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The Eve of a New Age: Alejo Carpentier and the New World Baroque

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The Eve of a New Age: Alejo Carpentier and the New World Baroque

Abstract/Resumen

ABSTRACT

Discussions of the Neobaroque began to find an important position in Latin American circles during the twentieth century. The goal of these discussions was a reassessment of an American identity by using the Baroque as a historical catalyst for cultural transformation. One of the prominent figures during this period who connected the Baroque with questions revolving around Latin American identity was the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. The following article examines Carpentier's theories on the New World Baroque taken from various essays published in *La novela lationamericana en visperas de un nuevo siglo* (1981). Through these essays, Carpentier's perspective of the Baroque is relayed into cultural themes of Latin America such as the importance of American solidarity, historical constancy, cultural innovation/progression, the natural environment, and urbanism. Analyzing the connection of such themes with the arrival of the New World Baroque sheds light on the crucial theoretical developments of Latin American identity during the twentieth century.

ABSTRACTO:

Las discusiones del neobarroco comenzaron a ocupar un lugar importante en los círculos latinoamericanos durante el siglo XX. El objetivo de estas discusiones fue una revaloración de la identidad americana al utilizar el barroco como un catalizador de una transformación cultural. Una de las figuras prominentes de esta época quien conectó el barroco con preguntas centrándose en la identidad americana fue el escritor cubano Alejo Carpentier. El siguiente artículo examina las teorías de Carpentier sobre el barroco del nuevo mundo según varios de sus ensayos publicados en *La novela lationamericana en visperas de un nuevo siglo* (1981). A través de estos ensayos la perspectiva de Carpentier sobre el barroco se transmite en temas culturales dentro de América Latina tales como la importancia de la solidaridad americana, la constancia histórica, la innovación/progresión cultural, el ambiente natural y el urbanismo. El análisis de la conexión de estos temas con la llegada del barroco al nuevo mundo arroja nueva luz sobre el desarrollo de los teorías claves de la identidad americana durante el siglo XX.

Keywords/Palabras clave

Alejo Carpentier, New World Baroque, Neobaroque, Latin America, Cuba, Neobarroco, Havana

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Cover Page Footnote

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Beginning on May 15th, 1975, a series of papers were given by Alejo Carpentier at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The four papers highlighted topics on Latin American culture, identity, and the New World Baroque: "Conciencia e identidad de América", "Un camino de medio siglo", "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso", and "Problemática del tiempo y el idioma en la moderna novela latinoamericana". They were published in México six years later and included in a compilation of essays titled *La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo y otros ensayos*. Of these, "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" highlights the importance of the New World Baroque as an inclusive form centered on the principles of *mestizaje*. Similar to his contemporary José Lezama Lima, Carpentier draws his insight on the Baroque from the *mestizo* project of José Martí's *Nuestra América* and associates the Baroque with the urban dynamics of architecture, which is particularly evident in another essay of his that discusses the Baroque architecture of Havana titled "La ciudad de las columnas."¹ It is clear that the works of Carpentier are influenced by the writings of Lezama Lima. Recognizing the similarities between the Baroque theories of Lezama Lima and Carpentier, Zamora and Kaup highlight the tendency of the two to advocate for an inclusive Baroque:

We understand Carpentier's inclusiveness not as cultural appropriation but as the desire, strongly felt by the 1940's, to engage the Baroque as an instrument "to incorporate the exterior world through the transformative furnace of assimilation," to repeat Lezama's phrase. Carpentier's New World Baroque, like Lezama's, represents an impulse toward inclusion (itself a Baroque impulse), an effort to bridge historical and cultural rupture, to assemble disparate cultural fragments—past and present, European and non-European. Both Carpentier and Lezama construct theories of cultural becoming that reach across the boundaries of fixed identities toward the formulation of yet uncertain ones. This capacity makes their theories relevant to postcolonial contexts worldwide. (9)

The centrality of Carpentier's theory is found in the belief that America is and has always been Baroque: "América, continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes, fue barroca desde siempre" (123). Carpentier seeks to "eternalize" the Baroque as an American referent. He therefore deemphasizes its significance as a temporal category, and claims the Baroque as an expressive style that has always represented Latin American culture. As I will discuss further, Carpentier eternalizes the Baroque by associating it with the ideas of

¹ Published in 1964 as part of his volume of essays *Tientos y diferencias*.

Catalan philosopher Eugenio D'Ors. Carpentier describes the Baroque as a timeless constant, thus giving it a transcultural and trans-historical character that he defines as "un espíritu barroco" (113). By endorsing the Baroque as a constant, Carpentier implies the Baroque to reflect "constant" elements of Latin America such as its natural environment. Thus for Carpentier, the Baroque proves less periodic and stylistic, and more universal and natural. In his writings, this perspective of the Baroque is relayed into cultural themes of Latin America such as the importance of American solidarity, historical constancy, cultural innovation/progression, the natural environment, and urbanism. Throughout this article, I discuss each of these cultural themes, and explore the key elements that form Carpentier's perspective on the twentieth-century reformulation of the New World Baroque.

1. American Solidarity

Nearing the end of his essay "Conciencia e identidad de América" Carpentier exhorts, "[p]ara mí terminaron los tiempos de la *soledad*. Empezaron los tiempos de la *solidaridad*" (87; italics in original). The process from solitude to solidarity in Latin America reveals an overarching theme that is evident in the 1975 discourses of Carpentier. The message here is clear: Latin America must stand united, or "solidified," under an independent and unified identity. He draws his inspiration from Martí's teachings of *mestizaje* and Americanism. In this same essay, Carpentier admits rather evidently his personal connection with the work of Martí: "Es cierto –me enorgullezco de ello– que tuve una temprana visión de América y del porvenir de América (me refiero, desde luego, a aquella América que José Martí llamara 'Nuestra América')" (84). Furthermore, he emphasizes that the ideology of Martí is connected to Cuba's history, artists, and revolutionaries. While describing his decision to return to Havana from an extended visit in Venezuela, Carpentier lists previous and current Cuban figures as "voices" that motivated him to return and describes Martí as their inspiration. He mentions various writers who took on important political roles such as the Cuban hero Julio Antonio Mella, the cofounder of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC, *Partido Comunista Cubano*); the Cuban poet and member of the PCC Rubén Martínez Villena; the Puerto Rican writer Pablo de la Torriente Brau who acted as an advocate for abused Cuban farmers in the early twentieth century; the PCC advocate Juan Marinello; the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén; and the revolutionary writer and Cuban intellectual Raúl Roa García. Carpentier later closes off by recognizing all those "voices" that had participated in some form in the 1953 assault on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba during the 26th of July Movement. Quoting the leader of the movement, Fidel Castro, Carpentier

exclaims, "Fuimos guiados por el pensamiento de José Martí," (86). Thus, José Martí, the voice that motivated the voices, created a loud enough call to entice Carpentier to return from Venezuela to Cuba. For it was in Cuba where he held the intention to partake in what he describes as "[el] servicio del gran quehacer histórico latinoamericano" (86). As he later notes, this great Latin American endeavour finds its purpose within the borders of Cuba and is guided by the ideology of Martí: "Y ese quehacer estaba profundamente enraizado en la historia misma de Cuba, en su pasado, en el pensamiento ecuménicamente latinoamericano de José Martí, para quien nada que fuese latinoamericano hubiese sido nunca ajeno" (86).

Two points are worth revealing in this recollection of Carpentier. Firstly, he is a clear advocate for the previous nineteenth-century and current twentieth-century revolutionary movements of his time. The 1959 Cuban revolution becomes for Carpentier a tangible example of Latin American solidarity. He perceives the Cuban revolution as an example of victory through the unification of Cuban patriots influenced by Martíán ideologies of liberty. A greater public advocate for the Cuban revolution than his contemporaries Lezama Lima and Sarduy, Carpentier in fact professes the Cuban revolution to be a victory beyond Cuban borders:

[V]eríamos cumplidos, en el alba del año 1959, con el triunfo de la Revolución cubana, y la reafirmación de ese triunfo en la decisiva y trascendental batalla de Playa Girón, primera gran victoria de una nación de nuestra América mestiza (como la llamara más de una vez, con orgullo, José Martí) contra el más temible de los imperialismos . . . ("El del gigante con botas de siete leguas que nos desprecia" . . . —y vuelvo a citar a José Martí.) (85)

It is not for *nuestra Cuba* that Carpentier attributes the victory of the Cuban revolution, but rather for *nuestra América*. There exists a tendency for Carpentier to place Cuban contexts, such as the revolution, within the broader category of Martí's *Nuestra América*. This leads me to my second point, which is seen in a similar tendency in Carpentier's writing to relay national patriotism within the context of individual existentialism. Martí often spoke in the context of the American "*hombre*" rather than in specific nationalities to avoid geographical divisions and promote the union of all Latin America. Carpentier tends to do the same. One example in particular can be seen at the end of his essay "Conciencia e identidad de América" when he advocates for a unified philosophy within Latin America: "Hombre soy, y sólo me siento hombre cuando mi palpito, mi pulsión profunda, se sincronizan con el palpito, la pulsión, de todos los hombres que me rodean" (87). Furthermore, in "Un camino de medio siglo" he existentially

connects himself with the temporal context of the Cuban revolution: "Hombre de mi tiempo, soy de mi tiempo y mi tiempo trascendente es el de la Revolución cubana" (111). He tends to purposefully skew the distinctions between individual associations (*hombre*) and national associations (Revolución cubana) in an effort to provide a figure of inclusivity. Moreover, like Martí who understood that inclusivity must require the right of entitlement –hence America is designated as "ours"– Carpentier similarly entitles the elements of Latin American culture under the category of "ours". Therefore, throughout Carpentier's four essays, the Latin American man is entitled *hombre-nuestro* (80), the Latin American continent entitled "continente nuestro" (82), the marvellous-real is entitled "maravilloso nuestro" (130), Latin American nature is entitled "nuestra naturaleza" (132), Latin American scholars are entitled as "nuestros maestros" (134), Latin American history is entitled "nuestra historia contemporánea" (135), and Latin American maturity is entitled "nuestra madurez" (135). Carpentier clearly reveals the project of Latin American identity to exist under an inclusive structure that imitates the writings of Martí. Referencing back to Martí's words in *La Edad de Oro y otros relatos*, "[u]n hombre solo no vale nunca más que un pueblo entero" (87), we can see that Carpentier endows the ontological project of twentieth-century Latin America with a similar nature. For Carpentier, unity is the essence of Latin American identity; inclusivity and integration are revealed as the path laid out by Martí to guide the individual *hombre* to a freedom found within the context of community. It is a freedom that Carpentier believed was being accomplished in the era of his time— an era which he depicts in his essay "Un camino de medio siglo" to foreshadow "la lucha de las transformaciones, de las mutaciones, de las revoluciones" (110). It was an era of change. These changes, which represent the shift from individual solitude to cultural solidarity, would require a common denominator throughout history that would support and justify the similitude and unity within Latin American culture. It is here in which Carpentier reaches out to the Baroque to symbolize the needed constancy of a Latin American culture still trying to find balance from an unstable and wavering history.

2. Baroque Constancy

Constancy creates solidarity. This seems to be the central theme of Carpentier's essay "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso". Here the Baroque is implied as the constancy that solidifies American unity: the Baroque being the constancy, *Nuestra América mestiza* being the unity. Carpentier borrows from the perspective of Eugenio d'Ors who describes the Baroque to be a continual eon and a human constant that contains "factores recesivos" (66), represents "la corriente

de vida” and reveals “la serie infinita de espacios posibles de dimensiones infinitas” (87). Following in the steps of d'Ors, Carpentier describes the Baroque as a "spirit" that returns cyclically throughout time. He writes:

Eugenio d'Ors, que no siempre me convence enteramente con sus teorías artísticas, pero que indudablemente en algunos ensayos es de una penetración extraordinaria, nos dice en un ensayo famoso que en realidad lo que hay que ver en el barroco es una suerte de pulsión creadora, que vuelve cíclicamente a través de toda la historia en las manifestaciones del arte, tanto literarias como plásticas, arquitectónicas o musicales; y nos da una imagen muy acertada cuando dice que existe un espíritu barroco, como existe un espíritu imperial. Este se aplica igualmente a Alejandro, Carlomagno o Napoleón, saltando por encima de los siglos. Hay un eterno retorno de un espíritu imperial en la historia, como hay un eterno retorno del barroquismo a través de los tiempos en las manifestaciones del arte; y ese barroquismo, lejos de significar decadencia, ha marcado a veces la culminación, la máxima expresión, el momento de mayor riqueza, de una civilización determinada. (113-114)

As is revealed in the citation above, for Carpentier, the Baroque is relayed throughout history like a creative "impulse" that returns in the manifestations of art. He argues against considering the Baroque as decadent and against the use of historical categories. By eliminating historical categories, the Baroque is able to return in the same manner in which an empire returns throughout history. We can turn to Irlemar Chiampi's study *Barroco y modernidad* to see practical examples of where the Baroque has returned, or as Chiampi explains "inserted" itself into literary modernity. According to Chiampi, the Baroque returns in a cyclical fashion, recycling itself throughout modernity in various artists and literary styles in the twentieth-century. "El barroco," explains Chiampi, "reaparece para atestiguar la crisis/fin de la modernidad y la condición misma de un continente que no pudo incorporar el proyecto del Iluminismo" (17). Firstly, she explains a Baroque reappearance in the modernist poetry of Rubén Darío. She goes as far as titling Darío as a Baroque "avatar":

Cierto preciosismo verbal y cierta verificación excesiva del mundo externo (al gongorino modo) podrían constituir, en la poesía de Darío, el primer avatar de la legibilidad estética del barroco, pero la mezcla (y pugna) de americanismo, galofilia e hispanismo en el poeta nicaragüense resultó en una versión del barroco coherente con el proyecto modernista de alinear nuestra literatura con el parnasismo y el simbolismo. (19)

The second insertion of the Baroque is recognized in the Avant-guard poets such as Jorge Luis Borges and José Lezama Lima. She explains that this insertion of the Baroque was made possible through the appropriation of pre-modern aesthetics. In particular it is the appearance of the Baroque "metaphor" in these poets work that draws Chiampi to this conclusion: "[L]a metáfora barroca es un modelo poético y una referencia crítica en sus búsquedas de innovación, contra el sencillismo de cierta poesía acomodada en la expresión directa y banal" (20). Lastly, the third insertion of the Baroque is realized when Baroque forms are conjoined with American content. Chiampi refers to this as a process of historical legitimization: "La legitimación histórica de lo barroco es un giro sustantivo de la reapropiación que requiere una dialéctica: la de convertir lo universal en particular y, al revés, lo particular en universal. Estos pasos decisivos son tomados por el propio Lezama Lima, en los años cincuenta, y por Alejo Carpentier, en los sesenta" (21). As Chiampi cleverly points out, the concept of historical legitimization is defined by the dialectic between the universal and the particular. This dialectic is clearly formulated in the writings of Carpentier who balances between the role of the individual *hombre* (the universal) and the national *americano* (the particular). Carpentier most clearly reveals this dialectical struggle at the end of his essay "Un camino de medio siglo":

Cuando un pueblo en que se ha nacido, decía José Martí, no está al nivel de la época en que vive, es preciso ser a la vez el hombre de la época y el de su pueblo. Y ya que el pueblo al que pertenezco se ha puesto repentinamente al nivel de la época en que vive, época del socialismo, en el seno de ese pueblo y en función de ese pueblo, trataré de realizar las tareas que aún me quedan por cumplir como escritor en el reino de este mundo. (111)

Carpentier endows the individual with the project of being a man of the time and of his people, that is a man of both universal and national significance. He further exemplifies the present conditions of Cuba under socialism, and recognizes himself as a writer of the people in the "kingdom of this world". It is both the people and the world that are reflected in Carpentier's motivations, implying both a project of universal inclusion and individual evaluation. For Carpentier, the individual is always subject to a greater universal role. This takes shape in his theories of the Baroque that connect the inclusive structures of Latin American *mestizaje* with the hybrid and symbiotic nature of the Baroque. Carpentier actually considers the whole cosmogony of America to be situated within the Baroque:

América, continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes, fue barroca desde siempre: ahí está el Popol Vuh, ahí están los

libros de Chilam Balam, ahí está todo lo que se ha descubierto, todo lo que se ha estudiado recientemente a través de los trabajos de Ángel Garibay, de Adrián Recinos, con todos los ciclos del tiempo delimitados por la aparición de los ciclos de los cinco soles. . . . Todo lo que se refiere a cosmogonía americana –siempre es grande América– está dentro de lo barroco. (123)

Here he lists various artists to reveal the vastness of the Baroque influence in literature, similar to what Lezama Lima did with his Baroque banquet. According to Carpentier, all the cycles of time, which are represented by different artists, tend to point to the Baroque. Therefore, the greatness of America is not found in historical periods, but rather in the culmination of Baroque expression.

3. Baroque Innovation

By viewing the Baroque as a "spirit" that can reappear, Carpentier is clearly implying its reappearance in the form of the New World Baroque. He is advocating for a Baroque that *reappears*, however does not *re-enact*. The key here is the distinction between innovation and mimesis. He is driven to define the differences between the two, fearing that the common definitions of the Baroque (he lists a couple near the beginning of his essay) do not do justice in capturing its meaning. Therefore, Carpentier distinguishes between mimetic and innovative expressions by clarifying the difference between the Baroque spirit and the Baroque understood as a specific historical style. He writes, "el espíritu barroco puede renacer en cualquier momento y renace en muchas creaciones de los arquitectos más modernos de hoy. Porque es *un espíritu* y no un *estilo histórico*" (119). Carpentier goes on to explain that the Romanesque and the Gothic represent historical styles while the Baroque represents the spirit. He justifies this by highlighting d'Ors observation that "'no existe un estilo gótico en la literatura.' En cambio, en literatura sí existe un estilo barroco" (119). On the other hand, he describes that romanticism, because it opposes classicism, can be thought of as Baroque rather than as a historical style. He advocates for romanticism saying, "el hombre del romanticismo fue acción y fue pulsión y fue movimiento y fue voluntad y fue manifiesto y fue violencia" (121). In particular it is the opposition between romanticism and classicism that justifies Carpentier's conclusion that the Romantic is Baroque. He is jumping on board with a common debate of his time that argued the distinctions between classicism and the Baroque. Like his contemporary Lezama Lima who tackled generalizations stating that "[l]a tierra era clásica y el mar barroco" (302), Carpentier is aware of the dynamics between the two. He believes classicism to oppose the Baroque. In fact, he goes so far as to call classicism the enemy of innovation: "la palabra clasicismo no tiene sentido ni

peso ninguno. Y yo diría que si toda imitación es académica, toda academia se rige por reglas, normas, leyes. Luego lo clásico es lo académico, y todo lo académico es conservador, observante, obediente de reglas; luego enemigo de toda innovación, de todo lo que rompe con las reglas y normas" (115). Similarly d'Ors, like other earlier critics such as Heinrich Wölfflin and Oswald Spengler believed the Baroque to alternate with classical types.² Carpentier however decontextualizes d'Ors theory in reference to the New World Baroque. Zamora and Kaup explain:

D'Ors's relation to Carpentier is seminal and yet also surprising, since the American Baroque never crossed d'Ors's mind, and his metropolitan context is far indeed from Carpentier's postcolonial Caribbean. And yet both theorists understood the Baroque as a style, a spirit, a human constant, rather than a particular historical period. For both, Baroque temporality overarches discontinuities, and Baroque space is labyrinthine, an ambit in which forking paths diverge, cross, and conjoin. (10)

Nonetheless, Carpentier seems more inclined to connect d'Ors and his New World Baroque theory based on the general concept of constancy rather than focus on the scholars distinction of Baroque contexts. His intention is to redirect the assumptions that the Baroque is a decadent or mimetic form that takes after classicism. The Baroque, as Carpentier implies, must be approached with a greater regard for its ability to transcend temporal limitations.

In her essay "Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier," Monika Kaup summarizes Carpentier's formulations of the Baroque, emphasizing the distinctions between mimesis and creativity:

Carpentier and other theorists of the New World Baroque seize on it not as a mimetic mode of representation, but rather as a device for the creation of new worlds, new collective identities, and new forms of expression. The New World Baroque is neither primarily nor exclusively about signification (such as post-Tridentine Catholic iconography and its symbolic conventions), but rather a means of producing things, a blueprint or mechanism for (and result of) the transformation of social, linguistic, and political structures. (111)

Kaup's main objective is to highlight Carpentier's New World Baroque as a form of creativity, an innovating tool that was destined to stretch the limits of American

² See Zamora and Kaup, 242-243.

expression and formulate new methods and styles in art. However, we are still left with the question of why the New World? Why Latin America? Narrowing this question further, why Cuba? Kaup reaffirms that the key here is found in the concept of *mestizaje*. It is Cuba's history of hybridity that designates it as a strong location for the New World Baroque. It is for this reason that in "Un camino de medio siglo" Carpentier acknowledges the importance of the term *criollo* saying "la verdad es que la palabra 'criollo' es un elemento vital para el entendimiento de nuestra América, de esta América, madre América, América mestiza, que es nuestro continente" (103). In "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" Carpentier connects the significance of creole with the mandate of the Baroque spirit. Simply put, his intentions are to reveal that Latin America is Baroque because it engenders a culture of symbiosis and *mestizaje*, the same principles that form the foundation of American *barroquismo*. Carpentier writes:

¿Y por qué es América Latina la tierra de elección del barroco? Porque toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra un barroquismo. El barroquismo americano se acrece con la criollidad, con el sentido del criollo, con la conciencia que cobra el hombre americano, sea hijo de indio nacido en el continente —la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis, de ser un criollo; y el espíritu criollo de por sí, es un espíritu barroco. (126)

Kaup digs a bit further into the question of the New World Baroque by sourcing the work of Caribbean theorist Michael Dash. She alludes to the fact that Cuba in particular exhibits hybridity based on its historical depopulation of its indigenous peoples. She explains:

Unlike on the mainland, in the Caribbean none of the indigenous languages and peoples survived: Arawak and Taino speakers had almost completely been exterminated in the first half-century after contact and conquest. This is why—as Caribbean theorists such as Michael Dash routinely observe—in the Americas, the Caribbean is the epitome of hybridity: there are no 'pure' indigenous origins to refer back to. The origin of Caribbean cultures is hybrid, in the confluence of races, in the mixing of immigrant peoples in plantation society composed of white masters and black slaves that dominated in the Caribbean. Here is one reason why Cuban writers would come up with a decolonizing theory of becoming-Baroque: given the lack of a pre-Columbian architectural heritage and languages, postcolonial thought had no alternative to work from within the colonizer's forms and language, folding the master's tools into minor cultural uses. (137)

The key here is found in Kaup's explanation that postcolonial thought had to work *within* the colonizer's forms and languages. By this, Kaup means to exploit the European tendency to rely on American input to create Baroque forms. In this same essay, Kaup argues that the insertion of American style in European forms represents what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe as a minor form of language. In their work *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* Deleuze and Guattari clarify the origins of a minor literature saying that "[a] minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). Furthermore, they explain that the term "minor" is used to designate a revolutionary condition of literature rather than specific examples:

We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature. Even he who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language, just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian. Writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own *patois*, his own third world, his own desert. (18)

In these terms, we can therefore understand the Baroque as a minor language to be constructed within the major, that being European. The New World Baroque is revealed like America's aesthetic *patois*, a third world, and its own desert, seeking its own form of expression. According to Kaup, understanding the Baroque as a minor form of language explains the innovative tendencies for it to hold the purpose of creating new forms of identity. Kaup explains that "[b]ecause [*mestizos*] could not appeal to a social place or identity of their own, these 'new people' born of the union of colonizer and colonized had to actively invent themselves as a group and create a voice of their own, by a transformative appropriation of the 'major' social structure which oppressed them" (127). The minor language thus indicates the efforts of American expression to survive under the oversight of the "major" European structure. It implies the innovation of American forms within an imposing European framework. Kaup clarifies: "It is therefore not a return to habits of passive imitation that the minoritizing operation proposes in the ingestion of hegemonic European culture, but active re-creation and reinvention" (129). She emphasizes this further by saying "the impulse to deform, to metamorphose, to assimilate the 'alien' in the absence of 'proper' being and thereby produce new identities and styles—signals this: the mestizo New World Baroque is *not about product, but process*" (128; Italics in original). And here we come to the heart of the issue. Kaup argues that the Baroque is less about the product it creates, and more about the process of its creativity. For this reason,

Kaup emphasizes Deleuze and Guattari's verdict that "metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor" (126). Whereas metaphor would indicate a created product of language, metamorphosis indicates the creative process. Deleuze and Guattari explain, "Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation. Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word" (22). Here, Deleuze and Guattari are reflecting on Franz Kafka's book *The Metamorphosis* where the protagonist Gregor Samsa turns into a beetle-like vermin. Concerning *The Metamorphosis* Kaup explains, "Gregor's becoming-animal is not allegorical; it is rather an opening towards new styles of being that help Gregor escape the bureaucratic world of power" (126). Kaup's purpose here is to connect the metamorphosis initiated by a minor language to the conditions of the New World Baroque. Like Gregor, the New World Baroque, a minor form of expression, undergoes a metamorphosis in order to assimilate into its New World environment. Connecting Carpentier's theories of the Baroque to the minor theories of Deleuze and Guattari she explains:

Carpentier's becoming-Baroque and becoming-*criollo* are about metamorphosis, not metaphor: like Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka, Carpentier's New World Baroque produces 'a people to come,' provisional cultural identities and perceptions that are still in the process of formation. It is this *production* of decolonizing difference and of new, rebellious worlds, identities, and expressions from hegemonic European forms—on the part of strangers living within its reach—that Carpentier is trying to express. (128)

Whether we choose to accept Kaup's connection between Carpentier and Deleuze and Guattari or not, there remains no doubt that Carpentier advocates for a Baroque that is constantly on the edge of "becoming," that is, a Baroque with strong inclinations to metamorphose. Carpentier paints a picture of a Baroque that always was in America and thus an America that was always progressing towards novel forms of expression. The Baroque thus reappears in the New World in favour of progress and during a time for which American identity required a referent that could be assimilated within the duality of European and American contexts— between colonial modernity and the post-colonial present.

4. The Marvellous-real and American Nature

In 1943, Carpentier took a trip to Haiti and while observing the culture and conditions of the country he was inspired to theorize what he would term to be the

marvellous-real (*lo real maravilloso*). In Carpentier's own words, he describes his initial observations in "Un camino de medio siglo":

En el año 1943 voy a Haití, casualmente, en compañía del actor Louis Jouvet y me hallo ahí ante los prodigios de un mundo mágico, de un mundo sincrético, de un mundo donde hallaba al estado vivo, al estado bruto, ya hecho, preparado, mostrado, todo aquello que los surrealistas, hay que decirlo, fabricaban demasiado a menudo a base de artificio . . . Surge en mí esa percepción de algo que desde entonces no me ha abandonado, que es la percepción de lo que yo llamo 'lo real maravilloso', que difiere del realismo mágico, y del surrealismo en sí. (102)

Carpentier further expands the marvellous-real in the prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo*. Explaining his trip to Haiti, he describes his encounter with the marvellous-real as a "quotidian contact," implying it to be found within the routine elements of life: "Esto se me hizo particularmente evidente durante mi permanencia en Haití, al hallarme en contacto cotidiano con algo que podríamos llamar lo real maravilloso" (5). Carpentier creates a rather ironic dialectic between the marvellous –that is wonder, awe, curiosity, the incredible– and the quotidian – that is normal, routine, casual, credible. However, according to Carpentier, this would prove less of a dialectic if we were to understand the true significance of the word "marvellous". In "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" he seeks to revise the definition of marvellous in the same manner he attempted to do in the beginning of the essay with the terms classicism and Baroque. He concludes: "debemos establecer una definición de lo maravilloso que no entrañe esta noción de que lo maravilloso es lo admirable porque es bello. Lo feo, lo deforme, lo terrible, también puede ser maravilloso. Todo lo insólito es maravilloso" (128). The quotidian is thus seen in the unusual (*insólito*) circumstances of life and recognized as "marvellous". Carpentier saw this in Haiti, but attributes it to all of America:

A cada paso hallaba lo real maravilloso. Pero pensaba, además que esa presencia y vigencia de lo real maravilloso no era privilegio único de Haití, sino patrimonio de la América entera, donde todavía no se ha terminado de establecer, por ejemplo, un recuento de cosmogonías. Lo real maravilloso se encuentra a cada paso en las vidas de hombres que inscribieron fechas en la historia del Continente. (El reino 5-6)

Furthermore, Carpentier believes it necessary to distinguish what is meant by the marvellous-real in comparison to previous referents such as magical realism and surrealism. He describes the German artist Franz Roth as coining the term

magical realism sometime between 1924 and 1925. Carpentier explains, "lo que [Franz Roth] llamaba *realismo mágico* era sencillamente una pintura donde se combinan formas reales de una manera no conforme a la realidad cotidiana" (129; italics in original). We can see then that the difference between magical realism and the marvellous-real is seen in its attempt to focus on the quotidian reality rather than unreality. Concerning surrealism, Carpentier distinguishes it from the marvellous-real in two ways. Firstly, he recognizes the tendency of the surrealist artist André Breton to consider that "sólo lo maravilloso es bello" (129). He argues that surrealist artists such as Breton never considered the reality that perhaps the marvellous was admirable not because of its beauty, but rather because it was unusual (*insólito*). Secondly, he argues that there is a lack of reality revealed in surrealism: "Ahora bien, si el surrealismo perseguía lo maravilloso, hay que decir que el surrealismo muy rara vez lo buscaba en la realidad" (130). On the other hand, the marvellous-real focuses specifically on the circumstances of reality. Carpentier concludes the status of the marvellous emphasizing its quotidian nature: "Lo real maravilloso, en cambio, que yo defiendo, y es lo real maravilloso nuestro, es el que encontramos en estado bruto, latente, omnipresente en todo lo latinoamericano. Aquí lo insólito es cotidiano, siempre fue cotidiano" (130).

Carpentier utilizes the marvellous-real as a comparative quality between America and Europe. This can be seen in his prologue to *El reino de este mundo* where he explains that "todo resulta maravilloso en una historia imposible de situar en Europa, y que es tan real, sin embargo, como cualquier suceso ejemplar de los consignados, para pedagógica edificación, en los manuales escolares" (8). As he explains, the marvellous-real is situated in America, but not in Europe. This is significant since it provides a comparative referent between Europe and America that is valuable in connecting the marvellous-real with the New World Baroque. In particular this comparison between America and Europe falls on the discussion of American nature. For Carpentier the essence of the marvellous-real is found not in stylistic or created elements of American culture, but rather within its natural environment. In "Lo Barroco y lo real maravilloso" he explains that "nuestra naturaleza es indómita, como nuestra historia, que es historia de lo real maravilloso y de lo insólito en América" (132). The emphasis on nature is a theme relayed in the novels of Carpentier as well, in particular the environment of the Amazonian jungle in *Los pasos perdidos*. In this novel, the natural, indigenous contexts are projected against structures of "civilization" and its modernizing dispositions. In reference to this novel, Cecile Leclercq recognizes an overarching dialectic formed between American nature and European culture:

Por otra parte, [en Carpentier] se revela el aspecto indómito de la naturaleza contra la cual lucha el hombre; presenta el cliché de la

devoradora naturaleza americana, reactivando la 'novela selvática' o 'amazónica' de las primeras décadas del siglo XX, no con el tono positivista sino esplengleriano: pues la exaltación de la fuerza telúrica de la naturaleza americana se contrapone a los engaños de la civilización occidental. Si por una parte corresponde la novela a la antítesis naturaleza/América vs. cultura/Europa, por otra expresa la confrontación de culturas, el intento de superación del eurocentrismo, tanto de parte del protagonista como del propio autor, para optar (por lo menos mentalmente) por las raíces latinoamericanas. (227)

Carpentier's intentions are to connect the natural environments of America with its races. He paints us a picture of geography with anthropology, landscape with mankind. However, these contrapositions fall upon a theory that is less concrete and simple that Carpentier makes out. His theory of the marvellous-real in many ways requires a faith or belief in its application to America. His examples appear more random than they are convincing. In "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" he eclectically jumps between examples of historical events to literature, from kings to authors, from periods of slavery to twentieth-century literary movements. He exemplifies the marvellous-real in Haiti by referring to the fortress constructed by Henri Christophe (King Henri I of Haiti) to guard the island from enemy attacks, thus permitting a period of independence. He mentions the return of Mackandal in Haiti that transformed the destiny of millions of slaves. He gives other examples, some of which include Benito Juárez, a five-term president of Mexico in the latter half of the nineteenth-century who ran his presidential office from a carriage travelling throughout the nation; the Bolivian guerrilla military leader Juana de Azurduy de Padilla whom he attributes as the precursor to the war of independence in Cuba all the while being a mother of two children to whom she gave birth to in a cave in the Andes mountains; and the founder of the doctrine of positivism, the French philosopher Isidore Auguste Marie François Xavier Comte who till this day is worshiped in temples throughout Brazil. He calls the poetry of Rubén Darío "una poesía sumamente barroca" (134), and describes the work of José Martí as "un artífice maravilloso de la prosa barroca, y en su ensayo fundamental, *Nuestra América*, donde se definen todos los problemas de América en pocas páginas, es un maravilloso ejemplo de estilo barroco" (134). He exemplifies the novel *Canaima* from the author Rómulo Gallegos, describing it to be the most Baroque of his works. Furthermore, he discusses the influence of the Guatemalan corpus of myth-historical narratives *Popol Vuh*, and other indigenous mythological works *Chilam Balam*, and *Anales de los Cakchiqueles* in writings in Asturias. Lastly he mentions the twentieth-century writers of the "[la] nueva novela" (135) whose novels are collaborated under the title of the Latin American "boom" and considers the entirety of their work to be Baroque (132-135). All in

all we are left with an eclectic variety of examples to support a theory defined primarily by how it compares with previous theories of magical realism and surrealism. Leclercq is right when she explains that "[l]a sensación de lo maravilloso supone entonces una fe en lo maravilloso, así como los esclavos creyeron en los poderes licantrópicos de Mackandal: para definir lo americano, escoge el elemento irracional que se opone a la razón, rasgo 'específicamente' europeo." (228). The marvellous-real in many ways is constructed more on sensation than on reason. It is proved not by the logic of the examples mentioned above, but rather in the "marvellous" quality of the culture that is represented. It is this very quality that separates it from European culture. Leclercq recognizes this by positioning the emotional status imposed by the marvellous-real in America against the rational status of Europe: "Carpentier utiliza más bien la antítesis emoción (no subconsciente) vs. razón, retomando el viejo cliché antagónico europeo razón/Europa vs. emoción-intuición/América Latina" (228). Once again a distinction can be made against surrealism here. Surrealism, according to Leclercq, attempts to create a rupture of reality by breaking through the barrier between the human being and its subconscious, but as a result it advocates for a lack of control that is in reality exercised by reason. Thus, Leclercq explains that the surrealist André Breton "es prisionero de las convenciones de la razón y del utilitarismo" (228). This is not the intention of Carpentier, who does not seek to break with reality, but rather utilizes reality as an antithesis to the emotional/intuitive dynamics of America.

Both the contrapositions of Europe and America as mentioned by Leclercq –Nature/America vs. Culture/Europe; reason/Europe vs. emotion-intuition/ Latin America– set up the marvellous-real to be Baroque. Like the marvellous-real, the New World Baroque works within the same European/American contrapositions and is most characterized by its natural environments. Leclercq describes the Baroque's involvement in America:

Lo real maravilloso carpentiano se vuelve 'patrimonio' de América Latina signo de diferenciación y de oposición: tanto su naturaleza, como su historia, sus cosmogonías, su folklore musical y danzario, y la presencia del fecundo mestizaje son tan maravillosos como barrocos. Lo real maravilloso y lo barroco, elementos imbricados, intervienen en la caracterización del medio y de arte latinoamericanos. (229)

Leclercq clarifies the connection between the Baroque and the marvellous-real by emphasizing that the Baroque conditions of culture are likewise marvellous, both representing the natural environment and the art of Latin America. Likewise, Carpentier's use of the neologism *barroquismo* is utilized to represent the tropical landscape of American nature. Carpentier explains, "[t]engo que lograr con mis

palabras un barroquismo paralelo al barroquismo del paisaje del trópico templado. Y nos encontramos con que eso conduce lógicamente a un barroquismo que se produce espontáneamente en nuestra literatura" (133). Carpentier therefore advocates for a Baroque culture connected to the tropical nature of Latin America. He exemplifies American literature to reveal such connections, indicating a literature that is both Baroque and marvellous. Leclercq explains this connection as a method to decenter America from European culture: "El barroquismo llega de esta forma a ser un estilo 'natural': de esta forma la naturaleza se vuelve cultura. Es una teoría que aspira a 'deseurocentralizar' la cultura y el estilo literario latinoamericanos, centrándolos en la naturaleza americana" (231). Referring back to the first theme of Baroque constancy that I mentioned, we can see how this theme of constancy fits well with Carpentier's project of connecting the Baroque with nature. Nature acts as the perfect constancy for Baroque expression. As American nature is and has always been constantly present, so too does the Baroque, the expression of nature, find its constancy in America. Carpentier, therefore matches the constancy of expression with that of nature, which can be said to be an all around marvellous connection.

5. The Urban Baroque

For Carpentier, the Baroque is above all an urban entity that is realized in architecture. In "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" he exclaims, "Nuestro mundo es barroco por la arquitectura —eso no hay ni que demostrarlo—, por el enrevesamiento y la complejidad de su naturaleza y su vegetación, por la policromía de cuanto nos circunda, por la pulsión telúrica de los fenómenos a que estamos todavía sometidos" (131). Similarly to Lezama Lima, Carpentier sees the symbolism of nature in architecture. In particular, Carpentier finds the symbolism of nature within the constructs of concrete. Amongst the concrete of Baroque cathedrals and Havana columns Carpentier envisions an American Baroque decorated with the symbolism of America's natural environment. As he did with his theory on the marvellous-real, he uses Baroque architecture in the New World to create a contrast between America and Europe. This is evident at the beginning of his essay "Conciencia e identidad de América":

Mientras el hombre de Europa nacía, crecía, maduraba, entre piedras seculares, edificaciones viejas, apenas acrecidas o anacronizadas por alguna tímida innovación arquitectónica, el latinoamericano nacido en los albores de este siglo de prodigiosos inventos, mutaciones, revoluciones, abría los ojos en el ámbito de ciudades que, casi totalmente inmovilizadas desde los siglos XVII o XVIII, con un lentísimo aumento de población,

empezaban a agigantarse, a extenderse, a alargarse, a elevarse, al ritmo de las mezcladoras de concreto. (79)

Carpentier artistically compares the older architectural forms of Europe to the emergence of new architectural forms in Latin America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Europe's innovation is seen as timid, while America's extends, enlarges, and elevates to the rhythm of concrete mixers— an artistic metaphor that implies a rhythm-like progression in America. American innovation is thus contrasted with European tradition. Carpentier in fact alludes to a progressive-like "style" in New World Baroque architecture. In particular, this progressive style is revealed in the abundant utilization of space which finds a central axis within its linearity that Carpentier titles in "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" as "núcleos proliferantes" (117). These proliferating centers are artistic designs that are utilized to take up the central space of the construct and specifically redirect the attention of the artwork from the inside out. Carpentier explains the centers as such:

[Los núcleos proliferantes son] elementos decorativos que llenan totalmente el espacio ocupado por la construcción, las paredes, todo el espacio disponible arquitectónicamente, con motivos que están dotados de una expansión propia y lanzan, proyectan las formas con una fuerza expansiva hacia afuera. Es decir, es un arte en movimiento, un arte de pulsión, un arte que va de un centro hacia afuera y va rompiendo, en cierto modo, sus propios márgenes. (117)

The Havana Cathedral proves to be a tangible example of these proliferating centers. Here, the main doors are positioned higher and to the center of the smaller side doors. The central doors draw attention to the central "axis" of the Cathedral, which is located in a perfectly vertical direction above the doors leading to a large clover-shaped stain glass window. From this centralized window, the architecture proliferates upwards to highest point where lies the figure of the cross. Likewise, the central window reaches out to each side where the towers stand, and downwards to the cathedral steps that extend towards the vast opening of the plaza. In this particular case, the axis of the cathedral in fact acts as the central focal point of the entire plaza. For Carpentier, Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, the cathedral of Toledo in Spain, Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, Charles Bridge and the Saint Clementine church in Prague all exhibit this proliferating nature of the Baroque (118). In each case, the objective of Carpentier is to reveal an architectural style that "fears" empty space and "flees" from its geometrical boundaries. As the Baroque flees from its center caressing

the prolific detail of the architectural walls, progression thus takes shape both metaphorically and metaphysically: the Baroque becomes movement.



1.1 The Havana Cathedral (1748-1777), view from the plaza.



1.2 Close up of the Havana Cathedral

In his essay "La ciudad de las columnas" Carpentier discusses the urban Baroque of Havana. His objective is to highlight the *mestizo* quality of Cuban architecture by identifying the excess of architectural columns represented in the city. The columns prove imperative in understanding the urban environment of the city. While reflecting on the positioning of columns throughout Havana, Carpentier in fact argues that the architectural layout of the city is designed around the absence of light, hence he labels Havana as the "ciudad de sombras" (62). This is another example of how natural environments are integrated into the Baroque. The natural context of light becomes the foundation for the Baroque form of Havana. Natural conditions thus guide urban development. Furthermore, he compares the hybrid quality of *mestizaje* with the superposition of column styles in Havana. He thus labels Havana as a style without a style, that is to say, an eclectic assortment of forms without a singular referent. He explains:

La Habana ese estilo sin estilo que a la larga, por proceso de simbiosis, de amalgama, se erige en un barroquismo peculiar que hace las veces de estilo, inscribiéndose en la historia de los comportamientos urbanísticos. Porque,

poco a poco, de lo abigarrado, de lo entremezclado, de lo encajado entre realidades distintas, han ido surgiendo las constantes de un empaque general que distingue a La Habana de otras ciudades del continente. (63)

Here Carpentier, goes further than merely distinguishing between European and American forms, advocating for the exclusivity of the Baroque form found in Cuba. Kaup believes that in this particular essay Carpentier turns the mainland/Caribbean displacement into a main subject of discussion since "the New World Baroque emerged from a sociohistory of *mestizaje* in a mainland—not a Caribbean—context" (136). He compares Cuba to mainland American countries such as México, Ecuador, and Perú and describes the atmosphere of Havana to represent a distinct expression of American *barroquismo*. According to Carpentier, Cuban *barroquismo* is particularly evident in the eclectic display of column styles represented in Havana. He explains:

Cuba no es barroca como México, como Quito, como Lima. La Habana está más cerca, arquitectónicamente, de Segovia y de Cádiz, que de la prodigiosa policromía de San Francisco Ecatepec de Cholula. . . Cuba no llegó a propiciar un barroquismo válido en la talla, la imagen o la edificación. Pero, Cuba, por suerte, fue mestiza —como México o el Alto Perú. Y como todo mestizaje, por proceso de simbiosis, de adición, de mezcla, engendra un barroquismo, el barroquismo cubano consistió en acumular, coleccionar, multiplicar, columnas y columnatas en tal demasía de dóricos y de corintios, de jónicos y de compuestos, que acabó el transeúnte por olvidar que vivía entre columnas, que era acompañado por columnas, era vigilado por columnas que le medían el tranco y lo protegían del sol y de la lluvia, y hasta que era velado por columnas en las noches de sus sueños. (73)

Carpentier thus identifies Cuban style under three verbs: accumulate, collect, and multiply,—all verbs that give a sense of "addition" which implies once again a style of progression.

In an interesting allusion, Carpentier associates the extensive display of columns in the city to be like a "jungle". With any other writer, this may not allude to much, however with Carpentier we as readers are immediately drawn to his use of the "jungle" as a Baroque metaphor. This is seen in his novel *Los pasos perdidos* where the jungle is used to imply distinctions between European modernity and American nature. Carpentier describes that "la increíble profusión de columnas, en una ciudad que es emporio de columnas, selva de columnas, columnata infinita, última urbe en tener columnas en tal demasía; columnas que, por lo demás, al haber salido de los patios originales, han ido trazando una historia de la decadencia de la columna a través de las edades" (65). He seems to

use the extension of columns as an addition to the metaphorical significance of the jungle. The jungle, the location of traditional indigenous populations is thrown in conjunction with the modernizing cultures outside of it. Carpentier, redirects this metaphor as he did with the "núcleos proliferantes" of architecture, that is, he creates a progression from the inner centrality outwards. Here, the jungle is seen as the inner axis of culture expanding outwards to its foreign contexts. Therefore, rather than looking from the outside into the inner "jungle" of columns, Carpentier directs the attention of culture from the inner jungle outwards. Hence, the columns are described as an "emporio", "selva", and "infinita" which give a sense of endless progression. He even attributes the columns as the "elemento de decoración interior" (64), comparable to the interior axis of "núcleos proliferantes" in architecture. One may then say that in Havana *the columns are the city's proliferating center*. The progression here is accomplished not by extending the natural contexts towards the "inner" urban concrete, but rather from the "inner" urban concrete to the natural "outside" jungles, thus implying an extension of the city. Carpentier clarifies saying, "todos los estilos de la columna aparecen representados, conjugados o mestizados hasta el infinito. Columnas de medio cuerpo dórico y medio cuerpo corintio; jónicos, enanos, cariátides de cemento, tímidas ilustraciones o degeneraciones de un Viñola compulsado por cuanto maestro de obra contribuyera a extender la ciudad" (65). The implication made by Carpentier is that where the city extends, so too does the Baroque. Since the Baroque is by nature a progressive form, expanding from its inner nucleus outward, so too must the city expand in a similar manner.



1.3 Columned balcony in Old Havana



1.4 Columned walkways in Old Havana

Carpentier's collage of the Baroque and architecture demands an acknowledgement of José Antonio Maravall's belief that the Baroque and the city go hand in hand. By acknowledging the connection between the city and the Baroque, we can observe that while the city expands, which Carpentier describes it to do in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so too does the Baroque. And as the Baroque expands it brings with it the novel task of assimilating within the culture of its time. Hence, Carpentier makes note of the Baroque's project of transculturation, tasking it with the role of transcending temporal and cultural discontinuities. He attributes this to the role of the Baroque spirit:

Espíritu barroco, legítimamente antillano mestizo en cuanto se transculturizó en estas islas del Mediterráneo americano, que se tradujo en un irreverente y desacompasado rejuego de entablamentos clásicos, para crear ciudades aparentemente ordenadas y serenas donde los vientos de ciclones estaban siempre al acecho del mucho orden para desordenar el orden apenas los veranos, pasados a octubre, empezaran a bajar sus nubes sobre las azoteas y tejados. (74)

Cleverly, contrasting the Baroque tension between order and disorder through the metaphor of cyclones and wind, Carpentier labels the Baroque as a form fighting against the colonial order through the tools of architecture. Trans-cultured, the Baroque arrives in the New World with a different project, one of postcolonial disorder, of wind, cyclones, transformation, mutation, and innovation— an overall voracity to progress.

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