

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

# NEOBAROQUE AND/IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

UNIVERSITY OF WROCŁAW  
8-9 MAY 2025

## ABSTRACTS



Uniwersytet  
Wrocławski

Instytut  
Europy Środkowej  
Institute of Central Europe



**Marjan Colletti** (University College of London & University of Innsbruck)

***Postdigital Neobaroque – PDNB (A Plurivocal Architectural Design-Research Project)***

This lecture presents an innovative design research project exploring the dynamic tension between modern and Baroque ideas in contemporary culture. Led by Marjan Colletti, the five-year project investigates this interplay across disciplines, primarily focusing on architectural design and blurring boundaries between theory, research, and practice. Framed as both inclusive and exclusive, PDNB adopts a critical stance towards its aesthetics and technologies, aligning with Eco's Open Work (1962) to foster plurivocal dialogue. Using Wölfflin's comparative formalism (1915) and Calabrese's semiotic analysis (1992), PDNB rethinks architecture's role in the 21st century by considering the impact of digital technologies. The project, characterised by transdisciplinarity, innovation, and engagement with the Anthropocene, features 1:1 installations, animated projects, and a three-volume compendium, offering valuable resources for researchers and designers seeking to innovate in socially, culturally, and environmentally conscious architectural design.

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**Dr. Víctor M. Pueyo Zoco** (Temple University)

***The Politics of the Baroque: Sovereignty and Monstrosity in the Late Habsburg Empire***

Why is the Baroque obsessed with monstrosity? How can Baroque monsters help us map out the coordinates of the present? Drawing on a collection of exceptional bodies and curiosities taken from a wide range of sixteenth to eighteenth-century sources (bestiaries, poetry, relations of events, miscellanea), I will show how the Baroque body politic laid the foundations for our current, “modern” social formations, creating the conditions for a new social contract and shaping our political imagination at the level of ordinary life. In so doing, I will challenge some of the most common assumptions regarding the Baroque (its concern with purely aesthetic form, its universal nature, or its unconditional alignment with the conservative agenda of the Counter-reformation) to present an updated outlook on what the Baroque was and on what it could still be.

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**Ewa Grzęda** (University of Wrocław)

***Juliusz Słowacki – a romantic or neo-baroque poet?***

The paper will focus on the work of Juliusz Słowacki – one of the most prominent Polish Romantic poets. Słowacki was born 11 years after Adam Mickiewicz, who is widely considered to be the originator of Romanticism in Poland. Słowacki, aware of Mickiewicz's achievements and position, tried to find his own oppositional artistic path in the early period of his work. In this respect, one can see, for example, clear influences of Baroque aesthetics and philosophy in his work, which has been pointed out by various researchers, including Claude Backvis and Alina Kowalczykowa. The consistent reference to the Baroque on many levels (aesthetic, philosophical, structural and thematic) in all periods of the Polish Romantic poet's work prompts one to ask the question to what extent he can be considered a Neo-Baroque creator of the Romantic period, similarly to Antoni Malczewski or George Gordon Byron, who were close to him? In this presentation, both the Baroque sources of inspiration that had a significant impact on Słowacki's creative process and the various ways in which he used Baroque conventions will be indicated. The exemplary material will first be the poet's works from the so-called Florentine period, from the series *Three Poems*.

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**Tessa Bolsover** (Duke University)

**Biography:** Tessa Bolsover is a poet, publisher, and interdisciplinary scholar. Her research centers post-1945 North American poetry while drawing on sound studies, media studies, gender studies, and ecological thought. She holds an MFA from Brown University and is currently pursuing a PhD in English at Duke University. Her first full-length book of poetry, *Crane*, is forthcoming from Black Ocean in 2025. She is also a founding editor of auric press.

***“Rotating Prisms”: The Shimmer of (Il)legibility***

This paper lays the groundwork for an investigation of the shimmer as a Neobaroque method for reading contemporary experimental poetry. As a visual phenomenon, a shimmer is defined as the modulating scintillation of light across a surface. As when sunlight glints off moving water, it is hard to look at directly. Both transparent and opaque, a shimmer mesmerizes, distracts, illuminates surface textures—turbulent reflections dazzle and disrupt any notion of a stable image. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold*, Roland Barthes' *The Neutral*, and Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, this paper develops a theory of the shimmer that illuminates the dual opacity and transparency of text, approaching the poem as a site wherein meaning is altered, to quote Barthes, “according to the angle of the subject's gaze” (*The Neutral*, 51). Through this lens, I present an in-depth reading of the contemporary U.S. poet Susan Howe's hybrid-form poetry and prose, tracing through her



work evolving theories of language, power, fragmentation and gendered (dis)embodiment. Shifting to her late work, I tune into the gradients of text, image, and affect in her book *That This* (2008) before concluding with a reading of her most recent book, *Concordance* (2019), as an ars poetica. Probing the limits of language, Howe's poetry registers the encryption of the illegible in the legible, the immaterial in material, and the past in the present.

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**Michael Cavuto** (Duke University)

**Biography:** Michael Cavuto is a poet and PhD Candidate in the English Department at Duke University, with specializations in African and African American Studies and Caribbean and Latin American Studies. His work engages transcultural, post-1945 poetics in the American hemisphere with an emphasis on decolonizing practices. At Duke's Franklin Humanities Institute, he is the Graduate Coordinator for the Climate Change, Decolonization, and Global Blackness series.

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### ***Solar Cosmologies of the American Baroque***

My research contributes to hemispheric discourse that is rethinking poetics of the Americas with a particular attention to American baroque traditions and decolonial thinking. Following the critical anthology *Baroque New Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2009), I use the term American baroque to encompass a range of baroque aesthetic trends that emerged in relation to one another throughout the Americas from the 16th century to the present, including the 20th-century Neobaroque. This paper constellates three foundational Caribbean writers to theorize a broader American baroque poetics in the 20th century that traverses linguistic boundaries. Drawing on the early decolonial essays of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter, I extend her insights into the relationship between the heliocentric revolution – Copernicus's centering of the sun in the galaxy – to rethink alternative solar cosmologies developed in the modernist poetry of Cuban poet José Lezama Lima and Martinican poet Aimé Césaire. Wynter links early colonial modernity to the heliocentric turn to theorize the role that Europe's scientific claim to objective reason played in the subjugation of non-Western cultures. I argue that alternative solar cosmologies in the works of Césaire and Lezama Lima refute the Eurocentric claim to universal knowledge, realizing a decolonial poetics that aligns with Lezama Lima's notion of the American baroque as a mode of "counterconquest". Working with the figure of ellipsis as central to both the European baroque conception of heliocentrism and Caribbean baroque poetics, cosmology as a scientific study of celestial systems can be rethought to critique the ways that cultural worldviews inform social behavior and cross-cultural contact.

This paper is part of a larger reconsideration of the American baroque as a decolonial aesthetic practice native to the various syncretic cultures of the colonized Americas.

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**Dorota Kołodziejczyk** (University of Wrocław)

***Neobaroque Entanglements: Language, Place, Indigeneity in Anna Burns, Natalie Diaz and Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki***

The indigenous identity, combining notions such as “original habitation,” “belonging prior to dominant settlers” and “ways of knowing,” is a unique instance of precarity generated by paradigmatically colonialist practices of state policies, dominant society norms and pressures, lack of acknowledgment and the consequences of marginalization (to say the least) in the realm of cultural imaginaries and consciousness. Bringing together three writers from three indigenous places of precarity, Anna Burns from Northern Ireland, Natalie Diaz from the US and Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki from Poland, I propose to focus on how in their writing language constitutes the main site of resilience. The three authors: two poets and one prose writer, have developed literary languages that are not only very unique in terms of author’s idiom, but also that are reappropriating the reality from the normative and majority language in ways that bring us close to the aesthetics of neobaroque. In each case that I am going to present, language is that of the colonizer’s – English in Burns and Diaz, Polish in Tkaczyszyn-Dycki’s. It is also at the same time the language wrenched from the standard and used to re-indigenize what it creates and challenge the precarity waged on the indigenous population (by, among others, language imposition, colonization through language, linguicide and other means of eradication through language). On the basis of these three authors I would like to formulate a case for the theory of neobaroque decolonial poetics.

Keywords: indigenous/indigeneity; poetics, decolonial, Anna Burns, Natalie Diaz, Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, neobaroque

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**Helga Mitterbauer** (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

***Poetry of Resistance: Neo-Baroque Elements in Herta Müller’s Collages***

Herta Müller was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2009 for her poetic depiction of resistance. In addition to her essay collections and novels, her collages are increasingly attracting attention: these collages are characterised by their position between literary text printed in volumes and works of art exhibited in galleries; they are thus transmedial forms of expression. The employment of forms that were popular during the Baroque period, such as emblems, or forms that were developed

during the Baroque, such as the list poem by Quirinus Kuhlmann, to whom Müller repeatedly refers, serves to reinforce their hybridity and polyphony. These forms align with the author's political commitment, as evidenced by her poetics of silence and cryptic speech, which can be traced back to the trauma she endured at the hands of the Romanian secret service, Securitate, and the interrogations she underwent in a reception camp in Germany.

Müller's neo-Baroque technique thus becomes a means of highlighting, in a highly poetic and occasionally hermetic form, the powerlessness and homelessness that politically motivated oppression engenders in its victims.

In this paper, selected examples from her anthologies of collages (*Die blassen Herren mit den Mokkatassen*/The pale gentlemen with the mokka cups, 2005; *Im Heimweh ist ein blauer Saal*/There is a blue hall in homesickness, 2019; *Der Beamte sagte*/The official said, 2021) will be used to elucidate Müller's poetic technique, with a particular focus on her utilisation of Baroque forms, thereby rendering her coding techniques accessible.

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**Kamil Rusiłowicz** (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

**Biography:** Kamil Rusiłowicz is a junior lecturer at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. His main area of research is neobaroque in contemporary American literature and culture. He is the author of *The Poetics of Neobaroque Space* (Wydawnictwo KUL, 2020).

### ***“The Last of Us Part II”: Toward a Minor Neobaroque Video Game***

The paper analyzes the video game *The Last of Us Part II* as an example of the neobaroque minor strategy. The goal of the strategy is to create an emotional reaction to the representation of violence in the game; its success, however, is strictly connected to the application of the major strategy – the player must become a willing participant of the neobaroque spectacle of violence. The paper discusses three aspects of the game – violence, narration, and the change of the playable character – as interconnected elements of the minor strategy responsible for destabilizing the ontological space of the player. It will argue that the post-apocalyptic America from *TLOU II* may be read as a critical mirror that utilizes the immersive nature of the medium in order to reflect on the player their (un)willingness to participate in the destructive act that originates baroque allegory.

**Oskar Zasada** (Jan Dlugosz University)

**Biography:** Oskar Zasada is a research and teaching assistant at the Institute of Literary Studies, Jan Dlugosz University, Poland. He received his PhD from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in 2019. His recent journal publications include “(Un)dead Stereotypes: An Analysis of the (De)evolution of the Supernatural Creature Archetypes in the *iZombie* Television Series” (ArchaeGraph) and “Tilting at Numbers: A Critical Analysis of the Quixotic Attitudes and Picaresque Undertones in Ramsey Campbell’s *The Count of Eleven*.” (World and Word). While his early academic endeavors were mostly related to American popular culture, he has since broadened his research interests to include interconnections between ludology and narratology, correlations between trans and posthumanism in literature, representations of cosmicism and mechanistic determinism in contemporary horror fiction, and instances of quixotism in superhero mythology. He also enjoys drawing and designing tabletop roleplaying games.

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***Shifting Borders, Shifting Forms: A Neo-Baroque, Boundary-Based Investigation  
into the Mechanics, Setting, and Sociocultural Framework of White Wolf’s  
“Werewolf: The Apocalypse”***

Barring a handful of scholarly fields, it is not often that pen-and-paper RPGs are subjected to critical analysis – and certainly not from a neo-baroque perspective. This trend is highly unfortunate because frequently the wealth of untapped conceptual potential contained in such texts is truly enormous and likely to broaden not only the reader’s understanding of the medium, but also of the pop cultural elements that helped to form a given work. Indeed, if an author proves sufficiently innovative while employing such building blocks, their creative endeavors can even further the development of certain fictional archetypes – yet the potential for such an outcome appears to be noticeably higher in titles with an inherent degree of baroque. Consequently, this paper will attempt to fill the aforementioned investigative vacuum by carrying out a detailed neo-baroque study of a game line known for possessing an abundance of qualities linked to bodies, confines, limits, incursions, breaking points, and wild zones – Mark Rein·Hagen’s *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. The article’s initial section is devoted to the exploration of the game’s core mechanics, employing a boundary-based perspective to trace the restrictive and enabling influences exerted by *Werewolf*’s different subsystems. Permeated by neo-baroque overtones, the true impact of these allowances and limitations can be felt both when reading up on in-universe events and when engaging in player-based interactions. The analysis’ second stage entails a critical examination of

the setting's conceptual and thematic components and of the mold-breaking, border-permeating shift they caused in the evolution of the classic werewolf archetype. These observations are then juxtaposed with the game's own set of narrative limitations imposed on form-changing entities, which helps to establish contrast and delineate similarities. The third stage goes on to map out the turbulent borders and wild zones that exist between the various ideological paradigms of the book's shapeshifting tribes. It also examines the fragmented and subjective ways in which *Werewolf's* protagonists perceive their fictional universe and evaluates the impact of these faulty perceptions on the reader's interpretation of the game's setting and metaplot. All of the above steps are meant to culminate in boundary-breaking attempt of their own – their purpose is to reveal and highlight the validity of a neo-baroque analytical approach in relation to a tabletop storytelling medium that has, up until this point, been viewed chiefly through the lenses of game and narrative studies. The presentation will be delivered in English.

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**Agnieszka Matysiak** (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

***Richard Foreman's Theatre of (Neo)baroque Melancholy***

While discussing Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, Terry Eagleton points to the fact that "[o]bjects in such [melancholic dramas] are fantastically collected, but then slackly and indifferently dispersed in their arrangements; and the very form of the *Trauerspiel* reproduces this irregular impulse, since it builds act upon act in the 'manner of terraces,' repulsing any suave linearity of presentation for a syncopated rhythm that oscillates endlessly between swift switches of direction and consolidations into rigidity" (*Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* 23). This observation could fittingly be ascribed to Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric compositions, all of which – since the playwright's theatrical inception in 1968 – have partaken of syncopated rhythms and vertiginous collections of objects that are subsequently slackly dispersed. These markers – the baroque markers indeed – entangled, to follow Mieke Bal's clarification of the term, with Foreman's avant-garde experimentality and his re-working of baroque concepts, betoken the idea of baroque universality and much-debated (Neo)baroque modes of artistic expression.

On the other hand, since these baroque images in Foreman's works fluctuate to and fro on and off the stage, thus suggesting a constant tension between emptiness, or void, and excess, some new questions start to arise: how does Foreman's language react to that loss and void, and how do those baroque images react to their own decline? Can language of incompleteness be brought forth through the excess of objects? And the fundamental problem: since "lacking," as Roger Bartra puts it, is "one essential condition" of melancholia, is it justified – bearing in mind the abovementioned observations – to consider Foreman's theatre as that of (Neo)baroque melancholy? The present



paper will attempt to propose a few suggestions regarding these inquiries by focusing on two plays: *My Head Was a Sledgehammer* (1994) and *Idiot Savant* (2009), both of which not only anatomize the process of melancholic loss, but also seem to sew melancholy into their narrative tissue, thus trying to embody the former in the language of incompleteness.

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**Jaśmina Morawiecka** (University of Wrocław)

***“Seen or seeing”? Perceptual and identity reorientations in Julio Cortázar’s short story “The Droolings of the Devil”***

Julio Cortázar compares the creative act to a trance-like experience: the writer immerses himself in the creation he has produced, adopts the perspective of his characters and, for an instant, truly becomes one of them. This is reflected in a particular feature of Cortazarian writing: the “perspectival quality”, that is, the processual and relational character of identity, which is never a static construct. A similar “perspectival quality” is also of fundamental importance in Amerindian perspectivism: a conceptual synthesis derived from anthropological studies of Amazonian shamanic metaphysics. I would like to hypothesise that the shamanic-perspective character of Cortazarian writing manifests itself not only in the plot layer, but also in the way the Argentinian writer conceives the interaction between the author, the text and the reader. In order to examine this triple author-work-receiver relationship, I shall analyse the short story *The Droolings of the Devil*. The theoretical foundation of this study is constructed on the basis of Cortázar’s reflections juxtaposed with the considerations of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (one of the leading researchers of Amerindian perspectivism). The metaphor of a metamorphosing exchange of gazes, key to both the Cortazarian imaginary and the conceptual apparatus of Amerindian perspectivism, generates the need to use a descriptive language that presupposes an analogous instability and processuality: the descriptive language proposed in the Michel Foucault’s interpretation of the painting *Las Meninas*. The Foucauldian study of the dynamics of the author-spectator-artwork relationship, juxtaposed with the conceptual apparatus introduced by Viveiros de Castro, allows for the construction of an interdisciplinary analytical tool and offers a new perspective on Cortazarian literary philosophy. For Cortázar, both the creative act and the act of reading imply the necessity of a continuous change of point of view: the necessity of constantly performing various perceptual and identity reorientations.

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**Dominika Bugno-Narecka** (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

**Biography:** Dominika Bugno-Narecka is Assistant Professor in the Department of American Literature and Culture at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland). Her research interests include ekphrasis, intermediality, neobaroque and the 21st century literature in English. The author of *(Neo)baroque Ekphrasis in Contemporary Fiction* (2019), she has also published several papers on word and image relationships in contemporary literature in English, and neobaroque readings of works by Thomas Pynchon, Bernard Malamud and Alejo Carpentier.

***Playing with the affordances of the book – from an inventory to a Wunderkammer***

The turn of the 21st century witnessed the return of the baroque cabinet of curiosities not only as contemporary art installations (e.g. Damien Hirst, Mark Dion, Joseph Cornell) or individual projects (e.g. Ian Hamilton Finlay's Little Sparta, the Quay Brothers' *The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer*) and collections (e.g. The Victor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art and Natural History, Guillermo del Toro's Bleak House); but most visibly as the subject of multiple novels and short story collections (Rosie Garland's *The Palace of Curiosities*, Paul Dowsell's *The Cabinet of Curiosities*, Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child's *The Cabinet of Curiosities*, Julie Koh's *Portable Curiosities*, or Susan Gloss' *The Curiosities*, to name just a few).

The paper attempts to rethink the baroque Wunderkammer and to present the book as a powerful 'technical medium of display' (Elleström) for the neobaroque cabinet of curiosities, be that notional or actual. Three particular examples selected for the paper – *The Thackery T. Lambshead Cabinet of Curiosities* (2011) edited by Ann & Jeff Vandermeer, *The Innocence of Objects* (2012) by Orhan Pamuk and *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections and Other Obsessions* (2013) by Guillermo del Toro – enfold the function of a collection catalogue or inventory with the notion of Wunderkammer itself, revealing the state of (acquiring) contemporary knowledge and the individual (?) obsession with emotions and fears (affect) of each 'collector'. Although the affordances of the book transform three-dimensional objects and space of the cabinet to two-dimensional visual representations (photograph, painting, drawing, sketch) and different types of text (description, narrative, interview), the uncanny combination of word and image follows the horror vacui principle and manifests neobaroque excess. At the same time, such form of assemblage modifies the implementation and realization of curiosity.

**Teresa Brus** (University of Wrocław)

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### ***Interwar Baroque in Cecil Beaton's Photography***

Baroque, argues Jane Stevenson, “represents a style which came into being in the 1920s and is associated in equal measure with designers and their style”. This paper proposes to engage with interwar baroque, the new baroque, as both a style and an attitude cultivated by Sir Cecil Beaton, photographer, designer, decorator and the arbiter of taste. In his magical Ashcombe country house, to create the realm of fantasy, “materials were put to uses never intended”. It is also where this influential image-maker was creating photographic portraits which originated a form of collective visual imagination. Promoting his baroque style in the cinema and in magazines, I will argue, Beaton became an expert of illusion camouflaging his own social origins and his sexual orientation.

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**Michał Delikator** (University of Warsaw)

**Biography:** My name is Michał Delikator. I am a second-cycle student of French Studies at the University of Warsaw. Previously, I completed my bachelor's degree in journalism and media studies at the aforesaid university with honours. I am currently developing a master's thesis plan on narrative strategies and their psychic origins in the literary and cinematic works of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jean Cocteau. My field of interest includes:

- 20th century French literature - formal experiments related to it, and its interactions with other forms of expression (in particular with film);
- post-structural philosophy - contemporary readings of past literary works through the prism of Michel Foucault's, Gilles Deleuze's and Jacques Derrida's concepts;
- history of European cinema - especially Polish and French auteur cinema;
- aesthetics of the cinematic image.

### ***Neo-Baroque Imaginarium – Jean-Jacques Beineix's “Betty Blue” and Luc Besson's “Metro” in the perspective of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy***

The neo-Baroque aesthetic, which combines visual sumptuousness, narrative fragmentation and emotional intensity, is an important point of reference in the analysis of the films *Betty Blue* (1986) by Jean-Jacques Beineix and *Metro* (1985) by Luc Besson. Both works, belonging to the current of French *cinéma du look*, create worlds full of superabundance and sensuality that correspond perfectly with Gilles Deleuze's philosophy.

The analysis is based on the theories of the philosopher contained in his works: *Cinema 1: Image-Motion*, *Cinema 2: Image-Time*, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, and *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

The first two works analyse how cinema transcends linear narratives and realist representations, offering new ways of experiencing time, space and subjectivity. *Betty Blue* and *Metro* reflect the Deleuzian notion of 'image-time', where narrative loses its dominant role in favour of images that expose discontinuity, fragmentation and ambiguity.

In *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* Deleuze describes the era as an aesthetic of infinity, dynamism and the interpenetration of different orders - interior and exterior, body and space. The films discussed here represent the premises of the Deleuzian concept of the 'body without organs' since the protagonists are often defined by intense emotions and bodily experiences that do not lend themselves to rationalisation. In this approach, these films serve as neo-Baroque *imaginaria* in which the emotionality of the characters and the aesthetic opulence of the images reflect the logic of the fold.

Having analysed the films presented in the context of Giles Deleuze's thought, it can be seen that the aesthetics of the neo-Baroque not only shapes the visual and narrative structure of the works, but also evolves into a philosophical reflection on the experience of time, space, body and affects. This cinematic *imaginarium*, inspired by the logic of the Baroque fold, redefines the world's perception as a field of infinite possibilities of transformation.

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**Iwona Grodź** (Poznan University of Social Sciences)

***"Film neo-baroque". Peter Greenway's example***

The subject of the paper will be authorial strategies and narrative situations, referred to by film scholars as neo-baroque, in selected films by Peter Greenaway, including: *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1984), *The Pillow Book* (1996).

The aim will be to answer the question about the functions of this type of references and narratives (the case of the film *The Draughtsman's Contract* and/or *The Pillow Book*) in artistic messages (film) from the perspective of the psychology of reception of a work of art.

I will follow this key, analyzing Greenaway's work through the prism of the concept of neo-baroque. At the same time, wondering how we can establish a relationship with others through sensory experience (words-images). The considerations will be conducted in two tracks, because I am interested in both the plot situation (intra-film perspective) and the reception situation (extra-film perspective) and the phenomenon of perception of images referred to, among others, as "neo-baroque" by the creator of *Wyliczanka*.

Methodology: phenomenology, hermeneutics



**Michał Wolski** (University of Wrocław)

Michał Wolski is an assistant professor in the Publishing Department at Faculty of Letters, University of Wrocław, Poland. His main research interests include the history and poetics of superhero comics, genre film and modern pop culture, in particular massive entertainment systems. He is also a member of the Polish Association of Comics Studies and the Polish Association of Film and Media Studies, as well as long-time chairman of the Association of Pop Culture Researchers and Pop-Cultural Education "Trickster" with which he organized over 20 scientific conferences and participated in publishing work on numerous books devoted to popular culture. He is scientifically interested in superhero comics, neo-baroque cinema, vampires (about which he wrote two books and defended his doctoral thesis), giant robots from outer space, Polish post-transformation culture, and video games. In his free time he fulfills himself as a typographer and graphic designer.

***Neobaroque in Children's Media. The Curious Case of "Transformers: the Movie"***

The Transformers franchise, a multimedia phenomenon encompassing a toy line, as well as entertainment supersystem (Kinder, M.) composed from animated series, and comics, burst onto the scene in 1984, swiftly becoming a global sensation. This widespread popularity culminated in the 1986 release of *Transformers: The Movie*, an animated film directed by Nelson Shin, designed to maximize the franchise's promotional impact and showcase its most captivating elements.

I would argue that the enduring appeal of the Transformers can be attributed to its profound alignment with the principles of neo-baroque aesthetics (as articulated by Angela Ndaliansis). The neo-baroque, characterized by excess, spectacle, and a blurring of boundaries, finds a potent expression in the Transformers' very essence. Each Transformer embodies a dynamic interplay of form and function, seamlessly transitioning between robotic and vehicular forms. This constant state of flux, encapsulated in the iconic taglines "More than meets the eye" and "Robots in disguise," embodies the neo-baroque's emphasis on illusion, spectacle, and the subversion of fixed identities.

Furthermore, the Transformers franchise draws upon and reimagines elements of popular culture, blending science fiction with mythology and incorporating visual cues from iconic films like *Star Wars*. This eclectic mix, characteristic of the neo-baroque, creates a captivating and multifaceted aesthetic that resonates with audiences of diverse backgrounds. The film itself, with its production values, exemplifies this aesthetic, delivering a sensory overload that immerses viewers in a world of spectacle and excess.

**Paweł Stachura** (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

**Biography:** Paweł Stachura is Associate Professor with the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include 19th-century American literature, American science fiction, literary theory, and comparative literature. He has published articles on nineteenth-century American fiction (mostly), a book on baroque visual readings of American popular fiction, and co-edited an essay collection about Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project.

### ***Liars in a burning theater***

17th-century popular baroque and 21st-century populist politics William Eddington's concept of the theater of truth needs be revised in the context of contemporary populist politics, defined by post-truth, prevalence of social media messaging, personality cult, and the role of irony in confrontations with opponents. When Eddington wrote *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, lies in politics were fabricated in an elaborately decorated theater of appearances. There was a considerable effort at creating an illusion, it was sublime and visual, and there was an element of truth, particularly in the settings and images of bodily harm. This was the theater of truth for educated audiences. Since then, Eddington has revised his concepts in two books: *What Would Cervantes Do?* (2022) and *The Splintering of the American Mind* (2018). Both theoretically and in media observation, it seems that now it is a different kind of theater, a post-truth theater which can be described in terms of the "popular baroque" or "poor baroque". This refers to the documented forms of popular entertainment in the 17th century, variously described as vulgar, violent and graphic: the bear-baiting houses, cockpits, parodies and travesties of high drama, public executions, early forms of circus and pornography. The features of this post-truth theater are baroque too, but more like the folksy, gross baroque, which occasionally can be discerned in works of the "regular" baroque. Those features can also be discerned in contemporary forms of political communication as employed by populist politicians (demagogy). It is more verbal than visual, based on bombastic hyperboles, capable of raising strong group emotions, group hatred. Another feature is that the spectacle is tacky, incompetent, poorly designed and executed. In this, modern populist rallies are similar to old fairground imitations of upper-class baroque, with added extent of exaggeration and simplification. The popular baroque is characterized by shortness, grossness, and violence, targeting the lower-class, semi-literate audiences. Another feature of the poor baroque is the lore of baiting (today: trolling), the ironic provocation of opponents, victims, the purposeful destruction of any conviction or truth by irony and violent oratory.

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**Marco Grosoli** (Research Fellow in Film Philosophy, NOVA University, Lisbon)

**Biography:** Marco Grosoli is Appointed Research Fellow in Film Philosophy at Universidade Nova (Lisbon, Portugal). He was Assistant Professor at Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan, 2016-2021), British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Kent (UK, 2012-2015), Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Experienced Research Fellow in Germany in 2022 (Potsdam Jan-Jun, Frankfurt am Main Jul-Dec), and Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Bologna in 2023. He published, among others, a monograph on Béla Tarr (*Armonie contro il giorno*, 2014) and one on the first years of French *politique des auteurs* (*Eric Rohmer's Film Theory*, 2018). As a film critic, he collaborates with *Film TV*, *Gli Spietati* and *Filmidee*.

### ***Against flexibility. Death, geopolitics and the neo-baroque in Raul Ruiz's "Mysteries of Lisbon"***

At the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century's booming wave of serial narratives (2005), Angela Ndalianis wrote that "The neo-baroque aesthetics [of] pre-1990s television series has become more intense, revealing a dynamism that tests story boundaries to the extreme". When Chilean film auteur Raul Ruiz (possibly the quintessential neo-baroque director, as per Michael Goddard's authoritative monograph), in the midst of that wave (2010), engaged with TV seriality through miniseries *Mysteries of Lisbon* (adapted from Eugène-Sue-feuilleton-esque eponymous novel by Camilo Castelo Branco), this endeavour looked like a meta-statement on contemporary neo-baroque itself.

Surprisingly, in Ruiz's 100+ films' body of work, often contriving Borges-esque labyrinthine narratives, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is one of his closest to traditional closure. Its multi-centric narrative sprawling, interweaving several storylines across different decades, countries and continents, does have a centre: a Portuguese orphan on his deathbed (framing the miniseries at both ends) imagines all those stories as so many variations on such melodramatic themes as impossible loves, children

separated from parents etc., reshuffling in many different guises the *originlessness* characterizing the orphan and transparently hinting at Ruiz's own tireless statelessness after Pinochet's 1973 coup condemned him to a decades-long, ever-wandering exile in all corners of the world. As the intricate narrative thread unfolds, however, this originlessness rejoins origin again, as right before dying the orphan imagines himself, as a grown-up, escaping to (Ruiz's native) South America. By analysing the centrality of *death* (a key baroque topic) in the miniseries, and by adopting Catherine Malabou's philosophy as a theoretical framework, I will argue that *Mysteries of Lisbon* (shot when Ruiz was dying of cancer) pushes the neo-baroque tension between finitude and flexibility to its extreme, ultimately discarding flexibility (the mantra of our contemporary, neo-liberal world) in favor of what Malabou calls *destructive plasticity*. I will focus particularly on the miniseries' implications as regards imperialism and decoloniality, stemming from the tangle between autobiography and neo-liberal geopolitics interwoven by Ruiz over his entire career, and crucial in *Mysteries of Lisbon* too.

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**Zofia Kolbuszewska** (University of Wrocław)

***Implosion of the Law, the Rise of Alternative Institutions and Neobaroque  
In Thomas Pynchon's novel "The Crying of Lot 49" and "The Good Fight" TV  
series***

The paper interrogates representations of the imploding authority of the Law at the moments of potential social and political change in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1967) and *The Good Fight* TV series (2017-2022), from the vantage point of neobaroque political aesthetics that is no imitation of a baroque style, but emerges as a response to the circumstances of Euro-American modernity first identified in the period of historical baroque. The novel and the series mark the beginning of the rise and waning of reality shaped by the neo-liberal capitalist economy over the last fifty years. Pynchon and the show producers probe into the collapse of the official institutions and the rise of alternative ones such as W.A.S.T.E. in Pynchon and "private judiciary" in the TV series. The Law's implosion is presented in the novel and the show as harking back to the representations of the state's collapse and the annihilation of legal order in Jacobean drama. The paper's theoretical framework is based on the discussion of the neobaroque by William Egginton and Monika Kaup, as well as engaging Christine Buci-Glucksmann's notion of Baroque Reason, Walter Benjamin's reflection on the Modernity's roots in the era of the baroque whose political culture was permeated by the profound sense of social change and decadence, and Richard K. Sherwin's insights in *Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque: Arabesques and Entanglements*.