We need to find the Universal in the bowels of the local and in that circumcised and li-
mited, the eternal.

Miguel de Unamuno

Between 1945 and 1959 Venezuela is con-
verted, by coincidence, in the place where
the most relevant work of two key fi-
gures in Latin American culture takes place: Alejo Carpentier (Lausanne 1904-París 1980) and Carlos Raúl Villanueva (Caracas 1900-Lon-
don 1975).

Beyond being a period corresponding to their own maturity proper of the age they were
going through, both artists lived during this period in a country that was in the process of transformation in all spheres, denoting the in-\n\nowledgment of literature by one and archi-
tecture by the other, a way of thinking and doing which had much in common, beyond the
contacts and direct exchanges that have taken place between them.

This brief paper will attempt to highlight the conditions that helped make this possible such as the concurrences and distances in the
processes of approaching reality followed by each one which allowed them to lay the foundations not only of a line of work but pri-
marily in a way of knowing.

Carpentier’s relationship with Venezuela oc-
curred within circumstances which could be
catalogued as special and to a certain point
surprising. The Cuban writer landed in Mar-
quedia at the age of 40 with the clear intention of having a break which would allow him to settle down and delve deeper into the inves-
tigations that he had already advanced on his return from his European exile and with the intention that he had arrived to a country that would allow them. His reencounter with Cuba and its music as well as the fascinating contact with Haiti and the history of its inde-
pendence process, seen from the principles of surrealism (movement he formed part of while living in Paris) allowed him between 1939 and 1944 to develop an interpretative theory of the American that would be enri-
ched and enlarged thanks to his connection with a country that had all the elements of the
New World: huge mountains, plains, rivers, forest, sea, and a mixed population formed
by whites, blacks and Indians. Venezuela also represented for Carpentier the opportu-
nity to see the other side of the coin: he wor-
ked as a publicist in the ARS company, foun-
ded by his Parisian friend Carlos Frías, who
had strong ties with the United States and lived in Caracas part of his existence that he
had rejected in New York. As is pointed out by Roberto González Echeverría: “Caracas ...
... is suffering a profound transformation that
puts Carpentier in touch with a post-industrial society, and in direct contact with the mass media that characterizes it ... Carpentier, in a
couple of words, experiences the Latin Ame-
nica of the future and its most remote past.”

All this, it should be added, amid convulsive political circumstances and an economic boom linked to the abundant oil production. We must remember that Villanueva became directly linked to Venezuela at the age of 28 having lived all his life in Europe. He brought with him a degree in architecture from the
Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris as well as the
baggage of one who had been in contact with the major avant-garde movements. Although
he studied Latin America from France, like
Carpentier he began to “discover it” when he
came into direct contact with its climate, its
gography, its history, its cultural events, its
cities and its architecture. Thus, the evolu-
tory process that his work followed, similar to that shown by Carpentier, could be under-
stood (as noted by Unamuno) as a gradual and consistent pursuit of the universal in the
borders of the local without abandoning the commitment of the time to which it belonged.

On the other hand, 1945 was the year in which they inaugurated the Urban Redevelo-
pment of “El Silencio”, project in which Vi-
lanueva managed to combine his reflections around the permanent values of the city and the
architecture of Venezuela’s past, after 15 years of uninterrupted activity. Catalogued as “the first element of the modern city”, “El Silencio” became the cornerstone of what would thereafter be the urban transformation of Caracas. A year earlier the construction of the University City had also begun, the culmi-
nating point of a constant exploration which
allowed Villanueva to capture another way of
viewing the urban without abandoning the necessary translation to the present of those “plastic elements used (for colonial architec-
ture) in defence against the elements.” It is
considered the most important and influential piece of Venezuelan architecture, the crea-
tion of the University City of Caracas was
fortunate to have continued almost without
interruption until 1958 despite the shocks and
together experienced by the country in that
period.

Thus we find that both Villanueva and Car-
pentier both undertook in the period that we are discussing important investigations which were located in different planes of action. Thus, Carpentier’s consolidation of thought about what is American, although it cannot be exempted from a range of circumstances surrounding his life, his education and his in-
tellectual trajectory it is possible to refer to it in two fundamental aspects which were the product of all his written work in Venezuela. The first is the gestation and subsequent de-
velopment of a true aesthetic theory focused on what might be called an optimistic view of
America since surrealism. The second is the transformation that Carpentier’s outlook suf-
fered after the initial impact produced by his
rediscovery of America by way of surrealism, the contact being on a level which was phy-
sical and existential, anthropological and eth-
no-graphic with the Venezuelan jungle and the cultural stages presented to him there, in
which the influence on him of Sartrian exis-
tentialism plays an important role. Carpentier
expressed his connection with philosophical
trends of the time which is evidenced by a
series of questions and reflections on the
subject of the authenticity or the good faith of
modern man; the role of culture in Western ci-
vilization particularly when addressed by the
knowledge of distant and different peoples
distinct to the patterns that characterize it,
the effects of modernity, its relationship to the
urban drama and its influence on the subject
who lives it; and above all the distressing
problem of artistic creation. The first aspect
should be reviewed in the light of the work
“The real wonder of America” (1948) comple-
mented with clarifications that Carpentier was
able to incorporate in subsequent works in
relation to the subject matter itself. With res-
pect to the second aspect we do not believe that there is nothing better than the analytical reading of The Lost Steps (1953), which we consider to be his most important novel. Villanueva meanwhile, as a product of his strong will to assimilate the permanent values present in the cultural events of his country, published in 1956 The Caracas of yesterday and today: its colonial architecture and the urban redevelopment of "El Silencio", a key place in the understanding of this work of interpretation, looking back from the eighteenth century. It supports all the operations of the expressive bringing up to date of this urban complex carried out by the architect, becoming the first opportunity given to Venezue- lana architecture to reflect on its origins. As a continuation of the inquiry held in Caracas yesterday and today — appeared a short article in 1952 entitled "The meaning of our colonial architecture" a substantial synthesis that would open the doors to the understanding not only the experimentation in many of the orders that governed the development of the University City but also the laying of the foundations of a "national architecture" more inclusively in terms of considering the various references coming from the colony, which would be powered by some of his students from the School of Architecture of the UCV.

We could say that Carpentier as he passed through Venezuela re-elaborated his thesis on "the marvelously real", making a differen- ce with what is known as "magical realism"; reinforcing its expressive proximity to the ba- roque, a fundamental feature associated with America. Maintaining a position close to the theoretical approaches of Eugenio d’Ors and Fernando Chueca Góitia who, either by the presence of human constants in the first case or the unchangeable elements in the second, coincide in allowing for the possibility to re-construct in a peculiar manner the history of the culture or, anyway, find explanations to cases of civilizations or styles that do not res- pond accurately to the analysis and classi- fication patterns canonically established. Car- pentier even stated that "... the baroque spirit can be reborn at any time and is reborn in many of the creations of the most contempo- rary architects of today", to which the Cuban writer alludes, is not the one that governs the design and construction of the most emble- matic space of Caracas’ University City: the Covered Square.

In this sense, we could say that it is no co- incidence that the Covered Square demonstrates how the influence on a reality that is in full transformation emerges in Villanueva, where everyday things are steeped in surrea- lism, where different historical moments live together at the same time and where at each step the marvelous appears through the ma- nipulations of nature and its own culture, all the aspects that Carpenter highlights through the experience of the protagonistic-narrator of The Lost Steps. The Covered Square is also a complex space, organic, dynamic, hybrid, jungle, where the light works in favour of a theatricality controlled by an individual ra- ther than protecting himself from the climate he shows that he has discovered it, he has tamed it and has fully deciphered it, a spa- ce that makes complete sense which Bruno Zevi, complementing that expressed by Car- pentier, associated with the Baroque: "... it is spatial liberation, it is the mental liberation of treaty writers’ rules, of conventions, of ele- mentary geometry and of all that is static, is also the liberation of symmetry and the anti- thesis between internal and external space". Carpenter and Villanueva, were men of their time, who in full maturity worked tirelessly in the same territory building a cosmopolitan scaffold based on their background and Eu- ropean training, with the same obsession to build bridges between different cultures as a way to understand and express their own culture and as ones who tried to show that the French accent that distinguished them was nothing but a circumstantial characteris- tic. We believe that, without doubt, both were attentive and assimilated the teachings which each one was demonstrating through their respective work. The didactic commitment that accompanied the actions of these two bright careers allows one to understand their questioning and activities as social events full of unquestionable citizenship. The Unamuno maximum, a shared guide contributes to de- termine the validity of both in this world where everything expires in time periods which are getting shorter and shorter.

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