personnages.

IJ : C'est le processus de la création elle-même d'une certaine manière ?

PG : C'est lié au processus, c'est lié aux modalités du récit, comment le récit est organisé. Vous savez, l'auteur lui-même, le point de vue de l'auteur est souvent porté par plusieurs narrateurs. Ça aussi c'est très important. On voit souvent que c'est souvent N'Dongo qui porte le point de vue de l'auteur, quelques fois c'est Kader, et vice-versa. Donc, il y a ce phénomène qui est très important. Mais il y a à considérer, dans le cadre du baroque, cet inachèvement du récit, en fait, qui ne fait qu'accentuer l'écoulement du livre, l'écoulement de l'écriture. En fait, quand vous regardez les dernières notes, parce que ce

qui est paradoxal, c'est que le roman s'achève par les notes, par les notes du second narrateur. Et c'est une façon aussi de postuler une possible suite du récit. Donc, on n'arrête pas ce phénomène d'écoulement du récit, on le postule comme continue, mais on ne le dit pas, on ne l'écrit pas. C'est aussi un aspect du baroque qui est l'inachèvement, et ça se voit dans cet aspect-là.

IJ : Donc pour revenir à la relation entre la manière dont il aborde l'histoire, avec cette stylistique baroque, quel est l'effet sur la perception du lecteur des événements historiques ? C'est-à-dire, en lisant le roman de Boris Diop, si le lecteur reconnaît d'une certaine manière les événements historiques, est-ce que ça crée vraiment un sentiment non seulement plus ambigu, mais plus profond des événements ? Parce que quand on étudie l'histoire, les événements sont présentés de façon très précise, très claire, mais ceci ne reflète pas du tout les événements réels : les dates, les chiffres, les personnages, ce n'est pas comme ça que ça a été vécu. Donc, dans l'œuvre de Boris Diop, dans la manière dont il représente les choses comme inter-croisées, infinies, inachevées, est-ce que cela fait que le lecteur comprend d'une manière plus proche, plus dans le domaine du vécu ?

PG : Plus réaliste. Oui. Je crois qu'il y a un aspect affectif et idéologique très important. L'aspect affectif, c'est que le lecteur adhère beaucoup plus à l'histoire qu'il lit, du point de vue subjectif, c'est-à-dire qu'il est beaucoup plus convaincu par ce qu'il lit. Pourquoi ? Parce que, en fait, on lui montre que la réalité de départ, est en fait quelque chose de sans âme, c'est-à-dire quelque chose qui n'est pas vivant, et qu'en fait, ce qu'on lui insuffle pour l'attirer est beaucoup plus fort et supérieur à la réalité. Et vous savez, quelque part, il dit ceci, N'Dongo dit ceci à Kader : "Je les ai laissés un soir sur le quai de cette gare, là à quelques mètres de moi, leur faisant des signes de la main. Et lorsque je suis revenu sur mes pas, Jeanne et Kader qui étaient étroitement enlacés ne gardaient plus que de vagues souvenirs l'un de l'autre. De qui se moque-t-on ? Qui se moque de nous ? Seuls les horaires des trains ne changent pas... Rien à faire, plus jamais Kader ne retrouvera Jeanne. Jeanne s'est mariée avec une huile particulièrement grasse du parti. Kader s'amuse à bourrer ses tiroirs de pièces de théâtre, poèmes, romans, dont le dernier *Le Temps de Tamango* – un titre qui ne veut rien dire –, prétend raconter ma vie du dedans" (158). C'est le personnage qui apostrophe maintenant le narrateur, et il dit ceci : "il est un peu ridicule mon ami Kader, mais il ne s'en aperçoit. C'est toujours ainsi. Alors, comme ça tu t'installes à ta table de travail, et tu me fous dans des situations impossibles d'ailleurs, que je ne m'appelle pas N'Dongo Thiam, tu le sais parfaitement. N'est-ce pas ? Fatigué de jouer au narrateur, ce paumé qui, dans certains romans, se tape derrière les autres pour leur faire raconter n'importe quoi. Quand t'apercevas-tu de la vanité de ton entreprise ? Tu ne réussiras jamais à camper tout le décor. Plus tu t'acharnes à coller au réel, plus ta laborieuse mécanique sonne faux et dérisoire, parce que, justement, mon pauvre Kader, tu n'es pas l'immense Gabriel Marquez" (159). Il cite Gabriel Marquez, et après il va pour dire que, "Si tu va aller loin Kader, sache que le vrai roman sera sans ellipse, quelques milieux de pages pour montrer Tamango en train de servir son café au général François Navarro" (160). Tamango a été dans l'œuvre, etc. etc. Pour dire quoi ? Pour dire que la déstabilisation du réel, c'est à dire de l'histoire, de la fiction historique

de départ, engendre une sorte de fiction, une autre réalité qui génère une sorte de complicité entre le narrateur et le lecteur, et c'est cela qui fonde, j'allais dire, une certaine esthétique qui fait que le lecteur va finalement participer à la poursuite de l'histoire dont il devient maintenant un des responsables. Je crois que c'est ça la question de l'interprétation. Le lecteur est responsable en partie de la signification qu'il va se faire du contenu. Et le deuxième élément, la deuxième étape, c'est qu'une fois cette relation établie, il revient pour lire l'histoire d'une certaine manière, d'une autre manière, avec les notes déjà, mais aussi, le lecteur sénégalais il revoit l'histoire d'une autre manière. Pour dire tout simplement, l'histoire fictive est beaucoup plus complexe que la fiction historique, que l'histoire de départ. Et on a inscrit dans l'ensemble des modalités du récit stable, classique, et formel tous les éléments qui concourent à bâtir. Et c'est à ces deux niveaux-là qu'il faut voir le baroque chez Boris Diop. C'est d'abord dans les modalités du récit qui suscite cette complexité, cet entassement, cette incertitude, et ces mutations entrecroisées, et c'est aussi au niveau même de l'interchangeabilité des postures romanesques, c'est à dire des narrateurs qui deviennent personnages, et des personnages qui deviennent des narrateurs, et c'est aussi dans leur destin et dans leurs caractères, dans ceux qui sont dans la fiction historique.

IJ : Je me demande si, dans cette façon de prendre le lecteur à l'intérieur de l'œuvre, de l'impliquer et de le faire travailler à lire attentivement et à apporter ses propres idées à l'œuvre, il y a un aspect didactique à cette pratique romanesque ?

PG : Effectivement, il y a un aspect didactique. D'ailleurs c'est une pratique qu'on retrouve dans le seizième siècle, par exemple, dans les romans de Rabelais, mais lui, il le faisait dans les préfaces, dans les prétextes, les avis au lecteur, les postfaces où il l'interpellait. Je pense au prologue de *Gargantua* de Rabelais. Je pense aussi à certains textes de Montaigne quand Montaigne postule une image du lecteur, ce qu'il appelle l'intelligent lecteur. Quand Rabelais, Érasme parle du lecteur qui a du nez, c'est-à-dire, qui a du flair, qui continue à aider le lecteur à la prise en charge de la signification du texte. L'aspect didactique, c'est que ce principe d'intégration du lecteur dans l'écriture est une manière de forger un protocole de lecture de l'œuvre, donc des modalités de perception et de lisibilité. Le lecteur est formé à être complice de l'auteur. Une fois qu'il entre dans le jeu, il devient un aspect, un acteur qui joue, et cet aspect là est formatif, cet aspect-là est didactique. Vous avez parfaitement raison. Et c'est aussi, je crois, une posture idéologique de l'auteur, puisque l'auteur voulait changer les mentalités de ces lecteurs, il voulait changer aussi la manière de voir l'histoire nationale. C'est tout à fait didactique. La nouveauté ici, on parle des nouvelles formes d'écriture, la nouveauté ici, c'est que ce n'est plus dans la thématique, ce n'est plus de manière, j'allais dire, pédagogique directe où on forme le lecteur de façon magistrale, comme le professeur demande, donc une certaine condescendance, il est supérieur, l'auteur devient supérieur au lecteur, non ! Le lecteur est désormais considéré comme un complice, égale, partenaire, qui convoie à se faire une opinion personnelle et complice. Et de ce point de vue là, il y a un changement de vision, mais aussi engendrement de procès.

IJ : Le “baroque mondialisé” selon Édouard Glissant, c’est une manière de vivre la diversité du monde. Donc, ça ne fait pas seulement qu’il y a une histoire du monde, le mondialisme, le mondialité. Plutôt, c’est beaucoup plus complexe. Donc, la question que je voulais poser par rapport à cette idée est la suivante: est-ce qu’il y a une relation entre la pratique esthétique, telle que fait Boris Diop, où il prend la réalité et la représente avec beaucoup plus de complexité, de différents niveaux, de différentes voix, donc est-ce qu’il y a un parallèle entre ceci et une certaine manière de vivre le monde de façon où il y a vraiment une relation, une complicité, disons une lecture du monde, là où le spectateur ou le lecteur ou le citoyen participe activement dans la création des réalités quotidiennes qui sont vraiment diversifiées et compliquées ?

PG : Oui, oui, je crois qu’il y a certainement un aspect similaire qui est très important ici, qui rejoint la volonté d’enseigner, la volonté didactique. C’est que pour Boris Diop, la réalité telle qu’elle se présente ne peut être jamais enfermée dans un carcan rationnel. Par exemple, quand il dit quelque part, “accepte que les gens, pendant quatre-vingt-dix ans, se parlaient et ils se rendent compte que c’est pas ce qu’ils ont voulu dire.” Pendant quatre-vingt-dix ans, on s’est battu et on se rend compte, qu’en fait, on s’était trompé, ce n’est pas ce que nous voulions dire. Il faut l’accepter. Qu’en fait, un bic qui tombe, c’est banal, mais peut être, il y a plus de complexité en cela, que dans cela, par exemple, on se rencontre, etc. Alors le problème ici c’est la responsabilisation de la vision, et je pense que c’est très important, c’est-à-dire, la responsabilisation de celui qui établit la relation énumérée. C’est très important. Cette relation libre de l’individu prend le pas maintenant sur la réalité perçue, c’est-à-dire, les modalités de perception prennent le dessus de l’objet perçu. Ça, c’est un premier élément. Le deuxième élément, c’est la subjectivité, c’est-à-dire, ce que l’individu est réellement, comme affection, prend le dessus aussi sur l’influence de l’extérieur. Autrement dit ici, la pluralité des caractères est posée comme une voie incontournable pour la compréhension du monde. Autrement dit, c’est la question de la diversité, non pas culturelle seulement, parce qu’à l’intérieure de la société sénégalaise, si vous lisez *Les Tambours de la Mémoire*, on a deux narrateurs qui sont plus ou moins des époux qui font des narrations communes, et souvent des narrations contradictoires. Donc, dans la même culture, dans la même famille, il peut y avoir cette diversité. Et donc, cette diversité n’est plus d’ordre culturel ou national, un pays contre un autre ou un bloc contre un autre, mais cette diversité devient positive quand on la cherche entre les individus même, et ça permet de transcender la question de la peau, la question de la race, la question de la culture, pour établir quoi ? Une communauté intellectuelle. Et effectivement, dans ce sens-là, on peut considérer qu’il y a une sorte de mondialisation de cette perception qui accepte comme donnée premier, la complexité du réel par rapport à sa propre perception et qui accepte surtout cette autonomie de ces perceptions et leur légitimité, donc il n’y a pas de perceptions supérieures par rapport à d’autres, mais il y a des perceptions plus cohérentes par rapport à d’autres.

IJ : Le fait que la réalité objective, en effet, disparaît ou se dissout dans plusieurs réalités subjectives, intersubjectives, et pourrait-on dire en même temps intra-subjectives ...

PG : Intra-subjectives, parce qu'il faut la vivre à l'intérieur, et c'est cette réalité nouvelle qui permet de réorganiser en retour la réalité objective en synergie, c'est-à-dire, avec une sorte d'orchestre.

IJ : Est-ce qu'il y a, disons, une façon d'appliquer cette idéologie à la société, à la vie sociale, à l'économie ou les matières... ?

PG : C'est-à-dire, le comportement, quelle est l'incidence sociale ?

IJ : Oui, est-ce qu'il y en a ?

PG : Vous savez, dans le livre, il y a quand même une vision sociale, parce que le triomphe ici, c'est en fait celui d'une minorité qui, par la particularité de cette vision qui est de cette nouvelle manière de s'organiser, a pu établir le bonheur de la collectivité, parce que nous sommes en 2063, et en 2063 il y a une république qui est établie, de partage, de bonheur, et d'opulence, où en fait, il s'agit maintenant de refaire l'itinéraire qui part de 1968 à 2063. Donc il y a un projet politique qui est ici, qui est postulé et qui a été atteint. De la même manière, on peut effectivement supposer que cette nouvelle vie complète qui prend les traits d'un baroque subjectif des personnages, dessine aussi une sorte de parti social où les gens seraient acceptés et considérés au même niveau, du point de vue du vécu quotidien, mais surtout du point de vue de leurs perceptions intellectuelles ; parce que c'est sur quoi il insiste : surtout c'est la vision, la perception de l'individu dans son autonomie, dans sa liberté, et c'est là qu'il doit, en retour, revenir pour réorganiser le réel. C'est la réaction de l'itinéraire rationnel classique auquel on avait la réputation.

IJ : Donc cette postulation d'une utopie future, et le fait qu'à partir de là, le récit consiste en une récupération de certains éléments du passé, est-ce que c'est une tentative de démontrer la nécessité de vraiment comprendre, disons, les faits historiques, de les comprendre, de les retravailler plusieurs fois pour en faire sortir des leçons ou des façons de faire qui sont différentes pour accéder à cette utopie qui est postulé très loin dans le futur, ou bien de l'autre côté, est-ce que cette utopie sert seulement de rêve inaccessible ?

PG : Oui, il y a une fonction critique. L'utopie a une fonction satirique. Parce qu'en fait, il s'agit bien d'une utopie, parce que la République postulée en 2063 et qui est présentée comme une république socialiste populaire, etc., est une république utopique. De ce point de vue la, elle sert tout simplement à regarder la république actuelle. Donc, la fonction satirique critique de dénonciation de la réalité est là. C'est pourquoi je disais que la fiction qui est créée ici permet de revenir sur l'histoire réelle, c'est à dire sur la veine historique, pour la relire autrement, mais en fait, c'est pour la détruire. Donc, il y a le principe de l'utopie, parce qu'on gomme toutes les traces du temps, parce que l'utopie n'est nulle part. Et l'utopie, c'est aussi le rêve lointain qui est postulé comme un vécu possible. Et c'est cette façon de construire l'utopie qui permet de postuler le présent comme négatif. Donc il y a une fonction critique. Mais il y a aussi une autre fonction :



l'appel à un optimisme qui va être cette fois-ci le fruit d'une invention, c'est à dire, l'esprit inventif de l'être humain est un des facteurs du changement et de la transformation. C'est très clair, parce que dans *Les Tambours* c'est flagrant, parce que dans *Les Tambours*, c'est Fadel, un personnage obsédé par l'histoire d'une héroïne plus ou moins oubliée, en fait, qui va finir par susciter la révolution qui va libérer du maréchal général Adelesio. Et donc, ce n'est qu'une obstination subjective qui conduit à une transformation radicale d'une réalité non-désirée. Donc il y a cette éducation du lecteur, et il y a aussi cet appel au changement de mentalité, parce qu'en 80, Boris Diop faisait parti des gens qui brodaient pour un retour à l'identité culturelle nationale et à la libération mentale par rapport à l'idéologie française, à l'idéologie coloniale. Et parce que pour lui la libération politique est faite, il reste maintenant la plus difficile des libérations, la libération mentale. Donc le roman s'intégrait dans un contexte de combat, cette fois-ci qui n'est plus un combat politique avec des partis, mais un combat avec l'intelligence. Là c'est tout à fait juste.

IJ : Est-ce que, d'une façon peut être ironique, la manière dont il détruit le roman à plusieurs reprises, il le déconstruit, même dans le passage que vous avez cité ? Est-ce que c'est ironique qu'il a été si bien reçu ? C'est un écrivain très célèbre, très connu dans le milieu international...

PG : ... Qui n'a pas eu le succès au début, parce qu'en 1980 quand il a publié *Le Temps de Tamango*, le roman était déroutant, parce que les lecteurs n'étaient pas habitués. C'était complexe, c'était compliqué, c'était neuf, c'était nouveau. C'était par la suite qu'il allait faire sa réputation. Il va faire sa réputation, comme vous avez dit, à partir de l'extérieur : surtout avec le deuxième roman, *Les Tambours de la Mémoire* qui va gagner le prix Président de la République. Il y a *Le Cavalier et son Ombre* aussi qui a eu le prix Top ; *Les Traces de la meute*, et son dernier roman qui est vraiment sur le Rwanda, etc. Donc il va faire sa route après parce que les intellectuels de l'université vont se saisir de l'œuvre comme étant une œuvre novatrice, comme étant le signe d'une vingt romanesque qui était en train de naître en Afrique et qui enterrait la vieille veine héritée de la colonisation que les romans de l'indépendance avaient adoptée.

IJ : Pour en sortir un tout petit peu, et parler en termes plus générales, avec l'œuvre de Boris Diop, y a-t-il d'autres écrivains de la littérature africaine que vous considérez comme s'étant plus ou moins adaptés à une esthétique ou un style plutôt baroque ?

PG : Vous savez comme je vous avais dit au début, je ne suis pas spécialiste, c'est pour ça que je vous ai envoyé à M. Ly. Je ne suis pas spécialiste de littératures africaines. J'ai eu à travailler sur Boris Diop parce que c'était vraiment nouveau, ça m'intéressait beaucoup, et dans le cadre de ce colloque avec l'Université de Montréal, et j'ai eu à faire des publications sur lui parce que ça m'intéressait ponctuellement. Mais je crois que vous avez tout un ensemble d'écrivains ; vous citez Sony Labou Tansi je crois, Henri Lopes dans *Le Pleurer-rire*, il y a aussi la romancière ivoirienne, Véronique Tadjo, il y a aussi la romancière gabonaise dont j'oublie le nom, donc pour dire qu'aujourd'hui et depuis les

années 80 le renouvellement de cette veine dont M. Ly vous avait parlé se dessine plus ou moins. Même au Sénégal, nous avons des écrivains qui ont plus ou moins adopté une autre forme d'écriture ; dans ce cadre là je pense à Cheikh Aliou Ndao par exemple, qui avait commencé, avec son premier roman par exemple, *Excellence vos épouses*, qui revient un peu sur la question de la critique des régimes politiques, mais par des modalités effectivement nouvelles ici, parce que c'est à partir du vécu familial des dirigeants qu'il met en scène, d'une certaine manière, l'œuvre par rapport à la mission et à l'intérêt national. Mais je crois qu'avec M. Ly, vous pouviez en revenir un peu en profondeur.

IJ : D'accord, merci. La dernière fois qu'on s'est rencontré vous avez mentionné que vous avez travaillé sur la question de la folie dans la littérature. Et donc, avant de terminer, je voulais revenir à cette question un tout petit peu parce que c'est quelque chose que je trouve très intéressant, et j'en ai parlé, justement, un peu avec Amadou Ly hier. Il me semble que cette idée de la folie, en tant que pratique littéraire, pas nécessairement d'être fou, mais peut être de paraître fou, en tant que révolte contre la rationalité, la linéarité, la logique, tous ces ordres qui sont généralement considérés comme classiques, peut être très intéressante. Donc, je vous laisse la parole pour en dire ce que vous voulez.

PG : Vous savez, en fait, que tous les personnages de Boris Diop, les personnages principaux du premier roman, *Le Temps de Tamango*, du deuxième, *Les Tambours de la Mémoire*, du troisième, *Le Cavalier et son Ombre*, à un moment donné ont été considérés comme fous. Si vous relisez *Les Tambours de la Mémoire*, je vous parlais de Fadel, cet obstiné de la Reine Johanna, etc., en fait, sa propre famille, parce qu'il est le fils d'un milliardaire très en vue dans le pays, et qu'il abandonne études et tout pour aller dans le Wissombo, retrouver l'image et l'histoire d'une reine perdue par le temps, etc. À un moment donné, ses parents, tout le monde, considéraient qu'il avait perdu la raison comme vous le dites. Vous savez que la question de la folie par rapport à la sagesse est une question classique depuis l'Antiquité gréco-romaine. La folie et la sagesse constituaient une sorte de pélot qui échangeait beaucoup de jeux. Je n'insiste pas là-dessus parce qu'il y a eu beaucoup de choses qui ont été dites, particulièrement *L'Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* de Foucault qui est un texte très fondateur. Mais ce que je veux dire, c'est que, dans la représentation de la folie, il y a ce qu'on appelle la sagesse folle et la folie sage. La folie sage est une représentation ironique de la sagesse, c'est à dire, c'est cette folie simulée qui est posée comme un masque. Nous avons cela dans la culture africaine, dans les romans africains. C'est quand la marginalité affichée constitue la voie la plus sûre pour accéder à une vérité non-partagée ou non-révélee, ce qui fait que le fou pour la communauté c'est le premier à accéder à un vrai qui n'est pas encore partagé. C'est celui qui postule la marginalité, c'est à dire qui ne fait pas comme le commun et qui adopte une voix singulière. Ça peut être cela. Mais dans le cadre même de l'histoire de la folie, il a cette dichotomie que l'on retrouve dans les livres de la Chrétienté, parce que saint Paul a beaucoup parlé de ce qu'il appelle la folie christique, la folie du Christ. Et ce qu'on appelait dans l'histoire littéraire à partir du seizième siècle, la

furie poétique, que Rimbaud et Baudelaire vont récupérer avec toutes ses folies chez Rimbaud, c'est l'accès à des mondes extraordinaires de lumière et de savoir que le commun et mondain ne peuvent pas comprendre, ne peuvent pas retenir. Donc, c'est cette folie qui est une sorte d'acquisition d'une sagesse individuelle à partir d'une perception de la vie particulière et vraie ; en fait, qui est souvent représentée dans le roman africain, pour terminer. Si on prend *L'Aventure Ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane, il y a une sorte de complicité insoupçonnée et en faite déroutante entre Thierno qui est le maître du vrai et de la parole de la sagesse, et le fou, ce qui laisse supposer une sorte de communauté. Ils partagent quelque chose que la communauté ne comprend pas. Ils partagent donc cette forme de sagesse supérieure qui est le mépris des choses terrestres, qui est la folie christique, qui est la folie religieuse, la folie supérieure en réalité. Vous allez chez *Sous l'Orage* de Seydou Badian, Thier Fall Konaté Diouf est un personnage qui réorganise les conclusions de la communauté des sages face au mariage, face aux mutations que, par la suite, il va subir. Il est perçu comme déréglé par les gens de sa génération, mais comme sage par la communauté des sages. On peut faire cette série de personnages, particulièrement dans la littérature africaine, pour dire tout simplement que la dichotomie ou la dualité classique qui était là, c'est-à-dire une folie qui symbolise la sagesse, parce que dans la marque, excusez-moi, dans le masque de la véritable connaissance et du savoir qui est la voie de l'humilité que le sage prend pour se dire, et une folie qui est la folie démente, clinique qui est le dérèglement, l'absence de la rationalité, etc., il y a cette possibilité. Maintenant, les personnages supérieurs, et ceux qui voient en général, au-delà de la perception mondaine sont souvent perçus comme des marginaux, or la marginalité est souvent une modalité de composition littéraire.

IJ : Oui, tout à fait, et le personnage dans *Le Temps de Tamango*, le personnage de N'Dongo justement c'est un tel personnage qui est biologiste ou scientifique ?

PG : Il est tout, il est historien, il est écrivain aussi parce que, vous savez, quand il rencontrait l'étudiant qui fait du cinéma, il demandait à son théâtre, il dit "vous en faites ce que vous voulez" etc., donc il est tout.

IJ : Et à un certain point, il abandonne, n'est-ce pas, sa carrière scientifique ?

PG : Il abandonne tout pour aller se faire boy d'abord. Oui ! Ses parents disent qu'il est fou. Oui, c'est ce qu'on dit, que vraiment il a perdu la raison, avec la raison, parce que les lieux communs du comportement doivent être respectés dans le cadre d'une société qui est réglée et réglementée. Donc, le refus du règlement social entraîne une caractérisation qui va de soi, c'est que vous sortez de la rationalité, vous sortez de la raison, donc vous êtes fou. Alors que c'est une vision supérieure et a priori désintéressée qui guide ce comportement là et fait que l'individu, le personnage, est perçu comme hors norme.

IJ : Oui, tout à fait, mais je vous pose la question, dans le roman, est-ce que, à la fin N'Dongo n'est pas, dans sa folie, revendiqué d'une certaine manière, parce qu'à la fin

n'accède-t-il pas à un certain statut, non pas héroïque, mais respectable. On comprend, en effet, que sa "folie" est vraiment quelque chose justement qui est au-delà des règles ?

PG : Oui, c'est ça, il atteint une sagesse supérieure, et la folie n'était ici qu'un tremplin, mais aussi une perception de l'autre. Parce qu'en fait, ce qui est important, c'est l'autre qui perçoit N'Dongo comme déréglé, du point de vue social comme du point de vue littéraire, parce qu'à l'intérieur du roman son personnage l'interprète souvent comme quelqu'un qui est cinglé. Mais la fin de l'itinéraire de N'Dongo confirme, en fait, que c'était quelqu'un qui possédait une vision supérieure qui devait détruire les normes établies, se construire, mais surtout avoir une réalité vivable.

IJ : Et je me demande si en même temps, les personnages qui sont présents dans le roman, le général Navarro par exemple, et d'autres membres de la société, les normaux, si en même temps, ils ne sont pas renversés, démontrés d'une certaine manière que c'est eux, les vrais fous ?

PG : Oui, il les représente comme des êtres désincarnés. Vous savez, même le président, il n'a pas de nom. Il s'appelle, le président, des ministres, c'est le ministre de l'intérieur, c'est le ministre de la communication... Le maréchal François Navarro, il est formé, parce que je le dis dans l'étude, Boris me l'a expliqué une fois chez lui, que c'est français de Navarre, parce qu'il voulait un représentant de l'ex-colonisateur pour continuer à jouer un certain rôle, parce que ce sont les conseillers de nos présidents qui donc, indirectement dans la perception de Boris, continuent le même travail qu'au temps de la colonie.

IJ : C'est ce qu'on appelle la néo-colonisation.

PG : La néo-colonisation, c'est ça. C'est pourquoi il les représente comme des êtres désincarnés, mais surtout des sortes de robots qui n'existaient que par leurs fonctions. D'ailleurs, le ministre de la communication ne pouvait pas tenir une conversation avec les journalistes dans sa conférence de presse parce qu'il était réglé comme une machine pour dire des choses, et une fois que c'est épuisé, il ne pouvait dire autre chose. Donc pour répondre à toutes les questions, il dit, "Il est temps, il fait chaud, il est temps de mettre fin à la conférence."

IJ : Comme ça ?

PG : Comme ça. Il avait raison.

IJ : Oui, c'est très intéressant ça. Voilà. Bon, je vous remercie.

PG : C'est moi qui vous remercie, aussi, parce que vous m'avez poussé un peu à revenir sur des choses que j'avais laissées depuis une décennie quand même. Ça me change un peu, et je crois que je vous souhaite bon succès...

**Appendix D :** Entretien avec Professeur Ibra Diene, Chef du Département de Lettres Modernes à l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop à Dakar, Mardi, le 7 juillet, 2009.

IJ : Vous remarquez chez les poétesses sénégalaises un conformisme avec la vie réelle dans le sens que celles-ci s'apprêtent à représenter dans leur poésie la matière du quotidien vécu, mais d'une façon que vous avez identifiée de baroque. Vous semblez suggérer que c'est plutôt dans la forme et le fond qui s'entrecroisent—dans « la dissonance entre la banalité du contenu et la solennité de l'expression »—que se situe le baroque ? C'est ça ?

ID: Non, pas du tout, parce que, vous savez, les poètes en général, ils voient autrement le réel. Quand Apollinaire dit qu'elle est belle la guerre, ou quand tu trouves que les bombardements lors de la première guerre mondiale se sont diffusés, quand tu trouves que le bombardement d'une forêt c'est une balle, c'est évidemment une sublimation. C'est une façon autre de voir la réalité. Et les poétesses également. Ce qui est banal et quotidien chez vous, ce qui est vulgaire et ne mérite peut être aucune attention, est pour elles, pour ces poétesses, quelque chose de particulièrement intéressant au point de susciter le rôle du langage chez elles. C'est peut être dû aussi à la sensibilité des femmes. Et j'ai voulu aussi dans cet article montrer que les femmes, par rapport à certaines réalités sociales, sont plus sensibles peut être que les autres. C'est ce que je me suis attaché un peu à faire. Oui.

IJ : Vous avez mentionné Apollinaire, et avec celui-là, vous avez parlé également des surréalistes et de dadaïstes. Est-ce que vous voyez dans ces mouvements artistiques au début du vingtième siècle, ou au milieu du vingtième siècle, est-ce que vous y voyez aussi un certain baroque dans cette mise à l'écart d'une réalité dans une expression qui reprend la réalité mais, comme vous semblez suggérer, d'une autre façon.

ID : Oui, évidemment, j'ai fait des rapprochements entre le surréalisme dans ce qu'il a de saugrenu dans son inspiration et dans ce qu'il y a de quotidien dans son langage, et une sorte de détournement qui fait que même le quotidien peut être poétique. J'ai fait souvent des rapprochements avec la littérature africaine, surtout avec la poésie africaine, et ici particulièrement cela est possible avec la poésie des femmes dont les thèmes sont également le saugrenu, le vulgaire, et peut être même, disons-le, ce qui est quotidien. Alors, est-ce que les surréalistes développent aussi un certain baroque dans leur écriture ? Je pense, oui, dans la mesure où leur point de départ c'est peut être de détruire l'intellect pour réhabiliter l'imagination en passant par évidemment un bouleversement du langage poétique. Les surréalistes comme les dada avaient pour ambition de détruire le langage de la littérature pour faire du langage quotidien un langage littéraire, et ça c'est une entreprise baroque évidemment. C'est là que j'ai trouvé un certain baroque, et c'est la raison pour laquelle je fais souvent des comparaisons de ce genre.

IJ : D'accord, c'est très intéressant. Vous citez en grande partie la poésie de Kiné Fall, n'est pas ?

ID : Oui. Kiné Kirama Fall, oui.

IJ : Et un poème que vous abordez est justement sa reprise d'un poème de Baudelaire, « Élévation », c'est ça ? J'ai trouvé cela intéressant à deux niveaux. D'abord, que pouvez-vous me dire par rapport à ce presque plagiat ? Parce que vous avez bien noté qu'elles essayent d'éviter le plagiat, en faisant de sorte que ce soit bien évident qu'il s'agit d'une reprise de quelque chose d'autre, d'une tradition qui est un peu étranger, c'est-à-dire le dix-neuvième siècle de Baudelaire. Est-cela aussi une forme de baroque, dans l'idée qu'elles refusent d'écrire en préférant plutôt la transcription ?

ID : Oui, et vous savez, il y a un poète français très célèbre, Louis Aragon, qui disait qu'il se méfie de la prétention à ne pas imiter, et il disait que le grand poète ce n'est pas celui qui n'imité personne, mais celui que personne ne peut imiter. Et évidemment, les jeunes poétesses aussi ont été influencées par leurs études et par ce qu'elles connaissent de la littérature. Vous savez que Baudelaire a beaucoup influencé aussi la poésie moderne. Et il y a aussi Senghor, et pour Kiné Kirama Fall d'ailleurs la préface a été faite par Senghor, la préface du livre que je cite. Alors, il y a donc ces influences, mais ça n'enlève pas à leur mérite puisque cette imitation du poème de Baudelaire c'est une forme de transcription certes, mais de réécriture puisqu'elle n'a peut être pas les mêmes objectifs. Vous savez que les grands écrivains peuvent faire aussi des variantes et des variations sur un thème. Vous connaissez des écrivains comme Marguerite Duras qui prennent un fait divers et qui écrivent trois livres différents sur le même fait divers. Évidemment donc, tous les grands poètes aussi, il leur arrive de prendre d'autres textes et peut être de les remodeler à leur façon. C'est une forme, certes, de transcription, comme c'est dit, de la littérature traditionnelle. Si vous prenez la dernière section du poème de Senghor par exemple, vous verrez que c'est la transcription de la culture traditionnelle. Mais dans cette transcription il apporte sa sensibilité de poète. Évidemment, le style, comme la forme en général, est poétisé, la roue des connaissances du poète sont réintégrés dans le texte, sa sensibilité, et c'est ça qui fait évidemment le grand poète. Pour Kiné Kirama Fall également, il y a certes une reprise du thème de Baudelaire, une sorte de retranscription du thème de Baudelaire, mais peut être c'est une façon aussi d'étaler sa sensibilité qui rencontre celle de Baudelaire et je pense que c'est aussi une forme de baroque que de se dire « je peux évidemment reprendre quelqu'un et faire apte d'originalité ». C'est une forme de baroque que d'écrire un poème à partir du poème de quelqu'un d'autre, c'est-à-dire de reprendre tout simplement l'existant et de prétendre faire l'œuvre de création.

IJ : Merci. Dans cette tentative de reprendre l'ancien et d'en faire du nouveau, est-ce qu'il y a un parallèle entre, par exemple au début de la modernité les écrivains ou les peintres baroques qui ont justement repris les traditions de l'Antiquité—les dieux et les déesses de l'Empire Romain défunt, par exemple—ces éléments de la culture antique classique, et les ont renouvelés en les mélangeant avec les nouvelles formes du monde chrétien à l'époque. Donc, de manière peut être pas identique, mais analogique, est-ce ce que font

ces écrivains et ces écrivaines “baroques” de l’Afrique francophone : une tentative de reprise des formes de la littérature française, de les renouveler et de les mélanger avec des formes d’une littérature africaine qui est en train de re-naître ?

ID : Oui. Il est possible de remarquer ça. Votre remarque est tout à fait juste quand vous liez ça au début de la modernité, mais ce n’est pas propre à cette époque. C’est une pratique de la littérature. C’est une pratique de la littérature. Vous savez, on dit qu’il n’y a pas de génération spontanée en littérature, et que même ce qui paraît être tout à fait nouveau est peut être lié au passé. En réalité, ce qu’on a fait en Afrique et au début du siècle, c’était devant le quotidien, devant la mode, devant la pensée dominante, de trouver des moyens pour dépasser, pour faire rupture avec cela. Et faire rupture ce n’est pas nécessairement faire quelque chose de tout à fait nouveau, mais quelque chose d’inconnu à l’époque. Cet inconnu de l’époque, peut être tiré du passé. Et il est arrivé évidemment qu’en littérature on remonte au passé pour faire du nouveau. Le dix-septième siècle s’est inspiré essentiellement de l’Antiquité, et on avait pourtant l’impression que la tragédie c’était vraiment quelque chose de tout à fait nouveau et quelque chose de tout à fait originel. Alors qu’en réalité, l’essentiel des termes était tiré du passé. Ici, également, les Africains très souvent se sont inspirés des écoles et des pratiques littéraires françaises du passé, mais ils ont fait rupture par rapport à certains renouvellements, certains apports, et par rapport aussi à l’application à leur réalité. Et on pourrait penser que le baroque c’est aussi cela. C’est un renouvellement constant, c’est un renouvellement du quotidien, mais dans ce renouvellement du quotidien, dans cette rupture avec le quotidien est-ce qu’on n’a pas le droit de remonter au passé, le passé étant très souvent une pratique oubliée. Vous savez, si vous interrogez la plupart des avant-gardes littéraires, si vous sortez ce qui rêve de la tradition, il vous reste très peu de choses nouvelles. Le nouveau roman en réalité c’est une sorte de nouveau roman ce qui a été préparé par le roman de l’entre deux guerres et des années cinquante, il vous reste très peu de choses. Si vous prenez le surréalisme, c’est pareil. Évidemment il y a eu des écrivains qui ont précédé et qui égayèrent les surréalistes des revendications. Pour les Africains également certaines pratiques paraissent être tout à fait propre à l’Afrique, mais évidemment on peut trouver toujours des racines et on peut retrouver aussi un héritage français quand bien même cet héritage est remis en cause, bouleversé, modifié ; et le baroque est peut être dans cette possibilité et cette tentative de renouvellement et de modification.

IJ : D’accord. Puisque vous avez mentionné un petit peu le roman, est-ce que c’est une pratique qui s’approche du travail bien connu maintenant de Yambo Ouologuem dans son œuvre *Le Devoir de violence*, qui a été critiqué, condamné de plagiat ? De même, à nos jours, Calixthe Beyala ? Que pouvez-vous me dire, justement dans le cadre de cette idée que ce n’est pas du plagiat, mais une reprise de la tradition, en même temps qu’un bouleversement pour en faire du nouveau ?

ID : Il est extrêmement difficile dans le roman, puisque nous glissons un tout petit peu vers le roman, dans le roman africain, surtout dans les romans où on a quand même des succès, il est difficile d’être tout à fait originel et de ne pas trouver un certain plagiat, du

moins, des sources. Ce n'est pas pour dire qu'ils n'ont pas de mérite. Bien au contraire. Quand ce n'est pas la tradition littéraire, c'est la tradition tout court. Des écrivains comme Ahmadou Kourouma avec *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, apparaissent comme être tout à fait originaux, mais en réalité Ahmadou Kourouma, c'est la culture mandingue. Il a tout simplement repris la culture mandingue qu'il a peut être pu présenter avec un certain aspect caustique ; étant littéraire, il a peut être une belle plume, il a su peut être bien transcrire plutôt que de bien créer. En réalité, la plupart des proverbes, des jurons, des choses qui sont dans le texte sont des choses qui existent déjà dans la culture mandingue. Quand on dit, par exemple, de quelqu'un qui est assez turbulent que c'est un incirconcis, tout cela vous pouvez trouver ça facilement dans la culture mandingue.

IJ : Donc, cette reprise justement, soit d'une culture mandingue, soit d'une culture littéraire, est-ce en cela que vous identifieriez du baroque ?

ID : Du conformisme d'abord. Le baroque serait maintenant dans ce qu'on fait de cet héritage, comment on arrive à transformer, à modifier même, et peut être même à camoufler cet héritage. Les surréalistes parlaient d'écriture de contrebande. Bon, quelqu'un comme Lautréamont parle de réécriture ou bien de renverser par exemple le langage quotidien. Est-ce que vous savez qu'il y a un texte d'Éluard, si mes souvenirs sont bons, et de Breton qui s'appelle *Notes sur la poésie*, et qui passait à l'époque pour certains, d'ailleurs critiques non-averties, pour un texte particulièrement, disons, originel, assez riche, une critique, une forme de contribution en essais sur la littérature, alors qu'en réalité, ce n'était que le contraire d'un texte de Valéry qui s'appelait *Notes sur la poésie*. Ils ont tout simplement dit le contraire de cet argument.

IJ : En lui donnant le même titre. C'est très fort. Une autre question, pour revenir à Baudelaire et au dix-neuvième siècle, Christine Buci-Glucksmann théorise l'esthétique baroque à partir de la philosophie de Walter Benjamin au début du vingtième siècle, la poétique de Baudelaire, et l'analyse que fait ce premier de ce dernier. Est-ce que vous y voyez, non pas un développement, mais une sorte de continuité dans les pratiques littéraires, peut-être pas à partir de Baudelaire, mais qui passent certainement de la poétique baudelairienne à certaines pratiques esthétiques des surréalistes, et de nos jours, comme vous l'avez remarqué, des pratiques des poètes et poétesses sénégalais ?

ID : Oui, tout à fait. D'ailleurs, si vous regardez un peu l'histoire littéraire, l'histoire de la modernité, très souvent on fait remonter la modernité à Baudelaire. Et évidemment, il est difficile aujourd'hui d'échapper à Baudelaire ou d'échapper au surréalisme. C'est pourquoi, d'ailleurs, il y a des textes qui s'appellent très souvent "la permanence du surréalisme dans tel œuvre," etc. Nul n'échappe au surréalisme aujourd'hui, même dans le langage quotidien, vous entendrez "mais c'est un phénomène purement surréaliste!" Hors, si vous demandez à ce monsieur ce que c'est que le surréalisme, il aura du mal à vous le dire. Évidemment donc, il a des écrivains qui ont tellement apporté à la littérature, qui ont tellement contribué à la sensibilité moderne, qu'il est difficile évidemment aujourd'hui d'échapper à ces gens-là. C'est pourquoi peut être Aragon, qui est assez



intelligent, a pu comprendre qu'il n'est pas possible d'échapper à ces gens. L'essentiel ce n'est pas de chercher à échapper à ces gens, l'essentiel c'est de pouvoir les dépasser. Évidemment, il y a une certaine continuité entre ce que Baudelaire a fait et ce que la modernité est en train de continuer à faire. La preuve, Kiné Kirama Fall renouvelle ce poème de Baudelaire, pas du point de vue de l'écriture mais du point de vue de la thématique.

IJ : La thématique justement de ce poème « Élévation » qui est repris par Kiné Kirama Fall, c'est la thématique d'une autre réalité.

ID : Oui, c'est le rêve de sortir de la réalité. "Envole-toi bien loin de ce nuage morbide," etc. C'est une façon de dire "le quotidien est abject, le rêve est là peut être pour me permettre d'être au-dessus." C'est une façon aussi pour ces dames très sensibles qui vivent avec beaucoup de blessures la réalité quotidienne, de pouvoir dépasser cette réalité quotidienne. Je ne sais plus si c'est Kiné Kirama Fall ou Fatou Ndiaye Sow, il y a une de ces dames qui est particulièrement sensible aux enfants errant dans la rue et qui écrit beaucoup de poèmes à propos de ces enfants : "Si j'étais Dieu, j'aurais fait ceci cela," etc. C'est une forme d'élévation aussi par rapport à la réalité quotidienne.

IJ : Donc, à peu près comme le baroque où il avait vraiment une misère qui s'installait— il y avait la peste, il y avait des monarchies qui s'installaient, il y avait l'urbanisation qui était en train de démarrer—dans cette misère, les artistes bien entendu, ils en prenaient mais justement c'était pour essayer de s'en sortir de passer à l'au-delà par la mythologie, la religion, l'art, et c'est à peu près, n'est-ce pas, ce qu'on fait dans ce nouveau baroque ?

ID : Oui. Ce n'est peut être pas les mêmes réalités. Ce n'est peut être même pas les mêmes tentatives, disons, de s'en sortir. Mais l'esprit est le même. Le nouveau baroque, évidemment, fait à peu près la même entreprise ; il s'agit de sortir, d'échapper, de faire autrement, et ça par rapport à une réalité qui est refusée. Évidemment, il n'y a plus de peste, mais il y a des choses qui lui ressemblent.

IJ : Oui, c'est vrai. Il y a le SIDA par exemple.

ID : Oui.

IJ : Une dernière question, pour revenir à cette idée d'où je suis parti, du baroque dans les îles de la Caraïbe, et pour essayer de voir un peu les similarités et des différences entre celui-ci et celui en Afrique. On parle souvent du baroque aux Caraïbes au niveau social, au niveau du réel même, par exemple dans l'architecture dans la ville où il y a un délabrement c'est-à-dire une sorte de décomposition des immeubles qui se défont depuis l'époque coloniale qui sont des vestiges ou des ruines. Ici au Sénégal, je n'ai pas tellement remarqué ce phénomène. Par contre, ce que je vois, c'est plutôt le contraire. C'est-à-dire qu'il y a au niveau visuel ce contraste dans les formes de la ville entre des

immeubles très grands, achevés, et il y a aussi du côté des immeubles qui ne sont pas terminés, qui sont en diverses étapes de construction. Donc, je me demande si on pourrait peut-être ne pas établir une similarité, mais plutôt une différence (similaire) en tant que ce n'est pas une ville qui se délabre, mais c'est une ville qui petit à petit, est toujours en train de se construire continuellement, et donc vous avez toujours ce contraste entre le fini et les étapes de construction qui se voit.

ID : Oui, mais c'est justement là qu'en général la littérature trouve les motifs de sa dénonciation. Si vous prenez par exemple *Nadja* de Breton ou si vous prenez *Le paysan de Paris* d'Aragon, vous verrez que la ville de Paris est dénoncée dans sa modernisation. Dans *Le paysan de Paris* on vous décrit des passages de Bambara, et on vous décrit aussi les entreprises d'Osmane, et cette forme d'urbanisation galopante qu'ils attribuent d'ailleurs aux Américains, à l'esprit américain, et ils dénoncent ça comme quelque chose qui va détruire évidemment l'esprit, la beauté, ce qui existait, pour instaurer l'esprit purement matérialiste, le vulgaire. La beauté va être effacée au profit, disons, du gigantisme et évidemment du matériel. Je pense que le baroque en Afrique n'est peut-être pas dans la forme d'urbanisation différenciée, de cette forme de tableau urbain, mais chez les femmes, c'est essentiellement dans les mœurs et dans la morale. L'évolution, le changement qui pousse au baroque ou à créer l'art est essentiellement dans, disons, les valeurs. Les poètes sont peu sensibles au quotidien dans sa forme matérielle, dans sa forme urbaine, je voulais dire. Il y a très peu de poétesses qui décrivent la ville dans son architecture matérielle. Mais par contre elles décrivent la ville dans ses foules bruyantes, dans la réalité de ses rues, dans sa population, et disons dans ses valeurs, dans ses valeurs qui sont farfouillés : des enfants qui sont laissés à eux-mêmes, ou des gens qui se comportent d'une certaine façon, et ça, c'est une sensibilité disons d'éducatrice aussi. Évidemment en rapprochement avec les Caraïbes, on pourrait peut-être trouver que la position des Caraïbes se justifierait dans la mesure où, au début du siècle, il y a eu comme une entreprise de destruction de la beauté naturelle des Caraïbes à la suite de la colonisation. Et évidemment, les gens sont très sensibles à cette forme d'évolution et de changement. En Afrique évidemment, il y a aussi cette forme de changement, mais elle est beaucoup plus visible dans la campagne que dans les villes ou dans les métropoles comme Dakar.

IJ : D'accord. Je vous remercie.