Introduction
Hans Scharoun’s ‘The Message of Baroque’ (1964)

Hans Scharoun wrote this text as an introduction to Pierre Charpentrat’s Baroque: Italie eurpe centrale, published in 1964 as part of the Architecture Universelle collection. This series was also published in Dutch, English, German, Italian and other languages, so multiple editions of this book came out between 1964 and 1967. Charpentrat’s text, generously illustrated with photographs by Peter Heman and featuring countless plans and sections, is aimed at an audience of both lay people and experts. Scharoun’s foreword is part of the publisher’s strategy of having renowned contemporary architects introduce its historical studies. While it is quite possible that Charpentrat had little or nothing to do with the selection of Scharoun (none of his published writings are on Scharoun), it fits in well with the attitude towards the Baroque that Charpentrat developed in his own work. He endeavoured to lay out a painstaking analysis of the Baroque form – to him quintessentially architectural and spatial – based on the functions that Baroque buildings were supposed to fulfill and the interaction between architects and religiously inspired patrons. This analysis, according to Charpentrat, revealed fundamental analogies between the Baroque and the best of modernism, which was similarly characterised by anti-academicism, functionalism and an awareness of the formal and spatial aspect of architecture. In that respect, Charpentrat’s work dovetails with that of Heinrich Wölfflin and Sigfried Giedion, and it has contributed both to the French study of the Baroque and to the French debate on modernism.

Translation: Pierre Bouvier

Preface

By Hans Scharoun

The climate of Baroque, the various elements which characterized the buildings, and the origins and styles of the architects of the period are all dealt with exhaustively in this book. Thus, demands of the present have been ample filled by illustrating our connections with that time. The following observations may serve to underline the necessity for a critical comparison correlating current trends with historical phenomena.

If we do not subscribe to Spengler’s view that all great civilizations are so many defeats, but follow Hugo Häring, who defends the genesis of mankind – its integration with the actual creative process – we see the great civilizations as the tasks which are given to mankind to be dealt with step by step in the workrooms, in the field of tension of rational and irrational, the rational which had its roots in the Greek sphere of influence. From now on it was linked with geometrical forms such as the rectangle (Greece) and the circle (Rome) until it attained the two-poled ellipse which gave the Baroque, especially in its Late German form, character and tension. This finds expression particularly in Baroque church architecture. Its character is a result not only of liberation from dogmatic petrification, which was the final fate of the Renaissance; nor is it an emotional illustration of the Reformed Religion. The ecstatic quality of Baroque art in its radical purposefulness accords with the pattern of behavior of Baroque man in general. Civilization is a living homogeneous structure.

In this connection let us focus on problems of structure that have again assumed importance in contemporary architecture. In the Middle Ages, planning and building were subordinated to the requirements of religious symbolism; the Baroque approach relates man directly to interior space. In Southern Germany, especially, it
The new Philharmonic building, Berlin, by Hans Scharoun

Another problem of contemporary architecture is the attention given to the "action." The Baroque, too, saw structures adapted to proceedings which found their expression in various types of church plan. This also applies to the arrangement of theater design – as, for example, in Bayreuth. The rigid seating plan of this building reflects the social structure of the time. The stalls were reserved for the populace and could become the scene of the action when, for instance, they performed country dances. This purposeful direction of consciousness towards an object is a matter of intentional imagination. What concerns, stimulates and excites us today, is the manifold, ecstatic and, in its successful moments, timeless result achieved. A radical opinion here becomes a work of art. The creation of a second natural world, worked on since by later epochs, found in the Baroque its first spontaneous realization as impulsive invasion of nature and reality – thus the great layouts of parks endeavoring to recreate nature, and the delight in robot-like automats.

What happens, takes place in an atmosphere of power-politics. But one thing is remarkable – while secular building remains largely a question of exteriors (apart from a few state rooms and a lavish display of staircases), the churches achieve a unity of component parts, whether their mood is tragic, gay or dramatic. Here is another association with today – the stirring of the creative imagination in science and art, especially in architecture, tends towards a restoration of unity.
Once more we must stress that the richness of earthly power is expressed in structural geometrical forms. The Baroque repeats these forms, and arches them over with the two-poled ellipses, the discovery of this last great stylistic period. This century-old individualistic civilization is replaced by a subjective 'Weltanschauung' and ends in authoritarian absolutism.

Berlin 1964

Nowadays, artistic development is no longer left to individual intuition, as with the Baroque. Humanity has a new task. Yet we could never perceive it in its entirety without knowledge of what has preceded it. It is therefore extremely important that we should concern ourselves with the work of the Baroque which still influences our world today.

LIVING ARCHITECTURE:

Baroque

By PIERRE CHARPENTRAT

Preface by HANS SCHAROUN

A CONTEMPORARY APPRAISAL, WITH ALL NEW PHOTOGRAPHS, OF A GREAT ARCHITECTURAL EPOCH OF THE PAST