

Lecture 2: The Baroque

“Baroque”

- A later invention, originally French, used in the 19th century, of negative connotations: “misshapen – malformed”. Referred to the overly-exaggerated forms of the period.
- Applied to differentiate the period (1620s-1670) from Mannerism and the Renaissance that precede it.
- Renaissance: flattened, human centred. Baroque: open, dynamic, experimental
- Baroque architecture, particularly in Italy, was bound closely to the catholic church and sovereign powers.
- As reform and uncertainty in church doctrine and ideology took place in the 16th century, visual modes of expression became fundamental to their propagation
- During the reform, architecture was sombre, austere. as the Council of Trent concluded on a basis of promoted religious teaching and urban improvement. This eventually grew to celebrate new-found openness post-reformation, both in renewed thinking, and in terms of regions of the world and trade. This is most evident in Rome.
- Religious structures, in the time of Sixtus V, are fundamental to the visual/spatial opening-up of Rome, sculpting and relating to city-scape around them (much more than preceding renaissance architecture), as well as serving as statements of the powerful church (e.g. obelisks, churches as axes).
- E.g. Piazza del Popolo, Rome, Carlo Rainaldi, Gian Lorenzo Bernini & Carlo Fontana, 1662-1667 – working together with roads, as a scenic end point, markers in a new radial street plan, plan of the trident.
- E.g. Piazza Navona, Rome, Giovanni Battista Borromini’s Sant’Agnese in Agone (1652) which faces the piazza takes on the shape of an organic wall, deeming the piazza almost an interior space. Features Bernini’s “Fountain of the Four Rivers” 1651.
- E.g. St. Peter’s Basilica, piazza and colonnade, Rome, Bernini, 1657-1667. A remaking, a processional way, use of the Doric Roman order, the piazza is oval shaped, symbolic of the outstretched arms of the Catholic church, play with light, perspective, scale.

Themes of the Baroque

- Exaggeration and manipulation; retention of classical orders and language, but becomes flexible, sometimes with reference to different classical sources than those of renaissance architects.
- Work across a variety of scales – very large scales; e.g. piazzas, to very small scales; e.g. chapel.
- Planning and geometry – deviation from centricity and simple geometry. Use of the oval and interlocking ovals, the Latin cross. For both liturgical, and aesthetic considerations.
- The above give room for movement and complexity, allowing space to be interconnected. The great innovation: space does not surround architecture but is created by it. Plasticity in the walls: push and pull, concavity and convexity. More dynamic in movement and tension. Moments of sculptural intensity, dramatic contrast between light and shade.
- Decoration and synthesis of the arts; coming together of the arts in one space. One architect, such as Bernini, was also a painter, a planner, and a sculptor. Dissolution of differentiation between decoration and building.
- Illusion and theatre – theatrical depiction, false perspective, concealment, light and shade, rapturous.
- Symbolism – family crests, religious symbolism.

Churches of Rome and Turin

- Il Gesu, Rome, Giacomo Vignola and Giacomo della Porta, 1568-76. Features an elongated cross plan, somewhat restrained, of the counter-reformation period (between the renaissance and the baroque).
- S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Francesco Borromini, 1638-41. Composed of interlocking ovals, dissolution of the dome via coffering, interplay of complex geometries, extraordinary fluidity in façade/portico.
- S. Ivo alla Sapienza, Rome, Francesco Borromini, 1642-44 (46-65). Shaped like a bee – the crest of its patrons. Located in the University of Rome. Complex entablature to a dissolving, pumpkin dome of sorts, spiralled external lantern.
- Palazzo Spada, 1652, Borromini, false perspective colonnade. Produced is an exaggerated length/depth.

- Austere and pale, restraint from decoration, as geometry induces dynamics. Much the opposite to Bernini's opulent, coloured vibrance.
- S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome, Gian Lorenzo, 1658-1661. Complexity induced by coloured marbles – different to Borromini. The façade is a single pedimented bay.
- Guarini, S. Lorenzo, Turin, 1666-1679. Nesting of space, ring of sixteen freestanding columns, lined by a complex entablature. Novel dome – intersecting ribs of Moorish, Spanish influence.
- Chapel of the Holy shroud, Turin, 1668-1694 – dissolution of the dome.
- Also present in Venice (Santa Maria della Salute, 1631-48), Southern Italy (Baroque town of Noto), Central/Western Europe, Spain.

Palaces

- Relationship of the garden to the plan, particularly the French estates.
- Vaux-le-Vicomte, France, Louis Le Vau, 1612-70. Elongated plan, dominance of the roofline, the mansard roof.
- Bernini, three projects for the east façade of the Louvre, 1665. Demonstrates a recession from the baroque to a more rational approach. Not accepted.
- Palace of Versailles, France, Andre le Notre, Louis Le Vau, and Jules Hardouin-Mansart, 1668-86. Opening up of visual and spatial axis. Great ordering element is the long, longitudinal central axis. Focus upon monumentality, hall of mirrors, all working to dramatic effect.
- Too present in Russia, Germany, Austra-Hungary. Each varies.
- Upper Belvedere, Vienna, Johann Lucas von Hildebrandt, 1721-23. Elaborate orders.

Baroque Sculpture

- "Apollo and Daphne", 1622-25. Baldacchino, St. Peter's Rome, 1623-24. Cornaro Chapel, S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome, altar "The Ecstasy of St. Theresa", 1647-52. Fountain of the Four River. All by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Demonstration of the genius of the individual, reworking of classical myth, of religious liturgy, vivid depiction of movement also deviates from classical ideals. Prowess of sculptors is demonstrated by expression of emotions, of movement. Others include the Trevi Fountains, Palazzo Poli, Rome, Nicola Salvi and others, 1732-51. Themes of death in "St Cecilia", Stephano Maderno, 1600. Note grand illusionary frescos.

The Awareness of Style – Revivalism, Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, Peter Collins.

- Style – evolved to be defined as "the fashion which each generation can promptly recognized as its own", "what ties together the aesthetic achievements of the creative individuals of an age", and "the expression of a prevailing, dominant or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of human experience peculiar to their day, and who are able to phrase this experience in forms deeply congenial to the thought, science and technology which are part of that experience."
- The term however has its roots in the literary tradition, it is the decorum which required the doing of something to be in the manner of doing that it was in harmony with.
- Such an epistemological understanding was gradually adapted into architecture. Its inherent nature saw almost certainly a delineation of one style that was superior to all others. In architecture, the very appellation of the discipline became relevant only to classical architecture unless otherwise stated.
- The earlier understanding of style perhaps then lie at the hearts of Charlemagne's Roman revival, Roman revivals of the Renaissance, among other singular, superior revivalist courses.
- Revivalist architecture is then not merely a borrowing of past styles, but too take part in their recollection and distinction. This saw the period as a corroboration of differentiated revivals, with none being superior to another.

Reading: Kostof – The Grand Manner

- The Baroque period was prefaced by changes in the fundamental understanding of the world. Particularly, the cornucopian notion of earth revolving around the sun shifted ideals to be in the grand manner, often neglecting the human scale for overall monumentality and reflection.
- The Baroque was part of the visual propaganda of the Counter-Reformation in Rome and of absolute monarchies (e.g. King Louis XIV). It is also the style of a typical autocracy. Thus, the theatricality and illusionism of the style has a political and religious rationale in addition to its aesthetic appeal. For these reasons, it was also unique to capitals and cities of influence.
- The Baroque urban form was preceded by the landscape design of gardens, The landscaping of gardens, in 17th century France, was described as the art of “how to straighten winding streets, rectify unavoidable irregularities of the ground, and arrange viewpoints.

Baroque urban elements pre-figured in the Renaissance

- The designed square, as surrounded by building facades.
- The trivium – the convergence of three radial streets upon a square.
- The desire to connect churches and other public monuments with straight streets to ‘create constellations of monumentality’.
- Continuous facades – no longer thought of as left over, interstitial spaces, rather spatial elements with their own integrity.

Sixtus V’s Baroque plan

- Emphasis on the vista, strategic placement of churches.
- The use of the obelisk as a striking spatial marker.
- The overarching urban principle of geometric order for its own sake becomes established.
- The emphasis on the city as theatre – the way in with the ‘Grand Manner’ sought to turn the composition of urban spaces, and the spatial experience of moving through streets and squares, itself into a spectacle (particularly relevant for Rome as a pilgrimage destination – the Holy City).

Baroque elements according to Kostof:

- The straight street, allowing for political control, as well as aesthetic satisfactoriness.
- The Baroque diagonal, resulting from the joining of gridirons, or designated to induced shortest paths.
- The trivium - the meeting of three radial streets at, or their divergence from, a piazza (and polyvium - more than three), serves to converge traffic, then distributing such evenly.
- The vista - whose primary purpose is to frame a distance view, so that it is seen through a composed foreground and is fixed at the opposite end by some worthy marker. Maybe either closed, framed, fixed,
- Markers and monuments – the use of freestanding monuments to either accent a vista or fix the space of a formal square. Such as fountains, triumphal arches, commemorative columns, and statues (at time equestrian).
- The ceremonial axis – a processional, decorated datum that demonstrates monarchical power.
- Note: The Baroque tradition carries through the superseding centuries, ringing true in the works of Haussmann, Mussolini, Hitler, and socialist states.

Reading: A Global History of Architecture – St. Peter’s Basilica and Baroque Italy

- Exaggeration and manipulation;
- Variations in scale of works;
- Planning and Geometry (experimentation with new plans based on the elongated cross and oval);
- Movement (accentuated expression of movement in planning, facades and surface detailing);
- Decoration and Synthesis of all the Arts;
- Illusion and Theatre;
- Symbolism