1742/1747: 
Evening in the Palace of Reason: 
Baroque as Absolut Culture 

Week 12 – Lecture 2 

28 November 2007
Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment

[J.S. Bach (d. 1750)]
A. Baroque: Representing
17th-century culture [ideas and values]

“The Baroque”: 1600-1750
Age of Absolutism
17th century is the world of
Descartes, Leibniz, Newton

**RELIGION + MATHEMATICS**

A universe of complete interrelatedness,
all under the Provident and Absolute
control of a God [Deus].

Note hybrid:
Reformation + Scientific Revolution =
“Absolute /arbitrary freedom of God” +
“cosmic rational [mathematical] order”

“In the minutest particle of matter . . .
there is a world of created things . . .
a perpetual living mirror of the universe”

--- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz [1646-1716]
B. 16th-century origins of “Baroque”:
From Italian Renaissance to
Early Modern Catholicism

15th-16th cc. Italian Renaissance Humanism:
“Man is the measure…”
St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome

Renaissance? Baroque?
Baroque:
first grows out of Italian Renaissance:
i.e., neo-classical

• HOWEVER: Architecture of absolutism
• Crushing weight --- the weight of earthly power
• Begins with the “New Rome” of late-Renaissance popes
• An aesthetic of excess
ABSOLUTISM:
Crushing weight: is divine + human
“The king is the lieutenant of God.” - Loyseau

Pope = absolutist monarch

Bernini:
St. Peter’s Throne
{Pope as “St. Peter”}
Perpetual motion / undulation:

THEATER / DRAMA / EMOTION
Louvre: Bernini Proposal
[“Italian Baroque”]
Perpetual motion / undulation:

THEATER / DRAMA / EMOTION

Louis XIV’s “classical” age:
Vying for the center of the Baroque 17th c.
[Paris, not Rome!]
Caravaggio
Crucifixion of Saint Peter
Judith Beheading Holofernes (ca. 1598)
The Sacrifice of Isaac (1603)
El Greco
View of Toledo

Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple
C. Migration to German-speaking lands
Southern [i.e., Catholic] German-speaking states

Prussian Baroque
Zwinger Palace
(Dresden)
1710-1728
What ideological “work” does the Baroque do for the Frederick II [the Great] of Prussia in Dresden?

Gives the appearance of ancient “courtly” power, authority --- legitimation --- to new money/new power
17th century is the world of Descartes, Leibniz, Newton

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J. S. Bach:

“Toccata and Fugue in d minor”

Right “fact”;

Wrong “significance”!!!
Toccata: toccare = “touch”
The “Fugue” as absolutist musical form

- Bach --- the most mathematical of all musicians.
- “Fugue”: a theme is repeated several times in a piece according to a fixed order and without any variation
  - “Absolutism”: the imposing of a theme without any accommodation to its surroundings
• “Fugue” VOCABULARY:
• 1) “Theme” or “subject” = the main “tune” of the piece

• 2) Notes of the scale:
  – (1) Doh
  – (4) fah
  – (5) sol,
  – (8) doh [octave]
Sum: Fugue as **Absolutist** music

- “The Fugue”: the repetition of a single subject
  - in a prescribed way
  - in different contexts
  - but without ever changing the subject
- “Fugue”: popular throughout 17th-c. Europe [Italy, Germany, France]…

**Cultural meaning?**

- *Invariance; timelessness; change-lessness*
D. Complicating Factor: Age of Absolutism is also the Age of the Rising Bourgeoisie

Castle Howard, 1699

Still belongs to the Howard family
Charles Howard, 3rd Earl of Carlisle
i.e., NOT ancient nobility … rather, “new money”
http://www.castlehoward.co.uk/metadot/index.pl
Chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte: built by Nicholas Fouquet

What does Baroque architecture / art do for these patrons???

Gives the appearance of ancient “courtly” power, authority --- legitimation --- to new money/new power.

By means of the Baroque, members of the Third Estate – the commoners – emulate the appearance of the Second Estate --- the aristocracy/nobility.
E. Baroque Interiors:

Age of Absolutism is Age of Capitalism

Third Estate → bourgeois individualism

Pieter de Hooch, *Interior*

What’s so big about an *interior*???

Invention of *bourgeois* life

Calvin: “vocation”
• Portraits / portraits
• What was once reserved to kings, queens, popes, saints, lords… now available to middle class: an image of oneself --- a self-image….

• See Dutch gallery at MFA: PORTRAITS
  – Legitimate families
  – A turn to the subject: each individual has their own unique vocation

Rembrandt van Rijn

"Self-Portrait as a Young Man"
The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1632)

Syndics of the Cloth Merchants’ Guild (1662)
What is the “Third Estate”???  Subjective individualism
Flemish (today’s Netherlands/Belgium): Jan Vermeer
Georg Friedrich Handel: “All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray”

- “All we like sheep have gone astray,
- everyone to his own way…
- We have turned / Everyone to his own way...”
Third Estate: “upward mobility” ---

>All we have gone each to his own way like sheep....
A turn to the “Third Estate” --- not just Popes and Kings [First and Second Estates] powerful: Third Estate: accumulation of wealth and power through commerce as merchants.

Musical joke

• Happy part is the “sin” part!

• Slow / sad: “And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
  – i.e., “But then the Lord came and saved us…” [sob, sob --- and we wish he hadn’t!!]