

## The Grace Machine: Of Turns, Wheels and Limbs

Lars Spuybroek

How do we live well? If there is one fundamental question that constantly occupies our minds, it is probably this one. There have been about a million different answers, half of which have come from religion and almost the same number from philosophy, not forgetting the multitude of aesthetic, psychological, therapeutic, hedonistic, practical and pragmatic answers. Too many answers, appearing in every possible combination. Taking out the last word and reducing the question to 'How do we live?' would make it infinitely easier to answer and would undoubtedly involve the bare cataloguing of all the necessities of the various domains. None of them would offer any clue whatsoever to what 'well' might mean – its definition can never be provided by a domain as such. Yet without exception, we apply the word to everything we do. We can drive a car and drive it well; we can cook a six-course meal and cook it well; we can lead a company and lead it well; we can take care of a difficult problem and do it well; we can run a marathon and run it well. We can do ordinary things extraordinarily, and extraordinary things far less well – either way. And when we have done something well, we can be fairly certain that next time we will probably be unable to repeat the act. There are no manuals for doing things well, as there are for doing things right. Taken literally, doing something right means doing it measured against an external standard, a ruler, a straight line divided up into proper increments telling us what is too little and what is too much. Certainly, there exist powerful external reasons for doing things, both causes and ends. We might be doing things 'because' or 'for';

however, to do something well we must employ an altogether different, internal measuring technique, which we denote as 'the way' we do things, relying on a rhythm, a pace, a course or a fluency while still incorporating those causes and ends. In doing something well, the cause, the end and the way of doing something are so intricately intertwined that we cannot separate them without destroying the effect of each on the whole.

Every single day, we find ourselves driven by a massive range of motives: we can do things out of sheer playfulness and relaxation, or spurred by a sense of moral duty, or as is more often the case, motivated by compensation, forced by physical necessity, or driven by hidden psychological desires or needs. And though all these variations – the spontaneity of play, the burden of duty, the effort of work, the necessity of nature – will play a prominent role in our analysis, none can tell us how to enact them *as never before*. This is undoubtedly an awkward statement, since it paradoxically implies that we have done that act a thousand times before and this time could be the best instance of it. We need to be cautious here: though such a process of instantiation singles out an act as unique, it does not necessarily mean we are looking for excellence. While excellence is continuous with a form of striving, that is not in itself its purpose. Doing-well or living-well does not involve a need for perfection. In its constant dealings with obstacles, it can never take form in a purified state; its constituent parts are always diverse and full of contrasts. What

we do and the way we do it might diverge. To do something well, we must often act against the very nature of the action, similarly to the technique of counterpoint in music. For instance, to play well, we should not act as if we are doodling; on the contrary, we should take the game completely seriously or else there is nothing at stake. As they say in football, it's life or death. And conversely, we can only do our duty as if we are playing tennis, since we would completely fail at a difficult task when doing it strenuously. Likewise, we can only do our work well if we find relaxation in it, and attend to necessities as if they sprout from freedom. How often do we not follow our desires as if they are our own ideas? Doing something well, then, means giving things a twist or a turn – the form action takes when we do several things at the same time. When driving well, we manoeuvre smoothly between slow- and fast-moving traffic, accommodate the behaviour of others, and operate without making abrupt changes. And when cooking that six-course meal, we time the preparation of one course to occur while the other is simmering on the stove and a third has been baking in the oven for hours. In these realms of action, the notion of turning and twisting can be interpreted quite literally, as actual curves left behind by a body moving in space. But the turn goes beyond mere pliancy and flexibility.

When we turn play into seriousness, or duty into ease, the turn is figurative, not literal. This concept of the turn goes much further than curvature and smooth movement between edgy obstacles, and undoubtedly further than a naïve opposition to the straightness of doing things right. It is made up of motion and activity, naturally, yet the movement in itself does not follow the way things take a turn. Our concrete movements are fed by a motion that is both larger and more abstract. The turn is larger than its agent. It is as much born out of a situation as it is initiated by an individual, and it is as much a figurative movement as it is concrete. In fact, it would be more correct to say the figure of the turn

stands by itself, and stands out as a figure that has been released from its origin rather than remaining attached to it. Doing something well, then, would be better described as a lessening of control than as an increase in it: a letting-go and a letting-happen more than a making-happen. Later on, we will have an opportunity to study examples of people who felt less present as events unfolded, especially in cases when things were going well – and the latter expression speaks for itself, suggesting that when one is doing well, things are too. In this sense, the figure of the turn should be perceived as a thing, and shelving it automatically under the category of motion, gesture or action will not suffice. In its figurative mode, the turn is not so much a movement between objects as it is the turning of movement into an object and, conversely, the turning of an object into movement – a reciprocal, symmetrical formula that will emerge as our central thesis.

Before our discourse starts to sound like an embarrassing misconception of quantum mechanics, we should hasten to point out that this fundamental vagueness of object and act has a history going far more deeply back in time than anything modern. In fact, its history winds through so many different periods that we cannot say exactly where and when it started – thousands of years ago, at least. From the perspectives of numerous disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, theology and aesthetics, the notion of doing well has been denominated as grace, a deviously complex term with linkages to gratitude, gracefulness and gratification as well as favour, pleasure, beauty and much more. The briefest way of defining grace would be to say it is movement that exceeds its agent, though admittedly such a cryptic definition calls for extensive elaboration. Grace is in many ways such an elusive concept that in each of the abovementioned disciplines it carries a completely different meaning. One explains it as an efficiency of mobility, another as an infinite power of transcendence, still others as mere good manners, and some as acquired customs and

habits. It is all of these and none. Grace is both the quality of the act and the movement that carries that act: in other words, it is both *of* and *beyond* the individual, anchored as well as unanchored, immanent as well as transcendent. How can this be? Certainly, for that reason it might seem a troublesome term for some, but studied more closely, the history of grace will not only prove comprehensive, but will demonstrate to be especially illuminating when viewed as a conceptual history. The further back we go, the more it will adjust later notions of itself. And though it has as many religious connotations as well as aesthetic, moral and social ones, this history will show that none of these domains is able to conceptually claim the ground on which we can explain the effects on the others.

### Grace and gift

Nonreligious readers will quickly associate the term 'grace' with gracefulness, an aesthetic term that seems to originate in a bygone age when elegance and convoluted formalities regulated public behaviour, or when now-forgotten treatises on sculpture emphasised tentative gestures and a soft expression of the flesh. Religious readers, on the other hand, will immediately recall the singing of 'Amazing Grace' or recognise the term from Sunday-school discussions of sufficient and efficient grace, signifying the ultimate source of generosity and goodness. However, neither the wholly aesthetic nor the solely religious, even in its social or moral guise, can claim the powers of grace for itself. Actually, things are far more confounded: all these neatly distinguished domains of human endeavour become more and more inextricably tied up with one another the further back we trace the term's history. It would be impossible to understand the Judeo-Christian enterprise of institutionalising a superhuman grace without acknowledging that the idea has aesthetics at its core. And, conversely, it is as impossible to accept the aesthetics of grace without understanding it as involving at least some form of transcendence. Generosity and goodness,

however, are by no means terms that should be associated only with monotheism; we encounter them in at least as fundamental a form in a period when a myriad of gods populated the heavens, namely in ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup>

At that time, grace was denoted with the Greek word *charis* (pronounced with a fricative 'h', as in the German *Bach*), and the concept played a central role in politics, love, friendship, competition and battle as well as religion. It is a word we encounter in many forms in the epic poems of Homer, Pindar and Hesiod, and in the hundreds of written works that constitute the classics. Today, we still find *charis* in words like 'charity' and 'charisma', to name just two derivations. Yet to properly understand the concept of *charis*, we will have to expand our study even further and go beyond that of the ancient Greeks, since *charis* is deeply rooted in gift culture, which in turn precedes Greek history by thousands of years. And it is not exactly clear – nor, perhaps, that relevant for our purposes – whether those roots lie in the Indus valley, in Minoan Crete or with the nomadic tribes living north of ancient Greece; probably in all three. Of course, gift cultures were and still are spread all over the planet, with the gift constituting a fundamental form of exchange in which aesthetics, sociology, economy and religion are undifferentiated. We will not be going into all the intricacies of gift exchange; what matters for our discussion is that *charis* conceptually originates in gift exchange, and that we will only be able to properly grasp the meaning of grace once we understand the gift.

The English word 'grace' is derived from the Latin translation of *charis*, *gratia*, and we encounter it in various forms related to gift culture: for instance, as 'gratitude', or thankfulness; 'gratification', the pleasure of receiving; and 'graciousness', a form of giving. In commentaries it is usually explained that *charis* is derived from the old Greek word for pleasure, *chara*.<sup>2</sup> Such a connection would start to explain not only why the exchange of goods as we

find it in tribal gift cultures cannot be unambiguously forced into social or economic models but also, and more importantly, why it took on the chiefly aesthetic connotations *charis* had in ancient Greece. The social as a concept, of course, is an eighteenth-century invention based on the *contrat social* and did not exist in the time of Homer. It would be a grave error to think all forms of togetherness were made of the same substance as the social. Similarly, it would be a mistake to confuse gift exchange with our notion of an economy, of exchange based on immediacy: we pay for things, be it entered on the side of debit or credit. Graciousness and gratitude are not part of its exchange values. The art of gift exchange is based on a subtle delaying of reciprocation, on the increase of esteem, on the sometimes overwhelming forms of repayment and the equally overwhelming forms of giving that we find in the tribal custom of the potlatch. If there is pleasure in the exchange of gifts, it is never what we – in the West, after Freud – would call pleasure: the satisfaction of the senses as related to an economy of the self. As the expression has it, we ‘take pleasure’ in something, and such taken pleasure is radically different from given and returned pleasure, therefore leaving a massive debt on the side of the subject. In Freud’s language, *Schuld* means debt as well as guilt. In contrast, the gratifying pleasure of *charis* is as much a pleasure of giving as of receiving and returning – that is, of going beyond the self. It is pleasure, yes, but not your pleasure; *you can’t truly own it*, since in the gift cycle *charis* is always being passed on. What we call objects and subjects are mere stations in the circulation of grace. And this is the main reason why any explanation of *charis* based on the standard objectivist or subjectivist theories of aesthetics is necessarily flawed.

To fully understand the circular nature of the gift, we must briefly turn to Marcel Mauss’s indispensable 1924 book *The Gift*, which begins with a startling question, one that – along with the

answers he subsequently offers – has occupied and often troubled scholars of anthropology: ‘What rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?’<sup>3</sup> We would probably formulate the question somewhat differently and more subtly; be that as it may, what matters is that (a) Mauss makes it categorically clear that the gift is never free:<sup>4</sup> every gift needs to be reciprocated in whatever form; and (b) that he locates the obligation to return not in mechanisms of the social or economic but in the ‘force of things’.<sup>5</sup> In the Maori gift culture on which Mauss based his studies, this power is identified as the *hau*, often translated as the ‘spirit of the gift’.<sup>6</sup> It is the *hau* in particular that makes gift-giving into a cyclical activity, not merely an oscillation between a giver and a receiver but making the receiver transform into a returning agent. Therefore, we should always keep in mind that gift exchange is structured according to three stages, not two agents, as our dualistic models of information exchange and communication prescribe. What exactly, then, is this power, which he calls the ‘force of things’? For almost a century, this has posed serious problems in anthropology. Some have vehemently denied its existence;<sup>7</sup> others have developed variations or allowed asymmetries and unilateralisms;<sup>8</sup> and still others have categorised it as a form of ‘personhood’, an animist notion<sup>9</sup> in which the donor’s personality – somehow – remains in the given object, causing it inevitably to return to its source. After the social and economic models, this adds a psychological explanation for gift-giving.

However, all theories offering secondary explanations are bound to fail. After our initial explorations of the turn and grace, we might be able to offer a simpler solution. When object and act are inextricably entwined, the act of giving an object becomes the same as that object giving itself. Though this is

a rather abstract formulation, we recognise it from art: we never know if the effect a work has on us is equal to what the artist effectuated. And it is no accident that this example is derived from aesthetics. In other words, we will never be able to fully distinguish between *what an object does to us* and *what is done to it*. The vector of the action proceeds through the object without changing, without any real before or after, that is, *without origin or end*. Things are 'leaf-shaped', as Goethe would say, pointing both backward and forward in time. The act of giving turns into the object, slipping through to turn into the act of reception, and when giving becomes receiving, the reverse logically follows, closing the circle. Circularity is a matter of logic before it can be understood socially, economically or psychologically. The feelings of esteem (of the donor), pleasure (of the receiver) and gratitude (of the returner) that accompany gift-giving necessarily follow from the vicious circle in which the act bites the tail of the object.

The richness of feeling related to the gift cycle in cases of *charis* can be relatively easily uncovered by tracing the word's use in the classics, and especially its early use by Homer. The word appears in so many different contexts that translators of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* have found it excruciatingly difficult to match its meanings in their own modern languages. There is Achilles's persistent anger in the *Iliad*, stirred by his assumption that he has been insufficiently *compensated* by King Agamemnon for 'tirelessly fighting the enemy';<sup>10</sup> Poseidon's questioning of the *generosity* of Odysseus, who offered the 'ships of the Argives'<sup>11</sup> in the *Odyssey*; the lack of *gratitude* shown by the suitors of Penelope, Odysseus' wife, left behind on Ithaca;<sup>12</sup> and moreover, the description of Hera's *charm* after she puts on earrings with 'three berry-like drops',<sup>13</sup> which is similar to the description of the *charisma* of Odysseus, who, after anointing himself with oil, is 'made taller to look upon and mightier'

by the goddess Athena, while 'from his head she made the locks flow in curls like the hyacinth flower'<sup>14</sup> – every variety of grace is denoted by that same word: *charis*. And countless other examples with different connotations can be found.<sup>15</sup> After all these centuries, it remains astounding to see that a word meaning favour, generosity, gratitude, enjoyment, recompense or even literally payment can directly connote the swinging of earrings and the curling of locks of hair. But *charis* lies at the heart of a world that does not discriminate between actions and things: things act, and actions present themselves as things. The ancient Greeks would laugh at us with our miserable division between ethics and aesthetics. Who are we to subjectify pleasure and isolate it from gratitude and giving? Who are we to view activity as purely a means to an end? The act moves through the end, and the way of acting is itself an object, making the act something larger than intention or actuality – in fact, making it super-actual, since it embodies a surplus of action, not a single deed.<sup>16</sup> Instead of viewing these overarching concepts as representing a primitive stage of confusion, we should acknowledge them as advanced, resolving the nagging dualism of thing and action by a circular logic – a logic clearly manifested in the tripartite structure of gift exchange.

Mauss firmly grounds gift culture in the notion of what he terms 'the three obligations: giving, receiving and returning'.<sup>17</sup> And even though he uses words like 'grateful' and 'gratitude', he surprisingly disregards their evolution into cultures of grace and even explicitly refuses to 'take into account the aesthetic phenomena' related to the gift.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, what the ancient Greeks offer us points resolutely in the opposite direction of Mauss's thesis: *charis* signifies each of the three stages of gift exchange, the cycle itself, as well as its intrinsic connection to aesthetics. As a matter of fact, the conflation of those meanings led to *charis* being personified by three goddesses, the Charites, or in

their Latinised designation, the Graces or the Three Graces. In the *Iliad*, where the divinities are not fully crystallised yet, Homer uses two different versions of the word *charis*, one capitalised and the other not. So far, we have only been looking at instances of the latter. Capitalised, the word functions as the name of one who in Homer's time was still a single goddess: Charis, 'wife to the far-famed lame god', Hephaestus, the builder of automatons.<sup>19</sup> In the *Odyssey*, this single goddess has transformed into Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, who hardly ever meets anyone without being prepared or accompanied by the Charites.<sup>20</sup> Hesiod, the Homeric poet from Orchomenus, is the first to identify the Charites by their names: 'Eurynome, the daughter of Ocean, beautiful in form, bore him three fair-cheeked Charites, Aglaea, and Euphrosyne, and lovely Thalia, from whose eyes as they glanced flowed love that unnerves the limbs: and beautiful is their glance beneath their brows.'<sup>21</sup> The cult of the Charites originated from the same city, Orchomenus in Boeotia, of which Pausanias said that its king Eteocles 'was the first man to sacrifice to the Graces', represented by three rocks that fell from heaven, luckily in front of the king's feet.<sup>22</sup> During that archaic period, the Charites were worshipped in Boeotia as spring goddesses, a clear reference to ideas of generosity and nourishing, as well as to the fact that grace was invariably 'poured over' mortals by the gods, while the pairing of stone and water corresponds to the intertwinement of object and movement.<sup>23</sup>

A closer look at the names of the Charites – Aglaea, Euphrosyne, Thalia – reveals more about how they relate to Mauss's three obligations. Aglaea, which means 'radiance' or 'shining', is the figure of giving; Euphrosyne, meaning 'joy' or 'good cheer', the figure of receiving; and Thalia, meaning 'bloom' or 'flourishing', the figure of thanking and gratitude. According to Seneca, the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus was the first to connect the names

of the Graces to their actual positions in the gift cycle.<sup>24</sup> This observation could scarcely be of greater significance. As a rule, tribal gift exchange as we encounter it in Mauss concerns the exchange of actual goods, yet in its Greek form, represented by the Charites, the emphasis shifts to the feelings that accompany such exchanges. And, even more significantly for our argument, it opens up the radical possibility that feelings, things and acts can be exchanged with one another; that feelings can reciprocate gifts of objects, and objects can reciprocate graciousness. The moment goods take on the form of the good or the beneficial, the beneficial can free itself from material goods.

Of the three goddesses, Aglaea plays the leading role, one that is slightly more abstract, being closely related to the radiance of Aphrodite or even Apollo, in whom the act of giving is expressed by the shining sunbeams he wears as a spiked halo on his head, sunbeams that we recognise from the depictions of the Egyptian sungod Aten which end in stylised, open hands – a clear indication of the gift.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Aglaea assumes the role of beauty that initiates a cyclical process of grace: a stage in which the object radiates movement. Euphrosyne personifies the reception of the gift in the form of joy. The few existing images show her drinking wine, and when we recall the prominence of springs in the rites of Orchomenus, we realise that she literally 'takes in' the gift. The gift is not just swallowed by Euphrosyne but wholly incorporated and internalised, which is why, of the three goddesses, this stage is associated most strongly with feeling. Thirdly, Thalia shows that the taking in of beauty does not stop with pleasure, as in the standard view of the last 300 years of aesthetic theory, but necessarily leads to a transformation, to blooming and flourishing. As an image of youth, Thalia personifies renewal, growth and prosperity; in becoming radiant herself, she assumes the role of Aglaea. The British classical scholar Jane Harrison characterised the Graces as



the 'givers of all increase'; the cycle adds one act to the next, and then to the next; they keep multiplying each other's effects.<sup>26</sup> In the cycle of grace, things keep turning. Viewed as round dancers, the Graces in fact change positions: giving becomes receiving, receiving becomes returning, and returning giving, one transforming into another.

Ancient iconography depicts the Graces without exception as dancing figures. Not coincidentally, the name of the city Orchomenus has the same etymological root as the word 'orchestra', meaning 'dance floor'.<sup>27</sup> On bas-reliefs from the Archaic period, the Charites are initially clothed and line up single file, strictly aligned, all looking in the same direction. They hold hands, grasping their attributes in their free hands – usually a piece of fruit, a garland, or a flower. Over time, we observe an increasing variety in the way they hold hands, while the expression of dancing becomes more prominent. In ancient Greece, dancing was a collective activity, with dancers moving in geometrical patterns, as in the round dance. While the Charites are mostly shown smiling and looking in various directions, they still line up, with one hand engaged in linking and the other hanging down. It is not until the later Hellenistic period that we see the circular configuration emerging. The figures were increasingly depicted nude, and though the figures became more three-dimensional, the sculptures as a whole remained flat and linear, though they were intended to represent a round dance. This paradox was solved with an ingenious invention: the middle figure was turned around so that her back faced the viewer. It makes all the difference. Since most sculptures were positioned against a wall and still acted as reliefs perceived in frontal view, they resembled the archaic A-B-C lineup, but looking closely at who holds who in the new configuration, we discover an A-C-B pattern: a circular organisation in which the figure on the left (A) holds hands with the figure on the right (B), while the turned figure in the middle

(C) holds the hands or shoulders of the other two.<sup>28</sup> These hands are closing the circle, while the two remaining hands hold the necessary attributes.

Again, it is the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca who connects their going hand in hand to the gift cycle, with 'one who bestows the benefit, one who receives it, and a third who returns it'.<sup>29</sup> This is the round schema we recognise from *Primavera*, the acclaimed painting by Sandro Botticelli, and the life-size statue *The Three Graces* by Antonio Canova, which we can walk around because of the unimpaired three-dimensionality of the figures and the configuration as a whole: a circular structure in which all limbs and digits – legs, arms, hands, fingers – are engaged in creating a single model of grace. The Charites function as one and three simultaneously. In the cyclical system of the round dance, the triad of three goddesses, similar to other 'maiden-trinities' such as the Horae (seasons) and Moirae (fates), accompany and guide events as *recurrent*, not as part of a linear, progressive timeline.<sup>30</sup> Yes, things change, but only according to rhythms and cycles. In mythology, these triads invariably operate in a covert manner, staying in the background where they can influence others without directly intervening themselves. The power of these women triads lies in their acting indirectly, never as protagonists of the story, and always as maidens, i.e., unattached. They act in stages, with things moving incrementally toward an end, and they act recurrently, with all their actions repeated, either over short, daily periods or very long time spans such as the seasons or the cycle of life and death.

We encounter the same ambiguity between one and three, as well as between object and movement, in the Charites' strange relationships with other gods, Aphrodite in particular. The Charites are three figures, and Aphrodite one, but Aphrodite is constantly attended by the three, and the three act

as one: their cycle is closed, and they dance as one. That Homer capitalised Charis's name in the *Iliad* was certainly no accident, nor was his confusion of her with Aphrodite in the *Odyssey*. The Romans translated *charis* as *venus* as often as they translated it as *gratia*, emphasises Karl Kerényi, who likens the Charites to 'a sort of threefold Aphrodite'.<sup>31</sup> There are numerous episodes in which the Charites accompany Aphrodite, weave an 'ambrosial robe'<sup>32</sup> for her, anoint her with 'immortal oil',<sup>33</sup> or assist her in a prolonged bathing ritual. Despite all the ambiguity, the myths still present us with a single Venus and a triad of Graces (here we switch from Greek to Roman denominations), a distinction made manifest in Botticelli's *Primavera*, in which Venus approaches us frontally, and the Graces dance with each other. Venus, in the orientation of her gestures and her gaze, engages with us, while the Graces, with their glancing eyes and entwined fingers, are wholly absorbed in each other. Such iconography shows how Venus *initiates* events, and how the Graces, like the Horae and the Moirae, influence *the course of events*: a subtle distinction that is consistent with the majority of depictions. Fortunately, Botticelli does not even make the slightest attempt to portray them as actually dancing; he is much more interested in the interlacing of the fingers and hands – one pair of entwined hands high up, the other at eye level and one down below – than in the positioning of the legs and feet.

The Italian sculptor Canova appears to be even less interested in portraying the Graces as dancing in his large sculpture of them. In marble, it would surely look ridiculous; as the word denotes, a statue stands. In all the swirling of gestures, of bent arms and bent legs, standing remains the essential problem of premodern sculpture; the physical question of how to stand must be answered in the statue's conceptualisation. This is absolutely crucial. A mere representational depiction of a 'graceful' movement would never reveal the powers of grace; only the

combination, interdependence and interpenetration of standing still and moving around can do that. Both works of art have found their own way to what we have been calling the figure – or what we should perhaps term *figuration* – Botticelli via the abstraction of lines, Canova through that of posture, the figure being that strange entity occupying the gap between the abstract and the concrete, force and form, or, to use the terms we have used since the start of this essay, movement and object. Botticelli and Canova have found solutions that allow us to view Venus and the Graces as intricately overlapping, or, more precisely, as modifying each other *contrapuntally*, one taking on the ways of the other. The graceful acts as an object, and the beautiful object radiates movement.

What, then, is the actual difference between beauty and grace? They are deeply interrelated but categorically different, and we should make every possible effort not to make a muddle of their complex relationship. In the descriptions above – the dance of three figures becoming one circular configuration, the progression of time returning to its starting point, and the Three Graces being attendants to a single Venus – we see a very special form of their role-switching that directly involves a reversal of object and movement. In his 1793 treatise 'On Grace and Dignity' (*Über Anmut und Würde*), Friedrich Schiller tries to solve the riddle: 'The Greeks still maintained a distinction, then, between grace, or the Graces, and beauty, since they attached attributes to them that do not apply to the goddess of beauty.'<sup>34</sup> Then, on the next page, he rigorously spells out his definition of how the two should be distinguished:

Grace is a movable beauty [*Anmut ist eine bewegliche Schönheit*], a beauty that can appear in a subject by chance and disappear in the same way. In this it distinguishes itself from static beauty (*fixe Schönheit*), which is necessarily granted along with the subject itself.<sup>35</sup>



It is the perfect formula. Edmund Burke's definition in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, which contains only a single, short paragraph dedicated to grace, is similarly structured but falls short in its conceptual depth: 'Gracefulness is an idea belonging to posture and motion.'<sup>36</sup> Burke identifies the same problem as Schiller: that grace should be viewed both as posture, i.e., standing still, and as motion; however, he accomplishes very little with the neutral conjunction 'and'. In merely adding stillness to movement, he fails to synthesise the two. Schiller, however, does exactly that. By contrasting the adjective 'movable' with the substantive 'beauty', he applies the 'rule of the turn' we formulated at the beginning of the essay, and more precisely in the previous paragraph: to make what we do and the way we do it – i.e., *what* and *how* – contrapuntal to one another. As a consequence, grace cannot be simply equated with movement or ease of movement, as, for instance, Paul Souriau and Herbert Spencer did.<sup>37</sup> Theirs concerns the beauty of motion, Schiller's that of movable beauty, which is something fundamentally different. Grace is motion that acts like an object; it is the Graces acting like Venus, dancing acting like standing, time acting like stoppage, three acting like one. (Clearly, the phrase 'acting like' begs for an explanation, but we will have to save that for the final part.)

In following the same logic for beauty, however, we should deviate from Schiller's labelling of it as 'fixed beauty', as seen in the quote above, an interpretation that fits the traditional, classical notion of beauty as timeless, similar to Keats's 'slow Time' in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. For the writer of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, beauty relates directly to structure, to standing and stillness; it is the 'architectural beauty of the human structure [*Bau*, literally 'build'],' evidently identified with gravity, seriousness and duty. The English word 'serious' shares its etymological origin with the German *Schwer*, or 'heavy'.<sup>38</sup> At first, Schiller performs his extraordinary

manoeuvre by placing grace in between pure movement and pure stillness, not via ambiguity, paradox, mediation or superposition – some of the terms we have used so far – but through the figure of counterpoint. In doing so, he was solving the enormous problems Kant had created by separating morality from aesthetics, which for Schiller had been the main incentive to write 'On Grace and Dignity'. Viewed from this perspective, the German poet-philosopher was trying to repair the intricate connections grace and gravity had shared in the Greek perception of *charis*. And for us, *charis* offers the main conceptual framework for understanding grace in its relation to beauty. Why, then, if grace can claim stillness, should beauty not be able to claim movement? The rule of the turn can be applied in both directions. Schiller would only have had to adopt the same technique for solving a paradox by using the adjective turn of the substantive.

With such a reversal, a formula for beauty emerges that was in fact concocted by Henri Bergson in 1904: 'Beauty ... is arrested grace'.<sup>39</sup> Beauty, then, is not on one side of the equation, identified with the fixity of the object, but rather occupies the same middle position as grace, while operating the other way around. Beauty is an object that acts like it is moving. Or, in a terminology used earlier, it is a still object that *radiates* movement – a formula that fits the towardness of Venus and the halo of Apollo as much as it does the shining of Aglaea. Although beauty is not the principal subject, we should mention that radiance is a concept that is as crucial to an understanding of ancient Greece as is *charis*.<sup>40</sup> It explains why Homer confused Charis with Aphrodite, and why words such as 'glowing', 'shining', and 'gleaming' flood the pages of the epic poems. It explains the Greeks' obsession with anointment, Odysseus's shining locks of hair, the endless combing and bathing, the gold on Achilles's shield, the fluting of marble columns, the polychrome paint on the same marble, and the gold

leaf that filled the eyes of marble statues.<sup>41</sup> Beauty is *charis* for still objects. It should be regarded as occupying the same middle position as grace, and solving the same opposition between still object and acting motion, yet in the opposite direction. We should never put beauty and grace in a dualistic relationship; in fact, they both resolve dualist oppositions, but in reverse order. Beauty turns into grace, and grace turns into beauty. Figuration consists of nothing but turns, and turns only.

The attentive reader will have noticed the ellipsis leaving a little gap in the Bergson quote, a void we should hasten to fill: 'Beauty, said Leonardo da Vinci, is arrested grace'.<sup>42</sup> It is a rather awkward quote, in a way, since the phrase is nowhere to be found in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*. In fact, Bergson's is an imaginary quote, based on his attentive reading of the French philosopher of habit and grace, Félix Ravaisson, who we will attend to later; but no matter – as a formula, it is as perfect as Schiller's. In the knowledge that Leonardo's treatise was written in the 1490s, Schiller's essay in the 1790s, and Bergson's lecture in the early 1900s, we should acknowledge the consistency of their discoveries by terming the reciprocity of beauty and grace the 'Leonardo-Schiller turn'.

It should not surprise us that Leonardo da Vinci's name enters the discussion; he had many things to say on the topic of grace, and we hardly have to mention explicitly that he shared Schiller's interest in the 'beauty of the human structure'. Leonardo's dazzling knowledge of human anatomy is well known. Looking at his anatomical drawings, we immediately see why his studies are so crucial for our argument: the human body is a complex network of connective elements. Ligaments, sinews, tendons, arteries, bones: it is as if the human body itself is a drawing, made up of linear elements intertwining in ever-darkening relationships while never fully retreating from visibility. This complex network led Leonardo to completely rethink the problem we

have mentioned a few times now: that of standing. One might think standing was a problem of connecting bones together, as one would the posts and beams in an architectural structure – that is, a problem of compressive forces. But Leonardo finds as many muscles and tendons in the human body as he does bones, analogous to his interest in the pulleys, springs and ropes that fill his notebooks. The problem of standing – of 'equipoise' as he calls it – is as much a question of tension as of compression. The two must be understood in relation to each other and as working in concert. How does the human body stand gracefully? If we apply the same rule of counterpoint we did earlier, we should answer, 'By standing flexed', or even 'By standing weakly'. We stand in *contrapposto*, with the *what* and *how* of standing in direct contrast. Or, to put it in even more aesthetic terms, we do not stand in the Doric manner, with our legs apart; we stand in the Gothic manner, with our tendons pulling us up while our bones hold us down. The opposition between motion and stillness that Schiller resolved in the domain of ethics in particular had been likewise resolved by Leonardo a few centuries earlier in aesthetics. For Leonardo, posture is about neither the dynamics of dancing nor the stasis of standing. No, it is about the *activity of standing*, the pulling and pushing of standing. There is nothing static about standing still; ask any dancer how difficult it is. Obviously, this implies the need for grace and the figure of grace.

In his *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo calls it 'Grace in the Limbs', and his advice for draftsmen and painters is to 'let them be easy and pleasing, with various turns and twists, and the joints gracefully bent, that they may not look like pieces of wood.'<sup>43</sup> And not drawing them as pieces of wood means paying extra attention to the hinging of the joints, and, more importantly, the coordination of all the various flexions into a set of what he identifies as undulations:

Consider with the greatest care the form of the outlines of every object, and the character of their undulations. And these undulations must be separately studied, as to whether the curves are composed of arched convexities or angular concavities.<sup>44</sup>

In the section titled 'Of Undulating Movements and Equipoise', he adds: 'When representing a human figure or some graceful animal, be careful to avoid a wooden stiffness; that is to say, make them move with equipoise and balance so as not to look like a piece of wood.'<sup>45</sup> Now, what exactly are these undulations or curves, these lines that appear in the figure that later became known as the *figura serpentinata*?

These are not simply curves liberated from the stranglehold of straightness, some trace of freedom that has wrested itself away from necessity. What could be more naïve than such a view? Again, all the figures Leonardo analyses *stand*; that is, they are organised around a vertical axis – and there is nothing straighter than the axis of gravity. Something far more complex than escape or liberation is going on here; rather the opposite: *all the curves are engaged in actively constructing vertical straightness*. The fingers, the hands, the arms, the legs, the neck, the spine: all the parts are individually mobilised to collectively achieve stillness. Again, we are not playing with paradoxes or metaphors here. The figure of grace is not some swooshy gesture drunkenly sliding over the slippery whiteness of the paper but rather a set of curves interrelated by a rigorous logic, a *configuration* organised around an invisible internal ruler. It is as if all the bendings of the curves cancel each other out against a perfectly vertical, but dashed, straight line, allowing the figure to stand, and not fall from grace.

To interrupt myself for a moment, figures do not seem to sprout from the ground or emerge from a background, as figures are commonly presumed to do. The type of figures we are investigating here

neither drop down from the sky nor rise up from the earth – i.e., they are neither produced by mere transcendence nor by immanence. Studying the historical evolution of *charis* and grace allows us to discern another form of production, something that has not fully crystallised yet in our analysis, though we can see some of its major aspects emerging. The figuring of grace appears to be based on a set of complex interactions, what we should perhaps call a machinery of workings. The figure seems like a machined product that occurs between two zones of influence, with (a) on one side, the input of a rhythm, of a turning cycle that conveys a constant supply of activity without producing specific activities as yet; a stream that does not in itself produce the figure, since for that to occur, the stream needs to (b) meet the vertical axis of gravity at the other end. It is as if grace relies both on a temporal component, a turning wheel, and on a spatial component, a standing structure, with the figure suddenly appearing in the gap between them, like an electrical arc between two poles.

In this sense, grace is definitely a figured line or group of lines, and this one-dimensionality is no accident, because the line is the dimension of the way, and the way is as much a trajectory as an object. But it does not exist by itself; without its poles, the lines are plotted in relation to each other without any external regulating device – therefore, it is precarious to formalise the line. We should be careful to consider the serpentine line as a 'line of grace', as the English painter William Hogarth famously did in *The Analysis of Beauty*,<sup>46</sup> as a line similar to the Mannerist *furia della figura* as advocated by Giovanni Lomazzo, who introduced the term *figura serpentinata* in 1584.<sup>47</sup> That said, Hogarth's S-figure shows more internal measure than we encounter in the fury of Mannerism, enabling the figure to create the large variety of configurational groups we find in Hogarth's work; people gathering in the street, dancing in a hall, or discussing politics at the table are always depicted as intricate

sets of nested serpentines. Mannerism hardly ever shows such converging entities, only doing so in sculptures such as Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women* – logically, because it is an actual statue, in which the problem of standing is inherent. Especially in painting, its serpentines operate as lines of divergence, of groups being scattered apart.

It is useful to remember that in Greek mythology the anti-Graces were personified by the Erinyes, also known as the Furies, figures of purely chthonic heritage. Leonardo's line is, as stated, not one of pure movement but one that measures itself against the act of standing, a feat we observed likewise in Botticelli and Canova. The exceptional quality of Botticelli's depiction of the Graces in *Primavera* lies in the fact that the painting behaves as a drawing. Not only do the legs, arms and fingers behave as lines; the contours, the tresses of hair, the folds in the sheer dresses all exhibit a strong but unusual sense of schematics and design. The resulting awkwardness is crucial to the work's quality. Though it was surely the reason why Walter Pater called Botticelli 'a secondary painter', any form of naturalism would have destroyed the work's power of figuration.<sup>48</sup> We cannot 'depict' grace, because the notion of a picture or image goes directly against that of a figure. The manifest presence of design makes *Primavera* more a Gothic than a typically Renaissance exercise; the latter always emphasises the solidity of volume, while the former revels in the kind of delicate linework we find in tracery and illuminated initials. Even the folds in the fabric, which usually seem to emerge from a textile surface, seem here to exist on their own, as figures, especially in the dress of Venus, whom we could easily mistake for the Virgin Mary, surrounded as she is by a foliate halo set against an arched niche magically created by two symmetrical trees in the background. When we step back to absorb the work as a whole, it becomes increasingly impossible to escape the sense of medievalism: the general lack of depth, the figures depicted at a similar size, floating on a sea

of fruit and flowers set against the dark green background of a forest – it all makes *Primavera* appear more like a tapestry than a perspectival view of volumes in space.<sup>49</sup>

Admittedly, declaring one of the highlights of neoplatonic artistry to be a Gothic project is pushing the argument; doing the same with a neoclassical wonder like Canova's *Three Graces* borders on the hyperbolic. But just look at it: except for the fact that it refers to the classics, Canova's work can hardly be termed classicist when compared to the deep-frozen stiffness of Ingres or Alberti. Maybe the best solution is to phrase things in contrapuntal terms again: it is using a classicist style to do something Gothic. A Gothic end achieved in a classical way. Almost all the limbs are in a flexed, weakened mode, except for a single leg of each of the goddesses, who stand in contrapposto, one leg straight and stressed, the other bent and relaxed. The glances; the opening of the fingers; the gentle placing of hands on shoulders, breast, and cheek; the springy ringlets flowing down; the single piece of cloth they share; the downcast eyes of Aglaea in the middle; her slightly raised position: it is as if there is an all-out weakening and softening of all the parts that, when they are interlaced, creates this inseparable group, standing as if by magic. In a way, they all let go, but instead of collapsing, they find one another and stand fast. Strictly speaking, we do not see three figures, the Graces, but dozens of figures at every scale from fingers to whole bodies, every one of them engaged in this single act of collaboration, creating a flexible network in the sense of Leonardo's anatomy: a flexible system of holding, touching, pulling and pushing that finds this singular figure of grace.

#### **Grace and habit**

Describing grace as a machine, then have it followed by analyses of art, makes us gradually realise that art has inexorably steered toward an impasse in the channelling of grace. As grace

became more and more established in the realm of the aesthetic, the aesthetic removed itself more and more from everyday life. If we wish to live well, it will never suffice to punctuate our everyday lives with visits to the museum or, for that matter, the church. We fundamentally need grace in life itself, at its most trivial moments, whether we are driving a car, cooking a six-course meal, taking a cup off the shelf to pour ourselves some tea, or sitting in a chair. Only the conceptual power of the figure explains sitting in the chair and getting up from it as a single activity, even a single object: still action and mobile action share one and the same continuous line. One might think this was the most trivial thing in the world, and in practice it is, but conceptually it is not. Getting up from a chair is as miraculous as a bird leaving its nest: *there has to be movement before you start moving*. How is this possible? It can only be understood (a) as a movement that is 'built in' as an inclination or excitation by the architectural *Bau* of the body so admired by Schiller and Leonardo – that is, as much by its weakness as by its strength, allowing mobility and stillness to coexist – and (b) if the act has been executed before, i.e., if the act of getting up precedes the sitting in the chair. These are the wheels of habit, but also of training, practice and imitation. Habit enables grace; doing-well is in one way or another dependent on doing-again – on recurrence, as mentioned earlier. Yet first and foremost, the production of grace takes place in the realm of the everyday and the ordinary.

These observations converge in the work of Félix Ravaisson, the nineteenth-century French philosopher of habit, and the only philosopher of habit who related it to grace as well as to what he called Leonardo's 'flexuous line'.<sup>50</sup> Through contemporary eyes, we might view habit as the source of boredom, rut and repetition, and no small number of philosophers has supported this view, Kant included. However, when we think of the habitual nature of the cycle – of our everyday activities but also of larger cycles, the monthly, the yearly, and

those of life and death as we have discussed them in the context of the Charites, the Moirae and the Horae – relating grace to habit becomes wholly relevant. By way of a quick introduction, let us consider a few of the references made by Pierre Hadot, who regularly mentions Ravaisson's notion of habit. In *The Veil of Isis*, for instance, he contextualises Ravaisson in relation to Pascal's *Pensées*:

Pascal may have thought of another "habitual" movement of nature when he wrote: "Nature acts by progress, *itus et reditus* (going and returning). It passes by and returns, then goes further. Then twice as little, then more than ever, etc. The flux of the sea takes place in this way, and the sun seems to advance in this way."<sup>51</sup>

In several of his writings, Hadot also refers to Bergson's imaginary Leonardo quote. In another, on Plotinus, he refers to Ravaisson's linking of habit and grace: 'Life is grace. No one has understood all the implications of this Plotinian experience better than Ravaisson in his *Philosophical Testament*. Grace, he tells us there, is "eurhythmia"; that is, "movement which does well".'<sup>52</sup>

The above quotes create the impression that Ravaisson fully equated habit with grace, but this is not always obvious. In his early, 1838 work *Of Habit*, Ravaisson compared habit to 'prevenient grace', that is, to the Christian concept of God's efficiency, enabling humans to act, choose and move.<sup>53</sup> Later, Ravaisson develops a more complex, distributed argument, supported by his interest in Leonardo's serpentine posture and his thirty-year research into the Venus de Milo, two cases in which grace appears as an actual, standing figure.<sup>54</sup> Reading Ravaisson, we begin to discern two sides of grace: a habit side that enacts the role of the turning wheel, creating the flux of activity, and a more aesthetic, graceful side that appears at the moment of figuration. At this point, the question arises of whether the rhythmic *wave line* of the flux directly and necessarily leads

to the *serpentine line* of the figure. From the above quotations, it is clear that Pierre Hadot viewed them as continuous, since he often confounds them. We do not require an extensive argument to see why they are so different: the wave line is fundamentally horizontal, while the figure of grace is organised around a vertical, as we have learned from Leonardo and Schiller. Habit and grace must be strongly related, yes, but they cannot be identical, since they differ in their connection from one to the other. The simple fact remains that we carry habits with us, while graceful acts are situated; they need to be found. Habits we have; grace we do not.

Here we are peeking a bit ahead in the argument, but as an initial sketch it helps us to start filling in the picture of the 'grace machine' and what we have called its two poles. Whereas a few pages back we stated that one pole of the machine consisted of a temporal wheel and the other of a spatial structure, we can now, thanks to Ravaisson, rephrase and call the former *the pole of habit*. In consequence, we should term the latter *the pole of inhabitation*, the other half of the grace machine which was of no particular interest to Ravaisson. If this distinction between the two poles has any validity, it means habit does not fit directly into the space of inhabitation, since for poles to work, they need to be apart. Needless to say, this goes against our fundamental beliefs: how can we trust anything if habit cannot rely on the things it surrounds itself with? The two poles are separated by a gap, and the machine produces the figure of grace to bridge them. But let us slow down and return to Ravaisson.

As with Schiller, it is not my aim to offer a detailed reading of Ravaisson's work; there are more than enough excellent discussions of both philosophers. Instead, we should concentrate on how habit can be understood in the framework of grace, and via grace, in the context of the ancient concepts of *charis* and the gift cycle. Seen from this viewpoint, my project is virtually the opposite of Ravaisson's,

namely to find a way to position habit – and subsequently inhabitation – conceptually within grace, and not the reverse. Our topic is grace, and how it appears between habit and inhabitation, or better, *in the gap* between habit and inhabitation. If we were to take habit as the starting point for arriving at an understanding of its relation to inhabitation, the magic or effortlessness of grace would at best result as a fortunate outcome, and at worst as a product automatically dropped off the end of habit's conveyor belt. It is neither: grace is uncertain and undetermined. Grace needs habit, but habit does not necessarily lead to grace, and grace therefore functions as an end to strive for, be it in our individual behaviour or collectively. Figuration, then, should be viewed as the goal, and habit as an essential part of the ontological machinery for achieving that goal. The *telos* of things is to go well.

Many of Ravaisson's constructions support this idea, especially because he succeeds in bridging numerous concepts like habit, grace, figuration and education. By conceptualising grace within the framework of habit, he restored some of the transcendence that had been lost in the aesthetic route that we chose to follow in our brief history of grace. On the other hand, it must be said that though Ravaisson's intuition served him well in his connection of habit to grace in his early treatise *Of Habit*, a closer reading of his later essays shows that, in fact, he came to view the two as continuous. In the end, Ravaisson perceived the rhythmic wave line of habit as identical to the serpentine line of grace, as Hadot indicated. My question would then be: How would the past ever flow into the present without transformation? That would be impossible; the present is by nature situated and therefore needs to meet the conditions of verticality along with those of rhythm. After all, when the issue arises how grace comes into existence, we should realise that the word 'existence' is derived from the Latin for 'standing', *sistere*; a connection we encounter likewise in the German *Bestehen*. Ravaisson



became convinced that the serpentine line in itself was enough to display the presence of grace. This is most apparent when, in his essays, he merrily switches back and forth between descriptions of Leonardo's and Michelangelo's respective uses of the S-figure, unaware of the yawning gap that separates the two Florentine masters on this score.<sup>55</sup> For Michelangelo, the serpentine line is a freely swerving figure that acts as if liberating itself from the weight of the marble block, while completely dependent on its structure to exist. He therefore operates fully within the classic opposition of grace and gravity, while Leonardo's concept of grace aims to dissolve that dualism by including gravity in the figure. As we saw earlier, for Leonardo, the serpentine figure is a *way of standing*: the swerving curve and the dashed perpendicular merge in a single, noncontradictory structure of grace.<sup>56</sup> Though he was a fervent student of Leonardo's work – and the Venus de Milo – Ravaisson did not recognise that dashed vertical, a line that for us plays an essential role in structuring inhabitation.<sup>57</sup> Grace is not some angelic curve freeing itself from gravity like a plume of smoke; no, it finds standing; as an instance of contrapposto it demonstrates how measured freedom allows us to find a stance. Evidently, that is what instantiation means.

Nevertheless, it cannot be emphasised enough that Ravaisson touched the heart of the matter by connecting habit and grace. Regardless how we define grace, it involves a movement that exceeds its agent, and such excess can only be supplied by habit. Ravaisson, in another way of saying that this movement is larger than us, writes of the 'effacing of effort': our actions become more and more effortless, as if carried by a greater force.<sup>58</sup> According to many philosophers of habit, including Ravaisson, habit is based on the fact that at the moment we reach a certain level of effortlessness, the inclination to repeat the act increases, while at the same time, the feelings that accompany the act decrease.<sup>59</sup> In the framework of grace, we can appreciate the

increase of inclination: we act as if we have the wind at our backs; the act becomes increasingly easier. If nothing else, grace is favour. The second part of the argument is far less convincing, if at all. Of course, in acting with less effort, we act with *reduced consciousness* but, as grace tells us, *with increased feeling*. Habit may be numbing; grace is not. In fact, there seems to be more feeling from the moment consciousness stops raising barriers. Just watch a person doing something well – say, driving that car we mentioned at the beginning, smoothly swerving around problems, stopping with foresight, checking the rearview mirror and adjusting his or her speed in between. Probably the driver will have forgotten the whole trip if asked for details afterwards; definitely a case of diminished consciousness. But would we also say he or she drove with less feeling? No, on the contrary, we rarely encounter so much feeling and tact. Every detail is absorbed, the minutest movement taken up in the activity; it is as if the car is surrounded by a halo that registers and processes every movement. When one is driving well, everything is networked and coordinated. We can hardly tell what is happening inside and what outside. The inside of the driver's body, the interior of the car, and the outside events form a single, yet impersonal sphere.

The driver acts in a state of blessing, similar to the effects of the gift: at first bestowed externally, the gift is wholly internalised, to be acted out again externally. Is the driver 'transported', or does the halo issue from him or her without meeting any obstruction? It is impossible to tell: transcendence and immanence make equal claims on the cycle by taking turns; that is, one acts as the other. We cannot say for sure who acts through whom and what acts through what, except that it concerns an extreme form of harmonisation – the reason why grace has such close ties to beauty. Habit starts with effort and moves toward effortlessness, as if things are moving by themselves, though such a state of grace would be impossible to find without

the expansion of feeling. It is certainly correct to say that with increased effortlessness the act liberates itself from its subject, but not from feeling. As stated earlier, in the gift cycle we don't own our feelings. The inclination is not merely to drive, or a liking to drive, but to drive well. Habit transforms the first step into the second, the skill of driving into the pleasure of driving; and grace transforms the pleasure of driving into driving-well. Habit is the run-up to the jump of grace. It explains *forwardness*, but grace explains *towardness*.

A disturbing question creeps into the mind. Is there any correspondence between the ongoing example of driving as finding grace and the description of grace as a machine? In short, yes, but the longer answer is: not in the way we might think. Though it is a machine, grace is never an assured outcome. While habit is surely part of its mechanism, we are looking at a machinery that runs on certainty in one direction and on uncertainty in the other. From grace to habit, the machine's workings are determined; from habit to grace, they are not. Never will it be certain that doing-again will result in doing-well; the machine does not produce grace as a commodity. Every time we act, we add speed to the turning wheel of habit, and thus to the transcendence of grace; however, grace given is not the same thing as grace received, and definitely not the same thing as grace returned.

Let us go back for a moment to Bergson's essay, to the point where he rephrases Ravaisson's ideas in terms of the gift cycle:

Thus, for him who contemplates the universe with the eye of an artist, it is grace that is apprehended through the veil of beauty, and beneath grace it is goodness which shines through. Each thing manifests, in the movement recorded by its form, the infinite generosity of a principle which gives itself. And it is not by mistake that we call by the same name the charm we see in

movement, and the act of liberality characteristic of divine goodness: the two meanings of the word *grace* were identical for Ravaisson.<sup>60</sup>

To be sure, the two meanings of grace are synonymous, not because of etymology but precisely because of what Bergson points at by using the language of gift exchange, implying the cycle is nothing but an exchange of generosity. A 'movement recorded by a form' is met by a moving form. Thus, grace cannot be reduced to its relationship with habit and must be consistently analysed as part of the gift cycle.

When we apply this model to driving a car, the question arises: Which of the two is actually moving, us or the car? We are sitting still in the driver's seat, changing the form of our bodies by moving our limbs. The car, however, is not changing its form at all but moving at high speed. Where is the actual exchange taking place? In this sense, driving a car is the opposite of riding a horse. When we ride, we become the immobile torso, and the horse acts as the limbs; in the case of driving, we are the limbs and the car the torso, in what is essentially a form of harnessing. We and the car are both built – that is, structures in the sense of Schiller's *Bau*. We both have a build inasmuch as we have been built in a certain way, with an architecture of still and mobile parts. Again and again, Schiller speaks of the 'technology of the human structure', *die Technik des menschlichen Baues*.<sup>61</sup> Obviously, the car has been built according to our build. Our way of driving adapts to the car, and the car has been adapted to our way of driving. In terms of the gift cycle, we might have a gift for driving, so to speak, but that gift is partially substantiated by the car; the car *enables* us to drive. We drive thanks to the car, but the car does not drive itself through us; it is a gift we have to receive, and which we try to return by increase, by driving well. The Graces are 'givers of increase', as Jane Harrison said.

Critics of technology have regularly advanced the argument that as we drive we are driven, that the car defines our behaviour as much as we define its behaviour, as if the machine turns us into a machine as well. Such co-determinism is *precisely not* what gift exchange entails: the gift does not define what the receiver does with the gift; it gives in such a manner that the receiver can become a returner. Instrumentality and purposiveness are never, and never will be, able to explain the nature of technology. The gift implicitly carries a sense of the indeterminate or surplus. Certainly, while driving we have a goal in mind, and likewise while hammering or typing, but if these technologies did not allow or again, enable swerving and manoeuvring, we would never be able to find our way. And as to the word 'enable', we should note that its etymology wholly coincides with that of 'inhabit', *in habilis*. Technology – that which is built – needs to reach beyond its purpose. Or, to phrase it in the religious terms of transcendence we used earlier, the car's build exudes a halo of movement, which by expansion turns into the halo of driving. The technology of the car's *Bau* is a form of enabling – that is, of empowering, not of defining. In this sense, we do not inhabit the car when we drive; *the car inhabits us*, exactly as the gift cycle's second stage of internalisation prescribes, to then make us expand and grow. Grace exceeds every notion of instrumental use or the 'least expenditure of force', as Herbert Spencer defined grace.<sup>62</sup>

The things around us – and all things are built things – do not passively await our gracious handling; there is as much generosity in them as there is in us. The movement we actualise is not just the movement stored in our own bodies by the rhythms of habituation. The gift cycle is, first and foremost, driven by the Leonardo-Schiller turn: stillness into movement (beauty), and movement into stillness (grace). In short, it will not suffice to explain the relationship between habit and grace in terms of

the early, Aristotelian Ravaisson, who was deeply influenced by the concepts of potential and actual movement. Potential movement does not simply lie stored in the darkness of our own bodies; it emanates from the things around us as well, visibly and actually, in what we have been calling a halo and what Bergson described as a 'veil of beauty', and beauty is wholly indeterminate.<sup>63</sup>

Here the argument turns sharply against ergonomics: the more that things and we adapt to one another, the less movement there will be. Fully adapted to us, the car will drive itself, and we will merely sit there being passengers. The whole secret of the gift cycle lies in the fact that the figure of grace cannot be appropriated, neither by us nor by the things around us. To drive well, or better, to live well, we need between us and things a certain *gap*: a word that slowly starts to take a central position in our discussion. We and things do not – and should not – fit, for it is in the gap between habit and inhabitation that the figure appears. However, determining that gap is a most subtle affair: if there is a perfect fit, the figure disappears, but if the gap grows too large, the figure disappears as well. Somewhere there exists a middle, though not merely between us and things but also between us and our habits. The gap is a *double gap*, existing on both sides of the middle: a graceful act can neither be produced by habit's repetition nor by the things around us. This, of course, is the reason why the figure's appearance is never certain. The whole art of doing-well, of grace, is jumping the gap between habit and inhabitation.

The word 'habit' evolved from the Proto-Indo-European root *ghabh*, which means 'to give, to receive', as well as the Sanskrit *gabhasti*, meaning 'hand' or 'forearm', both of which converge in the Latin *habere*, which means 'to have, to hold, wear, etc.' The contrapuntal ambiguity of having and giving expresses how habit and grace are firmly

rooted in the gift cycle – logically, since the cycle itself is based on the ambiguity of a property that is owned and a gift that is dispensed. If it were only owned, it could not be shared; if it were purely given away, it would never be returned. Ambiguity causes the gift to be returned, although, as mentioned before, the return of the gift makes ‘ambiguity’ the wrong term, since grace does not involve some passive, linguistic state of vagueness, contradiction or paradox but rather an active turn in need of being worked out, both in the present and as present. Giving means being given; handling means being handed. It is indeed, as Ravaissou says ‘a law, a *law of the limbs*, which follows on from the freedom of spirit. But this law is a *law of grace*.<sup>64</sup> And this can only be true because the law of the limbs is the law of the gift cycle, of the Graces. The law of the limbs is by no means a law of an established form of ease or a formalisation of ease, of what the French would call *souplesse* and the Germans *Gelenkigkeit*, since you neither fully have it nor is it fully given to you.<sup>65</sup> If it were given in advance, it would erode into *comfort*, the dream of ergonomics, which would make the whole cycle irrelevant. Again, technology reveals its deeply religious vocation; relieving us from burden and providing us with such ease of movement we can hardly distinguish between the religious comfort of solace and the technological comfort of appliances. But each works only when it stops short and acknowledges the necessity of the gap. Given too much comfort, we might as well disappear altogether. If, on the other hand, we were to claim grace as our property, as something we had and controlled as our own, it would degrade into *slickness* or virtuosity. Ease does not sprout from easiness: *ease sprouts from difficulty*. This is the law of the limbs, which is also the rule of counterpoint that lies at the heart of the Leonardo-Schiller turn.

### Grace and play

At the very beginning of our essay, the notion of counterpoint led us to posit that play means we

must act seriously, and that to do our duty we should act as if we were playing. These remarks contain a few words that have been used increasingly often throughout our argument and should now be given our full attention: ‘play’, ‘act’, ‘act like’, and ‘as if’.

What kind of play does this involve? Again, many clues are given by Schiller – someone at least as interested in freedom, grace and education as Ravaissou – the idea of play is central to his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Initially borrowing it from Kant’s remarks on the ‘free play of the imagination’,<sup>66</sup> he slowly transformed it into the ‘play drive’,<sup>67</sup> *Spieltrieb*, which is as much driven by the *Bau* of the body as by the mind’s urge for freedom:

Freedom now rules beauty. Nature provided beauty of form [*Bau*], the soul provides the beauty of play. Now we also know what grace is. Grace is beauty of form under freedom’s influence, the beauty of those appearances that the person determines.<sup>68</sup>

Schiller does not mistake grace for freedom. On the contrary, grace is the equation of frame and freedom, and that can only be solved via the contrapuntal figure, which fundamentally determines that freedom is to be found only under strict conditions, yet necessarily strict in the most abstract sense, as if the *Bau* could be schematised, similar to the ghosted presence of the vertical axis in contraposto. Evidently, if the strictness were concrete, it would not be able to generate freedom and spontaneity. Every architect knows we cannot build freedom, though the opposite is just as true: freedom cannot be found in the unobstructed absence of structure. How to solve this? Only by ghosting the frame. Play cannot exist without the ghosted frame, and when we look at the playing of games in sports, of roles in customs, or of parts in the theatre, we see this confirmed in many ways. Strict rules define the game, and sharply defined limits define the playing field. Yet these limits are painted on the ground in the form of dashed or continuous lines, and never

materialised by walls or fences. Limits are real but abstract, and at the same time strict but open, and more part of a world of rules than of laws, as Baudrillard would put it.<sup>69</sup>

Since turns and counterpoints fundamentally govern the playing of games, roles, and parts, play must rely on habit as well as being embedded in the machinery of grace. To properly understand how the different varieties of sport, custom, and theatre relate to our research into grace, habit and inhabitation, we will surely need more than this essay. For now, however, to complete our sketch of the grace machine, we should look into a few of their aspects.

In sports, we easily find dozens of connections to grace, habit and even *charis* – the references in Pindar’s *Olympian Odes* to the *charis* of athletes are numerous. Everything seems connected to our discussion of grace and habit: the relentless practicing of moves during training, the admiration brought on by striving, the searching for ease without strain, the grace of the figures with respect to posture, the uncertainty whether things will work out in the actual game, and the shining of the winners. Though habit concerns ordinary activity and training extraordinary activity, we should consider the two continuous and based on the same principles. Training in sports evolved from military drill, and some sports still show direct links to a military past, such as the javelin throw, boxing, judo and archery. In its relation to habituation, training is comparable to acquiring customs in social roles, and to rehearsing a part for the stage. We should keep in mind that customs are akin to costumes; we can put them on and take them off, in exactly the way Venus used the girdle of the Graces, according to Schiller.<sup>70</sup> Training requires enormous effort and the meticulous control of actions, which are without exception based on imitation, whether it concerns roles in the theatre or the social roles of customs. The fact that mimesis is one of the mechanisms in the complex machinery gives us a clear hint that habit is not merely a matter

of us and our bodily structures. Even when focusing on ourselves, as athletes often do, we imitate models and imagine opponents. Along with military drill, athletic training is the most extreme form of habituation we know, with its endless repetition of every movement, the constant attempts to improve, the difficulties and injuries to overcome, the stamina and extreme effort needed to persevere. One might think sports training and military drill would be the last places one should expect to encounter grace, but in ancient Greece – where else? – military exercise was viewed as a powerful source of *charis*. Herodotus reports on a scout spying on the Spartan army: ‘He saw some of the men exercising naked and others combing their hair. He marvelled at the sight and took note of their numbers. When he had observed it all he rode back ... and told Xerxes all that he had seen.’<sup>71</sup>

Naked exercising is one thing, but soldiers collectively combing their hair just before a deadly battle? It sounds as if the Spartans had the perfect understanding of beauty. Beauty and grace play a central, yet covert, role in sports as well. As David Foster Wallace observed in his celebrated article on tennis player Roger Federer, ‘Of course, in men’s sports no one ever talks about beauty or grace or the body.’<sup>72</sup> Yet grace is undeniably part of it, as the celebrated author shows in the following segment of the same article, in which he ponders the roles of movement, feeling, training, and consciousness. Reading Wallace on tennis is like checking off items on a list of aspects of habit and grace drawn up by Ravaisson:

Successfully returning a hard-served tennis ball requires what’s sometimes called “the kinesthetic sense,” meaning the ability to control the body and its artificial extensions through complex and very quick systems of tasks. English has a whole cloud of terms for various parts of this ability: feel, touch, form, proprioception, coordination, hand-eye coordination, kinesthesia, grace, control, reflexes, and so on.

For promising junior players, refining the kinesthetic sense is the main goal of the extreme daily practice regimens we often hear about. The training here is both muscular and neurological. Hitting thousands of strokes, day after day, develops the ability to do by “feel” what cannot be done by regular conscious thought. Repetitive practice like this often looks tedious or even cruel to an outsider, but the outsider can’t feel what’s going on inside the player – tiny adjustments, over and over, and a sense of each change’s effects that gets more and more acute even as it recedes from normal consciousness.<sup>73</sup>

There must be innumerable reasons why the world of sports has become our chief source of figures of grace, having taken over this role from the arts, and sculpture in particular. Just thinking of the top four sculptures of all time – the *Laocoön*, Cellini’s *Perseus*, Canova’s *Three Graces*, and Rodin’s *Balzac* – we realise that absolutely nothing today reminds us of such postural art, *except sports*. One of the reasons might be that sports in fact co-emerged with technology; the two seem like conjoined twins. Another reason might be the arts’ constant suffering under the metaphysical division of appearance and reality. In the arts, mimesis remains a hopelessly unresolved issue, while in sports, it is simply embedded in the mechanism of finding grace. In sports – as in custom, theatre and fashion – mimesis belongs to the domain of the real, not of illusion. Mimesis is wholly part of the ontological machinery of figuration, wherever it occurs, stabilising the turning wheel of habit and training.

When Federer hits his forehand or a football player makes an incredible move, when a volleyball player hits a smash or a high jumper throws his back over the bar, when an alpine skier performs a slalom or Valentino Rossi takes a bend on his motorcycle – lying on his bike like a huge frog – or when a diver jumps off the springboard, a gymnast performs a somersault, a boxer strikes a right blow, a skater does a pirouette, or a judoka makes a back throw,

these movements are without question real because they are graceful, and graceful because they are figural. Sports continuously supplies us with thousands and thousands of figures. The fact that these movements have the status of figures – and in our terminology, that means they act as objects – can be seen in a wide range of different phenomena. The most intriguing demonstration of this effect can be observed in the obsessive live replays during games and races on television that seem to grind time to a halt. We can see it even more clearly in the slow-motion replays of the most figural actions. No question that slow motion is one of the most original inventions in the world of technical imagery. Slow motion literally shows movement turning into stillness, and in that turn we recognise grace, not in either one separately. It is like seeing Keats’s slow time converge onto an object instead of emanating from it. Mere freeze-framing would fail to present us with the figure. Not one of these figural moves is certain; an athlete may train for a specific move and never find a way to use it, and he or she may come up with a completely new move during a game.

The fact that play, movement, training and grace occur in such an intricate web of workings becomes even more apparent in the lengthy argument of Plato’s *Laws*, the book that was so important to Schiller as he was writing ‘On Grace and Dignity’. Perhaps because it was the Greek philosopher’s last book, it seems to have been written by a thinker who has mellowed slightly. Having come out as the sworn enemy of mimesis in *The Republic*, in which he noted how essential imitation was in military training,<sup>74</sup> Plato now arrives at the view that dance is a necessary core activity within education (*paideia*) and essential to the successful building of any city-state. Schiller based both ‘On Grace and Dignity’ and *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* on the similar assumption that moral rectitude may be accompanied by aesthetic pleasure, especially in the context of education. There is a long section in the *Laws* in which Plato explains how the Athenians



teach rhythmic movement to their children ‘as by a tonic, when they are moved by any kind of shaking or motion, whether they are moved by their own action – as in a swing or in a rowing-boat – or are carried along on horseback or by any other rapidly moving bodies’.<sup>75</sup> Rocking babies as part of teaching the law of the limbs! Motion administered ‘as by a tonic’! Rhythm is ‘taken in’, absorbed, or – as we put it earlier when discussing Euphrosyne – swallowed, and returned beyond its sphere, in the realm of Thalia, as bloom and growth, or, in Plato’s words, in a child’s upbringing. This leads Plato to advocate a structured programme of training citizens through a set of dance routines that differ for each age group. And Plato goes further, especially with respect to *paideia* (play) and its connection to *choros* (dance):

It is the life of peace that everyone should live as much and as well as he can. What then is the right way? We should live out our lives playing at certain pastimes – sacrificing, singing and dancing – so as to be able to win Heaven’s favor and to repel our foes and vanquish them in fight.<sup>76</sup>

‘Live as well as he can’ – practically the first sentence of our essay. For the older Plato, dance, grace, training, education, and the appreciation of laws are so interconnected that he permits himself a wordplay on *choros* and *charis*<sup>77</sup> and even relates joy to mimesis.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps Kant, who stated that ‘imitation has no place in morality’, should have studied the Greek philosopher more thoroughly.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, Plato’s ideas even go beyond Schiller’s and Ravaisson’s, because the coupling of moral stance and aesthetic pleasure, viewed in the framework of *charis*, becomes a cyclical argument. Plato’s advocacy of collective dancing – during festivals that recur every two weeks, no less – would make it an activity shared by the whole community, doubtless inspired by the dancing Graces.

With the complex affinities between the various concepts of grace, *charis*, habit, training, play, and

mimesis, we have slowly developed a clearer picture of how the machine of grace is constructed, and before we tie up the argument, we should redirect it toward the larger issue of habit and inhabitation, the two poles of the machine. By looking at dance, art, sports, and play, we have enhanced our understanding of the path between habit and grace, the temporal pole of the machine. We have seen how the route from grace to habit, backwards in time toward memory, is assured by training and incorporation. We have also seen that the path forward in time, that of the production of grace out of habit, is not assured, and in this sense, the distance between habit and grace is part of the larger gap between habit and inhabitation.

But we have only occasionally been able to elaborate on the spatial side of the gap. Looking at sports has shown us that space itself contains such a gap. Indeed, *space is broken*, or, if you will, polarised. What we have called the pole of inhabitation is itself split in two. Sports, because of its intrinsic reliance on figuration, thrives on this dichotomy and takes place in the most radical manifestation of the gap possible, between pure field and pure object. In no way do the two fit together. Games are played on highly schematised fields, abstract surfaces we encounter in every type of game: boards, tracks, courses, arenas, pools, rinks, rings – surfaces that are geometrically divided by lines to create boxes, halves, bands, circles, corners, squares. A simplified geometry is inscribed on a highly abstract, smooth surface, not altogether different from the extreme abstraction of the highway’s asphalt and striping. Invariably, these are surfaces of speed, rhythm and movement; there hardly exist more radical examples of space taking on the properties of a drawing or diagram. They are even more abstract than plans, and more like schemes. Still, the field is just one half of what defines the realm of games. The other half consists of its antipode, namely concrete objects: sticks, bats, bows, hurdles; vehicles such as boats, cars, and motorbikes; and of course dozens of

types of balls: big, small, hard, soft, perfectly round, round and flat, and not quite round. Nothing tells the ball where to go on the field, except figuration. The figures we encounter in sports should be consistently examined as bridging-jumping between abstract surfaces and concrete objects.

This complex machinery of grace, of which sports is merely the most radical form, structures nothing less than our whole lives (and, I would add, those of all other things, but let us leave that for now). We cannot inhabit space directly with our habits. Undeniably, an enormous danger for architects, designers and engineers lurks in the idea that we can. Habit and inhabitation do not fit together like a hand and a glove; they are necessarily separated by a gap, a double gap with two sides: a horizontal, temporal side that ejects figures of grace that can only appear on the other, spatial side of the gap, itself structured as a vertical gap between abstract, smooth fields and concrete, contoured objects. Oddly enough, all the parts of what we have called the grace machine can be clearly defined and described – the wheel of habit and training; the rhythms it produces being spatially reflected in the abstract field; the existence of concrete objects, lifted from the field over the vertical axis of gravity – *but not grace itself*. Being wholly dependent on workings, it can never be assured of whether the machine works. Indeed, this radical uncertainty is the whole reason for its existence; it is a machine with a fundamental question mark at its heart.

### Notes

1. For the monotheistic version, see the Old Testament, in which the Hebrew word for grace, the good and the beautiful is *chēn*. Generally it is translated as finding 'grace in the sight of the Lord'. Strong's definition: '*chēn, khane*; from H2603; graciousness, i.e. subjective (kindness, favor) or objective (beauty): – favour, grace(-ious), pleasant, precious, (well-)favoured'.
2. Usually ascribed to Epicurus. Cf. Erkinger

Schwarzenberger, *Die Grazien* (Bonn: Habelt Verlag, 1966), 58.

3. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), 3.
4. *Ibid.*, vii, 16–18.
5. *Ibid.*, 43.
6. *Ibid.*, 14. And: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: De Gruyter, 1972), Chapter 7, 'The Spirit of the Gift', 149–84.
7. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, as quoted in Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 154: 'Are we not dealing with a mystification?' And: Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10: 'Why and how can I think that the gift is impossible?' Derrida argues that the notion of excess excludes the possibility of return. Mauss's argument, in stark contrast, is precisely that the return is enabled because of surplus, which is the whole reason why we cannot reduce it to mere economy.
8. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 191–96. And: Marcel Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*, trans. J.-L. Morhange (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 248.
9. See, for instance: Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (February 1999), 67–91.
10. *Iliad* 9.315–17.
11. *Odyssey* 1.60–62.
12. *Odyssey* 23.174–80.
13. *Iliad* 14.182–83.
14. *Odyssey* 23.158.
15. See: Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
16. I introduce the term 'superactual' in: 'Charis and Radiance', *Giving and Taking: Antidotes to a Culture of Greed*, ed. J. Brouwer and S. van Tuinen (Rotterdam: V2\_Publishing, 2014), 136–47.
17. Mauss, *The Gift*, 39–43.
18. *Ibid.*, 3.
19. *Iliad* 18.382.

20. *Odyssey* 18.193–94.
21. *Theogony* 910.
22. Pausanias 9.35.1
23. Barbara Breitenberger, *Aphrodite and Eros: The Development of Erotic Mythology in Early Greek Poetry and Cult* (London: Routledge, 2007), 107.
24. Seneca, *On Benefits*, Book I, part III.
25. Lars Spuybroek 'Sun and Lightning', in: *The War of Appearances: Transparency, Opacity, Radiance*, ed. J. Brouwer, S. van Tuinen and L. Spuybroek (Rotterdam: V2\_Publishing, 2016), 103.
26. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991 [1903]), 438, 444.
27. Schwarzenberger, *Die Grazien*, 46.
28. In various coins, vase paintings and reliefs, this is the main technique used to represent their circular configuration on a flat surface. See: Schwarzenberger, *Die Grazien*, Tafel 1–12.
29. Seneca, *On Benefits*, Book I, part III.
30. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 286.
31. Carl Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 101.
32. *Iliad* 5.338.
33. *Odyssey* 8.364.
34. Friedrich Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', trans. Jane Curran, in: *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity' in Its Cultural Context*, ed. Jane Curran and Christophe Fricker (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 123–24.
35. *Ibid.*, 125.
36. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.
37. Paul Souriau, *The Aesthetics of Movement*, trans. Manon Souriau (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), Chapter 10, 'Grace and Ease of Movement', 81–96; Herbert Spencer, *Essays: Moral, Political and Aesthetic* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1865), Chapter XIII, 'Gracefulness', 312–18.
38. Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', 128/176: 'die architektonische Schönheit des menschlichen Baues'.
39. Henri Bergson, *Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 207. See note 43.
40. Spuybroek, 'Charis and Radiance', 136–47.
41. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs: Études de psychologie historique* (1965): 'To the Greek, the *charis* does not only emanate from a woman's body, or from any human being who "shines" with the beauty of youth, with a sparkle (often found in the eyes) that inspires love; it also emanates from finely chiselled jewellery, carefully carved jewels, and from certain precious fabrics; from the scintillation of metal, the bright reflection of a precious stone's water, the polychrome quality of a weaving, and the vivid colours of the depiction of an animal or a vegetal setting with an intense liveliness. The silversmith's and the weaver's works also shine splendidly and render the gleam and light of flesh.' Quoted in Denis Vidal, 'The Three Graces, or the Allegory of the Gift', in *Hau Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 no. 2 (2014): 339–368.
42. Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 207. Funnily, this quote cannot be found in Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*. Bergson's remark comes from his essay on 'The Life and Work of Ravaisson', and he seems to be quoting from the work of the nineteenth-century French philosopher. However, the exact quote cannot be found there either. The closest is: 'Forms are beautiful, but movement possesses grace ... If it is possible to consider forms (as often happens in geometry) as the durable vestiges of movements, as *immobilized movements*, one can equally say, it seems, that *beauty is akin to the once mobile grace that has become fixed*' (emphasis added). At this point in the text, Ravaisson is not yet discussing the work of Leonardo; he does so in the paragraphs that follow. See: Félix Ravaisson, *Selected Essays*, trans. Mark Sinclair (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 178.
43. Leonardo da Vinci, 'On Painting', in: *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, trans. Jean-Paul Richter (London: Samson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883), par. 592 on p. 295.
44. *Ibid.*, par. 48 on p. 29.
45. *Ibid.*, par. 591 on p. 295.

46. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 51.
47. Gian Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato*, quoted in John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Penguin Books, 1967), 81.
48. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 48.
49. Cf. Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 107. An allusion to the Cluny 'millefleurs' tapestries that, though dated later than Botticelli's *Primavera*, are generally considered to be late medieval, especially the series of six in Cluny entitled 'La Vie Seigneuriale'.
50. Ravaissou, *Selected Essays*, 178.
51. Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 222.
52. Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50.
53. Félix Ravaissou, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008), 71.
54. Gregory Curtis, *Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 96–121.
55. Ravaissou, *Selected Essays*, 178.
56. I would define Michelangelo's use of the S-figure as (early) Baroque, a realm that only allows for figuration because it is prestructured (the reason why his figures take on the traits of the colossal), while Leonardo's is (late) Gothic, a world where weak limbs configure into a strong, rigid network. For further discussion of the differences between Baroque and Gothic, see Lars Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 24–27 and 44–45.
57. Ravaissou, *Selected Essays*, 260: 'Grace, which is all suppleness and flexibility, and thus as different as could be from geometrical rigidity'.
58. Ravaissou, *Of Habit*, 59: 'Yet by its repeated or prolonged exercise, we learn to adjust the quantity of effort, and to choose its point of application, in relation to the end that we wish to attain; at the same time, *the consciousness of effort is effaced*' (emphasis added).
59. This is what Ravaissou calls the 'double law' of habit (*Of Habit*, 37), explained by Catherine Malabou in her foreword to the English translation as the 'repetition [that] weakens sensibility and excites the power of movement'. See also: Clare Carlisle, *On Habit* (London: Routledge, 2014), 27–31.
60. Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 208.
61. Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', 177.
62. Spencer, *Essays*, 313.
63. Cf. Spuybroek, 'Charis and Radiance', 136–39.
64. Ravaissou, *Of Habit*, 57.
65. This would also be my critique of explaining Ravaissou's connecting habit to grace in terms of an exercise of bodily 'plasticity', as Catherine Malabou does in her foreword to *Of Habit*. Clare Carlisle adopts the principle in *On Habit* (21–24.) When grace is as much of as *beyond* the body, a (neo-)materialist notion such as plasticity or elasticity can never explain its structure. Grace is structured by a cycle that includes both horizontal immanence and vertical transcendence, a verticality that by definition cannot solely 'emerge' from the plane of immanence.
66. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §51: 'The Division of the Fine Arts'.
67. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. E. Wilkinson and L. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Letter XV.
68. Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', 133–34.
69. Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1979), 'La passion de la règle', 179–208.
70. Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', 124.
71. Herodotus, *The Histories* 7.208.3.
72. David Foster Wallace, 'Roger Federer as Religious Experience', *The New York Times*, August 20, 2006.
73. *Ibid.*
74. Plato, *Republic* 3.395b–c.
75. Plato, *Laws* 7.789.
76. Plato, *Laws* 7.803. See also: Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 18–19.
77. Plato, *Laws* 2.654a.
78. Plato, *Laws* 2.668.

79. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46: 'Nachahmung findet im Sittlichen gar nicht statt'.

### **Biography**

Lars Spuybroek is Professor of Architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta where he teaches design methodology and aesthetic theory. He is the author of among others *The Architecture of Continuity* (2008), *Research and Design: The Architecture of Variation* (2009), *Research and Design: Textile Tectonics* (2011), and *The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design* (2011 and 2016). Spuybroek is currently working on a book titled *The Grace Machine: Architectures of the Figure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).