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Introducing turbulence and turmoil into the academic text

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the Baroque*

EDITED BY
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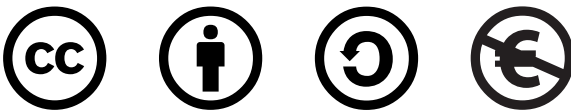
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BAROQUE AS TENSION: INTRODUCING TURMOIL AND TURBULENCE IN THE ACADEMIC TEXT

Mattijs van de Port

WHY DO I NEED THE BAROQUE TO MAKE SENSE OF MY ANTHROPOLOGICAL research findings, or rather, what can the baroque bring out in these materials? What I take the baroque to be – an aesthetic impulse, rather than a clearly delineated, historically situated style; an intuition about the failure of representation, rather than an alternative representational mode; a sensibility, rather than an art – will be elaborated below. Here, at the beginning of this essay, I would like to point out that this baroque that I have been introducing in my thinking and writing over the last years came into being in response to very particular ethnographic materials. I had therefore best start this essay by briefly introducing you to my work so that you may get an idea as to what ‘materials’ I am talking about.

My research has taken me to tumultuous places: the war-ridden Yugoslavia of the early nineties with its all-out destruction and disintegrating life worlds (Van de Port 1998); the Dutch underworld, with its unpredictable and incalculable violence (Ibid: 2000); and, for the last decade, Salvador da Bahia, where spirit-possession cults and ecstatic religiosities blossom as never before in the context of a global metropolis (Ibid: 2011). One of the things that struck me most about these worlds was the vast gap between life-as-it-presented-itself-to-my-interlocutors

and the way they represented this life to themselves and others. I found myself in places where, as David MacDougall (2006) would phrase it, *being* and *meaning* were frequently at odds with each other, where there was an almost palpable absence of reliable narrative frames that might provide guidelines as to how to interpret events, how to act, what direction to choose.

In my continuing attempts to theorise this gap between life and its cultural representations, some fieldwork scenes have become emblematic. For Yugoslavia, I keep returning to that old woman in the blackened ruins of her shelled home in the East Slavonian town of Vukovar. Given her old age, and knowing what atrocities were committed in this region in World War II, the war of the early 1990s must have been the second devastating event this woman had been forced to live through. Standing amidst the rubble, she lamented the loss of an indoor plant. With tears running down her cheeks, she described how big and lustrous it had been. 'Such enormous leaves it had', she added, waving with her arms to indicate the size. The way she said it evoked an image of her watering that plant every day, from one year to the next, watching it grow and become fuller, and the growth of that plant strengthening her faith in the new Titoist era, an era that had promised that wars were a thing of the past, and had allowed her to build a home with indoor plants that can grow to maturity. Yet amid the ruins she was forced to see that she had framed her life in a particular image of what life is like, and that the world in which she lived did not comply with that image.¹

For the Dutch underworld, I immediately think of the certainty with which drug traffickers would talk of 'the laws' of the underworld. 'We all *know* that if you mess up in such and such a way, you get the bullet', they would tell police investigators. But they knew full well that there are no such 'laws' in their business. You may get the bullet for 'messing up', but you may also get away with it. Or get the bullet for reasons beyond your calculations. The self-assured tone with which these drug dealers spoke of the rules that governed their lives was not an expression of confidence – far from it. It was more of a mantra which served to screen off the fears and paranoia that the absence of law generates (Van de Port 2001).

For Bahia, I often recall the shock of José, a young shop assistant, with whom I had seen the Hollywood movie *A Beautiful Mind* in a local movie theatre. This

movie casts the delusions of the mathematician and Nobel Prize winner John Nash as schizophrenia, forcing José to reconsider the nature of all the spirits he himself had seen during his life. José lives in a world where the reality of spirits interfering in human affairs is pretty much taken for granted. He had been telling me countless stories of spirits visiting him at night, giving him messages, taking him places. Yet now he had been confronted with a powerful reframing of these experiences. ‘Am I really mad?’ was the first thing he asked me when we left the movie theatre.

These recollections keep reminding me just how much anthropology had taught me to approach my interlocutors as people who are secure in the knowing of their life worlds, and how little my training had prepared me for the frailty of that knowing vis-à-vis life-disrupting events. I found – and keep finding – myself insufficiently prepared for the extent of people’s not-knowing; their doubts; the fluidity and incoherence of their views; for the amount of guessing and ad-hoc opinionating that goes into the construction of meaningful worlds; for the way people may find themselves lost between irreconcilable paradigms.

My struggle as an anthropologist and writer is therefore increasingly this: how can I move my readers closer to this sense of being lost? How can I instil in them the appropriate mood from which to observe and interpret the world-making² of Yugoslavs, drug traffickers, and Bahians? One would think that this should not be that much of a problem. After all, the fact that life is always in excess of our knowing is as defining a feature of our own being as it marks the lives of the people we study. As academics, we too are caught up in attempts to dream up a coherent, well-signposted world, firmly embedded in our representations of it, just as we are also plagued by the fact that real life keeps interrupting such daydreaming. We keep instructing ourselves, however, not to dwell on the shaky grounds on which our representations rest. We write about what we know, not about what we don’t know. And we thus seek to temper that uncomfortable suspicion that ‘the world itself lies largely beyond our linguistic and intellectual grasp’ (Jackson 2012: 29). Subjecting the world to our orderly aesthetic of straight lines, clear categories, coherent narratives, transparent methods, neat schemes, and learnt vocabularies, we provide our readers with a sense of being in control. The people we study may be lost. We are not.

In anthropology, the ‘writing culture’ debates of the 1980s questioned many of the stylistic conventions of academic world-making (see Marcus and Fisher 1986; Clifford 1988; Crapanzano 2004; Geertz 1989).³ A much discussed – but unfortunately much less practised – ‘literary turn’ sought to face the inadequacies of academic modes of representation, and opened up a space for the fuzziness, ambiguity, and indeterminacy that pervades life-as-it-is-lived, allowing a poetic register to play its part in ethnographic writing. However, it only takes one little step out of the confines of the ‘writing culture’ debate to see how its propositions have been marginalised in the social sciences and humanities, which are strongly committed to the idea that the university is a fact-producing industry. The critical reflections that were put forward in these debates have been reduced to an option (‘ah, I see, you are into “writing culture”! How interesting!’), rather than an epistemological turning point.

Allow me to present you some other emblematic images in order to underscore my point that it is very hard to escape the moulds into which academia casts its representations of the world-out-there. Picture me, struggling to evoke those dark and mud-smearred tragedies of war-ridden Yugoslavia in a vacuum-cleaned conference room, full of spotless white Formica tables. Me, trying to bring the all-pervading fear that ties the lives of drug dealers to my audience’s conscience, while in the background the projector produces a reassuring humming sound. Me, trying to summon up the mind-boggling dimensions of a Candomblé spirit-possession ceremony with a chair waving a note saying ‘5 minutes’, adding that ‘at 11 a.m. sharp there is coffee and tea’. Don’t get me wrong; I am all in favour of strict chairs at conferences. What I am trying to hint at is that there is something utterly unbending in the formats that academia offers us to report on our research findings; something utterly impossible in the ways we seek to transport other worlds into academic settings and representational practices. Therefore, when I read John Law’s admirable attempt to invent a ‘sociology of mess’ two decades later, his arguments sound as fresh and as urgent as if the ‘writing culture’ debate had not taken place at all:

parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and statistics, but other parts are not, or if they are, they are distorted into clarity

[...] if much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't have much of a pattern at all, then where does this leave social science? How might we catch some of the realities we are currently missing? (Law 2004: 2)

Which brings me to the baroque. Part of the problem I have sketched is about aesthetics, about issues of style, indeed, about the lack of recognition that our academic reports are as much subject to stylistic conventions as novels, poems, paintings, and buildings and not merely 'neutral reporting'. To adopt a term from Birgit Meyer (2010: 751), academic reports are 'sensational forms' (i.e. 'authorized structures of repetition that tune the senses and allow for particular experiences to occur'). As many have pointed out, the particular stylistic conventions that rule in academia are heavily marked by earlier attempts to mimic the natural sciences (see Lepenies 1986). Sociologist Alvin Gouldner (1974) wrote about Classicism as one of the deep structures of the social sciences, whereas Clifford Geertz subsumed the stylistic imperatives of academia under the label 'literalism'. Geertz succinctly articulated the tacit understandings underlying this style, when he wrote

[t]he strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands we talk about it without a fuss – a spade is a spade, a rose is a rose – on pain of illusion, trumpery, and self-bewitchment, leads on to the strange idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact (1988: 140).

Hindered by this invisible straightjacket of academic sensational forms, a number of social scientists, philosophers, and cultural analysts have explored the baroque to find possible alternatives for academic practices of representation.⁴ Clearly, scholars have moved in very different directions in their explorations of this aesthetic, so much so that in her detailed exposition as to how 'the baroque' has figured in debates in art history and philosophy, Helen Hills sighs that 'the term readily lends itself to extension such that it becomes meaningless' (2007: 67). One of the constants in these explorations, however, is that these

scholars found themselves seduced by the expressive forms the baroque has on offer, and the promise of epistemological innovations they contain. The baroque's preference for excess, fragmentation, instability, metamorphosis, labyrinthical complexity, polycentrism, irregularity, distortion, disharmony, and boundlessness (to mention but a few of the formal traits that have been gathered under the label baroque) suggests possibilities for an alternative organisation of textual representations, one which arguably suffers less from the academic imperative to 'distort reality into clarity', and which might make this sense of finding oneself gone astray amidst tumult and turmoil present in our texts.

With this prospect in mind, I have recently joined the search for a baroque alternative to the sensational forms of academia (Van de Port 2011; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c).⁵ The most immediate incentive for this move was the rich baroque legacy I encountered in the Bahian capital Salvador, where I have conducted fieldwork since 2001. In Salvador, the baroque is being pointed out to you almost everywhere: in the colonial churches and palaces; in monuments, artworks, fountains, and museums; in the pomp of religious processions and the ecstatic mood of religious celebrations; in the aesthetic preference for over-the-top exuberance, glitz, and theatrical excess displayed in the acts and attitudes of the Bahian popular classes (which ethnologist Pierre Verger famously described as Bahia's 'street-baroque'); or in the curly, flowery rhetoric with which Bahian academics and public officials tend to address their audiences. Bahians explicitly instructed me to take notice of their baroque ethos, using the term to characterise their ways of being: 'we are very *barroco*', is what they would say over and over again.

The second incentive to adopt the term was the reading of a most inspiring book by the Dutch art historian Frank Reijnders, *Metamorfose van de Barok* (1992).⁶ In this study, Reijnders discusses the baroque as the anti-art par excellence. The spirit of the baroque – which he finds to be operative in various moments in the history of the arts, not just in the historical period labelled 'the baroque'⁷ – disrupts an understanding of the arts as the articulators of all that is perfect, good, true, essential, and pure in the world. Hence the title of Reijnders' work: far from being a unified style, Reijnders' baroque is in a process of constant

metamorphosis, continuously trying to break into harmonious dream-worlds, whether they be of a classicist, romantic, fin-de-siècle, or modernist signature.⁸ In Reijnders' vision, the baroque is a creative intuition that appropriates artistic vocabularies and techniques, but uses these as a crowbar with which to break open worlds of perfection, so as to bring out the lack in all artistic representations of life and being.

Following Reijnders' take on multiple 'baroques', I will take my encounters with the Bahian baroque (and with the other 'baroques' I encountered in the body of literature on the style, as well as during my travels in Middle- and Southern Europe) as the empirical starting point for an exploration of what this disruptive aesthetic can do to bring the tumult and turmoil of the world into a scholarly text. In other words, my conceptualisation of the baroque in this text is 'intersubjective': the concept helps me to mark the differences between the way my Bahian interlocutors assemble their world, and the way a Dutch academic tends to go about this.

Juxtaposing academic and baroque ways of world-making brings up a number of interesting issues for consideration. The first issue I faced was how to avoid the 'domestication' of the baroque's capacity to produce turbulence and tumult, and the accompanying sense of 'being lost'. Take the image below (Fig. 6.1), which shows a so-called 'miracle room' in a sanctuary in Candeias, a small town in the Bahian interior. The room is full of ex-votos and gifts that were left there by the devotees of Nossa Senhora das Candeias. To subject this site to a formal academic analysis – picking apart the constituent elements of this jumble, classifying them, and explaining their meaning – runs the danger of dulling the shrieking, unsettling, and confusing assault on 'straight thinking' that this site so powerfully calls into being. In other words, to subject the baroque to the orderly aesthetics of academia threatens to render its disruptive powers harmless, which would make this whole project of exploring baroque alternatives to our modes of representation redundant. John Law's suggestion to shift the focus from discussing what a baroque aesthetics *is* to a focus on what a baroque register *does* – how this aesthetic 'enters into *experience*' (Law, this volume) – might help us out of this problem.



FIG. 6.1 Miracle Room in Candeias, Bahia.⁹

Which brings me to a second issue I had to ponder. For me, to think of the baroque is to conjure up images in my mind, rather than texts. Say ‘baroque’ and I see the endlessly folded garments of the statues of the saints in the Museu da Arte Sacra in Salvador, the ornate decorations of Bahian church interiors, the *trompe l’oeil* ceilings, the complicated play of the gaze in baroque paintings, or the jumble of Bahian ‘miracle rooms’. I am aware that there is a ‘textual’ baroque, a corpus of literature that might be explored for its tropes, rhetorical strategies, and undisguised ‘mannerisms’. Yet I must admit that for me (and I venture the opinion that I am not the only one), the lure of the baroque lies in its visual appeal to the senses, its *folie du voir* (Buci-Glucksman 1992). I found myself challenged to think through how the experiences evoked by baroque visuals might be brought into my texts; in other words, what kind of ‘cross-pollinations’ are possible between textual and visual mediums?

A last issue I needed to address in my explorations of the baroque is the fact that Bahian baroque occurs in a thoroughly religious society. Its work of disruption is driven by metaphysical concerns (and the politics therein implied). As I will elaborate below, it sought (and seeks) to articulate humans’ relation to the

Divine, or to be more precise, it sought (and seeks) to bring the lack in human-made worlds of meaning to consciousness, to thus produce a yearning for the transcendent, omnipotent power of the Divine – the *luz divina* (divine light) that is capable of replenishing the world and making it whole. I will argue that it is exactly this capacity to bring a transcendent realm beyond representation to consciousness that makes an exploration of the Bahian baroque useful for the epistemological innovations that I am after. I am of course aware that the religious motivations underlying baroque expressivities are hardly a selling point in academia, an institute that takes pride in being heir to the Enlightenment. To make a baroque intervention appealing – and I am, indeed, thinking quite strategically here – it is necessary to explore the similarities and differences between the ‘God’ of the baroque and more secularist contemplations of the ‘wholly other’. I will do this by making two hitherto unrelated scholarly discussions speak to each other. The discussions I am referring to are, on the one hand, those of art historians and cultural analysts like Reijnders, who took the baroque to be an ever-metamorphosing spirit of disruption, an aesthetic impulse that seeks to heighten a sensibility for the limits of all representational practices (Reijnders 1991; Calabrese 1992; Ndalianis 2004). On the other hand, I refer to the discussions of a number of philosophers and social scientists of the Lacanian notion of the Real (Žižek 1989; Stavrakakis 1999; Eagleton 2009), the dimension of being that confronts us with the lack in our representational capacities, and tears our reality definitions out of joint.

In what follows, I will elaborate on these issues in reverse order, starting with a discussion of the baroque as a religious ‘aesthetics of persuasion’.

THE BAHIAN BAROQUE AS A RELIGIOUS ‘AESTHETICS OF PERSUASION’¹⁰

The montage-like statuettes that you see in Fig. 6.2, examples of a popular art form from nineteenth-century Bahia, are my favourite illustration of the spirit that pervades the baroque that I encountered in Brazil. They are called *O Menino Jesus no Monte*, the Child Jesus on the Mountain. They are sometimes



FIG. 6.2 Lapinhas¹¹

also referred to as *lapinhas*, ‘little caves’, as many of them exhibit a dark void in the middle of the mountain, suggestive of a cave. What little information I found on these *lapinhas* reveals that they were made in convents in the Bahian Recôncavo area. The nuns from the town of Santo Amaro de Purificação were particularly famed for their artistic skills, and produced these *lapinhas* in great numbers (Marques and Araújo 2006; Silva 2007).

In their basic structure, the *lapinhas* are all alike. What you see is the child Jesus who, in king-like posture and outfit, reigns over a world that is represented as a messy pile of fragments: rooster, seashell, rabbit, house, little man, flower, duck. Glued to the mountain in random fashion, these individual elements are mere emblems: their meaning does not exceed the depth of a pictogram. Nothing in these *lapinhas* invites you to ponder the deeper significance of those roosters, flowers, or ducks, nor their mutual relations. Quite to the contrary: they invite you to ponder the *absence* of pattern, harmony, and synthesis, and entice you to

contemplate the lack of ‘wholeness’ to the world that they so strikingly express.¹² In some of the lapinhas that are on exhibit in a small museum in the centre of the Bahian capital Salvador,¹³ the piling up of fragments goes even further than the two examples presented above. The result is a veritable jumble of figurative elements. Watching these lapinhas, one can almost see those poor nuns, tucked away in their convent, fully absorbed in their frenzied attempt to recreate the world from which they had been banned by gluing ever more emblems to the mountain. Soldier. Church. Carriage. Horse. Negro-with-guitar. Bridge. Bottle. Peacock. More seashells. Mermaid. More flowers. And yet, all that the resulting encrustation of the mountain does is to dramatise the utter failure to grasp the world in its entirety by piling up its separate elements. Indeed, the thick crust of emblems first and foremost highlights that dark, empty cave in the middle of the mountain: a void that underscores the hollowness of this universe, its lack of inner meaning and substance.

The one element that brings harmony to these statuettes is the figure of the Menino Jesus. The divine child on top of the mountain, stretching out his little hand in a gesture of blessing, allows the fragments to cohere (and to be perceived as ‘the world’) just as it is this divine presence that is able to negate the emptiness of the cave below. And yet, for as much as the posturing of the kingly child speaks of a triumphant faith that brings order to an incoherent world, these lapinhas are tinged with a certain melancholy. For everything about them – most strikingly the disproportional size of the child Jesus in relation to the world below and its uninvolved and strangely directionless smile – works to suggest that this divine presence may be at work *in* the world of men, but is certainly not *of* this world.

This interpretation of the lapinhas takes its main cues from the work of Walter Benjamin on the baroque and a number of scholars who followed his line of argument.¹⁴ They have argued that the highlighting of the incompleteness of human-made worlds of meaning – and the notion of the Divine as an *absent truth* that might replenish this lacking world – spoke to the experiences of people who were living the turbulent religious–political developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Being the art of the Counter-Reformation, as well as the art of the ‘conquest, seizure and subjugation’ of the pagan peoples of the New World (del Valle 2002), the baroque sought to impose a revitalised

Roman Catholicism on a world ridden with religious conflict and schisms, where the taken-for-grantedness of a divine omnipresence was under siege. It was an aesthetic that expressed the disintegration of the sacred canopy *and* sought to counter it; it registered God's receding from the world of men *and* sought to stop this from happening; it was informed by people's despair over the fact that the presence of metaphysical truth in the world of men could no longer be taken for granted *as well as* by their hope that truth might reside elsewhere. 'Desperate faith' is how Bainard Cowan (1981: 119) labelled these two opposite dimensions of the religious mood that pervades the baroque. The tragic awareness of the imperfection of human-made worlds fuelled the yearning for a transcendent, divine agent who might mend the rents and fissures. A verse from songwriter Leonard Cohen beautifully captures this duplicity in baroque aesthetics: 'there's a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in' (in Fabian 1998: 34).

Two baroque churches in Bahia may serve as an example to spotlight how these 'cracks' were played out aesthetically in a religious setting, not only to bring that all-powerful yet absent God to presence, but indeed to provoke an encounter with that absent God in ecstatic experiences.

The Igreja de São Francisco in the Bahian capital Salvador is part of a Franciscan convent, and was built between 1708 and 1723 (Talento and Hollanda 2008).¹⁵ Somewhat hidden at the far end of the Terreiro de Jesus, the central square of the historical Pelourinho district, it comes across as 'yet another baroque church' (Terreiro de Jesus alone counts four huge baroque churches, the city many more). To enter the church's interior, one has to pass through a narrow and rather uninviting corridor which entirely fails to prepare the visitor for what is coming (or indeed, adds to the shock effect); stepping into the church, one finds oneself in the midst of what is best described as a 'golden storm', an overwhelming, whirling jumble of gilded ornaments, which produces a veritable 'blast' to one's sensory apparatus.

The most noticeable aspect of the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco is what some have called the *horror vacui* of the baroque, its 'fear of empty spaces' (Hansen 2006). Wherever you look, there are woodcarvings smothered in gold leaf, panels of *azulejos*, paintings of biblical scenes, or statues of saintly figures. The rectangular, hexagonal, rhombic, and star-shaped surfaces in between the

complicated geometrical patterns of the vaults on the ceiling all contain paintings with more biblical scenes. The multicoloured marble floor is decorated with wild, curly vegetal motives. Every single object – chandeliers, candle stands, balustrades, balconies, altars, columns, doors, holy-water fonts – seems to have spurred on the decorative zeal of the builders and become a pretext for more ornamentation. The interior is like a lapinha turned inside out: the jumble is no longer to be found on an object you can hold at a distance so as to contemplate it: you are now inside it.

Trying to take in the excessive decorations, the eye soon gets lost in what seems to be an unstoppable movement of curling, curving, and spiralling, producing an acute sense of dizziness. Adding to this dizziness is the fact that the designer's indulgence in ornamentation leads to the blurring of all clear lines. All sharp divisions and forms are covered by a thick crust of decorative elements, leaving them amorphous, like an old shipwreck on the bottom of the ocean, covered by shells and corals.

Clearly, this space does not want you to maintain your distance so as 'to get the picture straight'. Its aesthetic tactic is to overwhelm you, to engulf you,



FIG. 6.3 Igreja de São Francisco, Salvador da Bahia!⁶

to break down the control that ‘observation’ allows. The sensation it seeks is to push you off track, to provoke a sensation of falling, of being lost, of losing one’s grip.

This sensation continues at a semantic level. Transformations and metamorphoses are everywhere. Decorative curls become plants, which in turn become human figures. When giving them a second, more attentive look, acanthus leaves reveal the features of a lion’s head. Human limbs, not connected to any body, hold out chandeliers: reduced to mere decorative elements, they prohibit the idea that the category ‘human’ would somehow be a privileged category in the order of things. Everything could well be something else. Are these angels really angels? Many offer their nakedness to the congregation as ever so many flashers. Some seem pregnant. Some have remarkably erect nipples. Some look at us as if they were a prostitute soliciting at a street corner. Most of them boast silly smiles and other rather idiotic facial expressions, so stupid that you can’t help thinking that the slaves who did the woodcarving must have had a good laugh mocking the facial expressions of their Portuguese masters (a point that is also stressed by the black tour guides who take tourists into the church and help them to ‘read’ the interior).

And yet, for all the dizziness that the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco provokes, a description of my impressions would not be complete without mentioning its experiential antidote. For as much as this place seeks to induce in its visitors a sensation of losing their grip, no one actually falls when entering the church, or loses control. And intriguingly, it might well be again the design of the interior that brings about this sensation. For in the storm of whirling ornamentation, the statues of the saints remain calm and serene, resting points for the eye in spite of their flowing robes. More importantly, the overall structure of the interior has a theatrical set-up – the corridor of the nave, flanked by dark wooden pews, and the arched aisles all draw attention to the altar, thus bringing into focus the huge statue of Saint Francis embracing Jesus on the cross.

It is in this simultaneity of ‘losing one’s grip’ and ‘being led towards the Saviour’ that this church interior is at its most effective: the sensation of disorientation and instability comes hand in hand with an awe inducing sensation that a transcendent power, capable of keeping it all together, is present in this

space. Dizziness is produced to derail the subject, only then to grab this falling subject and lead him up to salvation.

The *trompe l'oeil* ceilings found in many of the Bahian baroque churches (Fig. 6.4) and elsewhere (Fig. 6.5) offer a second intriguing example of the baroque capacity to unsettle sense perceptions so as to provoke a head-spinning encounter with the blissful, transcendent realm of the Divine.



FIG. 6.4 Igreja da Matriz, Santo Amaro da Purificação, Bahia¹⁷



FIG. 6.5 Gesù, Rome¹⁸

Evidently, these ceilings negate the closure of an architectural space and suggest that the believers who have gathered for worship under this roof gain access to an infinite 'beyond'. They are, quite literally, a material expression of the thought that it is through the 'cracks' that the light gets in.

Yet the power of these ceilings does not rest in their being the illustration of a 'thought'; it rests in their capacity to make that thought experientially real. When I look up to these ceilings, I am of course aware that this representation of the heavens is a painting, an illusion, a 'trick' that is played on the eye (as the term *trompe l'oeil* suggests). Such knowing, however, does not prohibit a powerful, dizzying sensation of having access to – and partaking in – the infinite heights that are depicted. In other words, when I visit these churches and look up, I cannot fully dismiss the trick as being 'merely a trick'. Even though I am fully aware that my senses are being 'played' by the architectural space and the painted ceilings, part of my experience escapes this knowing. The knowing that the encounter with the 'transcendent' is 'in fact' a bodily sensation does not undo the mystery either. Film scholar Vivian Sobchak's insightful observations of her relation to the image on a film screen easily translate to the *trompe l'oeil* ceiling: 'As the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact, engaged in a constant activity of reciprocal realignment and inflection' (Sobchak 2011). Watching the image is thus the 'commingling of flesh and consciousness, the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning and where it is made does not have a concrete origin in either bodies or representation but emerges from both' (Ibid.). This 'meaning without concrete origin' – which has been called 'the sublime' in discourses on the arts, and the 'numinous' or the 'ineffable' in religious studies – opens a window onto a mysterious 'beyond', a larger, overarching reality plane that, while fully real, remains ungraspable for the intellect: an absent truth.

The instances of a religiously inspired baroque that I have discussed are fine examples of what Birgit Meyer calls 'an aesthetic of persuasion' (Meyer 2010). Clearly, the Catholic Church sought to inscribe the subject's experiential encounters with an 'infinite beyond' into its particular conception of the moral and political order, to thus endow that order with a touch of the sacred. Ecstatic

experiences of the ineffable were to be invoked via images, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of religious architecture, music, and pompous ritual and at the same time to be controlled through catechism and theological explanation. The ecstatic experiences of the great mystics of the baroque were brought to the community of believers in poetry, essays, tracts, and autobiographical reports: the mystical experience of an encounter with the Divine was to contribute to a 'science of the soul'. In other words, the experiential *je ne sais quoi* evoked in baroque art and architecture was attributed, *post hoc*, with a concrete origin: it was an experience of the Divine.

The attempts by religious institutions to 'colonise' the experiences of the ineffable they produced in their arts are what the baroque anthropology I seek to design would want to undo. But then again, my idea is not to reject the authority of the religious 'coloniser' of the ineffable in order to replace it with the authority of academia. Instead I would suggest toppling the Menino Jesus from the mountain, but then to leave its place vacant.

THE-REST-OF-WHAT-IS

The term I ended up working with to conceptualise this vacancy, this 'beyond' to all representation, is 'the-rest-of-what-is' (van de Port 2011), a catchphrase which summarises the writings of philosophers and cultural analysts such as Yannis Stavrakakis (1999), the early Slavoj Žižek (1989; 1997; 1999), Alain Badiou (2002), and Terry Eagleton (2009) on the Lacanian concept of 'the Real'.

The Lacanian 'Real' refers to the existential human condition that the symbolic orders that promise us to make sense of ourselves and the world fail to capture the experience of ourselves and the world in its entirety. The Real is thus not to be confused with 'reality'. On the contrary, these authors keep stressing that the Real is the *other* of reality, the dimension of being which makes us aware just how much our reality is dependent on our representations of it. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Slavoj Žižek describes the Real as

the starting point, the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolization [...] which in a sense *precedes* the symbolic order and is subsequently structured by it when it gets caught in its network: this is the great Lacanian motif of symbolization as a process which mortifies, drains off, empties, carves the fullness of the Real of the living body. But the Real is at the same time the product, remainder, leftover, scraps of this process of symbolization and is as such produced by the symbolization itself (1989: 169).

Intriguing contradictions abound in this Lacanian notion of the Real. First of all, the Lacanian Real must be conceptualised as a radical negativity in that it resists all symbolisation, representation, and narration. ‘Cancelling out the Real, the symbolic creates “reality”, reality as that which is named by language and can thus be thought and talked about’, writes Yannis Stavrakakis (2002: 526). ‘The Real is what remains outside this field of representation, what remains impossible to symbolize’ (Ibid.). Any claim to be able to articulate the Real is false, for an articulation of the Real would imply that this ‘beyond-of-our-knowing’ now finds itself *within* the horizons of the known – and is thus no longer what it was. The-rest-of-what-is must therefore be conceptualised as forever strange. It is the elusive, mysterious, ungraspable, inarticulable, inexplicable, baffling dimension of being. In his remarkable study *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics* (2009), Eagleton puts it like this:

[The Lacanian Real is] a version of Kant’s unknowable thing-in-itself [...] we can grasp this alien phenomenon only by constructing it backwards, so to speak, from its effect – from how it acts as a drag on our discourse, as astronomers can sometimes identify a celestial body only because of its warping effect on the space around it (Eagleton 2009: 149).

And yet, for all of its ungraspable characteristics, the Real derives its solid-sounding name from its unchanging and stone-like nature: it is, as Žižek puts it, ‘the rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles’, and ‘the hard core which remains the same in all possible worlds’ (1989: 169).

The other major contradictions that are to be faced when pondering the notion of the Real concern the way people experience and evaluate its presence in their lives. As I have just suggested, the Real reveals our structures of signification to be lacking: it is the excess, the surplus, the 'beyond' of our realities; the inevitable by-product of the process whereby form is carved out of the formlessness that Michael Jackson – following William James – has called the 'plenum of existence' (1988: 3). The Real is experienced as a constant threat to the stability of cultural definitions of what is possible, normal, credible, or true. Unrelentingly, the forces of the Real besiege the fortresses of meaning in which we have taken refuge. It is therefore not surprising that people shy away from confrontations with anything or anyone who raises an awareness of the Real and erect taboos and prohibitions to prevent this from happening.

And yet it is exactly because of its location beyond representation that the Real is also positively evaluated as fullness, totality, healing, and wholeness. As the-rest-of-what-is, it is the promise of having access to the infinite that the baroque *trompe l'oeil* ceiling holds out to the congregation of believers. Traumatic encounters with the Real may be experienced as blissful *plenitude*, or the 'All' that mystics have described as 'the oceanic feeling'. 'Nothing is lacking in the Real', says Žižek. 'The lack is introduced only by the symbolization' (1989: 170).

The focus of these writers on the 'failing' of the symbolic order does not mean that they find lack and incompleteness always and everywhere. On the contrary: it is exactly because of the awareness of the lack in symbolic modes of world-making that these thinkers have come up with such wonderful and insightful descriptions of the pivotal role of fantasy in covering up the rents, fissures, and black holes in the structure of meaning (see Žižek 1997; Stavrakakis 1999; Veenis 2012; Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering 1988). As Stavrakakis argued, fantasy is not the opposite of reality (as colloquial wisdom has it), but supports reality: it emerges exactly in the place where the lack of reality definitions becomes evident (1999: 46). Indeed, reality can only acquire a certain coherence and become desirable as an object of identification by resorting to fantasy.

This line of thought offers some striking correspondences with the (religiously inspired) baroque insistence on the incompleteness of man-made

worlds of meaning and the evocation of a potentially redemptive ‘beyond’ to these worlds. Žižek’s observation that ‘nothing is lacking in the Real’, that ‘the lack is only introduced by the symbolization’ (1989: 170), is fully compatible with a baroque discourse on the plenitude of the Divine, which presents the lack – via such forms as the *trompe l’oeil* or mystical ecstasy – as the beyond. Lacanian understandings of the Real are even more reminiscent of negative theologies, which insist that God is unfathomable and maintain that the Divine can only be understood in terms of what it is not; or radical theologies such as developed by Karl Barth, who sought to differentiate the human affair called ‘religion’ from the absent truth that is God: ‘For Man, God is always on yonder side, always new, far, strange, sovereign, never within reach, never in his possession: saying God means saying *miracle*’ (Barth 2008: 95). In these theologies, the difference between ‘God’ and the-rest-of-what-is seems to be reduced to a mere choice of terms.

The differences between religiously inspired baroque and Lacanian articulations of the human condition are as striking. In Lacanian thought, the baroque construct of a divine being called ‘God’, capable of imposing its all-encompassing meanings and morals onto the world, can only be understood as a desirable fantasy object, the imaginary solution to the lack that pervades the worlds of meaning and morals in which human beings dwell. To replace the Menino Jesus on top of the mountain with the Lacanian Real is to replace it with an empty signifier. It is indeed, to leave its place vacant.

BAROQUE WAYS OF KNOWING

I opened this essay with the observation that the stylistic conventions of academia are not very appropriate to instil in readers that sense of ‘being lost’ which I deem crucial to understand the world-making that goes on in turbulent places such as the former Yugoslavia, the Dutch underworld, and Bahia. I suggested that the baroque is a rich repository of sensational forms with which to reveal that sentiment, and I found in Lacanian musings over the notion of the Real an apt academic equivalent. The suggestion now presents itself that we might

simply 'go Lacanian', instead of 'going baroque'. Undoubtedly, such a move would produce a whole set of resistances (Lacanian thought is controversial, to say the least), but at least one would be working with ideas and arguments put forward by intellectuals in a thoroughly academic style. In other words, with Lacan our ideas would be challenged, but our ways of knowing would not be messed up.

The problem, however, is that replacing the baroque with its Lacanian avatar is exactly the kind of 'domestication' of baroque expressivities that I would like to avoid. No mistake about it, I have been much inspired by Lacanian scholars, in that they have enabled me to intellectually grasp the lack that lies at the heart of all representational forms and see the overlap in the existential plight of people in places as far apart as Vukovar, Amsterdam, and Bahia. They have helped me to think about the fact that the world does not comply with our narrations of it and to chart the implications of this observation for the anthropological study of world-making. Yet the way these scholars address me as a reader is very much within the modes in which we academics 'go about knowing': their vocabulary is experience-distant with contrived intellectual formulations and abstractions; they require me to think hard and deep; and they force me to stay attuned to the development of their argument, to follow them along, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter. They thus take me further and further from the ethnographic situation that I want to report on and ever more into academia. In addition, there is the intellectual satisfaction that is offered in this kind of writing: working hard to grasp the complicated arguments, the reader is continuously provided with a sense of mastery that is well caught in the very verb 'to grasp', which my dictionary of the English language translates as 'to seize and hold firmly'. It is for such reasons that these scholars only get me halfway to where I want to go: in allowing me to stay in the academic universe, and allowing me to experience this sense of mastery, they separate me – and my readers – from that old woman in her ruined home, from those paranoid drug dealers, and from the fears that a Hollywood movie caused in the mood and mindset of a young Bahian shop assistant.¹⁹

The baroque – or rather, the baroque that is being designed here: one from which an omnipotent and beneficiary God has been evicted – does not offer the satisfaction of a sense of mastery or being in control. It seeks to make the

lack that is at the heart of all world-making ‘experienceable’, not graspable. It is ecstatic, in that its movements are centrifugal, transporting its subjects out of familiar intellectual terrain, away from those rooms with white Formica tables and humming projectors. It seeks to shock, to confuse, and to derail by alerting its subjects to the rest-of-what-is, and unlike the Lacanian thinkers, it does not seek to make up for the tensions it produces. It does not shy away from the discomfort it gives rise to – a sense of non-accomplishment, unfulfillment and impotence – but seeks to add such affects to its palette. This, then, is why I am seduced by the baroque: it holds out the promise that its rich repository of expressive forms might bring me (and my readers) experientially closer to what it is like to be lost in the rest-of-what-is.

One may ask, of course, whether these propositions still fall within accepted ideas as to what academics are supposed to do. After all, one might argue that experience-centred modes of knowing, and emotional and affect-full apprehensions of life, pertain to the realm of poetry, literature, music, and the arts. I do think, however, that a separation between academics who cater for the ‘thinking’, and artists who cater for the ‘experiencing’ reproduces a false dichotomy of the disembodied knowledge practices of the academic versus the experience-full knowledge practices of the artist. As argued above, reading an academic text is an experience-full activity, producing all kinds of sensations, albeit sensations of *a certain kind*. It is exactly because the academic writer seeks to limit the range of sensations that are admissible in his or her text that we can think of ‘academism’ as a style, an ensemble of aesthetic conventions that casts the world in a particular light and produces particular reality effects.²⁰

Just how much academics are performing ‘emotion-work’ became clear to me when I came back from war-ridden Yugoslavia. The emotional overtones in the demands of my audiences to undo the ‘bloody mess’ of the world I had studied were hard to miss. The intense news coverage of massacres and atrocities in ‘a place where we used to go on holiday’ (as the often repeated phrase had it)²¹ had unsettled them. They wanted to be released from the tensions caused by shocking televised images. They sought to be *soothed* by my texts, comforted by the thought that it all appeared very chaotic and unfathomable, but that an expert might actually show that underneath the bloody mess ‘it all made sense’.

My resistance to delivering that comforting experience of release and relaxation, my stubborn refusal to clean up the mess, my attempts to send my readers into the mud, and the opposition this approach encountered (not least by a rather positivistic alter ego in my head) made me aware of how much we are under pressure to instil a particular kind of emotion in our reader's minds and bodies: the tranquillity and peace of mind that pertains to a world brought to order, the contentment that follows the illusionary sensation of being in control again. In response to hesitancy about bringing in emotion, I would say that maybe that is what we've been doing all along. The question is not whether we would want to open up our academic texts to emotions, but whether we want to expand the range of emotions that we deem admissible.

As I have made clear by now, a broadening of the experiential world that is an academic text is exactly what the baroque attention to the-rest-of-what-is might accomplish: to infuse our intellectual conquests of the rest-of-what-is with our not-knowing, our bafflement, our missing-out-on-things – and the feelings of discomfort, despair, and excitement this infusion may give rise to: to make our readers aware of the emotional undercurrents that accompany the eternal struggle to make a-story-to-live-by out of a world that is 'vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't have much of a pattern at all' (Law 2004: 2).

'How then to realise this?' one might ask. Introducing literary modes of writing which allow for more poetic registers of articulation are one way to go. In contrast with academic instructions to the author – to define, to fix, to delineate, to make explicit, to explain, to give 'the complete picture', to conclude – literary modes of writing wilfully produce 'gaps' and open ends to engage and activate the reader's imagination, inviting the reader to bring the narrative to life with his or her own idiosyncratic associations. As Wolfgang Iser puts it, in his masterful analysis of 'the reading process',

no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the *whole* picture before his reader's eyes. If he does he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realise the intentions of his text (1972: 287).

I am aware that inviting the reader to search for experiential or emotional overlap between his or her moments of derailment and being lost, and those of the people he or she is reading about, may strike the academic as odd and unwanted. For indeed, this implies the transfer of emotions that pertain to the reader's situation to the ethnographic setting: for instance, the life drama of that old woman in bomb-shelled Vukovar becomes experientially linked with, say, the drama of the loss of a dear friend due to illness, or even something as banal as losing him because of his move to another city. Such transfers of emotion may seem preposterous, or even disrespectful of the greater plight of others. But then again, in the reading process, these transfers of emotions of the reader to the characters and events that figure in the text are an inescapable given. Identification with a story implies this kind of emotional trafficking. It is not as if this is an 'option'. Rather, it is given with the act of reading. Moreover, as Wolfgang Iser explains, the inescapable fact that the reader brings in his or her own emotions does not mean that the encounter with the other does not take place.

The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact this reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text, and yet in supplying all the missing links, he must think in terms of experiences different from his own; indeed, it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him (Iser 1972: 287).

Readers are emotional and sentient interpreters of our words and always already implied in the making of our texts. In that sense, the moves I propose are towards a recognition of the role of the reader's imagination, and an exploration as to how that imagination can be played differently. They are *not* the clearing of a new path.

The other road to a realisation of a baroque anthropology, that is more

welcoming to the idea that there is a ‘rest-of-what-is’, is a reconsideration of the role that visuals might play in our reports. As stated, the baroque immediately conjures up images in one’s mind. Visual anthropology, a subdivision of the discipline where the form of knowing that is ‘looking’ has been intensively discussed, has recently introduced some very inspiring ideas as to what images might do in academia. David MacDougall, for instance, systematically compared writing/reading and filming/watching as knowledge practices, and explains how images are always in excess of what the producer of the image wants from it: ‘Shots are filled with both relevant and (to me) extraneous matter at every level [...] they drift constantly toward the actual complexity and indeterminacy of the experienced world’ (2006: 41). Whereas the containment of this ‘extraneous matter’ is the never-ending problem of the filmmaker, it is also the great potential of film as a medium, for it is exactly in this surplus that one may catch ‘glimpses of being more unexpected and powerful than anything we could create’:

in films the complexity of people and objects implicitly resists the theories and explanations in which the film enlists them, sometimes suggesting other explanations, or no explanations at all. In this sense, then, film is always a discourse of risk and indeterminacy. This puts it at odds with most academic writing, which, despite its caution and qualifications, is a discourse that advances always towards conclusions (MacDougall 2006: 6).

The digital age greatly facilitates the use of images in texts, and with online publishing all kinds of hybrids between texts, images, moving images, and sounds become imaginable. The exploration of these opportunities is only the beginning. By and large, images appear in texts as illustrations of an argument already made. The illustrations in this article are a case in point. And yet even here, the sovereignty of these images is not restricted by my narrative. For example, take the photograph of the miracle room in Candeias (Fig. 6.1). I introduced this image in my text to illustrate the baroque receptivity for mess. The upper right corner of the photograph, however, reveals an (earlier?) attempt by the caretaker of this site to neatly arrange the ex-votos on shelves. This detail does not undo my reading of the image, but signals other possible readings.

A more radical example of the way images may introduce the-rest-of-what-is into our reports is the photograph below. It shows the statue of a bleeding Christ in yet another Salvadorian baroque church, São Domingo de Gusmão. I might use this image of a human corpse thrown in front of an elegant Rococo altar, frozen in its convoluted rigor mortis, and with wide open eyes, to ‘serve’ an argument about the baroque insistence that the mystery of being escapes our intellectual grasp. Yet as it ‘hits us in the stomach’, as it jeers at such attempts to control it by typing a caption under it saying ‘Fig. 6.6, Christ figure, Igreja de São Domingos de Gusmão’, this image also catapults us out of the universe of this text. It is no longer an illustration of arguments made about the Real, it is a frightening encounter with it.

Instead of shying away from artistic resources in our reports on reality, I plead for crossovers into the realm of the (visual) arts. Why not grant the image a larger role than that of *illustrating* our arguments? Why not profit from the stubborn resistance of images to be fully subjected to our intellectual grasp? And given the fact that we are not artists ourselves, why not cooperate with artists and their capacity to provoke experiences of the sublime? I have long thought that to make such moves towards a new role of images needs to be justified. But I am more and more convinced that what needs to be justified is the decision to keep the power of images at a distance.



FIG. 6.6 Igreja de São Domingos de Gusmão, Bahia²²

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS: APERTURES

In this chapter, I have sought ways of making the gap between life and its representations present in anthropological reports, and so to counter the stylistic conventions that dominate academia and disrupt their comforting effects on readers. In the baroque I found a rich repository of sensational forms to express the intuition that all representations are ultimately lacking, as they cannot host 'the plenum of existence' (Jackson 1988: 3). Or rather, the baroque seeks to make that tension present, by hinting at the beyond of each and every representation, a field that I called the-rest-of-what-is.

I take this tension to be given with the condition of being human, the symbolising animal whose dependence on cultural representations is 'so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability' (Geertz 1973: 99). To phrase it with the grandiloquence and bombast that befits the baroque: as cultural beings we are all required to store our life and being in narratives which fail to deliver on their totalising promises. Moreover, I would argue that it is this common human experience that provides the meeting ground for anthropologists, the people they report on, and the readers of anthropological reports. We have all been derailed at some point, torn off the track we thought we were on, heading towards the future of our imaginations. And to a differing extent, we have all encountered the upheaval and despair – or the excitement and bliss – that may invade our consciousness at such moments. It is this commonality that might bring our readers experientially close to that old woman in Vukovar, to the 'desperate faith' with which those drug-traffickers clung to the thought that the underworld is subjected to strict laws, to the confusion of José that the spirits he interacts with are possibly a sign of schizophrenia.²³

The other possibility for introducing turmoil and turbulence in academic modes of report lies in a further exploration of our 'modes of address', the way in which we engage our readers to partake in the stories we have to tell. Acknowledging that the act of reading is not only an intellectual activity but also an embodied and experiential one opens up avenues for interpolating our readers as affective and sensuous beings. The baroque teaches us that there are ways to make the encounter with the rest-of-what-is happen in the act of

reading. Instilling in the reader ‘a sense of being lost’ might bring about a deeper identification of the reader with the subjects portrayed in the ethnography, and a greater commitment to find ways to relieve their plight.

For those of you who detect in this last ‘vista’ yet another fantasy to screen off the lack that lies at the heart of the anthropological project – yet another fantasy of comfort – I can only say ‘yes indeed’. I find relief and comfort in the thought that the world does not comply with anyone’s narration of it, and might therefore be a more welcoming place than we make it to be.

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NOTES

¹ For a full account, see Van de Port (1998) and (2013c).

² I use the term ‘world-making’ for people’s ongoing attempts to carve meaningful worlds out of the plenum of existence. I take anthropology to be the study of these attempts.

³ In an interesting special issue of *Etnofoor* (2011, XXI: 2), a number of authors – Michael Jackson, Kirin Narayan, Paul Stoller, and Barbara Tedlock among them – revisit the writing culture debate.

⁴ Next to the works that are referred to throughout the text, my readings on Brazilian baroque include Averini (1997); Ávila (2001); Bastide (1945); Freire (2006); Grammont (2008); Hansen (2006); Montes (1998); and Underwood (2002). For the use of the baroque in imagining the social I have acquainted myself with the work of Deleuze (2006); Benjamin (1977); Buci-Glucksmann (1992); Calabrese (1992); Ndaliansis (2004); and Wolin (1994).

⁵ As stated, the baroque served to articulate the tensions between life and its representations, which my earlier work in Serbia and the Netherlands had already brought to the fore. The main concepts I had used in this earlier work were the ‘Dionysian’, the ‘wild’, the ‘primitive’, and, more specifically for Serbia, the ‘Balkan’.

- 6 I thank my colleague Jojada Verrips for bringing this book to my attention.
- 7 This point is also made by Calabrese (1992), who speaks of the baroque as an artistic ‘impulse’.
- 8 Elsewhere, I have discussed the baroque dimensions of camp (van de Port 2012) and punk (van de Port 2013a).
- 9 Photograph by Mattijs van de Port.
- 10 For a full discussion, see Van de Port (2012), pp. 159–181.
- 11 Photograph by Sergio Benuti. Copyright courtesy of the Acervo Fundação Instituto Feminino da Bahia.
- 12 The *presepios* (cribs) that are set up in homes in the Bahian interior around Christmas time share the characteristics of the *lapinhas*. Next to images of the Holy Family they contain all kinds of items that aesthetically appealed to the women who assemble them – including empty shampoo bottles, canned sardines, and potted plants, producing a proliferating, messy mountain that sometimes takes up half the space of their living room. This particular ‘messy’ aesthetic is also a striking characteristic in the ‘miracle rooms’ of Bahian pilgrimage sites, as the photograph from the Bahian town of Candeias illustrates (Fig. 6.1).
- 13 The collection of ‘Meninos no Monte’ can be found in the Museu Henriqueta Catharino, which pertains to the Instituto Feminino da Bahia, once an old boarding school for rich girls in the centre of Salvador, now with a wonderful collection of popular religious art.
- 14 Benjamin (1977); see Owen (1980); Cowan (1981); Wolin (1994).
- 15 For a full account of this particular church interior, see Van de Port (2013b).
- 16 Photograph by Mattijs van de Port.
- 17 Photograph by Mattijs van de Port.
- 18 Photograph by Mattijs van de Port.
- 19 For a full discussion of this theme, see Mattijs van de Port, ‘Reading Bruno Latour in Bahia. Or: How to Approach the Great, Blooming Buzzing Confusion without Going Mad’ (2015).
- 20 One only needs to read Roland Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), a wonderful treatise on ‘reading’, to be reminded that reading is as much an experiential activity as an intellectual one (or else recall the phenomenologist’s understanding of the embodied ground of all mindful activity).
- 21 There was always a striking tone of *indignation* in the way people would say this, a sense of having been *betrayed*.
- 22 Photograph by Mattijs van de Port.
- 23 Highlighting this commonality is by no means an invitation to forget about the specificity of individual cases, to ignore that there are different ways in which worlds may fall apart (that there are different intensities of collapse – slaps and blows). I urge ethnographers to always zoom in on the particular and culture-specific modes of dealing with moments of derailment.

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