Not enough Baroque

Helen Hills (Hg.)
Rethinking the Baroque.
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Once, when questioned about the originality of Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (1980), Richard Krautheimer gave one of his rare and atypically acerbic replies: "you obviously haven't read much Sherlock Holmes". In many ways the volume discussed here provoked in the reviewer a similar response because, when reading through a number of the ten papers presented in these conference proceedings, he kept thinking: "but what about Argan?". In this case Giulio Carlo Argan playing Canon Doyle, to Gilles Deleuze's Eco, the latter's *Le Pli* of 1988 to Argan's brilliant but overlooked essay "La retorica e l'arte barocca" of 1955 which is not cited a single time in this book nor present in the bibliography. Acknowledging the importance of Argan (mentioned only in passing on p. 22) would not make Deleuze's work appear any less innovative, but it certainly would have helped explain more persuasively the significant shifts in post-war perception and reception of the Baroque that were part of the historical preamble to the appearance of *Leibniz et le baroque*.

TAKING THE STING OUT OF THE BAROQUE

Helen Hills' "Introduction: Rethinking the Baroque" begins with the statement: "The Baroque is a thorn in the flesh of European art and thought" (4). The scholars who have taken the sting out of the Baroque, seeing it neither as pejorative nor 'Early Modern', through their exploration of the idea of a "productive Baroque" (11), are according to Hills principally Walter Benjamin (1928) and Gilles Deleuze (1988), together with Hubert Damisch (1996) and Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1986). Thus "The Baroque: the grit in the oyster of art history", the first chapter and Hills' own contribution to this volume, praises Benjamin's and Deleuze's "radically different ways of interpreting the Baroque", by considering it not as decadence, but rather its antidote, and as "troubling the smooth waters of a linear historicism" (11).

This is all very well, but these saviours of the concept and idea examined here have been set up specifically in relation to "Benedetto Croce's characterisation of the Baroque as decadent" (11), yet it was Argan who first countered Croce's argument and proposed Baroque rhetorical technique as a productive process. And while it is true that three of the four authors Hills cites have made significant contributions to postulating an idea of the Baroque as a viable and valuable *modus operandi* that avoids simple forms of linear periodisation, to instead "think of Baroque as 'a conceptual technology'" (3), Hills' highly selective inclusions seem like those of a genealogist who has decided to air-brush out an unwanted member of the family tree. Argan was one of the first figures to make a major stride forward in re-thinking the Baroque in the twentieth century and he would, if anything, have buttressed significantly Hills' arguments for a conceptual technology.

EGREGIOUS GENEALOGIES

Hills rightly points out that as a term Baroque has been considered anachronistic: stylistically it has negative connotations and as 'Early Modern' is dogged by the problem of always being in a subordinate teleological relation to the 'Modern'. Instead, she wants to engage with the Baroque as a mode of organisation or system, so as to retrieve it from the margins of art history and to engage it for use in art and architectural historical studies and theory. Yet, to my mind, one of the most important contributions along these lines, one that was among

the first to posit Baroque as a 'conceptual technology', was precisely Argan's essay, and I quote: "L'arte non è che una tecnica, un metodo, un tipo di comunicazione o di rapporto; ed è, più precisamente, una tecnica della persuasione che deve tenere conto, non soltanto delle proprie possibilità e dei propri mezzi, ma anche delle disposizioni del pubblico al quale si rivolge. La teorica degli affetti, esposta nel secondo libro della Rettorica, diventa così un elemento nella concezione dell'arte come comunicazione e persuasione" (Giulio Carlo Argan, La "Rettorica" e l'arte barocca, in: *Atti del III Congresso internazionale di studi umanistici* [conference proceedings Rome 1954], ed. by Enrico Castelli, Rome 1955, 9–14, here: 11).

And further: "se l'arte barocca configura la rappresentazione come discorso dimostrativo e lo articola secondo un metodo di persuasione, è leggitimo chiedersi quale sia il soggetto o il fine della persuasione". Ed è proprio qui che l'esperienza della Rettorica aristotelica mi sembra fornisca una chiave d'interpretazione e di valutazione dell'arte barocca. Non esistono tesi a priori che l'orazione rettorica deva o voglia dimostrare; essa può applicarsi a qualunque soggetto perché ciò che importa non è di persuadere a questa o quella cosa, ma sempli-cemente di persuadere […]. Il trompe-l'œil, ch'è forma tipicamente barocca, non è che un caso particolare, estremamente limitato ma proprio perché maggiormente dimostrativo, di questa persuasione senza soggetto, in definitiva, senza una diretta partecipazione dell'artista, che fornisce soltanto una 'tecnica'." (ibid., 12f.).

I believe these citations demonstrate the work of a scholar aiming at: "mobilizing Baroque in relation to the historical – beyond the periodized" (Hills, 5). Indeed, Argan posited rhetoric and the art of persuasion as the technique that characterized the Baroque, a technique that had an autonomous development and was configured as a method: more precisely it was a method that became a system, the mode and medium rather than the message. Argan's argument, which was both genial and convincing, appeared in 1955 and constituted a crucial stepping-stone in the post-war period as it directly influenced Rudolf Wittkower's Baroque volume for the *Pelican History of Art* of 1958 as the latter took up and fully endorsed Argan's interpretation: "The ideas of this concise paper have influenced my argumentation" (Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750*, Harmondsworth 1958, 92). This point is made clearly by Evonne Levy, Rhetoric or Propaganda? On the Instrumentality of Baroque Art (in: *Estetica Barocca*, ed. by Sebastian Schütze, Rome 2004, 91).

STYLE, HISTORIOGRAPHY, REFRAMING

The following sections of the volume offer various papers that propose ways of rethinking the Baroque and interpreting those innovative critics who have changed our perceptions of the issue. Only nine of the sixteen original conference papers have made the cut to the published volume and aesthetics, music, painting and several papers on architecture have disappeared as the editor has selected from the variegated original contributions to construct a book that takes up a pronounced political-theoretical position. Given that style has always been a major issue, the two chapters of section two here make useful inroads in reconsidering the matter. Alina Payne's essay "On sculptural relief: 'Malerisch', the autonomy of artistic media and the beginnings of Baroque studies" (39–64), is the third in a trilogy of papers where she argues for the importance of the Pergamon Altar's display in Berlin in 1879, with its *malerische* marbles, for the irruption of Hellenistic 'Baroque' into considerations of 'Classical' Greek art that set in train much rethinking about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Howard Caygill's essay on "Ottoman Baroque: the limits of style" (65–79) also focuses on late nineteenth century changing considerations of Baroque including Heinrich Wölfflin's 1888 study of *Renaissance und Barock* and likewise offers a significantly new inter-pretation of its import, here in terms of Sinan's architecture, Western and non-Western scholar-ship, and how Wölfflin's study in many ways conjured the Baroque into being.

A change of tack to historiography is made in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's, "Discomfited by the

Baroque: a personal journey" (83–98), tracing the changes to how and when Baroque was taught in the US when he was studying and what it meant for a scholar determined to explore well to the East of standard Western scholarship. Kaufmann has made crucial contributions to the study of the geographical areas of Central and Eastern Europe, an area he has helped transform into a major area of study (although Argan, in *L'Europa delle capitali, 1600–1700*, Genève 1964, another work not cited in this volume, was one of the first to look beyond Europe by including Mexican and South American examples in his account of the Baroque). So too, Claire Farago, "Reframing the Baroque: on idolatry and the threshold of humanity" (99–122) examines recent disciplinary developments in this field and addresses the issue of just how the 'framing' of the Baroque happens, looking "in particular to the cycle of critiquing, re-enacting and sustaining old practices" (99).

It is thus surprising that Farago falls into the trap of citing so centrally Erwin Panofsky's posthumously published essay "What Is Baroque?" (in: *Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin, Cambridge/Mass. 1995, 17–88), the paper he never wanted published, while ignoring the article he did publish on Baroque space and perspective in 1919 dedicated to Gianlorenzo Bernini's Scala Regia in the Vatican, which has never been translated and hardly ever taken into consideration (Die Scala Regia im Vatikan und die Kunstanschauungen Berninis, in: *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen* 40, 1919, 241–278, especially 257). Absurdly, Panofky's manuscript has been reprinted as the opening essay in *Italian Baroque Art* (ed. by Susan Dixon, Oxford 2008, 7–21) as it fits the idea of Panofsky that scholars today prefer, ignoring the reality of what the author had published under his own name and in his own lifetime. The overlooked Scala Regia essay, which demonstrated just how revealing the study of perspectival and optical considerations could be in analyzing architectural style thankfully now has been republished in the systematic collection: Erwin Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze*, hg. v. Karen Michels/Martin Warnke, 2 vols., Berlin 1998, II, 897–938. Let us hope scholars take up the option of reading what Panofsky published rather than continuing to retroactively reclaim for him the image they are seeking.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Section four dedicated to Baroque Traditions contains two contrasting essays, a provocative and stimulating one by Anthony Geraghty on Nicholas Hawksmoor and John Locke, which juxtaposes the architect's drawing technique of the 1690s with the philosopher's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1689 as a way of rethinking the possibilities of an 'English Baroque'. On the other hand Glenn Adamson's essay "The Real in the Rococo" takes up the volume's focus on Deleuze but examines it through a discussion of ornament and detail in three case studies.

Section five "Benjamin's Baroque" is anomalous in that it contains a single isolated essay by Andrew Benjamin dedicated to his namesake "Benjamin and the Baroque: posing the question of historical time" (161–179). This study confirms the editorial focus on one of the key critics considered here as permitting and prompting a re-evaluation of the Baroque. Rather than offering a contribution to rethinking, this quite abstract philosophical discourse offers ruminations about how Benjamin's thought changed the course of things: "While the Baroque may have had neither an 'eschatology' nor a conception of 'other times' as Benjamin indicates (a position that can be incorporated into and thus forms part of the reiteration of history as historicism), it does not follow from the presence of such a possibility that the potentiality of the Baroque functioning historically, albeit within a radically different conception of the historical, is precluded by definition" (174).

The final section dedicated to "Baroque Folds" features Tom Conley's interesting but repetitive essay on "The Baroque Fold as Map and as Diagram" (203–217). As the translator of Deleuze's *Le Pli* Conley, who knows the work intimately, here applies it to a consideration of a series of seventeenth-century topographical images. Yet this contributor seems to be somewhat at odds with the editor as he repeatedly employs the word 'concept'

regarding the Baroque ("can it qualify as a concept? When awarded the autonomy of a concept…", 203), whereas Hills states at the outset "it is towards Baroque as idea (as opposed to concept) in Benjamin's sense of the terms that this book turns" (4). This final section also contains the single contribution commissioned after the conference. Mieke Bal's "Baroque Matters", chooses four contemporary artistic works to explore how Baroque can "refer to a vision rather than a style or period" (183) and thus this essay is similar to Conley's three case-studies, as they turn to concrete examples to explore technique and process, located here in theoretical frameworks that offer new and thought-provoking ways of examining the issue.

In the current Euro crisis Franco-German hegemony is supposed to be the crucial factor in resolving issues, whereas some might say that the recent appointment of Super Mario to lead the European Central Bank was fundamental to saving the single currency from armageddon in mid-2012. So too, the Franco-German dominance of this book and its bibliography distorts significantly an historiographical assessment of just who has made the most important contributions to rethinking the Baroque in the twentieth century. It was another wily Italian, mayor of Rome and superlative *éminence grise* of the post-war art-historical world whose brilliant short essay on "Retorica" transformed the field, but who has been underestimated here and indeed overlooked. Time for another rethink.

PROF. DR. ANDREW HOPKINS

Italienische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts in St. Petersburg

Svetlana Vsevoložskaja
Museo Statale Ermitage. La pittura italiana del Seicento. Catalogo della collezione. Milano, Skira 2010. 272 p., 105 ill. couleurs et 184 ill. noir et blanc. ISBN 978-88-572-0755-1. € 55,00

Les collections de peintures du *Seicento* du Musée de l'Ermitage n'avaient encore jamais fait l'objet d'une publication complète. Si certaines œuvres de Caravage, Domenico Fetti, Giovanni Lanfranco ou Guido Reni ont été souvent citées et reproduites, les plus récents catalogues sommaires des peintures du grand musée, publiés en russe depuis 1958, permettaient seulement d'en imaginer l'ampleur grâce à de brèves notices et à quelques illustrations. Quant aux onze volumes parus en russe et en anglais entre 1983 et 2008, sur les seize prévus, d'un catalogue plus détaillé et soigneusement illustré, l'un d'eux était consacré aux peintures du XIII^{e} au XVI^{e} siècle (Tatiana Kustodieva, *Catalogue of Western European painting / The Hermitage. 1. Italian painting. Thirteenth to sixteenth centuries*, Florence 1994) mais aucun n'avait encore concerné le XVII^{e} siècle, si l'on excepte une dizaine de celles de Venise déjà étudiées par Tamara Fomichova (*Catalogue of Western European painting / The Hermitage. 2. Venetian painting fourteenth to eighteenth centuries*, Florence 1992).