HEINRICH WÖLFFLIN

RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE

Translated by Kathrin Simon

With an Introduction by
Peter Murray

COLLINS

CONTENTS

Part I

THE NATURE OF THE CHANGE IN STYLE

I. THE PAINTERLY STYLE

It is generally agreed among historians of art that the essential characteristic of baroque architecture is its painterly quality. Instead of following its own nature, architecture strove after effects which really belong to a different art-form: it became 'painterly'.

The term *painterly* is both one of the most important and one of the most ambiguous and indefinite with which art history works. There is not only painterly architecture, but painterly sculpture. The history of painting has a painterly phase, and yet we speak of painterly light effects, painterly disorder, painterly profusion, and so on. Clearly it is impossible to use the word to definite purpose without first clarifying its meaning. What does 'painterly' mean? It would be simple enough to say that painterly is that which lends itself to being painted, that which without addition would serve as a motif for the painter. A strictly classical temple, if it is not in ruins, is not a picturesque object. However impressive it may be as a piece of architecture, it would look monotonous in a picture. An artist painting it on a canvas today would have great difficulty in making it look interesting; in fact he could only succeed with the aid of light and atmospheric effects and a landscape setting, and in the process the architectural element would retreat completely into the background. But a rich baroque building is more animated, and would therefore be an easier subject for a painterly effect. The freedom of line and the interplay of light and shade are satisfying to the painterly taste in direct proportion to the degree to which they transgress the rules of architecture.

If the beauty of a building is judged by the enticing effects of moving masses, the restless, jumping forms or violently swaying ones which seem constantly on the point of change, and not by balance and solidity of structure, then the strictly architectonic conception of architecture is depreciated. In short, the severe style of architecture makes its effect by what it *is*, that is, by its corporeal substance, while painterly architecture acts through what it *appears* to be, that is, an illusion of movement. Neither of these extremes, of course, exists in a pure state.

Painterliness is based on an illusion of movement. Why movement is painterly, and why it is communicated through painting rather than another art form can only be answered by examining the special character of the art of painting. Because it has no physical reality painting has to depend on effects of illusion. Its means of creating an illusion of movement are also greater than those of any other art form. This has not always been so; the painterly period, as we saw, was only one phase in the history of painting, and the painterly style was only slowly evolved by discarding a predominantly linear style. In Italy this process reached completion in the High Renaissance, notably in the work of Raphael: in the course of the Vatican Stanze, his style visibly developed from the old to the new, the decisive turning point coming in the Stanza d' Eliodoro.

The new expressive means that were to have such a decisive influence on architecture were various, and we may now try to list the main features of the painterly style. The most direct expression of an artist's intention is the sketch. It represents what appears most vital to him, and reveals him actually in the process of thinking. It may therefore be useful to start by comparing two sketches so that we may establish the clearest distinction between the two manners. To begin with, the medium changes with the style. Where the linear style employs the pen or the silver-point, the

30

painterly uses charcoal, red chalk or the broad water-colour brush. The earlier style is entirely linear: every object has a sharp unbroken outline and the main expressive element is the contour. The later style works with broad, vague masses, the contours barely indicated; the lines are tentative and repetitive strokes, or do not exist at all. In this style, not only individual figures but the entire composition are made up of areas of light and dark; a single tone serves to hold together whole groups of objects and contrast them with other groups. While the old style was conceived in terms of *line* and its purpose was to express a beautiful and flowing linear harmony, the painterly style thinks only in masses, and its elements are light and shade.

Light and shade contain by nature a very strong element of movement. Unlike the contour, which gives the eye a definite and easily comprehensible direction to follow, a mass of light tends to a movement of dispersal, leading the eye to and fro; it has no bounds, no definite break in continuity, and on all sides it increases and decreases. This, basically, is how the painterly style evokes an illusion of constant change. The contour is quite annihilated, and the continuous, static lines of the old style are replaced by an indistinct and gradually fading boundary area. Where figures had been sharply silhouetted against a light ground, it is now the ground that is usually dark; the edges of the figures merge into it, and only a few illuminated areas stand out.

Corresponding to this distinction between linear and massive is another, that between 'flat' and 'spatial' (substantial). The painterly style, with its chiaroscuro, gives an illusion of physical relief, and the different objects seem to project or recede in space.[1] The expression 'backward and forward' in itself suggests the element of movement inherent in all three-dimensional substances as compared to flat planes. In the painterly style, therefore, all flat areas become rounded and plastic with a view to effects of light and shade.

31

If the contrast between light and dark is extreme an object may appear to jump right out of the picture plane.

A development of this sort is easily distinguishable in the Vatican Stanze. Raphael appears to have made quite conscious use of this method, which he combined with a new and agitated technique. In the Expulsion of Heliodorus the dramatic force is considerably enhanced by isolated flashing points of light set off against a dark ground.[2] At the same time the picture space becomes deeper. The frame is sometimes seen as a gateway and in the later pictures suggests a real vista seen through an opening. Behind it, instead of a single plane or row of figures, is a deep recession that draws the eye into infinity.

The aim of the painterly style is to create an illusion of movement; its first element is composition in terms of areas of light and shade, its second is what I should call the *dissolution of the regular*, a free style or one of painterly disorder. What is regular is dead, without movement, unpainterly.

Unpainterly are the straight line and the flat surface. When these cannot be avoided, as in the representation of an architectural motif, they are either interrupted by some kind of accidental feature, or the building is depicted in a state of crumbling ruin; an 'accidental' drapery fold or something of the sort must be introduced to enliven it.

Unpainterly are the uniform series and the regular interval; a rhythmic succession is better, and better still is an apparently quite accidental grouping, depending entirely on the precise distribution of the masses of light.

To gain an even greater sense of movement, all or most of the composition is placed obliquely to the beholder. This of course had long been done with individual figures, but previously groups and architecture had always been disposed according to strict rule. A gradual change can be observed in the Stanze, from the books in the *Disputà*, timidly laid on a slant, to the little table in the School of Athens or the

1. Florence: Biblioteca Laurenziana, vestibule

2. Florence: Biblioteca Laurenziana, interior

3. Rome: S. Caterina de' Funari

4. Rome: S. Maria ai Monti

7. Rome:
St. Peter's
façade

8. Rome:
St. Peter's
rear

9. Florence:
S. Spirito
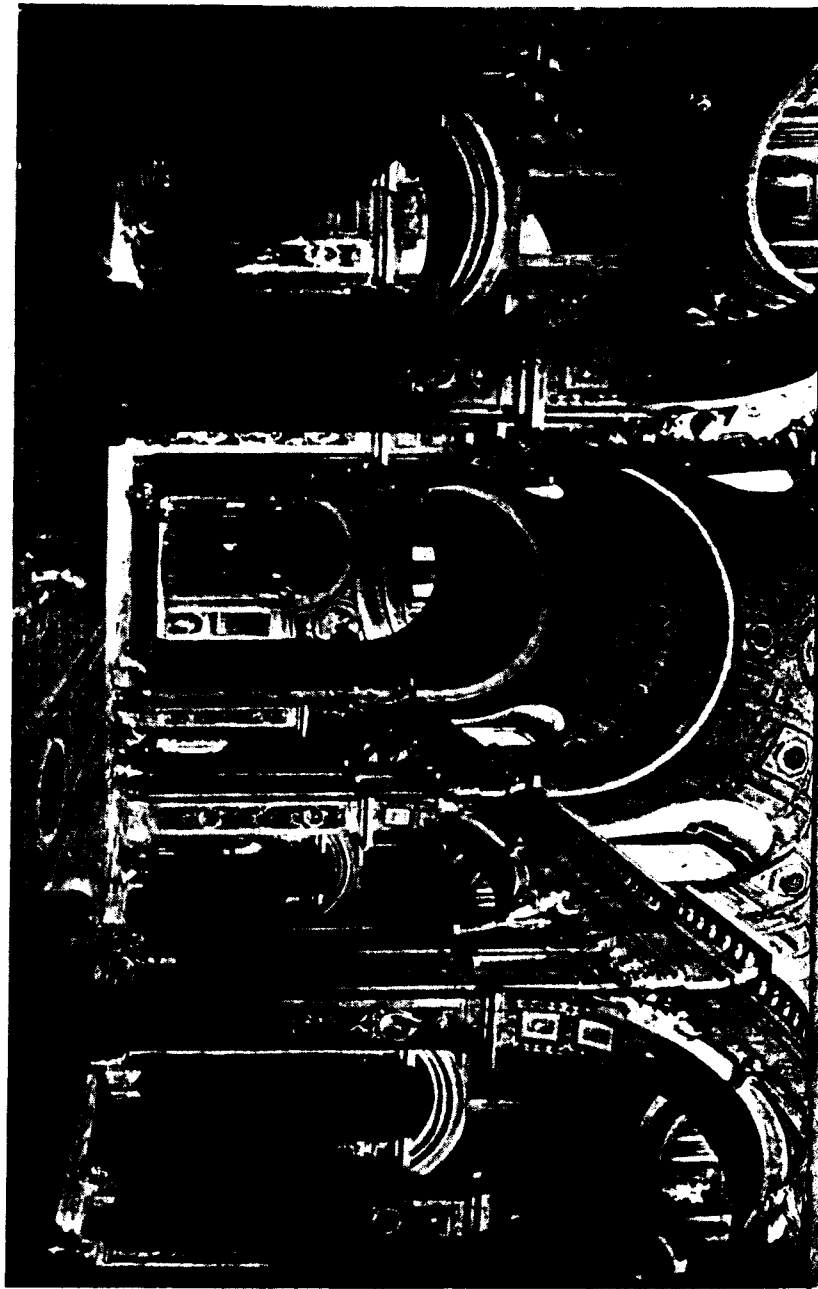interior

10. Rome:
Il Gesù
interior

rider in *Heliodorus*.[3] Eventually the whole composition, whether of figures or of architecture, is given an oblique axis; when a painting is seen from below, that is, when its vanishing point is high, there is the added effect of a sloping recession.

Unpainterly, finally, is the symmetrical composition. In the painterly style, there is only an equilibrium of the masses, with no neat correspondence of the individual forms to each other; sometimes the two sides of the picture are quite dissimilar, and the centre of the picture is undefined. The centre of gravity is transferred to one side, giving the composition a peculiar tension. A free painterly composition has no structural framework, no rule in accordance with which the figures are arranged; it is dictated only by an interplay of light and shade which defies all rule.[4]

The third element in the painterly style may be called *elusiveness*, the lack of definition. It is characteristic of 'painterly disorder' that individual objects should be not fully and clearly represented, but partially hidden. The overlapping of one object by another is one of the most important devices for the achievement of painterliness, for it is recognised that the eye quickly tires of anything in a painting that can be fully grasped at first glance. But if some parts of the composition remain hidden and one object overlaps another, the beholder is stimulated to imagine what he cannot see. The objects that are partly hidden seem as if they might at any moment emerge; the picture becomes alive, and the hidden parts then actually do seem to reveal themselves. Even the severe style could not always avoid overlapping objects, but all the essential features stood out clearly and any restlessness was softened. In the painterly style the composition is purposely arranged in such a way that the effect is an impression of transitoriness. A similar device is the partial concealment of the figures by the frame, so that all we see of them is half-figures looking into the picture.

It is, in fact, on the indefinable that the painterly style ultimately depends. If the dissolution of the regular is the opposite of the structural, then it is also the antithesis of the sculptural. Sculptural symmetry avoids the indefinite and un-finite, the qualities most essential to the painterly style.

For this does not work through individual forms, figures and motifs, but large masses, not through clear definition, but indefiniteness, limitlessness and infinity. A painting in the old style contained a limited number of figures, easily intelligible as individual forms and as a composition. In the baroque the number of figures became ever greater – one may note the steady increase in the Stanze – and melted into the dark background; the spectator, not minded to follow up individual elements, is content with a general effect. Since he cannot possibly absorb every single thing in the picture he is left with the impression that it has unlimited potentialities, and his imagination is kept constantly in action, a reaction, of course, intended by the painter. A painterly fold of drapery, landscape or interior owes its charm largely to this apparent inexhaustibility and lack of definition, with its perpetual stimulus to the imagination. How unlimited and inscrutable is the spatial structure of the Heliodorus compared with the School of Athens!

Ultimately the painterly style had to lead to a total annihilation of three-dimensional form. Its real aim was to represent all the vitality and variety of light, and for this purpose the simplest subject was as suitable as the richest and most painterly profusion.

It is a common error to confuse 'painterly' and 'colourful'. Our analysis of the painterly style shows that variety of colour was quite unnecessary to it. Indeed Rembrandt, the greatest master of the painterly, preferred the medium of the etching, a technique that works only with variations of light and dark. If colour, therefore, was a useful additional element to increase atmospheric quality, it was not an

essential component of the painterly style. The important thing is that in the baroque style it was not used to make a chromatic harmony in which each colour brings out the purity and the local qualities of its neighbours; local effects, on the contrary, were broken up with infinite modulations and transitions and subordinated to a unifying tonal scheme, so that nothing could disrupt the main effect based on an interplay of light and shade. Again the works of Raphael marked the transition from one attitude to the other. The enclosed, even monochromatic areas of colour in his earlier style gave way to colours changing and transforming themselves in all directions, full of life and movement.

The history of ancient sculpture offers another instance of the difference between 'painterly' and 'colourful'. The practice of colouring statues ceased at the precise moment when the painterly style began, that is, when the effect of light and shade came to be confidently relied on for the main effect.[5]

It seems that we have now rehearsed the main constituent elements of the painterly style. The possibilities of painterliness in sculpture are, of course, more limited; but even here it was possible to achieve by means of light and shade a composition which would cater to a taste for animated masses. Line was abolished; this meant in terms of sculpture that corners were rounded off, so that the boundaries between light and dark, which had formerly been clearly defined, now formed a quivering transition. The contour ceased to be a continuous line; the eye was no longer to glide down the sides of a figure, as it could on one composed of flat planes. It was led further and further round to the back of the form; an angel's arm by Bernini is like a vine-column. Just as no need was felt to make the lines of contours continuous, so there was no urge to treat the surface in a simpler way; on the contrary, the clearly-defined surfaces of the old style were purposely broken up with 'accidental' effects to give them greater vitality.

34

35

The same happened in relief sculpture. Whereas one could imagine the Parthenon frieze with a gold ground, which might form an effective foil to the beautiful contours of the figures, this would not be possible with a more painterly relief like the Pergamene Gigantomachia, which relies entirely on the effects of moving masses, and for which a gold ground would only create a wild and completely inappropriate confusion of colour.

But our subject is architecture, and there is no further need to analyse how far the painterly method was, or could be, applied to sculpture. Let us return therefore to our original thesis, which is that in the baroque period architecture became painterly, and that this quality is an essential characteristic of the baroque style.

It is not certain that the baroque should be approached in terms of the attitudes analysed here, and I believe that painterliness cannot properly be said to form the basis of the baroque style. For one thing, to approach it in this way might imply that architecture sets out to imitate a different art form, whereas what we are discussing is a general approach to form which embraces all the arts, including music, and which implies a more fundamental common source. What, in any case, have we said with the word 'painterly'? Does it mean that architectural forms are deprived of their solidity in order to provide what is simply an optical illusion? This cannot be so, because it would then follow that all inorganic styles are painterly. Does it mean that architecture is used as a means of suggesting movement? If so, we may at least have found a partial definition of the baroque style, but only a partial one, because French rococo also possesses movement and yet is very different from baroque. The light skipping movement of rococo is quite alien to Roman baroque, which is ponderous and massive. It follows that massiveness must be another ingredient of the baroque style; but we have now overstepped the bounds of

36

painterliness, and it becomes clear that this 'painterliness' is too general a concept to offer a comprehensive definition of baroque.

We should therefore do better to deduce the characteristics of the baroque style by comparing it with what went before, that is, with the Renaissance; this should make it clear what kinds of forms can be defined as painterly. We shall have to compare not only the individual forms of both styles, such as cornices and columns – for to do no more than this would be both unphilosophical and unscientific – but to find attitudes which exert an influence on form in general.

37

iI. THE GRAND STYLE

Renaissance art is the art of calm and beauty. The beauty it offers us has a liberating influence, and we apprehend it as a general sense of well-being and a uniform enhancement of vitality. Its creations are perfect: they reveal nothing forced or inhibited, uneasy or agitated. Each form has been born easily, free and complete. Its arches are pure semicircles; proportions are broad and pleasing. Everything breathes satisfaction, and we are surely not mistaken in seeing in this heavenly calm and content the highest expression of the artistic spirit of that age.

Baroque aims at a different effect. It wants to carry us away with the force of its impact, immediate and over-whelming. It gives us not a generally enhanced vitality, but excitement, ecstasy, intoxication. Its impact on us is intended to be only momentary, while that of the Renais-sance is slower and quieter, but more enduring, making us want to linger for ever in its presence.[1] This momentary impact of baroque is powerful, but soon leaves us with a certain sense of desolation.[2] It does not convey a state of present happiness, but a feeling of anticipation, of something yet to come, of dissatisfaction and restlessness rather than fulfilment. We have no sense of release, but rather of having been drawn into the tension of an emotional condition.

This general effect, which we attempted to define in the last chapter, results from a certain treatment of form which we shall now describe under the two main headings of 'massiveness' and 'movement'. A third heading could be Vasari's 'maniera grande',[3] the quality of monumentality

38

which was so well suited to the baroque, even if to a certain extent the grand style follows naturally from the search for massiveness. This 'maniera grande' consists of two elements; one is an increase in size, the other simpler and more unified composition.

After the activity of Michelangelo and Raphael in the Vatican, painting, sculpture and architecture increased steadily in scale; until beauty was conceived of entirely in terms of the colossal. Gracefulness and diversity gave way to a new simplicity, aiming only at large masses; the whole is permeated by a powerful and unifying force and nothing suggests a composition made up of separate parts.

The native Roman sense of monumentality had been given a new impetus in the Renaissance by the grandiose building projects of the popes. The most important single building was St. Peter's. Here was a new standard which suddenly made all earlier buildings seem small and pro-vided a great and perpetual challenge for the enthusiastic church builders of the Counter-Reformation.

In domestic architecture there was a similar desire to impress by size. Once Cardinal Alexander Farnese had raised the façade of his palace from 140 feet to 195 feet as a sign of his new dignity[4] on becoming pope, the fashion for huge palaces quickly became universal. Only a few examples can be mentioned: the Palazzo Farnese in Pia-cenza, which was influenced directly by its Roman model, the villa of the Farnese at Caprarola, both by Vignola; and the Roman palaces of the papal *nepoti*, each of whom tried to outdo the others. Even the villa lost its serenity in the pursuit of the new ideal. The greatest achievements of Florence seem relatively small by comparison with these buildings, with the single exception of the Palazzo Pitti and even this is largely baroque, for Brunelleschi's building had only half the present façade.[5]

Increasing size is a common symptom of art in decline;

39

or, more accurately, art is in a state of decline from the moment that it aspires to massiveness through colossal proportions. There is no longer a response to individual parts, and the formal sensibility becomes coarsened; the sole aim is to impress and overwhelm.

This style is better served by large unarticulated masses than by many separate parts. It aims at broadness and unity rather than detail or variety;[6] the progress from one to the other may be detected in the principles of composition as well as in its component parts.

Larger buildings naturally demanded simpler and more effective detail. The architrave was reduced from three to two units, and the profile of the cornice simplified to a few vigorous lines; the baluster, which had once consisted of two equal sections, became a single shaft, a form first used by Sangallo and Michelangelo (figs. 1 and 2).[7]

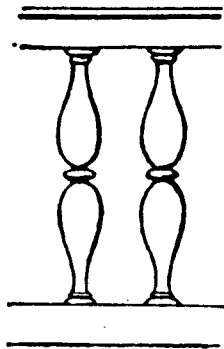This principle of simplification also became decisively
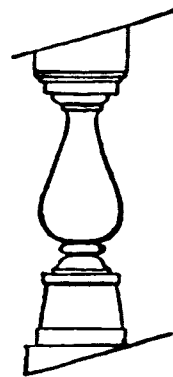

Fig. 1   Baluster, after Raphael

Fig. 2   Baluster, after Michelangelo, from the Capitoline steps

important for the composition as a whole, for the ground plan and the elevation. Façades consisting of a series of equal storeys became unacceptable; the 'grand style' demanded that the façade should reveal itself as a unified body.

In this development the most difficult problem was naturally posed by the palace. Rome led the way once again, and the moving spirit was Bramante himself; his 'ultima maniera' shows a definite move towards the *vertically unified façade*. Even he had outgrown the style of the Cancelleria with its three equal storeys; the ground floor now became a pedestal for the whole building. The most determined innovator was Michelangelo, in whose Capitoline palaces the two storeys are boldly held together with a single order of giant pilasters (pl. 15). Palladio followed him in this practice, but it found no imitators in Rome, where vertical members became unpopular and other ways of conveying the impression of unity had to be found. The method used was to make one storey much larger and richer than the others, but it was left to a later age, in the person of Bernini, to create the model which combined the giant pilaster order with the ground floor as pedestal; this was to have the greatest significance for monumental architecture.[8]

Venetian architecture continued along the same lines as before; the freely rhythmic disposition of masses was never understood there, and all palaces after Longhena's Palazzo Pesaro (*c.* 1650) consisted of a series of elaborate storeys equally accentuated. Even Palladio's palaces often had two, or even three, similar storeys.

The Cancelleria is as typical of the Renaissance in its *horizontal articulation* as it is in its vertical. The pilasters are placed so as to divide the wall surface into large bays, each enclosed by two smaller ones; the ratio of the smaller to the larger is determined by the golden section.[9] This motif was called by Geymüller 'Bramante's rhythmic travée' (pl. 16). It is a characteristically Renaissance conception,[10] and is often combined with a central arch, the motif becoming that of the triumphal arch. Its significance lies in the interplay of large and small pilaster bays; the small ones are always

small enough not to disturb the predominance of the large one, yet not so small that they lose their meaning as individual forms.

The baroque firmly repudiated this principle of articulation. Absolute unity became the rule, and subordinate parts were sacrificed. The high altar of the Gesù by Giacomo della Porta shows the transformation which the triumphal arch motif had undergone. The central arch is large, the side arches are stunted, and the columns placed so close together that they are almost coupled (pl. 10).[11] The same kind of transformation can be seen in the niche if we compare Bramante's niche with that (probably by Antonio da Sangallo) on the centre landing of the staircase in the Giardino della Pigna in the Vatican.

In northern Italy the old Renaissance modes continued to be followed in this respect also, as in the much imitated interior system of S. Fedele in Milan by Pellegrino Tibaldi, with its twice-repeated triumphal arch motif, and in the exterior articulation of Longhena's S. Maria della Salute in Venice.

A similar process of unification took place in the spatial organisation of the *interior*. Self-contained subordinate spaces made way for one single overwhelming central space. The ground plan followed a development parallel to the 'rhythmic travée'. In the Florentine basilicas of the early Renaissance, S. Lorenzo and S. Spirito, the aisles are in the ratio of 1:2 to the nave, a proportion also used in the articulation of wall-surfaces, as in the façades of Alberti. Bramante's first project for St. Peter's had subsidiary crossings with cupolas in the proportion of the golden section to the central crossing, after the manner of the Cancelleria. In the succeeding plans the side spaces became progressively smaller; the final development, in Vignola's longitudinal Gesù, had only a nave with chapels which, though interconnected, do not act as independent aisles (pl. 10). The Gesù became

the model for all churches in Rome. The three-aisled vestibule had a similar development which can be followed from Raphael's Villa Madama to Antonio da Sangallo's in the Palazzo Farnese. Subdivision of space remained exclusive to northern Italy.

The Renaissance took a delight in a system of greater and lesser parts, in which the small prepared one for the large by prefiguring the form of the whole. It is for this reason that even colossal buildings like the St. Peter's of Bramante have a less than overwhelming effect. The baroque has large forms only. This is evident if we compare Michelangelo's project for St. Peter's with Bramante's. In Bramante's first plan the arms of the Greek cross are twice repeated in decreasing proportions, like a sort of dying echo of the colossal motif, whereas there is no trace of such a modification in Michelangelo's design (figs. 18 and 19). The articulation of the wall follows an even more typical course. Bramante, beginning with a two-storey system, had himself finally adopted a single colossal order; but he had kept small columns for the ambulatories at the ends of the arms, and these, more nearly approaching human proportions, afforded the beholder some repose and brought the colossal within his grasp. Michelangelo does away with the transitional ambulatories. The baroque is a search for the intimidating and overwhelming.

III. MASSIVENESS

The baroque required broad, heavy, massive forms. Elegant proportions disappeared and buildings tended to become weightier until sometimes the forms were almost crushed by the pressure. The grace and lightness of the Renaissance were gone; all forms became broader and heavier. We only have to look at the balustrade of Michelangelo's staircase to the Capitol to appreciate this (pl. 25). A similar transformation is characteristic of pilasters and piers.[1]

Church and palace façades were given as much width as possible; the façade of St. Peter's, for instance, is artificially widened with turrets at the angles. Moreover, from the time of the Palazzo Farnese, palace façades were not articulated vertically; they lost their pilasters, even in buildings of nineteen bays such as Ammannati's Palazzo Ruspoli. On church façades the verticals were retained, but great projecting cornices and horizontal accents provided a strong counterweight to them.

One of the most direct ways of suggesting weight and oppressiveness was by a heavily depressed pediment. A shallow pediment gives a sinking rather than a rising effect, emphasised by a base-line which projects beyond the corner of the building; this practice is first to be seen in della Porta's design for the Gesù, where the effect is increased by heavy acroteria on both sides. Low pedestals and high attics pressing down on the supporting members, were also used.

The design of staircases showed how much satisfaction

was found in low, spreading forms. The aim was to 'salire con gravità', ascend with gravity, in Scamozzi's words, and often the steps were so shallow that they were uncomfortable to walk on. This was carried to a monstrous degree in the curved staircase leading up from the Piazza to the church of St. Peter's, which looks like some viscous mass slowly oozing down the slope. There is no suggestion of ascent, only of downward movement.

This effect of yielding to an oppressive weight is sometimes so powerful that we imagine that the forms affected are actually suffering. The serene semicircular arch was depressed into an ellipse, first of all in the second storey of the Palazzo Farnese;[2] the tall, slender pedestals which had contributed so much to the feeling of lightness in earlier buildings now became low and uncomfortable, and, in the vestibule of the Palazzo Farnese, for example, one cannot help feeling the weight of the burden.

These forms were enlarged by *Michelangelo*. The colonnade in the Palazzo dei Conservatori (pl. 15) have positively unpleasant proportions, the upper storey pressing down so heavily on the small columns that they in turn seem to be pushed against the giant piers. We feel they are there only under duress. This sensation is partly caused by the irrational and perverse intervals between the columns; they are so uncomfortably close as to be unsatisfying and consequently unnatural.[3]

The pleasure found in treating matter with violence could only lead to a tendency to *amorphousness*, and an architect as unscrupulous as Giulio Romano carried this to its utmost extreme. In the Sala dei Giganti in Mantua form is completely annihilated; raw, unformed masses break in, unhewn boulders take the place of cornices, corners are bevelled off. Everything bursts its bounds and chaos triumphs. But this is an exception, and hardly contributes to the general character of baroque. We can also excuse

naturalism in 'rustic' fountains and in landscape architecture, where matter appears entirely formless.

The broad forms of the baroque style are part of a totally new conception of *matter*, that is of the ideal aspect of matter which gives expression to the inner vitality and behaviour of the members. The hard, brittle stuff of Renaissance architecture has suddenly turned supple and soft; sometimes it almost reminds us of clay. In fact Michelangelo actually made clay models of such architectural features as the undulating staircase of the Laurenziana,[4] and its form shows it, as Burckhardt observed.[5] The response to paint is similar; if we compare a landscape by Annibale Carracci with one of the early Florentine Renaissance – to take the strongest possible contrast – we find, in place of sharp angular rock formations, a clayey mass of a rich blue-green hue suffused with light. The same development from an angular, almost metallic style to a wealth of soft masses and lushness can be observed in everything. The same Annibale Carracci finds a late figure by Raphael 'as hard and as sharp as a piece of wood' ['una cosa di legno, tanto dura e tagliente'].[6] As early as Vasari the dryness of Bramante's early Roman style of the Cancelleria is criticised; 'secchezza' was something hated by the baroque.

As matter becomes soft and masses fluid, structural cohesion is dissolved; the massiveness of the style, already expressed in the broad and heavy forms, is now also manifested in inadequate articulation and lack of precise forms. To begin with, a *wall* was now regarded as a single uniform mass, not as something made up of individual stones. Stone courses ceased to be used as an aesthetic motif; when possible they were covered up. The Renaissance manner is best illustrated in the neat ashlar of the Cancelleria, in which the side façades also show a most elegant use of brick. But now the general practice was to cover brick with stucco, after the example of the Palazzo Farnese.[7] The stone block (in Rome

the splendid travertine used since antiquity) lost its meaning as an individual component, so that there were no more rusticated façades; the experiments of Raphael and Bramante on the ground floors of palaces (figs. 27 and 28) were never repeated.[8]

One might almost say that the baroque style deprived the wall of its tectonic element, that the mass of which the wall is composed lost its inner structure. And if the wall consisted of materials other than rectangular blocks, there was no reason why straight lines and right-angles should be retained. *All hard and pointed shapes were blunted and softened, and everything angular became rounded.*

The love of fullness and softness was a Roman taste. The Florentine style remained much drier and harder and even Michelangelo's origins sometimes betray him. The easiest point of attack for this new conception of form lay in ornament. If we look at the coat-of-arms by Michelangelo on the Palazzo Farnese, dating from about 1546, at Nanni's on the Porta del Popola, or della Porta's on the Gesù, we see that here the baroque ideals were put into practice quite early on. If we compare them with, say, the coat-of-arms on the corner of the Cancelleria, the contrast is immediately obvious. The Renaissance work looks fragile, its brittle stuff terminates in sharp edges and hard angles, while the baroque forms are full, opulent, and curled over in round and generous whorls. Cartouches were also treated in this way, quite different from the Florentine or north Italian manner that reminds one of strips of leather. Michelangelo's famous Ionic capitals on the Palazzo dei Conservatori are another case in point (fig. 3).

Marble was almost entirely replaced by travertine, which had been given to nobility in the decoration of the Farnese courtyard;[9] its spongy 'spugnoso' character lent itself well to a baroque type of treatment, whereas marble, which has a finer grain, demands a more delicate technique.

In architectural forms the soft, full forms appeared in bulging friezes and such pedestals as that of the base of the

Fig. 3   Capital, Palazzo
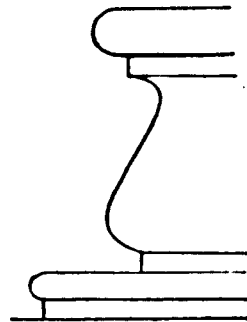dei Conservatori,
ground floor

Fig. 4   Profile of pedestal from the Palazzo
Farnese

Palazzo Farnese (fig. 4), and in the gable-ends terminating in snail-like whorls first used by Michelangelo in the sarcophagus-lids of the Medici chapel in S. Lorenzo and later by Vignola on the main portal of the Gesù (fig. 15). The composition of volutes will be discussed presently. Stylised wreaths and bunches of leaves were used to make bizarre friezes; in the Lateran basilica even archivolts and pilasters were decorated with thick clusters of palm leaves.

Particular care was taken to see that the profiles of mouldings should be soft and fluid. Their component parts were merged into one continuous line; *right angles were avoided altogether*.[10] Two of Bramante's profiles from the Cancelleria set against two later ones (fig. 5), show the sharp, precise and detailed work of the Renaissance, and by contrast, the attempt to create a soft fluidity in the early baroque. This antipathy to the right-angle was so strong that no inhibitions were felt about letting structural surfaces abut in a very marked curve. The earliest instance of this was the base of the Porta di S. Spirito by Antonio da Sangallo (fig. 5),

48

the next was the exterior of the apse of St. Peter's, by Michelangelo. In the severe style no straight surface could ever have departed from the vertical.

On the same basis angles were rounded off even in ground plans. So much, in fact, was the sense of structure lost sight of that walls were soon made convex or concave at will; this was part of the increasing tendency to convey a feeling of movement and will therefore be discussed below in the appropriate place.[11]
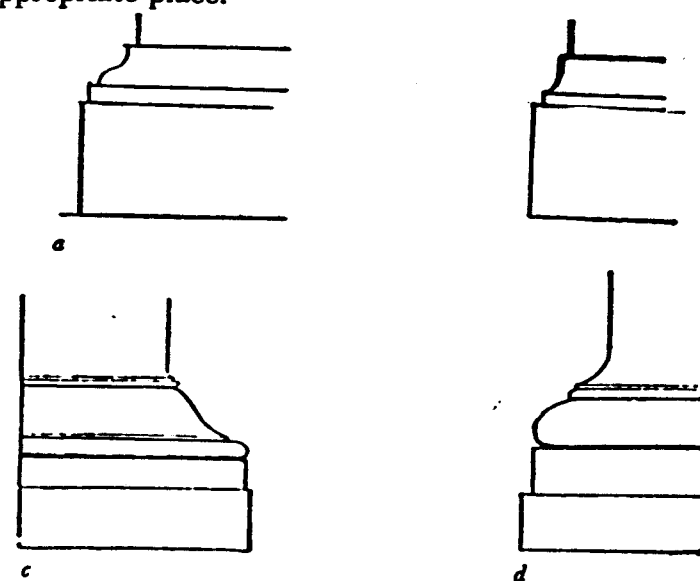

Fig. 5   Profiles of column bases from *a, b,* Cancelleria
c Palazzo dei Conservatori *d* Porta Santo Spirito

The third decisive element of baroque was the incomplete articulation of masses. Architectural members kept a quality of massiveness because they were little differentiated. They are not clearly bounded forms with an independent existence; the individual element was deprived of its value and force, and structural members were multiplied and lost their independent mobility, imprisoned in the material. The architectural body as a whole remained tightly pressed

c   49

together, largely unarticulated both in plan and elevation. The serenity of Renaissance architecture had been achieved precisely through the loosening of the mass, in the happy articulation of the whole and the freedom of individual members; the baroque implied a reversion to a more amorphous state.

One symptom of this was replacement of the column by the *pier*. The solemnity of the pier lies in its being materially confined. The column is round and free and clearly detached from the mass, it is all will and vitality; but the pier always remains so to speak with one foot stuck in the wall and, lacking the independence of the cylindrical form, communicates a sensation of massiveness.

In the lively seaports of Genoa, Naples and Palermo, and on the whole in Florence too, the column was never abandoned. But the early baroque in Rome was completely dominated by the pier, and the column did not return until about the middle of the seventeenth century.

The disappearance of light arcaded courtyards and loggias was a particularly noticeable feature. The complete change of mood is epitomised by the difference between the cortile of the Cancelleria (pl. 16) and that of the Palazzo Farnese (pl. 17); the latter is overwhelmingly solemn. In churches piers became necessary for reasons of construction, because columns were not strong enough to carry the heavy barrel-vaulted ceilings. The piers became broad, unarticulated stretches of wall. But this was not enough to convey the impression of massiveness; the arches between them were made to terminate considerably below the architrave, and the keystone was omitted. This one finds in the interior of the Gesù (pl. 10) and, at an even earlier date, in the main windows of the Villa Farnese at Caprarola, and later examples occur in S. Maria ai Monti by Giacomo della Porta, the façade of S. Gregorio Magno by Soria (fig. 17), and the façade of the Scala Santa by Domenico Fontana.

In northern Italy, where brick was the chief building material, piers had been used for a long time as a matter of structural necessity, but there they had been given a certain grace by slender proportions and by partition into four pilasters (fig. 6); the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista in Parma and S. Salvatore in Venice are examples. Translated into baroque terms this same pier, composed of four pilasters, looked like the one from the Palazzo dei Conservatori shown in fig. 7; the mass is no longer completely articulated or bound by the pilasters, but emerges at the corners.
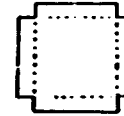
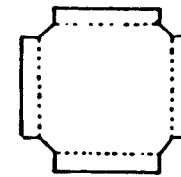Fig. 6 Scheme of section of a Renaissance pier

Fig. 7 Scheme of section of Baroque pier

The substitution of the pier for the column naturally meant also the substitution of the *pilaster* for the half-column. The progress from colonnade to pier arcade is illustrated in the courtyard of the Palazzo Farnese (pl. 17), the Sapienza (pl. 20) and the Collegio Romano of Ammannati.

A common practice of the transitional period was to tie the half-columns and pilasters to the wall and frame them with great rusticated blocks. Serlio, much given to this kind of thing, justified it by pointing to the example of Giulio Romano; Vignola used it for gateways, mostly in rustic settings.

The most advanced expression of imprisoned matter was achieved by *Michelangelo*: here form struggles with mass. We saw the same development in the columns of the Capitoline palace, which appeared to be pushed by sheer weight

against the giant piers (pl. 15). Here too is the sense of suffering, the members that appear unable to free themselves from the suffocating embrace of the wall. In the vestibule of the Laurenziana (pl. 1) the columns do not even emerge beyond the surface of the wall but are held as pairs in recesses. The composition has no sense of satisfaction or fulfilment, or of necessity, so that it creates an impression of constant movement, an unending process of impassioned agitation and furious struggle between form and mass. It is a unique manifestation of the baroque spirit, doubly unique in the superb way in which the stormy prelude is resolved in the main room at the top of the staircase where suddenly everything is calmness and repose; the vestibule, we now see, was only an introduction to this second and nobler effect. We shall have more to say later about this kind of composition by contrasts; only Michelangelo ventured such a thing.

In the colonnade of the Palazzo dei Conservatori the motif is repeated in a slightly different form. Michelangelo made all the forms in the porch as massive as possible in order to secure a maximum contrast with the interior. The columns are not free from the wall, yet they are not half-columns but rather whole ones which have not yet won their freedom. Perhaps half protrudes beyond the wall and the rest is still immur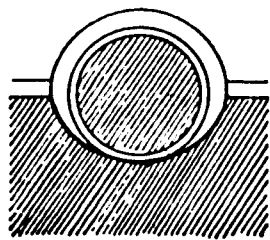ed in it (fig. 8). In this way we are given the impression of an unceasing, restless struggle for liberty. Later the motif of the 'imprisoned' columns, to coin the term, was often used in varying degrees, anything from a quarter to three-quarters being free. For façades it was useful for the strong shadow cast in the recess on both sides of the column. In

Fig. 8 Section of an 'immured' column

the second period of the baroque the column was freed again, and always backed by a pilaster.

In the Renaissance every architectural member was simply and purely stated, while in the baroque *members were multiplied*. The main reason for multiplication was the abnormally large proportions which demanded more vigorous forms, [12] but soon it became quite usual to repeat forms several times over, encasing, for instance, pediments in pediments. Single forms lost their power to convince; any form that was to have more than purely accidental effect had to be reproduced twice or three times. Once simple statements were abandoned, there was nothing to set a limit. Another factor was the multiplication of contours in the interests of painterly effects. The single, clear and self-sufficient line was replaced by a kind of formative zone, a complex of lines which made it difficult to recognise the actual contour. This resulted in an illusion of movement, a suggestion that the form had first to move into its allotted position.

Superimposed pilasters were of this kind. These were pilasters flanked on each side by a receding half-pilaster, and later even by a further quarter-pilaster. It probably originated in brick buildings, where it would have constituted an easy adaptation of the rounded half-column. Something similar sometimes occurs in quite early buildings in the Romagna and Lombardy: the church of S. Cristoforo in Ferrara is an example. A different source is suggested by the loggia in the Farnesina, where the wall shows the same motif fully developed. Here the intention is quite different; the pilaster is a two-dimensional echo of the corresponding pier, and it is conceivable that this effective motif was transferred from there to the façade.

The earliest superimposed pilaster in Rome is to be found in the first storey of Bramante's Belvedere courtyard. [13] Peruzzi used it in the Palazzo Costa and Michelangelo in

the second storey of the Farnese courtyard (pl. 24), and general imitation followed.

A related form was the *flat, framing strip* sometimes surrounding three sides of a pilaster bay. It is so to speak a pilaster in embryo. Again it is not a definite, simple statement of form, but a transition, a blurring of contours, often reminding one of a chromatic scale in music.[14] The wall recess or, to keep to our first term, the pilaster bay framed with a flat moulding, appears to be another motif derived from brick architecture. We find it in the buildings of Peruzzi, who as a Sienese was well acquainted with this material, and later as an important feature with Michelangelo (pl. 8).

The duplication of terminating members was another aspect of the habit of compounding. The forms ceased to have well-defined boundaries at the top and bottom, they became hesitant and unable to decide where to finish. The first example must be the piers in the cortile of the Palazzo Farnese (pl. 17), and if we compare the bases and double cornices of this building with the simple and assured forms of Palladio's courtyard in the Carità in Venice, the difference between the two conceptions will be clear. The tomb of Paul III, by Gulielmo della Porta, has a base of this complex sort and columns come to be provided with double plinths. The contours of attics on church façades underwent the same treatment, as in della Porta's design for the Gesù (fig. 16) Vignola's project in comparison with (fig. 15). The lines of the cornice seem to be echoed several times over, the termination is inconclusive.

The sense of massiveness was largely effected by omitting the framing members which enclose and subordinate the material. In this respect baroque is the extreme opposite of the gothic style. Gothic emphasises the framing members. It has firm structural supports, lightly filled in, whereas *the baroque puts the emphasis on the material*, and either omits the

54

frame altogether or makes it seem inadequate to contain the bulging mass it encloses. The Renaissance follows a middle course, keeping a perfect equilibrium between the filling and the enclosing structural members. The decorated pilaster of the Renaissance is inconceivable without its frame; in the baroque this enclosing frame is abandoned and the ornament allowed to luxuriate unchecked. Early examples of this practice are Michelangelo's tomb of Julius II in S. Pietro in Vincoli, and the Cappella Cesi in S. Maria della Pace by Antonio da Sangallo and Simone Mosca. The coffered barrel-vault was formerly encased in a frame moulding omitted in the baroque, in which the coffers cover the entire vault without any framing. This can be seen in the Cappella Corsini in the Lateran, by Galilei, which is in other respects one of the purer works of the late period.

The *corners* of buildings were designed according to the same ideas. The same contrast between gothic and baroque, the one accentuating the structural members and the other the filling-in, should be kept in mind. Giotto's campanile in Florence has little projecting towers in miniature at the corners; everything depends on the strong frame. In the Renaissance wall surfaces terminate with a simple pilaster, first a single, later a double one. In the early baroque period the pilaster is moved inwards, leaving the bare wall to form a corner by itself, as can be seen in Vignola's Capitoline porticoes, or the porch of S. Maria in Domnica, wrongly attributed to Raphael. The superimposed pilasters creates a whole complex of lines at the corner so that it becomes hard to recognise; this we can see in the tomb of Paul III by Gulielmo della Porta, and in Soria's S. Gregorio Magno (fig. 17). As a matter of principle the baroque avoids displaying corners; it is concerned with façades and their outer parts are kept as inconspicuous as possible. The vigour and magnificence are thrown to the centre.

This is effectively enhanced by making the decorative

55

filling too large, so that it overflows its allotted space. Extreme effects of this kind cannot of course extend to the whole composition; they are only possible for details where the discord can eventually be resolved. One example is the decoration of ceilings; the filling of the coffers was composed in a way that suggested a perpetual state of friction between recess and frame. In a Renaissance ceiling all elements are happily harmonised, everything has air and space; but baroque ceilings are crowded and massive and make us fear that the filling will burst out of the frames. The first such ceilings are by Sangallo in the Palazzo Farnese. The cramped niches on church façades will be discussed later.

In the decoration of dome pendentives the same occurs in the figures by Domenichino in S. Andrea della Valle, too large for the space they fill; in the later stages there were no scruples at all about ornament overflowing in this way. In St. Peter's we can see how the figures in the spandrels of the nave arches gradually become larger towards the entrance; those at the end, the most recently executed, are the most expansive. The same phenomenon is seen in the statues which fill the niches. Statues in general only appealed when they threatened to burst their niches.

The mass of the architectural body as a whole remained unevolved, with no developed plan. Loggias and similar forms disappeared. The size of all openings diminished in relation to the wall. The ideal church façade was an unbroken wall of travertine, and with the palace it was the same. Already there were cases when an entrance arch stopped short of the cornice, leaving an uninterrupted stretch of wall in between. This motif imparted a sense of uneasiness.

The façade was left unarticulated. Even the grand style had demanded façades subdivided as little as possible, cast as a single piece. The unity was not complete, but the subsidiary parts were left in a dependent state; it was this that constituted an incomplete articulation. The Renaissance had

56

found its highest fulfilment in the conception of a whole that consisted of a harmonious combination of individual self-contained parts. A favourite design had been the church façade with free-standing wings that reproduced the motif of the central part in miniature, as in S. Maria di Campagna in Piacenza. This would have been out of the question in a baroque church, where the subsidiary parts were kept inarticulate and imprisoned in the main mass of the building, never attaining independence.

The same was the case with the ground plan: it remained unevolved. The building never progressed beyond the state of a compact mass. And yet how much the vitality of a building depends precisely on dispersal of the mass! What would Palladio's Villa Rotonda be without its porticoes? Or the Farnesina (pl. 29) without the charming motif of projecting wings, apparently given complete liberty? Such a thing was impossible in a baroque building; if there were wings they were never free from the main mass, for there would have been no means of linking them to it. Only with the later baroque is there a return to freer forms.

57

IV. MOVEMENT

Massiveness and movement are the principles of the baroque style. It did not aim at the perfection of an architectural body, nor at the beauty of 'growth', as Winckelmann would put it, but rather at an event, the expression of a directed movement in that body. Where on the one hand mass became greater, on the other the strength of the members was increased, though not in such a way as to influence the whole structure uniformly. Rather did the baroque concentrate the whole strength of the building at one point, where it breaks out in an immoderate display while the rest remains dull and lifeless. The functions of lifting and carrying, once performed as a matter of course, without haste or strain, now became an exercise of violent and passionate effort. At the same time this action was not left to the individual structural members, but infected the whole mass of the building; its whole body was drawn into the momentum of the movement.

In contrast to Renaissance art, which sought permanence and repose in everything, the baroque had from the first a definite *sense of direction*. It expressed an urge for upward movement, and so the vertical force was opposed to the broad massiveness that we have already described, and became gradually stronger until eventually in the second period of baroque it outweighed the horizontals. *The motif of orientation* first asserted itself in individual features, in the *irregular distribution of ornament*. Windows were given an upward emphasis. The half-columns of the classical Renaissance aedicula were quickly shed and replaced by consoles,

58

but the pediments, far from being reduced in size, were made to project powerfully in order to cast a strong shadow.

At the same time there was a widespread tendency to dissolve the horizontals, to *break up the forms*, a practice indulged in without any regard for the rights and meaning of the individual forms, with the purpose only of creating a painterly illusion of movement in the whole. Window jambs were extended downwards below the line of the sill, or upwards in a kind of 'ear'. The base-line of the pediment was broken in half, and later the apex also. Forms of this kind can usually be traced to Michelangelo, and the windows in the second storey of the Palazzo Farnese courtyard (pl. 24), themselves heralded by the Laurenziana, were of the greatest influence. In expressive contrast to the agitated individual features the large horizontals of the cornice remained undisturbed. The practice of bending forms was only very discreetly used during the first baroque period, mainly for entire wall surfaces. The contrasts obtained in this way were used to good effect until Maderna's time; the situation only becoming acute in the course of the seventeenth century, when every half and quarter pilaster tried to find an echo in the cornice and its effectiveness was completely destroyed. It was then too that all tectonic structural elements fell victim to a wild desire for movement, so that, for example, pediments piled up and were thrust outwards. We need not follow this development here.

The upward urge also expressed itself in an *accelerated linear movement*. This is the meaning of forms such as the herm-like pilasters that become wider as they move upwards, and seem to rise more quickly than straight unexpanding ones; we see them in the vestibule of Michelangelo's Laurenziana (pl. 1), on the tomb of Julius II, and later in some works by Vignola. The use of vine columns can be traced to the same desire for movement. The first of these on a monumental scale – judging by references in the later

59

editions of Vignola's *Regola* – would be on Bernini's baldacchino in St. Peter's (1633), although of course they appear earlier on Raphael's tapestry cartoons, where they are based on ancient models. In the early baroque period they were unimportant.

The expression of upward movement in the dome will be discussed in the chapter on ecclesiastical architecture.

The new taste was to be of the utmost importance for church façades. For one thing, it demanded an entirely new approach to the problem of surface treatment. The former balanced and satisfying relationship between window or niche and bay, in which each seemed to have been made for the other, was completely upset: the niche and its surrounding aedicula now strained upwards, so much so that they touched the architrave or the niche above it, leaving a large empty space below; and the fact that the niche was squeezed into a narrow bay and closely hemmed in by pilasters, made the upward movement appear even stronger.

There are certain symptoms here which recall gothic art, although gothic and baroque represent completely opposite ideals in all other respects. Even here the differences are vital, for in gothic the vertical movement streams upward without check and dissolves playfully at the top, while in baroque it encounters the resistance of a heavy cornice, though – and this is what matters – a harmonious solution is always found in the end.

In the upper parts of the building, surface and decoration coexist more peacefully; but any impression of complete calm was kept for the interior, and the contrast between the agitated idiom of the façade and the relaxed peace of the interior is one of the most compelling effects in the baroque repertory.[1]

This final calming of a violent upward surge derives from Michelangelo, and in the Laurenziana it is already fully developed (pls. 1 and 2).[2] The most important and in-

fluential design of this sort in Rome was probably the exterior of the apse of St. Peter's (pl. 8): the forms become purer and stiller as they ascend, and the façade motif[3] – unpleasing in itself – is resolved in the dome. Here we learn what, in the hands of such a master, constituted 'composition in the grand manner'.

The disposition of horizontals followed a development similar to that of the verticals. By concentrating the main emphasis on the centre, as much movement as possible was brought into the composition. This was in direct contrast to the great Florentine-classical conception, where the noblest effect had been a regular, harmonious disposition that excluded all display, even for principal doorways and windows.

In its simplest expression, this principle takes the form of a *rhythmic* sequence, as opposed to a merely regular and metric one.[4] Thus the windows in Giacomo della Porta's Palazzo Chigi follow each other in accelerating rhythm towards the centre, although the change of interval has no structural motivation. This concept was developed in the church façade, which in the hands of Giacomo della Porta became a system of partially overlapping sections, with the sculptural emphasis increasing towards the centre. The effort and the slow gathering of force is expressed by a progress from pilasters to half-columns and then to whole columns; above all, when clusters of columns pile up in the centre. The outermost bays remain almost entirely expressionless. The body is not uniformly animated.

The final consequence was that the whole wall mass surged: concave end bays were contrasted with a lively convex movement towards the spectator in the centre. This was the line that Michelangelo used in the notorious Laurenziana staircase (pl. 2).[5] The motif was first used on a large scale by Antonio da Sangallo[6] for the Zecca Vecchia (old mint)[7] and the Porta di S. Spirito, though with concave

walls only. The earliest full examples were in the churches of Borromini: in moderation in S. Agnese in Piazzo Navona, but carried to the utmost extremes in S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1667).[8]

By making walls surge in this way the baroque achieved another purpose; since the pediments, windows, columns and other members followed the oscillation of the wall, the result was an impression of lively movement. Identical forms could be seen simultaneously at different angles; the columns, for instance, being orientated on varying axes, looked as if they were perpetually twisting and turning. Each member seemed to have been seized by a wild frenzy. It is this that characterises the art of Borromini. With it, however, the baroque necessarily lost its original massiveness and solemnity; blank walls became unacceptable and everything was dissolved in decoration and movement.

The baroque never offers us perfection and fulfilment, or the static calm of 'being', only the unrest of change and the tension of transience. This again produces a sense of movement, though of a different kind. *Tense proportional relationships* were part of this characteristic action. The circle is for instance an absolutely static and unchangeable form, but the oval is restless and always seems on the point of change; it lacks inner necessity. The baroque sought out such free proportions as a matter of principle; everything that was self-contained and complete was contrary to its essential nature. It used the oval, not only for medallions and similar objects, but for ground plans of halls, courtyards and church interiors. The form made its appearance early, as part of an agitated composition in a painting by Correggio (1515),[9] and this was at a time when no-one in Rome had thought of using it, either in painting or architecture. It was then taken up by Michelangelo for the plinth of the statue of Marcus Aurelius,[10] and passed on to Vignola; he in turn used it several times for medallions in the courtyard of the

villa at Caprarola, also for staircases. Giacomo della Porta transformed the semicircular theatre of the Belvedere courtyard (pl. 19) into the oval one of the Sapienza (pl. 20). The circular oculus disappeared from the church façade. The first elliptical ground plan occurred in an architectural treatise, Serlio's *Libri d'Architettura*,[11] but only much later it was applied in practice, as we shall see in connection with ecclesiastical architecture.

Similarly, the square gave way to the oblong. It is to be noted, however, that the oblong (and the ellipse), whose proportions are determined by the golden section, are stable compared with other, slimmer or more depressed forms. They are therefore avoided by the baroque, whereas they were universally accepted in the Renaissance. The most monumental manifestation of this new spirit was the abandonment of the centrally-planned church for the longitudinal one.

The ideal of tenseness was promoted by forms which were *unfulfilled to the point of discomfort*. Some of these have been mentioned already: the columns held back in recesses in the wall, the decorative fillings on the point of overflowing, and the church façades whose bays are filled with discordant decorations; every time an illusion of movement is generated.

Just as the baroque had achieved its purpose by means of the irregular and apparently incomplete, the unsettled and impermanent form, so it could put the 'painterly' device of *partial overlapping*, and intangibility to good use. In this context the clustered pilaster, with its suggestion of a half-pilaster, should be mentioned again. The strict tectonic mode had demanded clear forms which were whole and therefore calm. But overlapping forms result in something intangible and are therefore a stimulus to movement. If, in addition to this partial overlapping, the composition is complex and the forms and motifs bewilderingly profuse, so that the individual part, however large, loses its significance

in the mass effect, then there are the elements that produce that impression of overwhelming and intoxicating lavishness peculiar to the baroque style.

Let us take as an example the ceiling of the Galleria Farnese by the brothers Carracci (pl. 2). Although it derives from Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling, the difference is immense. Michelangelo's clear, architectonic arrangement has been sacrificed in order to achieve a richness beyond one's full comprehension. The principles of the design are difficult to recognise and in the face of this intangibility the eye remains perpetually in a state of unrest. Image overlaps image, and it seems as if removing one will only reveal another; the corners open out into unending vistas.

The same principles of design govern the magnificent façade of St. Peter's (pl. 7) and of its imitators. Again the masses of interpenetrating and overlapping forms make it impossible to distinguish the actual space-enclosing wall. This very antipathy to any form with a clear contour is perhaps the most basic trait of the baroque style.

The church interior, its greatest achievement, revealed a completely new *conception of space directed towards infinity:* form is dissolved in favour of the *magic spell of light* – the highest manifestation of the painterly. No longer was the aim one of fixed spatial proportions and self-contained spaces with their satisfying relationships between height, breadth and depth. The painterly style thought first of the effects of light: the unfathomableness of a dark depth, the magic of light streaming down from the invisible height of a dome, the transition from dark to light and lighter still are the elements with which it worked.

The space of the interior, evenly lit in the Renaissance and conceived as a structurally closed entity, seemed in the baroque to go on indefinitely. The enclosing shell of the building hardly counted: in all directions one's gaze is drawn into infinity. The end of the choir disappears in the

gold and glimmer of the towering high altar, in the gleam of the 'splendori celesti', while the dark chapels of the nave are hardly recognisable; above, instead of the flat ceiling which had calmly closed off the space, loomed a huge barrel-vault. It too seems open: clouds stream down with choirs of angels and all the glory of heaven; our eyes and minds are lost in immeasurable space.

True, these effects of an all-consuming decoration are the product of a later period of baroque, but the determining feature of this art, the uncontrolled revelling in space and light, was strongly felt from the first. The contrast between this attitude and the Renaissance is, of course, no more than relative, for the earlier period had not quite been able to resist the charm of light effects. But we are inclined to see things in a more painterly way than the Renaissance did, more so than was intended. Our point of view should be that a feeling for effects of light cannot exist as long as it is not desired by current taste.

Conclusion: the system of proportionality

Quite early in the Renaissance the theory was formulated that the sign of perfection in a work of art was that it could not be changed, not even in the smallest detail, without destroying the beauty and the meaning of the whole. That this rule was formally recognised as early as the mid-fifteenth century is perhaps the most significant factor in the development of Italian art towards the classical ideal. Its formulator was the great Leon Battista Alberti.

The classic passage from his *De re aedificatoria*[12] reads as follows:

'Nos tamen sic deffiniemus: ut sit pulchritudo certa cum ratione concinnitas universarum partium in eo cujus sint: ita ut addi aut diminui aut immutari possit nihil quin improbabilius reddat. Magnum hoc et divinum . . .' ['. . . I

shall define beauty to be a harmony of all the parts, in whatsoever subject it appears, fitted together with such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered, but for the worse. A quality . . . noble and divine. . . .']¹³

Alberti is here a prophet, for his conceptions were fulfilled a half century later by Raphael and Bramante.

If we ask how this effect was to be attained in architecture, the answer is, almost entirely by harmony of proportions. The proportions of the whole and of the parts must be based on an underlying unity; none must appear accidental and each must follow from the other as a matter of necessity, as the only possible and natural one. This kind of interconnection is rightly called organic, for its secret lies in the very fact that art works like nature, *that the image of the whole is repeated in its parts*. Let us, as a concrete example of this, look at the top storey of the Cancelleria (fig. 9). The small
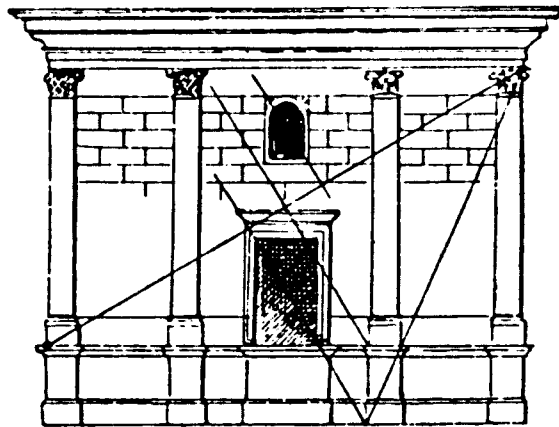

Fig. 9   Proportional system of the Cancelleria

window at the top has the same proportions as the main one, and this in turn only repeats the proportions of the bay which it occupies. Further, the area of the whole order is fixed according to the same ratio, but inverted (b:h =

66

H:B), so that the diagonals are at right angles to each other. This determines the proportions of the side bays, and they again echo the form of the entire wing of three storeys, excluding, of course, the base and cornice. Astonishing as this all-embracing harmony may be, it extends much further, for not even the smallest detail is allowed to escape the basic ratio; and this, finally, far from being arbitrary, is determined by the golden section, a proportion which we experience as 'pure', that is, as completely satisfying and therefore completely natural.

What we term proportionality, Alberti calls *finitio*.¹⁴ His definition of this word is: 'correspondentia quaedam linearum inter se, quibus quantitates (of length, breadth and depth) dimetiantur'; this, admittedly, does not say very much. In the sixth book, on the other hand, the words 'omnia ad certos angulos paribus lineis adaequanda' are probably intended to signify the same as the theory formulated above. *Finitio* is a constituent element of the highest concept of all, that of *'concinnitas'*. Basically, however, both these terms mean the same thing, or at any rate Alberti uses them interchangeably to mean complete harmony. 'Concinnitas' means that the separate parts 'mutuo ad speciem correspondeant'. Elsewhere it is 'consensus et conspiratio partium', and when he speaks of a beautiful façade as 'musica', in which not a note can be changed, he means nothing else than the unalterable, or the organic determination of form.¹⁵

These terms are quite alien to the baroque, and it is inevitable that they should be; the aim of this style is not to represent a perfected state, but to suggest an incomplete process and a movement towards its completion. This is why the formal relationships become looser, for the baroque is bold enough to turn the harmony into a dissonance by using imperfect proportions. As long as a work is to have any aesthetic meaning at all, its proportions cannot of course be

67

governed entirely by such a dissonance. But harmoniously related proportions became fewer and less conspicuous. The simple harmonies of Bramante's style suddenly seemed trivial and made way for more far-fetched relationships, more unnatural transitions that the untrained eye could easily mistake for complete absence of form. Consider especially the consequences of devices such as superimposed pilasters, blurred contours, and in short, the abolition, of all clearly separated elements. In Giacomo della Porta's Gesù façade (fig. 16) the rectangle of the main doorway, plus the segmental pediment, with pilasters, base and entablature, has, as we should expect, the same proportions as the entire central section of the façade: that is, the area covered by the main pediment excluding the base of the lower order of pilasters. But the ratio is obscured by the insertion of another pediment and half-columns into the segmental pediments with the pilasters; this detracts from the authority of the pilaster order through its columns and sets itself up as the more important of the two orders. Motifs of this kind occur several times over on the façade. The analogy with certain effects in advanced musical composition need not be stressed.

The significant thing is not the attempt to complicate our perception of harmonious relationships, but the intention to create an intentional dissonance. The baroque flaunts cramped niches, windows disproportionate to their allotted space, and paintings much too large for the surfaces they fill[10]; they are transposed from a different key, tuned to a different scale of proportions. The aesthetic charm of this approach is the resolution of the discords. Towards the top the discordant elements come to terms and a harmony of pure relationships is created. Such relationships go as far as contrasting an interior with an exterior, the vestibule with the library in the Laurenziana (pls. 1 and 2), the vestibule with the courtyard in the Palazzo Farnese (fig. 10
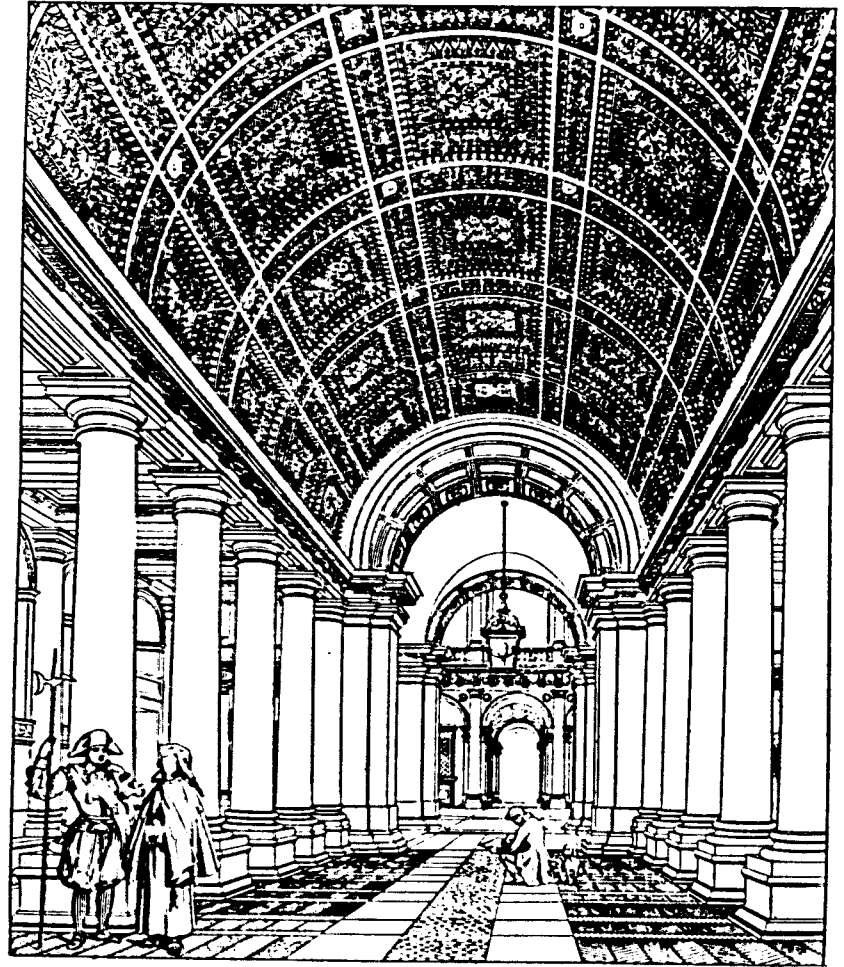
Fig. 10   Palazzo Farnese: Vestibule with view into courtyard

and pl. 17). Architecture had become dramatic; the work of art was no longer composed of a series of independently beautiful and self-contained parts. Only through the whole could the individual part gain value and meaning, or a satisfying conclusion and a termination be brought about.

The art of the Renaissance strove for perfection, 'something that nature can only achieve rarely'. The effectiveness of baroque depends on the stimulating quality of a formlessness which first has to be overcome. Alberti's 'concinnitas' is in the last resort at one with the spirit of nature[17], the creator and greatest of all artists (optima artifex). The art of man only tries to enter into the cohesiveness of natural creation and thereby into that universal harmony which finds such repeated and enthusiastic expression in Alberti's writing. Nature is consistent in all its parts: 'Certissimum est naturam in omnibus sui esse persimilem.'

I believe that here we have a glimpse into the very heart of the artistic spirit of the Renaissance, and at the same time a point of view for the clearest comprehension of the change to the baroque style.

Part II

THE CAUSES OF THE CHANGE IN STYLE