MANNERISM AND MANIERA
BRIEF NOTES ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MANNERISM

The critical problem of studies on Mannerism is the use of the term. It must be conceded that it is a historiographical invention. The term was first used in art historical scholarship and later transposed to architecture. Many studies on mannerism express the phenomenon as a search and experiment for new forms, and choose to de-emphasise the crisis of the arts. To see mannerism as consistently identifiable style would be problematic. Hence, a discussion on the historiography is vital and instructive prior to a study on Mannerism.

ART HISTORICAL ORIGINS

The modern use of the term maniera is attributed to Giorgio Vasari, who used it to describe the tendency to be expressive. His use of the term manieraconjures the notion of ‘having style’, which is a refined sophistication and a positivistic affectation of being gracefully accomplished. From the 17th to the 19th century, however, the term maniera had come to mean ‘mannered’. and was understood as an anathema - it was a derogatory description of an irrational and decadent sensibility. At the turn of the 19th century, expressive and violent tendencies in art renewed an interest in maniera, and launched a series of reappraisals of the phenomena. The first formulations were by Walter Friedlander, and Max Dvorák in the 1920’s. Friedlander, in 1925, analysed the maniera of the 16th century as the anti-classical style. He also identified ‘anti-mannerism’, which later scholarship would understand as late mannerism. Dvorák, in 1921, tended to see the spiritual in the maniera - he tended to emphasise the immaterial and metaphysical aspects, as opposed to the empirical. The concern for immaterialism identified by Dvorák, should be understood not so much as a spiritual turn, but rather a peculiar intellectualisation of the spiritual. This notion is given excellent treatment by Panofsky in 1925. Panofsky discussed Zuccaro, Lomazzo

1 Friedlander is attributed to formulating the word mannerism as we use today.
2 These are invariably morphological studies rooted in historicism, and miss the point that the urge to seek and experiment arises from an inadequacy with the legitimacy of the artistic order of the day.
3 Marco Treves, ‘Maniera, the History of the word.’ Marsyas, i, 1941, pp. 69-88
5 ‘Mannered’ as superficial, marginal and decadent affectation, in an age where the unity of action was prominent.
6 Walter Friedlander, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian painting , New York 1957
7 Max, Dvorák, El Greco and Mannerism’, Magazine of Art, xlvi, 1953
8 Arnold Hauser, Mannerism, London 1986, p.16
9 Erwin Panofsky, Idea: A concept in Art Theory, Columbia 1968
and Bellori, and he identified a dualism in mannerism. This is a character of any mannerism.

**LATER SCHOLARSHIP**

I will briefly outline contributions from various authors. Shearman uses the Vasarian notion, that of the polished style in his book *Mannerism*. Thus, he extracts the positive side of the *maniera*: the sense in which difficulty and complexity are overcome, by an express *bravura* associated with the ease of accomplishment. Shearman, refuses to connect any sense of crisis, spiritual or otherwise, to his formulation of the term *maniera*. Smith’s paper, *Mannerism and Maniera*, identified the stylistic origins of the form and discovers the eclectic practice of classical quotation out of classical context. This has a deeper significance and is a particularly piquant aspect of late mannerism. In *Art in Crisis*, Sedlmayr tends to proffer a rendering of the phenomena as ‘... stiff, cold and dead.’ Despite the emphasis on the chthonic, a connection which mannerism does have, Sedlmayr recognises the doubt, the anxiety and the inner conflict present in mannerism. These, he proffers, allows us ‘... to understand the phenomena of mannerism, if one tries to recapture its feeling for the quality of life as a whole.’ In *Mannerism*, Hauser remarks that mannerism ‘... is unable to state its problems except in paradoxical form’. In *Four stages of Renaissance style*, Sypher identifies in the form of tensions and dualities, the cognisant contour of the phenomena, common to a more unified view of the work of art. In *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, Freedberg, contributes a comprehensive study of regional differences and uncovers the differing tendencies of the early and late periods in the *Cinquecento*, re appraising many discrepancies amongst in the pre-war scholars.

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But his resurrection of the positivistic reading, perhaps in reaction to the derogatory connotations that the term *maniera* was associated with between the 17th and the 19th centuries, is as ‘positivistic’ as it was ‘negativistic’.

11 Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre*, p. 189
This argument, when understood with Sedlmayr's fascination concerning the subject of death; a reading which he makes from the inorganic and artificial character of mannerist work, reveals the chthonic element in mannerism, but also reveals the stress which he makes on the chthonic. For Sedlmayr, such inorganic character is lifeless and therefore lacking in vitality and must be dead. The stress on morbidity in Sedlmayr is somewhat unbalanced, as his argument appears to be not only an eventuality of a sequence of highly selective, analogous, conflations; but are made from a number of highly selective examples which relate closer to the other phenomena which he discusses. Sedlmayr's thinking follows the sequence: inorganic - inanimate - artificial - lifeless - therefore dead. In the chapter 'Precursors of Modern Art', Sedlmayr discusses Goya, demons, late medieval pictures of Hell etc. The feeling that the mannerist examples were chosen for the similarity with these other morbidities, is not a mere suspicion, but an obvious impression.

12 Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre*, p. 189
13 W. Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*, Massachusetts 1978,
14 S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, London 1990,
MANNERISM IN ARCHITECTURE

In 1925 Wittkower treated the vestibule to the Biblioteca Laurenziana as a problem of Mannerism, one of the first of the architectural studies of the phenomena. The essential characteristic is what he calls the ‘dual structure’ in architecture. This is similar to Panofsky’s. Wittkower’s reading tends towards the formal, and he identified an ambiguous character in the structural and the physiognomic expressions in the decoration of the vestibule. In 1946 Pevsner, adopting these contradictions in architectural order, seen as maniera, identified the mannerism in the facades of Giulio Romano’s work. Pevsner posed the question of what to make of Palladio - significant yet, most apparently Classical of the architects of the period. This challenge was taken up by Anthony Blunt in 1949, who argued a visual conflict in the geometry of Palladio’s façade of the San Francesco Della Vigna in Venice. The recognition of maniera in a conservative work is a significant turn in mannerist scholarship. He posits the view that the undecidability of spatial demarcation in the typical plans of Corbusier’s interiors are mannerist. Colin Rowe in 1950, makes the connection of mannerism in Corbusier, Mies and the Bauhaus; engaging the problem of reading Mannerism in an architecture devoid of overt ornamentation. In summary, Rowe’s essay is built on the observations he made on the formal and geometrical elements of the building. For Rowe, mannerism offers the observer in his words ‘... no unambiguous satisfaction for the eye.’ Lotz’s paper in 1963, a late rejoinder to Pevsner and Wittkower, attempts to place Palladio in the scheme of Mannerism. Palladio’s mannerism, according to Lotz, is in the indecision of the plan, despite the seemingly resolute whole. Arnold Hauser and of Hans Sedlmayr argue that this tendency of maniera is present in the Modern, and furthermore is the origin of modern sensibilities in art and literature.

COMMON GROUND

The common ground amongst these studies is the attempt to describe the various contingent and incidental expressions as critical challenges toward orthodox belief and dogmatic methodology in the creative arts. Maniera is used here in the sense in which a perceived attitude, conscious or unconscious, makes a typically ambiguous and excessive expression and thus differentiates from the normative order.

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17 Rowe, ‘Mannerism and Modern Architecture’, p. 29 - 58
18 Rowe, ‘Mannerism and Modern Architecture’, p. 50
There is due to a doubt in the wholeness and integrity of culture. The notion of Mannerism as we receive it arrives through this circuit of historiography. Mannerism, as a 20th century term, refers to the understanding of the phenomena *maniera*.

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