

Global Baroque – transcultural and transhistorical aspects: some preliminary reflections

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ABSTRACT In the last years the term of a global baroque became more prominent. This article presented as preliminary reflections intends to contextualize this transhistorical and transcultural approach within the developments of the so-called global art history. It also tries to (de-)construct its historiographical fundaments in the 19th century as well as its possible theoretical implications for the 21st century.

KEYWORDS Baroque, Theory, Historiography.



Fig. 1: Façade of San Joaquin Church, 1869, Iloilo, Philippines.

Photo: Jens Baumgarten.



Fig. 2: Façade of Miagao Church, 1787, Iloilo, Philippines.

Photo: Jens Baumgarten.

The façade of the church San Joaquin on the Filipino island of Iloilo shows on its upper part a monumental relief [Fig. 1]. It joins several scenes of the victory of the Spanish over the “Moors” in the battle of Tétouan, which happened in 1860 in Morocco. The representation surprises by its stylistic and iconographical choices. The history painting of the 19th century was already established, but the choice of the local authorities followed in a record time – the execution happened already in 1865 – followed the Baroque models of a specific Filipino model. This model can for example be found in the Miagao Church only 40 kilometers of distance [Fig. 2]. This example not only proves the expression of Kosselleck: “Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen” (Simultaneity of the unsimultaneous), but shows the possibilities of a transcultural and transhistorical baroque approach to understand these phenomena as well as these kind of artifacts, which were excluded from a traditional art history.

Within the theoretical and methodological debates about the objectives of a global art history and about its impact onto the discipline itself, the cultural and historiographical phenomena of the baroque and its appropriations offer a rich topic for further discussions and analysis. The concept of global baroque has emerged as a key to discussing and understanding early modern, modern, and contemporary aesthetic discourses, especially in order to connect and confront European and Latin American art histories.

The baroque, as a seemingly universal stylistic phenomenon, connecting the early modern, the modern, and the contemporary periods, shall be analyzed as a case and model of globalization of art and art history. The transcultural approach to the baroque covers the cross-cultural impact of its style, the intercultural and local differentiation of its forms and meanings, its function as a means of cultural hybridization and amalgamation, and its uses as a means of national identity building. The transhistorical approach points to the alleged historical transcendence and universality of the baroque style, as established by late 19th century art history, and aims at analyzing the ensuing ideological and aesthetic constructions of history by the means of baroque style in Latin America.¹

The global baroque calls for an interdisciplinary approach, including different fields of the humanities and social sciences, such as economics and anthropology, which shall be tested in the Workshops. For example, new approaches like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's notion of perspectival anthropology and controlled equivocation,² or the post-comparative notion of 'false friends', can help in analyzing the complexity of the global baroque and in understanding how different visual systems and processes of conflict and negotiation were established in contexts of cultural alterity. This approach can facilitate the reevaluation not only the relations between Christian colonizers and the indigenous communities, but between the contemporary scholar and his objects of research, and offers alternative concepts to the dichotomy of center and periphery.

As to deal with the complexity of a global baroque and to avoid the perpetuation of national art historical traditions and mythologies, it is necessary to compare Latin American baroque, for example, to Asian contexts, and to address the appropriation of the baroque in 20th and 21st century art historical and political discourses. The formation of an artistic system in the Americas and Asia, ensuing from dialogues and clashes between European models and local prescriptions, will be a major point of discussion. The circulation of art objects, between not only European nations and their colonies, but among the different colonial contexts and between European countries themselves, will be taken into account. For instance, this concerns the formation of an Italian taste in 18th century Portugal, the study of Central European varieties of baroque art, and the cultural differences between German or Italian Jesuit workshops in countries such as Paraguay, Chile, and Bolivia.³

¹ *Defzig Barock. Von Cattelan bis Zurbarán – Manifeste des prekär Vitalen*, ed. by Bice Curiger; Cologne, Snoek, 2012; exhibition: Zurich, Kunsthau; *Contested visions in the Spanish colonial world*, ed. by Ilona Katzew; Los Angeles/New Haven/London, Los Angeles County Museum of Art/Yale University Press, 2011; exhibition: Los Angeles County Museum of Art/Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Historia; *Rethinking the baroque*, ed. by Helen Hills; Farnham, Ashgate, 2011; *Barock – modern?*, ed. by Victoria von Flemming and Alma-Elisa Kittner; Cologne, Salon Verlag, 2010.

² VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *The inconstancy of the Indian soul: the encounter of Catholics and cannibals in 16-century Brazil*; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *From the enemy's point of view: humanity and divinity in an Amazonian society*; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

³ BAILEY, Gauvin Alexander. *Art of colonial Latin America*; London/New York, Phaidon, 2005; KELEMEN, Pál. *Baroque and rococo in Latin America*; New York, The Macmillan Company, 1951.

The Latin American cultural context integrates a complex blend of European heritage, local and indigenous traditions, and a significant African presence. It has long been the stage for a remarkable superposition of cultural models, which encompass the Tridentine directives on art, the classical tradition, Native American imagery, Asian practices, or modernist International Style. To read these associations and to map out the mutual interferences, it is essential to connect both European and Latin American contexts.

An expected outcome of this project will be the possibility of reevaluating local and national theoretical standards by offering a critical perspective on the issue of cultural exchange. It is our aim to contribute to the development of a transnational art history and its debates. A new balance of local and global can emerge from this experience and function as an analytical model, primarily in the case of colonial countries and areas, which have undergone significant cultural or political clashes and alliances. The definition global and local issues and the potential and limits of these concepts in approaching art objects, are under examination.⁴

The transcultural and transhistorical approach is able to reveal points of intersection and interweave the two activities. A personal experience of students and professors, discussing topics related to cultural identity such as the baroque and art historical practices such as methodology and historiography, can lead to a spreading and lasting impact.

Questions of cultural transfer, of the mobility and circulation of artifacts and ideas, the variety of art histories, differing local historiographies and methodologies, define the broader epistemological framework. The point of departure falls under the rubric *global baroque*, a fundamental term for both art history and cultural identity across the continents. The debates focus on the field of inquiry as to refine the analysis in the circulation of artistic models, artists, and art works in the early modern period. Given that the notion of the baroque has been intensely discussed as an essential characteristic of Postmodernism, for instance in Angela Ndalanian's *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and contemporary entertainment* (2004),⁵ it combines questions about the past and the contemporary situation of a globalized discipline, which represents one of the important methodological and theoretical challenges for the field. The

⁴ *Resisting the present. Mexico 2000/2012*, ed. by Anne Montfort *et al.*; Barcelona, RM Verlag, 2012; exhibition: Paris, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, ARC/Puebla, Museo Amparo; *Intense proximité. Une anthologie du proche et du lointain*, ed. by Okwui Enwezor *et al.*; Paris, Artlys, 2012; exhibition: Paris, Palais de Tokyo; *The global art world. Audiences, markets, and museums*, ed. by Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg; Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009; *World art studies: exploring concepts and approaches*, ed. by Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme; Amsterdam, Valiz, 2008; *Is art history global?*, ed. by James Elkins; New York/London, Routledge, 2007; SUMMERS, David. *Real spaces. World art history and the rise of western modernism*; London/New York, 2003. *Weltkulturen und moderne Kunst. Die Begegnung der europäischen Kunst und Musik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert mit Asien, Afrika, Ozeanien, Afro und Indo-Amerika. Ausstellung veranstaltet vom Organisationskomitee für die Spiele der XX. Olympiade München 1972*, ed. by Siegfried Wichmann; München, Verlag Bruckmann, 1972; exhibition: Munich, Haus der Kunst; Oskar Beyer, *Welt-Kunst. Von der Umwertung der Kunstgeschichte*, 3. ed.; Dresden, Sibyllen-Verlag, 1923.

⁵ NDALIANIS, Angela. *Neo-baroque aesthetics and contemporary entertainment (media in transition)*; Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 2004; *Barock [Medienkombination]. Ein Ort des Gedächtnisses. Interpretament der Moderne/Postmoderne*, ed. by Moritz Csáky, Federico Celestini and Ulrich Tragatschnig; Vienna, Böhlau, 2007.

lecture courses, seminars, and field trips thus relate to an extended notion of the *baroque*, reaching from the 17th to the 21st century. *Baroque* is a historical and stylistic category, which both academic cultures share. However, this flexible stylistic label has undergone dramatic changes from early modern to postmodern times and has contributed to very distinct cultural identities in Europe and South America respectively.⁶

Research Latin American baroque visual culture is at its most vibrant stage in its history. Since the 1992 Quincentenary of Columbus's landfall onto the New World, exhibitions, conferences, and publications have brought colonial baroque art to the attention of specialists in the early modern period, of art history, and the public at large. With few exceptions, however, the scholarly and pedagogical treatment of this significant material has been restricted to certain locales: Latin American,

⁶ BECKER, Margret. *Der Raum des Öffentlichen. Die Escola Paulista und der Brutalismus in Brasilien*; Berlin, Reimer, 2012; *História da arte. Ensaios contemporâneos*, ed. by Marcelo Campos et al.; Rio de Janeiro, Editora da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2011; *Baroque new worlds. Representation, transculturation, counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup; Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2010; BASTOS, Maria Alice Junqueira; Ruth Verde Zein, *Brasil: arquiteturas após 1950*; São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 2010; *Adriana Varejão. Entre carnes e mares/Between flesh and oceans*, ed. by Isabel Diegues; Rio de Janeiro, Cobogó, 2009; *Cannibalismes disciplinaires. Quand l'histoire de l'art et l'anthropologie se rencontrent*, ed. by Thierry Dufrene and Anne-Christine Taylor; Paris, Institut national d'histoire de l'art/Musée du quai Branly, 2009; *Brazil contemporary. Architecture, visual culture, art*, ed. by Ole Bouman, Sjarel Ex and Ruud Visschedijk; Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2009; exhibition: Rotterdam, Nederlands architectuurinstituut/Nederlands fotomuseum/Museum Boijmans van Beuningen; *Hot spots. Rio de Janeiro/Milano-Torino/Los Angeles, 1956 bis 1969*, ed. by Christoph Becker; Göttingen, Steidl Verlag, 2009; exhibition: Zurich, Kunsthaus; Styliane Philippou, *Oscar Niemeyer. Curves of irreverence*; New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2008; ANDERMANN, Jens, *The optic of the state. Visuality and power in Argentina and Brazil*; Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007; *Igreja da Pampulha. Restauro e reflexões*, ed. by Silvia Finguerut; Rio de Janeiro, Fundação Roberto Marinho, 2006; *Transculturation. Cities, spaces and architectures in Latin America*, ed. by Felipe Hernández, Mark Millington and Iain Borden; New York, Rodopi, 2005; *Readings in Latin American modern art*, ed. by Patrick Frank; New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2004; *Latin American architecture 1929-1960. Contemporary reflections*, ed. by Carlos Brillembourg; New York, The Monacelli Press, 2004; *Brazil: body & soul*, ed. by Edward J. Sullivan; New York, Guggenheim Museum, 2001; exhibition: New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum/Bilbao, Guggenheim Museum; *Oscar Niemeyer. Selbstdarstellung, Kritiken, Oeuvre*, ed. by Alexander Fils; Berlin, Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 2000; GUIMARÃES Cêça de, *Lucio Costa. Um certo arquiteto em incerto e secular roteiro*; Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 1996; *Reframing the Renaissance: visual culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650*, ed. by Claire Farago; New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995; UNDERWOOD, David. *Oscar Niemeyer and the architecture of Brazil*; New York, Rizzoli International Publications Incorporated, 1994; UNDERWOOD, David. *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian free-form modernism*; New York, George Braziller Incorporated, 1994; *Brasilien. Entdeckung und Selbstentdeckung*, ed. by Hugo Loetscher; Bern, Benteli Verlag, 1992; exhibition: Zurich, 1992; *Modernidade. Art brésilien du 20e siècle*, ed. by Aracy Amaral; Paris, Ministère des affaires étrangères/Association française d'action artistique, 1987; exhibition: Paris, Musée d'art de la ville de Paris, 1988. FILS, Alexander. *Brasília. Moderne Architektur in Brasilien*; Düsseldorf, Beton-Verlag, 1988; PhD thesis: Universität Bochum, 1986; DOS SANTOS, Cecília Rodrigues; et al. *Le Corbusier e o Brasil*; Sao Paulo, Tessela, 1987; MACHADO, Julio Cesar. *O barroco carioca*; Rio de Janeiro, Rio Arte e GRD, 1987; LEMOS, Carlos; José Roberto Teixeira Leite; Pedro Manuel Gismonti, *The art of Brazil*, forew. by Pietro Maria Bardi and Oscar Niemeyer; New York, Icon Editions/Harper & Row, 1983 [first ed.: São Paulo, Abril, 1979]; HORNIG, Christian. *Oscar Niemeyer. Bauten und Projekte*; Munich, Heinz Moos Verlag, 1981; BAZIN, Germain. *L'architecture religieuse baroque au Brésil*, 2 vols.; São Paulo/Paris, Museu de arte/Éditions d'histoire et d'art/Librairie Plon, 1958; PAPADAKI, Stamo. *The work of Oscar Niemeyer*, 2. ed.; New Haven, Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1957 [first ed.: New York, Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1950]; DORFLES, Gillo. *Barocco nell'architettura moderna*; Milan, Tamburini, 1951; *Brazil builds. Architecture new and old 1652-1942/Construção brasileira. Arquitetura moderna e antiga 1652-1942*, ed. by Philip L. Goodwin, 4. ed.; New Haven, The Museum of Modern Art, 1943; exhibition: New York, The Museum of Modern Art; GIEDION, Sigfried. *Spätbarocker und romantischer Klassizismus*; Munich, F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1922.

Iberian, and Anglo-American universities for the most part, and, to a much lesser extent, academic institutions in France and Italy. At the time of writing, there is no permanent chair for Latin American colonial art exists in the German-speaking world. In Latin America and Brazil specifically, recent research in the history of art history, especially about of Germanophone figures such as Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegl, and Heinrich Wölfflin, has gone largely unnoticed, despite the fact that these art historians enshrined the very topic of the baroque as a field in its own right.

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the historiography of the baroque, the assumptions, ideologies, and methods underwriting the interpretation of 17th century visual culture. The research project *Hispanic baroque* funded by the Canadian Research Council and several exhibitions from the Prado Museum in Madrid to the National Museum in Mexico City are notable examples. Furthermore, as represented by such ventures as the Getty Research Institute's *Text and documents* series and the founding of the *Journal of Art Historiography*, the field of art history is increasingly engaged with examining the blind spots of our disciplinarian identity. Working on both sides of the Atlantic, art historians' s interrogation of the application and the parameters of the baroque have investigated a rich array of topics: the simultaneous rise of baroque studies and neo-baroque architecture in imperial Vienna and National Socialist Germany;⁷ the development of critical terms such as *malerisch* as to describe overlaps in media; the malleable use of the baroque to characterize a motley range of objects and ideas, from Late Antique sculpture to Gothic architecture; the problem of excess and surfaces in the writings of Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Omar Calabrese, and others who have propagated the idea of a transhistorical and transcultural neo-baroque.⁸

Amidst this orientation towards the historiography of the baroque and neo-baroque, an unexamined geographic tension has emerged, a conflict that pits nationalist desires against global diffusion of style. On the one hand, the European baroque, and specifically the style of visual culture of 17th century Rome, has been in the focus of art historians seeking to understand the origins of the field.⁹ For 19th century art historians, such as Jacob Burckhardt, Cornelius Gurlitt, Heinrich Wölfflin, August Schmarsow, and Alois Riegl, the concentration on Rome was a solution as to organize the bewildering amount of different material.¹⁰

⁷ RAMPLEY, Matthew. "Subjectivity and modernism. Riegl and the rediscovery of the baroque"; in: *Framing formalism. Riegl's work. Essays*, ed. by Hans Sedlmayr; Richard Woodfield; Amsterdam, G + B Arts Internationa, 2001, pp. 265-290.

⁸ DELEUZE, Gilles. *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*; Paris, Éditions de minuit, 1988.

⁹ BURDA, Felix. "Barocke Installationen. Die Raumkunst des Barock, gesehen aus dem Blickwinkel der modernen Videokunst"; in: *Hubert Burda. Kunst und Medien. Festschrift zum 9. Februar 2000*, ed. by Judith Betzler; Munich, Petrarca-Verlag, 2000, pp. 217-223; CASTELNUOVO, Enrico; GINZBURG, Carlo. *Centro e periferia*, in: *Storia dell'arte italiana*, ed. by Giovanni Previtali; Einaudi, Turin, 1979, vol. 1.1.; *Baroque art. The Jesuit contribution*, ed. by Rudolf Wittkower and Irma B. Jaffe; New York, Fordham University Press, 1972; *Barock als Aufgabe*, ed. by Andreas Kreul; Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2005; *Estetica barocca*, ed. by Sebastian Schütze; Rome, Campisano, 2004.

¹⁰ GURLITT, Cornelius. *Geschichte des Barock-Stiles in Italien*; Stuttgart, Verlag von Ebner & Seubert (Paul Neff), 1887; WÖLFFLIN, Heinrich. *Renaissance und Barock. Eine Untersuchung über Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien*; Munich,

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Nonetheless, the geographic focus on Rome underscored contemporary claims, made in the popular press and elsewhere, of the city as a Catholic power, an especially fraught issue in post-unification Italy. Even in those works concerned with the 'periphery', where one might expect an ecumenical stance towards the issue of mobile forms, a stable focus upon place and topography prevailed. The field of Latin American baroque, as Gauvin Bailey observes, "has been hampered by regionalism and polemic, frequently taking the form of jingoistic patriotism".¹¹ Although once included in the same vice-royalty, monuments in Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina have often been studied in isolation, enlisted in the construction of nationalist art historical narratives. Furthermore, much of this scholarship focuses predominantly on Spanish colonial territories, while ignoring to a large degree the Portuguese colonies (with the exception of Luís Sobral de Moura). As George Kubler and Martin Soria would declare in their seminal 1959 Pelican survey *Art and architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American dominions, 1500 to 1800*, it was of utmost necessity "to respect regional groupings, even at the expense of nationalist sentiment", since "one cannot anatomize a national architecture in terms of

Theodor Ackermann königlicher Buchhändler, 1888; August, SCHMARSOW *Barock und Rokoko. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung über das Malerische in der Architektur*; Leipzig, Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1897; RIEGL, Alois. *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, ed. by Arthur Burda and Max Dvorák, 2. ed.; Vienna, Kunstverlag Anton Schroll & Co., 1923 [first ed.: Vienna, Kunstverlag Anton Schroll & Co., 1907]; PANOFSKY, Erwin. *Three essays on style*, ed. by Irving Lavin; Cambridge Mass./London, The MIT Press, 1995; GROSSE, Ernst. *Die Anfänge der Kunst*; Freiburg im Breisgau/Leipzig, Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1894; KUGLER, Franz. *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*; Stuttgart, Verlag von Ebner & Seubert, 1842.

¹¹ BAILEY, Gauvin Alexander. *Art on the Jesuit missions in Asia and Latin America 1542-1773*; Toronto/Buffalo/London, University of Toronto Press, 1999.

another”.¹² Diffused throughout Latin America in the 20th century, the neo-baroque architecture movement, known as the colonial revival (*renacimiento colonial*), is an eloquent testimony to the nationalist orientation of these art historical investigations.

On the other hand, baroque is the international style par excellence. Already in the 19th century, art historians acknowledged that the baroque had spread far beyond its origins in Rome in conjunction with the diffusion of Catholic missions and the territorial ambitions of the Christian empires. The ‘triumph of the baroque’ not only occurred along the traditional art historical axis, which extended from Naples to Venice, but also in regions further north (France, England, Sweden, the Low Countries, and Russia). Traveling architects, books, and models propagated the style, alongside responses to classicism and Palladianism, in the Hapsburg Empire’s great swaths of territory in Eastern and Central Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America, and Asia. The recognition of the baroque’s global diffusion continued well into the 20th century. Kubler and Soria notably expressed that the original, though unfulfilled scope of their monumental survey was “Asia, Oceania, Africa, and the rest of Europe”.

The category of the baroque has thus paradoxically become both a local and a global, if not a ‘glocal’ phenomenon.¹³ This stylistic category might embody the essence of a nation, its ideological and political ambitions; and yet, certain ornamental schemes and the characteristics of massiveness, movement, and direct appeal to the viewer were translatable and indeed disconcertingly present in painting, sculpture, architecture, and ephemera in vastly different locales. Throughout the historiography, methodological debates concerning the geographic boundaries of the baroque came to a head: should scholars embrace manifestations of baroque outside their purview of specialization, even at the expense of glossing over the particularities of historical and local conditions? Or should they restrict themselves to a singular geographic context, be it Rome, Salvador, or Ouro Preto, while giving up potentially rich points of comparison? Based upon these questions, a further set of issues arises for scholars today: what are the geographic contours, and ultimately, what should constitute a global vision of the baroque? How might it be researched and taught, to both students of art history and graduate students in the specific field? How can ‘traditional’ art historical concerns, such as iconography, style, social and political context, and patronage, engage with the expanding geographic horizons of the discipline at large?

¹² KUBLER, George; Martin Soria. *Art and architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American dominions, 1500 to 1800*; Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1959.

¹³ *Universalität der Kunstgeschichte?*, ed. by Monica Juneja; in: *Kritische Berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 2012, vol. 40, n° 2; *Global studies. Mapping contemporary art and culture*, ed. by Hans Belting *et al.*; Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011; *Islamic artefacts in the Mediterranean world. Trade, gift exchange and artistic transfer*, ed. by Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli; Gerhard Wolf; Venice, Marsilio, 2010.