Mannerist Architecture and the Baroque

In this lecture I want to discuss briefly the nature of Mannerist architecture and then begin to consider baroque art.

We have already paid some attention to Mannerist painting and sculpture; and have seen how in the work of painters like Rosso Fiorentino, Bronzino and Parmigianino; and sculptors like Giovanni Bologna and Cellini, that after 1527, classical forms came to be used in a spirit alien to them; each artist developing a highly personal style containing capricious, irrational and anti-classical effects. Although the term Mannerism was first applied to painting before it came to be used to describe the period style between 1527 and 1600; it is possible to find similar mannerist qualities in the architecture of the time. And again it is Michelangelo whose work provides, as it were, a fountainhead of the new style.

Rosso’s *Decent from the Cross*, which we have taken as one of the first signs of Mannerist strain and tension in the High Renaissance world, was painted in 1521. Three years later Michelangelo designed his Laurentian Library,* that is in 1524. It was designed to house the library of the Medicis; and we may take it as the first important building exhibiting Mannerist features.* We can best consider these features by comparing the interior of the library with the interior of an early Renaissance building such as Brunelleschi’s S. Lorenzo.

Consider his use of columns. In Brunelleschi they are free standing. When he uses pilasters they project out from a wall as you expect a buttress to. Michelangelo’s columns, however, although they do support piers which in turn support the roof, are set in flush with the wall surface, or in other words, the wall surface is broken back behind them. The columns and entablature which it supports no longer projects from the wall surface. The consoles or brackets below the columns support nothing. The square niches with nothing in them look like windows, but windows without openings; the pilasters of the niches taper not from bottom to top, but fro top to bottom.

Another building which reveals even more sharply the hall-marks of the Mannerist style is the Palazzo de Té designed by Gibilio Romano, Raphael’s pupil. It was begun in 1526 and completed in 1534. The key stone drops below the line of the arc; the triglyphs and architrave appear to have slipped. There are many other similar anti-classical devices in this strange building.

Insider the building Guilio Romano’s Mannerist paintings* are equally remarkable. He was here emulating and outdoing Mantegna’s *sotto in su* painting in the Ducal Palace also at Mantua. Vasari inspected the building, in the company of the artist, and has left us with a memorable description which may well be taken as contemporary
evidence as to the kind of psychological effect such a painting was intended, at the
time it was produced, to have on the beholder.

‘In this work in order to render it the more fearsome and terrible, Guilio represented
the giants, huge and fantastic in aspect, falling to earth, smitten in various ways by the
lightning and thunderbolts; some in the foreground and others in the background,
some dead, others wounded, and others again covered by maintains and the ruins of
buildings. Wherefore let no one ever think to see any work of the brush more horrible
than this one; and whoever enters that room and sees the windows, doors and other
such like things all awry and, as it were, on the point of collapse, and the mountains
and buildings hurtling down, cannot but fear that everything will fall upon hum, and,
above, as he sees the Gods in Heaven rushing, some here, some there, and all in flight.
And what is most marvelous in the work is to see that the whole of the painting has
neither beginning nor end, bit is so well joined and connected together, without any
divisions or ornamental partitions, that the things which are near the buildings appear
very large and those in the distance where the landscapes are, go on receding into
infinity; whence that room, which is no more than thirty feet in length, has the
appearance of open country’.

Here the we have a painting which evokes the psychological effects which the
mannerists sought, and exploits devices of illusionism and the sense of the infinite
which was to be a quality of the baroque.

The third important mannerist architect of whom I must take note, and the greatest
architect of the latter sixteenth century, is Andrea Palladio. Palladio was in the
tradition of Alberti, that is to say, he was a humanist and a theoretician; and through
his publications his ideas became immensely influential; Indeed his four books on
architecture, Quattro libri dello architettura was probably the most influential
architectural text ever published, not excepting even Vitruvius. His Church of San
Giorgio Maggiore,* Venice was designed late in life in 1565. Here he superimposed a
tall narrow temple front upon a wide but low one. In order to keep the classic
proportions however he has had to place the columns on a high podium, and the
pilasters of the recessed pediment upon a much lower one. In the Redentore,* Venice,
begun ten years later in 1576, his use of the pediment front is even more complex.
First one for the portico of the entrance front, then a tall temple front supported by
half columns and pilasters set in front of a high rectangular attic, and behind both, first
a low recessed pediment; and another above it. It is as if three or four Roman temples
were placed end on end and nearly squashed flat by one of Leonardo’s battering-rams.

It would not be correct, however, to describe Palladio simply as a mannerist architect.
In fact he strove very deliberately and consciously to base his architecture upon
classical precedent, upon classical rules. He is therefore generally described as a
classicist, one of the first to be so called. In the first place the term is usually applied
only to post-renaissance artists, that is, to artists who flourished after 1525. Secondly, it refers to post-renaissance artists who regarded the art of antiquity, together with those High Renaissance masters who rediscovered antiquity, as providing an infallible guide and standard in art. Classicism has been a recurring feature of Western art since the 16th century. When it does appear it usually proceeds from architects, artists and writers of a rather scholarly intellectual or meditative turn of mind who are unhappy about the excesses, as they see them, of the contemporary style, and seek to purify it by returning to antiquity for guidance.

The Villa Rotunda, near Vicenza, is an excellent example of Palladio’s classicism.

Palladio believed as Alberti did that a centralized plan was the ideal one and held the sanction of antiquity. He believed too, inaccurately in fact, that Roman villas possessed porticos like Roman temples, so he put one on each side of his villa Rotunda; and produced a building which came to exercise great influence upon architecture in the 18th century which classicism again became a powerful current in art.

Turn to baroque art.

The mannerist style continued until the end of the 16th century; but long before that elements of the new style, the baroque, which was to dominate 17th century art in Europe had been forming. It is most unwise to search for any single explanation for the origins of the baroque. An historical event is always the product of many causes. Yet there can be little doubt that one of the facts which led to the triumph of the baroque style was the Counter Reformation.

The widespread success of the Reformation in the North compelled the Catholic church to reform herself from within. These Church reforms went on continuously from the Lateran Council of 1512 until the last session of the Council of Trent in 1563. This Council, as a reply to the widespread destruction of religious images by protesters, stressed the importance of the cult of images. The didactic purpose of religious art was also stressed. The Council of Trent decreed, among many other things that ‘by means of the stories of the mysteries of our Redemption portrayed by paintings or other representations, the people be instructed and confirmed in the habit of remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith.’ The art which reformed Catholicism required (1) that was clear, simple and intelligible in its meaning—and so in marked difference from the obscurities and ambiguities of mannerism. (2) the interpretation should be realistic. The stories of the saints and their martyrdom are, of course, filled with brutality, sadism and sheer horror (St Bartholomew; St Agatha of Catania, St Lucie of Sicily. Van Gogh). (3) Draw men to piety by a direct appeal to their feelings. For the new reformed faith, truth in all its horror was considered essential. The Jesuit, Possevino, writing in 1595, said that
Christ should be shown afflicted, bleeding, spat upon, with skin torn, wounded, deformed, pale and unsightly’.

By 1580 Rome was beginning to recover from the time of troubles that had set in with the sack of Rome in 1527. The pontificate of Sixtus V from 1585 to 1590 was especially important in marking the change. He initiate a great urban development, re-planning Rome with long straight avenues, squares, fountains and obelisks in order to turn Rome into the most modern and beautiful city of Europe. It was Sixtus V, in the five short years of his Pontificate, who transformed Rome into the great baroque city we know today; it was one of the great achievements in town planning of all time.

With this ambition to make Rome the most modern and most wealthy town in Christendom, a new reforming and missionary zeal is closely associated. The situation has something in common with the thirteenth century: at that time the Albigensian heresies and the new urban classes offered a challenge to which the new religious orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans were the reply. Now in the sixteenth century the far deeper challenge of the Protestant North produced a new crop of Catholic religious orders: the Theatine (est 1524), aimed at reforming the Church from its abuses and scandals. They were not allowed to own property or to beg. They distinguished themselves from the secular clergy by wearing white socks. The Barnabites (established 1535) for education and mission work; the Oratorians of St Phillip Neri, formally recognized in 1575, began as an informal meeting of laymen who preached and discoursed spontaneously following their inner voices. They placed much emphasis upon sacred music; on of Phillip Neri’s earliest penitent was Palestrina, who was charged with the music of the Oratory and came to exercise an enormous influence upon the development of sacred polyphonic music.

In visual arts, however, the most important of the new orders were the Jesuits founded by St Ignatius Loyola and approved by the Pope in 1540. There aims were two fold (1) to support the Papacy and the Catholic Church against the heresy, that is against the Protestant faiths; and (2) to undertake missionary work among the heathen. During the 17th and 8th century their missions were active and influential in North America, Japan, China and India. It is an oversimplification to claim that the Jesuits created baroque art; but they certainly played a great part in developing and spreading it throughout the world. What they sought to do was to embrace both the culture which had emanated from humanist thought and the new science which had sprung from men like Copernicus and Galileo, within the context of Christianity. Baroque art, too, had similar aims, so that it has been at time described as Christian humanism. One that Baroque art does not reject perspective, chiaroscuro or naturalism. It seeks to embrace them all within a new kind of emotional unity.

We may trace the architectural beginnings of the baroque in the mother Church of the Jesuit order, Il Gesu,* Rome. The church was planned in 1568 by Vignola one of
Michelangelo’s assistants at St Peter’s Note that the plan is extremely compact, the crossing with its high dome on a drum dominated, and the high altar in its great apse. Ausles have gone to be replaced by apses containing chapel altars. The façade of Il Gesu designed by Giacomo dela Porta, 1575-84, provides us with an idea of the visual ingredients of Baroque elevations. Not of these features are themselves new, it is their incorporation within a new kind of visual unity which is important. Note first the enriching ornament around the door: parts of pilasters and columns appear to support both a triangular and a segmented pediment. The central door frame juts slightly forward. This central sculpture-esque enrichment s carried through to the top. The vertical accent is emphasized by breaking the entablature forward over columns and pilasters. Note, too, the special rhythm established by the coupling of pilasters, the recessing of one pilaster behind another. If we compare the façade of Il Gesu with Bramante’s Tempietto, or better still, if we go back to the original source of both Baroque and Renaissance architecture to Roman architecture, and look for a moment, at the Roman Temple known as the Mason Carree at Nimes.* We will see the basic difference between the Baroque and the Roman system of forms. The architectural historian Emil Kaufmann has admirably summed this up by saying that the Greco-Roman system is based on addition, each element of the structure is considered as a separate element which contributes to the totality. But Baroque characterised not by addition but by concatenation, which for Kaufmann means a linking together of unequal parts. Note the architectural embellishment around the door, it is answered by an embellishment similar to unequal above. Note that the coupled units are never quite the same. Nevertheless despite this concatenation, this linking of unequal parts, symmetry, axial symmetry is preserved.

In painting the break with mannerism may be seen in the work of Caravaggio, an artist of violent and turbulent temper who spent his life getting out of one scrape and then into another. Wittkower calls him the first Bohemian, and he died young at the age of 37. He was, however, a thoroughly revolutionary artist, as may be seen in his early work The Calling of St Matthew in the Contrelli Chapel of S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. Matthew, the tax gatherer is seated with some of his cronies in a common tavern. Christ appears in bare feet, like a common beatnik, and says, ‘Come on Matthew, you old sot, or words to that effect.

Caravaggio introduces a new kind of realism into the world of mannerist art. He developed Leonardo’s chiaroscuro and investigated the dramatic possibilities of light in the treatment of realistic subjects; especially the use of candlelight. He is recorded to have painted directly on to canvas fro the model instead of working from preliminary sketches and preparatory drawings. His canvasses are characterised by the dark yet luminous shadows, and the group of painters, mainly Neapolitan and Spanish, influenced by him have been called the tenebrisii (from tenebroso, murky or cloudy). (Madonna of the did? Rosarie(?), Virgin and Serpent, Cruel(?) haper(?), Supper of
Emmaus(?), drowned Harlot from the Tiber, Virgin and Child with St Anne, Death of the Virgin.

Caravaggio’s work maybe taken as representative of the realistic strain in Baroque art. In Italy it met with the greatest resistance—Caravaggio, after all, was a wild, uncouth fellow—but his influence upon European baroque painting can scarcely be exaggerated. He exercised a great influence upon the group of Dutch painters known as the Utrecht School, such as Honthorst (Georges de la Tour, Joseph the Carpenter) and Terbruggen, and through them Caravaggio came to influence the art of Frans Hals, Rembrant and Vermeer. In France he influenced the work of Georges La Tour—famous for his candlelight effects* and the brothers Le Nain—who painted French peasants in a dignified but realistic manner. In Spanish art Ribera certainly and Zurbaran possibly were influenced by Caravaggio and through these painters Caravaggio came to influence the early work of Velasquez and Murrilo. Few painters in history have been more influential than Caravaggio.

Caravaggio’s uncompromising realism did not find immediate favour in Italy either with the common people, who preferred their religious icons to be more idealized, or with the intellectuals and cognoscenti. It was not the early baroque realism of Caravaggio but rather what we must call the early baroque realism of Caravaggio but rather what we must call the early baroque classicism of a group of painters from Bologna called the Caracci: Ludovico, Agostino, and Annibale Caracci that became most popular in the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Annibale Carracci was the most important painter of the group. The style he developed is an anti-mannerist style which avoided the affectations of mannerism, went back to the High Renaissance for its models. Example: Virgin with St John and St Catherine, 1593, ... (?) with the Dead Christ. Bologna goes back to the classical contraposto of Leonardo and Raphael’s Madonnas. But his colour owes much to Correggio and the Venetians. The style of the Carracci is therefore often known as an eclectic style because it sought, and sought quite consciously, to combine the different virtues of the High Renaissance masters. And because he sought also to purify the art of his time from its maniera, its mannerist exaggeration and go back to a ore classical style, he must, like Palladio, be called a classicist. Unlike Caravaggio, who painted easel pictures in oil, the Caracci followed the great High Renaissance tradition of fresco painting.

Annibale’s best known paintings are the frescoes in the Palazzo Farnese Rome.* the Subjects are the loves of the classical gods. Annibale makes much use of the nude as the basis of all his compositions, and makes much use of illusion by establishing several different levels of reality on the one surface that is, painted architecture, nude youths, and stories of the gods within painted frames. It is illusion within illusion. The Venetian aspect of Annibale’s style is best seen in his Landscape with Flight into
Egypt, with its quiet idyllic mood, its small figures, its careful organization of architecture and figures in relation to the whole picture space. Here we have the beginnings of baroque landscape classicism, to become so well known in the later work of Poussin* and Claude.*

Now classicism always tends to be associated with an intellectual cast of mind; and it is not surprising to find that the Caracci were closely associated with a circle who had begun to formulate the doctrine of classical art anew. The most important member of this circle was Giovanni Agucchi who wrote a treatise on painting about 1610. The treatise is important because it may well have been a kind of answer to the last of the Mannerist treatises on painting. This was written by Federico Zuccaro who published his Ideas o the Sculptors, Painters and Architects in 1607. Zuccaro analysed the concept of artistic design by saying that it consisted of two aspects: *interno disegno* or internal design, which corresponded to the inner idea in the mind of the artist, and *esterno disegno* or the form in which the idea passes into matter. This was essentially the emphasis upon ‘inner vision’ which the Mannerists had inherited from the neo-Platonists of the High Renaissance.

In sharp contrast to Zuccaro, the connoisseur Agucchi in his Trattato dell Pittura published a year or so later formulated the classical doctrine not in a Platonic manner, but in an Aristotelian, empirical manner. Nature was imperfect he said, but the artist did not improve her by recourse to inner vision but by selecting only her more beautiful parts and joining them together to make a beautiful unity. In adopting this position Agucchi, the supporter of Annibale Caracci was adopting a position similar to that of the first early Renaissance theorist Albert who also claimed that perfect beauty as to be achieved by observation and selection of different types of beauty. Raphael complained that the trouble about adopting Alberti’s method was that there just weren’t enough beautiful women about to make it a practical procedure, so that he had to adopt the Platonic procedure and draw the beautiful women in his head. Which reminds one of the lady he complained to Degas: why must you always paint women so ugly? Because, Madame, replied Degas, women usually are so ugly.

Now I have stressed this debate about the nature of ideal beauty for one reason, it stands at the very beginning of academic art, and is to occupy artists and writers for three centuries. For Zuccaro was not only a later mannerist painter of little consequence who wrote a treatise, he was also the founder of the first art academy in the true sense in Europe, the Academy of St Luke, established in Rome in 1593, and in 1598 the Bologna Academy closely associated with the Carracci was established.

The greatest of the baroque sculptors, the greatest sculptor since Michelangelo and one of the great creators of the baroque style was Bernini (1598-1680)
Like the High Renaissance masters, Bernini admired classical antiquity. As a student the greatest influences upon his work were Michelangelo, antiquity and Annibale Carracci. His work reveals the effect of the study of late classical and Hellenistic Roman statuary. We might compare Bernini’s David for example with the Borghese Warrior. We often indeed call Hellenistic sculpture like the Laocoon and the Pergamon Altar piece Hellenistic Baroque and we should remember that Hellenistic art played its part in the creation of the Baroque style. If we now compare Bernini’s David with Michelangelo’s David we may note another stylistic feature of the Baroque. Michelangelo’s David is self-contained, Bernini’s David implies the presence of Goliath. Someone has remarked that if you stand too close to the Bernini David the natural inclination is to duck to avoid getting hit. Be as it may, this is what Wölfflin is getting at when he describes Baroque composition as open composition: it implies a world outside itself, the David implies the Goliath. Furthermore Bernini’s David, unlike Michelangelo’s is fully and completely released from the block which once enclosed it; he has transformed both antique sculpture and High Renaissance sculpture into an energetic and realistic style.

Bernini’s most famous group, the Apollo and Daphne group will serve to illustrate both his own and the new baroque style. He has chosen the very moment of metamorphosis when the god just manages to touch the girl. Her horror and his surprised consternation are both registered. There is no classical calm here. The open work character of the group may have been suggested by the Laocoon, which Bernini would have known. But in the Bernini the interest is much more centered upon movement. Note too the diagonal emphasis of the group, and Bernini’s interest in the highly realistic rendering of texture. And yet the interesting thing is that this art, so different in its forms and temper to classical art, was deeply grounded in it.

In the Apollo and Daphne, Bernini makes a direct assault upon our feelings. How easily this could be put to a religious purpose is to be seen in his Ecstasy of S. Thereas,* in the Cornaro Chapel sta Maria Della Vittoria, Rome. Visionary ecstasy is here translated into sensuous and physical terms. This is the essence of the baroque. The many religious commentators in the Council of Trent indeed suggested that the artist should himself feel the horrors of martyrdom and the ecstasies of the mystics if he were to paint them and sculpt them successfully. Finally we might note that Bernini’s magnificently unified conceptions whatever they borrow from antiquity seem clearly to be the realization of a single, unified and essentially personal realization of the subject; he is we might say, guided by his ‘inner vision’ rather than by observation and selection. In this regard he continues the platonic trend of though in Michelangelo and the Mannerists.
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