

Infinite Folds: El Greco and Deleuze's Operative Function of the Fold

The diffuse light and the vaporous masses of clouds bursting into the geometrically constructed space in El Greco's *Annunciation* of 1567 emphasise the contrast between a measurable terrestrial world and an immeasurable celestial one (fig. 1). The geometric shapes on the floor, with their closed contours, stand out against the billowing cloud formations, which carry the archangel Gabriel and also conceal most of the blue sky and the source of light. The opposition and transition between fixed forms and formlessness is carefully composed: the spaces occupied by the terrestrial floor and the heavens each take up a complete half of the painting.¹ Located precisely in the centre, the dark brown horizontal parapet, both horizon and demarcation of the floor, marks the separation between the two worlds.

Concealed behind the clouds, a wide, unbounded sky opens up above the horizon. Filling the upper part of the painting, it is either a celestial irruption into an interior, or a landscape that is located outside. The horizon above the parapet envelops the viewer as it would in a landscape painting. Both forms of the ground, the one of the floor and that of the landscape, are thus intertwined in El Greco's *Annunciation*.² There is a tension between the closed contours, the fixed forms and perspectival geometry of the lower half and the formless fields of colour, the tangents, curves, hyperbolae and undulating lines above that exceed the painting. This tension, a continuous motion, is created, as will be shown in what follows, by the different forms and processes of the folds in the painting.

1 Wölfflin 2015.

2 In his essay 'L'art et le pouvoir du fond' Maldiney shows that in the most powerful artworks we perceive the ground as analogue to the ground on which we move, or to the space that surrounds us and that we pass through; Maldiney 1994b, 182.

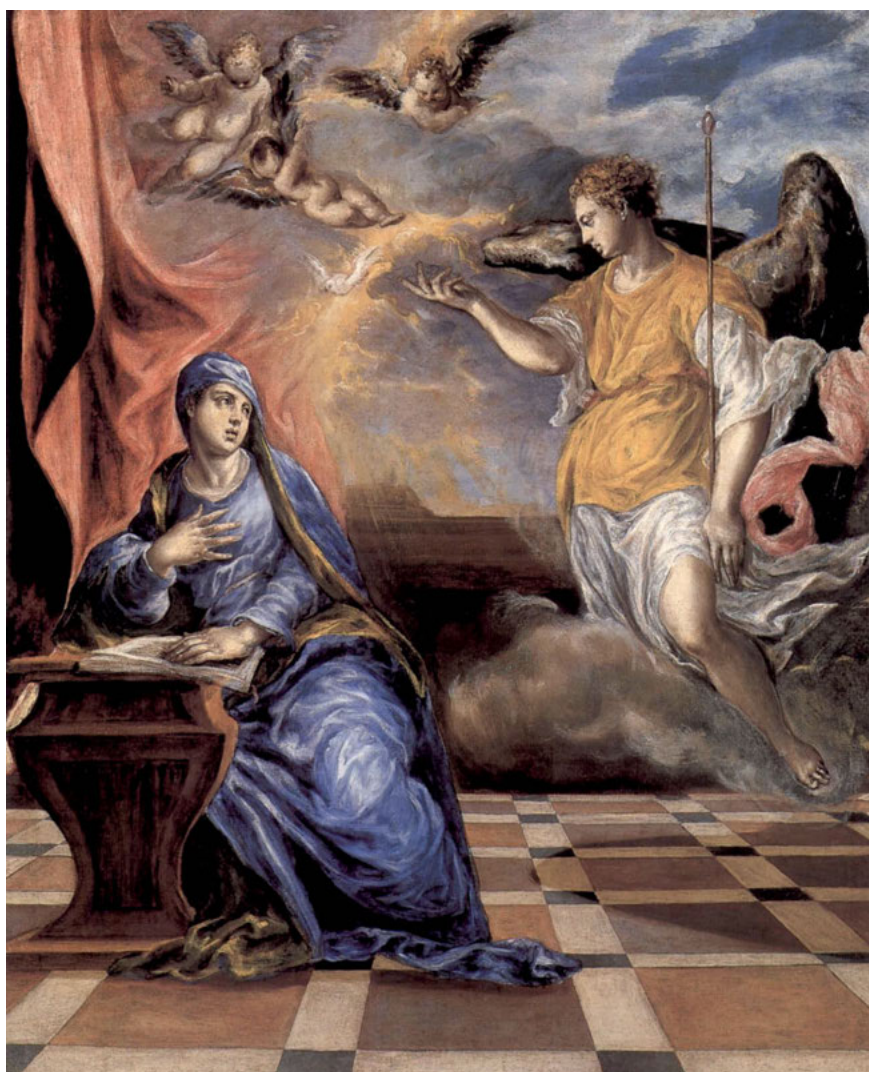


Fig. 1: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

In El Greco's *Annunciation*, the chequered floor represents a tangible, clearly delineated space, in which Mary and the archangel Gabriel can take their positions. Like a wall, the low parapet, functioning as a border, marks the outline of the floor. The edge of the dark brown, impermeable wall acts as a distant horizon, on which we can discern the silhouette of a building. The vanishing point is thus situated behind the enclosing parapet, in a place which also lies outside our perception (fig. 2). The wall is not only a horizon and a dividing line between heaven and earth, but it also conceals, like a closed door, the distant recession of the floor as it converges into the infinite vanishing point. The

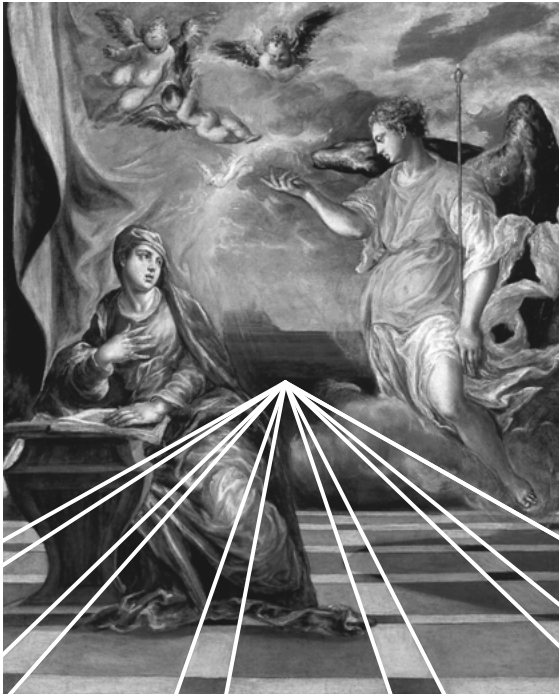


Fig. 2: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, according to a scheme of C. B.



Fig. 3: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, detail.

position of the bright cloud in front of the massive, dark and enclosing wall intensifies the downward pull of the linear perspective. In this place in the painting, the encounter of the terrestrial world and the numinous realm, the divine, is palpable: on the floor we can see the distinct outlines of the shadow cast by a cloud (fig. 3). In its fusion of light and line, the representation of this shadow, with its closed contours, follows the rules of linear perspective, while the indeterminate form of the cloud itself defies such a

spatial representation.³ In opposition to the pure perspectival clarity, the opaque cloud, which is both light and heavy, bright and dark, almost completely obscures the view of the wall (fig. 1).

Six years before the *Annunciation* of 1576 (fig. 1), which measures 117 x 98 cm, El Greco painted a smaller version of the same theme (fig. 4). As in the later version, bright light, accompanied by tumbling cherubs, pours out of the cloudy sky, streaming down into the geometrical space below where it seizes the red curtain. In both paintings, the opposition of solid form and diffuse formlessness corresponds to the terrestrial world below and the celestial sphere above, a physical and a numinous world. It is within this field of tension that the *Annunciation* takes place, and El Greco's task was to render visible this biblical event of the Incarnation as transition. As in the later treatment, in this earlier, smaller version, a linear perspective pulls the viewer's gaze to a distant place. With its steep recession, the painting establishes a rhythm alternating between the light falling in from the right and the shadow cast by the cloud. If we retrace the thinly drawn grid of the floor, we find two vanishing points. The location of the first – in the shadow of the larger arch, where the two central orthogonals intersect – is very close to the threshold of inside and outside. This disturbs the spatial arrangement: the view of the outside appears as a painting within the painting. But if we follow the outer orthogonals, we arrive at a second vanishing point, in the arch at the end of the narrow passage (fig. 4). The orthogonals do not end behind an opaque wall here but recede into a view opened up by the arch. The patch of blue within this second arch either suggests a view on to an open sky or a marble wall. El Greco's two *Annunciations* show how he developed his pictorial concepts of form and linear perspective, of opaque formlessness and deformation, and brought them into a dynamic relationship to each other.

In his study *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, first published in 1981, Gilles Deleuze has explored the deformation of painting in El Greco's work. He draws our attention to a horizontal line in *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, which divides the painting into two parts, "upper and lower, celestial and terrestrial"⁴, a division which we also find in El Greco's *Annunciation*. In the lower part

"there is indeed a figuration or narration [...], although all the coefficients of bodily deformation, and notably elongation, are already at work. But in the upper half [...] there is a wild liberation, a total emancipation: the Figures [...] are relieved of their representative role, and enter directly into relation with an order of celestial sensations."⁵

3 Brunelleschi demonstrated this in his experiment with linear perspective in the early fifteenth century. See Damisch 2002, 111–124.

4 Deleuze 2003, 9.

5 Ibid.



Fig. 4: Doménikos Theotókopulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1570, oil on wood, 26 x 20 cm, Madrid, Prado.

With the Holy Ghost, “lines, colors, and movements are freed from the demands of representation.”⁶ Seven years later, in his book *Le pli* (*The Fold*) of 1988, Deleuze returns to this horizontal line which divides the painting in two, creating an upward surge and downward pull. Deleuze considers this fold, “a fold which differentiates and self-differentiates”⁷, to be the ideal fold of the baroque, and adopting a Heideggerian concept, calls it *Zwiefalt*. In El Greco’s *Annunciation* this “twifold”⁸, a fold between two folds, articulates itself on the horizontal and vertical planes, in curvilinear and undulated form and in the fields of colour.

According to Deleuze, a painted image can be conceptualised in two ways: the Platonic notion of everlasting similitude and identity or exactly the opposite, with difference at its core, and representations as the product of a movement of difference. Deleuze challenges the notion of a painting as static representation, depiction, narrative or illustration of something external to itself, arguing that it is the difference internal to the painting that unfolds as creative movement, revealing a loose and multidirectional network of colours

6 Ibid.

7 Deleuze 1991, 236.

8 In the English edition of *Le pli* (Deleuze 1993) Heidegger’s neologism *Zwiefalt* has been erroneously rendered as *Zweifalt*, which, as Sjoerd van Tuinen points out, does not capture the word’s intrinsic duplicity and ambiguity. He suggests that the best English translation would be the Middle English “twifold”. Van Tuinen 2014, 69 and 83f. (note 49).

and lines. The static opposition of colour and ground is dissolved and replaced by a fluid interplay that has emerged from dynamic structural relations.⁹ In El Greco's *Annunciations* the formless ground of colour and the clearly outlined figures have equal weight, and their relation to each other is one of difference as well as of gradual transition. The motifs of heaven and curtain are also spatially separate yet intertwined, and this interpenetration is most intense where the celestial light dissolves into the drapery of the red curtain. The opposition of the numinous-intelligible world and the physical world of sensations is overcome through the curtain as well as the mediation of the archangel Gabriel, who "is the figure of the coming of the invisible into the visible and of the unsayable into the word"¹⁰. That he acts as a messenger is emphasised by his central place in the composition, opposite the red curtain, exactly between heaven and earth. Gabriel's arrival on earth is marked by the sharply defined shadow on the one hand and the formless cloud on the other. The form of the archangel, who is floating above the ground in his heavenly sphere, with a bared leg, is gracefully distorted into a *figura serpentinata*.



Fig. 5: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, according to a scheme of C. B.

In direct contrast, the straight vertical line of his sceptre points towards the heavens and intersects the horizontal line of the wall (fig. 5). If we follow the angel's downturned right wing, we notice that it describes a horizontal line, while the left wing, gradually turning from white to black, ascends into the cloudy sky as a vertical line parallel to the frame. A structure of perpendicular lines is thus repeated in metonymic shifts in the

⁹ Uhlig 2007, 301–305.

¹⁰ Marin 2006, 181.

painting. Even the smallest details have this basic structure of a cross, for example the filial of the sceptre with its three white pearls, which marks a horizontal to both sides and also joins the ascending vertical. Thus two movements are created: a vertical ascension and a horizontal bilateral movement, which points sideways out of the picture and is echoed on both sides by the two figures, Mary and the archangel Gabriel, as well as by the swathes of red fabric next to them, the curtain to the left and the drapery beside the angel on the right.

Rich in tonal variation, the folds of the red curtain, which reach into the light and colour of the heavens, folding and unfolding from both sides and culminating in *Zwiefalt*, move into the darkness at the left margin and the radiant light in the distance. This folding and unfolding movement breaks out of the frame as an infinite sequence, abandoning the geometry of the finite for the differential geometry of calculus. In the first two volumes of his *Konturen einer Geistesgeschichte der Mathematik: Die Mathematik und die Wissenschaft* (vol. I) and *Die Mathematik in der Kunst* (vol. II)¹¹ Max Bense refers to Heinrich Wölfflin's analysis of form¹², which, along with the work of Alois Riegel and Wilhelm Worringer, was crucial for Deleuze's conceptualisation of painting. Bense theorises the relationship between the principles of style as form in art and in mathematics to explore parallel developments between the history of art and the history of mathematics. According to Bense, Wölfflin's studies of the transition from Renaissance to baroque as a movement from fixed form to formlessness¹³, from the linear to the painterly, from planarity to recession, closed form to open form or clearness to unclearness¹⁴ reveal formal developments in painting that attend Euclidean geometry in the Renaissance and elements of calculus in the baroque. The baroque handling of light and colour and its curved lines can be expressed mathematically as infinitesimal functions.¹⁵ In its beauty "of boundlessness and the infinite"¹⁶, the open form of the baroque emancipates itself from the frame, filling it with unruly figures, unevenly distributed areas of light and sharply cropped forms.¹⁷ By using terms such as *sequence*¹⁸, *irrational*¹⁹ and *incommensurable*²⁰ for the description of the dynamic depth of baroque paintings, Wölfflin, for his part, applies mathematical concepts to his analysis of form.²¹

11 Bense 1948 and Bense 1949. For the link between Bense and Wölfflin see: von Herrmann 2014.

12 Wölfflin 1967 and Wölfflin 2015.

13 Wölfflin 1967 and Wölfflin 2015.

14 Wölfflin 2015.

15 Bense 1948, 26f. and 92.

16 Wölfflin 2015, 226.

17 Ibid, 205 and 210f.

18 Ibid, 230.

19 Ibid, 278, 280, 283, 291.

20 Ibid, 291.

21 Bense 1948, 100.

Art-historical, philosophical and mathematical analysis of form have helped us to elucidate the structure of El Greco's *Annunciation*: the horizon line, which demarcates zones of drawn form and coloured formlessness, the geometrical perspectival space or the intersecting vertical and horizontal movements above the archangel. Further connections to calculus can be seen in one of the important figures in the composition, the red curtain, which takes up two thirds of the pictorial space on the left side. Falling down in a straight line in one place and in undulating folds in another, it creates a vertical line which joins the figure of Mary. What is striking here is that the edge of Mary's blue garment is aligned exactly with the horizontal line of the grid of the floor. If we read this horizontal line as the axis of a coordinate system and take the perpendicular line of the left edge of the painting as vertical axis, we can retrace the figure of a hyperbola, which escapes the frame of the painting (fig. 6). The complex structure of this work thus shows baroque space curves in the interplay of coordinate axes and tangents. Bense explains this process in baroque art as follows:

"The simple, continuous linear arrangement of objects commonly used in Renaissance painting to create clear, simple ratios of proportion and symmetry, which, as Wölfflin too has rightly noted, also governs all classical art, is replaced in the baroque by a non-linear, continuous, curved arrangement of objects, and from this results what some describe as the emphatically asymmetrical character of baroque composition."²²

The pictorial and compositional hyperbola of the red curtain at the left margin in El Greco's *Annunciation* and the superimposed undulating line of the drapery further unfold in the folds that merge into the heavens, fan out of them or are drawn in. The interaction between the cloud formations and light trails on one side and the folds of the curtain and its shadow on the other is also expressed as an upward-sloping curve under the group of cherubs.

The undulating lines, curves, zigzags and diagonals are not drawn, but created by the interplay of colour modulations between light and dark, between warmer and colder tones. This complexity of baroque drapery as *Zwiefalt* did not appear in the earlier treatment of 1560. Here the curtain moves in a diagonal line, merging into the light and reaching

22 Bense 1949, 58. Note that this does not refer to the 17th century Cartesian coordinate system of analytic geometry (developed by Descartes and Fermat), which might have also oblique axes, but to a late Middle Ages concept of geometry that emphasizes the construction of an infinite space via a system of perpendicular lines. For concepts of an infinite, imaginary space (*spatium imaginarium*) during the late Middle Ages see Grant 1981, chapter 6. Bense has also suggested that El Greco's paintings served Leibniz as a source of inspiration for the discovery of calculus. Note that calculus was developed by Gottfried Leibniz and Isaac Newton, independently from each other, in the 17th century.



Fig. 6: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, according to a scheme of C. B.

out of it into the pictorial space. But a space curve, framed by the white stairhead, is perceptible as a contour in Mary's garment. In both treatments of the *Annunciation* the finite in the geometrical space is pushed to its limits, both undermined and mediated, to create a bridge to infinitude and formlessness: a concentric movement penetrates the depth of the painting, while an eccentric movement reaches out of it. While the movement of the systole leads to an isolation of the figure, that of the diastole causes expansion and dissipation, as Deleuze has shown in *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*.²³ Within the painting everything is distributed as diastole and systole. The systole contracts and condenses forms and bodies, while the diastole expands and dissolves them into light and colour. Even if the form of the curtain were to dissipate entirely in formlessness, it would remain constrained by the forces that have taken hold of it to return it to its surroundings. Deleuze calls the interplay of diastolic and systolic movements *rhythm*.²⁴ It is through rhythm that form manifests itself in the painting and the painting's relation to the outside is expressed.

The relational web in this painting follows Deleuze's concept of the diagram as a disorganised and deformed unity, which shows a visual abyss in the depths but also creates order and rhythm. The diagram brings violent chaos and formless colour to the pre-existing figuration but is also "a germ of rhythm"²⁵ for the new order of painting. A year

²³ Deleuze 2003.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 102.

before *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explored rhythm and its relation to chaos. “From chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born.” Chaos is the milieu of all milieus. The milieus that have come out of chaos either consolidate or revert, dissolving back into chaos. In the milieu as form, chaos is never absent. Rhythm is created through passages from one milieu to another.²⁶ The in-between is what rhythm and milieu have in common, while the emergence of rhythm between the milieus that have rhythm creates difference. This is why rhythm and milieus that have rhythm are never on the same plane.²⁷

The consolidating and closed milieus, which are deformed in El Greco’s paintings, play a crucial role for Deleuze and Guattari and their approach to art. Art prevents milieus from stabilising, enabling instead an open and developing in-between of rhythm. In their philosophy of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari see rhythm as a movement between chaos as ground and emerging milieus. What is created by the operative identity of the fold is neither a static form nor a spatial juxtaposition of forms but the rhythm in its space-time dimension.

In El Greco’s *Annunciation*, the divine bursts into the world through the medium of painting: the Incarnation as the becoming of God emerges from the shapeless ground as colour. Out of the colour of the heavens, the Holy Ghost penetrates the room, followed by the archangel Gabriel, who surprises Mary as she is reading a book. From behind the dark cloud formations in the distant depths of the painting, the Holy Ghost, in the shape of a white dove, emerges out of the radiant yellow ground. The archangel Gabriel is enclosed by grey-brown clouds and blue sky, and Mary stands out against the red curtain. While these figures are clearly delineated from their surroundings, the celestial colours on the left-hand upper margin of the painting all merge into each other. The yellow, blue, grey-brown and red are the ground of the source of light, of the sky, the clouds and the curtain. They create metonymic movements in the painting, which enable an interaction between the formless ground and the solid forms of the figures. The yellow of the ground behind the clouds is echoed in Gabriel’s garment, the blue of the sky on the right reappears in Mary’s cloak, and the red of the curtain in the curling drapery, which ends in a circular form in the far right of the painting.

Not form but colour determines the ground of the numinous divine, which streams into the geometrically constructed space. Like a magnetic force field, the celestial ground seizes the red curtain. At its centre are the fields of colour – the grey-blue of the sky and the yellow behind the clouds – and the Holy Ghost and the cherubs. The fiery golden yellow pouring out of the depths behind the parting clouds, carrying the Holy Ghost

²⁶ Deleuze/Guattari 1988, 313.

²⁷ Ibid.

in the form of a white dove, is particularly intense and powerful. This yellow breach in the clouds is the pivotal point of the painting. The diagonal between the archangel's raised arm and a floating cherub crosses the trail of light directed towards Mary, which also flows into the right wing of the upper cherub. The archangel Gabriel gazes down at Mary and transmits the divine message, pointing towards the centre of the painting, the yellow ground.

Thus in the *Annunciation* of 1576 the archangel's pointing finger directs us back to the location of the vanishing point. If we ask what is hidden behind the billowing cloud formation, our attention is drawn to the pictorial layers unfolding in the distance. As can be seen from the shadow cast by the cloud, the archangel Gabriel is standing behind Mary. Mary is therefore in the foreground of the painting, but her body is twisted backwards, so that she can see the archangel. The archangel looks at and points towards the Holy Ghost in the form of the white dove. The movement into the distant background, as well as into the horizontal width and vertical height, opens up an almost unfathomable depth. This pictorial depth, which sets in motion a play of ever more distant vistas, posing the ontological and theological question of the ground as ground of being, is opened by the folds of the red curtain. Abandoning the spatial staggering of the Euclidean linear perspective, still present in the tiled floor and the wall, the opaque curtain emerges as a field of colour that renders visible a movement between form and formlessness. Folded as *Zwiefalt* it mediates between the perspectival space and the radiant celestial realm behind the clouds. It thus establishes the revealing and concealing function of the ground, which opens up the unfolding of sensation.

The folding and unfolding between form and formlessness enters the painting through the gazes and the constellation of gazes of the cherubs. The cherubs accompany the flight of the dove, and the manner of their depiction makes the Holy Ghost appear even more distant in the depth of the infinite ground. In both *Annunciations*, the entrance of the Holy Ghost is expressed in the form of light and shade, as well as in the drapery of the red curtain. In the 1570 version, which also contains a small red curtain, the warm light surrounding the Holy Ghost is in stark contrast to the cold light outside the room, highlighting the irruption of the divine into the terrestrial space. These movements in the painting help to emphasise Mary's backward turn towards the archangel who is standing behind her. The latter points towards the Holy Ghost and the radiant yellow ground, which initiates a back-and-forth and circular motion between the near and far in the painting. While in the 1570 version the attitudes of the cherubs directed this movement into and out of the remote depths of the painting towards the near (fig. 2), in the 1576 version the movement runs across the whole painting through the constellation of gazes (fig. 1). Mary's turning towards the archangel, who is standing behind her, is reciprocated by Gabriel's eye contact, as he points towards the Holy Ghost and the red curtain. At the same time, the three cherubs at the top left look at Mary. If we follow

the directions of the gazes of all the figures in the painting, we see that they describe a circle, which corresponds to the spatial movement into the distance, towards the radiant ground behind the clouds and back towards the near foreground, to Mary (fig. 7). This movement, a vector field which exists only on the surface, intersects the geometric planes of the composition.²⁸ The diagram, as operative set of asignifying lines and fields of colour, moves between the fluid chaos of formlessness and the static order of form.



Fig. 7: Doménikos Theotókopoulos, called El Greco: *Annunciation*, about 1576, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, according to a scheme of C. B.

The movement from the foreground to the deepest layer of the radiant yellow ground is also reversed: the light, which emanates from the lowest layer of the divine ground, penetrates the room, describing a movement from the background into the foreground. All the lighting in the painting is arranged around the source of light behind the Holy Ghost. This becomes especially obvious in the tonal modulations of the archangel's right lower arm and his neck, as well as Mary's hands, face and neck, and the bodies of the small cherubs in the upper section of the painting, or the curtain on the left. This countermovement is emphasised by the three cherubs above the yellow ground, who look down towards the red curtain. The light bursts out of the yellow ground that seems to be located behind the thick, dark blue clouds. But if we look at the zone underneath we see that the yellow light rays are now appearing in front of the cloud formations rather than behind them. In this place the ground, from which the light emanates, has turned into rays of yellow light, which penetrate the room and create the shadow of the floating cloud.

²⁸ I am grateful to Michael Friedman for this observation.

In both *Annunciations* by El Greco, the use of light and shade clearly differentiates active and passive ground, a point that Deleuze, referring to *The Baptism of Christ*, has commented on in *The Fold*. El Greco's paintings show that the darkness and the light are both active grounds.²⁹ The yellow ground, concealed behind the dark clouds but breaking out of them in the form of the Holy Ghost, is an active ground, which takes hold of the forms and deforms them. What is crucial here is the colour, as well as the circular relation between clearly formed and formless ground, a relation that manifests itself in the restless twists and turns of the cherubs, until it finally streams into the room as incandescent light. In the 1570 *Annunciation*, too, the distant yellow ground articulates itself, breaking through the billowing dark clouds. In both treatments the red curtain is seized by the active force of the yellow ground from which the light source of the painting streams. It simultaneously dissolves in it and emanates from it, folding and unfolding.

El Greco's paintings direct our attention to the non-visible, to the formless and the fields of colour, which in their visibility make the sensible experienceable as withdrawal. It is not recognisable objects and given forms referring to an intelligible world that take central stage in the *Annunciations* but rather the folding and unfolding of an infinite becoming. God is being itself and the ground of Being, and God's incarnation raises the question of the ground of images, which is why Louis Marin could conclude that the Incarnation concerns the theological essence of painting itself.³⁰ Representing the moment of Incarnation, both *Annunciations* by El Greco show that the essence of the ground lies in its continuous withdrawal. But this withdrawal does not refer to the invisible world of ideas, which primarily shapes sensation, but marks the beginning of visual emergence. Not as an intelligible sign, but as a shapeless colour, the divine ground breaks into the visible world. The mystery of the Incarnation is translated into the process of artistic creation, appearing in the painting as an infinite and continuous movement of the fold between form and ground.

Drawing on Henri Maldiney's essay 'L'esthétique des rythmes',³¹ Deleuze has related this movement and the resulting deformation to the baroque fold, "which ceaselessly unfolds and folds back from both sides and which only unfolds one by folding back the other in a coextensivity of the unveiling and veiling of Being, of the presence and withdrawal of the being."³² What is shown in this concept of the image is thus the boundless freedom of

29 Max Raphael has shown this in a comparison of Tintoretto and El Greco. See Raphael 2009, 111.

30 Marin 2006, 195.

31 See Maldiney 1994a. Drawing on F.W.J. Schelling's concept of the *Grund* (ground), Henri Maldiney stresses that the ground is the foundation that enables the forms to liberate themselves from the surroundings that have captured them. But the German word *Grund*, as he goes on to explain, also means origin and cause. Thus the ground does not only function as counterpart of the forms but also establishes an ontological and aesthetic relation to the world. See also Maldiney 1994b, 174.

32 Deleuze 1991, 236.

the fold. As the fold frees itself from its supports in the painting, an infinite competition between the structure of the fold and the objects begins, which Deleuze demonstrates using two examples from the work of El Greco:

“If we wish to maintain the operative identity of the Baroque and the fold, we must then show that in all other cases the fold remains limited while in the Baroque it experiences a limitless release, whose conditions can be determined. The folds seem to take leave of their supports, cloth, granite, and cloud, to enter into an infinite competition, as in the *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane* of El Greco (the one in the National Gallery). Or else, notably in *The Baptism of Christ*, the counter-fold of calf and knee, where the knee seems the inversion of the calf, lends an infinite undulation to the leg, while the pinching of the cloud in the center transforms it into a double fan ...”³³

The counter-fold, the infinite undulating form and the double fans are rendered visible in the two *Annunciations*, as the fold leaves its supports – curtain, draped garments and clouds – and, as a detached and free structure, is transferred to the painting as a whole, where it captures the field of the Elements:

“The liberation of folds that are no longer merely reproducing the finite body is easily explained: a third entity, or entities, have placed themselves between clothing and the body. These are the Elements. We need not recall that water and its rivers, air and its clouds, earth and its caverns, and light and its fires are themselves infinite folds, as El Greco’s paintings demonstrate.”³⁴

In El Greco’s two *Annunciations*, the elements “mediate, distend and broaden” not only the clothing and the bodies but also the drapery of the red curtain with its deep shadows.³⁵ At first, the drapery, with its dark modulations of shade, appears in spatial mode. But at the moment when the curtain is seized by the pictorial ground of air, light, fire and clouds, its operative identity also becomes visible in temporal mode, opening up a communication between form and formlessness, near and far, inside and outside, the finite and the infinite.

Translation: Martina Dervis (London)

33 Ibid, 241f.

34 Deleuze 1993, 122, trans. modified.

35 Ibid.

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