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Simulation, Gender, and Nature in Sarduy: Lezama's Neobaroque, Baudrillard's Simulacra, Butler's Performance, and Ecology

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We'll explore the concept of simulation that Severo expounds especially in *La simulación* (1982), but also in other texts.¹ We will not search for influences, seeking instead seminal, intertextual echoes that reverberate in the works of Sarduy, Lezama, Baudrillard, and Butler. We'll begin by taking into account connections between Lezama's and Sarduy's neobaroque, which have been widely acknowledged by Severo and many critics, and we'll expand them. Then, we'll examine understudied affinities among Sarduy's and Baudrillard's simulations and simulacra, in addition to Sarduy's and Butler's notions of gender as performance.² We'll probe aspects of nature in Sarduy, as well as, briefly, what I am calling Sarduy's "partial ecology" that have been overlooked by critics.

1. Lezama, Sarduy, and the Neobaroque

Sarduy's high regard for Góngora and Lezama is evident in several of his works, especially those covering the baroque and neobaroque. In an interview with Tenorio, Severo states that the baroque "ha tenido dos momentos fulgurantes, uno en Góngora, y otro, en Lezama Lima" (2). He also compares and contrasts his own work with Lezama's (3-5). Yet, Sarduy's relationship with Lezama was not always harmonious. In *La ruta de Severo Sarduy*, González Echevarría points out that when Sarduy severed his ties with the literary journal, *Orígenes*,³ in order to participate in *Ciclón* and *Lunes de Revolución*, there was not only a break with *Orígenes* and the style of Sarduy's earlier works until *Gestos* (1963), but also a "recuperación del grupo *Orígenes*, específicamente la obra de Lezama" in Sarduy's later texts, which is "el

doble movimiento más importante para entender la obra de Sarduy" (5). This should not be taken to imply that Sarduy imitates Lezama. If Sarduy re-reads the tradition of *Orígenes* in *De donde*, he also critiques it in the latter novel, as well as later works, in which not only telluricism, but also patriarchal and provincial views of Cuba are questioned, per González Echevarría (13, 14).⁴ Sarduy also reworks in an original manner some of the cultural strata that appear in Lezama and Paz, such as the Orient that is prevalent in *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), *Cobra* (1972), *Maitreya* (1978), and elsewhere.⁵ Other phases of Sarduy's writing are related to his association with the structuralism of *Tel Quel* and *Mundo Nuevo* in *Cobra* and post-structuralism in *Maitreya* and *Colibrí* (1984) (González Echevarría 14).

Despite González Echevarría's exclusion in *La ruta* of *De donde* from his list of Sarduy's structuralist texts, this novel does contain structuralist elements, as evidenced by Sarduy's mentions of Jakobson and concepts from that period, yet it also exceeds a structuralist perspective. The undiscerning Narrador Uno supposedly reiterates what Roman Jakobson said about messages requiring an emitter, a code, etc., albeit "es algo que no comprende y que acaba de leer en alguna parte" (Sarduy, *De donde* 65). Sarduy's challenge to referential language is typical of structuralism. Nonetheless, his polyphonic *De donde*, which goes against the grain of conventional, realistic novels, examines the question of identity through 3 great ethnic and racial heritages (Asian, African, and Spanish) that Sarduy shares with his native country of Cuba; in so doing, he goes beyond structuralism and anticipates the more contemporary notions of transculturation or hybridity. After summarizing some of Sarduy's main filiations, we'll turn now to the neobaroque.⁶

Sarduy distinguishes among classical, baroque, and neobaroque writing from the semiotic perspective of linguistic signs in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (1969), but particularly in "El barroco y el neobarroco" (1972) and the essays contained in *Barroco* (1974); this also appears in *La simulación* (1982) and *Nueva inestabilidad* (1987). He states in "El barroco y el neobarroco":

Con respecto a los mecanismos tradicionales del barroco, estas obras recientes de Latinoamérica han conservado, y a veces ampliado, la distancia entre los dos términos del signo que constituye lo esencial de su lenguaje, en oposición a la estrecha adherencia de éstos, soporte

del arte clásico. Abertura, falla entre lo nombrante y lo nombrado y surgimiento de otro nombrante, es decir, metáfora. (170)

Sarduy also elucidates how the metaphoric mechanisms of substitution, condensation, and proliferation function, especially in "El barroco y el neobarroco."⁷

Classical writers, who followed Aristotelian precepts, believed that one could paraphrase a metaphor from figurative to literal language without much loss of meaning. Nevertheless, authors such as Góngora, who is the epitome of the baroque for Lezama and Sarduy, stand in stark contrast to classicism. In order to decipher such works as Góngora's *Polifemo* or *Soledades*, Sarduy points out that one has to use a double process of interpreting Góngora's allusions to Greco-Roman and Renaissance culture, as well as to metaphors from the latter period that had become codified in the baroque. Therefore, there is already a "falla" between "lo nombrante" (or signifier) and "lo nombrado" (the signified) in Góngora.

Lezama's admiration for Góngora is clear, for example, in "Sierpe de don Luis de Góngora," an essay from *Analecta del reloj* (1957). He was not alone in lauding Góngora, as did Sarduy. The tercentenary of Góngora's death was celebrated by the Generation of 1927 in Spain, whose members included García Lorca, Alonso, Diego, and others. Zamora and Kaup trace additional sources of Góngora's and Quevedo's importance in a "(re)discovery" of the baroque in the late 19th Century and the first decades of the 20th, such as by Darío, the Mexican Contemporáneos, Reyes, and art historians (2: 4-5).

In "Sierpe," Lezama considers Góngora's poetry "la glosa secreta de los siete idiomas del prisma de la entrevisión. Por primera vez entre nosotros, la poesía se ha convertido . . . en un diferente y reintegrado órgano" (2: 185). Lezama remarks in "Sierpe" that disguise "es siempre una intercomunicación entre la realidad y la gravitación igualmente real de la otra naturaleza creada por el disfraz" (2: 210). The technique of metamorphoses and the use of disguises about which Lezama comments in Góngora appears in *Paradiso* (1966) and is surpassed by Lezama; these are both exceeded by simulation in Sarduy's works, as we will see later.

In "La curiosidad barroca," an essay from *La expresión americana* (1957), Lezama revisits the baroque positively, although he also criticizes aspects of Góngora's style. He avers that in Spain and

Spanish America, it is not “un estilo degenerescente, sino plenario que . . . representa adquisiciones de lenguaje, tal vez únicas en el mundo”; he explains why it was “un arte de la contraconquista” in Latin America that develops into an authentic, syncretic style (2: 304-07). On the one hand, Góngora’s style has affinities with the Enlightenment in Spanish American, baroque writers like Sor Juana and Sigüenza y Góngora. On the other, it transculturates indigenous and African elements, blending them with those of the Iberian colonizers innovatively; this gives the colonized their own voice in painting and architecture, for instance, in Kondori and Aleijadinho, respectively.

Critics like Chiampi would agree with Lezama’s assessment of Góngora. For Chiampi, Lezama develops the concept of the destiny of America in *La expresión* as an imaginary era in which the

Baroque becomes the shaping paradigm and authentic beginning of a truly American reality. It is an aesthetic of ‘curiosity,’ of infernal knowledge, whether Satanic or Faustian—a diabolical *poiesis*, one could say that manifests itself as much among the literati of the viceregal elite as among Indian and mestizo artists. (512)

Furthermore, “The decisive factor in this Americanization of the Baroque is its early modernizing orientation, introducing in a period altogether premodern [sic] the concept of revolutionary art,” which “ceases to be merely ‘historical’ . . . and becomes instead our permanent modernity, the *other modernity*. . . . Lezama insists on the idea of America as a matter of *becoming*, of being and nonbeing in permanent mutation” that “converts the Baroque into an endlessly ‘transforming form’” (Chiampi 513, 515). I’ll apply Chiampi’s *poiesis* to examples taken from *Paradiso*, which is Lezama Lima’s most famous narrative work, in order to analyze Lezama’s neobaroque.

In an oneiric and sadistic scene in chapter III of *Paradiso*, the unfaithful Isolda is transformed into a grotesque manatee, blending human and animal attributes from various species. Michelena despairs “sin saber dónde depositar sus celos, pues Isolda cambiaba de caprípedo en estación indefinida” (1: 73). Isolda’s inconstant goat-footedness (“caprípedo en estación indefinida”) alludes metaphorically to her infidelity and causes a break between the signifier, “caprípedo,” and the missing signified, “infiel.” She is severely beaten during long, convoluted sentences by some of her previous lovers, the musicians at

the party. Then, “Después de la ronda de las Nictimides, habían elaborado los fiesteros un árbol muy ancho de tronco, simulacro de papel transparente con ventanas para los cardenales, donde iban llegando los músicos del cuarteto, cada uno con un disfraz diferente” (1: 73). Said musicians or “cardenales” metamorphose as they change disguises; for instance, “El disfrazado de clarinetista de Potsdam” came “tocado de joveneto [sic] que oficia de vidriero” and “pasaba dejando que la noche lo extrajese de su disfraz, para ceñirse otro disfraz: el tronco ancho de ventanas cardenales, levantando el proverbio del árbol musicado,” and so on (1: 72, 73). Readers have to actively decipher *Paradiso* on multiple levels. Given the relevance of “Potsdam” for deciphering “Nictimides” in the passage above, the latter is a play on the Latin phrase, “nec timide” (“not timidly”). Among multiple other references, it is part of the motto of the city of Gdańsk, “*Nec Temere, Nec Timide*” (“Neither rashly, nor timidly”); Gdańsk was returned to Poland by the World War II Allies, due to decisions made at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences (*New World Encyclopedia*).

Sexuality of many varieties appears in *Paradiso*. It is not always positive, such as in the case of an old pederast who gropes adolescents without their consent; this sexual harassment is part of their *via crucis* to adulthood. In contrast, sex is a movable feast with respect to Farralúque in chapter VIII, as it becomes a path to self-discovery for him and other youthful characters in the boarding school and at Upsalón. The fictitious name alludes to the University of Havana (Sarduy, “*Paradiso*” 148), but Lezama also uses poetic license here to refer to the 20th letter of the Greek alphabet and the Greek numeral for 400, “upsilon.”

Like Lezama, Sarduy incorporates very active readers in his neobaroque works by using complex metaphors, among other techniques. As in the examples above from *Paradiso*, readers have to fill in the textual voids or linguistic breaks, as well as look for contextual associations among signifiers and signifieds in order to decipher them.

The resonance of structuralism and post-structuralism is clear in Sarduy’s postulates, depending on the work to which one refers. For Sarduy, textual blanks are not meant to hide transcendental meanings beneath the textual surface, as in more conventional literature. Instead, Sarduy creates polysemy and plural interrelations among the linguistic and textual elements that he employs, as does Lezama, which readers

have to restructure for themselves creatively and actively as co-writers of the work. Sarduy calls this dynamic type of reading a "radial" one in *Barroco* (76) and "El barroco y el neobarroco" (170) or "lacunaria" in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (80), which constructs its own reality on the page. The process is similar to viewing paintings that use anamorphosis, for instance, for which Sarduy also offers different types of readings in *La simulación*. These are the "lectura frontal," "marginal" and "barroca" (*La simulación* 25-28). In the first or "frontal reading," objects in the foreground form another design that has to be uncovered on the second plane. This design can be interpreted symbolically by means of a "marginal reading" or it can be taken as a simulacrum in which what counts are the simulating skills of the painter and the deciphering ones of the reader during a "baroque reading." The latter is similar to the rebus of Lacanian psychology when a person is psychoanalyzed.⁸ Sarduy prefers the baroque type, not surprisingly.

A good example of these reading mechanisms that Sarduy describes in *La simulación* is Holbein's anamorphic "The Ambassadors," in which a skull is hidden in the painting. The first or "frontal" reading would provide a merely descriptive viewing, whereas in the second or "marginal" one, what could pass for a sea shell at the bottom of the canvas is transformed into a skull; in this case, the audience's perspective has to change to a lateral one to see it. This requires a "marginal" displacement of the viewer. The third type is the "baroque" reading of the painting, favored by Sarduy, that goes beyond a lateral displacement to a recognition of the adeptness of the simulator; it alludes to the simulation drive of representation that ends in the void or death, according to Sarduy.

In Lacan, the analyst has to piece together the symptoms of the patient to uncover and understand what caused the latter's problems. Sarduy explains in *La simulación* that the dispersed, self-images of the patient as the subject of psychoanalysis are hidden from him, but are woven together by the analyst. In a neobaroque literary text, the reader assumes an oblique relationship as well to the work in order to be able to see through the guile of disguised forms, multiple versions of reality and disinformation, akin to the camouflage and transvestism that Sarduy reveals in *La simulación*.

Sarduy does not merely limit himself to the external, 'real' world of observable phenomena. González Echevarría was one of the first to

analyze Sarduy's "autonomous writing," that is "la escritura como sistema específico sujeto a sus propias leyes, no circunscrita a un significado, sino abierta a una multiplicidad de significados" ("Son de la Habana" 731).⁹ Be that as it may, it would be a mistake to claim that there is no reality in Sarduy's works except the textual one, as in the case of the racial, ethnic, cultural, and historical allusions, etc. in *De donde*.

Zamora credits Lezama and Sarduy with "remov[. . .ing] the New World Baroque from its art historical niche and transform[. . .ing] it into an ideology and aesthetics of cultural difference" ("New World" 116). She adds:

Sarduy, Lezama Lima, and Carpentier are aligned in their use of Baroque space to constitute Latin America as a mobile complex of cultural and historical constellations. Though they vary markedly in their assessment of the nature and feasibility of the enterprise, each recognizes the Baroque impulse to displace and decenter, amplify and include. (116, 120)

One could use Zamora's insights to answer those critics of Lezama and Sarduy who chastised them for not being engagé, which shows a basic misunderstanding of their writing, since it is liberating and inclusive in a different way.

Sarduy often presents more than one reality through polyphonous narrative voices that show multiple perspectives, thus freeing language and the reader ludically from denotative constraints. This creates a neobaroque break between signifiers and signifieds, which is obvious in texts like the novel which gave him international acclaim, *De donde son los cantantes*. Such a mechanism becomes even more complex in later novels such as *Cobra*, *Maitreya*, and *Colibrí*, written before *Pájaros de la playa*. *Pájaros* was published posthumously, after Sarduy died of AIDS; its style is less hermetic than in some of his earlier texts.

In the metafictional novel, *De donde*, Auxilio and Socorro narrate different versions of incidents in the text, such as in their diaries, which parody satirically Christopher Columbus' journal of his voyages to the New World. Bruno and Clemencia narrate briefly as well. There are also "Narrador Uno" and "Dos," in addition to a first person narrator, at times called "Yo." The latter is a mask of the author and is defied by Auxilio and Socorro when they both undermine his omniscience and

omnipotence as an “escritor Dios” (31).¹⁰ This process is intensified in *Maitreya*, where there are multiple variants of the facts surrounding the future Buddha, whose name is “Maitreya.” In *Colibrí*, the narrators fight with Yo to write the novel and almost constantly tell events in different ways. In this novel, its protagonist, Colibrí, insults Yo, whom he realizes is another character like him, as a well as a narrator, whose authority he derides.

Auxilio is a good example of a simulacrum of the divine Word made flesh that refers to Christ as Logos when she inscribes her nude body with Biblical texts that contain “los textos del Señor”; they are read lustfully by Bruno, “mirándole las caderas como si leyera” (138). As she dances, Socorro declares, “Venid devotos: ¡he aquí la carne hecha verbo!” (137). Auxilio and Socorro turn devotion into an erotic metaphor of the body as signifier (Sarduy, *Escrito* 20), which acts as a substitute for the signified, the biblical text.

Sarduy’s profane, satirical humor not only pokes fun at the Logos, but also at Catholicism as the religion institutionalized by the Spanish conquerors in what would become Cuba and Latin America through his simulated, disintegrating statue of Christ made flesh in *De donde*. When the last chapter begins, Auxilio and Socorro travel from Cádiz, Spain to a bizarre Cuba (where it snows, there is a metro, and other anomalies). They are searching for their lover, Mortal, who supposedly becomes Christ metaphorically. As is the case with any simulacrum, this Christ’s façade hides no transcendental meaning or true reality. In the interview with Tenorio, Sarduy relates his literary characters to “simulacros,” “simulaciones,” and “anamorfismos” and describes them similarly to what we will see in *La simulación* (2).

2. Sarduy’s and Baudrillard’s Simulation

Laddaga mentions “simulation” as a term that was “current in the theoretical culture of which Sarduy was a part” and which Laddaga attributes not only to Derrida, but also Deleuze (who, in turn, develops some notions from Klossowski), as well as to animal mimeticism in Callois (176). Sarduy himself cites Derrida, Deleuze, and Callois, among other sources, such as Lacan, Barthes, and even Lezama for some of the ideas that he develops innovatively in *La simulación*. Tellingly, Sarduy and Laddaga omit the mention of parallels which we will probe between *La simulación* and Jean Baudrillard’s work,

Simulacres et simulation, which was published in 1981, the year before *La simulación*. I’ll cite the English edition, *Simulacra and Simulations*, to facilitate the comparison and contrast of Baudrillard’s and Sarduy’s ideas.

Baudrillard’s interests in *Simulacra and Simulations* are broader than Sarduy’s in *La simulación*. Baudrillard deals with postmodern, consumer society and culture, including power and cybernetics, whereas Sarduy focuses mainly on art, animal mimeticism, transvestism and related topics. Neobaroque literature, which Sarduy theorized and practiced, is another aspect of the postmodern.

There are similarities between some fundamental aspects of simulation in Baudrillard and Sarduy. For Baudrillard,

. . . simulation is the generation . . . of a real without origin or a reality: a hyperreal . . . substituting the signs of the real for the real. . . . Simulating is not pretending. . . . [It] threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary.’” (1-3)

With respect to the postmodern, Baudrillard adds that simulation implies representation in and of itself as a simulacrum and the “rational distinctions upon which the whole of the social order and power depend” (6, 21). It is a “short circuit of reality and . . . its duplication through signs” (27).

Sarduy’s Christ in *De donde* is “hyperreal,” in the sense that Baudrillard uses this term. He is a blend of reality—that of the historical Jesus, represented by the statue that comes alive in the novel—and an illusory, imaginary representation of Jesus that short circuits the boundary between the real and its sign. In addition, the narration points to this image’s textual and artistic artifice through metafiction and by revealing the wooden construction of the statue. The novel’s Christ character distorts the historical Jesus and what Jesus stands for in the Catholic Church, an institution with spiritual, political, and social power. The Christ statue’s performance of his original model’s role, ultimately, is purely a simulacrum without a reality, an image that does not reflect what it pretends to represent. Sarduy’s Christ even displays all too human attitudes and weaknesses, as when his wooden body is starting to decay and Auxilio and Socorro solicitously rub it with camphor to allay the rot. While they tend to him lovingly, his amusing thoughts are profane and sexual and include a

course: "Seré bígamo, más no maricón —pensó. Y miró de reojo al Bruno, que se reía, envidioso" (131), as though Bruno were his rival for the affections of Auxilio and Socorro. Elsewhere, Christ feels ill at ease and unwell in the midst of his adoring crowd of believers in Havana, welcoming him as a celebrity. The first person narrator asserts that "no estaba hecho para el proletariado: el tumulto Lo asfixiaba" (140), blending a Marxist term ("proletariat") with what would be anathema to such an ideology: referring to the divine by employing a traditional capitalization that implies religious veneration ("Him"). Such a conventional use of capital letters is satirized in other parts of the chapter as well.

3. Simulation in Nature and Transvestism

Sarduy does not define, but describes what the simulation drive is ("la pulsión de la simulación") in his prefatory remarks to *La simulación*: "fenómenos disímiles . . . que van desde lo orgánico hasta lo imaginario, de lo biológico hasta lo barroco: mimetismo (¿defensivo?), animal, tatuaje, travestismo (¿sexual?) humano, maquillaje, mimikry [sic] dress art, anamorfosis, trompe-l'oeil" (7). These are some of the mechanisms with which the book is structured and ways in which Severo proceeds to discuss the concept of simulation. He uses examples taken mainly from painting, but includes other art forms and literature, as well as animal mimeticism, gender, etc.

For Sarduy, transvestism does not simulate an imitation of a woman, but of "una apariencia" (*La simulación* 13). It's a metamorphosis, a ludic transformation that exceeds women's femininity. It involves camouflage, an effacement of the macho and even of women, which causes the intimidation of others due to the excesses of artifice and masks in drag. He compares transvestites' and insects' "autoplástica" in terms of their ploys, use of color, and goals (15). The insect and the transvestite are "*hipertélicos*: van más allá de sus fines" (14 n2).

In *La simulación*, the transvestite's mimeticism is due to a desire for any of the following: (a) metamorphosis, mimicry, or to appear to be more womanly than a woman, at times to the point of a hyperbolic excess that can be lethal, for it gives the transvestite away; (b) cosmetic or surgical camouflage so as to disappear, become invisible; to erase the woman's "clan" or the aggressiveness of the male horde, which

results in an "anulación que a su vez comunica con la pulsión letal del travestí y su fascinación por la *fijeza*" (15); (c) to intimidate by means of excessive artifice. In *Colibrí*, the Regente, Enana, Gigante and other characters are transvestites, including one named "Sarduy" (who is a metafictional, authorial mask in the novel). They participate in the drive to camouflage themselves and disappear, using excessive cosmetics and make-up, as do Auxilio and Socorro in *De donde*. Cobra uses surgical camouflage when he wants to have his feet reduced, which implies his desire to alter his sex, since the feet and phallus are connected metaphorically: a book that he read before the operation contains a method for testicular reduction, which Cobra wants to apply to his feet. He is surgically castrated by Dr. Ktazob, whose name implies this act as Prieto points out (138-39, 265 n5).

Drawing on the work of Cott and Callois, in Sarduy's comparison and contrast of transvestism and animal mimeticism in *La simulación*, the chromatics of animals is analogous to that of the transvestite. Some of their aims are similar, with the proviso that "El animal-travestí no busca una apariencia amable para atraer (ni una apariencia desagradable para disuadir), sino . . . desaparecer" (16). Mimeticism is a baroque drive of theatrical excess in both the animal and transvestite, which is based on camouflage in animals. It neither guarantees safety from predation, nor represents a "necesidad biológica derivada de la competencia entre las especies o de la selección natural"; instead, as with the transvestite, "existe en el mundo vivo una ley de disfrazamiento puro, una práctica que consiste en hacerse pasar por otro" (16),¹¹ in Sarduy's opinion.

Sarduy compares mimeticism in *La simulación* with a mere copy and finds that mimeticism gives the illusion of the model which is a simulacrum, not an exact copy of an original; he cites Deleuze's *Logique du sens*. Instead of wanting to copy the essence of the model (a woman), as was indicated earlier, Sarduy adds that the transvestite wants to produce the *effect* and surface appearance of said model; thus, he considers it to be a subversive and vacuous theatricality.

Unlike in the West, in the East the void of the Buddhist and Taoist theogonies is a "*vacuidad germinadora cuya metáfora y simulación es la realidad visible*" that leads to liberation; in drag, the visible universe is a simulacrum of that energetic void (*La simulación* 20). This perspective helps to explain the baroque reading of anamorphosis and

reality, in addition to the theatricality of simulation that Sarduy explores in *La simulación*.

Sarduy perceives analogies between a butterfly creating the illusion of a leaf and a transvestite simulating a woman in *La simulación*. Said techniques are akin to trompe-l'oeil and anamorphosis in painting that function as simulations in which the observer participates. The optical illusion of trompe-l'oeil makes itself "pasar por el referente" and surges from a center of reference (41-43). Anamorphosis is more complex, as we evinced in Holbein's "The Ambassadors."¹² He describes these mechanisms in terms of the baroque, for instance, in "El barroco y el neobarroco."

Drawing on the work of Callois, Sarduy finds parallels between the mimeticism of some Indonesian butterflies, which are experts at the art of camouflage and cannot be distinguished from the plant forms that they simulate, and transvestism. This type of butterfly is a simulacrum, an illusion, which "travestida ha logrado su teatro: representación de la invisibilidad" (*La simulación* 61). Even some Javanese butterflies that cannot be eaten put on a hypertelic, baroque display of designs, similar to the performance of transvestites. The latter do not seek just to attain the appearance of women or not to be seen as men, but wish to disappear and can metamorphose indefinitely; the transvestite's simulation is based on desire as its drive and her/his mimeticism is symbolic, per Sarduy.

The concept of theatricality, associated with the transvestite in Sarduy's *La simulación*, shares some similarities with the way in which he and Butler consider gender as performance.

4. Performing Gender in Sarduy and Butler

González Echevarría asserts that for Sarduy, gender is an artificial construct similar to his use of "cultural grammar" and language, in which "los generos son funcionales, no naturales" (*La ruta* 9). This is evident in such novels such as *De donde, Cobra, Maitreya, Colibrí* (1984), *Cocuyo* (1990) and *Pájaros de la playa* (1993). In my estimation, gender in Sarduy goes beyond artifice to include a performative aspect that has affinities with some of Butler's postulates and antecedes them.

In her work, Butler is opposed to essentialist notions of sex and also views gender and even the body itself as a cultural and personal

construct. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), she posits that traditionally there was a "false stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain" (172). However, there are discontinuities in gender that do not account for non-heteronormative contexts, such as drag, in which "anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" create dissonances among these categories (175). Thus, gender can be seen performatively, as in her *Gender Trouble*:

. . . acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance [of gendered identity], but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences Such acts, gestures, enactments . . . are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a . . . public and social discourse. (173)

Gender is subject to laws and regulations. Not only transvestism, but all sexual practices question that identity by implying that gender is a "*corporeal style*, an enactment or 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (177, 179).

Although in later works Butler has further developed and revised some of her premises in *Gender Trouble*, she suggests that gender—straight, gay, transsexual, transgendered, and their many variants—are simulations. In her more recent *Undoing Gender* (2004), she indicates that

If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance [Through] the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced *and* altered in the course of that reproduction. (218)

Clearly, the performance of gender in Sarduy's works is akin to the way in which Butler conceives it. One need only look at the gender performativity in flux of many of Sarduy's characters in his novels to find evidence of this. For example, in *De donde*, Auxilio and Socorro are androgynous, which is also reflected by shifting grammatical structures at times. In *Colibrí*, the simulated, masculine aggression of the gay wrestlers in La Casona is highlighted at the start of the novel, yet, they also put on the opposite performance: "aquel cubil que, visto ayer y de frente, era un energético potrero de macharranes peleones, una verdadera cuadra de sementales en celo, pero que visto hoy y de lado —como lo permite ese mundo, reducido al ínfimo espesor de la representación— no es más que un *boudoir* . . . de locas anémicas, una parodia pintarrajeada del varonil emporio de ayer" (113). It is a simulated *representation* that alters textual 'reality' and the reader's assumptions about the characters' gender.

5. A Partial Ecology in Sarduy and Conclusions

Sarduy is not an ecologically sensitive writer and nature in his works is often a painterly, symbolic, decorative or a simulated, imaginative one. However, he includes aspects of ecology in *La simulación* by stating that "El hombre y los insectos son solidarios en un mismo sistema" (15n3) and proves this affirmation with examples like those which we discussed. He anticipates that he might be criticized for being anthropocentric, but counters this by saying that the argument used by Callois in *Méduse et Cie* is itself anthropocentric. Sarduy explains that to exclude insects "de todo sistema humano sería absurdo" (15 n3).

The names of animals and some of their attributes appear in such novels by Sarduy as *Cobra*, *Colibrí*, *Cocuyo* and *Pájaros*. Caballo and Caimán are two protagonists in *Pájaros de la playa*, in which men, sea gulls, and cats are dying from AIDS. The latter is represented as an unspecified illness to which the work alludes by such mentions as that of "Retrovir (AZT)" (156), a medicine used to combat the disease. AIDS is also seen as a metaphor of the Big Bang cosmological theory that not only explains the start, but also predicts the end of the universe. According to one of the narrators of the book: "el astrónomo se había encerrado . . . en su celda para redactar un diario sobre la extinción del cosmos y su metáfora, la enfermedad" (120), whose symptoms this

cosmologist with AIDS chronicles. He is another of Sarduy's *personae*. One of the prematurely old youths dying of AIDS says empathetically of the birds that are passing away in *Pájaros*: "Suffren también del mal" (24).¹³ Thus, Sarduy shows again that human beings and animals are interrelated, which is an ecological concept.

Through our comparison and contrast of some of the principal conceptualizations of Lezama, Baudrillard, Butler, and Sarduy, we have seen how the neobaroque, simulation, and gender are interwoven in Sarduy. For Sarduy, nature is also an important part of that complex web of interrelationships to which human and non-human beings belong.

Notes

¹ The more recent edition of Sarduy's works is his *Obras completa*, ed. Guerrero and Whal, but I will cite from earlier editions, since there aren't fundamental changes in the quoted texts.

² Some of Sarduy's and Butler's ideas, such as simulation and gender performativity, have been mentioned together by critics, sometimes in conjunction with Baudrillard's simulation, but in other scholars' works, neither the concepts of these three thinkers nor the neobaroque in Lezama and Sarduy have been compared and contrasted in detail. For example, see Esterrich, Lewis, and Kulawik.

³ It lasted from 1944-55 and was headed by Lezama and Rodríguez Feo. See González Echevarría, *La ruta 5*.

⁴ About Cuba in Sarduy's works, see also González Echevarría's "La nación."

⁵ Regarding the East in Sarduy, see Kushigian.

⁶ Guerrero's and Méndez Rodena's studies of the neobaroque in Sarduy are useful complements to mine, as is González Echevarría, *La ruta*.

⁷ I will not discuss them here except in passing, since I studied and related them to the neobaroque in *Autor/lector*, "Afinidades intertextuales" and in "Scientific and Neobaroque."

⁸ On the impact of Lacan on Sarduy, see my "La sutura sarduyana."

⁹ González Echevarría does consider aspects of reality in Sarduy in his more recent "La nación," for instance.

¹⁰ The circulating narration, "puesta en tela de juicio," as Sarduy describes it, which becomes an essential aspect of his novels from *De donde* on, is explained by him in an interview with Rodríguez Monegal, "Las estructuras" 20-21.

¹¹ Sarduy cites Hugh Cott, *Adaptive Coloration in Animals* 99.

¹² For a more extensive explanation of trompe-l'oeil and anamorphosis, see my *Autor/lector* 114-17. See also Eduardo González.

¹³ Scientists would not claim that AIDS can attack all sorts of species, albeit they believe that it was originally transmitted to human beings by African simians. The Ulloas and I have analyzed elsewhere the role of AIDS in *Pájaros* and Sarduy's other works. See their "La función" and "Pájaros" and my "Imaginario cosmológico," as well as my "La sutura."

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José Lezama Lima y el cuerpo sexualizado

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1. Hay un modo de examinar, en *Paradiso*, la cuestión del sexo en *sí mismo*, el sexo en tanto ejecutoria que se desplaza de inmediato a su realidad logocéntrica. Esa forma de examen dialoga con el carácter puramente *circunstancial* de la sexualidad, su naturaleza de *confección cultural*, radicada en el centro mismo del triángulo que forman el deseo, la fascinación y las *suposiciones en torno al cuerpo del otro*. No habría, por tanto, que desechar la idea de que, en ciertas novelas, el sexo es un territorio de lo fantástico. Y si a esto agregamos que resulta posible situarnos en diferentes perspectivas, entonces delante del lector (me refiero a una especie de superlector) se abrirá un horizonte de probabilidades donde el asunto del desempeño sexual se desdramatiza en términos éticos y religiosos, para redefinirse dentro del territorio inmarcesible de la cultura y sus tradiciones clásicas.

2. Observado como lenguaje activo del erotismo y la pulsión sexual, el cuerpo lezamiano no es, en *última instancia*, un cuerpo de mujer. Decimos "cuerpo lezamiano" y vemos que se trata de un varón heterosexual cuyas tipologías lo inscriben muy bien en la masculinidad y sus roles o papeles más o menos previsibles. ¿Es esto así? Supongo que sí. Tengo esa hipótesis. Pero me refiero a una condición que queda subrayada cuando nos detenemos a pensar en las convenciones *adicionables a esa masculinidad* en el soma que ella *prescribe*. Un soma que Lezama conecta con una erótica llena de posibilidades y de atisbos, en especial los que brotan de la mirada clásica.

3. Si tomamos en cuenta que Cemí es la concreción de un espíritu excepcional, o que va por el sendero de las excepciones, y que Fronesis es un objeto de deseo muy bien delimitado, veremos que Lezama no renuncia ni puede renunciar a apartarlos de cierta contaminante *culpabilidad homoerótica*, hija, acaso, de la actividad dionisiaca (su