

Introduction

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[D]ans le monde baroque, l'Ange ouvre le jeu de l'illusion, ce léger vertige du théâtre sur le théâtre d'un visible peint où l'oeil voudrait à la fois être dans les coulisses et sur scène. (Buci-Glucksmann 50)

Etymologically ambiguous (Portuguese for an irregularly shaped pearl; a medieval scholastic term for a tortuous argument in logic) and used to refer both to an historical period (Wölfflin) and to a recurring aesthetic, a tendency (d'Ors), "baroque" is an embattled term. In the literary context alone, it has been used in relation to Shakespeare (Carpentier 29), seventeenth-century German drama (Benjamin 40-41), the "baroque moderne" of Baudelaire (Buci-Glucksmann 74), detail and decadence (Schor 47), "la notion moderne d'ouverture" (Eco 20), postmodernism or the "affect of modernity" (Massumi 747) and a current in contemporary *québécois* writing, particularly women's writing (Bertrand). Not unlike the term "post-modern," "baroque" refers to so many historical moments and so many formal and aesthetic qualities (ornament, excess, passion, multiple perspectives, movement, hybridity, illusion, surface play, broken form, stylistic peculiarities, interdisciplinarity, the sublime, the ephemeral, etc.) that it has become mired in generalizations. In what follows, I use "Baroque" to refer to the period from about 1580 to 1750 and "baroque" to refer to practices and preoccupations associated with that period which surface in the texts published here. A certain interference between the two is inevitable, even necessary.

This is not to make of the baroque a transhistorical aesthetic category. The term has been used in different ways at different historical junctures and in the context of different cultural/political projects. First used by late eighteenth-century European art critics, the baroque initially designated a set of conventions and aesthetic practices that had gone out of fashion and that were considered grotesque. In the twentieth-century, Gérard Genette finds in the baroque a reactionary desire to "*maîtriser un univers démesuré*—

ment élargi, décentré, et à la lettre désorienté en recourant aux mirages d'une symétrie rassurante qui fait de l'inconnu le reflet inversé du connu" (37). Christine Buci-Glucksmann finds a more radical engagement with "*la Raison de l'Autre, de son excès et de ses débordements*" (13). In 1975, Nicole Brossard uses the term to characterize "*la parole féminine*" which turns in circles and finds no point of entry in history (52-3); then in 1995, in *Baroque d'aube*, she uses elements of the baroque to give form, embodied representation, to the passion of two women.

What are the discursive horizons of the baroque in late twentieth-century Quebec and Canada? What is at stake for contemporary women writers and artists in the baroque? Undeniably, feminist projects sit uneasily within the religious fervour of the Counter-Reformation. But the Baroque is also a period of substantial cultural transformation (including radical change in conceptions of the subject); a period preoccupied with passion, with overwrought surfaces, with making the material (paint, marble, stone, fabric, flesh) yield to signs of emotion; a period fascinated with the ecstasy of the martyr; a period given to allegory, to representations which disrupt the eternal by yoking it to the historical; and a period associated with ornament, detail, the grotesque and other categories identified as feminine. The texts which follow variously resist, mobilize, inflect and recontextualize elements of the baroque. Julia van Gorder's text, for example, interrogates the economy of gender which subtends the technique of chiaroscuro: who stands in the shadows of Rembrandt's paintings, in those dark spaces that delineate character and enhance dramatic effect? In van Gorder's text, the interwoven monologues of Rembrandt and Saskia, the painter's wife and favourite model, suggest that the women who serve as models and who sustain Rembrandt on a quotidian basis are key to the emotional and psychological insights for which the paintings are known. In other words, the shadows, too, give form. Cora Cluett's painting *No Longer Absent* shows that there can be no simple return to the Baroque. A product of the late twentieth century, the painting nevertheless breaks the surface of the formalist grid. Creating disturbances in the abstract structure of repetition and meddling with the viscous surface, it gives the effect of marks in skin, of burns or scars. From a distance, the painting looks beautiful; close-up, it confronts us with diseased or damaged flesh — not the radiant flesh of Baroque painting.

Two cultures or technologies can, like astronomical galaxies, pass through one another without collision; but not without change of configuration. (McLuhan 149)

Although not explicitly a theory of the Baroque, Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* provides a valuable lens through which to read the cultural transformations of the seventeenth century and those of the late twentieth century. Drawing a parallel between the advent of the printing press and that of electro-magnetic technology, McLuhan suggests that such radical innovation produces a "prolonged phase of 'adjustment' to the new model of perception set up by the new technology" (23). Just as the effects of the shift from scribal to typographical culture are keenly felt during the Baroque period, nearly two hundred years after the invention of the printing press, the effects of electronic culture (on subjectivity, perception, political organization, literacy, etc.) are just beginning to be felt at the end of the twentieth century. If, as Walter Benjamin suggests in his study of seventeenth-century German drama, "the baroque explores libraries. Its meditations are devoted to books" (140), then what can the contemporary baroque be said to explore? A film such as Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) with its drama of the flesh, choreographed chaos and baroque lighting and sets offers one possible response. Simultaneously a spectacle of the aesthetic, intellectual and imaginative possibilities of books, and a spectacle of their degradation and destruction, the film traces contradictory tendencies inherent in the move from manuscript to print culture during Shakespeare's day. Similar contradictions structure the move from print to electronic culture in our day: on the one hand, we are heavily invested in electronic media as a means of accessing information, producing documents and communicating; on the other, we cling to print culture, buying printed software manuals, privileging printed copies of texts on diskette, and using print-friendly terms for digitalized processes (translating, cutting, copying, pasting, etc.).

Dominique Paul's video installation "Marie goes to Hollywood" mobilizes a number of these contradictions and mixed-media constructions. Images of women produced by mass media are collaged with figures of women in Western painting and Western mythology — specifically with figures in Rubens' *The Reception of Marie d'Médici in Marseille* — in order to bring women from different contexts together and to ask questions, for example, about how the nineteenth- (and twentieth-) century waif relates to the fleshy body of the seventeenth-century nymph. Paul describes her installation as a "palimpseste électronique" (itself a collage of a term derived from manuscript culture and a term from twentieth-century culture), that is, as a multi-layered computer presentation of images and

sounds, many of which are electronically derived from painting, photography, video-tape, audio-tape, radio, etc. While one watches, one also listens as the sound track shifts from radio to the sound of flipping pages to the sound of poetry read by a computer-generated voice. Encouraging visitors to manipulate images (and not just to look at them) and presenting images on a 9 x 12 foot screen which approximates the relationship to the body (viewing body and represented body) offered by a large painting or sculpture, the installation values touch and favours relations of contiguity among bodies. The image of a woman's hand running down the thigh of Michelangelo's *David*, for example, is produced by recording a woman standing behind the screen onto which the sculpture is projected and running her hand up and down its surface. This sequence not only uses the medium of video to animate the flesh of a classical sculpture, introducing movement and hybridity more characteristic of baroque sculpture, it also represents the feminist subject's deconstruction of the heavily gendered opposition between classical and baroque aesthetics.

One woman became a man when he jumped over an irrigation ditch and his cunt dropped inside out: gender is the extent we go to in order to be loved. (Glück 57)

Baroque mixing, what McLuhan characterizes as two cultures or technologies passing through one another, takes queer forms in this issue. Ailsa Kay's text, for example, transgenders Casanova, a libertine figure born in Venice in 1730 (near the end of the period known as Baroque), and combines elements of twentieth-century and eighteenth-century discourse and culture. Episodic in form and superficial in its presentation of character and event, the text is picaresque — but a baroque picaresque with elaborately worked surfaces, extremes of pleasure and revulsion, and a keen sense of theatre. Casanova's most valuable possession is a brooch, an ornate miniature portraying a sexually explicit scene in such exquisite detail that one requires a magnifying glass to appreciate it. As the brooch suggests — and as Casanova learns in her various adventures — there is more to a given scene of gambling or lovemaking than meets the eye. (It is no coincidence that the seventeenth century saw the invention of the microscope as well as the telescope.) Trish Salah's text, too, transgenders characters but without allowing the gender attributes or the sexual practices/postures associated with those attributes to stabilize. Sexual desire affects how characters perform themselves; characters seem endlessly to change form and position; shapes, actions and states associated with dif-

ferent genders, different sexualities — “girlskin” and “meat packing,” for example — come together, however briefly, in a single character. Without losing sight of the specific effects of gender in bodies, the text unhinges the accoutrements of gender and re-attaches them, allowing bodies to be “sexy before [they’ve] been real.”

In the Baroque the soul entertains a complex relation with the body. Forever indissociable from the body, it discovers a vertiginous animality that gets it tangled in the pleats of matter, but also an organic or cerebral humanity ... that allows it to rise up, and that will make it ascend over all other folds. (Deleuze, The Fold 11)

Gilles Deleuze, in the context of a reading of Leibniz and the Baroque, makes an argument not unlike that of McLuhan. From his perspective, if, in the seventeenth century, theological reasoning breaks down and gives way to human reason, “these days it’s no longer theological but human reason, Enlightenment reason, that’s entering a crisis.... So in our attempt to preserve some part of it or reconstruct it, we’re seeing a neobaroque” (*Negotiations* 162). The figure of the “fold” is inspired by Leibniz’s work in a number of fields, including philosophy, art, architecture and mathematics. The simplest form of the fold, Deleuze suggests, is to be found in the way “fabric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body it covers” (*The Fold* 121). Deleuze evokes Baroque sculpture where “marble seizes and bears to infinity folds that cannot be explained by the body but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze” (*The Fold* 121-22). Far from being mere decorative effects, he explains, these folds “convey the intensity of a spiritual force exerted on a body, either to turn it upside down or raise it up over again, but in every event to turn it inside out and to mold its inner surfaces” (*The Fold* 122). This final comment speaks in interesting ways to the infinite loops and folds of Fiona Smyth’s drawings. The abundance of curls which fill the first page, taken along with the host of tears that radiates outward from a single eye in the second, suggest a subject overwrought, moving between extremes of emotion. Instead of a “spiritual force,” what is written in these folds and loops, is the force of *affect*, particularly its capacity to create extravagant surface effects. To dismiss such surface effects as ornament or as excessive detail would be to underestimate their power.

A number of the visual texts published here manipulate fabrics in the ways Deleuze describes. In them, the garment takes on a life of its own, not only because the folds are sculpted by external forces, by emotion, but

also because the woman's body is absent. In Magie Dominic's *Crucified Woman*, as in Joanne Tod's paintings, women's bodies are everywhere implied — in the gown and bed which are so often contiguous with those bodies — but nowhere to be seen. In Dominic's installation, which I return to later in the introduction, the marks of suffering on the surface of the nightgown are the legacy of various forces, among them Christianity and prevailing sexual practices and gender relations. Ranging from the tawdry *Amber Twirl* to the sublime *Elixir*, Tod's paintings of vessels on mattresses literalize the clichéd relationship between women and beds. At the same time, they present that relation as one of disjunction. The vessels, which are neither viewed nor lit from the same angle as the mattresses, have the appearance of images from an entirely different context superimposed on the surface of the painting. To borrow the words of Tom Conley in his discussion of Baroque painting, Tod's paintings "lead the eye to confuse different orders of space and surface" (xii). Although there is no vessel on the mattress in *Manganese Queen*, the elaborately patterned fabric, the design produced by quilting, and the lighting create equally complex effects of folding. Stylized and elegant in design, the paintings hold elements of Mannerism in tension with the Baroque use of paint to achieve sculptural effects, sculptural effects which emphasize discontinuity between figure and ground.

[T]he universe resembl[es] a pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves. (Leibniz, letter of 1619 cited in Deleuze, *The Fold* 5)

With folds that evoke labia, rose petals, ripples, a vortex and an experience of bliss, Sandra Gregson's *Swaddling* cuts across categories such as inside and outside, organic and inorganic, human and non-human, object and experience, mobile and static, solid and liquid, beautiful and sublime, literal and figurative. The sculpture is a vivid example of the way folded surfaces disrupt the categorical distinctions by which we habitually apprehend and interpret. *Swaddling* approaches from a feminist perspective the complex relation between the tactile and the abstract, between materiality and transcendence, which Deleuze finds in Leibniz and in the Baroque. More specifically, it explores the morphology of a woman's body (the cultural signification of the body's forms) and, at the same time, destabilizes the binary categories by which prevailing culture limits the possible significations of that body.

Not unlike *Swaddling*, "The Four Winds" moves across a vast emotional and conceptual terrain. As the winds of the title suggest, this movement is

multidirectional and constantly shifting. By juxtaposing fragments from different discursive fields, leaving referents unclear and making contextual marks and grammatical links scarce, Tegenkamp's text creates various kinds of surface disturbances or pleats. The textured surface — which has the feel of broken aphorisms intercalated with various forms of quotidian and corporeal interference — gives us only a fleeting connection with any one domain: visual culture, drawing, aesthetics, geometry, physics, philosophy, feminism. The various technologies of seeing mentioned in the first stanza give way to "g(r)azing," an oscillation between sight and touch which returns in the final stanza with the line "Arm becomes conscious as the eye drifts." "G(r)azing," touching lightly in passing, is an apt way of describing the rhythm of channel changing, internet surfing and other experiences of late twentieth-century technology. Not unlike a metaphysical conceit, "g(r)azing" is a densely-woven figure which runs through the poem both as a thematic concern and as a strategy for avoiding the closed circuit of the sentence, something the text describes as an "occupational hazard." It is not gazing, the text suggests, but *framing* and *angle of vision* which permit the "objectification" and "blue glass erasure of [women]." Constantly shifting ground, perspective and levels/objects of attention, and using sentences that touch upon "her" only in passing, the text combats this objectification and erasure. The "she" of the text takes the fleeting form of a "breathtaking vector," of "that moment of absolute possibility" which concludes "A Portrait of."

Can various key issues and concepts in feminist theory — including women's experience, subjectivity, desire, pleasure — be reconceived in corporeal terms ...? Is there the possibility of transposing the terms of consciousness and the entire psychical topography into those of body mapping and social tattooing? What is lost in this process? Or gained? (Grosz 160)

Elizabeth Grosz uses the Möbius strip to help conceptualize the kind of becoming I allude to above, a becoming which is differently inflected from Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming woman" (see Grosz 161-64). A Möbius strip is a one-sided figure which appears to have two sides until one runs one's finger along the length of its twist and arrives at the point from which one started. In the terms of Brian Massumi, it is "a processual figure" which "cannot be intuitively understood by sight alone, only by combining sight and touch over time with an act of imagination" (752). Thinking about subjectivity in terms of a Möbius strip, as a *surface* which comprises both an inside and an outside, helps explain "the collapse of

interiority" which Jana Evans Braziel finds in the narrative subject of Flora Balzano's novel. Braziel works with a Deleuzian model which, instead of viewing the body as an expression of a psychic interior, a relatively inaccessible inner self, views it as an assemblage of orifices, surfaces, fragments, flows, intensities and desiring machines. In this sense, the pain experienced by the woman narrator when her mother puts hot peppers between her labia, produces a disturbance, a loss of language, at a related site on her body, the lips. Whether conceived of as outside (pain) or inside (psychic disruption), these effects are radically continuous with one another along the loop or fold of subjectivity. (Grosz 116-17).

In the words of kim dawn's "she leaves her mouth on things," "the fold is both the lip and / the mouth the inner and outer simultaneously." dawn's speaker dreams of putting "her little faces in all the folds and crevices of the fleshy mounds" of "the fleshy baroque / women"; she dreams of "a beautiful nothingness" which "has / alotof / skybluey." In dawn's text, the breakdown of the Enlightenment subject is played out on the level of the speaker's flesh, in the form of "blueys" produced by various "thrashings to her own body." Giving herself blueys is one way to become embodied, to know that she is capable of intense feeling; leaving her mouth on the fleshy bodies of women, inscribing O's (think of the ecstatic O's of so many Baroque mouths or of the "oooo. come again" which punctuates Wanda Coleman's "Frick Fro") is another way. Both allow her to lose herself in flesh, a feminist strategy for breaking down the rational subject, for "approaching oblivion," and, at the same time, for "resisting annihilation."

The speaker of T.J. Bryan's "Melting My Iron Maiden" is explicit about the power of "sweet pain" to ground her in her flesh. She sees important differences between "the pain [she has] suffered at the hands of oppressors" and "the power/aggression/domination dynamic which can be experienced as a healthy part of the erotic." In order to underline these differences, Bryan's text grapples with questions about the ways in which various discourses, including feminist, lesbian and s/m discourses, regulate sexual practice, the production of desire, and the relation between bodies and their accoutrements: Who decides the appropriate modes of performing rage and hurt? How does the eroticization of black leather reinforce racist beliefs about black skin? How does access to wealth figure in the speaker's fascination with a white dyke in black leathers? What constitutes violence? Manifestory in its use of "we," its courting of scandal,

and its promise to fulfill certain desires (Knight 159), the text performs the fantasies about which it writes and challenges readers to participate in them.

These sites of intensity — potentially any region of the body including various internal organs — are intensified and excited, not simply by pleasure, through caresses, but also through the force and energy of pain. Pain, as Nietzsche well recognized, is as capable, perhaps more so, of inscribing bodily surfaces, as pleasure. (Grosz, Space, Time, and Perversion 198)

The threshold between pleasure and pain at which a number of the texts in the issue linger is a privileged site/moment in Baroque painting and sculpture. Martyrdom is to the Baroque what miracles are to the Renaissance (Hartt 688). Works such as Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* which capture the moment at which earthly suffering gives way to heavenly bliss were designed to give individual viewers the illusion of a limit experience with the divine. Such works played a key role in the Counter-Reformation project to intensify individual conviction by heightening the emotional impact of religious art and Church architecture (Hartt 688). Given that the same codes were used for sacred and secular works (Lucie-Smith 79), and given the focus on the effects of ecstasy in the body (and its garments), Baroque representations of martyrdom move ambiguously between the ecstatic and the erotic.

Ambiguity, oscillation and uncertainty in experiences of pleasure/pain, in relations of power, and in performances of gender are key to the texts of Anne Stone, Alana Wilcox, Trish Salah and Ailsa Kay — as well as to those of dawn and Bryan. In these late twentieth-century feminist contexts, the ambiguity has to do with tactics for responding to discourses (including feminist discourses) which locate women in contradiction and with the constitution of an embodied and *explicitly sexual* subject who wears her pleasure in her flesh. dawn's and Bryan's speakers ground themselves in their flesh in response to discourses which simultaneously idealize women and *equate them* with their bodies, thereby giving them little power of mediation over their relationship to the sensations and social codes that traverse those bodies; Bryan's speaker raises questions about her own relationship to discourses (some prevailing, some radical) which eroticize black skin as a sign of the "other, outside, primitive, rebellious ... sexually aggressive, emotionally unstable, criminal"; the texts of Salah and Kay sketch characters who, like contemporary angels, move between genders, between postures of submission and domination, between the human and

the non-human, thereby disturbing entrenched pairings, practices, morphologies and gender performances; and the texts of Stone and Wilcox, to which I turn shortly, grapple with the ambiguities of a feminist subject's relationship to discourses of desire through which her own subjectivity is constituted. Braziel's discussion of Balzano's novel, of course, is less ambiguous. The woman narrator's experience of sexual abuse — which is painful and *not pleasurable* — has to be remembered, reckoned with from an ethical standpoint in this discussion of limit experiences of sexuality.

The insistence that a subject is passionately attached to his or her own subordination has been invoked cynically by those who seek to debunk the claims of the subordinated.... Over and against this view, I would maintain that the attachment to subjection is produced through the workings of power, and that part of the operation of power is made clear in this psychic effect, one of the most insidious of its productions. (Butler 6)

Stone's "An Unnatural History of the Sexes" explores the complexities of subjection and resistance. Shifting among present, imperfect and future (perfect) tenses, the text blurs the difference between what is happening, what has happened repeatedly in the past (and continues to happen), and what the speaker projects, fantasizes, will happen. Framed in this way, scenes between the Baron and the woman lover or between the two women have the quality of performances repeated so often that their modes of coercion can be predicted ("As meat loves salt, I'll answer. Because that is how he [the Baron] will have taught me to answer") and, at the same time, of performances yet to be staged in which the speaker will undermine expectations ("She will give me a filmy scarf, to bind my wrists. / I'll bind my throat instead"). Within the implied relations of power, subjects shift positions and calculate carefully in the direction of pleasure ("Precisely how painful? he will ask"). Binding one's own body for another, giving oneself over to the will of another, mimics and thereby makes visible the effects of power in the constitution of the subject. Such ritualized performances are dangerous within the terms of feminism precisely because, as Butler points out, they mimic the passionate attachment to subordination which is an insidious effect of power. However, they also have potentially productive effects: the possibility of taking up an active *role* in relation to the terms of one's subjection, of analysing and intervening in those terms, and of taking pleasure in the ambivalence that marks the scene. Wilcox's "Fragments" explore this ambivalence from a position of extreme (self-)irony. The speaker exposes the workings of power, sig-

nalling her complicity in those workings ("Feudal, I offer myself to you"), their instability ("A scythe in my hand, I admire the strength of this, your grain, before I despatch it"), her ambivalence toward her lover/Lord ("that I might hold you while I transgress your throat"), her pleasure ("knives so sharp I could moan"), and her resistance ("The cobbled dirt catching your blood in spatters, a portrait of your fifedom"). In Wilcox's feminist anatomy of romantic discourses of love, bodies are sites of constant and dramatic intervention, and words hang over the steel table, over the fields, poised between acts of violence and acts of love.

"Passion," a word used widely to refer to ardent affection or to something which commands such a feeling, is also a state of being subjected to or acted upon by something outside oneself; it has shades of martyrdom and suffering. In different ways, each of the texts which draws on Christian iconography raises the issue of passion. Dominic's *Crucified Woman*, like Claudine Bertrand's "Liturgie du Corps," involves an identification with Christ. In the former, the identification is with Christ's suffering. The installation moves from the symbolic stage of Christ's Passion to the historical stage of women's lived experience. In the words of Walter Benjamin writing about the representation of Christ in German Baroque drama,

The mystical instant becomes the "now" of contemporary actuality; the symbolic becomes distorted into the allegorical. The eternal is separated from the events of the story of salvation, and what is left is a living image open to all kinds of revision by the interpretative artist.
(183)

At the same time that *Crucified Woman* draws attention to historical reality, it retains some of the symbolic value of an image of Christ on the Cross. Particularly installed in a public space (Elizabeth Seton Center, New York, Good Friday 1998), it makes the passion/suffering of women visible and invites a collective response to that passion. Subversively inhabiting the discourse and rituals of the Catholic liturgy, the woman speaker of "Liturgie du corps" marks potentially sensual moments and highlights the play between the earthly and the transcendent. She imagines another woman who participates with her in a ritual which is simultaneously a Christ-like sacrifice and a sexual encounter. The poem ends with Communion, a ritual of transcendence which leaves the speaker "aveuglée / Par l'action sacrificielle / De la déchirure du monde," a metaphor for the

woman lover's body, for her sex. In other words, if this is a moment of transcendence, it is an embodied transcendence, arrived at through pleasure. The representation of women as Christ has the potential to produce all the positive effects outlined in my discussion of Stone and Wilcox. The challenge, however, is to destabilize the omnipresent narrative of transcendence-through-sacrifice which threatens to bind women to an already familiar sainthood. Emphasizing relations of contiguity, staying close to the flesh, imagining positions other than that of sacrificial victim, keeping the positions in flux, are very important in this context.

It is an unsurpassably spectacular gesture to place even Christ in the realm of the provisional, the everyday, the unreliable.... Above all it is the offensive, the provocative quality of the gesture which is baroque. (Benjamin 183)

Whereas Dominic and Bertrand focus on the figure of Christ, Weidenhammer and Hatt draw on female figures such as the Virgin Mary, nuns and women martyrs. *Virgins for Choice* and the poems from *After-Dinner Saints* de-idealize the latter figures by associating them with contemporary causes, popular culture and quotidian pleasures. Hatt's *Virgins for Choice*, for example, collages an image of the Virgin with pro-choice discourse. This gesture transforms a unique spiritual figure into an historical group capable of collective political action (*Virgins*); it lends women who fight for choice on abortion the attention which the Virgin Mary generally commands; and it destabilizes anti-choice discourses which rely upon the Virgin Mary as an idealized image of woman as vessel. The "saints" of Weidenhammer's mock hagiography mimic the posture of women martyring themselves for various causes and highlight departures from this posture, for example, a nun devoted to coffee drinking or a woman with a passion for baring her breasts. As I suggested earlier, feminist projects sit uncomfortably within the religious iconography of the Baroque; at the same time, the incongruous and provocative nature of feminist appropriations of Christian figures is part of what renders these texts baroque in contemporary terms. The photographs of April Hickox offer an interesting angle on the productive cultural work carried out by unexpected adjacencies and hybrid forms. Through the juxtaposition of elements within Christianity (cross/skeleton; tinsel/angel; Christmas card/wise man) and of elements from Eastern and Western cultural traditions (hindu deity *ganesha*/hippie rings; Indian leaf painting/Western relief), these photographic compositions imply a critique of Christianity's cult of suffering and of Western cultural imperialism.

The texts of Katarina Soukup, Julie Voyce, Ailsa Kay, Catherine Kidd and Beth Goobie explore the grotesque as much as the baroque. This is not surprising if we consider that the two aesthetics share a preoccupation with distorted or proliferating forms, rhetorical ornament, movement, excess, emotion, instability and the meeting of incongruous elements. As the work of Schor (3-6; 42-64) and Russo (1-6) suggests, both the baroque and the grotesque have been contrasted to neo-classical aesthetics and construed as feminine. The difference lies in the grotesque's connections to the uncanny, the carnivalesque, the abject and the mutant. From the perspective of Russo, there are two major threads in contemporary discourses on the grotesque: one is the theory of carnival and the other, the concept of the uncanny (7-10). Both rely heavily on the trope of the body, she suggests, whether the carnivalesque "social body" (8) or the strange, doubled or monstrous body "as cultural projection of an inner state" (9). The five texts in question here do not fit tidily into one or the other of these categories; they focus on the subject divided within itself and, at the same time, analyse the ways in which social codes structure those divisions. The "circus crowd" which "the girl with many heads" sees when she looks in the fun-house mirror, for example, is a social body made monstrous by an economy of acceptable and unacceptable types, a social body which relies upon the abject, the out-cast to consolidate itself. In "the headless bride," what is repulsive or grotesque is not just a question of details remarked upon by an observant girl (the "twisting pattern of cabbages-roses strangling themselves in lovely ways" or the likeness between a "plastic bag of pink hair ornaments and play cosmetics," and the "bags of internal organs found in turkeys"); it is the *effect* of prevailing discourses of culture in the lives of women and girls.

In this version of the carnival, the emphasis is not on the decadence of this historical period, where the disintegration of the subject passes for progressive. Rather, she and her sisters are dressed up for the explosion (the end of the era) in robes of stunning irony.... (Scott 134)

Katarina Soukup's essay turns our attention to another issue raised by Russo: that of the woman who makes a spectacle of herself, who forgets herself and inadvertently loses her sense of appropriate boundaries (Russo 53). Such a figure appears in the texts of Soukup, Voyce, Kay and Kidd. The women in Chytilová's *Daisies*, the film Soukup discusses, devour an entire banquet to which they are not invited; Voyce's Capt. Babe traipses through the dining room alternately bearing, becoming and

exploding along with various candelabra; during one of several more or less public scenes of lovemaking, Kay's Casanova has to contend with the effects of a feast of figs on a woman lover's digestion, and Kidd's narrator announces at the Thanksgiving dinner table that she and her brother have pinworms. In each of these scenes, the rituals surrounding food are key sites for displaying appropriate or inappropriate femininity. As Soukup points out, feasts are carnivalesque moments open to what Russo calls the "redeployment or counterproduction of culture, knowledge and pleasure" (62). In the case of Chytilová's *Daisies* and Voyce's Capt. Babe comic, for example, a discourse of reason, progress and stern necessities (whether that of Social Realism or of recipes for a healthy social body) is destabilized by combining it with the utterly frivolous and excessive.

"Redeployment" and "counterproduction" are helpful terms for understanding the relationship of contemporary feminist projects to the Baroque. In the texts of this issue, the Baroque's use of paint to achieve sculptural effects works to denaturalize the relation between "vessels" and mattresses; chiaroscuro is reframed as a gendered economy of light and shadow; the force which animates flesh and sculpts material is emotional and erotic rather than spiritual; folds not only act independently of the bodies they cover (as they do in Bernini), but also stand in for those bodies and signal the effect in those bodies of various forces — from sexual pleasure to Christianity; the insistence in Baroque sculpture and painting on the play of light on surfaces becomes an insistence on the mapping and marking of body surfaces, on a topographic understanding of body and psyche which breaks down the distinction between body and psyche, outside and inside (Grosz); the Baroque drama of spirit and flesh gives way to the contemporary drama of a subject grounding herself in her flesh, exploring the threshold between pleasure and pain in ways which de-idealize martyrdom and intervene in the terms of subjection; ambiguity takes the form of hybrid bodies in the service of fleeting desires; the concern with the Sister Arts manifests itself in photographs of bodies from contemporary magazines collaged with Baroque paintings of women's bodies; and the metaphysical conceit takes the form of "g(r)azing," a figure which brings touch to bear upon sight at the same time that it enables a woman subject's becoming.

Through a curious effect of historical folding, the Baroque sensibility speaks to a number of the preoccupations of late twentieth-century critical thought, including performance, affect, hybridity, uncertainty, embodiment, surface effects, subjection, technology and interdisciplinarity. Insofar as the

contemporary baroque participates in and compensates for the breakdown of the Enlightenment subject (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 162), feminist writers and artists have a stake in exploring this baroque fold. What is more, as they renegotiate the subject, they have a stake in addressing aspects of power, sexuality, violence and flesh which are crucial to the baroque and which have proven to be unruly and relatively “unskirtable” (Scott 117) within the discourses of feminism.

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