The Spaces That Never Were in Early Modern Art

The Spaces That Never Were in Early Modern Art:

An Exploration of Edges and Frontiers

By

Jelena Todorović

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3727-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3727-9

To my parents

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PROLOGUE

Since classical antiquity, physical space and its imperfect double, the illusory space used in the visual arts, have been among mankind's perpetual obsessions. However, very few studies have questioned the reality of represented space, or dealt with those liminal phenomena that exist on the blurred, ephemeral, and ever-changing boundary between reality and imagination.

In parallel to the conquest of tangible, three-dimensional space, another space has been claimed: the space of the margin, which has always existed on the very edge of reality, between the artificial and the imagined. For a space to be liminal, it must be more imaginary than real, and contain a plurality of times and places that is usually not present in the palpable world of reality.

Liminal spaces describe those curious worlds confined within gardens and collections, underpinning dreams of ideal societies, and constructing visions of distant, unconquerable and inaccessible shores. Not usually found on maps or in atlases, they are not subject to the laws of perspective, and elude normal representation – always beyond and behind the established depiction of space. Often, they possess another layer of signification, capable of transforming a mere image of nature into a political manifesto; the lines on precious stones, into the shapes of vanished cities; or private art collections, into dreams of absolute power.

As a shadow of space proper, the liminal domain has existed in all periods of art in a variety of forms, and has always served to outline the frontiers of our imagination. Nevertheless, one period in the history of art and culture left a particularly strong mark on the development and typology of liminal spaces. In the age of the Baroque, the space of the imaginary, as well as the space of the margin, became as important as the depiction of reality. Multiplied to infinity, Baroque spaces of the imagination reflected a complex and fragmentary image of the universe, and complemented the era's equally complex understanding of time.

Baroque culture, itself fragmented and polyphonic, was at a deep level particularly susceptible to the creation of spaces that defied, and indeed overcame, expected spatial parameters. This propinquity to fragmentation and particularity was deeply connected with the very composition of the Baroque world. It was a great age of movement, of migrations external and internal alike, during which entire regions and nations were irrevocably displaced. Their peoples sought solace and refuge in the panoply of new worlds it created, populating new continents and forming new empires. They disseminated the ideas of the Baroque and further accelerated its fragmentation even as they expanded its boundaries, and thus transformed it from a purely European into a profoundly global phenomenon.

While the religious political and technological upheavals of the time redrew and recomposed the map of the known world, a parallel process of fragmentation occurred internally: with plurality and complexity of vision and of the self deeply marking the Baroque individual. From turbulent movements of the soul to the temporal notion of the "eternal present", polyphony was one of the main modes of being in this troubled age.

As such, the fragmented liminal spaces the period created were often realms of instability and disquiet. They reflected the paradox of existence, equally delineating ascents into heavenly abodes and descents into endless voids of negation and nothingness. These spaces occurred equally in literature, in the visual and performing arts, and even in architecture, where even or especially the most monumental structures of the age conveyed a powerful sense of instability and imbalance. From Borromini's fluid facades and liquid interiors, to Guarini's spaces of absence and the impossible compositions of Philippo Juvara, the liminality of spaces was embedded in the architecture of the time. In their precarious geometry, these unstable realms of the Baroque perfectly complemented the instability and fragility of being; the ephemerality of our mortal selves. Those notable subjects of Baroque culture – volatility, unsteadiness, and the transitory nature of life – also perfectly describe the spaces of absence and negation that populated an age that was itself fleeting. As John Donne subtly expressed it in his *Nocturnal*, we ourselves, like the world around us, are created of spaces which *are not* and *never were*:

> For I am every dead thing,
> In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
> For his art did expresse
> A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
> From dull privations,
> and leane emptinesse:
> He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
> Of absence, darknesse, death;
> things which are not.[1]

Consequently, any book on early modern liminal spaces – on spaces that never were, fragmented, unstable and impossible – cannot itself be linear in structure. The very nature of its subject matter eludes finite typological classification. In its stead, I offer a looser structure based on some forms that the representation of liminal spaces often took in early modern culture: fragmented spaces, unstable spaces, ruins, and impossible worlds. I do not propose that this is a perfect or final classification, only a workable one. As such, this book presents not a complete overview of liminal spaces in the history of early modern art, but a set of new insights into liminal forms and their representations that shaped the early modern age and its *imaginaire*, and thus, ultimately, our own understanding of liminal spatial phenomena.

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[1] From 'A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day' by John Donne, in idem, *The Works of John Donne with a Memoire of his Life*, ed. by Henry Elford (London: John W. Parker, 1889), 126.

CHAPTER I

FRAGMENTED WORLDS: IMPOSSIBLE REALMS AND SHADOWED SPACES

The Baroque worldview was strongly marked by the notion of fragments and the fragmentary, which crucially shaped many of its liminal realms. With meanings ranging from 'particular' to 'unfinished', broken or 'incomplete', the Baroque age's ideas of the fragmentary echoed the plurality of the age itself. Arguably, few Baroque concepts were so encompassing; it included understandings of time and space, denoted both abundance and transience, equally described the piling-up of riches and crumbling into ruin. Fragmentation was present in all forms of the visual arts, in literature and in architecture, not merely on a conceptual level, but even more importantly, on the level of the depiction of space. Being a peculiar spatial element in itself, the fragment was, in the Baroque age, the creative foundation for a profusion of liminal phenomena.

Unlike many other periods in the history of culture, the Baroque is decidedly difficult to define: an inconstant, fluid and ever-changing universe.[1] Often described as an age of pluralities, the Baroque was marked by visual, temporal, spatial and sensory polyvalence that gave shape to the real world as well as to art. It was visible in the swirl of angels encompassing Lanfranco's dome of San Andrea della Vale, and in the myriad shades of destruction in Zumbo's *Victims of Plague*; it overwhelmed the spectators of

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[1] For the concept of fluidity in Baroque culture, see Jelena Todorović, *The Hidden Legacies of Baroque Thought in Modern Literature: The Realms of the Eternal Present* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 117-52.

Roman *Quarantore.* This multiplicity was present in the whirl of times, encompassed by the peculiarly Baroque notion of the 'eternal present', and in the equally multifaceted multimedia experience of Bernini's *bel composti*.

In contrast to previous periods, the Baroque was marked by expansion, the bending and blurring of boundaries, by growth and overgrowth; by excess, visual and sensory alike. And all these elements existed in a newly defined form of dynamism, in the flux of the glorified movement that permeated all aspects of life.[2] From the flight of time, and the flow of line that outlined the undulating shape of Baroque sculpture and architecture – from its macro- to its microcosms – the entirety of existence was moved by a grand tide. If there was a force that could have shaped the Baroque world, it would have been the centripetal one, a vortex of activity drawing disparate and often seemingly dissonant fragments to its centre.

Since it was also a time of paradox, the fluidity and flux of Baroque culture did not implicitly contain a sense of overwhelming harmony in that flow. It was undoubtedly a form of unity, but one composed of diverse, often opposing fragments. As Montaigne put it, 'Like the harmony of the universe, our life is made out of contrary things.'[3] The Spanish poet Gracian expressed a similar worldview:

> [As] I was contemplating this very laudable harmony of the entire Universe, a harmony composed of a strange contrariness that as the world is so large it does not seem it would have the power to maintain itself for a single day, this left me baffled, because who would not be astounded by seeing a harmony so strange[?][4]

Thus, the same age that could simultaneously embrace permanence *and* transience could likewise exhibit an equal interest in unity *and* particularisation. Although they were already well established in

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[2] Todorović, *Hidden Legacies*, 5-11.

[3] Quoted in Jose Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 157.

[4] Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, 158.

Mannerist thought, the notions of the fragment and the fragmentary profoundly marked the Baroque worldview and – even more importantly, for purposes of the present discussion – shaped many of its liminal realms.[5] With meanings ranging from “particular” to “unfinished” or “incomplete”, the Baroque age’s ideas of the fragmentary echoed the plurality of the age itself.

Primarily, fragmentation was evident on the political level, with religious wars transforming Europe into an ever-changing compendium of fragments. This was undoubtedly most pronounced in the German states, where borders followed the confessional divides of the age, both informally prior to the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, and as a matter of international law thereafter.[6] It also resulted in a proliferation of capitals in the Baroque world, further enhancing the polycentricity that became one of that world’s defining cultural elements. Thus, the fragmentation of this period was not necessarily negative, but encompassed a wealth of meanings. Like the culture that created it, it was polyvalent.

While in the political macrocosm, fragmentation delineated the power of faith, it was used in the realm of the arts as a means of glorifying and propagating that faith, alongside other, more profane ideologies. Yet, the importance of the fragment in the Baroque age went even further, surpassing the level of pure form and acquiring more profound connotations: of the fragmentation of the world, of the state, and of the self.[7] Arguably, few Baroque concepts were so encompassing, for it included understandings of time and space;

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[5] For the concept of the fragment in Mannerism, see Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism* (London: Routlege and Kegan Paul, 1965), 172-85.

[6] David M. Luebke, ‘A Multiconfessional Empire’, in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. by T. M. Safley (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 129-54.

[7] An interesting insight into the concepts of the fragment and fragmentation in Baroque poetry can be found in Hugh Grady, *John Donne and Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Although the author uses the Baroque notion of fragmentation to form a connection between the world of Donne and Benjamin’s concept of allegory, which could be further discussed, he provides a thorough overview of fragmentation as one of the Baroque’s leading aesthetic principles.

denoted both abundance and transience; and equally described the piling-up of dispersed riches and crumbling into ruin. Fragmentation was present in all forms of the visual arts, in literature and in architecture – not merely on a conceptual level, but more importantly, on the level of the depiction of space. And being a peculiar spatial element in itself, the fragment was, in the Baroque age, the creative foundation for a profusion of liminal phenomena.

The fluid and fragmented world

Fragmentation of space was often used in art to denote the places in between: realms of multiple visions and meaning. The profusion of fragments complemented the plurality of times that tended to co-exist within a given Baroque work of art, as expressions of the "eternal present" where all pasts and all presents were united and existed *ad infinitum*; and fragmented spaces embodied the same totality, but of particles rather than eras.[8] In other words, a Baroque space was never singular, but many spaces, each contributing to the fluidity of the whole.

In architecture, such fragmentary space was masterfully employed by Francesco Borromini, both in his San Carlo alle Quatro Fontane **(Fig.1-1)** and his San Ivo alla Sapienza.[9] Both spaces were undulating, endless, almost in ceaseless movement. He created the ultimate fluid space, but not the space absolute that his interiors, totalising expanses of white, might at first imply. Rather, Borromini's complex spaces were constituted of separate fragments, mutually interlocking to create the spatial expression of times united. In his spaces, the observer cannot ascertain the full span of the range of time or space he is experiencing; they seem to be spaces within spaces, projecting in front of him unto infinity. In their status as a unity of fragments, they echo the words of John Donne, another great master of fragmentary representation: “these three parts of time shall be of this time, the three parts of this exercise.”[10]

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[8] For more information on the concept of the unity of fragmented worlds, see Jelena Todorović, *O ogledalima ružama i ništavilu-koncept vremena i prolaznosti u kulturi baroknog doba* (Beograd: Clio, 2012), 123-52.

[9] For more information on these buildings, see *Borromini e l'universo barocco*, ed. by Richard Bösel et al. (Milano: Electa 1999); and Rudolph Wittkower's seminal *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1739*, __ vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), I.

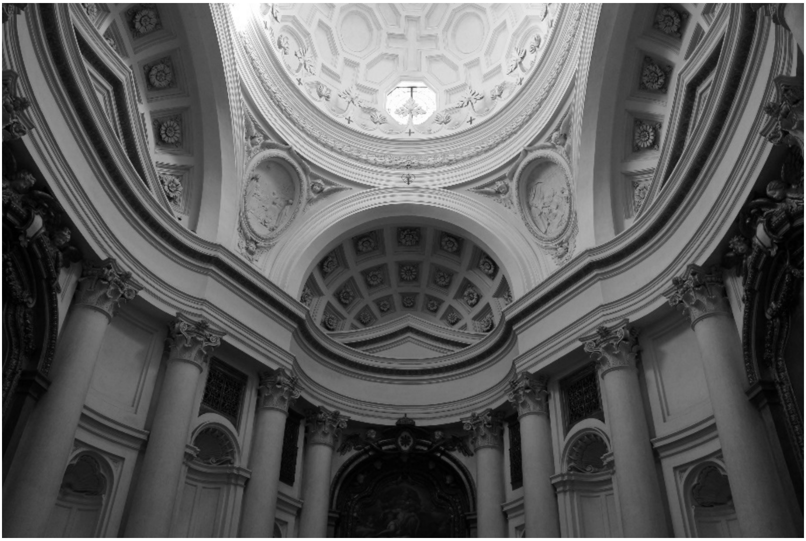

Figure 1-1 Francesco Borromini, *Interior of San Carlo alle Quatro Fontane*, photo by Mileta Prodanović

While Borromini introduced the coherence of fragments into complex unities, the work of Guarino Guarini explored it even further.[11] In his celebrated dome of the chapel of the Holy Shroud in Turin (1666-1679), Guarini constructed a vertiginous geometry of fragments. In this fragile equilibrium, each segment alluded to an equally complex temporal element that the sacred space contained. On the other hand, the lightness and airiness of the dome expressed an aspect of the imaginary that had been absent from Borromini's fragmentary creations. The space of Guarini's cupola is floating and luminous, articulated by its light supporting ribs intersected with a multitude of windows. Indeed, it is shaped more by absences than by solid matter: an endless compendium of intervals. The space thus created appears insubstantial, belonging more to the domain of visions than to reality. Despite this liminality, however, it was never meant to be an *unstable* space like those that will be described in the next chapter of this book, for instability could never have been introduced into the sacral domain of the church. Thus, its absences were not intended to be seen as voids, but as realms of luminescence; sources of the Divine Light. Moreover, being composed of a myriad of particles, Guarini's dome – with its clear and overwhelming geometry and its harmonious interplay of light and shade – communicated the same harmony of contrariness that Montaigne and Gracian had ascribed to the universe itself.

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[10] John Donne, *The Works of John Donne with a Memoire of His Life*, ed. by Henry Elford (John W. Parker: London, 1889), 157.

[11] On Guarini’s dome in Turin see, John Beldon Scott, *Architecture for the Shroud: Relic and Ritual in Turin* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 191-217.

A similar form of fragmented space, of continuity within discontinuity, wherein the sense of time seems transported into the matter of space, was depicted in a profane context: Bernini's Borghese mythologies, in particular the one depicting the process of metamorphosis, *Apollo and Daphne*. Fundamentally, this work was an expression of Bernini's desire to make the impossible; to create a sculpture that revolved in time, visualised through the multiplicity of space.

Executed in the finest white marble, *Apollo and Daphne* offered the viewer an uncannily vivid image of the transformation of the young nymph into a laurel tree, but also rendered it as a process rather than as a single scene taken from the wider narrative. That is, Bernini executed a succession of spatial and temporal fragments, thus allowing Daphne's transformation to unfold perpetually. He represented his two protagonists close enough to each other to allow for a compact composition, and to suggest the fleeting moment during which Apollo presumed he had captured the young nymph. His hope is delineated in several segments, each unfolding one chapter of the myth.

His steps are almost catching up with hers; his breath is on her neck, and his hand reaching for her waist as her hair flies over his face. This is the moment just before the revelation, and yet also the moment of transformation. The momentousness and motion are contained in the bodily postures: both figures have one of their feet off the ground, and their hands grasp the air – one in despair, the other in the last glimmering of hope.

It was Bernini's cunning conceit that this moment of transformation should be progressively revealed to the observer via a series of segmented viewpoints.[12] Apollo's billowing drapery is already intermingled with the laurel leaves sprouting from Daphne's legs; his feet barely touch her toes, already turning into roots; his face is only a breath away from her branching hair; and instead of her silky waist, his hand grasps coarse bark. Thus, hope is merged with realisation, and the touch confirms what the eyes have only suspected. This plurality of moments is seamlessly complemented by the work's plurality of spatial fragments. It is at once an image of past, present, and future.

Such fragmentation of both time and space was achieved via Bernini's masterful carving of details and textures – particularly, the merging-points of hair and branches, toes and roots, bark and skin. However, it was not only the animated composition and rendering of the bodies that unfurled the entire metamorphosis in the eyes of the beholder. Rather, Bernini relied upon multiple viewpoints to achieve this, and was the first Baroque artist to do so.[13] That is, he wanted his sculpture to be experienced in time as well as in space, each temporal fragment having its corresponding spatial equivalent.[14] These elegant and smooth transitions from one

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[12] See Rudolph Wittkower, *Bernini* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964); Joy Kenseth, 'Bernini's Borghese Sculptures – Another View', *The Art Bulletin*, 58 (1981), 191-210; Andrea Bollard, '*Desiderio* and *Diletto*: Vision, Touch and Poetics of Bernini's Apollo and Daphne', *The Art Bulletin*, 82 (2000), 309-30.

[13] Until Joy Kenseth's revealing 1981 study 'Bernini's Borghese Sculptures – Another View', scholars of the Roman Baroque considered that its sculpture, like contemporary architecture, had only one principal viewpoint.

[14] Specifically, in the *Apollo and Daphne* group, the sculptor created three equally important views: the rear view from behind Apollo's back as he chases Daphne; the most commonly reproduced one, from the side, in

segment to another, from one ‘frame’ to the next, from one texture to another, immersed the audience in the un/reality of the work of art, enveloping them in the unity of fragments as well as of opposites: *smooth/rough, hair/leaf, finger/branch, skin/bark, chase/escape, hope/delusion*.

This amassing and overlaying of such incompatible pairs of concepts, textures, movements and emotions was echoed in yet another Baroque compendium of opposites, whose fragments were verbal rather than visual, and whose world was sacred rather than profane. In his poem “The Change of Human Things”, the seventeenth-century German poet Quirinus Kuhlmann used the same mechanism – the accumulation of seemingly disparate particles – to assemble a powerful projection of the ever-changing world:

> What, good, strong, thick, straight,
> Long, great, white, one, yes, air, fire,
> High, far is named,
> Thinks bad, weak, thin,
> Bent broad, small, black, three, no;
> Earth, flood, deep, near to shun.[15]

Kuhlmann’s personal vision of the fragmented universe was expressed more fully in his deeply mystical poem ‘The Creation of Adam’, which achieved a kaleidoscopic vision of time and space:

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which the idea of an attainable goal is at its height; and the frontal one, in which the transformation is at its most visible.

[15] ‘*Was gut, stark, schwer, recht,*
Lang, gross, weiss, eins, ja, Luft, Feuer,
Hoch, weitgenennt,
Pflegtbos, schwach, leicht,
krumm, breit, klein, schwartz, drei, nein,
Erdt, Flut, tief, nah zumeiden.
[...]
Alleswechselt, allesliebet; allesscheinet was zuhassen:
Werausdiesemnachwirddenken, muss der Menschen Weisheitfassen.’

From Quirinus Kuhlmann, ‘The Change of Human Things’, in *The Baroque Poem*, ed. by Harold B. Segel (London: Dutton, 1974), 198-9.

> The Breath was in him, the Breath of God himself,
> From which everything came which ever came into being
> The vapour just vapoured our eternally-most-eternally,
> As it had vapoured out the world.
> His foundation was without foundation, becomes even more
>   unfathomable
> Even though he is also unfathomably revealed.
> The eternal was-is-will-be eternally engenders is-will-be-was
> Because eternal will-be-was-is, is the Eternal-most eternal.[16]

Kuhlmann employed a method of absolute internal disintegration, of incoherent and contrasting slivers of poetic form, to form a precarious unity of pious visions, and manifest his peculiar disjointed world. His poems display a cunning interplay of paradoxes, in which the quickened rhythms of change, interchange and inner metamorphoses seek to replicate, as exactly as possible, the same fragile equilibrium of the divine that Guarini had embodied in his dome in Turin.

Like Kuhlmann's complex temporal connotations, his spatial demarcations are most difficult to fathom. Only in the *atemporal* domain of eternity, in the *foundation without foundation*, could spatial coordinates be this elusive. By testing the limits of mere wordplay and distorting syntax, Kuhlmann achieved, in the spatial domain, a perfect embodiment of the seventeenth-century English polymath Thomas Browne's ”eternal present”, where all times were present at once, and *was-is-will-be* stood for the singular, indivisible fabric of time. For Kuhlmann, as for Gracian, the world was indeed unity in discontinuity, diffused over the infinity of time.

> All other things have been or shall be, but in Eternite there is no distinction of tenses […and] those continued instants of time which flow into thousand yeares, make not to him one moment[.][17]

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[16] From Quirinus Kuhlmann, 'The Creation of Adam', in *A New History of German Litterature*, ed. by David E. Wellerby (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2004), 302.

[17] Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1654), 11.

Another understanding of fragmented space and fragmented time was captured in the curious scupltures of the undeservedly forgotten Johan Georg Pinsel (1715/1725-1761?). In the mid-eighteenth century, in that late flowering of the High Baroque in Central Europe, Pinsel created a peculiar form of spatial language for the patrons of the then-Polish city of Lvov, during a brief yet prolific career. His enigmatic work has only recently received critical acclaim, with exhibitions at the Louvre in 2012-13 and, more recently, the show “Heavenly” at the Belvedere.[18] Very little is known of Pinsel’s life or his art, which makes attributions of his sculptures quite difficult. Yet, while a high proportion of his works have been lost, those that survive in the Museum of Sacred Art in Lvov testify to a very particular understanding of the liminality and plurality of spaces.

Usually polychrome and gilded wood, Pinsel’s statues are a veritable whirlwind of particles. Almost obliterated by powerful unfurling draperies, they display the heightened sensibilities of late Baroque spirituality, and a remarkable talent for expressivity. The subjects’ bodies and the fabric that envelops them are divided into myriads of facets, each accentuating a segment of time and a nuance of emotion from the sacred narrative.

His *Mourning Madonna* **(Fig.1-2)** is completely engulfed in a billowing drapery, to the extent that the vibrant fabric becomes an extension of her body and the most direct communicator of her emotional states. Her animated hands and body, caught in the upswept motion of sorrow, contain in themselves a complete sequence of motions: an elaborate choreography of grief. Despite its immobility, *Mourning Madonna* simultaneously occupies several spaces, all of which are fused in a complex interplay of surfaces. Like Kuhlman’s poem, the statue is a vision of the eternal compendium of tenses, a mystery of Death and resurrection, of mourning and miracle.

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[18] Very few publications on Pinsel’s art exist. The exceptions include Jan Ostrowski, ‘A great baroque master on the outskirts of Latin Europe: Johann Georg Pinsel and the high altar of the church at Hodowica’, *Artibus et Historiae*, 21 (2000), 197-8; and Han Scherf and Jan Ostrowski, *Johan Georg Pinsel: un sculpteur baroque en Ukraine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editiones Louvre, 2012).

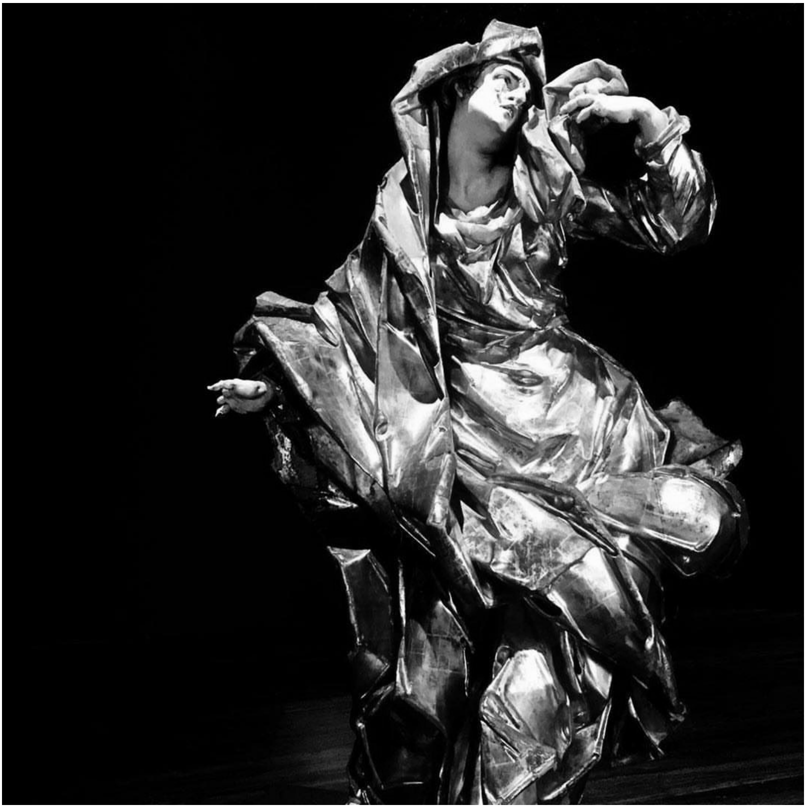

Figure 1-2 Johann Georg Pinsel, *Mourning Madonna*, photo by the author

In some instances, even details of Pinsel's works such as the small surviving fragment of *The angel's head from the Passion composition* (now also in the Museum of Sacred Art in Lvov) announce the wealth of spatial and temporal complexity that the full figure must have possessed. Both the lines of the face and the multiple directions of the flowing hair denote a motion not otherwise visible. Simultaneously, they bespeak movement in time and space through the dynamic narrative of the Passion.

Elaborating upon Bernini's understanding of drapery, Pinsel treated the fabric of his figures as if it were their *souls' skins*. Moreover, where Bernini's Borghese mythologies had featured multiple viewpoints carefully staged, Pinsel utilised pronouncedly geometric facets, each denoting a different perspective, but all condensed into a single figure. Although intended to be displayed in places with a single viewpoint, the abundance of spatial fragments contained in each of his figures overcame all constraints, and expanded the limited space they occupied. Almost a prefiguration of cubism, Pinsel's art expressed his longing to encompass the plurality of perspectives confined in one image; to provide a multitude of views that could be seen and experienced in a single instant.

An almost exact translation of Pinsel's multifaceted fragmentary treatment of figures into the medium of paint can be seen in the work of his contemporary and compatriot Franz Anton Maulbertsch (1724-1796), one of the leading decorators of the great Baroque churches of the Austrian Habsburg Empire. Although greatly esteemed in his day, Maulbertsch has only recently received the scholarly attention he deserves, in a 2014 monograph by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann.[19] The closeness of Pinsel's and Maulbertsch's approaches, and the complementarities of their artistic concepts, were noted in a joint exhibition that the Belvedere organised in 2016.

While even simple altarpieces like *St. Narcisus*, *Judith and Tamar* and *Judith with the head of Holofernes* become, in Maulbertsch's hands, swirling fragments of matter where space and time stand forever superimposed in one ceaseless motion, his illusionistic ceilings open up an infinity and plurality of vision rarely seen in his age. Maulbertsch's equivalents of Pinsel's faceted drapery, the chief communicator of his protagonists' 'passions of the soul', were the facets that conquered the entire space of his paintings, and which enabled him to create an intricate web of spatial relationships that, in some ways, went beyond the masterly illusions of Baciccio or Pozzo. The plurality present in Pozzo's and Baciccio's ceilings is achieved mainly through the multiple spatial planes that their figures populate and conquer. Maulbertsch, on the other hand, created pictorial spaces in which all temporal and spatial constraints are simply obliterated. As with his altarpieces, the entirety of each ceiling is rendered as a grand whirlwind of light and shade, figures and clouds. Everything is fragmented, and each of the particles reflects one nuance of the divine narrative.

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[19] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Painterly Enlightenment: The Art of Franz Anton Maulbertsch 1724-1796* (North Carolina, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

The dome and the ceiling of the Piarist church of Maria Treu in Vienna (1752/3), unarguably Maulbertsch's principal work, is an incomparably complex rendering of this concept of a fragmented Heaven. A representation of the *Coronation* and *Assumption of the Virgin*, Maulbertsch's frescoes render the glory of Heaven as the magnificent compendium of differently lighted fragments, a marvel beyond space and time. The space of Maulbertsch's divine vision is a pool of luminescent light, an almost annihilated realm where even the figures are abstracted into shards of gleaming motion.[20] Not one, but several vortices of power move the composition. Spaces overlap and swirl into one another, divisions and distances reverberate into immeasurable visual splinters. And in the midst of this heavenly tide, heaving and swelling before the bewildered viewer, stands the source of this overwhelming motion: the flame-like figure of the ascending Madonna, her body of the same matter as the incandescent clouds, commanding the heavenly scene. This is the Baroque space at its most fluid: its boundaries elusive and its distances, illusory.

While Pinsel, Kuhlmann and Maulbertsch depicted the Baroque universe's heavenly abode, equally complex structures were created as microcosms of earthly existence. Despite having originated in the Renaissance, the princely and aristocratic collections in *Wunderkammern* gained in prominence as well as in numbers during the Baroque age, which they closely mirrored.[21] Containing objects representative of both *naturalia* and *artificialia*, respectively the domains of natural riches and those created by man, each *Wunderkammer* also encompassed the far more liminal territories of the invisible, ethereal and imaginary. Like the Baroque world itself, these cabinets were reflections of reality and unreality, and their owners acutely aware that the realms of dreams were indivisible from the world of matter. With plurality as their common denominator, cabinets of curiosities came to be synonymous with Baroque visual compositions and other structures. Like the Baroque visual idiom itself, the cabinet was malleable, adaptable and open to seemingly endless proliferations.

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[20] DaCosta Kaufmann, *Painterly Enlightenment*, 100-10.

[21] On *Wunderkammern* in the Baroque age, see *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by Jan Elsner (London: Reaktion, 1994); *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century Europe*, ed. by Oliver R. Imprey and Arthur MacGregor (London: House of Stratus,

Wunderkammern also became emblematic of Baroque notions of time and space, and of the ever-changing pluralities that constituted its worldview. Their eclecticism reflected not only the fragmented immensity of the universe, but also the equally segmented and polyvalent space of the collector's self.[22] Each cabinet was incomparably unique, offering an inimitable likeness of its creator to posterity, a symbolic alter ego in which the multiplicity of their artefacts denoted the wealth of notions epitomised by the singularity and rarity of their keepers. Like magical looking glasses, they returned to their collectors almost infinitely multiplied versions of themselves, virtual likenesses that collectively were often envisioned as images of their *true selves*.

Recording of such cabinets' contents in paint or print was an established practice, and one that served at least three purposes. First, it ensured that the cabinet, and its collector, would be remembered long after their time, securing them a fragment of immortality. Secondly, a painting of a *Wunderkammer* functioned

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2001); *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to Enlightement*, ed. by R.J.W.Evans and Albert Marr (Harmondsworth: Ashgate, 2006). On cultures of collecting, see also James Stourton and Charles Sebag-Montefiore, *The British as Art Collectors: From the Tudors to the Present* (London: Scala, 2012).

[22] On collections as images of the collectors' selves, see, Jelena Todorović, 'The Pursuit of Tradition – the State Art Collection and the process of creation of multiple identities', in *The Catalogue of the State Art Collection in the Royal Compound* (Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2014), I, 14-43.

as an allegory of the world, presented in all its fragmentary glory. And thirdly, it was a means of presenting the virtuosity of the painter, whose task of recording the multitude of textures and rich colours that a *Wunderkammer*'s artefacts possessed was a complex one indeed.

One portrait of a *Wunderkammer*, depicting fragmentary possessions from a fragmented world, is preserved in the Norwich Castle Museum as *Yarmouth Collection* (*The Paston Treasure*, 1663). Illustrating the riches collected by the Paston family, the painting itself was a treasure long forgotten. After centuries of oblivion among the museum's holdings, it was fully researched and restored to its former glory only in 2017.[23] Thorough study of this image has provided a unique insight not merely into the politics of collecting as engaged in by William Paston, but more importantly, into his worldview as reflected in the curious artefacts of his collection – his fragmented universe.

The Pastons of Norfolk were not remarkably wealthy, but were remarkably well documented for a family of their time. As Alice Sprawls has noted, the survival of their correspondence from the late Middle Ages down to early modern times has afforded scholars an unparalleled opportunity to trace their marvellous ascent.[24] The William Paston responsible for the magnificent collection depicted in the painting was a true man of his age. His elaborate grand Grand Tour took him from Germany to Venice and Cairo, then Constantinople, Athens and Alexandria. During this adventurous voyage he acquired a great number of artefacts, many of which would feature in the painting. Aware of the remarkable nature of his 'world of curiosities', he commissioned the painting to document it, and to serve as a monument not only to the collection itself, but to him, and to the fragmentary age he inhabited. Moreover, he was friends with the great Norwich polymath Thomas Browne, who left some of the most lucid observations of the Baroque age.[25] In his book *Religio Medici*, Browne not only elaborated the above-mentioned concept of 'the eternal present', but left us careful diagrams intended to illustrate the fragmentary nature of all living things. The same particularity was a governing principle behind the assemblage of objects in the painting.

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[23] Norwich Castle Museum inventory number NWHCM: 1947.170. For a detailed study, see Spike Bucklow, *The Anatomy of Riches: Sir Robert Paston's Treasure* (London: Reaktion, 2018); and *The Paston Treasure – Microcosm of the Known World*, ed. by Andrew Moore, Nathan Flis, and Francesca Vanke (New Haven and Norwich: Yale University Press, 2018).

[24] Alice Spawls, 'At Norwich Castle Museum', *London Review of Books*, 47 (2018), 30-1.

Compared to the usual run of paintings of the same genre, *The Paston Treasure* is remarkably large. It depicts a slightly angled table with treasures massed upon its surface, intermingled with flowers, shells, and fruits of the field and sea. Gilded and bejewelled nautilus shells, carved ivory and coconut chalices share the display with musical instruments, a globe, an extinguished candle, a clock and an hourglass. All of these artefacts denoted abundant luxury as well as the refined taste of their owner. Yet, what makes the scene particularly outstanding and complex is the presence of two figures: on the left, an ornately dressed black servant with a monkey on his shoulder, and in the central foreground, a little girl holding a musical score and a bunch of roses. A rich red velvet curtain swirls around the column and occupies almost the entire space behind the table and above it.

Spatial relationships in *The Paston Treasure* are as polyvalent and incoherent as the collection it depicts. Firstly, the entire table is presented at an impossible angle, displaying all of its riches while remaining miraculously stable. A similar spatial paradox affects the objects depicted: although carefully rendered, each seems to occupy a space unto itself, bearing almost no connection to the objects that surround it. Often, they do not reflect one another, or cast any shadows; or their mutual reflections are decidedly askew. However, none of this was due to the painter's lack of skill. As Spike Bucklow shrewdly remarked about the artist, "He knew all about linear perspective, but purposefully avoided it [… H]e had visceral experience of the world's fragmented and unstable nature. Acknowledging that fragmentation and avoiding the illusion of

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[25] Paola Findlen and Francesca Vanke, 'Sir Thomas Browne, the Pastons, and the pursuit of health and wealth', in *The Paston Treasure*, ed. by Moore et al., 232-8.