

CHAPTER SEVEN

‘A PALACE AND A PRISON ON EACH HAND’: VENICE BETWEEN MADNESS AND REASON, FROM THE BAROQUE TO ROMANTICISM

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Lord Byron’s famous opening of Canto IV of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* offers one of the most extraordinary literary portraits of Venice:

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out of the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter’s wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me; and a dying Glory smiles
O’er the far times, when many a subject land
Look’d to the winged Lion’s marbles piles,
Where Venice sate in state, thron’d on her hundred isles!
(IV.1-9)

The passage brings together time and space, history and culture, and, as I shall argue here, reason and madness, and thus defines Venice as a city that is both Baroque and Romantic. This image is, accordingly, a fitting starting point for an exploration of the relationships between Romantic and Baroque conceptions of architecture and the city. The limits of this essay itself only allow me to sketch an argument concerning these relationships and of each conception itself, Romanticism and the Baroque. This argument is grounded in the role of materiality in defining the space or time, or ‘spacetime’ of the city, or any spacetime—physical, cultural, political, and historical, or that constituted by various interactions among these spacetimes, which is in fact always the case. I also argue that

materiality itself must be conceived in the same plural (physical, cultural, political, and historical) and multiply interactive sense. My main thesis is that the materiality pertaining to a given space or spacetime inflects or ‘curves’ this spacetime, as against the Euclidean and then Cartesian concepts of mathematical space, or our (Cartesian) models for other spaces, often based on these concepts.

This statement is literally true in physics, where, according to Albert Einstein’s so-called *general relativity* theory, a non-Newtonian theory of gravity, introduced in 1915, the gravity of material bodies or of other forms of materiality, such as an electromagnetic field, curves spacetime (which physically means that gravity bends light rays). This curvature is, moreover, generally variable, depending on the amount of matter in the vicinity of a given point. The theory is grounded in one of the key concepts of modern geometry, due to Bernhard Riemann, the concept of “manifold”—defined as (in general) a non-Euclidean space, composed of a conglomerate of local spaces, whose curvature may vary. The physical part of Einstein’s theory in part follows Leibniz, arguably *the* greatest philosopher of the Baroque. Leibniz questioned Newton’s concept of absolute (ambient) space in which bodies are placed and argued instead that the idea of space is meaningless apart from the presence of physical bodies. The concept of spacetime was introduced earlier as part of the-called *special* (rather than *general*) relativity theory, formulated by Einstein in 1905 and restricted to the theory of electromagnetic phenomena, such as light, in the absence of gravity. In either form of relativity theory, special or general, one can no longer distinguish unconditionally, once and for all, spatiality and temporality, since space can become time, and time space. By contrast, the concept of spacetime is rigorously applicable throughout, and allows for this exchange between spatial and temporal determinations of events depending on the frame of reference in which a given event is defined. The scheme is correlative to the impossibility of a single frame of reference that would allow one to coordinate all the events in the way it is possible in Newton’s physics. This impossibility gives the spacetimes of Einstein’s theory an irreducible heterogeneity, even in the absence of gravity. The variability of curvature, defined by gravity, gives spacetimes of general relativity an even more radical heterogeneity. Indeed, apart from certain special cases, it deprives them of all homogeneity, in accordance Riemann’s concept of manifold, defined as a heterogeneous, but connected, conglomerate of local spaces (of, in general variable curvature) ‘quilted’ together.

Einstein’s theory has important technological underpinnings in the processes of observation and measurement, which give it a more complex

architecture and/as a form of materiality. Einstein's great initial insight was that space, or time, do not exist independently, for example and in particular, in the form of Newton's absolute space and time, but instead arise, as *effects*, from the technological nature of our measuring instruments, such as rods and clocks, and of our perceptual and conceptual interactions with these instruments (those of our bodies included). This techno-material efficacy of space and time, and of spacetime, is not unlike the efficacy of Derrida's *différance*, that produces, as effects, multiple differences, proximities, and interactions between and among entities that in an un-deconstructed regime would be seen as unconditionally separate or opposite (Plotnitsky 2002, 184-99). Derrida sees *différance* as the material efficacy of both spatiality and temporality, of the spatiality of space and the temporality of time, or sometimes, of the spatiality of time and the temporality of space (Derrida 1982, 13). Materiality is conceived here so as to include the materiality of writing, using the term 'writing' in Derrida's extended sense, reciprocal with a certain radical idea of materiality, coupled to the idea of technology, via *différance* and other Derridean "neither terms nor concepts," such as trace, supplement, dissemination, and so forth. This broader view of materiality allows one to extend Einstein's technological argument concerning space and time just sketched to space and time, or spacetime, of all our cultural production, including that of our theories, such as Einstein's relativity. All cultural artifacts, scientific theories included, become effects, products, of a material *différential* dynamics, and thus are written in Derrida's sense by means of technologies of culture (beginning with pens and pencils, but hardly ending with them).

An analogous type of argument was developed in the constructivist social studies of science, where, more recently, an uncritical view of social constructivism as a single determining "technology" of such productions was reexamined as well, bringing the resulting constructivist argument closer to that offered in this essay (for example, Latour 1999). I am, however, primarily concerned here with extending this argumentation beyond science, to the Baroque and the Romantic urban spacetimes, as *curved* by materiality in its various forms, and their artistic and literature representations. The term 'architecture' may be given a new meaning from this perspective: it creates space, physical and cultural, including political, or time and history rather than is something that is put in space for the purposes of living or other reasons, or even merely something that shapes or reshapes the space it is put in. One might, then, define architecture *as* this materiality, materiality that makes possible any space or time, material or mental, physical or historical, and that defines any specific spacetime,

by always creating and dislocating it, by deconstructing and, importantly, (re)delimiting (rather than eliminating) any spatio-temporality that we might assume to be stable or definitive.

It must be kept in mind, however, that, as Derrida (1982) and Paul de Man (1996) argue, it is impossible to unequivocally dissociate or metaphysically isolate materiality, physical or cultural, from phenomenality. Any specific form of materiality is, in part, given to us by phenomenality, even though phenomenality, too, is the product of materiality, beginning, again, with that of our bodies. These reciprocal interrelationships are irreducible and are themselves part of the type of dynamics that Derrida pursues in terms of *différance* and writing, and de Man pursues in terms of allegory, and specifically Romantic allegory. This process is captured or *allegorized* by Byron's depiction or, again, inscription of Venice, with which I began here. Byron's perception and thinking give Venice its shape, create (along with the physical materiality of the city around him and via the technology of his body) Venice and its architecture (in the conventional sense). Byron's position, as a poet and an exile, on a bridge between a palace and prison, the position that defines poetry and the poet, is reciprocally defined by architectural materialities, physical, cultural, political, including those of Venice. Shelley thematizes the situation in his description of "[his] own, [his] human mind . . . / Holding an unremitting interchange/ With clear universe of things around" in "Mont Blanc" (36-40), which depicts the mountain in architectural and often Baroque terms of "city" and "ruin".

By endowing a given spacetime curvature, and, to begin with, by merging space and time into a heterogeneous spacetime (and, by extension, culture and history into a manifold of cultural-historical chronotopes, as Mikhail Bakhtin would call them), materiality, I argue, also gives it a "Baroque" architecture, as against a Euclidean or Cartesian one. This curving and especially varying curving of chronotopes by materiality and specifically by Derridean or de Manian techno-materiality appears to be missed by Bakhtin, and I would argue, by Henri Lefebvre's analysis of urban spacetimes (sometimes also shifted or *curved* too much toward social constructivism and away from more complex and multilayered materialities). I use the term 'Baroque' both in its historical sense and in its conceptual sense, in part following Deleuze's concept of the Baroque as elaborated in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Deleuze 1992). This sense allows one to extend the denomination 'Baroque' beyond its conventional historical boundaries, all the way into our own time, without in any way diminishing the significance of the historical Baroque; and Romanticism, I argue here, is part of this, still continuing,

history of the Baroque. (The historical Baroque retains its significance in shaping this history.) As noted above, in physics the idea of materiality, as defining the “architecture” of space, originates in Leibniz and, thus, in the Baroque, in Leibniz’s and the Baroque’s confrontation with Newton and the Cartesianism of Renaissance. As Borromini’s or Christopher Wren’s work especially demonstrates, the actual Baroque architecture explores both effects of materiality, spatio-temporality and curvature, at various levels—conceptual, physical, and cultural, including political. So do the Venetian Baroque painters, especially Tintoretto, who has a particular significance for Deleuze’s analysis of the Baroque (Deleuze 1992, 29-31; 75).

Thus understood, the Baroque frees its spacetimes from the imposition of the ‘Cartesian’ or (to the degree one can still use the term) ‘Renaissance’ architecture (mathematical, physical, or cultural) upon them (Deleuze 1992, 3; 32). This imposition would presumably enable a *rational* coordination of points or events in space or time, or spacetime (which may also be conceived, at least culturally, in these Cartesian terms). Ultimately, one would be able to arrive at a single global coordination of all events in space and time. The Renaissance concept of perspective, grounded in Euclidean geometry and grounding the corresponding view of the world, Descartes’s analytic geometry (which algebraically codifies geometrical lines and figures), and Newton’s absolute space and absolute time are among the primary models of this philosophy and ideology based on it. This ideology has its proper material efficacy in the concomitant development of capitalism and, in Louis Althusser’s language, its ideological state apparatuses. By contrast, while Baroque spaces, or, their best mathematical model, Riemannian spaces in mathematics, allow for local coordination and grids (it may not be possible to do without them), they do not in general allow for global coordination.

The cities were gradually made to conform to or to obey more and more this Cartesian rationality and coordination, spatial or cultural, or historical, insofar as their past history was ‘revised’, and their future would be shaped accordingly. Of course, coordination and grids, spatial and cultural, have existed in and shaped cities and other spaces throughout human history. In question here is a broad ideology and its material apparatuses aimed at a global (rational) cultural-historical coordination that defined the city and, along with the life of society, the city life, accordingly. This ideology was also to serve the program of the Enlightenment and was, reciprocally, amplified and, in practice, enforced by this program.

The program proved to be more difficult to advance in some cases, such as Venice, many political pressures, from within and from without, notwithstanding. Some of these pressures unavoidably had their effects, which resulted in losses in the Baroque richness of Venice's spacetimes, lamented by Byron in *Childe Harold*. Still, Venice has managed to remain more Baroque in its spacetimes under the Cartesian siege of the Enlightenment, and even absorb Cartesianism into them. Venice is a Baroque city par excellence, not only in terms of the architecture of its buildings or its paintings, but also in terms of its overall curvilinear Baroque spacetime, physical, cultural, and historical. Indeed, one can hardly doubt that this spacetime helped to bring about its architecture and especially paintings.

Also a mad city, literally a mind *twisting* city, and a (the?) city of madness! This aspect of Venice is symbolized or allegorized arguably most dramatically or tragically by its greatest imprisoned mad man and its greatest poet, Torquato Tasso. Tasso, described as "the Bard" mad and "divine" (echoing Plato's definition of poetry as divine madness in *Ion*), is the first proper name mention by Byron, and it figures significantly in the part of Canto IV devoted to Venice (*Childe Harold*, IV, 146; 19). Tasso's story, as a story of love, politics, and madness, becomes central to Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo*, in part inspired by his reading of the Canto.

With Michel Foucault's analysis of madness in the classical age, the age of Cartesian reason, I give (with due caution) the idea of the Baroque city as a "mad city" a positive meaning. For, one might say that this Baroque architecture or the Baroque more generally gives or restores a certain form of 'madness' to our spacetimes. Indeed, one could, at least metaphorically and perhaps not only metaphorically (since lines are created by us rather than exist as pre-given in some pre-given space, material or mental), define curvature as a certain madness, perhaps the divine madness, of the straight line, as a straight line gone astray, as if deflected, sometimes traumatically, by something within or without it. Unless, it is, on the contrary, the straight line that is a mad curve, and Cartesian coordination and reason are madness—not reason gone mad, but the madness of reason itself. Descartes perhaps already knew this, even if against himself, as Derrida argues in his reading of Foucault, which may be more Foucauldian that it might appear (Derrida 1978). It follows that madness and reason, even in mathematics, let alone in poetry, are not simply or unequivocally distinguishable so as to allow reason to isolate madness, just as Venice or its rulers wanted to isolate Tasso or Paris Antonin Artaud. Artaud, alongside Vincent van Gogh and Friedrich Nietzsche, is Foucault's principal example of madness judging reason,

defined, naïvely, as the grid of the rational. But then, Foucault's point is that these cases, or, by implication, that of Tasso, are not essentially different from most other cases of madness, which reason or, again, something that sees itself as reason wants to isolate. As will be seen, Shelley makes the same point in *Julian and Maddalo*. This is why Foucault argues that each of these cases or any case of madness, or reason, is both exemplary and yet unique in its mixture of reason and madness. In Baroque spacetimes, boundaries between reason and madness are possible, too, and sometimes necessary, but are never unconditional or established once and for all. These spaces combine reasons and madness (as the best reason or madness must do), just as Riemannian spaces in mathematics and Einsteinian spaces in physics combine Cartesian grids or other coordination with the play of curvatures.

Venetian paintings offer remarkable allegories of the architectural materiality of the Baroque in the present sense, that of inflecting and curving spacetimes, interactively, physical, phenomenal, and cultural—from straight lines to curves, from coordination and grids to curved spaces with at most local coordination, from reason to madness. Tintoretto's paintings are perhaps the greatest examples of this allegorization and, thus, of the Baroque in Deleuze's extended sense, and, as I said, they are important for Deleuze's analysis of the Baroque. In Tintoretto's frescoes of the Scuola di San Rocco, virtually all spaces or temporalities, physical and social, are defined by the material, corporeal ('heavy') bodies, architectural or human, and by their movement from the physical architecture and material architectural creation of spacetime in them, to the historical and social, including political, ones, and the corresponding spacetimes. As a result, they also become reflections of, and on, the fact that Venice, beginning with its architecture, is indissociable from its politics and its geopolitics. More accurately, one should speak of the interplay of both. One need not start with physical spacetimes and then move to the historical and social-political ones, although the physical ones might strike one first in experiencing these paintings. Instead, both types of spacetimes incessantly, interminably pass into and define each other, often through the interactions, confrontational or consonant, of the different perspectives on the world offered by their characters.

A significant portion of Romantic poetry, especially that of the younger Romantics, such as Byron, Shelley, and Keats, or their German counterparts, such as Heinrich von Kleist (Deleuze 1992, 125), is concerned with and offers allegories of the Baroque. It explores the emergence of *curved*, as against Cartesian or Newtonian, spacetimes due to the action of materiality upon them, with both these spacetimes and

materiality defined broadly as phenomenal, physical, and cultural, or interactively all three. Specific references to Baroque architecture and cities, in particular, Venice or Rome, in Byron's *Childe Harold* or in Shelley's *Adonais* and *Julian and Maddalo*, are both symptomatic of the significance of these allegories and help to create them. It is worth citing Shelley's letter, written from Milan after a visit to Como, which he describes in terms of a "union of culture and the untamable profusion & loveliness of nature is here so close that the line where they are divided can hardly be discovered". He then writes:

Como is only 6 leagues from Milan, & its mountains are seen from the Cathedral. This Cathedral is a most astonishing work of art. It's built of white marble & cut into pinnacles of immense height & the utmost delicacy and workmanship, & loaded with sculpture. The effect of it, piercing the solid blue with those groups of dazzling spires relieved by the serene depth of this Italian heaven, or by moonlight when the stars seem gathered among those sculpture shapes is beyond anything I had imagined architecture is capable of producing. The interior tho[ugh] very sublime is of a more earthly character, & with its stained glass & massy granite columns overloaded with antique figures & the silver lamps that burn forever under the canopy of black cloth beside the brazen altar & and the marble fretwork of the dome, give it the aspect of some gorgeous sepulchre. There is one solitary spot among these aisles behind the altar where the light of the day is dim & yellow under the storied window which I have chosen to visit & to read Dante there.

I have devoted the summer & indeed the next year to the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness, which I find upon inspection is, if properly treated, admirably dramatic & poetical. (Shelley 1964, 2: 461-62)

The phrase "architecture is capable of *producing*" may be read in the direct sense, at work through Shelley's depiction of architecture in his poetry. Architecture produces a curved Baroque spacetime in which Shelley finds himself, and which his own phenomenal perception and thinking help to construct as such in a reciprocal interchange with the architectural universe around him. The tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness, a quintessentially Baroque subject, linked to the curved, mind-twisting spaces of the Baroque Venice, never materialized. The project mutated into *Julian and Maddalo*, perhaps a fortunate genetic mutation. While keeping the same spacetime of the Baroque and the same city, Venice, as its primary incarnation (also in the direct sense of material embodiment), the poem replaced or rather linked both poetry and the madness of Tasso to, as Shelley says in his Preface, the "agony" found in

“the text of every heart” (Shelley 1977, 113). It is not possible for me to give a proper reading of this extraordinary work. Nearly every line of the poem, by the very nature of the dynamic flow of its poetic curvature (characteristic of Shelley’s poetry in general), inscribes, enacts both the Baroque in the broad sense of this paper and the Baroque of Venice. I would like, however, to comment on the question of madness in the poem from this perspective.

Inspired by the story of Tasso and by Shelley’s reading of Canto IV of Byron’s *Childe Harold*, the poem is structured as a “conversation” (the poem’s subtitle) between its two main protagonists, Julian and Maddalo. The poem ostensibly suggests Shelley as a prototype for Julian and Byron for Maddalo, and gives the corresponding character a few traits of each poet. As, however, a number of commentaries, beginning with Earl Wasserman’s classic study (Wasserman 1971, 57-83), show, the poem makes it both difficult and unnecessary to identify or even to properly correlate the two protagonists with Shelley and Byron respectively. The conversation is a confrontation between Julian’s (roughly Enlightenment) views, explained in detail throughout the poem, and “the darker side” (49) taken by Maddalo, whose specific views, however, are “not exactly known” (Shelley 1977, 113). The case of the Maniac, the third main protagonist (whose name is not given) of the poem, the case of madness, offers an occasion to settle the dispute. The reasons for the Maniac’s illness are not exactly known, and, as I shall explain, may ultimately not be important, although his disappointment in love appears to be the cause. The poem also contains two female characters—the Lady, the Maniac’s companion, and Maddalo’s daughter—who are not given much space but whose significance is considerable, although their role cannot be considered here.

The debate remains unresolved, which is not surprising given the generally skeptical nature of Shelley’s poetry. Instead, as is characteristic of Shelley, more profound questions are posed, giving the two protagonists and the poem’s reader an opportunity to think more deeply about the case and the world. Also, there emerges a new space or, again, spacetime of the relationships between people, a new spacetime of friendship (the words “friend” and “friendship” appear throughout the poem, and dominate the closing part, after an encounter with the Maniac), although I can only mention this aspect of the poem here. The character of Maddalo’s daughter—“A woman, such as it has been my [Julian’s] doom [fate] / To meet with few, a wonder of this earth, / Where there is little of transcendent worth, / Like of Shakespeare’s women: kindly she / And with a manner beyond courtesies/ Received her father’s friend (589-94)—

becomes especially significant in this context. In any event, Shelley's strategy is to refocus on the long, disconnected monologue of the Maniac, or rather partly disconnected, between reason and madness, which is often the language of what reason sees as madness: "The colours of his mind seem yet unworn;/ For the wild language of his grief was high./Such as in measure were called poetry" (ll. 540-542). One might say, with Foucault, that this is the voice of madness, which, however, also measures our reason, especially that part of reasons (or a form of madness in its own right, a dangerous form of madness), which defines madness as that which is outside the *coordinates* (the Cartesian space) of reason. Equally subtle is Shelley's rearranging of the architecture of the space that the Maniac inhabits. In responding to Julian's question: "Alas, what drove him mad?", Maddalo replies:

I cannot say;
 A Lady came with him from France, and when
 She left him and returned, he wandered then
 About yon lonely isles of desert sand
 Till he grew wild—he had no cash or land
 Remaining—the police had brought him here—
 Some fancy took him and he would not bear
 Removal; so I fitted up for him
 Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim,
 And sent him busts and books and urns for flowers,
 Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
 And instruments of music—you may guess
 A stranger could do little more or less
 For one so gentle and unfortunate;
 And those are his sweet strains which charm the weight
 From madmen's chains, and make this Hell appear
 A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear.—
 (245-61)

The allusion to Milton's "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a heav'n of hell, hell of heav'n" (*Paradise Lost* I, 254-55) is extraordinary and remarkably to the point, which contributes to its extraordinary impact. Heaven and Hell are both cities, and Venice may be both, just as was Dante's Florence. The police, part of the surveillance system of the city and of the maintenance of its coordinated order and social grid, bring the Maniac into his proper place of isolation. The Maniac's "fancy" not to be removed from his isolation is an interesting question in its own right, but would require a separate consideration. The main point here is that Maddalo creates a different spacetime, Leibniz

would say, a different *monadological* space or spacetime (the Maniac's phenomenological time is yet another important subject, which I have to put aside here). This spacetime is the spacetime of the Baroque, now that of the Baroque interior, defined, as Deleuze argues, by the complex relationships between the pleats of matter and the fold of the souls, and of their respective curvatures (Deleuze 1992, 2-5). In this type of spacetime, the relationships between reason and madness become radically redefined, preventing their unequivocal separation and thus a rigorous (in either sense) isolation of madness from reason, its exclusion from reason. There are no police, governmental or mental, which can do so, without an abuse of power by the force that is supposed to protect us in reason and madness. The spacetime of the Maniac's room, or the spacetime of Venice, to which it is metonymically related and which it, in part, metaphorically represents, is the allegory of these relationships.

This is a grand Foucauldian moment of the poem, which also allows us, with Shelley and Venice, to bring together Foucault and Deleuze (whose philosophical friendship is akin to that of Byron and Shelley). From this perspective, the reason for the Maniac's madness is indeed less important than his voice, as Maddalo suggests to Julian earlier, before Julian's Enlightenment ideas suffer a shipwreck in the Maniac's room, in the spacetime of the Baroque, beside the sea, a space without grid, upon which our navigation likes to impose (albeit for good reasons) coordinates. As Foucault tells us in *The History of Madness* (Foucault 1988; I use Foucault's original title here), it is not only cases like those of van Gogh, Nietzsche, or Artaud that cannot be measured by reason, if defined apart from madness, and that by their 'madness' measures this 'reason' instead. Foucault appears to be using these cases because they make it difficult for us to separate reason and madness. The main point or at least impact of appealing to them is, I would argue, in showing that every case of madness would, given space enough and time, enough spacetime, reveal the same complexity of the relationships between reason and madness.

This is why Shelley gives no name to the Maniac and says in the Preface that "of the Maniac I [the fictional author of the preface] can give no information. He seems by his own account to have been disappointed in love." Shelley suggests that "the unconnected explanation of his agony will perhaps be a sufficient comment for the text of every heart" (Shelley 1977, 113). That his love story may be tragic, too tragic to be told and made known to "the cold world," which is also the world of cold reason, as the poem's last line tells us (l. 617), only supports and amplifies Shelley's point. One need not be "officially" declared "mad" by reason to be oppressed by it or to prove it wrong when it tries to isolate madness

from thought. In the Maniac's own words: "*Me—who am as a nerve o'er which do creep/The else unfelt oppressions of this earth*" (449-450; Shelley's emphasis). If there is reason, thinking reason, madness is its nervous system. Our neural system is surely a supply system to both, just as canals are for Venice, and for its reason and its madness.

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