

Becoming Space in Every Direction: *Birdman* as Post-cinematic Baroque

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Abstract

While the post-cinematic is typically understood as the passing of film-as-celluloid, the digital expressivity of film need not involve the loss of materiality. Inspired by Giuliana Bruno's call for cinematic materiality to be re-thought through the substance of material relations rather than through technological definitions, this article examines how the baroque endures in the post-cinematic. Concentrating my analysis on *Birdman: Or, The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014) as one instance of the post-cinematic baroque, it argues for the baroque as being organised by particular vectors of movement that move between the horizontal and the vertical and the inner and the outer, often giving rise to composite and/or highly spatialized displays. Taking inspiration from Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the fold, art history, media archaeology and film studies, I argue for Iñárritu's film as enacting baroque configurations of body, space, movement and environment. As with the formal and affective uplift of the musical and superhero film genres as well as the importance of movement in historic baroque forms, *Birdman* defies the horizontal plane. As I argue it, *Birdman* reprises the longstanding baroque desire to become space in every direction.

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth
(Raymond Carver, *Late Fragment*)

If the question 'what is cinema?' continues to haunt us in the digital age, it brings with it renewed opportunities to consider how the post-cinematic connects with media experiences of the past. The post-cinematic is defined here as the passing of film-as-celluloid though this passing is not equated with the loss of materiality. In her book *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media*, Giuliana Bruno argues that materiality needs to be re-thought 'not

[as] a question of materials but rather [...] the substance of material relations'.¹ By detaching cinematic materiality from tired definitions of a film's technological make-up, Bruno enables an embodied appreciation of how our 'sense of space and contact with the environment' persists in the digital by tracing shifting sets of material and aesthetic relations across film and media history.²

Following Bruno's lead, this article explores how the baroque's substance of material relations might be mapped across the pre-cinematic, the cinematic and the digital. Concentrating my analysis on *Birdman: Or, The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014), I consider some of the ways in which historic baroque configurations of space, body and environment find new life and liveliness in Iñárritu's film. To develop the possibility of a post-cinematic baroque, I draw particular inspiration from philosopher Gilles Deleuze's work in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993). For Deleuze, the baroque is more than just a historic era or even an aesthetic style. What he calls the baroque fold is a trans-historic trait that inflects 'architects, painters, musicians, poets, and philosophers', as well as filmmakers into the twenty-first century.³ If 'the Baroque can be stretched beyond its precise historical limits' as Deleuze insists it can, it is because contemporary media works also have the capacity to move 'according to the fold'.⁴ While *Birdman* is not the only instance of what we might call a digital or a post-cinematic baroque, it allows us to re-visit the history of baroque forms and their movements and how they might connect with cinema for this is a film that moves 'according to the fold'.⁵

To help me establish the relevance of the baroque to the digital expressivity of *Birdman*, what follows will draw important connections between Deleuze's fold with vitalist accounts of the baroque in early art history; with different film genres that are devoted to the lures of movement or moments of uplift and with Norman M. Klein's media archaeology of baroque special effects. To clarify: I am not suggesting that the post-cinematic age is inherently baroque or that the baroque was not present in earlier generations of filmmakers. As I have argued elsewhere, the baroque needs to be expanded beyond notions of a visually spectacular and/or technologically-driven aesthetic if it is to have saliency for contemporary film and media theory. This article continues that endeavour by considering how the post-cinematic baroque is organised by particular vectors of movement that alternate between the horizontal and the vertical.⁶ The attitude of becoming space in every

¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 2.

² Ivi, p. 8.

³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 34.

⁴ Ivi, pp. 33–34.

⁵ Ivi, p. 34.

⁶ See Saige Walton, *Cinema's Baroque Flesh: Film, Phenomenology and the Art of Entanglement* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp.19–22.

direction is a longstanding tendency on the part of the baroque that connects its art history to Deleuze's fold and both to the architectonics of movement that is performed by Iñárritu's film.

Deleuze's Architectonic Folds

In his seminal *Life of Forms in Art* (1934), the early French art historian Henri Focillon was amongst the first to identify the baroque as a recurring or cyclical phenomenon. For Focillon, forms are mobile because they are 'specific to time but also spanning across it'.⁷ According to Focillon, the baroque is a trans-historic form that can reveal 'identical traits existing as constants within the most diverse environments and periods of time'.⁸ In his vitalist and morphological account of form, Focillon is well attuned to the baroque appetite for movement, energy and spatialized dispersal. He suggests that baroque forms yield dispersive displays of movement that transform time into space. To quote Focillon, baroque forms will 'proliferate like some vegetative monstrosity. [...] they tend to become space in every direction [...] to become one with all its possibilities'.⁹

For Focillon, the baroque aesthetic is bound up with a strong sense of liveliness, with movement and with multi-directional dispersal. In his later work on *The Fold*, Gilles Deleuze also understands the baroque as a vital operative function or trait: it 'endlessly produces folds'.¹⁰ Like Focillon's evocative description of becoming of 'space in every direction', Deleuze's baroque insists on arresting movement and spatial dynamism as essential to baroque form and thought. However, Deleuze goes one step further than Focillon by positing that an optical account of the baroque — even the baroque conceived as its own spectacular optic — might be too restrictive. As it is prone to a powerful sense of movement in and through space, Deleuze identifies 'the operative concept of the Baroque [as] the Fold, everything that it includes, and in all its extensiveness'.¹¹ For Deleuze, the fold is the formal and conceptual means by which we can account for both the historic specificity of the baroque and the trans-historic activation of the baroque-as-fold in contemporary media.

While Deleuze's titular guide and interlocutor in *The Fold* is Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, it is the philosopher's use of historic baroque media (especially architecture) and his engagements with early art history that concern me here. Re-reading Deleuze's text alongside early art historic studies of the baroque

⁷ Angela Ndaliansis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 8.

⁸ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. by George Kubler (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1992 [1934]), p. 58.

⁹ Focillon, p. 58 [emphasis added].

¹⁰ Deleuze, p. 3. As Tom Conley notes in his translator's introduction, Deleuze's trans-historic take on the fold parallels Focillon's morphology of forms.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 33.

que, the architectonic implications of the fold become particularly striking.¹² The architectural sensibility of the fold comes to the fore through Deleuze's repeated engagements with the work of the early Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, whom he cites as the first to establish the baroque as a distinct set of 'material traits'.¹³ Drawing directly on Wölfflin's writings on historic baroque architecture, Deleuze glosses baroque material traits as the following: a 'horizontal widening of the lower floor'; a 'flattening of the pediment'; the 'rounding of angles and avoidance of perpendiculars'; sets of 'curved stairs that push out into space'; 'spongy, cavernous shapes'; matter that is handled in 'masses or aggregates'; and the expression of 'vortical form always put in motion by renewed turbulence'.¹⁴

Lest the architectural nature of the fold be missed, consider the references to architectural foundations, façades and frameworks that appear in Deleuze's conceptual scaffolding of the baroque-as-fold. In addition to Wölfflin's material traits, outlined above, the philosopher defines the baroque as inventing 'the infinite work or process. The problem is not how to finish a fold, but *how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity*'.¹⁵ This is Deleuze's radical re-definition of the baroque, as what he calls 'the fold to infinity'.¹⁶ At the same time, his sensuous descriptions of the baroque as air-borne or as a potentially infinite or processual movement rely heavily upon the grounding and solidity of architectural metaphors and motifs. A gravitational pull to earth as opposed to the urge to take flight is particularly evident in Deleuze's allegory of the Baroque House. Here, baroque architecture is put to the purpose of philosophy as a folding between two levels or floors. By way of the Baroque House, Deleuze identifies the baroque as moving between two specific levels that fold between immanent 'pleats of mater' (the lower level; the life of the senses) and the immaterial 'folds in the soul' (the upper level; the life of the mind).¹⁷

Throughout, Deleuze consistently makes use of historic baroque architecture and early art history to argue for the baroque fold as being organized by particular vectors of movement. Invoking Wölfflin once more, he comments that: 'as Wölfflin has shown, the *Baroque world is organized along two vectors, a deepening toward the bottom, and a thrust toward the upper regions*'.¹⁸ He also quotes directly from Wölfflin's first book *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888) to outline how the 'Baroque underlines matter', even though '*it does not suffice to contain the mass that spills over and passes up above*'.¹⁹ For Deleuze, as for this article, the baroque moves between the horizontal and the vertical, the earth and the air, also

¹² Ivi, p. 33.

¹³ Ivi, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 34.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 122.

¹⁷ The Baroque House is Deleuze's means of reconciling any ontological split between the life of the body and that of the soul/mind. See Deleuze, p. 39.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 29 [emphasis added].

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 123.

folding between the inner and the outer (the mind and the senses). How might these ideas be pushed cinematically?

At this juncture, we can identify a number of aesthetic and material traits to Deleuze's baroque fold that can be brought to bear on Iñárritu's film. These features include: the expression of prolonged, processual or infinite movement; a clear foregrounding of architecture; and repeated emphases on vertical movement, flight and propulsion, as this exists in counterpoint to the horizontal. As it enacts a tension between the horizontal and the vertical, seeking liberation from the lower level or else presenting bodies and worldly objects in literal states of suspense or in flight — *Birdman* can be approached as one instance of a post-cinematic baroque that moves 'according to the fold'.²⁰

Birdman begins with the clicking of drumsticks, followed by clashing cymbals and drumbeats that evoke the sounds of rolling thunder. Against the film's percussive score, red letters begin to form a quotation from the last published poem of American short-story writer and poet, Raymond Carver (*Late Fragment*: a poem that was written while Carver himself was dying of cancer). After the film's title appears, we catch a brief glimpse of jellyfish that can be seen beached upon a seaside foreshore. The film then cuts to the unexpected image of a meteor seen hurtling through space. The meteor's downward trajectory and its fiery movement through space is interrupted by a hard cut that gives way to a still shot of the film's lead, Riggan Thompson (Michael Keaton), seen from behind. Like the movement of the meteor, Riggan is suspended in-between the grounding of the earth and the sky. Our introduction to Riggan sees him meditating in a backstage dressing room, while microscopic dust particles float about and the sounds of a ticking clock quietly count down his mortality.

Within the first few minutes of Iñárritu's film, we have moved from the grandeur of macro-scale movements in outer-space to a scene of mundane, earthly reflection. However, the film's enigmatic opening ushers in unresolved questions. Does it belong to an internal or external event? Are these images 'real' or 'imagined'? Are they a metaphoric stand-in for Riggan's mental meditation or perhaps an excerpt from one of his blockbuster movies? Similarly, the first lines of dialogue that are spoken by Riggan's alter-ego, the Bird-Man, could pertain to either the cosmological journey of the earth or reflect the terrestrial angst of a washed-up Hollywood actor on Broadway: 'How did we end up here?'. The opening becomes even more complex if we consider the few brief words of Spanish that can be heard before the film's 'overture' for they feature the composer of *Birdman*, Antonio Sánchez, who can be heard asking director Iñárritu a question.²¹

²⁰ Ivi, p. 34. *Birdman* can therefore be distinguished from other digital films such as *Russian Ark* (*Russkiy Koucheg*, Alexander Nikolayevich Sokurov, 2002). Though both films are structured by virtuoso long-takes, the latter does not enact baroque movement between the horizontal and the vertical. On the digital baroque as avant-garde see Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On baroque haptics and digital filmmaking see also Walton, pp. 208–26.

²¹ Dolores Tierney, 'Dolores Tierney on *Birdman* or *The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*',

From the beginning, *Birdman* introduces a movement between the horizontal and the vertical. Grandiose shots of the sky and outer-space function in clear counter-point with the more mundane concerns of Riggan. In addition, the film moves freely between the internal and the external and between a 'realist' and a 'fantastic' film aesthetic so as to muddy the distinctions between them. Throughout, we watch Riggan/Bird-Man enact super-heroic powers in a film that is not overtly coded as belonging to this genre. Set inside the space of the St. James theatre in New York City, much of Iñárritu's film follows Riggan at ground-level as he rehearses his own stage play adaptation of a Carver short story, *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*. As the camera trails Riggan in the midst of rehearsals or behind the scenes, we get to see Riggan's interactions with the rest of the cast; his troubled relationship with his young rehab daughter, Sam (Emma Stone); his desperate need for artistic affirmation and approval in the wake of his Hollywood career fallout and to witness his psychological conflict with his inner Bird-Man (and all that his alter-ego represents).

For the character of Riggan Thompson, unlike the Bird-Man, the 'art' that is the theatre trumps literature as well as the pleasures of Hollywood 'entertainment'. For *Birdman* itself, however, divisions between media or between Hollywood filmmaking versus 'art' are a much more complicated matter. In his descriptions of the pre-modern baroque 'unity of the arts', Deleuze outlines how separate art forms such as painting, sculpture and architecture were deliberately merged so as to be folded into one overarching and implicitly populist performance.²² In the post-cinematic performance that is *Birdman*, Iñárritu brings together literature, theatre, poetry, comic books, music and cinema and destabilizes the borders between them. Interestingly, the director also makes a number of references to the history of baroque and neo-baroque literature in this film: from the structure of the play within a play format to the inclusion of people on the street shouting lines from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ('a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury') or the scene in which actor Mike Shiner (Edward Norton) can be seen reading a copy of Jorge Luis Borges's *Labyrinths*. And yet, despite this film's many literary references to Carver and to other authors or its allusions to the craft, aspirations or pretensions of the American stage, it is cinema that remains Iñárritu's foremost and virtuoso 'player'.

Writing of the historic baroque unity of the arts, Deleuze comments upon how the baroque seeks to 'attain a unity of the arts as "performance", and to draw the spectator into this very performance'.²³ Similarly, Iñárritu's folding together of multiple media formats is done in order to draw the spectator deeper into the kinaesthetic performance and imaginative potential that is cinema. As William

Mediático: Media and Film Studies Blog, 23 February 2015 <<http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/mediatico/2015/02/23/birdman-or-the-unexpected-virtue-of-ignorance-alejandro-gonzalez-inarritu-2014/>> [accessed 24 March 2016].

²² Deleuze, p. 123.

²³ Ivi, p. 123 [emphasis added]

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Brown comments, 'what really comes through' in *Birdman* is just how powerfully 'cinema can trump theatre through its central device: movement'.²⁴ Expanding Brown's comments further, I would add that it is not just the appeals of cinematic movement that catalyse this film but the baroque desire to become space in every direction. In these terms, baroque forms will detach from the ground by endeavouring to 'go through the ceiling' through aesthetic expressions of infinite circulation and ambient movement.²⁵ Those familiar with *Birdman* will be well aware of how the film is structured by a particular stylistic conceit, achieved in and through uses of digital cinematography and editing. Following the first of its few visible edits, *Birdman* proceeds as the film were one long, fluid and continuous take across multiple spaces and across different time frames.²⁶ Emmanuel Lubezki's camera follows not only Riggan and his movements in and through the St. James theatre but also the film's ensemble cast: bodies move upstairs and downstairs, out onto the rooftop, in and out of dressing rooms and on and off the Carver stage set. The space of the St. James theatre and the movement of its inhabitants therein unfurl in an ever-winding and continuous spatial display wherein 'architecture and film co-exist in the same moment'.²⁷ Just when we thought that every possible nook and cranny of the theatre space had been revealed, the camera then follows Riggan downstairs into the bowels of the theatre before unexpectedly bursting through the stage doors with him and moving outside onto the bustling city streets to meet Mike. Yet another layer of spatial complexity and potential avenue for human as well as camera movement is added.

According to Robert Sinnerbrink, the Mexican-born Iñárritu often favours the structure of the 'network narrative' to portray 'dispersed engagement, coalescing events and clashing story lines'.²⁸ This is because the network narrative allows Iñárritu to plait together multiple plot lines and different diegetic spaces and times, inter-weaving the fates of his different characters or that of entire cities into one labyrinthine structure. By way of *Birdman*, I think we can add post-cinematic and baroque complexity to Iñárritu's use of the network narrative. Rather than weaving together separate plot lines, the film re-configures the network narrative as a multi-directional, architectonic and highly spatialised display that gets physically moved along by the entrances and exits of the characters and the seemingly weightless choreography of Lubezki's camera.

²⁴ William Brown, 'Birdman and the Intoxicating Alchemy of Cinema', *The Conversation*, 6 January 2015 <<https://theconversation.com/birdman-and-the-intoxicating-alchemy-of-cinema-35275>> [accessed 24 March 2016].

²⁵ Deleuze, p. 34.

²⁶ In *Birdman*, editing is disguised by darkness or the calculated use of edges and corners. See Tierney who compares its digitally masked edits to *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948).

²⁷ Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York: The New Press, 2004), p. 11.

²⁸ Robert Sinnerbrink, 'Postsecular Ethics: The Case of Iñárritu's *Biutiful*', in *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation*, ed. by Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 166–85 (p. 169).

Birdman as Baroque Scripted Space

Birdman is not just a paean to cinematic movement. Iñárritu stages very particular kinds of cinematic movement — movements that have the potential for transforming the dynamics of the ordinary and the everyday. For my purposes, it is important to note how this film enacts a constant dialectical tension between the ‘fantasy’ of the vertical (motifs of flight; cinema and superheroes) versus the ‘reality’ of the horizontal (motifs of gravity; the theatrical stage and fatherhood). Even as the film’s human characters tread the theatre boards, the camera repeatedly drifts, floats or orbits around their bodies. Independent of Riggan or of others, the camera’s vision will halt to contemplate the verticality of buildings; to linger on the motion of birds in flight or scenes of the sky transitioning from day to night. Through his inclusion of air-borne motifs together with Lubezki’s ambient camera, Iñárritu make it seem as if the film itself were trying to take flight.

In his *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Superman in the 20th Century*, Scott Bukatman draws important formal and conceptual parallels between the superhero and musical genres. As he details, both genres enact a ‘freedom of movement’ that allows them to superimpose ‘the fantastic on the face of the utilitarian, bringing the city back to the fact of its own fantasy’.²⁹ Likewise, Iñárritu’s film partakes of the freedom of movement; scenes of urban fantasy and moments of literal as well as affective uplift that pervade these two genres.³⁰ As Bukatman observes, to be a superhero or an inhabitant of the musical ‘you’ve got to be able to move’ or, at very least, access enhanced powers of human motion’.³¹ Through the seeming effortlessness of song and dance, the urge to flight or displays of super-human strength and speed, both superheroes and musical characters embody the agility of the other-worldly. Given his tongue-in-cheek references to the Hollywood super-hero, it is not surprising to find that Iñárritu’s own Riggan/Bird-Man (played by a former Batman) is endowed with his own special motorial powers that involve levitation, flight and the telekinetic manipulation of objects. Similarly, Lubezki’s camerawork enacts its own carefully rehearsed and digitally achieved super-human movement. In this regard, *Birdman* encourages us to *feel* as if its vision were live and natural and akin to the spontaneous eruption of energy, grace and movement that occurs in a Hollywood musical (numbers that themselves were just as labour intensive as well as skilfully timed and carefully choreographed as the camerawork displayed here).

What might all this have to do with a baroque organisation of body, space and environment? To answer that question, we must turn to Norman M. Klein’s

²⁹ Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 189.

³⁰ Note the musical significance of this film’s location on Broadway; advertisements for musicals that appear throughout or the use of percussive beats and sounds while the characters walk and talk.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

notion of the baroque scripted space. In his book *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects*, Klein conducts an illuminating media archaeology of baroque film and media by tracing their roots back to the ceiling and dome decoration of seventeenth-century Europe. As these were purpose-built architectural sites that the beholder had to personally navigate, movement was essential to feeling the scripted space. To quote Klein: ‘when the sky was askew on a ceiling, it operated like *an animatic*, a five-minute stroll towards revelation, from pride to humility, from hubris to prayer’.³² If grand-scale ceilings and domes opened up a sensory portal to the divine, that portal could only be accessed through the movement of the beholder below. The ‘space underneath [the] dome generated [...] *walk-through stories*’ that encouraged the beholder to enact their own ‘tangible path to God’ through walking, drifting and free floating ‘inside the skin of these domes’.³³ Scripted spaces speak to how the baroque is entrenched in palpable connections between body, space and environment that will open up in multiple directions.

Obviously, these architectural effects existed centuries before film and they were also catalyzed by very different historic and socio-political contexts. Like Bruno, however, Klein refuses technological specifics in order to cut a media archaeological path from the history of scripted spaces into cinema.³⁴ His work suggests a walk-through mode of story-telling that can be extended to films whose architectonics moves from the horizontal to the vertical. Whether analogue or digital, such films build towards moments of formal and affective uplift through their privileging of movement, uplift and weightlessness. Wandering about inside the scripted spaces of the historic baroque, the beholder had encountered all manner of gravity-defying effects. From flat walls that bent and curved to an array of ornamental figures, often floating in mid-air (angels, clouds, cherubs and, of course, birds). These in-built special effects were intended to move not only the body but the mind of the beholder into moments of elation and/or private contemplation. Like *Birdman*, scripted spaces were carefully designed to unfurl in multiple directions and to alternate between impressions of weighted form/bodies as opposed to weightlessness. The progressive movement of the beholder concluded with epiphanic movement in the mind, triggering sensory surprise or a ‘moment of wonder’.³⁵

Following his altercation with a prominent Broadway theatre critic, his daughter and others, an increasingly despondent Riggan commits suicide on the stage during preview week. Following the blast of the shotgun, the camera lingers on a view of the theater audience and their standing ovation before rising upwards to the roof of the theatre, taking in its glittering lights. At this point, the film folds in upon itself by returning to previous paths of character and came-

³² Klein, p. 53.

³³ Ivi, p. 50 [emphasis added]

³⁴ Ivi, p. 11.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 12.

ra movement in order to initiate new trains of thought. According to Anthony Vidler, what is so unique about Deleuze's baroque-as-fold is its spanning of the physical and the mental, as well as 'its ability to join [...] all levels and categories at the same moment'.³⁶ In the penultimate scene of *Birdman*, we find an equivalent to Deleuze's folding between matter and mind and the conjunction of all levels or ideas in a moment.

Against the fanfare of a drumroll, we return to the descending meteor from the film's opening. A band troupe, formerly glimpsed outside the space of theatre, now beat their drums on center stage for the camera. We glimpse flashes of the Carver stage set illuminated by lighting, while Spider-Man and other people in costumes from Times Square slowly move across the stage. We return to the dressing room that had featured in the opening, replete with its tiny dust specks. In this revealing sequence, Iñárritu weaves between the macro and the micro, collapsing all the different spaces and times of the film into one composite display that lends cinematic form to the opening lines of poetry from Carver: 'And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?' Shots of the meteor speeding through the sky give way to a return to the beached jellyfish, now surrounded by flocking birds. Imagery pertaining to the earth and the sky meet, intertwining the film's horizontal and vertical impulses. Despite the quasi-spiritual nature of this sequence, *Birdman* does not invoke a transcendental beyond for Riggan. Iñárritu's film comes full circle, suggesting that there might be an intricate yet entirely immanent connection or folding between things.³⁷ The scene ends with a raised shot that takes on a non-descript hospital ceiling, where Riggan is revealed to have survived and finally feels himself to be 'beloved on this earth'.

Conclusion: Taking Flight

Taking my cues from the work of Deleuze, Bruno, Klein and other thinkers, I have approached the baroque's substance of material relations in film through its kinaesthetic appeals to the body, space, movement, architecture and environment rather than through strict technological definitions. In doing so, I have considered how *Birdman* bears substantial continuities with the movement that organises historic baroque forms (the scripted space) and with film genres (musicals and superhero films) that also privilege vertical movement and moments of uplift.

In my analyses of *Birdman*, it has certainly not been my intention to graft Deleuze's 'infinite' fold onto the stylistic technique of the long-take nor to reductively imply that all digital filmmaking is baroque. Given Deleuze's own archi-

³⁶ Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 218.

³⁷ According to Sinnerbrink, Iñárritu often couples quasi-spiritualism with realism in his filmmaking.

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tectonic conception of the fold, I have instead suggested that particular vectors of movement shape baroque forms and a baroque cinema (analogue or digital). Here, bodies as well as camera movement will seek to take flight, to levitate and to fulfil the baroque urge to become space in every direction.

As D. N. Rodowick reminds us, the ‘difficulty of placing film as an object grounding an area of study does not begin with the digital “virtualization” of the image’.³⁸ Given that the history of film studies has involved ‘constantly shifting terrain for thinking about time-based spatial media’, Rodowick suggests that the ongoing critical flux as to just what constitutes film in the age of the post-cinematic might be approached ‘a positive thing’.³⁹ For this article, that critical flux allows alternate media archaeologies and different aesthetic modalities such as the baroque to emerge into view. By way of conclusion, I find it significant that Iñárritu’s film gestures towards potentially infinite yet invisible conjunctions of film, body, space and movement. In the closing scene of *Birdman*, Riggan embraces his inner super-hero and defies gravity once more. This moment of uplift occurs entirely off-screen. It is intimated only by the sense of joy or hopefulness that flickers across Sam’s face as she sees her father in flight. Embracing the vertical pleasures of Hollywood, Iñárritu’s *Birdman* hints that it is really cinema itself that allows all of us (not just the Bird-Man) to take formal, imaginative and affective flight. New as well as old possibilities of still await us in the wings.

³⁸ D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 12.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.