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Towards a Cartographic Methodology for Art Historiography

To designate certain affairs as a period in history is to assume or posit some kind of unified process or whole to what has been happening that can be overseen. When an historian judges a certain sequence of various occurrences to constitute a complex with the identity of a period, he or she is making the crucial and most conclusive historiographic decision of present knowledge about those events in times past.¹ Whether the historian's judgment be in fact insightful or superficial, tentative or certain, right or wrong, without attempting the ordering of knowledge which the category of "period" provides, the historian has abdicated his office. It is simply philosophically naive to think and write as if "periods" are a matter of chronology.² Historical beginnings and endings are of a different sort than those determined by which side of the earth faces the sun. Historiography is not a series of almanacs.

The kind of reality historical periods have is still a mooted problem. For millenia Western thinkers believed world development fell into definite epochs ordained to correspond to the six days of creation or the six stages of microcosmic man's lifetime. In their view periods existed as substantively different ages, marked by significant events outside of human control, which nevertheless succeeded each other in one Continuous movement.³ Italian Humanists of the fifteenth century devised the schema of "ancient," "medieval," and "modern" times. Although in common use today this periodization is uncommonly useless for scientifically precise historiography because of the bland content of each period, the uncertain

¹ J. H. J. van der Pot, *De Periodisering der Geschiedenis. Een Overzicht der Theorien* (Hague, 1951), pp. 17-18, 22. This dissertation is accompanied by a very brief summary in English.

² Claudio Guillen, "Second Thoughts on Currents and Periods," in *The Disciplines of Criticism. Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*. Eds. P. Demetz, Th. Greene, Lowry Nelson, Jr. (Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 489-90.

³ This framework developed by Augustine in *De Civitate Dei contra paganos* remained popular well into the 1500s. Cf. Denys Hay, *Annalists & Historians, Western Historiography from the VIIIth to the XVIIIth Century* (London, 1977), pp. 17-23, 27-32, 89-90, 118-19. Also, van der Pot, op. cit., pp. 40-43.

criteria adopted for differentiating them, and the fruitless arguments engendered as to whether modernity began with the Renaissance or the Enlightenment.⁴ Important for my topic is the twist Hegel, Herder, and Fichte gave to the "modern" period when they, in collaboration, if you will, converted the wisdom or spirit of ages past into the genius or spirit of their own post-French Revolutionary day. *Zeitgeist*, conceived as a cagey, almighty Daemon brooding with destiny over all cultural phenomena,⁵ gave historiography a powerful, secular principle for periodisation: detect the ruling Spirit of a time and you can characterize the historical homogeneity present; dated boundaries - and lacunae in its regime can be discovered more exactly later.

Current historiography, however, by and large is leery of accepting the German Idealist mythology of a daemonic Spirit. The most that academicians are usually prepared to grant is that periods are heuristic devices, conceptual instruments to detect connections; "periods" can perhaps serve as hypothetical "regulative ideas" or disposable models for analysis, but not many thinkers today would accept responsibility for much more.⁶ And a few intrepid souls walk in where more careful scholars fear to tread and virtually reject periods as fictions. They tend to revert to re-sensng and "pre- [144] sentifying" great, old artefactual forms, so not to segment the worm of history, or skillfully catalogue discrete items found within

⁴ For sources and a critical review of the matter cf. van der Pot, op. cit., pp. 113-23, 126-50. Jacob Burckhardt saw the modern era begin with the Italian Renaissance "individual." Ernst Troeltsch argued that only with the *Autklärung* did culture break out of its restrictive, ecclesiastical imperium and begin a new age.

⁵ Herder's 1798 text sets the tone: " 'Was ist der Geist der Zeiten?' Allerdings ein mächtiger Genius, ein gewaltiger Dämon" (II, 14). "*Geist der Zeiten* heisse also die Summe der Gedanken, Gesinnungen, Anstrengungen, Triebe und lebendigen Kräfte, die in einem bestimmten Fortlauf der Dinge mit gegebenen Ursachen und Wirkungen sich aussern Diesen Gemeingeist des aufgekiarten oder sich aufkliarenden Europa auszurotten ist unmöglich Irre ich nicht, so sind *drei Hauptbegebenheiten* oder *Epochen Europas*, an denen dieser europäische Weltgeist haftet. Eine ist längst vorüber, sie dauerte fünf- bis achthundert Jahre und kommt hoffentlich nie wieder. Die zweite ist geschehen und geht in ihren Wirkungen fort; ihr Wert ist anerkannt und muss, der Natur der Sache nach, immer mehr anerkannt werden. Über der dritten brütet der Weltgeist, und wir wollen ihm wünschen, dass er in sanfter Stille ein glückliches Ei ausbrüten möge" (II,16). *Briefe zur Befürdenmg der Humanitiit* (Berlin, 1971), 1:77, 80-81. Cf. Karl Lowith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (Stuttgart [1941], 1958), pp. 220-251.

⁶ B. von Wiese, "Zur Kritik des geistesgeschichtlichen Epochebegriffes," *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* II (1933):130-144; Rene Wellek, "Periods and Movements in Literary History," *English Institute Annual 1940* (Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 88-93; Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought, Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 393; H. P. H. Teesing, *Das Problem der Perioden in der Literaturgeschichte* (Groningen, 1949), pp. 8-11, 40-48 [Teesing corrects Von Wiese's misuse of Kant, pp. 46-47]; Alastair Fowler, "Periodization and Interart Analogies," *Sew Literary History* 3 (1971-72), 489-91.

parts of centuries.⁷ Such a method is indeed without daemonic madness, but it also leaves historiography without ontic grounding, blowing where it lists, since "centuries" have nothing to do with historical knowledge and have no base in human experience other than their being a multiple of our normally having ten toes.

To elucidate the general problem I shall focus in this essay specifically on what is called "the Enlightenment" in the eighteenth century, or the cultural span when "rococo art" was dominant in Europe. Did the Enlightenment actually exist as an historical period once upon a time, or is it only in a few scholarly minds?

I should like to pass in critical review several major positions taken on the question before I present my own alternative. The answer to the question on the reality and character of the Enlightenment period not only shows one's particular historiographic method but also deeply affects one's resultant understanding of art and literature produced by two generations of gifted people, let's say, from around 1712 to the 1770s in Europe and England.⁸

Historical sense comes, in my judgment, when one can relate our day to other times and interpret the difference in culture meaningfully for a next generation. If the Enlightenment period and any phases within it be nothing more than momentary shapes conjectured to be seen in the flames of history, many eighteenth-century scholars today will only have red faces for their trouble, from having been too near the fire. The same will hold true for historians of art and literature of whatever "period."

The late Arnold Hauser (1893-1978), perceptive and undoctinaire, exposts French *fetes galantes* painting, *hotels*} and the decorative salon art of society during the years of the Regence and Louis XV as the dialectical turning point of elitist

⁷ Cf. H. P. H. Teesing, op. cit., pp. 12-17; Jost Hermand, "Über Nutzen und Nichteil literarischer Epochenbegriffe, ein Vortrag," *Monatshefte* 58 (no. I, 1966), 296-300; Lawrence Lipking, "Periods in the Arts: Sketches and Speculations," *Sew Literary History* I (1969-70), 189-200; David Rosand, "Art History and Criticism: The Past as Present," *New Literary History* 5 (Spring 1974), 437-38; lectures given by Ralph Cohen at the University of Toronto, spring 1979.

⁸ "Patterns of emphasis in research are not completely determined by assumed or accepted schemes of periodization, of course, but it would be difficult to deny their focusing influence." Clifton Cherpak, "The Literary Periodization of Eighteenth-century France," *PMLA* 84 (March 1969), 323 n. 12.

Renaissance culture and our more democratic way of pursuing happiness.⁹ So-called rococo art, which was "the last universal style of Western Europe" and "the final phase in a culture of taste ... the last style in which 'beautiful' and 'artistic' are synonymous," rococo art expresses *in its form* the worldview at work among the aristocracy and middle-class of those days seesawing back and forth for societal cultural power.¹⁰

Independently, in connection with his analysis of French literature of the same time, Roger Laufer posits practically an identical thesis. Rococo style, *style des "lumières"*¹¹ says Laufer, in all its astonishingly back-tracking, unifying sinuosity expresses perfectly in *un compromis souriant* the underlying socio-economic contradiction of a bumbling *l'ancien regime* opening its doors to artisan and *philosophe* and the social-climbing middle-class picking up blue-blood culchah.¹² The very structure of rococo elegance mediates, manifestly blends with titillating technique, the constant opposition of *raison* and *sensibilite* which were held in tense dialectical equilibrium by the society in ferment until the critical '60s and only reached a resolution of sorts in the revolution.¹³

⁹ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, trans. S. Godman (New York, 1951), 3:33. "The rococo itself prepares the way for the new alternative, by undermining the classicism of late baroque and by creating with its pictorial style, its sensitiveness to picturesque detail and impressionistic technique an instrument which is much better suited to express the emotional contents of middle-class art than the formal idiom of the Renaissance and the baroque. The very expressiveness of this instrument leads to the dissolution of rococo, which is bent, however, by its own way of thinking on offering the strongest resistance to irrationalism and sentimentalism. Without this dialectic between more or less automatically developing means and original intentions it is impossible to understand the significance of the rococo; not until one comes to see it as the result of a polarity which corresponds to the antagonism of the society of the same period, and which makes it the connecting link between the courtly baroque and middle-class pre-romanticism, can one do justice to its complex nature."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:35. Also Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (Cleveland, [1958], 1969), p. 241, and *The Sociology of Art*, translated by K. Northcott [1974], from a section published in *Critical Inquiry* 5 (no. 3, :979), 429-30, 436-38.

¹¹ Laufer has been criticized for his unusual and expansive use of the term "rococo." "Entre le classicisme de 1660 et le romantisme de 1830, la France n'a élaboré qu'un seul style, auquel je propose de donner un seul nom, celui de rococo," *Style Rococo, Style des "Lumières"* (Paris, 1963), p. 13. But he carefully notes nuances of change ("On peut distinguer dans le rococo trois moments .. :'), affixing more conventional limits; cf. p. 39. Dates are among the lesser worries for Marxist historiography. It is true, however, that various traits he ascribes to rococo literature may arguably be features of general artistic normativity rather than dated ones peculiar to a rococo style. And his repeated "la mise en question, caractéristique du rococo" (p. 30) may overload, I think, the historical fact with eisegetic connotations borne by a twentieth-century existentialistic sensitivity. Cf. also pp. 25, 28, 46, 48.

¹² Laufer, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14, 39.

¹³ "Le style rococo exprime la réalité la plus profonde du dix-huitième siècle: il découvre sans les dépasser les insolubles contradictions économiques dont les repercussions idéologiques amèneront dans les années soixante la crise de la philosophie des Lumières" (*Ibid.*, p. 42). Cf. also pp. 32-34, 38, 43.

So both Hauser and Laufer see Enlightenment culture as a period to be a pivotal, passing stage in an ongoing dialectical struggle for a brave new world. Hauser's and Laufer's keen analyses of the restive preciosity of rococo art and literature remind one of the fascinating love-hate evaluation of the Enlightenment's blessed curse upon our life-patterns today made by Horkheimer and Adorno and various Neo-Marxists, as if "the Enlightened ones" halted between two opinions of privilege and revolution and therefore left a legacy of societal and cultural disarray.¹⁴

When Hans Sedlmayr treats the *Hotel de Soubise* as an exemplary rococo *Gesamtkunstwerk* against the backdrop of world epochs in art history and, on a more restricted scale, in the setting of the four major eras of Western art since the Roman empire, one receives a much more settled picture of French art 1725-1750 A.D. than appears under Hauser and Laufer's scrutiny.¹⁵ Regence and rococo architecture and painting may have been bitten by the bug [145] of a velvet-gloved ("taubenfilssige") revolution, but it is still a late species of the Renaissance-baroque age of Western art, 1470-1760, says Sedlmayr. The efflorescence of ornamentality and the obeisance to erotic passion stamp the rococo as secular, blind to regions of supersensible reality to which its images could be analogues; but the easy grace of the encircling rococo line saves it from the godless anarchy and subsequent disrespect for natural materials which begins in earnest sometime after 1770, leading to our present technocratized planet.¹⁶

Helmut Hatzfeld follows the same line of attack, albeit more with literary flair than with philosophical precision,¹⁷ It appears to be more important for the kind of

¹⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming [1944] (New York, 1972). Analyzing fundamentally from the same position Pierre Francastel reaches a similar bittersweet judgment on "L'Esthetique des lumieres" in *Utopie et Institutions au XVIIIe Siecle* (Paris, 1963), pp. 336-37, 343, 348-52, 356.

¹⁵ Hans Sedlmayr, "Die Vier Zeitalter" (1948), "Weltepochen der Kunst" (1956) and "Das Gesamtkunstwerk der Regence und des Rokoko" (1958), in *Epochen und Werke, Gesammelte Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte* (München, 1960), 2: 342-60, 188-93.

¹⁶ "Die innerste Triebfeder dieser sanften Revolution in beiden Hauptphasen - Regence und Rokoko - ist die Verkündigung einer neuen obersten Lebensmacht, der stärksten unter allen: der sinnlichen Liebe. Göttlich verfeinerte Sinnlichkeit das Geistreiche der Sinne wird das Ideal" (Ibid., 2:190). Cf. also 2:191, 193, 350-52, 358-60. Also, "Analogie, Kunstgeschichte und Kunst," *Studium Generale* 8 (no. H, 1955), 697-703.

¹⁷ "Der Versuch eines destruktiv-kritischen Bruches mit einer sakularen Vergangenheit, der von einer leichtfertigen Oberschicht durch geschickte Vulgarisation verbreitet wird, gibt dem Rokoko seine innere Anarchie. So darf man wohl Rokoko definieren als: *Seelische Anarchie unter der Maske des*

historiography Sedlmayr and Hatzfeld practice to detect the general *Weltanschauung* incarnate in given art and literary works than to document their interacting crises, becomings and begoings. So Periods for them tend to become types or solid states of value-configurations in which the art and literary historian's task is to detect the spirit of a piece, deduce its measure of typicality, for example, as "rococo man," and further, using co-temporal cultural evidence from other fields, gauge its *geistesgeschichtliche* step on the world history scale of wholeness, beauty, holiness, or evil.¹⁸

Wylie Sypher's tack is not to debate the fact that bona fide styles are striking indices to cultural life and a prevailing, contemporary world outlook; but he takes pains to state that styles, which may double up in a period (= time-span) or in an artist's oeuvre, have a life of their own in art and literature, so that a history of style transformation does not need to become "culture history."¹⁹ In fact Sypher originally held forthrightly that styles recur and probably follow a set cycle of integration, disintegration, and reintegration, although not in any strictly determined number of years.²⁰ His later reflection hedges a bit by saying that stylistic *techniques* recur, and he honors the cumulative debt of any newly

heiteren Spiels." Helmut Hatzfeld, "Rokoko als Literarischer Epochenstil in Frankreich:" *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938), 535.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35:534. Also, "The Rococo of the Eighteenth Century 1715-1789" in *A New Approach to French Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 102-19; "A New Periodization of Literary History: A Review Article," *Romance Notes* 2 (no.1, Fall 1960), 73-75; and *The Rococo. Eroticism, Wit, and Elegance in European Literature* (New York, 1972). The breath-taking seriousness of what is at stake for Sedlmayr becomes clear when Sedlmayr ups the ante on Max Dvorak's methodology and talks about the metahistorography of art: "Auf dieser höchsten denkbaren Ebene [where one judges the truth or lie of the art work] wandelt sich Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte in *Kunstgeschichte als Pneumatologie und Diimonologie.*" From his piece "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte" [1949], in *Kunst und Wahrheit, Zur Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (Hamburg, 1958), pp. 81-82. Lorenz Dittmann signals dangers in Sedlmayr's position in *Stil Symbol Struktur: Studien w Kategorien der Kunstgeschichte* (Munich, 1967), pp. 186-92, 204-208, 212-13.

¹⁹ Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style* (Garden City, 1955), pp. 9-10, 13-18, 30. ", .. I have assumed that a genuine style is an expression of a prevailing, dominant, or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of human experience peculiar to their day and who are able to phrase this experience in forms deeply congenial to the thought, science, and technology which are part of that experience A style is more than the techniques that go into the making of the style, for a style expresses in adequate and, perhaps, classic form the whole consciousness of an age." *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature* (New York, 1960), pp. xix-xx.

²⁰ Sypher, *Four Stages*, pp. 6-9. " ... we shall be less concerned with historical sequence or geographic latitude than with defining the alternations in style occurring everywhere in the renaissance arts Like the burning phoenix, a style can resurrect and transform itself in a miraculous way. It has its own fate, but not always the fatality of the history that is written in time" (*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33).

occurring style to the total of past styles.²¹ Yet Sypher is still willing to maintain that the rococo as a major modern style recurs; it returns [145] in the late nineteenth-century stylization of Art Nouveau.²²

With that the proverbial bag or muddle of worms is opened: how can "the rococo period, covering roughly the first half of the eighteenth century,"²³ born of honest Newtonian deism and breathing arabesque heroic couplets,²⁴ ever be said to "recur"? Is the idea of a "period style" emptied of calendar dates serviceable to an authentic writing of *history*: Are neo-styles ("neo-rococo," "neo-classical") historically possible as genuine atavisms?

The case argued by Philippe Minguet is more restrained. With admirable care he explores the equation that artistic culture is not wholly other from current societal affairs but as functions of one another, in tandem, art and other meaningful life practices show congruence and convergence; and when historiographers recognize such a concordance for a time somewhere as a common style, a cohering *esprit du temps*, for example, from around 1720-1760 in Europe, and call it "rococo," nobody should nitpick the term to mean every fact alive and dead then has to exemplify everyone of its family characteristics.²⁵ Minguet shows by painstaking analysis of peculiarly architectural features in buildings designed by Neumann, the Zimmermanns, and Cuvillies in southern Germany, that one cannot do justice to their forms, purpose, aura, or structure in terms of "late baroque" or "classical"

²¹ Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism*, pp. xx-xxi, xxvi.

²² "Yet rococo is a legitimate-indeed, a recurring style, and trifling as it may be, is singularly important because it is the last coherent style before the later eighteenth century, and the nineteenth, lost a style and had, instead, only stylizations. In fact, the return to a style at the close of the nineteenth century came in part through the neorococo methods of Art Nouveau. This is why we must deal with rococo as a modern style." Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism*, p. 4. Cf. also "the decorative Art Nouveau, the new rococo of the later nineteenth century:" pp. 24, 47, 229-231, 238-40. Between 1955 and 1960 Sypher's grand programmatic cycles of style ("The cycle of renaissance styles is closed," *FOUR Stages*, p. 34) broke down, I think, perhaps under the influence of Hauser and Francastel's more developmental, genetic approach (explicitly acknowledged in *Rococo to Cubism*, pp. v, xviii-xix, xxi-xxiii, 152). In 1955 Watteau and rococo seem to be the last stage of a cycle (*Four Stages*, pp. 9, 32); in 1960 rococo is called "the first modern style" (*Rococo to Cubism*, p. 20), and is followed only by "tendencies" until the "neo-archaic" (*Four Stages*, p. 32) or "archetypal" (*Rococo to Cubism*, p. xxiii) modern style of cubism takes command. If styles have the order of "systems" for Sypher (cf. Emil Kaufmann quote in *Rococo to Cubism*, p. xvii), then now rococo and cubism will not recur (?). In 1960 the brevity and danger! of a full-fledged style is emphasized (*Rococo to Cubism*, pp. xxiv, 153-55).

²³ Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism*, p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 12-15, 41-43.

²⁵ Philippe Minguet, *Esthétique du Rococo* (Paris, 1966), pp. 181, 190-91, 254, 261-62, 272-73

style architecture. Their architectural originality is thoroughly and irreducibly rococo, a third way (*une troisième voie*) aesthetic normativity shows up historically between the Renaissance and Impressionism, naturally always colored by particular artistic visions and locale.²⁶ He uses the close bond between architecture and life-style to draw a convincing portrait of the public mentality that lived and moved and had its being within bemirrored apartment, miniaturized salon, and atectonic church, under an "epiphany of graciousness":²⁷ so he documents the independent identity of a rococo art and life-style, however limited and short-lived.²⁸

Nevertheless the question still rises because of how he explains both the sub[146]lime baroque and the gracious rococo as being "deviations" from the most normal, perennial, more equal ideal of the three classical beauty: does a rococo period style slip then somewhat for Minguet too into a possible categorical type?²⁹

1. We do well to recognize the turbulence of historical genesis Hauser and Laufer highlight. In my judgment they force a disruptive, dialectical scheme upon the reality of cultural development and reduce art and literature into pawns of a fated class struggle; but they honor the fact that periods are a war of currents and countercurrents and eddies of forces busy interacting, transacting, and confronting one another, and that the rise and fall of period styles is bloody because human allegiances are at stake. So no art or literary historiography worth its salt will describe rococo style in the Enlightenment setting as a checker game of artistic forms.³⁰ Periodization is not a chess problem.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 62, 123-24, 143-75, 277-79.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 181-82, 200-206, 238-40, 277 *et passim*.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 175, 277.

²⁹ "On voit l'avantage considerable de la primaute *de droit* que nous reconnaissons au classique, en nous fondant, croyons-nous, sur la nature des choses. Repense legitiment, non comme un pole. mais comme le centre, il est susceptible d'etre modalise dans un autre sens que le baroque. A l'equilibre de *deficience* correspond cet equilibre de *surcroil*: la grace. Double recherche de l'equilibre: l'une d'une harmonie qui se fait et se defail; l'autre d'une harmonie *parabolique*, corrigeant sa *mol/esse* par la *virtuosite*, sa tension par la remission" (Ibid., p. 276). Minguet's preference for classical style (au sens large) as *unite dans la Hariete* shows up repeatedly: pp. 63, 116, 145, 158, 275. Alastair Fowler noticed a comparable bias in Ernst Robert Curtius and E. H. Gombrich's breakdown of styles, although they credit only one departure from the norm-mannerism. Cf. *New Literary History* 3 (1971/72), 494-95.

³⁰ Arnold Hauser, "Art History Without Names," in *The Philosophy of Art History*, pp. 156, 161-65, 208-210. "Style is neither a genetic nor a teleological concept; it is neither set before the artist nor accepted by him as a goal. It is neither a special-concept under which particular phenomena are subsumed nor yet a logical category from which other concepts could be derived. It is rather a dynamic relational concept with continually varying content, so that it might almost be said to take on a new

2. Sedlmayr and Hatzfeld point to the unpopular truth that cultural leaders in history serve different idols. In my judgment they tie up the hegemonic stance on ultimate concerns at a given time into too neat a package; they tend to look at art and literature mostly as faces for worldviews; and because they adjudge secularization to plague our civilization with an enormous loss of value they fail to see the past historical need for desacralization of culture if it would mature, and simply are suspicious of innovative changes in art and literature as probably destructive. But they rightly appeal to the fact that periods are dated, irreversible, discontinuous configurations of norms posited in time, and that the historiographic point is how a new generation trades on the tradition inherited in its field, evaluated against some final standard.³¹ Art and literary historians who would believe that the Enlightenment is only a generalization and not a deep-going environment of spirited commitment surrounding the works of man's hands forfeit their historiographic birthright to assess the meaning and place in world history of the artefacts they examine. That leaves the field open for spot checks on individual pieces by new critics for anything curious to our attention.

3. The sanity with which Sypher and especially Minguet assemble comparative art detail and societal phenomena to describe a rococo style can teach us what an historical homogeneity is and is not. They exhibit the fact that periods are historical events: not sums of happenstantial entities in succession and not logical constructs. It would save untold debate over secondary matters if it could be commonly accepted that it is unscientific to treat periods, i.e., *historical events*, as a *logical class* of items that need to have necessary and sufficient reasons to be included or whose members must instantiate a precise definition.³² The community of traits Minguet and Ronald Paulson, for example, establish by deft, relevant

sense with each new work" (Ibid., p. 209). CL Laufer, op. cit., pp. 42-43; Francastel, op. cit., pp. 349-50.

³¹ Wellek, op. cit., pp. 89-91; Dittmann, op. cit. . p. 163; John Passmore, "History of Art and History of Literature: a commentary," *New Literary History* 3 (1971-72), 575, 584-86.

³² Historical reality may drive logicians berserk, but the solution would be to develop a logical analysis supple with imagination, not try to square the parabola of historical unity into a Venn diagram. Cf. Meyer Schapiro, "Criteria of Periodization in the History of European Art," *New Literary History* I (1969-70), 113-14; Alastair Fowler, "Periodization and Interart Analogies," *New Literary History* 3 (1971-72), 492-93. Note Karl Aschenbrenner's nod to Kant's "reflective" judgment and his own careful thought on "historical universals" and "similation," in *The Concepts of Criticism* (Dordrecht-Holland, 1974), pp. 295-319.

characterization which honors peculiar national idiosyncracies and the particularity of architecture, interior decoration, manners and mores, landscape art, engravings, painting and novel, while showing a significant, over-all, cultural pattern,³³ proves that historical realities caught and delineated by historiographic categories like period, style, tradition and trend, are of a different order than what a logical dart can hit. Just so little as the differences in ultimate philosophical convictions which bedevil theories of history can be adjudicated and settled by an umpire in logic, just so little can tightening up one's definition of terms provide genial historiographic insight or correct historiographic astigmatism.³⁴

Before I conclude with a modest proposal on a way to overcome the most persistent bugaboo of art historiography into which Sypher and many less critical historians slip -the metamorphosis of unique periods into recurrent types of human cultural dispositions-I should note the important work of two masters of caveat in our search for a more fruitful historiographic method dealing with the Enlightenment as a period.

Herbert Dieckmann cautions against *le grand tableau* as an abstraction but admits that there is a general cultural current one may call "rococo" and "a movement of Enlightenment, which undoubtedly constitutes [147] an essential part of the

³³ Cf. Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression. Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1975), for example, "The Poetic Garden," pp. 19-34, and "The Conversation Piece in Painting- and Literature," pp. 121-36.

³⁴ "Logical precision in making distinctions naturally has an important, limited service within all narrative. One must beware, however, of over-precisioning terms, as if univocality and equivocality are the only possibilities for sound discourse. In correcting Paul Hazard's extreme definition of "reason," Roland Mortier opens the door for an ampler sense to do justice to Diderot's "raison-sentiment" ("Unite ou scission du siecle des lumihes?" in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 26 [1963], 1207, 1211, 1215-16), what one might call a ludic rationalism. Also, whether "rococo" deserves the dignity of synonymy with "Enlightenment," in Anger's terms, whether "rococo" is a *Zeitstil* or *Epochenstil*, and whether such cultural movements be truly cosmopolitan in Europe or staggered, parallel national developments: such problems are not questions demanding *logical* decisions. Cf. Alfred Anger, *Literarisches Rokoko* (Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 11-14; Werner Krause, "Zur Periodisierung Aufklärung, Sturm und Drang, Weimar Klassik" within section on "Zur Konstellation der deutschen Aufklärung," in *Perspektiven und Probleme, Zur französischen und deutschen Aufklärung und andue Aufsdtze* (Berlin-West, 1965), pp. 234-38; Carl J. Friedrich, "Style as the Principle of Historical Interpretation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* XIV, 110. 2 (1955), 144-45. Also cf. Teesing, *Vas Problem der Perioden in der Litemturgeschichte* "Was wir als primal' and was wir als sekundiiir chte. "Was wir als primiiir and was wir als sekundiiir betrachten wollen, ist also lediglich eine Frage des Standpunktes. Mit wissenschaftlichen Mitteln Hisst sich das kaum entscheiden. Nur dann ist eine Entscheidung möglich, wenn man auf Grund einer bestimmten Weltanschauung (oder doch einer bestimmten geschichtsphilosophischen Lehrmeinung) seinen Stanpunkt verabsolutiert" (p. 79) .

eighteenth century ..."³⁵ His worry is that a basic trait or specific ideology of the *Aufklärung*, such as religious iconoclasm, be hypostatized, essentialized, and prevent historians from remembering, for example, Pascal's living presence then, including Pascal's contextual import for Voltaire's polemics.³⁶

While no one will argue with the rejection of oversimplified generalizations and blanket preconceptions, nor doubt that the corroborating translation of criteria from one cultural field to another is fraught with pitfalls, still Dieckmann's confession to a minimalistic scepticism is sad.³⁷ His tired wisdom to forego "defining the oneness" of the period and to hold his "historical prehension" at making specific interconnections between different figures intelligible remains fixed by the very logicistic project of definition he rejects and belies the accumulating promise of his own methodical notation of themes and characteristics that are "representative."³⁸

Concept specialist, and gadfly extraordinaire, Patrick Brady has faulted so many analysts of rococo style one may sometimes think he believes that any consistent method will falsify the cultural whole if it identifies a pattern that is more than an artistic tendency.³⁹ Other times Brady himself uses "Zeitgeist," "rococo society"

³⁵ Herbert Dieckmann, "Themes and Structure of the Enlightenment," in *Essays in Comparative Literature* (St Louis, 1961), pp. 56-59; "Reflections on the Use of Rococo as a Period Concept," in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, ed. P. Demetz et al. (Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 429-31, 434.

³⁶ Dieckmann, "Religiose und Metaphysische Elemente im Denken der Aufklärung" [1963], in *Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung* (München, 1974), pp. 259-60, 266, 271-73.

³⁷ Dieckmann, "Reflections on the Use of Rococo as a Period Concept," pp. 431-35. "Den Beiträgen zur Erforschung des 18. Jh., die in dieser Sammlung erscheinen, liegt keine allgemeine Theorie der Geschichte oder Deutung und keine allgemeine These des Wesens der Aufklärung zugrunde. Obwohl der Verfasser nicht abstreiten will, dass die Aufklärung als eine Epoche bezeichnet werden kann, ist er sich zu sehr ihrer Vielgestaltigkeit bewusst, um zu versuchen, ihre Einheit zu definieren; er vermeidet sowohl Antithesen aufzustellen, wie Synthesen zu konstruieren und glaubt, der Geschichte gerecht zu werden, wenn auf Grund von spezifischen Fragestellungen Beziehungen zwischen verschiedenen Autoren erkennbar und in einem problemgeschichtlichen sowie formgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang deutbar werden. Ob die Begriffe, die er verwendet, gültig sind, muss nicht das vorhergehende Reflektieren auf sie, sondern das Erkenntnisergebnis zeigen. Mit diesem Verfahren, in dem man ein Bekenntnis zu nominalistischer Skepsis sehen kann, hofft er angesichts einer modernen Aktualisierung der Aufklärung bewusst zu machen, dass diese Epoche nahe und doch fern steht. ... Historische Anschauung oder sehende Erkenntnis ist immer schon Vermittlung zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, mithin eine Weise der Überwindung des Historismus." From the 1974 "Nachwort" in *Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung*, p. 491.

³⁸ Cf. Dieckmann, "Reflections on the Use of Rococo as a Period Concept," pp. 421, 431, 435.

³⁹ "A style label is useful only in so far as it defines primarily an aesthetic attitude or tendency rather than a period." Patrick Brady, "Rococo Style in French Literature," *Studi Francesi* no. 30 (1966), 428, repeated in "From Traditional Fallacies to Structural Hypotheses; Old and New Conceptions in Period Style Research," *Neophilologus* 56 (1972), 3-4, and again in "The Present State of Studies on the Rococo," *Comparative Literature* 27 (no. 1, Winter 1975), 30. Also, cf. review of Hatzfeld in

and even "rococco culture" as if they were established terms.⁴⁰ Perhaps his strictly individualist-empiricist bark is worse than his more recently acquired Structuralist bite?

Yet despite the enormous, important knowledge helpfully gathered, as it were, the head of a pin, and the intense rigor statement exacted by his expert analytic precision, there are a few dubious tenets t need questioning.

(1) On what grounds should one believe t a strictly *definitional* thread will lead out of an *historical labyrinth*?⁴¹ Does not such a logical class conception of "period," ultimately based on dates, named by majority vote of artefacts of the time,⁴² miss the nub of "defining" a period by what *sets* the prime cultural norm and pace of *historical* initiative in motion?

(2) Why should one follow the method of taking a term defined by its use in its original sphere of interior decorative art, elaborate it by finding formal stylistic correspondences in other arts (characteristic of the other arts and literature), and then expect such careful, detailed comparisons to deliver "the essential" of the *period* style?⁴³ If one works from art and literature first, before going to their common cultural stock, will it not leave one with an "essentially contested concept"

Comparative Literature 25 (no. 4, 1973), 265, and "The Present State of Studies on the Rococo," pp. 22,33 .

⁴⁰ "A un certo momento, una delle varie lendenze coesistenti puo avere il sopravvento, o perche esprime una specie di *Zeitgeist* che meglio appaga, o perche s' armonizza col temperamento dei massimi artisti dell'epoca, o perche esprime il gusto del ceto che ordina le opere a questi artisti: ed e un fatto che i suddetti moth'i sono raramente indipendenti fra loro." Patrick Brady in *Dizionario critico della letteratura francese* (Torino, 1972), p. 10-11, repeated in "The Present State of Studies on the Rococo," pp. 30-31. Also, cf. "From Traditional Fallacies to Structural Hypotheses," p. 6. "The term rococo refers to a relatively unified culture existing in a relatively short span of time " "Period Style Terms and Concepts: the Wittgensteinian Perspective," *The Journal of Critical Analysis* 4, no. 2, (July 1972), 67.

⁴¹ "Period style is inevitably concerned with necessary and sufficient criteria, i.e., with definitions: the history of the relationships between terms and concepts is absolutely crucial to period style research We can wander about in this delicate labyrinth without a definition, but if we wish to go anywhere in particular, or even ever to emerge from the labyrinth, only a definition will provide the thread to draw the phenomena involved together into a coherent pattern." "Period Style Terms and Concepts," pp. 67-68.

⁴² "La validita della tendenza a denominare il primo Settecento 'la periode du rococo' .. dipende dal presupposto che l'estetica del R. e quella che, neU'epoca in questione, e stata illustrata dal maggior numero di capolavori." *Dizionario critico della letteratura francese*, p. 1011.

⁴³ Patrick Brady, "Rococo and Neo-classicism," *Studi Francesi* 8 (1964), 34; "From Traditional Fallacies to Structural Hypotheses," pp. 4-5. Or has the earlier (1960s) empiricistic method of obtaining "convincing analogies" by having interior decoration "colonialize" other arts reached a bind, and Brady now (1970s) settles for a Structuralistic "myth" that is not verifiable but permanently hypothetical? Cf. Lipking, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-97.

of period style, since historical periods are not primarily artistic matters but fully cultural events?

(3) Why is the denomination of (capitalized!) Nature and Woman as the "spirits" of rococo and the binary opposition of "feminine" and "masculine" (elaborated as *esprit de finesse* and *esprit de geometrie*) any less simplistic historiography for contrasting rococo and neoclassical period styles than other "traditional fallacies?"⁴⁴ Does not such categorical judgment cast into (eternal) *types* what should instead be both conceived and perceived as an *historical* progression or regression?⁴⁵

The gist of my position could be postulated somewhat as follows: *Periods* are homogeneous, cultural historical events which do not recur. Periods are never periodic. But *Weltanschauungen* (of a certain indefinite number) do persist through different periods and "recur," that is, become articulated culturally again and again. *Styles* are aesthetic imperatives posited by a human community responding to the call for style in the world. Style is epitomized in art and literature but is not an artistic invention, Style is always the structurally embedded conjunct of a period and a *Weltanschauung*; and every style inescapably occurs in an idiom manifesting the particular variables (personal, national, special field, and the like) of its concrete circumstances. What counts historiographically most among the welter of style

⁴⁴ Brady, "Rococo and Neo-classicism," pp. 42-43, 46-47; "Rococo Painting: Some Points of Contention," *Studi Francesi* no. 47-48 (1972), 271,280.

⁴⁵ "Teasing exposes the inadequacy of bipolar schemes for catching the nuanced relation between two different periods and shows how such a reduced perspective avoids asking questions about the meaning of a given period for subsequent times; cf. *Das Problem der Perioden in der Literaturgeschichte*, p. 117. Cf. also Guillen, "Second Thoughts on Currents and Periods," pp. 484-86, 503. Do both Brady and Dieckmann themselves slip into the fault they warned others against, viz., conceiving "rococo" and "Aufklärung" as "recurrent" affairs? "The principles of enlightenment reflect or express a certain form of thinking, a definite bent of the mind, perhaps even a recurrent stage which by an inner determinism follows stages of predominantly metaphysical, religious, mythical, or simply speculative thought, periods of dominant structures, and solid stable systems of the mind" (Dieckmann, "Themes and Structures of the Enlightenment," p. 71). "A style is static and permanent insofar as it represents an ever-recurring tendency of artistic expression (e.g. the tendency towards lightness, subtlety, grace, and finesse, as distinct from those of simplicity, symmetry, and cold sobriety or of dynamic power and drama). But it is not immutable or unvarying: while it never totally ceases to exist but merely becomes subservient, latent, or dormant at various times and in various places, it reappears in forms that are modified by historical and geographical circumstance. Thus, in the case of any given period style (e.g., the rococo) transformation is concerned with emergence from and return to a dormant or latent status" (Brady, "From Traditional Fallacies to Structural Hypotheses," p. 8).

changes is this: does the intra-period and inter-period significant change represent *historical development*, regression, or what?

Let me hint at what these postulates mean for art and literary historiography of the Enlightenment by describing succinctly a few key features of three basic coordinates that are categorical factors constantly in force for art and literature and of special concern to historians.

1. The synchronic reality of a period is pancultural and takes its definition from the most dynamic cultural leadership, whether it prevails over all fields or less than all. The communal unity of a period, which sets it off from other periods, is most like that of a regime whose power and rule depend upon subjects willing to live and move and do their art, for example, under its sway. Because there normally are contending cultural leaders and because various arts and different cultural areas have differing pace and often perform at various levels of submission to the dominant cultural spirit, the homogeneity of a period is not some one prime characteristic. The structural macro-unity of a period is more like the snake of European currency values.⁴⁶ But periods can be roughly dated somewhere; periods can run simultaneously, although they do not recur;⁴⁷ and the more-than-individual hold on people, the principality of a period, is historically real, as real a compelling force as Nazism, for example, or Hellenism.

2. Complicating the synchronic cultural reality of period, which serves as a powerful, enveloping milieu for all kinds of individual acts, is the constant presence of different, distinct types of worldviews. Every discontinuous, synchronic historical homogeneity has a typological variety of perchronic (= enduring through time) stances on what counts in life and how the world is constituted. A person picks up a given world-vision as surely as one is born into a given mother tongue; it is much

⁴⁶ "van der Pot, op. cit., pp. 27-29; Frencastel, op. cit., p. 334; C. van de Kieft, "De periodisering van de geschiedenis der middeleeuwen," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 81 (1968), 433, 438, 440-41, 444; Lipking, op. cit., p. 196.

⁴⁷ "The phasing in and out of different periods during an overlapping sequence of years is normal. Many have noted, however, that since the 1750s in Western civilization, when no one principality seems to have reached unrivaled rule, there tend to be a plethora of historical "movements" or "trends" or "currents" instead of settled "periods." Cf. Jost Hermand, "Über Nutzen und Nichteil literarischer Epochenbegriffe," p. 302; Guillen, op. cit., pp. 482-83, 486-88.

like the fact that every artist, by virtue of his or her early training, is outfitted with the a priori of a certain art tradition.⁴⁸ The point is that recognition of this living perchronic reality of multiple, coexistent *Weltanschauungen* (and art traditions) stops one from treating periods as one-dimensional phenomena. A period needs to be read not as a one-line Gregorian chant melody but as a symphonic score-not just because of the snake of cultural strata, the species of arts, and many other shifting, complicating features, but especially because of the culturally highly determinative, structural presence of worldviews that fundamentally affect artistic performance too.⁴⁹

For example: Watteau's exquisite coloring shares the *spirit* and therefore period of Hogarth's serpentine line of beauty, but the *Weltanschauung* shaping Watteau and then Hogarth's art is as different as a pastoral idyl is from a picaresque tale.

Watteau's *worldview* that shows obliquely through his paintings is similar to one embodied in Giorgione's art, and there may even be iconographic features true to that type of idyllic perspective, but Watteau and Giorgione belong to different periods. Analysis of art style will always do well to honor both the synchronic and perchronic factors informing its dated occurrence. There is no "typical" rococo painter or writer. There are always basic varieties of the rococo "period style"- idyllic-rococo (Lancret), picaresque-rococo (Longhi), heroic-rococo (Tiepolo), and others.

3. A third dimension is the diachronic reality of historical development. Historical passage is not predictable like ordinary genesis since sequential connections between human deeds may occasion surprises, and there is always something uncanny about the becoming of a period itself. What the relative contribution various acts within a period will make toward the enrichment or wastage of a heritage in a certain cultural area awaits the imperfect, formative actions of those who, independently, follow such preparation or execution. There are two things of special note, however, for the historian who is intent upon detecting what actually happened:

⁴⁸ Cf. Kurt Badt, *Kunsttheoretische Versuche, Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. L. Dittmann (Köln, 1968), pp. 148-150; Alastair Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

⁴⁹ Teasing, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-98.

(a) Within a period different *cultural* generations are called upon to perform different tasks if the various worldview coefficients are to be promissory notes rather than dead weights, and if the period itself is to foster maturation in the different cultural realms. Innovation in artistic style, for example, needs to be followed by practitioners who consolidate specific artistic gains; a following stage demands renewed diversification and modification, or the artistic elan of the period tends to sag at that point with "formula" art and undo itself.⁵⁰ Without culturally instigative or integrative initiative in a given field, the historical import of that specific field dwindles.

(b) The struggle between cultural adherents of different period constellations must not obscure the fact that each contending regime is judged not only on its evolvement of culture from where it begins but also on its long-range service in opening up each given area to a more normative performance.⁵¹ The *historical* importance of many rococo art works, for example, lies more surely in their demythologizing action, wittingly or not, and coinage of a new artistic idiom bent solely on pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, than in any specific, marvelous rendition of form or theme.⁵²

The forte of the alternative historiographic method I have only sketched here is that an historical period is conceived concretely in three-dimensional structure, so that relative simplicity, complexity, and flexibility are structurally assured. Every art or literary artefact considered historically will be immediately scrutinized comparatively as to current milieu, traditional matrix, and eventful import. One would not be afraid using this methodological approach, on the basis of firsthand

⁵⁰ The role of "generations" in cultural leadership and their "logic" of succession has been often noted since Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation* (1926); cf. Teesing, op. cit., pp. 66-67, 73-76; George Kubler, *The Shape of Time, Remarks on the history of things* (Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 101-103; Pierre Francastel, "L'Esthetique des Lumieres," pp. 353-55; Jost Hermand, "Uber Nutzen und Nachteil literarischer Epochenbegriffe," pp. 305, 308; Guillen, "Second Thoughts on Currents and Periods," pp. 483, 499, 503. The critical moment in this pattern-will the style become formulated or regenerated-has led some to call the "formula art" "mannerist," and then see it as recurrent, viz., any style in crisis. Cf. Alastair Fowler, "Periodization and Interart Analogies," pp. 503-505.

⁵¹ . M. C. Schmidt, "De Tijd der Geschiedenis" [1966], in *Bulletin van die Suid-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir die Bevordering van Christelike Wetenskap* no. 12 (January 1968), 5-19, and "Ennclopedie van de Geschiedeniswetenshap, nader over de dynamiek van de geschiedenis" (Amsterdam, 1975), p. 21.

⁵² "Ronald Paulson. op. cit.. pp. 50-51; also, my forthcoming article 'Telltale statutes in Watteau's Paintings' in *Eighteenth Century Studies*

examination, to associate Gainsborough with Watteau,⁵³ and to exegete Hogarth, Fielding, and Sterne as pace-setters in rococo-picaresque style.⁵⁴ One would need to test the spirit and cultural contribution of each specific item, and one can be kept from making easy generalizations if one always takes into account the three-dimensional mesh which is present and relevant for understanding what is going on.

But I shall not wager any more corrective judgments against traditional shibboleths at this time. My concern has been with general historiographic methodology. As far as "the Enlightenment" goes, which I have taken for illustrative purposes, once the fact of an Enlightenment period is granted, it could be called rococo in style, practicalist in philosophy, physiocratic in business and so on, depending upon usage best for a specific cultural area, but all meaning "the Enlightenment period."⁵⁵ That might solve a few terminological problems. But a question harder than terminology is, for example, whether the cultural direction whose style was spearheaded by the likes of Winckelmann and Mengs, David and Ledoux, or Reynolds, is Enlightenment in spirit. Such figures were not kindred to the Idealistic period which is called "Romantic," were they? Or was their movement simply an abortive, old-fashioned regression replete with authoritarian tendencies? A decision on such a matter generates polemic heat because one's committed view of history is involved, not just a certain judgment.

If Remy Saisselin's muddlesome article⁵⁶ is only asking for more and more clarity about less and less meaning, it won't do as critique. But it can be read as a plea for an imaginative theory of historiography which will do justice to the rich complexity of the Enlightenment period. My three-dimensional cartographic methodology tries to do that, and would be serviceable for historiography in other cultural times too, "Renaissance art," "Victorian literature," or whatever. The theory of period

⁵³ Paulson. op. cit. p. 98,

⁵⁴ It *seems* to me to be a singular oversight that so few specialists in "rococo" have given serious attention to William Hogarth's treatise *Analysis of Beauty* (1745-1753) which, although it doesn't use the "term," is an essay describing the *fact* of rococo aesthetics, how "the lively feeling of wantonness and play ... the joy of persute" pertains to painterly lines, architecture, decoration, dance forms, and ordinary life activities.

⁵⁵ Dieckmann rejects this desirability because of how the equivalents have been loaded; cf, "Reflections on the Use of Rococo as a Period Concept," pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶ Remy G. Saisselin, "The Rococo Muddle," *Studies on Voltaire and Eighteenth Century Studies* 47 (1966), 233-55.

underlying the methodology I propose also tries to have academics face the question in our world, the scholarly world too, of hunger, the lie, and hope for the truth, of whether and when the historiographic grand tour is worth taking.

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