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Supervisor: Dr. Juan Luis Suárez, *The University of Western Ontario*
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hispanic Studies
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BAROQUE WORLDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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by

Xavier Gamboa

Graduate Program in Hispanic Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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WESTERN UNIVERSITY

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Baroque Worlds of the 21st Century

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Abstract

This dissertation furnishes an analysis of the unfolding twenty-first century neobaroque phenomenon. Thus this disquisition delves through assorted cultural artifacts from the current digital era as well as manifestations of neobaroque motifs; these virtual baroques of the twenty-first century range from memento mori, video games, social networking sites and the sponsors of these neobaroque manifestations--the corporations, a baroque legacy. This thesis seeks parallels, as opposed to replications of the first modern global culture--the historical baroque of the seventeenth century; it also provides an extensive etymological research of the international and evolving meaning of baroque, taking also into consideration its political instrumentality. The approach of this study also treats the current neobaroque as a global phenomenon. Therefore, to unveil the baroque resonance of these artifacts, global and multidisciplinary scholars and theories from traditional and nontraditional baroque bastions will be applied.

Keywords: Neobaroque, baroque, etymology, memento mori, corporation, new technologies, video games, virtuality, Web 2.0, twenty-first century.

Dedication

To doña María Martha F.G., accountant, executive, mother-- and stalwart supporter.

Per Angusta Ad Augusta

Acknowledgments

"When you drink the water, remember the well."

Chinese proverb

I am grateful to Western University, in particular, to my mentor and dissertation director Dr. Juan Luis Suárez. Dr. Suárez's professionalism, encouragement, and support merit gratitude. I also appreciate the opportunity to become involved in the Hispanic Baroque and CulturePlex projects; they continue to serve as wells of knowledge--and interesting inquiries. Likewise, I would like to thank Dr. Rafael Montano and Dr. Joyce Bruhn de Garavito for their guidance as professors and chairs. Thanks to everyone else who contributed to this journey.

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> "Neo-Baroque calls for a more entertaining, more challenging, digitally-oriented education that forces students to solve real problems with present-day solutions."
>
> Dr. Juan Luis Suárez, *Barroco Nova*

Chapter 1

A Case for Baroque Paradigms--Roots and Conceptual Issues Leading to Contemporary Neobaroque Artifacts

The historical baroque is not taking over the twenty-first century; after all, the seventeenth century has gone into the realm of history. Nevertheless, not all baroque features fade through time--they adapt. Indeed, the baroque's adaptable features continue to reemerge through time. Even today, baroque facets emerge as neobaroque artifacts spring into the new digital era.

In this dissertation, I will argue that protean attributes of the baroque continue to manifest as neobaroque artifacts as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century. By "neobaroque artifacts," I mean emerging contemporary manifestations of baroque features and motifs; especially, those adapted to the virtual media propelled by globalized digital technologies. For the

record, in this thesis, I categorically gainsay that everything related to the historical baroque resurfaces nowadays, or that everything is "baroque" for that matter.

Furthermore, I espouse the notion that the emerging diverse, global and multicultural culture of the multitude--akin to the ancient Roman form of pluralism--that overlaps with a surfeit of virtual interaction and information, spurs cultural complexity, a sign of neobaroqueness. Let me reiterate that by neobaroqueness I do not mean an utter replication of a historical time period associated with the seventeenth century; but rather, I aim to accentuate the adaptation of the historical baroque's strategies and motifs into twenty-first century digital and global popular culture. So, is this a phenomenon? Absolutely, but not a phenomenon geared exclusively to the few or ultra-elite, such as the oligarchic patrons who purchased paintings for their private collections during the historical baroque or enjoyed complex and puzzling poetry while the majority of the population remained illiterate. This emerging "neobaroqueness" is geared towards the demos--like Shakespeare's or Lope's popular theaters. What actuates this "neobaroque?"

I consider globalization, crisis, decentralization and mass-oriented technological innovation as the driving forces behind this contemporary cultural phenomenon. In this discourse, I define crisis not only as a critical turning point or a time of dire straits, but also a time of conjuncture under the decentralizing drift catalyzed by ubiquitous digital technology worldwide. Certainly, the first crisis of the age of Cyberia yielded a proactive and mass-oriented theatricality; the user is the actor and public simultaneously in a virtual environment generated by the mainstream accessibility to gadgets that facilitate access to the digital and virtual milieu of Web 2.0.

Indeed, today's virtuality embraces digitalization; they go hand in hand and are no longer monopolies of knowledge kept by institutionalized ivory towers or opulent cliques fond of costly high-tech widgets. For better or worse, globalization brings about cost-effective manufacturing of gadgets that facilitate the digital and virtual realms to the populace; it has truly democratized those theatrical virtual realms. Now everybody can become an actor-spectator on Web 2.0 via Facebook or YouTube. Even the old traditional media--remember television?--has managed to come on board Web 2.0, where "users-viewers" can

follow, create and report more news and input on Facebook. The ongoing era of digitalization has taken the not-so-new concept of virtuality to new heights of popularity.

For the purpose of this disquisition, virtuality can be concisely delineated as the conceptualization that the real and tangible--as well as abstract concepts--can be diffused via multisensory configurations conveying information. In chapter two, I will further discuss the baroque legacy on virtuality and make the case for its application and readaptation in today's digitalized society. Likewise, in chapter four I will argue the need to consider video games as "neobaroque artifacts," a theme that will resound on the final chapter where I discuss the impact of the ultimate twenty-first century hegemonic entity that harks back to the historical baroque.

In a nutshell, to illustrate this thesis, the ensuing chapters will delve into contemporary cultural artifacts exemplifying neobaroque facets, arguing further for the need for awareness of baroque parallels in the twenty-first century (chapter two). Next, the concept of memento mori (chapter three) that continues to reach spectacular proportions on the mass digital media, a reemerging neobaroque motif. Further, chapter four covers the

interactive, immersive and theatrical features of video games (and their nexus to the baroque). Then, chapter five focuses on social network sites, another persuasive and interactive neobaroque digital theater of the world--dominated by Facebook. Finally, to wind up this discourse, chapter six discusses the baroque born patrons of these neobaroque artifacts--corporations.

I will also argue the need to recognize the political properties of neobaroque artifacts. Thus, to underpin this position, I will take into account current scholarly perspectives that politicize neobaroque artifacts; but at the same time, I will critique and voice my opinion on these points of view--as well as on concepts presented throughout this thesis--and to contribute to contemporary neobaroque discourse by pointing out readapted baroque facets in today's digital global culture.

Moreover, in the spirit of critical thinking, and taking into consideration the need to address the politicization of baroque artifacts in the twenty-first century, I point out the need to recognize the erosion of the traditional bastions of power. That is, the ascendancy of monarchs, clergy and officials continues to dwindle, whereas the corporation--a seventeenth-century creation--is

in the ascendant. Therefore, in chapter six I propound the need to further focus on the "corporate baroque," the driving force of the current digital spectacle. Furthermore, the scholarly diversity and interest behind baroque scholarship carries on. Thus, to further this thesis, I will draw on the multidisciplinary academic lore of notable baroque and neobaroque scholars from North America, Australia, Asia and Europe. In effect, there is something quite appealing about this field globally. Therefore, this is a noteworthy affinity with the first modern global culture--the historical baroque.

As for its academic antecedents, this study builds on the legacy of baroque research trailblazers. The scholarly precedents of this research furnish substantial support. Better yet, many contemporary scholars continue to recognize the legacy of twentieth-century baroque and neobaroque intellectuals who credit the seminal scholarly research carried on by nineteenth-century academics who propugned the "baroque" as a respectable field of study. Who are some of these salient scholars?

Let us begin by acknowledging that the late twentieth century enjoyed a boom of baroque and neobaroque research that continues to resound. The 1980s, for instance,

witnessed the 1987 publication of Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque*: *A Sign of our Times*, Christine Buci-Glucksmann's 1984 *Baroque Reason*, and Gilles Deleuze's 1988 *The Fold*: *Leibniz and the Baroque*--all significant works that emphasize baroque carry-overs beyond the historical baroque period. Of course, the earlier decade, the 1970s, attested to the launching of monumental cultural and sociopolitical theories surrounding the baroque and neobaroque. In effect, the 1970s put Caribbean baroque and neobaroque intellectuals on the map; notably, Severo Sarduy's 1972 essay "Baroque and Neobaroque" as well as his 1974 anthology *Baroque* (Kaup 136). Similarly, Alejo Carpentier published in 1974 *Baroque Concerto*, followed by "Baroque and Magic Realism," a 1975 theoretical paper linking the baroque to the Latin American literary Boom movement's genre that catapulted writers like Gabriel García Márquez into the limelight (Kaup, "Neobaroque" 136; Zamora and Kaup 8-9; Zamora 230-232). All of Carpentier's works have a common denominator, as Monika Kaup notes: his recognition that the Americas' baroque epitomizes the baroque trait of adaptability via cultural hybridity and multifariousness ("'¡Vaya Papaya!'" 158). Likewise, 1975 witnessed the release of José Antonio Maravall's influential sociopolitical work *Culture of the Baroque*.

This is not to say, however, that earlier twentieth-century works did not bear an impact on baroque research later on. For example, Walter Benjamin's 1928 *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*--a disquisition that drew significantly from the historical baroque's theatrical legacy--continues to reverberate among academicians. In addition, Henri Focillon's position that the baroque phenomenon is cyclical through time, as stated in his 1934 monograph *The Life of Forms in Art*, continues to resonate in twenty-first century scholarly works like *Neo-baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*.

Prior to the beginning of this scholarly journey into twenty-first century neobaroque artifacts, the conceptual issue surrounding the meaning of "baroque" compels attention. What is a conceptual issue anyway? Any conceptual issue begs the question--what does that mean? This tends to throw the term "baroque" into the realm of logomachy. Where does the term "baroque" come from? Let us walk through the baroque's transformative hermeneutics.

Thus, let us begin with Marie-Pierrette Malkuzynski's baroque research--translated, revised, and republished up-to-date in 2009--; it brings new light to the "baroque" term's etymology. Malkuzynski's etymological study is

significant because it illustrates that the term "baroque" is not completely alien to the historical baroque period. In fact, her thorough analysis helps to illustrate that the negative connotations of the term "baroque" come also from its etymology.

First of all, Malkuzynski zeroes in on *Summulae logicales*--the thirteenth-century work of Portuguese scholastic Pietor Ispano (306). In his work, Ispano expatiates on "the *baroco* formula" (306). In essence, within the context of scholastic logic, *baroco* serves as a mnemonic code denoting the following:

> The first vowel (a) indicates a universal affirmative proposition in the first part of the syllogism, while the second and third (o) indicate a particular proposition. The letter *b* shows that it is an irregular syllogism that can be reduced to the first mode of the first figure (Barbara), and the letter *c* (in *baroco*) indicates the way the reduction is effected. (Malkuzynski 306)

Nonetheless, this logic's mnemonic came under fire by prominent scholars during the Renaissance.

Notably, it came under attack by one of the Renaissance's leading humanists--Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. As Malkuzynski points out, Erasmus excoriates the *baroco* formula and thus, affixes it "counterproductive," in his 1519 treatise *Ratio versae theologiae* (306). Likewise, in 1570 Giovan Francesco Ferrari, a bard from Modena, coins the phrase "*argomento in baroco*." Ferrari's phrase aims to be pejorative since he considers preposterous the rigidity behind the *baroco* syllogism's logic; especially when driven to the utmost. That is because, in spite of its punctiliousness, the meanings of "*sillogismo in barroco*" can be easily transposed. All it takes is to make the *baroco's* minor premise indemonstrable (Ferrari, qtd. in Malkuzynski 306).

More recently, in the 2009 monograph *Baroque & Rococo*, twenty-first century Italian scholars Margo Bussagli and Mattia Reiche's inference reverberates with Ferrari's and Malkuzynski's viewpoint. In effect, Bussagli and Reiche lay bare that during the historical baroque "the Italian word *baroco*, which referred to a figure from rhetoric, an Aristotelian syllogism already familiar to scholars," tended to yield "sophisms and Byzantinism" (10). Hence, to illustrate this point, Bussagli and Reiche adduced a 1627

verse line; where the historical baroque poet Antonio Abbondanti da Imola states that “salted meat quenches thirst” (10-11). This truly evinces a sophistic and deceptive argument. It violates common sense; it is preposterous. Nonetheless, as Bussagli and Reiche note: “by logical progression we can reach the conclusion that a salty sausage quenches thirst;” sausage consumption generates thirst and thus, the urge to quench such thirstiness with a great deal of fluid as well (10-11). Indeed, the same captious argument could be made about eating salty tortilla chips.

Bussagli and Reiche--as well as Malkuzynski--echo earlier twentieth-century research linking the term baroque to the *baroco* syllogism. In fact, their research helps to account for Luis Vives’ phrase “sophists in baroco and baralipton” cited in René Welleck’s 1946 disquisition “The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship” and in Miroslav John Hanak’s 1970 academic think-piece “The Emergence of Baroque Mentality and Its Cultural Impact on Western Europe after 1550.” Interestingly, Vives lambasted the *baroco* and its adherents in 1519 (Hanak 315; Wellek 77); the same year Erasmus--Vives' Achates and mentor--animadverted on the *baroco* (Malkuzynski 306). Palpably, during the Renaissance

and historical baroque--at least in what is now modern Italy--the term "baroque" faced skewering for being associated as a side effect of scholasticism.

Nevertheless, late twentieth-century scholar Vernon Hyde Minor offers no negative critiques of the *baroco* syllogism; unlike the ones pointed out by current twenty-first century academics, fifteenth century humanists or even seventeenth-century intellectuals. In fact, he asserts that the majority of academics favor the concept that the term "baroque" comes from the medieval *baroco* syllogism (13).

In addition, Peter Davidson concurs in part with Minor's perspective on the scholastic origin of the term "baroque." Indeed, in his 2007 treatise *The Universal Baroque*, Davidson acknowledges that the earliest form of the term baroque comes from the baroco syllogism. Nonetheless, Davidson, at variance with Minor, recognizes its shortcomings, including those outlined by late Renaissance intellectuals like Michel de Montaigne (3). Indeed, Montaigne's criticism of the *baroco* underscores the imputation that this syllogism hamstrings sensibleness:

> La plus expresse marque de la sagesse, c'est une esjouissance constante : son estat est comme des

> choses au dessus de la lune, tous jours serein. C'est Baroco et Baralipton, qui rendent leurs supposts ainsi crotez et enfumez ; ce n'est pas elle, ils ne la cognoissent que par ouyr dire.
>
> The most manifest sign of wisdom is a continual cheerfulness; her state is like that of things in the regions above the moon, always clear and serene. ’Tis Baroco and Baralipton [Two terms of the ancient scholastic logic.] that render their disciples so dirty and ill-favoured, and not she; they do not so much as know her but by hearsay. (qtd. in Davidson 3)

Similarly, Davidson tagged this syllogism as “a logical proof which is not quite a proof,” in other words, an intellectual gimmick (Davidson 3). Nonetheless, Davidson considers the *baroco*’s imperfection a metaphoric veracity, a “poetic truth” (3); since, in Davidson’s view, the baroque illustrated in art--in particular--derives “from saying that some thing is, in a restricted sense, another thing altogether” (3). In other words, he considers the baroque a “paradox machine;” something on which Davidson bases his claim that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)--

starting in 1765--provides citations that illustrate his baroque's inference.

Nevertheless, the up-to-date OED digital edition, launched at the ebb of the new millennium's first decade, begs to differ with Davidson; this edition takes into account other etymologies of the term "baroque." Moreover, baroque has become a more positive term. Indeed, the 1650 word "Quaker" parallels this etymology. After all, British Justice Gervase Bennett coined it as an epithet to the members of the Society of Friends (OED). Now it proudly connotes a religion and the conglomerate corporation Quaker Oats. Consider the latest OED's excerpts on the baroque from 1765 on:

> c1765 H. Fuseli tr. J. J. Winkelmann Refl. Painting & Sculpt. of Greeks 122 This style in decorations got the epithet of Barroque taste, derived from a word signifying pearls and teeth of unequal size.
>
> 1846 Athenæum 17 Jan. 58/2 Sometimes baroque, Mr. Browning is never ignoble: pushing versification to the extremity of all rational allowances, and sometimes beyond it, with a

hardihood of rhythm and cadence little short of Hudibrastic.

1851 F. Palgrave Hist. Normandy & Eng. I. Introd. 44 Which rendered every name and thing connected with the mediæval periods baroque or absurd.

1867 W. D. Howells Ital. Journeys 77 The building coldly classic or frantically baroque.

1877 Baedeker's Central Italy & Rome (ed. 5) p. lix, The authors of the degenerated Renaissance known as Baroque were really Vignola (1507–73) and Fontana's nephew Carlo Maderna (1556–1639). An undoubted vigour in the disposition of detail, a feeling for vastness and pomp, together with an internal decoration which spared neither colour nor costly material to secure an effect of dazzling splendour: such are the distinguishing attributes of the Baroque style.

1882 A. Beresford-Hope Brandreths I. i. 3 Studded with baroque pearls.

1921 B. F. Fletcher Hist. Archit. (ed. 6) i. 546 In the fullness of time the Renaissance passed into the Baroque, which at the beginning of the

seventeenth century gave expression once again to the human side in architecture, for it was a spontaneous breaking away from orthodoxy in plan, design, and treatment.

1928 Times Lit. Suppl. 15 Mar. 188/2 French-Canadian art is being recognized as a baroque style which is other than the European baroques.

1938 W. S. Maugham Summing Up 28 The sonorous periods and the baroque massiveness of Jacobean language.

1938 Mod. Lang. Notes Oct. 547 The period of literature described as 'baroque' ends about 1690, when German baroque architecture is beginning to develop.

1949 Times Lit. Suppl. 10 June 376/4 The word 'baroque' has come to be accepted as a convenient portmanteau term which covers the music composed between 1580 and 1750 and the plastic arts of an era which begins and ends slightly earlier.

1953 J. Summerson Archit. Brit. 1530 to 1830 iii. 125 (heading) Wren and the Baroque (1660–1710).

> 1953 J. Summerson Archit. Brit. 1530 to 1830 xvii. 172 At Blenheim the English Baroque culminates.
>
> 1953 J. Summerson Archit. Brit. 1530 to 1830 xvii.
>
> 178 Its spirit is the emotional spirit of English Baroque, and it was that which touched Burlington's antipathies.
>
> 1954 L. D. Ettlinger in Listener 2 Dec. 954/1 The robustness of the Baroque gives way [in the 18th cent.] to the gentler graces of Rococo.
>
> 1957 T. S. Eliot On Poetry & Poets 167 The conjunction of Christian and classical imagery [in Lycidas] is in accord with a baroque taste which did not please the eighteenth century.

Thus this extensive roster of quotations, compiled by *OED Online*, exemplifies the transformative tendencies of the meaning of "baroque."

In addition, some of the preceding quotes--besides illustrating the wide usage of the term baroque--hint to other alternative etymological roots behind "baroque." For

instance, the 1765 OED's citation expands on a common alternative theory about the baroque's etymology--the irregular shaped pearl theory; it applies this term to describe twisted dentition. In effect, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries *barroco* denoted an irregular shaped pearl to jewelers (Segel 15). So where does the twisted pearl version of the term "*barroco*" come from? From the Iberian Peninsula, specifically, from the Portuguese phrase *perola barroca*, "baroque pearl" (Segel 15). After all, as noted by Harold B. Segel in his in-depth study, "The Meaning of Baroque," the term "baroque" owes its genesis to the similarly spelled French adjective; it bids fair to derive from the Portuguese jewelers' word denoting twisted pearls instead of the *baroco* syllogism (15).

In fact, to buttress the preceding inference, Segel refers to a former staunch supporter of the syllogism theory on the origin of the word "baroque": none other than the literary scholar René Wellek; after all, he toned down his pro-syllogism stand stated in the 1946 article "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship." Namely, in a turnabout, Wellek recognizes that the lexeme, "baroque," in English derives--through French--from the Portuguese

jewelers' term; nonetheless, Wellek still maintains that in modern Italian the syllogism plays a more significant role in the origin of the term "baroque" (Segel 15).

More deeply, William Samuel Howell, based on Helmut Hatzfeld's groundwork, provides another intriguing add-on to the Portuguese derivation theory of "baroque" (4). Significantly, there is much more about the etymology of the Portuguese term "*perola barroca*." At least in geographical terms since--in addition to its association with those type of twisted pearls--it also relates to the Portuguese colloquialism "*Broakti*" (Baroquia). This term denotes a spot in colonial Goa, India; it underwent a post-1530 economic boom thanks to the Portuguese discovery of "irregular pearls of local origin" for commerce (4 Howell).

Conversely, there is another Italian version besides the *baroco* syllogism's etymological theory. This etymology can be traced back to the closing of the fourteenth century in Tuscany, Italy. In this region, the terms *barroco*, *barrocolo*, and even *barrochio* denoted a type of moneylender's agreement. In particular, one that stipulated a steep charge on the sale of wares on account; but it also included a clause allowing the usurer to rebuy such goods at a reduced cost (Malcuzynski 305). The use of the term

"barroco," in this context, appeared "in many theological, literary, and legal documents in Italian and Latin" (Malcuzynski 305). Notably, during the historical baroque, the Tuscan "*barroco*" context appeared in Petrus Caballus' 1606 criminology treatise *Resolutionum criminalium centuriae duo* (Malcuzynski 305).

Likewise, this context showed up in France during the historical baroque. For instance, in Moliere's 1667 play *The Miser*, a "barroco" type of contract is drafted (Malcuzynski 305). Furthermore, this distinctive context continues today to be applied in the region of Bologna, Italy; this takes place through the phrase "*fér di stocc e barlóc*," which means a misleading and unethical business maneuver for the sake of profit (Malcuzynski 305-306). Therefore, this alternative etymological version supplements the assorted origins of "baroque," the critical ones in particular; after all, the preceding phrase denotes the act of achieving lucre through chicanery. All in all, even the etymology of the term "baroque" illustrates the sundry, flexible and transformative context of this peculiar phenomenon.

What about defining baroque as a concept? It had a difficult start during the eighteenth century; the same

period where the use of syllogisms ran out of favor. Thus, in 1740, the dictionary of the French Academy classified the notion of "baroque" as aberrant, asperous and outré (Malcuzynski 307). In other words, this French lexicon tagged this term as an unflattering adjective used to describe peculiar art, discourse or way of thinking (Malcuzynski 307). Forty-two years later (1788) the *French Dictionary of Methods* echoed the remarks given earlier by the French Academy:

> The Baroque in architecture carries a hint of the bizarre . . . . It is so to speak, refinement, or perhaps we could even say abuse. What severity is to good taste, the Baroque is to the bizarre. The idea of the Baroque brings with it the idea of ridiculousness indulged to excess. (qtd. in Malcuzynski 307)

These negative connotations continued to intensify--and not just in France; in 1797, the Italian fine arts critic Milizia labeled the baroque as the apex of "the bizarre, ridiculousness taken to the extreme" (Malcuzynski 307).

Notwithstanding, in 1843 Jakob Burkhardt became the first scholar to use the term "baroque" to classify a historical period within the context of architectural

analysis. Furthermore, Burkhardt stresses the functionality of labeling a historical period as “baroque” because it serves to flag the downfall of the Renaissance. In effect, he asserts that the “baroque” twilights between eras as a cyclical phenomenon where peculiarity prevails (Malcuzynski 308).

Similarly, the controversial nineteenth-century German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche ascribed to the baroque phenomenon as cyclical (Malcuzynski 308). Nonetheless, the Swiss scholar Heinrich Wölfflin merits the laurels for vindicating the baroque construct in academia via his late nineteenth-century seminal work *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888). This is a significant monograph that sketches the uniqueness of the historical baroque art and literature--in its own right--without negative connotations. Therefore, it paved the way for further research during the twentieth century and beyond, even in Western societies not traditionally identified as “baroque.” Wölfflin’s work became a watershed in the vindication of “the baroque” as an independent and scholarly discipline in Western culture.

Nonetheless, the baroque as a respectable academic concept faced a bumpy journey into full acceptance; it arrived till the opposition against its due acknowledgement

wilted by the end of the twentieth century. This deeply rooted antagonism against the baroque--as a cultural concept--goes back to the crisis of the Western Christendom split created by the Reformation. Protestants interpreted the seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation culture--ranging from fine arts to literature--as a countermove from the secular arm rooted in medieval Catholicism. Conversely, Rome saw it as the application of secular arts for the service and protection of the Catholic faith (Dawson 188). Furthermore, the strife between Catholics and Protestants expanded up to the seventeenth century. Thus it incited bloodthirsty wars, such as the devastating Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), as well as religious persecutions and executions in both camps. Hence, these conflicts also fomented a "cultural cold war" between these two blocs.

In the Catholic camp, the baroque cultural push spurred a concerted effort between the medieval Catholic praxis and the Renaissance humanism (Dawson 189). As paradoxical as this may sound, it worked. Humanists and creative artists fond of classical models of fine arts and education centered on ancient Greco-Roman manuscripts embraced the Counter-Reformation; it provided them the

opportunity to reform the medieval model of the arts and culture. Nevertheless, Rome, like in the Middle Ages, remained the dominant patron in those fields--with notable anomalies, such as Louis XIV (Dawson 189).

The cultural baroque sponsored by Rome promoted a mélange of mysticism; it originated in sixteenth-century Spain, in conjunction with the reforms advocated by secular Renaissance artists (Dawson 189). Even seventeenth-century baroque churches have been regarded as modern medieval Gothic churches; after all, their curves, contrast in shade and multi-religious symbolism echo the Gothic style of the late Middle Ages (Dawson 190). Certainly, the Protestants, wide of the mark in part, recognized the medieval aspects of the Counter-Reformation sponsored baroque culture. Nevertheless, this assorted cultural phenomenon soon pervaded not just Catholic countries; it also managed to penetrate in Protestant nations not dominated by Calvinism--which strongly promoted iconoclasm, reading and weeding out any legacy of Catholicism. The best example of this phenomenon is the United Kingdom, which produced one of the greatest playwrights of the baroque era--William Shakespeare (Dawson 191).

At this point it is fair to ask, why should Shakespeare be regarded as a baroque playwright counterpart of Lope de Vega? In effect, the seventeenth-century baroque culture recognized the need to win over the hearts and minds of the kingdoms' multitudes. Popular theater to the populace, a medieval tradition, became part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation secular strategy adapted into early modernity. That being said, it also flourished in Elizabethan England; an Anglican dominated nation where the Anglican Church continues to share a parallel hierarchical structure with the Catholic Church. Hence, the British Puritans--inclined to Calvinistic zeal and to divorce from Rome's traditions--eventually shut down Shakespeare's Globe Theater in 1642 (Morgan 340).

Nevertheless, the seventeenth century became a turning point that facilitated what I call "baroque synergy." By this term I mean the ability of the baroque cultural phenomenon not to foist assimilation; it has the ability to engineer and adapt diverse cultural manifestations and schools of thought simultaneously to achieve an end--or multiple ends. This significant baroque trait adapts and evolves according to the tailoring need of its sponsor--a church, regime or corporations later on. Therefore, I

would argue that the baroque yields synergy and promotes concerted efforts as opposed to black-and-white linear dichotomies. Nothing cultural is pure, even if it appears to be so according to the powers that be.

The seventeenth century not only unveiled a religiously influenced baroque culture identified primarily with Rome and its Mediterranean Counter-Reformation allies. I argue that during the seventeenth century the French Monarch Louis XIV (1638-1715) tiled the way for an enticing, proactive and secular political neobaroque; this secular baroque evolved and eventually became embraced by corporations in the ensuing millennium. Louis XIV made sure that his exurban château virtually orbited around its absolute Sun King from within. Thus he opposed the Spanish majestic--yet churchly--Escorial Palace and Monastery design (Blanning 37).

Indeed, the Escorial--besides resembling a giant basilica--revolves around its religious chapel placed at the center of its palatial universe (Blanning 37). In contrast, Louis XIV's Versailles Palace, allegorically and tangibly, hinges on propagating the glorification of this absolute monarch. Thus, Louis XIV promoted his own personal logo through culture; thanks, in particular, to

his adroit adviser Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) of whom the King obviously heeded his cultural advice:

> Your Majesty knows that in the absence of brilliant feats of war, nothing does more to signal the grandeur and intelligence of princes than buildings, and all posterity measures them by the yardstick of these superb palaces which they construct during their lifetime. (qtd. in Schnapper 198-199)

Therefore, when it came to the Château Versailles, the Sun King took this advice to the letter. First of all, unlike the Escorial, this castle lacked Christian images outside its chapel, located outside the interior Court Royal--the heart of the castle. Indeed, the salon Apollo--the throne room--received the honor of being at the center of the Versailles Palace instead of the royal chapel (Blanning 37). The Sun King lived and set the blueprint of secular baroque iconography signifying prestige, power and success; in other words, Louis XIV established the secular royal baroque brand by applying baroque synergy for his own aggrandizement.

After all, this absolute Monarch accurately recognized the baroque cultural modus operandi's potential as a

political tool to control his court. Unlike Rome, Louis XIV applied the Renaissance's classical revival and the medieval iconography for secular as opposed to religious interests. Certainly, Louis XIV not only centered his royal headquarters on him; he also politicized other visually artistic artifacts celebrating and propagating his grandeur and achievements.

Consider the title given to the painting celebrating the Sun King's vanquishing of the Spanish Crown, "The Preeminence of France Recognized by Spain" (1662), displayed proudly at this castle (Blanning 39). In fact, this painting presaged Louis XIV's regime change in Spain after the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714); he made his grandson King of Spain by dethroning the House of Habsburg, thus establishing a Spanish Bourbon dynasty that continues till today.

Besides paying homage to his military might, the paintings at Versailles Palace also allegorically celebrated Louis XIV's civic virtues, such as his charity. After all, the Sun King sponsored the building of the National Residence of the Invalids (*Hôtel des Invalides*) in 1670. Indeed, this is an impressive building itself of which disabled war veterans constituted most of its

beneficiaries (Blanning 38). Likewise, the Versailles Palace gardens also played the role of aggrandizing the Sun King via sophisticated complexity intertwined with sculptures honoring Louis XIV (Blanning 38).

The Sun King applied a “baroque political strategy” of social control in his Versailles court, made up of 20,000 high class individuals plus their servants (Blanning 36). In the end, it paid off; he managed to keep potential dissenters and backstabbers at bay and outlived all absolute monarchs in Europe--he lasted seventy-two years as absolute monarch (Blanning 31). By ensuring his authority and control over “high class culture,” Louis XIV cleverly managed to institutionalize knowledge and culture under his patronage. In effect, while Louis XIV’s modus operandi of social control over his court applied assorted theatrical awe to serve his image, he also made sure that he had the monopoly on it.

In effect, the late seventeenth century became France’s apex of hegemony as the emerging superpower of Europe at that time. Louis the XIV’s France promoted the institutionalization of knowledge; this not only facilitated science but, in my opinion, it also served to ostensibly monitor, control and to ensure loyalty to the

royal patron. In contrast, Louis XIV's court at his helm, which controlled all of the cultural and political institutions, incarnated Baltasar Gracian's realpolitik advice: "It is easy to kill the bird that flies in a straight line, but not the one that changes its line of flight" (10). Therefore, in order to hold a firm grip on his court, the Sun King transformed it into a complex and allegorical modus operandi of baroque control; all carried out behind the guise of simplicity and classicism outside Versailles.

The baroque era of Louis XIV can be regarded as the first modern and global incarnation of Eurocentricity. After all, the helm of power rested in European powers rather than in their respective worldwide domains. The Sun King's use of art and culture to control all aspects of his court flourished beyond its borders. He made France a cultural center and thus, French became the first vernacular language to be used in an international peace treaty--the Treaty of Rastatt (Blanning 51).

Louis the XIV did not hold the monopoly on the baroque artistic style. After all, the Sun King had a batch of European monarchs--in charge of Germany, Austria and Russia--that looked up to him, even posthumously.

Consequently, they copycatted the hegemonic headquarters that reflected the undeniable cultural and political powerhouse centered on Louis XIV--Chateau Versailles (Freund 24).

The Sun King, a descendant of the Medicis, sponsored baroque art to achieve secular awe. Not just from the French multitude and court but also to impress international diplomats and functionaries that came to France to negotiate (Freund 24). This French baroque art survived longer than the monarchy itself; the Treaty of Versailles, one of the most famous treaties of the twentieth century, became ratified between the walls of the Louis XIV's baroque palace.

Four hundred years later, the Sun King's baroque style would reverberate on Jean Rousset's early twentieth-century summary of the baroque:

> To the intuition of an unstable and moving world, of a multiple and inconstant life, hesitating between being and seeming, fond of disguise and of theatrical representation, there correspond, on the expressive and structural level a rhetoric of metaphor and *trompe l'oeil*, a poetics of surprise and variousness and a style of

> metamorphosis, of dynamic spread and dispersion in unity. (qtd. in Caws 6)

After all, Louis XIV incarnates the secular baroque dynamism and illusory complexity. Why? First of all, besides being a war hawk King, he had a particular fondness to perform as an avid ballet dancer and loved to dress up as a venerable Greco-Roman mythological figure--Apollo (Blanning 42). Furthermore, he also organized a spectacular urban festivity, a carousel, at *Place du Carrousel* in 1662 (Blanning 42). It became the first and last major celebration of the Sun King outside Versailles. Louis XIV could not help but to make it baroquely entertaining; he required noble members to dress up as "Romans, Persians, Turks, Indians and Americans" to win the King's favor and a diamond prize (Blanning 42). The Sun King can be credited to be Donald Trump's baroque predecessor by producing a "reality" entertainment show for the public, long before television. Therefore, Louis the XIV exemplifies best the historical baroque secular politicization of artifacts, thus setting the stage for future well-to-do commoners and their corporations. In the final chapter of this disquisition, I will discuss how the

corporations have supplanted Louis XIV's secular royal propaganda and democratized it.

As for the baroque as a concept, it can be complex one. After all, it produces an outgrowing outcome of perpetual dynamic flux. Hence, it has the ability to embrace polysemous standpoints and functions (Caws 6). Prior to its application on digital humanities, twentieth-century American scholar Mary Ann Caws recognized the "baroque complexity" as a significant imprint on the surrealist movement; in fact, she echoes Bakhtinian thought as she asserts that "the baroque approach teaches us to think about reversals, upside-downness, and in-outness;" thus the baroque entails "a fascination with what is complex, multiple, clouded and changeable" (4). Indeed, the complexity aspect of the baroque concept also caught the eye of theorists, primarily from the humanities and social sciences.

In 1975, the baroque complexity aspect experienced a renaissance of its own in science; especially in the science that deals with analyzing complexity, which continues to consider the baroque paradigm as valuable tool for analysis (Kwa 46). Why? Because one of the transcendent legacies of the historical baroque is its

affinity for complexity, which can be applied politically as Louis XIV did. Nonetheless, it can also be applied apolitically for scientific analysis since it demands "strong phenomenological realness, a sensuous materiality" (Kwa 26). This baroque "materiality" is multidimensional and multidirectional, thus it has a tendency to yield sophisticated and cooperating combinations that blur the subject and its milieu (Kwa 26). Thus, this breakdown of the baroque as a science tool substantiates my argument that the baroque, as a cultural phenomenon, has a significant synergic attribute. In other words, it is versatile and has complex functionalities.

I also argue that the baroque--as a concept--decentralizes a black-and-white paradigm. Baroque art is recognized as fully decentralized. Therefore, I beg the question, what is more decentralized in the current digital era than Web 2.0 and its predecessor, Web 1.0? Let us face it: the original Internet arose from the anticipation of a nuclear holocaust crisis during the Cold War. Fortunately, that "virtual crisis" never came to be. Hence, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the privatization of the Internet planted the seeds of a new global digital culture. This digital artifact eventually faced its own crisis; a

crisis that generated the current and proactive global digital culture revolution by users, to users and for users in the sea of Web 2.0. In other words, it lit the spark of baroque synergy.

So, does art reverberates in complex digital technology? Certainly, and throughout history, as renowned Italian baroque scholar and writer Umberto Eco puts it: "in every century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality" (13). Times change and so do technology and culture. The end of history like the Y2K scare never materialized. In fact, the post-year 2000 problem world has never been more complex, political and neobaroque. Culture is no longer dominated by powerful monarchs and their vast courts. Now, the multitudes of consumers have caught the attention of the most powerful historical baroque's legacy--the corporation.

In closing, the baroque phenomenon does not disappoint in bringing together and projecting its "baroque synergy." This up-to-date introduction is just the first step of an exciting journey of discovery and critical thinking; it ranges from an extensive general introduction, memento

mori, video games, Facebook, corporate baroque and the ensuing chapter that deals with neobaroque today.

"You are dreaming of what used to be,

And think you have taken the wrong turn."

Mind in a Box

Chapter 2

Rediscovering the Baroque as Neobaroque in the 21st Century

Emerging neobaroque paradigms aim not to turn back the clock to the seventeenth century--far from it. The dawn of the new millennium adapts and mutates baroque techniques into its hegemonic digital and global culture. This new century evokes and exudes parallel--though not congruent--aspects of the cultural phenomenon that permeated the historical baroque of the seventeenth century and beyond. In this chapter, I aim to further delve into the contemporary baroque phenomena, as neobaroque, of the emerging global and digital culture.

The assorted descriptions of the twenty-first century as a neobaroque epoch hint the rising of a phenomenon that merits notice. Indeed, Joyce Korotkin, an artist, curator, fine arts scholar and coauthor of *Neobaroque!*, posits in

her paper, "The Neobaroque Era," that this era esthetically evokes and leans towards the baroque rather than postmodernism; although she acknowledges that both have many aspects in common. She considers it suitable to designate this epoch as "Neobaroque." Korotkin stresses the importance of demarcating neobaroque from postmodernism. Not only by capitalizing the spelling of neobaroque on purpose in her article, but also by underscoring significant dissimilarities.

Indeed, in Korotkin's view, a certain sensibility distinguishes the emerging twenty-first-century neobaroque from any preceding paradigm. This sensibility is "more a state of mind than a tangible movement," like an aroma drifting about and so, creating a visible fragrance brimful of profligate plethora; it is indescribable and inexpressible (Korotkin). In short, it is a neobaroque trait beyond words.

Likewise, although Korotkin admits the hurdles of classifying the notion of neobaroque; she asserts that neobaroque today possesses other amalgamating and unique attributes, such as its elaborate, lavish and "no-holds-barred over-the-top sensuality," unlike the "Post-Modernism minimalist restraint" (Korotkin). The neobaroque of the

twenty-first century is dynamic, imposing and innovative. Hence, the twenty-first-century neobaroque applies "exquisite means to convey a devastating message" (Korotkin).

Korotkin implies that the historical baroque concept of "undeception" carries over into the emerging twenty-first-century neobaroque. This is truly remarkable; after all, "undeception" is the closest English equivalent--and coevally applied in the seventeenth-century translations of Quevedo's works--of the Spanish word *desengaño* according to the unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Korotkin illustrates the meaning behind this historical baroque term as it manifests in twenty-first-century neobaroque art (Korotkin).

For instance, one example includes Ann Craven's renderings of mutated giant birds painted on rich and lavishly colored background; thus it echoes the historical baroque aim to raise moral issues by implying the "should this occur?" question through art, an artful way to further undeception. Indeed, Craven's art depicts an allegorical criticism of undue genetic manipulation and interference leading to dire consequences. Therefore, this twenty-first-century approach, in Korotkin's own words, combines:

> Neobaroque philosophical approach to the acerbic truth of contemporary life with the delight in ornamentation, swirling movement, curved line, and flourish that defined art in the seventeenth century." (Korotkin)

In effect, the parallelism between the didacticism of the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries is noteworthy.

Furthermore, the way the critique of science impacts neobaroque art is intriguing and not alien to its historical baroque predecessor. Namely, considering that during the seventeenth century, a keen interest in science and technology prevailed. The historical baroque witnessed the coining of terms harbingering the eventual boom of science; but it also witnessed its effects on life forms--including humans--like "guinea pigs" as noticed in the unabridged *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

In addition, Korotkin posits that the lack of geometric basis is another notable neobaroque trait of this century, as illustrated in the artwork of Tony de los Reyes' "doomed blue ships on whirling swells, unanchored by linear space" (Korotkin). Nonetheless, this nonlinear feature is not limited to fine arts; it pervades into visual arts of the twenty-first century, as shown in Jeremy

Blake's highly colored videos which "glowed like fireflies lighting up the night;" works which stood in opposition to prior styles where the norms of rational rigidity and visible moderation prevailed (Korotkin).

By the same token, Korotkin points out that nonlinear neobaroque phenomenon manifests themselves in the plastic arts, citing as examples the works of artists such as Bonni Collura--whose sculptures resemble thawing ice cream, referencing "curvilinear and corpulent Baroque works" (Korotkin). Indeed, the artistic examples go on underscoring that the twenty-first century has unveiled a new era of complex visuality. This complex and chaotic intertwining is the side effect of societal crises reflected on artwork. Therefore, Korotkin considers the "complex mix of high anxiety, party fever, and post 9/11 shock" as the key ingredients of this organized and artistic neobaroque chaos. This is akin to the complex, dynamic and forceful reactions of the Big Bang, so necessary for giving birth to the universe (Korotkin).

This is not to say that the contemporary neobaroque is a doomsday phenomenon. Korotkin reckons that the contemporary artistic neobaroque has a "celebratory aspect" shown in its assorted, vivid and lively hues. Hence,

neobaroque art exhibitions combine diverse art forms that echo the Maravallian notion of the baroque feast--or a carnival (Korotkin).

The shock and awe-producing artistic phenomena of the twenty-first-century neobaroque aims to fill the vacuum left by the plain minimalism of the late twentieth century. Therefore, neobaroque "is intended for consumption first by the senses, then by the intellect" (Korotkin). Equally important, neobaroque art not only entertains but also raises awareness of controversial issues--like child abuse--and thus, it searches and makes use of "the darkest compulsions of contemporary psyche" (Korotkin). Indeed, neobaroque artists, such as Nicola Verlato, synthesize baroque Caravaggesque with Renaissance narrative imagery, producing works that deals with polemic issues, which include "wars, institutional greed, political scandal, consumerism, environmental devastation" and so forth (Korotkin).

Although Korotkin never uses the word "crisis" in her expounding of neobaroque art today, she commends today's neobaroque artists for exposing its existence via their artwork:

> Neo-Baroquists excel at exposing the painful realities of life via the beauty they are able to extract from it. It is, in fact, a sensibility of hope that prevails even in the midst of this Age of Decadence with its hardcore porn, wars, institutional greed, political scandal, consumerism, environmental devastation, and rampant brutality--from racism and ethnic cleansing to terrorism. (Korotkin)

Like their historical baroque forerunners, neobaroque artists of the twenty-first century engage on a mission to allure, entertain and educate through the senses.

Nevertheless, even though Korotkin acknowledges the spectacularity of today's thriving neobaroque; she differs from some twentieth-century scholars' viewpoint--including Maravall and Guy Debord--who considered the term "baroque" as the smokescreen of a spectacular cultural mode of social control. Korotkin abstains from labeling the neobaroque as a juggernaut or as a superfluous form of artistic escapism or kitsch. What makes this neobaroque especial--like its seventeenth-century counterpart--is its complex intertwining of art and purpose. Indeed, in Korotkin's words, neobaroque "success depends upon embedded layers of

meaning enmeshed within a work's seductive surface beauty" (Korotkin). That meaning leans toward didacticism and even politics (Korotkin). Hence, akin to the historical baroque artwork, contemporary neobaroque art must be read "between the lines" of its images, to grasp the meaning of their end.

In the end, Korotkin reiterates her conviction that the neobaroque thrives in the twenty-first century. In fact, now that the neobaroque is in full bloom, Korotkin provides an overview of other significant neobaroque attributes, including pictorial preponderance, implied activism via artful allegories and so forth (Korotkin). In addition, the contemporary neobaroque parallels its seventeenth-century historical baroque predecessor in its festive spirit, which advances with an egalitarian and inclusive global reach. Indeed, Korotkin credits the neobaroque of the twenty-first century not to the new breed of artists graduating from fine arts schools. Quite the opposite, she considers them the messengers of "a deeply profound indicator of the times," neobaroque (Korotkin).

Are there any roots to this sudden interest in the baroque and neobaroque by scholars of nontraditional baroque nations like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United

States and Australia in the twenty-first century? Absolutely, this sensibility has its taproots embedded in the last two decades of the twentieth century, in particular, during the 1980s in France. During that time,Christine Buci-Glucksmann's *La raison baroque: de Baudelaire à Benjamin (Baroque Reason: From Baudelaire to Benjamin)* (1984) and *La Folie du voir: del'esthétique baroque* (*Madness of Seeing: the Baroque Aesthetic)* (1986) found Modernist characteristics present in the baroque period. Likewise, Gilles Deleuze's *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque (The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque)* (1988) asserted that 'the Baroque can be stretched beyond its precise historical limits' (Walker 2). Therefore, without a doubt, these scholars made an impact on their twenty-first-century counterparts. After all, the baroque continues to mesmerize multidisciplinary academicians of the twenty-first century. In fact, contemporary scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds carry on and tailor the findings and positions of their respective late twentieth century colleagues; thus, they kept the baroque research flame alive and well into the twenty-first century.

For instance, twenty-first-century academician Anna Munster's deep study on contemporary media, *Materializing*

New Media, dedicates a whole chapter to the relation between baroque and digital culture, titled "Sampling and Folding: The Digital and the Baroque." Munster not only pays homage to the late twentieth century seminal work *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* by Gilles Deleuze. In fact, Deleuze's baroque fold theory holds sway on Munster's disquisition of digital media. Indeed, she states that "thinking through the baroque as an unfolding ongoing event allows us to see its virtual and actual relations to computational culture and therefore to understand culture according to new modalities" (41). She goes on to discuss that the baroque can be proactively heterodox as a "scientific, artistic and cultural 'war machine'" at variance with the linear rationality of traditional science (Munster 43); she asserts that the baroque targets the senses and consciousness "in its articulation of perception" (Munster 43). On the other hand, she also credits the baroque as an instrumental force with the ability to bring heterogeneous cultural elements together, in harmony, in times of crises; she credits Maravall for pointing that out (Munster 47). Therefore, Munster considers the baroque as an adaptable cyclical phenomenon that can be applied to the study of current digital culture. After all, it crafts divergent topos and thus,

engenders “entwined embodied, aesthetic and technological relations” (Munster 48).

Deleuze’s baroque research also struck a chord with contemporary British popular culture scholar Patricia MacCormack who, in her 2007 peer-reviewed article, “Baroque Intensity: Lovecraft, Le Fanu, and the Fold,” expounds Deleuze’s notion that baroque entities exist within a pleat of matter, in the ensuing excerpt:

> In the Baroque one’s nature depends entirely on the forces and malleable, supple forms with which it folds, at every turn unique and unpredictable. Baroque interpretations see forms as made up of many smaller parts and being part of larger systems, always teeming as aspects rather than forms and infinitely multiple. The self is not known to the self because it is always more than a single expression and less than an individual. Baroque entities exist within what Deleuze calls a pleat of matter. Leibniz emphasises that through creating and existing within relations or pleats all form and thus all reality is purely perspectival. Neither form nor substance can be apprehended as a totality. ‘Each body has its

> degree of firmness and fluidity; It has its fluidity or divisibility of itself, but its firmness from the motion of bodies' (Leibniz 86). This means that the plagued individuals are themselves constituted differently and as their forms are more and more effected by the otherworldly forms they are further extricated from the human world. In Baroque stories, transformation occurs when the affective bodies which constitute the form of the individuals are constructed through limits and firmness found in other structures – other incarnations of matter, via otherworldly versions of form and through other, non-Euclidian physics. (MacCormack, "Baroque Intensity")

MacCormack applies the historical baroque writings of Leibniz to buttress her adaptation of Deleuze's baroque standpoint into her analysis of two noteworthy horror writers of the Victorian and Great Depression eras. Nevertheless, Deleuze's *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* not only impacted MacCormack's analysis of Le Fanu and Lovecraft's horror style--from a Deleuzian baroque

interpretation; they also had an impact on MacCormack's most recent and thought provoking monograph--*Cinesexuality*.

In *Cinesexuality*, MacCormack dedicates two complete chapters to an evolved, secular and image driven baroque colored by Deleuze's fold concept (63). Although MacCormack's study aims to define and put forth the notion of cinesexuality--cinephilic concupiscence--in film, a baroque paradigm plays a pivotal role (1). In fact, MacCormack goes as far as to assert that "it must be understood that baroque intensities are to be found in *all* images, as they are contingent on the desire of each spectator, which is neither present nor known to us before, or beyond, the event" (63). As the current global society immerses itself every day in digital imagery, MacCormack's study can further facilitate the understanding of why images continue to captivate, as they did during the historical baroque.

MacCormack's "Baroque Cinesexuality" chapter yields an inference applicable to the present-day digital phenomenon where the user of Web 2.0--the new Internet--acts as an actor and spectator, and thus becomes producer and consumer of information. Actually, MacCormack goes as far as to state that "all images are real to the extent they are

present and materialize the spectator as we materialize images" (67). Thus, for MacCormack, the baroque plays a significant role in illustrating how the spectators are folded with the images (67). This is a pivotal role; after all, MacCormack considers the baroque as "existence and reality understood as encounters of position, perspective, and the affects and pleats through which they are formed and which they produce" (67).

In effect, MacCormack, as a Deleuzian scholar, acknowledges how Deleuze characterizes "baroque" as something inadaptable to configuration (67). Indeed, MacCormack underscores Deleuze's concept that folds constitutes images; not in segments but rather, in an assorted continuum of folds. On that account, MacCormack deems any contact with cinesexuality as "baroque events through which we are emergent in the world and the world emergent in us" (67).

Furthermore, MacCormack's "Baroque Cinesexuality" chapter provides a thoughtful contemporary application of the baroque in order to understand complex images: "Images do not need to mirror the world because the ways images materialize us is through intensities not equivalencies" (67). According to MacCormack, the baroque fold principle

lives in everyone; thus, when individuals come across images, including uncommon ones, the "baroque perception is not found in its form or function but in the pleats with which it folds us and we create with it" (67). So, MacCormack argues that when persons attempt to substantialize an unusual image, it has an effect on their lives as a whole via a "baroque" mixture of those individuals' "ideologies, values and configurations of desire and self" (67). This meticulous chapter on baroque cinesexuality takes Deleuze's twentieth-century postulate on the baroque to new heights.

In the same way, MacCormack's mesmerization for the baroque as a paradigm to expound her concept of cinesexuality continues on "Baroque Becomings," the last section of *Cinesexuality*, which she dedicates in full to the Deleuzian interpretation of baroque. In effect, MacCormack centers on what she considers baroque imagery in cult horror films. MacCormack discusses *Hellraiser* and especially its subsequent sequel--*Hellbound*--as baroque films anew. Likewise, in *Baroque Baroque*, Stephen Calloway noticed the parallels among Pinhead and the other Cenobites with seventeenth-century "écorché figures" (anatomical

models) commonly found in painters' studios during the historical baroque period (209).

Intriguingly, akin to MacCormack's inference over the application of the baroque to her concept of cinesexuality in 2008, Calloway infers that the purpose of such grotesque figures in *Hellraiser* is to create an almost pleasurable sensation of fright, a "frisson" (Calloway 209). Indeed, it can be argued that MacCormack's monograph, and especially her second chapter on the baroque, flourishes and expands Calloway's posit on this cult film. MacCormack links not only the parallels the use of sensuality and allegory to the historical baroque, but also closer similarities between them; like Calloway did when comparing the popularity of écorché figures in the seventeenth century which, later on, held sway in the design of the *Hellraiser* Cenobites, for effect (Calloway 209).

In "Baroque Becomings," MacCormack reminds her reading audience that, in the baroque tradition, the makers of *Hellraiser* as well as its sequel, *Hellbound*, continue to expand the use of updated baroque themes, artifacts and imagery (85). Thus MacCormack considers them as prime examples of baroque horror cinema (85). Though, with MacCormack's tweak, as she reveals in her own words:

> *Hellraiser* proffers to its protagonists, and the cinesexual, baroque configurations of demonic flesh and temptation away from the signifying paradigms of grand narratives of regulation, most pertinently the Church. (86)

Namely, this film illustrates a secular rather than clerical baroque. Nonetheless, the metaphysical remains pivotal in this secular baroque film. On that account, MacCormack applies Deleuze's baroque fold theory to limn the extramundane scenario portrayed; especially, in the way that fallen angels--the Cenobites--intertwine multiple dimensions or "realities" at the same time:

> In the film they occupy borderlands, evince the world itself as folded, not their world and our world but both simultaneously and made up of angels and folds that intercede at various point which shift depending on locations and times of invocation. (86)

Hence, MacCormack stresses that the effect of this baroque film comprises of paradoxical and complex imagery that challenges the senses; though instead of mystical and hagiolatrous baroque artwork--as in Bernini's *Saint Teresa*--, in *Hellraiser* the seeker of metaphysical joy is anything

but a saint; in fact, he is a hedonistic occultist who looks for pleasures beyond this world at all costs. As a result, the baroque horror allegory intensifies as these grotesque and complex fallen angels show up (86).

Furthermore, MacCormack adds that the illustrations of the fallen angels make mesmerizing instances "of what could constitute a baroque body literally peeled back and segmented not through discrete centralizing organization but perspectival flesh-fabric-folding planes" (86). Thus, MacCormack bespeaks the creative and transcending baroque adaptability manifested in *Hellraiser* and *Hellbound*, her prime examples of baroque horror films.

Certainly, MacCormack's thorough updated application of Deleuze's notion of the baroque as well as the parallels she identifies with baroque motifs of the seventeenth century--tentacles, the labyrinth, allegory, mysticism and so forth--is significant; moreover, she substantiates that the twentieth century legacy of Deleuze's baroque disquisition remains alive and well in the new millennium--and continues to evolve. Hence, MacCormack demonstrates in her careful analysis, creative adaptations of historical baroque motifs and twentieth-century baroque theory.

An equally important paragon of the baroque's labile character comes closer to home; it is furnished by Canadian scholar Rob Shields. In *The Virtual*--an in-depth study on the coeval virtual world of cyberspace--Shield acknowledges the need to look back to the historical baroque style to grasp the current virtuality of cyberspace. Shields goes as far as to dedicate an entire section of his monograph to "Baroque Cyberspaces" (7).

"Baroque Cyberspaces" contemplates the significance of the baroque to fathom virtuality; it provides a survey of its not so dormant existence during time periods not traditionally associated with the baroque (Shields 7). In fact, Shields remarks the interestedness of eighteen and nineteen-century authors in the historical baroque style landmarks, such as the Hall of Mirrors at the Versailles Palace, *trompe l'oeil* ornamentation and semblance (Shields 7). Mirrors and its images are considered pivotal predecessors to contemporary virtuality. This is significant. Indeed, in Shields' view, "the image is virtual in that it suggests a potential mirror-world on the other side of the glass, an early precursor of the power of simulation" (7). Hence, Shields underscores the importance of history; after all, earlier times foresaw how

individuals nowadays regard the virtualities illustrated in computer-generated spaces, such as geographically dispersed business teams, also known as "virtual teams" (7).

Shields adds another historical example; he remarks that the eighteenth century attested to the primordial mise–en–scènes of virtuality, usually found in the inside ornamentation of houses of worship--trompe l'oeil (7). This artistic manifestation had an agenda--reassurance in the midst of upheaval; the semblances seemed to transgress gravitation. Hence, Shields concurs with José Antonio Maravall's theory that this spectacle of special effects had the purpose to generate stability through awe. He goes on underpinning Maravall's contribution to the overlapping between baroque and virtuality through this Maravallian quote:

> The heady lure of these mystical works is based on their elaborate continuities of human and fictive space. . . . They pair techniques involving the creation of a dreamscape, and the provision of [human] figures for identification that call the viewer to enter fictive space, changing with their movements, inviting their co-

> authorship. They are fundamentally navigable . . . 'spaces of persuasion.' (qtd. in Shields 7)

Shields utilizes Maravall's quote to introduce and bridge virtuality and baroque. Nevertheless, prior to juxtaposing their parallels, he confirms his concurrence with Maravall; in particular, Shield agrees that the historical baroque style is a mode "of forced perspective" via immersion into a histrionic ambit that goes "beyond the cares of the subluminary world" in its art (8). In addition, Shields goes on with a powerful quote from *Against Literature*--a 1993 thought-provoking treatise by John Beverley, highlighting the relevance of the historical baroque to virtuality:

> At its pinnacle, the Baroque offered the thoroughly mediated interactivity of audience participation in the spectacle of its own rule. . . . [It] 'was like postmodernism today, at once a technique of power of a dominant class in a period of reaction and figuration of the limits of that power'. . . we need to understand the culture of the spectacle in the first Baroque as the beginning of our own. To understand that the vertigo of imperial expansion, the terrors of

> absolute power and the morbid fascination with decay and mortality have been transformed into these virtual architectures is to catch a glimpse of the emergence of our own obsessions with the universe as our object of possession, our anxieties about absolute commodification. (qtd. in Shields 8)

Unlike this quote, Calabrese, Beverley's contemporary, rejects postmodernism as an adequate categorization; in fact Calabrese lambasted it as a trite term "for a wide variety of different creative operations" (Calabrese 12). Likewise, Calabrese, considers postmodernism inadequate for construing the complexity of the "artistic, scientific and social phenomena" occurring since the last two decades of the twentieth century (14). Therefore, neobaroque as opposed to postmodernism fits better for analysis; it seeks parallels with its historical predecessor--the Baroque--rather than hindsight, the way postmodernism deals with modernism (Calabrese 15).

Indeed, Shields buttresses his application of the historical baroque as a way to fathom contemporary virtuality, with a little help from twentieth-century baroque researchers. In the case of Maravall, he provides

Shields a primordial model of what eventually became Web 2.0; a place where the public became virtual actors and spectators--the same conclusion reached by MacCormack in her analysis of image reception via a baroque model. As for Beverley, besides echoing the interactive feature of the baroque audience--so prevalent in today's Cyberia--he provides Shields with a rationale; it underlines the adaptable baroque mode that has reached the digital virtual era. Thus, Shields infers that virtual milieus overlap the interest of "the baroque church ceiling" to beckon the public "into a spectacle which transcends the everyday spaces of the temporal world" (8). Those historical baroque spaces--akin to the ubiquitous computer-generated environments today--called for the demarcation "of the mind and body into a virtual and concrete pair: the soul and the flesh" (Shields 8). Hence, concurring with Maravall, the system that wins the virtual--the hearts and minds--wins the bodies (Shields 8).

This baroque delimitation carried on into today's virtual reality fixated millennium. Nevertheless, Shields demurs at considering it a panacea--especially for social ills--as some high-tech enthusiasts do (15). Moreover, Shields recognizes the monumental significance of the

historical baroque style as a paragon of historical virtualism--such as in the interior of baroque churches. In the end, Shields' most striking observation is to note the ability of the virtual baroque mode to transcend time and acquire a life of its own through its adaptability (17).

Are Deleuze and Maravall the sole twentieth-century baroque theorists with an impact that transcends into the twenty-first century? Not necessarily. In "The Cyber-Baroque: Walter Ong, The History of Rhetoric, and an Early Modern Information Mode" Jean Vincent-Blanchard acknowledges the significant contributions of Omar Calabrese's *Neobaroque: A Sign of the Times* and the not so distant anthology *Résurgences baroques* compiled by Nicolas Goyer and Walter Moser. Jean Vincent-Blanchard credits these studies for eliciting attention to the study of comparisons between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries; but he also acknowledges them for serving as paragons of "early modern cultural productions in the context of larger epistemic shifts" (Vincent-Blanchard 150).

Even though Vincent-Blanchard uses the term baroque in his article's title, he also admits, at the beginning,

that he favors studying early modernity from a historical perspective centered on rhetoric; in that rhetoric's history--unlike the vague baroque or classicism classifications--furnishes further painstaking concepts (150). Nevertheless, Vincent-Blanchard ends up recognizing that "baroque discourse displays many visual elements that are characteristics of rhetorical performance" (168). Subsequently, he moves on to discuss the current digital era where the virtual and artistic imagery prevail in cyberspace.

Indeed, as Vincent-Blanchard discusses cybernetics, he cannot divorce the parallels between the historical baroque and the twenty-first-century Cyberia. In his outlook, akin to the historical baroque, Vincent-Blanchard asserts that the criteria of truth--necessary for evaluating the constant information bombardment via cyberspace--belongs to ethics rather than science since "it is characterized by a performative nature" (Vincent-Blanchard 172). After all, "sensuous pleasures and special effects" impinge on this era; thus, today's yardstick of truth is verisimilitude, "as in oral-aural cultures" (Vincent-Blanchard 172).

As a result, Vincent-Blanchard infers that the current culture of communication and interaction ("the interface

culture") needs to focus on countervailing the seeming accuracy of icons (172). Therefore, he echoes the historical baroque message that perception is not always reality; in other words, symbols could be masks--with ulterior motives--applying visual rhetoric to persuade without spurring serious and critical deliberation. Thus, Vincent-Blanchard concludes that twenty-first-century educators must now confront this gauntlet thrown by Cyberia (172). This is not to say that rhetoric, allegory, and symbolism always bring forth detriment.

So, is the twenty-first century becoming a spectacular baroque century where images preponderate? Yes, considering some of the interesting parallels with the seventeenth century historical baroque, such as the use of animation as a narrative style (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 27). Nowadays more than ever, it has been argued that animation is the narrative flow of the prolific "Electronic Baroque" (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 27). Animation no longer means Saturday morning cartoons in the twenty-first century; rather, animation can literally keep track of a smart bomb to shock and awe (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 27). Furthermore, the graphical computer representation of any computer office desk--the desktop--

comprises animation. Even more intriguing, animation today has the crucial role of ascribing human features to digital information--computer avatars and emoticons come to mind (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 27).

Paradoxically, the end result is the illusion that users have greater command of the digital data they wield by clicking graphic symbols on their computer; icons that acknowledge users' commands in an easy-to-use format and yet deviate them from the ultimate form of control in computer science--programming (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 27). This is hard to grasp at first, until a hacker or virus creator--proficient programmers--undeceive users of their utter dependency on hidden algorithms and program codes, which wear icons as digital masks.

Likewise, the digital multimedia of the twenty-first century shares parallels with its historical baroque forerunners. After all, this animation dominated multimedia conveys a message, as *trompe l'oeil* did. Thus multimedia immerses its users into verisimilar digital artifices by wearing the mask of special effects; akin to "Baroque sculptural and architectural tricks" where statues are in "continuous movement" and require the audience immersion (Klein, "Animation as Baroque" 29).

Norman Klein certainly strikes a chord when he compares animation as a vernacular rather than an elite mode of narration; such comparison echoes baroque theorist José Antonio Maravall's concept that baroque is a mass driven cultural movement. A notion which is not so far-fetched since social networking sites like Facebook not only serve as storytelling venues, loaded with baroque allegory and digital masks; they are also constantly consumed, developed and driven by their respective herds of users.

Furthermore, in "Bush as Baroque Special Effects" Klein expounds that the twenty-first century is a paragon of reemerging baroque tactics and concepts. Put bluntly, Klein's argument overlaps that of Morpheus in *The Matrix*; namely, in that the new millennium has created a dream world that gives individuals the illusion of freedom to choose one's own destiny. Why *The Matrix*? Because the current digital global society is engrossed in a mazelike pathway--it generates the mirage of volition (Klein 379). Individuals, when it comes to their destiny, have the illusion of self-determination generated by a smoke screen; it is a mere ostensibility. Like in *The Matrix*, simulation spawns complacency of the status quo (Klein 380).

The twenty-first century continues the political theatricality with a baroque twist in that "today, simulation in media has evolved into a precision tool that exercises enormous political power. This tool can fake wars or break treaties" (Klein 381). To Klein, the twenty-first century has also become the century where TV--and media per se--has evolved into "an instrument" rather than a "servant of power" (381). Indeed, he goes on to draw parallels between the historical baroque and the early twenty-first-century media; as Klein puts it, the media "operates practically as an instrument with its own kingdom, by its own authority, in a theater as politically coherent as Baroque special effects" (Klein 381). Once again, Maravall's excogitation that led to his baroque theory resonates--it is all about control. More specifically, Klein asserts that the special effects of the twenty-first-century media have reached an exactitude that echoes the "perspective awry or immersion" of the historical baroque. Moreover--akin to Maravall--Klein asserts that behind all of the current media special effects, there are ulterior political agendas seeking to gain society's hearts and minds (381).

What follows makes Klein's article intriguing and quite piquant--the political scrutinization of the polemic first millennial election of the leader of the sole remaining superpower--George W. Bush--through a baroque anatomization. In effect, Klein's inference on this matter is controversial as well, in that it tallies this election with each class of special effects that he has come across; that is, his research, which ferrets out information from as far back as four hundred years ago ("Bush as Baroque" 382). Accordingly, Klein compares the role of the twenty-first-century media responsible for broadcasting the first millennial presidential election to "Baroque trompe l'oeil;" and thus, he ends up drawing parallels with the illusion of free will portrayed in *The Matrix*. Likewise, he draws a parallel comparison between this polemic election and seventeenth-century theatricality, especially the "Baroque spectacle" of 1620 applied for the benefit of the Crown. Indeed, to Klein, it has reemerged, rekindled and readapted to the twenty-first century to foment the willful acceptance of the status quo (Klein "Bush as Baroque" 384). The "Electronic baroque" of the twenty-first century, according to Klein, is imbued with deception.

This “electronic Baroque” acts like a lord of illusions; but in the neo-theater of the world of this nascent millennium, the illusion created by special effects has become the accepted reality (“Bush as Baroque” 384). Thus, to underpin the assertion that the “Electronic baroque” has a monumental effect, due to its power of persuasion, Klein references to cognitive psychology theories; in particular those theories supported by Daniel Schacter, a renowned Harvard professor of psychology who asserts that the brain cannot “chemically separate truth from fiction” (“Bush as Baroque” 384). Hence, an effective illusion can indeed persuade individuals and their brain hormones, even if the illusion is false. That is, a delusion can subjectively become a fact (“Bush as Baroque” 384).

Furthermore, Klein continues to draw parallels between the historical baroque and this era. Some are quite dire, as he states: “Indeed, the world has left the twentieth century from two ends, as I often say--into the future and into the Thirty Years’ War (1618), at the apex of the fundamentalist madness during the Baroque” (390). Thus, Klein infers that the special effects of the new millennium are a mixture of “terror with reassurance, where the

artificial invades the natural," to perpetuate the dominant global system by bamboozling the public's free will ("Bush as Baroque Special Effects" 391). Norman Klein, besides his great contribution to the historical study of special effects, has a knack for politicizing cultural phenomena. In effect, he has no qualms about acknowledging the political capacity of the baroque to function as a propeller of a political juggernaut that has transformed into a *Matrix* fuelled by the "Electronic Baroque" of the new millennium.

This is not to say that Klein is the only scholar that acknowledges the political ramifications arising from a reemerging baroque milieu in the twenty-first century. In "Law, Metaphysics and the New Iconoclasm," legal scholar Richard Sherwin considers this period a neobaroque era; he concurs with what Calderon de la Barca stated in his magnum opus *Life is a Dream*--"we are living in a dream world," at the service of the system (76). Indeed, in his subsequent article, "What Screen do You Have in Mind," Sherwin reaffirms his assertion that the twenty-first century is characterized by the "emergence of a new baroque era" (5).

Therefore, Sherwin opines that visuality in the twenty-first century shares a considerable "process of de-

rationalization" with the historical baroque of the seventeenth century ("What Screen do You Have in Mind" 5). That is, a modus operandi of setting the public's endowed ability to reason in a Matrix-like reverie, which puts the mind on sleep mode. Likewise, he notes that nowadays the seventeenth century "Cartesian disembodiment" has morphed into an experience dominated by tangible, picturesque and emotive "visual experience of moving images on the screen" (Sherwin, "What Screen do You Have in Mind" 6). All of these phenomena are not art for art's sake, although it might appear to be the case on the computer, television, cinema screens and so forth.

Sherwin recognizes that his politicization of the new millennium baroque can be bolstered by late twentieth-century baroque theories; not only by Maravall but also by Christine Buci-Glucksmann. After all, Sherwin refers to her "madness of vision" that distinguishes the baroque; he goes on to meld it with Maravall's approach. Namely, Sherwin labels the baroque as a "madness that may be yoked not simply to desire, but also to the manipulations and deceit of desire in the service of power" ("What Screen do You Have in Mind" 6). This instrumental baroque phenomenon, in Sherwin's view, is not alien to the modern

and postmodern societies--it is a highly adaptable baroque carry-over.

In other words, the baroque as a mechanism of control is not exclusive to the establishment of the seventeenth century. Thus, it has evolved through time under assorted names and terms, such as: "engineering of consent, society of the spectacle, and the political ascendance of manipulative media events (constructing artificial, preferred realities)" (Sherwin, "What Screen do You Have in Mind" 6). Hence, according to Sherwin, the contemporaneous neobaroque comprises a political instrument--analogous to its historical baroque counterpart--that catalyzes puissance's peculiar proclivity to absoluteness; that is, despotism due to power's insatiable thirst and inclination for plenary control--even if lying behind the plethora of neobaroque masks and screens that make up the system (Sherwin, "What Screen do You Have in Mind" 6).

In the end, Sherwin is not completely somber about this phenomenon. As a legal scholar, he recognizes the important role that attorneys and judges can play to undeceive the public of the subterfuge of persuasive imagery applied for the sake of unwarranted power ("What Screen do You Have in Mind" 6). Therefore, Sherwin

recognizes another baroque capability--the undeceiving baroque impetus represented by thinkers like Gracian, and Sherwin himself, in the neobaroque of the twenty-first century.

As the first decade of this new millennium wanes, the baroque paradigm remains alive and well; it includes "phenomena of endogenous excess, ranging from artistic and media products to political and social behavior," an occurrence foresighted by Calabrese, which continues to bear an imprint today (58-59). Evidently, Lady Gaga--today's pop music diva, fashionista and superstar--dawns the artistic and pop culture neobaroque of the new millennium's second decade. Just consider some of her commingling music videos, such as "Bad Romance;" a video where she voluptuously melds the shock, sensuality, excess, ornamentation, allegory, as well as the inescapable and undeceiving puissance conveyed by memento mori at the end.

Moreover, and echoing the historical baroque's transcending adaptability and synergy among diverse cultures, Iain Chambers links hip-hop music to the baroque. Namely, in the subsection "Unspeakable Sounds," of his paper "History, Baroque and the Judgment of Angels," as he states the following:

> Like in the Baroque insistence on the ornament that permits us to look into the interior and bear witness to the 'underground of language', rap's decoration and decentring of readily available languages and styles suggests that music reflects more than is accessible to the categories of reflection, and invokes the effort to say that of which one cannot speak. (95)

Indeed, Chambers resonates with Calabrese's concept that baroque eras tend to sway away from centralization, that is, to become centrifugal (58). In addition, twenty-first-century rap has truly become more syncretic than its twentieth-century predecessor; it has gone mainstream, like the historical baroque musical spectacles. Now its vast vernacular audience comprises the inner-city, the suburbs as well as the virtual global village online.

Today's neobaroque is truly vernacular and entrenched in global popular culture. Likewise, this is also true in the latter twentieth century--as noted by Calabrese--and most recently by Angela Ndalianis, Bruce R. Burningham, William Egginton and Krešimir Purgar, among other scholars. These contemporary scholars tend to quote or acknowledge each other's neobaroque research. In particular, Angela

Ndalianis has made a tremendous contribution to the rekindlement of the study of neobaroque, since the dawn of this new millennium. She has bolstered up that the baroque and neobaroque of the twenty-first century share parallels; as she puts it in her paper "Baroque Perceptual Regimes," as early as the year 2000:

> The seventeenth century and our own era are epochs that reflect wide-scale baroque sensibilities that, while being the product of specific socio-historical and temporal conditions, reflect similar patterns and concerns on formal levels. While specific historical conditions differ radically, both epochs underwent radical cultural, perceptual, and technological shifts that manifested themselves in similar aesthetic forms. (Ndalianis, "Baroque Perceptual Regimes")

Hence, both time periods embrace an interest in: "spectacle, illusionism, and the baroque formal principle of the collapse of the frame" (Ndalianis, "Baroque Perceptual Regimes").

Consequently, Ndalianis carried on and published, three years later, her in-depth monograph *Neobaroque*

Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment; where she underscores the importance of sensory experiences in both the baroque and twenty-first-century neobaroque (5). Likewise, in her neobaroque monograph, Ndalianis accentuates the multimedia, multisensory, and parallelism with the historical baroque that continues to evolve and flourish since the twilight of the last century, in her own words:

> The neobaroque 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 the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in technologically and culturally different ways. Importantly, underlying the emergence of the neobaroque are transformed economic and social factors. (5)

Certainly, Ndalianis' outlook continues to materialize through those neobaroque multimedia spectacles and virtualities which become more popular and portable on a daily basis; in particular, with the crescent popularity of the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad--carry-overs of trompe l'oeil to the current neobaroque vernacular virtuality and

theatricality. Likewise, these gadgets are truly epitomes of interactive baroque theatrical adaptability; indeed, mass users can simultaneously perform and be part of an audience on diverse virtual and digital stages--Facebook, Twitter, Google, video games, YouTube, Second Life and so forth; means that are accessible via those mini-theatrical gates (smartphohes, tablets, laptops, among other devices) that keep getting smaller and yet bigger in the users' minds--from almost anywhere.

Certainly, Ndalianis' work acts upon those of fellow contemporary researchers, like in Bruce Burningham's 2008 *Tilting Cervantes: Baroque Reflections in Postmodern Culture*. Burningham not only references Ndalianis' 2000 paper to justify his interest in seeking parallels with the historical baroque; he also tweaks his sources to zoom in exclusively on the Spanish baroque's impingement "on the culture of the twenty and twenty-first centuries;" and by that he means beyond the Spanish and Spanish Latin American nations (5).

In fact, as an early twenty-first-century scholar, Burningham focuses on the impact of the Spanish baroque "within the Anglo-American Academy and contemporary global culture in general" (5). Thus, through his neobaroque

lens, he anatomizes, compares and determines the existence of parallels among classic Spanish baroque literature masterpieces, such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and popular culture cult films like *The Matrix*. After all, Burningham considers "Thomas Anderson/Neo as a figure of Alonso Quixano/Don Quixote" (8); and likewise, *The Matrix*'s agents as inquisitors in charge of imposing a mono-reality. Thus the last battle of *The Matrix* trilogy--Neo against agent Smith--is regarded as a parallel of the encounter between Don Quixote and the Knight of the Mirrors--though with Burningham's neobaroque tweaking to explain the victor's success:

> Neo vanquishes his reflective nemesis by allowing Smith to turn him into an exact replica of his chief inquisitor. However, because the film posits Neo as a 'mathematical anomaly, the remainder of an unbalanced equation,' this final baroque mirroring of Neo and Smith initiates a systemwide crash through which the *Matrix*'s virtual reality essentially 'reboots' itself. In this, Neo proves not only that he is the 'I' (as opposed to the messianic--and anagrammatical--'One' promised from the beginning of the

> trilogy), but also that his final status as a numerical cipher within a mathematically encoded text mirrors that of Don Quixote. (8)

I would add that this final faceoff between agent Smith and Neo is also significant in that it illustrates Neo's mortality. Therefore, this scene shows an action-packed memento mori, which makes obvious that even heroes, regardless if they can fight Matrix agents and dodge bullets inside the Matrix wonderland, will die. Even though Neo seemed larger than life--like Don Quixote's protagonist--throughout most of the Matrix saga; in the end, Neo becomes a memento mori as well--a baroque motif--by sacrificing himself to save humanity.

In addition, this intriguing quote hints at Burningham's pivotal parallel between the historical baroque and neobaroque nowadays--the means of the mirror image, unveiled at the end of his disquisition:

> The baroque holds a mirror up to life not to accentuate the image reflected but to celebrate the mirror itself. And no culture since the seventeenth century has been as actively engaged in this critical reflection as our own. (181)

Therefore, Burningham's neobaroque perspective establishes a novel nexus not only with the historical baroque but also, more specifically, with Spanish baroque literature. This includes Spanish America's baroque thinkers like Sor Juana; after all, she inferred the unattainability of Shangri-La--advanced by the Renaissance--in that mere mortals tend to obfuscate such Eden by earthly complexities fueled by human nature; hence, underscoring humanity's inability to reach a homely heaven on Earth (181).

Thus, four centuries later, Burningham underscores that Sor Juana's rationale resonates in *The Matrix* trilogy; this takes place, in particular, when agent Smith and the Architect (the allegorical name of the character who created the Matrix) explain to Morpheus and Neo that humans tend to deviate from heavenly harmony (181). Truly, Burningham sets forth an intriguing neobaroque perspective between Spanish baroque thinkers and the current popular global culture. These are two paradoxically dissimilar--yet similar--modern and complex societies, where the baroque can deceive or undeceive the willing Neos, or even Don Quixote; after all, semblance is not always reality.

The global and digital neobaroque continues to thrive via Web 2.0 and high-tech gadgets. What makes it tick?

Power--political power in particular--can be a factor as noted by Walter Moser; the transcendent and adaptable baroque esthetics, after all, can be applied as powerful political means of persuasion "to subjugate the subject," as well as "to exert social integration if not repression" (27). Indeed, these multifarious and persuasive "aesthetics of power" can be applied to win the hearts and minds of individuals for good or base political motives (Moser 27). Later on, William Egginton's 2010 treatise *The Theater of Truth*: *The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, continued to elaborate on the nexus between power and the resurgence of baroque elements via the neobaroque paradigm.

Prior to unfolding his critique, Egginton credits Ndalianis' work for establishing a tie-in between the historical baroque and the current neobaroque:

> As a result of technological, economic, and industrial, and economic transformations contemporary entertainment media reflect a dominant neobaroque logic. The neobaroque shares a baroque delight in spectacle and sensory experience. Neobaroque entertainments, however--which are the product of conglomerate entertainment industries, multimedia interests,

> and spectacle that is often reliant upon computer technology--present contemporary audiences with new baroque forms of expression that are aligned with late-twentieth-and early-twenty-first-century concerns. The neobaroque 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 the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in technologically and culturally different ways. Importantly, underlying the emergence of the neobaroque are transformed economic and social factors. (Ndalianis, *Neobaroque Aesthetics* 5)

Indeed, Egginton recognizes Ndalianis monograph on neobaroque. He values her cogent discussion on the parallels between the historical baroque "technologies of vision and representation;" in particular, their instrumentality as a means to "infiltrate our consciousness through film and video, computers and the Web, and video games and theme parks," and so illustrating "baroque aesthetic tropes" (Egginton 81).

Nevertheless, Egginton craves the baroque sociopolitical aspect, which Ndalianis abstains from in her monograph (*Neobaroque Aesthetics* 23). Hence, he animadverts on the lack of scrutiny of this significant baroque feature (81). Furthermore, to Egginton it is important to acknowledge the following historical baroque tie-in features, especially the last one mentioned:

> While it is undoubtedly the case that baroque sensibilities are closely linked to epistemic disruption, opening horizons of knowledge, and the introduction of new modes of representation, what keeping the historical baroque in mind allows us to do is to recognize the ever-present potential of baroque aesthetic expression for centripetal identification strategies, as well as for their dissolution. (81)

Therefore, Egginton labels any exclusion of this baroque potential as theoretical obliviousness or elision.

Egginton raises the question of the motivating forces behind our present-day spectacles, asking if these, like the baroque spectacles described by Maravall, are "deployed for the advantages of specific political and class interests" (82). Especially, Egginton posits a baroque

sociopolitical tie-in with the contemporary "military entertainment complex" (82). Hence, "how particular forms of aesthetic enjoyment structure and position their subjects or end-users" warrants focus in any form of baroque research, in Egginton's view (82). Decisively, he opines that the pretermission of the "major baroque strategy of subjection to an ever-deferred truth" strips the neobaroque of its refractory capability (82).

To Egginton, empires--either hoary or new--and their respective "military-entertainment complexes" tend to promote the notion of interchangeability between actuality and simulacrum, as long as the status quo remains undisputed; hence he refers to this matter as "illusionism," where the accustomedness of a subtly established and complex assemblage of control functions as its modus operandi in order to familiarize with "a technologically constructed secondary frame" (82). Thus, he draws parallels with pop culture's inculcation--leading to popular entertainment consumerism--with the historical baroque theater reinforcing complacency of the status quo to its mass audience; it is all about control through illusion (82).

Furthermore, unlike his contemporary neobaroque researchers, Egginton asserts against the notion of linking neobaroque research to popular culture. He considers such a nexus unacceptable, as shown by his remonstration below, which underlines the need for demarcation:

> The force of this distinction, I want to stress, is not mere snobbery, a defense of higher, more literary and artistic production against popular culture; rather, it is based on the observation that the illusionism of Hollywood cinema and the spectacle of the fashion industry, no matter how worthy of admiration their techniques might be, both function ultimately as lures for the production of docile consumers; the bait of difference, of individuality, is proffered in the service of mass commodification. (83-84)

Notwithstanding, he also recognizes that the baroque is comprised of aspects that can point to structural issues on the accepted status quo; he terms them as “minor baroque strategies” to the extent that their course of action uncovers the seemingly “unrepresented as still being a function of representation” (83).

By the same token, Egginton insists on the importance of striving for an unblemished neobaroque form; in that he believes in its incorruptibility by the free enterprise system. That is, he holds that art and literature that implement the baroque "minor strategy" would make them immune to commercialization "because the very function of the strategy undermines the basis for identification necessary for mass comodification" (84). Evidently, it appears that this thinker is unfamiliar with Burningham's neobaroque work that refers to Sor Juana's admiration for the ultimate divine simplicity; regardless of her acknowledgement of its incompossibility on Earth (Burningham 181). Likewise, as Larry and Andy Wachowski--*The Matrix*'s neobaroque scriptwriters and film producers--put it through Morpheus's advice to Neo:

> You have to understand that most of these people are not ready to be unplugged and many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it. (53)

The life of contemplation is not for everyone.

Indeed, *The Matrix* is a blockbuster success with the masses and academia--and with diverse schools of thought. The Wachowski brothers can be considered neobaroque

counterparts of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and so forth; since their spectacular production not only appealed to their diverse audiences, but also, in a subtle manner, critiqued some central aspects of the system. Analogously, it is no accident that the Puritans abhorred Shakespeare's Globe Theater or that reactionary forces lobbied the Spanish Crown to scant popular baroque theater (Metford 81; Morgan 340). In fact, during that era, the works of popular historical baroque playwrights remained shunned by academia. Back then, who would have pictured that these commercial and popular culture entertainments would become academic canons long before the end of the last millennium?

Accordingly, the claim that considers the structure of the system as just a mere and ostensible baroque hydra is quite quixotic; Sherwin and Klein illustrate that there are standpoints that critique the misuse of baroque strategies as neobaroque--implicitly applying the baroque undeception approach--long before Egginton's disquisition. Even Ndalianis' monograph recognizes such applications as the boon and bane aspects of the baroque; although she opted not to center her study on the sociopolitical features and capabilities of today's global neobaroque pop culture (*Neo-Baroque Aesthetics* 23). Ultimately, complexity is one of

the beauties of the baroque multifariousness, where subtle dissent, control and even mysticism can coexist; perhaps the system cannot be beaten, though it can be subtly resculptured. Next, the ensuing chapter focuses on the contemporary manifestation of the baroque motif and legacy of memento mori.

"If I'm not dead enough for life
Am I alive enough for dead?"
Icon of Coil

Chapter 3

The Baroque Legacy of *Memento Mori*

Is the topos of memento mori relevant in the Western world? If so, how is this baroque contextuality reverberating today, at the dawn of a high-tech millennium? What is meant by memento mori? Let us begin with a definition of this term. The topos of memento mori literary means "remember that you must die." That is, the concept that all human beings--regardless of position, power and background--are mortal. Indeed, roots of this concept can be found as far back as ancient Rome where, in the *Apologeticus* (197 AD) Tertullian justified the Christian position of not recognizing the Roman emperor as a deity. To buttress his stand, Tertullian invoked the Roman convention entrenched in the Latin phrase "*Suggeriter enim ei a tergo, Respice post te, Hominem memento te*," which means "remember that you are a mortal" (Tertullian 97). In effect, this phrase traces itself back to victory parades in ancient Rome; where, as part of the event, a

public servant recited this statement to the emperor. In a nutshell, this expression effectively encapsulated the sobering reminder of death's ascendancy over all, regardless of echelon or title (Tertullian 97). As Christianity flourished throughout Europe, the concept of death remained significant in religion and art.

In fact, human fascination with death is a study in itself--thanatology--as shown in Philippe Aries' extensive research in *The Hour of Our Death*. Moreover, in fine arts, memento mori has a long tradition in forming a fundamental component of the still life painting style during the seventeenth century (Maleuvre 142). However, does memento mori resound today or has it fallen into oblivion? At first glance, it may be hard to grasp the relevance of memento mori in our global popular culture where many people dread death. Indeed, in some places, public institutions go as far as enacting legislation barring the media from taking pictures of their troops' flag-draped coffins. Then why does this macabre theme remains alive and well in this digital millennium? In this chapter, I will explore and evince the protean presence of this protractive baroque motif in the unfolding twenty-first century. Thus, in particular, this chapter seeks to focus

on the emerging neobaroque adaptation of memento mori in our popular global culture.

What is new and different with the memento mori theme of the twenty-first century? Undoubtedly, today's information technology has globalized expressions of memento mori via cyberspace. Therefore, echoes of memento mori resonate on the stage of our digital theater of the world; that is, our computer screens that open doors and windows into virtual realities and dimensions, like a metaphysical mirror. In this light, memento mori remains alive and well; for the moment, let us bring to light some of its coeval and unique manifestations.

Nowadays, Cyberia provides shelter for this topos. In particular, the realm of Web 2.0 furnishes an interactive and complex theatrical habitat, where memento mori manifests itself. Therefore, in order to fathom social networking sites hospitable to memento mori, such as Vampirefreaks.com, it is important to define the meaning of syncretism. Why? Because it is an important conceptual issue readapting to today's digitally dominated society, especially within the context of memento mori.

Etymologically, the term "syncretism" originated during the historical baroque period; it refers to the

school of thought of George Calixtus (1586-1656), a Lutheran theological scholar who sought to find common ground between Catholic and Protestant theology (*OED Online*). Nonetheless, within the context of today's memento mori, I define syncretism as the synergetic coexistence between contemporary digital modernity and emblems signifying this topos. Are memento mori symbols making a comeback as they did during the historical baroque? Absolutely, in their unique twenty-first century neobaroque way, and this begs a discussion of memento mori symbols.

First of all, let us recognize that the historical baroque is the first modernity. As such, the baroque marked the climax of the Western Christendom's fragmentation, a ramification of the Reformation. Furthermore, when we think about a world war, we tend to look back to the Great War (1914-1918) or its sanguinary sequel (1939-1945). Nonetheless, the seventeenth century witnessed the first true modern world war--the Thirty Years' War, not to mention, the resurgence of the plague. Moreover, the baroque era witnessed other mini world wars instigated by powerful and belligerent absolute monarchs, such as Louis XIV, and death superabounded. Thus, death

and the topos of memento mori remained as relevant as during the Middle Ages, regardless of the Protestant split of Western Christianity; even in Protestant nations, baroque still life and vanitas art emerged.

The Italian master Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) spearheaded a modern vivified version of memento mori during the dawn of the historical baroque. That is, he trailblazed an early modern variation of this motif--the still life style. Caravaggio's "Basket of fruit" canvas ushered his memento mori motif breakthrough. After all, it gave memento mori center stage through allegorical symbols. Similarly to Lope de Vega's creative and innovative approach to theater--which rejected the stringent Aristotelian rules favored by academia--, Caravaggio set the stage for making memento mori the central theme of the canvas. Hence, this was an innovative approach on Caravaggio's part, since the leading fine arts academies of his time considered other themes more exalted, such as scriptural subjects (Bussagli and Reiche 26-27).

From all the possible symbols, the paragon of memento mori is the skull. Certainly, this remembrancer of mortality managed to incorporate itself into the first modern era and beyond. It can be found farther and further

west than Caravaggio's Italy, in still-life paintings of the baroque Dutch master Rembrandt (1606-1669), among other leading European artists of that era. Additional symbols include flowers, music notes, hourglasses, candles, old fruit, perishable food and so forth; they represent the ephemerality of life.

Are there any symbolic parallels between the historical baroque and the now with regard to memento mori? Absolutely, even though today's Western societies tend to be more "secular," reminders of our mortality are everywhere. Web 2.0's social networking sites can be fertile ground for memento mori and vanitas motifs nowadays, even in alternative social networking sites. For instance, Vampirefreaks.com brings together a diverse online community of religious, irreligious, and agnostic users who share a zeal for the macabre, the twisted and the bizarre. That is to say, a multifarious community of artists and users, whose recognition of human mortality becomes a point of convergence and inspiration. There is no hesitancy in showcasing implicit and explicit symbols of death and mortality--anything from skeletons, zombies, vampires, Grim Reapers and so forth; it is literally a dark site where a morbid atmosphere prevails.

What makes this Web 2.0 site even more interesting is the hybrid nature of its framework. Vampiresfreaks.com owner and founder, Jethro Berelson--who goes by the username "Jet"--is a family man and a memento mori businessman ("VampireFreaks.com Users," *Canadian Press*). Unlike Facebook, VampireFreaks.com openly sells online dark alternative apparel, music and so forth; its store is loaded with a great deal of neo memento mori paraphernalia--skeleton clothing and t-shirts emphasizing mortality (as seen in fig. 1 and fig. 2 bellow); it also carries death and skeleton dolls, including Clive Barker's most infamous metaphysical character action figure--Pinhead, a fallen angel who is summoned through a labyrinth-like puzzle box.

Fig. 1. Nightshade Clothing Unholy Grail T-shirt image.VampireFreaks.com Online Store. n.d. Web. 1 Jun. 2009.

Fig. 2. Emily the Strange Creepy Bones Cami Set. VampireFreaks.com Online Store. n.d. Web. 1 Jun. 2009.

Frankly, going through their inventory of popular culture memento mori icons (fictional and real) is a book in itself ("VampireFreaks.com").

Furthermore, Vampirefreaks.com might not be a colossal corporation like Facebook; it is tailored to dark alternative subculture that craves memento mori motifs. This takes place within a digital and diverse Western global community; users have the option to set the default language into English, Dutch, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Norwegian or even Polish. In fact, this unusual social networking site has caught the eye of professional artists interested in novel and macabre themes; in particular, musicians of diverse nationalities who share a passion for

dark alternative, Goth, Cyber-Goth and Industrial music. Accordingly, they sponsor Vampirefreaks.com by enrolling in its premium account services, thus allowing them to offer free samples of their music, art and links.

One of these remarkable artists associated with the dark subculture of death and memento mori is Aurelio Voltaire Hernández. He is better known as Voltaire, a Cuban born American regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the Goth subculture. Voltaire is also a professor at The School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City. In effect, Voltaire illustrates the twenty-first century artistic cult of memento mori, via his prolific and diverse artistic repertoire; he echoes the ancient baroque masters who transcended their artistry's imprint through a diverse array of media to European nations and beyond. Certainly, Voltaire underpins his versatility to convey memento mori in this digital millennium, achieving this through music, film, comics, Web 1.0 and 2.0 sites, as well as with *Deady*; a video game loaded with virtual skeletons and graves in a morbid memento mori atmosphere (Voltaire, Voltaire.net; Vampirefreaks.com Premium Account). It must also be noted that to Voltaire, the theme of human mortality and personification of death goes beyond borders;

it is global. Thus, Voltaire constantly conveys his art to his global audience in the universal language of business nowadays--English. Interestingly, even though his ancestry is Cuban, Voltaire utilizes an interesting Mexican neobaroque imagery of memento mori syncretism on the cover of his 2007 album *Ooky Spooky*, as seen in fig. 3 below.

Fig. 3. Voltaire's syncretic memento mori album *Ooky Spooky*.

Indeed, this cover's imagery underscores the protean and undying legacy of baroque memento mori; but this is also highlighted by this album's music, which illustrates a baroque synergy within the context of memento mori in popular culture, with songs like: "Land of the Dead," "Dead," "Reggae Mortis," and "Day of the Dead." The Goth and alternative subcultures do not necessarily identify with Latin American mysticism; nevertheless, it can be argued that they share a common nexus--the topos of memento

mori adapted to the new digital era as a baroque parallel--that is, neobaroque. In effect, the memento mori presented in this album echoes and buttresses a baroque syncretism--not only because it pictures Voltaire, the maestro, dressed in a mariachi costume (a legacy of the French occupation of Mexico) embracing a memento mori symbol par excellence--the skull. Indeed, Voltaire's multicultural album is also a tribute to popular culture memento mori, manifested in his songs about zombie films, death and macabre music.

Of course, there are other artists who share Voltaire's passion for memento mori themes but with different rhythms--industrial music for instance. Before moving on Vampirefreaks.com, let us consider another alternative global artist with echoes of memento mori--Apoptygma Berzerk--an industrial band from Norway that also sings in English. Unlike mainstream bubblegum pop rock, Apoptygma Berzerk's lyrics can be quite mystical and questioning of today's materialistic society; they also resonate the baroque spirit of memento mori. Consider, for instance, some of the lyrics of their song "Eclipse," which is an obvious critique of our saturated media culture:

> As we dwell inside the safe zones that we've made.
> Where nothing but earthly pleasures seem to matter.

The only light we see is from the screens.
No will to feel or explore the forgotten dimension.
(*Welcome to Earth* CD)

This song has a metaphysical as well as a memento mori undertone, as it alludes to the beyond; perhaps because it was written at the eve of the year 2000 problem scare. Similarly, a fascination with mortality pervaded during the baroque, not only among artists--such as Caravaggio or Rembrandt--but also among poets, playwrights and moralists. After all, the concern that individuals disregarded their mortality--by becoming willing preys to the earthly-minded legerdemain of worldliness--became a grand theme of the baroque (Scherer, "Temporal and Eternal Realities" 162). Thus, the first modern fascination with memento mori transformed into an impacting motif, encompassing the arts as well as funeral homilies (Scherer, "Through the Looking Glass" 380).

As it did during the historical baroque, memento mori still serves as a reminder of one's mortality. But also as an instrumental undeceiver of worldly deceptions, as echoed on these lyrics, song by Apoptygma Berzerk: "Our selfish lives have made us all go blind/one day we'll awake by a bright light on the horizon." Likewise, a salient clue

hinting to the memento mori message encapsulated in this song comes from its last stanza: "Someday we'll catch a glimpse of eternity, as the world stands still for a moment." Thus, it implies an eschatological memento mori; it stresses the ineluctable fate for humanity prior to Judgment Day; that is, it manifests a scenario that, for the time being, every mortal must face sooner or later by oneself--life's passing.

Vampirefreaks.com illustrates the enthusiastic embrace of the topos of memento mori in a contemporary digital subculture. So, is memento mori reserved for selective subcultures such as the Goth, Neo-Goth, Cyber-Goth and so forth? Not necessarily, memento mori has managed to emerge in unexpected locations, including "the happiest place on Earth." After all, Disneyland subsumes a dash of memento mori in its attractions by purveying "a few monsters between the cuteness, a haunted house with a version of Pepper's Ghost" (Klein 391). Thus this grain of decease--illustrated via optical illusions, glass, simulacra and spectacle--provides a friendly reminder of life's impermanence (Klein 391). Likewise, I argue that amusement parks and large fairs--such as the Pacific National Exhibition (in Vancouver)--can spawn a sense of memento

mori; this is done via their rollercoaster, chute-the-chute and hyper-coaster rides. After all, such frantic rides bring forth a virtual, yet palpable, remembrancer of human mortality, that is, a breathtaking memento mori.

So, is the sponsorship and use of this topos by conglomerates sheer entertainment? Does it have an agenda? It depends on whom we ask. To nonconformist scholars like Klein, our media dominated digital theater of the world requires "a mix of terror with reassurance, where the artificial invades the natural, to reveal the power of the prince;" the prince is the status quo (391). Klein, like his earliest Spanish predecessor José Antonio Maravall, considers the past, present and future baroque as a versatile culture of control--in other words, a reassuring or "directed culture" in Maravallian terms. This perspective boils down to the concept that everything is about control by the system; in this case, global capitalism, where the "electronic baroque" embodied in cyberspace provides the spectacle, the cyber-obfuscation, that is, the special effects needed to win the hearts and minds of the masses (Klein 391-392). Hence, in this vantage point, memento mori acts only as a neobaroque tool to appease, entertain, and dilute dissension.

Are neobaroque and the reemerging memento mori only becoming globalized and manifested in private amusement parks and corporate sponsored entertainment? What about in public institutions like museums? Let us take a look at the Commonwealth of Australia, where the cultural significance of memento mori has gained recognition. This is noteworthy because Australia is not considered a baroque bastion; although it has recently gained notoriety thanks to Professor Angela Ndalianis' significant research on popular culture--*Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*.

So, is it possible to find today a free, publicly funded exhibition dealing with memento mori in the world's smallest continent, far away from the traditional baroque or neobaroque strongholds? Certainly, such as during the University of Queensland's 2008 exhibition *Neo Goth: Back in Black*. This exhibit illustrates a keen interest for the reemerging aspect of memento mori in circles beyond alternative subcultures. In addition, Lisa Slade--author of the official *Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide*--acknowledges the importance of being familiar with the baroque legacy; she underscores its importance to fathom

the neo Goth art and culture of the museum's exposition, as she states:

> Generally, one key concept or leitmotif from the exhibition is explored in the discussion of each artist. Key concepts and terminology introduced in this guide include Baroque, *horror vacuii*, *memento mori*, Renaissance, Rorschach, still life (*nature morte*), the 'uncanny' (*das Unheimlich*), *and vanitas*." (*Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide*)

As in Vampirefreaks.com, this academic museum also decided to embrace the commerciality of memento mori by selling mementos of this neo memento mori exhibition, as seen in fig. 4 and fig. 5 below.

Fig. 4. The Neo Goth Exhibition Catalogue Cover features the image of the 2007 painting *May Your Wishes All Come*

True by Kirra Jamison. This image unequivocally displays various symbols associated with memento mori--such as the skull, flowers and the dark background; they manifest life’s ephemerality.

Fig. 5. This untitled 2008 watercolor image, by Ben Quilty, made into a t-shirt for the Neo Goth Exhibition store is a straightforward memento mori souvenir; after all, it centers memento mori’s symbol par excellence--the skull.

This is not to say that there were no new and promising artists on display. On the contrary, the exhibition showcased pieces by twenty-something Kate Rhode, from Australia, who illustrates her inspiration from the baroque topos of memento mori; Rhode’s works focus on the themes of death, nature and the museum, as shown on her 2008 work *Coral Vanitas* (see fig. 6 bellow)(*Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide*).

Fig. 6. 2008 work *Coral Vanitas*. The dark background and elaborate golden legs illustrate a baroque imprint; but once again, the skull and the skeletons remain at the center of this contemporary memento mori artwork (*Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide*).

This painting's title and display of coral, flowers and small human skeletons aims "to remind the viewer that all the attempt to exceed nature are futile and that all life ends in death and emptiness" (*Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide).* It is no accident that its title has the Latin word *vanitas*; it literally means "emptiness" and--as during the historical baroque epoch--complements the topos of memento mori by underscoring the ephemerality of life (*Neo Goth: Back in Black Interpretive Guide*; Maleuvre 142).

Furthermore, in a critique on this exhibition, "How Death Becomes You," Doctor Rosemary Sorensen noted that the symbols and imagery of memento mori are evident:

> Kate Rohde's take on memento mori . . . . Coral Vanitas (2008): a glass-sided casket, atop an ostentatiously gilded table filled with a profusion of red coral from which rise comically styled skeletons with wide-*eye* white bunnies grazing at their feet. (Sorensen)

Sorensen goes on by calling this work "over-abundant," that is, full of enough excess to be considered true Gothic. In my view, her criticism parallels the traditional criticism of the baroque style--its fondness for excess. Moreover, another example that substantiates the impact of the baroque motif of memento mori comes from Alison Kubler, the curator of the exhibition *Neo Goth: Back in Black*. Indeed, Kubler articulates that "skulls adorn everything from mobile phones to children's clothing, while contemporary high fashion is heralding a return to black via nu grave" (qtd. in Sorensen, "How Death Becomes You"). Is this a tenuous claim? Or is it just the mere and evolving continuity of the versatile topos of memento mori?

Christine Buci-Glucksman argues that the baroque theme of memento mori remained resilient during the nineteenth century. Two decades later, the English scholar Caroline Evans, in her work *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle Modernity and Deathliness*, concurs and acknowledges the relevance of Buci-Glucksman's findings. In fact, Evans considers Buci-Glucksman's study, which deals with the presence of baroque patterns during the nineteenth century, a research milestone; it establishes a nexus between baroque paradigms and fashion--the crux of Evans' study; but also, it illustrates the continuity of the baroque fascination with death and ephemerality throughout modernity and beyond, as pointed out in Buci-Glucksman's words:

> Modernity is this theatricality which is constantly eroticizing the new. For if the eye functions here as the organ of the passions and of their aggravation, the theatre for its part is unreal and lacking in affect--masquerade and artifice which Baudelaire's apology for appearances and fashion makes quite manifest.
>
> In fact, unlike all the philosophers of traditional aesthetics and the beautiful, Baudelaire's critical texts never fail to

> associate modernity with fashion, and more generally with an aesthetic of appearances, artifice and play which promotes baroque values par excellence of spectacle, unexpectedness, ephemerality and mortality. (166)

Indeed, Caroline Evans concurs with Buci-Glucksman; likewise, Evans also shares Alison Kubler’s view that memento mori has had an impact on fashion, as we will see below.

Evans underscores the pivotal role of death and memento mori on high fashion--that is, high style worn by an exclusive clientele such as supermodels and celebrities--in her work *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle Modernity and Deathliness*. Evans goes as far as dedicating a whole section to the theme of memento mori in high fashion. Nevertheless, the theme of memento mori permeates throughout the volume, with its strong emphasis on deathliness as the title implies. Moreover, Evans credits Charles Dana Wilson--ironically, the creator of the Gibson Girl, the apotheosis of buoyant and nimble modernity--because he never turned a blind eye to the topos of memento mori. Besides the Gibson Girl, Charles Dana Gibson created one of the greatest epitomes of memento mori at the

beginning of the twentieth century, as illustrated in this 1908 postcard:

Fig. 7. Charles Gibson truly illustrates the inevitable fate of all beauty and materialism; his style reverberates with the historical baroque *vanitas* works. Gibson underscores the theme of memento mori on this ironic and iconic image, included in *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle Modernity and Deathliness* (Evans 223).

This image resonates with the baroque spirit of memento mori in that it seeks to encourage thought-provoking metaphysical questions about our earthly existence--and the beyond--through representations of death. Hence, as noted by baroque researchers like Dane Munro, author of the monumental study *Memento Mori*, "the Baroque has the capacity to shock and to capture the eye" but also it is

"an excellent vehicle" for the memento mori concept. In effect, Evans attributes the roots behind Gibson's interest in memento mori to a long-standing tradition. That is, a seventeenth-century baroque tradition; a time where a great deal of its art works would show women in their dressing room with at least one symbol of earthly temporality (such as a cloak, hourglasses or a skull) (Evans 223).

As for the new millennium high fashion, it is also significant to recognize another important legacy of the seventeenth-century baroque--mercantile capitalism. Therefore, as Evans notes in her analysis of Walter Benjamin's work, a connection existed between nineteenth-century consumerism and the beginning of mercantile capitalism in the seventeenth century (Evans 228). After all, these were societies in transition. Likewise, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are periods of monumental transition. Indeed, this current neobaroque era also comes "with a period of globalization and fast changing technologies" (Evans 228). Consequently, this cultural "shake up," acts as a dark muse; and thus, it paves the way for somber themes, like memento mori, to come into the spotlight again (Evans 228).

What about finding nowadays a public spectacle where memento mori manifests? Kobena Mercer notes the public street shrines of children who passed away display “toys as kind of memento mori” (6). However, is it possible to find in this digital century a public memorial or funeral that parallels the seventeenth-century posthumous services of individuals who were considered the “beautiful people” of their respective era? Indeed, during the seventeenth century, royalty literally epitomized “beautiful people,” especially powerful absolute monarchs whose extravagance and excess during their lifetime gave a negative connotation to the term “baroque” for many years. Nevertheless, during the historical baroque, not everything centered on glorifying the ephemeral and earthly power of these mere mortals--regardless of their hierarchical position in the Great Chain of Being.

Baroque funerals and memorials accentuated the triumph of death over all, regardless of opulence or power; this took place at the funeral services of France’s Louis the XIV--a patron of baroque art extraordinaire--and at the funeral service of his Austrian cousin counterpart, Leopold I (Scherer, “A ‘Living’ Baroque Example of Dying” 3). Even posthumously, these two former baroque patrons embraced the

baroque spirit that underscores life's transitoriness. Indeed, as in all baroque funerals, these monarchs' posthumous services publicly displayed caskets decorated with obvious memento mori's symbols of death--especially skulls; they also included homilies that emphasized metaphysical spirituality, as noted by William F. Scherer:

> The Baroque Age, moved by overwhelming impulse to bridge the cleavage between *vanitas* and *aeternitas* produced rich homiletical thought based upon the Christian topos of salvation—transcendental extension of the human spirit beyond the existence of the mortal flesh. (Scherer, "A 'Living' Baroque Example of Dying" 4)

This religious mode of thinking served as a yardstick of how to live but also of how to die a baroque death (Scherer, "A 'Living' Baroque Example of Dying" 4).

Perhaps public funerals or memorials of royalties of some sort tend to be more baroque; the last one in the twentieth century was Princess Diana's service after her tragic death. As for the twenty-first century, something unexpected happened--Michael Jackson, the "King of Pop," suddenly passed away; hence, his passing became a massive

spectacle in our globalized theater of the world. Certainly, the King of Pop's memorial turned into the first neobaroque memento mori spectacle of the twenty first century, at a global level.

Furthermore, the King of Pop's public memorial echoed a spirituality that surprised many observers in our digital media; headlines such as "Michael Jackson's Public Memorial Strikes a Spiritual Note" in the *Colorado Daily* online illustrates this point. Even before the event on Tuesday July 7, 2009, people from all over the world applied in hordes to try to win free tickets to attend the memorial service. Before discussing some baroque aspects of this service, let us, for the moment, put on the spot what was said during the baroque public memorial of Louis XIV by Jean Baptiste Massillon, his chaplain: "Dieu est grand;" the priest carried on with a spiritual eulogy emphasizing the *vanitas* ("emptiness") of this temporal and material life, thus emphasizing the necessity of death to attain the metaphysical beyond (Scherer, "A 'Living' Baroque Example of Dying" 3).

Moving on, over four hundred years later, the present differs a great deal from the historical baroque, including in terms of its popular culture. Today's popular global

culture seems only interested in quick, colorful and materialistic entertainment such as heavily scripted "reality television," soundbites, meaningless commercial slogans and digital gossip. Then, all of a sudden, a neobaroque spirituality and imagery of memento mori emerged after the passing away of a globally beloved and despised complex figure.

Several religious ministers partook in the King of Pop's posthumous ceremony, notably the reverend Al Sharpton, a civil rights activist. Interestingly, Sharpton focused not on the spirituality but rather, on the following King of Pop's monumental life accomplishments:

> When Michael started, it was a different world, but because Michael kept going, because he didn't accept limitations, because he refused to let people decide his boundaries, he opened up the whole world. In the music world he put on one glove, pulled his pants up and broke down the color curtain where now our videos are shown and magazines put us on the cover.
>
> It was Michael Jackson that brought blacks and whites and Asians and Latinos together. It was

> Michael Jackson that made us sing "We are the World" and feed the hungry long before Live Aid.
>
> Michael rose to the top, he outsang his cynics, he outdanced his doubters, he outperformed the pessimists. Every time he got knocked down he got back up. Every time you counted him out he came back in.
>
> Michael never stopped. Michael never stopped. Michael never stopped. ("A Recap," *CNN.com*)

After listening to that eloquent tribute, I could not help but to think about its baroque parallels; in particular, the cultural syncretism, intensity, and emotional dynamism peculiar to the baroque epoch and, to an extent, to the late King of Pop.

Nevertheless, in Michael Jackson's public memorial, the artists, rather than the ministers, provided some of the most touching and spiritual moments. Who can forget Stevie Wonder's poignant and spiritual words of tribute: "I do know that God is good. And I do know that as much as we may feel--and we do--that we need Michael here with us, God must have needed him far more" ("A Recap," *CNN.com*). This remark echoes the baroque remark of Jean Baptiste Massillon

at Louis XIV's service centuries earlier--and during very different times. Definitely, the heart of this memento mori spectacle centered at the unforgettable memorial that took place at the Staples Center in Los Angeles; it transmitted live and globally via traditional and new media, such as online streaming. Why neobaroque memento mori? Fig. 8 speaks for itself.

Fig. 8. Photographer Wally Skalij captured the ultimate memento mori apotheosis at the global Staples Center Memorial--a casket with the body of the King of Pop.

Notably, no one expected that the casket with the King of Pop's corpse was going to be present; after all, it was a twenty-first century memorial. Nonetheless, at the last moment, the streets of Los Angeles stood still; the coffin with the King of Pop's remains arrived at the Staples

Center for Michael Jackson's final act--a live memorial broadcasted across the globe, with his dead body present. The King of Pop's memorial not only took place in a colossal and tangible arena; it also occurred in a virtual theater of the world filled with symbols of memento mori. They ranged from flowers, the casket, as well as the dark and somber mourning clothing and sunglasses worn by his family and friends as they publicly expressed their grief and woe. The metaphysical aspect of the baroque memento mori that underscores "the transcendence of the spirit over body," remains alive and well in the neobaroque digital spectacle of the twenty-first century; the King of Pop's memorial manifested it to the world (Scherer, "A 'Living' Baroque Example of Dying" 8).

Memento mori remains a relevant concept, despite the fact that we live in an age where virtual and ageless avatars--as opposed to the person behind the 3-D image--roam cyberspace. These "forever young" avatars, popular among gamers of online game communities and 3-D social networking sites--such as Second Life--can be seen as the neobaroque "masks" of this millennium. After all, during the historical baroque, masks and disguises were the most advanced theatrical technology available in order to

achieve "the next degree of going invisible" by creating a socially accepted illusion, as the avatars (Skrine 25). Likewise, one interesting observation in Peter N. Skrine's *The Baroque: Literature and Culture in Seventeenth-Century Europe* is the idea that the seventeenth-century masquerade consisted of a game where:

> Only feasible and socially acceptable if played by all, and an awareness of this essential condition can alone save the delightful masquerade from dissolving into appalling pandemonium. (25)

In effect, in a baroque comedy, the removal of someone's mask was a hint for a happy ending; however, if the play was not a comedy then the removal of a mask would expose Death itself (Skrine 25-26). Namely, akin to our computer and HD Television screens today, during the baroque epoch, the mask was considered a "thin and fragile screen between ignorant illusion and revelation of the starkest truth;" thus it "represents one of the fundamental dimensions of baroque culture. . ." (Skrine 28). On that account, the undeceiving feature of memento mori comes to mind; sooner or later, after all, our digital masks come off to pave the way for the ultimate fate of death.

The historical baroque of the seventeenth century bridged the ancient topos of memento mori into modernity and transcended it; thus, memento mori has reached the current digital global society. Indeed, the twenty-first century is the century of digital imagery via Web 1.0 and Web 2.0; it is an epoch where the global society experiences a constant feeding of digital video and images. Hence it has materialized into a sophisticated society of memento mori represented in each photograph produced. Indeed, Susan Sontag justifies and elaborates on this concept--ahead of her time--in the following excerpt from her monograph *On Photography*:

> To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt. (15)

Twenty years later, Rebecca Solnit concurs with Sontag as she asserts that "all photograph is still life, freezing it as something no longer living, but virtually embalmed and immortally immobile" (qtd. in MacDonald).

At this point, it should be added that even cartoons and films are just a series of photographs that move fast

in a sequence. After all, this feature is their hinge to give the illusion--to the human sense of sight-- that the images are moving. In the words of the philosopher Roland Barthes:

> By shifting this reality to the past ('this-has-been') the photograph suggests that it is already dead . . . I can never see in a film certain actors whom I know to be dead without a kind of melancholy: the melancholy of photography itself. (79)

Hence, the ubiquitous digital photographs via this era of massive and cost effective technology has created an unwitting mass culture of high-tech memento mori artists.

Memento mori, a topos that conveys a reminder of the mortal essence of humanity regardless of rank, is alive and well. The historical baroque served as memento mori's transporter from classical antiquity and the Middle Ages into the modern era and beyond. The torch has been passed to this new digital neobaroque epoch; an era where memento mori continues to fulfill its mission: to illustrate and remind humanity of its finite existence. Now, in the ensuing chapter, I move on to discuss video games as neobaroque artifacts.

"I envision a game that has the drama of theatre and the narrative complexity and emotional impact of a novel."

Clive Barker

Chapter 4

Kinetic and Interactive Art: Virtuality and Special Effects in Video Games

Video games have become embedded in today's digital global culture; their ubiquitous presence prevails and continues to thrive. They appear in films, posters, toys and comic books--among other popular merchandise. In *Neo-baroque: Aesthetics of Contemporary Entertainment* Angela Ndalianis asserts that this seriality trend "is the result of a neobaroque 'aesthetic of repetition' that is concerned with variation, rather than unoriginality and invariability" (33). Undoubtedly, this emerging neobaroque global pop culture pattern has found a paragon in video games.

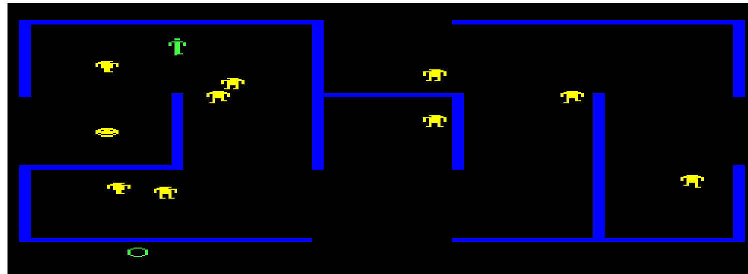
The flexibility shown by video games to adapt and accommodate emerging new technologies makes them a fascinating and complex subject matter; in fact, today's video games go hand in hand with the Internet. Furthermore, this video game surge elicits the puzzling question: Is this a mass-based or individual-based

phenomenon? The answer varies according to the times and so, the answer to this question would have been quite different during the 1980s or early 1990s than in the twenty-first century; after all, unlike any other period in history, we live in a virtually boundless and increasingly digitally dominated world. Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss this thriving neobaroque artifact--video games.

Indeed, video games have evolved and established a symbiotic relationship with the Web. Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs) illustrate this feature, since they allow video game players to interact with each other in a virtual milieu while playing a role. Accordingly, in this chapter I will also synthesize and acknowledge the impact of contemporary video games as an art form; by this I mean the traditional sense associated with the term "art," in particular, performing arts. After all, as in theater, video games bring plots to life and thus, generate worlds within this "real" world on the digital stage. Certainly, video games provide new horizons in contemporary neobaroque studies as we will see below.

Nowadays, video games no longer entail the primitive one dimensional technology of the 1980s shown in video games such as *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, *Pac-Man*, or

Williams Defender. Even though these classic video games might be considered banal by today's high-tech standards--dominated by the Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo platforms--Omar Calabrese considers them illustrations of the 1980s neobaroque technology in his seminal monograph: *The Neo-baroque Era* (102). Nevertheless, before moving on to discussing 1980s video games, we must recognize that, despite the lack of today's technological sophistication, some retro video games stand out. I would argue that *Berzerk* (1980) falls into such category. After all, *Berzerk* illustrates an important baroque feature--the labyrinth, as seen in the following image:



In effect, *Berzerk* depicts a simple but accurate labyrinth; this labyrinth conveys not only a visual and virtual image of itself, but also an unseen "tangible" reality check for the virtual humanoid protagonist, a role played by the actual gamer. After all, if the player virtually touches any of the labyrinth walls, the humanoid protagonist becomes "undeceived" through death by electrocution

(International Arcade Museum). Despite its simplicity, Berzerk's electrocution sequence provides a vivid auditory memento mori image as well.

Today's technology produces video games with far more superior visual aesthetics and sophistication than *Berzerk*. Nonetheless, this video game, in spite of its plainness, delivered diversion and amusement via verisimilar sound effects ahead of its time--akin to those of Star Wars laser phasers. This is remarkable, bearing in mind the limited capability of the unsophisticated Atari consoles back then; in any case, they opened the door to the sphere of science fiction and thus, allowed gamers to "experience" the virtual sound of a laser gun within the realm of this video game. Even today, websites and YouTube videos of this cult game continue to illustrate these attributes online. Hence, despite their age, good video games--like the artistic baroque works--have the capacity to produce an effect on their audience. In this chapter, I underscore the fact that contemporary video games found in personal computers--Windows and Macintosh--as well as video game consoles--Sony PlayStation, Nintendo Wii and Xbox 360--have neobaroque elements.

In effect, contemporary video games can include allegorical symbols as well. At first glance, this feature appears to be just a mere artistic attribute. Nevertheless, as some video games critics point out, such symbols can carry obvious and surreptitious messages in favor of the system. In other words, they function as art at the service of secular power; a technique spearheaded by the Sun King during the seventeenth century. After all, video games allegories have the prowess to maneuver the users' emotions; akin to the artistic works of the seventeenth century that aimed to project favorable or unfavorable a particular institution, monarch, notion, belief or topos.

Conversely, video games have gained recognition as a propitious performing art. Indeed, video games analysts and consultants John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade, among others, recognize the benignant theatricality of video games. Hence, *The Kids are Alright*--Beck and Wade's monograph--limns video games as an inexorable advance of contemporary commercial theatricality; and thus, it propounds that each video game set sets an elaborate theatrical set (Beck and Wade 62). How effective? A great deal in that video games immerse their players into virtual

parallel worlds, as any good theatrical performance would. Take the case of gamers stranded at the airport. Nowadays, serious gamers carry virtual ambulant theaters in the form of portable video game consoles, such as Nintendo DSi, or Sony PSP. Thus, in this scenario, these gizmos provide those gamers a virtual escape from humdrum dullness (Beck and Wade 63). This certainly begs the question, is it fair to compare video games to the arts of the historical baroque era? I would argue that both have the ability to captivate their audience; video games, like theater, a work of art or literature, have the prowess to immerse gamers into virtual worlds.

Likewise, a special report about video game addiction, by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's newsmagazine *Marketplace*, illustrates anew the way that video games function as theatrical media, virtually transferring individuals into another reality. Namely, this documentary centers on the controversial video game *Everquest*. Indeed, this special report begins by introducing an audience-actor of this virtual and interactive digital theater. Her name is Tracy Montague, a single mother who every night becomes the "Chanteez Soulcharmer of Valorguard, a dragon-slaying enchanter" through the virtual reality of *Everquest* online

("Everquest," *Marketplace*). Unlike the innocuousness of video games proposed earlier, this documentary underscores the dark side of their persuasive attribute. Accordingly, to substantiate this claim, *Marketplace's* producers consulted Dr. Alain Dagher, a neurologist at the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital; he is also a researcher who studies video games players' brains.

How persuasive are video games through their actor-audience interactive setting? To the full, as pointed out by Dagher who, in his research, infers that goal oriented tasks, performed by gamers, produce a physiological effects tantamount to those reached by using narcotics. In effect, *Everquest* fits the profile of video games that act as drugs. This takes place after advancing and completing video games missions. As a result, gamers' dopamine hormone level increases. Unlike the metaphysical baroque ecstasy, represented by Bernini's sculpture of Saint Teresa, persuasive video games beguile gamers by boosting the production of a hormone also boosted by cocaine ("Everquest," *Marketplace*). Video games, as contemporary digital performance arts, go beyond their historical baroque predecessors. Unlike baroque's performing and fine arts, which stimulated the senses via the illustration of

voluptuous bodies as well as gritty and metaphysical themes, video games captivate through a complex, multi-artistic and interactive approach.

Certainly, video games can take over a gamer's feelings, emotions and soul--if the gamer surrenders to their persuasive realms. In other words, extreme gamers would rather divorce themselves from reality and live in a video game virtual world. Consider the case of a young man who decamped from his brother's wedding early, without attending the reception, in order to return to his apartment to play *EverQuest*. In this extreme case, this gamer took his own life due to unrequited virtual love through *Everquest* online; one of his fellow online gamers rejected his virtual advances and thus, sparked the sorrow that fomented him to put an end to both virtual and physical worlds ("Everquest," CBC *Marketplace*).

What makes video games so effective in persuading individuals to abandon reality? To favor the virtual and intangible reality produced by zeros and ones? After all, *EverQuest*, along with other blockbuster video games of the fantasy genre, are mere high-tech fairy tales. Nonetheless, these video games' real magic comes from their ability to make the unbelievable believable and the

impossible possible--in our minds. I would argue that these video games provide virtual "great escapes" that parallel, and yet eschew, the spirituality and metaphysical joy illustrated, via a sculpture, in the *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* mentioned earlier. At any rate, Bernini's carving is a quintessential reflection of the historical baroque spirituality. Conversely, the search for the ecstasy illustrated in this historical baroque masterpiece continues nowadays, but for the most part, in terms of materialistic bliss. This is no surprise in that today's modern society encourages consumerism rather than spirituality to deal with life's trials and tribulations. Hence, video games have become a means to take gamers into a blissful virtual realm; that is, into a type of alternative reality--a metaphysical world.

At this point, I must point out that the baroque style comports with video games as an art form technique. In effect, video game designers and researchers recognize the historical baroque style's significant contribution to the video game industry, through its artistic techniques. A case in point comes from video games scholar Magy Seif El-Nasr's paper "Dynamic Lighting for Tension in Games." She applies the term "brightness contrast" to indicate the

dissimilarity in brightness among the different regions of a video game scene; thus indicating that "high brightness contrast denotes high difference between brightness between in one or two areas in a shot and the rest of the shot." Such delineation is anything but trivial. After all, the preceding artistic technique goes back to the historical baroque. Strictly speaking, the precise term for this artistic technique is "chiaroscuro," which means light and darkness in Italian (Seif El-Nasr et al). On that account, long before the wide proliferation of video games, the chiaroscuro baroque style served the film industry as a special effect; this took place, especially, during Hollywood's golden age, to increase movie audiences' level of excitement in films such as the classic drama *Citizen Kane* (Seif El-Nasr et al).

Likewise, moving forward to the present, video games continue to utilize the baroque chiaroscuro technique--among others--in order to excite, provoke and engage video game players. For instance, *Resident Evil 4* and *Silent Hill 2*, two hit horror video games, make use of this baroque technique. Why? On account of the dreadful incertitude and vulnerability created by this baroque effect, which generates an effective horror setting (Seif

El-Nasr et al). Furthermore, this ongoing artistic baroque technique conveys an effective mode to descend the minds of gamers into a menacing setting. Thus, video game players become engrossed in a virtual reality world where they take on uncanny creatures to survive and escape the trials and tribulations of an unknown horizon, as shown on the following images of *Resident Evil 4 (left)* and *Silent Hill 2* (right).

How is chiaroscuro applied in video games? A neobaroque modus operandi adaptation of this baroque technique can be credited. The chiaroscuro's light contrast technique can be achieved by any element that reduces the perception of clarity, such as the darkness yielded by the shadows of various objects gathered together or via simulated natural phenomena, fog for example (Seif El-Nasr et al).

Moreover, the application of baroque techniques on video games has recently gained recognition in Italy, the historical baroque's cradle. In fact, Domenico Quaranta, a

contemporary Italian virtual worlds researcher, recognizes the ongoing significance of baroque techniques in current digital technologies. Hence, in his article, "Game Aesthetics: How Video games are Transforming Contemporary Art," he devotes a section on this topic titled "Video Game Baroque." In this segment, Quaranta fleshes out a discussion on an alternative approach "between abstraction and photorealism . . . which references the polygonal aesthetic of 3D video games but seeks to subvert the tendency towards photorealism in various ways" (305). This is achieved by means of taking into account popular strategies, even subversive ones.

One of such strategies consists in infiltrating the "reality" of the 3D setting of the pro-military video game *Counterstrike* via "velvet-strike;" this is a code name for a digital form of vandalism tantamount to the graffiti sprayed on bridges and buildings by street artists. Political activism holds sway on the individuals behind velvet-strike through their software application; these activists have become virtual graffiti artists taking on pro-military video games. Therefore, their course of action brings about a concurrent military and pacifist milieu. Under these conditions, the foolhardiness and

warmongering encouraged in pro-military video games can be questioned. How? Through thought-provoking "mind splints" that Velvet-Strike inserts--in the targeted video game--in the form of background slogans. For this reason, I concur with Quaranta as he states that this baroque technique targets at: "juxtaposing two aesthetics corresponding to two opposing ideologies as well as making the game scenes appear more real and at the same time pointing them up as a medium and tool of propaganda" (305). After all, the slogans Velvet-Strike inserts in these video games, such as "Hostages of military fantasy," aim to become an epiphany, which engenders a form of proactive and contemporary digital baroque undeception.

This activism targets ordinary gamers. In effect, the contrast achieved between the fictitious attribute of military video games combined with exposing the dire reality of their blood-and-guts themes glamorized in the name of entertainment is one of the characteristics of the Internet's "digital folk art" (Quaranta 305). Thus, as in the historical baroque, an era where popular performance arts flourished, this type of activist digital art targets the populace. This is no accident. Even Quaranta recognizes such theatricality.

I would argue that Quaranta should have added the following contemporary video games features--thought up by Italian new media scholar Fulvio Carmagnola--to his "Video Game Baroque" section, as opposed to the other sections. First of all, the first feature propounds that new digital media, video games in particular, supplants esthetic extrospection in favor of proactive involvement and engrossment; this in turn disorientates, producing a "feeling of omnipotence." The next feature emphasizes that digital hypertextuality takes away the "roles of author and spectator" (qtd. in Quaranta 298); hence, it decimates "temporal depth" through the fusion of both roles. Moreover, the third feature underscores that, in today's digital culture, visuality and virtuality vanquished textuality and physicality respectively; thus wrecking the demarcation "between the real and imaginary" (qtd. in Quaranta 298).

In the end, the fourth and final feature attributes to the digital and interactive screen theaters of video games the capability to obliterate "the distinction of living and non-living," and so, creating a metaphysical fetish (qtd. in Quaranta 298). These features illustrate video games' persuasive prowess as neobaroque artifacts of

the unfolding digital era. Even Quaranta ends up acknowledging that video games' strong persuasiveness can be applied beyond mere entertainment. For this reason, Quaranta categorizes video games as artifacts of "undoubted political and sociological value," which belong in the spheres of "cultural constructions" and "public places" (303). Therefore, I would add, that such features resonate with the theatricality, political and metaphysical nature behind the historical baroque art; features that have become adapted to the current and dominant, secular and corporate culture of the emerging millennium.

The art of the historical period known as the baroque fostered sensual and provocative art represented by stunning voluptuous bodies, such as Velázquez's *Venus at Her Mirror* and Bernini's *Saint Therese's Ecstasy*. Video games, as neobaroque artifacts, trail the historical baroque; thus, light, contrast and figures created by means of polygons yield sensual and memorable artworks in our video game era. *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft illustrates this concept to perfection; after all, this voluptuous and successful video game protagonist brings to life echoes of the baroque sensuality, as shown in the following image:

So, is perspective or subjectivity a significant influence in interpreting a work of art? It all depends on the open-mindedness and flexibility of the interpreters; in particular, when they deal with ambiguous works of the historical baroque or those of the emerging neobaroque today. In other words, Bernini's *Saint Therese's Ecstasy*, viewed from the lenses of contemporary individuals, with no spiritual upbringing or belief, they might be inclined to consider such work of art as a mere representation of climax; on the other hand, mystical or spiritual individuals would tend to interpret the statue as an illustration of eternal divine bliss.

That being said, researchers, including Laura Fantone in "Final Fantasies: Virtual Women's Bodies," considers Lara Croft's figure and sex appeal as a strategy designed for the purpose of luring male players. Nonetheless, feminists as well as sapphic women have also appropriated

Lara Croft as a superwoman icon and paladin of the struggle of their respective causes; that is, Lara Croft has become their new Wonder Woman or video game Xena (Fantone 65). Hence, this virtual superhero's popularity reverberates with Buci-Glucksman's concept of the female body in modern baroque:

> In this baroque of female bodies, allegory appears in modern interpretation. . . . Only the status of feminine, of the female body as a once real and fictitious, makes it possible to distinguish modern from baroque allegory. (102, 109)

Video game research is not exclusive to the English or French academic domain. For instance, in the Hispanic world, video game research has flourished, as seen in "Brecha digital y video juego: categorías perspectivas y cognitivas" (*"Digital Frontier and Video Game: Perspective and Cognitive Categories"*) by Chilean scholar Rafael del Villar Muñoz. Villar Muñoz's work focuses on the effects on cognition and perception caused by several video games, including *Age of Empires II*.

Villar Muñoz's findings conclude that there is a close relation between cognitive and perceptive processes. His research subjects developed a way to look in correspondence with the search of a parallel process of information; that is, sight focus in cases where the processing is not narrative, mostly images (the majority). Thus, perception does not operate as a stimulus-reaction model; instead, what is perceived is in correspondence with a previous concept. That is, sighting engages into a visual survey through the eyes or head movements. Such scrutiny is applied to the screen, video game console or personal computer (including joysticks, game controllers, mouse and keyboard) and eventually, to the context (Villar Muñoz 11). In other words, gamers completely immerse their cognitive and perceptive faculties while playing video games, a dynamic activity, in particular, the type that emphasize strategy and complex adventures. Villar Muñoz recorded the following results. Let us walk through them.

First of all, such movements, according to Villar Muñoz, tend to be multiple and the subjects incorporate several simultaneous eye surveys; there is no central focus and so the subjects want to learn everything without a specific eyesight preference. Second, the movements tend to be random; what is repeated is the geometric pattern, configured but not as a stable figure. As a result, the figurative elements of a perceptive space are linked with another so that a global configuration can be reached. Third, there is less control of the vertical and horizontal surveys in straight lines, since the subject does not only looks from top to bottom or from left to right; the subject wants to be informed of everything that is going on. Fourth and last, there is a presence of fluctuated visual surveys; all of the elements of the visual survey are registered in addition to the straight line movements that perceive the beginning and the end of the movement. Moreover, in an intermediate point there are scattered figures (straight line movements that allow to capture three or more spaces). This means that in contrast to the horizontal-vertical sight, the curved journey captures what is in the image surroundings without leaving out anything (Villar Muñoz 12).

Why would the preceding translation and paraphrasing of Villar Muñoz's study be considered relevant and significant to this study and chapter? Regardless of the fact that Villar Muñoz's aforementioned description of the effects of video games lacks the baroque or neobaroque tag, the inferences and observations of his study bare a compelling similarity with the effects associated with the historical baroque art; these effects include: opposition to linearity, polycentrism, constant movement, engrossment, and an affecting attribute. Behind all of this baroque complexity in Villar Muñoz's study, a positive side effect flourishes in the video game player.

In effect, Villar Muñoz concludes that by providing the opportunity to familiarize oneself with machines that produce complex graphics, such as personal computers and video game consoles, individuals enhance their perceptive competence. Hence, gamers become accustomed to complex technologies and sophisticated devices. In other words, gamers constantly play in "spaces without the narrative focalization of a single space;" this yields a technological knowledge that enables them to work in complex systems (Villar Muñoz 11-12). Indeed, these findings by Villar Muñoz are consistent with other similar

international studies. For instance, the research behind Glenda Andrews and Karen Murphy's article "Does Video-Game Playing Improve Executive Function?" concludes that "regular video-game playing has beneficial effects on cognitive functioning" (158).

All in all, contemporary video game research has unfolded a new horizon of multidisciplinary research. This emerging field of study provides the opportunity to fathom and appreciate baroque parallels in our digital era, including virtuality, polycentrism, lighting special effects, and contrast; in effect, they stimulate the senses, as they did during the historical baroque. As well, today's digital applications of baroque techniques resonate with the sensuality of the baroque sculptured and painted figures via digital polygons; they continue to captivate as interpretations of modern allegories of heroines of the marginalized, as Tomb Raider's Lara Croft. Video games provide the opportunity to question reality by providing a dynamic theatricality that has the potential to immerse individuals in a world that is both "virtual" and "real;" thus exercising their cognitive and perceptive processes. Furthermore, this technology offers the opportunity to question its own purpose, as illustrated in

the digital video game activism of Velvet-Strike by sabotaging paramilitary video games via pacifist messages. At this point, it is worth pointing out that art critics of the academic anthology *Neo-baroque!* also politicize the reemerging baroque elements in the current digital global culture. Inasmuch as they link this advent to a crisis and shake-up of values, as Robert Storr enunciates:

> The Neo-Baroque is in part a rejection of the dominance of certain cultural norms propagated by those with puritan ideas of modernity, that is to say, both fundamentalists of the Right and Left . . ." (*Neo-baroque!* 22)

In a nutshell, at present, video game design continues to benefit from and apply baroque techniques; it also applies technology to create an interesting parallel to the polemic art of the historical baroque. As Alexis Rockman puts it, "computer games are particularly Baroque in their use of dense spatial pictorialism" (*Neo-baroque!* 21). Therefore, video games represent a new wave of reemerging baroque paradigms embodied in the neobaroque digital spirit of our contemporary society.

In closing, technology in the twenty-first century has propelled an unprecedented video game expansion, perhaps

one of the greatest in history. Technological advances have turned contemporary video games into a tidal wave as opposed to their earlier predecessors. Hence, video games have become a massive and individual spectacle targeting the senses. In the most extreme cases, video game players become possessed by the reverie created in the video games fantasy realm. Thus, they lose their grasp on reality. Online video games have created such powerful bonding among its users. Video games, indeed, have a complex and fascinating ability to adapt to new technologies as persuasive and contemporary neobaroque artifacts. Besides, now the imposing voice given to consumers via Web 2.0 has made video games ubiquitous and powerful forms of art with a life of their own.

Indeed, video games have become powerful means to various ends; thus they affect the mind and senses, as the art and plays of the historical baroque of the seventeenth century. So, are video games today promoting a culture or a system? Or are they just a mere form of entertainment? Who benefits from the applications of such baroque techniques? And to what end? This food for thought provides the basis for further and deeper academic research on this emerging neobaroque artifact. Therefore, I will

further discuss these important questions juxtaposed with other contemporary and emerging neobaroque artifacts in subsequent chapters, chapter six in particular. Now, in the ensuing chapter, I move on to discuss another neobaroque and interactive virtual theater of the world: social networking sites.

"Everybody's business is nobody's business."

Daniel Defoe

Chapter 5

Neobaroque Tendencies in Online Social Networks

Is it possible to revive the historical baroque in our contemporary digital society? Prior to answering this question, it is necessary to note that in the context of this work the term "baroque" means both an artistic and cultural phenomenon--where "cultural" refers to the concepts of popular customs and lifeways. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the aim of this work is not to resurrect the historical period known as "baroque;" either as the style coined by the nineteenth-century scholar Heinrich Wölfflin in his work *Renaissance and Baroque*, or as the seventeenth-century cultural system described by José Antonio Maravall in *The Culture of the Baroque*. In my opinion, the historical baroque of the 17th century belongs in the past. Our modern society continues to move forward; it does not tend to share some of the controversial values of the historical baroque era--slavery, absolute monarchy, the subordinate status of

ordinary women, castrati entertainers and so forth. Nevertheless, baroque patterns, styles and methods readapt and reinvent themselves thorough time. One of the objectives of this chapter is to compare and contrast the facets parallel to those of the historical baroque that have reemerged at the beginning of the 21st century on social networking websites, Facebook in particular; it also aims to answer the following questions central to this study: What is Web 2.0 and a social networking website? Are there any parallels between the concepts and strategies of these new technologies with those of the historical baroque? Are social networking websites neobaroque artifacts of the 21st century?

Before moving on, it is important to discuss some of the baroque and neobaroque aspects that are reappearing today. More specifically, this ought to serve as a clarification of the conceptual issue of baroque and neobaroque throughout this chapter and work. In my opinion, neobaroque today can refer to the readaptation of baroque patterns and paradigms according to their historical circumstances. Indeed, several scholars of multiple disciplines have ventured in postulating baroque methods and models in order to analyze a study from a

"baroque" perspective. Since these scholars are contemporary, I consider them neobaroque theorists. For instance, Maggie MacLure in "The Bone in the Throat: Some Uncertain Thoughts on Baroque Method" overviews some of the most recent methodologies and analyses of our contemporary world from a "baroque" outlook (729). MacLure interprets a baroque approach as comprehensive, dynamic and recalcitrant (729). Furthermore, MacLure provides a detailed sketch of reemerging and intertwined baroque traits:

- favouring of movement and tension over structure and composure;
- defamiliarization—the estrangement of the familiar;
- the attempt to 'represent the unrepresentable';
- the nausea, dizziness or melancholy that the necessary failure of this project inaugurates;
- loss of mastery of self and other;
- embrace of the non-rational and the supernatural;

- theatricality—life, art and philosophy as performance, productive of doubles, illusion, copies, fakes, simulacra and apparitions;
- resistance to generalization, abstraction or totalization;
- proliferation of fragments, details and marginalia;
- epistemic excess—i.e. overflowing of boundaries and structures;
- confusion of opposites such as reality and representation, light and dark, life and death, surface and dept;
- fragmentary or distorting textual devices—montage, assemblage, allegory, analogy, parody; the *mis en âbime*(the text within the text);
- illusionistic and distorting visual representation—mirrors, anamorphic images, *trompe l'oeil* paintings;
- dislocation of time and space through vertiginous shifts of scale and focus;

- production in the spectator/reader of disconcerting emotional states—vertigo, wonder, fascination, rapture, awe, anxiety;
- an abject status as frivolous or degraded vis-à-vis dominant meaning systems or cultural practices. (MacLure 731-732)

This is a significant list; it outlines some of the identified characteristics of the baroque in our current era. Not all of those traits are encompassed in the topic of this chapter. Nevertheless, there are some key points from this list that are useful in the study of social networking sites, such as the concept of "production in the spectator. . ." and "confusion of opposites such as reality and representation" (MacLure 732). In effect, baroque patterns and paradigms have an extraordinary ability to endure and adjust to new technologies and times, a resilience that has captivated scholars like MacLure.

It is also worth mentioning that the baroque paradigm is a double-edged sword. This is a view divergent from MacLure's since she considers the baroque approach method as a "hope of enabling 'other knowledge,'" and a voice and language for the nonconformist of the status quo. In her

perspective, it aims to "stand for an entangled, confounded vision that resists the god's eye perspective and the clarity of scientism" (MacLure 731); thus, MacLure underlines Robert Harbison's concept--stated in *Reflections on Baroque*--that a baroque approach would withstand perspicuity, power, and the monolithic perspective; hence, it would also be "uncertain about scale, boundaries and coherence" and favor the "unconcluded moment" and "interrupted movement" with attention to detail (MacLure 731). As we will see further on, the baroque ability to create illusions like a *trompe l'oleil* painting is not solely a tool for the recalcitrant masses or scholars. In the recent past, the baroque has been charged as being an instrument of complaisance. Can some of the neobaroque branches of the 21st century be guilty or at least suspects of such collusion? After analyzing some of the issues surrounding social networking sites and establishing baroque parallels, the bipolar nature of the baroque as a complex and paradoxical method of empowerment and disguised serfdom can be revealed.

When did this recent and contemporary interest in the baroque receive a boost in research? At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium, a surge in

academic interest arose in descrying baroque paradigms and patterns in periods and cultures not commonly associated with being baroque. This keen interest in finding parallels with the historical baroque period flourished in Europe in the 1980s. During that decade, French scholar Christine Buci-Glucksmann inferred--in *Baroque Reason*: *From Baudelaire to Benjamin* (1984)--that the baroque period continues to resound in post historical baroque periods such as the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Wacker 2). Furthermore, another French scholar, Gilles Deleuze, also recognized the historical transcendence of the baroque in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988). Likewise, the English translation from French and Italian into English of Florence's professor Omar Calabrese, *The Age of Neo Baroque* (1987), put the term "neobaroque" on the map in the English language. After all, Calabrese's work is a monumental monograph for any scholar interested in neobaroque patterns in contemporary popular culture; it is the first work of its kind. Two decades later, Angela Ndalianis follows Calabrese's footsteps with her keen knack for identifying parallels between the Baroque and contemporary popular culture in *Neo-baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004). Besides MacLure, who acknowledges Ndalianis' contribution to cultural studies for her work on

neobaroque, Kelly A. Wacker in her book *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art* praises all of these preceding studies; she acknowledges them for their contribution to the study of the continuity of the baroque phenomenon through time. Thus, for the record, the term "neobaroque" provides a label to illustrate the perennial essence of the adaptable baroque paradigms and patterns.

Indeed, if in the field of fine arts the classical style attributes consist of stability, constancy, and well defined lines, the traditional baroque style is far from it; rather, it differentiates itself with its own peculiar, dynamic and complex idiosyncrasies. The baroque style is an active one; it keeps in motion. This is not only the case in artistic expressions, such as paintings and sculptures.

New technologies tend to intertwine with society's values, styles and customs. In our current information age, the global web of the Internet is the means for this ongoing and evolving intertwining. It all began with the first version of the Internet--Web 1.0--that was successfully replaced by the contentious term Web 2.0. According to Paul Anderson's article "What is Web 2.0?: Ideas, Technologies and Implications for Education," Web

2.0 is a controversial term to some prominent technology personalities such as Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the father of the Internet (5). Anderson goes as far as to call Web 2.0 a "slippery character to pin down;" he quotes Sir Tim Berners-Lee stating that ". . . this Web 2.0 it means using the standards which have been produced by all these people working on Web 1.0" (5). Is Web 2.0 an ersatz of Web 1.0?

To be fair to these critiques, we ought to recognize and credit Web 2.0's forerunner. Indeed, like the historical baroque style that has its roots in the Renaissance, Web 2.0 emerged from Web 1.0. So what makes Web 2.0 so unique and different besides its name? Web 2.0 critics and adherents concur that, in contrast to Web 1.0, defining this new version is a complex issue. Web 2.0 has dynamic, active, constant, infinite, complex and kinetic aspects. Moreover, Web 2.0 users are actively engaged in sharing and developing this new version of the World Wide Web rather than passively receiving the information from the service provider and corporate webpage developers. That is, the users have become spectators and actors, the public and the artists of the virtual and complex relationships stimulated by Web 2.0. This new version of the Internet has evolved technologically and socially by

the active participations of its users, creating a complex and amorphous system. Even detractors of the term Web 2.0--like Anderson--recognize that ". . . it is important to note that the term was not coined in an attempt to capture the essence of an identified group of technologies, but an attempt to capture something far more amorphous" (5). Perhaps Anderson meant "baroque" when he used the term amorphous to describe this new buzzword of the information age. After all, the preceding concepts used to describe Web 2.0 match with some of the baroque patterns and paradigms list cited from MacLure--with more to come.

The meaning of baroque, like the meaning of Web 2.0, continuously evolves. What would be the catalysts to spark baroque patterns and paradigms in technology and culture? The answer perhaps begins in the roots of the term Web 2.0 for this specific study. So, where and when does this buzzword comes from?

Web 2.0 is a product of the 21st century. Dale Dougherty--a technological pioneer of the "old Internet" who set about the first commercial website in 1993--coined this term at a technology conference in 2004 (Cobo Romaní 15). Dougherty is also one of the founders of *O'Reilly Media*, a company famous for promoting this version of the

Web which publishes computer books and organizing technology oriented conferences. More specifically, Tim O'Reilly, president and cofounder of *O'Reilly Media* (Dougherty's boss), published the extensive article "What is Web 2.0: Designs Patterns and Business a Models for the Next Generation of Software" to clarify the meaning of "Web 2.0."

O'Reilly goes further into detail about the genesis of the term Web 2.0. According to O'Reilly, Dougherty, vice president of *O'Reilly Media*, came up with the term "Web 2.0" during a brainstorming session in a conference between *O'Reilly Media* and *MediaLive International*. This article is significant not only for stating the seven principles of this new version of the Web but also for showing the great complexity behind Web 2.0. O'Reilly, in fact, emphasizes that Web 2.0 can be pictured as a group of principles and procedures that interact, intertwine and show "some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core," in his own words. These seven principles deeply discussed by O'Reilly in his online article are:

> The web as platform, harnessing collective intelligence, data is the next Intel inside, end of the user release cycle, lightweight

> programming models, software above the level of a single device, and rich user experiences. (O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0")

Thus, O'Reilly created the following meme map of Web 2.0 to illustrate his points:

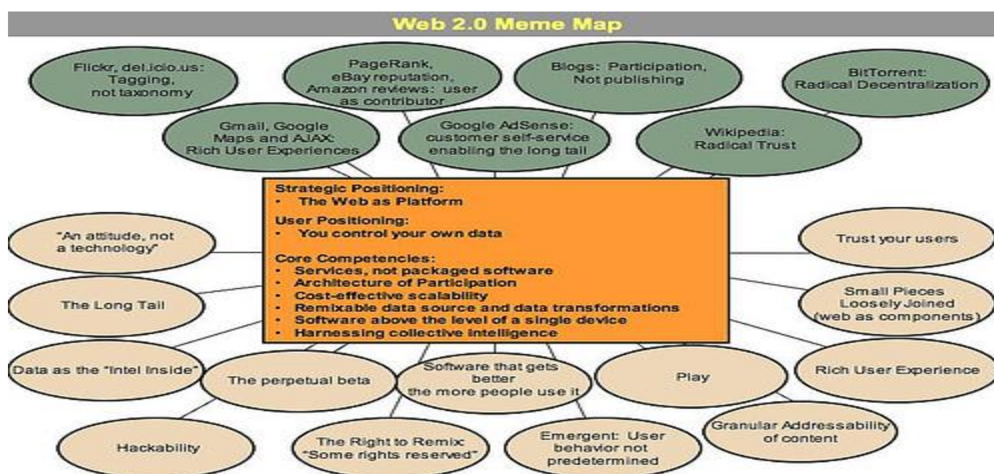


Figure 1 shows a "meme map" of Web 2.0 that was developed at a brainstorming session during FOO Camp, a conference at O'Reilly Media. It's very much a work in progress, but shows the many ideas that radiate out from the Web 2.0 core.

This meme map aims to provide visualization of, in O'Reilly's words, a "set of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core." Nevertheless, O'Reilly, in his comments about the meme map above, also acknowledges that

theorizing about Web 2.0 is indeed "a work in progress." This is certainly true. Web 2.0 is a term that continues to be debated and expanded years after the initial publication of O'Reilly's article in 2005.

So what triggered Web 2.0 and what does it has in common with some of the theories of the origins of the historical baroque? If we consider the social aspects and circumstances of the historical baroque, such as Maravall's approach in *The Culture of the Baroque*, culture and technology go hand in hand in reinventing and innovating from the ruins of the old. From Maravall's perspective, there was a social turmoil created by the declining power of Spain and the mass migration from the country into the cities; hence theaters, baroque spectacles and parties had to be developed in order to control the incoming masses. Even the fine arts style that Wölfflin coined as "baroque" originated in Rome during a period of great social turmoil in Europe--the Reformation. In this case, however, O'Reilly refers more to a metaphysical rather than tangible crisis or turmoil generated by the incoming masses of peasants as Maravall and other theorists of cultural phenomena proposed. One must remember that even during the historical baroque--that Maravall and Wölfflin discuss--

there is always a mass market. Was this style or culture created as a means of social control or preserving the faith in the 17th century? Numerous studies exist denying or confirming such possible rationales for the historical baroque. Fortunately, the predicament that facilitated the birth of Web 2.0 is not as complex, bloody and instigative.

Indeed, O'Reilly stresses the relevance of critical points that can serve as turning points of technological revolutions that pave the way to revamp the traditional structure of a system, in this case, the Web:

> The bursting of the dot-com bubble in the fall of 2001 marked a turning point for the web. Many people concluded that the web was overhyped, when in fact bubbles and consequent shakeouts appear to be a common feature of all technological revolutions. Shakeouts typically mark the point at which an ascendant technology is ready to take its place at center stage. The pretenders are given the bum's rush, the real success stories show their strength, and there begins to be an understanding of what separates one from the other. (O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0")

This is a powerful introduction to his 2005 article. In a subtle way, O'Reilly buttresses the notion that the dot-com shakeouts provided the optimum circumstances for an improved and innovative version of the Web. In addition, O'Reilly affirms that "Web 2.0" is a needed neologism to describe and distinguish the newly emerging variant of the Web since the prior version is associated with the dot-com downfall of the late 20th century. Two years later, O'Reilly continues to adhere to his article.

In an interview, he unequivocally states the importance of the term "Web 2.0" as a catchword of hope needed to provide the buoyancy needed to surmount the remaining hurdles of the dot-com bust. After all, O'Reilly emphasizes that when Dougherty used the term "Web 2.0" for the first time at the conference, many of the participants were economic casualties of the dot-com bust (Interview *UK Intruders TV*). Thus, there was a need for an allegory of renewal to boost the morale of the conference participants and thus, to ease any possible apprehension and skepticism towards the new version of the Web. Like the baroque concept of an ongoing infinite, it is worth remarking that O'Reilly's vision in defining Web 2.0 does not end in the conclusion of his article or interview; in his article,

indeed, he made the point that defining and exploring the boundless nature of Web 2.0 is “a work in progress.”

Furthermore, Graham Cormode and Balachander Krishnamurthy published in June 2008, in the online and peer reviewed *First Monday Magazine*, “Key differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0,” an up-to-date article aiming to demarcate the two versions of the Web. For them, one of the key attributes of Web 2.0 subsumes the increase of “social networks, bi-directional communication, various ‘glue’ technologies, and significant diversity in content types” (Cormode and Krishnamurthy). Interestingly, they concur with O’Reilly that the study and analysis of Web 2.0 is an ongoing endeavor since it revolves in a “rapidly evolving environment.” Then, what is the key divergence between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0?

Cormode and Krishnamurthy continue to buttress the concept that the ability to engage and engross the virtual masses--the users, makes Web 2.0 unique and massively popular. Indeed, these researchers like O’Reilly and other early researchers of Web 2.0 stress that in Web 1.0 the users maintain only an active role as consumers of information; in contrast, in Web 2.0, the users actively play the roles of consumers and producers of information at

the same time. In addition, the subtle politicization herein makes this article extremely interesting; it considers users' active involvement "democratization." In their perspective, the blossoming of "niche groups" (collection of friends) that can exchange content of any kind (text, audio, video) and tag, comment, and link to both intra-group and extra-group pages" illustrates the "democratic nature" of this new Web (Cormode and Krishnamurthy).

Furthermore, and in relation to this chapter, it is important to notice the critical role of social networking sites to distinguish Web 2.0. Facebook and MySpace, for instance, are user centered sites (Cormode and Krishnamurthy). In sum, Cormode and Krishnamurthy conclude--like O'Reilly--that Web 2.0 must be considered an ongoing study, a dynamic endeavor; though, they always stress the significance of social networking websites since they regard the dynamic and interactive linking to friends in their view, the "most frequently changing entity of Web 2.0." This could be debatable.

In my opinion, despite the changed, "free" and improved software technology available in social networking websites, which has captivated herds of users into joining

them and making them active participants and consumers, a crucial question remains: at what cost? Even Cormode and Krishnamurthy acknowledge that in their recent article they omitted one critical matter of Web 2.0 that deserves further study--the issue of privacy; this is a hot topic looming one of the most popular and appealing social networking sites and echoing interesting parallels of baroque mechanisms far from the baroque model that MacLure idealized as means of recalcitrance. The study of Web 2.0 is mesmerizing but complex since this new Web version encompasses many popular online applications that the majority of users nowadays take for granted. Furthermore, there are other innovative websites that assist in demarcating Web 1.0 from Web 2.0; these sites include YouTube and Wikipedia. Nevertheless, the boom of social networking websites, such as Facebook, deserves, in view of their massive appeal in the modern and globalized culture of the information age, greater scrutiny.

Let us begin with a succinct definition and history of social networking websites. Danah M. Boyd, one of the most distinguished scholars and researchers on social networking websites, along with Nicole B. Ellison in their compendious and informative study “Social Network Sites: Definition,

History, and Scholarship," provide an extensive definition of a social networking site. They define a social networking website as an online based service; one that allows users to build a public or semipublic profile in an enclosed system; it enables them to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a network. Likewise, they can also view and go over their list of contacts (including lists of other users in the system) (Boyd and Ellison). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, from Boyd's perspective, the aspect and milieu where these connections occur varies from site to site; for instance, the social networking website Vampirefreaks has a gothic and horror theme; thus it is very different from the two popular mainstream social networking websites MySpace and Facebook. So, are MySpace and Facebook corresponding competitors? Not entirely, as we shall see further ahead, Facebook can be ascribed as the most neobaroque artifact for matching most of the positive and negative baroque attributes reemerging in our modern global society listed at the beginning of this chapter.

It is also important to remark that social networking sites are not that new, despite the fact that today social networking sites are the latest trend in social networking

and are considered a central branch and paragon of Web 2.0. This popular system of “free” services has its roots in the old Web--Web 1.0. In fact, social networking websites started with the now defunct SixDegrees site established in 1997; it lasted a mere three years. Regardless of its short lifespan, this pioneer website became the first site that allowed users to simultaneously create a user profile, and a list of “friends” to traverse. Moreover, it enabled the user’s list of “friends” to be publicly accessible as well as to create user profiles and friends lists, all in the same website, and thus, it became the first comprehensive social networking website (Boyd, “Social Network Sites”).

In other words, SixDegrees turned into the first site that combined all of the social network service tools offered separately online by other sites like Classmates.com; but it provided its users with more agency and autonomy in matters of input. Ironically, even though this site attracted millions of users, it failed as a business venture; so it ended up shutting down like many online companies during the dot-com bust. In this regard, A. Weinreich, the founder of SixDegrees, considers the lack of success of his social networking website a dire side

effect of premature innovation launched at the wrong time (Boyd, "Social Networking Websites").

Nevertheless, in the first decade of the 21st century, all of a sudden, social networking websites have experienced an unprecedented boom in popularity, primarily with the youth demographics--the new generation, our future. Social networking websites form part of Web 2.0, and thus, there are dynamic social webs where the user is the massive producer of information willingly and unwittingly at the same time. Why this shift in the mode of thinking compared to the 1990s?--peer pressure, one of the most effective forms of persuasion, to join social networking websites, especially Facebook. In fact, in "Why Youth Love Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life," Danah Boyd cites participants stating that if they are not members of a popular social networking site, they "don't exist" (Boyd, "Why Youth Love Social Network Sites" 119). Therefore, there is a parallel resonance with Maravall's observation that during the historical baroque era, as the Spanish sociologist Félix Ortega notes: "the kingdom of opinion" consecrates the empire of "taste" over reason," that is,

the power of public opinion is stronger than any army to control the masses (Ortega 256).

Without a doubt, in the realm of social networking websites and Web 2.0, Facebook has become a juggernaut phenomenon of its own. Since its beginning, Facebook achieved establishing links and appeal with the youth masses despite its far from grassroots origin. Facebook started in one of America's most prestigious Ivey League Schools--Harvard University--in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, a student who eventually became a famous Harvard dropout like one of his future minority partners in Facebook--Bill Gates. Remarkably, in only four years Facebook expanded not only in centers of higher education but also in high schools; since 2007, anybody can join regardless of their academic affiliation. Thus, this significant transformation unleashed an unstoppable turning point in the history of Facebook because previously only users who could prove their status as students could join this social networking site (Boyd, "Social Network Sites"). It truly became massive.

Furthermore, at this stage it is important to stress that the active participation of the users in consuming and producing information simultaneously provides the key to

demarcate Web 2.0 from its predecessor; this is a common fact in the array of social networking websites owned by transnational corporations. Thus, an obvious question arises: is Facebook really free? A neobaroque approach might undeceive society on this regard. After all, in our modern world where individuals tend to follow and accept as dogma the advances, conveniences and benefits derived from science and technology; contemporary neobaroque films that question the current status quo and reality--like *The Matrix*--illustrate and reveal the double edged nature of baroque and the contemporary neobaroque today; especially, when they are applied as a means to slyly capitalize on Web 2.0 users; nevertheless, there is also the possibility of recalcitrating against this complex system since the neobaroque concept has the potential to smash the constant linear thinking mentality of conformity.

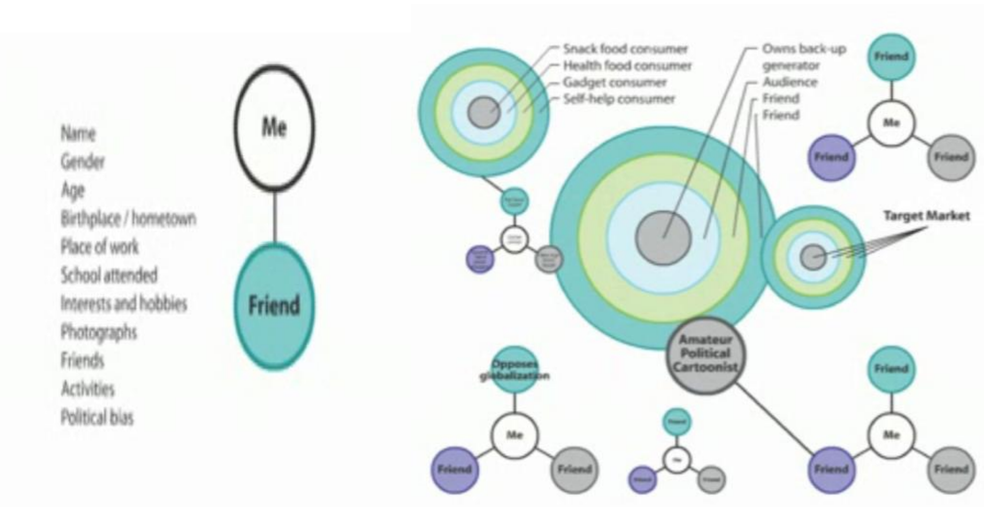
In fact, before social networking websites became a focal interest for academia, Maríangela Petrizzo Paéz and Isidro Maya Jariego wrote "La red de Matrix ¿En los límites de lo possible?" ["The Matrix Web: Inside the limits of possibility?"], a prescient article taking into account the important allegory behind this film in relation to our emerging and interconnected socio-technical society; where

the term Matrix means a diffused, perplexed and strange reality built like a thicket of spider webs of information (27). Petrizzo Páez and Maya Jariego tacitly address the significance of a baroque tool to illustrate their analysis of the emerging information society. Indeed, this article and *The Matrix* film question our reality via a baroque tool par excellence--an expanded metaphor, also known as an allegory. Notwithstanding, the use of allegory remerges not only to question the purpose of both versions of the Web or to study them as a phenomenon of neobaroque in our popular culture as in Angela Ndalianis' *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*; it can also be a tool for any system, regime or organization, with boon or bane consequences for the public.

Perhaps one of the most memorable scenes in *The Matrix* occurred when the character Morpheus offers to Neo a choice of two pills: a blue pill to continue to live in the fantasy world of the status quo or a red pill to achieve undeception; that is, to unearth the unreal but real reality. For us, undeception about social networking sites comes not in the form of a renegade science fiction character like Morpheus, but rather from the Canadian

government via a warning issued and posted on a well-known component of Web 2.0--YouTube.

This warning comes in the form of the video *What Does a Friend of a Friend of a Friend Needs to Know About You?: Privacy on Social Networks*, produced and posted officially by The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. It raises awareness about the immense power generated and succumbed to by the users of social networking sites run by multinational corporations like Facebook, one of the most thriving. This video clearly illustrates the vast complexity behind all of the social networking websites which constantly collect users' personal information and their respective social network as shown in the following still from the video:



Blatantly, the preceding figure points to how deep those seemingly harmless and user friendly social networking sites get to know their users as well as their social networks, even outside the virtual world of cyberspace. Some critics might consider this vast gathering of information from the users a contemporary form of Big Brother surveillance. Undoubtedly our information era has turned the old saying "knowledge is power" to something more than a mere cliché; why would multinationals be so interested in gathering so much complex information about its users? Information has likely become a new form of capital and commodity in the 21st century; although, another question ponders whether social networking sites providers genuinely share the power generated by their users or only give the illusion of such. History might move forward technologically, but some forms of social control seem resilient and blatantly parallel other centuries in some aspects.

Indeed, in his work on the historical baroque, Maravall, a historian, stresses the furtiveness of the power behind the baroque spectacle, such as the theater. Furthermore, during the 17th century, the zenith of the historical baroque in Spain, Francisco Cáscales

acknowledges in *Tablas poéticas* (*Poetic Tables*), that the *comedia* provides the necessary means to imbue the masses with good values in order to allay dissent. In other words, Cáscales considers the *comedia* instrumental to reach and direct the souls and minds of the bevy of urban dwellers, the grass roots, in order to reeducate them and maintain civil harmony. Likewise, it can be argued that social networking websites provide a form of entertainment with the ulterior motive to tacitly monitor and distract the masses from nonconformist ideologies; but also that they provide a venue to capitalize from the invaluable information provided, on those sites, without the need of the users to fill a survey online.

Moreover, Spanish historical baroque Playwright Lope de Vega, in his treatise *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (*The New Art of Writing Plays*), asserts the great importance of "the masses," as he states in his own words: "y escribo por el arte que inventaron los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron porque como las paga el vulgo, es justo hablarle en necio para darle gusto" (243). Lope de Vega's bottom line does not only come from a baroque playwright's perspective but also from the standpoint of a shrewd businessman. After all, successful businesses tend

to maintain satisfied customers. This principle has not changed much today. Social networking websites such as *Facebook* need the mass public, as the National Spanish Theater created by Lope de Vega, to succeed.

Are social networking websites mere businesses with complex marketing tactics aimed at their market targets? After scrutinizing the YouTube video sponsored by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and articles dealing with the impact of social networking sites; these include "The cost of (anti-)social networks: Identity, Agency and Neo-Luddites" by Ryan Bigge as well as "Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0" by Trebor Scholz, among others--the answer is far from simple. Nevertheless, these academic articles as well as the YouTube video from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada make a significant contribution to the analysis of this theme; they illustrate the illusion of power and control that social networking websites users presume they have due to their massive numbers as members of such sites. Is that really the case or just a form of credulity rationalized by the masses of users who enjoy the "free" applications and services provided by social networking sites? The infamous

Facebook News Feed privacy scandal of 2006 offers an illustrative rejoinder to this question.

This incident sparked when Facebook made unequivocally obvious its surveillance to their legions of faithful users; the users realized that "Big Brother" Facebook actively monitored all their online activities, including those of their "friends." The bottom line: users became enraged because Facebook made the surveillance blatant by announcing and sharing the activities of their social networking acquaintances and friends (real and virtual). Facebook News Feed set off a chain of complaints and public outrage from its users who threatened to abandon this social networking website for good. Within days, Facebook withdrew this blatant invasion of privacy. Ironically, Facebook continues to quietly collect personal information but never as blatantly obvious as it did with News Feed, the root of all the controversy surrounding privacy concerns at that time.

After Facebook shut down News Feed, the reality of the lack of privacy on social networking sites continued, as shown in the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada YouTube video. Even O'Reilly--among others--during a UK Intruders TV interview accentuates that users of

social networking sites are constantly being monitored; as long as these users have the impression of having their privacy protected, respected, and private--even if it is not the case—controversy, dissatisfaction and desertion are curtailed. How many of the social networking sites' users read the fine print in the terms of service section, especially of Facebook? Researchers like Boyd recognize that, as long as the users are not irked by blatant intrusion into their privacy by an evident corporate monitoring, the status quo will continue (Boyd "Social Network Sites").

Web 2.0 critics, especially those who feel uneasy about the ramifications of the popular social networking sites, would concur with Maravall that the power of the masses is a mere illusion; the paragons vary in each period--for instance, the *comedia* during the historical baroque period, television in the 20th century and now the multimedia provided in the social networking sites. In effect, they generate, via their users, a gold mine of one of the most valuable assets of the information age--information (Beer and Roger, "Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0"). This form of exploitation is voluntary, invisible and illusive like a genuine *Matrix*.

In my opinion, one of the most significant differences between Facebook and other social networking sites providers, centers on its appeal to the young masses. This appeal is seductive. During the historical baroque period Maravall considered the mass appeal persuasion of the baroque spectacle a form of persuasion aiming not to demonstrate but to convince; that is, it aims to win the minds and hearts of the masses, a perspective shared by the Spanish sociologist Félix Ortega in "*Los orígenes de la cultura de las masas: El orden y la ciudad del Barroco*" ("The Origins of Mass Culture: Order and the Baroque City").

For Maravall and Ortega, the baroque as a culture of entertainment provides an effective mechanism of social control to manipulate and direct the urban crowds. Facebook parallels such effectiveness in persuading the virtual masses of the 21st century to remain users and customers of its services; after all, users pay with the newest form of capital today--information. Indeed, the fact that Facebook persuaded its Hispanic users to translate its Spanish version absolutely free of charge illustrates this social networking company's prowess to persuade its users. This made headlines globally, such as

in the Spanish electronic magazine soitu.es: "*Facebook lanza su version en español sin gastar un céntimo en traductores*" ("Facebook launches its Spanish Version Without Spending a Cent on Translators").

At this point, it is worth emphasizing the importance to keep in mind the impossibility of reliving a historical era in the present. Times have changed. The power of absolute monarchs in Western culture has faded. Today the state, of any nation, cannot afford global isolation. We live in a digital and information age where the world is linked via an infinite margin of possibilities--the global Web, the Internet. Thus, it is worth asking who is behind this global Web today. Today the key conduit of information is the new and emerging Web 2.0 since it allows the dominant multinational corporations to constantly obtain and gather information, the most valuable commodity of the information age. Even O'Reilly, at the end of his interview with *UK Intruders TV*, recognizes that social networking sites companies--Facebook in particular--have an enormous advantage in Web 2.0; in that they have the ability to constantly collect extensive amounts of information from their users; one of the key components, in

O'Reilly's view, to measure success or failure in that medium.

Information is more than ever the blood and soul of Web 2.0, a new form of capital. Even business schools like Madrid's IE Business School study social networking. It all goes back to a basic baroque questioning of reality; although in this case, this concept is used to create an illusion of something unreal to present it as real to unwitting masses of consumers. For instance, in an extreme example, Manuel Ángel Alonso Coto, business professor at IE Business School, discusses in his academic blog the infamous case of the attractive Facebook woman who "lost" her camera at the beach. Digital pictures from that camera were posted to try to "find" the owner. Nevertheless, it was a mere marketing deception, which aimed to lure traffic to the supposed good Samaritan's site; in reality, the individual behind this ploy was an agent of an adult entertainment company with ulterior marketing intentions. This form of deception echoes the cautionary warnings from Maravall and Félix Ortega since they emphasize that forces within a system can deceive the public and manipulate it to achieve a particular aim and control. Indeed, in Felix Ortegas' perspective, one of the strategies of the baroque,

as a mechanism of social control, is to stimulate and foment passion in order to make the masses stop thinking and questioning the status quo; this is done via a vast and saturated mass of unverifiable opinions that distort any qualm against the system (274-275).

Today, as in the times when the historical baroque flourished--even beyond the Atlantic--under the aegis of the Spanish Empire, we find ourselves again in a global phenomenon of intercultural globalization thanks to the accessible conduit of Web 2.0. Nevertheless, the capital no longer comes and goes as gold through the transatlantic route; the new capital is information capital created and consumed by the users of Web 2.0, a venture sponsored by transnational corporations. This chapter focused on social networking sites, Facebook in particular, since its popularity with the ordinary people, especially young, continues to grow exponentially. Could this engender an impact on global culture and thus, start a wave of neobarroquization? A fair answer to this question is beyond the scope of this chapter; hence, within the context of social networking sites, we can find some parallel paradigms--although not equivalent due to the impossibility

to relive a historic era--to the first global baroquization.

Despite the fact that Facebook is not a Crown, State or Empire, the sun never sets for the users of this service, and the presence of this social networking website continues to expand globally. This is no accident; after all, one of Web 2.0's central objectives is global expansion. This concept is illustrated by Javier Oliván, a *Facebook* international Manager cited in *Yahoo* online news: "Our goal would be to hopefully have one day everybody on the planet on Facebook" (Hosaka). In fact, in an another Internet video interview conducted by Intruders TV UK, Oliván reiterates the preceding quote cited by the Associated Press/Yahoo News reporter Tomoko Osaka. Furthermore, Oliván and the interviewer discussed the internationalization of Facebook; they concurred that one of the key differences between Facebook and MySpace is the dynamic involvement of users; they also talked about how, in contrast to MySpace, Facebook, as mentioned earlier, persuaded its users to translate the site into Spanish at no cost. Obviously, in this respect, Facebook is a better paragon of Web 2.0 than MySpace; after all, Facebook has taken the dynamic participation of the user as a creator--

rather than receiver--to the limit. In the interview, it is acknowledged that Facebook is a competitive and top social networking site company; this success is credited to an international cultural appeal, according to Oliván.

Although the historical and global baroque era cannot be restored, elements associated with the baroque can reemerge and readapt by means of "neobaroque" artifacts, such as Facebook. Today Facebook and other social networking sites facilitate the flow of information; likewise, they also promote an international digital culture where the virtual masses actively participate. Despite the fact that this digital culture originates in a particular geographical place, it evolves and adapts beyond its immediate location in each nation and region that is introduced. This echoes the first global baroque phenomenon experienced by Italy, Spain, Spanish America and so forth. Nevertheless, behind fine arts, entertainment and culture it is significant to recognize the power that lies beneath. In our digital and global era, the state cannot curtail the boundless horizon of the Internet.

In particular, Facebook is perhaps the most representative of all the social networking sites since it centers primarily on its users. It is not only one of the

most popular social networking sites but also the most controversial. All of the issues raised by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada can be linked to Facebook. Compared to other social networking sites, Facebook has a knack for privacy violations. Thus, the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC), at the University Of Ottawa's Faculty of Law, took legal action against Facebook in 2008; it complained to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, which then sponsored the YouTube video cautioning about the privacy issues surrounding social networking sites.

The baroque as neobaroque elements can become a double edge sword, taking into account its persuasive aesthetics but also, its political implications; undoubtedly, they entertain. Here are some questions to ponder: is education the real purpose or purposes behind any art form? Is it entertainment? Control? Exploitation? In order to achieve any of those possible motives, the baroque developed some of the patterns listed at the beginning of this chapter, which have been identified as reocurring once again in our modern society.

In Web 2.0, social networking sites illustrate the potential power of users for recalcintrance in an emerging

neobaroque model. Nonetheless, they also unwittingly embrace an intricate system that subtly capitalizes from them via a sophisticated neobaroque artifact. The dominant social network site--Facebook--is one of the biggest islands in the vast and complex archipelago of Web 2.0; not only does it partake in dynamism, interaction and persuasion capabilities with this new version of the Web, but it also shares the mechanisms associated with the cultural baroque. Indeed, this popular social networking site functions as an interactive "theater of the world;" a theater where the virtual global masses act simultaneously as spectators and producers; it is also digital public space, where they perceive power as consumers.

Notwithstanding, this perception of empowerment provides a virtual illusion, a neobaroque reverie. Users of social networking sites work for hours and hours freely, like virtual slaves producing information capital. Sooner or later these devoted individuals, who live within this system dominated by multinationals, have to find employment. These corporations want the best candidates, and for some social networking sites users, unfortunately, their compromising personal information, which they willingly posted, can end up at the hands of potential

employers. Social networking sites assist in controlling the tangible and the virtual global cities via entertainment, akin to the historical baroque control of urban centers. The baroque echoes into new technologies; it becomes more fascinating and complex; new technologies such as social networking sites provide venues for neobaroque paradigms to flourish; they intertwine politics, culture, entertainment, conformity and recalcitrance in today's digital theater of the world. As for the next chapter, I turn to explore and discuss the powerhouse behind the neobaroque artifacts of the twenty-first century--the corporate baroque.

"Of what use is knowledge if it is not practical?"

Baltasar Gracian

"And many of them are so inured,

so hopelessly dependent on the system,

that they will fight to protect it."

The Matrix

"The demise of one baroque structure,

which would likely give way

to a new structure no less baroque."

Edmundo Paz Soldán

Chapter 6

Beyond the Bottom Line: The Ascendant 21st Century Corporate Baroque

The baroque zeitgeist's reanimation through prevalent neobaroque artifacts compels further vetting. Unlike reliving the traditional historical baroque, the current global society has adapted its own version, and it is not always for the best. Or is it? Are today's neobaroque artifacts the bells of hell announcing the end of times? After all, the current times can be rightly considered times of trial and tribulation; they are rife with economic incertitude and institutional disillusionment, that is, "times of crisis" in Maravallian terms. Thus, some of the

harshest critics of these emerging baroque artifacts--as the ones discussed throughout this discourse--consider such neobaroque artifacts as smokescreens. In other words, *Matrix*-like control mechanisms that alleviate the public of reality's checkered complexity, and thus, they subtly and suavely, dragoon complacency. Not necessarily. There is light at the end of the tunnel; baroque undeception redux becomes reachable via the neobaroque.

Today, Sherwin and Klein parallel Gracian's quest to question the questionable, even the system. It is no accident that Gracian's bestseller *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* remains in print in the second decade of this new millennium. In fact, Gracian's best-seller inspired, during the dwindling years of the last millennium, Nicholas Spaddacini and Jenaro Talens to compile an anthology acknowledging Gracian's timeless usefulness: *Rhetoric and Politics: Baltasar Gracian and the New World Order*.

Spaddacini and Talens' anthology's title hints to a crucial baroque common denominator, still relevant today--though not alien to controversy like the "baroque" term per se: rhetoric. Rhetoric ought not to be a term of contempt, and much less baroque rhetoric. Why? Because rhetoric functions instrumentally; it has no soul like a hammer; it

can serve for good or wicked deeds; its wielding human factor decides its aim. As Aristotle puts it, rhetoric functions “as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric* Book I). As with the topos of memento mori, the baroque bridged the ancient and medieval art of rhetoric into modernity and beyond.

What is rhetoric anyway? Where does it come from? These questions merit their own thorough study, as the one conducted in *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, by rhetoric scholar James Herrick. Herrick infers that rhetoric sprang into being when humanity recognized that symbols, besides expressing significance, can be devised to serve as a means to an end, that is, to persuade into a desired course of action (31). This type of symbolic rhetoric’s origin remains a riddle (Herrick 31).

Nonetheless, the Western tradition of rhetoric as a systematic field of study traces itself back to its ancient Mediterranean roots (Herrick 31). Indeed, the citizens of the free polis studied and practiced rhetoric in Greece since the year 5 B.C. Likewise, rhetoric became part of the patrician education in ancient Rome as well as in the Middle Ages as part of the trivium (Levy 43-45). During

the historical baroque, a surge of interest in rhetoric blossomed. Nascent scholarly and religious organizations embraced rhetoric into their curricula. Baroque rhetoric enthusiasts considered it a useful educational tool (Levy 43-45).

Indeed, during the dawn of the seventeenth century, the heart of the historical baroque, 1599 to be exact, the Jesuits entrenched rhetoric into their teaching methodology manual--the *Ratio Studiorum*; thus, these global travelers and missionaries disseminated rhetoric wherever they taught. Certainly, Jesuits served as patrons of rhetoric during early modernity since they considered rhetoric functional and instructive in the cultivation of their pupils (*Ratio Studiorum* 72). The ensconcing of rhetoric in the *Ratio Studiorum* unlikely surprised anyone at the eve of the seventeenth century. It was a matter of time; it was simply a formality. After all, prior to the seventeenth century, the Society of Jesus disseminated the teaching of rhetoric throughout their schools; a task achieved with the assistance of the rhetorical teaching manual *De Arte Rhetorica Libri tres ex Aristotele, Cicerone et Quintiliano, praecipue deprompti*, published in 1569 and

written by Cipriano Suarez, a fellow Jesuit scholar (Manuel Martins 5).

The Jesuit tradition of imparting knowledge through rhetoric training branched off and adapted as the order expanded globally during the dawn of the seventeenth century. Even the Society of Jesus own rigorous three year philosophical training known as the *Curso Conimbrecense*, as Antonio Manuel Martin remarks, unfolded "through the teaching institutions connected to the Jesuits in Europe, the Americas and Asia (India, China and Japan)" (2). The Society of Jesus not only promoted rhetoric in Latin but also in the vernacular. As George Kennedy notes, upon their arrival to the viceroyalty of New Spain in 1572, the Jesuits established a college in its capital--Mexico City--where they encouraged the study of rhetoric (254). Consequently, several Jesuits in New Spain composed scholarly treatises in Latin and Spanish during the historical baroque era, including: "*Breve Instrucción y Suma Rhetórica de Predicadores* by Domingo Velázquez (1625) and *De Arte Rhetorica* (1646) by Tomás González" (Kennedy 254).

At this point, it is pertinent to remark that the historical baroque took place in times of an early modern

gigantomachy between Reformation and Counterreformation blocs. Moreover, this period witnessed the birth of the term propaganda in 1622 with the formation of the apostolic Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Bireley 172-173); unlike today, early propaganda did not have a negative connotation. In fact, baroque Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries came to apply the term propaganda to refer to the propagation of their creeds (Levy 56). Rightly, the Jesuits can be attributed as modern pioneers and propagators, not just of their faith, but also of rhetoric via assorted modes.

In *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*, contemporary scholar Evonne Levy has gone as far as claiming that propaganda has substituted rhetoric "as the site of interested discourse, of instrumentality" (11). Nevertheless, this same scholar recognizes that propaganda's ultimate goal is effective suasion--the pith and core of rhetoric (Levy 11). Indeed, Levy, in a U-turn on her earlier statement sloughing off rhetoric, recognizes that propaganda can be considered an element of recent rhetoricalness; in her own words, "propaganda is but one aspect, one manifestation of the manifold forms of rhetoric--history, science, speech in the public realm,

advertising, literature, and so on" (Levy 69). This reasonable change of heart makes sense; especially, since it recognizes rhetoric's vast multifarious spectrum encompassing the secular and religious realms. Primordially, propaganda denoted the dissemination of Christian culture and religion until its broad negative connotation took over later on (Levy 56). Rhetoric, and especially, baroque rhetoric, propagated via propaganda--in its primordial sense.

This is not to say that rhetoric remains off the hook nowadays. As recent as the summer of 2010, a scholarly book, which recognizes Gracian's contribution to the historical baroque hyperbolic style, provides the following back-handed compliment to rhetoric: "Rhetoric aims to deceive, *engañar*, but exaggerated *agudeza* [wit], an integral part of the art of creating new understanding, aims to enlighten, *desengañar*, a fallen world" (Johnson 125). This is quite an interesting and yet ironic citation, especially, considering the title of this monographic source--*Hyperboles*: *The Rhetoric of Excess in Baroque Literature and Thought*. Conversely, contemporary rhetoric scholar Scott Crider concurs with Gracian's--and his fellow Jesuits--enthusiasm for this art; in that he

considers rhetoric spiritual advancement (Crider 1). Crider counteracts the denigrating connotation imputed to rhetoric nowadays. That is, rhetoric's unfair tagging as a dark art intended to serve deception, unscrupulous individuals, kakistocracies, and the like (1).

Indeed, Crider recognizes rhetoric as an ambivalent discipline throughout its longtime history. Nevertheless, Crider pleads his case for rhetoric, underlining that many of Western culture's public-spirited icons trained in this art, including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Junior, among others (Crider 2).

Coming back to the issue of baroque rhetoric, it is fair to ask: What about the relevance of baroque rhetoric in the twenty-first century? Is there such a label? Of course, scholars like Daniel Gross in his work *The Secret History of Emotion* concurs in labeling the rhetoric of the seventeenth century as baroque rhetoric. After all, it was designed to win the hearts and minds of its audience. Politically, as Gross notices, baroque rhetoric via its histrionic spectacle, not only in theater per se, but also in ceremonies and rituals, effectively won the rapport of the monarchs' subjects by surrendering their emotions through awe (14). Many of these strategies carried on and

adapted to the times ensuing the historical baroque period at the end of the seventeenth century.

Indeed, as Rémy Saisselin points out, even Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith indicate the clandestine presence of "baroque culture and mentality" from beyond the grave(33). More intriguingly, it was the resilience of the baroque concept of the mask that perplexed Enlightenment thinkers the most. After all, for many of these thinkers, the mask, as a symbol of dishonest sanctimony, helped to stigmatize the seventeenth century. The crosscurrent, secularly leaning, eighteenth century readapted the baroque mask; thus, during the Enlightenment, Adam Smith accounted that "in the eighteenth century the mask was that of felicity and happiness" rather than insincere piety--though still a baroque trait carry-over (Saisselin 33).

Today's rhetoric is alive and well and could not be closer to the baroque in the parallelisms and carry-over concepts manifested in neobaroque artifacts. Today's neobaroque rhetoric is digitally iconic in every way possible. Persuasion, however, continues to be its crux. Indeed, current scholars, such as Keith and Lundberg, define rhetoric "as the study of producing discourses and

interpreting how, when, and why discourses are persuasive" (4); namely, the art of learning how to induce via discourses in this socially networked society. Hence, it is important to keep in mind that a discourse refers to more than a formal public speaking engagement. It can also refer to a formal literary work--like this one--as well as an assorted array of symbolic exchanges of any register level, from "newspapers, pictures, movies, Web sites, music" and so forth (Keith and Lundberg 4).

Likewise, it is crucial to fathom when persuasion takes place; since it comprises theatrical effects that, when effectively orchestrated, affect emotions--pro, con or in-between-- about someone or something (Keith and Lundberg 4). To me, rhetoric serves as a multifarious art of persuasion that can turn into positive or poisonous propaganda. Like water, rhetoric can assist in quenching thirst for knowledge as well as to power the turbines necessary to wash out deceptive ignorance that can lead to unwitting error; or, on the other hand, to drown unsuspecting victims into exploitation and deception when spuriously applied. Therefore, Michel Foucault's research legacy on biopower and biopolitics meshes with this discussion.

Foucault’s look into these subjects has nothing to do with biology scholarship. Instead, it deals with an interconnected, complex and invisible power intertwining every aspect of our lives, where the controlled control the controlled, echoed decades later on the Matrix’s allegorical description:

> The Matrix is everywhere, it’s all around us, here even in this room. You can see it out your window or on your television. You feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes. . . . (29)

Indeed, Foucault refers to the system as the Matrix decades earlier:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that transverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network

> which runs through the whole social body much more than a negative instance whose function is repression. (61)

In other words, this is a complex system of interconnected relationships that keeps the intricate societal machinery running--a baroque system. After all, Foucault himself credits the seventeenth century as the starting point of technologically generated power; this is one of the main points stressed in the pre-Matrix prison scenario discussed further in his classic study *Discipline and Punish* (61).

Foucault's and Maravall's views recognize the significance of the historical baroque era as the cradle of the modern and postmodern subtle collective control of ordinary individuals, that is, the masses--a sentiment echoed on the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* films. As discussed earlier, Sherwin, Klein and Egginton--contemporary scholars--tend to politicize the current century and refer to it as a spectacle and image driven neobaroque. Specifically, the Matrix allegory has provided a practical Petri dish to anatomize the current neobaroque society and its institutions.

Obviously, the era of the once almost almighty Western monarchies is long gone. So, if this is indeed a

neobaroque century, where else--besides the ubiquitous virtual reality of the digital mass media--does the baroque manifests? Twenty-first-century Foucauldian scholar David Gabbard provides food for thought as he asserts that “one could say that the market, like a form of artificial intelligence, constitutes the operating program of all of our society’s dominant institutions” (42). Intriguingly, the seventeenth century gave birth to crucial institutions of control, as discussed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*; this is one of the main sources of Gabbard’s critique on compulsory schooling, intertwined with *the Matrix*’s ambience paradigm.

As in *the Matrix* films, Gabbard deems that the masses are the “batteries” of the current system, and more specifically, of its kernel--the market. Hence, from a perspective highly imbued by Foucault’s research on early modern social control, Gabbard infers that compulsory public institutions serve as invisible molders and enforcers of political power dictated by the system. The system might no longer be an absolute monarchy as in the seventeenth century per se. Instead, it is an establishment dominated by corporations--the ultimate virtual baroque masks masking corporate stockholders--

nestled in the market milieu (Gabbard 45). As noted earlier, their power is ultimately neobaroque in that it is omniprevalent, complex, subtle and practically invisible.

Academic aristarchs of the current global, digital, social, and technologically neobaroque-driven century can benefit from Foucault's research legacy on the historical baroque--especially, from Foucault's critiques on the sociopolitical institutions established during the seventeenth century; in particular, their ability to adapt through time--as found on preeminent samples of Foucaltian oeuvre, including *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Madness*, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, and so forth.

Nowadays, legal entities convey such power and virtuality; they have legal recognition as "persons" without having flesh and bones. They can sue, lobby and exercise a great deal of influence beyond the borders of any nation. Even individuals can create mini-versions of such entities by dint of becoming incorporated themselves, thus creating their own virtual business alter ego conferred and accompanied by the title Inc. Such entities can be terminated without affecting their founders' personal finances; after all, they are separate legal entities. Indeed, at a greater scale, these entities

anonymize their shareholders; save their CEOs, who, besides having stock options, can become charismatic celebrity-like figures of spectacle proportions like the late Steve Jobs--Apple's former CEO and cofounder.

Furthermore, as noted by Descartian scholar Dalia Ludovitz, the baroque Cartesian confluence of the corporal, technical, as well as the incorporeal, begets: "a new understanding of the body as a virtual entity, whose mechanical legacy will continue to haunt the destiny of modernity" (22). Indeed, the historical baroque definition of the term corporation, coined in 1611, truly suits these paramount and virtual baroque bodies:

> A body corporate legally authorized to act as a single individual; an artificial person created by royal charter, prescription, or act of the legislature, and having authority to preserve certain rights in perpetual succession. (*OED Online*)

The Cartesian corporal concept transcends beyond the historical baroque.

Today, many of these virtual legal bodies have "revirtualized" online. Who has not heard of Internet

banking by now? Others, literally, were born online, like Facebook and Google. Many of these titanic virtual bodies--online and offline--lie behind many of the conveniences enjoyed by most industrialized nations, including employment. Yet the dark side and warnings of the historical baroque echoed in Gracian's ethico-political writings remain well-adapted to serve individuals caught in the competitive corporate ladder of the twenty-first century, the "rat race;" where they seek to maintain their in favor status as courtiers did during the baroque. After all, the virtual heads of the unwary continue to roll. Two documentaries come to mind, *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* and the Canadian documentary *The Corporation*.

Corporate neobaroque embraces politics and persuasion beyond its internal "corporate culture," as its baroque predecessor's "court culture." Similarly, the corporate neobaroque has a firm foothold in the public sphere. It promotes logos and brands of tangible products and services, but also widespread virtual and computer-generated imagery, that is, mass produced icons. Redolently, images and icons characterized the historical baroque style--and its rhetoric. Nonetheless, today's

baroque generates from virtual corporate entities--the corporations.

Nowadays, images and icons, such as the ones found on computer screens and video games, epitomize our digital society. Therefore, these contemporary icon-filled media make optimum environments for neobaroque rhetoric. This is not farfetched. Persuasion, the crux of rhetoric, spurred a whole treatise on its impact on video games produced in this century dominated by digital imagery.

In *Persuasive Games*, Ian Bogost acknowledges video games as an art and swaying tool for boon or bane. Likewise, Bogost recognizes--as rhetoric advocates of traditional disciplines discussed before--that rhetoric remains undermined:

> *Rhetoric* might conjure the impression of *hot air*, as in the case of fast-talking con who crafts pretentious language to hide barren or deceitful intentions. Academics and politicians are particularly susceptible to this sort of criticism, perhaps because we (and they) tend to use flourish and lexis when coherence runs thin, as in this very sentence. Rhetoric is often equated with a type of smokescreen; it is

> language used to occlude, confuse, or manipulate the listener. (15)

Truly, today's rhetoric lambasting echoes baroque bashing. Nonetheless, rhetoric and especially baroque rhetoric, can effectively apply imagery and icons apart from the singled out oral or written rhetorical applications--and not always for detrimental purposes as discussed earlier.

Returning to Bogost, he takes on board visual rhetoric as a branch of rhetoric in the twenty-first century (21). In particular, Bogost credits Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill for pinpointing the interdisciplinary nature of the study of visual rhetoric; likewise, Bogost accredits them for pinning down today's sophisticated technology as a blitz of images in order to "influence people's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs" (21). I concur on the importance of recognizing the significance of visual rhetoric, especially taking into account Sonja Koss' reassessing of rhetorical theory in Helmers and Hill's seminal anthology, *Visual Rhetoric*:

> A rhetorical theory once restricted to linear linguistic symbols thus explodes into one characterized by multidimensionality, dynamism,

> and complexity by visual units of meaning are taking into account in rhetorical theory. (308)

In other words, it has become neobaroque indeed. It is fascinating to go over page after page of visual rhetoric research without finding the terms "baroque" or "neobaroque." It is like reading a reverse dictionary, especially in Koss's case; her conclusion echoes Walter Benjamin's angle on the baroque, as well as many of this discourse's inferences in regard to the manifestation of neobaroque via its artifacts in this new millennium:

> Visual rhetoric may not be used to persuade audiences in directions intended by a rhetor and may not be contributing to standard definitions of rational public communication, but its effects are significant and certainly not always negative. The world produced by visual rhetoric is not always--or even often—clear, well organized, or rational, but is, instead, a world made up of human experiences that are messy, emotional, fragmented, silly, serious, and disorganized. (310)

Just like in the *Matrix*, the Internet, or even *Don Quixote*, expecting the unexpected can be the norm. Especially, if

individuals exercise free will to open their eyes to the wonder of possibilities for change, empowerment and agency with teeth. On the other hand, complacency can be bliss to some. Indeed, acquiescence--or even catharsis--as a result of the massive visual spectacle--pumped by powerful virtual corporate entities--can be a choice to those free enough to embrace a passive stand on life. This complex paradox illustrates the baroque and neobaroque possibilities; they can liberate and bind simultaneously; it is up to the human element to tip the scales.

Certainly, free will remains a central concept of today's society, as during the historical baroque. Unsurprisingly, winning over individuals' volitions--the art of persuasion embodied in rhetoric--remains as important as ever and thus, baroque rhetoric. Baroque rhetoric matters and ought not to be assailed like the terms "baroque," "propaganda" or "rhetoric" per se. It is far easier to mar than to critically think that these are just mere neutral tools, like a sledgehammer, with the same potential to crack an issue or a reputation; it is up to the human factor to apply volition.

Moving on, the baroque and neobaroque avenue of the spectacle--for a boon, bane, commercial, political or moral

agendas--furnishes the multitude’s need for ample illustrations, even when dealing with memento mori. That is why the 2009 King of Pop’s mega-memorial service served as a visual and virtual reminder that no matter how much wealth, power or success reaches one’s life--it will end. Such a powerful memento mori manifestation remains relevant.

Certainly, it is quite intriguing that the presence of memento mori in *Lexx*, one of the most obvious neobaroque science fiction television shows produced in Canada--in the late twentieth century--has not generated more attention in academia. Especially, since it ingeniously personifies memento mori in one of its primary characters--Kai, last of the Brunnen-G, a reanimated former Divine Shadow assassin who regains his free will. The series *Lexx*, in its own right, can be attributed as neobaroque for its constant use of allegory, sensuality, action and complex dreamlike settings that include parallel universes. Even Captain Stanley H. Tweedle, of the big bug-ship Lexx (a living leviathan and intergalactic insect spaceship with the capability to pulverize planets) can be regarded as the zany-*gracioso* companion of Kai’s quest for redemption. Indubitably, *Lexx* not only merits a neobaroque status but

further research as well--as Star Wars and other science-fiction popular culture shows cited in Ndalianis' *Neo-Baroque: Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*.

A notably area of potential research opening within the new millennium neobaroque is horror. In fact, as discussed in this discourse earlier, Patricia MacCormack--who considers the baroque as a crux element of her cinesexuality theory-- illustrates her viewpoint with classic baroque horror films, like Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*. This takes us to the just released--summer 2010--David Castillo's study of baroque horror in today's global society--*Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities*. What makes this anatomization remarkable? Castillo's political piquancy tinctured throughout this work--since the preamble--as shown below in his own words:

> *Baroque Horrors* reexamines imperial dreams of national origin and historical destiny as well as fears of invasion and contamination in the age of exploration. A central conclusion of my study is that the shadows that lurk in our closed spaces are symptoms of the baroque horror (vacui) that continues to haunt the architecture of modernity.

> In this sense, one of the most important lessons we can learn from facing our baroque horrors (fictional as well as historical) is that the monsters come with the house, or as José Monleón put it in his study of the modern tradition of the fantastic, "the monsters were possible because we were the monsters." (xiii)

Castillo makes no bones about his anti-imperialist, multidisciplinary and multicultural approach.

How far is Castillo willing to politicize his baroque horror monograph? Deeply, since Castillo, early on, aspires to deflect the contemporary cultural-political colloquy from "the familiar narrative patterns that generate self-justifying allegories of abjection and to refocus it on the history of our fears and their monstrous offspring" (xii). Furthermore, I am delighted that Castillo acknowledges and applies Foucault's concepts in his contemporary baroque analysis--especially, the Foucauldian episteme--defined by Foucault as follows:

> I would define the *episteme* retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable

> within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *episteme* is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific. (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 197)

Namely, Castillo's baroque research aims to set forth new contextual horizons in order to reconsider and query about the Foucauldian corpus of concepts that mold knowledge through time (Castillo xii; Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 197; *OED Online*).

Castillo's recent treatise provides an intriguing neobaroque perspective since it links it to the historical baroque. Nonetheless what is even more interesting is what Castillo ferrets out from the historical baroque: "the roots of the commodification of nature and the horror vacui that accompanies it" (xiv). In fact, Castillo seeks and finds lurid parallels between Gonther Von Hagens' Body Worlds--the ultimate and most macabre memento mori spectacle (besides a battlefield or an actual morgue); after all, Body Worlds displays unskinned human cadavers performing everyday activities; this is a truly eye opener

that undeceives the skin-deep illusion of corporal immortality--and a commodified horror spectacle.

Contemporary theatrical scholar Gianna Bouchard goes as far as comparing the Body Worlds exhibit as a hybrid aesthetic-scientific theatrical spectacle with its modern roots in the seventeenth century--the historical baroque. To buttress her assertion, she refers to Julie Hansen research on the cabinet of curiosities, the *Wunderkammer*, (60). Hansen's inference on the seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer* reverberates with the neobaroque theatricality of the ebbing twentieth and dawning twenty-first centuries:

> In professional forums ranging from public demonstrations of anatomy to the dissected curiosities displayed in the Wunderkammern, staged medical performances were designed to attract viewers' attention and to assert professional legitimacy. (663)

Body Worlds is controversial in that it is a graphic and a theatrical memento mori reminder of the dance macabre that the baroque bridged into modernity and beyond.

Even Castillo, in an earlier work that likely inspired his book, "Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition,"

recognizes the transcendent theatricality of the baroque. Thus, he goes as far as to link it with the current digital age in a neobaroque-existential tone:

> The unsettling feelings of alienation, self-estrangement, and lack of authenticity that we associate with our digital age are not easily distinguishable from the early modern experience of loss of meaning and the baroque fascination with the theatricality of life and the deceptive nature of appearances. (100)

Castillo's might seem somber but is quite accurate about this Web 2.0 dominated digital era. Social networking sites can become theatres of horror by exploiting the insecurities and angst of its users. This is not necessarily done by some government or secret society, but by fellow actors-participants--other users. In other words, icons, pictures, digital interaction and hypertext, in the current digital theater of the world, that suppose to bring happiness and cheerful connections all the time, can be a venue for deceit, evil and mental torture. This is also known as "trolling," a form of cyber-bullying. Trolling on social networking sites has been associated with suicides, especially of young teenage boys and girls;

it can be that fiendish (Gordon, "Anti-Cyberbullying"). In the end, Castillo infers that the ultimate horror of our time is the emptiness disguised behind the excess of the consumer driven society. The quest of achieving the impossible and absolute earthly utopia masks its central hollowness--the aim for the impossible, the "baroque condition," in Castillo's terms (100).

The commodification of the macabre spectacle discussed in Castillo's *Baroque Horrors* has found a home in a peculiar digital genre--horror video games. In fact, these types of video games inspired the 2009 anthology, *Horror Videogames*, compiled by Canadian video game scholar Bernard Perron. As a bonus, this anthology comes with an introduction by neobaroque horror writer extraordinaire Clive Barker. Who says that literary figures cannot mesh with video games? In recent years, Barker developed an avid interest in horror video games; he even produced *Jericho*, his own supernatural horror video game which features, in the *Hellraiser*'s and Body Worlds' tradition, metaphysical, complex, macabre and baroque creatures; thus his video game grosses goriness and horror, as his novels.

Barker's foreword provides an insightful input from his multimedia artist's perspective on the cultural and

artistic significance of video games today. Indeed, Barker assails what he considers an ongoing disregard for video games by the intellectual community for the following reasons, in his words:

> The people who are ignoring this significant phenomenon are the very people who should be most concerned with the power and its influence upon the predominantly young and impressionable minds of our populace: the Zeitgeist-watchers, the professional commentators who make it their business to read the auguries of our culture in the entrails of pop phenomena. (Barker 1)

Why? Because in Barker's view, intellectuals have the duty of creating discourse on substantial cultural occurrences carrying consequences for ensuing generations, as he puts it:

> After all, whatever the shortcomings of games at their present state of development, they are shaping the imaginations, intellects and even the sexual development of the voting populace who will shape the world tomorrow. (Barker 1)

Once again, baroque rhetoric takes center stage unnamed; unlike its crux--persuasion, manifested and discernable as the mechanism spurring the auguring consequences derived from the engaging digital and virtual icons that make up video games.

How engaged are these gamers? "*Profoundly, intimately involved*--in the action," in Barkerian terms (2). Hence, although Barker himself is now involved in the art of video games as a digital artist and designer, he also recognizes the double-edged hidden power of these image-driven stories; thus he warns about the following video games pitfalls on gamers:

> These players are defining their own kind of heroism, or, more perniciously being drawn into identification with evil. Let us not dismiss the power of these stories too lightly. *They tell lies*. The most monstrous lie, of course, is the merciless contempt that they stir up for the Otherness; the ease with which something other than the human is demonized, and reduced, and made fodder for the gun-wielding player who stands anonymously behind the screen. Is this not very dangerous territory? (Barker 2)

Likewise, Barker asserts his disquiet about video games' capability to deceive through illusion; something not to be taken lightly since deception misleads and misinforms, as Barker illustrates:

> There are of course other, arguably less pernicious lies perpetrated by these ubiquitous fictions. That, for instance, physical beauty is likely to be an indication of moral purity. That, for instance, ugliness is almost certainly the sign of evil. That, for instance, Black Means Bad. (Barker 2)

Barker's concerns revoice historical baroque concerns with the pitfalls of deception; whose roots can be traced back to the *ars moriendi*, bridged to the modern era by the baroque--like memento mori (Cunningham and Grell 311).

Moreover, as he closes his foreword, Barker echoes the moral concerns regarding deception--a far-reaching motif during the historical baroque used by artists, writers and thinkers like Gracian. Akin to memento mori, the concept of deception has deep moral roots, as noted by Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell in their treatise *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe*; the art of deceiving tallies the

craft of fiends trying to tempt, trick and doom souls till the end (311).

Hence, it is quite intriguing that, in the post-historical baroque millennium, Barker raises parallel issues with regard to video games. Namely, Barker exhorts us to consider the moral validity of the virtual stories told in video games; thus to come to terms and realize that gratification not always lands in propitiousness (2). Therefore, Barker alludes to the carnage that took place at the Coliseum for entertainment purposes, a bloodbath that remains reprehensible today. This is ironic; after all, Barker's *Jericho* video game is truly a gory horror-baroque experience. Though, in the baroque strong moral tradition of many of its artists and thinkers, it should be unsurprising that as new technologies collide with art, moral issues about their ramifications arise as well in neobaroque artifacts--like video games. After all, "to dismiss the idea of moral context is to despair of our species and our planet" (Barker 2).

In addition to Barker's forward, Bernard Perron, the editor of *Horror Video Games*, introduces baroque overtones that echo the theatrical interactivity of the current neobaroque discussed in this dissertation. Consider the

following statement where Perron contrasts horror films to horror video games:

> The horror film is defined as a "body genre" because its bodily and ecstatic excess is causing the body of the spectator to be caught in an involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen. Insofar as the gamer is not only caught up in this involuntary mimicry, but also to act and feel through its presence, agency and embodiment in the fictional world, the survival horror genre extends those bodily sensations. (9)

Certainly, today's technology allows the user not only to interact with the macabre theatre provided by horror video games as Perron notices; they also--in a sophisticated and interactive neobaroque trompe l'oeil--allow interaction with other virtual bodies thanks to online gaming, as discussed earlier in this work.

Even Perron recognizes this corporal and interactive virtuality in his more detailed article "The Survival Horror: The Extended Body Genre;" he asserts that video games carry out "an operation which returns the virtual body to the viewer, now transformed into a gamer" (121).

Similarly, echoing engaging aspects associated with historical baroque art, Perron takes notice of how video games’ virtuality interconnects with the body:

> Insofar as perception, cognition, and emotions are grounded in the body and its dynamical interactions with the environment, it becomes both difficult to subscribe to a conception of the film viewer—and gamers--as a disembodied eye and necessary to turn to the lived body in front of the screen. (“The Survival Horror” 123)

The baroque trompe l'oeil that immerses the body and mind remains alive and well in the interactive Web 2.0 and video games; they keep becoming more and more sophisticated neobaroque artifacts. After all, the trompe l'oeil,

> ‘fools the eye’ by imitating its object so faithfully that the onlooker is momentarily gripped by an inability to tell the difference between representation and reality, original and copy. (MacLure 734)

During the historical baroque, traditional artists applied trompe l'oeil to their paintings and sculptures (MacLure 734). Today, nonetheless, digital technology has managed to

produce the trompe l'oeil effect via high-tech multimedia electronic programs and gadgets with screens of all sizes.

Furthermore, Perron's miscellany illustrates the baroque trait of hybridity in video games, which glides between the East and West thanks to Japan's hegemony on game titles. In particular, Martin Picard discusses the "transnational manifestations within the industry" (99). Moreover, Picard underscores the existence of transnationality in video games, which he defines as "the global ways in which cultural goods are created, produced, and distributed internationally" (99). This is not only the case with video games. Manga and Nippon films have also spread globally as well (Picard 98). Hence, this illustrates, as Maravall puts it, "appealing to the efficacy of the visual image is typical of societies where a guided mass culture develops" (251).

Moving on, it is also worth noting the application of contemporary neobaroque theories on video games, as video game researcher Christian McCrea did with Ndalianis' neobaroque theory on the Xbox 360 exclusive zombie-horror video game *Dead Rising*. McCrea has an interesting viewpoint in regard to the grim scenario of zombies in a shopping mall, either in George Romero's timeless horror

classic film *Dawn of the Dead*, or in Keijii Inafune's video game *Dead Rising*; to McCrea, zombies in a mall, in Romero's film, act as a critical allegory of the futile and mundane shopping routine of our consumerist society; in contrast, in Inafune's scenario, zombies "are functional ornaments," in the sense that the gamer has to actively engage and shop for the assorted variety of zombies throughout the mall to survive (231). Thus, McCrea notices and applies a contemporary neobaroque theoretical concept to Deep Rising's players who are actively engaged in an environment that challenges their perceptions and emotions through a combination of "the visual, the auditory, and the textual in ways that parallel the dynamism of seventeenth-century baroque form;" a concept postulated by Ndalianis in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*(5).

To be fair to Romero, I would like to add that the concept of the zombie comprises a Carpentierian baroque hybridity; in that the original zombie legend comes from the Caribbean folklore, Haiti in particular (Métraux 281). Additionally, the zombies are also a macabre and baroque memento. George Romero merits credit as a reviver of this concept, in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, by readapting and incorporating this Caribbean myth into our

popular culture; in effect, it has yielded many clones, including *28 Days Later*, *Zombie Land* and so forth. The twenty-first century neobaroque manifests in zombie films and video games.

Indeed, even in Romero's latest movie, *Diary of the Dead* is set as a YouTube zombie documentary, where the masses take the role of reporting the outbreak online. This film includes overtones of memento mori and a critique of today's consumerist and materialistic society. This is not to say that neobaroque video games like *Deep Rising* cannot be political à la baroque. Consider the deception themes in some of the various possible endings of this horror game: in one, the establishment sent Special Forces death squads to wipe out any witnesses of the outbreak and quarantine; it is game over for the virtual hero-gamer. On a happier note, in one of the alternative endings, the hero-gamer escapes the quarantined city and, as a freelance reporter, manages to leak and undeceive the world of the cover-up--Gracian would be proud.

Video games are the rising giants of neobaroque artifacts. They are no longer child's play; after all, the average player age is near twice the legal age of eighteen (Perron "Introduction" 4). I would go as far as to label

video games as an art form; a contentious topic, especially between film critic Roger Ebert; he gave thumbs down to the notion of classifying video games as art in his April 16, 2010 blog posting "Video Games Can Never be Art." It was his response to Kellee Santiago, video games designer and CEO of Thatgamecompany, who in her address at the 2009 TedxUSC annual innovation conference at the University of Southern California (USCA) classified video games as art. Thus, it prompted Ebert to underscore his disagreement on his blog, which in turn prompted thousands to reply in rebuttal--including Kellee Santiago and Clive Barker.

As a neobaroque researcher in our contemporary global digital culture--from an arts and humanities perspective--, this disputation about whether video games are art or not tickled me. I found this dispute intriguing as well as the pundits on both sides; mostly because it kindled up on Web 2.0, beginning with the multitude of gamers and public that swarmed Ebert's blog with posts rebutting his claim. Consequently, Ebert, the celebrated critic, of Siskel and Ebert fame, regarded by Forbes magazine as the foremost and powerful pundit, in a save-face makeup statement on his blog entitled "Okay Kids, Play on My Lawn" (on July 1, 2010), changed his position; he assented that video games

can indeed become art after all, in the future, as opposed to his earlier “never.”

In my opinion, Barker had it right when he cited Shakespeare in his rebuttal to Ebert:

> I think that Roger Ebert's problem is that he thinks you can't have art if there is that amount of malleability in the narrative. In other words, Shakespeare could not have written 'Romeo and Juliet' as a game because it could have had a happy ending, you know? If only she hadn't taken the damn poison. If only he'd have gotten there quicker. (“The Interactive Parallel Universe”)

Nevertheless, I am surprised that no more members of academia got involved. To me, the historical baroque can teach everyone something about video games--they are the people’s art, like Shakespeare’s or Lope de Vega’s plays. For political or plain entertainment purposes or both, the multitude enjoys video games like they enjoyed theater during the baroque. Even Barker concurs, since he argues in favor of the public rather than the critics like Ebert: “Games aren’t about reviewers. They are about players.” (Barker, “The Interactive Parallel Universe”).

Times change, and it has taken a few centuries to recognize Shakespeare, Cervantes and Lope in the canon--so why not video games? I hope it will not take that long. After all, through personalized avatars and interactions with other virtual gamers online, video games continue to become more and more theatrical and interactive as well as narrative. Once again, let me briefly address Barker's video game concern. Actors who play murderous kings, like Shakespeare's Richard III or Macbeth, know they are not kings after leaving the stage; likewise, players who play the role of an evil Terminator or monster, ought to leave it behind as soon as they disengage from their video game console.

In the end, I share Professor Perron's enthusiasm as he states that his seminal video game research anthology is just a "front door" out of a vast domain; thus, it encourages multidisciplinary scholars and gamers to "think after dark after gaming in the dark" ("Introduction" 12). The video game frontier merits more attention in academia. One day it can become as popular at work as at home, as contended by Stanford professor Byron Reeves and venture capitalist Dr. J. Leighton Read in their treatise *Total Engagement*: *How Games and Virtual Worlds are Changing the*

Way People Work and Business Compete. Is the neobaroque Matrix emerging? Time will tell.

As this disquisition wraps up, Microsoft has launched its latest Office productivity suite version--Microsoft Office 2010. Unsurprisingly, it is geared towards social networking, vivid visual presentations and interactivity (Microsoft Office 2010). That is, the corporate operating system and software giant--Microsoft--has veered towards Web 2.0 in its popular Office productivity software, and thus, echoing Sherwin's assertion that this is the century of icons. After all, the basal difference between Office 2007 and its up-to-date version is that Microsoft Office 2010 embraces more visual icons as well as the popular and interactive social networking applications found on Web 2.0 (Microsoft Office 2010). Indeed, more and more technology flows towards the virtual theater of the world scenario as discussed in this study. The intertwining between baroque and digital technology has produced intriguing studies, such as Sean Cubitt's *Digital Aesthetics*.

Although Cubitt's monograph title might dissuade seekers of a link between the baroque and the ongoing digital hegemony, deep between the covers lies a goldmine of insightful pointers on why digital aesthetics match the

neobaroque classification. Not bad, for a closing twentieth-century study. In fact, not only is Maravall's baroque research praised, but also, as asserted in this research, Cubitt recognizes the baroque's ability to provide "thoroughly mediated interactivity of audience participation in the spectacle of its own rule" (75). Thus, the baroque's supple resilience resurges by the "spectacular cultures" trends that set the stages of a "*fin-de-millennium*" neobaroque; hence they augured the current neobaroque manifesting itself through the digital global village online, and even on television--its airway signal is becoming digitalized. The interactivity between the public and the spectacle that Cubitt considers a noteworthy aspect of the historical baroque, at its zenith, has materialized via advances in digital technologies as this new millennium waxes. Certainly, Cubitt anticipates such a de facto incidence of the second decade of this new century:

> We need to understand the culture of the spectacle in the first baroque as the beginning of our own. To understand that the vertigo of imperial expansion, the terrors of absolute power and the morbid fascination with decay and

> mortality have been transformed into these virtual architectures is to catch a glimpse of the emergence of our own obsessions with the universe as our object of possession, our anxieties about absolute commodification. (Cubitt 75)

Taking into account human nature's craving for demigod status, Cubitt infers that the emerging digital technologies, especially the ones emphasizing virtuality, convey baroque allegories with the purpose of satisfying the human craving for self-reproducing immortality within a non-biological realm (75). Undoubtedly, Cubitt anticipated the persuasiveness of the digital culture that dominates more and more the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, Cubitt's most striking prediction and anatomization of the emerging neobaroque phenomenon is recognizing that is corporate driven. This is significant. In fact, corporate neobaroque can be a subcategory of neobaroque. Conglomerates like Facebook and others behind Web 2.0 or video games development would rightly fit in it. Why? Because as Cubitt noticed at the end of the last century, time has guillotined monarchical baroque empires.

Unquestionably, corporations are today's digitalization patrons.

As the twenty-first-century's second decade unfurls, so does the pythonic digitalization of the demos in a complex and interactive neobaroque multifarious manner, hence begging the question, how colossal? Virtually as gargantuan as Google TV--"search engine meets television," and much more, released in 2010--the ultimate integrated complex and demotic neobaroque theater of the world (Google Inc, "Google TV"). Truly, Google TV incorporates every possible virtual and technological aspect discussed in this discourse.

In the hybrid baroque tradition, Google Inc has partnered with traditional media cable channels like Home Box Office (HBO) as well as major hardware and software conglomerates, such as Sony, Logitech and Intel, resulting in software and hardware that allow the targeted five billion television users to turn the twentieth century television set into an interactive Web 2.0 medium. Furthermore, unlike Web 1.0 or classic television, Google TV furnishes its users with Web 2.0 computer applications--apps--akin to the ones found on the iPod touch and iPad. Even Facebook can be accessed simultaneously through Google

TV while watching a television show and using a smartphone as a remote control; it is that sophisticated.

More intriguingly is Google TV's encouragement for active participation from the public--and not only by creating YouTube videos and by providing creative entertainment with easy to use apps. Google TV encourages its users to develop more virtual widgets, that is, to develop more Google TV applications; after all, Google TV provides an open software platform (Google Inc, "Google TV"). In Google's Inc own terms, Google TV is "an adventure where TV meets web, apps, search and the world's creativity" (Google Inc, "Google TV"). In a world where five billion watch television, Google TV is no small step (Google Inc, "Google TV").

Web 2.0 corporations continue to expand as well as the magnitude of its proactive-consumer drones (that is, their actor-performer users). This begs the questions: can the neobaroque virtual theatricalization of society via its Web 2.0 artifacts like Facebook, YouTube, online video games and now Google TV develop any further? Is the constant production and consumption of more virtual icons progress? Or, "societies on the rise are simple, unadorned and relatively uncompromising. Those on the decline are given

to open-mindedness, self-indulgence and the baroque" (Ralston 467). On the other hand, in *Digital Baroque*, Timothy Murray considers "the energetic present, as articulated in relation to the analog past while bearing on the digital future" (7). Hence, Murray recognizes Walter Benjamin's contribution to digital baroque besides Deleuze.

The baroque concept of the library continues to make sense today. After all, we are a digital storage obsessed society where our hard drives, flash drives, portable hard drives, Xbox 360 hard drive and so forth, keep getting bigger and bigger to enhance our digital library experience. Thus, echoing "the process of storing and schemata to which the emergent libraries of the seventeenth century were a monument," as Murray credits Benjamin (Murray 7). Benjamin, indeed, gives food for thought and deserves credit for pointing out something so common today in our digital society: storage-mania, as he attributes this phenomenon to the historical baroque, in his words:

> The baroque ideal of knowledge, the process of storing, to which the libraries are a vast monument, is realized in the external appearance of the script. Almost as much as in China it is, in its visual character, not merely a sign of

> what is to be known but it is itself an object worthy of knowledge. (Benjamin 184)

Truly, Benjamin also deserves credit for anticipating visuality's hegemony through the millions of digital libraries of personal and corporate computers, ironically, most of them made in China.

History will witness, absolve or condemn the fate of today's neobaroque and its artifacts. Thus, the future is exciting for neobaroque researchers as digital and iconic globalization expands. The baroque as neobaroque provides a colorful array of manifestations via its artifacts. Baroque dispels ossification. That is the beauty of it. It refuses to be molded by a single and linear ism. Baroque's reinstitution shuns feasibility. Baroque's neobaroque proteanism embraces it.

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