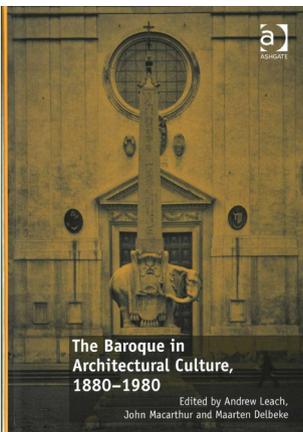


review / JAN SMITHERAM

The Baroque in Architectural Culture 1880–1980. Edited by Andrew Leach, John Macarthur and Maarten Delbeke. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015.

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The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880–1980 is aimed at exploring two projects, “the intellectual history of modern architecture and the history of architectural historiography.” In doing so, the book “defines a role for the baroque in the history of architectural historiography and in the history of modern architectural culture.” The historical understanding of baroque as a phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth century is acknowledged in the book, but the central focus is on how the baroque has been created in our more recent past. Or, more accurately, its focus is to unpack how particular politics of our recent past have shaped how the baroque is understood from the 1880s to the 1980s. The book draws our attention to which stories of our recent past have flourished, and which have fallen by the wayside. Thus the book asks the reader to consider how the baroque has been shaped by privileging a particular understanding, author, text, and national location.

The strength of the book is its focus on the history of modern architectural culture and its historiographical approach. This approach offers us, following Gayatri Spivak, an “insistence on the politics of the present in the making of the past more precisely still foregrounds the location of the historian or teller of tales” (Spivak, 1999: 119). And this book offers a critique of linear ideas of history, but renders it complex and multiple. Moreover, it also questions stories that are rendered neutral in the continual circulation of ideas named in relation to the baroque. Although this is also the weakness of the book, as it takes on a historiographic approach but never considers how history is made in the present directly, instead, it is situated in looking at how the baroque is re-made in our recent past—never joining in with more contemporary debates.

The book’s twenty chapters are structured around a loose chronology, as described by the the three editors. The tone of their first chapter is clearly aimed at an academic audience, as evident in the complexity of the argument, sentence structure and terminology. But subsequent chapters seem aimed at a broader audience that might chide the introduction’s complexity and opacity, after which we begin with Francesca Torello engaging Albert Ilf’s writing on the baroque of 1880s Vienna.

To give an idea of the breadth of the chapters included in this book, we end with Gro Lauvland’s chapter considering the recurrence of the baroque in the

Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz's writing in the 1970s, in particular, the baroque ideas of constancy and change. The middle chapter by Andrew Leach on the future of baroque, circa 1945, acts to an extent, but not entirely, as a datum on how the baroque is received. The anthology ends with editors Leach and Delbeke providing further insights and questions provoked by the book.

As one reads the book, one is faced with the ebb and flow of opinion on the baroque: from delight to distaste, from exclusion to source material, and from signaling the new to what we must depart from (see Michael Hill's chapter on Steinberg). The book questions how the history of the baroque has been construed in our recent past and looks at how it has been edited, whose voices are heard (or not) and how this functions as the grounds for the constant "traffic of ideas" between modernism and baroque.

Francesca Torello's and Matthew Aitchison's chapters highlight how favouring of certain voices over others has had an impact on how the baroque has been understood and shaped, and consequently has an impact on how we have come to understand it in more contemporary times. Francesca Torello's chapter highlights how the history of the baroque has been edited or controlled for the use of particular ends. She attends to how the Germanization of the baroque in Weimar, Germany, occurred not because it was formal or rational, but because it was expressive and spiritual. A similar concern with national identity and its complex intertwining with the baroque is evident in Matthew Aitchison's reading on the effects of Pevsner's shift from Leipzig to England.

The book demonstrates how careful readings provide us with a richer history, rather than an attempt to reinstate a singular or authoritative understanding of the baroque. Chapters which highlight that the baroque is made up of multiple and complex story lines, rather than a singular story, are those by Luka Skansi, Denise R Costanzo, Maarten Delbeke, Albert Narath and Francesca Torello.

Luka Skansi's chapter deals directly with an uncritical collapsing of the present in the past, unpacking the "retrospective projection of Modern expectations and tendencies onto the so called baroque" (49). Meanwhile, Denise R Costanzo in "Giedion as Guide" challenges the framing of the baroque as theatrical, deceitful and lacking integrity—via a standard modernist text. Similarly, Maarten Delbeke's reading of Charpentrat allows us to understand the salvaging of the baroque from the avalanche of popularism through a functionalist reading of it. However, a careful reading did not foreclose on chapters that were more propositional, such as Albert Narath's insightful article on *Großstäd* and *Barockstadt*, which unpacks the relationship between architecture and advertising—that enables an expansion on the historiographical theme outlined at the start of the book. But at the same time, it is similar to Torello's chapter in demonstrating how the baroque had been reframed within this period—to invoke the new.

Chapters that stood out were those providing clear insights into the thickening complexity of relations between modernism and the baroque, while at times highlighting caution against periodisation. These were chapters by Andrew Hopkins, Luka Skansi and Eacaiisa Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen. Through a close reading we are also made privy to how subtle shifts, or omissions in knowledge, provide us with different understandings of the baroque, as evident in John Macarthur's chapter.

A point articulated clearly by Evonne Levy, compares Riegl with Wöllfflin, where the latter's aristocratic vision of the baroque dominated; Wöllfflin continues to

dominate as a significant figure in framing the baroque and in writing on perception. While Wöllflin's linear approach to history has dominated subsequent understandings, the history of the baroque and its relationship with modernism in this book is cast as a series of contested relationships rather than as a process of time imaged in a more linear way.

While the book is focused on history in its aim and methods, the chapters which are likely to connect with a broader audience are the ones which induce us to think architecturally, with such a notion explored in Roberto Dulio's chapter in this book. Here, Dulio cites Bruno Zevi; "the history of architecture as taught by architects is only valid if it manages to extricate itself [from the past] other than the verbal instruments of writing of the history of art through a graphic and three dimensional and operative criticism that induces one to think architecturally" (188).

The chapters by Silvia Micheli, Luka Skansi, Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, Anthony Raynsford and Gro Lauvland offer the possibility of inducing one to think architecturally. These chapters raise questions, which are relevant to, and help locate, discussions about how one approaches design, rather than just being relevant to historical stories and how history is made—the potential here is to shape how we might look at, for example, how design thinking is made in the present.

The book does raise a few questions however. The first was the desire to reinstate Sedlmayr to architecture's history, and to an understanding of the baroque. In Chapter 8 a physiognomic analysis was explained in neutral terms by the author as merely Sedlmayr's curiosity of new analytical tools and at an apparent departure from art history. And, this was before you reach the author's revelation (at the end of the chapter) of Sedlmayr's adherence to Nazism. Yet, critically, this neutral framing defangs the fact that physiognomic analysis was a tool used by the Nazis to situate people of colour and Jews between apes and white men as proof of their inferior status: as subhuman (Gray, 2004).

Although the use of physiognomic analysis within architecture predates Sedlmayr by some years, its troubled history cannot be ignored. Yet, the author of this chapter urges us to question the implicit ban on Sedlmayr, which he suggests is not because of his ties with Nazism, but as a result of the ambiguity of his research. However, this raises questions as at the time of writing this review, this was the only chapter referenced because it provides support to look to Sedlmayr, despite his past. Considering the historiographical approach of the book one would assume that this would draw attention to how arguments on the baroque are being constructed and remade—and to what ends.

To ask what does it mean when an argument is cast as neutral, despite the context, as attempted by some writers on the baroque, and cited in this book to define the baroque as a style and therefore "without ideological or conceptual content", leaves us with "a tool of dry historiography that cannot be turned to evil ends" (Leach, 2016: 126). The conflation of baroque and national identity, which Leach speaks to, illustrates the complicities of power with architectural and artistic movements, but it does not follow that notions of the baroque around complexity, ambiguity, senses, and feelings are wrong. But what must be challenged and debated following historiographical approaches is treating history and its methods as neutral and banal: as the book argues at times rather than unpacking the political consequences further of how the baroque has been tied up and utilised to support a particular ideology.

The second question explores why the book concludes at the 1980s without going further. The final chapter laments the baroque's loss of historical position, or even the lack of welcome with which it is greeted within general debates of the discipline. However, are we not in a post-critical period where anything goes, where a range of ideas are welcome? Is this not the perfect time for a historiographic insistence on how the politics of the present are refashioning the past? One, therefore, would think a historian's close reading of the digital use of the baroque would be more than welcome—to develop a clearer understanding of its significance and how it operates in our own time. A further rounding out of the chapters would have been enabled by extending to more contemporary writing that would enable a strengthening of the question—how is the baroque being re-made in the present?

To conclude, the points raised in this review do not detract from a book which clearly situates the baroque in the history of architectural historiography and in the history of modern architectural culture. This is an elegant book and a welcome addition for scholars of art and architectural history. Additionally, the book boasts a wider appeal than those concerned specifically with a historical perspective.

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