

COLECCIÓN PERSPECTIVAS

SEVERO SARDUY

BARROCO

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UNO

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DOS

I. CERO.

II. CÍRCULO.

III. CICLO.

"retombée": causalidad acrónica,
isomorfia no contigua,
o,

consecuencia de algo que aún no se ha producido,
parecido con algo que aún no existe.

0. CÁMARA DE ECO

Las notas que siguen intentan señalar la "retombée" de ciertos modelos científicos (cosmológicos) en la producción simbólica no científica, contemporánea o no. La resonancia de esos modelos se escucha sin noción de contigüidad ni de causalidad: en esta cámara, a veces el eco precede la voz.

Historia caduca leída al revés; relato sin fechas: dispersión de la historia sancionada.¹

Boomerang: trazando la agrimensura de la cámara de eco, el mapa de la repercusión, ciertos modelos, cuya "retombée" se detecta, mostrarán su reverso: ni esquema puro, operante, sin base, ni unidad científica mínima, sino —patente en el círculo de Galileo, o en la teoría del Big bang de Lemaître— núcleo imaginario, marca teológica.

Para elucidar el campo simbólico del barroco, la "retombée" se define como oposición de dos formas —el círculo de Galileo y la elipse de Kepler—, y sumariamente,

¹ Historia sancionada (historia de lo científico en la práctica científica); historia caduca (historia de las intervenciones de lo no científico en la práctica científica). Cf.: Gaston Bachelard, *L'Activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine* y Dominique Lecourt, *Pour une critique de l'épistémologie*, París, François Maspero, 1972, pág. 34.

como marca de otra oposición —la de dos teorías cosmológicas actuales: el *Big bang* y el *Steady State*—, en unas pocas obras de hoy.

Si el espacio promulgado tipo es el que describe la Cosmología, es simplemente porque esta ciencia, en la medida en que su objeto propio es el universo considerado como un todo, sintetiza, o al menos incluye, el saber de las otras: sus modelos, en cierto sentido, pueden *figurar* la epistemé de una época —aun si consideramos la indagación cosmológica como simple región de un discurso datable, esos esquemas serán válidos: reflejos de otros, generadores de la epistemé dada, *sinopia* del fresco visible.

En el espacio simbólico del barroco —en ese, ilusorio, a que abren página y tela, pero también en el espacio físico, atravesado por el símbolo de la ciudad y la iglesia— encontraríamos la cita textual o la metáfora del espacio fundador, postulado por la Astronomía contemporánea; en la producción actual, la expansión o la estabilidad del universo que supone la Cosmología de hoy, indistinguible de la Astronomía: no podemos ya observar sin que los datos obtenidos nos remitan, por su magnitud, al "origen" del universo.

I. LA PALABRA "BARROCO"

Todo texto sobre el barroco se emprende considerando los orígenes de la palabra *barroco*. Criticándola aquí, éste confirma esa manía, ese vértigo del génesis que otorga a la filología un saber excesivo y subraya sus límites logocéntricos. La naturaleza de las cosas —se supone, al proceder así, que la tienen— estaría substancialmente escrita, como un significado aunque olvidable presente, en las palabras que las nombran: así, del barroco perdura la imagen nudosa de la gran perla irregular —del portugués *barroco*—, el áspero conglomerado rocoso —del español *berrueco* y luego *berrocal*—, y más tarde, como desmintiendo ese carácter de objeto bruto, de materia basta, sin factura, *barroco* aparece entre los joyeros: invirtiendo su connotación primera, ya no designará más lo inmediato y natural, piedra o perla, sino lo elaborado y minucioso, lo cincelado, la aplicación del orfebre. Discutibles filiaciones posteriores insisten en el sentido del rigor, de la armazón paciente: *barroco*, figura del silogismo —precisión de la joyería mental—; *Baroccio*, un rebuscado productor de madonas.

Los estudiosos han agotado la historia de *barroco*; poco se ha denunciado el prejuicio persistente, mantenido sobre todo por el oscurantismo de los diccionarios, que identi-

fica lo barroco a lo estrambótico, lo excéntrico y hasta lo barato, sin excluir sus avatares más recientes de *camp* y de *kitsch*. Este rechazo, de aparente inocencia estética encubre una actitud moral: "La extravagancia es un sustantivo femenino, término que expresa en la arquitectura un gusto contrario a los principios recibidos, una busca afectada de formas extraordinarias y cuyo único mérito consiste en la novedad misma que constituye su vicio... Se distingue, en moral, entre el capricho y la extravagancia. El primero puede ser fruto de la imaginación; la segunda, resultado del carácter... Esta distinción moral puede aplicarse a la arquitectura y a los diferentes efectos del capricho y de la extravagancia que se manifiestan en ese arte... Viñole y Miguel Ángel a veces admitieron en sus arquitecturas detalles caprichosos, Borromini y Guarini fueron los maestros del género extravagante".¹

A la historia del barroco podríamos añadir, como un reflejo puntual e inseparable, la de su represión moral, ley que, manifiesta o no, lo señala como desviación o anomalía de una forma precedente, equilibrada y pura, representada por lo clásico. Sólo a partir de d'Ors el anatema se atenúa o, más bien, se disimula: "Si se habla de enfermedad con respecto al barroco es en el sentido en que Michelet decía: 'La femme est une éternelle malade'".

Motivar el signo *barroco*, fundamentarlo hoy sin que la operación implique un residuo moral, no podría lograrse si se pretende una concordancia de orden semántico, un acuerdo de sentido entre la palabra y la cosa; donde se instaura un sentido último, una verdad plena y central, la singularidad del significado, se habrá instaurado la culpa,

¹ Quatremère de Quincy, *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture*, 1832.

la caída. A la manía definidora, al vértigo del génesis, opondríamos una homología estructural entre el producto barroco paradigmático —la joya— y la forma de la expresión *barroco*:² analogía que articula al referente con el significante, primero considerando la distribución de los elementos vocálicos, luego, su grafismo:

—"La palabra *barroco* posee dos claras vocales *bien engarzadas*, que parecen evocar su amplitud y su brillo":³ el soporte, pues, es opaco, estrecho; en esa superficie consonántica, bien engarzados, como las perlas en la montadura, espejean los elementos claros.

En esa distribución brusca de la luz, en esa ruptura neta cuyos bordes separan, sin matices, la autoridad del motivo y la neutralidad, lo indiferenciado del fondo, hay un anuncio del momento cenital del barroco: el caravaggismo.² Contraste inmediato entre campo de luz y campo de sombra. Suprimir toda transición entre un término y otro, yuxtaponiendo drásticamente los contrarios: así se obtiene —ya lo había formulado la Retórica de Aristóteles— un mayor impacto didáctico; aprender con facilidad es un placer consubstancial al hombre: se enseña con silogismos rápidos, sin junturas verbales, relacionando antitéticamente sujeto y predicado.

Cifrado pues, en *barroco*, el método, el modo, pero también la vocación primera de ese estilo, que no por azar ha podido relacionarse con la expansión jesuítica: la pedagogía, la expresión enérgica que no sólo da a ver, sino que "pone las cosas frente a los ojos". Arte de la *argucia*: su sintaxis

² Según la definición que da de ellos A. J. Greimas en el prefacio de Louis Hjelmslev; *Le Langage*, París, Minuit, 1966.

³ Victor L. Tapié, *Le Baroque*, París, Presses Universitaires de France, 1961, pág. 9. El subrayado es mío.

visual está organizada, en función de relaciones inéditas: distorsión e hipérbole de uno de los términos, brusca noche sobre el otro; desnudez, ornamento independiente del cuerpo racional del edificio, adjetivo, adverbio que lo retuerce, voluta: todo artificio posible con tal de argumentar, de presentar autoritariamente, sin vacilaciones, sin matices. *Todo por convencer.*

—*Barroco*: en la sordina del flujo consonántico, la *a* y la *o*; el barroco, como el *Abricot* de Ponge, va de la *a* a la *o*. *Barroco*, "al oído, se abre y se cierra con un lazo (boucle): las letras *a* y *o*: la palabra se repliega sobre sí misma en una figura circular, serpiente que se muerde la cola. Comienzo y fin son intercambiables. La palabra, en su inscripción, ofrece la imagen sensible de ese regreso, de esa vuelta. La figura del lazo (...) designa tanto la actividad literal (...) como las figuras semánticas: ciclo de las estaciones, girar de los astros, forma de las frutas, y su conclusión: las significaciones cerradas con dos vueltas de llave (bouclées à double tour). Ese lazo (boucle), si creemos las pruebas de la etimología, es una boca: boucle, del latín buccula, diminutivo de bucca, boca. La figura del lazo, ligada a la de la vuelta (de llave, de escritura, de saltimbanqui), está sobredeterminada: se encuentra situada en un cruce de sentidos, en un cruce de caminos donde se superponen, enlazadas en la forma de la fruta, escritura, geometría, astronomía, retórica, música y pintura (...). Todos esos caminos que se encuentran, obligatoriamente, en ese cruce, pasan por la letra redoblada del título, como en el circo, a través del aro, los leones sucesivos, las melenas de llamas".⁴

⁴ Gérard Farasse: "La portée de 'l'Abricot'" in *Communications* 19, París, Seuil, 1972, pág. 186.

Abricot/barroco: es "en el ojo de las letras donde se produce y se cruza el tema del oro, en la letra *O*, boca abierta, enlazada (bouclée)".⁵ *Barroco* va de la *a* a la *o*: sentido del oro, del lazo al círculo, de la elipse al círculo; o al revés: sentido de la excreción —reverso simbólico del oro— del círculo al lazo, del círculo a la elipse, de Galileo a Kepler.⁵ *Abricot*: sol visto en eclipse, placé en abíme; *barroco*: sol en el cénit —en la *o* círculo—, y luego, doble centro —la *a*-lazo, el doble centro de la elipse—, uno de los cuales es el propio sol.

Esta transcripción del barroco requiere su referente: uno, arquitectónico, le corresponde sin residuos: el Santo Sudario, de Guarino Guarini, en Turín, es una montadura; se trataba de engarzar la mortaja manchada, la huella de la cara en el paño.

⁵ El paso de Galileo a Kepler es el del círculo a la elipse, el de lo que está trazado alrededor del Uno a lo que está trazado alrededor de lo plural, paso de lo clásico a lo barroco: "La ruptura que rechaza la colección de todos los conjuntos —y le impide ser admitida entre ellos— instituye un borde, y es alrededor de ese borde, y tomando apoyo en su efecto, que va a ejecutarse la fantástica sinfonía del uno y el infinito, de lo singular y lo dispersado, dualidad resentida y trazada en el cuerpo y que se expresará más tarde como dualidad entre poder-ley y deseo, entre todo lo que gira alrededor del Uno —función paternal, "unión" en una comunidad, "unidad" de acción...— y lo que evoluciona alrededor de lo plural, o de lo "plurien" (juego de palabras en francés entre plural y nada, rien), es decir, relaciones sexuales, en las cuales los cuerpos son al menos dos, cualquiera que sea su sentido, esquizofrenia, en la cual el cuerpo aparece segmentado y multiplicado". Daniel Sibony "L'infini et la castration", in *Scilicet* N° 4, París, Seuil, 1973, pág. 82. En lugar de las frases subrayadas en el original, subrayo otras para asimilar el círculo y la elipse a los dos términos que opone el autor.

La armazón de la capilla es sutil: no se limita a la relación ingenua soporte/motivo, sino que, cumpliendo con la vocación pedagógica del barroco, nos presenta a la vez su realización literal y, repitiéndola, su metáfora en el mármol. El soporte/motivo, es decir, el dosel y el arca que cubre, cofre del sudario, están desdoblados y cubiertos a su vez por una meta-concreción del proyecto, por la definición, en un plano superior, metafórico, de la noción de barroco: la cúpula negra, montadura *aparente*, sabia superposición de estructuras estrelladas donde, *preciosa*, ha quedado engarzada la luz.

Desde su construcción hasta nuestros días la oscuridad de la capilla, la opacidad de sus materiales, la carencia de ventanas y el empleo, considerado abusivo, del mármol negro, han sido objeto de intriga, de crítica y hasta de burla. Para justificar este andamiaje sombrío, los historiadores se han visto obligados a recurrir a explicaciones alambicadas o de una gran densidad simbólica. Se ha discernido por ejemplo, en el plano, "una contaminación intencional, al menos en sus significados emotivos, entre la cripta y la cúpula" (...) "el sudario de Cristo, abandonado en el momento de su resurrección, es prueba de su humanidad y de su divinidad. La asociación es, pues, del todo pertinente. La muerte y la eternidad están yuxtapuestas en el sacro paño como la luz y la sombra en la negra capilla luminosa".⁶

Esta "clave para interpretar el edificio" estaría implícita, por otra parte, en el camino que los fieles deben recorrer para llegar hasta el sudario: escaleras empinadas y oscuras, que acentúan el sentido del esfuerzo, la fatiga; parece que

⁶ Eugenio Battisti: *Rinascimento e Barocco*, Turín, Einaudi, 1960, pág. 276.

hay que subir de rodillas, como si, bajo la curva de la bóveda, se subiera al Calvario.

Otras lecturas igualmente simbólicas han visto en los esquemas geométricos y los planos de la cúpula evidentes analogías con los "temas" de horóscopos, a los cuales Guarini era aficionado, infiriendo de ello que la distribución de los efectos luminosos obedece a configuraciones zodiacales; puede epilogarse también, con Wittkower, sobre la estructura de la capilla en tanto que emblema del dogma de la Trinidad; finalmente, en el hecho mismo de exponer la reliquia en lo alto del ábside puede leerse una significación política: los miembros de la casa de Saboya, que continúan siendo sus propietarios, en lugar de conservar el paño en la intimidad del palacio, extienden generosamente sus beneficios, sus radiaciones, al pueblo, y demuestran, con esa "fastuosa reconstrucción del Santo Sepulcro de Jerusalén, qué falsa era la afirmación de Lutero según la cual Dios no se ocupaba de eso más que de los bueyes".

El acercamiento que hoy proponemos no pretende ni confirmar ni desmentir los precedentes. No se trata de una nueva interpretación, en función de una clave inédita, ni de otra lectura. Nada precedente o exterior al edificio lo justifica, ningún símbolo; nada sustenta ni se añade a la arquitectura negra, ni aspira a despejar su opacidad. Se postula aquí una *conformidad* entre ese producto barroco ejemplar y la palabra que lo designa, conformidad, a nivel de la última, en dos planos: la forma de su expresión —la distribución de sus elementos consonánticos y vocálicos; el grafismo de estos últimos— y el sitio simbólico de su aparición, el vocabulario técnico de la joyería.

Si el Santo Sudario corrobora, en su organización significativa, la forma de la expresión *barroco* y el lugar de su

aparición, de ese surgimiento queda otra marca, no menos estructural: residuo de significado, vestigio puramente maquinal, sin vínculo asignable con su referente, *vaciado*: en la poesía barroca, las palabras que designan los materiales canónicos de la orfebrería no funcionan como signos plenos, sino, en un sistema formalizado de oposiciones binarias —la antítesis es la figura central del barroco—, como "marcadores" afectados de un signo positivo o negativo, es decir, como puras *valencias*: "En efecto, la predilección del poeta barroco por los términos de orfebrería y de joyería, no revela esencialmente un gusto 'profundo' por las materias que designan. No hay que buscar en ello una de esas ensoñaciones de que habla Bachelard en las que la imaginación explora los estratos secretos de una substancia. Esos elementos, esos metales, esas piedras preciosas no se utilizan, al contrario, sino por su función más superficial y más abstracta: una especie de *valencia* definida por un sistema de oposiciones discontinuas y que evoca más las combinaciones de nuestra química atómica que las transmutaciones de la antigua alquimia".⁷

⁷ Gérard Genette: "L'or tombe sous le fer", in *Figures*, París, Seuil, 1966, pág. 33.

II. LA COSMOLOGÍA ANTES DEL BARROCO

II. 1. *El geocentrismo*

En el *Timeo* surge una metáfora cuya resonancia ideológica se prolongará hasta el barroco: el Cielo es el lugar de las Ideas: el Ecuador —plano de los astros fijos que se desplazan de oriente a occidente con velocidad uniforme, la mayor de todos los cuerpos celestes— es el círculo del Mismo; la Eclíptica —gran círculo de la rotación anual del sol— el del Otro. Los dos círculos cósmicos corresponden a los dos elementos necesarios al funcionamiento de la dialéctica platónica. La figura que trazan en su movimiento los cuerpos celestes, cuerpos vivos, "testimonian el parentesco entre la apariencia sensible del Cielo y la estructura inteligible de las ideas".⁸

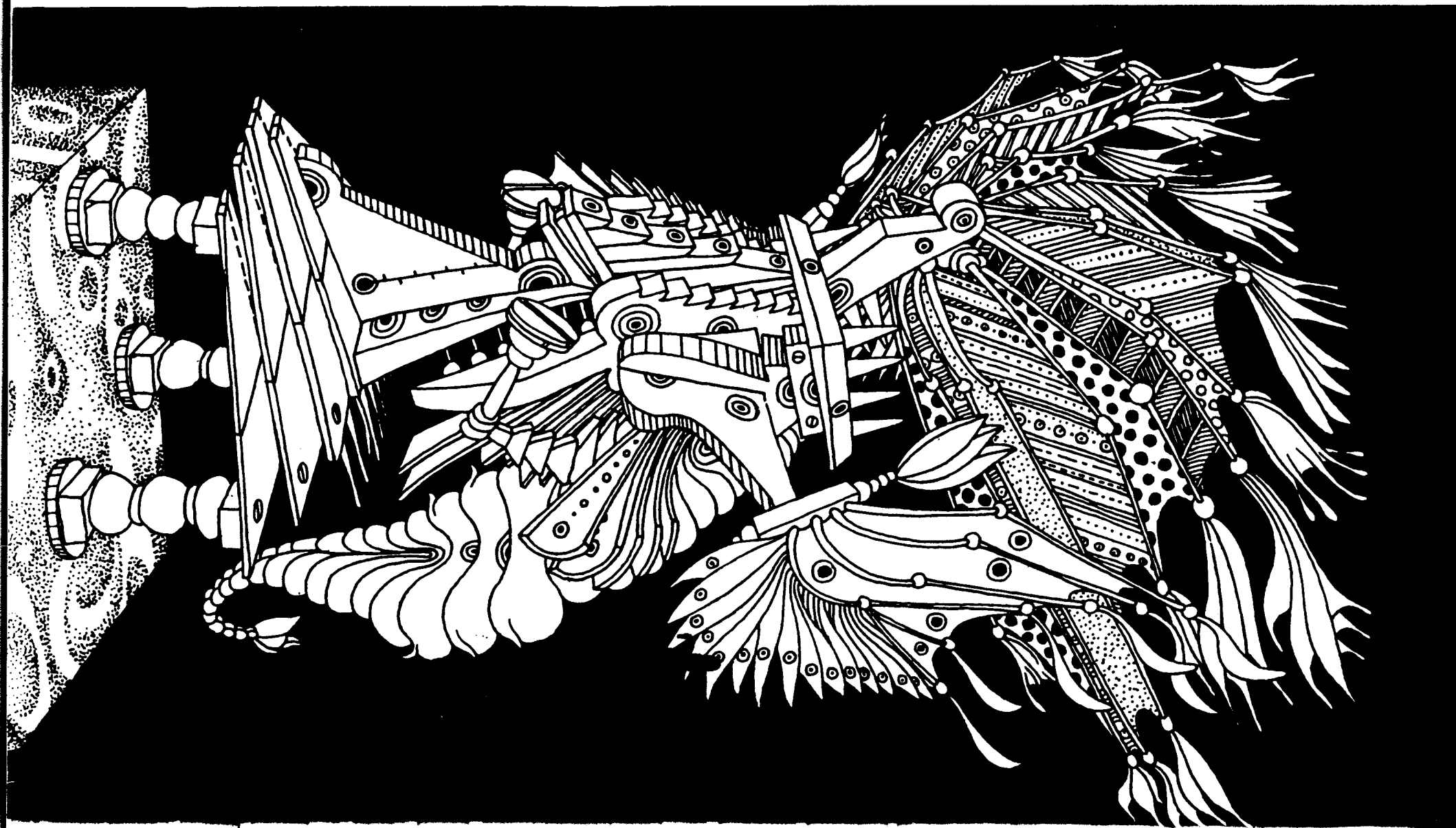
⁸ Jacques Merleau-Ponty y Bruno Morando: *Les trois étapes de la Cosmologie*, París, Robert Laffont, 1971, pág. 46.

El prestigio platónico del círculo se ancla, evidentemente, en la enseñanza pitagórica; algo menos citado es su anclaje en Heráclito, en quien la significación del círculo, idéntica a la que tiene en Platón, puede ser leída en tanto que inversión simbólica —como lo ha hecho Cassirer en *La philosophie des formes symboliques*, París, Minuit, 1973, vol. II, pág. 165— a partir del budismo, "moral" en que podemos señalar el primer recurso sistemático a la figura en tanto que significante privilegiado.

diacritics

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interview / Severo Sarduy

Severo Sarduy is a young Cuban writer (b. 1936) established in Paris, where he is director of the Latin American collection of Editions du Seuil. He began his literary career as a poet in pre-revolutionary Cuba. After the Revolution, in 1959-60, he was part of the team of writers who published *Lunes de Revolución*, an active literary weekly directed by the novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante. At the end of 1960, a grant from the government sent Sarduy to Paris to study art history at the Ecole du Louvre. He has been in Paris since, where, after completing his studies, he joined two influential literary groups: the one formed around *Mundo Nuevo*, a monthly literary journal directed by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and the *Tel Quel* group. He had published two novels, *Gestos* (1963) and *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), and one book of critical essays, *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (1969). These last two

books, as well as his third novel *Cobra* (to appear this spring in Spanish; fragments have already appeared in *Tel Quel* translated by Philippe Sollers), show the influence of the structuralist *Tel Quel* group, which will be evident also in his answers in the following interview. Aside from his work as a novelist and playwright, Sarduy has served as intellectual bridge between the French literary theoreticians and the Latin American intellectual community.

Roberio González Echevarría: Severo, I know that you're preparing a lengthy essay on the Spanish-American baroque for a UNESCO book edited by the Peruvian critic, Julio Ortega. In addition, your interest in the works of Góngora and Lezama Lima

qualify you as an expert in the baroque of the seventeenth century as well as in that of the contemporary period. I'd like you to speak first of Góngora, and then proceed to the baroque of Lezama Lima and of course, that of your own works.

Severo Sarduy: Góngora was born in 1561 and died in 1627. If I remember correctly, he wrote the first *Soledad* in 1612, the year in which he also wrote *Poliemo*. I am not the least bit interested in making a kind of literary and historical parallel with what happened in that period. I mean, as an example, all the biographers of Góngora point out that in 1604 peace was made in London, and the second part of the *Guzmán de Alfarache* was published. Or they can say that in 1609 the *moriscos* were expelled and there appeared, as well, Quevedo's translation of Anacreon, and Quevedo's polemic with Góngora was begun. What the biographers point out is a visible parallel, a visible synchrony with what happened in that moment. I am more interested in establishing a kind of table—and I would give the word "table" the meaning which it has in French when one speaks of a *table de correspondances*; that is, an interplay of different signs that correspond among themselves—establishing a table of the underlying elements that reverberate in the wording of the *Soledades*, and which are not marked by visible historical events. For example, we can keep in mind the following: What is the *episteme* which the baroque makes explicit and puts into practice? There is a factor which seems to me to be essential, which undoubtedly Eugenio d'Ors, the precursor of all that we can mention in this sense, foresaw: in this age which we have just situated, Kepler discovered that the rotation of the planets around the sun is not circular, as was believed and as Galileo continued to affirm for primarily esthetic reasons, but *elliptical*—I underline, obviously, the word "elliptical." At the same time, if I remember correctly, it was Harvey who discovered that the circulation of the blood traces a kind of ellipse around the heart. I should also add another thing to this *dossier*: the canonical structure of the Church was decentralized; in place of a central aisle leading the worshiper from the entrance to the high altar, it took the form of a building without specific entrances and exits, and whose plan was opened, just as the urbanism of the baroque city was opened. In other words, the baroque city was no longer a center around the cathedral, around the dome, but rather a decentralized organization—"polysemous" shall we say—with various comings and goings, with various interior sections. Thus we see here that there exists a kind of underlying battle—which interests me much more than those battles and those treaties that the biographers point out—between two forms characteristic of our western civilization: the circle and the ellipse. This struggle of circle and ellipse has various manifestations; it is fought in several fields. In painting, it is apparent for example, how in the works of Raphael, a circular structure continued to prevail. However, already in Pierre de Cortona, the central circle breaks apart and everything is organized into a kind of ellipse that defines the baroque, of which Cortona is perhaps the most characteristic Italian painter. Thus we see how in painting the circle and

the ellipse confront each other. I believe that, forcing things a little, we could say that the figures in Guadalupe which carry on a dialogue in the paintings of Zurbarán can also be inscribed within a circle, while those of El Greco can not.

RGE: And how do you extend these ideas to literature?

SS: The area to which I am most interested in extending these ideas is, obviously, literature. In Góngora, as in all of the baroque, the ellipse is the essential support, and the rhetorical ellipse here corresponds, metaphorically I think, to the geometric ellipse. This is not by chance. In the Gongorine ellipse, in the baroque ellipse, there are two centers: the suppressed term and the "suppressing" term. In an ellipse, there is always a term which is hidden, censured; and one which blossoms from the textual surface to serve as a *cachette* or a mask for the other. Instead of saying "Strait of Magellan," we would say, "the hinge, the narrow embracer of one ocean and another, etc." We know perfectly well that certain animal names are censured in Gongorine rhetoric, that one can not speak of hens, and so forth. We know that there is a series of pre-established *topoi*, so that one term may be censured and the other apparent one may cover it. In a Lacanian sense we can say that what Góngora shows is precisely what he hides from us. In other words, that which he shows, as in the metaphor that supports all of the Lacanian psychoanalysis, is that which never ceases to hide something. The Gongorine ellipse, in short then, functions as a table of events which are never historical, which can never be dated, but which constitute the epistemology underlying all the mechanisms of the baroque; which is to say, the struggle between Galileo and Kepler, between Raphael and Cortona, between Zurbarán and El Greco, between the "divine" Herrera and Góngora.

RGE: Let's move on to contemporary literature, or rather to the present baroque of Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy.

SS: We're going to begin exactly as we did with regard to the Spanish baroque of the seventeenth century—with cosmology. Which is to say, what does contemporary cosmology teach us? The latest theories are supported by data obtained not through instruments of observation but through radio, using high frequency waves. These waves have allowed us to construct a cosmological theory which is almost sure, to the extent that one can speak of cosmology beyond hypotheses. The universe is presently in expansion—this theory is called, precisely, the theory of the expanding universe. This expansion, which has verified that celestial bodies constantly distance themselves from each other, proves that at a certain moment—and to which undoubtedly corresponds the notice which heads the second part of *Enana Blanca* in *Cobra*—there was an explosion of a quasar, and this explosion gave origin to the universe such as we know it, which brings us to the following: the center of the universe is empty; it is a polyvalent and movable center. This theory of the empty center, this topology of the empty center, is going to reverberate in literature exactly as the theory of the ellipse resounded at a certain moment in the structure of the Gongorine metaphor. To wit: I believe

that the textuality consistent with this theory is precisely one which stipulates an empty center. In other words, the censured word is going to form here that empty center; it will not exist any more, but its pulverizations at various levels will be legible in the textual surface, in that which Julia Kristeva calls the "phenotext," as opposed to the "genotext." The genotext is movable, plural, empty; the phenotext—that is, the visible, legible surface of the text—will, by means of a radial reading, make room for this word, this paragram which has been censured, eliminated. Here I will allow myself to give an example of radial reading found in *Cobra*, by means of the censured or suppressed paragram "morphine" at which one arrives through a series of signs that participate on different levels; on a phonetic level, when instead of "morphine" allusion is made to "Morpheus," to "morphologically," to "white morpheus" which is a cattle disease, etc. On the level of meaning, reference is made to a series of images of whiteness such as "snow," and an another level, to "horse," which, in slang, is another way of saying "morphine," etc. Thus one can read on various levels these signs which lead to a center which is no longer there, which is already missing.

RGE: I would like you to clarify a little more the difference between paragram and radial reading.

SS: Radial reading is the process which can lead us, in this case, to a negative and absent paragram. In other words, the basic model, that which generates the visible text, the phenotext, is no longer there; it is missing. We could say, in a very Heideggerian sense certainly, that it shines by its absence.

RGE: But then, should the reader of that paragraph in *Cobra* to which you were alluding—should he be able to recover the genotext?

SS: No, no, his reading would be innocent.

RGE: Then if the reading of such text were not innocent, it would not be considered a "good reading"?

SS: I think it would be as if the seventeenth century reader had to recognize the zodiacal allusions Góngora makes in the first *Soledad* in order to know that he was speaking about the month of April. I think that the reader of the age generally read very naively. *Cobra* is full of such traps, some of which are for my friends, some for you as you know, some for Roland [Barthes], some for François [Wahl], and others strictly for me which no one knows. In other words, there is a series of formal secret mechanisms. Let me use a canonical example of this devotion: the sculptures of the Parthenon, situated at a great height on the metope of the pediment, and not visible except frontally or from below, are also minutely sculptured from behind. The craftsman who created them dedicated this work to the gods. That work, although not to be contemplated by men, had to be perfect. These "secrets of construction" were dedicated to God. In this sense, in the humble as well as minute composition of *Cobra*, there are many "secrets of construction"; the manuscript which in Benares I offered to the Ganges for example, was the object of great care.

RGE: Then an innocent, naïve reading is for those who have said that you alone understand *De donde son los cantantes*.

SS: In other words, the reading, with all of the mechanics to which we refer, is not accessible to everyone. I think it's evident that there are degrees of perception in all readings. That which interests me is to see how the whole *épistème* of his age is reflected in the practice of writing of each author. I repeat that I am not the least bit interested in lists of contemporary occurrences which point out to the author, for example, that there was a reform of customs and a high sense of authority in the year 1623, when Góngora received a pension of 400 *ducados*! *RGE:* This brings us to a theme to which you have alluded in several of your works: the expulsion of the author, or the negation of a unique, individual emissive center.

SS: Well, perhaps this stems in part from an observation by Philippe Sollers with regard to the absence of the author. Through a series of motives of an ideological nature, in Sollers the interesting thing is precisely the censure of that type of emissive center of the text which is the author, and which is, specifically, the Romantic author. Romanticism supposes—and this conception has been handed down to our age through a series of persistent prejudices—that there is a single, omnipotent emitter of the text, and that the text is an expressive entity which stems from a center and which is decoded by another center: the reader. Even in Sartre, the idea of language as practical—inert stems from this conception, since the author would be someone who uses that practical—inert entity to express something that is his own psychology, etc.

RGE: This is what you parody in *De donde son los cantantes*, when you appear in the novel . . .

SS: As author . . .

RGE: Yes, and later in *Cobra*, when you appear and threaten a character with exclusion from the chapter which you are writing.

SS: In other words, that which is being formulated there exactly is that there is no author. And why is there no author? Because if we carry our ideology to its ultimate consequences, we will know that there are no proprietors of language. . . . Plagiarism, as Lautréamont proposed, is not only admissible, but advisable besides. One must totally suppress the idea of a central emitter of the voice.

RGE: But getting back to the expulsion of the author, how is it effected, how can we nullify him?

SS: This idea of eliminating the author, of expelling him, can be realized by means of two practices. One of these practices is very obvious: the ultra-baroque. In other words, when we arrive, for example, at the temple of Kajuraho, that enormous Indian pyramid of copulating figures; or when we arrive at the temple of Konarak or Mahabzhi-Puram or to Kanchi Puram, or to any of the great places of Indian architecture (also in this context: the window of Tomar, of Alcobaga, and of Batalha; as well as certain South American colonial architecture—the works of the Indian Condori, or the works of the authors of the Sacramum of Mexico, the works of the Aleijandino in Minas Gerais. . . .) All of these works have no author. . . . the baroque proliferation is so extreme that this type of bubbling up of the signifiers expels all personal ideology, all psychology. There is no author because the *horror*

vacui eliminates any central emitter. In this sense I believe that all the works which I have just mentioned have no author. I believe that here that which is manifest is a grammar in proliferation; an exacerbat code which devours everything. The chapters "by" Churriguera in the cathedral at Burgos have no author. Gongorine literature, the literature of the extreme baroque, expels this omnipotent entity of which we were speaking.

The second possibility is that which has already been practiced in the United States by the sculptors of the school of "minimal art." For example, Bob Morris, Donald Judd, John McCracken, Larry Bell, Sol Lewitt, etc. And perhaps preceding these sculptors, the painter Barnett Newman. What do these sculptures of minimal art—or, as has been said, of primary structures—teach us? In the case of Barnett Newman, monochrome panels. In the case of the others, simple cubes, cylinders—in other words, pure geometric forms. These painters and sculptors, by reducing themselves to primary structures, that is, to the structures which engender all other possible forms in space, and by radically eliminating all expression, eliminate the author as well.

RGE: Thus it is the opposite of what you mentioned before about the ultra-baroque.

SS: Yes, the opposite of what I had said. In this sense, I think that a painting of Barnett Newman also has no author. Showing a blue monochrome panel is precisely bringing us to that point of non-reducibility of expression.

RGE: Is this what you have tried to do in *La playa*?
SS: *La playa*, my dramatic piece whose subtitle is precisely *Primary Structures*, claims to do nothing other than show primary grammatical structures. There is practically no plot, and no development, since it is a fixed theater, and as it was represented in Kassel, there are no entrances or exits of characters, nor any movement. It is like a staged photograph. The sentences—*et pour cause*—are extremely simple, and they do not allow one to "see" or rather to hear more than the essential articulations of the composition of the sentence. The mechanics of this play consist of showing the support which from a subject leads to a predicate and to a direct object. As in the cube of Larry Bell, that which one sees is the essential support of all possible bodies in space. That is the second practice of the expulsion of the author; the first by hypergraphy, the second by the reduction of the support to the primary structure.

RGE: You say that there is no plot in *La playa*; however, you told me that . . .

SS: Of course, there is a kind of plot, shall we say, *grosso modo*, which can explain to a certain extent the acceptance of the play in Germany. It deals, putting between quotation marks the work "deals," with the story of a German gigolo in Cannes. The gigolo, as hero of the play, has business in the south of France with whatever people he meets, which gives rise to a whole series of possibilities of combination, and of sexual combination [. . .] but anyway, this is relatively marginal.

RGE: Why also the subtitle *Sequences*?

SS: It is called *Sequences* simply because it stems in a sense from a play by Luciano Berio called

Sequences.

RGE: But "sequence" indicates "progression," doesn't it?

SS: It really refers to the strongest etymological meaning of the word "sequence," as the *Littre* defines it, and as was subject of an essay by François Wahl which you will probably read when the play comes out in print. Sequence is precisely the combining of various cards of the same suit in the deck.

RGE: Getting back to the baroque, I know you have on other occasions expressed some ideas about the morality of the baroque, especially in relation to eroticism, which is one of the preferred themes of your work—of creative work as well as of your critical work. What is the morality of the baroque, and to what extent is it manifested in the proliferation of signifiers of which you spoke earlier?

SS: A morality of squandering, of waste. We should start off with the idea of baroque as waste and over-abundance of signifiers, as totally saturated information. The baroque is precisely the squandering of signifiers, or "media," and from there, I believe arises the censure of a moral order of which the baroque has been victim in civilizations as puritanical as the French. In France there has never been a perfect expression of the baroque. Remember the censure, and carrying things to their extreme, the expulsion in France of Bernini, whose project for the façade of the Louvre was rejected. I would say—exaggerating a bit—that neither in French architecture nor in painting is there a perfect baroque as there is in Italy or in Spain or in Germany.

RGE: And with regard to eroticism?

SS: Eroticism, like the baroque, is a squandering, because eroticism is a game which carries with it no "information." Eroticism is not in function with reproduction, but with excess, with play. The erotic man is the *homo ludens*, not the man who reproduces. Eroticism then responds to a baroque phenomenon of waste, of loss.

RGE: Then Don Juan would be the typical case, wouldn't he?

SS: Of course, Don Juan is the typical case, although Ives Bonnefoy, in his recent book *Roma 1630*, which won this year's prize for criticism and which is precisely about the baroque, says that Don Juan is not a baroque character since he doesn't fulfill to satiety a total adherence to the object, that he assumes the category of absolute in the baroque expenditure; a *hic et nunc* which for him is the condition of the baroque and which—and I continue to paraphrase Bonnefoy—Bernini exemplifies in the days of San Marcos.

RGE: I haven't read Bonnefoy's book, but from what you tell me, I doubt that I could agree with him about Don Juan.

SS: Anyway, that which I find interesting to note is that eroticism has been censored for the same reason that the baroque was censored. In other words because they are not functional, because they do not carry with them a mass of information, of utility. Genetic information is the penetration of the spermatozoid into the egg. Eroticism opposes this carrying of information. The baroque sentence does not lead us to a pure and simple meaning, but rather, through a series of ellipses, of zig-zags, of *détours*,

carries with it only a floating signifier—empty and polyvalent.

RGE: And how can we apply these observations to the case of present-day Cuba?

SS: That which is happening in Cuba could be called a type of psychoanalysis of the Hispanic. The catharsis which is there being effected is that of all the repressed censures during the centuries beginning with the Inquisition.

RGE: But then, how can the work of Lezama Lima be explained within that context?

SS: Lezama is precisely the reverse of the Torquemadesque coin, since he attacks the censure on two of its levels, on two levels of waste: on the level of the erotic—and I cite obviously the Farralque episode in *Paradiso*—and on that of the baroque. In this sense, he has dealt a blow to the censure on an exterior level—thematic—but also on a profound level—structural, syntactic, in the immense metaphorical squandering of *Paradiso*.

RGE: Yes, and in the case of Carpenter?

SS: It would be very difficult to speak of Carpenter. I wish to revise to a certain extent my thesis on Carpenter. I don't believe Carpenter is baroque in the sense which I have just given to this word.

RGE: I don't agree with you on that.

SS: I believe that he deals with a type of very learned and proliferous organization, but one which doesn't imply semantic waste. I don't think there is this squandering of information in Carpenter. But, I have to work much more with this author. It certainly interests me to contradict his ideology of the baroque. For Carpenter—and he mentions it explicitly in the interview we read today at home—the baroque is a kind of metaphor of nature. He considers, as did d'Ors in *Lo barroco*, that the baroque mechanism is a natural metaphor. D'Ors says that there is nothing more baroque than a Portuguese park at noon; he speaks of the natural, Adamic state of the baroque; he formulates a paradisiacal state of genesis, a natural primogenial state. And Carpenter says that the Amazon River, the uncontrollable vegetal proliferation of America inevitably had to lead us to the baroque. I don't think that the thesis of the justification of the baroque by natural analogy is as convincing as that of its justification by textual metaphor.

RGE: I agree, but, as Emir Rodríguez Monegal has

pointed out, there is a great difference between Carpenter as theorist and Carpenter as novelist.

SS: Of course, of course [...]

RGE: I would say that in his novels, Carpenter is baroque almost in spite of—or perhaps in opposition to—that which he himself has stated in his book of essays, *Tientos y diferencias*.

SS: Well, in that case, yes, but I am using as a point of departure his explicit ideology, that which he has stated: his conception of the baroque is totally "d'Orsian." In this case I am putting into practice the basic structuralist opposition between *nature* and *culture*. I believe that the baroque is nothing other than a metonymy of cultural order, not a metaphor of natural disorder. It interests me more that the base be intertextual. Why? Because the intertextual base permits the conveying of an idea which seems to me essential in the baroque: the idea of "grafting."

RGE: Yes, but you know that in *Los pasos perdidos*, Carpenter grafts from colonial texts and at times, as I told you this morning, from little-known ethnographic texts as well.

SS: Yes, I know. I believe that precisely in this case I agree to the extent that the baroque can be interpreted as a cultural metaphor. I cite the façades of colonial architecture to which I alluded, where we see that the elements of the Icaic art, pre-Cortés in general, have been grafted onto an architectural structure of Hispanic origin. In literature, of course, the quotation, plagiarism, reference, and reminiscence would correspond to this type of grafting. But I am still of the idea that the baroque is a phenomenon of intertextuality precisely because the intertextuality allows me to bring into function another element—to my judgment an essential one: the element of parody, very visible in Lezama and scarcely visible at all, excuse me, in Carpenter.

RGE: I agree.

SS: I believe there can be no baroque without parody.

RGE: Without doubt, parody is the missing element in Carpenter.

SS: There is no baroque without parody; parody is a distancing, grafting, and as we have already seen—and you alluded today to Calderón's *Life is a Dream*—the baroque stems from an image which contradicts itself, which hollows itself out. The baroque is the blind spot of the king.

(Translated by Jane E. French)