The Baroque and the Cultures of Crises

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Hispanic Baroques:
Reading Cultures in Context

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The present volume deals with various formulations and uses of a concept—the Baroque—which in recent times has undergone a series of recyclings and permutations at the hands of literary/cultural critics and artists from various fields and academic disciplines. Baroque, Neobaroque, and Ultrabaroque are related concepts which have also been used to define certain social and cultural manifestations from the early modern period to late and post-modern times. Current interpreters of the Baroque in its latest reincarnations have pointed to some striking parallelisms between these disparate periods by invoking the notion of horror vacui and alternative ways of understanding complex realities. Thus, whether one emphasizes the “containment” side of the Baroque (José Antonio Maravall being its major exponent in connection with the dominant culture of seventeenth-century Spain) or its “transgressive” or liberating aspects (as has been the case with most Latin American voices on this question), what they seem to have in common is an awareness that these phenomena must be understood within the larger frame of epistemic and/or social crises. Interestingly, in recent years there has been substantial emphasis on the notion of a “baroque reason” and the rejection of traditional dichotomies and established norms, even in reference to the context of the earliest Baroque. Mabel Moraña (in this
There is another concept, that of “Mannerism,” which is often found in association with the “Baroque,” especially in art history. These two concepts often overlap as Arnold Hauser shows when he argues that the conflict between the two styles “is more sociological than purely historical” (94). Mannerism is said to be

the artistic style of an aristocratic, essentially international cultured class, the early baroque the expression of a more popular, more emotional, more nationalistic trend. The mature baroque triumphs over the more refined and exclusive style of mannerism, as the ecclesiastical propaganda of the Counter Reformation spreads and Catholicism again becomes a people’s religion. The court art of the seventeenth century adapts the baroque to its specific needs; on the one hand, it works up baroque emotionalism into a magnificent theatricality and, on the other, it develops its latent classicism into the expression of an austere and clear-headed autoritarianism. But in the sixteenth century mannerism is the court style par excellence. (94–95)

Hauser applied his theory of historical materialism to define the art of this period as the expression of Catholic, anti-Reformation propaganda, focusing on the Church’s use of art and literature as symbolic weapons to guide and co-opt the masses. At the same time, the aristocracy is said to have adapted this art for its own use and enjoyment thanks to its spectacularity and richness. Hauser’s view of the associated concepts of Mannerism and Baroque relates to stylistic as well as to ideological features.

Wylie Sypher, on the other hand, understands them as two stages of Renaissance style, with Mannerism being characterized by “formal disintegration” and the Baroque by “formal reintegration.” Sypher maintains that Mannerism has its own rules, among which he mentions a “diagonal or mobile point of view, disproportion, imbalance, thwarted verticality, funnel space [. . .] and tensions that were accommodated rather than resolved.” Thus, baroque art would be “a reaction against the unstable, involved, and over-ingenious structures of mannerism” (184) which are extravagantly and exuberantly resolved, performing a “mighty katharsis by spectacle, by an expressive power” (185). Hernán Vidal (in this volume) challenges the arbitrariness with which concepts such as “Mannerism” and “Baroque” are constructed and goes on to focus on the manner in which the artistic production of the seventeenth century connects to social and political developments. The operative concept in his analysis is that of “military revolution,” the development of massive armies (land and naval forces) which triggered the changes associated with the birth of Modernity. To
the extent that the Baroque is viewed as "a category of imperial administration," he complements Maravall's focus on institutions and ideas to explain and interpret its culture.

Interestingly, the eruption of postcolonial studies seems to have given new impetus to the debate regarding the Baroque both as aesthetic category and as historical/cultural problem. This is seen in the discussions that center on decolonizing critical agendas. Thus, in a recent volume on colonial Latin America, one of the editors explains his project in this fashion:

What this book does is, precisely, the opposite of criollismo: an in-depth study of the peculiarities of Latin American colonial situations that take into account its consequences for the situations of social injustice of the present; a study that holds the historical agents that created that social injustice responsible and that does not forget the memories of the colonial subjects demonized or repressed by hegemonic power. (Verdesio 9–10)

Despite the certainty with which this statement is made, the author does acknowledge the work of critics such as Mabel Moraña for understanding that "the Baroque esthetic trend served, depending on the authors, either the cause of the consolidation of the colonial status quo or the resistance to it" (4). Regardless of where critics fall within the political spectrum, and despite their specific critical agendas, it is clear that the Baroque as a category of analysis still holds sway in literary/cultural studies, particularly in connection with Latin America. Moreover, as we point out later in this introduction, the concept of Baroque is still engendering new terms to describe and interpret new realities.

In a prior volume of Hispanic Issues, Alberto Moreiras reflected upon the understanding of the Baroque as a "field of identitarian expression concerning the peculiar Hispanic experience of modernity" (207) and challenged the well-known interpretation of Roberto González Echevarría, which sees the Baroque "as a mark of continental identity" and locates it "metonymically in the so-called Boom of the Latin-American novel" (212), while, in fact, not going beyond the Colonial Baroque or "its status as regional ideology at the service of the constitution of the local as a differential mimetic/identitarian apparatus of social capture" (212). Moreiras not only distances himself from what he calls regionalist, identitarian paradigms, but specifically embraces the concept of the Neobaroque, which for him implies an "interruption of the principle of regionalization" and a kind of passage or "pilgrimage toward the outside" (210). The Neobaroque is mobilized in the name of a "freedom of thought" (218) marked by interruption in line with the foundational work of Severo Sarduy and José Lezama Lima (225).

In the 1950s, Lezama Lima had spoken of the Spanish American Baroque as the art of "counter-Conquest" and as an urban and intellectual phenomenon close to the spirit of the Enlightenment—a frame for new "formas de vida y de curiosidad" (46) (ways of life and types of curiosity)—while Severo Sarduy would later identify the Baroque with an epistemic break (especially reflected in a revolution in astronomy) and would argue for a restricted semantic field, "un esquema operatorio preciso, que no deja intersticios, que no permitiera el abuso o el desarraigo terminológico de que esta noción ha sufrido recientemente y muy especialmente entre nosotros" (1386) (a precise operative scheme, without interstices, which would not allow for the abuse or the lack of accuracy that this notion has suffered recently, particularly among us). Sarduy was probably referring to broad definitions such as Alejo Carpentier's, for whom America had always been baroque. But Sarduy's main contribution to the debate was his notion of a neo-baroque retombrée (a relapse or achronic causality) marked by the appearance of a crisis in our understanding of the universe and expressed through an art of irregular, inapproachable forms: "un neobarroco en estallido en el que los signos giran y se escapan hacia los límites del soporte sin que ninguna fórmula permita trazar sus líneas o seguir los mecanismos de su producción" (1375) (an exploding Neobaroque in which signs spin and escape toward the limits of the medium, without any formula that could trace its lines nor follow its production mechanisms).

Sarduy's arguments were to open a rich debate about the similarities between our age and the seventeenth century and have found much echo in the fields of literary/cultural studies even beyond the Spanish-speaking world. For example, the Italian semiotician Omar Calabrese adopted Sarduy's idea of a baroque relapse and concluded that "many important phenomena of our time are distinguished by a specific internal 'form' that recalls the baroque" (15). Calabrese attempts to describe the morphology of an anti-classical "social aesthetics" and, like Sarduy, identifies connections between contemporary science and art, although he avoids establishing a relationship of causality between them. Moreover, as Moraña indicates, correctly, in this volume, "Calabrese dismisses, in a radical manner, the historicity and contingency of all cultural production in order to establish a transmediatic and transcultural perspective that approximates phenomena and fields of knowledge that, in fact, are only related by their semiotic behavior and their contemporaneity" (250).
Freedom and Containment

In recent years literary and cultural theory has dealt with how power relations are part of a dynamic process that exceeds its negative attributes when it is seen only within the seemingly oppressive domain of the "State." Some of Foucault’s ideas on this issue have become common currency, especially the assertion that power “doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repressive” (60–61). Similarly, others have argued for a “dialectic of control” in social systems (Giddens 145), contending that “all power relations . . . manifest autonomy and dependence ‘in both directions’” (149). The reversible order of this scheme seems to be advanced as an expressed critique of Max Weber’s conception of bureaucracy which holds that, within bureaucracies, formal authority relations are accepted consensually at all levels of the organization, so that controlling bodies and their subjects work together. Interestingly enough, this same type of critique of “trickle down” power relations has been leveled against Maravall’s interpretation of baroque culture.

Following general lines of thought which argue for the reciprocities of power relations, and keeping in mind Maravall’s well-known interpretation of the Baroque as a “conservative,” “guided,” “urban” and “mass-oriented” culture, we will examine different types of texts from the Spanish 1600s for the purpose of showing that while a homogeneous subject may indeed be posited through a variety of cultural and artistic products oriented toward “mass” consumption (especially certain types of theatrical performances, sermons, festivals, chapbooks, and so on), the possibility of alternative positions cannot be excluded. Such alternatives are implied in the subject’s awareness that power relations involve reciprocity. In Maravall’s case it must be said that despite his basic emphasis on ideas and institutions and, therefore, on the exercise of power from above rather than a focus on subjectivity on a more concrete level, his writings also make clear that one cannot understand the complexities of Spanish baroque culture without taking into account the discrepant voices that are raised against its conservative programs.1

While literary/cultural critics often question Maravall’s notion of dirigismo (social guidance) to explain how in the 1600s the monarcho-seigniorial segments of Spanish society worked to maintain the prevailing system of privileges, they continue to rely on his extraordinary work of synthesis to examine along socio-historical lines various types of texts of the Spanish 1600s within that immediate context of production/reception (Romero Díaz, R. de la Flor) From our perspective, Maravall’s interpretation of the Baroque seems to be especially useful in dealing with the impact of certain “mass-oriented” cultural products of the 1600s. One could mention the sacramental and secular plays that were staged in the thousands in the urban centers of Spain, as well as the performances of sermons by famous preachers on sacred occasions and spectacular displays connected with religious and/or secular celebrations (catasfalques, triumphal arches, elaborately decorated altars, processions, and various other visual and/or auditory effects, including illumination and pyrotechnics). In fact, Maravall’s general interpretation is further sustained by a conservative line of picaresque narratives that espoused, at least on some level, the repression of social and moral deviance.

The case for Spanish baroque theater as a vehicle for social and political propaganda is well known and has been argued by various scholars (Maravall, Díaz Borque, and Noël Salomon) in conjunction with the popular comedia of the early 1600s whose manifesto was Lope de Vega’s Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo (New Art of Writing Plays in Our Time) (1609). Let us consider for a moment Cervantes’ implicit criticism of Lope de Vega for having acquiesced to the demands and tastes of the vulgo (a non-discriminating “mass” consumer) and the realities of the marketplace where producers and the entire commercial and regulatory circuit of the theater favor the kind of formalic plays that were composed by Lope and his school of playwrights. Cervantes’ critical position on this matter is made clear in several of his well-known texts, among them Don Quijote (I, 48), Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses (1615) (Eight Comedies and Eight Interludes), the Adjunta al Parnaso (1614) (“Addendum” to Voyage to Parnassus), and in some of the plays written toward the end of his life, among them Pedro de Urdemalas (Peter, the Great Pretender), a three-act play, and “El retablo de las maravillas” (The Magic Tableau), a one-act farce, to mention the most prominent examples. The “Addendum” to Voyage to Parnassus carries a brief dialogue between a certain Pancracio and an interlocutor named Miguel (de Cervantes) that speaks eloquently to this issue:

Pancracio: ¿Y agora tiene vuestra merced alguna comedias?
Miguel: Seis tengo, con otros seis entremeses.
Pancracio: Pues, ¿por qué no se representan?
Miguel: Porque ni los autores me buscan ni yo los voy a buscar a ellos.
Pancracio: No deben de saber que vuestra mercedes las tiene.
Miguel: Sí saben; pero como tienen sus poetas paniaguados y les va bien con ellos no buscan pan de trastigo. Pero yo pienso darlas a la estampa
para que se vea de espacio lo que pasa apriesa y se disimula o no se entiende, cuando las representan. Y las comedias tienen sus sazones y tiempos como los cantares.

(Pancracio:)  And now [tell me], do you have any comedias [available for sale]?
(Miguel:)  I have six of them with six other interludes.
(Pancracio:)  Then why aren’t they being represented [on stage]?
(Miguel:)  Because producers do not seek me out nor I them.
(Pancracio:)  Surely they must not know that you have them.
(Miguel:)  Yes, they do know; but since they have their own protégés and do fine with them, they do not look for problems. But I plan to have them published so that one might see slowly [on the printed page] what moves quickly and is either concealed or not understood when they are represented [on stage]. Moreover, comedias, like songs, also have their seasons and occasions.)²

Cervantes understands that his kind of conceptual theater was out of step with the expectations of producers, actors, and audiences. We also see in this quotation that he reflects two attitudes toward the act of reading: one hinging on spatial development in time (theatricality) and the other based on narrativity in a strict sense (Spadaccini and Talens, Through the Shattering Glass 46). For Cervantes, theater is a system of representation and an institutional apparatus with its own conventions and mediations which “produces action, time, and meaning through a time imposed on the audience moment by moment” (47). On the other hand, theatricalized narration provides the discriminate reader with a mental space of interpretation that precludes the type of closure imposed by the accepted canon of the staged performance (47).

Cervantes' position on this issue provides a stark contrast to that of Lope de Vega, who expresses reluctance at having his plays appear in print for fear of being subjected to misunderstanding and unfavorable scrutiny in the privacy of the reading rooms. Unlike Lope, Cervantes displaces his plays from the public stage, away from the impresario’s vulgo and onto the printed page in search of a thoughtful reception. In fact, the implications of theater as spectacle is a recurring motif in much of his writing, and in plays such as Pedro de Urdemalas and El retablo de las maravillas, this very question is inscribed in their respective textual spaces, thus challenging the reader to reflect on the fictional status of theater and the manner in which it functions ideologically. Moreover those plays speak to the manipulative uses of the new popular theater and how the vulgo’s perceptions are mediated by the material conditions of the stage with its ever greater reliance on special effects (tramoyas), a recognizable character typology, constant twists of the plot, extraordinary emphasis on action rather than characterization, the repetitive uses of certain themes (among them, the harmony of country life, the social and political integration of the rich peasant, and the stability of the traditional honor code), and the ultimate resolution of conflict often through the intervention of the Monarchs or their representatives. In fact, it is the repetitive character of these “mass-oriented” products that propel the spectator onto the realm of the familiar, facilitating a non-discriminating reception (Horkheimer and Adorno; Maravall) as Cervantes knew well in opposing his theater to the formulaic comedía nueva of the beginning of the 1600s.

The notion of a non-discriminating, “mass” reception which Cervantes attributes the theater-going public of the comedía nueva is also useful for a discussion of the baroque sermon and the auto sacramental (sacramental play). Regarding the former, it is well known that preachers used rhetorical devices and dramatic ploys to captivate audiences, as we learn from a certain Fray Ángel Marín (1613), a contemporary of Cervantes, who stresses that the oral performance allows the preacher to give “viva a lo que decía con la voz, con las acciones, con el modillo de decir, con los movimientos; y en papel es imposible escribirse nada de esto” (cit. by Barnes-Karol 76) (to give life to what he is seeking to convey, through his voice and actions, his manner of saying things, and the movements of his body; whereas on paper it is impossible to write any of this). There is also evidence that preachers sought to profit through the use of representational techniques that were common to the new popular theater. Thus, toward the end of the seventeenth century (1698) a certain Francisco Caus was to describe one of his colleague’s sermons in this manner: “con ser tan contrario de las comedias, se portaba en este ejercicio como los comediantes. Estos, para llamar gente, y tener ganancia, suelen disponer en el Teatro algunas apariciones, que llaman tramoyas, a cuya novedad se junta tal vez mayor discurso que para un sermón, y con esto aumentan su grangera” (Even though it [preaching] is so contrary to the theater, he behaved in this exercise as actors do. Actors, in order to attract audiences and make a profit, commonly use scenic effects called tramoyas, which, because of their novelty, draw perhaps bigger crowds than sermons do, and, in this way, they increase their earnings) (Ledda, cited by Barnes-Karol 57).

Another interesting document along these lines is a treatise written by the jurist Gaspar Gutiérrez de los Ríos whose Noticia general para la estimación de las artes, y de la manera en que se conocen las liberales de las que son
mecánicas y serviles... (1600), deals among other things with the connection between the art of painting and drawing with rhetoric and dialectic:

No es poca también la emulación que tienen estas artes con la Retórica. Porque si para ser perfectos los Oradores han de ser diestros y experimentados en el estilo del decir, grave, mediano, humilde, y mixto, correspondiendo siempre a la materia que se trata: de una manera en las cartas, de otra en las historias, de otra en los razonamientos, oraciones y sermones públicos: de una manera en las cosas de prudencia, de otra en las cosas de doctrina: si deven así mismo demostrar todo género de afectos de ira, misericordia, temor, o amor, y passarlos a los oyentes, para poder persuadir e inclinarlos a lo que se dize. (Calvo Serraller 79)

(Its not little the emulation that these arts (painting and drawing) also have with Rhetoric. For if in order for the Orators to be perfect, skilful, and experienced in the style of saying—serious, moderate, humble, and mixed—corresponding always to the material at hand: in the letters one way, another in the histories, still another in the reasonings, orations and public sermons: one way in matters of prudence, another in doctrinal ones: they must likewise demonstrate all types of impressions: ire, mercy, fear, love, and transfer them to the listeners in order to persuade them and incline them toward what is said.)

According to Gutiérrez de los Ríos, the audience will be moved by the ensemble of representational skills with which the preacher conveys the message.

Other documents from the period underscore the importance of painting over printed texts for the illustration of religious history and values as well as for the preservation of secular authority. Thus, in a memorandum to King Philip III by a number of court painters, ca. 1619, it was stated that, “la pintura, que en un instante nos muestra y hace capaces de lo que por lectura era fuerza gastar mucho tiempo, y hojar muchos libros, siendo en ellos dicho con multitud de palabras, con mucha erudición y teología para declararse, y muy posible, después de todo, quedar menos entendido de mucha gente” (Calvo Serraller 165) (painting, which in an instant shows us and teaches us what would, of necessity, have taken much time leafing through and reading many books, since what is stated in them is said with many words, with much erudition and theology for the sake of clarity and which, in the end, might be less understood by many people).

The various quotations included above proffer a distinction between the text that is represented on stage or through pictorial images and the one that is read; between the possible mediation through linguistic and kinesic signs on the part of the preacher or through spectacular depictions on the part of the painter and a reception through reading that is of necessity more cerebral and less susceptible to emotion. The sermon sought to teach and persuade the faithful in line with the principles of the Counter Reformation. This same idea was to guide the Catholic painter, according to Francisco Pacheco in his Arte de la Pintura (1649), in which there is an explicit mention of the parallelism that exists between the work of the painter and that of the preacher. His ideas about the mission of painting must be understood within the context of Counter Reformation culture, since the Council of Trent had defended the use of images to promote devotion and to strengthen worship. Pacheco compares the painter’s labor to that of the preacher in that they both worked at the service of Church and faith. As such they had a common goal: to persuade the populace. In the case of a canonical painter such as el Greco, it has been demonstrated (R. de la Flor, Barroco 117) that his Toledo: Plano y vista (1610–1614) “purifies” the image of a city contaminated by the presence of non-Christian, Semitic elements. This idea connects perfectly with Maravall’s interpretation of the Baroque as a culture of guidance and control.

Baroque secular and religious celebrations allow people to partake of the splendor and spectacle associated with key institutions of the Spanish state: the Church and the Monarchy. Thus, the elaborate representation of sacramental plays on the feast of Corpus Christi gave visibility to the concept of transubstantiation as well as to other teachings of the Catholic Church. At these public spectacles the audience would be expected to be engulfed in a sea of emotion and be guided toward an affirmation of faith (Brad Nelson, in this volume, analyzes Calderón’s El gran mercado del mundo to underscore the inscription of certain tensions within the text and the possibility for a different kind of reception). This very idea is conveyed by the great Mexican Creole writer, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in a short dramatic panegyric (“Loa”) to the sacramental play El divino Narciso (The Divine Narcissus) which, according to the text, was destined to be represented in Madrid. In the panegyric, the allegorical character called “Religion” speaks in metaphors but simultaneously undertakes the representation of the story through visual images with the aim of converting native subjects through their senses. In the respective examples of sermons and sacramental plays, an audience became absorbed into a power network that was an expression of God’s will, while in the case of the early Lopean comedia, the symbolic identification was often with the King and was effected through an honor code that demanded absolute obedience.

The conservative energies within the Baroque can also be felt within a moralizing line of picaresque narrative whose archetype is Mateo Alemán’s
Guzmán de Alfarache (1599, 1604), an extraordinarily popular novel, a best seller which went through some twenty-six editions in the seventeenth century and the publication of some fifty-thousand volumes. In this particular narrative, the alliance between Church and State in disciplining and punishing the deviant *picaro* is manifested throughout the text, but most especially in part II, where the sermon becomes the dominant narrative structure. The narrator’s apología for traditional order is summarized in the idea that salvation can be achieved within one’s social position (“sálvese cada uno en su estado”).

In general we might say that Guzmán de Alfarache and several other picaresque narratives of the early Baroque propose a totalizing conception of morality in relation to an individual who is depicted as breaking the very rules which the aristocratic and ecclesiastical State expects him to obey. Fiction, then, serves to represent the essentially moral nature of reality as well as the possible outcome of a world without rules. Thus various manifestations of transgression such as sorcery, witchcraft, prostitution, thievery, abuse of charity, and countless other forms of delinquency became embedded in the cultural and political discourses of the time. Picaresque literature provides a mapping of the cancerous underclass that roamed the cities in order to expose the dangers posed by those “unhinged” individuals to the urban groups (including merchants) that had the most to lose from their illegal activities. In another picaresque novel, La hija de Celestina (1612) (Celestina’s Daughter), Madrid, “the mother of all people,” becomes part of Elena’s ecosystem, a place of riches and temptations to be exploited; the anonymity that the city provides facilitates her contact with individuals of various ranks who are tricked by her into believing that she possesses spiritual gifts and healing powers. Her activities include prostitution which, in the end, contributes to her demise: after it is discovered that she has killed her pimp, she is garroted by the authorities, stuffed in a barrel, and thrown in the Manzanares river. But not before she returns stolen property to her victims and undergoes a spiritual conversion! This conventional ending à la Guzmán corresponds to a discursive integration of different spheres of society.

A sample of literary texts from the Hispanic baroque period point toward a broader and more problematic understanding of power relations. One of the most interesting figures to have dealt with the complexities of such relations is the Jesuit thinker Baltasar Gracián whose *Héroe* (1637) is emblematic along these lines insofar as it makes clear that individuals and groups bring a kind of capital (*caudal*) to every transaction (Primor II, “Cifrar la voluntad”). To the extent that such capital becomes someone else’s object of desire, the actions of one’s potential antagonists must be anticipated through an understanding of their mental processes. This relationship of power may be viewed as productive insofar as the individual is involved in an exchange that allows for the possibility of gaining practical knowledge, the kind that may be used in defense of the self. For this individual there emerges a break between knowledge viewed as an instrument or as a product of power relations and knowledge seen as an absolute explanation of oneself, grounded outside of concrete social relations (Sánchez and Spadaccini).

Let us recall that in many baroque texts, the concept of *virtù*, in which an individual is a producer of his own genealogy, undergoes a transformation. That production now depends upon the use of practical knowledge framed by prudence (Maravall, *La cultura* 138 ff.), by one’s ability to exercise a discursive constraint. This prudent use of knowledge allows one to navigate through the perilous waters of deception in which individuals are isolated and subjected to predators. This very idea is captured in Gracián’s Aphorism 181 of his *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (Art of Worldly Wisdom), which advises: “Sin mentir, no decir todas las verdades” (Don’t lie, but don’t tell the whole truth). One of the reasons for suppressing truth is the unpredictability of its reception and the possibility of exposing oneself to personal harm:

No hay cosa que requiera más tiento que la verdad, que es un sangrarse del corazón. Tanto es menester para saberla decir como para saberla callar. Piérdese con sols una mentira todo el crédito de la entereza. Es tenido el engañador por falso, y el engañado por falso, que es peor. No todas las verdades se pueden decir: unas porque me importan a mí, otras porque al otro.

(Nothing requires more skill than the truth, which is a letting of blood from the heart. It takes skill both to speak it and to withhold it. A single lie can destroy one’s reputation for honesty. The man deceived seems faulty, and the deceiver seems false, which is worse. Not all truths can be spoken: some should be silenced for your own sake, others for the sake of someone else.)

In the world of the court as represented by Gracián, survival depends upon techniques of representation which call for the management of truth in order to avoid bitter disillusionment or what is graphically called a bloodletting of the heart (“sangrarse del corazón”). Survival and ultimate success hinge upon a careful negotiation of one’s relations with others within clearly established parameters, and only those who practice a strategy and technique of prudence can control their own destinies (“arte para ser dichoso” [the art of success], aphorism 21). This self-control is opposed to spontaneity or to the giving of oneself
to passion. Through his aphorisms Gracián proposes an economy of language and behavior and a controlled, self-defined individual through a highly pragmatic action which leaves nothing to chance (Sánchez and Spadaccini).

For good reason Gracián’s aphorisms point to the importance of rhetoric as a discipline to manage public life. Within the context in which his writings were received in baroque Spain, the idea for the reader was to assimilate patterns of behavior that could help one take advantage of the rules of an established social order without seeking to transform them (Spadaccini and Talens, Rhetoric and Politics). The highest form of practical wisdom was to understand the demands of public “opinion” within the structure of a court that now included professional bureaucrats, statesmen, artists, and various moneyed groups and then master the proper techniques of public representation, in other words, theatricality. (See Ordóñez Tarín in this volume on the contradictory relationships between institutions and intellectuals such as Gracián and Quevedo; see also Egginton’s problematization of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical hypothesis about the Baroque through a reading of Gracián’s Criticón).

There are various other narratives of this period that stress a practical view of morality. This can be seen in a witty picaresque novel that challenges directly the moral assumptions propagated by the popular Guzmán de Alfarache. In Francisco López de Ubeda’s La pícara Justina (1605), published soon after the appearance of the second part of Alemán’s novel (1604) and just prior to the publication of the first part of Don Quijote (1605), the dual structure of Guzmán de Alfarache is maintained only in appearance. The somber voice of Guzmán, the converted pícaro, now gives way to an ironic and playful account of a life of deviance and the creative steps taken by Justina to improve her lot. In this particular picaresque narrative the baroque city again becomes the center of attraction and it is within that space of exchange that her morality is shaped by individual action. Such action is expressed through parody of the official discourse on poverty and charity as her notion of giving (and taking) is of a contractual kind, with none of the theological trappings assumed by the official discourses of Church and State. Justina also rejects any apprehension of reality that relies on sight, for it can numb the mind and cast prudence aside. True love is defined by Justina as exchange and, as such, it resides in the hands rather than in the heart. The world is seen through her hands which become the emblem of the individual’s control of the self in the practical sphere of social intercourse: “amor que sale primero a los ojos y a los meneos que a las manos, no creo en él; manos muertas y ojos vivos es imaginación y chimera ... Reniego del amor, si ése es amor” (446) (I do not believe in the kind of love that manifests itself to the eyes rather than to the hands—says Justina—Dead hands and live eyes are love’s imagination and chimera ... If that is love, I reject it). Justina’s self-definition and initiatives are precisely what the totalizing, moral narrator of Guzmán de Alfarache wishes to suppress (Sánchez and Spadaccini).

A different understanding of power relations may be gathered from an analysis of colonial texts in which the so-called “Barroco de Indias” tends to impugn those discourses that deprive the Other of a voice. Important figures such as Sor Juana, Sigüenza y Gongora, and Espinosa Medrano (El Lunáreo) claim an American identity forged in a vital space that encompasses a variety of languages and cultures. For these Creole intellectuals “alterity and identity are the two sides of the same collective experience and of the same project, one that struggles to make possible the utopia of the American being as a socially differentiated subject” (Moraña, Relecturas v). At the same time it is important to underscore the fact that baroque colonial writing is defined not only by its contestatory orientation but also by its propagation of hegemonic discourses. This can be seen, for example, in the “Loa” that precedes Sor Juana’s El divino Narciso and in Sigüenza y Gongora’s Teatro de virtudes políticas (Theater of Political Virtues). (For an analysis of the contestatory voice of intellectuals such as Cervantes and Inca Garcilaso on the colonial question, see Suárez in this volume).

In the case of the Creole letrado Sigüenza y Gongora there is a clear attempt to distance himself from the encomiastic messages that were usually inscribed in the triumphal arches constructed to welcome figures of power and authority. In his case he was to organize the reception of a Viceroy (the Count of Paredes and Marquis of la Laguna), who was coming to Mexico from the metropolis. The Teatro underscores the irony and resentment of a Creole intellectual against the metropolis’ attempt to impose its cultural and political models. For Sigüenza y Gongora, the very idea that a bureaucrat was to be received as a Caesar exposed the Empire as an empty mask. For his part, he preferred to invoke old Mexican warriors whom he contrasted to the faceless bureaucrats who were arriving from Madrid. Sigüenza y Gongora’s suggestion is that the addressee of the triumphal arch did not understand the allegorical significance of the monument, for he had not had contacts with indigenous cultures and, in any case, suffered from a lack of interpretative capacities. Sigüenza y Gongora perceives this emptiness and supplements the image of the monument with an elocutive explanation inviting the Viceroy to seek counsel and consult “con su pueblo todos y cada uno de los asuntos de este arco” (189) (with his people any and all matters included in this arch). The homage to the Viceroy thus becomes a pretext by Sigüenza y Gongora to distance himself from the arch’s purpose to embody metropolitan power.
Interestingly, the extraordinary experimentation with language that is the hallmark of much of Spanish baroque literature also involves a definition of the reader in the tension between containment and freedom. (For a discussion of the notion of “author” and the creation of the literary field see Gutiérrez in this volume). This may also be seen in Cervantes’ fiction where reading emerges as a demystifying activity, one which goes beyond the simple linguistic properties of discourse to discover that those properties “announce the authority and social competence of speakers” (Bourdieu 63).

From a rhetorical standpoint, one of the techniques used by art and literature to persuade was to implicate the reader/spectator in the work itself. In Cervantes, perhaps more than in any other Spanish writer of his time, the audience is rescued from this type of cooption as a separation of reality from literature is effected within fiction. Moreover his self-critical texts confront dialectically the life experience of the reader and, in so doing, reject the sort of ideological manipulation that was being promoted through the mass-oriented culture of his time.

In this discussion of containment and freedom in the Spanish Baroque, we return to Cervantes, for he had the pulse of his age as few other Spanish creative writers did. His texts bring to the reader’s attention the specific registers that contextualize the act of communication and challenge the reader to reflect upon the reliability and authority of the speaker. With respect to the picareseque, he rejects the totalizing voice of the reintegrated pícaro (the voice of social and moral authority) and invents characters who shape their own destinies through dialogue; while in reference to the official theater of the early 1600s, he underscores the manipulative uses of art in the creation of a model of life. Finally, his writing brings to the forefront the questions of gender and ethnicity as expressions of how to give voice to the repressed Other. He brings to his creative project an uncanny understanding of the mechanisms and uses of specifically defined cultural artifacts and the manner in which they are constructed and received by different kinds of audiences. His texts activate the “reader,” calling attention through irony to the conventions that help to propagate the myths of official culture. The post-Cervantine novella of Gonzalo de Céspedes y Meneses, Juan Pérez de Montalbán and María de Zayas y Sotomayor may also be seen as cultural spaces for the confrontation of contradictory discourses in urban settings (see Romero-Díaz in this volume).

We have attempted to sketch out various representations of power relations during the early period of the Spanish Baroque focusing on the idea that containment and freedom are not mutually exclusive concepts. The success of any guidance had to contend not only with an appropriate receptivity on the part
of subjects who were being guided but also with those who were creating their own spaces of resistance: those who relied on self-guidance.

Baroque and Modernity

Descartes believed that one of the three main goals of philosophy is to help in the guidance of life (Principia Philosophiae, 1644). Cartesianism was adopted in many parts of Europe as an alternative to a decadent Scholasticism, and although Descartes's works were included in the Index of prohibited books in 1663, liberal Dutch universities continued using them. It was precisely in the Netherlands where Baruch Spinoza developed a philosophy which entailed a moral and personal search of vital wisdom along lines comparable to those of Descartes and Gracian. Their rationalism tends to suppress the passion, that is, any element that could interfere with the pragmatic achievement of the individual's goals. Martin Jay speaks of a multiplicity of visual cultures founded on three different "scopic regimes of Modernity" which constitute historically defined ways of seeing. The dominant one in the modern era is Cartesian perspective, which can be identified with the Renaissance (Albertian) notion of perspective and Descartes's idea of subjective rationality. In the words of Jay, this regime "was in league with a scientific world view that no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text, but rather saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher" ("Scopic regimes" 118). A less prevailing regime is the one modeled by the Dutch "art of describing" or Northern nonperspectival tradition of the map and its lack of insistence on the boundary of a window frame, opting for the continuum of the painted surface with the world beyond the frame. Finally, a regime that has been especially attractive for postmodern thinkers because of its "subversion of the dominant visual order of scientific reason" (Downcast Eyes 47) is that of the Baroque with its distorted, unfocused, vertiginous opticality and its rendering of the visual field from multiple viewpoints.

While much of the discussion about the Baroque today focuses on the notion of the irrational, one must also acknowledge its more explicitly rational side. Accordingly, in recent years there has been a great deal of discussion about the existence of a "baroque reason" which would emphasize excess, plurality of views, and corporeality. For Roland Barthes, the baroque semantics is the topos of the impossible, modeled on the oxymoron. It would also entail the rejection of the great classical dichotomies that oppose subject and object, real and unreal, masculine and feminine. For Christine Buci-Glucksman, "contrairement à toute métaphysique du sujet et du Cogito comme présence à soi dans la représentation, la vision—celle de saint Paul—dépossède le sujet de lui-même, le désapproprie, l’absente en une série de métamorphoses, de sorties hors de soi" (La folie du voir 118) (Contrary to all metaphysics of the subject and of the Cogito as presence in itself in the re-presentation, the vision—that of St. Paul—dispossesses the subject from himself, it appropriates him, it makes him absent through a series of metamorphoses, of exits from the self).

Buci-Glucksman has developed an interpretation of the Baroque and of contemporary culture around the axis of what she considers to be "le grand axiome du baroque: Être, c’est Voir" (92) (the great axiom of the Baroque: to Be is to See). In an interview given toward the end of 2000 on the occasion of an exhibition called Triomphe du Baroque (Triomphes de la Baroque) dealing with the work of contemporary "carnal artist" Orlan, Buci-Glucksman relies on some of the notions that she had explored in La folie du voir (The Madness of Seeing) to stress the polarity of the Baroque, one of jouissance vs. one of death; one of fullness or plenitude (as in the case of Leibniz or Deleuze) vs. one of emptiness or void (Borromini's spiral, for example); one of glory or power such as Bernini's vs. the Baroque of the martyr (Sigismond). The Baroque is seen as a special moment within our monotheistic Western culture (a culture of "the fall and the elevation" [26]): "it's a dualist culture, and what's interesting in the feminization of culture is the refusal of this dualism. The baroque is a moment within Christianity, and even within the counter reformation, which will introduce the double and will hybridize the low into the high and the high into the low" (26–27) thus pointing to the Baroque's potential for rejection of established norms. (García Pabón in this volume studies criollo narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to explore the particular responses to the intersection of life and death and its relationship to their subjectivity).

In the late twentieth century the Baroque was to emerge as a crucial concept for a comprehensive understanding of Modernity. The appearance of the concept of Neobaroque and the insistence by many contemporary artists on finding affiliations with the cultural production of the seventeenth century have contributed to the acknowledgement of its importance. Already in the 1920s, Walter Benjamin realized that his project of developing an "archeology of the modern" had to go through an analysis of the major elements that constituted the imaginary of the seventeenth century. He was to come to the conclusion that the Baroque—and Modernity at large—were essentially melancholic, with Hamlet and Baudelaire being the greatest exponents of this condition. (For a discussion of the Baroque and melancholy, see R. de la Flor in this volume). Thus, in his The Origin of German Tragic Drama, completed in 1928, Benja-
min’s conception of Modernity did not depend only on Enlightenment reason; he recognized that certain factors deny the rationality of the process of historical construction and, in so doing, he pointed to the impossibility of stable totalities and absolute truths.

The image that Benjamin used to illustrate that process was that of the ruins. The tragic events which developed during and immediately after his lifetime would sadly confirm the convenience of such an icon. Commenting on Benjamin’s work, the Spanish philosopher Ana Lucas was to observe that “baroque theater had staged a representation of the world that becomes ‘ruin,’ but it has been only nowadays when we have finally confirmed the ruinous character of our whole reality. Instability, polidimensionality, mutability, and fragmentarity are baroque traits which Benjamin detected in Modernity and which have now exploded, invading all aspects of cultural and social reality” (23).

The ruins within which we need to survive are those of certainties, those of “substitute theologies”—to use Steiner’s terms—that took the place of religion and functioned as mechanisms of human consolation. It is difficult to deny that we live in a time of a generalized perception of crisis. Already in 1972 Maravall had perceived “some similarities that exist between our current situation and that of the seventeenth century, a time full of conflicts” (Teatro 93). Fernando R. de la Flor, a contributor to this volume, wrote not long ago that in the 1600s “decadence and disenchantment [. . .] took hold of the stage of representation (the symbolic space of the Counter Reformation), forecasting in three hundred years the same doubts and the same auto-destructive energy that is acting on our own symbolic production nowadays, a time which is thus living its baroque revival, the neobaroque” (Península 14).

That self-destructive tension which de la Flor names as characteristic of our culture is the manifestation of the period of uncertainty which we are witnessing at virtually every level. Ours is a time in which the most extreme side of baroque horror vacui is completely justified. It might be worth remembering that the Aristotelian theory which denied the possibility of existence of a vacuum was not refuted until the mid-1600s by Galileo’s disciple Evangelista Torricelli. From the important discussions generated in the seventeenth century by this topic there remains today an indelible association between horror vacui and the arts of the Baroque. There is actually a twofold connection: while some Baroque and Neobaroque cultural products can be perceived as fighting a vacuum-related anxiety through an extreme or excessive formal density, other products point toward that same “nothingness” by showing a resistance to that very same density. Both positions can be understood as an expressive answer to the “fear of vacuum” that characterizes the creative manifestations of the Baroque and Neobaroque (see Castillo in this volume).

In some of the works of the great Spanish baroque poet Luis de Góngora that great density becomes particularly apparent, as Dámaso Alonso notes when he points out that in “the Solitudes the introduction of pompous processions, of series of fruits, delicious foods, beasts [. . .] are decorative elements, contributing within the general plot—in the same way as the exact and shining word does—to give Góngora’s poetry its pompous, ornamental and loaded flavor” (312). However, the exuberance of a Baroque artifact such as the Solitudes can be seen as something with a deeper meaning than the simple display of spectacular and sensual elements with an ornamental purpose: it responds to an urge to fill the void of the semiospheric tabula rasa while reminding us at the same time of the futility of earthly things. As empty signifiers at least on one level (since they correspond to ephemeral, vain realities), those shiny words have been brought into existence to deal with the horror vacui that haunted seventeenth-century imaginations. Similar comments could be made about the work of contemporary Spanish poet Guillermo Carnero. In his book Dibujo de la Muerte, one of the most celebrated poems, “Capricho en Aranjuez,” starts with a remarkable enumeration of luxurious items, namely colorful and delicate fabrics, precious minerals and crafted woodwork (Aranjuez is the site of one of the Royal Palaces of the Spanish Crown). The lush listing is suddenly interrupted by a somber memento of life’s brevity, something to which the poem already points to in its first line. Carnero’s piece is therefore a vanitas through which we learn about the futility of accumulating material goods and, in a broader sense, about the insignificance of our earthly desires and achievements (Martín-Estudillo, “Neobarroquismo”). As Prieto de Paula has put it, the abundant enumerations in Carnero’s compositions are “a true lesson of nothingness [lección de la nada] of baroque origin. The most important mission of this objectual exuberance is pointing to an inner vacuum: things are not there for what they denote by themselves, but as the answer to some kind of horror vacui” (72).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Leibniz (see Tymieniecka) wondered why it is that there is Being rather than Nothingness. Today we live on a latent absolute nothingness, and any work of art is a reminder of it. As George Steiner notes, “there is in the most confident metaphysical construct, in the most affirmative work of art a memento mori, a labour, implicit or explicit, to hold at bay the seepage of fatal time, of entropy into each and every living form” (Grammars 2). We live with the possibility of overkill, the total and repeated destruction of the human species and the planet where we dwell. Under
these circumstances, our existence must be seen from the point of view of its unavoidable relationship with inexistence. It is, for Heidegger, _Sein zum Tode_, a possibility of Being intrinsically referred to the possibility of not Being. Today more than ever, our existence is a being “for/toward” death, a thought which is as characteristic of Heidegger as it is of Quevedo, one of the great baroque poets of the Spanish 1600s (Martín-Estudillo, “Metapoesía”).

It is clear that baroque texts are not defined simply through morphosyntactic concentration. What awes is their extremeness, either through accumulative excess or minimalist representation: in this sense, painters as different as Rubens and Sánchez Cotán may be said to be baroque in their craft. The baroque hyperbolic morphologies of nothingness and excess are two extremes that converge in the common anxiety caused by the perceived closeness of non-existence and of an epistemic and moral vacuum (see also Castillo in this volume). Some of the major figures of the Spanish Baroque dramatize these very tensions in their writings. Thus one might point to Gracian’s poetics of silence (Egido), Quevedo’s nihilistic accumulation, and Gongora’s exuberant verbosity.

Although it was in Latin America rather than Spain where the term “Neo-baroque” emerged with more conviction, one should not forget that a major impetus for the revalorization of the Baroque was the commemoration, in 1927, of the third centennial of Luis de Gongora’s death. The now illustrious group of poets who celebrated the occasion—ignoring the dominant academic disdain—were to find renewal in their craft not in the staid atmosphere of Spanish Romanticism but from the experimentation with language that had marked the work of the most adventurous Spanish baroque poets, especially Gongora, whose impact on some of them was such that it gave rise to the concept of “neogongorismo.” One thinks of Rafael Alberti’s _Cal y canto_ (from 1929), Gerardo Diego’s _Fábula de Equis y Zeda_ (1926–1929; first published in 1932), and Miguel Hernández’s _Périto en lunas_ (1932). The last two works are the most manifest cases of homage to Gongora. Hernández’s imitation of the baroque poet was so good that sometimes it is difficult, even for informed readers, to distinguish Gongora’s work from the pastiche that his admirer created, while Diego’s poem is a playful Avant-Garde recreation of the rich language of the _Solitudes_.

The recuperation of the defenestrated Andalusian baroque poet did not respond to a mere caprice of the authors of the so-called Generation of 1927. As Octavio Paz noted, it was the lack of a strong Romantic movement in Spain that made the Spanish Avant-Garde look back toward the Baroque to find in it a ground-breaking discourse. If the modernity of the German poetic voice was born with Goethe and Novalis and that of the French lyric had in its origins the trio conformed by Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Baudelaire, the great poets of the Spanish generation of 1927 found their own roots in baroque poetry, whose leading figure was Gongora. It is well-known that one of the clearest signs of identity of the Avant-Garde was its rejection of Western high-culture tradition. In this case, however, it must be noticed that the “obscure” Gongora and baroque art in general had a very problematic place—if any—in that tradition. The revival of his poetry was just another manifestation of radical innovation and anti-academicism of the young poets of ‘27, who despised the corrupt culture of their elders.

The new way of understanding Gongora’s poetic project enjoyed a less obvious but deeper reception within the poetry of the members of the 1968 generation in Spain, also known as the Novismos. These authors seem to agree with Gracian’s dictum from _Agudeza y arte de ingenio_: “la verdad, cuanto mas dificultosa, es mas agradable, y el conocimiento que cuesta, es mas estimado” (85) (the more difficult it is to achieve truth, the more pleasant it is, and the more cherished is the knowledge it requires). When we deal with the poetry that followed Gongora’s footsteps, we must be aware that it is an openly elitist one which explicitly asserts its own difficulty and resonates in what José Ortega y Gasset wrote in his _La deshumanización del arte_ (The Dehumanization of Art), “el placer estético tiene que ser un placer inteligente” (32) (esthetic pleasure must be an intelligent pleasure).

**Conclusion: A Baroque for All Seasons**

The reappropriation of the concept Baroque is an ongoing one, and it seems that its rearticulation changes in line with the particular position that one adopts _vis-à-vis_ the social and political realities of a particular time, usually one of transition or crisis. In the case of the Ultrabaroque, its characterization has had less to do with formal or thematic similarities with earlier manifestations of the Baroque (especially that of the seventeenth century) than with an “attitude” toward current issues of personal and institutional relations, touching on questions such as _mestizaje_, hybridity, transculturation, and globalization. This new development may be seen in the work of the organizers of, and contributors to, the exhibition _Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art_ (2000). The event, which originated in the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, sought to expose and explain the artistic production stirred by the importation and recycling of the European Baroque in the Americas. The curators stated that they understood the Baroque as “a model by which to understand and analyze the
processes of transculturation and hybridity that globalization has highlighted and set into motion” and that it is “pertinent today more as an attitude than a style and is interdisciplinary in nature” (Armstrong 3).

While the discussion surrounding the Ultrabaroque seems to be quite compelling when framed in terms of an “attitude” toward the issues mentioned above, or when it is tied to critical periods of change, it also seems to lack precision when it characterizes its distant model—the Baroque of the seventeenth century—or when it refers to the erosion of borders within our current globalized world:

Just as the baroque era was a time of choices—people could choose a different faith, a different occupation, even a different part of the world to live in—so today are we barraged with “lifestyle” options. The eroding borders in contemporary life between virtual and reality, global and local, education and entertainment (to name a few), present us with unfathomable possibilities and choices. The artists represented in Ultrabaroque embrace such contradictions in their work and their lives. In this era of global villages, cultures, economies, and networks, which is defining our future in ways we don’t yet understand, the baroque resurfaces as a model for coming to terms with the challenges presented by this transitional period. (Armstrong 17–18)

The idea of “eroding borders” should be nuanced, for we know that fences are being raised to separate people along economic, ethnic, and religious lines. And, as for “lifestyle” options, or the freedom to choose how one leads one’s life, it must be recognized that is an idea which is particularly ingrained in our own context where, in theory, you can aspire, as the saying goes, to “be all that you can be” or to construct multiple and ever-changing identities (see also Vidal in this volume). There is a Baroque for all seasons.

Notes

1. This position is made clear in several of his major books—La oposición política bajo los Austrias, La literatura picaresca desde la historia social and even La cultura del Barroco, in which he explicitly says that there are “instances, even frequent ones, of repulsion against what is proposed. The background of conflict and of opposition in the seventeenth century is there for all to see, and without taking it into account—one must also insist on this point—nothing can be understood” (198).

2. All translations are our own unless otherwise indicated.

3. One of the examples mentioned to illustrate her point is Francisco de Quevedo’s Gracias y desgracias del ojo del culo (Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Ass Hole).

4. The rationale behind the exhibition was derived mainly from Alejo Carpentier’s idea of America as a continent that had been baroque even before the arrival of the European conquerors:

Nuestro mundo es barroco por la arquitectura—eso no hay que demostrarlo—por el envenenamiento 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 [. . .] Y si nuestro deber es el revelar este mundo, debemos mostrar, interpretar las cosas nuestras. Y esas cosas se presentan como cosas nuevas a nuestros ojos. La descripción es ineludible, y la descripción de un mundo barroco ha de ser necesariamente barroca, es decir, el qué y el cómo en este caso se compagan ante una realidad barroca. (123-24)

(Our world is baroque because of its architecture—this goes without saying—the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation, the many colors that surround us, the telluric pulse of the phenomena that we still feel [. . .] If our duty is to depict this world, we must uncover and interpret it ourselves. Our reality will appear new to our own eyes. Description is inescapable, and the description of a baroque world is necessarily baroque, that is, in this case the what and the how coincide in a baroque reality.)

Works Cited


Part I

The Baroque and Its Dark Sides