

The Logic of Reconciliation

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I want to situate the current debates around personal, social, and political reconciliation within a larger (and, I hope, richer) domain, one entangling philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and ethics. This paper seeks to expose that wider expanse of analogy in which reconciliation appears as a special case. The historical concept I will be exploring — the perceptual judgment of sameness-indifference — as well as its bridging practices are not unknown. But recently the concept has once again become allegorically inverted, either into the tautology of self-same identity or into the endless repetitiveness of "original" traditions. Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction relentlessly promoted the alienating strategies of radical difference. The unraveling of these isolating and antimimetic theories with the emergence of multidimensional electronic media, multiculturalism, and postcolonial and transnational studies offers new opportunities for trying to rejoin the fragments of an ancient suturing rhetoric with the contemporary search for connections. Moreover, in making individual sense impressions intelligible to others, boundary-crossing analogy redeems the mimetic power of images both from a reductive Cartesian technology of deception and from the inarticulateness of the Kantian nonrepresentational Sublime.

Analogy is the art of expressing kinds of relationship. Affinity and kinship provide a flexible framework for asking how any one thing might be provisionally yoked to any other thing in the vastness of the universe. As a dynamic method of inferencing, this cognitive and somatic conjunction assists in the discovery of homomorphic and homologous intermediaries among disjoint forms. Analogy is thus generative of fluid patterns of arrangement and possible narratives. It acknowledges the absence of purity in the repleteness and density of the experiential encounter.

Because my principal purpose is to bring back intersubjective analogy for serious consideration in light of the modern concern to reconcile, I need to sketch the simultaneously cosmological and epistemological order in which this transactional leap arose. I find it significant that, in the West, the problem of locating what we have in common — and the central role of images in that process — emerged as a response to the grim actualities of war in Iron Age Greece. If we look, however briefly, at the pre-Socratics and their genealogy of bifurcation, we observe the beginnings of dualistic reasoning. Getting beyond the limits of actual knowledge allowed one to seize a tantalizing, but foreign, reality. In Paul Grenet's words, the preclassical Greeks adopted an "analogical attitude" to cope with the challenge of how to depict the existence of what cannot be seen (such as a separate soul, or an elusive order), or to suggest the idea of an ephemeral substance without a body. Wind, smoke, shadow, dream, fire, and image were the phenomenological terms of comparison they borrowed to marry the suprasensible to the sensible realm.

But it was Heraclitus (536-470 B.c.) who turned analogy away from the kind of simple, vertical anthropomorphization found in Homer (who used personification to wed the quarrels happening atop Mount Olympus to battles raging below at Troy) and honed it into a general tool for scientific explanation. This "greatest of the Ionians" extended the core concept of a nature divided by war to law, ethics, and human conduct. Violent struggle, in his view, preceded any renovation of opposites, whether in the material, biological, or cultural spheres. This fact was not lost on Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault. Yet, especially in the case of the latter, the reconciliatory potential dropped away.

Empedocles expanded the associative/dissociative binaries in Heraclitus's principle of change and further transformed them into dehumanized drives crisscrossing the universe. Love and Strife depersonalized celestial mechanics into rhythmic impulses imparting motion to the four elements. The implicit tension in this cosmology between the invisible springs of action and their visible effects was made explicit in the writings of Anaxagoras and Democritus. Their development of the physiognomic argument — asserting that behind all appearances lurks something more important that does not appear — was taken up most memorably by Plato (427-347 B.C.).

But it is not the philosopher of the Divided Line that I wish to recuperate here. Rather, I want to linger with the Plato who mollified the intractable dichotomies of the pre-Socratics by the addition of a mediator. To be sure, in the *Timaeus* and the *Symposium*, the Creator or Demiurge always stands *in between* thought and a more precious concealed reality. Yet this apparent valorization of the nonmimetic is tempered by another, forgotten aspect of Plato's dialectics of love. In the *Phaedo*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Politics*, he introduced *Logoi* — literally delicate resemblances floating in space in the middle of the universe — to embody the analogical notion of a third term. These ghostly representations, or fleeting *images*, enable us to make the transition from empirical things to otherwise unseizable intelligible Forms.

Plato uses a watery analogy to evoke the *Logoi*, comparing them to the mirroring waves in which astronomers observe eclipses. Importantly, this is a theory of "soft" (that is, approximating) mimesis, not of the hard facsimile or the empty but rigid simulacrum. The type of undulating motion implied in Plato's account is significant as well. The reconciliation of opposites in a subtly diversified unity comes about, not through drifting or vacillation, but by rocking between poles. Here we have the first glimmers of the mobile faculty of judgment at work, and along with it of *aesthetics* as perspicuousness, as a constantly adjudicating or balancing mode of sensory knowledge.

In this *participatory* theory of analogy (because extremes partake of and are thus modulated by a fluid medium), liquidity mediates the absolute opposition between incongruous orders — whether they be phenomena and noumena, or body and soul, or body and bodies. Louise Bourgeois's glassy installation art offers a protracted meditation on analogy-as-participation: instead of Plato's ebbing and eddying ripples, Bourgeois's evaporating moisture and sinuous flasks render irreconcilability approximate and distance near. In *Cell II* (1991), a host of Shalimar bottles are tightly grouped on a round mirror next to a pair of folded hands. This insistent parallelism of similar forms — varying only in scale and the amount of perfume remaining — contributes to their intrapermeability. It also obliges the viewer continually to estimate, and so adjust, her awareness of presence and absence, closeness and remoteness. *Le Défi* (1991) — the analogical counterpart to Damien Hirst's chilly pharmaceutical allegories and repelling medicinal chests — invokes the incantatory tradition of the Jesuit catoptric mirror-cabinet. This virtual *Wunderschrank*, or dramatic cupboard of shimmering transparent vessels, establishes a connective rhythm among the proportionally varied vases to cross the boundary and meet the viewer on the other side.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991) makes even more explicit this performative aspect inherent in the analogical jump to link. He explores the problem of creating equitable relationships by alluding to the difficulties of achieving synchronicity. Two identical wall clocks, displayed side by side, tick in harmony. Despite coming face-to-face with this incontrovertible evidence of a shared time, the beholder is simultaneously conscious of deprivation. The artist's very effort to establish a moment of mutuality evokes all those other vanished instants when minds and bodies were not conjoined.

There is a vital distinction to be drawn, then, between being antithetical and being inimical. I cannot lay out here (as I do in my book *Visual Analogy*) how, already beginning with the theurgical Neoplatonists of the later fourth and fifth centuries, analogy became converted and inverted into the negative dialectics of allegory.¹ Not unlike the situation in Iron Age Greece, this, too, was a warring period, but one of immensely greater complexity. This divisive epoch witnessed the agonizing dissolution of the Roman Empire, mass diaspora, and the heresy struggles waged by an orthodox Christian monasticism against the hydra of syncretic heterodoxy sprouting in the East.

Allegory, I argue, involved a twin gnostic gesture that hardened over time. Its formal strategy established either a bureaucracy of truth or coterie of nihilism. Either no unfilled space was to be left within the minutely segmented universe (thus obstructing any reconciling leap to resemblance) or all matter was to be cleared out, leaving an untraversable chasm (producing, most recently, the unmooored spin of the signifier). Analogy, as a method for mediating, that is, maintaining a balanced or proportional relation between the world of experience and the noetic realm, disappeared into a clutter of clogging avatars or into a vacuum. Paradoxically, the dichotomizing result was the same: only the identically minded get closer together.

I have recounted this hermeneutical tale of fundamentalist sedimentation and romantic estrangement elsewhere. Here I can only complicate the foundational story of analogy by introducing Aristotle's *predicative* version into the mix. For Aristotle (470-384 B.c.), analogy is both poetic and mathematical-philosophical. As a trope (from *tropein*, to turn) it belongs to the larger domain of metaphor, which is in turn a component of logic. "Translation" best describes its rhetorical function, since metaphor transports words from one order of reality to another. Similarly, speech and conversation conduct meaning through a network of connections going both ways.

Contrary to Plato's participatory dialectic — modeled on the wavy rocking of water — Aristotle develops a judiciary logic rooted in the visual vocabulary of geometry. Significantly, perspicacity continues to play a central, if altered, role. Specifically in the *Topics* and the *Prior Analytics*, analogy is discussed in terms of conformity and congruence, equity and inequity, as Kant will later do when examining the operations of judgment. As a type of incomplete induction enabling us to reason from the particular to the general, this comparative procedure constituted an art of discovery, not a rigorous method. For Aristotle, invention — whether in poetics or in logic — hinges on the creation of an *equivocal* middle term, one that literally stands in between the singular instance and the general rule. Note that its lack of fixity also implies mobility, an alternating between poles.

Similarity, in this system, is the result of a provisional unity, one that rises above each of the individual cases to span items in different or distant categories. Because there are so many variables in bringing disparate properties together under a common rubric, resemblance is partial (i.e., equivocal, not univocal, shifting between the recognition of congruence and incongruence). If the image-in-the-middle, according to Plato, always floats, the middle term in an Aristotelian syllogism always remains ambivalent. In sum, both Plato and Aristotle — despite their important differences — suggest that the reconciliation of contraries comes about through motion. It is through continuous kinetic adjustments that far-apart agents gain proximity or that ordinate things can be fairly coordinated. Moreover, both philosophers emphasize the arcing role of vision in the struggle to overcome alienation. Whether we speak of the imagination's leaps of insight or the jumps of the eye, it takes perceptiveness to recognize and produce junctures.

A constant theme of metaphysics from the later Neoplatonists to Augustine, Descartes, Kant, and Karl Barth was the need to overcome resemblance. In one way or another, mimetic or analogical theories posited mirroring as a central and positive aspect of their operations, while allegory refused

to reflect. Discussions of similarity became hopelessly entangled in the growing polemics surrounding the perils of vision. Pursuing the branchings of resemblance, it was feared, might lead us astray or seduce us into seeing erroneous connections.

Thus for Nietzsche it was only by an aphoristic refusal of plenitude that creation could take place. For Heidegger, Being came into its own through painstaking differentiation from beings. For Walter Benjamin, the decline of aura belonged to a downward spiral shaped by the melancholic interplay of nostalgia and loss. Paraphrasing Ruti Teitel, I want to ask why the most negative form of representation — i.e., nonmimetic allegory — has become emblematic of advanced artistic and social theory. This predictable set of outcomes, I believe, is the lopsided result of following an immature and one-sided cultural pattern.

In order to insert the unrealized analogical project into modern times, I want to recuperate a generally underrated philosopher. Leibniz (1646-1716) deserves to be recognized as the heir of the Plato of the *Logoi*. His multifaceted work is deeply relevant: first, because he proposes a participatory theory of reconciliation that functions within a postcoordinate world; second, because a positive view of optical technology drives his entire system; and third, because, at a fundamental level, his metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are an *aesthetics*. That is, images are not used as mere illustrations but as the embodiments of his philosophy. Without them there would be no understanding.

This great German polymath is our contemporary precisely because — unlike Plato — he can no longer credibly invoke the natural world as a support for images. For him, the connective medium that will engender a community of agents acting upon a diversity of interests at particular points of time and space must be an optical device. The encyclopedism of the late *Monadology* (1714) — a kind of cosmic pointillism — took up the Scholastic challenge to connect God with man. Leibniz, however, transformed this medieval quest into a spatiotemporal game, a gigantic jigsaw puzzle binding the infinite atomic diversity of the universe into compossible concordance. We will see that a very special sort of mirror performed the acrobatics of coordination.

An encyclopedist, mathematician, philosopher, linguist, and simultaneously a utopian and pragmatic political theorist, Leibniz pictured the cosmos not as it appeared when reflected — static and flat — within a conventional looking glass. Instead he deployed a magically illusionistic realm of repeatable objects visible from myriad vantages. In this ontologized theory of perception, the substance of every living thing acted as the unique point-of-view of its soul. The body behaved as if it were wearing one of those multifaceted spectacles that the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher describes in his *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1678). Peering through these curious lenses results in the environment slivering in a distinctly personal way. But reciprocity rules Leibniz's system, and the world also looks back at us. Subjects and objects are momentarily reconciled, just as happens when we gaze into the bulging convexities of a *sorcière* mirror. In this undulating silvery surface — the technological analogue of the watery *Logoi* — apparitional objects project their particular shapes outward to intersect with the look of the viewer. Each distinct locus of matter peeps out from its own angled vantage and re-presents to itself the aspect it witnesses.

The doctrine of preestablished harmony is the ultimate logic of the link. Like a digital computer, this connective system is both automatic and interactive. Monads are caught up endlessly in feedback loops. For Leibniz the world is an infinity of converging series, capable of being extended into each other around unique points. Significantly, a sophisticated theory of analogy undergirds the entire system: "Now this connection, or this adaptation of all created things to each and of each to all, brings it about that each simple substance has relations which express all the others, and that, consequently,

it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe."² As I have been arguing, this "living mirror" is not flat but curved — like the *sorcière* mirror or the metamorphosing spectacles. It animates forms by visually rocking them across a swelling surface.

Leibniz instantiates this scheme of obtaining as great a variety as possible while maintaining the greatest order by invoking one of those glazed cosmological cabinets or catoptric coffer constructed by the Jesuits. These microcosmic chests are themselves the virtual counterpart to the material *Wunderschrank*. If cabinets of curiosities housed encyclopedic collections of disparate objects that had to be hyperlinked through the viewer's insightful "jumps," the mirrored cabinets of the Jesuits boxed the dynamics of an intersecting and reverberating network of light. As Kircher recounts, the faceted walls, floors, and wings of these crystalline theaters of the world multiplied and modified enshrined tiny bits of cork, vegetation, coins, medals, stones, miniature figures, and diminutive buildings to infinity. Leibniz spells out the implications of this new kind of digital communication: "And as the same city looked at from different sides appears entirely different, and is as if multiplied perspectively; so also it happens that, as a result of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are as it were so many different universes, which are nevertheless only the perspectives of a single one, according to the different points of view of each monad."³ Although all monads experience the same world in its totality, they only clearly experience their part of the world.

Here we are given a foretaste of Leibniz's theory of blur. Today we would call it "noise." There is an important difference to be drawn between Descartes's allegorizing notion of the deceiving senses and Leibniz's existential awareness of the limits of human knowledge. Clear and distinct panoramic vision is God's alone. For, at every moment, emotionally charged minute perceptions well up within us, but without rising to consciousness by being focused through reflection. "It is they [the *petites perceptions*] which form I know not what, these tastes, these images of the sensible qualities, clear in the mass but confused in the parts, these impressions which surrounding bodies make upon us, which embrace the infinite, this connection which each being has with all the rest of the universe." Leibniz puts such half-formed inklings and inferences in the middle to cloud linear vision. These filmy intermediaries allow us to extend ourselves multidimensionally, revealing vistas where all things may yet conspire.

By reopening the case for analogy, I have tried to get historical constructs to join our present. Reconciliation is a convergent process somewhere between clemency and condemnation. Separating from an old regime or a prior position entails both a gap and a motion toward something new with which we hope to become partially integrated. I have argued that this limited passage, or unfinished work of transition, needs to be situated within a larger philosophical and aesthetic imaginary, one in which visual media assist in the work of redemption. Artworks as analogues of transitory realities have long established a space for reflection where the subtleties of individual, social, and cultural repetition get played out for all to see.

Barbara Maria Stafford. The Logic of Reconciliation. In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Experiments with Truth. Documenta11_Platform2. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 311-318.

References

- 1 For the background to the present essay see my *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1999). Also see "The Demon of Analogy," a section in my introductory essay, "Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains," in *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Getty Museum of Art, 2001).
- 2 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology*, 1714, § 56.
- 3 *Ibid.*, § 57.