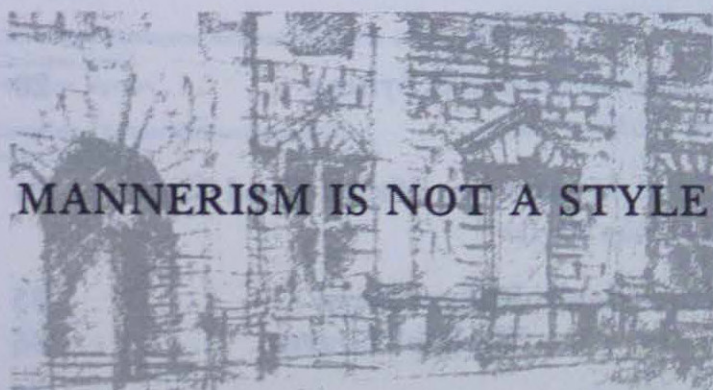


You see gentlemen, reason is an excellent thing, there's no disputing that, but reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life and all the impulses. And although our life, in this manifestation of it, is often worthless, yet it is life and not simply extracting square roots. Here I, for instance, quite naturally want to live, in order to satisfy all my capacities for life, and not simply my capacity for reasoning, that is, not simply one twentieth of my capacity for life. What does reason know? Reason only knows what it has succeeded in learning (some things, perhaps, it will never learn; this is a poor comfort, but why not say so frankly?) and human nature acts as a whole, with everything that is in it, consciously or unconsciously, and, even if it goes wrong, it lives.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Notes from Underground

One can not deny the validity of Rationalism as a thought process, yet it has, in our time, been, for the most part, superficially reduced by many to a preconceived and therefore closed body of rules, notions and governing principles whose own self induced forced perspectives, on moral and economic pretexts, to a large extent, attempts to greatly limit supposedly mannered forms of personal expression; as they don't fit into the neat prepackaging of conventional Rational theory.

Rationalists claim that architecture is the province of civilization and therefore must not be the result of empty fashion or forced originality. Intellectually, this stance is legitimate, even necessary. Yet reality prevails, and experience has eloquently shown that Rational theory, too strictly adhered to or perverted has yielded and therefore will yield bland, sometimes inhumane cities. When confronted by too many rules, our capacity to think becomes numbed, and like drones, we meekly carry out misunderstood dogma. We no longer reason, we rationalize. Our architecture and society superficially remains morally upstanding yet emotionally void.



MANNERISM IS NOT A STYLE

It is the considered distortion of style, of accepted norms, which, by its very existence lends added meaning to that which it distorts. It is an attitude, an aesthetic sensibility, inherent to varying degrees in all artist's particular and even peculiar design approaches; whether they admit to it or not. Humanistic in temperament, it has, since the early sixteenth century experiments of Raphael, Guilio Romano, Palladio, Michelangelo et al, been perceived by many, as the antithesis of reasoned or rational thought — yet it is not irrational.

Mannerism has few rules, is open minded and seeks to guiltlessly articulate what Dostoyevsky termed "will", "a manifestation of the whole human life and all the impulses", accepting the inevitable negative ethical implications which stalks supposedly exaggerated, and therefore decadent formalism.

This is not a plea for architectural hyperbole or the trivial pursuit of ill-considered historical caricatures in the person of the elusive dropped keystone and his by now numerous, cliché ridden confrères. When Guilio Romano dropped his keystones, so to speak, he was searching for renewed tectonic meaning; as the language of the Renaissance had become too familiar and in his mind, lacking in meaning. He was simply attempting to extend the classical tradition, boldly marking it with individuality. He did not abandon the Vitruvian trinity, qualifying that, which is good architecture (specifically, that all good architecture must be firm, commodious and delightful). He merely added significance to the meaning and condition of the work delight.

His mannerisms were however, the result of a profoundly personal struggle. He broke the rules of the classical Renaissance only when he fully understood its lessons. He did not thoughtlessly pillage, and then assume the very personal mannerisms of Michael Graves or Robert Stern directly from the pages of Charles Jencks' most recent editorial effort in A.D. Herein probably lies much of the negativism associated with Mannerism or even with so called Post Modernism, a current strain of Mannerism, today. It is perceived as superficial style, thin surface makeup, too easily removed and often transferable from one architect to another, from one context to another, and on occasion, not unjustly so.

Of course, those who reduce Mannerism or Rationalism for that matter, to the level of fashion, will always produce half hearted, ultimately banal works. However, the short sighted, blanket condemnation of mannered approaches only hinders rational discussion.

We are therefore obliged to develop the tolerance and perception to evaluate Mannerism on its own terms. We must be able to judge form, content, the form within the content and the content within the form, without prejudice or bias. We must advocate a more liberal, inclusive definition of the to now stale, stifled theories of Rationalism and Functionalism. Of course architecture must have rules, must be rationalized, must work on at least minimum functional levels. Yet, can we not include amongst these rules and rationalizations, the fundamental humanistic notion, that architecture must transcend excessive purification, and must not subordinate Mannerism to a quasi moralist/Functionalist wastebin? For to cite the inspired words of Edwin Lutyens, "architecture with its beauty and passion begins where functionalism ends".

Would it not be a truly Rational/Functional architecture which would accept what appears to be a most obvious premise, that architecture must not function exclusively, on the morally obsolete, economically expedient level of gratuitous rationality; that form is equivalent to meaning and is supremely functional for exactly that reason?

Hal Ingberg