

The Baroque spirit in Quito

Key words: HYBRIDITY, VISIBLE-INVISIBLE ASPECTS, TRANSFER, BAROQUE EON, IDENTITY, APPROPRIATION, RENOVATION-CONSERVATION

In the first chapter I am going to briefly analyze the concept of Baroque as an historic constant and not only as a movement that took place in the 17th and 18 centuries. I will unpack the baroque theory of Nietzsche who affirmed that the Baroque is a phenomena that recurs cyclically throughout the ages, his own dualism of the Apollonian, and the Dionysian, as well as the theories of Buci Glucksmann and Walter Benjamin who have also stated that the baroque reoccurs in modernism and postmodernism, and then I will refer to the catalan philosopher and art critic Eugenio D'Ors, who defined the classical and the baroque as opposing forms of the human spirit. Opposing "eons" as he called the metaphysical and stylistic forces that impel artistic production in every age and culture. D'Ors opposition between classicism and the baroque weighs reason against instinct, unity against rupture. D'Ors argues for what we might now think of as a kind of Baroque DNA that runs in given cultures. He understood the Baroque as a human constant, a spirit rather than a particular historical period. Baroque temporality overarches discontinuities and Baroque space is labyrinthine, an ambit in which forking paths diverge, cross and conjoin. This amplification of the Baroque has been both, controversial and largely influential. On the one hand Anglophone critics wary of the baroque, such as Rene Wellek, have pointed to D'Ors ahistorical essentialism, arguing that such abstract generalizations turn the Baroque into a meaningless category. On the other hand, D'Ors work proved indispensable to the Cuban writers Alejo Carpentier and Jose Lezama Lima, and to Ecuadorean philosopher Bolivar Echeverria, as they worked to elaborate their theories of the Baroque in Latinamerica. In the act of moving the Baroque beyond seventeenth century Europe, d'Ors revised its political and social function. Rather than a style aimed at imposing and conserving European values, it could now be understood as a potentially dynamic, destabilizing force embracing multiple cultures and periods. In the case of Quito one could formulate the question as to whether the baroque eon belongs to the way of seeing and perceiving life in this Andean region.

Heinrich Wolfflin was widely read in Latin America and especially adopted by the Argentinian art historian Angel Guido. In his essay *The Rediscovery of America in the Arts* 1940, he used the term Mestizo Style to define the arts of Latin America. He characterized the resurgence of Amerindian culture in the mestizo style as an aesthetic rebellion that paralleled political

revolutions like the one that took place in 1780 against the Spanish regime. The Yale scholar George Kubler dismissed the term as racist and stated that the planiform constructions to which Guido referred were typical of provincial and rural arts everywhere. And then started a great debate between Hispanist and Indigenists about which I will write in more detail. While the Indigenists, like Meza and Gisbert from Bolivia defended the term mestizo style, saying that it comes from a distinct point of view that responds completely to indigenous sensibility and that it therefore should not be disparaged with norms such as “primitive”, “popular” or “provincial”, the italo/venezuelan architect Graziano Gasparini not only insulted indigenists but also claimed that art historians should not depend on written documents and that the visual analysis should prevail. The result of depending on visual analysis has been the use of terms such as Tequitqui, Indo/Christian, Criollo, Mestizo Baroque and Hybrid Baroque, which suggest hybrid or mixed ornamental characteristics, but none of these can be used for the case of Quito. The arts in Quito are practically deprived of any visible signs of indigenous contribution, in fact, the city was admired in the XVIII and XIX centuries for the high quality of the artwork and its resemblance to European art, and since the middle of the XX century it lost interest among scholars for the same reason.

Indigenists as well as hispanists relied on visual elements to consolidate their positions, as if the legacy of the indigenous peoples could be seen in the buildings like the color of the skin supposedly determines ethnicity. Carolyn Dean and Dane Leibsohn in *Hybridity and its Discontents*, suggest that the visible and the invisible are slippery elements, especially when analyzing visible mixtures, and Susan Webster recently demonstrated how the dependence of the visible has shaped an image of colonial art as a symbol of the Spanish imperial Project, a point of view that could be changed by taking into account two aspects that are invisible but significant: the persons and the processes involved in the architectonic production. For instance, International scholars have praised the architecture of Quito and affirmed that it is of such high quality that it equals that of Spain.” However, historical documentation registers that the Spanish *mecenas* did employ European treaties but most of the architects and constructors were indigenous peoples, mostly Inca descendants, and not from other ethnic groups. The builder who was usually an indigenous master, was in charge of providing its own team of workers specialized in the different instruction processes. From a European and Western point of view, that is not a very prestigious job, but from an Andean point of view, the control over the people and the construction processes was an expression of authority. According to the colonial chronicles, the *Sapa Inca* was also an architect whose

power and authority resided in his capacity to enroll experts in the construction of monumental buildings that were designed and supervised by the *Sapa Inca*, who also participated in the production process. Furthermore, the Inca point of view is characterized by its distinctive relation with materials. The essence of the stone was more important than its superficial appearance, so when they constructed with stones they were organizing the disordered nature. They gave more importance to the essence of things than to forms and styles, that is why probably, the European style was appropriated by the indigenous people from the beginning of the colonial period. There are other causes that have been suggested for the lack of visual hybridity in Quito, such as the lack of monumental Inca constructions and the decline in creativity because of the Inca domination, (the settlements established in Ecuadorean territory were conquered by the Incas 80 years before the arrival of the Spaniards), but the workers in construction were mainly from Inca origin. So I think that it is important to analyze hybridity also from the Andean point of view and not only with western eyes. Apart from the influence of Gasparini, documents were considered suspicious because they were the legal instruments of the colonial Enterprise. It is fair to say that they could have hidden purposes formulated in the byzantine language of Spanish bureaucracy, but we should also recognize the essential data that they can provide to complement the visual analysis of art historians and to grasp the invisible of which Dean and Leibsohn speak.

In concluding this chapter I will explain why I rather prefer the term New World Baroque when we refer to the production in Quito. In two case studies I will analyze the influence of the religious orders in the arts and the way in which Catholicism and Andean Religion interacted. I will of course study the process and persons involved in the construction and decoration of the buildings, concentrating in the XVIII century. A review of secular art will help to determine taste and preferences. This is important when studying the role of colonial art in shaping the nations identity. At the beginning of the XX century the term School of Quito started to be used among Ecuadorian scholars. It is true that the production of Quito can be differentiated from the one of Lima or Mexico, but there is no unified visual language to justify the application of the term to the works of art of almost three centuries. I will argue, as I did in my master's thesis, that one could speak of a school of Quito only in regard to the sculpture made in the second half of the XVIII century.

What happened in the XIX century? How many churches were reconstructed in Baroque style after earthquakes or fire? Were there economic means to renovate the churches and Quiteños preferred not to do so? Or was it the other way around? Did Ecuador participate in

the Plenary Council of Latin America, that took place in Rome, from where Chile, Argentina and Peru imported Neoclassicism?

My research will try to answer all these questions with an interdisciplinary approach.

CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS: FORMAL AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS,
ICONOGRAPHIC-ICONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS, PATRONAGE ANALYSIS, THEORETICAL
ANALYSIS, SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Research sources:

Methodologically, I will start with a historiography of the terms used to describe colonial art in Latin America.

In addition to secondary sources, it will be necessary to research the Archbishop archive and the archives of the churches chosen as case studies to determine the construction processes of the buildings and the persons involved in order to determine the invisible indigenous contribution. It will be important to determine whether in those cases the indigenous "*maestro*" was in charge of contracting the people and of controlling their work, and whatever role they were assigned.

I will also look for sermons to analyze them within their contexts and try to find any connection between the word, the architecture and the images displayed in the church.

In the Archbishop archives I need to find documentation regarding the Plenary Council of Latin America that took place in Rome in the XIX century. Neoclassicism in Peru, Argentina and Chile was imported after that plenary. I need to know whether any Ecuadorean priest participated or not, and I need to find any references made by the church regarding Church Architecture in that century.

I will visit the churches and analyze their works of art in situ, according to Wolfflin and Panofzky's methods, and with an interdisciplinary approach.

It is also very important to research the financial situation of Ecuador and of the Church in the same time period, since renovation also requires financial means.

