

Terms of Art – Reframing Key Concepts in Philosophy and Art Theory: "Style"

Deadline: Feb 28, 2026

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Call for Papers for the first edition of the series Terms of Art – Reframing Key Concepts in Philosophy and Art Theory, focusing on the concept of "Style".

Terms of Art – Reframing Key Concepts in Philosophy and Art Theory (edited by Moritz Pretzsch and Anna-Lisa Scherfose, forthcoming with De Gruyter/Deutscher Kunstverlag) is dedicated to re-examining central concepts in art for their current relevance and substantial significance. At its core, the series focuses on essential terms in art, art studies, art theory, aesthetics, and adjacent disciplines. It centers on terms with complex histories of definition and usage – concepts that emerged in specific historical contexts but have retained their relevance.

In light of technological transformations and the political and social challenges of our times, the series aims to revisit such concepts in comprehensive and multilayered ways, challenging the perception that they are outdated, abstract, or vague. Its goal is to present a polyphonic spectrum of art-theoretical and philosophically grounded perspectives that open up new insights and angles on seemingly familiar terms.

Guiding questions include:

- How must we approach each concept today?
- What new interpretive potential has emerged from recent technological developments?
- To what extent can each term be applied to current societal processes, and where does it risk becoming obsolete?
- How must we reconceptualize the nexus of art and the human in relation to each foundational term?

Topic "Style":

"Le style est l'homme même" – style is the man himself: With this concise dictum, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon declared in his 1753 inaugural address to the French Academy that individual style is a mirror of character. But does this assertion still hold true today? To what extent is style a testimony to human individuality, originality, and existential urgency? In short, how must we understand the nexus of style and the human today?

Like many key concepts in art, "style" is difficult to pin down. It denotes qualities of form that can simultaneously be understood as expressions of attitude or as valid norms. Style may thus be the object of normative art theory as well as of historical description. Often, it is interpreted as a mode of (artistic) expression, aesthetic presentation, or action, specifically in relation to content or aesthetic meaning. The conceptual emphasis is placed on the mode of production. At the

same time, the concept of style is anything but unproblematic. It intersects with rhetorical terms such as “correctness,” “purity,” “clarity,” “truth,” “beauty,” and “appropriateness,” incorporating some aspects while neglecting others.

Historically, the term gained wider usage in Italian Renaissance art literature. Antonio Filarete, in his *Trattato di architettura* (1460s), was the first to use the term “individual style” (Pfisterer 2002). Giorgio Vasari introduced the notion of “maniera” in the 16th century to describe artistic traits, establishing a chronological progress model of painting centered on artists like Giotto, Cimabue, and Raphael. “Maniera” was later replaced by “stile.” In the 17th and 18th centuries, the method of stylistic comparison emerged, especially in the writings of artist-authors such as Abraham Bosse, Giulio Mancini, Roger de Piles, and Jonathan Richardson. These texts, aimed at collectors, sought to distinguish originals from copies, determine quality criteria, and attribute unsigned works. This expertise was summarized under the concept of connoisseurship.

In the German-speaking world, Johann Joachim Winckelmann fundamentally shaped the concept. In his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), he divided Greek art into four historical styles, while normatively privileging the classical Greek as an ideal. Goethe, in contrast, praised the Gothic style of Strasbourg Cathedral (1772), offering a counterpoint to Winckelmann’s classicism. Later, in his essay *Simple Imitation of Nature, Manner, Style* (1789), Goethe nuanced his aesthetic position but still regarded style, understood as the highest form of artistic expression, as a function of the artist’s individuality and cognitive power.

In 18th-century France, style was seen as the unity of individual creativity and collective influences (provenance, zeitgeist, models). Buffon’s dictum was transformed by Hegel into an objectivist theory that understood style as an appropriate mode of representation, in contrast to subjective mannerism. In the 19th century, this was radicalized by Flaubert’s ideal of *bien écrire*. Nietzsche, by contrast, questioned the truth claims of such concepts, viewing style as an expression of plural perspectives and as a tool of critique.

With the institutionalization of art history, style became a key category of aesthetic attribution. A famous example is the “Holbein Controversy” (1871). Around 1900, Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin developed systematic models of stylistic history: Riegl through the concept of artistic volition, and Wölfflin through formal oppositions (e.g., linear/painterly, plane/depth), meant to reveal transhistorical perceptual structures. Style was thus conceived as a collective, temporally bound phenomenon – not normative, but descriptive.

In the 20th century, the concept expanded through cultural theory. Meyer Schapiro interpreted style as an expression of social and historical conditions; Ernst Gombrich defined it as any recognizable way of form-giving; George Kubler saw it as a “shape of time” manifest in serial problem-solving. Style thus lost its normative edge and came to function more as a heuristic tool.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (1986) linked academic style analysis with everyday stylization. As style became more prominent in everyday life, it faded from scholarly discourse, raising the implicit question of how science itself is stylized, particularly art history. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* has been especially influential in this regard from an educational and sociological perspective.

While style was foundational in the early discipline of art history, today it plays only a marginal role in theoretical debates. In practice – such as in museums, conservation, and the art market – it remains operative under the rubric of style criticism. In the context of an interdisciplinary image

science, however, style may once again gain theoretical traction (cf. Bredekamp/Schneider/Dünkel 2008).

Today, style is used ubiquitously, not only in reference to art, music, or architecture, but also to behavior and expression in nearly all areas of life. Consequently, the aesthetic-artist concept of style has evolved—away from normative, epoch-bound attributions, toward ideas of style as structure, choice, attribution, or consistent expressive pattern.

This volume will therefore undertake a systematic and historical reassessment of the concept of style.

Key questions include:

- How can we understand style today from an art-theoretical and philosophical perspective?
- What is the relationship between style, authenticity, originality, and art?
- How does the growing use of artificial intelligence transform the discussion?
- Do we today possess a new concept of style, with a new validity?
- And where lies the world-shaping power of style?

Each volume will comprise about twelve contributions of roughly 20 pages each, authored by leading researchers selected through invitation and open call. The first three editions will focus on Style, Kitsch, and Taste.

Please submit proposals for the volume Terms of Art – Style (max. 350 words), along with 5 keywords, a brief CV, and contact information, compiled into a single PDF, by February 28, 2026, to Moritz Pretzsch (moritzpretzsch@uni-kassel.de) and Anna-Lisa Scherfose (a.scherfose@uni-kassel.de).

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by end of May 2026.

Final contributions (English language, max. 50,000 characters including footnotes and spaces) are due by October 31, 2026.

All submissions will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

Reference:

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