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The Eye of the Panther: Rilke and the Machine of Cinema

THE ASSORTED OBJECTS described in Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* make up a collection whose variety and opulence are reminiscent of the Baroque, as are the Jardin des Plantes and the Jardin du Luxembourg, respective settings of two of the most famous of these poems, "Der Panther" and "Das Karussell." These and other of Rilke's so-called "thing poems" (*Dinggedichte*) are fraught with a "baroque" tension between the economy of form and the unstable worldly economies that poetic closure works to exclude. Figures of precarious control, panther and carousel alike *gyrate*, defining an empty center that exists solely in relation to a periphery. The accelerating carousel in particular illustrates how this geometry dissolves into entropy and how the periphery threatens to triumph as empty though dazzling façade. The panther too, turning in circles on tensed loins, reveals *form* as energy held in reserve. It is no coincidence that these poems occur at a time when the formal dynamism of Baroque art and architecture was receiving new and unprecedented attention. This rediscovery of the Baroque projected modern anxieties onto an earlier epoch torn between containment and expansion. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Heinrich Wölfflin's discussion of animated stone, of restless and unstable forms, and especially of a chiaroscuro that makes objects appear to leap out of the picture plane, might well have applied to the advent of cinema (ca. 1895), which placed the spectator in the path of oncoming locomotives, and whose own use of chiaroscuro helped fold the technological "monster" back into a more archaic fear of the outside. Monsters proper, such as Dr. Frankenstein's creature, not only became commonplace in cinema but came to personify an often disquieting process of animation, a final violation of the law of beauty which, almost two centuries earlier, neoclassicism had installed as a bulwark against Baroque monstrosities (Wellbery 192-94). Likewise, if Rilke's *New Poems* brim with classical relics, most notably a marble torso whose inner life makes itself felt as the uncanny ability to return the beholder's gaze, his carousel, by contrast, is blind. An afterimage of Baroque spectacle as well as a proto-cinematic machine, its whirling menagerie uniquely demonstrates the crisis of modernist form.

Another machine, one of the many various constituents of nineteenth-century "visual culture," appears in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

(1915), conjured alongside the incoherence of the modernism this poem helped define:

It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns
on a screen . . .

Placed at the modern disjuncture between meaning and expression, Eliot's magic lantern is a Victorian throwback—a domestic remnant that alludes to the cinema yet antedates the electricity essential to the projection of film and celebrated by the “nervous geometry”¹ of futurist composition (“nerves [thrown] in patterns on a screen”). Whereas the frenetic bolts and flashes of Boccioni's *The Noise of the Street Enters the House* simulates the firing of nerves as they register outside disturbances that both violate the inside and call it into existence, Eliot counterposes the practiced decorum of a civilized interior, of which the magic lantern is a marker, to the excess and entropy of the urban milieu, here personified as an eroticized, feline presence:

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

The projection onto the outside of a beast (less predator than figure of arousal) implicates the inside in a struggle for survival culminating in the urbane delicacies —“the taking of a toast and tea”—that represent the final conquest of anything within that rubs, licks, and curls about. The interior the magic lantern occupies is one in which the aesthetic and the anaesthetic merge, as proclaimed by the panavision-like tableau with which Eliot's “Love Song” opens:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;

A modernist echo of Romantic narcissis, these lines call upon the ether that for Romanticism was the universal *fluidum*—the all-enveloping, life-giving element which, by the time Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was given cinematic interpretation (by James Whale in 1931), had been specified as electricity (even if drawn from the ethereal realms above).² The electricity that disappears behind the archaism of the magic lantern reappears on the screen as nervousness itself. A mounting scientific interest in nervous disorders coincided with a new understanding of the human being less as a dense body than a network of electrical pulses. This network in turn became the metaphor by means of which the modern city, criss-crossed and undercut by utility, telegraph and telephone cables (not to mention

¹ “Nervous geometry,” a phrase coined by Drieu la Rochelle, is used by Christoph Asendorf to characterize an epochal shift in perception (*Strome und Strahlen* 119-21).

² True to the Frankensteinian dream of a form of procreation that would by-pass the maternal body, Friedrich Hölderlin addresses the ether as a father (“Vater Aether!”) whose animating breath (“beseelende Luft”) usurps the precedence of the mother's milk, “An den Aether” (1796).

electric street cars), acquired a “nervous system.” By the time the theory of relativity had formally declared *mass* and *energy* to be two variations of the same thing, the increased presence of electricity had brought about what Christoph Asendorf has called “the gradual disappearance of matter”—a dissipation for which the immateriality of ether is an appropriate figure (as is the “atmosphere” that in the development of nineteenth-century painting came to predominate over material objects).³

As both life-giving and nerve-deadening substance, the figure “ether” evokes an ambivalence commensurate with the dual potential of electricity. Emblematic of this ambivalence is the electric chair, which in the very process of killing produces in its victim a semblance of life, causing the body to twitch and convulse even after death (Asendorf, *Batterien der Lebenskraft* 116-17). Dramatized electrocutions of notorious criminals were in fact a common subject of very early cinema, but even more famous perhaps is Thomas Edison’s documentary of the actual electrocution of a homicidal elephant at Coney Island in 1903 (Gunning 37). After the animal failed to succumb to a poison-laced meal, the park’s management resolved to use the occasion to showcase the awesome electrical power at its disposal—in effect to harness the wattage that otherwise served to brighten the night sky over New York. The sad and macabre sight of the elephant dying is an exact inversion of the later spectacle (no less sad) of the Frankenstein creature—like Eliot’s outcast, a “heap of broken images” (*The Waste Land*)—jolted to life by charges culled from the heavens during a raging thunderstorm. It is an act of creation that literalizes and renders monstrous the *shock* that attended the reception of the earliest experiments in cinematic animation.

In both its literary and cinematic forms, *Frankenstein* has long served to warn of the catastrophic consequences of modern, promethean aspirations. The perverse outcome of the Enlightenment dream of a rational procreation that would circumvent the womb, the creature personifies a disembodied and dismembered reason, manifesting the complex implications of the expression “brainchild” (Bewell). Gothic settings typify attempts in the twentieth century to disguise the technological nightmare in terms of the more archaic and forbidden desire to breed life into dead matter; Wegener’s *Der Golem* (1920) is an early and accomplished example of a genre that casts scientific monstrosities as real monsters, fleshing out the agon wherein reason dons the mask of the natural enemies it once rose to vanquish—a dialectic that helps explain how the very name Frankenstein, proper to the scientist, has instead come to be synonymous with the creature (Brooks 199).

This reversal is dramatized in the life-and-death struggle in which the original film production of *Frankenstein* culminates—a scene that foregrounds the mechanism of cinema and thus identifies the cinematic apparatus as part of the Frankensteinian dream. Pursued by irate townspeople armed with torches and

³ See the discussions of Impressionism by Asendorf (*Strome und Strahlen* 5-14) and Kenner (18). In this same context, Cray’s analysis of the “vertiginous uncertainty separating forms” in the stereoscopic image is fascinating: “Compared to the strange insubstantiability of objects and figures located in the middle ground, the absolutely airless space surrounding them has a disturbing palpability” (125). See also Bohme’s discussion of the aesthetics of “Atmosphere.”

pitchforks, the creature overpowers his creator and drags him to a windmill, where he is seen chasing his would-be captor around the central grinding mechanism, a horizontal wheel turning in the middle of the building (Fig. 1). For an instant, predator and prey peer silently at each other, their faces flickering between the wooden rods that form the teeth of the rotating gear (Fig. 2). Not only does the scene simulate the effect of a more primitive, silent film, it also alludes to the zoetrope—a nineteenth-century invention whose principle was crucial to the eventual development of motion-picture photography and projection. Paper strips depicting actions in graduated sequence were placed on the inside of a cylindrical drum in which evenly spaced slots had been cut. The drum was then spun, causing the pictures to appear to move when viewed through the slots. Blank sections of the drum separating the slots, like the shutter that interrupts the beam of light in a film projector, enabled the eye to read the sequence of broken images as unbroken movement.

The mechanism of the mill, furthermore, is a generator that translates the force of the wind into industrial power, duplicating the earlier moment in the film in which the energy of the thunderstorm was routed for the purpose of bringing the creature to life. And this harnessing of nature in turn brings us back to the poems by Rilke with which I began. Rilke's carousel, I suggest, is a plaything that mimics the work of the mill and so caricatures this act of harnessing. It even sports a stag, "just like in the wild, / although it wears a saddle" ("ganz wie im Wald, / nur daß es einen Sattel trägt").¹ As was true of the rogue elephant's electrocution, the animation of the creature constitutes an elimination of the wild. Appropriately, the *Frankenstein* film ends with a wedding; like the horses on Rilke's carousel, the inventor is "hitched" (*angespannt*). What "Das Karussell" parodies, "Der Panther" invests with poignant resignation: the great cat, also turning in controlled circles of implied power, and peering out through "passing bars," resembles the monster watching his prey through the vertical rods of the spinning gear:

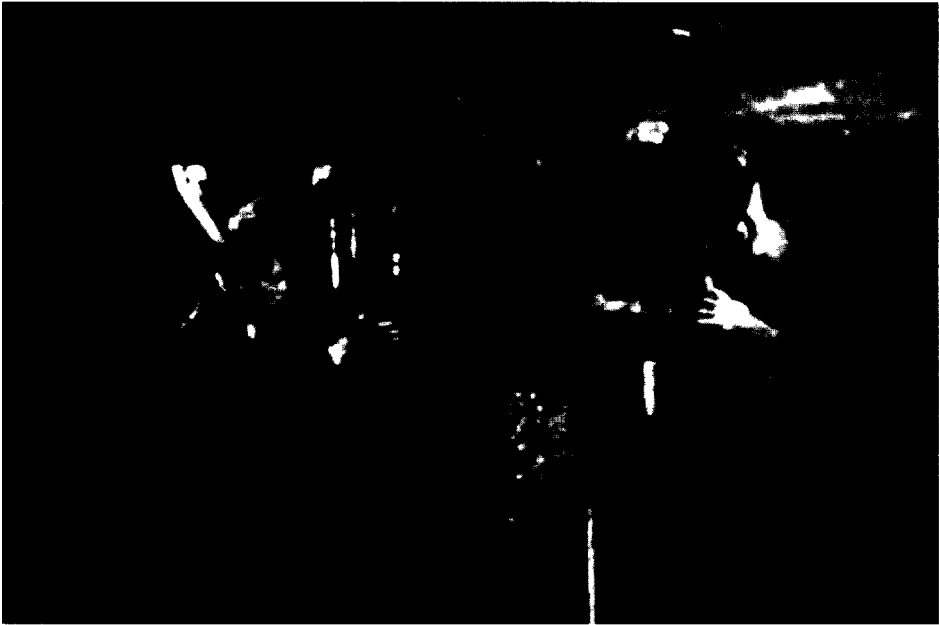
Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehen der Stäbe
so müd geworden, daß er nichts mehr halt.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gabe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

(The passing bars have left his gaze so worn,
that nothing it receives it long retains.
A thousand bars do seem to pass before him,
behind which nothing of the world remains.)

This series of mechanically analogous figures—the carousel, the zoetrope, the turning mill, the panther circling in its cage—couples the act of cinematic animation with an atavistic pre-history of aesthetic practices that enable one, literally, to "toy" with the prospect of danger.² *Frankenstein*, *Caligari*, *Der Golem*, *Metropolis*, and numerous other variations of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," attest to the risk

¹ All poems by Rilke are cited from *Werke*, vol. 2. Translations of Rilke's poetry are mine unless otherwise indicated.

² See Stewart's analysis of the aesthetics of miniaturization in relation to the popularity of toy railroads among the Victorians (58-59).



Figs. 1 & 2.

Frankenstein (1931, Dir. James Whale)

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of the toy itself becoming dangerous.⁶ One might not expect this from a carousel, which seems so innocent of struggle and which disguises its machinery so half-heartedly. Yet the radical lifelessness of its carved horses spells an indifference that defines what is truly uncanny about machines that run themselves. Of the carousel's capacity for de-familiarization, one example seems especially acute. Beginning with a murder plot conceived during a railway journey, the suspense of Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1950) reaches a crescendo when a carousel, its operator having been struck by a stray bullet, races out of control. The potential dangers of train travel are here displaced onto the wildly accelerating merry-go-round, and the existential terror that once greeted the advent of the railroad resurfaces in an amusement park, the likes of which had, at the turn of the century, been the site of a nascent commercial cinema that seemed habitually to project the railroad as its twin.⁷

Motion pictures were scarcely a decade old when Rilke wrote "Das Karussell" (1906) and with it suggested a mechanical model for registering the modern forces of dissipation and demonstrating the effects of these forces on stable forms, both material and poetic. The gravity of tradition coincides with the inertia of the contraption, which surrenders to movement only gradually before yielding to a frenzied rotation eventually described as "breathless" and "blind."

Mit einem Dach und seinem Schatten dreht
sich eine kleine Weile der Bestand
von bunten Pferden, alle aus dem Land,
das lange zögert, eh es untergeht.
(A roof and its shadow turns
a little while with the supply
of colorful horses, all from the land
that hesitates before it disappears.)

Children mounted cheerfully atop wooden beasts evoke an idyllic world in which bridled nature and unobstructed sight go hand in hand. If the image appeals to the innocence Hitchcock so relentlessly undermines, it also addresses the shifting relationship between movement and vision, which the novel velocities of train travel had seriously destabilized. As a machine in motion that incorporates the seeing subject into the apparatus, the carousel joins a collection of devices, among

⁶ For purposes of describing the inability of industrial society to contain the progressive impulses it has unleashed, Marx borrows the figure of the sorcerer (*Hexenmeister*) no longer able to control the subterranean forces (*unterirdische Mächte*) he has summoned forth (25). Moretti regards *Frankenstein* as an allegory of this reversal, likening the monster to the working class—imperfect, disfigured, discontent, and ultimately far stronger than its maker, the bourgeoisie (81-90). Even "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* reproduces the specifics of this Marxist fable: the apprentice (Mickey Mouse), conjuring magical powers he does not understand, converts a broom into a worker; the broom sprouts arms and legs (though no head) and begins carrying pails of water, suggesting an identity of worker and tool. Moreover, this "new worker" apparently has an infinite capacity for biological reproduction: Mickey destroys the broom with an ax, after which each splinter emerges as a new and complete water-bearer. The result is a flood resembling the catastrophic inundation that occurs in Lang's *Metropolis*, when the rebellious workers destroy the machines they slavishly serve.

⁷ The spinning carousel that appears toward the beginning of *Das Kabinett des Dr. Calhgan* cites the historical link between cinema and amusement park, much as the organ grinder in the foreground alludes to the manual cranking of the movie camera.

them the moving diorama, that helped lay the groundwork for the cinema, which like the railroad required an adjustment to visual speed (Crary 112-13).

But "Das Karussell" is still finally a *poem*, the concerns of which are formal, and in which the very materiality of form is at issue. The wooden animals that circle in the carousel's orbit are inanimate leftovers in a physical universe in which energy has been freed from matter. Rilke first names the object's opaqueness—a resistance to light that translates into a weighty reluctance. What, by the way, is the Frankenstein creature other than a heaviness—a resistance that gives form to energy by interrupting its flow? The persistence of the retinal image, that is, the phenomenon that enables us to interpret the broken images of the zoetrope as continuous movement, is known in German as the "sluggishness (*Trägheit*) of the eye," a formulation which both the panther and the creature seem to embody.⁸ Especially interesting in this context is Ezra Pound's characterization of a poem as an "engine" that works to "gather the latent energy of Nature and focus it on a certain resistance" (qtd. in Kenner 165).

In describing a machine whose rotation conforms to the rhythms and repetitions of lyrical structure, "Das Karussell" cites a tradition in which inanimate objects inspire poems that strive to recreate formally the self-containment of the thing described. A more obviously neoclassical instance of this genre among Rilke's poems is his "Archaischer Torso Apollos" (1908), in which the reciprocated gaze, so fundamentally disrupted by the carousel, is reclaimed: "denn da ist keine Stelle, / die dich nicht sieht" ("for here there is no place / that does not see you"; the translation is Mitchell's). In "Der Panther" the same reciprocity succumbs to visual fatigue: padding wearily in circles that define an empty vortex, the cat can look but not see. Its suppleness—and even the tremulous sheen of its coat—is deferred to the marble figure, which does see, and whose loins "turn" around a center into which, in contrast to the carousel, a smile (or prayer) can still penetrate:

. . . und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte [sonst] nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stunde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

(. . . nor could [other wise]
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared
Other wise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur.)

This last simile has the effect of emphasizing the lack that forms the center around which (in the other poem) the panther turns. The mechanical monotony of this *Sich drehen* is likewise implicit in the title of Luigi Pirandello's *Si gira* (1915), the fictional diary of a cinematographer who grows despondent after a bystander muses that a machine could spare the operator the effort of maintaining manu-

⁸ Rilke's poetry overall is a gallery of inert things. Cf. Calhoun

ally a steady camera speed." Less than a year before Rilke wrote "Der Panther," Alfred Stieglitz had photographed an approaching locomotive and called it "The Hand of Man," expressing an ambiguous awe of the technology that both extends the human hand and replaces it. Resisting the inference that his handiwork is strictly mechanical, and countering that fluctuations in camera speed reflect a human sympathy with the actions filmed, Pirandello's cameraman defies the rationalization that, following Marx, converts the worker into an "appendage of the machine" (*Zubehör der Maschine* [27]). "Si gira," the Italian directorial equivalent of "Rolling!," means literally "It's turning"; as a reflexive construction (identical to "Es dreht sich"), it names an *automaticity* of self-operation illustrated in the extreme by Hitchcock's unmanned carousel. An absence of agency is apparent too in the panther, whose pacing in tight circles constitutes a play of physical forces centered on a point of indifference:

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

(The padding gait of strides both strong and supple,
in tiny circles turning tightly round,
is like a dance of force about a middle,
in which, benumbed, a mighty will is bound.)

Betäubt ("benumbed," from *taub*, meaning "deaf"), like the oarsmen who bear Odysseus safely past the Sirens, the caged panther remains strong, but its strength is no longer its own. Its centrifugal pacing translates animal power into patterns unconsciously performed—the same harnessing of natural forces parodied in "Das Karussell."

The patterning described in "Das Karussell," "Archaischer Torso Apollos," and "Der Panther" as a "turning" (*[sich] Drehen*) finds a different articulation in "Die Fensterrose," another poem from the *Neue Gedichte*. Here, Rilke compares the rose window of a cathedral to the eye of a cat, the gaze of which is in turn likened to a whirlpool:

Da dim: das trage Treten ihrer Tatzen
macht eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt,
und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen
den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt,
gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt,—
den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis
ergriffen, eine kleine Weile schwimmt
und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß,
wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,
sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen
und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut—
So ergriffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein
der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen
ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein

⁹ First published as *Si Gira*, Pirandello's novel reappeared under the title *Quadern di Serafino Gubbio—operatore*

(Inside: the heavy padding of their paws
 creates a hush that nearly drives you mad,
 and just as suddenly one of those great cats
 pins down the wandering gaze and pulls
 it hard into its own gigantic eye.—
 the gaze, which, as if on water overcome
 by a swirling funnel, floats awhile
 and then goes under and is forever gone,
 when this same eye, which seems asleep,
 lifts open and falls shut again with rage
 and draws the gaze into its heart, blood-deep;
 so did the windows of great churches
 pluck the hearts of another age
 from darkness and rush them unto God)

The whirlpool, as a *force* that generates a *form* (“eines Wirbels *Kreis*”), makes explicit the vortex that also defines the movement of both the carousel and the panther. Charybdis-like, it exerts a pull that the poem studiously sidesteps as it trips through a gauntlet of relative and subordinate clauses (“den Blick, der, wie . . .”). The sonnet form, which is immediately apparent but little more than a visual shape, seems indifferent to the linear tedium that requires the reader to connect a relative pronoun (“ihn”) to an antecedent occurring five lines earlier (“Blick”). This grammatical and syntactical clutter is at odds with the economy of lyrical form suggested by the vortex of the whirlpool, a “patterned energy” whose integrity does not rely on the material that makes the pattern visible.¹⁰

The physics of the vortex corresponds to an economy of suspense in which inertia and calm are the manifest expressions of an ominous latency. The sluggish and silent paws of the great cats intimate the prospect of oblivion, vaguely threatening and vaguely inviting. As the undifferentiation of self and world, oblivion constitutes an ecstasy known to infants and to whomever slips into the whirlpool (“und nichts mehr von sich weiß”). The drive for self-annihilation couples narcissism with megalomania: Freud refers to the “omnipotence of thoughts” (*Allmacht der Gedanken*) common to small children and shamans, Lacan to those mystics who believed that their visions made them privy to the all-encompassing eye of God. Lacan’s particular definition of the gaze as being proper to the object—his claim that the object returns, *as gaze*, the look of the beholder—is suggestive of any number of poems by Rilke in which the ability of things to see is at stake (Lacan 95-96). His eye on a different poet, Benjamin affirms similarly that to experience a thing’s aura is to invest it with the ability to look back (“den Blick aufzuschlagen”). Concerned with the conditions that cause the aura to deteriorate, Benjamin locates the uncanny novelty of early portrait photography in the fact that the camera (like, indeed, the lifeless eyes of the automaton) records the image without returning the gaze of the person photographed:

¹⁰ See Kenner, especially the chapter entitled “Knot and Vortex” (145-62). Note the description of the vortex in Poe’s “Descent into the Maelstrom” and the *amusement* felt by the narrator as he is pulled toward the whirlpool (445).

Was an der Daguerreotypie als das Unmenschliche, man konnte ja sagen
Tödliche mußte empfunden werden, war das (ubrigens anhaltende)
Hereinblicken in den Apparat, da doch der Apparat das Bild des Menschen
aufnimmt, ohne ihm dessen Blick zurückzugeben. Dem Blick wohnt aber die
Erwartung inne, von dem erwidert zu werden, dem er sich schenkt. (223)

(What was inevitably felt to be inhuman, one might even say deadly, in
daguerreotypy was the [prolonged] looking into the camera, since the camera
records our likeness without returning our gaze. But looking at someone carries
the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. [187-88])

It thus seems especially fitting that the final strophe of "Die Fensterrose" should present a camera obscura: the dark interior of a cathedral penetrated by light entering through the aperture of a rose window. To the extent that this description alludes to photography, the alignment of the rose window with the eye of the cat lends the "apparatus" an animacy which, in the disenchanting world of "Der Panther," even the animal is denied. Turning mechanically in miniaturized circles, Rilke's panther is more the genuine photographic instrument, its eye a lens that opens to receive an image it ultimately does not see:

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf—. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille—
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

(But seldom does the curtain of his pupils
draw up— An image steals past,
goes through the waiting sinews taut with silence,
Goes to the heart and, finally, is lost.)

Its stillness a product of unwavering torsion, the panther's body is a physical analogue of suspense. It is in the carousel that suspense, as an interplay between pleasure and displeasure, finds perhaps its most domesticated variant—a game in which a child repeatedly loses (*fort*) and regains (*da*) a parent watching from the surrounding crowd. Indeed, it is a ritual in which children, for a brief interval, are abandoned to the wild, the wooden beasts functioning as masks that hint at a danger available now only as caricature.¹¹ The logic following which masks keep the mana they embody in abeyance is the logic that understands imitation as repetition (*which the carousel formally demonstrates*). Horkheimer and Adorno adapted Freud's "compulsion to repeat" (*Wiederholungszwang*) to a global trajectory (enlightenment) that not only realized mastery in repetition but also defined the aesthetic in terms of distance, distance being the surplus that mastery produces.

Lashed to the mast of his own ship, the Odysseus of the Siren episode is the ancestor of the classical restraint that Lessing juxtaposed to imitations mistaken for nature—to "signs . . . taken for wonders" (to borrow from Eliot's "Gerontion" ["In the juvenescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger"]).¹² This aesthetic legacy required an indifference on the part of the spectacle, which amounted to a prohibition, made explicit by Diderot, against looking directly at the spectator. Rilke's archaic torso is a spectacle that does look back, and for this very reason its

¹¹ See Benjamin's analysis of carousels in *Einbahnstraße* 62-63.

¹² "Poetry" in German was once referred to as "bound speech"—*gebundene Rede*.

marble surface shimmers like a predator's fur (*Raubtierfelle*), intimating the danger implicit in the reciprocated gaze: the spectacle that cannot see is a panther in a cage.

The threefold occurrence in "Das Karussell" of the benign object par excellence, a white elephant, identifies a stationary point of observation apart from the moving spectacle whose self-containment is experienced as indifference. The spectator's alienation is that of Benjamin's photographic subject, who peers into an apparatus that does not see him:

Und auf den Pferden kommen sie vorüber,
auch Mädchen, helle, diesem Pferdesprunge
fast schon entwachsen, mitten in dem Schwunge
schauen sie auf, irgendwohin, herüber—
Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.
(And there on horses perched they circle by,
girls, too, bright, and for this horseplay
really overgrown, amidst the fray
they look up, any which way, over here—
And now and then a white elephant)

The aimlessness of this *irgendwohin* and the chance and momentary coincidence of otherwise disparate lines of sight suggest a dislocation and multiplication of perspectives familiar from the Baroque (Jay). If Rilke's spinning carousel is like a camera, it is also a lavish and animated façade in which the immaterial triumphs. It might therefore be argued that photography restores to the fleeting impression the privilege it enjoyed in Baroque aesthetics. Certainly what Benjamin described as the morbid experience of being photographed is akin to what Nietzsche saw as the mask-like effect of a beautiful building (178-79): one is met in either case with a vacant stare. The carousel, its lions and elephants vestiges of empire, performs a radical disarticulation of soul and mask, and of center and periphery, culminating in a "blind game" commensurate with a postmedieval, Newtonian universe that makes room for chaos, and as such, fortune:

Und das geht hin und eilt sich, daß es endet,
und kreist und dreht sich nur und hat kein Ziel
Ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau vorbeigesendet,
ein kleines kaum begonnenes Profil—
Und manchesmal ein Lächeln, hergewendet,
ein seliges, das blendet und verschwendet
an dieses atemlose blinde Spiel
(And it goes on and rushes till it ends,
and circles and turns round and has no plan
Some red, some green, some grey shot past,
a profile small and hardly yet begun—
And now and then a smile, this way facing,
a blissful one, which dazzles and disappears
into this breathless blind game . . .)

In the course of the carousel's acceleration a form that begins "with a roof and its shadow" ("Mit einem Dach und seinem Schatten") relinquishes its opaqueness. Wooden animals lose their contours and disappear into a whirlwind of verbs of motion and disembodied colors, out of which flashes the occasional

smile, as insubstantial as the colors themselves, which motion has set free of their material supports.

This dissolution of stable and distinct forms recalls, as I suggested at the beginning of this essay, Wölfflin's description of Baroque art, an art in which outlines are blurred, light and shadow achieve a value unto themselves, and, accordingly, forms begin to "play": "Das Ganze gewinnt den Schein einer rastlos quellenden nie endenden Bewegung" ("The whole acquires the appearance of a restlessly teeming, never-ending movement" [135]) (qtd. in Simmen 13). Furthermore, if Wölfflin's analysis effectively describes Rilke's carousel, it is also consistent with an economy of unlimited growth, not to mention a cosmology that reflects and promotes the dream of boundless expansion. Such systematic transgressiveness is implied in Wölfflin's characterization of Baroque chiaroscuro, which in the extreme may make the object depicted appear to "jump out of the picture plane" (31-32).¹³ In a similar formulation, but with reference to Lumière's famous film of an approaching locomotive (*L'Arrivée d'un train*, 1895), Noel Burch notes "the extraordinary effect of depth produced by a framing that makes the train arrive toward the spectator (35)." The new-found sympathy for Baroque art and architecture may in fact indicate an affinity between that earlier epoch and the age that produced spectacles such as Lumière's film. Anticipating the advance of Lumière's locomotive by roughly seven years, Wölfflin's description of objects that appear to leap out at the beholder also conjures the latent potential of Rilke's panther, whose cage marks a boundary in sudden need of fortification. A fin-de-siècle reemergence of "baroque" instabilities marks an attenuation of bourgeois ideology, which had camouflaged economic adventurousness as restraint and made restraint the touchstone of an aesthetics synonymous with interiority. The fact that the early cinema houses were lavishly adorned "palaces" not only suggests the return of the Baroque as film but also identifies the Baroque itself as a "cult of distraction" (Kracauer 311-17; Maravall 118), whose excess and frivolity the nineteenth century had systematically stifled.

This connection is supported by the trajectory of the recent work of Gilles Deleuze, work which includes studies of both early cinema and the Baroque. In the latter instance (and the later book), Deleuze emphasizes a disjunction between façade and interior so complete that either term, absolute in itself, thrusts the other forward. It is no longer a question of an excessively decorated and overly filled interior threatening to "explode" what contains it, for the inside, Deleuze insists, is already "an inside without an outside"; it is a spectacle seen from within, a *mise-en-scène* in the strict sense, "offered to the gaze that discovers it entirely from one point of view" (*The Fold* 28-29). Although one might argue that Deleuze releases the Baroque from the projections of a generation (Wölfflin's) whose anxieties about the unsustainability of a closed interior caused it to look to the seventeenth century for the image of rupture, his discussion of the chiaroscuro of German Expressionist cinema identifies an agoraphobia ("the [sublime] rediscovery of the infinite in the spirit of evil") that by now should

¹³ "Durch die Verschärfung des Kontrastes von Hell und Dunkel kann der Eindruck bis zu dem eines wahren 'Herauspringens' gesteigert werden" (31)

seem all too familiar—namely, the abhorrence of a void whose reemergence within spells the end of the interior as locus of illusion: “[Murnau’s *Nosferatu*] reaches a climax when a powerful light . . . isolates him from his shadowy background, making him burst forth from an even more direct bottomlessness, giving him an aura of omnipotence which goes beyond his two-dimensional form” (*Cinema 1* 53).

The two-dimensionality violated by *Dracula* is what, according to Siegfried Kracauer, the early movie palaces were meant to uphold. Films were routinely preceded or interrupted by variety acts, and the fluidity between stage and flat screen facilitated the repeated creation and destruction of the illusion of cinematic space. Likewise, the elaborate ornamentation of these theaters served to stimulate peripheral vision in order that the audience not “disappear into bottomlessness” (“ins Bodenlose versinke” [314]). The return in *Nosferatu* (1922) of the abyss as vampire—the personification of *horror vacui*—demonizes the axis connecting deep background to foreground, which some twenty-five years earlier had placed the spectator squarely in the path of a locomotive-turned-beast.

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