

**NICOLAS LE CAMUS DE MÉZIÈRES'S ARCHITECTURE OF
EXPRESSION, AND THE THEATRE OF DESIRE AT THE END OF THE
ANCIEN RÉGIME;
OR, THE ANALOGY OF FICTION WITH ARCHITECTURAL INNOVATION**

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette dissertation explore le rôle de l'architecture en tant que langage expressif, à travers la théorie de caractère en France à la fin du dix-huitième siècle. Depuis l'Antiquité, Vitruve avait établi le rôle expressif de l'architecture dans sa définition du terme "décorum". Pour Vitruve, toutefois, l'architecture exprimait un ordre qui transcendait sa matérialité, l'ordre de l'univers.

Vers la fin du dix-septième siècle, des changements culturels importants transformèrent la nature même de l'architecture. Le questionnement des fondations naturelles de l'architecture plongea la discipline dans une crise potentielle de la signification architecturale. Les architectes du dix-huitième siècle commencèrent à explorer le pouvoir expressif de l'architecture en tant que produit d'une imagination personnelle et spécifique au contexte culturel, et essayèrent de préserver sa signification de façon à ce que l'architecture demeure un langage commun.

L'architecte français et théoricien Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1721-ca.1793) développa une théorie de l'architecture suivant laquelle le caractère d'un bâtiment se devait d'exprimer sa destination ou le statut social du client pour lequel il était construit. Contrairement aux théories de caractère précédentes en architecture, celle de Le Camus était basée de façon explicite sur une analogie entre l'architecture et le théâtre: le mode d'expression en architecture suivait une progression temporelle typique du déroulement dramatique dans une pièce de théâtre; l'augmentation graduelle de l'ornementation des portes et des seuils successifs rappelait la succession des décors dans une performance de théâtre. Cette étude examine les théories d'expression au théâtre qui influencèrent de façon explicite les théories architecturales de Le Camus, telles que la mise en scène et le jeu des acteurs. Une étude plus poussée du rôle social et politique du théâtre dans sa forme construite met en évidence l'innovation architecturale de l'œuvre bâtie de Le Camus.

Alors que les études précédentes sur Le Camus de Mézières mettent l'emphase sur son plus important traité architectural, *Le génie de l'architecture, ou l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations*, cette dissertation analyse également le vaste répertoire des œuvres écrites de Le Camus, incluant ses pièces de théâtre, son roman, et une description d'un jardin pittoresque. Ces ouvrages révèlent l'objectif réel qui sous-tend la théorie architecturale de Le Camus: la volonté d'exprimer la tension érotique d'une architecture des sens.

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INTRODUCTION

During the last decade preceding the French Revolution, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1721–ca. 1793), a French architect, prolific writer and theoretician, defined the role of architecture as an expressive language. Like earlier theorists, he believed that the aim of architecture was to communicate the character and social status of his clients, but he also believed that buildings could evoke human sensations because they could speak to the mind and move the soul. He claimed that the essence of architecture was fictional and poetic.

Ever since antiquity, Vitruvius had established the expressive role of architecture in his definition of the term "decorum". For Vitruvius, however, architecture expressed an order that transcended its materiality, it spoke of the order of the universe. Important cultural changes motivated by the Scientific Revolution transformed the very nature of architecture in the late-seventeenth century. A questioning of the natural foundation of architecture plunged the whole discipline into a potential crisis of meaning. Eighteenth-century architects began to explore the expressive power of architecture as the product of a *personal*, culture-specific imagination, and struggled to preserve its meaning so that it could remain a shared language.

Following in the footsteps of Le Camus de Mézières, and sharing his interest in a linguistic analogy, Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–99), one of the most influential architects and theoreticians of that period, wrote that architecture is an art that fulfills the most important needs of social life. Moreover, it is an art that addresses our senses by communicating various impressions to them. Like many of his contemporaries, Boullée believed that architecture could communicate moral principles by modulating the lives and emotions of its inhabitants.

Par les monuments utiles, il nous offre l'image du bonheur; par les monuments agréables, il nous présente les jouissances de la vie; il nous enivre de la gloire par

les monuments qu'il lui élève; il ramène l'homme à des idées morales par les monuments funéraires et, par ceux qu'il consacre à la piété, il élève notre âme à la contemplation du Créateur.¹

In his *Essai sur l'art* (ca. 1793), Boullée compares architecture to a poem that can evoke in us emotions related to the use of a building, revealing its character. "Les images qu'ils offrent à nos sens," he writes, "devraient exciter en nous des sentiments analogues à l'usage auquel ces édifices sont consacrés." Indeed, this visual poetry was the primordial role of architecture. Boullée clearly distinguishes between construction and the process of conception, emphasizing that architecture is *not* "l'art de bâtir," as Vitruvius had claimed. Vitruvius mistook the effect for the cause, Boullée says, since conception is the first and essential dimension of architecture: "C'est cette production de l'esprit, c'est cette création qui constitue l'architecture."²

Following the French Revolution, however, architectural theory underwent some radical transformations, especially in the work of Jacques-Nicolas-Louis Durand (1760–1834). Paradoxically, Durand was Boullée's close friend and most fervent disciple. For Durand, architecture became an art of efficiency in which buildings must be composed

¹Étienne-Louis Boullée, "Considérations sur l'importance et l'utilité de l'architecture," *Architecture, Essai sur l'art*, ed. J.-M. Pérouse de Montclos (Paris: Hermann, 1968), 33.

²"L'art de bâtir n'est donc qu'un art secondaire, qu'il nous paraît convenable de nommer la partie scientifique de l'architecture." Ibid., 49. It is important to remember that Boullée was a student of Jean-Laurent Legeay, who proclaimed the superiority of the idea over construction. See Louise Pelletier & Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, Mass. : The MIT Press, 1997), 216–27. Boullée goes even further and claims that if an architect devotes too much time to practice, he runs the risk of abandoning the more noble, speculative part of his art: "Dira-t-on qu'il serait convenable que pour suivre des études de pur spéculation, l'architecte abandonnât des affaires lucratives? Hélas!" Boullée, *Architecture*, 54.

rationally to avoid wasteful expenses.³ The question of expression became incidental, subordinated to the primary utilitarian concerns. In a very revealing plate in his *Précis des Leçons d'architecture* (1802), Durand proposes a more "rational" alternative to the Church of Ste. Geneviève, the French Pantheon in Paris built by Germain Soufflot after 1764. (See Figure 1.) The plate compares the cruciform plan of the actual Pantheon to Durand's own alternative project for a circular building. His project might have created an effect of vastness and magnificence, but Durand's primary concern was that his rational plan was more efficient in terms of the relationship between the use of walls and the surface area covered by the building. By rejecting the symbolic role of architecture and focusing on its usefulness and functionality, he reframed the discipline as an applied science, and initiated an important paradigm shift in architectural theory.

Since the nineteenth century, mainstream architecture was indeed regarded as a functional discipline, less concerned with questions of expression than its utilitarian role. Coincidentally, the notion of program, previously considered an important constituent of architectural meaning, articulated through discursive language as social conventions, or through poetic language as fiction, was reduced to its more pragmatic requirements. Architects ceased to be concerned with the expressive nature of their work because they believed that expression would be conveyed automatically by "solving" the functional requirements of the program. The search for meaning in the notion of character was reduced to a syntactic interest in typology.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, architectural theory has exceeded this discussion of functionalism. With complex structural forms being calculated by computers, and with innovative building materials being generated by science, any

³For more on Durand, see Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983), chap. 9.

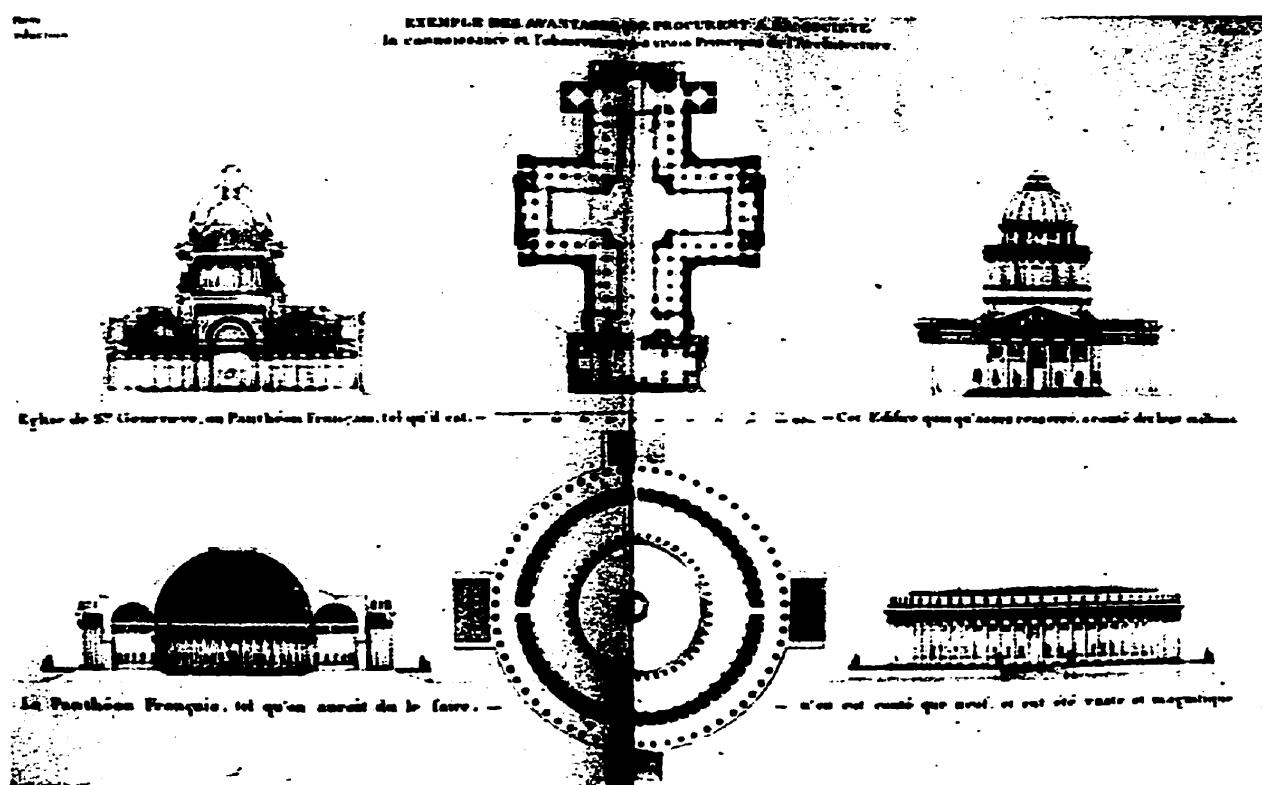


Figure 1: Comparison of the French Pantheon in Paris designed by G. Soufflot, and Durand's "rational" alternative project. From Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis des Leçons d'architecture* (1802) [reprint 1981].

imaginable - or unimaginable - shape can now be built. This extreme freedom to manipulate the form of our built environment has led to recent architectural structures based on organic evolutionary growth and proliferation. In this spirit, Greg Lynn has proposed a "blob architecture" whose primary objective appears to be unexpected shapes: the dream of absolute formal innovation in architecture.⁴ He claims that this model of organic growth produces buildings that are more functional than any rational building. He denies, however, that their appearance should be interpreted as a formal expression. (See Figure 2.) In other words, any parallel between the formal generation of architecture and the program it is meant to enclose is purely coincidental. Even though the relevance and application of functionalism continue to be questioned in the late twentieth century, a shared mode of architectural expression is still needed, because if architecture's communicative role in language is relinquished, it may also lose its right to "perform" in the public domain.⁵

⁴He writes, "The design process of this project [Cardiff Bay Opera House] . . . could be characterized by an alternative conception of repetition that can be broadly understood as evolutionary, flexible and proliferating. Alfred North Whitehead has described evolution as the 'creative advance into novelty.' . . . [N]ovelty, rather than being some extrinsic effect, can be conceived as the catalyst of new and enforceable organizations that proceed from the interaction between freely differentiating systems and their incorporation and exploitation of external constraints. Novelty and order are related in an autocatalytic rather than binary manner as they are simultaneously initiated from a constellation of vicissitudes." http://www.basilisk.com/R/renew_d_novlty_symmtry_576.html (August 1999)

⁵In her prologue to *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt explains the importance of language for finding meaning in the world, and the troubling disconnection between scientific language and politics in the contemporary context. "Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake," she writes, "matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being." Scientists, and by extension architects, no longer seem to see or anticipate the political implications of their work because "they move in a world where speech has lost its power." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 3-4.



Figure 2: Competition entry for the Cardiff Bay Opera House, by Greg Lynn (1994) [Internet].

Over two decades ago, Richard Sennett proclaimed the death of public space in his eloquent study, *The Fall of Public Man*. Sennett stressed that architecture had to involve the public realm in order to be more than just a self-referential game. In his view, the growing importance of the private domain and the dismantling of conventions after the Ancien Régime led to social imbalance, a loss of equilibrium between the public and private realms, and the collapse of what he calls the coherent culture of the Enlightenment.⁶ Public life has been subjected to radical changes during the past two centuries, and Sennett clearly stated the issues and consequences of capitalism and the industrial revolution. More recently, the rapid spread of technological communication, such as the internet, has transformed the private cell of the home or the individual office into a direct point of access for inter-personal - some may claim public - communication. Every day, fewer meeting places are needed. However, a longing for potential spaces of public interaction has led sociologists, urban planners, architects and even developers to demand and create surrogate public places. Hybrids have been created by crossing models of public places from previous eras with twentieth-century programs, with shopping malls and office towers developing neutral meeting spaces, and residual urban spaces becoming deserted public parks. At best, these public places provide circulation space for pedestrians. "Public space" is no longer a significant space appropriated by everyone; it has become a residual space that belongs to no one.

Sennett describes the problem of modern cities in terms of loss: the lost public dimension of human life, the lost social conventions among members of a community that had permitted spontaneous interaction, and the lost role of man as a public actor. Although Sennett is right in saying that the modern city is impoverished in its public life when compared to the society of the Ancien Régime, the contemporary solution cannot be to

⁶Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 28.

adopt a nostalgic attitude toward a past era. Nevertheless, it is my view that alternatives may be found by carefully examining the theoretical responses to this changing context that were provided by architects such as Le Camus de Mézières. This context involves great transformations in the realm of intimacy, carefully analyzed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958).⁷

In France prior to the eighteenth century, the public realm was governed by the monarchy and was understood as a mediation between the transcendent order of the universe and the political order of the finite human world. Architecture could occupy this public realm because it was a prime tool of mediation. During the seventeenth century, architecture and related disciplines such as gardening conveyed the symbolic order of the human world through their use of perfect geometry. French gardens, epitomized by the great compositions at Versailles, were not only a sign of the king's power and universal dominance; their geometry established a strong order amidst a changing world.⁸ The architecture of theatres also conveyed this political order by incorporating the auditorium and the stage into a symbolic geometry, with a perfect perspective illusion focused on the patron: in most cases, the king. The hierarchy of this architectural framework not only glorified the monarch as the only person who could witness the perfect geometry of the stage; in many Baroque theatres the royal box was the prime focus of attention, rivalling the

⁷Arendt traces the origins of the word "social" as coming not from the Greek, but from the Roman language. The Greeks didn't think of the social as referring specifically to the human condition, but to any animal life. Political life, on the other hand, was not only different, but stood "in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (*oikia*) and the family," in other words, to the social life. This political life, or *bios politikos* as Aristotle called it, was characterized by two kinds of activity: *praxis* (action) and *lexis* (speech), and excluded everything that was merely necessary or useful. Speech was crucial because it was comparable to action. More than just a means of communication, language was an important mediator for finding meaning in the world. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 24–26.

⁸Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, 174–75.

importance and ornamentation of the stage on the opposite side of the theatre. (See Figure 3.) One's proximity to the king's box was more important than the action on stage; this indicated the social and political standing of the various members of the audience. As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, citizens were becoming less concerned with their place in a coherent totality and more aware of their own individuality, thus undermining the political stability of the Ancien Régime.

Sennett was among the first to understand the relationships between theatre and public life during the eighteenth century. In his insightful chapters on public life during the Ancien Régime, he emphasizes the importance of role playing in society and clearly shows that public behaviours were based on the notion of man as an actor. However, he fails to recognize the eighteenth-century emergence of a new individuality (which today we identify with our cherished subjectivity), what Georges Gusdorf calls "the birth of a romantic consciousness." Sennett instead assumes that this new subjectivity developed from the beginning of the French Revolution to the first decades of the nineteenth century. In *Naissance de la conscience romantique au siècle des Lumières*, Gusdorf is critical of historians who reduce their reading of history to a single, coherent line of interpretation. Historians of the eighteenth century tend to emphasize either rationalist thought or the pre-romantic thought of some of the *philosophes*. On the contrary, Gusdorf writes, historians must respect apparent contradictions, especially during the eighteenth century, when discrepancies also can be understood as complementarities of light and darkness, reason and sentiment.⁹ Even in the writings of a single author, contradictions should not be dismissed but acknowledged. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), for example, is usually regarded as a precursor to the romantic revolution because he forcefully defended the

⁹"L'historien doit respecter le droit à la contradiction comme l'un des droits de l'homme." Georges Gusdorf, *Naissance de la conscience romantique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Payot, 1976), 32.



Figure 3: Ducal box at the Bayreuth Opera, by Giuseppe Galli da Bibiena (1748). [Carlson, 1989].

primacy of sentiments and the importance of the self, yet his *Contrat social* is imbued with rationality.¹⁰ The reconciliation of such apparent contradictions is the essence of eighteenth-century art and philosophy.

This dual dimension of culture is most obvious in the decades preceding the French Revolution. On the one hand, the prevalent empiricism and growing rationalism of the Enlightenment emphasized intellectual research, philosophy, and science. Its most important representatives - John Locke (1632–1704), Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–80), Voltaire (1694–1778), Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (1717–83) and the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–94) - professed a philosophy based on a continuous, linear history that aspired to the betterment of society, the abandonment of all superstitions, tolerance, justice for all, and the consecration of man. On the other hand, Rousseau introduced an epic of decadent culture in opposition to this progressive concept of the human mind. He was the "conscientious objector" of the Enlightenment, to use Gusdorf's expression.¹¹

Gusdorf does not frame a particular historical period as a frozen moment; instead, he presents history as the result of converging forces. The dominant force usually establishes the tone: *l'esprit du temps*. The notions of *l'esprit du temps* and *l'air du siècle* are explained best by Montesquieu:

Dans toutes les sociétés, qui ne sont qu'une union d'esprits, il se forme un caractère commun. Cette âme universelle prend une manière de penser qui est l'effet d'une chaîne de causes infinies, qui se multiplient et se combinent de siècle en siècle. Dès que le ton est donné et reçu, c'est lui seul qui gouverne...¹²

¹⁰"...si Jean-Jacques Rousseau est le patriarche européen du primat du sentiment, l'auteur du *Contrat social* se montre pétri de rationalité dogmatique. Aucun des grands noms du XVIII^e siècle ne semble exempt de cette dualité, qui ne saurait être interprété comme une duplicité." Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 40–41.

¹²*Oeuvres de Montesquieu*, Pléiade, 1:114; quoted by Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 22.

Consequently, the eighteenth century has come to be known as "the Enlightenment," an era dominated by the rational, scientific mind. Gusdorf argues, however, that if rationalism truly had dominated the spirit of the eighteenth century, the debate over its various manifestations would not have been argued so passionately. In fact, the very term "Enlightenment" remained controversial throughout the eighteenth century. Scientific minds (led by the growing popularity of Newtonian philosophy) continually tried to establish their supremacy over the shaken metaphysics of the classical era and the emerging romanticism with its rediscovery of the realm of shadows.

Some philosophers, such as Michel Foucault and his followers, would argue that what Gusdorf calls the "birth of romantic consciousness" in the eighteenth century could not have taken place prior to, or even concurrently with, the domination of rationalism. In *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault describes two major breaks in the *episteme* since the Renaissance: one in the mid-seventeenth century and one in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century break was marked by a new humanism, a different way to reflect on the human subject. According to Foucault, the ego had already been postulated as a subject in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century that man was understood as a complex organism rather than just a rational machine. It was then that order distinct from pure correspondence in language was recognized.

Foucault's proposition of a radical break of *episteme* in the nineteenth century is undermined by Gusdorf's detailed study of the emergence of a new individual during the Enlightenment. In the early eighteenth century, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, first considered the human subject and presented his philosophy of sentiments in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). This notion of man as a sensitive consciousness was more widespread during the second half of the eighteenth century. In direct opposition to Foucault, Gusdorf argues that this concept of man as a subject could not have appeared suddenly after the fall of the Ancien Régime. Instead, the

conditions for this new epistemology had been ripening throughout the eighteenth century, and flourished after the radical break with tradition that was marked in France by the French Revolution.

It is not the aim of this dissertation to debate with philosophers over a definite date for the beginning of romanticism. Instead, the aim is to achieve a better understanding of the complex philosophical landscape in the late eighteenth century, since two important forces that helped define it - an emerging rationalism and the birth of a new subjective individual - continue to shape the profile of the late twentieth century. However, the circumstances surrounding these forces have now changed. The common ground that the Enlightenment was trying to overturn was the classical metaphysics of the seventeenth century. Today, our common understanding of the world is dominated by scientific rationalism and the presumption of a transparent society, while some philosophers are trying to recover a sense of meaning through embodied consciousness.¹³

If architecture indeed can recover a public dimension that dissipated with the fall of the Ancien Régime, it will not be, as Sennett's reading may suggest, by inventing and promoting a new set of social conventions. The complex situation that preceded (and somewhat anticipated) the radical turning point of the French Revolution may help us recognize the interplay of more recent forces at the eve of our new millennium. Now that public interaction has been radically altered by global media, computer networks and other forms of mediated communication, it is paramount for architects to evaluate the impact of these modes of interaction on the profession, and to seek appropriate ways of conveying meaning in their work beyond the utilitarian objectives of functionalism. A meaningful public realm may be envisaged and restored only when the apparent contradictions that seem to divide contemporary society are clearly understood.

¹³This position found a crucial interpreter in the voice of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

It would be presumptuous and even naive to attempt to formulate a general solution to the contemporary problem; instead, this dissertation will concentrate on the complex relationship between the public and the social realms toward the end of the Ancien Régime, and their gradual merging in various disciplines.¹⁴ Poetry and music flowered with the emergence of a new subjective individual, and were accompanied by the rise of the novel as an entirely social art form. In theatre, tragedy lost some ground to new dramatic genres such as the *drame bourgeois*, which depicted private and social individuals as opposed to the archetypal characters of classical tragedy. These radical transformations of the artistic landscape coincided with the decline of the most public of arts: architecture.¹⁵

To investigate architectural implications during the last few decades of the Ancien Régime, I will focus on the architectural theory of late-eighteenth-century French architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières¹⁶ and follow transformations in the expressive role of architecture with the rise of the subjective individual. Le Camus de Mézières is usually acknowledged for his theoretical influence on important architects of the late eighteenth century, such as Boullée and Sir John Soane. Soane shared Le Camus's belief that "architecture is like a beautiful woman: she should please in herself; she needs few

¹⁴Jean-Jacques Rousseau was responsible for some major transformations in the realm of intimacy during the second half of the eighteenth century. Rousseau arrived at his new formulation of the individual through a rebellion "against society's unbearable perversion of the human heart." The modern individual, constantly torn by endless conflicts due to "his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, [with] his ever-changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life, was born in this rebellion of the heart." Arendt, *Human Condition*, 39.

¹⁵This is confirmed by the publication of many texts on the decadence of architecture at the end of the eighteenth century, such as Charles-François Viel, *Décadence de l'architecture à la fin du 18e siècle* (Paris, 1800). Arendt argues that the decline of architecture testifies to the "close relationship between the social and the intimate." *Ibid.*

¹⁶For an extensive review of literature, see Appendix 1.

ornaments."¹⁷ Consequently, he translated almost the entire section on "De l'art de plaire en architecture" from Le Camus's treatise on the meaning of architecture, *Le génie de l'architecture: ou, L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780).¹⁸ Both Boullée and Soane drew important lessons from Le Camus's theory on the expression of architectural character, especially his use of light and shade to convey specific emotions. As a practising architect, Le Camus is best known for his construction of the Halle au blé in Paris (1763–67), a municipal institution for distributing grain in the city, originally built on the land of the hôtel de Soisson and integrated into the Bourse du commerce in 1889. (See Figure 4.) He also wrote treatises on building construction and strength of materials, but *Le génie de l'architecture* is acknowledged as his most significant text.

Le génie de l'architecture includes Le Camus's clearest formulation of character theory in architecture. In the eighteenth century, character theory considered architecture as an expressive language, and thus preserved the public relevance of architecture as a means of establishing order despite the rise of the subjective individual. For Le Camus de Mézières, the intersubjective dimension of architecture, expressed as character, was epitomized paradoxically by the private architecture of the *hôtel particulier*. He described the potential of private architecture to express the individual character of its owner on the urban stage, and thus to preserve the public role of architecture through language. Le

¹⁷Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le génie de l'architecture: ou, L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* [Paris: B. Morin, 1780] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 33.

¹⁸Soane translated an important part of Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture* while he was working on his own *Lectures on Architecture* for the Royal Academy in 1808; the *Lectures* were published in 1929. A partial German translation of *Le génie de l'architecture* also appeared in 1789 in *Allgemeines Magazin für die bürgerliche Baukunst*, issued in Weimar. For more information on these two translations and Le Camus's influence on Boullée, see Robin Middleton's introduction to the English translation of Le Camus de Mézières's treatise, *The Genius of Architecture; or, the Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center, 1992), 61–62.



Figure 4: Halle au blé in Paris, by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1767), integrated into the Bourse du commerce in 1889. [Lecoq]

Camus's attention to the expressive role of architecture reflected his personal fascination with the theatre and its ability to move the souls of the spectators. The theatre provided him with a pervasive analogy to demonstrate the relevance of architecture as a new form of language.

In addition to his central architectural treatise and his few technical treatises, Le Camus also wrote several literary works, usually neglected by modern scholars due to their apparent lack of architectural value. Scholars have either emphasized the apparent contradiction between the poetic language of *Le génie* and his more technical texts on architecture or tried to reconcile these works by regarding *Le génie* as a technical manual on the *hôtel particulier*. Meanwhile, virtually nothing has been written about his plays, his novel or his description of a picturesque garden. In the present dissertation, I shall try to demonstrate that Le Camus's "secondary" works provide clues for understanding the true lesson of *Le génie de l'architecture*.

Le génie de l'architecture has been described as a "technical treatise" and as a "handbook on the planning of the French *hôtel*."¹⁹ These descriptions, however, fail to acknowledge the more fundamental intention of the work: to define not only the conventional *distribution*²⁰ of a *hôtel particulier*, but the erotic tension of architectural space. The mode of discourse in Le Camus's treatise is far from purely technical. Its frequent use of theatrical metaphors to speak about architectural concepts such as gradation of ornamentation, succession of spaces, and emotional climax shows his intention to develop a theory based on an "architecture of the event" that demands to be reenacted by

¹⁹ Michel Denon, introduction to Vivant Denon, *Point de lendemain*, and Jean-François de Bastide, *La petite maison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 24; cited in Middleton, introduction to Le Camus, *The Genius*, 17.

²⁰ The word "distribution" is used throughout this dissertation with its specific meaning (borrowed from eighteenth-century French language) of the organization of the rooms of a building in plan.

every visitor/spectator of the architectural scenery.²¹ It is my intention in this dissertation to explore the true meaning of architectural distribution and the expressive role of architecture in *Le génie de l'architecture*.

The dissertation is divided into four parts. Part I, "Staging an Architectural Theory," introduces Le Camus's architectural theory in relation to the eighteenth-century notion of architecture as an expressive language. Le Camus's major treatise, *Le génie de l'architecture*, is discussed in the context of his wider practical and theoretical production. Part I also demonstrates that the primary model for Le Camus's architectural theory, unlike those of his predecessors, was the theatre.

Part II, "Architecture as Theatre and the Relocated Spectator," traces the influence of social and cultural forces on Le Camus's architectural theory. It looks specifically at the movement of the spectator in *Le génie de l'architecture* in relation to the changing status of the spectator in society and in the theatre, with attention to an emerging theatrical genre, the *drame bourgeois*, that provided a model for Le Camus's own plays.

Part III looks closely at the title of Le Camus's treatise, *Le génie de l'architecture; ou, L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations*, and examines some crucial, yet unacknowledged philosophical sources that clearly influenced Le Camus's theory. It expands on the two clauses of the title, by studying first the notion of "genius" in eighteenth-century aesthetics; and the nature of "sensations" in the empirical philosophy of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and Edmund Burke. Denis Diderot's emphasis on language, although it has not previously been acknowledged as a significant source, probably had the greatest influence on Le Camus's architectural theory.

²¹This notion of architecture as an "event" is presented by Ignasi de Solà-Morales in his book *Differences, Topographies of Contemporary Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997). De Solà-Morales's discussion of contemporary architecture is greatly indebted to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

Part IV, "The Plot: An Architecture of Desire," discloses the main thread that extends throughout Le Camus's architectural theory, not only in *Le génie de l'architecture* but also in his other writings, including his novel and his description of a picturesque garden. *Le génie de l'architecture* is not merely a series of individual parts, loosely linked, as some contemporary critics have suggested; it follows an elaborate sequence whose ultimate aim is to seduce the reader/spectator.

The concluding remarks of the dissertation reflect on the notion of temporality in architecture and its potential for considering architectural program in alternative ways.

PART 1: STAGING AN ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

The publication of important eighteenth-century treatises on residential architecture, such as Jacques-François Blondel's *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance* (1737–38), Charles-Étienne Briseux's *L'Art de bâtir les maisons de campagne* (1743), and Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture: ou, L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780), indicate the new importance given to private life. Other treatises, such as Germain Boffrand's *Livre d'architecture contenant les principes généraux de cet art* (1745), also emphasized the social dimension of private architecture. They sought to define architecture as a truly expressive language, an *architecture parlante* of sorts that sought to maintain its political dimension. Le Camus de Mézières's treatise is devoted entirely to private architecture, demonstrating how the character of a specific client can be translated into the programmatic requirements for the *hôtel particulier*, the great town house of the Ancien Régime:

L'Edifice que fait construire un grand Seigneur, le Palais d'un Evêque, l'Hôtel d'un Magistrat, la Maison d'un Militaire, celle d'un riche Particulier, sont des objets qui doivent être différemment traités. Les sensations qu'ils excitent ne sont pas les mêmes; conséquemment les proportions de l'ensemble, celles des masses & des détails demandent des caractères qui leur soient propres.²²

Previous architectural theories on private architecture considered the general proportions of the whole and the use of specific architectural orders (or their established proportions) to convey the appropriate character of a building. Like his predecessors, Le Camus believed in the importance of masses and proportions to express the destination of a building. He also maintained that there should be a close relationship between the exterior appearance and the internal distribution of a building, and he devotes a chapter of his

²²Le Camus de Mezières, *Le génie de l'architecture*, 8–9.

treatise to "exterior decoration." Most of his treatise, however, is a linear, room-by-room description of living spaces and service quarters (*servitudes*), starting at the vestibule and concluding at the riding school (*manège*), in which he reinterprets the classical principles of distribution to evoke particular sensations in the spectator/inhabitant through the use of appropriate characters: "Chaque pièce doit avoir son caractère particulier. L'analogie, le rapport des proportions décident nos sensations."²³

The architectural orders and ornamentation that determine the character of a room should be announced from its entrance, Le Camus argues. "Le passage même des portes doit annoncer & avoir l'empreinte du lieu où il conduit par le caractère qui lui est propre, par la forme & son étendue."²⁴ The complexity of the distribution (including the number of anterooms) depends on the grandeur of the whole and the social status of the client.²⁵ Interestingly, the relative importance that Le Camus gives to each room (as suggested by the length of the text describing it) is different than in the previous century. Greater emphasis is given to the private rooms devoted to pleasure, such as the boudoir and the baths, as opposed to the public apartments with representational roles, such as the salon and the bedchamber:

[I]l y a encore de petits appartemens où on a le soin de faire trouver tout ce que la commodité, l'aisance & le luxe peuvent faire désirer. Aussi ces petits appartemens sont-ils plus fréquentés que les grands; la nature conduit à cette préférence. Les grands appartemens ne sont, à proprement parler, que de parade, il semble que la gêne & la contrainte en soient l'apanage: dans de trop grandes pieces l'homme se trouve disproportionné.²⁶

²³Ibid., 45.

²⁴Ibid., 68.

²⁵Le Camus, however confesses that it is dictated mostly by customs and refinement: "mais combien le raffinement a-t-il fait naître de besoins." Ibid., 86.

²⁶Ibid., 89.

These architectural transformations resulted from the new importance given to the self and to private life during the eighteenth century. These transformations included the abandonment of parade apartments (*pièces d'apparat*) in favour of *petits appartements* for both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, with a corridor that isolates every room from the flow of circulation.²⁷ (See Figure 5.) This need for greater intimacy is confirmed by Le Camus throughout *Le génie de l'architecture*. In the section on distribution, Le Camus insists that connections among rooms be planned so that maids and servants can remain almost invisible. Numerous concealed passages (*dégagements*) can allow servants to go from one room to the next without being seen, and thus become least intrusive. The boudoir, the heart of intimate and private life, is located at the end of a long sequence of rooms, as if to filter out any unwanted intruders.²⁸ Le Camus was most interested in the private apartments: not only the boudoir and the various bathrooms and closets for which he provides lengthy descriptions, but also *servitudes* such as larders, cellars, and kitchens. Again, Le Camus was fascinated with the individual character of these apartments and was eager to provide a specific program for each one.

Le Camus's linear description of the distribution and ornamentation of rooms was a novel way to present his ideas on architectural expression. Even more innovative was his description of how transitional spaces, such as the vestibule and the series of anterooms, must announce the character of the main rooms, making an analogy to the theatre:

Mais encore une fois, c'est dans cette pièce [seconde antichambre] qu'on doit commencer à ressentir le genre de sensation qu'on aura à éprouver dans les pièces

²⁷"Les pièces, naguère faites pour l'apparat, prennent des dimensions modestes; le petit salon, le boudoir sont des lieux réservés à l'intimité, à l'isolement. Le nom même du "boudoir" [de bouder] atteste la possibilité de se retirer du groupe, dans une réserve nuancée de mélancolie ou même d'hostilité; le boudoir est par excellence le lieu du retour à soi." Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 340.

²⁸This progression toward the boudoir is also eloquently described in Jean-François Bastide's *La petite maison*, to which I shall return later.

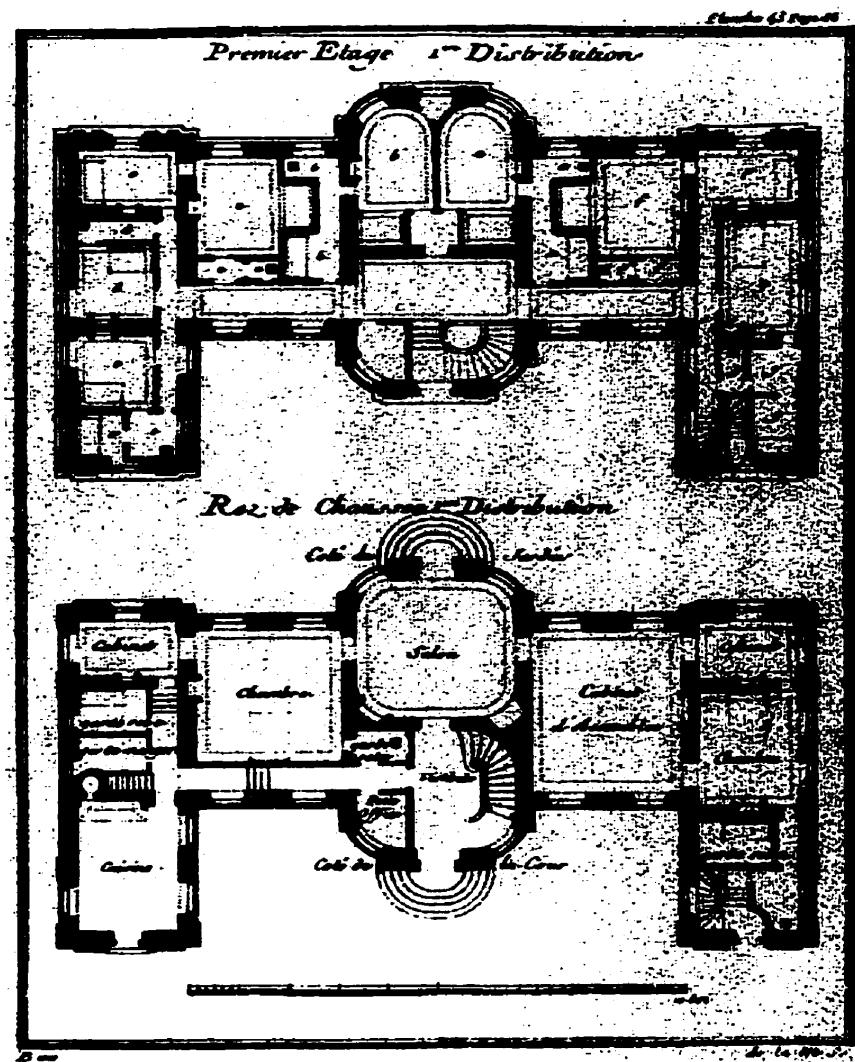


Figure 5: Ground-floor plan and first-floor plan of a country house. From Charles-Etienne Briseux, *L'art de bâtir les maisons de campagne* (1761) [reprinted in Middleton, 1992].

qui suivent; c'est, pour ainsi dire, une *avant-scène* à laquelle on ne peut apporter trop de soin pour annoncer le caractère des Acteurs.²⁹

In emphasizing the sense of progression through the building, Le Camus compares the second anteroom (the actual threshold of the *hôtel*) to the proscenium of the theatre. It is the cornice that performs the role of framing the character of a room, he explains, and one must pay it the most serious attention: "C'est la partie que l'on doit le moins négliger, elle fait l'encadrement du tout, elle doit avoir un genre, un caractère propre, & être marquée au coin du bon goût."³⁰ By gradually increasing the richness of ornament throughout this progression of spaces, the character of the *hôtel particulier* is progressively disclosed. This disclosure resembles the build-up of dramatic action and "suspense" in a play.³¹ In other words, Le Camus's treatise describes an unfolding of space with an emotional tension that is similar to the unfolding of action in theatre.

Le Camus's interest in theatre was not only theoretical but also came from a genuine interest in play writing. During the ten years prior to the publication of *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus wrote many plays that were performed by his own Société dramatique. Throughout his architectural treatise, the theatrical metaphor is pervasive. In the first few pages of the introduction to *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus admits his admiration for the work of the famous architect and stage set designer Jean-Nicolas Servandoni (1695–1766). Servandoni's work at the theatre became a model for Le Camus's architectural theory. The use of light, the unity of character, and the temporal and emotional progression in a play were fundamental concepts of Servandoni's performances that Le Camus transposed directly into his architectural theory. Le Camus also praises

²⁹Ibid., 101; my emphasis. In his English translation of *The Genius of Architecture*, David Britt translates the word *avant-scène* as "proscenium." *The Genius*, 110.

³⁰*Le génie*, 50.

³¹Ibid., 44–45.

Charles Le Brun for his characterization of the passions in painting, and *Le génie de l'architecture* itself is dedicated to Claude Henri Watelet, author of a treatise on gardening. Whereas previous studies on Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture* have argued that his theory was greatly indebted to character theory in painting and the development of the picturesque garden in France,³² this dissertation proposes that the theatre was his main influence, and that this emphasis distinguishes Le Camus's theory of character from those of his predecessors.

³²This is indeed the position of Robin Middleton in his introduction to the English translation of Le Camus de Mézières's treatise, *The Genius of Architecture*.

CHAPTER 1: ARCHITECTURE AS AN EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Since Antiquity, architecture has conveyed an expressive power. The temples of Minerva, Mars and Hercules, for example, were built in the Doric order because its simple, potent form was appropriate to the gravity of these divinities. According to Vitruvius, "Because of their might, buildings [devoted to these divinities] ought to be erected without embellishments."³³ Temples to Venus, Flore, Proserpine and the Nymphs required the Corinthian order, which was more appropriate to the gentleness of these goddesses. Temples to Junon, Diana and Bacchus were built in the Ionic order, which best represented these divinities: "The determinate character of their temples will avoid the severe manner of the Doric and the softer manner of the Corinthian."³⁴ In *De Architectura* (first century B.C.), Vitruvius described *decor* (translated as "decorum") as "the faultless ensemble of a work composed, in accordance with precedent, of approved details."³⁵ This fundamental respect for conventions (from the Greek *thematismos*) was dictated by both custom and nature.

Vitruvius first wrote of the expressive role of architecture in terms of the relationship between signifier and signified: "That which is signified is the thing proposed about which we speak; that which signifies is the demonstration unfolded in system of precepts."³⁶ Vitruvius used the signifier/signified distinction to explain the intimate relationship between theory and practice in architecture. While practice focuses on the application and execution of projects in their appropriate form, he writes, theory explains

³³Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *De Architectura*, trans. F. Granger (London & Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1983), Book I, chap. 2, 29.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 27–29.

³⁶Ibid., Book I, chap. 1, 7.

and demonstrates "la convenance des proportions que doivent avoir les choses que l'on veut fabriquer."³⁷ For example, Caryatids, statues of women from Carie holding entablatures, expresses both the structural role of columns and the historical event of the defeat of the inhabitants of Carie by the Greeks, thus illustrating the classical relationship between theory (the signified) and practice (the signifier). (See Figure 6.)

For Vitruvius, however, architecture expressed an order that transcended its materiality. Architecture was not only the "art of building" but also included gnomonics and mechanics.³⁸ Architecture spoke of the order of the universe. In 1684, Claude Perrault (1613–88), a member of the Académie Royale des Sciences and best known as an architect for his design of the east colonnade of the Louvre, (See Figure 7.), translated Vitruvius's treatise, and his extensive notes and commentaries demonstrate some fundamental changes that were transforming the very nature of architecture at the end of the seventeenth century. Whereas Vitruvius argued that architecture consists of *ordonnance* (a translation of the Greek term *taxis*), disposition or arrangement (from the Greek *diathesis*), eurythmy or proportion, decorum (which Perrault translates as *bienséance*), and distribution (from the Greek *oeconomia*), Perrault insists that Vitruvius was mistaken and that only *ordonnance* and disposition should be considered true constituents of architecture.³⁹ Together, they express the use of each room and the *destination* of the building:

³⁷Vitruvius, *Les dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve, corrigés et traduits en 1684 par Claude Perrault* (Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, 1979), 2. In his French translation of Vitruvius's *Ten Books*, Perrault translates the Latin word *ratiocinatione* as *theorie*, while Granger translates it as "technology."

³⁸Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, Book I, chap. 3.

³⁹"Vitruve a ajouté la Proportion, la Bienséance & l'Oeconomie à l'Ordonnance & à la Distribution, non comme des parties de l'Architecture, mais comme ce qui les perfectionne, & il a voulu dire sans doute que l'Architecture a deux parties, sc̄avoir l'Ordonnance & la Disposition qui donnent à tous les membres de l'Edifice leur perfection." Vitruvius, *Les dix livres*, trans. Perrault, 10.



EXPLICATION DE LA PLANCHE I.

*'La Figure des quatre Caryatides qui est mise icij , est prise de la Salle des Gardes Suisses dans le Louvre. Ce sont des Statues de douze piez de haut , qui soutiennent une Tribune enrichie d'ornemens tailllez fort proprement. Cet excellent ouvrage est de J. Goujon Architecte & Sculpteur de Henry II. On peut encore voir des Figures de Caryatides à la Planche marquée** à la fin du 6. chapitre du 6. livre.'*

B

Figure 6: Caryatids from the Salle des Gardes Suisses in the Louvre. From Claude Perrault, *Les dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve* (1684) [reprint 1979].

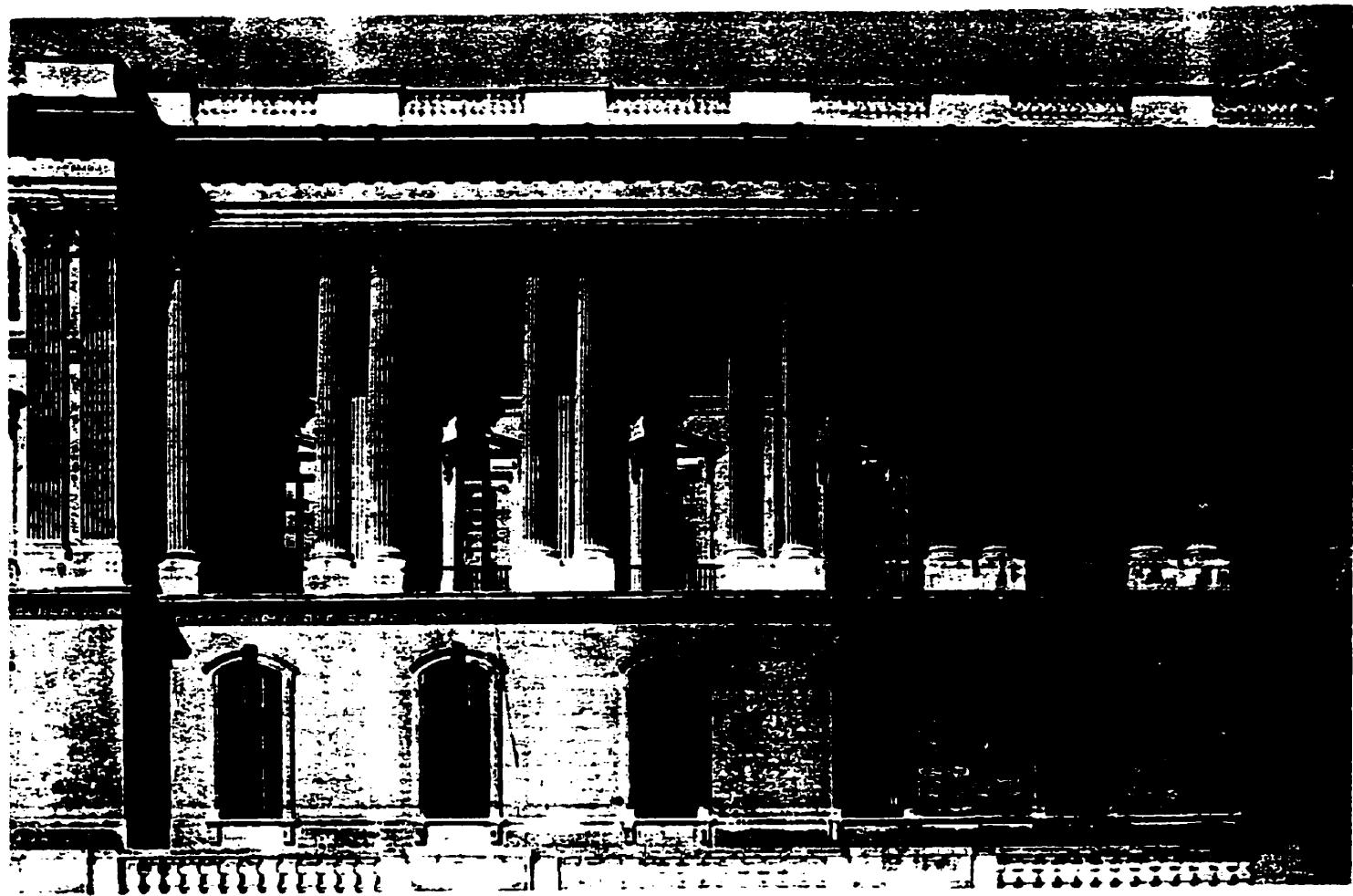


Figure 7: The eastern colonnade of the Louvre, by Claude Perrault. [Szambien].

L'Ordonnance d'un Bastiment consiste dans la division de la place qu'on y veut employer; cette division se fait de telle sorte que chaque partie ait sa juste grandeur convenable à son usage & proportionnée à la grandeur de tout l'Edifice. . . . La Disposition est quand toutes les parties sont mises en leur lieu suivant leur qualité, c'est à dire dans l'ordre qu'elles doivent avoir selon leur nature & leur usage.⁴⁰

Bienséance, or *decorum*, for Vitruvius was one aspect of architecture that determined "ce qui fait que l'édifice est tellement correct, qu'il n'y a rien qui ne soit approuvé & fondé sur quelque autorité."⁴¹ Vitruvius explains that this authority was based on custom and nature. Perrault, however, insists that its origin is in custom (*accoustumance*) and regards it as the principal authority in architecture. Misreading Vitruvius, or perhaps adding a new emphasis, Perrault writes that "Vitrue semble faire entendre que l'Acoustumance (*sic*) a la principale autorité dans l'Architecture."⁴² In presuming that *decorum* was based primarily on custom, Perrault enabled the discipline of architecture to be conceived as an art based on convention. This radical questioning of the natural foundation of architecture permitted an arbitrariness that plunged the whole discipline into a potential crisis of meaning. However, architects did not immediately embrace Perrault's position; they remained convinced that natural proportions were a fundamental principle but were obliged to acknowledge the new role of conventions in their theory of architecture. Eighteenth-century architects started to explore the expressive power of architecture as the product of a *personal*, culture-specific imagination, and struggled to preserve its meaning so that it could remain a shared language.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 12.

⁴²Ibid.; my emphasis.

Claude Perrault versus François Blondel

To understand the full implications of architectural expression during the eighteenth century, it is important to consider the debate on the architectural orders that began in the late 1670s and 1680s and resonated in architectural treatises for over a century.⁴³ In 1683, Claude Perrault published his *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes selon la méthode des anciens*, the first architectural treatise to challenge the Vitruvian canon by questioning harmonic proportion as the foundation of architectural orders.⁴⁴ François Blondel (1618–86), professor at the Académie Royale d'Architecture and author of the authoritative *Cours d'architecture*, engaged in a debate with Claude Perrault. At issue was whether architectural proportions are based on natural and therefore absolute principles, as argued by Blondel, or whether they result from social conventions and a general consensus among architects, as maintained by Perrault.

In his *Ordonnance*, Perrault argues that architectural beauty and the meaning of architecture cannot reside in precise proportional relations because there is no rule on which all architects agree. Every architect, he claims, has attempted to perfect the art by adjusting architectural proportions. To support his claim, he compares the writings of various renowned authors and shows the inconsistencies among all previous unified proportional

⁴³Debates on the status of architectural orders, proportion and harmony rely on a complex terminology of notions or principles such as character (*caractère*), appropriateness (*convenance*), taste (*goût*), etc. In *Symétrie, goût, caractère* (Paris: Picard, 1986), Werner Szambien traces the semantic transformations of such terms from the sixteenth century to the French Revolution. This semantic study of architectural terms includes various references to Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture*. Most interesting are the sections on the proportions of architectural orders, the notion of imagination expanding from the simple mode of knowledge established by Condillac, and the complex transformation of the term *caractère*. Szambien, *Symétrie*, 42–43, 121–22, 174–99.

⁴⁴A. Pérez-Gómez's introduction to the translation of Claude Perrault's treatise, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns After the Method of the Ancients*, trans. I.K. McEwen (Santa Monica: The Getty Center, 1993), is a crucial reference for the interpretation of Perrault's theory.

systems. (See Figure 8.) He concludes that the beauty of architecture lies more in "the grace of its form" than in "the exactitude of unvarying proportion." The different characters attributed to the architectural orders on the basis of their relative proportions "with little exactitude or precision are the only well-established matters in architecture":

Tout le reste qui consiste dans les mesures precises de tous les membres & dans un certain contour de leur figures n'a point encore de regles dont tous les Architectes conviennent; chacun ayant tasché de donner à ces parties la perfection, dont elles sont capables, principalement en ce qui depend de la proportion: en sorte que plusieurs bien que par des manieres differentes s'en sont également approchez au jugement des intelligens: Ce qui fait voir que la beauté d'un Edifice a encore cela de commun avec celle du corps humain, qu'elle ne consiste pas tant dans l'exactitude d'une certaine proportion, & dans le rapport que les grandeurs des parties ont les unes aux autres, que dans la grace de la forme qui n'est rien autre chose que son agreeable modification, sur laquelle une beauté parfaite & excellente peut estre fondée, sans que cette sorte de proportion s'y rencontre exactement observées.⁴⁵

Although Perrault was not the first to identify inconsistencies among the proportions that various authors had ascribed to the architectural orders since Antiquity, he was the first to reject the explanation of his contemporaries, including François Blondel, who argued that minor discrepancies resulted merely from interpretation problems while the "universal ideal" remained unchallenged. To account for the dissimilarities, Perrault rejected the concept of a unified theory of harmony, and instead proposed two kinds of beauty in architecture: positive and arbitrary. "Positive beauty" was based on what he called "convincing reason" and included the demonstrable quality of craftsmanship. "Arbitrary beauty," on the other hand, was no less important, but was less tangible because it emphasized the composition of the whole and relied on conventions that could vary from one society to another.

⁴⁵Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance des cinq especes de colonnes selon la methode des anciens* (Paris: Chez Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1683), i–ii.

ANTIQUÉ AVEC LA MODERNE:

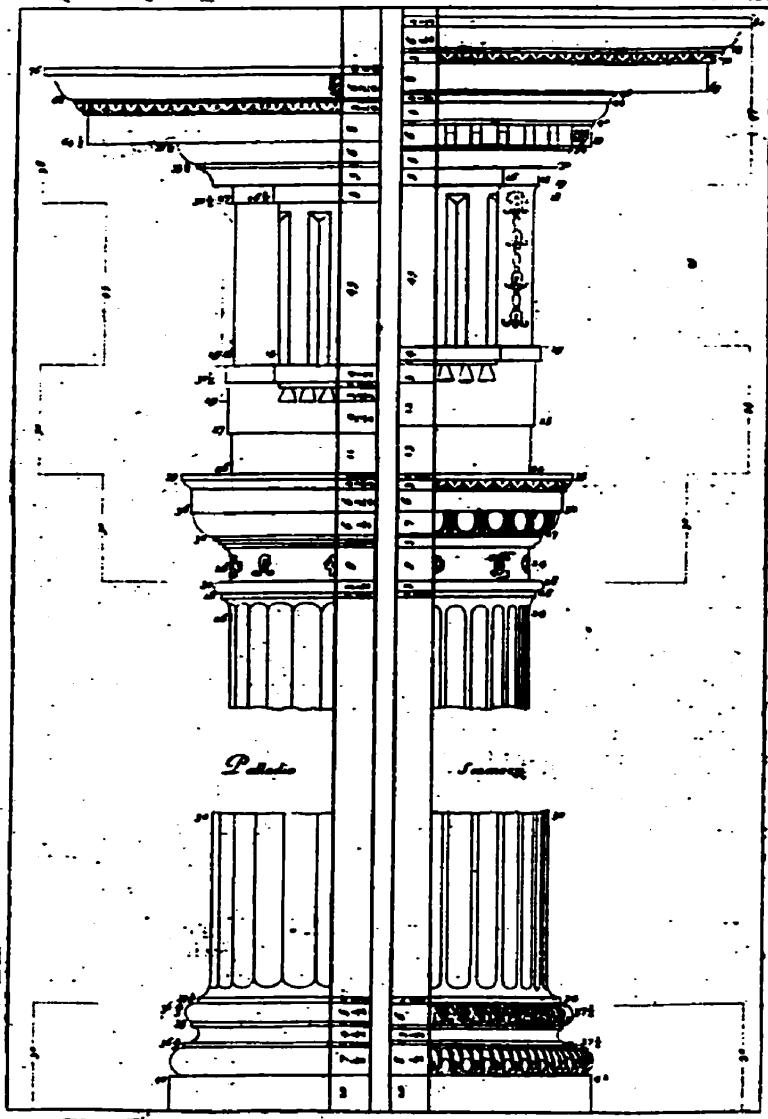


Figure 8: Doric order according to Palladio and Scamozzi. From R. Fréart de Chambray, *Parallèle de l'architecture antique avec la moderne* (1650) [reprinted in Perrault, 1993].

Le fondement positif est l'usage & la fin utile & nécessaire pour laquelle un Edifice est fait, telle qu'est la Solidité, la Salubrité & la Commodité. Le fondement que j'appelle arbitraire, est la Beauté qui dépend de l'Autorité & de l'Acoustumance.⁴⁶

Presuming that the value of architectural proportions is relative, Perrault took the initiative to introduce a new module of his own that slightly adjusted the proportion of each architectural element, so that the pedestals and the heights of columns in the five orders would follow a progression of whole numbers. (See Figure 9.) This "method founded on reason" is superior to others, Perrault argued, for the "facility that it affords memory for retaining dimensions."⁴⁷ Perrault was indeed a true Cartesian: although he believed in the importance of universal norms for guiding architecture, he also thought that these norms should be based on reason rather than on precedents. Despite what might be expected, François Blondel did not refute Perrault's simplified method for determining architectural proportions. On the contrary, in his commentary on *L'Architecture françoise des bastimens particuliers* (1685) by Louis Savot, Blondel praises the advantages of this method. The work of Perrault, he writes,

contient une maniere infiniment plus aisée que toutes les autres pour l'usage des cinq ordres d'Architecture, parce que leurs parties y sont sous des mesures invariables, & qui sont ou les mêmes dans tous les ordres, comme aux entablemens qui ont par tout deux diamètres de hauteur; ou qui se suivent par des différences égales, comme aux Colonnes qui se surpassent de deux tiers de diamètres d'ordre en ordre, & aux piedestaux qui se surpassent seulement d'un tiers de diamètre. Il s'est principalement attaché à former une idée des mesures des Ordres d'Architecture, moyenne entre les plus grandes & les plus petites, qui se trouvent

⁴⁶Vitruvius, *Les dix livres*, trans. Perrault, 12.

⁴⁷Perrault, *Ordonnance*, 67.

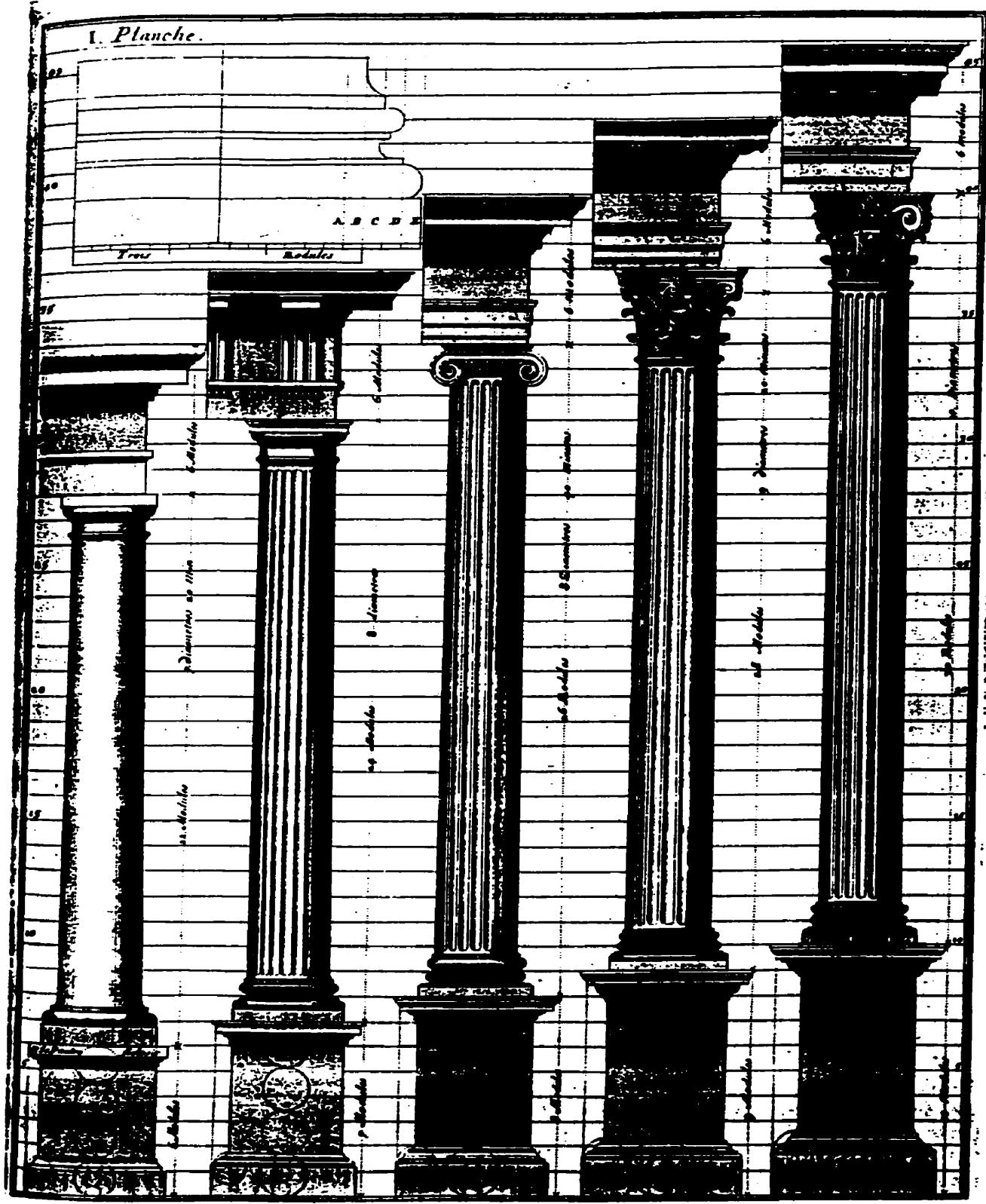


Figure 9: Proportions of the five architectural orders according to Perrault. From C. Perrault, *Ordonnance des cinq especes de colonnes* (1683) [reprint, 1993].

dans les Ouvrages antiques & dans les livres des Architectes. Ce qu'il a fait avec beaucoup de succez.⁴⁸

Blondel did not oppose Perrault's simplification and rationalization of proportional rules; it opposed the deeper philosophical implications of his theory. Perrault had challenged the premise that architecture is founded on absolute principles. In fact, the most significant transformation brought about by his theory may be the very separation between the positive foundations of architecture (commodity, stability, salubrity) and the arbitrary rules based on custom. By promoting arbitrary rules, Perrault enabled architecture to be based on human principles; previously, it had always been based on an order that transcended the human condition. Anticipating Perrault's forthcoming book on the architectural orders, Blondel praised his general competence but also questioned his challenge to Vitruvius's canon. In his *Cours d'architecture* (1675–83), Blondel clarifies this point of contention by restating Perrault's own position:

Nous aurons bien-tost un Ouvrage de M. Perrault sur le même sujet des proportions de l'Architecture, qui ne peut estre qu'excellent venant de sa part; Quoique dans les Notes qu'il a faites sur Vitruve, il paroisse estre d'un sentiment extremement éloigné de celui de cet Auteur, lorsqu'il dit que *les proportions des membres de l'Architecture, qui selon le sentiment de la plupart des Architectes sont quelque chose de naturel, n'ont été établies que par un consentement des Architectes, qui ont imité les Ouvrages les uns et des autres, et qui ont suivi les proportions que les premiers avoient choisies, non point comme ayant une beauté réelle, convaincante et nécessaire, et qui surpassé la beauté des autres proportions, mais seulement parce que ces proportions se trouvoient en des Ouvrages qui ayant d'ailleurs d'autres beautez réelles et convaincantes, telles que sont celles de la matière et la justesse de*

⁴⁸Louis Savot, *L'Architecture françoise des bastimens particuliers composée par M Louis Savot augmentée dans cette seconde édition de plusieurs figures & des notes de Monsieur Blondel . . .* 1673, 2e ed. (Paris, 1685), 341.

*l'exécution ont fait approuver et aimer la beauté de ces proportions, bien qu'elle n'eut rien de réel dans la nature.*⁴⁹

In the following chapter, Blondel refutes the reasons invoked against "la nécessité des proportions en Architecture, qui ne sont, comme on dit, approuvées que par accoutumance."⁵⁰ In effect, Blondel was warning against the long-term consequences of Perrault's position: if the proportions of architectural orders were nothing more than a shared set of conventions established in Antiquity and simply accepted by subsequent generations of architects, there would be no reason to prevent them being substituted by an infinite number of other proportions. The selection of proportions therefore would depend on the taste, experience and intelligence of the architect, thus challenging natural harmony as the basis for meaning in architecture. This was essentially the point of departure for a century-long debate over natural beauty and arbitrary beauty in architecture.

The consequences for practice, however, were not felt immediately. Perrault's position remained controversial throughout the eighteenth century while Blondel's teachings endured as the official principles of the Académie Royale d'Architecture. After Perrault, Vitruvian authority was not replaced immediately by human custom and convention. On the contrary, the proportions of architectural orders retained their former association with nature (through the proportions of the human body), along with their assumed value and their implicit character. Although this notion of "character" became a

⁴⁹François Blondel, *Cours d'architecture enseigné dans l'Académie royale d'Architecture* (Paris: Chez l'auteur & Nicolas Langlois, 1675–83), 2:761–62; italics in the original text.

⁵⁰Building, Blondel argues, is natural because it is born from necessity. In building, all that has to do with *salubrité*, *solidité* and *commodité* is also natural because it is also derived from necessity. *Bien-séance* and decoration are more ambiguous, he says, yet they are also in our nature. Comparing architecture to the other arts, he writes: "Les beautez qui nous ravissent dans l'Architecture, ont aussi quelque fondement réel & naturel en nous, qui fait qu'elles nous plaisent, parce qu'elles sont conformes ou qu'elles sont faites à l'imitation de celles qui se voyent dans les Ouvrages de la Nature." *Ibid.*, 766.

widely accepted convention during the first half of the eighteenth century, nature remained the acknowledged source of architectural proportions and its ability to convey meaning in architecture was never really in question. Perrault's thesis, however, marked the beginning of major transformations in architectural theory that would have profound repercussions in practice. He not only developed his system of proportions into a method that was easier to use but also rejected the need for optical correction, thus giving theory an absolute supremacy over practice and enabling it to become a prescriptive tool.⁵¹

This complex tension between convention and nature would pervade many spheres of knowledge during the Enlightenment. Although the practice of architecture was unaffected by these new theoretical concerns at the time of the debate between Perrault and Blondel, subsequent generations of architects certainly felt the need to acknowledge the profound ideological change brought about by Perrault. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the practical implications of Perrault's theory would become obvious in the work of innovative architects such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Étienne-Louis Boullée, who made a radical departure from the traditional "classical" orders of architecture.

Character theory in architecture during the first half of the eighteenth century

Following Perrault's questioning of the Vitruvian canon, eighteenth-century French theory began to confront the loss of absolute principles in architecture. Although authors of architectural treatises continued to acknowledge Vitruvian sources, they gradually discontinued demonstrations of the natural origin of architectural proportions, thus ending a centuries-long tradition in architectural writing. And although architects still respected the Vitruvian principles, they felt the need to define a new theory of architecture that would acknowledge the growing importance of convention. Throughout the eighteenth century,

⁵¹For more on this subject, see Pérez-Gómez's introduction to Perrault, *Ordonnance*, 24–27.

architectural theory never really lost the desire to reconcile architectural order and cosmological order, but architects realized that they could not rely on universal harmony to give meaning to their work. Looking to shared conventions of architecture as an expressive language was an attempt to save architectural meaning. This new interest in the expressive power of architecture would lead to a theory of character.⁵²

One of the earliest formulations of this new character theory can be found in the writings of Jacques-François Blondel, author of the *Cours d'architecture* (1771–79) and numerous architectural treatises, and professor at the Académie Royale d'Architecture from 1756 to 1774.⁵³ It is in one of his early writings, *De la distribution des maisons de campagne* (1737–38), that Blondel first declared that the exterior expression of a building should announce its destination:

Nous venons de dire qu'il falloit donner une marque de dignité au principal étage d'un Édifice auquel il semble que les autres doivent céder; ce même égard doit être observé dans les Façades, lorsqu'il s'agit de l'ordonnance générale d'un monument un peu étendu, devant donner de la supériorité au principal corps de Bâtiment, soit par la richesse de sa décoration, soit par son élévation, afin que les personnes qui n'ont que la vûe des dehors s'apperçoivent par cette marque de distinction du lieu où réside le Maître. Les autres Bâtimens qui environnent ce corps de Bâtiment

⁵²In her Ph.D. dissertation, Lily Chi looks at the premises that established the question of character theory in architecture, specifically the debate surrounding the introduction of the notion of relative beauty by Claude Perrault, before investigating the early eighteenth-century theories of character in the works of Germain Boffrand and Jacques-François Blondel. "Beginning with Boffrand and Blondel," Chi says, "the formulation of architectural character was an effort of retrenchment: an attempt to reformulate the classical ideal of harmonic form without recourse to the foundational premise of a harmonic, analogical universe." Lily Chi, "The Quest of an 'Arbitrary' Authority," Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1997, 8.

⁵³Although he also published his teachings under the title *Cours d'architecture*, Jacques-François Blondel should not be confused with François Blondel mentioned earlier.

supérieur, doivent aussi dénoter leur usage, soit par la sculpture qui les décore, soit par les membres d'Architecture qui les composent.⁵⁴

Blondel emphasizes that the organization and hierarchy of a facade (its *ordonnance*) should reflect its internal use. Inside a house, every room should clearly indicate its destination through a proper use of decoration: "on doit toujours caractériser l'usage de chaque pièce."⁵⁵ Blondel goes even further by stipulating that the attributes of a facade should express the character and dignity of its owner: "Lorsqu'on élève un Palais, il me semble qu'on en doit orner la façade d'attributs qui expriment la dignité du Seigneur pour qui on le bâtit."⁵⁶ Subsequent authors extended this expressive ambition to devise a more comprehensive theory of character that included not only architectural proportions and orders, but all forms of decoration. Germain Boffrand (1667–1754) went even further by suggesting that an architect could transform the inhabitants of a building by choosing the appropriate character for it. Toward the end of the century, Ledoux proposed an additional interpretation of character in architecture, emphasizing moral edification: "Le caractère des monuments, comme leur nature, sert à la propagation et à l'épuration des moeurs."⁵⁷

The theory of expression in architecture relied heavily on other art forms for its principles. From its early formulation, character theory in architecture demonstrated some close affinities with the art of theatre, including theories of acting, the personification of characters, and stage set design. For Blondel, the close relationship between the exterior and interior decoration demanded a unified intention and a progression comparable to a

⁵⁴J.-F. Blondel, *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la décoration des édifices en général* (Paris: Chez Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1737–38), 1:113–14.

⁵⁵Ibid., 2:122.

⁵⁶Ibid., 2:27.

⁵⁷Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* [1804] (Munich: UHL Verlag, 1981), 12; John Archer, "Character in English Architectural Design," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* XII/3 (Spring 1979): 346–47.

sequence of theatrical scenes. A visitor to the building would then observe a coherent composition unfolding in front of his eyes. Exterior decorations, he writes, must be

d'une relation parfaite avec l'intérieur, il faut s'attacher à leur donner une si parfaite intelligence, que le *spectateur* ne puisse regarder l'une avec plus d'intérêt que l'autre.

C'est cette union accomplie qui fait voir l'excellence d'un Architecte, sur tout lorsqu'il a l'art de faire ensorte que la décoration extérieure annonce la distribution du Bâtiment; cependant on ne doit pas en cela porter le scrupule jusqu'à marquer par des allegories particulières l'usage du dedans de chaque partie de l'Edifice; cette affectation produiroit un coup-d'œil mal entendu, dont nous avons quelques exemples dans nos nouveaux Bâtimens. . . .

Un bon Architecte doit avoir des vûës plus générales, & c'est au *spectacle* entier de son Edifice qu'il doit être le plus attentif.⁵⁸

With the unifying value of character in Blondel's theory, decoration was an essential part of the design, much more than a mere addition to an independent structure. An explicit association with theatre appeared later in Boffrand's *Livre d'architecture* (1745). This also marks the beginning of the search for the proper means of expressing character in architecture. In Boffrand's treatise, the architectural orders are presented as "characters" with an implicit authority as symbolic sources of measure and beauty. Although an analogy to the proportions of the human body continues to be assumed, emphasis is placed on the particular expressive quality of each architectural order:

C'est dans les proportions de l'Ordre Dorique qui est le plus materiel, de l'Ordre Corinthien qui est le plus léger à la vûë, & le plus susceptible d'ornemens, & de l'Ordre Ionique qui tient le milieu entre les deux extrémités, qu'on peut trouver le caractère qui convient à chaque espece d'Edifice.⁵⁹

⁵⁸J.-F. Blondel, *Distribution*, 2:26–27; my emphasis.

⁵⁹Germain Boffrand, *Livre d'architecture contenant les principes généraux de cet art: et les plans, élévations et profils de quelques-uns des bâtimens faits en France & dans les pays étrangers* (Paris: G. Cavelier, 1745), 1–2.

Boffrand not only attributes a specific character to each order, but also recommends its appropriate use or situation. He is aware that various authors have presented different proportions for the architectural orders, but suggests that these discrepancies are due to rules of appropriateness that vary with nations, climate, etc. Knowing the conventions and customs of a nation and the specific character of each architectural order, it is the responsibility of the architect, he writes, to choose the proportion that best represents the destination of a building:

Il est de la prudence de l'Architecte habile de faire le choix [des proportions] qui conviennent le mieux à la destination de son Edifice, suivant son étendue, sa hauteur & la distance d'où il peut être vu.⁶⁰

It is in the second section of his treatise, "Principes tirés de l'art poétique d'Horace," that Boffrand most explicitly compares the expressive role of architecture with that of theatre. In a summarizing passage on his ideas about architectural genres, Boffrand writes that painting, sculpture, and poetry belong to the same family in the arts. Music depicts various sides of Nature by expressing passions, from the very tender to the most violent. Similarly, even though the work of architecture may seem purely material, it is

susceptible de différents genres qui rendent ses parties, pour ainsi dire, animées par les différents caractères qu'elle fait sentir. Un Edifice par sa composition exprime comme sur un Théâtre, que la scène est Pastorale ou Tragique, que c'est un Temple ou un Palais, un Edifice public destiné à certain usages, ou une maison particulière. Ces différents Edifices par leur disposition, par leur structure, par la manière dont ils sont décorés, doivent annoncer au spectateur leur destination; & s'il ne le font pas, ils pechent contre l'expression, & ne sont pas ce qu'ils doivent être.⁶¹

Continuing his parallel between the architectural orders and the genres of poetry, Boffrand describes how the character of each order imprints its effect directly on the senses

⁶⁰Ibid., 2.

⁶¹Ibid., 16–17.

of the spectator. It is necessary, he writes, that "le spectateur ressent le caractere que [l'édifice] doit imprimer." It is the duty of the architect to know the meanings expressed by the architectural orders and to use them as basic elements of a shared language; "un homme qui ne connoît pas ces différens caractères, & qui ne les fait pas sentir dans ses ouvrages, n'est pas Architecte."⁶² The expression of specific emotions became the guiding principle of character theory, subordinating beauty itself to the expressive role of architecture (See Figure 10.):

Il ne suffit pas qu'un Edifice soit beau, il doit être agréable, & que le spectateur ressent le caractere qu'il doit imprimer, en sorte qu'il soit riant à ceux à qui il doit imprimer de la joie & qu'il soit sérieux & triste à ceux à qui il doit imprimer du respect ou de la tristesse.⁶³

In his *Cours d'architecture*, which was not published until 1771, Jacques-François Blondel expanded his notion of architectural character to include a parallel with facial physiognomy, inspired by René Descartes and Charles Le Brun, in which facial expressions represent the internal passions and character of the soul. (See Figure 11.) In his *Conférences sur l'expression* (1698), Le Brun suggested that various elements of facial expression combine to convey a particular emotion. His theory was most influential in the art of painting and acting theory, but Blondel believed that it also had direct affinities in architecture. He even claimed that Claude Perrault's celebrated monuments owed much to Le Brun's theory.⁶⁴ Blondel proposed that elements of a building could suggest facial physiognomy and thereby convey a character that would unify its program.⁶⁵ However,

⁶²Ibid., 26–27.

⁶³Ibid., 32.

⁶⁴Chi, "Quest," 220.

⁶⁵Archer, "Character," 342–45. Even though the focus of his article is on English architectural theory, and particularly on the formulation of character theory in Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), Archer first traces a concise history of character theory originating in the French tradition.

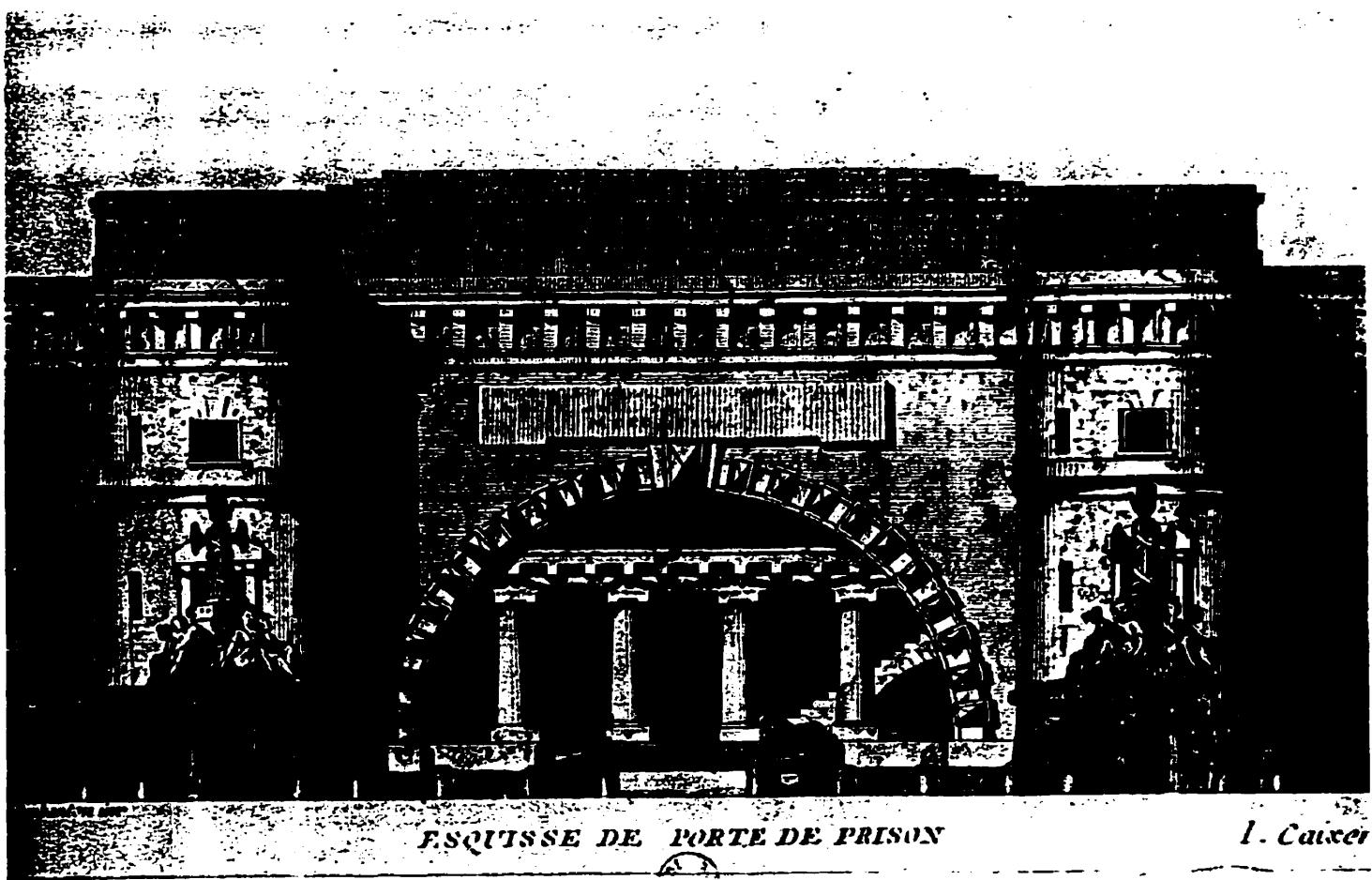


Figure 10: A prison gate by Daubenton (1775). [Szambien].

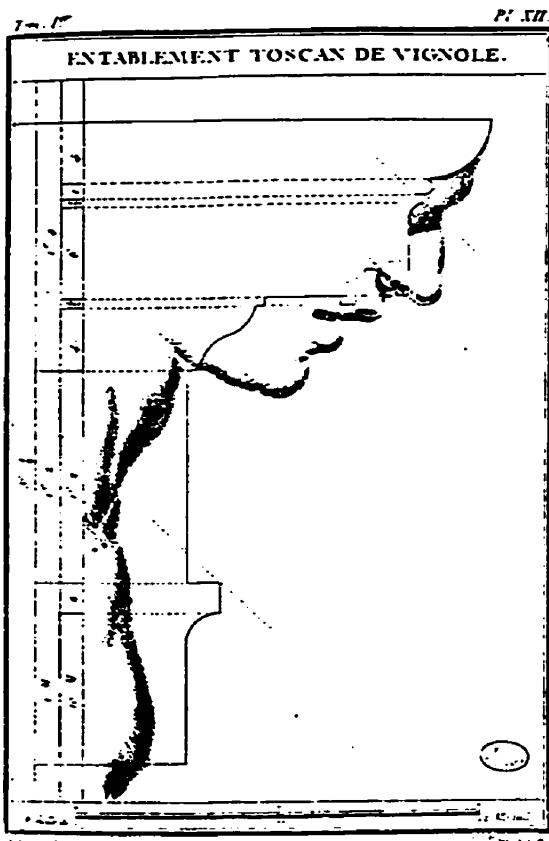
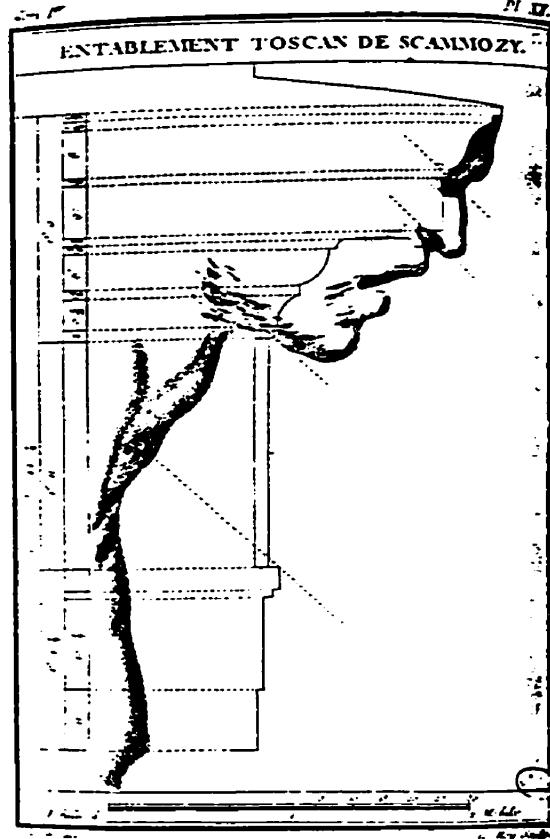
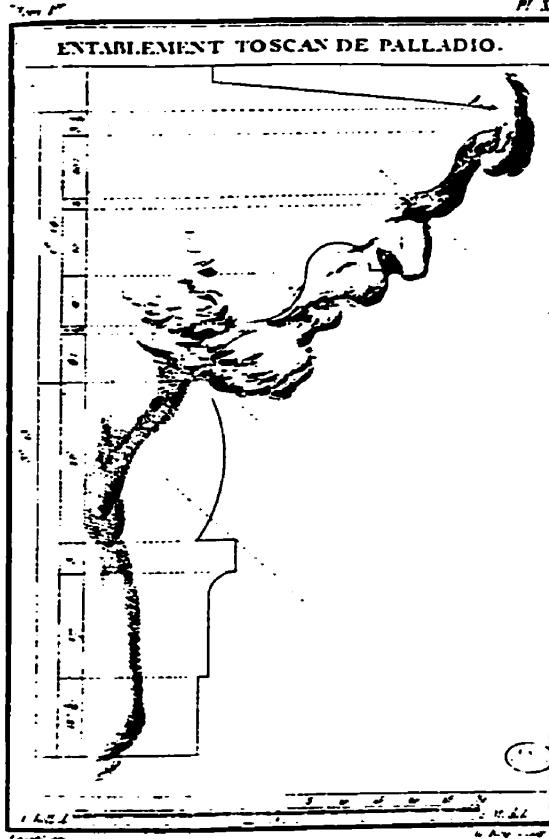


Figure 11: Tuscan entablatures from Palladio to Vignola, according to J.-F. Blondel. From J.-F. Blondel, *Cours d'architecture* (1771) [reprinted in Szambien].

like many of his contemporaries, Blondel did not avoid the apparent dilemma of conflicting intentions. On the one hand, he opposed the desire to establish an absolute and universal basis for architecture, grounded on natural proportions; and on the other hand the need to account for relativity in notions of taste and beauty, and the important role of convention in establishing the expressive language of architecture. In his *Cours d'architecture*, Blondel writes:

C'est . . . dans les ordres qu'il faut chercher le caractère de l'ordonnance, & comme leur proportions ont été puisées originairement dans la nature, c'est dans celle-ci . . . qu'il faut chercher à se rendre compte du bel (*sic*) ou du médiocre.⁶⁶

A contemporary of both Blondel and Boffrand, Charles-Étienne Briseux, also wrote a treatise on architecture in which character theory figures prominently. Even though his *L'Art de bâtir les maisons de campagne* (1743) was written only a few years after Blondel's *De la distribution des maisons de campagne*, Briseux's treatise clearly anticipates the architectural theories that emerged in the final decades of the eighteenth century. The architectural orders were relegated to the end of the second volume of his treatise, rather than appearing at the very beginning, as was the tradition. Briseux justifies this decision by saying that the orders do not properly belong to private architecture but only to palaces and public buildings. His decision to include them at all was motivated only by a desire to provide the reader with all essential parts of architecture:

s'étant fait un objet principal de la Distribution & de la Construction des Bâtiments particuliers, il étoit raisonnable de remplir cet objet, avant que de traiter de ces Ordres, qui n'appartiennent proprement qu'aux Palais & aux Edifices publics, & qu'on peut dire n'être ici que hors d'œuvre, & seulement pour que le Lecteur n'ait pas besoin de recourir ailleurs, pour se mettre au fait de toutes les parties essentielles de l'Architecture.⁶⁷

⁶⁶J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, 2:2–3.

⁶⁷Charles-Étienne Briseux, *L'Art de bâtir les maisons de campagne* (Paris, 1743), 1:xii.

In effect, Briseux not only challenged the established priority in architectural writings, but was also the first to dissociate the notion of character from the architectural orders, thus anticipating later theories such as Le Camus de Mézières's, in which the orders were only one of many attributes that converged to define the particular character of a place. Also anticipating Le Camus, Briseux states that the distribution of a country house is determined by "la disposition du Terrein, l'Entrée principale, l'usage propre à chaque Bâtiment, qui doit être placé suivant sa destination, enfin l'état de la personne qui fait bâtir."⁶⁸ As with Briseux, the social status of the client indeed was a fundamental aspect of Le Camus's character theory. Like most of his contemporaries, Briseux was also conscious that customs and conventions played an important role in the distribution of a building. For example, the position of the chapel in a private house would depend on the specific rules of the diocese:

Il est permis dans les uns de la renfermer dans le Corps de Logis, même dans des Armoires, pourvu que ce soit dans un lieu dont l'usage n'ait rien d'indécent. En d'autre Diocèses, on veut qu'elle soit isolée de tous les Bâtimens. C'est à l'Architecte à se faire instruire de la règle du País, avant que de fixer la position de la Chapelle.⁶⁹

In the importance given to service areas over the *corps de logis*, the rooms devoted to public function, Briseux's treatise also resonates with Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture*. Briseux discusses the appropriate location for each room, beginning with the kitchens, the greenhouse for the *orangerie*, and the bathroom. He describes the location and disposition of stables and sheds (*Remises*), the attic (*greniers destinés à mettre les grains*), and *chenil* (for dogs); the ice box (*glacière*) and various ways of preserving ice; and only then describes the principal rooms, their use, and their distribution. The position

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:2.

⁶⁹Ibid., 1:25.

of the *Cabinet d'assemblée*, he writes, usually determines the distribution of the other rooms. Moreover, "La grandeur des principales Pièces doit être réglée suivant l'état du Maître, & l'étendue du Bâtiment."⁷⁰ Unlike Le Camus de Mézières, however, Briseux defined the position of every room with more concern for *commodité* than representation.

While the first volume of Briseux's treatise is concerned mainly with distribution, the second volume tackles problems of construction, from building materials, foundations and structure to exterior and interior decoration. Echoing Blondel and Boffrand, his first consideration in the decoration of a facade is appropriateness:

Cette Décoration doit offrir une beauté naturelle, aussi noble que simple, & qui contente la vûë par la seule symmétrie & le juste rapport que les parties auront entr'elles, & avec leur tout, & par un heureux mélange d'ornemens propres au sujet & placés avec convenance.⁷¹

The decoration of facades must "répondre à leurs différents usages." Consequently, one must maintain a hierarchy, giving priority to the *corps de logis*; the first floor must also be lighter than the ground floor, which appears more "négligé & mâle."⁷² The orders, he insists again, are not appropriate for country houses, but only for palaces, castles, temples, and other public monuments. It is important, however, to designate the particular character of each facade:

Quoiqu'on ne se serve pas des Ordres dans la décoration d'une Façade, il est cependant à propos d'en désigner le caractère dans les parties qu'on y emploie; & si l'on veut composer quelques profils particuliers, tels que ceux d'une Corniche, d'un Plinte, d'une Imposte, d'un Archivolte, etc. on donnera à chacune de ces parties la largeur que demande l'Ordre qu'on aura pour objet, & l'on se servira de

⁷⁰Ibid., 1:21.

⁷¹Ibid., 2:115.

⁷²Ibid., 2:116.

moulures qui y soient relatives, afin de pouvoir monter avec proportion de la simplicité à la richesse.⁷³

The last part of Briseux's treatise discusses interior decoration, and this is where he eloquently anticipates Le Camus de Mézières's theory by suggesting an increase in the level of decoration as one proceeds from room to room, and by comparing the inhabitant to a spectator:

Les premières pièces des appartements, à commencer par les vestibules, doivent plutôt satisfaire par la noblesse de leurs formes que par la richesse de leurs ornements et l'architecte habile doit contenter la curiosité des *spectateurs* avec une telle graduation que leur admiration puisse augmenter à mesure qu'ils avancent dans les pièces et qu'ils les trouvent décorées de plus en plus.⁷⁴

Here, near the end of Briseux's treatise, there is only a hint of a theatrical analogy in this unfolding of architectural space in a private house. Almost four decades later, it was developed much further when Le Camus de Mézières explored this temporal enactment of architecture and pushed the theatrical analogy to its limit. In his *Livre d'architecture*, Boffrand had already compared the characters of buildings to theatrical *scenes*, announcing their destination through their disposition, structure, and ornamentation.⁷⁵ Boffrand, J.-F. Blondel and Briseux, as pioneers in this new expressive theory of architecture, made use of the theatrical metaphor, but nowhere is this parallel more explicit than in Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture*.

Placing theatre at the centre of his discussion of the expressive nature of architecture is a fundamental innovation in Le Camus's theory. His treatise describes the succession of

⁷³Ibid., 2:120.

⁷⁴Ibid., 2:154; my emphasis.

⁷⁵Boffrand, *Livre d'architecture*, 16. In her article, "The Use of Architecture: The Destination of Buildings Revisited," *Chora* 2 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996):17–36, Lily Chi expands on the theatrical metaphor in the characterization of architectural use.

rooms in the *hôtel particulier*, each one announcing the next in a way that recalls the unfolding of a play, each doorway framing a new scene like a theatrical proscenium. Each room was also intended to convey a different emotion. Le Camus explicitly compares the emotions created by architecture to those engendered by theatrical stage sets:

En examinant un monument, nous éprouvons différentes sensations opposées les unes aux autres: là, c'est la gaieté; ici, la mélancolie. . . . Voulons-nous en juger avec certitude & satisfaction? Jettons les yeux sur les décos de nos Théâtres, où la simple imitation des ouvrages enfantés par l'Architecture détermine nos affections. Ici, c'est le Palais enchanté d'Armide; tout y est à la fois magnifique & voluptueux; on devine qu'il fut élevé par les ordres de l'Amour. La toile change; c'est le séjour de Pluton qui porte l'horreur & l'effroi dans les ames.⁷⁶

Architecture here becomes an expressive language that can produce "poetic effects upon the beholder."⁷⁷ While architects from the generation of Boffrand and J.-F. Blondel had already elaborated a new theory of architecture in terms of character theory, their position about architectural meaning was always related to the use of the classical architectural orders. Learning from their teachings, as well as from the theories of Charles-Étienne Briseux, Le Camus de Mézières conceived his architecture in a manner that would reflect the owner's social status. In expanding the notion of character, he not only invoked the architectural orders but also addressed the senses, using light, colour, smell and music to convey specific emotions. In Le Camus's theory, the architectural orders were grafted almost incidentally to fit the chosen character, and were treated as almost equal to painting and sculpture. The owner's personal story served as the basis of the architectural program, with every room being experienced in a certain way.

⁷⁶Le génie, 4–5.

⁷⁷Remy Saisselin, "Architecture and Language: The Sensationalism of Le Camus de Mézières," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 15 (1975): 239.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, architectural theoreticians such as J.-F. Blondel, Boffrand, and Briseux assumed that the proportional relations of architectural elements could communicate the destination of a building. Whether based on natural harmony or on cultural convention, the architectural orders (or their corresponding proportional relations) continued to be used as a shared language to convey the character of a building. With the surge of Neoclassicism around mid-century, the orders became the "metaphysical principle" of architecture that expressed not only character but the very essence of architectural meaning. Marc-Antoine Laugier, in his *Essai sur l'architecture* (1755), clearly expresses this renewed importance:

Les parties d'un Ordre d'Architecture sont les parties mêmes de l'édifice. Elles doivent donc être employées de manière non-seulement à décorer le bâtiment, mais à le constituer. Il faut que l'existence de l'édifice dépende tellement de leur union, qu'on ne puisse retrancher une seule de ces parties, sans que l'édifice croule.⁷⁸

While the orders remained important for the architects of the last decades of the Ancien Régime, they were no longer sufficient to convey the character of an entire building. Their status became the same as for sculpture and painting, and only the coherent use of different modes of ornaments throughout a building could convey its appropriate character.

Like Boffrand and J.-F. Blondel, Le Camus de Mézières believed that the characterization of space should represent the owner's personal story. *Le génie de l'architecture* proposes a narrative program that not only conveys the owner's social status but also gives a temporal coherence to the entire composition. When Le Camus takes the reader on a tour of a *hôtel particulier*, he emphasizes the relationship among successive rooms. Clearly influenced by Briseux's architectural theory, Le Camus de Mézières emphasizes the importance of a unifying theme that recurs throughout the building, with

⁷⁸Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* [1755] (Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, 1979), xvii.

dramatic tension that builds toward an emotional climax. Indeed, his description of a *hôtel particulier* leads to a dramatic unfolding, with a central character of the architectural composition indicating the need for dramatic unity:

Comme dans les pieces dramatiques une seule action remplit toute la scène, il faut de même dans un édifice observer l'unité de caractere, & que cette vérité fixe d'abord l'imagination, en frappant les yeux.⁷⁹

This desire for narrative cohesion came from a need to substitute the principles of cosmic harmony that had guided classical architecture until the end of the seventeenth century. The temporal unfolding of the architectural program required an embodied observer to confirm the expressive character of the architecture.⁸⁰ Although Boffrand and J.-F. Blondel had already made the "spectator" an important element in their theories, Le Camus de Mézières proposed an even greater emphasis on the beholder and the senses.

⁷⁹ *Le génie*, 63.

⁸⁰ Chi says: "The *spectateur* is specifically identified as the site and confirmation of [architecture's moral and expressive] effects - a distinct but intrinsic term for a theory of expressive architectural form." Chi, "The Quest," 291.

CHAPTER 2: LE CAMUS DE MÉZIÈRES, THE ARCHITECT AND THEORETICIAN

In *Discours sur la nécessité de l'étude de l'architecture* (1754), Jacques-François Blondel writes that the architect cannot limit himself to the rules of his art. He must be familiar with the rules and theories of everything related to architecture, including mathematics, perspective, sculpture, painting, gardening, stone-cutting, carpentry, and structures. However, he concedes that it is not necessary for the architect to master all of these sciences.⁸¹ Following the Vitruvian tradition, Blondel thought that the architect also should have a general knowledge of philosophy, experimental physics, medicine and music. He should have a general education and be an *homme de lettres*. Le Camus de Mézières's wide range of interests, from the strength of materials to play writing, was consistent with Blondel's ideal architect. What is remarkable, however, is the manner in which his interest in subjects such as theatre, gardening and literature converged toward a new, expanded theory of architecture.

The life of an architect, the complexity of a century

Born in Paris on May 26, 1721, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières is best known as the architect of the Halle au blé in Paris.⁸² Very little is known about his life, and the information concerning his architectural practice is imprecise and has led to various problems of attribution. He probably contributed to this confusion, since he is known to have published at least one book under a pseudonym, Wolf d'Orfeuil, and two other books anonymously. He had two brothers: Antoine, a doctor and author of *Médecine de l'Esprit*

⁸¹Jacques-François Blondel, *Discours sur la nécessité de l'étude de l'architecture: De l'utilité de joindre à l'étude de l'architecture celle des sciences et des arts qui lui sont relatifs* [1754] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1973), 55–56.

⁸²For a review of literature on Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières's work, see Appendix 1.

(1753), and Louis Florent, an iron merchant and contributor to the *Journal de commerce et agriculture*. Le Camus de Mézières did his classical studies before studying architecture, and later learned the craft of construction with Antoine Babuty Desgodets (1714–66), architecte-expert with whom he worked on *Essai sur le bois de charpente* (1743), later integrated into *Dissertation de la compagnie des architectes experts des bâtiments à Paris, en réponse au mémoire de M. Paris du Verney sur la théorie & la pratique des gros bois de charpente dans leur exploitation & dans leur emploi* (1763). In 1751, Le Camus de Mézières became architecte juré du roi, and he was identified as architecte-expert-bourgeois or appraiser in the *Almanach national*.⁸³ In 1762, his wife died, leaving him with three daughters: Adelaïde, Françoise and Angélique Le Camus. He married Marie-Madeleine Cécire on July 5, 1765, and she became the inspiration for his theatrical plays.⁸⁴ This period also coincided with his most important architectural commission: the design and construction of the Halle au blé, its delivery port (*gare fluviale*) and the residential development surrounding the new building. It seems surprising that Le Camus was chosen as the architect, since he had built almost nothing prior to this project.⁸⁵ Even though the

⁸³ Although the first entry in the *Almanach national* mentions his complete name, Le Camus de Mézières, in a later entry in 1757 his name appears simply as Le Camus, Rue & porte S.Jacques. The inconsistency in his appellation may have contributed to the confusion over the attribution of some buildings, now known to be by Louis-Denis Le Camus.

⁸⁴ In 1781, he dedicated the publication of his plays in *Mes délassemens, ou les fêtes de Charonne* to his wife, Madame L.C.D.M.: "C'est à toi, chère Épouse que je dédie ce petit Ouvrage. Puis-je mieux faire? Il t'appartient déjà. Le désir de te plaire & celui de t'amuser un moment, sont les Génies qui me l'ont inspiré. . . Sois persuadée que je m'estime le plus heureux des hommes, si, rassemblant en ces lieux quelques Dragons honnêtes gens, je puis te développer mon coeur, & te dire, dans leur style simple et sincère: Je t'aime & t'aimerai toujours."

⁸⁵ The *lettres patentes* for the construction of the *halle au blé* and *une gare pour les bateaux* are dated November 25, 1762.

Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale d'Architecture 1671-1793 (1911) states that Le Camus de Mézières died in 1789, he was still active in Paris in 1793.⁸⁶

The Halle au blé, or Granary, erected in Paris between 1763 and 1767 on the site of the old Hôtel de Soisson, is the only large-scale public project whose attribution to Le Camus de Mézières has not been contested. Much admired for its innovative shape and urban configuration, the *halle* was designed as a circular market with an outer ring for storing grain and a central open-air court where transactions would take place. (See Figure 12.) Shortly after its completion, however, its storage capacity was deemed insufficient, and the open court was covered with a wooden cupola by Legrand and Molinos in 1782. (See Figure 13.) In 1769, Le Camus produced a collection of plates depicting the Halle au blé, as well as a project for covering it, acknowledging that he himself was aware of the limited floor area provided by the new building. The *Recueil des différens plans et dessins, concernant la nouvelle Halle aux grains, située au lieu et place de l'ancien Hôtel de*

⁸⁶In his *Dictionnaire des architectes* (1872), Lance claims that Le Camus died on July 27, 1789. Charles Bauchal in his *Nouveau dictionnaire biographique et critique des architectes français* (1887), 340, claims that even though his name still appeared in the *Almanach* of 1790, it may have been kept by mistake and Le Camus could have died even earlier. In a paper presented to the *Commission du Vieux Paris* on the "rénovation d'un immeuble ancien quai de la Tournelle, no.63 (5e), et note sur la date du décès de l'architecte Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières" (séance du 9 octobre 1961, Procès-verbal no.6, *Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, no.286, 13 décembre 1962, p.2961), Michel Fleury demonstrates that Le Camus de Mézières was still active in 1791, for he gave a power of attorney on January 30, 1791, where he is explicitly qualified as "architect expert." Furthermore, a sale document for his building on quai de la Tournelle was signed on March 28, 1793, further postponing the potential date of his death.

Figure 12: Plan of the Halle aux blé and its surroundings; engraving by G.-L. Le Rouge (1763). Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Deming].

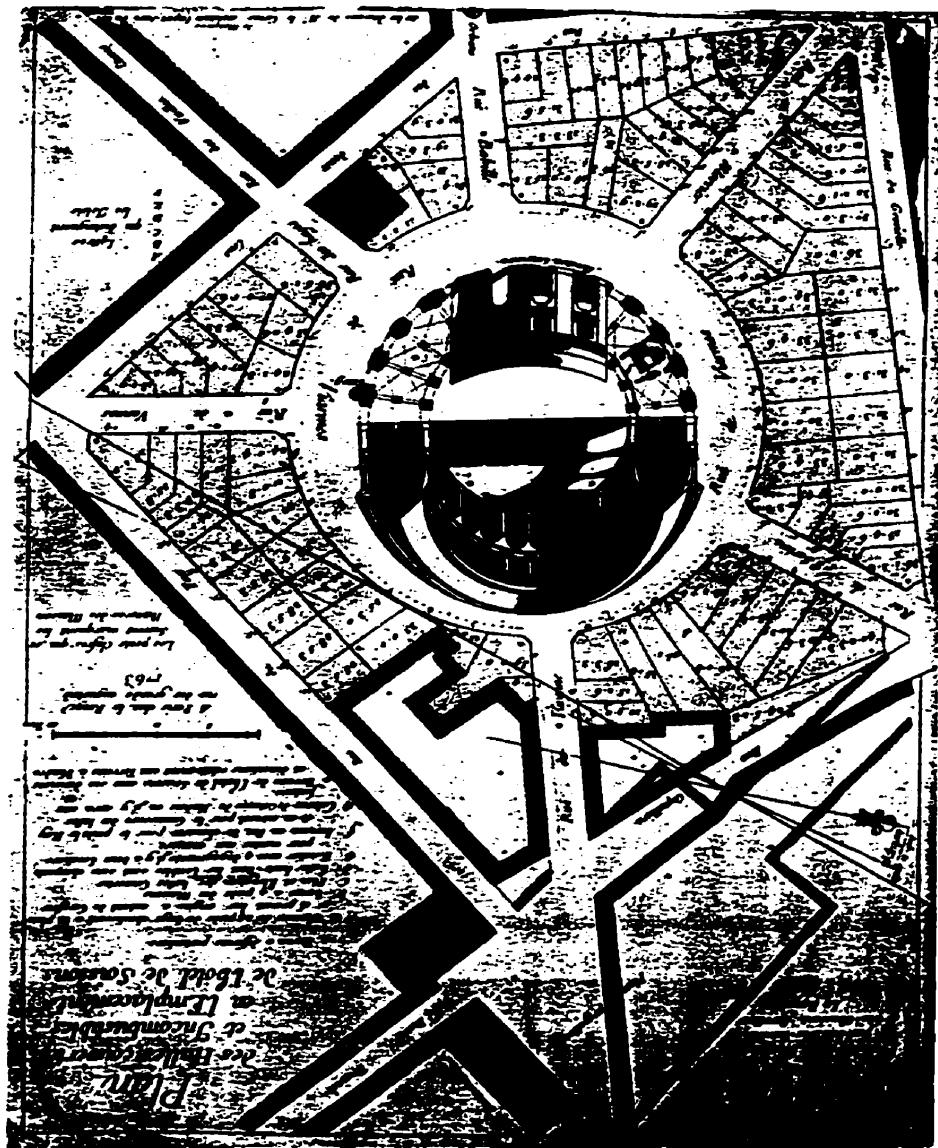




Figure 13: Interior of the Halle au blé at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
From *Journal des monuments de Paris* [reprinted in Deming].

Soisson was produced in a very limited edition,⁸⁷ and included many plates showing the two staircases, considered at the time as a masterpiece of stereotomy.⁸⁸

The construction of the Halle au blé led to a lengthy speculative development of the surrounding area by Le Camus de Mézières and his contractor, Charles Oblin. This residential development restricted access to the Halle au blé and delayed the official opening of the building for almost two years. Although many of Le Camus's contemporaries praised the mastery of its architecture, as a financial enterprise it was a failure that had repercussions until the end of Le Camus's life.⁸⁹ After the death of his associate Charles Oblin in 1785, Le Camus continued to suffer consequences from the bankruptcy and was involved in a lawsuit by the city in 1791 concerning the succession of Oblin's company. Le Camus apparently was in a poor financial situation at that time, for he pleaded to the meeting of the Union des Crédanciers du 8 avril 1791 that he be granted financial assistance due to the infirmities of his old age and his pressing needs. He pleaded to Mrs les syndics et conseils de l'Union to provide him with a living allowance sufficient "pour le mettre à portée de satisfaire à ses besoins pressants et d'acquitter quelques dettes pour lesquelles il

⁸⁷Middleton has recorded only eight copies of the book, in various states of completion and bound in irregular order, thus implying that they were probably issued at different times. See Le Camus, *The Genius*, trans. Middleton, 215–18.

⁸⁸Almost half of the plates of the *Recueil* are devoted to the stairs. Le Camus himself claims that stairs were "la pierre de touche du goût et de l'intelligence." Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir* (Paris, 1781), I, 156. Even today, one of these staircases has been preserved and integrated into the new Bourse du commerce and is still admired for its craftsmanship.

⁸⁹Arch. de Paris, DQ10 1392, dossier 3046, et Lacroix, *Actes de la commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, Paris 1908, t.VI, 191–92; see also Mark Deming, *La Halle au blé de Paris 1762–1813. "Cheval de Troie" de l'abondance dans la capitale des lumières* (Brussels: Archives d'architecture moderne, 1984), 43.

est pressé.⁹⁰ It is believed that further debts forced him to sell, in 1793, a building on quai de la Tournelle that had belonged to his family for many generations.

Another important commission came from Armand-Gaston Camus, a lawyer at the parliament, for the construction of a *hôtel particulier* in Faubourg Saint-Honoré (1769–70) that was rented for life to the Prince and Princess de Beauvau. The building was converted in 1861 into the Ministère de l'Intérieur. (See Figure 14.) The construction of this *hôtel* was studied only recently by M. Paul Bouteiller, who wrote two articles about it.⁹¹ The most important discoveries of M. Bouteiller were a ground-floor plan of the building and the contract document that provides not only the general distribution of all of the rooms, but a detailed description of their interior decoration including materials, the location of mirrors and chimneys, the shape of the ceilings, and the position of eventual paintings.⁹² This information will be especially important as we examine Le Camus de Mézières's theory for the distribution of a *hôtel particulier* and its realization in practice.

The association between Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières and Armand-Gaston Camus apparently had begun in 1765, when Le Camus de Mézières transformed a building on Guénégaud Street that had belonged to his father.⁹³ They would work together on a

⁹⁰AN, Min. cent. LXXXVIII, 1328, Délibérations, 5ème cahier, 8 avril 1791, quoted by Deming, *La Halle*, 43.

⁹¹Paul Bouteiller, "L'hôtel du ministre de l'intérieur et les bâtiments de l'administration centrale de 1790 à nos jours," *L'administration*, no.150 (15 janvier 1991): 199–210; "La construction de l'Hôtel de Beauvau au XVIIIe siècle," *L'administration*, no.151 (15 avril 1991): 122–27. M. Bouteiller also wrote two small books specifically devoted to the hôtel de Beauvau: *L'hôtel de Beauvau, Histoire d'un hôtel privé parisien devenu ministère* (Paris: Éditions SIRP), and *L'hôtel de Beauvau, 96 Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions ISI, 1994).

⁹²Both the plan and contract were included as an appendix to Middleton's translation of *The Genius of Architecture*, 203–14.

⁹³Bouteiller, "L'hôtel," 3.



Figure 14: Hôtel de Bauveau, by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1769), converted into the Ministère de l'Intérieur in 1861. Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Deming].

number of occasions. In 1768, a few months after signing the contract with the Prince de Beauvau, A.-G. Camus entered into a similar deal with the Marquis Charles-Claude du Tillet and his wife Geneviève-Charlotte Bellard de Scébœval. As in the previous contract, the Marquis and his wife would rent for life a *hôtel* commissioned by A.-G. Camus and designed by Le Camus de Mézières. This time, Le Camus and the brothers Bernard and Charles Oblin, his associate for the development of the Halle au blé, signed to guarantee the transaction.⁹⁴

Le Camus de Mézières was indeed very active in the urban development of Paris, not only as an architect but also as a landowner and investor. He was not only involved in the speculative development of the area surrounding the Halle au blé, but also owned important pieces of land around Place Louis XV (now place de la Concorde),⁹⁵ a building on quai de la Tournelle, and a group of houses in Charonne.⁹⁶ He was also well connected on the political scene. When Place Louis XV was being developed, he negotiated on behalf of the very powerful comte de Saint-Florentin to acquire a site belonging to the city of Paris. In an undated letter written between 1763 and 1767, Le Camus de Mézières defended a deal previously negotiated with Monsieur Moreau concerning an exchange of land. The deal was conditional to the right of M. de Saint-Florentin to enjoy a site at the corner of the Rue de l'orangerie. In Paris at that time, this was a very important location, since it constitutes one of the corners of Place Louis XV, developed on the general plan of Jacques-Ange Gabriel:

⁹⁴Ibid., 3–4.

⁹⁵Arch. Nat. Z/1J/896, "Estimation des terrains pour Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, Place Louis XV, 13 septembre 1765."

⁹⁶Jacques Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique des Rues de Paris* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1963), 2:388, 687.

Permettez moi de vous importuner un instant pour vous témoigner que j'ay signé les deux moyens que vous avez proposé, et en même tems pour vous prévenir que nous n'accepterons le premier que conditionnellement à ce que Monsieur de Saint-Florentin joüira personnellement du terrain de l'encognure de la rüe de l'orangerie, qu'autrement nous restraignons notre position au second moyen, tel que vous l'avez rédigé, qui en échange de terrain pour terrain.⁹⁷

The site in question is the actual location of the hôtel Saint-Florentin, built for the comte himself by Chalgrin in 1767 at the expense of the city of Paris, on a small deviation originally called cul-de-sac or Rue de l'orangerie, now renamed Rue Saint-Florentin.⁹⁸ Louis Phélieux, duc de La Vrillière, comte de Saint-Florentin (1705–77) was in fact a minister to Louis XV, and was very close to the king.⁹⁹ Two years after the construction of his *hôtel* on a site acquired for him by Le Camus de Mézières, the comte de Saint-Florentin signed a royal decree authorizing the construction of the Colisée in Faubourg Saint-Honoré,¹⁰⁰ a vauxhall on the Champs-Élysées that was supposed to house the largest celebrations in honour of the marriage of the Dauphin, the future Louis XVI; coincidentally, Saint-Florentin was also a major investor in the project. This new form of public entertainment hall was imported from England after the end of the Seven-Year War and spread rapidly throughout Paris during the final decades of the eighteenth century. The

⁹⁷Letter by Le Camus de Mézières, The Getty Research Institute for the History of Arts and The Humanities, Accession number: 870428.

⁹⁸For more details on the change of name of the street and the development of this site, see Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique*, 2:406–7.

⁹⁹After having lost a hand while hunting, Louis XV wrote to him: "Vous n'avez perdu qu'une main; vous en trouverez toujours deux chez moi à votre service." Ibid., 2:406.

¹⁰⁰Paul d'Ariste & Maurice Arrivetz, *Les Champs Élysées. Étude topographique, historique et anecdotique jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Emile-Paul Éditeur, 1913), 221–22.

gigantic theatre sponsored by Saint-Florentin was short-lived, however: less than a decade after its completion the creditors began its demolition.¹⁰¹ (See Figure 15.)

For two centuries, the construction of the Colisée in Paris was attributed to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, who had been involved in the development of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. In his *Mémoires secrets* (1780–89), a meticulous compendium of gossip about the artistic world and the aristocracy, Bachaumont attributes the construction of the Colisée to "un certain *Camus de Mézières*, architecte de M. le Duc de Choiseul."¹⁰² Relying on this information, historians assumed that Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, architect of the Halle au blé, was also the architect of the Colisée in Paris.¹⁰³ Two articles published in 1971, however, have challenged this attribution. In his article "Les 'Vauxhalls' parisiens au XVIII^e siècle," Alain-Charles Gruber attributes the building to a namesake of Le Camus de Mézières: Louis-Denis Le Camus.¹⁰⁴ In "Autobiographies d'architectes Parisiens," H.

¹⁰¹ A project that was supposed to cost seven hundred thousand pounds finally cost its investors over two million, six hundred thousand pounds.

¹⁰² Italics are in the original. Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France, depuis MDCCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou, Journal d'un observateur...* (London: Chez John Adamson, 1780–89), IV:249, entry dated June 10, 1769.

¹⁰³ Louis Hautecoeur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France* (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1950–52), 4:452; Émile Dacier, *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin* (Paris: Les Éditions G. Van Oest, 1931), 83–84; Paul d'Ariste & Maurice Arrivetz, *Les Champs Élysées. Étude topographique, historique et anecdotique jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Emile-Paul Éditeur, 1913), 221–27; Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Alain-Charles Gruber, "Les 'Vauxhalls' parisiens au XVIII^e siècle," *Société de l'histoire de l'art français* (1971): 125–43. Gruber's article, although rectifying the attribution of the Colisée to Louis-Denis Le Camus, is filled with inconsistencies. In many instances, Gruber confuses the author of the Colisée and the author of the *halle au blé*. "L'exécution des plans [du Colisée], he writes, fut confiée par la société du grand *vauxhall* au jeune architecte Louis-Denis Le Camus, architecte habituel de Choiseul, qui avait remporté un grand succès avec sa construction hardie de la halle aux blés de Paris." To confuse the matter even further, Gruber writes: "Le Camus de Mézières (sic) exprime dans son plan du Colisée des idées que son homonyme résumera plus tard dans un remarquable ouvrage théorique d'architecture intitulé *Le Génie de l'Architecture ou l'Analogie de cet Art avec nos Sensations*, paru en 1780." The attribution of the *halle au blé* to Nicolas

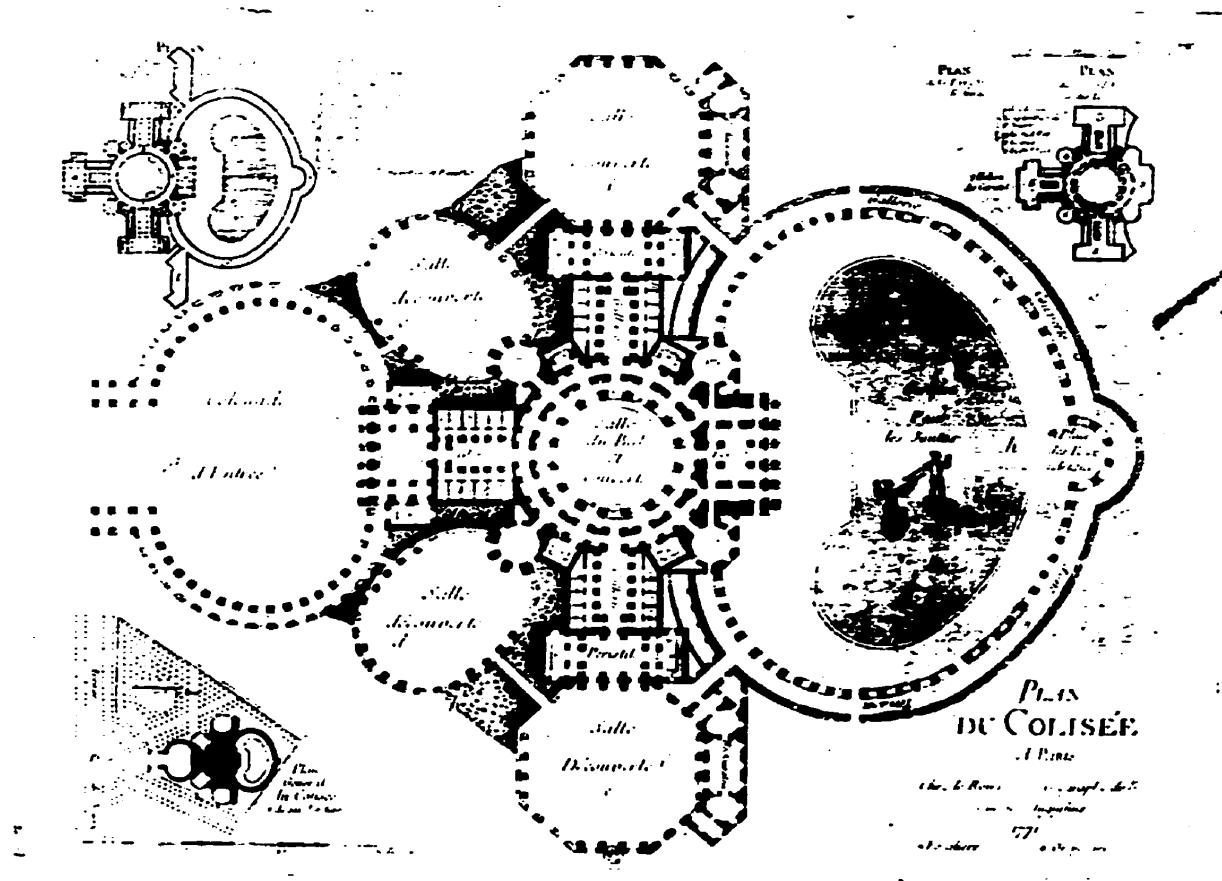


Figure 15: The Colisée in Paris, by Louis-Denis Le Camus (1771); plan by Georges Louis Le Rouge (1771). [d'Ariste & Arrivetz].

Ottomeyer published Louis-Denis Le Camus's letter of application to the Académie Royale d'Architecture, dated April 1770, which confirms Gruber's claim.¹⁰⁵

As *contrôleur* at the Invalides, Louis-Denis Le Camus had remained relatively inactive until the 1760s, when the comte de Stainville, who had just been appointed minister of war under Louis XV and had been named Duc de Choiseul, asked him to remodel his château in Chanteloup.¹⁰⁶ The problem of attribution of the Colisée is related to two other projects carried out for the Duc de Choiseul. One is the château in Chanteloup, with its garden and pagoda, where the Duc de Choiseul resided during his exile from the court between 1770 and 1774;¹⁰⁷ the other is the residential development that surrounded the new Comédie italienne in 1783, on a site that also belonged to the Duc de Choiseul. Until the publication of the article by Ottomeyer, all three projects were assumed to be the work of Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières. They have now been attributed to Louis-Denis Le Camus.

Nevertheless, it is significant that the construction of the Colisée, an innovative theatre in Paris, was attributed to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières during the eighteenth century. After the construction of the Halle au blé, Le Camus had become a renowned architect. The Halle au blé itself was not only a vital institution in the economic landscape of Paris, but was also transformed on many occasions into a public theatre or vauxhall, as for the celebrations of the marriage of the Dauphin, for which the unfinished Colisée by Louis-Denis Le Camus had originally been destined. In his *Description du Colisée*

Le Camus de Mézières has never been questioned, nor has his *Le génie de l'Architecture*. These blatant biographical mistakes cast some doubts on the scholarly value of Gruber's research. Gruber, 132–33.

¹⁰⁵H. Ottomeyer, "Autobiographies d'architectes Parisiens 1759–1811," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris* (Paris, 1971): 177–78.

¹⁰⁶Michel Gallet, *Les architectes parisiens du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Mangès, 1995), 289–92.

¹⁰⁷In 1775, Choiseul asked Le Camus to transform the gardens surrounding his castle and to build a pagoda in testimony of friendship to those who remained loyal to him while he was in exile.

(1771),¹⁰⁸ Le Rouge describes the decoration of every room in a way that seems to anticipate *Le génie de l'architecture* in its use of mythological figures and its characterization of spaces. A large colonnade surrounded a water basin for naval games and led to a grotto with a concealed statue of Neptune dominating a fountain; the entire composition recalled the nymphs of Villa Maser. Also around the central hall were four circular cafés decorated with motifs of the four continents.¹⁰⁹ Jacques-François Blondel, in his *Cours d'architecture*, even describes the famous Colisée on the Champs-Élysées as a construction whose architectural compositions "se prêtaient au génie de l'architecture."¹¹⁰ Various coincidences - Le Camus de Mézières's declared interest in the theatre, the formal similarity between the Granary and the Colisée (J.-F. Blondel referred to the Halle au blé as "the new Colisée"), and the many theoretical affinities between the new theatre and *Le génie de l'architecture* - still raise suspicions that Le Camus de Mézières was involved in the construction of the Colisée.¹¹¹ It is not impossible that he defined the architectural program of the theatre, since Achard et Compagnie, the group that developed the project,

¹⁰⁸George Louis Le Rouge, *Description du Colisée, élevé aux Champs-Élysées, sur les dessins de M. Le Camus* (Paris: Le Rouge, la Veuve Duchesne, 1771).

¹⁰⁹Gruber, "Les 'Vauxhalls,'" 134.

¹¹⁰J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, II, 189; my emphasis.

¹¹¹Much circumstantial evidence still seems to link Le Camus de Mézières to the Colisée. Beside the architectural affinities with his own projects and his political association with Saint-Florentin, in 1769, the year when the construction of the Colisée began, Le Camus de Mézières moved to Rue Verte, Faubourg Saint-Honoré, next to the newly opened Rue du Colisée. Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique*, 2:251; *Almanach national* (Paris, 1769). It is also interesting that in *Le Guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir*, a treatise by Le Camus de Mézières, published exactly at the time of the demolition of the Colisée, an entire section is devoted to the demolition of existing buildings. Even though this practice of demolishing existing structures before beginning a new construction may not have been unusual, it is nonetheless surprising that it was discussed in such an extensive manner in a treatise on the art of building, taking into consideration, so to speak, the very finiteness of the life of a building. Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le Guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir* [1781; 2nd ed. 1786] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), Letter 43.

was known to have hidden important political figures who fought to remain anonymous throughout the misadventure of this controversial project. Given Le Camus de Mézières's difficult financial situation after the bankruptcy of his development around the Halle au blé, it probably would have been unwise for him to be directly involved in the development of the Colisée, which was comparable in scale and urban complexity to his earlier, ill-fated project.

After the financial failure of the Halle au blé (and the simultaneous demise of the Colisée), there were very few signs of Le Camus de Mézières's architectural activity. He did not withdraw from society, however. From 1770 to 1781, he animated the Société dramatique de Charonne, which met in a pavilion that he had erected on Rue Saint-Blaise in Charonne. (See Figure 16.) Following this transitional period, Le Camus de Mézières, the author, became most prolific. Le Camus de Mézières may have spent much of this time, between 1770 and 1780, writing about his architectural ideas. In 1780, he published his most innovative architectural treatise, *Le génie de l'architecture; ou, L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations*. Within the next two years, he also published three books dealing with technical problems of construction: *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir* (1781), *Traité de la force du bois* (1782), and (anonymously) *Mémoire sur la manière de rendre incombustible toute salle de spectacle* (1781). Even more impressive than the number of books was their variety of subjects. Between 1781 and 1784, he also published part of the repertoire presented at the Société dramatique de Charonne in *Mes délassemens ou les Fêtes de Charonne* (1781); *Description des eaux de Chantilly et du Hameau* (1783), a narrative description of a garden designed by the architect Le Roi for the Prince de Condé; *Aaba, ou le triomphe de l'innocence* (1784), a mythological love story of Aaba, a Greek girl, and her lover Hilas, a shepherd; and, fueling the controversy over his identity and the attribution of his works, *L'esprit des almanachs* (1783) under the pseudonym Wolf d'Orfeuil. This



Figure 16: Pavilion in Charonne, by Le Camus de Mézières. Photographs by d'Atget (before 1929). Musée Carnavalet, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Hillairet].

period of great literary activity also coincided with a renewed spiritual quest, indicated by Le Camus's involvement in freemasonry.

The breadth of Le Camus's written work has often been overlooked, yet it clearly exemplifies the complexity of the decades preceding the fall of the Ancien Régime. On the one hand, Le Camus's technical studies, manuals, almanac, and interest in freemasonry are in complete agreement with the Newtonian empirical science and natural philosophy that dominated the Enlightenment. On the other hand, his novels, plays, description of picturesque gardens, and attention to sensations in *Le génie de l'architecture* all point to a new romantic consciousness in the eighteenth century. The great variety of Le Camus de Mézières's work seems difficult to reconcile; his obsession with technical concerns of construction in *Traité de la force du bois* and *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir* is hardly evident in his more poetic work, *Le génie de l'architecture*. However, this contradiction is apparent only from our current standpoint; during the eighteenth century, the poetic and technical aspects of Le Camus's architectural treatises shared the language of empirical science and natural philosophy.

Newtonian empirical science and Le Camus de Mézières's technical studies

Le Camus de Mézières was an active freemason, member of the lodge of L'Étoile Polaire from 1773 to 1774, and of Les Coeurs Simples de l'Étoile Polaire from 1776 to 1783.¹¹² These lodges included other important architects such as Jean-Baptiste Paulin, architect of the king; Charles Dumont, professor of architecture; and Charles de Wailly, architect and *contrôleur* of the king. Incidentally, de Wailly shared le Camus's interest in the theatre, and was directly involved in the construction of many theatres, including the Comédie française, which he designed with Marie-Joseph Peyre. Le Camus and De Wailly must

¹¹²Alain Le Bihan, *Franc-maçons parisiens du Grand Orient de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1966), 299.

have been acquainted, since their involvement in the lodge of Les Coeurs Simples de l'Étoile Polaire overlapped for at least two years, from 1776 to 1778, when the final drawings for De Wailly and Peyre's new theatre were being produced.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century in France, freemasonry attempted to preserve a balance between the primacy of rationality and the growing search for truth beyond rational understanding.¹¹³ The Masonic doctrines were closely related to Newton's natural science and philosophy. Jean Théophile Désaguliers (1683–1744), who became Great Master of the Lodge of England in 1719, was a famous promoter of Newtonian philosophy and author of *The Newtonian System of the World, the Best Model of Government* (1728). This dual interest in empirical science and esoteric religion led to the creation of a "natural religion" that provided freemasonry with its particular ideology.¹¹⁴ In architecture, the new perception of geometry in nature led to developments in architectural language.¹¹⁵

Newtonian empirical science was based on a new metaphysical approach to nature. Throughout the eighteenth century, Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) dominated scientific thought, and led to a new Natural Science that sought to establish laws and consequences of natural phenomena from observation and mathematical analysis. With the growing influence of Newtonianism, nature itself was believed to follow a coherent order that could be observed directly. As a devout Christian, Newton believed that experience and calculations could unveil the presence of God in the world. Nature was essentially a "revelation" imbued with a divine power that preserved the

¹¹³Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 277.

¹¹⁴For more on this, see Georges Gusdorf, *Les principes de la pensée au siècle des lumières* (Paris: Payot, 1971), 405–6.

¹¹⁵For more on the influence of Freemasonry on late eighteenth-century architectural theories, and particularly on the work of Ledoux, see Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis*, 151–54.

cohesive order of the universe.¹¹⁶ Although it would take more than a century for Pierre Simon Marquis de Laplace to describe God as an "unnecessary hypothesis" in his *Traité de la mécanique céleste* (1799),¹¹⁷ Newton was soon regarded as the leader of scientific agnosticism. Newton's distinction between "causes" and "laws" became the point of departure for Auguste Comte's positivism in the nineteenth century. Unlike Descartes, who believed he could demonstrate how the Creator constructed the world by speculating on its causes, Newton was content to look for mathematical laws regulating the universe, using experimental methods.

Newton's experimentation provided science with evident certainty, a degree of "absolutism" that all other fields tried to reproduce in analogical ways.¹¹⁸ His theory of gravitation, for example, was translated in the field of biology as "attraction theory." In his *Opticks* (1704), Newton himself tried to rationalize the physiology of vision and the phenomena of sensitivity and movement by devising explanations based on other, physical situations.¹¹⁹ In experimental philosophy, the triumph of empiricism over the classical philosophy of the seventeenth century was achieved by John Locke, who believed that all ideas are acquired first through the senses, in direct opposition to Descartes's notion of innate ideas. Locke's theory of knowledge acquisition was based on an objective observation of the world, again directly influenced by the growing impact of the natural sciences. Locke published his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690, three years after Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. In his *Essay*, Locke

¹¹⁶Ibid., 155–56.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁸For more on the influence of Newtonianism on the field of architecture, see Louise Pelletier and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997), Variation Two.

¹¹⁹For more on the impact of Newtonianism on various disciplines, see Gusdorf, *Les Principes*, 181–91.

traces all knowledge to sensations, heightened by reflection. His intention, clearly, was to oppose ideological constructions based on innate ideas and, like Newton, he anticipated the positivist philosophy of the nineteenth century. D'Alembert would eventually compare Locke's accomplishment in philosophy to Newton's in science: "Il créa la métaphysique à peu près comme Newton avait créé la physique."¹²⁰

Under the influence of Newtonianism, eighteenth-century architecture also sought rules extracted from nature. This was especially evident in the late-eighteenth-century theories of Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude Nicolas Ledoux, but was also present in Le Camus de Mézières's architectural theory, with its analogy between architecture and human sensations.¹²¹ Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Claude Perrault's architectural theory had shaken the metaphysical foundations of the discipline by questioning the Vitruvian canon and the very possibility of universal principles. Perrault's distrust of optical corrections expressed his general doubt of what could not be measured and calculated in the physical world, thus anticipating the Newtonianism that would dominate science and philosophy throughout the eighteenth century. Like contemporary philosophers such as Locke, Perrault rejected the principle of innate beauty and harmony. Absolute beauty resulted from a rational application of the rules of construction, while arbitrary beauty was based on custom and convention. To counter the latent relativism implied by this new concept of "arbitrary" beauty and the conventional status of the orders, architects such as Boullée and Ledoux grounded their architectural theories on the implicit

¹²⁰D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, II, (Paris: Gonthier, 1965), 99; quoted by Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 112–13.

¹²¹In his article "Étienne-Louis Boullée. Empiricism and the Cenotaph for Newton," *Architectura* 23 (1993): 37–57, Martin Bressani proposes to demonstrate that the "enthusiasm for modern experimental science" (Newton's empiricism) and the "melancholic sensibility" that both determine the work of Boullée are not contradictory, but intimately connected to one another. It also aims to demonstrate "a direct influence from the field of philosophy" on the work of Boullée.

order of nature. Criticizing Perrault's questioning of the natural foundation of Vitruvian principles, Boullée asks:

L'architecture n'est-elle qu'un art fantastique, et de pure invention, ou les principes constitutifs de cet art émanent-ils de la Nature?¹²²

In his own architecture, Boullée himself dispensed with the Vitruvian orders but introduced a theory of characterization based entirely on Nature. His belief in a "universalism" was based on a conviction that a primitive architecture, anterior to classical antiquity, was "immutable in its forms and symbols." This exaltation of the primitive, inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "good savage", was animated by a desire to return to nature.¹²³ Boullée's architectural doctrine was indeed based on the imitation of nature, and his theory of the bodies ("De l'essence des corps") classifies the forms of nature according to their specific character. His position, explicitly Platonic, considered regular and symmetrical forms to be superior to irregular ones, with the sphere being the most perfect. (See Figure 17.) The empty spherical space that would symbolize the infinity of the universe in his cenotaph and other architectural monuments was a direct extrapolation of Newton's cosmos, in which, unlike Descartes's Baroque universe, the void was an important component. As this reliance on the character of natural forms became a fundamental part of Boullée's architectural theory, "the search for pure and fundamental forms was unquestionably related to natural philosophy's search for truths of universal validity."¹²⁴

¹²²Boullée, *Architecture*, 121.

¹²³J.-M. Perouse de Montclos, introduction to Boullée, *Architecture*, 15.

¹²⁴Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis*, 131. Pérez-Gómez continues: "In a truly Platonic sense, the sphere became the image of *agathon* - supreme beauty and goodness. Issuing from Newtonian cosmology, it symbolized the presence of the infinite *in nature*" (141).



Figure 17: Cenotaph for Newton, by Etienne-Louis Boullée (1784). Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Pérouse de Montclos].

Boullée's theoretical position, like that of Le Camus, was greatly indebted to the sensationalist philosophy initiated by John Locke, but the impact of this philosophy on eighteenth-century theories of art and architecture was due mainly to its development by Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, for whom the arts had a common origin in expression.¹²⁵ To symbolize nature in their architectural creations, Boullée and Le Camus used natural forms as a basic language to announce the destination of the building.¹²⁶ Describing the character of Greek temples, Boullée associates the volumetric forms with the divinities to which they are dedicated (Jupiter, Venus, Minerva, Pluto, etc.), without explicitly referring to the Vitruvian orders. Unlike J.-F. Blondel and Boffrand, for whom the classical orders provided the primary narratives to guide the architectural decoration in particular kinds of buildings, Boullée and Le Camus de Mézières believed that the qualities of architectural forms were perceived directly through the senses, and thus could convey the characters of specific divinities. The Temple to Jupiter, in Boullée's words, presents a noble and majestic form; the Temple to Venus is made of soft and rounded shapes that seem to be the work of Love herself; the Temple to Minerva is characterized by its regularity, perfect symmetry and noble simplicity; and the Temple to Pluto, god of Hell, presents a hard and angular form. In addition to this formal description, Boullée describes the quality of light that contributes to the specific emotion in each temple.¹²⁷ Like Boullée, Le Camus believed that natural form could express particular character and evoke specific emotions in the soul. In the decoration of a boudoir, for example, masses may vary but the guiding principle should be "de ne pas s'écarter des plans circulaires. Cette forme convient au

¹²⁵Condillac's contribution to Le Camus's theory will deserve our attention in a following chapter.

¹²⁶Ledoux also used the purity of forms found in Greek temples to develop a new geometric vocabulary "that could chasten the Rococo style in the interests of clarity and naturalness." Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 120–22.

¹²⁷Boullée, *Architecture*, 33–34.

caractere du lieu, elle est consacrée à Vénus.¹²⁸ Le Camus also insists that each monument calls for a specific sentiment, a particular feeling: the prison inspires fear and sadness, while festive places such as theatres invite pleasure.¹²⁹ (See Figure 18.) Le Camus, however, did not dispense altogether with the classical orders, as did Boullée. On the contrary, their traditional character offered another way to express the destination of a building:

L'ordre Toscan par ses proportions annonce la force, la solidité, & représente un homme nerveux & robuste. Le Dorique nous offre un homme d'une taille noble & avantageuse. L'Ionique tient de l'ensemble d'une belle femme avec un peu plus d'embonpoint que celui d'une jeune fille élégante & svelte, d'après laquelle font données les proportions de l'Ordre Corinthien. Quant au cinquième Ordre qui est le Composite, il est formé des quatre autres, & de-là même il prend son nom. Nous voyons donc dans la progression de ces ordres la force, l'élégance, les graces, la majesté & la magnificence.¹³⁰

Unlike Le Camus, Boullée's notion of character was not restricted to mythological figures or proportional associations with the human body. Boullée drew his inspiration from movements of Nature, such as the seasons:

Mettre du caractère dans un ouvrage, c'est employer avec justesse tous les moyens propres à ne nous faire éprouver d'autres sensations que celles qui doivent résulter du sujet. Pour comprendre ce que j'entends par caractère ou effet subit des

¹²⁸Le génie, 122.

¹²⁹Ibid., 4-5; Boullée, *Architecture*, 5.

¹³⁰Le génie, 22–23. Szambien remarks that Le Camus de Mézières diverges from the classical doctrine when he attributes to the Tuscan order the character of force and solidity. This character was traditionally attributed to the Doric order, which follows the proportions of *l'homme de taille moyenne et avantageuse*. Traditionally, the Tuscan order was considered to be *si grossier qu'on ne le met en oeuvre que fort rarement*. Andrea Palladio, *Les quatre livres d'architecture*, trans. R. Fréart de Chambray (1650), 13, quoted by Szambien, *Symétrie*, 138.

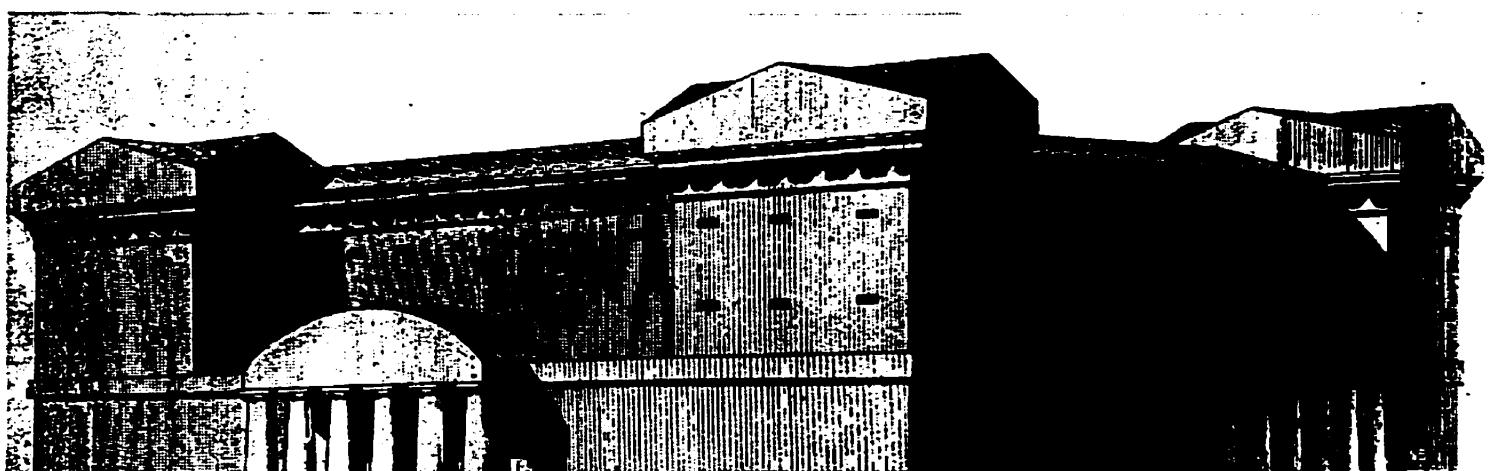


Figure 18: Prison project for Aix-en-Provence. From C.-N. Ledoux: *Unpublished Projects* (1992).

différents objets, considérons les grands tableaux de la nature et voyons comment nous sommes forcés de nous exprimer d'après leur action sur nos sens.¹³¹

Boullée describes the specific character of every season, and extends them into programs for specific buildings. The *images riantes de l'automne*, for example, convey the appropriate character for monuments such as vauxhalls, fairs, public baths and theatres. Boullée devotes entire sections of his *Essai sur l'art* to such entertainment and public halls. (See Figure 19.) The theatre, in particular, is devoted to pleasure; its character is determined by the attributes of Venus, and consequently, Boullée praises the beauty of women.¹³² With Boullée, the program is no longer conveyed by the conventional Vitruvian orders but rather uses the natural effects of masses and volumes to create its images. Boullée goes further and states that architecture is "le seul art par lequel on puisse mettre la nature en oeuvre."¹³³ The ability of architecture to "put nature into work" accounts for the sublimity of the art, while the use of symmetry and order, as fundamental natural principles, confirms that the architect is perpetuating the project of the divine creator:

Le plan de l'univers formé par le Créateur est l'image de l'ordre et de la perfection. Si tous les hommes devenaient assez sages pour ne former entre eux qu'une seule et même famille, on serait tenté de croire que la divinité, pour opérer l'établissement des hommes sur la terre, leur a donné l'architecture, dont les principes constitutifs sont fondés sur la symétrie qui est l'image de l'ordre et de la perfection.¹³⁴

¹³¹Boullée, *Architecture*, 73–74.

¹³²Ibid., 96–97, 105–7. Under the section "Colisée," Boullée develops the program of some kind of public theatre located on the Étoile, on the Champs-Élysées. This project appears to be related to the Vauxhall of the same name operating not far from the chosen site a decade earlier.

¹³³Ibid., 73. This notion is recurrent throughout *Architecture, L'Essai sur l'art*.

¹³⁴Ibid., 37–38.

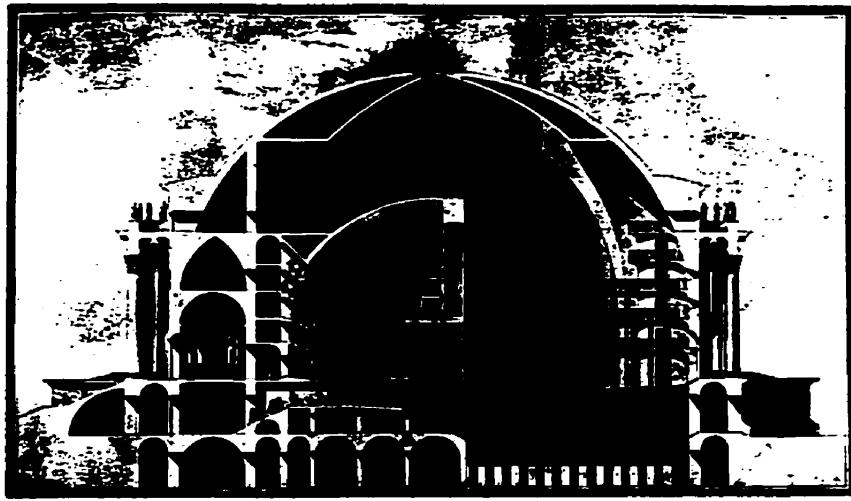


Figure 19: Project for an opera house, by Etienne-Louis Boullée (1781).
Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Deming].

In *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus de Mézières also alludes to Newtonian science. Describing the inanimate objects of nature, Le Camus associates their non-verbal effect on our senses to that of architecture, using the analogy of attraction/repulsion theory from physics: "Une construction fixe nos regards par sa masse; son ensemble nous attire ou nous repousse."¹³⁵ But it is in his more technical studies that Le Camus expressed his debt to the natural sciences most explicitly. While Le Camus states in *Le génie de l'architecture* that "the objective of architecture is to move our souls and excite our sensations" and that "this could be achieved only through the use of harmonic proportions," the intention of his *Traité de la force du bois* was clearly technical. In it, he compiled results from various experiments on wood, and drew some conclusions for designing wooden structures efficiently.¹³⁶ Such divergent interests, however, are not contradictory when understood in an epistemological landscape configured by Newtonian natural philosophy, with its empirical emphasis and its implicit metaphysics of number.¹³⁷ The apparent contradiction between Le Camus's highly philosophical and speculative theory in *Le génie de l'architecture* and his technical interest in the dissertation on wood was not an anomaly in the eighteenth-century context; both were discussed at sessions of the well-established Académie Royale d'Architecture. Our current understanding of disciplinary autonomy and the antithetical nature of poetry and technique is obviously a more recent condition.

¹³⁵Le *génie*, 4. This analogy with the language of physics was first pointed out by Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 241.

¹³⁶Pérez-Gómez notes the complexity of Le Camus's work by delineating the apparent contrast between *Le génie de l'architecture* and his two other books concerned with technical problems of construction. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis*, 74.

¹³⁷Pérez-Gómez's commentary on Le Camus is particularly helpful for it places his theory of a harmonic architecture in the context of the century-long debate over the notion of arbitrary and absolute beauty that stemmed from Perrault's questioning of the status of architectural orders. Ibid.

Traité de la force du bois was written in memory of Babuty Desgodets, master and long-time friend of Le Camus de Mézières, with whom he wrote *Dissertation de la compagnie des Architectes Experts des Bâtimens à Paris... sur la théorie & la pratique des gros bois de charpente dans leur exploitation & dans leur emploi* (1763). Because of the great cost of wooden structures and their relatively short life - in 1762, the École Royale Militaire had to replace the beams of its structure only six or seven years after its original construction - Le Camus de Mézières and Babuty Desgodets searched for the causes of this rapid deterioration in their various treatises on wood.¹³⁸ The *Dissertation* begins with a general introduction to botany, "Conformation & Anatomie de l'Arbre," followed by a discussion of the impact of soil on the quality of wood, and the appropriate age at which to cut trees to maximize their strength. Commenting on Vitruvius's advice to ring the trunks of trees several months before cutting them, to dry them out by preventing the entry of new sap, Le Camus and Babuty Desgodets suggest instead to float the trees on water. Their direct criticism of Vitruvius's methods clearly shows that the new science had overthrown the traditional authority:

Pour parvenir à cette évaporation, Vitruve conseilloit de cerner les arbres; mais chacun sçait que de son tems, la Physique n'avoit pas encore atteint le degré de perfection, auquel elle est parvenue aujourd'hui, & dont nous sommes redevables aux lentilles microscopiques; suite des découvertes de Galilée.

¹³⁸"Nous cherchâmes le moyen de connoître le vice du bois, de le rendre sensible & d'y remédier." Nicolas Le Camus de Mezieres, *Traité de la force du bois. Ouvrage essentiel, qui donne les moyens de procurer plus de solidité aux Edifices, de connoître la bonne et la mauvaise qualité des Bois, de calculer leur force, et de ménager près de moitié sur ceux qu'on emploie ordinairement. Il enseigne aussi la maniere la plus avantageuse d'exploiter les forêts, d'en faire l'estimation sur pied, etc.* (Paris: Chez l'Auteur et chez Benoît Morin, 1782), 8.

L'usage & l'expérience nous ont appris que cette pratique est dangereuse; c'est aussi ce que nous reconnaissions par la mécanique de l'arbre.¹³⁹

In his later studies on wood, Le Camus also considered experiments by natural scientists such as Duhamel, Parent, and Buffon. One of his crucial conclusions from their research was that beams and joists would be more efficient with their widest dimension positioned vertically. He also concluded that beams could be divided along their length, a process called *la refente des bois*, so as to reduce the amount of wood and its weight on supporting walls.¹⁴⁰ Le Camus de Mézières applied his findings on splitting wood to the construction of military barracks in Faubourg Saint-Marceau on Rue Mouffetard in Paris. Since the financial enterprise seemed somewhat precarious, Le Camus suggested that the structural members for each floor be split, so that every joist would be only two inches wide, six inches deep and nine feet long, thus saving almost two-thirds of the wood. He also made the beams half as wide. The savings were significant, and Le Camus was pleased that his theoretical findings were finally being put into practice.¹⁴¹ The project, however, was badly received by the master-builders, who vehemently protested to have the project stopped:

En effet, les Maîtres Charpentiers, instruits de ce qui se passoit, s'imaginent qu'ils vont perdre leur état, parce que l'on produisoit aux Bâtisseurs des moyens d'épargner cent pour cent. Ils ne font pas attention, que c'étoit au contraire pour eux un véritable avantage; puisque, de cette maniere ils évitoient nombre de

¹³⁹Le Camus de Mézières, *Dissertation de la compagnie des architectes experts des bâtimens à Paris, en réponse au mémoire de M. Paris du Verney sur la théorie & la pratique des gros bois de charpente dans leur exploitation & dans leur emploi* (1763), 69.

¹⁴⁰"Nous ne pûmes nous empêcher d'en admirer les avantages [de la refente des bois], & de former des voeux pour que le Public eût assez de force pour vaincre les préjugés, & scut mettre à profit une pareille découverte." Ibid.

¹⁴¹"Le Public alloit cesser d'être la victime de la cupidité." Ibid., 11.

banqueroutes qu'occasionnent leur avidité en fournissant des bois qui doublent & triplent la dépense.¹⁴²

The issue, in fact, was a dispute between traditional practice and a new theory based on mathematical calculations. Indeed, as we shall see, the floors were said to deflect even before the building was occupied, thus confirming the objections of the master-builders. The debate between science and tradition had arisen two years earlier with the construction of Ste. Geneviève, the French Pantheon in Paris, by the architect Germain Soufflot (1713–80). (See Figure 20.) In 1764, Soufflot initiated a structure that its detractors would soon accuse of defying traditional rules. The very slender structure of the dome and its supporting piers was based on precise mathematical calculations that minimized the use of stone. Unlike Le Camus, however, Soufflot's argument for reducing the thickness of his structure was both scientific (the efficient use of materials) and aesthetic; he believed that structural stability and aesthetics were interdependent. Pierre Patte (1723–1814), author of *Mémoire sur les objets les plus importants de l'architecture* (1769), was very critical of Soufflot's construction and predicted the imminent collapse of the dome. Patte claimed that Soufflot had challenged natural proportions by basing Ste. Geneviève on calculations rather than on empirical observations of architectural precedents.¹⁴³

The dispute between those who believed in mathematical calculations and those who believed in traditional examples remained unresolved at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1800, Charles-François Viel perpetuated the controversy in his *Décadence de l'architecture à la fin du dix-huitième siècle*, and sided with Patte in the debate over the dome of the Pantheon. He criticized Soufflot for resting the fate of his building on

¹⁴²Ibid., 11–12.

¹⁴³For more on the debate opposing Soufflot and Patte, see Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis*, 260–64.



Figure 20: The church of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, by Germain Soufflot (1764), transformed into the French Pantheon after the 1789 Revolution. [Pérez-Gómez, 1983].

mathematical demonstrations rather than on practice and experience. Some have argued, Viel says, that many ancient and modern buildings are over-dimensioned in some parts and under-dimensioned in others, if considered from a scientific standpoint. However, their very existence, after many generations, is the best proof of their legitimacy: "Les géomètres . . . sont si peu d'accord entre eux, sur la précision de leurs théories respectives appliquées à l'architecture!" Rules alone cannot determine the appropriate way to build solidly, nor can they dictate the form and disposition of buildings:

[Ce serait] vouloir soumettre l'ordonnance qui constitue essentiellement l'architecture, à un véritable mécanisme; tandis qu'il est constant que les règles sont impuissantes pour déterminer l'emploi du style, imprimer le caractère propre à un monument, et y répandre cette harmonie qui en fait tout le charme.¹⁴⁴

Viel argues that science alone cannot resolve the problems of construction, and tells the story of De la Hire as an example. The theories of this *géomètre distingué*, he writes, have been proven inexact by the new generation of mathematicians, yet they cannot agree among themselves on many points, especially the spherical vaults. Some believe that such vaults do not produce a lateral force (*une poussée latérale*), while others believe they do. The mathematicians all use calculations to prove their system, Viel continues sarcastically, but each arrives at a different result. Only the architects who know both sides of architecture (*le génie de l'art* and *la science de la construction*) and who rely on the experience of their predecessors can succeed in building spherical vaults of the utmost solidity.¹⁴⁵

Viel's reactionary position opposed not only scientific experimentation but also other new tendencies: looking to sources other than ancient Greece for architectural

¹⁴⁴Charles-François Viel, *Décadence de l'architecture à la fin du dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Chez l'auteur & chez Perronneau, 1800), An VIII, 28.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 12–13.

principles, taking great liberty in exploring new fashions, and letting the imagination forge new principles:

Jamais les causes générales et particulières de décadence de l'architecture n'agirent avec plus d'activité qu'aujourd'hui; jamais ses véritables principes ne furent plus nécessaires à propager, pour les opposer à un esprit de mode qui, depuis quelques années, domine la plupart de ceux qui l'exercent; esprit dont l'influence puissante porte à cet art, les atteintes les plus nuisibles. Selon les architectes qui abondent dans ce sens de nouveauté, c'est un système d'école de ne s'attacher qu'à la manière de l'ordonnance d'un petit nombre de monumens des anciens et des modernes, que les plus brillantes époques des arts ont produits. Il faut, selon eux, étudier les édifices de tous les âges et qui existent chez toutes les nations, pour mettre à profit leurs genres de compositions, et trouver *dans ces divers rapprochemens les principes de chaque architecture*; comme s'il pouvait exister des principes, dans les productions capricieuses des peuples barbares, et ailleurs que dans celles des Grecs.¹⁴⁶

Viel was criticizing the very notion of innovation and was attacking the architecture of Ledoux and Soufflot without naming them. Viel identifies two fatal periods for architecture. The first, described as a false taste, is epitomized by the work of Lajoue and Oppenord. The second, closer to the end of the century, was marked by the work of two "infamous" architects: "l'un, [célèbre] par l'étendue de ses entreprises ruineuses; l'autre, par la multitude de ses dessins, produits d'une imagination vagabonde et déréglée."¹⁴⁷ A return to real beauty in architecture, Viel writes, can happen only if we carefully study the precedents of classical architecture, and "par l'union du génie de l'art, avec la science de la construction et celle de la pratique." These two branches of architecture, united by the experience of practice, cannot be divided because "il existe une dépendance réelle, entre les

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 5–6.

¹⁴⁷Although they are not named, one can easily recognize the work of Soufflot and Ledoux. Ibid., 8.

proportions qui constituent la belle ordonnance de bâtimens, et celle qu'exige la solidité de leur constructions."¹⁴⁸

Le Camus de Mézières did not escape the repercussions of letting mathematical calculations take precedence over traditional practice. Faced with the dilemma of the military barracks on Rue Mouffetard, Magistrate M. de Sartine appealed to the Academies for advice. Two reports were produced: one by MM. de Parcieux and Perronet for the Académie Royale des Sciences, the other by MM. Camus and Desmaisons for the Académie Royale d'Architecture. Since his theories were increasingly coming under attack by master-builders and other practicing architects, Le Camus de Mézières attempted to legitimize them by invoking these two reports from the Academies, even though their conclusions tended to undermine Le Camus's theoretical speculations. An excerpt from the report of the Académie Royale des Sciences describes the floor structure of the four-storey building, emphasizing that the beams were already deflecting prior to the occupation of the building:

On a remarqué que les poutres ont fléchi, les unes de quatorze lignes, d'autres de quinze, dix-huit & vingt-quatre lignes, & une entre autre de trois pouces deux lignes mesurée au milieu.¹⁴⁹

The report, however, praises Le Camus's intention to minimize unnecessary loads on the walls and "prévenir une dépense qui augmente tous les jours par la rareté des bois de charpente." The report also agrees that beams and joists with a vertical profile are more structurally efficient, as in Le Camus's building. The designated members of the Academy confirmed many of the calculations on which La Camus based his project, but also warned that the advantages of splitting wood have limitations, mainly because cutting through the

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁹*Traité de la force du bois*, 16.

grain weakens the wood.¹⁵⁰ Referring to Buffon's *Mémoire* (1741), the authors of the first report agreed that joist dimensions usually are unnecessarily large, but noted that the distribution of a building can change with a new owner, so it is customary to provide a stronger floor structure. The report concludes that, despite the great advantages in "reformer l'abus des trop gros bois," one should not move to the other extreme of using "des bois de sciage réduits à une trop faible épaisseur."¹⁵¹ The report of the Académie Royale d'Architecture agreed with the report from their colleagues at the Académie Royale des Sciences, and also concludes that they could not approve the wooden structure of the floors because it did not respect the "règles établies par l'expérience, ny aux principes de la méchanique."¹⁵² Le Camus remained confident that time would prove him right, and the preface of his *Traité de la force du bois* concludes on an optimistic note:

Depuis cette époque, on a fait refendre en deux, dans nombre d'Édifices, les solives ordinaires & de remplissage. On a conservé la plus grande hauteur, en la posant de champ. Les planchers se sont bien conservés, & n'ont fait aucun mauvais effet . . . c'est même aujourd'hui la manière d'opérer.

Le progrès des Arts ne se fait que par une multitude d'observations qui ne peuvent être l'ouvrage ni d'un homme seul ni d'un temps borné.¹⁵³

Even though *Traité de la force du bois* may appear to be an entirely technical treatise concerned with the composition of wood and the strength of materials, its scientific focus is complemented by a highly sensitive and even sensuous perception of the physical world. Le Camus introduces the treatise with an initial promenade through a forest. Understanding the strength of material in a wooden structure enables one to penetrate the

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 17.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 23.

¹⁵²Henry LeMonnier, *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale d'Architecture 1671–1793* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1911), VII, 250–55, 328.

¹⁵³*Traité de la force du bois*, 24.

"secrets of nature" and the laws that regulate it, Le Camus writes, yet the sensuous experience that fills one with delectation as one enters a forest is no less powerful. The majestic grandeur of nature invites one to reflect and meditate. These sensations are probably caused by the filtered light, the various shades of green in the foliage, the height of the trees, and the depth of the silence.¹⁵⁴ A subtle wind that causes the leaves to shiver can suddenly fill us with overwhelming emotions, shuddering in horror at the sacred woods: "notre ame aussi-tôt est émue, inquiète; nous ressentons une sorte de frissonnement, nous éprouvons l'horreur sacrée des bois."¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, Le Camus uses the same expression to describe the expressive power of architecture in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Comparing the effects created by a work of architecture to those of a stage set of an enchanted forest by Servandoni, he writes: "A la vue de la forêt de Dodone, l'ame est émue; on est saisi de l'horreur sacrée des bois."¹⁵⁶ The very smell of freshly cut wood on a building site can bring back these emotions:

Quel agrément, quel charme ne goûte-t-on pas, si l'on pénètre de grand matin en ces lieux! quelle odeur plus suave, plus délicieuse! On seroit incliné à croire que nous faisons la découverte d'un sixième sens, & que nous en ressentons les premières saveurs. Toutes les merveilles de la nature contribuent à cet enchantement. La rosée pénètre les pores des feuilles, en ranime les parfums: la fraîcheur de la terre les condense & les rend plus sensibles; l'Aurore les met en mouvement, & les répand dans les airs. Un poëte diroit que c'est l'ambroisie des Dieux qui se prépare. Entre-t-on dans un endroit renfermant des arbres abbattus, épars ou rangés en piles, tel que dans un chantier? on est frappé d'une fraîcheur particulière: il semble que l'air de ce lieu soit différent de celui du voisinage où il n'y a pas de

¹⁵⁴"Ces différentes sensations sont causées sans doute par la lumière du jour affoiblie, & occasionnées par le sombre des feuillages, la teinte de leur verdure, la multiplicité, la hauteur des arbres, & le silence profond qui règne de toute part." Ibid., 41–42.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁶*Le génie*, 5.

bois. La raison de cette espece de phénomene s'explique naturellement, lorsque l'on considére l'humide dont le bois est pénétré.¹⁵⁷

This is the extent of Le Camus's poetic description of wood. He then leaves the sensuous smell of freshly cut wood to concentrate on the more pragmatic concerns of drying beams and joists prior to construction. At least seven years are needed, according to M. de Buffon, to dry joists eight or nine inches thick, and more than double this time is required to dry hewn beams sixteen to eighteen inches thick. Most of the treatise is devoted to distinguishing among different kinds of wood and describing experiments and calculations by various natural scientists, concluding that oak should be used for most construction.

When he defines what constitutes architecture in the introduction of his treatise on wood, however, one promptly recognizes the author of *Le génie de l'architecture*. In his "Discours préliminaire," Le Camus reiterates what he says is a daily complaint: construction is too expensive, and contemporary buildings don't seem to last as long as those of previous centuries. However, construction should not be understood as part of architecture:

L'Architecture en France est un des Arts qui approchent le plus de la perfection. La beauté de ses proportions, la pureté de ses profils, le bel ensemble des masses excitent nos sensations. L'oeil est content; notre ame est émuë. Tel est le ressort de ce que nous appelons décoration. Jette-t'on les yeux sur la partie de distribution? on verra l'homme le plus sensuel goûter une douce satisfaction. Son air annonce que ses vues sont remplies; il jouit; il trouve tout ce qui peut contribuer à ses aises; il rencontre dans le moindre Appartement ce qui répond à ses caprices, à ses fantaisies. Le luxe le plus somptueux, le goût le plus rafiné font leur séjour de sa demeure délicieuse. L'art, imitateur de la belle nature, les y fixe, les y enchaîne.

¹⁵⁷*Traité de la force du bois*, 42–43.

La théorie & la pratique de l'Architecture sont complètes dans ces deux genres, il est difficile d'y ajouter. Il n'en est pas de même de la construction.¹⁵⁸

As in *Le génie*, the role of architecture is to "excite our sensations," to please the eye and to touch the soul. Through combined attention to decoration and distribution, architecture conveys the perfection of Nature. For Le Camus de Mézières, the theory and practice of architecture are concerned strictly with decoration and distribution; the construction and solidity of buildings (the classical *firmitas*) are not part of architecture, but an autonomous discipline. Le Camus even claims that architects were never concerned with this discipline, always neglecting it as a lower, mechanical art:

Soyons de bonne foi: les Artistes ont négligé cette branche; ils l'ont dédaignée, comme une partie méchanique qui ne demandoit que des soins grossiers. La regardant au-dessous d'eux, ils l'ont délaissée à des personnes souvent peu intelligentes & presque toujours avides & mercénaires, suite malheureuse du peu d'éducation . . . il est inutile d'aller au-delà. Ne cherchons pas d'autres causes des erreurs de la bâtisse: tel est l'abus & telle est la source du reproche qu'on est en droit de faire.¹⁵⁹

By describing what he considers to be the source of all problems of construction - the fact that this discipline was left to the hands of subordinates - Le Camus is not so much posing a historical diagnosis (which would, in any case, be totally inaccurate) as describing a more recent condition. The very possibility of understanding *firmitas* as a separate discipline in the eighteenth century coincided with the emergence of engineering as an autonomous profession. The condition that Le Camus describes, in which the historical and cultural roots of architecture have been disconnected from the scientific rules of construction, has led to irreconcilable contradictions. Le Camus contributes further to the

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 26–27.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 27.

debate between tradition and science by criticizing tradition for providing insufficient principles to guide construction:

La pratique est bonne pour la main-d'œuvre: elle est même nécessaire; mais elle est insuffisante pour la marche raisonnée de l'exécution. Ses tâtonnemens ne vont pas toujours au but. Si quelquefois ils y parviennent, ce n'est que par suite du hazard. La science des méchanique seule peut guider, elle a ses loix, ses principes; elle seule assure qu'on est dans le vrai chemin: elle y remet, si l'on vient à s'égarter. Elle frappe au vrai but; elle indique la solidité, l'économie; elle emploie victorieusement les forces convenables.¹⁶⁰

Traité de la force du bois focuses on carpentry because it is the main cause of failure in buildings. The nature of wood has not changed since the beginning of time, Le Camus writes, but due to the growing demand in recent years, trees are often cut at an inappropriate time, when still filled with sap; they are also cut too young, before reaching their appropriate strength. Le Camus's concerns here are clearly scientific and he refers extensively to Parent, Buffon and Le Bossu. Giving a detailed account of Buffon's procedure for measuring the strength of wood, Le Camus is confident that this empirical method - progressively adding weight onto wooden members with different sections and different lengths - could lead to the formulation of clear and reliable principles.¹⁶¹ Le Camus's concern in the *Traité* echoes his previous *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtit* on building construction, which also emphasizes carpentry and various kinds of wood. Le Camus indeed qualifies carpentry as the most important mechanical art related to buildings, since it is the most useful and pleasing. In addition to protecting us from humidity and the general effects of weather, carpentry pursues the work of nature and creates magical effects:

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 31.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 34–36.

Elle [la menuiserie] décore nos appartemens, & nous garantit de l'humidité; c'est par sa magie que les arbres se développent & se réduisent dans les longueurs & les épaisseurs dont nous avons besoin; que leurs différentes parties se réunissent, semblent ne former qu'un seul corps, & nous produisent des panneaux & des assemblages d'une précision sans égale. On diroit que c'est la nature elle-même qui opere & nous favorise de ses miracles. C'est la baguette de la Fée qui enfante ce que l'imagination peut concevoir de plus utile, de plus agréable & de plus intéressant.¹⁶²

Le guide, however, was written for a different reader than *Traité de la force du bois*. The title, *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir; Ouvrage dans lequel on donne les renseignemens nécessaires pour se conduire lors de la construction, & prévenir les fraudes qui peuvent s'y glisser*, states the objective of the book. It was written for clients rather than for the building trades, to reveal common mistakes by clients and potential frauds one could expect from contractors.¹⁶³ After listing everything that an owner ought to consider before contracting a project, including the choice of an architect, Le Camus goes into great detail on the process of construction, from borrowing money to choosing a good contractor who won't indulge in wine and waste his time and the client's money. He meticulously describes every kind of building material, from the wide variety of wood and stone to the various types of nails. He provides recipes for varnishes, and indicates how to produce different colours.¹⁶⁴ The intent, however, is still to educate clients and not architects or

¹⁶²Le Camus argues that Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself wished to be instructed in this profession. Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le Guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir. Ouvrage dans lequel on donne les renseignemens nécessaires pour se conduire lors de la construction, & prévenir les fraudes qui peuvent s'y glisser* [1781; 2nd ed. 1786] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 2–3.

¹⁶³Ibid., xv.

¹⁶⁴Le Camus devotes various sections to colors and painting where he acknowledges different authors, including Watelet who, he says, wrote about this sublime art. The kind of painting Le Camus turns his attention to is what he calls "peinture d'impression" and is defined as "l'Art de coucher à plat les couleurs sur des murs, sur de la menuiserie, sur des plafonds, etc." Ibid., 39, 68–72.

builders, and Le Camus warns his reader against trying to practice architecture without proper training. Even though his *Guide* attempts to cover every aspect of construction, the training of an architect requires assistance from an experienced master. *Traité de la force du bois* promoted science to ensure "progress" in the art of construction, while *Le guide* insisted on the importance of experience in training an architect; together, they indicate the complex balance between science and tradition, as well as the status of theory in the eighteenth century. A century after the teaching of architecture was sanctioned by the creation of the Académie Royale d'Architecture in France under Louis XIV, and after Jacques-François Blondel's school offered a new form of architectural education during the first half of the eighteenth century, even architects who were committed to the scientific development of the discipline were not ready to accept theory as a potential replacement for practice and experience. While theory could extract clear principles and lead to a more rational practice, the example of an experienced master was considered the only reliable way to educate an architect. Le Camus insists on the importance of choosing a good architect, and describes the qualities that a client should seek. He warns against architects who are more interested in decoration than in making sure that the cost of the project will not ruin the client. He also warns against architects with no experience, and those who draw very well without knowing the art of building: "La bonne volonté ne suffit pas. La pratique est indispensable, elle ne peut s'acquérir qu'avec le temps & par la continuité des opérations."¹⁶⁵

In *Le guide*, Le Camus revisits some themes developed earlier in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Sensuous language is again used to describe some aspects of architecture, and he reformulates the theory of expression that characterizes his previous work. *Le guide* is written in the form of letters to a friend, the first one devoted to the pleasure of

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 40–41.

building. It seems that everyone feels this need to build, Le Camus writes, even if only to remodel one's house. And what we build reflects who we are:

Ce que nous faisons nous est relatif, nous le disposons suivant notre goût & nos besoins; notre amour-propre est flatté, nous sommes satisfaits, il nous plaît, nous le contemplons avec des yeux d'indulgence: tel à-peu-près un pere se regarde dans ses enfants.¹⁶⁶

Le Camus elaborates on the importance of cohesive character in a digression on the common origin of sculpture and architecture. He criticizes the "goût frivole & léger" that marked the reign of Louis XV, and compares it to "bad Gothic." The accession of Louis XVI and the appointment of M. le Comte de la Billarderie d'Angivillier as the head of the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts inspired new hope. In Le Camus's view, it marked a return to a greater sense of order in which different genres and characters are expressed clearly, with ornaments used only "qu'autant qu'ils sont analogues aux endroits de leur destination."¹⁶⁷ The construction of a house, however, is more than an expression of the owner's character. The building enterprise has important social repercussions. One should pay the workers according to one's means, Le Camus advises, but he also asks whether one is animated by the "zele d'un bon & véritable citoyen." If this is the case, he writes, an owner should hire a thousand workers, and stimulate the economy in doing so: "l'argent circule, vous faites des heureux: est-il plaisir plus délicat?" This attitude indicates an ethical aspect of construction during the Ancien Régime: the objective was not yet to get the work done at the lowest price, but to be a good citizen.

As might be expected from the author of *Le génie de l'architecture*, the analogy between architecture and theatre is extended to the process of construction in *Le guide de*

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 119–20.

ceux qui veulent bâtir. For Le Camus, construction is not unlike theatre, since it is an ideal means of relaxation and entertainment that occupies our attention entirely:

L'Art de bâtir . . . fait diversion; les inquiétudes, les embarras se dissipent, il apporte du délassement; chaque jour nouvelles scènes, nouvelles sensations, idées neuves, nouveaux plaisirs.¹⁶⁸

Le Camus's ever-present interest in the theatre took a different turn in a pamphlet published anonymously in 1781, the same year as *Le guide de ceux qui veulent bâtir*. Its main concern was to present concrete ways to prevent deadly fires in entertainment halls: "Les accidents du feu, cet élément vorace & destructeur, les suites funestes qui en résultent sont si terribles, qu'au seul récit l'épouvante & l'alarme s'emparent des coeurs les plus fiers, les plus insensibles."¹⁶⁹ By then, the city of Paris had been struck by many significant fires in theatres. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Paris Opera was plagued by numerous fires, two of them destroying it completely. After the fire of 1763, Soufflot was called to Paris to restore the *Salle des Machines* of the Tuileries that would temporarily house the Opera. In 1781, a second fire destroyed the opera house by Moreau that had been built only a decade earlier, in 1770. The Opera was then housed in a temporary structure erected in 75 days on Boulevard St-Martin.¹⁷⁰ The numerous fires at the Opera and other public theatres prompted architects to apply their ingenuity to make theatres incombustible, to provide easy escape in case of a fire, and even to stop fires once they had started. For example, following the 1781 fire at the Opera, then located at the *Palais Royal*, Boullée designed a project for a new opera house in which safety and fire

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 3.

¹⁶⁹Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Mémoire sur la manière de rendre incombustible toute salle de spectacle* (Paris: Chez Benoît Morin, 1781), 3.

¹⁷⁰Thirteen years later, while the temporary structure was threatening to collapse, the opera was moved again to the Théâtre des Arts in 1794, where it stayed until 1820. Its permanent residence was built only under the Second Empire.

prevention were the main concerns. The site he chose was the place du Carrousel, between the Louvre and the Tuileries, now occupied by the Arc de Triomphe. Boullée praised this location for its easy access and fluid circulation, as well as its proximity to the warehouse for the sets (*magazin*). He also justified the monumental setting of the building because it would prevent a fire from spreading. Exits were carefully considered, and building materials were restricted mainly to brick and stone. Only the floor and some wooden decorations could burn, but to reduce the risk that fire would spread, a water reservoir was placed below the floor of the entire theatre to extinguish the first flames. Boullée's preoccupation with fire reflected a general concern among architects for public safety in such entertainment buildings, filled with burning candles, volatile fumes, and flammable sets.¹⁷¹ Pierre Patte, in his *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale* (1782), complains about the great fire hazard in the theatres of the time. He claims that there was at least one accident every week in which paper-lined sets could have caught fire. Long after the invention of *réverbères* (light reflectors), the stages continued to be lit with open candles, usually manipulated by drunken men. To hinder the spread of fire, Patte suggested building the boxes against a masonry wall (either stone or brick) to protect the exit corridors.¹⁷²

Inspired by the same desire to prevent these all-too-familiar tragedies, Le Camus de Mézières examined the architecture of theatre buildings. Like many of his contemporaries, he carefully considered the ideal location for a new opera house, as well as the appropriate distance from any surrounding construction. As for Boullée, aesthetics and rational design decisions were indivisible:

¹⁷¹ At the end of the eighteenth century, the preoccupation with fire became the central subject of treatises on the theatre. See, for example, George Saunders, *A Treatise on Theatres* (London, 1790).

¹⁷² Patte, 192ff.

Toute Salle de Spectacle devroit être isolée. La facilité du service, celle des abords préviennent l'enchaînement des accidens: si nous considérons d'autres objets que la sûreté publique, nous dirons que la grandeur, la magnificence semblent l'exiger.¹⁷³

Le Camus's suggestions for making theatres incombustible went far beyond those of Boullée and his other contemporaries. In his *Mémoire*, Le Camus proposes to eliminate the very cause of these tragedies. No combustible materials were to be used in *any* part of such public buildings: "Tâchons de trouver ces principes dans la cause; faisons mieux, supprimons la cause, nous n'en craindrons plus les effets."¹⁷⁴ His own Halle au blé in Paris, acclaimed for its incombustibility, served as a powerful example to demonstrate the feasibility of his theatre project. Stone would be the favoured structural material, and the attic would be made of brick. Bridges and doors would be made of iron, and the space inside doors could be filled with copper or *fer battu*. Like the attic, the ceiling above the auditorium would be made of brick, with a minimal curve that would be imperceptible from below. The ceiling would be strengthened by an iron structure and the entire surface would be covered with plaster "pour du tout ne former qu'un seul corps."¹⁷⁵ The floors of the boxes would be made of stone, either in arches (*voussures*) or slabs, as was currently done for balconies. The supports and balustrades would be iron, covered with copper instead of canvas. Le Camus even speculates that such materials might favour the voices of actors:

L'endroit seroit-it plus sonore, plus harmonieux, les tons plus brillans. Les Romains, par ce motif, pratiquoient sous leurs amphithéâtres des vases d'airain: l'opération que nous proposons pourroit y suppléer. Nous avons toute raison pour le croire; nous osons même dire plus, nous en avons l'expérience; si la Salle devenoit trop sonore on doubleroit les tables [the panels of the balustrades], & entre

¹⁷³ *Mémoire sur la manière de rendre incombustible*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

deux on metteroit de la terre & du sable. Regardons le tout comme un instrument qu'on peut mettre au ton qu'on voudra.¹⁷⁶

Le Camus's acoustical theory pretends to be based on tradition - the resonating vases described by Vitruvius - but it soon exceeds that tradition by speculating on the eventual sonority of an auditorium in which the balustrades are lined with sheet metal: "couvert de tôle, ou plutôt de tables de cuivre." Obviously, the science of acoustics was still in its infancy. Although wood and other flammable materials would help reduce reverberation, they were systematically excluded from the auditorium furnishings and the stage sets. The floor of the entire theatre would be made of stone or brick pillars and vaults. Because dancers need a wooden surface on which to perform, Le Camus makes a single exception here but suggests placing it directly on the vaults so that any fire would be easily contained. The stage machinery would be made of iron, copper or lead. "Les frises & ciel" of the decoration would be made of very thin copper painted like canvas, with all sharp edges finished with a fold (*bourrelet*) to prevent accidents. Le Camus also notes that this finishing detail would give some thickness to the sets and look more dignified than the thin edges of canvas. He continues describing every component to show that the theatre contains no combustible material. Even the curtain would be made of copper.¹⁷⁷ Le Camus concludes that theatre fires can be prevented in thousands of ways if we are willing to pay the expense. It is particularly important not to skimp on the cost of public buildings, since

ils doivent passer à la postérité; d'ailleurs avec de l'imagination, de l'intelligence & du goût les obstacles s'évanouissent, & servent souvent d'occasions pour échauffer les Génies, & produire les découvertes les plus intéressantes. C'est ici le cas où l'art doit faire jouer tous ses ressorts, & la prudence se faire connoître. Nous sommes dans un siècle éclairé. L'Architecture est aujourd'hui un des Arts qui

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 9.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 10–11.

brillent le plus en France: rien n'étonne, rien n'arrête; il suffit de vouloir & de fournir à la dépense.¹⁷⁸

Le Camus's treatises all indicate his genuine interest in the theatre and its various applications to architecture. Strangely, when Le Camus directly confronts the issue of theatre design, he focuses on a single technical problem, leading to a proposal that is ultimately impossible to realize, with little basis on precedent. Although Le Camus de Mézières's technical treatises may suggest that he emphasized science and theory over other considerations, his entire body of work indicates no such dichotomy between technical rationality and the expression of cultural values.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 12–13.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER THEORY IN THEATRICAL STAGING

The introduction of the notion of "character" in architectural theory stemmed from a new concern with sensitivity and the expressive nature of architecture. It was prompted not exclusively by a transformation within the field of architecture, but by an association with other disciplines. After seeking universally valid proportions in music, architecture examined other theories of expression in painting, poetry, and theatre to try to redefine its status as an art of imitation that was no longer limited to the proportions of the human body.¹⁷⁹ In *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus de Mézières explicitly identifies the sources that most influenced his work. In the first pages, he acknowledges his debt to a work by Charles Le Brun, *Conférences sur l'expression* (1698). In his introduction to the English translation of Le Camus de Mézières's treatise, *The Genius of Architecture* (1992), Robin Middleton emphasizes that Le Camus's theory was greatly indebted to theories of expression in painting, from Le Brun's notion of physiognomy to Du Bos's *Réflexions critiques* (1719) and Roger de Piles's *Cours de peinture par principes* (1708).¹⁸⁰ Middleton bases his claim on the fact that Le Camus acknowledges Le Brun's contribution concerning the expression of the passions in painting: how a single line can express joy, sadness, anger, or fear in the expression of a face. Le Camus, however, does not compare architecture to painting, but only mentions how forms can evoke specific emotions. According to Le Camus, it is the combined effect of architecture, painting, and sculpture that can powerfully convey to the soul "presque toutes les affections & sensations qui nous sont connues."¹⁸¹ The painterly comparison in *Le génie de l'architecture* merely introduces

¹⁷⁹Szambien, *Symétrie*, 174.

¹⁸⁰*The Genius of Architecture*, introduction by Robin Middleton, 23–31.

¹⁸¹*Le génie*, 5.

the analogy to theatre, which, like gardening and music, involves the spectator/visitor/listener in a temporal unfolding of the artistic work.

Le Camus was particularly interested in a theatrical performance that, in his view, fully corroborated his architectural intentions: a *jeu d'optique* by the famous architect Servandoni at the *Salle des Machines* in 1741. This theatrical production relied on the stage sets to convey the plot. Servandoni's design of theatrical scenery directly informed Le Camus's own theory of architecture as an expressive language. Le Camus frequently refers to the succession of rooms and anterooms in the *hôtel particulier* as an unfolding of scenes in a theatrical performance, and he defines spaces using lighting effects and maintaining a unity of character - principles borrowed directly from his knowledge of theatre, and dear to Servandoni. A close look at these theatrical principles and Servandoni's theory of expression will indicate their influence on Le Camus de Mézières's theory for the distribution of the *hôtel particulier* and define his notion of "character" in late-eighteenth-century architectural theory.

Servandoni, the master of special effects

Jean-Nicolas Servandoni was said to be an exuberant character.¹⁸² He was short-tempered, and carried a bad reputation.¹⁸³ He was nonetheless very prolific as an architect

¹⁸²Also known as Giovanni Nicolo Servandoni, he was born on May 2, 1695, in Florence, from an Italian mother and a French father named Servan from Lyons, who was a coachman and drove between the two cities. Baptized the following day, the record kept in Santa Maria del Fiore identifies his father with an italicized name: Giovanni Luigi Servando. The most comprehensive biography can be found in Jeanne Bouché, "Servandoni (1695–1766)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1910): 121–46.

¹⁸³"En 1731, il se battait avec les autres locataires de l'hôtel de Longueville et leur laissait sa perruque en dépouilles opimes; en 1734, il menaçait de mort l'architecte J.-B.-A. Beausire; en 1735, il réglait à coups de poing un dessinateur des bâtiments." Arch. Nat., Y. 574–81, 947; also published by J.-J. Guiffrey, *Nouvelles Archives de l'art français* (1888), V:263; quoted by Louis Hautecœur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France* (Paris: Picard, 1950), 3:269. Before arriving in Paris, Servandoni spent some time in

and stage designer in France from his arrival in 1724 to mid-century.¹⁸⁴ In 1728, he became *Premier peintre décorateur* for the Académie Royale de Musique, the Opera, where he worked for about eighteen years, producing over sixty designs. In 1731, he was admitted as a landscape painter to the Académie Royale de Peinture. In 1732, he took over Oppenordt's work for the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and his facade on the west side was to become a turning point in neo-classical architecture.¹⁸⁵ He also designed numerous ephemeral structures for festivals and special events such as the birth of the Dauphin in 1730 and the marriage of Madame Elisabeth to Don Philippe in 1739. (See Figure 21.) He organized celebrations at Sceaux for the duchesse du Maine, and at St-Germain for the duc de Noailles.¹⁸⁶ In his text for the *Salon* of 1765, Diderot described Servandoni as "grand

England, where he married Anne-Henriette Roots in London. He left his wife in complete misery, with eight children. While in France, he had a son, Servandoni d'Hanetaire, who became a comedian, but Servandoni apparently denied being the father. Servandoni died on January 19, 1766. The only contemporary reference can be found in only two lines of Bachaumont's *Mémoires secrets*: "On apprend la mort du célèbre Servandoni, homme d'un talent supérieur, mais d'une conduite inconcevable." Bouché, "Servandoni," 122–28.

¹⁸⁴Servandoni studied with Paolo Pannini, a painter who combined landscape painting with views of monuments and ruins from antiquity; he also studied with the architect Jean Joseph de Rossi.

¹⁸⁵Hautecœur traces the development of the facade since 1675 (when construction was stopped due to lack of money) to the project by Oppenord begun in 1719 and the competition for the facade in 1732. Servandoni, who had already designed the chapel of the Virgine in 1729, won the competition. Hautecœur also traces the successive transformations of Servandoni's project by other architects, including Patte and Maclaurin in 1767, and Chalgrin after 1777. Hautecœur, *Histoire*, 3:319, 362–65. After Servandoni died in 1766, Oudot de Maclaurin was appointed architect to complete the St-Sulpice facade. He did not follow Servandoni's latest design, however, but reverted instead to a 1739 design. In 1770, while the work was hardly completed, it was struck by lightning - perhaps Servandoni's last optical effect.

¹⁸⁶Servandoni travelled all over Europe, and produced many works of architecture and ephemeral structures. For a brief biography and an exhaustive list of Servandoni's architectural work, see Hautecœur, *Histoire*, 3: 266–70. Hautecœur takes part of his information from J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, 1:103. See also Quatremère de Quincy, "Servandoni," in *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages des plus célèbres architectes du XIXe siècle*

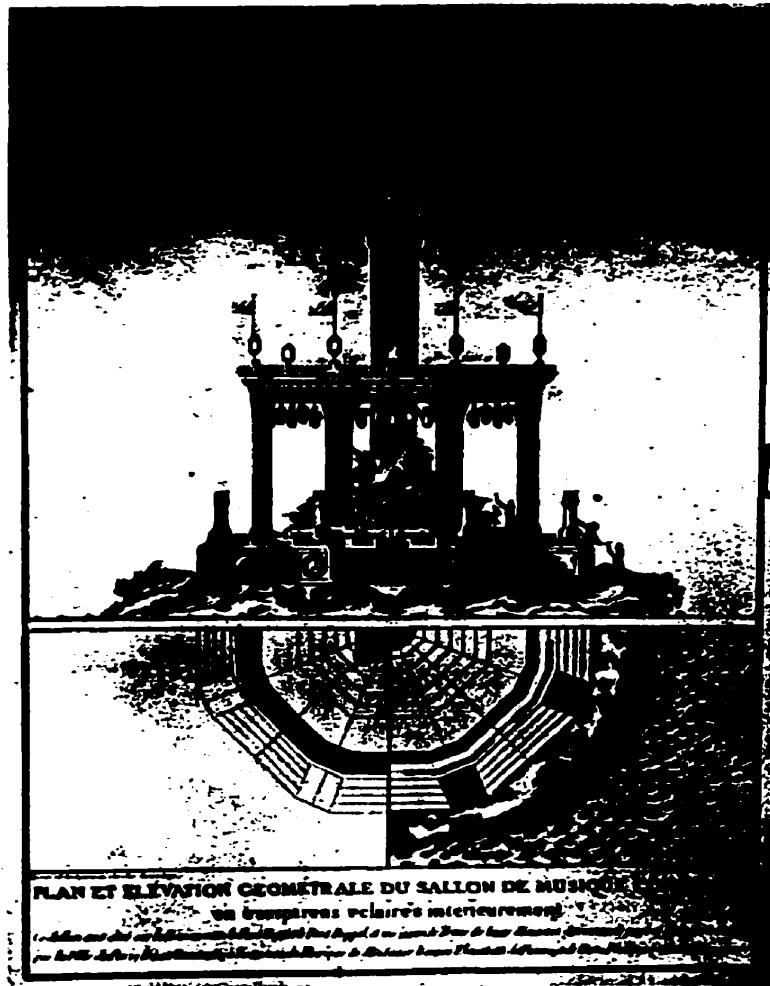


Figure 21: Floating music pavilion on the river Seine in Paris, an ephemeral structure designed by Jean-Nicolas Servandoni to celebrate the marriage of Madame Elisabeth to Don Philippe in 1739. [Mourey].

machiniste, grand architecte, bon peintre et sublime décorateur." Servandoni greatly influenced the architects of the eighteenth century: beside his explicit impact on Le Camus de Mézières's architectural theory, he was admired by J.-F. Blondel,¹⁸⁷ and influenced the career of Charles de Wailly, who studied under him.

Servandoni was known for bringing the Italian tradition of oblique perspective to the French stage. This *scena* or *perspectiva per angolo* was introduced by Ferdinando Galli Bibiena in his treatise *Architettura Civile* (1711). This important text clearly indicates a transformation in the relationship between the stage and the audience in the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁸ A general comparison of *scènes figurées* (scenic representations on backdrops) reveals a remarkable change from central perspectives in the late seventeenth century to complex-angled views in the eighteenth century, in which multiple vanishing points would draw spectators beyond the limits of the scenic frame. (See Figure 22.) Cochin, in his *Lettres sur l'opéra*, describes this form of staging:

Les habiles artistes Italiens, tels que Bibiena, osoient présenter leurs objets sous un point de vue sur l'angle ce qui les rend plus pittoresques, & offre au Spectateur un coup d'oeil agréable dont la perspective échappe à sa critique, les lignes fuyantes tendant à des points, qu'il n'est pas à portée de juger; il s'ensuit en même tems qu'on ne voit plus le défaut de rapport dans les lignes qu'éprouvent ceux qui ne sont pas placés directement au milieu de la Salle.¹⁸⁹

Indeed, the perspective illusion of the *scena per angolo* projected the walls of virtual cities forward, to embrace the audience. The eye of the spectator was intentionally pulled

jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1970), 2:284–96; and Eveline Schlumberger, "Un génie d'opéra: Servandoni," *Connaissance des arts* (August, 1965), 23.

¹⁸⁷"Plein des beautés de l'antiquité, il a su soutenir le style grec dans toutes ses productions, tandis que Paris de son temps n'enfanta guère que des chimères." J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, IV, 351.

¹⁸⁸On the Bibiena family's contribution to the development of stage set design, see Alpheus Hyatt Mayor, *The Bibiena Family* (New York: H. Bittner, 1945).

¹⁸⁹Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Lettres sur l'opéra*, 64–65.



Figure 22: Sketch of a stage set, attributed to Jean-Nicolas Servandoni. Coll. Destailleur, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Bouché].

in various directions to create the illusion of an endless extension to the stage. The composition created "a sense of expansion in the spectator,"¹⁹⁰ precisely because the boundaries of the virtual space could not be grasped. Servandoni, in particular, succeeded in creating new spatial effects and increased the vastness of the decor by using gigantic architectural elements in the foreground, such as bases of enormous columns that were cut off by the proscenium arch but were imagined to extend far up into the flytower. To increase the apparent depth of the stage, Servandoni also modified the sizes of elements and their relative distance as they receded into the background, but he preserved a backdrop that was extended in height to increase the spectators' perception of endless distances. (See Figure 23.) Servandoni effectively created an illusion that the space of the stage spread outwards, beyond the wings and into the space of the auditorium.

Although the specific performance recalled by Le Camus at the beginning of *Le génie de l'architecture* probably involved some principles of the *scena per angolo*, he refers to a different kind of staging, also devised by Servandoni, that relied solely on sets and lighting effects to create an illusion that could induce emotion in the spectators: the *jeux d'optique*. At first, these representations excluded live actors and even music. Servandoni's ambition was to create a spectacle in which the pictorial illusion, enhanced by lighting effects, would be the principal element. In 1737, he obtained the concession of the *Salle des Machines*, whose greatest advantage was the depth of the stage because it permitted unequaled use of stage machinery.¹⁹¹ (See Figure 24.) Although the acoustics

¹⁹⁰On the altered relationship between the spectator and the stage due to the introduction of several vanishing points in stage set decors such as those of the Bibienas, see Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 139–95.

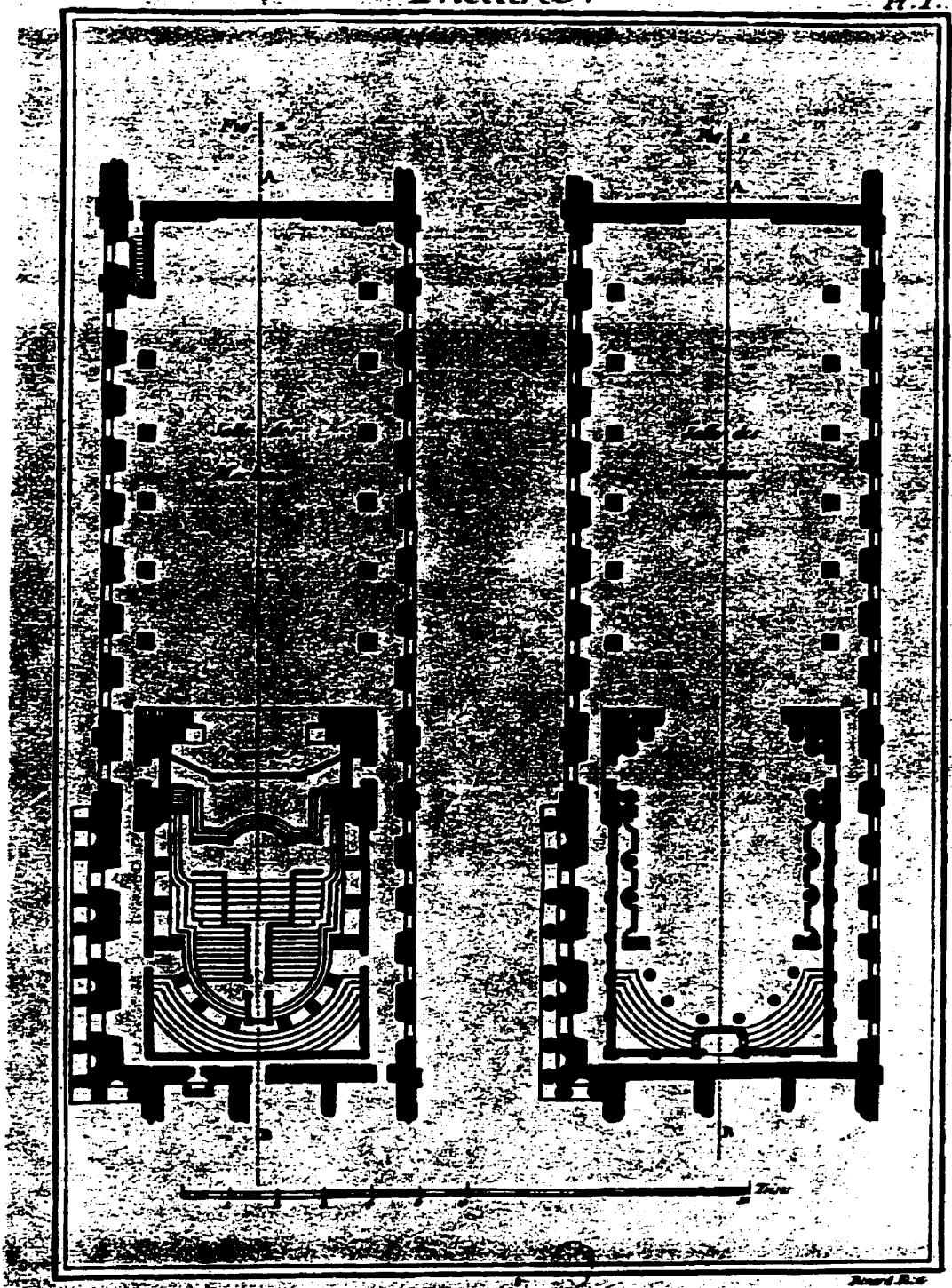
¹⁹¹Servandoni was granted the privilege to produce his *spectacles d'optique* in the *Salle des Machines* during the Easter weeks from 1738 to 1742, and then from 1754 to 1756. Arch. Nat., O/1/382: *Lettres du Ministre de la Maison du Roi*, September 16, 1737. Imported from Italy, the construction of elaborate



Figure 23: Stage set of the interior of a palace, attributed to Jean-Nicolas Servandoni. Coll. Destailleur, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Bouché].

Théâtres.

H.I.



Salle de Spectacles. Plan sur Bas de Chariot, &c. &

Plan de la hauteur des premiers étages de la Salle des Machines du Château des Tuilleries.

Figure 24: Plan of the Salle de Machines in the Tuileries (seventeenth century).
From J.-F. Blondel, *Architecture françoise*. (1752). [Heuzey]

were terrible due to the geometry of the theatre, this limitation was of little concern to Servandoni, since the spectacles were to be silent. The very first show he produced for the *Salle des Machines* even rejected the narrative continuity of theatrical performance. It was a kind of diorama based on a painting by Pannini, representing St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. The descriptive program of the event announces "an exact representation" of the interior of the church. The declared objective was to "make known the famous basilica to those who could not go to Italy."¹⁹² To give a sense of the enormous dimensions of the architectural space, Servandoni added kneeling people painted in perspective.¹⁹³ Writing much later, Quatremère de Quincy would describe this innovative performance:

Il appartint à Servandoni de pouvoir donner à ce qui n'est que l'accompagnement du drame, la valeur entière d'une sorte de drame sans parole, et d'intéresser l'esprit à une action scénique par le seul secours des yeux.¹⁹⁴

However, the reception of this visual event, devoid of either music or narration, was divided. In the pamphlet describing a later production, *La descente d'Enée aux Enfers* (1740), produced two years after the spectacle of St. Peter's in Rome, Servandoni himself acknowledges the limitations of organizing a performance around a fixed perspective image. The need to "entertain the public for a certain amount of time" required not just the

machinery to change the sets and create magical effects through the mechanical apparition of scenic elements opened up a new realm of possibilities for stage design. The theatre most famous for its stage machinery in Paris at that time was built for opera, on the order of Mazarin for the young Louis XIV, in a converted structure on the Tuileries. Built from 1659 to 1661 by Gaspare Vigarani, its deep stage (132 feet) provided great opportunities for scenic invention, and its elaborate machinery provided the name for the theatre: La Salle des Machines.

¹⁹²"Faire connaître à ceux qui ne peuvent aller en Italie, mieux que par des plans et des dessins, la célèbre basilique." Giovanni Nicolo Servandoni, *Description abrégée de l'église de Saint-Pierre de Rome* (Paris, 1738).

¹⁹³Gösta Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 134.

¹⁹⁴Quatremère de Quincy, "Servandoni," 2:288.

prestige of the machines, but the performance of a few actors and even concerts to give "some kind of life to this spectacle."¹⁹⁵ Servandoni later reintroduced music into his *jeux d'optique* and supplemented the mechanical figures on stage with live actors performing pantomime. The succession of scenes, however, remained the primary element to express the dramatic unfolding of the action. Performances attracted an important crowd of spectators who were curious to witness the elaborate lighting effects and extravagant settings. The large expense of each production, however, meant that Servandoni could hardly cover his costs. In some instances, the cost of candles alone exceeded the income from ticket sales. In 1742, after losing money from these performances, he was forced to stop, and returned to work at the Opera to pay off his debts. He resumed his production of *jeux d'optique* in 1754, but again ran out of money four years later. The *intendant des Menus-Plaisirs* paid his debts a number of times, but soon gave up. Diderot himself, who admired Servandoni's work, wrote some caustic criticism of the man as an incorrigible spender:

Ce Servandoni est un homme que tout l'or du Pérou n'enrichirait pas; c'est le Panurge de Rabelais, qui avait quinze mille moyens d'amasser et trente mille de dépenser; grand machiniste, grand architecte, bon peintre, sublime décorateur, il n'y a aucun de ses talents qui ne lui ait valu des sommes immenses. Cependant il n'a rien et n'aura jamais rien. Le Roi, la Nation, le public on renoncé au projet de le sauver de la misère; on lui aime autant les dettes qu'il a que celles qu'il ferait.¹⁹⁶

Toward the end of his life, given his quarrelsome personality, his intransigence, and his insolvency, Servandoni fell into disfavour and seemed to have been shunned by *le tout Paris*. By the time Le Camus wrote *Le génie de l'architecture*, more than two decades after the last performance of his *jeux d'optique*, Servandoni's fame had faded. Yet, the performance at the *Salle des Machines* in 1741 evidently made an indelible mark on Le

¹⁹⁵Giovanni Nicolo Servandoni, *La descente d'Enée aux Enfers* (Paris, 1740).

¹⁹⁶Diderot, *Salon de 1765*, Assezat et Tourneux; quoted by Hautecœur, *Histoire*, 3:269.

Camus, for it is the first example that came to mind when he sat down, forty years later, to write his innovative architectural theory.¹⁹⁷ Le Camus establishes direct connections between Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* and his own character theory in architecture. Le Camus believed that every building could be compared to a theatrical event of the kind produced by Servandoni, since architectural compositions were also expected to express a specific character and speak directly to the senses. As Condillac emphasized in his *Traité des sensations*, however, language proved to be a necessary mediator between sensation and reflection. To overcome the limitations of performances without dialogue, the shared language of mythological stories and natural phenomena became crucial elements of Servandoni's staging. Le Camus used similar means to express architectural programs.

The declared goal of Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* was to impress the eye and to create visual epics; to do this, he attributed the character of a particular divinity to each set, or used a natural element to dominate a scene. Excessive heat or cold could be suggested by introducing signs of a particular season, Le Camus explains. A single scene with neither actor nor narration could "make us feel the burning heat of the Sun" or could "[convey] to our souls the idea of a biting cold" through a simple representation of lonely, bare trees rising from snowy rocks:

¹⁹⁷There is some confusion in identifying the specific performance to which Le Camus is referring in the first pages of *Le génie de l'architecture*. "Les Aventures d'Ulysse à son retour du siège de Troie" was performed at the Salle des Machines in 1741; as described by Le Camus, it included a prison, sumptuous gardens, and the Palace of Circé, daughter of the Sun. Le Camus, however, also refers to Godfrey's camp and the enchanted palace of Armide that appeared only in Servandoni's staging of *La forest enchantée* in 1754, from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. If this might indicate that Le Camus's memory could have "played him false," as Robin Middleton suggests in his commentaries to the English translation of *Le génie de l'architecture*, it also indicates that Le Camus was familiar with a wide range of Servandoni's performances. See *The Genius of Architecture*, 180–81, note 3–4.

un air sombre, un ciel pâle & uniforme auroit annoncé de nouveaux frimats prêts à se répandre. Des fleuves glacés & immobiles, des sources surprises & comme arrêtées dans leur fuite, n'auroient présenté qu'une nature privée de vie & de mouvement. Ce spectacle noue eût fait frissonner.¹⁹⁸

The specific character of each stage set, and its ability to inspire distinct emotions in the spectator, is precisely what Le Camus considered most relevant to his own character theory. While the enchanted Palace of Armide exudes magnificence and voluptuousness, a scene representing Pluto's abode evokes horror and fear. Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* used architectural compositions as a visual language to express various "affections," and touched the soul as only architecture could: "Ce sont . . . les dispositions des formes, leur caractère, leur ensemble qui deviennent le fond inépuisable des illusions."¹⁹⁹ In associating architecture and stage sets, Le Camus not only challenges the traditional role of architecture but redefines the notion of illusion in the theatre. He makes no reference to optical deception at the theatre;²⁰⁰ instead, it is through sensations or "affections" that theatrical settings, like architecture, can "speak to the mind, move the soul."²⁰¹

The modulation of light and darkness

The use of light was an effective way to express the character of theatrical scenes, especially in Servandoni's *jeux d'optique*. An increased contrast between the light on stage and the dark auditorium could create terrifying and sublime effects. The lighting system in French theatres until the end of the eighteenth century, however, remained primitive. In

¹⁹⁸Le génie, 6–7.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 7.

²⁰⁰About architectural proportions, Le Camus "accepted optical corrections because he believed that meaning was embedded in the object and not, as Perrault maintained, in the mind." Richard Cleary, "Beauty: Absolute or Arbitrary?" in *Design Book Review* 34 (Fall 1994), 57.

²⁰¹"C'est de ce principe qu'il faut partir, lorsqu'on prétend dans l'Architecture produire des affections, lorsqu'on veut parler à l'esprit, émouvoir l'âme." Ibid.

1781, Antoine Laurent de Lavoisier presented his "Rapport sur la manière d'éclairer les salles de spectacle" to the Académie Royale des Sciences, showing that lighting was still a major problem.²⁰² The light on stage was insufficient, and the air in theatres was still "filthy and unhealthy" even though wax candles had replaced tallow. Because the actors were usually lit from footlights (*lampions de la rampe*), their facial expressions were distorted, and a background that received only lateral lighting would be completely dark at the centre. Lavoisier complained about the mediocrity of current theatres, where many spectators still could not see the stage. Chandeliers were known to have fallen from ceilings, while most of the remaining ones lit either the front stage, blinding the actors, or the auditorium, blinding many of the spectators. Chandeliers also obstructed the view of spectators, mainly those in the second boxes. Spectators would often be disturbed "to trim the tallow candles that filled these chandeliers."²⁰³

Toward the middle of the century, the chandeliers that lit the front stage were gradually eliminated by increasing the footlights, further distorting actors' facial expressions, and wax replaced tallow and oil. Chandeliers that had been situated throughout the auditorium were gathered together in the middle, and the structure was made lighter. This is the general manner in which theatres were lit in France until the end of the century. Even with the various improvements to lighting in the theatre, Lavoisier identified two major problems. First, in all parts of the auditorium that are not lit by footlights, such as the orchestra, the amphitheatre, the stalls, and even some boxes, the darkness makes it

²⁰²It was later published in Antoine Laurent de Lavoisier, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1865), 3:91–102. Coincidentally, Lavoisier's "Rapport" was presented the same year Boullée produced his project for the opera house.

²⁰³"pour moucher les chandelles de suif dont ces lustres étaient garnis." Lavoisier, "Rapport," 91. Goethe also complained about the technical problems of trimming candles. He writes: "I could think of no better invention than that of candles burning without having to be trimmed." J. W. von Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche* (Zurich, 1950), 421; quoted by Bergman, *Lighting*, 55.

difficult to recognize people or to read anything. The second problem is that the footlights cast too much light close to the stage, blinding those in the front rows.²⁰⁴ Lavoisier proposed a number of changes, such as lighting the front-stage from above, and using *réverbères* - a type of reflector unknown even to the members of the Académie - to reflect light in the appropriate direction. Lavoisier was aware that the clarity of an object depends not only on the amount of light it reflects, but also on the light that surrounds it.²⁰⁵ For example, an object seen against the sun may reflect much light but would be indistinguishable. This phenomenon was well known to Servandoni, who understood that one could increase the effect of decorations and the theatrical illusion either by casting more light onto the stage or by diminishing the light in the auditorium. To achieve the greatest effect in the theatre of the Tuileries, Servandoni devised a system of counterweights that could raise the candelabra in the auditorium as the curtain rose, so that the audience would not be lit by direct light.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴Lavoisier, "Rapport," 92.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 93. In the Renaissance, Angelo Ingeneri was already aware that "the darker the auditorium, the more luminous seems the stage," for he discussed these issues in his treatise *Il discorso della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (1598). Ingeneri seems to have been the first author to discuss the appropriate lighting of the stage to show the facial expression of actors. For more on this, see Bergman, *Lighting*, 66.

²⁰⁶It is in Venetian theatres - either the San Samuel (1655) or the San Giovanni Crisostomo (1667) - that the candelabra was first raised into a well above the ceiling of the auditorium during the performance, thus producing semidarkness for the audience. Used in other theatres, this alteration of the light in the auditorium, however, was not widespread. Most preferred to keep the auditorium illuminated throughout the performance. As a general rule, the auditoriums of Renaissance and Baroque theatres were at least as well illuminated as their stages. Until the early part of the eighteenth century, numerous French theatres had windows to admit natural light (the théâtre du Marais, which opened in 1644, is one of them), and since performances took place in the afternoon (ending before 4:30 p.m.), theatres most likely relied on this source of light. The presence of natural light confirms the fact that complete darkness in the theatre - or at least in the auditorium - was not a priority, and probably hardly an issue in France until the third decade of

Unlike Servandoni, Lavoisier did not suggest darkening the auditorium entirely. Complete darkness in the theatre was not a common feature until the nineteenth century, partly for technical reasons but mostly because light in the auditorium was required so that spectators could interact with one another. Even though Servandoni demonstrated that darkening the auditorium was technically feasible, and that a greater lighting contrast between the auditorium and the stage enhanced the visual illusion of the performance, his example was not immediately followed by anyone else in Paris. The social implications of making the action on stage the sole focus remained unacceptable. It was generally assumed that actors and spectators should be surrounded by the same light, since the division between these two realms was not yet clearly defined; they effectively shared the same world, a public space of social interaction.²⁰⁷

Lavoisier was not in favour of darkening the auditorium, since he was aware of the social problems it would entail. Instead he suggested that the lighting system be improved in all three parts of the theatre: the stage and its decorations, the actors, and the spectators. To light the auditorium, Lavoisier proposed that sources of light be placed behind elliptical openings in the ceiling that would serve as reflectors.²⁰⁸ He emphasized that the actors and their movements should be lit properly so that every subtle expression can be perceived. He suggested various ways of lighting actors from the front, since this provides the most

the eighteenth century. Donald Charles Mullin, *The Development Of The Playhouse: A Survey Of Theatre Architecture From The Renaissance To The Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 30; Marvin Carlson, *Places of performance: the semiotics of theatre architecture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 140.

²⁰⁷The next recorded instance of the auditorium of a French theatre being darkened during a performance was only in 1778, when the chandelier of the Versailles Opera was raised into some kind of bell in the ceiling. Many protested against this darkening of the auditorium, and it seems that after this first performance in darkness, the chandelier of the Opera was kept in its lowered position. Pierre Peyronnet, *La mise en scène au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974), 67.

²⁰⁸Lavoisier, "Rapport," 97.

direct light and increases the contrast with the light in the auditorium, to augment the theatrical illusion. Such strong light would tend to blind the actors, but he says this is not a problem because the actors do not need to see the spectators in front of them. For Lavoisier, the visual contact between actors and spectators could be partly severed, suggesting an increased segregation between the two realms at the theatre.

To increase the contrast between the stage and the house, Lavoisier proposed to light the stage set panels from behind in ways that would hide the source of light and increase its intensity by using more reflectors. He stresses that the backdrop is the most important element of the theatrical illusion but complains that it is rarely lit properly because of its width. In response, he suggests that it could be lit very easily with parabolic or spherical reflectors placed above the front stage, within the arch. These reflectors would be mobile and could be filtered through screens of different densities and colours to modify the quality of light.²⁰⁹ Even though very few technical descriptions of Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* still exist, one can easily assume that the devices described by Lavoisier, if not explicitly attributed to Servandoni, are similar to those used by the Italian architect. Lavoisier's technical advice corroborates the magical effects praised by so many contemporary observers of the *jeux d'optique*.

Servandoni made light an active part of pictorial creation by controlling its colour and intensity on stage and by darkening the auditorium. His performance of *Pandore* in 1739, for example, began with a representation of chaos. Thunder and lightning accompanied the creation of the Elements, and Fire was represented using transparencies.²¹⁰ It was followed by a depiction of Olympus, with Jupiter's palace

²⁰⁹Ibid., 95.

²¹⁰In an earlier production for the opera *Proserpine*, in 1727, Servandoni created a waterfall made of silver gauze gliding on two wheels. A similar device is represented in Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* [1751-1780] (Pergamon Press, 1969).

surrounded by hundreds of shining gold and silver columns. Iris, the gods' messenger, appeared on her luminous arch (15.5 meters in diameter) in the colours of a rainbow. The stage was then darkened to anticipate the calamities when Pandora received the box containing ills and miseries. The performance ended with a new vision of chaos and nature in rebellion: "Trembling of the Earth, volcanoes, rains of fire, collapsing cliffs, thunder, lightning and all that might serve to represent a universal disorder, ended this grand performance."²¹¹ The following year, with the *Descente d'Enée aux Enfers*, Servandoni warned his public that he had chosen a subject "that provides the greatest contrasts, causing rapid changes from darkness to light, from fear to delight, from terror to grace, surprises that constitute the main events of a silent spectacle."²¹²

In *La forest enchantée* (1754), presented more than a decade later, the music by Francesco Geminiani and the pantomimes were given a new importance in the overall production, but the stage sets and the lighting effects continued to be the principal elements conveying the story. Based on Torquato Tasso's epic *Jerusalem Liberated*, it tells the story of Godefroy de Bouillon, chief of the first crusade to Jerusalem. After the Christian army was pushed back from the Holy City and their weapons burnt by Clorinde and Argan, the magician Ismen decides to cast a spell on the nearby forest to ensure that the crusaders will not be able to rebuild their artillery. The tone of the representation is given at the beginning as an image of a forest where darkness prevails. Only some faint rays of moonlight pierce the dense foliage. The forest is "so dense and so dark that its appearance inspires fear."

²¹¹Giovanni Nicolo Servandoni, *Description du spectacle de Pandore* (Paris, 1739); translated in Bergman, *Lighting*, 134.

²¹²"fournissant les contrastes les plus marqués, occasionnant de rapide passages des ténèbres à la lumière, de l'épouante au plaisir, du terrible au gracieux, surprises qui font les situations d'un spectacle muet." Servandoni, *La descente*; my translation.

Le Théâtre représente la Forêt enchantée située dans un vallon solitaire, dont l'épais feuillage ne laisse qu'une faible entrée à la pâle lumière de la Lune . . . Le Soleil dans sa course l'éclaire à peine d'une pâle et triste lumière: telle à peu près que dans un temps nébuleux, et celle qui suit ou qui précéde la nuit, & lors que l'Astre du jour a cédé la place aux étoiles, ce bois paroît enveloppé des plus affreuses ténèbres.²¹³

Invoking all the demons, rebellious spirits and dark inhabitants of Hell, Ismen asks them to unite themselves intimately with every tree in the forest, as the soul and the body of mortals are united, so that when the Christians come to the forest to get wood to rebuild their machines, the malefic spirits will cause them to run away.²¹⁴ As the magician completes his malefic spell, the moon is covered by a thick veil and the night stars lose their brightness.²¹⁵ Later, the light of the moon turns blood-red as the forest becomes possessed by evil spirits. As the Christians try to enter the woods, the stage is suddenly darkened and a thickening mist slows their progress. When they are met by spectres and phantoms, dreadful noises are heard, like the roaring of lions and the whistling of serpents accompanied by thunder. As they try to brave the nightmarish spectacle, they are stopped by a wall of fire. The Christians try to climb it, but are pushed back by demons that belch forth torrents of flames.²¹⁶ As they cannot endure such an attack, the soldiers retreat to their camp. There, the brightness of the sun and the scorching heat have created a drought

²¹³Giovanni Nicolo Servandoni, *La forest enchantée* (Paris: Ballard, 1754), 5–6.

²¹⁴Ibid., 8.

²¹⁵"La Lune aussi-tôt se couvrit d'un voile épais, tous les astres de la nuit perdirent leur éclat." Ibid.

²¹⁶Ibid., 12. Although the attendance to the *jeux d'optique* remained important, the second series of performances presented at the Salle des Machines after an interruption of twelve years was received with more skepticism. In his *Correspondance littéraire*, F.M. Grimm harshly criticized Servandoni's production of *La forest enchantée*, for Torquato Tasso's terrible monsters appeared as little more than *spectres estropiés*, he writes, and the torrents of flames were depicted as sparkles of fire. For more on the reception of Servandoni's *jeux d'optique*, see Bouché, "Servandoni," 139.

that is causing the soldiers to die of thirst and weakness. The visual effect of the scene was so powerful that it profoundly influenced Le Camus, who describes it in *Le génie*:

Le fameux Servandoni . . . a su, dans un Spectacle muet, faire éprouver l'effet de l'ardeur brûlante du Soleil. On y voyait le Camp de Godefroy en proie aux feux de la Canicule; presqu'aucune ombre, un ciel rougeâtre, une terre aride, un effet de lumière qui rappelloit celui d'un air enflammé; tout y produisoit une illusion dont aucun Spectateur n'étoit à l'abri; on croyoit souffrir, on étoit soumis à la puissance de l'Art.²¹⁷

Godefroy is pondering how he could deliver his soldiers from such calamities when the Saint Hermit Peter appears in front of his eyes, bringing with him the young Renauld, a knight who alone can defeat the forces of darkness that have invaded the forest. Godefroy presents Renault with a sword that an angel had given him for this purpose, and sends him to the forest. In the meantime, the Hermit raises his arms to the sky and, in response to his fervent prayers, receives the sound of thunder that will lead to a salutary rain to ease the suffering of the soldiers.²¹⁸ As Renault approaches the forest, all seems quite and peaceful, with no sign of the feared demons. Again, the atmosphere of the play is conveyed by the lighting effect: "Les premiers rayons de l'Aurore commençoiient à peine à sortir du sein des Ondes; l'éclat des Astres de la nuit étoit à peine obscurci par une lumière plus vive."²¹⁹ The forest appears joyful with its fresh greenery and its charming shadings. Renault is soon surprised by the pleasant sounds of the forest: "le doux murmure des eaux, le chant du Rossignol plaintif, auquels se joignoient la voix des Syrennes, & plusieurs instrumens de Musique formoient cet harmonieux concert."²²⁰ This prelude announces nymphs emerging from trees: "Un des arbres . . . s'étant ouvert, il sortit de son

²¹⁷*Le génie*, 6.

²¹⁸Servandoni, *La forest enchantée*, 13.

²¹⁹Ibid., 14.

²²⁰Ibid.

sein une belle Fille, vêtue d'une façon singulière."²²¹ They encircle Renauld, who thinks for a moment that he has recognized in one of them the features of the beautiful Armide. Since he is expecting the tricks of demons, he does not let her beauty touch him, and instead takes out his sword, which unleashes the fury of all the demons that inhabit the forest. Renault defends himself, and as he strikes the most majestic tree that embodies the master of darkness, the malediction is defeated: "Le tonnerre aussi-tôt cesse de gronder; la terre se farermit; l'air reprend sa sérenité, le Myrthe disparaît, & avec lui s'évanouissent les Monstres, & tous les enchantemens de la Forêt."²²² Good has prevailed over evil, and the Christians reenter the forest. Although Servandoni gives very few specific indications of the lighting effects and the devices used to create them (such as transparencies and light filters), it is clear that the transformation of the stage, rather than the performance of mimes, carried the dramatic action in his *jeux d'optique*.²²³

Servandoni also exploited his lighting effects and optical games outside the theatre, including the design of various ephemeral structures for royal and political events. To celebrate the birth of the Dauphin in January 1730, the Marquis de Santa-Cruz, ambassador of Spain, and M. de Barrenechea organized celebrations "as majestic and sumptuous as they could be," on the request of Philippe V.²²⁴ They took place in the *hôtel* of the duc de Bouillon, by the river Seine, and involved elaborate lighting and sumptuous decorations.

²²¹Ibid., 15.

²²²Ibid., 16.

²²³Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* have been compared to Daguerre's and Loutherbourg's dioramas in the nineteenth century, and were even qualified as legitimate precursors to such devices. Similarly, Martin Bressani compares Boullée's cenotaph to a panorama in his article "Étienne-Louis Boullée." While Boullée's cenotaph is not only a representation of a physical image of the world but a reenactment of a cosmological concept, in the case of Servandoni, with the darkened auditorium, the distinction is more difficult to make.

²²⁴The description of the celebrations of 1730 are based on Gabriel Mourey, *Le livre des fêtes françaises* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1930), 198–212, and Bouché, "Servandoni," 143.

Servandoni was commissioned to build a structure on the river, between the Louvre and the hôtel de Bouillon, so that the entire population of Paris could be part of the celebration. The structure was in the form of two mountains united at their base, representing the Pyrenees and symbolizing the alliance between France and Spain. (See Figure 25.) Some waterfalls, trees, plants, tritons, nereids, and other sea creatures populated the composition. The two mountains floated on two boats richly decorated with gold and shells. The boats also supported orthogonal structures representing the temples of Pleasure and Joy, occupied by the musicians. On either side, two floating terraces covered with coloured sand and patterns of grass supported two rocks on which two bronze statues again represented Spain (a lion, symbolizing courage and majesty) and France (a rooster, symbolizing vigilance and ingenuity). Elaborate fireworks were also staged and divided into two acts. For about an hour, fireworks were launched from various sea monsters, and the two mountains transformed into volcanoes. Then, from the centre of the two mountains, a powerful light simulated the rising sun. At the same time, a giant rainbow linked the two mountains, and on top, the goddess Iris floated on a cloud. The overwhelming presence of these rocks emerging from the river and embracing the sun used "sublime" nature to express the grandeur of the event.

A decade later, Servandoni staged the celebration in honour of the marriage of Madame Elisabeth to Don Philippe in 1739, which was unquestionably the most widely acclaimed public event of that period. J.-F. Blondel devoted an entire publication to commemorate the event.²²⁵ Quatremère wrote that it surpassed all events of its kind ever to

²²⁵Jacques-François Blondel, *Description des fêtes données par la ville de Paris, à l'occasion du mariage de Madame Louise-Elisabeth de France & Don Philippe, Infant et Grand Admiral d'Espagne . . .* (Paris: Le Mercier, 1740). It includes 22 pages of text and 13 large engravings. The celebrations took place on August 29–30, 1739, and were staged between the Pont-Neuf and the Pont-Royal.



Figure 25: Ephemeral structure in Paris, designed by Jean-Nicolas Servandoni to celebrate the birth of the Dauphin in 1730. Engraving by J. Dumont le Romain. [Mourey].

take place in Paris.²²⁶ As with previous celebrations, Servandoni used the river Seine as his stage, but this time he did not limit himself to one specific location. The entire area between the Pont-Neuf and the Pont Royal became the theatre for the festivities.²²⁷ A temple devoted to Hymen was erected in the middle of Pont-Neuf, on the terreplein where the statue of Henri IV stood. (See Figure 26.) It was "some kind of Greek Temple, open in the shape of a peristyle or colonnade, isolated on all its sides."²²⁸ A transparent octagonal music pavilion was lit from inside and floated on the Seine. Fireworks were choreographed from the buildings.

The relationship between fireworks and architecture was carefully considered during the eighteenth century, and became a subject for treatises. *Le Traité des feux d'artifice pour le spectacle* (1747) by Amédée François Frézier was probably the most important one. He discusses the specific materials involved in the production of fireworks but also describes the appropriate architectural order to accompany fireworks and emphasizes the cohesion of all the arts. Frézier says that the talents of pyrotechnicians must be completed by those of the "Architectes, Peintres & Sculpteurs, mais particulièrement par ceux des gens de lettre qui savent présenter sous des idées agréables les sujets qui donnent occasion aux réjouissances."²²⁹ Implied in this statement is the need

226 "L'opinion est encore qu'il n'y a été surpassé par personne." Quatremère, "Servandoni," 2:290–91.

227 "Quel amphithéâtre renommé chez les Romains," Servandoni asks, "pourrait être comparé à celui que l'art en cette occasion semble n'avoir emprunté que de la nature, ou plutôt que l'art s'était préparé lui-même sans savoir à quel précieux usage il devait le destiner un jour? Ni celui de Vérone, ni celui de Nîmes, ni le fameux Colisée de Vespasien ne peuvent entrer en comparaison ni pour le nombre de spectateurs, ni pour la richesse et la variété des édifices." Bibl. de l'Arsenal, ms. 2757; quoted by Bouché, "Servandoni," 144.

228 "Une espèce de Temple à la Grecque, ouvert en forme de Péristyle ou Colonnade, isolé de toutes parts." J.-F. Blondel, *Description*.

229 Amédée François Frézier, *Le Traité des feux d'artifice pour le spectacle* (Paris: Nyon, 1747), 384; quoted by Werner Oechslin and Anja Buschow, *Architecture en fête: l'architecte metteur en scène* (Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, 1984), 29–30.

to mediate the event itself through language. Frézier also defines the appropriate disposition and decoration of the various kinds of *théâtres d'artifice*, and describes the particular architectural order and conventions that must regulate each kind of celebration; a wedding celebration, for example, needs a Temple to Hymen, for she is the goddess who presides over marriages. This respect for architectural decorum would ensure that the celebration conveys its precise meaning.

Frézier was not the only one to describe the relationship between architecture and fireworks. Francesco Miliza and J.-F. Blondel included fireworks in a special category of their architectural treatises. Given the major importance of public gatherings, Blondel included celebrations (*fêtes*) as a basic element of architecture, and devoted entire chapters to ephemeral architecture.²³⁰ In that context, architecture clearly involved the temporal unfolding of a choreographed event. It is interesting that Blondel placed fireworks in a category of architecture that included less ephemeral, yet temporary structures such as ballrooms, feasts, triumphal arches and entertainment parks. In his *Cours d'architecture*, Blondel describes such structures together with theatres and vauxhalls, again emphasizing the direct connection between public events and architecture.²³¹

Architects certainly were sensitive to how the character of an ephemeral structure should relate to the specific event it celebrates. Fireworks in these festivities played a role analogous to the lighting effects at the theatre. In his *Essai sur l'art*, Boullée criticizes the limitations of theatre lighting, especially the lack of control of the lighting contrast between the stage and the auditorium. The impressions that a play intends to make on the spectators, Boullée explains, are often undermined solely by the misuse of lighting in the auditorium:

²³⁰J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, 1:123.

²³¹Ibid., 2, chap.7.

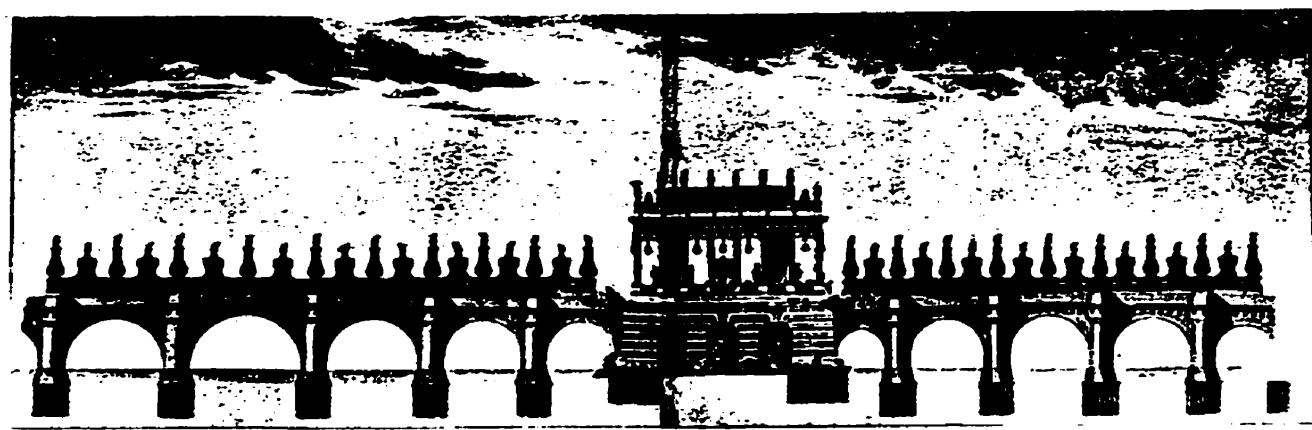


Figure 26: Temple of Hymen on the Pont-Neuf in Paris, designed by Jean-Nicolas Servandoni to celebrate the marriage of Madame Elisabeth to Don Philippe in 1739. [Mourey].

Il n'est personne qui, préparé par le titre d'une pièce à des idées lugubres mais assis au milieu d'une salle très éclairée, n'éprouve quelque peine à se distraire des sensations dont la vivacité des lumières a rempli ses organes, lorsqu'au lever de la toile sa vue se porte tout à coup sur une scène ténébreuse. L'effort qu'il est obligé de faire pour se remettre au ton nuit à l'illusion, et l'on ne sait pas toujours jusqu'à quel point cette situation peut nuire à l'ouvrage.²³²

Boullée's regard for light in architecture was greatly indebted to Le Camus de Mézières's own theory of character in architecture. Like Le Camus, Boullée believed that light should be used in a building to create a unified effect. To express specific characters, he drew from nature, especially from the seasons. Of winter, for example, he writes:

Nous avons remarqué que, dans la saison de l'hiver, les effets de la lumière étaient tristes et sombres, que les objets avaient perdu leur éclat, leur couleur, que les formes étaient dures et anguleuses, que la terre dépouillée offrait un sépulcre universel.²³³

His funerary architecture was inspired by the character of winter and its modulation of light and shade.²³⁴ (See Figure 27.) Similarly, Le Camus advises that to render a place sad, "le jour doit être sombre, resserré, & former comme des demi-teintes; il faut des masses simples & unies, afin qu'il y ait moins de jeu dans le tout."²³⁵ On the other hand,

²³²Boullée, *Architecture*, 104–5.

²³³Ibid., 78. Boullée compares the character of the four seasons and the specificity of their lighting effects. He writes: "Nous avons remarqué que les images riantes de l'automne étaient produites par l'extrême variété des objets, par le contraste de la lumière et des ombres, par les formes pittoresques et leur peu de similitude, par la singularité et la bizarrerie des couleurs panachées et bigarrées." Boullée, *Architecture*, 77–78.

²³⁴ "Pour produire des images tristes et sombres, il faut, comme j'ai essayé de le faire dans les monuments funéraires, présenter le squelette de l'architecture par une muraille absolument nue, offrir l'image de l'architecture ensevelie en n'employant que des proportions basses et affaissées et enfouies dans la terre, former enfin par des matières absorbant la lumière le noir tableau de l'architecture des ombres dessiné par l'effet des ombres encore plus noires." Ibid.

²³⁵Le génie, 65–66.

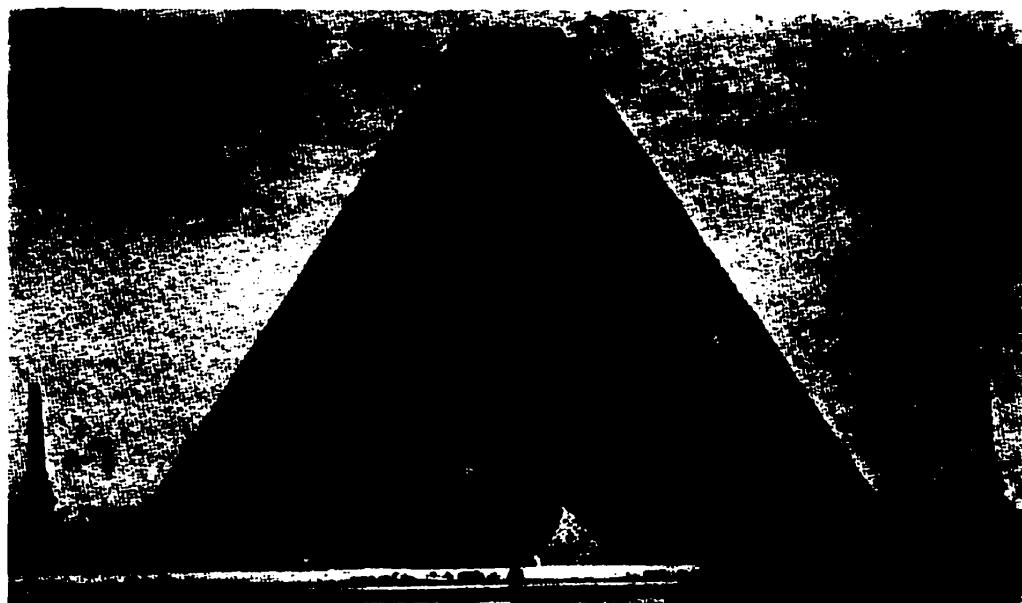


Figure 27: Design for a pyramidal cenotaph, by Étienne-Louis Boullée.
Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Pérouse de
Montclos].

an even and subdued light, complemented by lighting from above, evokes thoughtfulness.²³⁶ The half-light of the interiors of the église du Val-de-Grace, the Sorbonne, and the College Mazarin, for example, suggest reverent meditation by reorienting the movement of the soul inwardly.²³⁷

Le Camus was the first architectural theoretician to discuss the effects of lighting and how they affect our perception of spaces and their qualities. The control and modulation of light sources became a crucial element in his architectural compositions. As the proportions of masses and the general ordinance of facades convey specific characters, Le Camus writes, the same is true for all lines, contours, profiles, and ornaments in architecture. Every detail, appropriately employed, contributes to the specific sensation that the architect seeks to evoke. Light and shade, artfully distributed, reinforce the desired impression and can ensure a successful effect:

Un édifice très-éclairé, bien aéré, lorsque tout le reste est parfaitement traité, devient agréable & riant. Moins ouvert, plus abrité, il offre un caractère sérieux: la lumière encore plus interceptée, il est mystérieux ou triste. De même dans les détails des distributions, une suite de divisions relatives les unes aux autres, assure le caractère général.²³⁸

Le Camus compares the art of using light and shadow in architecture to the art of a skillful painter who knows how to take advantage of the effects of shadings and how to use nuances of tints to impart harmony to the whole.²³⁹ For Le Camus, however, the use of

²³⁶Ibid., 66.

²³⁷Ibid., 18–19.

²³⁸Ibid., 43–44. This passage had a great influence on Sir John Soane, who translated an important section of Le Camus's treatise. Since it would exceed the scope of this study to describe the impact of Le Camus de Mézières's theory of character on the work of Soane, see Middleton's introduction to *The Genius of Architecture*, 62; and David Watkin, *Sir John Soane, Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy, Lectures* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 210–19.

²³⁹*Le génie*, 62–63.

light in architecture was not equivalent to a painterly concern with colour, nor to the frozen moment of a painting. The changing position of the sun during the day continually transforms the light that falls on a building, and consequently, the general distribution of the *hôtel particulier* must account for the particular orientation of each room. Le Camus suggests that the roof of the covered portion of the riding school be used as a garden for the boudoir and the dressing room, and that the garden in front of these two rooms be oriented toward the setting sun:

De cet aspect favorable pour la composition on tireroit les plus grands effets, & la partie de la colonade en face des croisées, tournée en conséquence du côté de l'Ouest, seroit éclairée pittoresquement, au moyen des rayons que le Soleil couchant darderoit sur cette partie. Il produiroit l'aspect d'une *scène théâtrale* par le contraste des ombres & de la lumière.²⁴⁰

The intimate relationship between the distribution of rooms and the movement of the sun was not unique to Le Camus's theory, for Vitruvius had recommended that baths and winter apartments be oriented toward the "wintry sunset."²⁴¹ Le Camus's discourse on distribution, however, exceeds that of Vitruvius. For Le Camus, the "quality" of lived space was a theoretical concern. Clearly, he is transposing the use of light in Servandoni's *jeux d'optique* into a theatrical/architectural composition, and simultaneously transforming the users of the boudoir and dressing room into spectators of an architectural sunset in which the sharp contrast of shadows and the subsequent dimming of light announce the melancholy of the night.

²⁴⁰Ibid., 268–69; my emphasis.

²⁴¹Vitruvius, Book I, chap. 2, 31. Vitruvius also suggests light to be "taken from the east for bedrooms and libraries; . . . for picture galleries and the apartments which need a steady light, from the north, because that quarter of the heavens is neither illuminated nor darkened by the sun's course but is fixed unchangeable throughout the day." Ibid.

Le Camus complains that architects have neglected to consider light as an architectural element. A work that is magnificent in itself often seems frigid if it is bathed in the wrong light, for the wrong exposure can dull contrasts and transform a good composition into a monotonous display. This is demonstrated by the facade of the hôtel des Monnaies by Jacques Antoine, Le Camus notes. "Ce morceau heureusement conçu, bien composé, de la plus grande harmonie, paroît monotone."²⁴² The problem is the northerly exposure of the building, which prevents the articulation of shadows and the expression of the projecting portions. The colonnade of the Louvre, on the other hand, is called on to support Le Camus's argument. With its easterly exposure, the effect of light and shadow enhances the relief of the facade.

L'Architecte le plus intelligent ne peut espérer de réussir, qu'autant qu'il aura fait son dessein, en conséquence de l'exposition du Soleil qui éclaire les parties principales de l'édifice à construire.²⁴³

In his chapter on exterior decoration, Le Camus develops his theory for an architecture of light and shadow. The specific character of a facade will be influenced not only by its orientation but also by the modulation of its relief. The true artist who wants to produce a soft and tranquil scene will be careful not to combine masses that vary drastically, and will avoid large differences in protruding and receding parts that would produce excessive contrasts between light and shade. "Le caractere de la douceur ne se fait jamais mieux sentir que lorsque les ombres deviennent plus foibles en s'allongeant."²⁴⁴ To attain respect, one must achieve a character of grandeur through well-proportioned masses and noble profiles. Le Camus recommends that an excessive play of light be avoided, and

²⁴²Le génie, 270–71.

²⁴³Ibid., 62.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 58.

that shadows be even, with little reflection.²⁴⁵ If a building is destined for entertainment, the architect should eliminate harsh effects produced by deep relief, with a strong contrast between light and shade, for they disturb the enjoyment of scenes intended for amusement and pleasure.²⁴⁶ The *genre terrible*, on the other hand, should exploit great contrasts because terror results from magnitude and force, and the opposition of light and darkness expresses such effects. Darkness alone evokes terror, but this sensation is heightened when darkness is combined with intense light, leading to sublime effects.

The sensation of sadness or gaiety in architecture depends directly on the compactness of the masses. This is a natural principle, Le Camus explains, since "we are so constituted that in moments of joy our heart expands and loses itself in space." It also depends on the intensity of light and the general sense of openness: "Un lieu bien ouvert, où regne un beau jour, beaucoup d'harmonie, beaucoup d'accord, peu d'ombre, afin qu'il y ait moins de contraste, appellera cet esprit de gaieté qui s'accorde si bien avec la santé."²⁴⁷ A severe light falling on straight lines in a narrow, vertical space may induce a state of reverence, as in Gothic churches, Le Camus suggests, since reflected daylight and light coming from above produce a majestic dimness appropriate for religious buildings. To evoke voluptuousness, on the other hand, straight lines must be partly abandoned in favour of curves, which are more appropriate to Venus, and light should not be too bright or the mystery will be lost. "Il faut d'ailleurs que la galanterie & la délicatesse y regnent."²⁴⁸ The modulation of light and shade in architecture is an important means for conveying the appropriate character, and it is through such modulation that the architect can produce true beauty: "Les ombres doivent tempérer les jours, & la lumière doit tempérer les

²⁴⁵Ibid., 67.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 59.

²⁴⁷Ibid., 65.

²⁴⁸Ibid., 67.

ombres. C'est dans ce principe que réside la réussite; dans lui seul on peut trouver le *vrai beau*."²⁴⁹

Unity of place and the perfecting of an illusion

In addition to light, stage sets were another compelling way to express the proper character of a scene at the theatre. Until the middle of the eighteenth century in France, many complained of the lack of realism caused by primitive machinery, and the fact that the same stage set was often used for many productions. These "generic" sets were commonly called *Palais à volonté*. Many argued that such universal backdrops could not adequately invoke more than one location without breaching the unity of place. Although this notion of "unity of place" was not described explicitly in the classical theory elaborated in Aristotle's *Poetics*, it was usually regarded as a corollary of the classical unities of time and action. According to Aristotle's notion of unity of time, "Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit."²⁵⁰ The classical ideal of unity of action stated that "in a tragedy we cannot imitate several lines of action carried on at one and the same time; we must confine ourselves to the action on the stage and the part taken by the players."²⁵¹ Such unities implied a physical coherence of the place being represented on stage, which forced the authors to stage their plays in a unified location. Pierre Corneille (1606–84) rigorously observed this rule but was aware of the greater difficulties encountered by modern authors, compared to those in antiquity. The laws of convention and decorum often prevented a complex action unfolding in a single place, and Corneille therefore permitted "some extension of the rule."

²⁴⁹Ibid., 62.

²⁵⁰Aristotle's *Poetics* V.4–5, from Aristotle's *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, trans. S.H. Butcher (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 23.

²⁵¹Ibid., XXIV.4–7, 91–93.

The action could take place in more than one location, provided that all of the scenes were in a single city, and that the scenery changed only between acts.²⁵²

The notion of unity of place on the stage was greatly challenged by eighteenth-century authors, and it took a radical turn in the second half of the century. Authors such as Voltaire and Nougaret claimed that the greater flexibility in dramatic action demanded various locations that were impossible to recreate in front of a single background because it would break the narrative illusion. In his article on "Decoration" for the *Encyclopédie*, Marmontel, a close friend of Voltaire, complains about the conventions that apply to the stage sets for tragedies. Those sets should be changed as easily as they are at the opera, he claims. He condemns the current practice in stage set design for its indifference to verisimilitude, and denounces the neutral stage that the unity of place had encouraged in France as an artistic hindrance:

Le poëte a beau vouloir transporter les spectateurs dans le lieu de l'action; ce que les yeux voient, devient à chaque instant ce que l'imagination se peint. Cinna rend compte à Emilie de sa conjuration, dans le même sallon où va délibérer Auguste; & dans le premier acte de Brutus, deux valets de théâtre viennent enlever l'autel de Mars pour débarasser la scene. Le manque de décosations entraîne l'impossibilité des changemens, & celle-ci borne les auteurs à la plus rigoureuse unité de lieu; règle gênante qui leur interdit un grand nombre de beaux sujets, ou les oblige à les mutiler.²⁵³

François Marie Arouet (1694–1770), known as Voltaire, contributed directly to the debate on this issue, in the successive staging of his tragedy, *Semiramis*. Commissioned for the *relevailles* of Madame la Dauphine, it was still incomplete when Marie-Thérèse-Raphaële died after giving birth to a princess.²⁵⁴ The story of *Semiramis* is complex. The

²⁵²Aristotle's *Theory*, trans. Butcher, 297–98.

²⁵³Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 4:701.

²⁵⁴Jean-Jacques Olivier, introduction to Voltaire, *Sémiramis* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1946), viii–ix.

queen of Babylon, Semiramis, killed her husband Ninus with the help of Assur. Tormented by remorse and by the shadow of her husband, she looks for help and support in a young general, Arzace, with whom she falls in love without knowing that he is her own son. A young princess named Azéma is Semiramis's rival. After the king is assassinated, Assur unsuccessfully tries to ascend to the throne by proposing first to Semiramis and then to Azéma to marry him. When Semiramis announces her decision to marry Arzace, Ninus's tomb echoes with the sound of thunder, and the shadow of the deceased sovereign appears. Through the mouth of a grand priest, Arzace learns the truth about his secret birth. Without knowing, Arzace inflicts a deadly wound to his mother in the mausoleum of his father. Assur is taken away, and Semiramis invites her son to marry Azéma.²⁵⁵

The comedians of the Comédie française agreed to perform *Semiramis* in 1748, and to ensure that the decors could be realized with the appropriate magnitude, Voltaire asked Madame de Pompadour, the Duc d'Aumont and the Duc de Fleury to convince the King to pay the expenses. For its first performance in 1748, however, the number of sets was reduced from four to one because the space on the stage of the Comédie française was crowded with spectators (a widespread custom that plagued various theatres between 1637 and 1759) and because of the clumsiness of the machinery for changing the scenery. The actions, which were supposed to take place inside a temple, at the door of a mausoleum, and in a garden in front of a Palace, were all performed in front of a single background, designed by Dominique-François Słodtz, painter at the *Menus Plaisirs*. (See Figure 28.) Voltaire opposed this generic set and denounced the inconsistencies that it caused. He also vehemently argued against the presence of spectators on stage. Until 1759, this greatly affected the staging of plays and restricted the movements of comedians. It also led to some

²⁵⁵This brief synopsis is partly taken from Per Bjurström, "Mise en scène de Sémiramis de Voltaire en 1748 et 1759," *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* (Paris, 1956) 8:302–3.

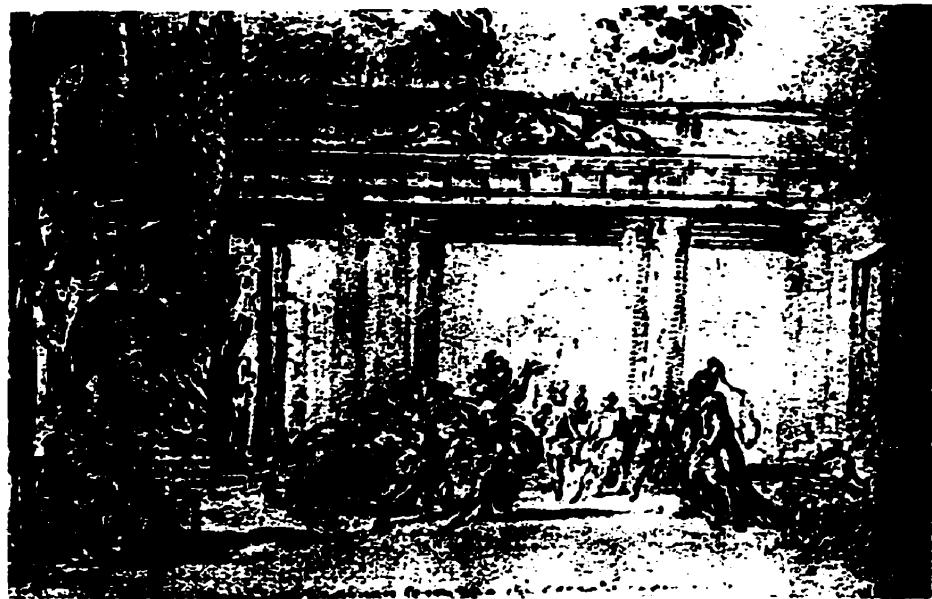


Figure 28: Stage design by Dominique-François Slodtz for the first performance of Voltaire's *Sémiramis* in (1748); drawing by G. de Saint-Aubin. Note the spectators sitting on either side of the stage. [Bjurström].

amusing anecdotes. In a performance of *Semiramis* in 1748, for example, at the end of Act III, Ninus's shadow was supposed to enter the stage from a lateral wing, but with spectators blocking the way, a guard was forced to shout: "Messieurs, place à l'ombre!" ("Make way for the shadow!") It goes without saying that the dramatic effect of the scene was greatly compromised by this unexpected warning, and the entire audience broke into laughter.²⁵⁶ Voltaire, offended by this incident, but mainly disturbed by the lack of realism that it engendered, led the opposition to the presence of spectators on the stage. In his preface to *Semiramis*, he describes the appalling physical context of theatres in the middle of the eighteenth century:

Je ne puis assez m'étonner ni me plaindre du peu de soin qu'on a en France de rendre les théâtres dignes des excellents ouvrages qu'on y représente, et de la nation qui en fait ses délices. *Cinna*, *Athalie* mériteraient d'être représentés ailleurs que dans un jeu de paume, au bout duquel on a élevé quelques décosations du plus mauvais goût, et dans lequel les spectateurs sont placés, contre tout ordre et contre toute raison, les uns sur le théâtre même, les autres debout dans ce qu'on appelle le *parterre*, où ils se précipitent quelquefois en tumulte les uns sur les autres, comme dans une sédition populaire.²⁵⁷

After twenty-one performances in the Comédie française during 1748 and 1749, the play was withdrawn from the repertory. *Semiramis* was also performed at Fontainebleau for the King, and for this occasion Voltaire revised many passages in the play. Given the small dimensions of the theatre, some physical adjustments were needed. Voltaire also requested that no candelabra be hung from the proscenium, for he needed complete darkness for a night scene in Act III.²⁵⁸ Voltaire's advocacy for a greater realism on stage also applied to declamation, and costumes were expected to be historically more realistic.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 8:306.

²⁵⁷Voltaire, "Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1877), IV, 499; quoted by Bjurström, "Mise en scène," 8:300–301.

²⁵⁸Olivier, introduction to Voltaire, *Semiramis*, xxx.

In 1756, *Semiramis* was presented once more at the Comédie française, with Henri-Louis le Kain playing Arzace. His performance shook the audience with its realism, but Voltaire apparently resisted extreme realism in acting. Although he fought for the greatest possible realism in the theatrical setting, Voltaire's attitude toward acting remained bound to the French tradition that demanded restraint, even in the expression of passion.

In 1759 a radical change was made in a new staging of *Semiramis*. Using his political influence, Voltaire succeeded in having the spectators removed from the stage of the Comédie française and having specific sets designed for the crucial scenes of his play. In 1758, after decades of complaints by Voltaire and others about spectators on the stage, the Comte du Lauraguais compensated the actors of the Comédie française for the loss of income caused by removing audience seats from the stage. This century-old tradition was irrevocably abolished in 1759.²⁵⁹ The removal of spectators was intended to create a greater illusion on the stage.²⁶⁰ In eighteenth-century society, however, "illusion" was not equated to unreality. In fact, the distance intentionally maintained between representation and reality during the seventeenth century was collapsed in the eighteenth century, and the

²⁵⁹For more on this question, see Adolphe Jullien, *Les spectateurs sur le théâtre* (Paris: A. Detaille, 1875) and A. Prat, "Le parterre au XVIIe siècle," *La Quinzaine* (February, 1906): 388–412. See also Pierre Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale. Ou, de l'ordonnance la plus avantageuse à une salle de spectacles, relativement aux principes de l'optique & de l'acoustique. Avec un examen des principaux théâtres de l'Europe, & une analyse des écrits les plus importans sur cette matière* (Paris: Moutard, 1782), 185–86; J.J. Rousseau, *Discours: Lettre sur les spectacles* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1939), 119; Martine de Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale en France au 18e siècle* (Paris, Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1988), 160; Peyronnet, *La mise en scène*, 100; and Hobson, *The Object of Art*, 194. Hobson presents this transformation of the acting area as another attempt to collapse the action on the stage with a perfected illusion of reality.

²⁶⁰The disappearance of the spectators transformed the stage into a tableau, while the audience, physically well contained in the auditorium, became more easily controllable. Diderot criticized the changes in the audience following this event, in his "Lettre à Madame Riccoboni," in *Writings on the Theatre*, ed. Green. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 216.

mechanism for "deceiving" the spectator was hidden. The aesthetics of stage illusion is clearest in Marmontel's article on "Entr'acte" from his *Les éléments de littérature* (1787). The audience and the actors live in different worlds, he emphasizes, and their autonomy should be maintained to preserve the illusion. Consequently, changes of scenery should be hidden from the audience. This abolition of the distance between representation and reality is also clear in Ferdinando Galli da Bibiena's treatise *L'architettura civile* (1711). Although his treatise is supposedly devoted to architecture, he writes about theatre and the representation of architecture, equating represented buildings to theatrical scenery. In regrouping them under the general category of architecture, the eighteenth-century architect/stage set designer implicitly assumed that architecture and the theatre had been.

In the decades following the removal of spectators from the stage, transformations in stage design thus tended toward greater realism, as did theories of acting and costume design.²⁶¹ The first three pairs of wings no longer hidden by spectators gave stage-designers a greater ability to create visual effects. The machines developed during the second half of the seventeenth century (such as those introduced by Torelli and later by Vigarani for the Salle des Machines) also enabled stage sets to express the specific character of each scene. The acting area of the Comédie française, newly freed from spectators, permitted a new style of acting and a greater mobility for the actors.²⁶² The *Palais-à-volonté*, in which changes of place were marked only by different accessories, was replaced by a different setting for each scene.

On August 6, 1759, the new production of *Semiramis* opened, with stage sets by Paolo Antonio Brunetti. It seems that an arcade in the foreground remained constant, while

²⁶¹The reform of costumes at the theatre was carried through by Lekain and Clairon at the end of the 1750s.

²⁶²On the old and new style of acting, see Voltaire, *Appel à toutes les nations, des divers changements arrivés à l'art tragique* (1761).

the background changed as necessary.²⁶³ (See Figure 29.) This second staging of *Semiramis* marked a turning point toward more realistic architectural settings in the theatre. The specificity of the sets not only influenced the realism of the play, but also enabled the actors to move more freely on stage and no longer worry about transgressing the different conceptual spaces imposed by the scenery. Voltaire had also criticized builders for not providing distinct places for action on the same stage:

C'est la faute des constructeurs, quand un théâtre ne représente pas les différents endroits où se passe l'action, dans une même enceinte, une place, un temple, un palais, un vestibule, un cabinet, etc.²⁶⁴

To address this problem of continuity and unity of space, various theatrical devices were formulated between 1760 and 1784, many of them influenced by Voltaire, including a tripartite stage that allowed actions to occur concurrently, and complex machinery that permitted quick changes of scenery. In 1765, Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–90) devised a stage divided into three parts that enabled three scenes to be performed simultaneously in his *Projet d'une salle de spectacle pour un théâtre de comédie*. (See Figure 30.) Since three scenes can indicate three different locations united by the front stage, Cochin explains, the rule of unity of place that so often restricts an author's imagination could be followed more easily. The partitioned stage indeed conveyed three different locations, often needed in plays such as Voltaire's *Semiramis*.

La vraisemblance en seroit moins ouvertement blessée... Quelquefois la décoration doit représenter plusieurs édifices différens, comme dans Sémiramis, où l'on doit voir un temple, un palais & un tombeau, tous objects distincts, & que le Décorateur, faute de place, ne sépare qu'à peine à l'aide de quelques chassis

²⁶³Bjurström notes that this way of changing the sets had been done fifty years earlier by Juvara, in Italy. Bjurström, "Mise en scène," 316.

²⁶⁴Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1880), 31:328. Quoted by Bjurström, "Mise en scène," 318.



Figure 29: Stage design by Antonio Brunetti for the final scene of Voltaire's *Sémiramis* at the Comédie française in 1759. [Bjurström].

Planch. IV^e

Coupe de la Salle de Spectacle sur le grand Diametre.
Présentant l'ouverture du Théâtre.

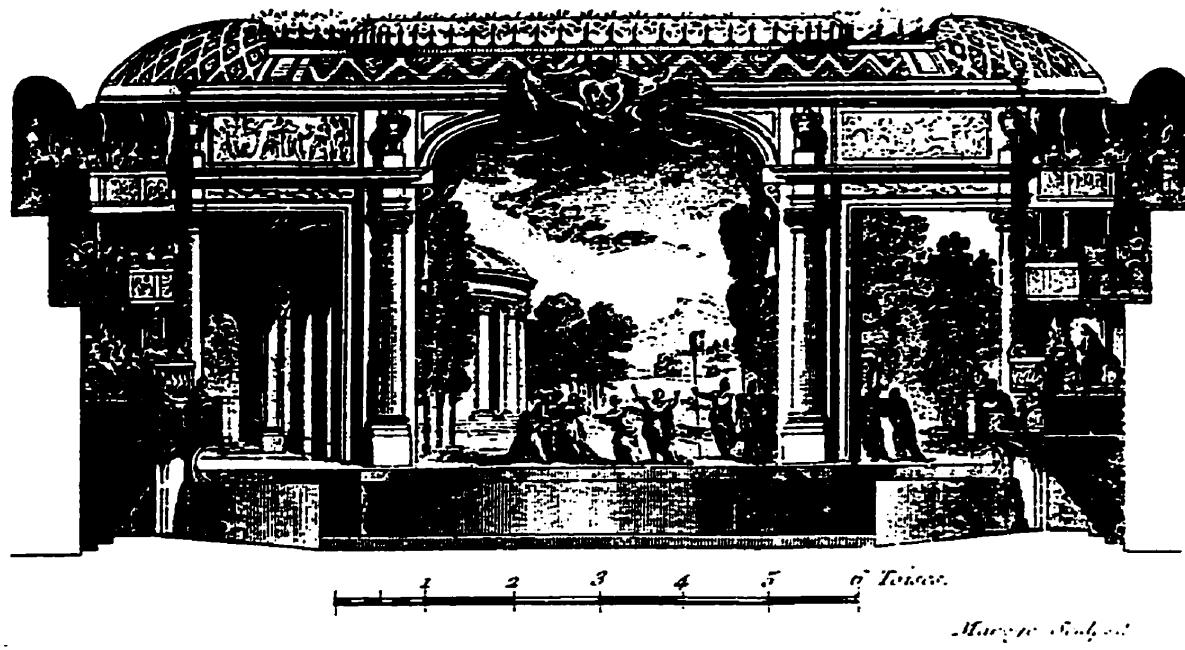


Figure 30: A tripartite stage. From C.-N. Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle pour un théâtre de comédie* (1765).

toujours trop étroits. On sent combien il seroit plus à son aise [avec la triple scène] pour déployer son génie.²⁶⁵

Ledoux built a tripartite stage in his theatre at Besançon, designed after 1776. He framed the stage with an undecorated arch, presenting an unobstructed view, and divided the wide opening into three sub-stages to permit a greater variety of scenes. Ledoux's triple scene fulfilled the aesthetic requirement of spatial and temporal coherence, while treating each scene as an individual *tableau*. This divided stage proved to be a technical nightmare for the machinery engineer, however, and Ledoux himself had to outline and paint some of the canvas to be used on stage.²⁶⁶ Ledoux's idea of a triple scene may have been inspired by an early proposal by Peyre and de Wailly for the Comédie française. In 1771, they had also designed a divided stage,²⁶⁷ but by the time the theatre was built in 1779, successive sets had been universally adopted.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle pour un théâtre de comédie* [1765] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1974), 18–19.

²⁶⁶Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), 183.

²⁶⁷In an unpublished *Mémoire*, De Wailly defended the divided stage: "Dans la forme nouvelle, la situation du Procoenium [*sic*] divisé en trois scènes, séparées par deux colonnes pourra marquer trois lieux qui auraient pour réunion le Procoenium. La vraisemblance en sera moins ouvertement blessée; le lieu où il conviendrait qu'à la rigueur la scène se passât serait au moins indiqué par la décoration de la scène et d'où arriveraient les acteurs." Archives Nationales, O¹ 846, n.8; quoted by Daniel Rabreau, "Des scènes figurées à la mise en scène du monument urbain," in *Piranese et les Français* (Roma : Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1978), 462.

²⁶⁸The radical transformation of the performing area during the second half of the eighteenth century, brought about by a renewed concern with the notion of unity of place and the desire for greater realism at the theatre, and giving the stage sets the appropriate character demanded by each scene, is illustrated by Louis Charpentier in *De l'illusion théâtrale* (1768): "J'arrive à la Comédie comme dans un appartement d'ami. Il faut détruire cette idée; il faut me transporter dans le palais d'Auguste, dans le sérail, dans le Temple du peuple de Dieu, dans le camp d'Alexandre. Si je vois toujours la salle, je prends peu d'intérêt à la représentation." Quoted by Bergman, *Lighting*, 177.

The new specificity of theatrical scenery had wide architectural repercussions, especially in the theories of Le Camus de Mézières. In *Le génie de l'architecture*, one of the fundamental concepts was to give each room a distinctive character that would accurately express its destination. Since each room or apartment in a building is used for a specific purpose, Le Camus thought, it must be treated differently. The character of a room would be expressed with certain proportions and architectural elements: "La proportion d'une partie au tout détermine la situation naturelle d'un objet, indique son espece, & donne le style convenable à chaque scène."²⁶⁹ Just as generic scenery at the theatre was replaced by elaborate and successive sets, in Le Camus's architectural theory every room was experienced in a temporal unfolding of the architectural space.

On the exterior, the modulation of masses and the articulation of facades would express the purpose and relative importance of the various parts of the building. In the relationship between garden and building, Le Camus insists that the aisles, the parterres, and the esplanade must be proportional to the size of the building because it governs the composition. The proportions among the various parts are the essential basis of a building: "Il faut que tout concoure au même but, comme dans une décoration de Théâtre, où tout est relatif."²⁷⁰ Like a play telling a unified story, the entire building would express the owner's character: "Comme dans les pieces dramatiques une seule action remplit toute la scène, il faut de même dans un édifice observer l'unité de caractere, & que cette vérité fixe d'abord l'imagination, en frappant les yeux."²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ *Le génie*, 62.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

CHAPTER 4: RULES OF EXPRESSION AND THE PARADOX OF ACTING

In the first few pages of *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus de Mézières acknowledges the affiliation of his theory of architectural character with the work of Charles Le Brun (1619–90), an influential French painter protected by Colbert and Louis XIV:

Le célèbre le Brun, dont les talens honorent sa patrie, nous a prouvé la vérité de ce principe [character theory] en nous donnant son caractere des passions; il a exprimé les différentes affections de l'ame, & rendu par une seule ligne la joie, la tristesse, la colere, la fureur, la commisération, &c.²⁷²

Le Brun was entirely committed to the empirical study of emotions. His *Conférences sur l'expression*, an anatomy of the passions, became the first systematic recording of human physiognomy as it is transformed by emotions. Le Brun's theory was most influential on classical and neo-classical painting in France and in England,²⁷³ but was also important for the art of acting because it provided a clear set of facial expressions that could be reproduced by actors. Le Camus considered that architecture was less defined in terms of a frozen picture than as a temporal unfolding. It is therefore the underlying assumption of this chapter that Le Camus was interested in Le Brun's theory for its temporal application in acting rather than for its pictorial application in painting.

Le Brun's theory of expression

Charles Le Brun, a contemporary of Claude Perrault, helped create the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture under Colbert. He presided over the Académie as chancellor from 1668, and as director from 1683. His book *Conférences sur l'expression*, published posthumously in 1698, was originally delivered as a lecture to the members of the

²⁷²Ibid., 3–4.

²⁷³His treatise was translated into English in 1734.

Académie. In it, Le Brun defines the notion of expression as "what stamps the true characters of every thing . . . Expression is also a part that intimates the emotions of the Soul, and renders visible the effects of Passions."²⁷⁴ Passion is "an emotion of the Soul" whose cause also has an effect on the body. Le Brun explains that "corporeal actions" provoked by passions are induced by the motion of the "nervous juices" that pass through the muscles and inscribe a certain expression on the body:

The nerves act only by the spirits contained in the cavities of the brain; and the brain receives the spirits immediately from the blood, that passes continually through the heart, which heats and rarefies it so, that, being strait conveyed to, and filling the cortex of the brain, a certain fluid juice is there produced, called *Animal spirits*.²⁷⁵

The soul was said to be located in "a little gland in the middle of the brain" - what Descartes calls the pineal gland - and Le Brun says that the face is the most expressive part of the body because it is closest to the soul. The eyebrows, because of their physical proximity to the pineal gland, are most indicative of the passions.²⁷⁶ Likewise, the mouth reflects the movements of the heart because the heart is where we feel the effects of the passions. These effects are felt in every function of the body, such as the heart-beat, digestive function, and internal heat. They are also expressed by every part of the body, as we recognize anger or wrath in "a man clenching his fists, and seeming to strike."²⁷⁷ Le Brun divides the range of passions into two categories, the simple passions and the

²⁷⁴Charles LeBrun, *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* [1734], introduction by A.T. McKenzie (Los Angeles: Univ. of California, 1980), 12.

²⁷⁵Ibid., 12–13.

²⁷⁶"As the gland, in the middle of the brain, is the place where the Soul receives the images of the Passions; so the Eye-brow is the only part of the whole face, where the Passions best make themselves known." Ibid., 20–21.

²⁷⁷Ibid., 20.

compound ones, and gives an extended description of their physical manifestations. Of anger, he writes: (See Figure 31.)

When Anger seizes the Soul, it is expressed by red and fiery Eyes; the Pupil wild and flashing; the Eyebrows alike, either lifted up or depress'd; the Forehead very frowning, with wrinkles between the Eyes; the Nostrils open and extended; the Lips pressing together, the Under One rising above the Upper, leaving the corners of the Mouth somewhat open, and forming a cruel and disdainful smile. The Teeth will seem to gnash, and the Mouth foam; the Face appear pale in one place and inflamed in another, but swelled all over; the Veins of the Forehead, Temples and Neck also swelled and extended; and the Hair standing on end: In time, the Person thus affected will seem rather to pant than breathe, the Heart being oppressed by the abundance of blood flowing to its relief.²⁷⁸

Le Brun's intention was to provide painters with an elaborate description of facial movements to signify specific emotions. Although he might have sought to establish "a scientific analysis of the principles governing expression so that painters might work not in imitation of nature but according to its laws, creatively," the text and illustrations of the *Conférences* soon were recognized as "fixed patterns for expression."²⁷⁹ Various facial traits and lines of the eyebrows and mouth began to serve as ready-made formulae to express specific emotions. This codification of facial expression was to have an impact also on acting theories throughout the eighteenth century. French actors started to model their bodily movements and facial gestures on codified rules of expression derived from Le Brun. His dual influence on painting and the theatre became especially evident in a French form of entertainment during the late eighteenth century, known as *Tableaux vivants*. Denis Diderot promoted this form of acting, in which actors would group and regroup to form compositions derived from paintings acclaimed for the intensity of their emotional effect, such as those of Jean-Baptiste Greuze. In 1761, for example, the Comédie italienne

²⁷⁸Ibid., 45.

²⁷⁹*The Genius*, introduction by Middleton, 23.



Figure 31: "Anger". From C. Le Brun, *Conférences sur l'expression* (1698).

presented *Les noces d'Arlequin*, using Greuze's painting *L'Accordée de village* as the model for a *tableau vivant*. According to the *Mercure de France*, the garments and attitudes of the actors resembled those in the painting, and during the scene of the wedding festivities, the curtain was drawn to reveal the *tableau*.²⁸⁰

Le Brun's influence on the theatre went far beyond this literal use of expressive paintings as models for theatrical scenes. He initiated a school of thought in which emotions identified in human physiognomy could be reproduced almost mechanically by actors to evoke the same emotions in spectators. This concept seduced the scientific minds of the Enlightenment but was not without opposition. It rekindled the century-old debate on the moral status of actors and comedians and the authenticity of their emotions. Actors themselves were divided into two opposing factions whose major point of contention concerned the role of conventions in the art of acting. They debated whether actors really felt the emotions they were conveying to the audience or whether they were generating an appearance of emotions using acting techniques. Some believed in an "inner sensitivity common among all educated men" that could reveal truth and authentic emotions, while others shared Le Brun's belief that expression could be reduced to a code. The theatrical stage thus became the site for an open debate on the moral, social, and artistic role of conventions, in a century when theatre was pervasive.

In his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719), l'abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (1670–1742) seems to reconcile these positions, first by praising the illusion of "artificial passions," and then by presenting his theory of an inner sensitivity that could judge taste in the arts (the essential component that prevented the eighteenth century from falling into relativism). Du Bos redefines the balance between the intellect and the artistic intuition he calls "sentiment," emphasizing that reason can be used only to justify this

²⁸⁰*Mercure de France*, December 1761; from Bergman, *Lighting*, 220.

intuitive judgment. Since moments of passion are usually followed by days of sadness, art that relies on passionate emotions could recreate artificial passions that would allow us to taste the delightful side of emotions while avoiding their unpleasant consequences:

L'art ne pourrait-il pas créer, pour ainsi dire, des êtres d'une nouvelle nature? Ne pourrait-il pas produire des objets qui excitassent en nous des passions artificielles capables de nous occuper dans le moment que nous les sentons, & incapables de nous causer dans la suite des peines réelles & des afflictions véritables?²⁸¹

Nature has made us in such a way that we are affected by the emotions and suffering of anyone or anything that approaches us, Du Bos writes. This is why actors who are touched by the characters they are impersonating can affect us directly. Unlike Le Brun, Du Bos believes that an actor must feel the emotions he is portraying in order to touch a spectator, rather than using a gestural code. The argument, however, is not a simple one, since Du Bos also speaks of an artistic distance that enables the artist (poet, painter, or actor) to create artificial passions that are not equivalent to the emotions that inspired them:

Le Peintre & le Poëte ne nous affligen qu'autant que nous le voulons, ils ne nous font aimer leurs Héros & leurs Héroïnes qu'autant qu'il nous plaît: au lieu que nous ne serions pas les maîtres de la mesure de nos sentimens; nous ne serions pas les maîtres de leur vivacité comme de leur durée, si nous avions été frappés par les objets mêmes que ces nobles Artisans ont imités.²⁸²

Du Bos devotes an entire section to such artistic distance and theatrical illusion. He argues against the notion that the poetry of words, the verisimilitude of a stage set, and the apparent truthfulness of an actor's declamation can make us believe we are witnessing a real event instead of a performance. The difference between illusion and reality must be

²⁸¹L'abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* [1719] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 1:III, 26.

²⁸²Ibid., 1:III, 31–32.

maintained for the work of art to be fully appreciated. We do not go to the theatre expecting to witness real action, Du Bos continues, and even though we may be touched by it, we remain aware that we are witnessing an imitation:

Nous arrivons au théâtre, préparés à voir ce que nous voyans; & nous y avons encore perpétuellement cent choses sous les yeux, lesquelles d'instant en instant nous font souvenir du lieu où nous sommes, & de ce que nous sommes. Le spectateur y conserve donc son bon sens, malgré l'émotion la plus vive. C'est sans extravaguer qu'on s'y passionne.²⁸³

To prove that pleasure from a theatrical performance is not caused by the illusion itself, he notes that this pleasure is often greater when we become aware of the workings of the illusion, and when we can appreciate the work a second time. For Du Bos, the artistic distance produces a cathartic effect at the theatre. This artistic catharsis enables the spectator to witness artificial passions with controlled pain. These passions are weaker than natural passions but are more bearable to the spectator, who can observe the situation on stage without suffering the same degree of pain as in real life.²⁸⁴ Du Bos devotes an entire section to this notion that dramatic poetry "purges the passions" by showing spectators the distractions and aberrations to which the passions can lead. One of the first objectives of theatre was to teach morals by inspiring hatred of vice and love of virtue.²⁸⁵

The apparent opposition between those who defended the role of actors as catalyst of emotions, and those who favored the use of conventional signs to portray passions, led to an important debate on the notation of gesture and voice at the theatre. In painting, facial

²⁸³Ibid., 1:XLIII, 451–53.

²⁸⁴Saisselin relates Du Bos's notion of natural versus artificial passions to Le Camus's theory of sensations in architecture. Although Du Bos does not explicitly address the question of architecture in his treatise, Saisselin argues that the sentiment created by architecture was natural as opposed to the artificial passions created by art. Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 241.

²⁸⁵Ibid., 1:XLIV, 458–61.

expressions were tabulated by Le Brun and later completed by Lavater, and in dance the need for a system of notation had always been recognized, but in theatre the recording of actors' gestures remained controversial. Some, such as Servandoni d'Hannetaire²⁸⁶ and Duclos in the *Encyclopédie*, objected that annotating a play would produce uniform performances, reduce actors to puppets, and give absolute authority to the person who made the annotations. Others, such as Du Bos, paradoxically considered notation as the foundation of the "science of play-acting."²⁸⁷

The paradox of the actor

The actor Luigi Riccoboni, in his *Pensées sur la déclamation* (1740), condemned the French acting style as contrived and artificial. He believed that an actor should "feel" the emotions in order to create an illusion for the spectators. His son, Antonio Francesco Riccoboni, in his *L'Art du théâtre à Madame XXX* (1750), insisted instead that an actor should understand "the natural reactions of others and imitate them on stage through complete control of his expression."²⁸⁸ Even though acting theories remained divided between these two apparently contradictory positions, all agreed that actors could succeed in communicating a wide range of emotions by closely following a set of conventional gestures. The debate was concerned more with the degree of personal feelings that an actor was permitted to convey.

The treatise of F. Riccoboni, the son, systematically describes the various components that constitute the art of acting, including gestures, voice, and declamation. In the section on gesture, he describes the general position of the body, then the head, arms,

²⁸⁶Servandoni d'Hannetaire is usually believed to be Jean-Nicolas Servandoni's illegitimate son.

²⁸⁷For more on this, see Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale*, 92.

²⁸⁸Antonio Francesco Riccoboni, *L'Art du théâtre à Madame XXX* [1750] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 73–75.

etc. It is in his section on "Le jeu muet" that Riccoboni emphasizes the physiognomy of the face and explicitly recalls Le Brun's theory of expression. However, his description of specific passions, and how they are expressed by the inflexions of the eyebrows and the movements of the mouth and eyes, is aimed more specifically at the art of acting; he says that the actor should use the upper part of the face to convey the greatest effect, instead of the mouth or chin.

Even though these movements of the face are regulated by specific conventions, Riccoboni also notes that "it is a great advantage if one received from nature pronounced traits."²⁸⁹ An actor can acquire the ability to wrinkle the forehead or to frown the eyebrows but to "express with the face in a sensitive manner" it is helpful for an actor to have the eyes "of a striking colour and a liveliness that can be perceived from afar."²⁹⁰ Riccoboni certainly was not opposed to an actor contributing his/her own personal character to the role being portrayed. In fact, he emphasized the innate character of each actor (physiognomy, eye colour, voice, etc.) and insisted that an actor not play a role whose character was opposed to his/her own. Acting, for him, involved playing on the recognized individuality of every actor: "*celui qui veut jouer la Comédie, doit s'attacher à l'espèce de rôle qui convient à son talent, mais sur tout à sa figure & à sa voix.*"²⁹¹ He warns against forcing one's voice or trying to change its natural tone, or even worse, trying to imitate the voice of another actor. "*Chacun doit se servir de la voix que la nature lui a donnée, & ne jamais chercher à lui substituer un son qui n'est pas le sien propre.*"²⁹² If one has severe eyes and a harsh voice, one should not try to express emotions inspired by love, he writes. Even though the signs that express a feeling may be well known and can

²⁸⁹Ibid., 75.

²⁹⁰Ibid., 76.

²⁹¹Ibid., 94–95.

²⁹²Ibid., 16.

be learned, one should avoid expressing certain emotions, feelings or passions that would seem contradictory to one's innate character, for it would deny the "appropriateness of character." Therefore, it appears that F. Riccoboni's position was not so different from that of his father: both believed that the actor must start from an internal condition to express various emotions or passions. Nevertheless, for F. Riccoboni, the actor's art is in mastering and submitting one's emotions to the rules of expression:

L'on appelle expression, l'adresse par laquelle on fait sentir au Spectateur tous les mouvements dont on veut paraître pénétré. Je dis que l'on veut la paraître, & non pas que l'on est pénétré véritablement . . . Si l'on a le malheur de ressentir véritablement ce que l'on doit exprimer, on est hors d'état de jouer. Les sentiments se succèdent dans une scène avec une rapidité qui n'est point dans la nature. La courte durée d'une Piece oblige à cette précipitation, qui en rapprochant les objets, donne à l'action théâtrale toute la chaleur qui lui est nécessaire.²⁹³

The opposition between these two theories of acting was carried forward by Diderot in his own writings on the theatre. The text that presents his views on the art of acting most explicitly, *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*, written during a period of over ten years but published only posthumously in 1830, leads to conclusions that seem contradictory to a position that he eloquently defended in his earlier writings on the theatre, such as *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* (1757).

Denis Diderot (1713–84) devoted himself to the art of the theatre only briefly: in 1757 he wrote a play entitled *Le Fils naturel*, followed by a series of philosophical reflections in his *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* that defined a new theatrical genre. The following year, he published a second play, *Le Père de famille*, followed by *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*. The play was not immediately received with the enthusiasm that its author had expected, but nonetheless was a significant development in eighteenth-century

²⁹³Ibid., 36–37. In a footnote, F. Riccoboni acknowledges the opposition of his theory to that of his father.

theatre. These two plays, accompanied by their theoretical discussions, constitute the founding works of the *drame bourgeois*. A fundamental objective of this new dramatic genre was to depict the movements of the human soul as truthfully as possible in an attempt to raise the moral values of the spectators. Sensitivity was a basic requirement that would guide even the most mediocre actor to express truthful emotions on stage:

Une actrice, d'un jugement borné, d'une pénétration commune, mais d'une grande sensibilité, saisit sans peine une situation d'âme, et trouve sans y penser, l'accent qui convient à plusieurs sentiments différents qui se fondent ensemble, et qui constituent cette situation que toute la sagacité du philosophe n'anlyserait pas.²⁹⁴

Diderot's next involvement in the theatre came in 1769, more than a decade later, when Grimm entrusted him with the task of writing a review of a recent book on acting entitled *Garrick ou les acteurs anglais*, translated from English by Antonio Sticotti (1769).²⁹⁵ Diderot admired the play-acting ability of David Garrick to distance his expression from the feelings of his soul. A week later, Diderot enthusiastically wrote to Grimm and announced that the book inspired him to write what might be his finest and most original piece: "C'est un beau paradoxe. Je prétends que c'est la sensibilité qui fait les comédiens médiocres; l'extrême sensibilité les comédiens bornés; le sang froid et la tête, les comédiens sublimes."²⁹⁶ A year later, the "beau paradoxe," a sixteen-page essay, appeared in the *Correspondance littéraire* under the title "Observations sur une brochure intitulée *Garrick ou les acteurs anglais*." Diderot's article was also a response to Pierre

²⁹⁴ Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, ed. P. Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1968), 104.

²⁹⁵ *Garrick ou les acteurs anglais* was originally inspired by a treatise written in 1749 by Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le Comédien*. Sainte-Albine's treatise on acting supported the view that the actor feels what he plays. It was partly translated into English and adapted for English readers by John Hill as *The Actor* (1750–55). This reduced version was translated back into French in 1769 by Sticotti as *Garick ou les auteurs anglais*.

²⁹⁶ November 14, 1769, *Correspondance inédite*, t.I, 102; quoted by Paul Vernière in Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 292.

Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien* (1747), which argues that the soul of the actor is the source of his/her power.

Diderot's inspired text was rewritten many times and at least five versions are known to exist. Although it was not published until the nineteenth century, Diderot's manuscript was known to many of his contemporaries and prompted countless attacks for its controversial depiction of actors' dubious moral sense. The primary quality of the greatest comedians, he claims, is their ability to reproduce realistic signs of emotions without ever sensing them. Diderot was suggesting that acting is an art of imitation that undermines authentic emotions, and that the cold and rational reproduction of conventional gestures is far superior to any felt (natural) emotion:

Il me faut dans [ce grand comédien] un spectateur froid et tranquille; j'en exige, par conséquent, de la pénétration et nulle sensibilité, l'art de tout imiter, ou, ce qui revient au même, une égale aptitude à toutes sortes de caractères et de rôles.²⁹⁷

The paradox that occupied Diderot was not a simple opposition between art and nature, however. Diderot believed that "all the study of the actor was directed at finding the essential forms which govern the natural world; the actor distills these forms out."²⁹⁸ For Diderot, "convention" was ultimately founded on nature. In comparing "tears raised by a tragedy of real life" and those raised by a "touching narrative," Diderot warns that while the directness and immediacy of the natural world may seem superior to the world created on stage, the former is more vulnerable: it may not reach its audience in a controlled way and cannot be repeated with the same fervour. If an actor truly felt the emotions he is expected to portray on stage, he argues, it would be impossible for that actor to perform the same role every night with the same genuineness and success. He believed that la Clairon (whom he considered a sublime actress) truly experiences the torment of the characters she

²⁹⁷Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 306.

²⁹⁸Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 112–13.

impersonates when rehearsing a new play, but once she fully possesses her role, she repeats it with no emotion: "elle est l'âme d'un grand mannequin qui l'enveloppe; ses essais l'ont fixé sur elle."²⁹⁹

For centuries, forms of acting had been closely related to the content of what was being performed, and so acting was a form of rhetoric. Diderot, however, undermined this relationship. In his *Paradoxe*, he conceived performing as an art form in and of itself, with no reference to what was being performed. In other words, this amounted to a divorce between form and content. His position on the innate character of comedians was also more radical than any of his predecessors. While F. Riccoboni put forward a thesis similar to Diderot's, that actors did not feel the passion they enacted on stage but only reproduced recognizable signs, he still believed that certain roles were more appropriate to some actors because of affinities to their personal character. Diderot, on the other hand, denied that comedians have a character at all. It is not that they have lost their natural character because they continually personify others, he insists; this would be mistaking the effect for the cause. Instead, actors can play an infinite number of roles precisely because they have no character of their own.³⁰⁰

Diderot has often been accused of philosophical inconsistency in his theory of acting, for his posthumous work appears to contradict the thesis of his earlier work, particularly his theory for the *drame bourgeois*, but also many of his texts for the *Salons*

²⁹⁹Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 308. In the 1760's, Mlle Clairon was the lover of Marmontel, one important contributor to the *Encyclopédie* and close friend of Diderot. Beatrix Dussane, in *Reines de théâtre 1633-1941* (Lyons: H. Lardanchet, 1944), explains Diderot's *Paradoxe* through his connection with Clairon.

³⁰⁰"On a dit que les comédiens n'avaient aucun caractère, parce qu'en les jouant tous il perdaient celui que la nature leur avait donné, qu'ils devenaient faux, comme le médecin, le chirurgien et le boucher deviennent durs. Je crois qu'on a pris la cause pour l'effet, et qu'il ne sont propres à les jouer tous que parce qu'ils n'en ont point." Ibid., 350.

that addressed the sensitivity of spectators. The apparent contradiction between his early writing and his *Paradoxe*, however, may not be entirely irreconcilable if we consider them closely. As in the *Paradoxe*, Diderot's *Entretiens* criticizes every aspect of French theatre that opposes verisimilitude, including the generic decors and the declamatory style that deviates from reality. The actors' relationship on stage is equally unnatural since they maintain a fixed distance among themselves, never daring "to look each other in the face, turn their backs to the spectator, move close to one another, part, or rejoin."³⁰¹ Diderot's two major texts on theatre were written from opposite viewpoints: the *Paradoxe* focuses on the actor, while the *Entretiens* considers emotions evoked in the spectator, as will be discussed in a later chapter. The *Paradoxe* could be defined as the science of acting, while the *Entretiens* elaborates on the art of performance. In Diderot's search for truthful expression, these works depict two sides of a unified reality. Truthfulness at the theatre does not involve showing things as they are in nature, for this is only commonplace. "Le vrai de la scène . . . c'est la conformité des actions, des discours, de la figure, de la voix, du mouvement, du geste, avec un modèle idéal imaginé par le poète, et souvent exagéré par le comédien."³⁰²

Diderot's theory of acting was closely related to the theory of character in architecture at that time: like an actor learning the signs that express specific emotions, an architect would learn a conventional language of lines, masses, and ornaments to express specific characters. Diderot himself devoted a few disparate reflections to the question of architecture and expression. In his *Essais sur la peinture*, an entire chapter deals with architecture as the mother of all the arts; unlike the arts of imitation such as painting and

³⁰¹Diderot suggests instead a more natural arrangement on the stage similar to the *tableau* in painting. Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1969) 3:140; translated by Carlson, *Places of Performance*, 153.

³⁰²Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 317.

sculpture, architecture has no model in nature.³⁰³ In *Le monument de la place de Reims* (1760), Diderot explicitly addresses the expressive role of architecture and the destination of buildings, criticizing the general lack of intention and appropriateness in most contemporary buildings: "Les architectes ne songent point à se demander: quel est l'objet principal de mon édifice? Qu'est-ce qui s'y passera? Quelles sont les circonstances du concours qui s'y fera?"³⁰⁴ Consequently, buildings may be beautiful, but unlike the great temples of antiquity, he writes, they are not necessarily suitable for the site and the purpose for which they are built. "Qu'on fasse entrer dans son projet la considération du temps, du lieu, des peuples, de la destination, et l'on verra varier à l'infini la proportion des pleins, des vides, des formes, des ornements et de tout ce qui tient à l'art."³⁰⁵ The main role of the architect is to consider various expressive means and to ensure that the destination of a building is clearly asserted:

J'exigerais seulement (et c'est certainement exiger une chose sensée) de celui qui doit construire un édifice, qu'on en devinât la destination d'autant loin qu'on l'apercevrait. Il n'en est pas de l'architecture comme des autres arts d'imitation; elle n'a point de modèles subsistants dans la nature d'après lesquels on puisse juger ses productions. Ce que je dois apercevoir dans un édifice, quand je le regarde, ce n'est point la grotte qui servit de retraite à l'homme sauvage, ni la cabane qu'il se fit à lui-même et à sa famille, quand il commença à se policer; mais la solidité et l'usage présent. Si l'usage est nouveau, l'édifice est mal fait, ou il se distingue de tout autre par quelque chose qu'on a point encore vu ailleurs.³⁰⁶

This ability of architecture to indicate its usage is precisely what occupied Le Camus de Mézières in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Like Diderot, Le Camus also draws from both convention and nature in his search for truthful expression. Architecture, he thought, could

³⁰³Ibid., 728.

³⁰⁴Denis Diderot, *Sur l'art et les artistes*, introduction by Jean Seznec (Paris: Herman, 1967), 68.

³⁰⁵Ibid., 69.

³⁰⁶Ibid.

express its destination by evoking specific emotions or sensations through its proportions, the modulation of its masses, the rhythm of its facades, and the variation of its roof lines. The dome of the Invalides, for example, with its pyramidal composition and the base from which it rises so majestically, inspires grandeur and magnificence, Le Camus writes.³⁰⁷ As the subtle movements of an actor's eyebrows can express alone a wide range of emotions, the relative heights of buildings (the roof lines forming an architectural expressive feature) also express a complex modulation of human emotions. Describing the juxtaposition of masses of different height in a courtyard, Le Camus explains: "Les édifices plus ou moins élevés sur le même espace forment la gradation de la tristesse à la gaieté."³⁰⁸ With the perspective effect and the movement of the viewer, the modulation of masses and the projection of various parts contribute to an impression of movement in the facades:

Ce sont les masses, ce sont les corps & les avant-corps qui concourent à l'effet. Dans les plans ils donnent du jeu, dans les masses ils fournissent la grace, & dans l'élévation ils interrompent la ligne droite & monotone qui termineroit l'édifice & le rendroit fatiguant & ennuyeux. En effet, par le moyen de la perspective, les avant-corps nous paroissent plus élevés que ceux qui forment le fond.³⁰⁹

In addition to the modulation of the *avant-corps*, the variation of the roof line ensures that the intended character of a building will be expressed, like the gesture of an actor on stage, even from a great distance: "Dans une longue facade il faut interrompre la ligne droite qui pourroit le terminer, & qui l'empêcheroit de jouer & de se dessiner dans le vague de l'air: autrement elle seroit monotone & ne produiroit aucun effet."³¹⁰ Le Camus illustrates this notion by referring to the "monotony" of the garden facade of the Château de Versailles. If one looks at the ensemble from a distance, the facade appears as a long,

³⁰⁷Le génie, 18.

³⁰⁸Ibid., 69.

³⁰⁹Ibid., 72–73.

³¹⁰Ibid., 75.

monotonous, high wall. If the architect had broken the rigidity of the roof line and the uniformity of the mass, however, this modulation would have given it "play and life," he concludes. The reasons again are provided by the rules of perspective and optics:

Un avant-corps, par une suite de la perspective, paraîtra plus haut que l'arrière-corps; l'observation décide la question, ainsi que les démonstrations des principes d'optique. En effet, d'un point tirez deux lignes formant un angle quelconque, l'ouverture sera progressivement plus grande à quatre pieds qu'elle ne l'est à deux; donc le corps le plus éloigné paraîtra moins haut à raison de sa distance.³¹¹

Le Camus observes that the articulation of a facade "gives life" to a building, but also insists on a close correspondence between the interior decoration and the exterior expression. The ornaments of a facade are like theatrical costumes that convey appropriate character. If the degree of richness in a facade is not consistent with the interior decoration, it produces a sensation like that of a person in "un habit superbement galonné, & le reste de l'habillement pauvre, rustique & grossier."³¹² During the second half of the eighteenth century, the appropriateness of actors' clothing to their specific character was a subject of controversy. Before then, costumes were usually very elaborate, in accordance with the prevailing taste of the time. Actors invented new fashions for the stage that were then adopted by the general public on the streets of the capital.³¹³ In his article "Décoration" for the *Encyclopédie*, Marmontel condemns the current practices of theatrical costume. He advises actors to use a costume that suits the character and the situation, instead of relying on traditional elegant tragic dress and ornate wigs:

Il s'est introduit à [l'égard des vêtements des acteurs] un usage aussi difficile à concevoir qu'à détruire. Tantôt c'est Gustave qui sort des cavernes de Dalécarlie

³¹¹Ibid., 74.

³¹²Ibid., 81.

³¹³Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe* [1740] (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1969), 101.

avec un habit bleu-céleste à parmens d'hermine; tantôt c'est Pharasmane qui, vêtu d'un habit de brocard d'or, dit à l'ambassadeur de Rome:

*La Nature marâtre en ces affreux climats,
Ne produit, au lieu d'or, que du fer, des soldats.*

De quoi donc faut-il que Gustave & Pharasmane soient vêtus? l'un de peau, l'autre de fer... C'est au spectateur à se déplacer, non au spectacle; & c'est la reflexion que tous les acteurs devroient faire à chaque rôle qu'ils vont jouer: on ne verroit point paroître César en perruque quarrée, ni Ulysse sortir tout poudré du milieu des flots.³¹⁴

Marmontel was not alone in pleading for more realistic costumes. In his *Saggio Sopra l'Opera in Musica* (1755), Francesco Algarotti discusses the importance for costumes to represent current usage as closely as possible: "alle usanze dei tempi, e delle nazioni, che sono rappresentate sulla scena."³¹⁵ Similarly, Louis Charpentier in *Cause de la decadence du gout sur le théâtre* (1768), argues that an overly elaborate costume, with too many diamonds or a misplaced richness, focuses attention on the actor (or, most often, the actress) to the detriment of the character being represented (*le personnage*): "Dès qu'on ne voit que l'Actrice, on oublie le personnage, & la Pièce manque son but."³¹⁶ In his treatise *De l'art du théâtre* (1769), Jean-Baptiste Nougaret also complains about the inappropriate costumes at the theatre. Actors undermine the theatrical illusion by wearing garments that are not suitable for their character.

Les *Collins* sont habillés trop élégamment; leur frisure de petit-maître est sur-tout choquante. La coiffure des Actrices en général mérite le même reproche; une simple Paysanne a-t-elle ses cheveux bouclés avec art, & porte-t-elle des pompons

³¹⁴Marmontel, "Décoration" in *Encyclopédie*, 4:701.

³¹⁵Francesco Algarotti, *Saggio Sopra l'Opera in Musica* [Venice, 1755; Livorno, 1763] (Bologna: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1989), 56.

³¹⁶Louis Charpentier, *Cause de la decadence du gout sur le théâtre* (Paris: Au Parnasse François, 1768), 75.

& des aigrettes? Une pareille coiffure est encore plus ridicule que ces énormes paniers que portent les femmes qu'on voit agir dans la Comédie.³¹⁷

The growing concern for theatrical attire during the eighteenth century led to a renewed debate over the use of masks and make-up on stage. Nougaret writes that in antiquity, Greek and Roman actors used masks representing joy on one side and sadness on the other. This double-profile mask expressed all the passions that agitated the actor. Declamation was written in a form similar to musical notation, and the movements and gestures of actors were recorded in a similar fashion.³¹⁸ Nougaret explains a fundamental difference between the "symbolic" form of acting in antiquity and that of his contemporaries: the modern actor, he writes, expresses passions with the face, and must try to reproduce the signs of these passions as naturally as possible. Nougaret's concern echoed those of contemporary actors such as Mlle Clairon, the famous interpreter of Voltaire's tragedies, who was opposed to the use of powdering known as "grimage," a make-up that disfigured the actors' faces. It helped to reflect the poor light of the stage, but its principal function was to distinguish between a normal individual and a theatrical one. Clairon generally opposed it because it masked the face of the actor and reduced the possible range of facial expressions.

The complex relationship between natural and symbolic expression at the theatre during the eighteenth century casts some light on a similar situation in architecture. In antiquity, the double-sided mask was sufficient for expressing the entire range of emotions required of an actor, and the few architectural orders were sufficient for expressing the entire range of architectural programs: a temple of Apollo, a temple of Venus, or any other kind of building. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Le Brun's theory of expression marked a radical change not only in painting, but in acting theory and

³¹⁷Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *De l'art du théâtre* [1769] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 1:351.

³¹⁸Ibid., 1:345–46.

architecture as well. He believed that every passion was specific and that their signs were universal. Consequently, when Le Brun worked occasionally as an architect, his practice reflected his theory of character, using codified architectural elements such as the classical orders but also conventional iconographic elements and symbolic motifs. In the twelve pavilions he designed for the Château de Marly, these elements are easily readable and express the destination of each building. (See Figure 32.) His theory of expression would influence architectural theories of the first half of the eighteenth century, such as those of J.-F. Blondel and Boffrand, for whom the notion of convention was predominant.

Later in the eighteenth century, the number of characters and passions portrayed at the theatre increased, as gestures and facial expressions grew more complex and as the innate character of each actor was recognized. At the same time, the range of architectural programs also multiplied. In *L'art du théâtre*, F. Riccoboni advocated this individualization of character, stating that every actor should play roles that correspond to his/her own character.³¹⁹ Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Ledoux brought this quest for individual affirmation into his architectural theory, and went so far as to invent a specific architectural form to express the individuality of each client. (See Figure 33.) Although Le Camus did not invent a new architectural form for each client of his *hôtels particuliers*, his public monument for the conservation of grains in Paris, the Halle au blé, inscribed in the dense urban structure a truly innovative form that clearly announced its unprecedented architectural program.

³¹⁹Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, in his *Le Comédien* (1749) proposes a similar theory. He claims that the actor must be endowed with the specific characteristics of the role he is asked to perform. Age, voice, and constitution must be suitable to the impersonated character. Carlson summarizes Sainte-Albine's position by saying that he proposes "the general application of the Horatian rule of decorum in character types to the actors' portrayal of these types." Carlson, *Places of Performance*, 160.

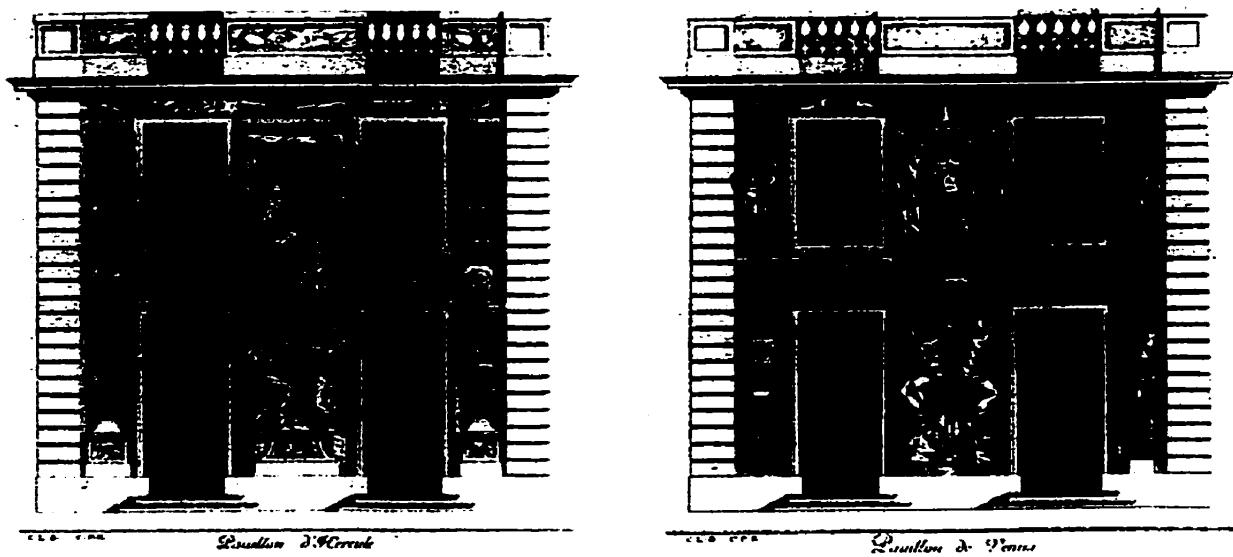


Figure 32: Pavilions of Hercules and Venus at the Château de Marly. From C. Le Brun, *Divers dessins de décoration de pavillons* (1690) [reprinted in Middleton, 1992].

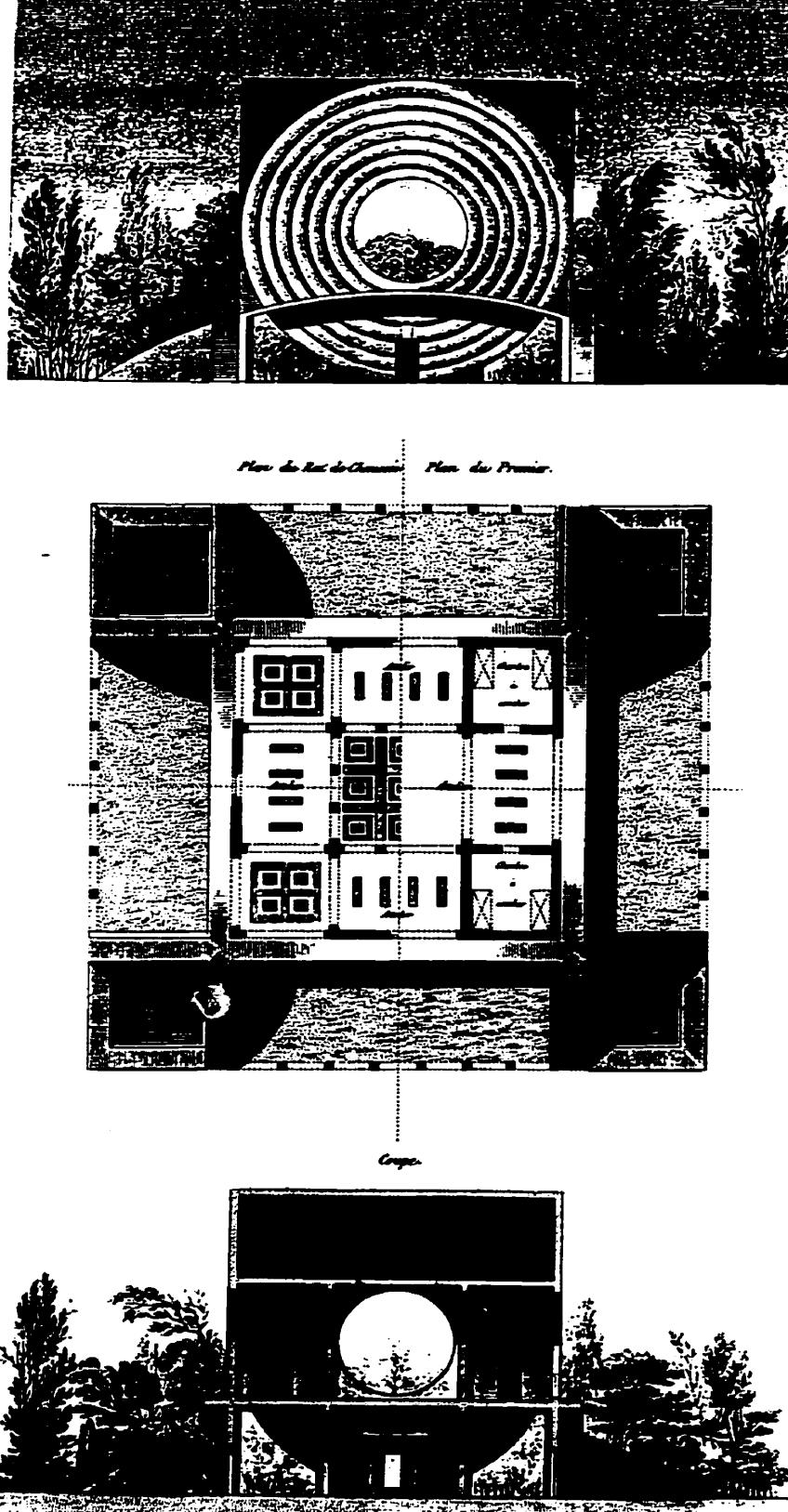


Figure 33: *Atelier des Cercles pour les ouvriers chargés de la construction des Cercles, placés au centre de quatre Routes.* From C.-N. Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* (1804) [reprint 1981]

PART 2: ARCHITECTURE AS THEATRE AND THE RELOCATED SPECTATOR

Diderot concludes his *Paradoxe* by comparing the comedian to the social actor, stating that both succeed in their enterprise not by being sensitive but by simulating signs of true emotion: "Ne dit-on pas dans le monde qu'un homme est un grand comédien? On n'entend pas par là qu'il sent, mais au contraire qu'il excelle à simuler, bien qu'il ne sente rien."³²⁰ The individual in society who pleases everyone, adjusting his/her discourse to the situation and speaking positively on every subject, has no innate character, Diderot writes. "C'est un adulateur de profession, c'est un grand courtisan, c'est un grand comédien."³²¹

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the theatricality of social life had extended gradually beyond the physical boundaries of theatre buildings and out into the city. The role of theatre became much broader than simply a form of entertainment; it changed how individuals related to one another in society. Theatre buildings came to express the grandeur of the nations that produced them, as noted by Jacques-François Blondel: "Ces édifices [theatres] doivent annoncer par leur grandeur & leur disposition extérieure, l'importance des Villes où ils se trouvent élevés."³²²

In the section from *Le génie de l'architecture* devoted to exterior decoration, Le Camus de Mézières expresses his ideas about appropriateness (*convenance*) pertaining to architecture. This notion of *convenance* was at the heart of discussions on public architecture and was a fundamental consideration in the design of public theatres. Le Camus writes that *convenance* "est déterminée, & s'acquiert moins par l'étude des règles que par la parfaite connaissance des moeurs, des usages du siècle, & du pays où l'on

³²⁰Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 381.

³²¹Ibid., 347–48.

³²²J.-F. Blondel, *Cours*, 2, chap. 7.

vit."³²³ The changing role of convention during the eighteenth century and its new theatrical role in society influenced the architectural space of the theatre. It is in the remodeling of the traditional auditorium - and the reticence of many architects to amend this tradition - that the influence of convention was most evident. The gradual penetration of the acting space into the auditorium (especially with the extension of the apron and the introduction of *perspectiva per angolo*) contributed to a reversal of the roles of actor and spectator in the theatre. In projects such as Ledoux's theatre in Besançon, which framed both the actors on stage and the spectators in the auditorium, the proscenium became a reversible framing device.

³²³Ibid., 56; "The part of Architecture that we call by the name of fitness is defined and may be learned not so much by the study of rules as by a perfect understanding of the manners and customs of the age and country in which one lives." *The Genius*, 93.

CHAPTER 5: THEATRE AS THE LOCUS OF PUBLIC AND SOCIAL EXPRESSION

To observe and to be observed: two interchangeable roles

With its well-established spatial hierarchy, the architecture of the theatre clearly conveyed the public order at the end of the seventeenth century. After the death of Louis XIV, the architectural design of the theatre remained essentially unchanged but social transformations led the institution of theatre to be used as a model for role playing in the public realm. Acting was no longer restricted to the performing stage in theatres; it became a way to conduct oneself in society. In his novel *Lettres persanes* (1721), Charles de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) exploited a recent fascination with exoticism to comment on this change. One of his characters, Rica, a Persian visitor to Paris, naively describes the behaviour of spectators in theatre boxes and confuses them for mute actors. Through the eyes of this visitor, Montesquieu was in fact describing a social behaviour that was strongly criticized by many of his contemporaries:

Je vis hier une chose assez singulière, quoiqu'elle se passe tous les jours à Paris.

Tout le peuple s'assemble sur la fin de l'après-dînée et va jouer une espèce de scène que j'ai entendu appeler *comédie*. Le grand mouvement est sur une estrade, qu'on nomme le *théâtre*. Aux deux côtés, on voit, dans de petits réduits qu'on nomme *loges*, des hommes et des femmes qui jouent ensemble des scènes muettes, à peu près comme celles qui sont en usage en notre Perse.

Ici, c'est une amante affligée qui exprime sa langueur; une autre, plus animée, dévore des yeux son amant, qui la regarde de même: toutes les passions sont peintes sur les visages et exprimées avec une éloquence qui, pour être muette, n'en est que plus vive. Là, les actrices ne paraissent qu'à demi-corps et ont ordinairement un manchon, par modestie, pour cacher leurs bras. Il y a en bas une troupe de gens debout, qui se moquent de ceux qui sont en haut sur le théâtre, et ces derniers rient à leur tour de ceux qui sont en bas.

Mais ceux qui prennent le plus de peine sont quelques gens qu'on prend pour cet effet dans un âge peu avancé, pour soutenir la fatigue. Ils sont obligés

d'être partout: ils passent par des endroits qu'eux seuls connaissent.³²⁴

As in other eighteenth-century novels that used the theatre as a setting for considering convention and appearance in society, Montesquieu emphasized the reversibility of the roles of actor and spectator, and the complementarity of seeing and being seen. Spectators not only performed for their peers; they often interacted loudly with the action on stage.³²⁵ As social actors, they felt compelled to proclaim their appreciation of the plot, to improvise new rhymes, and to interrupt the play when they judged it to be unworthy of their attention. Part of the audience even specialized in this "quality control" of new plays, and became known in France as *la claque*. One such group of improvised critics in Paris was led by Chevalier Jacques-Rochette de La Morlière, a Casanova of sorts and king of mischief. Very influential in theatre circles, La Morlière's *claque* was feared by everyone related to the stage. His influence could make a play a resounding success or destroy it completely in a few minutes. Desperate authors, insecure over the fate of their play, would try to bribe him for some applause. Opposing factions would pay him to cause a commotion that would lead to the demise of the play and its author. He once ruined a play simply by yawning continuously. "The contagion of his yawns spread through the whole audience and finally attacked the actors themselves!"³²⁶ Ironically, La Morlière's career as a critic was terminated after he himself wrote a play that was received so badly that he lost all credibility.

The public inclination to interact with a play, and often to interrupt it, was due

³²⁴Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), 61–62.

³²⁵For some interesting examples of such interactions between spectators and actors at the theatre, see Henri Lagrave, *Le théâtre et le public à Paris de 1715 à 1750* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksiek, 1972), particularly part 4, "Le public au théâtre."

³²⁶Augustus John's introduction to the English translation of Chevalier Jacques-Rochette de La Morlière, *Angola: An Eastern Tale* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1926), xii.

partly to the design of the auditorium. Most boxes in a horseshoe theatre did not face the stage, so spectators' attention tended to drift toward their peers. Also, until the last decades of the eighteenth century, the *parterre* usually provided no seats, and the spectators who were forced to stand throughout a performance were more likely to display their lack of interest in a play by reacting to it. Moreover, the numerous spectators (mainly the young and the members of the upper rank) who sat on the stage of the Comédie française in Paris until 1759 often moved around freely and invaded the performing area. The presence of both actors and spectators on stage and the almost uniform lighting throughout the theatre made it difficult to distinguish the acting in the play from other kinds of acting.

The tendency for theatrical acting to serve as a model for social expression is described most eloquently in *Angola* (1746), a satirical novel by Chevalier de La Morlière himself, and one of the most popular *boudoir* books in France during the second half of the eighteenth century. Prince Angola was sent to a fairy queen from a faraway land to complete his education in a manner that would avoid him having his heart broken by love. This plot serves as a pretext for a titillating description of the manners and customs of Paris at the time. To show Prince Angola appropriate behaviour in high society, Almaïr, a courtesan and close friend of the Prince, takes him to the Opera, where he is presented with a new social code. At first dazzled by the novelty and magical illusion of the scene, the Prince gradually becomes more relaxed, and even starts listening to the Opera with what La Morlière describes as "some vulgarity: that is to say, he gave it his whole attention." Meanwhile, Almaïr, who was more experienced than the Prince, simpered, quizzed all of the women, and did not sit still for a moment in his seat, on which he sprawled rather than sat. The Prince was most annoyed by Almaïr quietly humming what the actors were singing on stage. Weary of this perpetual movement, the Prince asks Almaïr:

-- Je croyais qu'on venait au spectacle pour l'entendre, mais apparemment que ce n'est pas la mode, car vous êtes d'une distraction qui ne vous permet pas sûrement

d'en remarquer les beautés ni les défauts.

-- Fi donc, vous moquez-vous? reprit Almaïr, on a sa réputation à garder, et rien n'est si maussade que d'écouter une pièce comme un *marchand du coin* ou comme un provincial qui débarque; nous autres gens d'une certaine façon, nous sommes censés tout savoir; on vient ici pour voir les femmes, pour en être vus, on entend tout au plus deux ou trois morceaux consacrés par la mode, et à la fin, on loue à l'excès ou l'on blâme hardiment toute la pièce.³²⁷

Their arrival and departure from the theatre were also crucial moments of the theatrical experience. Later in the book, the Prince makes a second visit to the theatre. After spending many days partying in the country, a group of courtesans, including Angola, decide to return to town to see a play at the Comédie française. Although they had seen it many times, the play was fashionable and they could not miss this performance because all of Paris would certainly attend it. This time, the most important events in the "ritual" of theatre-going happen outside the theatre, during the transition between the street and the auditorium:

Arrivées à la porte de la Comédie, elles [the women of the group] furent fort regardées par la jeunesse brillante qui occupait le balcon et l'escalier; on joua l'incognito, on se cacha le visage avec l'éventail, et on fut fort aise d'être vu; enfin, au travers des regards curieux des uns, et des propos galants des autres, elles parvinrent à la loge.³²⁸

The author emphasizes the presence of the "charming women, clad in their most sumptuous garments" who "simply came to parade their charms in the half-light of the theatre," and the fashionable disinterest of the men who crowded the stage, then left during the most interesting passage of the play, disturbing the actors and displaying their calculated boredom to everyone:

³²⁷Chevalier Jacques-Rochette de La Morlière, *Angola* (Paris, 1746), 69–70.

³²⁸Ibid., 118.

Les gens du bel air ... s'embarassaient fort peu de la pièce, et il leur arrivait bien souvent de demander au 5e acte ce qu'on avait joué; couchés immodestement plutôt qu'appuyés sur le théâtre, ils étalaient leurs charmes séducteurs, braquaient continuellement leur lorgnettes, caraissaient leurs jabots, badinaient avec un bouquet, sifflaient un air nouveau, faisaient des signes d'intelligence aux actrices, qui souvent ne les connaissaient pas, et enfin, après avoir épuisé tous les lieux communs d'une coquetterie qui aurait paru décente dans les femmes les plus décidées, ils attendaient le moment et l'endroit le plus intéressant pour traverser le théâtre, en regardant leur montre, dérangeaient les acteurs, sortaient d'un air étourdi et affairé, se précipitaient dans leurs équipages, et allaient se montrer dans tous les autres spectacles, et y commettre les mêmes indécences et les mêmes étourderies.³²⁹

This apparent nonchalance and spontaneous audience response demonstrated that actors and spectators inhabited the same world in the middle of the eighteenth century, and that this world was in no way distinct from real life. The city itself was regarded as an extension of the theatre, and eighteenth-century authors consciously acknowledged this direct relationship. In 1749, Fielding spoke of London as "a society in which stage and street were 'literally' intermixed,"³³⁰ and a few years later, Rousseau characterized urban man as an actor.³³¹ It is precisely because the rules and conventions that regulated social behaviour were set so clearly and had become so ingrained in their way of life that spectators at the theatre and urban actors could behave with this uncanny spontaneity.³³²

329 *Ibid.*, 21.

330 Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 64.

331 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à Monsieur D'Alembert* (Paris, 1758).

332 Sennett explains these actions by saying they were perceived as signs rather than symbols. "People did not at every moment have to engage in a process of decoding to know what was being said to them behind the gesture. This was the logic of the point: spontaneity was a product of artificiality." Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 80. In the mid-eighteenth century, the acknowledged pleasure of observing and being observed by strangers had many urban repercussions in cities such as London and Paris. The new institution of the public park, for example, was created as a response to this new mode of interaction in public. Because of

This form of play-acting in society had many architectural repercussions. In *Le génie de l'architecture*, for example, Le Camus de Mézières insisted that the *hôtel particulier* provide transition spaces to allow the master of the place to control his/her own "representation." The lobbies (*dégagements*), he writes, must be provided with hidden doors (*faux-fîyans*) to suggest that one has gone out when one is still inside. This device enables the master to show his presence or to hide when necessary, as in a performance. Le Camus emphasizes that *dégagements* expressing the role-playing of the master serve mainly to ensure the tranquillity of those "qui ont quelque representation à observer."³³³

In many instances, Le Camus characterizes not only the master but also the guests as social actors or active spectators. In a section devoted to the dining room, for example, he suggests surrounding the room with a small amphitheatre of two or three steps (*gradins*) on which freshly cut flowers could be placed to further enhance the cheerful character of the place. Middleton sees this as an attempt to address the sense of smell, as well as an overt reference to the picturesque garden.³³⁴ Le Camus obviously sees it as a way to further impress on the guests the character of gaiety and sweetness, appropriate to the dining activity. Surrounding the dining room with this amphitheatre of flowers also encourages the guests to become social actors.³³⁵

the dress code and the general respect of conventions dictated by the "sumptuary laws" - a violation of which could be punished by a jail sentence - people strolling through the park knew at first glance the social status of any stranger, and consequently could assume the appropriate social behaviour. While this permitted extemporaneous conversations (although such contacts were always brief), it also gave everyone the license to pass anyone without engaging in conversation. It is here that the idea of silence in public first germinated. In Sennett's view, the well-defined set of conventions is precisely what permitted spontaneous interaction of strangers in the public realm. *Ibid.*, 64–86.

³³³ *Le génie*, 163. This expression is translated as "those persons who have some state to maintain." *The Genius*, 132.

³³⁴ *The Genius*, 56.

³³⁵ Le Camus in fact continues his reflection on flowers by referring to the greenhouse of an actress whom

The rules of civility and conventions at the theatre

In eighteenth-century novels, social life was often compared to a comedy. Vivant Denon's *Point de lendemain*, first published in 1777, is a remarkable example. The story begins at the opera, where the narrator - who is identified with Denon himself at an early age - finds Mme de T. waiting for him in her box. She invites him to her country house, where he meets her husband and later, her official lover. The narrator is nonetheless seduced by his beautiful hostess, as she lures him to her picturesque garden with its love pavilion. As they return to the house, Denon discovers her secret cabinet which constitutes the utmost device for architectural seduction. As the story unfolds, Denon realizes that he was no more than an actor in a performance staged by Mme de T. herself: "Je ne savais pas que tout ceci était une comédie."³³⁶ *Point de lendemain* in fact describes how the narrator was fooled by the illusions of an elaborate stage set and the carefully controlled demeanour of a social actress.

The set of codified behaviours that seemed to dominate the public domain was not entirely new in the eighteenth century; its sources can be traced back to the rules dictated by the art of civility and *bienséance* in the previous century. From the early seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, numerous manuals on civil conduct were published in France. Their basic premise was that a person's inner qualities were not sufficient for him/her to become a "gentleman" or a "lady"; each individual must learn the rules of civil conduct to understand his/her place in society, to project an appropriate appearance, and to provide pleasing company. Moreover, the art of pleasing was not an optional pastime, it was a real duty.³³⁷

Middleton identifies as La Guimard. *Ibid.*, 194, n. 49.

³³⁶V. Denon, *Point de lendemain*, 99.

³³⁷In the art of conversation, for example, it was not enough to understand everything the other was saying; one had to appear to be listening. See Chi, "Quest," chap. 13.

These rules of *bienséance* may seem arbitrary and manipulable because they regulated only appearances and allowed intention and action to be disconnected. However, the status of conventions in eighteenth-century French culture eludes simplistic definitions. Their arbitrary nature never led to dispensable rules. Instead, they became a basic ground for both ethical and aesthetic judgment in arts, as well as in social behaviours. Even in the gallant society of the eighteenth century, where social conventions were most refined, and where every minute gesture - the intonation of the voice, a timidity in the eyes - could be forged and manipulated to convey a calculated impression, the transgression of this shared common language could be read as perjury and lead to immediate social condemnation.

The novel by Choderlos de Laclos, *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782), clearly illustrates this complexity. The story is about ultimate power involving two masters of emotional illusionism: the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont. Playing with the signs that served to indicate consent between lovers, the Marquise and the Vicomte entered into a cruel contest to determine who could most successfully manipulate appearances of love to deceive a fated prey. In a letter written to the Vicomte, the Marquise de Merteuil is proud of her perfect control over emotions and her ability to master the signs and gestures that normally indicate a woman's love:

quand on alla souper, [il] m'offrit la main. J'eus la malice, en l'acceptant, de mettre dans la mienne un léger frémissement, et d'avoir, pendant ma marche, les yeux baissés et la respiration haute. J'avais l'air de présenter ma défaite, et de redouter mon vainqueur. Il le remarqua à merveille; aussi le traître changea-t-il sur le champ de ton et de maintien. Il était galant, il devint tendre.³³⁸

As the Marquise was about to savour her victory, however, the Vicomte launched a counterattack. He disclosed to the world the true intentions of the Marquise and the means she used to attain her goal. By publishing the letters she had addressed to him, in which

³³⁸Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les liaisons dangereuses* (Paris, 1782), Lettre 85.

she revealed her most perverse intentions, the Vicomte exposed the Marquise as the greatest manipulator of appearances and established conventions. Social condemnation was immediate:

Mme de Merteuil, en arrivant de la campagne, avant-hier jeudi, s'est fait descendre à la Comédie Italienne, où elle avait sa loge; elle y était seule, et, ce qui dut lui paraître extraordinaire, aucun homme ne s'y présenta pendant tout le spectacle. À la sortie, elle entra, suivant son usage, au petit salon, qui était déjà rempli de monde; sur-le-champ il s'éleva une rumeur, mais dont apparemment elle ne se crut pas l'objet. Elle aperçut une place vide sur une des banquettes, et elle alla s'y asseoir; mais aussitôt toutes les femmes qui y étaient déjà se levèrent comme de concert, et l'y laissèrent absolument seule. Ce mouvement marqué d'indignation générale fut applaudi de tous les hommes, et fit redoubler les murmures, qui, dit-on, allèrent jusqu'aux huées ... On assure que Madame de Merteuil a conservé l'air de ne rien voir et de ne rien entendre, et qu'elle n'a pas changé de figure! mais je crois ce fait exagéré. Quoi qu'il en soit, cette situation, vraiment ignomineuse pour elle, a duré jusqu'au moment où on a annoncé sa voiture; à son départ, les huées scandaleuses ont encore redoublé.³³⁹

The story clearly indicates the malleability of gestures as arbitrary signs of an expressive language. Yet, it also shows that social conventions had acquired the positive status of ethical behaviour. By transgressing the rules and manipulating the signs and gestures accepted by general consensus as the expression of love, the Marquise had committed the ultimate social crime (even worse than adultery, the transgression of a legal rule). Consequently, her punishment took place in the public realm: she was expelled from the public institution *par excellence*, the theatre. This social condemnation was worse than death itself:

La même personne qui m'a fait ce détail m'a dit que Mme de Merteuil avait pris la nuit suivante une très forte fièvre, qu'on avait cru d'abord être l'effet de la situation violente où elle s'était trouvée; mais qu'on sait, depuis hier au soir, que la petite

³³⁹Ibid., Lettre 173, from Madame de Volanges to Madame de Rosemonde.

vérole s'est déclarée, confluente et d'un très mauvais caractère. En vérité, ce serait je crois, un bonheur pour elle d'en mourir.³⁴⁰

Clearly, the complex nature of conventions is illustrated by this strange duality between arbitrary conventions and the ethical values that determined the fate of the Marquise. This complexity governed not only social behaviour, but the entire domain of artistic production. This should be kept in mind whenever we confront the notion of convention in the arts, especially in the possibilities of architectural meaning throughout the eighteenth century.

New taste for private performances

The passion for theatre that radically transformed eighteenth-century social life had many architectural repercussions. As theatre became a way of life, the passion to perform crept into every branch of society. This is confirmed by Bachaumont's description of Paris society in 1770:

La fureur incroyable de jouer la comédie gagne jurement, et malgré le ridicule dont l'immortel auteur de la *Métromanie* a couvert tous les histrions bourgeois, il n'est pas de procureur qui, dans sa bastide, ne veuille avoir des tréteaux et une troupe.³⁴¹

Soon everyone longed to be an actor, even if performing only for a few guests, and in a few decades the popularity of private theatres grew rapidly in France.³⁴² (See Figure 34.) From the death of Louis XIV to the end of the eighteenth century, however, few new public theatres were built in Paris. A royal decree at the end of the seventeenth century

³⁴⁰Ibid.

³⁴¹Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, entry dated 17 mars 1770.

³⁴²In her last chapter, Rougemont emphasizes that "Pendant tout un siècle, le théâtre de société est plus qu'une mode rivalisant avec d'autres: il constitue un des fondements les plus stables de la vie mondaine et des échanges sociaux." Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale*, 306.

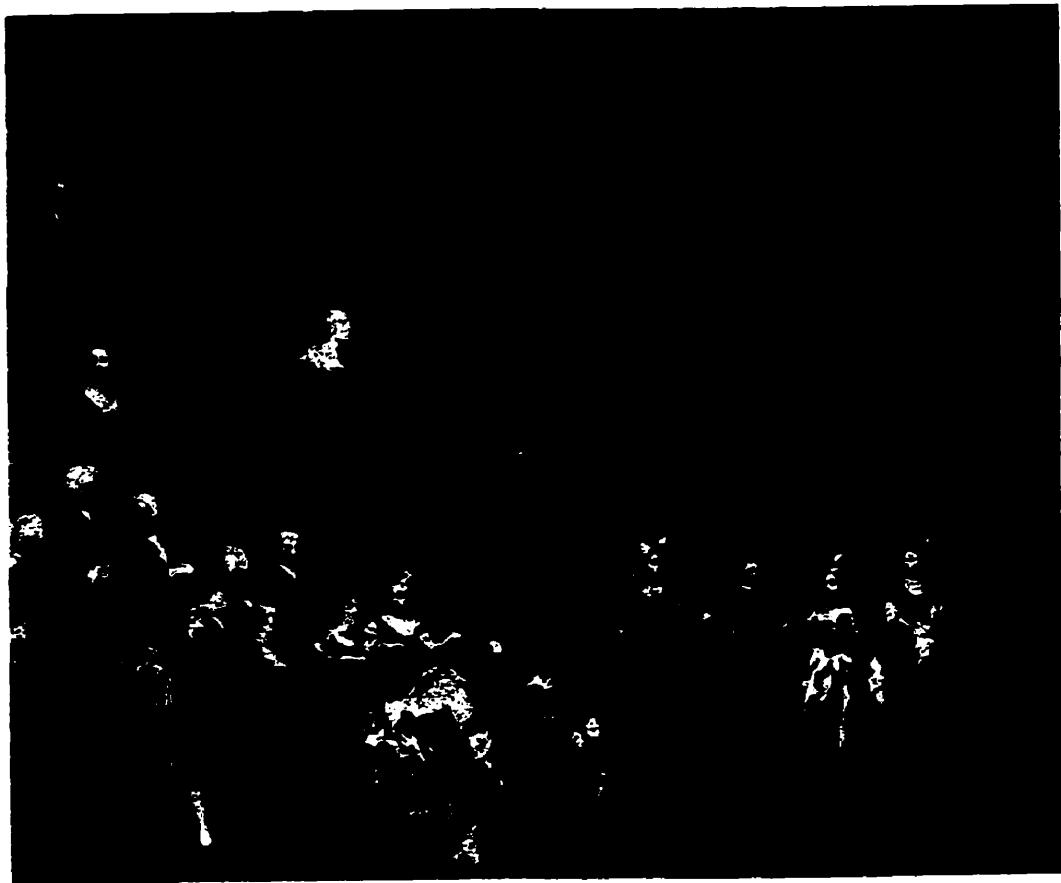


Figure 34: Painting of a theatrical performance in a private house (1731–32) by William Hogarth, Private collection. [Carlson].

limited the number of official "public" theatres to three.³⁴³ These "privileged theatres" were the Opera, the Comédie française, and the Comédie italienne.³⁴⁴ This political control did not reflect the remarkable changes in the social role of the theatre, however. By mid-century, more than sixty private and court theatres had been built in Paris alone. By the time of the French Revolution, this number had grown exponentially.³⁴⁵ Private theatres ranged from large-scale entertainment halls, privately owned but open to the public, to more intimate theatres that were sometimes secret.

The Théâtre des petits cabinets at Versailles was undoubtedly the most famous of these secret theatres. Throughout the eighteenth century, boredom was a prevalent social disease, of which Louis XV was known to suffer.³⁴⁶ To fight the King's boredom, his

³⁴³Under pressure from Madame de Maintenon (1635–1719, and secretly married to the King after 1683), who was concerned with the morality of the theatre, Louis XIV issued a decree in 1699 that limited the number of official public theatres in Paris. The attribution of such privilege, as could be expected, is very complex and can be traced back to the fifteenth century. It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with this particular development.

³⁴⁴The three theatres with Royal privilege had been granted the exclusive right to perform the classical and operatic repertoires. The Opera was granted the privilege to exploit any art form in music, including singing and dancing, and held the exclusive right to produce opera and ballet. The Comédie française and the Comédie italienne, the two other official theatres, divided the classical repertory between them. The former retained the privilege to any classical play performed in "the French manner," including tragic drama and comedy of the French repertory, while the latter could perform comedy reminiscent of the *commedia dell'arte* - an improvised theatre typical of the Italian tradition - and in the late 1760s, the comic opera. In 1769, they were entrusted with the power to review and censor the repertory of every fair theatre, a power that they were often accused of using to annihilate all dramatic value from plays performed on the boulevard and in the fairs.

³⁴⁵Concerning the emergence of private and court theatres, see Carlson, *Places of Performance*, 50–52.

³⁴⁶Many novels and even treatises were devoted to this affliction, such as André-François Boureau-Deslandes, *L'Art de ne point s'ennuyer* (1715). For an interesting analysis of the nature of boredom as it is expressed in Boureau-Deslandes's treatise, and its incidence on the understanding of conventions during the eighteenth century, see Chi, "The Quest," 223–34.

favourite, Madame de Pompadour,³⁴⁷ resorted to various modes of entertainment to entertain the King and the court, theatre being her preferred diversion.³⁴⁸ From very early on, Madame de Pompadour was recognized as a distinguished musician and a beautiful woman. She became Madame Le Normand d'Étiolles before being chosen by the King to become his favourite. At Étiolles, she had played comedy on a theatre that was comparable in magnificence to the Opera.³⁴⁹ This theatre had been built for her by the uncle of her husband. She also played at Chantemerle, in the theatre of her friend Madame de Villemur. Her past success in playing comedy prompted her to have a theatre built at Versailles to entertain the King. A gallery of the palace, close to the *cabinet des médailles*, was transformed into a place for performance known under the name "Théâtre des petits cabinets."³⁵⁰ (See Figure 35.) This theatre remained a secret, and the list of guests was very restricted. The spectators were exclusively chosen by the King, and it was the

³⁴⁷Born with no title of nobility, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson (1721–64) came from bourgeois origins. She received a princely education supervised by the *Fermier général* Le Normand de Tournehem, the uncle of her future husband. Her natural and acquired talents soon led her to the steps of the throne. Victor Du Bled describes her as a daughter of a "mère assez galante, d'un père qui a encouru condamnation à mort pour avoir malversé dans les vivres." *La Comédie de société au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1893), 49.

³⁴⁸It is indeed with the influence of Madame de Pompadour and the interested assistance of her brother, the Marquis de Marigny, that Louis XV took interest in the theatre.

³⁴⁹In a letter from the President Hénault to Madame du Deffand, he says: "Elle sait la musique parfaitement bien, elle chante avec toute la gaité et le goût possibles, sait cent chansons et joue la comédie à Étiolles, sur un théâtre aussi beau que celui de l'Opéra, où il y a des machines et des changements." Quoted by Adolphe Jullien, *Histoire du théâtre de Madame de Pompadour, dit Théâtre des petits cabinets: Les grandes nuits de Sceaux: le théâtre de la duchesse du Maine, d'après des documents inédits; L'opéra secret au XVIII^e siècle: aventures et intrigues secrètes racontées d'après les papiers inédits conservés aux Archives de l'Etat et de l'Opera* [Paris: J. Baur, 1874] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1978), 2.

³⁵⁰Ibid., 3.



Figure 35: Performance of the opera *Acis et Galatée* on the stage of the Théâtre des petits cabinets in Versailles; gouache by C.-N. Cochin (1749). [Jullien].

greatest honour to be invited.³⁵¹ There, Madame de Pompadour continued to exploit her acting talent. In the first year of the Petits cabinets, from 17 January to 18 March 1747, she performed in all the plays and sang during many spectacles. After showing the King that she was an "exquisite comedian" and a "talented singer," she achieved her goal of awakening the King's love for her and reaffirming her power.³⁵²

Before the opening of the next season in December 1747, the theatre was extended to accommodate changing rooms. The space reserved for the King and the spectators was also increased and the orchestra was placed between them and the stage. The following year, the theatre had become too small for its popularity, and a new temporary theatre was built at great expense in the grand marble staircase of the Ambassadors.³⁵³ This second theatre could be dismantled in fourteen hours and re-assembled in twenty-four. To be accepted as a member of the troupe, one had to demonstrate an aptitude for playing comedy, but politics was also involved. Regardless of whether they played in a particular performance, every member of the troupe was given access to the theatre, and therefore could be present as a spectator. Given the limited number of places and the elitist selection of spectators, many were willing to trade political favours to obtain even the smallest role.³⁵⁴ One consequence of letting all of the actors become spectators was that both the stage and the auditorium of the Théâtre des petits cabinets were filled with "actors," again showing social behaviour being influenced by theatrical convention. Also, to ensure that they would not be excluded from this most select group, actors as well as spectators were urged to express their most enthusiastic participation. The rules, however, were strict and women were all-powerful on the stage of the Petits cabinets: only they could choose the

³⁵¹Ibid., 7–11.

³⁵²Ibid., 13.

³⁵³Ibid., 35.

³⁵⁴Du Bled, *La Comédie*, 56–57.

work to be performed, the time and frequency of rehearsals, and the day of the performance. It was forbidden to refuse a role. Latecomers were charged fines but women were granted a half-hour grace period.³⁵⁵

In 1748, Madame de Pompadour began the construction of the château de Bellevue, including a small theatre to be completed at the end of the 1749–50 season. Because of the excessive expenses of the theatre at Versailles and the political controversy surrounding it, the King decided that all performances would now take place at Bellevue.³⁵⁶ The theatre at Bellevue was even smaller than the ones at Versailles. It forced the King and Madame de Pompadour to restrict further the number of guests. The Troupe des petits cabinets received less applause in Bellevue than it had received at Versailles, partly because of the size of the theatre. Faced with a reduced audience, the actors' interest also diminished. The performances became less and less regular, and finally stopped altogether when there were no more actors.³⁵⁷ The Theatre des petits cabinets, from its first performances at Versailles to the final attempts to revive it at Bellevue, had lasted for six full years.³⁵⁸

Historians have speculated on the reasons for the demise of Madame de Pompadour's theatres and her coincidental descent from the rank of favourite. Political maneuvering by the Duc de Richelieu was partially responsible for moving the troupe from Versailles to Bellevue. It has also been suggested that the theatre in the grand staircase of the Ambassadors was dismantled because a balcony that had been added in 1749 destroyed the intimate character of the theatre that had pleased the King.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵Ibid., 53.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 60–63.

³⁵⁷The last performance in Bellevue, in March 1753, was Rousseau's opera, *Le Devin de village*, and although it was said to be a great success, La Pompadour had fallen from the King's favour and the audience diminished with every performance.

³⁵⁸Jullien, *Histoire du théâtre*, 66.

³⁵⁹Thierry-G. Boucher, "Rameau et les théâtres de la cour (1745–1764)," in *Jean-Philippe Rameau*,

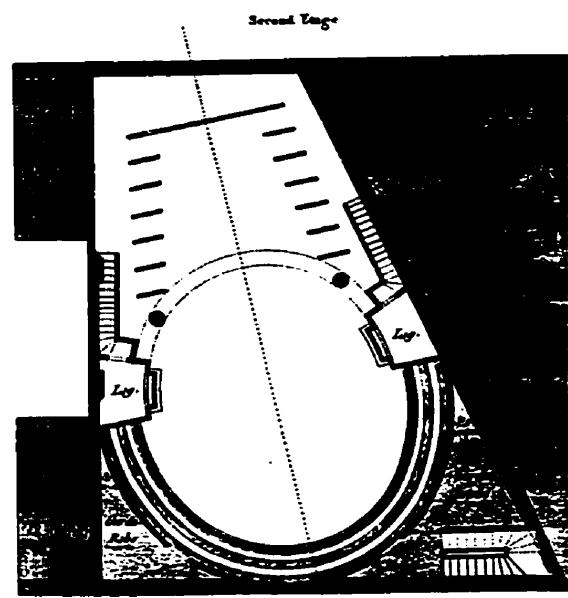
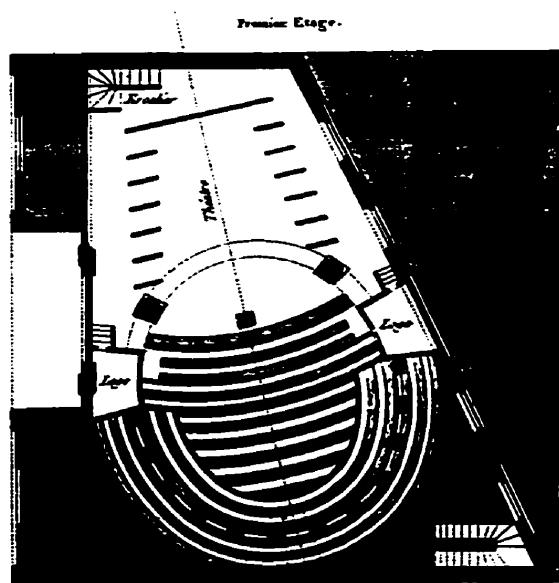
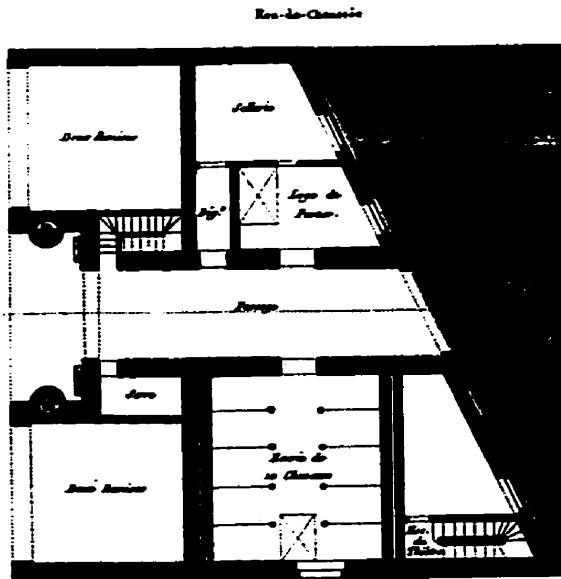
An equally famous private theatre was that of La Guimard (1743–1816), the first dancer at the Opera, renowned for her many lovers and the luxury in which they kept her.³⁶⁰ The public's fascination with the private lives of performers became widespread during the eighteenth century. Titillating personal details often became the subject of loud comments by spectators during performances. At the same time, performers also played a social role in their mundane life. This is best exemplified by La Guimard, who assembled a very prestigious crowd in her private theatre. She owned various theatres in her successive residences,³⁶¹ but the most celebrated one was built by Ledoux for her *hôtel* of the Chaussée d'Antin. (See Figure 36.) This private theatre, built in 1772, was Ledoux's first theatre design.³⁶² It provided Ledoux with many contacts, which in turn led to more

Colloque International organisé par La Société Rameau (Paris, Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1987), 574.

³⁶⁰La Guimard was also known as a generous patron of the arts. In her hotel, she had some famous paintings by Fragonard and others, and while Louis David was working there as a young apprentice, La Guimard noticed his great talent. She became his patron, giving him a pension to pursue his studies in painting. Henri D'Almérás and Paul D'Estrée, *Les théâtres libertins au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: H. Daragon, Éditeur, 1905), 295.

³⁶¹She was in constant financial crisis, and at some point, she had to get rid of her hotel on the Chaussée d'Antin to pay her creditors, and organized a lottery in which the hotel was the winning prize. Soon after, she would have a second residence on Chaussée d'Antin designed for her by the architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. In that *hôtel*, as in her country house, a theatre would occupy an important part of the planning, as it occupied a crucial part of her life. In her summer residence, the architect Piètre designed a théâtre de Pantin for her. This kind of theatre was very fashionable during the eighteenth century. The plan was based on two half-ellipses and could hold 234 spectators, excluding the boxes. It was considered an intimate theatre. *Ibid.*, 284–91.

³⁶²Anthony Vidler writes: "In many respects, the Guimard theatre anticipated Ledoux's design for the theatre of Besançon after 1776; in the context of a private house it was recognized, in Bastide's words, as 'a masterpiece of its kind,' especially for the intimate relationship it forged between spectators and performers." Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 54.



Sur Plan Archéole de Paris

Figure 36: Plans and section of the theatre for Mlle Guimard on Chaussée d'Antin in Paris, by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1772). [Ramée].

lucrative projects, including his theatre in Besançon. With its oval shape and surrounding colonnade, the auditorium was a reduced version of the Opera at Versailles built by Jacques-Ange Gabriel in 1770. The sumptuous *hôtel* of La Guimard was apparently financed by l'évêque d'Orléan. Fleury describes its theatre in these terms: "Guimard dédia à la muse de la comédie les plus délicieux boudoirs que l'imagination d'un architecte puisse fournir."³⁶³ In his *Mémoires secrets*, Bachaumont claims that philosophers, enlightened spirits, artists and individuals with a wide variety of talents comprised her audience and promoted her to become an adulated figure. The theatre could hold 500 people comfortably and it included some closed boxes (*loges grillées*) on the ground floor so that women of the court could arrive incognito and escape through a back door after enjoying the performance.³⁶⁴

This anonymity was deemed necessary in La Guimard's theatre because she was famous for presenting on her stage some very explicit plays called *saynètes érotiques*, often censored by the authorities. Unlike Madame de Pompadour's Petits cabinets, where the rules of *convenance* were sometimes partially rewritten to please the favourite's whims but were never truly transgressed, La Guimard's *Théâtre d'Amour*³⁶⁵ explored the darker side of theatrical pleasure. Private theatres, such as that of La Guimard and the *théâtres de société* established by the bourgeoisie, were intentionally ambiguous: neither "privileged" nor "popular," they could pretend to be private while actually being public.³⁶⁶

³⁶³D'Almérás and D'Estrée, *Les théâtres libertins*, 292. It is also described by Thiéry in his *Guide* (1787), 292.

³⁶⁴D'Almérás and D'Estrée, *Les théâtres libertins*, 296.

³⁶⁵This was the title of the manuscript that compiled the plays performed on the stage of her theatre.

³⁶⁶For more on this, see Giuseppe Radicchio and Michèle Sajous D'Oria, *Les théâtres de Paris pendant la Révolution* (Fasano: Elemond periodici, 1990), 12.

CHAPTER 6: LA SOCIÉTÉ DRAMATIQUE DE CHARONNE AND THE *DRAME BOURGEOIS*

Le Camus de Mézières's interest in the theatre is evident throughout his architectural work. This constant intertwining of theatre and architecture stems from an explicit interest in the expressive role of theatre as a performing art. Le Camus was a dilettante playwright, and created with his brothers the Société dramatique de Charonne (1770–81) that met in Le Camus's own private theatre, where the Parisian intellectual crowd also liked to gather.³⁶⁷ Part of the repertoire of the Société was published in *Mes délassemens ou les Fêtes de Charonne* (1781). It includes two plays set in the very surroundings where they were meant to be performed.

The first play, *Les Dragons de Charonne*, indicates that the action is set in the gardens of Le Camus de Mézières's beloved wife.³⁶⁸ The story portrays a young gardener, Colas, who is unwillingly enrolled in the King's regiment as a *Dragon* - a name given to the soldiers of the Royal Regiment. In the meantime, Colas's girlfriend, Lise, discovers that he was not orphaned at an early age, as he had thought, but is in fact the son of rich parents who had left for America when he was still young and entrusted him to the care of a farmer couple until they returned. Then war broke out and communication was lost. M. Lindor, the Captain of Dragons, turns out to be Colas's real father. They are reunited, and the story ends in an effusion of love and happiness as Colas's and Lise's good Mistress - identified with Madame Le Camus de Mézières - gives Colas a hundred

³⁶⁷Le Camus is known to have written at least four plays, including *Les Plaisirs innocents*, *Les Suisses reconnaissants*, *Les Laitières de Bagnolet*, and *Les Dragons de Charonne*. Gourdon de Genouillac, *Paris à travers les siècles*, livraison 168, 3:357. Concerning the Société dramatique de Charonne, see D'Alméras and D'Estrée, *Les théâtres libertins*, 52; and Léo Claretie, *Histoire des théâtres de Société* (Paris: Librairie Molière, 1905), 96.

³⁶⁸"La scène est à Charonne, dans les Jardins de Madame L.C.D.M." *Mes délassemens ou les Fêtes de Charonne* (1781), 3.

thousand écus and Lise's hand.

The second play, *Les laitières de Bagnolet*, is set in Bagnolet Street, a main road in Charonne, a block away from Le Camus's theatre. The social status of the main characters, however, are more identifiable with the peasants in the countryside. The story presents an encounter between two farm girls, Perrette and Suzon, who are taking their merchandise to Paris (following La Fontaine's fable, Perrette is carrying a milk jug that will break before she arrives in Paris!), and two poachers, La Forest and La Plaine. Illegal hunting epitomizes for Perrette and Suzon all that is despicable and contemptible in young villagers. However, one of the poachers (La Forest) is Perrette's lover, whom she does not recognize under his disguise. La Forest is eventually caught by a forest warden, and Perrette is devastated when she learns of La Forest's identity. She nonetheless pulls every possible string to free her fiancé, and once more, thanks to the open heart of the good Mistress of the canton (again, identified with Madame Le Camus de Mézières), virtue, love, and expression of good will overcome obstacles caused by initial carelessness. Both plays contrast the simple happiness of country life and the chaos of city life, a theme obviously influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau that will reappear most strongly in Le Camus's fascination with the picturesque gardens.³⁶⁹

Diderot's drame bourgeois

Le Camus's plays, especially the first one, demonstrate a clear affiliation with a new theatre genre, the *drame bourgeois* or *comédie sérieuse*, created two decades earlier by Diderot.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹In the first scene of *Les Dragons*, Colas is dressed as a gardener and sings about his happiness, far from the chaos of the city: "Loin du tracas de la ville, / Je suis heureux dans cet asyle; / Sans aucun chagrin, / Je plante mon jardin. / Ce n'est point l'or qui fait le vrai bonheur; / Je cesse d'y prétendre; / Et je ne veux entendre / Qu'à la paix de mon coeur..." *Mes délassemens*, 7-8.

³⁷⁰Diderot himself recommends that "C'est dans le genre sérieux que doit s'exercer d'abord tout homme de lettres qui se sent du talent pour la scène." *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 137.

Indeed, as we shall see, the settings of Le Camus's plays, the social status of the characters, the moral questions raised by their condition, and the hidden family origin of the main actor Colas in *Les Dragons* are not unlike the condition of Dorval in Diderot's *Le fils naturel*, a founding work of the new theatre genre in the eighteenth century.³⁷¹

Le fils naturel and the subsequent *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* (1757) are Diderot's first significant dramatic writings. He intended *Le fils naturel* to be more than a rendition of a fictional story. His intention was to portray in the most realistic manner the souls of theatrical yet authentic individuals at crucial moments in their lives:

Lysimond [the father]: "Dorval, pensez-tu qu'un ouvrage qui leur transmetterait nos propres idées, nos vrais sentiments, les discours que nous avons tenus dans une des circonstances les plus importantes de notre vie, ne valût pas mieux que des portraits de famille, qui ne montrent de nous qu'un moment de notre visage?"

Dorval: "C'est-à-dire que vous m'ordonnez de peindre votre fine, la mienne, celle de Constance, de Clairville et de Rosalie."³⁷²

As if to ground the play in a real, contemporary setting, Diderot introduces the play by describing his first encounter with Dorval, the main character, in the countryside where Diderot had gone to rest just after the publication of the sixth volume of the *Encyclopédie*. We are told that the story that he is about to tell was known throughout the canton, and everyone admired its main protagonist for his great virtue. Dorval, a man of great honesty but illegitimate birth, is the closest friend of Clairville. After residing at Clairville's house for some days, Dorval decides abruptly that he must leave. Although Diderot does not immediately reveal the reason for this decision, the dramatic tension suggests a hidden passion that prevents Dorval from thinking clearly.³⁷³ As the story unfolds, we learn of

³⁷¹Although Le Camus's plays are classified as *théâtre de société*, related to the tradition of *vaudeville*, their moral overtone makes a definitive classification difficult.

³⁷²*Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. J. Assézat (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 7:20-21.

³⁷³For an analysis of the dramatic structure of the play, see Aimé Guedj, "Les drames de Diderot," *Diderot*

Dorval's secret love for Rosalie, Clairville's fiancée. The feeling is reciprocal, so Rosalie's relationship with Clairville is compromised. Because of his loyalty to Clairville, Dorval attempts to escape this untenable situation but Constance, Clairville's sister, tries to prevent him from leaving. Constance declares her love for Dorval, but this feeling apparently is not reciprocal. The story then takes a twist when Constance finds an unfinished love letter by Dorval that she mistakenly believes to be for her. The letter, in which Dorval declares his passionate love and explains why he must disappear from her life, instead was written for Rosalie. Constance gives the letter to her brother, who interprets Dorval's desire to leave as a sign of scrupulousness, to avoid Constance getting involved with a man of his obscure origin. Clairville insists on giving his sister's hand to Dorval, who cannot refuse unless he rectifies the situation and confesses his love for Rosalie. Since he cannot betray Clairville's friendship, Dorval resigns himself to marrying Constance, despite Rosalie's desperation. As Dorval finally sacrifices "his passion, his fortune, and his freedom"³⁷⁴ for the sake of friendship, Rosalie's father, Lysimond, returns from a painful voyage during which he was detained as a prisoner in England. When Lysimond recognizes Dorval as his illegitimate son, Dorval and Rosalie thus discover that they are brother and sister, and their reciprocal attraction is explained as fraternal instinct. The intrigue is resolved: virtue has won over human passion.

Le fils naturel was followed by three *Entretiens* that take the form of a dialogue between Dorval, the main character of *Le fils naturel*, and Diderot (as "Moi"), in which they discuss various issues, from the relationship between art and nature to the three dramatic unities.³⁷⁵ In the *Entretiens*, Diderot defines how the new theatrical genre differs

Studies 14 (1971): 15–95.

³⁷⁴ *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, 19.

³⁷⁵ Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 77–175. In his introduction to the *Entretiens*, Vernière understands that the dialogue between Dorval and "Moi" could easily be read as an encounter between the two Diderots: the

from both tragedy and comedy, while acknowledging its debt to these two classical genres.³⁷⁶ The complex genealogy of the *drame bourgeois* and its similarities to other genres has led to various interpretations since its inception in the mid-eighteenth century. Louis Sébastien Mercier in *Du théâtre ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773) describes the *drame* as a cross between tragedy and comedy: "ayant le pathétique de l'une, & les peintures naïves de l'autre."³⁷⁷ Using Aristotle's *Poetics* as the basis of his analysis, he writes that the word *drame* comes from Greek Δρῦμα, which literally means "action": "C'est le titre le plus honorable que l'on puisse donner à une pièce de théâtre, car sans action point d'intérêt ni de vie."³⁷⁸ Mercier also describes the *drame bourgeois* as the genre *larmoyant*. Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, while acknowledging Diderot's contribution to this genre, calls it *comédie-bourgeoise* or *comique-larmoyant* in *De l'art du théâtre*, and distinguishes it from other kinds of comedy because its subject is taken from what is called *les honnêtes gens*: "Elle ne met en jeu que des Bourgeois, mais des Bourgeois un peu distingués, tels que de riches Négocians."³⁷⁹ Its objective is less to provoke laughter than to make one cry.³⁸⁰

enthusiast and the rational. He suggests, however, that in the *Entretiens*, Dorval is not so much Diderot's internal voice than the ghost of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (73–74).

³⁷⁶In her recent study on theatre life in France during the eighteenth century, Martine de Rougemont defines the genealogy of the *drame bourgeois*: "le drame est fils de la comédie larmoyante qui est fille du haut comique. Diderot signe son acte de naissance" in 1757 with *Le fils naturel*, "mais c'est Sedaine qui le met au monde quelques années plus tard. Le drame se divise en drame bourgeois et drame sombre." Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale*, 29.

³⁷⁷Sébastien Mercier, *Du théâtre ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* [1773] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 94.

³⁷⁸Ibid., 95. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3.3.

³⁷⁹Nougaret, *De l'art du théâtre*, 2:6–8.

³⁸⁰Nougaret is in fact very critical of the *drame bourgeois*, which forces the spectator to change from sadness to laughter in an instant.

Diderot himself acknowledges the lineage from the classical genres to the *drame bourgeois*. In his view, the *drame bourgeois*, or *genre sérieux* as he calls it, is the middle ground between comedy and tragedy, bridging two extremes.³⁸¹ However, he emphasizes their dissimilarities.³⁸² One of the fundamental distinctions between classical tragedy and the *drame bourgeois* lies in the nature of their characters. While tragedy depicts archetypal *personae* such as kings, warriors, and even mythological figures and demigods to incite the highest emotions in spectators, the *drame bourgeois* is intended to abolish the distance between spectators and represented characters so that the audience identifies with the action on stage.³⁸³ In the *drame bourgeois*, he writes, characters are often as general as in comedies, but they are always less individual than in tragedies.³⁸⁴ Diderot explains the difference between comic and tragic characters in these terms:

Le genre comique est des espèces, et le genre tragique est des individus. Je m'explique. Le héros d'une tragédie est tel ou tel homme: c'est ou Régulus, ou Brutus, ou Caton; et ce n'est point un autre. Le principal personnage d'une comédie doit au contraire représenter un grand nombre d'hommes. Si, par hasard, on lui donnait une physionomie si particulière, qu'il n'y eût dans la société qu'un seul individu qui lui ressemblât, la comédie retournerait à son enfance, et

³⁸¹Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 135–37.

³⁸²In *The Object of Art*, Hobson distinguishes between tragedy and *drame* in terms of illusion: "Pleasure in French tragedy is an oscillation, indeed an enjoyment of the discrepancy, between the appearance and what lies behind ... this is the structure of *dissimulatio*. The *drame* is defined in opposition to this structure, as the contrary of tragedy" (175). In an interesting study of the *drame bourgeois*, Scott S. Bryson argues that the *drame bourgeois* challenged the extremes of traditional comedy and tragedy "both on the level of the object represented (the ethereal hero/the grotesque villain) and the emotions they provoked (terror/laughter)." Scott S. Bryson, *The Chastised Stage. Bourgeois Drama and the Exercise of Power* (Saratoga, CA: ANMA Libri, 1991), 61.

³⁸³The role of the poet is to find the words with which everyone would identify. See Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 99.

³⁸⁴Ibid., 141.

dégénérerait en satire.³⁸⁵

Since antiquity, the distinction between comedy and tragedy was also indicated by the poet's attitude toward the spectators. According to Aristotle, in a comedy,

the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience. The pleasure ... thence derived is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are deadliest enemies - like Orestes and Aegisthus - quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one slays or is slain.³⁸⁶

The distinction between tragedy and the *drame bourgeois* was echoed by Mercier, who writes that tragedy belonged to the Greeks, while the eighteenth-century spectators in France needed a different kind of theatre that can "portray our fellow men, move us, and interest us in their condition."³⁸⁷ This questioning of the appropriateness of Greek tragedy in eighteenth-century France resonates with a similar challenge to the rules of the classical orders in architecture. Mercier states that theatre conveys the mores, the character, and the genius of a nation and of a century. Because theatre also presents details of the private life, the legislation, and the virtues of its time, classical theatre needed to be reconsidered.³⁸⁸

Theories of acting and especially the relationship between actors and audience were also diametrically opposed in classical tragedy and the *drame bourgeois*. In a tragedy staged during the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, the body of an actor was largely immobilized due to the weight of the costume and wig, problems of lighting, and the need to face the audience continually, since facial gesture was the most important element of dramatic communication. In a tragedy, actors also played "for the audience" and rarely

³⁸⁵Ibid., 140.

³⁸⁶Aristotle, *Poetics*, 47–49.

³⁸⁷Mercier, *Du théâtre*, 102.

³⁸⁸Ibid., 103. Diderot's position converges with that of Mercier when he argues that the *drame bourgeois* is more useful than comedy or tragedy because its actions are more akin to real life. Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 136.

looked at each other. In the *drame bourgeois*, the audience is ignored and assumed to be non-existent. The actors in this new genre were no longer symbols; they started expressing themselves as individuals:

Dans une représentation dramatique, il ne s'agit non plus du spectateur que s'il n'existe pas. Y a-t-il quelque chose qui s'adresse à lui? L'auteur est sorti de son sujet, l'acteur entraîné hors de son rôle. Ils descendent tous les deux du théâtre. Je les vois dans le parterre; et tant que dure la tirade, l'action est suspendue pour moi, et la scène reste vide.³⁸⁹

The *drame bourgeois* favours ordinary characters who express their natural feelings. By privileging the commonplace and by collapsing the traditional distance between actors and spectators, theatre could become a vehicle for moral reform by showing the consequences of one's action in an everyday context. This claim for the moral impact of theatre and art in general pervades Diderot's work: "Rendre la vertu aimable, le vice odieux, le ridicule saillant, voilà le projet de tout honnête homme qui prend la plume le pinceau, ou le ciseau."³⁹⁰ In Diderot's later writing on theatre, the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, he describes the theatre as a cleansing, cathartic device. He explains that the citizen who enters the theatre leaves his/her vices at the door and takes them up again on the way out.³⁹¹ The proscenium arch, however, is the most significant threshold that precedes

³⁸⁹Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 102.

³⁹⁰Diderot, *Essais*, 718; quoted by Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 80. In the second chapter of his book, Scott S. Bryson defines what distinguishes bourgeois drama from the great tragedies and comedies of the French seventeenth-century court theatre: "To attend high theatre, then, was in some ways to bathe in this royal light, to be reaffirmed, *confirmed* as a member of the City. In this sense, theatre is synonymous with ritual. On the contrary, for Diderot and the bourgeois aesthetic he envisions and seeks to impose, theatre would constitute an absolute break with existing social reality and the injustices that permeate it; theatre would literally be a refuge for all those seeking honest, authentic, *moral* relations among men." Bryson, *The Chastised Stage*, 37.

³⁹¹"Le citoyen qui se présente à l'entrée de la Comédie y laisse tous ses vices pour le les reprendre qu'en

true access to the theatre.

With this notion of theatre as a tool for moral reform and with his attempt to redefine the notion of participation in theatrical performances, Diderot anticipated Jean-Jacques Rousseau's own reflections on the theatre in his *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, written one year after the publication of Diderot's *Entretiens*.³⁹² Rousseau's *Lettre* was written as a response to d'Alembert's article on Geneva in the *Encyclopédie*, in which he attacks Rousseau's native city as being unreasonably conservative.³⁹³ A former ally of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists, Rousseau appears deeply offended by the article, and his response depicts Geneva as an ideal society. In his *Lettre*, Rousseau condemns the theatrical nature of cosmopolitan cities and openly criticizes Voltaire and the Encyclopedists' enthusiasm for the theatre, which in his view was "the poison of Parisian mores."³⁹⁴ In fact, since 1755, Voltaire had been established in Geneva, *aux Délices*, and was trying to convince the city to build a theatre where his plays could be performed. This prompted great opposition from Rousseau, who saw seeds of depravity in the theatre that

sortant." Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 354.

³⁹²The parallel between Diderot's *Entretiens* and Rousseau's own considerations on the theatre is particularly relevant if we adhere to Paul Vernière's hypothesis that the character of Dorval in the *Entretiens* was probably based on Diderot's friend at the time: Rousseau himself. Vernière bases his claim on the fact that the *Entretiens* were written during the summer of 1756, just after the publication of the sixth volume of the *Encyclopédie*, while Diderot stayed at Massy. A few weeks earlier, Diderot had visited Rousseau in his hermitage. Vernière establishes many parallels between Dorval's position in the *Entretiens* and Rousseau's writings at that time. See Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 72–74.

³⁹³Rousseau was a citizen of Geneva, a city of Calvinist tradition. After the controversy surrounding the publication of the article on Geneva, the *Encyclopédie* was denied permission to publish any additional volume for a period of over six years.

³⁹⁴Rousseau's position was shared by some of his contemporaries, such as Charles Desprez de Boissy, who wrote in 1756: "L'art du théâtre ne renue l'âme que pour lui faire goûter les sensations de la volupté." *Lettres sur les spectacles; avec une histoire des ouvrages pour et contre les théâtres* (Paris, 1756), 15.

lead to corruption in large cities because they provide a playground for evil. In cosmopolitan cities, men are not restricted by conditions of survival, Rousseau argues, but have time for leisure, which in his mind necessarily leads to vice. In a society of strangers, social codes are established and prevent "honest" interaction. The mask of politeness is a sign that individuals are acting, and thus losing their inner selves.³⁹⁵ In the *Lettre*, Rousseau also comments on the apparent contradiction between social gathering at the theatre and the growing isolation of each spectator: "L'on croit s'assembler au spectacle, et c'est là que chacun s'isole."³⁹⁶

After proclaiming the inherent social dangers of theatre, Rousseau finally admits that in an ideal republic - as he imagined Geneva to be - there is a need for spectacles, but of a different nature. These spectacles must involve the entire population in an active way, rather than expecting them to witness an illusion passively, as in the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*:

Mais n'adoptons point ces spectacles exclusifs qui renferment tristement un petit nombre de gens dans un antre obscure; qui les tiennent craintifs et immobiles dans le silence et l'inaction; qui n'offrent aux yeux que cloisons, que pointes de fer, que soldats, qu'affligeantes images de la servitude et de l'inégalité.³⁹⁷

In contrast to traditional theatre, Rousseau suggests that the subject of the spectacle should be the spectators themselves: "donnez les spectateurs en spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes."³⁹⁸ Such spectacles, Rousseau proposes, could take various forms such as gymnastic competitions, races, wrestling, and other exercises for the body. Although Diderot also believed in the importance of involving spectators directly, his

³⁹⁵Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 6.

³⁹⁶Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à Monsieur D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), 66.

³⁹⁷Ibid., 122.

³⁹⁸Ibid., 123.

definition of theatrical performance remained more traditional, for he did not abandon the narrative structure of plays. For Diderot, as for Sébastien Mercier, who also defended the *drame bourgeois* for its moral role in society, theatre was not just a mirror of reality but also a means of transforming reality. Mercier even refers to the playwright as a "legislator" whose fictions on stage rectify social and political injustices.³⁹⁹ The role of the poet is to paint the portrait of some infamous character, he says, and to punish those who have escaped the trial of justice: "qu'on arrache du sein de ses voluptés infames ce monstre; qu'on dresse un échafaud, & que, livré à l'exécution publique, il monte sur le seul théâtre qui lui convient."⁴⁰⁰

The ultimate objective of the theatre should be to educate the population rather than to be merely frivolous entertainment or mindless distraction.⁴⁰¹ For Diderot in *Le fils naturel*, the *drame bourgeois* reenacts more than a simple story. The purpose of the play is to convey to future generations an example of moral and virtuous behaviour. In fact, in the introductory pages, Diderot explains that the play was written at the request of Dorval's

³⁹⁹Mercier, *Du théâtre*, 151–55, 194–96.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid., 119. In his introduction, Scott S. Bryson compares the blurring of the limit between "the public's space and the representational space" in the *drame bourgeois* to the legal and penal reforms of the judicial system of the same period in France. Bryson claims that the distance established between the criminal and the public during capital punishment is similar to the distance established between a classical play and the spectator, a representational distance equally challenged by a life sentence of enforced labour in the first case, and the *drame bourgeois* in the second. In Bryson's concept, both the life sentence of enforced labour and the *drame bourgeois* create a greater identification with the spectacle. Bryson also compares the body of the actor to that of the criminal or the prostitute, and equates their doubleness (the actor often lives his real life according to different moral standards than those of the characters he portrays on stage) with an opacity that opposes Rousseau's "ideal of transparency." Bryson, *The Chastised Stage*, 80.

⁴⁰¹"Je veux que le théâtre soit pour [le peuple] un objet d'instruction, un honnête délassement, un plaisir utile, & non une distraction, ou un moyen politique pour l'étourderie & pour l'amuser, loin de toutes reflexion sérieuse & patriotique." Mercier, *Du théâtre*, 216.

father, Lysimond, who was touched by the virtue of his son and the good fortune that it precipitated, and now proposes to transform their own story into a modern myth whose ritual would be reenacted every year in the place where it first happened:

Il ne s'agit point d'élever ici des tréteaux, mais de conserver la mémoire d'un événement qui nous touche, et de le rendre comme il s'est passé.... Nous le renouvelerions nous-même tous les ans, dans cette maison, dans ce salon. Les choses que nous avons dites, nous les redirions. Tes enfants en feraient autant, et les leurs et leurs descendants.⁴⁰²

The staging of a play

Although Le Camus de Mézières's plays lack the dramatic complexity and character depth of plays such as *Le fils naturel*, they have a similar moral aim: to punish crime and glorify virtue. Le Camus de Mézières's use of the theatre as a prime model for his architectural theory was not a mere coincidence or a personal whim. During the eighteenth century, the theatrical stage and bourgeois architectural settings were continually influencing one another. In the *drame bourgeois*, theatrical scenery included not only traditional urban and institutional settings (such as temples and palaces), but also internal domestic spaces of private apartments. In his *Entretiens*, Diderot even creates an equivalence between the dramatic space and the private space of the *hôtel particulier* by staging the first performance of *Le fils naturel* in the living room where the events where said to have taken place.

After inviting himself to what was meant to be a private performance, a reenactment of Dorval's personal story, Diderot is finally given permission to attend, but his presence had to remain unnoticed because of the private nature of the play: "il y a quelques scènes où la présence d'un étranger gênerait beaucoup."⁴⁰³ As a hidden spectator, Diderot was thus

⁴⁰² *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, 7:20.

⁴⁰³ Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 21.

allowed to witness the unfolding of a family drama:

J'entrai dans le salon par la fenêtre; et Dorval, qui avait écarté tout le monde, me plaça dans un coin, d'où, sans être vu, je vis et j'entendis ce qu'on va lire.⁴⁰⁴

This initial performance of *Le fils naturel* epitomized fundamental principles of the *drame bourgeois*. Because the actors did not acknowledge the spectator, the traditional dominant role and space of the spectator were undermined. In Baroque theatres, the geometry of the auditorium and the stage scenery was designed for the dominating gaze of the sovereign, and the performance was directed toward this ideal vantage point.⁴⁰⁵ In the *drame bourgeois*, and especially in *Le fils naturel*, the spectators assumed a more voyeuristic role. Because the actors-characters seemed unaware that they were being watched, the performance acquired an aura of authenticity. In his writings for the *Salons*, Diderot developed this notion further in relation to paintings.⁴⁰⁶ The spectator becomes a silent observer of a private scene, thus abolishing the virtual distance between spectators and actors.⁴⁰⁷ Hidden in a far corner of the room, Diderot knew that his presence must remain unnoticed to avoid disturbing the action taking place before his eyes, yet he felt compelled to interject and wished he could become an active participant in the play:

La représentation en avait été si vraie, qu'oubliant en plusieurs endroits que j'étais spectateur, et spectateur ignoré, j'avais été sur le point de sortir de ma place, et

⁴⁰⁴Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵Bryson, *The Chastised Stage*, 19–20.

⁴⁰⁶We shall return to this notion of authenticity in painting in chapter 10 of this dissertation.

⁴⁰⁷I do not mean to imply that the *physical* performing distance between actors and spectators was truly abolished with Diderot. Throughout the eighteenth century, theatre genres such as the *drame bourgeois* sought to create a greater association between the action on stage and the emotional participation of the spectators, but the architectural tendency in newly built theatres was to further isolate the realm of the actors from that of the spectators.

d'ajouter un personnage réel à la scène.⁴⁰⁸

Diderot used a similar notion in one of his earlier works, *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748), a boudoir novel written in less than six months that became an instant success. Like other libertine novels of the time, the underlying intent was to demystify women's apparent modesty and virtue, to reveal those values as "the most detachable of masks."⁴⁰⁹ The story portrays a Sultan (whom critics identified as Louis XV) and his Sultana (most likely based on Madame de Pompadour) discussing the truthfulness of women's expression of love. The Sultan Mangogul is skeptical that women ever express their true feelings, and wagers that he can prove to the Sultana that his suspicions are well-founded. He is given some magic rings that can make him invisible. When Mangogul turns his rings on a woman, they unleash their magical power to disclose the secrets of female sexuality, making her private parts speak freely.⁴¹⁰ Like Diderot himself sitting in a hidden corner of Clairville's living room to witness the performance of *Le fils naturel*, the main protagonist of *Les bijoux indiscrets*, Mangogul, thus becomes a voyeur of scenes performed by improvised actors who are unaware of his presence. The Sultan is given access to the authentic emotions of women by becoming invisible and observing their unrehearsed performance.

By appearing to ignore the spectator's presence, the *drame bourgeois* paradoxically entralls the spectator, based on a belief that the emotions presented are authentic. Because it seems that the actors are not really playing a part but only being themselves, the spectators believe in the genuineness of the action and are drawn into the performance as

⁴⁰⁸Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 78.

⁴⁰⁹Chantal Thomas, "The Indiscreet Jewels: A Dangerous Pastime," in *The Libertine Reader*, ed. M. Feher (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 334.

⁴¹⁰Ibid., 336.

hidden participants.⁴¹¹ In his *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, published with his second play, *Père de famille* (1758), Diderot describes this concept in terms of an invisible fourth wall that isolates the stage from the auditorium. In his advice to authors and actors, he writes:

Soit donc que vous composiez, soit que vous jouiez, ne pensez non plus au spectateur que s'il n'exista pas. Imaginez, sur le bord du théâtre, un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas.⁴¹²

Although Diderot implies a physical severance of the spectators from the space of performance, one should not conclude that the audience was excluded from participating, nor that the performance itself could take place without the presence of an audience. One should keep in mind that this desire to exclude the spectators from the space of performance had many implications in 1758. At this time, spectators were still sitting on the stage of the Comédie française in Paris. This new notion, that the spectator sees the action through the missing fourth wall of a closed room, was not fully accepted, even by those who were in favour of radical changes in theatre. For example, Nougaret, in *De l'art du théâtre*, opposed Diderot's idea because he could not accept the virtual disappearance of the spectators. Instead, he proposes treating the stage as a street corner that is naturally predisposed to the gathering of a crowd.⁴¹³ The notion of the missing fourth wall nevertheless had some concrete equivalents in eighteenth-century architectural theories.

The invisible presence of the spectator in Diderot's *Le fils naturel* and the Sultan in *Les bijoux indiscrets* was translated in Le Camus's theory for the *hôtel particulier* into an

⁴¹¹ Michael Fried relates this denial or oblivion of the theatre audience to a similar phenomenon in paintings at that time. His interpretation, however, is problematic, for he claims that the objective was to "neutralize" the visual domination by the theatrical audience, "to wall it off from the action taking place on stage." Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 96.

⁴¹² Ibid., 231.

⁴¹³ Nougaret, *De l'art du théâtre*, 1:355–57.

interesting system of corridors contained within walls, providing a concealed place from which masters could spy on their staff, but potentially also on their guests:

Il seroit utile au Maître de la Maison de la parcourir d'un bout à l'autre sans être vu; c'est une chose aisée à pratiquer, & par le moyen de laquelle il semblera passer à travers l'épaisseur des murs, & les pénétrer dans leur longueur: il ne faut à cet effet qu'un corridor pratiqué entre les deux pieces d'un corps de logis double ... on voit ce qui se passe au moyen d'une petite baie cachée au haut de chaque piece.⁴¹⁴

These devices became especially fashionable in the architecture of seduction epitomized by the *petite maison*, and appeared frequently in the fictional architecture of eighteenth-century libertine novels. In Chevalier de Nerciat's *Félicia, ou mes fredaines* (1786), for example, a network of hidden corridors enables one of the protagonists to spy on Félicia at her evening toilette and to enter her room without her knowledge. In turn, a similar system of niches hidden within walls gives Félicia great power, allowing her to see everywhere without being seen: "Je devins maîtresse de pénétrer partout, de tout voir. C'était vraiment un plaisir de femme."⁴¹⁵

The form of this inhabited wall/threshold was analogous to the inhabited proscenium in French theatres, a tradition that persisted until the end of the Ancien Régime. (See Figure 37.) In spirit, it anticipated the voyeuristic space of the darkened auditorium that would transform the mode of artistic involvement during the nineteenth century. While an eighteenth-century citizen could be characterized by an ability to balance the civic claims of public life and the natural claims of private life,⁴¹⁶ the stage - especially the stage of the

⁴¹⁴Le génie, 95–96.

⁴¹⁵Nerciat, *Félicia, ou mes fredaines* (Paris, 1786), 56; quoted by Remy Saisselin, "The Space of Seduction in Eighteenth-Century French Novel and Architecture," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford) 319 (1994): 429. Saisselin devotes the entire article to the role of architecture in eighteenth-century novels.

⁴¹⁶Sennett, *Fall of Public Man*, 27–28.

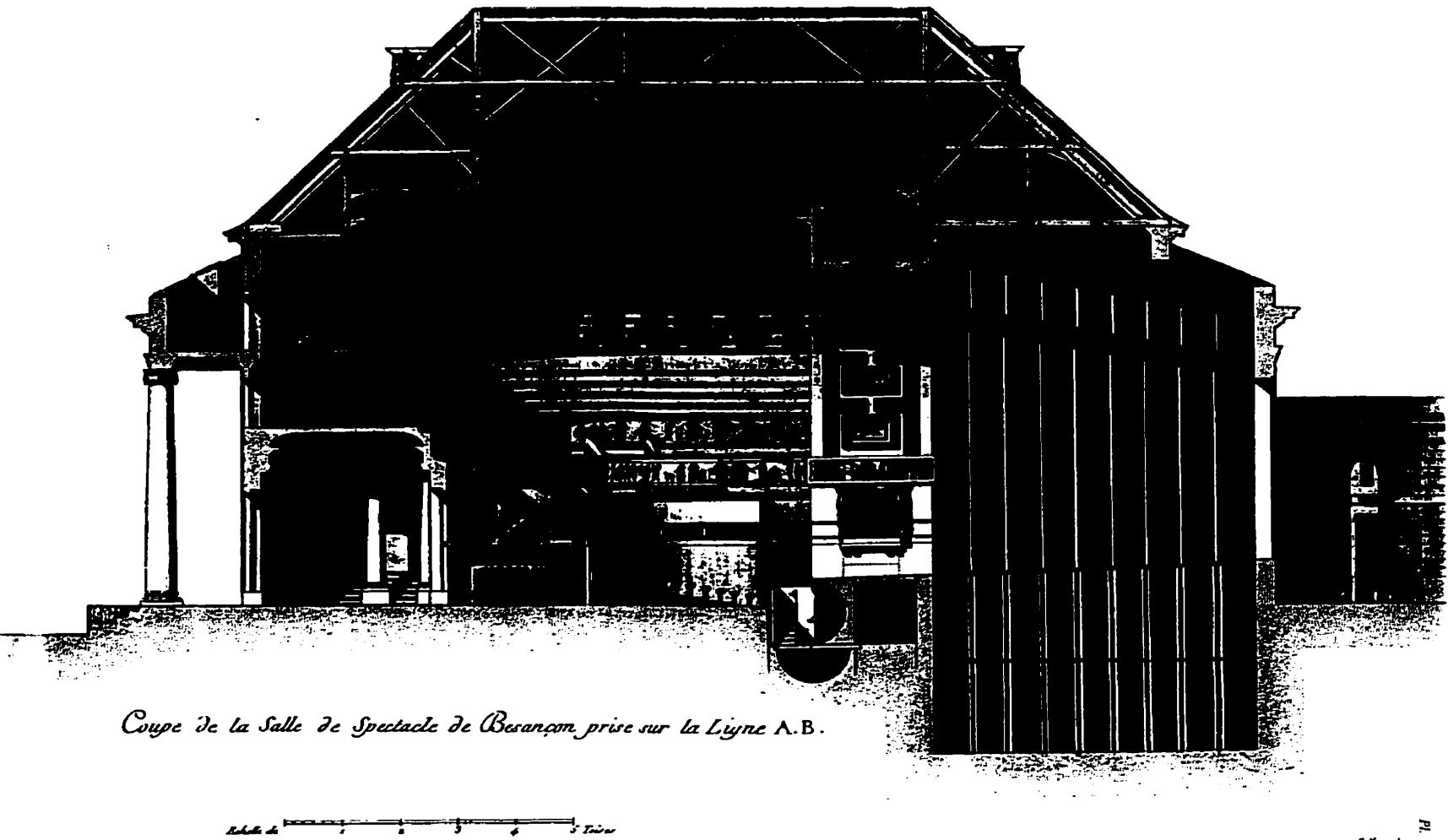


Figure 37: Section through the theatre at Besançon, by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1783). A royal box is still included in the the proscenium arch. [Ramée].

drame bourgeois - appeared to be seeking a merging of public and private life by presenting private scenes to an audience. This fundamental transformation began in the mid-eighteenth century and would find its apogee in the nineteenth century. It is clear, however, that a late-eighteenth-century spectator generally did not feel the same need for anonymity as a nineteenth- or twentieth-century spectator. The performance of *Le fils naturel* ultimately was staged for the benefit of a single spectator, hidden yet celebrated: Diderot himself.

CHAPTER 7: THEATRE ARCHITECTURE AND THE ROLE OF THE PROSCENIUM

The flourishing of private theatres in France throughout the eighteenth century compensated for the limited number of official public playhouses. Even though acting had become a way of life, from the end of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century no new public theatre was built in Paris, except for the small theatres of the fairs and the transformed *jeux de paume*. The general lethargy in theatre construction for almost a century in Paris was sometimes blamed on financial problems,⁴¹⁷ while the absence of innovation in theatre design was attributed to the institutional rigidity of the privileged theatres.⁴¹⁸ The situation, however, is more complex. Even though political

⁴¹⁷The privilege received by the three theatres protected their repertoire, but did not involve a real financial sponsorship by the state. Instead, the privileged theatres were subjected to an entertainment tax, a "poor tax" that entitled the Parisian hospitals to 25% of their gross income. This connection between theatre and health, somewhat reminiscent of the cathartic effect attributed to Greek theatres of antiquity, persisted throughout the eighteenth century. This "poor tax," established in 1699, originally targeted only the privileged theatres, but in 1773 it was extended to the fair and boulevard theatres. Moreover, the concern with the morality of theatre was widespread during the eighteenth century. On the immorality of the theatre and the Church's contempt for actors, see, for example, Charles Desprez de Boissy, *Lettres sur les spectacles* (1780).

⁴¹⁸Even with its monopoly on performances in Paris, the opera could hardly meet its debts, and in 1784, it was granted the right to exploit economically the minor theatres of Paris by renting at a very high price the privilege to perform. The leasing of privilege led to cumbersome devices aimed at differentiating one boulevard theatre from the next, in order to preserve the appearance of specific privilege. For example, since the late 1760s, the Comédie italienne had acquired from the Opera the exclusive right to perform comic opera. In 1784, the Opera leased a similar right to the small theatre at the Palais Royal, with the stipulated exception that the actors of the Beaujolais would have to "mimic on the stage what others sang for them in the wings." In 1786, the Bluette, another boulevard theatre, was granted a similar right but was required to place a gauze curtain between the stage and the auditorium. This kind of scrim was adopted by the Délassements-Comiques "to differentiate itself from the Associés, which in turn opened its show with marionette skits that symbolically bound to the fair its forays into the elite genres of tragedy and

and economic circumstances may have affected the ability of troupes to build new theatres, the ones that were built on the boulevards or in the provinces resisted all architectural innovation.

The reason can be attributed to the dominating role of conventions at that time. Social conventions in France remained largely unchallenged by the general public during the eighteenth century. Social behaviour at the theatre similarly resisted major transformation of its code of conduct. The gradual emphasis given to the action on stage over the hierarchical distribution of the auditorium, however, transformed the conditions of public interaction at the theatre. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century in France, the architecture of public theatres followed a tradition that flourished during the previous century. This physical organization of the theatre conditioned certain behaviours, and in turn, various customs affected design decisions in the construction of new theatres. The strange tension created by an inherited architectural form and a changing mode of social expression led to the physical transformation of the theatre toward the end of the century, thus confirming the radical changes in the social order.

Given Le Camus's direct involvement with the theatre and the fact that the public building he designed, the Halle au blé, doubled as an entertainment hall, it is important to understand the context of theatre architecture in the eighteenth century to fully grasp the implications of Le Camus's architectural theory.

Rethinking the space of the auditorium

Theatre was traditionally considered not only a mode of entertainment but also an institution of social and political interaction. The internal hierarchy of the auditorium emulated the social order from which it emerged and permitted the participation of every

comedy." For a comprehensive study on Boulevard theatre, see Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984).

individual in the community. Since its origin in antiquity, theatre had been a surrogate ritual involving the entire community in a cathartic process of purification. Large, open-air structures were built to hold almost the entire population of a city. Alberto Pérez-Gómez eloquently summarizes the philosophical implications of the complex and highly symbolic rituals of Greek and Roman theatre:

The introduction of the amphitheatre [in Greece] poignantly represents the profound epistemological transformation signalled by the advent of philosophy. This becomes a place for seeing, where a distant contemplation of the epiphany would have the same cathartic effect on the observer as was accomplished previously through active, embodied participation in the ritual. This distance is, of course, akin to the theoretical distance introduced by the philosophers, which enabled a participation in the wholeness of the universe through rational understanding, as a disclosure of discursive *logos*.⁴¹⁹

Throughout the early development of such structures, from a modified hillside with a circular acting area partially surrounded by tiers of seats (prior to the fifth century B.C.) to the oldest surviving stone theatres (mid-fourth century B.C.), the relationship between actors and spectators underwent some fundamental changes.⁴²⁰ Since their inception, performances probably had not relied on naturalistic acting, as characters were masked and wore costumes that enabled the audience to recognize particular characters from a great distance.⁴²¹ (See Figure 38.) As early as the fifth century B.C., the circular acting area

⁴¹⁹Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation," in *Chora: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* 1, edited by A. Pérez-Gómez and S. Parcell (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 13.

⁴²⁰Since little archeological evidence prior to the fourth century B.C. has survived, all historical reconstructions and interpretations remain partly speculative.

⁴²¹Simon Tidworth writes: "Masks, costume, movement and language were all stylized, giving the dramatic poet freedom only within quite narrow limits." *Theatres: An Illustrated History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1973), 9.



Figure 38: Painted vase depicting an actor in costume, holding his mask (fourth century B.C.). [Tidworth].

became the round dancing floor for a chorus, while the actors moved to a slightly raised platform behind it. (See Figure 39.) In the early theatre there was no scenery, although a few props and some mechanical devices may have been part of the ritual.⁴²² A stone building at the back (*skene*) was eventually added to provide changing rooms and a backdrop for the action. With the Roman tradition came a more complex construction: the auditorium was usually set on a complex path of corridors and stairs that helped distribute the circulation, and the *skene* rose from the ground and became multi-leveled. When changing scenery was introduced on the *periaktoi*, "triangular pieces of machinery that revolve" behind the openings of a fixed *scena* (as described by Vitruvius), this probably indicated a more realistic performance. (See Figure 40.) The images represented on the *periaktoi* corresponded to the type of stage set appropriate to each dramatic genre: tragedy, comedy and satire. Whether this scenery was represented in some form of perspective, however, was greatly debated during the Renaissance and remains a point of contention among scholars interested in the meaning of the word *scenographia*.⁴²³ What is more important for the current discussion is that this movable stage machinery was an early attempt to give a specific character to the stage, to complement the genre of play being performed.

In the Middle Ages, the Roman drama and its performing tradition had completely died out. In its place, a new form of play based on biblical stories began to be performed in churches. A major breakthrough occurred when Latin was replaced by vernacular

⁴²²Aristotle (384–22 B.C.) writes that Sophocles (ca. 496–406 B.C.) "raised the number of actors to three," thus potentially diminishing the role of the chorus, "and added scene-painting." *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a Critical Text and Translation of The Poetics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 19.

⁴²³For more on this, see Pelletier and Pérez-Gómez, *Architectural Representation* , 45–51.

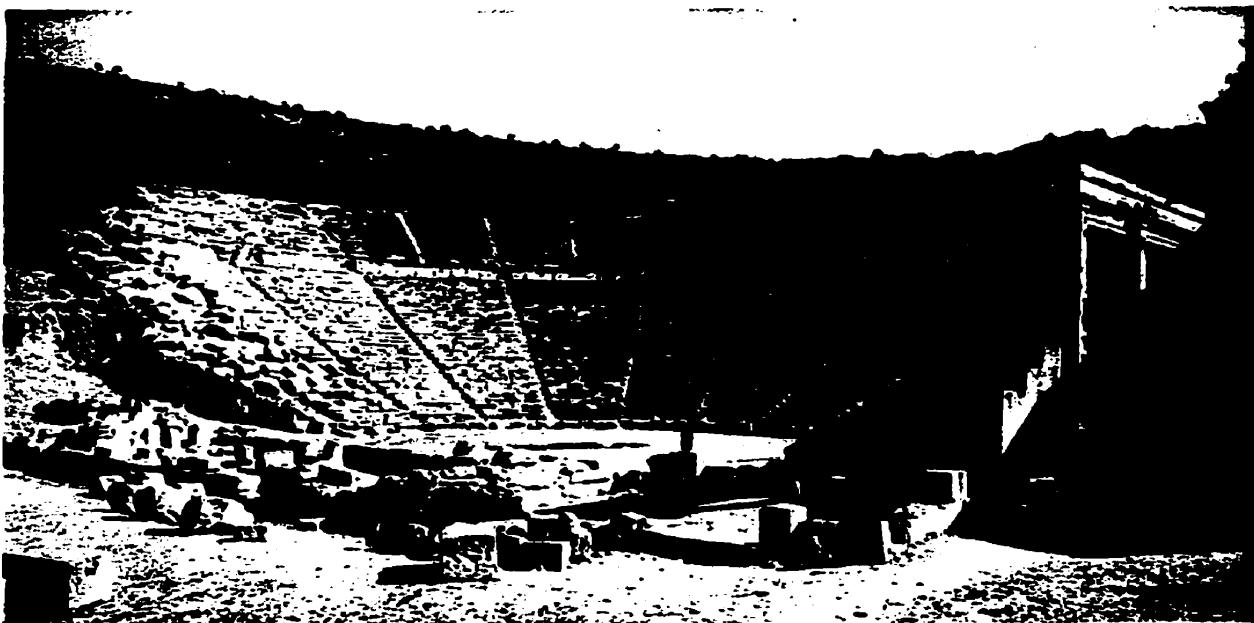


Figure 39: Theatre at Epidaurus, Greece (ca. 350 B.C.), the oldest surviving theatre in which the arrangement of the orchestra and *skene* is still preserved. [Tidworth].

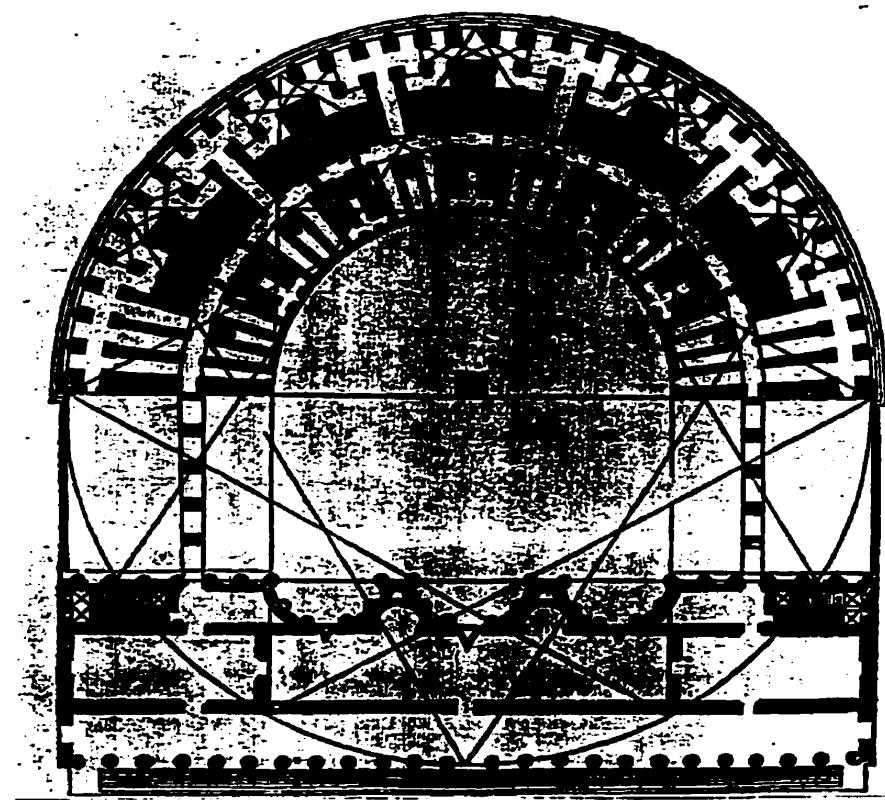
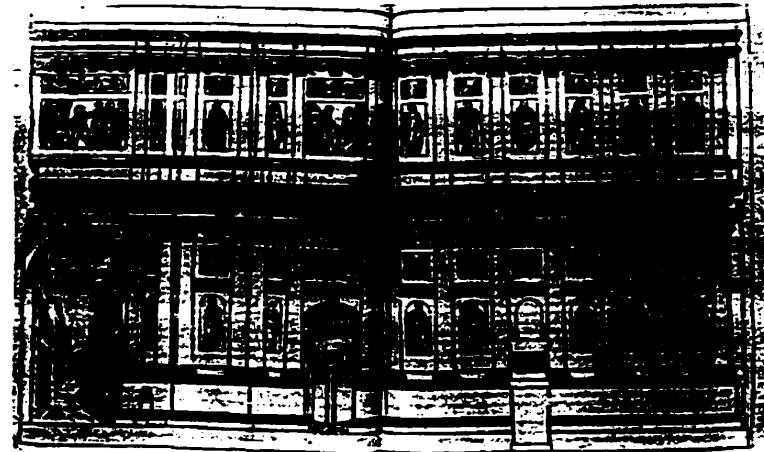


Figure 40: A Roman theatre with *periaktoi*. From Daniele Barbaro's translation of Vitruvius, *De Architectura* (1567) [reprint 1987].

languages and "the plays emerged from the churches into the market squares."⁴²⁴ Staging traditions became diversified throughout Europe. In some countries these "Mystery plays" continued to be performed in churches, while in England they took place on movable carts called "pageants" that were paraded through the streets. In other European countries, Mystery or Passion plays were performed in an acting area surrounded by scaffolds, thus anticipating the auditorium. The performing area itself was sometimes raised off the ground, but the distance between actors and spectators remained flexible, and actors could descend from their platform and share the space of the spectators. In Lucerne, Mystery plays were performed in the principal public square, the Weinmarkt. (See Figure 41.) Stands for the spectators were built around the square, and scaffolds were set up all around to represent places in the story, such as Heaven at one end and Hell at the other. The actual performing area was the open space in the centre. This multiplicity of sets, presented all at once to the spectators, was characteristic of the medieval drama.⁴²⁵

During the Renaissance, the translation and publication of Vitruvius's *Ten Books of Architecture* had a resounding impact throughout Europe. Its emphasis on the theatre marked another important turning point in the history of European theatre. In Italy, the renewed interest in Vitruvius gave rise to a new architectural form based on the classical theatre, as evident in Palladio's Teatro Olimpico (1580–85) and Scamozzi's theatre in Sabbioneta.⁴²⁶ (See Figure 42.) Throughout Europe at this time, there was a great variety

⁴²⁴Tidworth, *Theatres*, 35.

⁴²⁵Ibid., 36–43.

⁴²⁶The renewed interest in classical theatre architecture coincided with the re-evaluation of classical literature and the desire to revive Plautus, Terence, and Seneca "in conditions as close as possible to their original performance." Ibid., 44. For an excellent study of the theatre in Sabbioneta commissioned by Vespasiano Gonzaga, the ruler of Mantua, see Kurt W. Forster, "Stagecraft and Statecraft: The Architectural Integration of Public Life and Theatrical Spectacle in Scamozzi's Theater at Sabbioneta," *Oppositions* 9 (Summer 1977): 63–87.

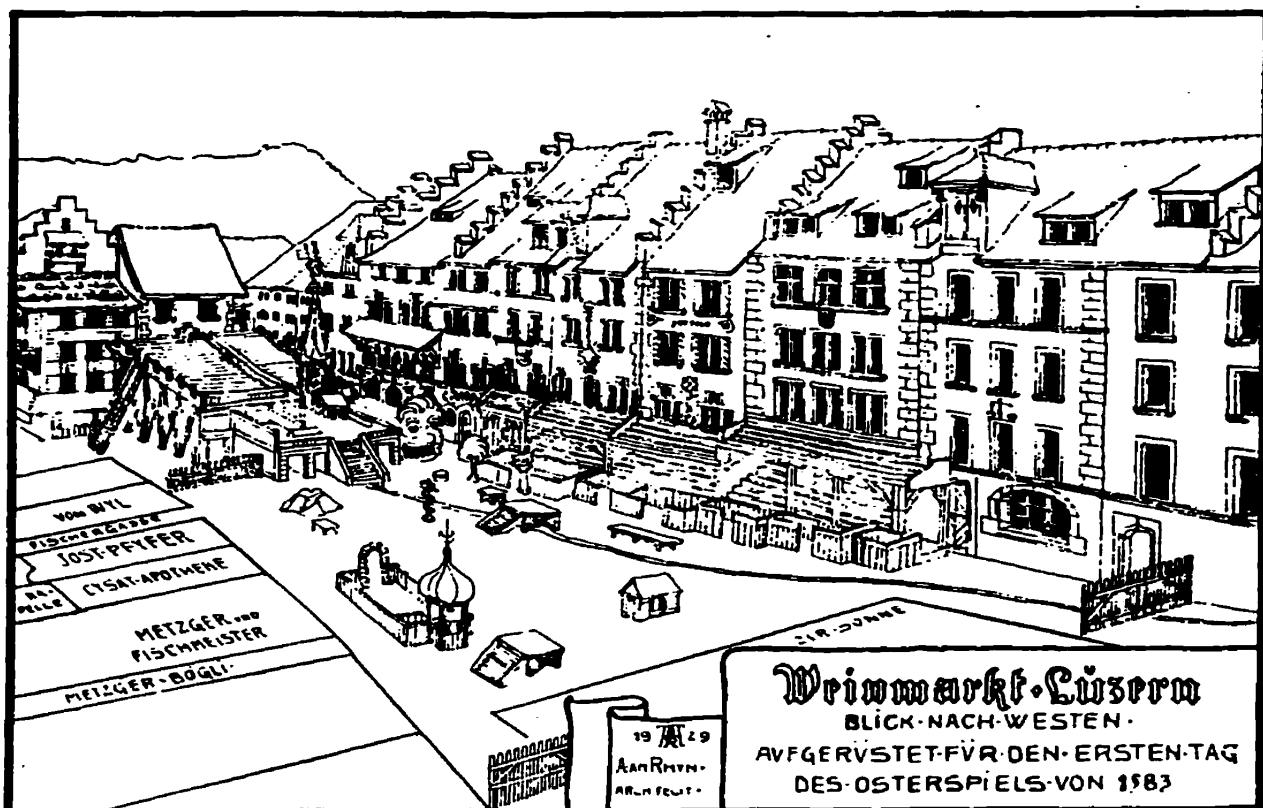


Figure 41: Reconstruction of a Mystery play in the Weinmarkt in Lucerne.
[Tidworth].

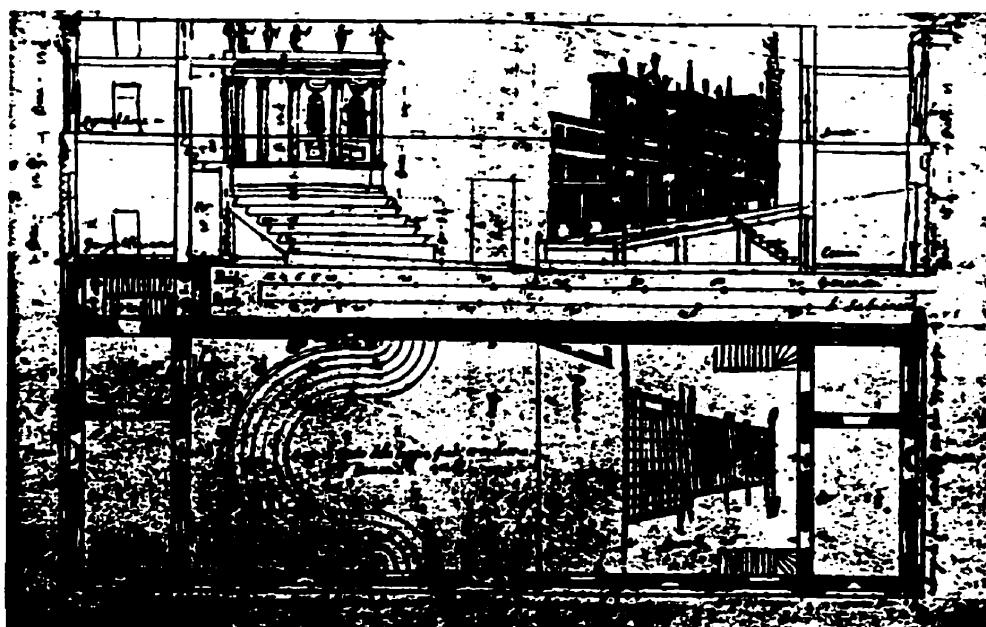


Figure 42: Plan and section of the Gonzaga Theatre in Sabbioneta, by Vincenzo Scamozzi (1588). Uffizi 191A, Florence. [Forster].

of theatrical forms, based not just on changing styles, but increasingly dictated by new theoretical concerns about the performing arts. In England, for example, new forms of theatrical performance, such as the Elizabethan theatre, gave rise to equally innovative theatre architecture.⁴²⁷ Even though they remained open-air theatres, performing places such as the Rose (1587) and the Globe (1599) established a new relationship between the place of performance and the spectators. (See Figure 43.) In the rest of Europe, however, the *teatro da sala*, a "converted hall with seats round three sides and scenery at one end" remained the most common form of theatre.⁴²⁸ The Hôtel de Bourgogne, which housed the Comédie française until the end of the seventeenth century and "saw the whole transition of French drama from medieval to modern," is a good example of this architectural distribution. It was installed in a converted room in the palace of the Duke of Burgundy in Paris in 1548.⁴²⁹ The Théâtre Marais, the second public theatre in Paris, was built in 1621 in a former tennis court. Even though little is known about it, it was certainly a long, narrow space with at least one gallery, as the existing structure gave its shape to the

⁴²⁷It is usually assumed that the development of theatrical form in England between the years 1580 and 1620 was widely influenced by the tradition of playing in the yards of inns, surrounded by galleries. "When players became prosperous enough to build theatres of their own, this was the model that they followed." An alternative theory is that they may have copied bear-baiting arenas. Tidworth, *Theatres*, 60. Frances A. Yates, however, argues against the general trend that sees in the inn-yard the origin of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres. She puts forward the theory that these theatres were more of a "return to antiquity." Yates summarizes the argument: "The Shakespearean type of theatre represented as never before since antiquity the most important aspects of the ancient theatre as described by Vitruvius, its aural, musical, and cosmic aspects.... The designers of this type of theatre knew something of classical theory on these matters and produced an adaptation of the ancient theatre which was actually closer to its spirit and function as the vehicle of poetic drama than any other Renaissance adaptation." Frances A. Yates, *Theatre of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 125.

⁴²⁸Tidworth, *Theatres*, 50.

⁴²⁹Ibid., 58–60.

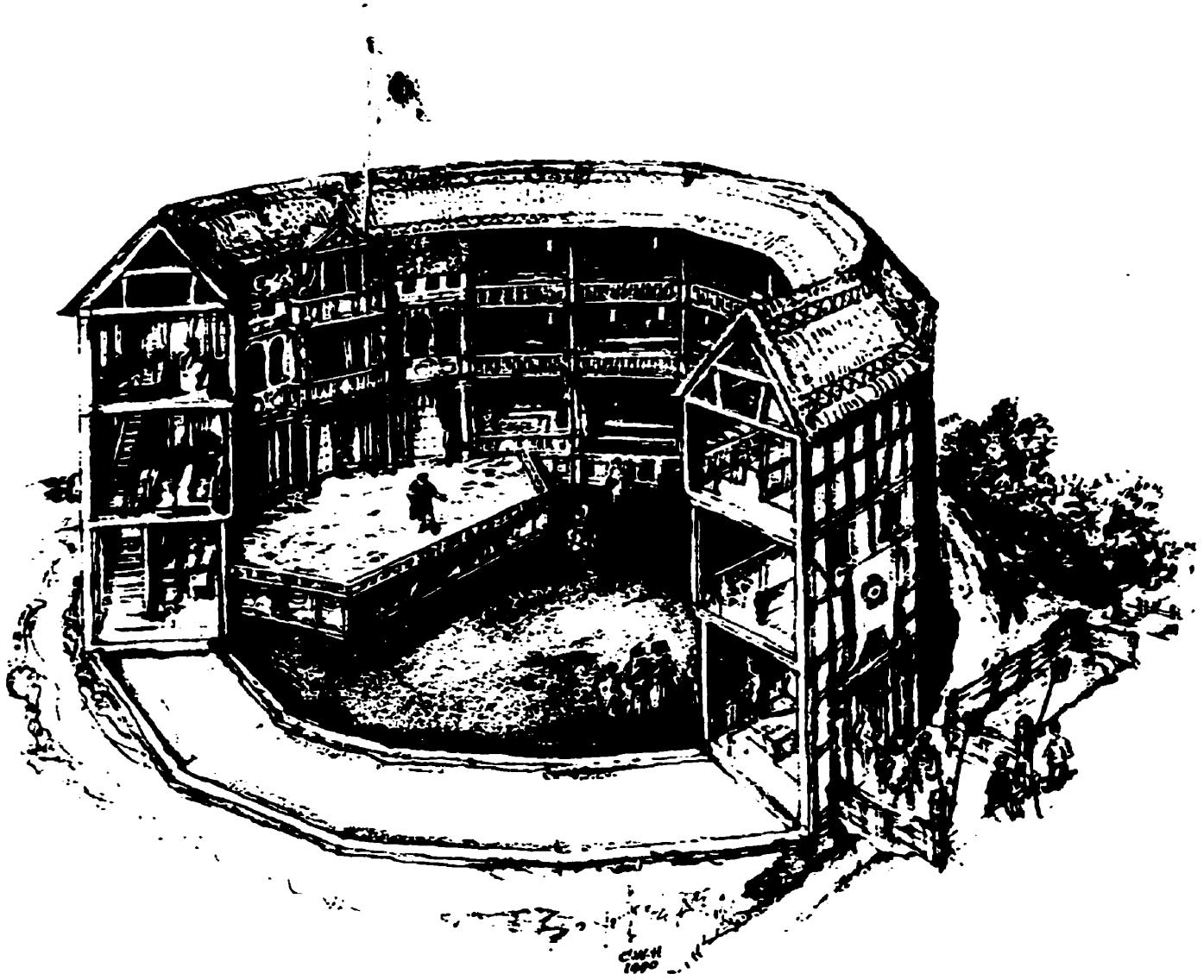


Figure 43: Reconstruction of the original Rose Theatre in London (1587), by C. Walter Hodges. [Mackintosh].

theatre. In Italy, the Teatro Mediceo in the Uffizi Palace in Florence was also a great hall, converted into a theatre by Buontalenti in 1586. A famous engraving by Callot (1617) clearly shows that "the spectacle was not confined to the stage alone," since "the players spilled out into the auditorium by means of ramps or stairs."⁴³⁰ (See Figure 44.)

From the Renaissance onwards, the architectural structure of the theatre explicitly manifested the changing relationship among the theatre patron, the general audience, and the actors on stage.⁴³¹ However, the essential features of the "modern" theatre, including the horseshoe-shaped auditorium, the tiers of galleries or boxes, and the "picture-frame" stage, appeared during the first half of the seventeenth century. The Teatro Farnese at Parma, built between 1617 and 1628 by Giambattista Aleotti, was an important example of a U-shape auditorium and proscenium stage. (See Figure 45.) It provided enough space on stage to allow for movable scenery, a great innovation in the early seventeenth century. The rows of seats framed an area in the middle of the auditorium where the action, not confined to the stage, could spill forward as in previous Renaissance theatres.⁴³² The proscenium arch was also introduced in the first half of the seventeenth century. With it came the curtain that enabled set designers to unveil their scenery with "dramatic suddenness." The introduction of this single theatrical element had direct repercussions on the art of performing, as well as on the art of stage set design. The proscenium, with its well-contained acting area, seemed to call for all the seats (as well as the walls that divided boxes) to be oriented toward it. Although it may seem logical that the stage would become the main focus of attention once the action had retreated behind the picture frame, it took

⁴³⁰Mullin, *Development Of The Playhouse*, 22–25.

⁴³¹On the spatial hierarchy of Renaissance and Baroque theatres, see Carlson, *Places of Performance*, 140–43, 173. Carlson traces the development of architectural elements of the theatre such as the loggia and the royal boxes, and emphasizes their highly symbolic significance.

⁴³²Tidworth, *Theatres*, 66–67.

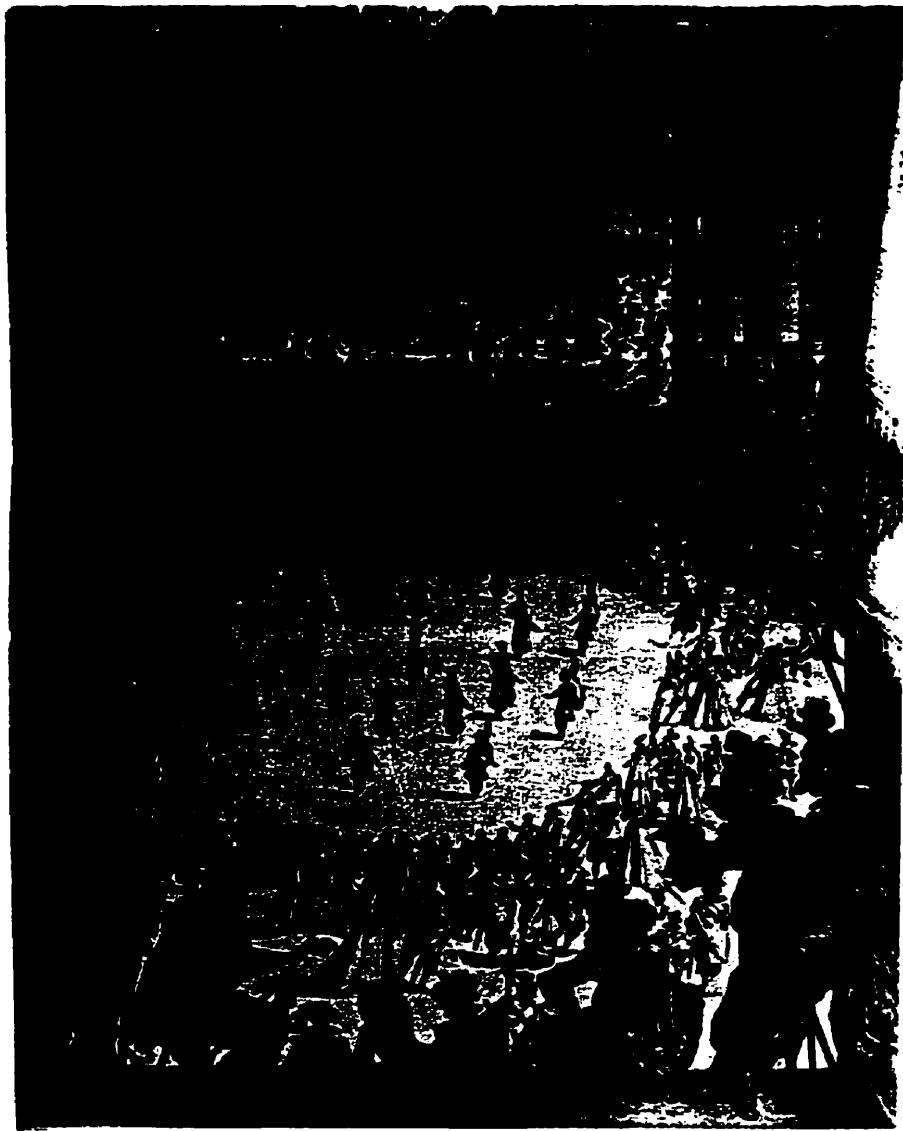


Figure 44: The Teatro Mediceo in Florence (1617); illustration by Callot. Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e Stampe, Florence. [Pelletier and Pérez-Gómez].

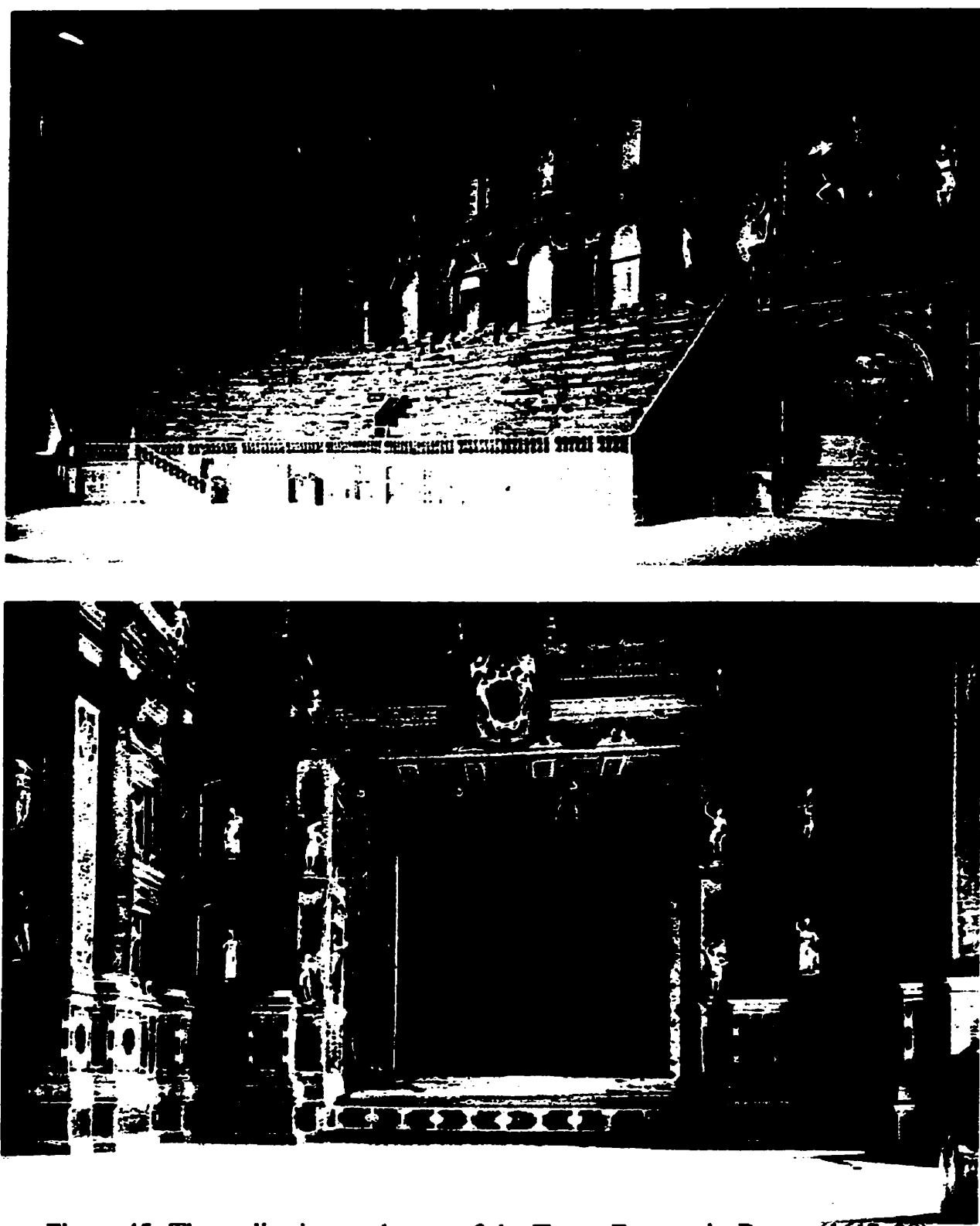


Figure 45: The auditorium and stage of the Teatro Farnese in Parma (1617–28).
[Carlson, 1989].

almost a century (and even longer in France) for the distribution of the auditorium and the disposition of seating to reflect this change.⁴³³

Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century ellipsoidal-shaped auditoriums in Italy, such as Fontana's Teatro Tor di Nona (1660) and Teodoli's Teatro Argentina in Rome, and Benedetto Alfieri's Teatro Reggio in Turin, were the earliest examples of theatres that explicitly tried to improve the visibility of the stage.⁴³⁴ (See Figure 46.) They heavily influenced neighbouring countries such as France, particularly through study trips by young students of the Académie Française in Rome. However, until the second half of the eighteenth century in France, theatres continued to use converted halls such as tennis courts and *jeux de paume*, which explains the usual rectangular shape of the auditorium, excessively deep for the width of the stage.⁴³⁵ (See Figure 47.) This disposition, which

⁴³³Fabrizio Carini Motta's *Trattato sopra la struttura de' teatri e scene* (1676) is the first "modern" treatise on the architecture of the theatre. Motta advises placing the partitions between boxes "along the axes of the sight-lines instead of at right-angle to the balustrade" to provide the best view of the stage, but such considerations were not always argued in rational terms. In fact, in many theatres the most coveted seating places had a poor view of the stage, but a good view of the auditorium. This arrangement of the auditorium clearly reflected the importance of theatres as places for public display.

⁴³⁴The theatre of the court of Philip IV of Spain, built in the summer palace of *El Buen Retiro* by the Italian Cosimo Lotti in 1632, anticipated by many decades the most important features that characterized French and Italian theatres of a later period, as well as Venetian playhouses. The *parquet* was provided with benches parallel to the stage, with a central aisle for easy access. It was surrounded with boxes whose divisions were angled toward the stage to improve sightlines toward a raised proscenium stage. In fact, special care was taken to improve visibility of the stage, such as projecting the box fronts slightly beyond the edge of the gallery. Mullin, *Development Of The Playhouse*, 26.

⁴³⁵Such theatres included the Théâtre du Marais, the Petit Bourbon (1635), Richelieu's theatre in the Palais Cardinal (1641), and Giacomo Torelli's theatre, which had the first proscenium frame in France. Even though the period of important architectural transformations in the Italian theatre coincided with a great effervescence of dramatic writing in France (Corneille, Molière, Racine), the physical conditions of places of performance in the French capital remained primitive. Molière's troupe, for example, performed in a small theatre at the Palais Royal, built in 1660 by Lemercier, which had a stage too shallow to

was dictated by existing structures, became identified so strongly with the French theatre that architects such as Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–90) doubted that architects building new theatres would easily give up this configuration:

On peut dire ... que l'on a point encore bâti en France de théâtre exprès; que tout ceux qu'on y voit ont été construits en des lieux donnés, étroits et fort long, et en cela directement opposés à toute bonne forme de théâtre et contradictoire à leur destination ... Cependant malgré la connaissance que nous avons soit des théâtres antiques, soit de ceux de l'Italie moderne, on n'oseraient conclure que, si nous en construisions de nouveaux, il eût beaucoup d'architectes qui voulussent renoncer à notre plan ordinaire, tant l'habitude ... a de force.⁴³⁶

As late as the end of the eighteenth century, Ledoux criticized this long-standing tradition. It is a mistake to use the shape of *jeux de paume* to model new theatres, he writes, because their function is very different. Not only is its shape inappropriate to provide a good view of the stage, its partitioned areas promote corruption:

la forme des théâtres ressemble aux lieux destinés à lancer la balle d'un paumier; c'est une ornière à pic où les passions de tous genres remuent leur vase, où le souffle du spectacle exhale la corruption et répercute sans cesse les poisons qu'il avale.⁴³⁷

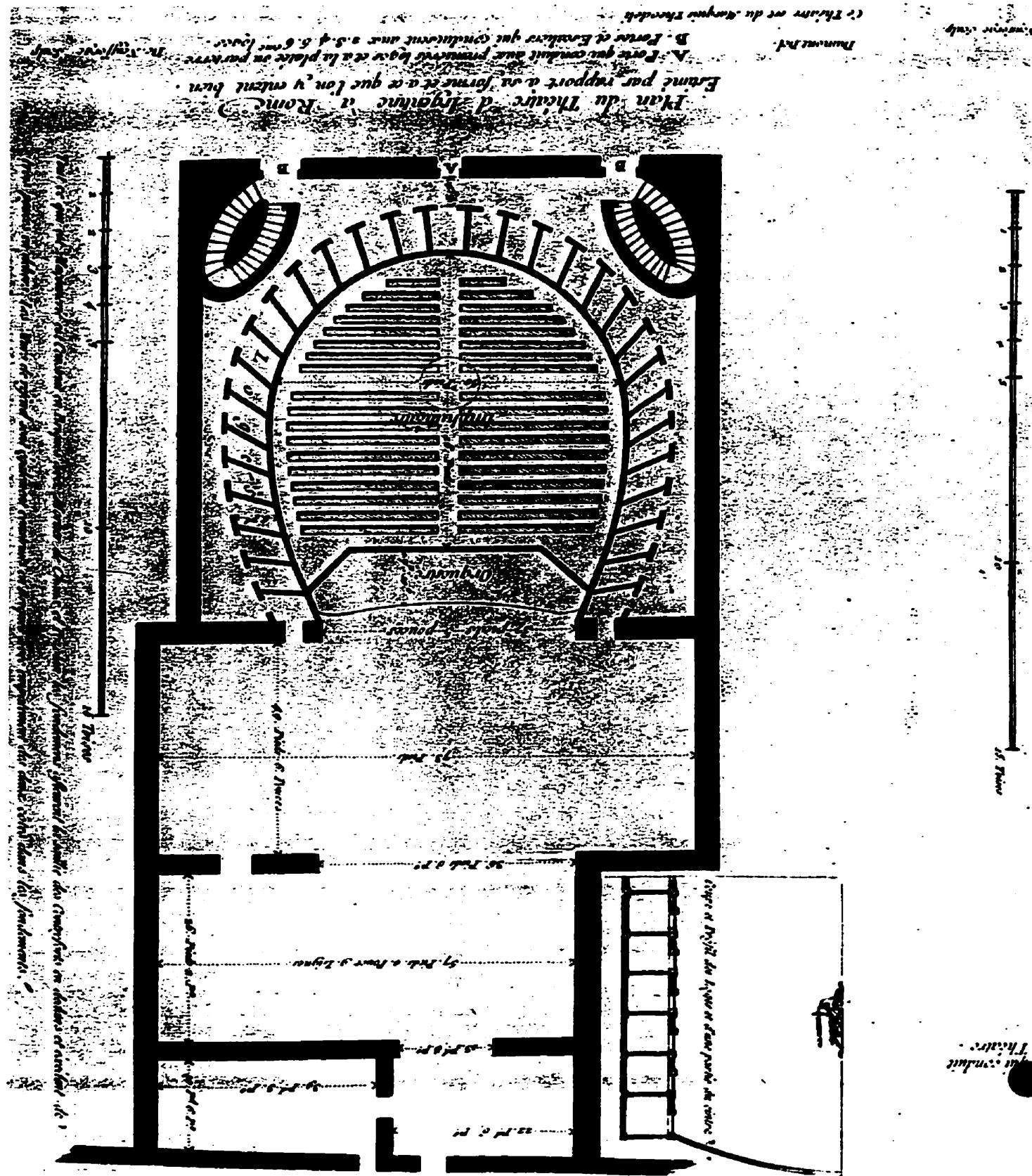
The theatre of the Comédie française, built by François d'Orbay in 1689, indeed reproduced the elongated U-shaped auditorium of earlier converted structures. Benches were placed at the back of the *parterre*, and on the stage for spectators who wished to make a spectacle of themselves (*se donner en spectacle*), while a large part of the auditorium was

accommodate elaborate scenery. After merging with the Comédiens du Roi that were then housed in the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the troupe moved in 1680 into a theatre fitted in a *jeu de paume* on Rue Guénegaud, which had been built for opera in 1673. Radicchio and D'Oria, *Les théâtres de Paris*, 7.

⁴³⁶Cochin, *Voyage d'Italie* (1758).

⁴³⁷Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* [1804] (Nördlingen: NHL Verlag, 1981), 229.

Figure 46: Teatro Argentino in Rome. From G.P.M. Dumont, *Parallel de plans des plus belles salles de spectacles* (1760) [reprint 1968].



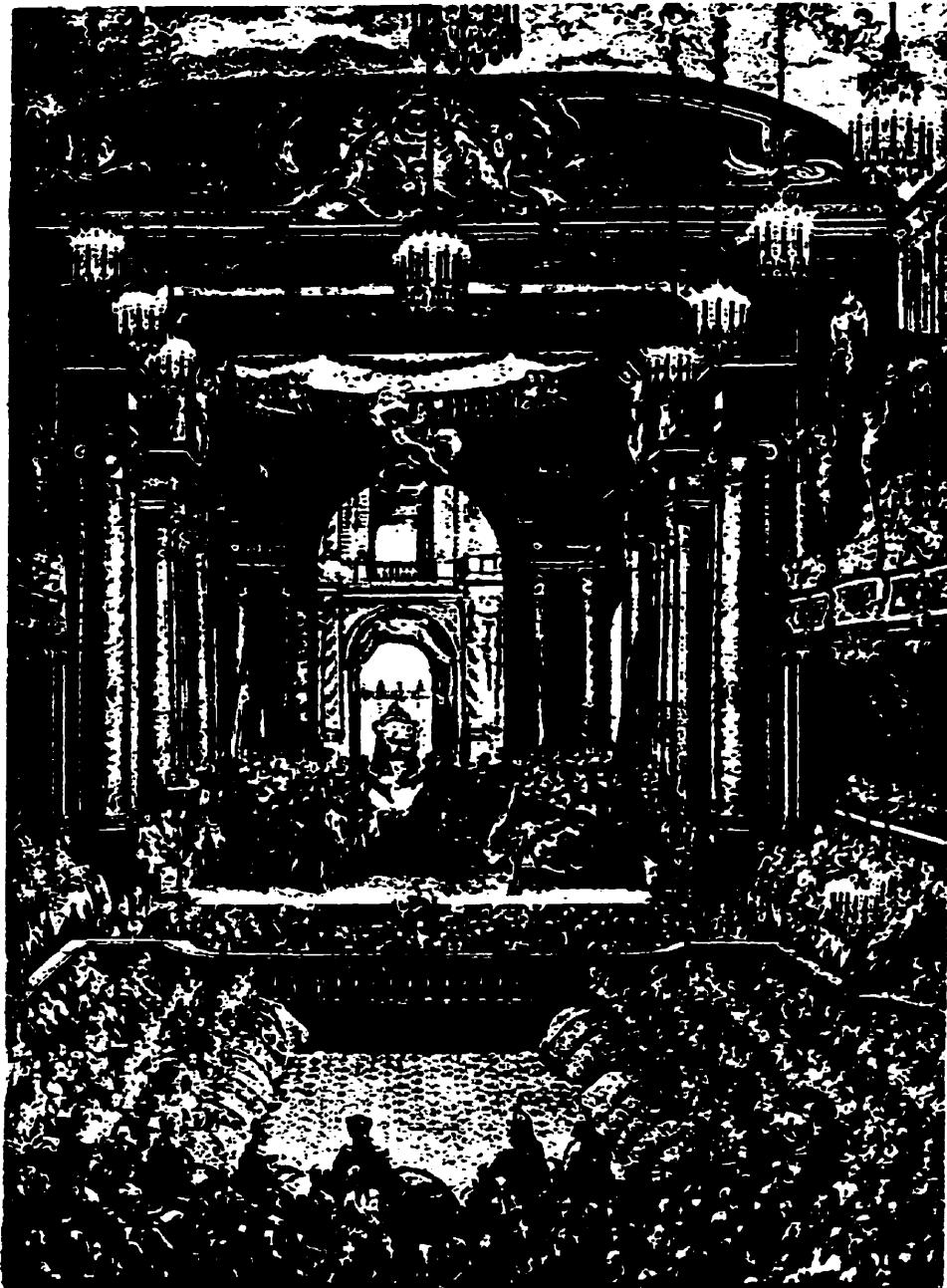


Figure 47: A *comédie-ballet* by Voltaire, presented at Versailles in 1745; engraving by C.-N. Cochin. The spectators were still facing each other, rather than being oriented toward the stage. [Bjurström].

for a standing audience.⁴³⁸ (See Figure 48.) Unlike the Italian theatres, the Comédie française did not have a royal box at the back of the auditorium, marking the ideal vantage point for perspective illusion. While Baroque stage sets in most European countries were designed to provide the sovereign with an ideal view of the scenery on stage, the French fashion of seating important spectators directly on stage, as if to display them along with the dramatic action, were too well embedded. Instead, private boxes for royalty were provided on either side of the stage, facing the apron.⁴³⁹ The well-established ritual of going to the theatre followed the prevailing social hierarchy. The seating arrangement on stage and in the auditorium was irrational according to visibility and acoustics but was clearly believed to reflect the social order, and no architect dared challenge it before Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in Besançon and Charles De Wailly and Marie-Joseph Peyre in Paris during the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The beginning of a new tradition and the relocation of the spectator

U-shaped auditoriums inspired by previous converted structures continued to be built in France until the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact, the first French public theatre to apply the lessons from the Italian theatres was that of Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713–80), built in Lyon between 1753 and 1756. In Paris, the fire at the Opera in 1781 and the decrepit state of both the Comédie française and the Comédie italienne finally prompted three new public theatres to be built between 1779 and 1783, offering architects an opportunity to develop new architectural forms.

⁴³⁸Tidworth, *Theatres*, 74.

⁴³⁹Mullin, *Development Of The Playhouse*, 53. Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale*, 160. Rougemont argues that additional boxes at the level of the *avant-scène* were oriented obliquely toward the auditorium instead of the stage, thus providing them with a rather poor view of the performance. "C'est une formule extrême et très frappante de l'interprétation de ces loges comme projection du public face au public."

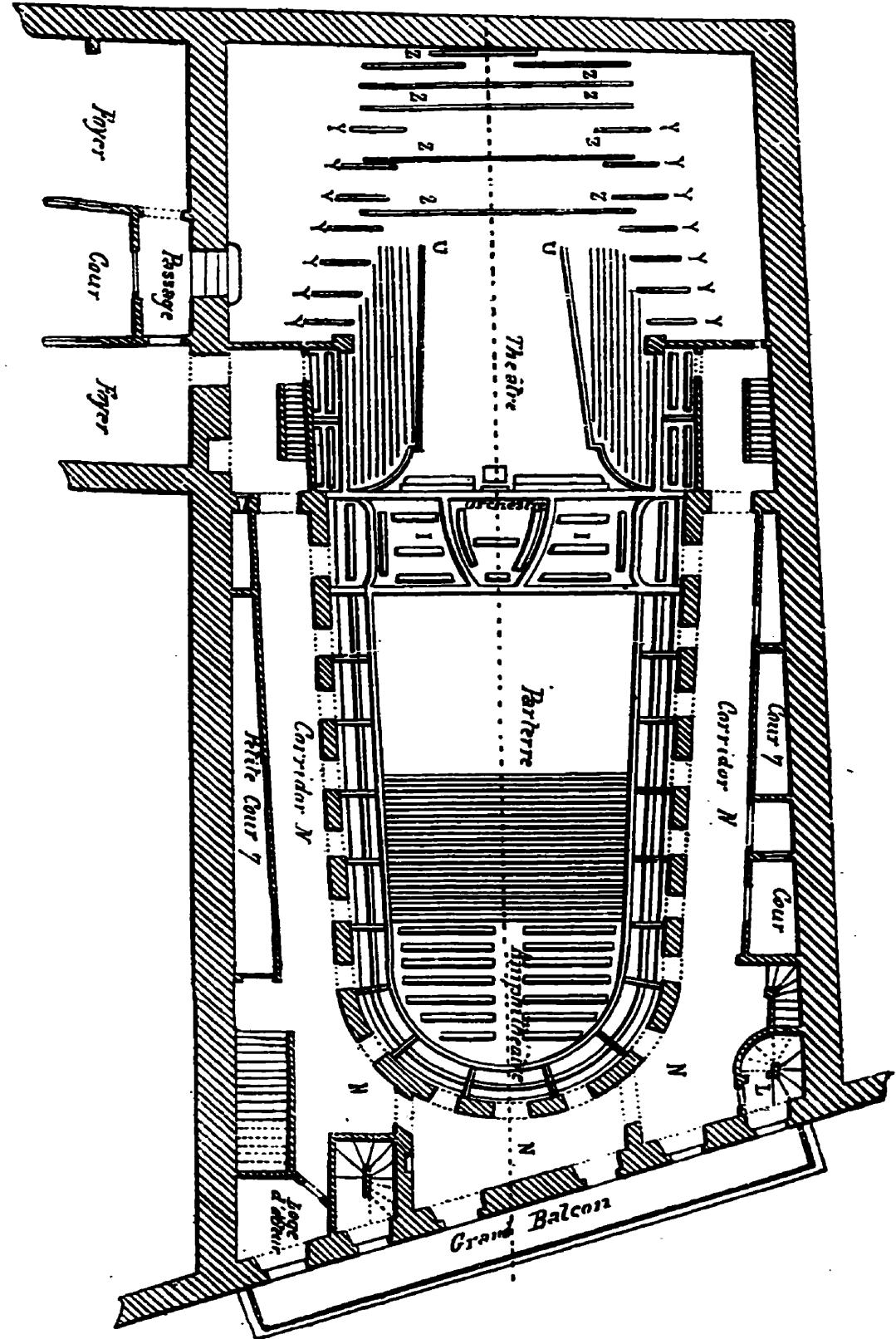


Figure 48: Plan of the Comédie française, with benches on the stage (1689). From J.-F. Blondel, *Architecture Françoise*, II (1752).

From the mid-eighteenth century to the eve of the French Revolution, the theatre experienced some major transformations in the character of its architecture, as well as technical developments in stage machinery, advancements in lighting for the stage and auditorium, and improvements in its acoustics. Considerations of sight lines and speculations on the acoustic qualities of spaces suddenly became an issue, and theatres were no longer fitted into existing buildings. These major transformations coincided with a renewed interest in the architecture of antiquity. Until then, the absence of a coherent theory of theatre architecture had been loudly criticized by philosophers, playwrights, and even notorious architects such as Jacques-François Blondel. Blondel sarcastically wrote in his *Architecture françoise* (1752) that "It is not thanks to buildings of this kind [theatres] that French architecture has won its renown."⁴⁴⁰ Voltaire himself echoed this concern in an even more caustic manner: "Les bonne pièces sont en France, les belles salles à l'étranger."⁴⁴¹

The important changes that occurred in French theatre architecture around mid-century coincided with Madame de Pompadour's great appearance on the French political scene as she became the official mistress to Louis XV.⁴⁴² Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713–80), a young promising architect and favourite of Madame de Pompadour, was chosen by the Académie Royale d'Architecture to accompany her brother, the Marquis de Marigny, on a trip to Italy to study the great monuments of antiquity. L'abbé Leblanc (Madame de Pompadour's advisor on purchases of works of art) and C.-N. Cochin (the

⁴⁴⁰J.-F. Blondel, *Architecture françoise* (Paris, 1752) 2: 14.

⁴⁴¹Voltaire, "Dissertation sur la tragédie" [1750], in *Oeuvres* 4: 487.

⁴⁴²She became known as the patroness of the arts, and Louis XV's interest in architecture has been attributed to her own insistence. Her influence was further secured by the successive appointment of her uncle Le Normant de Tournehem, and her brother M. de Vandière (1727-1781) (who became Marquis de Marigny), as director-general to the *Service des Bâtiments du Roi*. In 1749, after being promised the post at the *Services des Bâtiments*, Marigny, guided by his sister, embarked on a preparatory study tour to Italy.

draughtsman and engraver, employee of the Menus-Plaisirs) were also part of the delegation.⁴⁴³ Although they went to Italy to study classical architecture, their interest in the theatre led them to visit many contemporary buildings. Their expedition took them first to Turin, where the Marquis became acquainted with Comte Alfieri, the designer of the Turin Opera.⁴⁴⁴ Then they went to Milan, Parma, Regio, Modena, and Vicenza, where they visited Palladio's Teatro Olimpico. Soufflot also went farther south to study the architecture of Naples, Herculaneum and especially Paestum.⁴⁴⁵ He was profoundly impressed by the theatre at Herculaneum, whose semicircular shape seemed to mimic the "natural" grouping of an audience on a hillside.⁴⁴⁶

Soufflot's observations during this trip were immediately put into practice in his theatre for Lyon. The shape of the auditorium is a truncated ellipse, like the Turin Opera. (See Figure 49.) While the ground floor has a traditional standing *parterre*, the vertical section of the auditorium was innovative. Instead of an Italian stack of pigeon-hole boxes, it featured three continuous levels of balconies, stepping back in a way that resembles the theatres of antiquity. Every seat was endowed with good visibility, and the new spatial organization also followed social conventions in France. In the Italian tradition, the boxes were closed on all sides, and even the front could be closed for more privacy. In French

⁴⁴³Wend von Kalnein, *Architecture in France in the Eighteenth Century*, translated by D. Britt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), 131.

⁴⁴⁴Benedetto Alfieri was not an architect but a lawyer when he built the *Teatro Regio* at Turin for King Carlo Emmanuele III's palace. For this project, he started from the original project by Juvarra, and was later appointed "First Architect to the King in succession to Juvarra." Tidworth, *Theatres*, 84.

⁴⁴⁵While Vandière was entertained by various ambassadors, Soufflot, accompanied by his friend Gabriel Pierre Martin Dumont, author of the *Parallèle des plans des plus belles salles de spectacle d'Italie et de France* (1774), went on this southern expedition.

⁴⁴⁶Daniel Rabreau, "Autour du voyage d'Italie (1750). Soufflot, Cochin et M. de Marigny réformateurs de l'architecture théâtrale française," *Bullettino de Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura "Andrea Palladio"* (Venice) 17 (1975): 214–15.

Plan des Premières Loges du Théâtre de Lyon

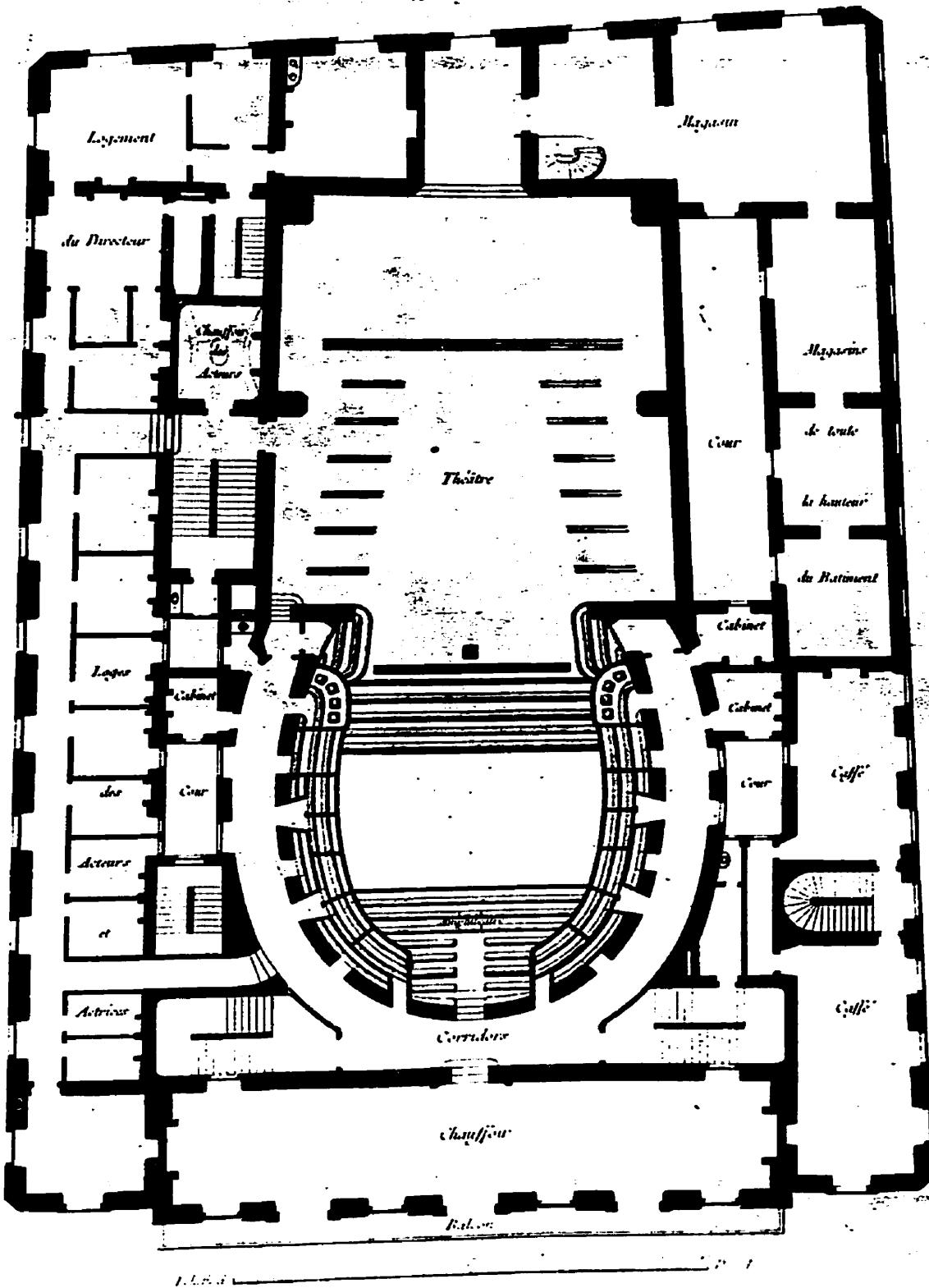


Figure 49: Plan of the theatre in Lyon, by Germain Soufflot (1756). From G.P.M. Dumont, *Parallèle de plans des plus belles salles de spectacles* (1760) [reprint 1968].

theatres, however, it was essential to be seen, so the emerging tradition favoured a more open distribution of the auditorium. Soufflot's theatre in Lyon was also the first freestanding theatre to be built in France, anticipating the monumentality of the playhouse as a civic centre.⁴⁴⁷

Cochin also applied his findings to a project for a theatre that was published in 1765. In *Projet d'une salle de spectacle pour un théâtre de comédie*, Cochin acknowledges Palladio's Teatro Olimpico as his primary inspiration, but although he believed that the Italian model offered great alternatives in the design of a theatre, he was aware that any innovation had to be adapted to French customs and the laws of *convenance*.⁴⁴⁸ He was nonetheless very critical of existing theatres in France. Their principal problem, he argues, concerns their proportions:

Nos salles de spectacle ... sont trop profondes; tellement que les loges du fond, qui sont les plus favorables pour voir le spectacle, & celles pour qui se disposent le jeu du théâtre & l'effet des décos, sont trop éloignées pour que l'on y puisse voir & entendre distinctement.⁴⁴⁹

The general configuration of the auditorium remained a hotly debated topic in theatre design and became the subject of many treatises during the second half of the century. In his *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale* (1782), Pierre Patte (1723–1814)

⁴⁴⁷The first freestanding theatre building in Europe, however, appeared in Germany: the Berlin Opera House built in 1741 by Knobelsdorf for Frederick the Great. It apparently influenced many public theatres built in eastern France during the following decade, including Lyon and Metz. Montpellier was also among the first to be conceived as an independent building. Tidworth, *Theatres*, 103; Mullin, *Development Of The Playhouse*, 90.

⁴⁴⁸"On ne le propose point [Palladio's theatre] comme propre à être érigé à Paris: il peut y avoir des loix de convenance relatives à cette Capitale, auquelles on ne s'est point assujetti; mais si quelques villes de province vouloient se construire des salles de spectacle ... elles seroient d'autant plus susceptibles des avantages que présente ce nouveau plan." *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁴⁹Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle*, 4.

considers various shapes for the auditorium, but like Cochin, he gives great importance to the rules of *convenance*. After praising the technical advantages of the theatres of antiquity, and clearly stating that the seating in classical amphitheatres was superior in sight lines and acoustics,⁴⁵⁰ Patte concludes that the hierarchy established by the boxes in French theatres had become so customary and socially important that he deemed the ancient examples inappropriate to French society:

Cette disposition des spectateurs, sur les gradins en amphithéâtre, offrirait à la vérité un ensemble plus imposant à l'oeil que nos loges ordinaires & les surfaces nues ménagées, tant près de l'avant-scène que vers le haut de la Salle, pourroient effectivement être avantageuses aux renvois du son; mais, comme nous l'avons déjà observé en parlant du Théâtre antique, est-il bien vrai que nos usages & nos moeurs pussent cadrer avec une semblable distribution, & qu'on s'avisât de préférer, à la commodité que procurent les loges, des places isolées où chacun paroîtroit confondu, & où les femmes seroient si peu remarquées?

Patte later elaborates on the same subject:

Les femmes, accoutumées depuis long-tems à faire le principal ornement de cet objet de nos plaisirs, ne trouveroient pas leur compte à ces gradins sur lesquels elles paroîtroient isolées & confondues; la propreté des habits paroît même répugner à cette distribution; outre cela, c'est la location des loges à l'année qui produit le revenu le plus assuré des théâtres permanens dans les grandes Villes.⁴⁵¹

The idea of a uniform public, in which the identity of every spectator would be merged into a general mass, clearly remained unacceptable at this time, only a few years before the French Revolution. Patte even warns against alternate dispositions for the auditorium. He considers English theatres defective because they tend to have galleries that

⁴⁵⁰Patte discusses various artifices that were used to help propagate sounds, such as the *vases d'airain* described by Vitruvius.

⁴⁵¹Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 141–42, 165.

fan out toward the back of the auditorium, rather than circles of boxes.⁴⁵² Most spectators face the stage, he writes, "but nothing is less pleasing and conforms less to good taste than this arrangement."⁴⁵³ It divides the house into three separate parts, and prevents any contact among members of the audience. Each person sees only those at his own level.⁴⁵⁴ Even though Patte invokes the principles of optics in the title of his treatise, and begins by saying that the shape of a theatre must fulfill the double objective of seeing and hearing the action on stage,⁴⁵⁵ his seemingly scientific intentions are soon cast aside when they are contradicted by social conventions.

While Patte sought to preserve the interaction among spectators, he did not aim to create greater contact between the audience and the actors. Patte criticizes the use of pronounced fore-stages, an English invention that was used also in many theatres in Italian cities such as Naples, Milan and Rome, and was previously proposed by Cochin in his own treatise and later defended by André Jacob Roubo in his *Traité de la construction des théâtres* (1777). In France, this protruding apron was introduced largely because of the presence of spectators on stage. Because stages were badly lit and overly populated with a well-paying public, the actors had been forced to perform within a very restricted area at the front of the stage. To improve the situation, the front stage was extended well into the auditorium, even half-way into that space. In his *Essay on the Opera* (1767), Francesco Algarotti criticizes this kind of stage:

By that expedient the actors were brought forward into the middle of the audience.... The actor, instead of being so brought forward, ought to be thrown

⁴⁵²Tidworth remarks that Patte's description of English theatres doesn't seem accurate, and he wonders what Patte knew about them. Tidworth, *Theatres*, 102–3.

⁴⁵³"... mais rien n'est moins agréable & conforme au bon goût que cet arrangement." Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 118.

⁴⁵⁴Ibid., 118–19.

⁴⁵⁵Ibid., 3.

back at a certain distance from the spectator's eye and stand within the scenery of the stage in order to make a part of that pleasing illusion for which all dramatic exhibitions are calculated.⁴⁵⁶

Echoing Algarotti's concern, Patte emphasized that a clear separation should be maintained between the realm of the actors and the realm of the spectators. He criticized fore-stages that advance too far into the audience because the actors are removed from the scenery, thus destroying the theatrical illusion.⁴⁵⁷ Without a fore-stage, however, the voices of actors may be lost in the wings. As a compromise, Patte suggested that the fore-stage be a "mixed area" between the auditorium and the stage.⁴⁵⁸ The proscenium thus becomes a permeable boundary between the stage and the auditorium. Patte's notion of a transitional space between actors and spectators in fact reflected the design of the new Comédie française by De Wailly and Peyre in 1782, and anticipated Ledoux's redefined proscenium in his theatre at Besançon.

Throughout the eighteenth century in France, developments in the acting space, including its fluctuating boundary with the space of the spectators, were never resolved into a single, universally accepted solution. The dimensions of the proscenium were subject to enormous changes, based on technical and acting considerations. The successive proposals for the design of the new Comédie française included a wide range of dimensions for the proscenium. In the first project, prior to 1769, the proscenium was

⁴⁵⁶Francesco Algarotti, *Essay on the Opera* (1767); quoted by Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London: Routledge, 1993), 30.

⁴⁵⁷Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 180. In *A Treatise on Theatre* (1790), George Saunders also argues against the projecting apron stage, and favours instead the French theory that "a division is necessary between the theatre and the stage, and should be so characterized as to assist the idea of their being two separate and distinct places."

⁴⁵⁸"... un lieu mixte entre la Salle & le Théâtre ... destiné à préparer l'ouverture de celui-ci." Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 183.

sixteen feet deep, but in the project approved by Louis XV in late 1769 the depth was only five feet. Eight years later, De Wailly and Peyre returned to their original idea with a proscenium that was eighteen feet deep.⁴⁵⁹ In an undated *Mémoire*, the architects cite acoustical reasons for an extended apron:

Par le moyen du proscenium avancé jusqu'au centre de la salle, tous les spectateurs se trouveront à peu près à la même distance de la scène, ce qui empêchera la voix de se perdre dans les coulisses, et n'étant plus obligée de parcourir un long espace ni de séjourner dans les angles, elle conservera mieux sa vibration.⁴⁶⁰

To help solve acoustical problems, the orchestra was located between the stage and the spectators. Two years after the official opening of the Comédie française, Ledoux sank the entire orchestra (an early example of an orchestra pit) to control the acoustical effects more carefully and to reduce the visual obtrusion of musicians in front of the stage. This single change had a tremendous impact on both the action on stage and the audience by further emphasizing the unidirectional intention of the performance.⁴⁶¹

Acoustical problems, however, were attributed mainly to the shape of the auditorium, and every author had strong opinions on the subject. Patte favoured the ellipse, with its long axis perpendicular to the stage.⁴⁶² (See Figure 50.) Soufflot used the

⁴⁵⁹On either side, two small boxes were inserted into it, thus returning to the old tradition of playing among the spectators. Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale en province au XVIII^e siècle* [Droz, 1933] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1976), 71–72. Fuchs equates the narrow proscenium with a realistic, illusionistic stage, while a deep proscenium would suggest a more schematic, atmospheric stage.

⁴⁶⁰Arch, Nat., O¹ 846 n^o8; quoted by Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale*, 74.

⁴⁶¹Almost a century later, Wagner used a similar device in his Festspielhaus in Bayreuth.

⁴⁶²To prove his claim, Patte introduces the notions of sound reflection and wave theory. In nature, he says, everything seems to move, to turn or to gravitate either in circles, in ellipses, or according to certain curves around centres: "Dieu, a-t-on dit, n'a fait que géométriser en créant l'Univers: le son conséquemment doit être aussi asservi à l'une de ces déterminations." Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 13. His theory was clearly indebted to the Newtonian sciences and the underlying belief that the universe was

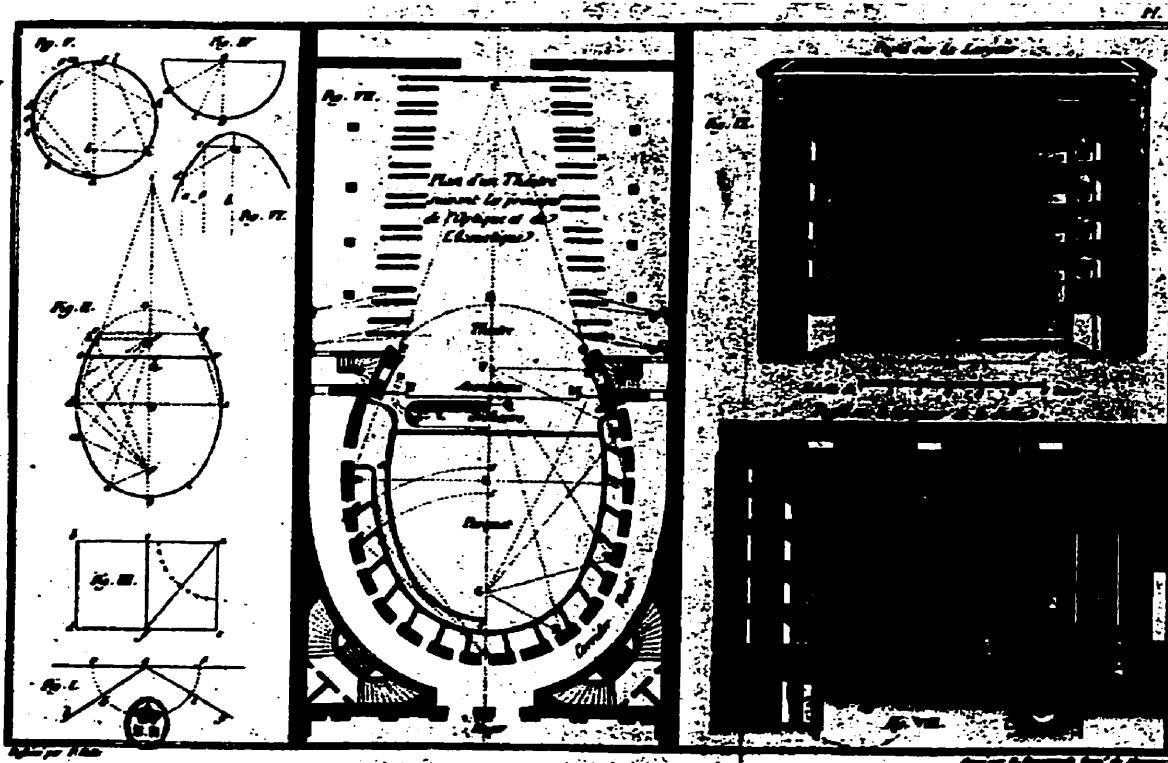


Figure 50: Plan and sections of a theatre designed “according to the principles of optics and acoustics.” From P. Patte, *Essai sur l’architecture théâtrale* (1782).

ellipse for his theatre in Lyon, but unlike Patte, he truncated it near one of its focal points rather than through its mid-point, thus preventing awkward reverberations.⁴⁶³ Cochin based the plan of his theatre on an oval shape cut along its main axis, with its short axis perpendicular to the stage to bring the audience closer. This required the aperture of the proscenium to be widened. (See Figure 51.) An extended apron (*avant-scène*) also brought the actors forward into the auditorium. According to Cochin, this would bring the spectators closer to the stage, with a more advantageous angle to witness the action. Cochin appears to be proposing a more rational distribution for the auditorium, giving priority to sightlines and acoustics. His ideal theatre also attempts to move the focus of attention from the auditorium, where spectators would face each other and act for their peers, to the stage, where the action was taking place. Although Cochin advocated a respect for conventions, his own ideal theatre initiated an important transition toward a new architectural hierarchy.

The most radical changes were implemented by De Wailly and Peyre in their second proposal for the Comédie française, submitted in 1770. This is where a *parterre* with seating first appeared. Previously, the middle class, students and intellectuals in France had stood in the *parterre* throughout an entire performance. A crowd of standing spectators encouraged commotion in the theatre, and, as with La Morlière's *claque*, it was a fertile ground for all sorts of disturbances. The "uncivilized" custom of standing in a section of the *parterre* was still common in the privileged theatres in France during the 1780s but was criticized by various authors, including Pierre Patte:

rational and implicitly geometric.

⁴⁶³This solution, however, was not shared by all; some, such as the Chevalier de Chaumont, claimed that the vertical proportions of the building and the widening in its upper portion produced disastrous acoustic effects. Grimm later wrote that Soufflot, who built in Paris a theatre where one does not see, was also the designer of the theatre in Lyon where one hears nothing. See Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale*, 68, 96.

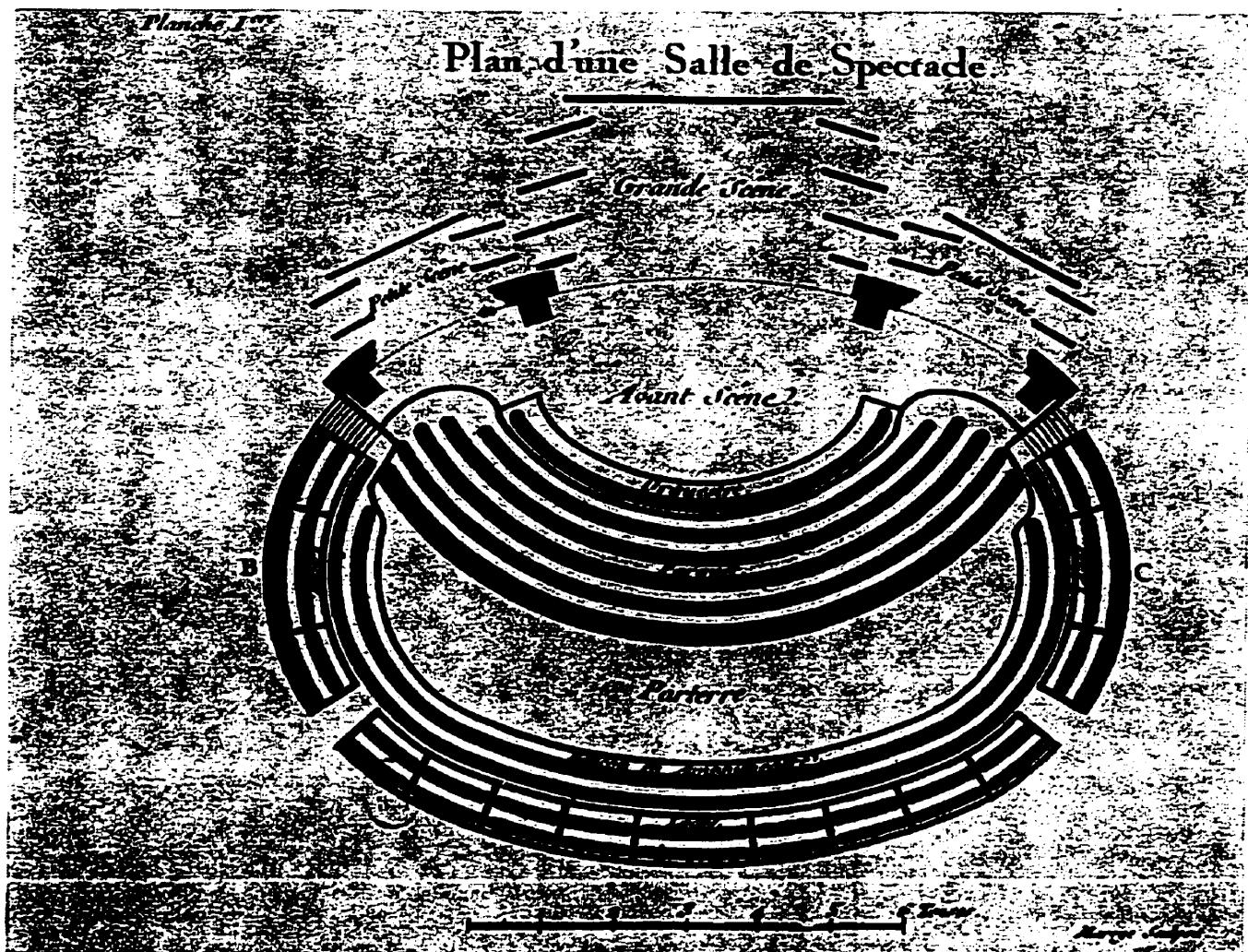


Figure 51: Plan of a theatre. From C.-N. Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle* (1765).

Il est certain que les cabales & les partis, qui se cachent aisément dans une foule qui se tient debout & en tumulte seroit à découvert dans une assemblée d'hommes assis. Alors chaque personne est en vue à toutes les autres, & craint de déshonorer son caractère & son jugement. Alors le parterre ne seroit plus un champ de bataille, où chaque parti se distribue par peloton.⁴⁶⁴

This radical idea to seat the entire audience was carried through to the final project and acclaimed by many of their contemporaries. This design decision, however, had direct repercussions on the attitudes of spectators and their customary interaction during performances. Many critics of the time, including Diderot, Sébastien Mercier, and Marmontel, commented on the audience's change in behaviour. Although the middle class could now enjoy greater comfort, this brought a certain "deadness" into the theatre. According to contemporary critics, it contributed to the taming - and ultimately the silencing - of the audience.⁴⁶⁵ Seating the spectators in the *parterre* cooled down their acting inclinations, and they began to present themselves more as facades, displaying their social status, wealth and taste in the way they dressed.

In the new Comédie française the vertical distribution of boxes inherited from the Italian tradition was replaced by a receding and more open series of balconies with low partitions.⁴⁶⁶ It was highly praised for allowing spectators to be seen as well as to see the

⁴⁶⁴ Patte, *Essai sur l'architecture théâtrale*, 175, quoting M. de la Harpe in his *Éloge de Racine*.

⁴⁶⁵ In his letter to Madame Riccoboni (1758), Diderot complains about the cold silence that already paralyzed the spectators, and mourns the tumultuous involvement of the spectators that characterized the theatres during the first half of the eighteenth century. Even though the play sometimes could hardly start because of the uproar, he says that this is the most favourable disposition for a poet, because when a passage of the play pleased the crowd, the excitement reached its apex, and the spectators would ask for it to be repeated again and again: "On était arrivé avec la chaleur, on s'en retourait dans l'ivresse: Voilà le plaisir." Denis Diderot, *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, edited by F.C. Green (London: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 216.

⁴⁶⁶ Although two decades earlier Soufflot had modified the seating arrangement of his theatre in Lyon in a similar fashion, this distribution of the auditorium was nonetheless innovative for a Paris audience.

action on stage.⁴⁶⁷ The social hierarchy in the theatre was based no longer on one's proximity to the royal presence but on one's view of the stage and vertical position within the auditorium. Individuals from the same social class gathered in predetermined sections of the theatre, and physical dividers reinforced the social order.

A few years after De Wailly and Peyre introduced these hierarchical divisions, Ledoux made a similar spatial segregation in his theatre at Besançon, but his reorganization went even further: the *parterre*, traditionally for people of the middle class, was replaced by a *parquet* reserved for important guests, so they could be seen from everywhere. The public of the *parterre* was sent to the *paradis*, a seating gallery above the third tier of boxes, at the very top of the theatre.⁴⁶⁸ To maintain the social order, particular prices were assigned to every category of seats.⁴⁶⁹ Unlike traditional theatres, where a basic distinction between order (in the boxes) and disorder (in the *parterre*) embodied the social distinction between nobility and vulgarity, the Comédie française by De Wailly and Peyre and Ledoux's theatre in Besançon placed every spectator in a well-defined social order. Although the king no longer provided a focal point for the architectural composition,

⁴⁶⁷In his *Cours d'architecture*, completed by Patte in 1777, J.-F. Blondel already suggested removing the traditional boxes from the theatre and replacing them with galleries, and transforming the *parterre* into a *parquet* with seating places. Blondel also suggested dividing the orchestra in two, on either side of the forestage. This last design was criticized by Patte in his own treatise on the theatre. Patte criticized mainly the uncertainty of his colleague regarding the appropriate shape for the theatre.

⁴⁶⁸In his theatre in Bordeaux (1780), Victor Louis (1731–1811) was in fact the first architect to experiment with a new way of placing the poorest spectators in a *paradis*. For more on the transition from a standing *parterre* into a seating *parquet* in Ledoux's theatre, see Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 170.

⁴⁶⁹In a letter to the Intendant of Franche-Comté, Charles-André de Lacoré, dated 24 August 1775, Ledoux promotes his idea of dividing the auditorium in such a way by arguing that the richer class (*les gens voiturés*) will no longer be disturbed by the smell of the poor class, the pedestrians. "[Il n'auront pas à] respirer les odeurs que dans nos salles exhalent les piétons." Quoted by Jacques Rittaud-Hutinet, *La vision d'un futur: Ledoux et ses théâtres* (Lyon: Presse universitaire de Lyon, 1982), 14.

spectators could find their places in the social hierarchy and feel they were participating in an order that transcended them.

The new seating arrangements and general distribution of the Comédie française and the theatre in Besançon challenged established social conventions at the theatre. In devising these formal changes - giving greater exposure to spectators by eliminating the boxes, replacing the standing *parterre* by a *parquet* with seating, and emphasizing sight lines - the architects had influenced the social behaviour of the spectators. These architectural transformations of the internal space of the theatre did not affect only the interaction of the spectators within the auditorium, however; they established a new relationship between the auditorium and the stage. The proscenium that previously was considered as a transitional space between both realms became a more definite threshold that could no longer be transgressed at the expense of theatrical illusion.⁴⁷⁰

This separation became obvious when optical devices introduced by Soufflot and Cochin into their architectural projects challenged the traditional position of the spectator. In his *Projet d'une salle de spectacle*, Cochin considers how to increase the number of places in his theatre. Some of these places may be uncomfortable, he concedes, but for new plays "on se trouve heureux d'avoir une place quelle qu'elle soit."⁴⁷¹ He suggests locating additional places behind the first boxes by cutting openings (*lunettes*) into the back of the first boxes so that people standing in the corridors could watch opening-night

⁴⁷⁰Spectators were no longer admitted onto the stage - although the proscenium arch itself still could contain royal boxes - and the actors' position was itself carefully controlled. An actor could no longer move across the implied line between the proscenium and the front stage without symbolically changing space, nor could he come too close to the sets without interfering with the perception of scale and thus challenging the perceptual coherence of the whole stage set. The quest for a greater illusion on stage during the second half of the eighteenth century was accompanied by a greater segregation of the space of performance from that of the audience.

⁴⁷¹Cochin, *Projet d'une salle de spectacle*, 30.

performances and special productions. This device, he indicates, was used successfully by Soufflot in his theatre in Lyon:

Elle suffroient pour quantité de personnes qui ne veulent voir les nouveautés que pour en porter des premiers leur jugement, & qui ne pensent pas qu'il leur faille un plus sérieux examen pour décider qu'une pièce est sublime ou detestable. Cette idée est exécutée avec succès dans le beau théâtre que M. Soufflot a construit à Lyon.⁴⁷²

This device, however, not only exploited the physical capacity of the theatre to increase attendance. It also introduced a new category of spectators, akin to viewers of the *drame bourgeois*: present yet invisible, watching yet detached from the action on stage. These concealed openings at the back of the auditorium were also closely related to Le Camus's system of hidden corridors and peeping holes that enabled the master of a *hôtel particulier* to observe the movements of visitors without being seen.

In his treatise on the design of a theatre for the opera, Chevalier de Chaumont claimed that these *lunettes* in the theatre legitimized the presence of social intruders. He regarded them as indecent devices for eavesdropping and spying on "distinguished people": "Il est très-indécent de placer au-dessus des personnes distinguées, qui sont dans les Loges, comme, des espions & des auditeurs, qui examinent & écoutent ce qui se dit & se fait."⁴⁷³ The eighteenth-century spectator never ceased to be an active participant in the theatre, however, and such devices were never widely used.

Even though actors and spectators in these newly developed theatres were becoming more segregated, the spectators remained social actors in transitional spaces such as vestibules and grand staircases. The design of these transitional spaces added to the

⁴⁷²Ibid., 31–33.

⁴⁷³Chaumont, *Véritable construction d'un théâtre d'opéra à l'usage de la France* (Paris: Chez de Lormel, 1766), 15.

spectacle, and clearly extended theatricality into the public realm of the city. As in La Morlière's novel, the arrival and departure of theatrical spectators were significant ceremonies. These social rituals affected the architectural design of theatres. Foyers and salons were expanded, and triumphal stairs replaced narrow stairways to the tiers. The design of De Wailly and Peyre's Comédie française, for example, treated these architectural elements as places for social performance.⁴⁷⁴ The vestibule, stairs and foyer provided an impressive spatial sequence for displaying spectators, as shown in De Wailly's drawing presented at the Salon of 1781, in which the audience prepares to enter the virtual world of theatrical representation.⁴⁷⁵ (See Figure 52.)

Victor Louis's Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux, begun in 1773 and completed in 1780, also embodied the desire of the *beau monde* to make a spectacle of themselves. Although it was not completely innovative, it did incorporate many new ideas.⁴⁷⁶ The basic plan of the house is a circle with one quarter truncated at the line of the orchestra pit. Even though the theatre's standing *parterre* was conventional, the series of transitional spaces in the theatre, including many salons and foyers, had become much larger than the auditorium itself. (See Figure 53.) The monumental staircase had a rusticated ground floor, a detail normally found on the exterior. (See Figure 54.) This suggests an attempt to emulate

⁴⁷⁴"L'escalier se métamorphose en une sorte de seconde salle: l'escalier lui-même servant de scène pour les entrées des personnes de haut rang et les galeries, de rangs de loges pour les spectateurs de cette représentation 'au second degré'." Steinhauser, "Le théâtre de l'Odéon de Charles De Wailly et Marie-Joseph Peyre, 1767-1782." *Revue de l'art* 19 (1973), 40.

⁴⁷⁵"From a colonnaded ground-floor space with a central opening to the roof, wide stairs diverged to either end of the first floor, where promenades lined with columns led back to the central opening. There a great octagon of coupled columns supported a continuous gallery, an arcade and a painted dome." Kalnein, *Architecture in France*, 179–80.

⁴⁷⁶The galleries are supported "with fewer and heavier posts in a monumental order reaching from pit to cornice. . . . The gallery fronts . . . cantilevered out beyond the line of the columns" make the boxes more spacious. *Ibid.*, 98.



Figure 52: Vestibule of the Comédie française in Paris, by Peyre and De Wailly (1771); drawing by De Wailly (1781). Musée du Louvre, Paris. [Kalnein].

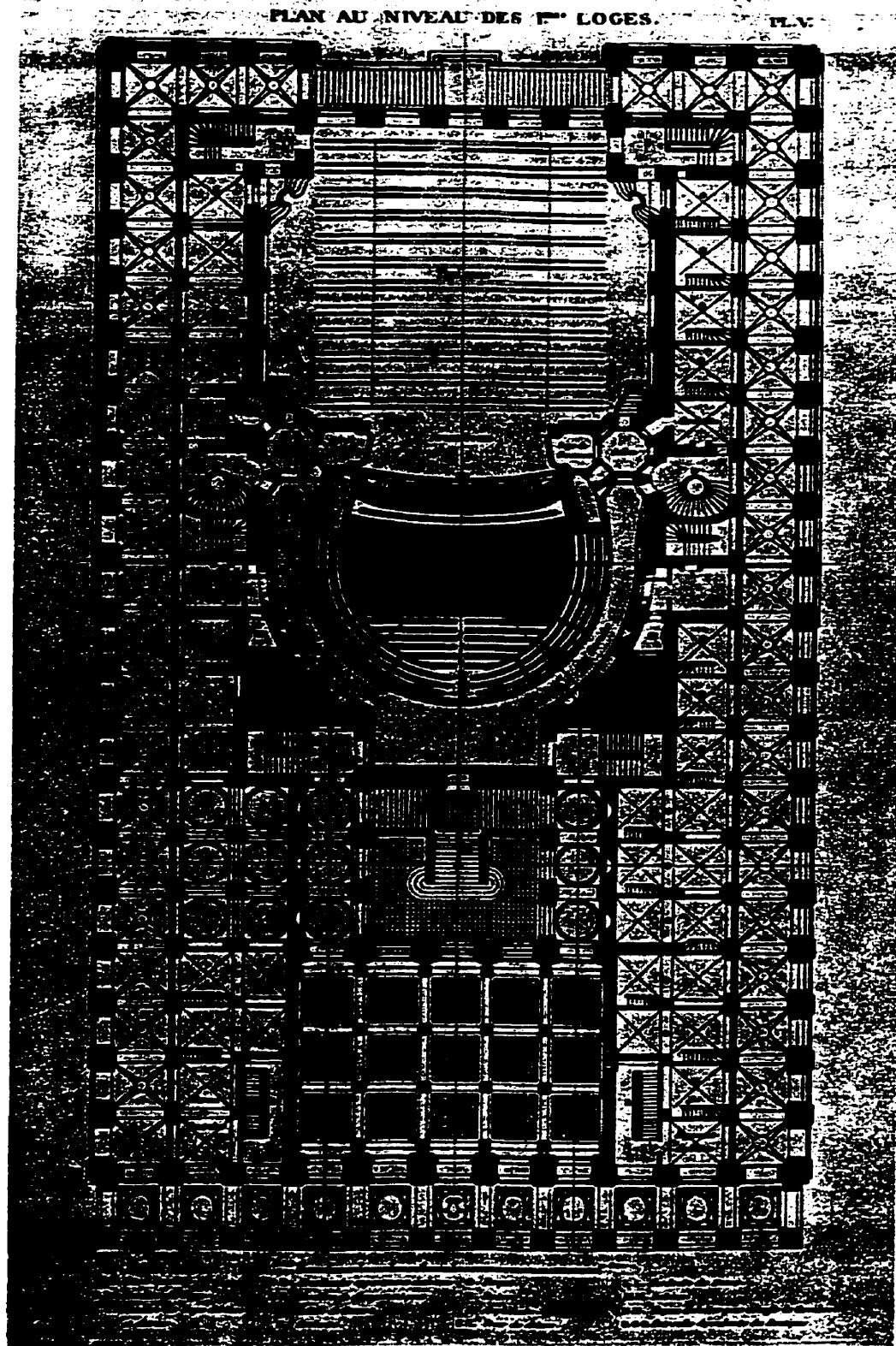


Figure 53: Plan of the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux, by Victor Louis (1780). [Pariset].



Figure 54: The grand staircase of the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux, by Victor Louis (1780). [Tidworth]

urban space within the space of the theatre. By providing spectators with an ideal setting where they could see and be seen, the grand staircase served as a stage where the public could perform.⁴⁷⁷

The eighteenth-century spectator oscillated between two different roles: an observing witness and a true social actor. Although the space of the stage may have seemed irremediably dissociated from that of the auditorium in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the architecture of theatres still suggested that these two realms could be unified or inverted. Like Gabriel's Opera at Versailles, the more recent theatres by Ledoux, Victor Louis, and De Wailly and Peyre all used a colonnade around their auditorium that extended through the proscenium into the scenic space beyond, thus continuing the order of the house and suggesting a physical link between the two realms. (See Figure 55.) A similar device was used by Moreau in his Opera house, built in Paris in 1769. The curve of the auditorium ended well within the proscenium, thus promoting an illusion of depth and continuity between stage and auditorium.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷This majestic stair was equaled only in the nineteenth-century Paris Opera by Charles Garnier, who indeed acknowledges Louis's influence in his own treatise, *Le Théâtre* (1871). As in Louis's theatre in Bordeaux, the public areas in Garnier's theatre explicitly extend the theatricality of the event, especially in the Hall and the Grand Stairs. For Garnier, "all that happens in the world [was] in sum only theatre and representation." To be an actor or a spectator had truly become "the condition of human life." Charles Garnier, *Le théâtre* (Paris: Hachette, 1871), 1–2. However, the spectators who attended the new Garnier theatre at the end of the nineteenth century experienced theatrical events in a space that was qualitatively different from the theatrical space of the Ancien Régime. The complete darkening of the auditorium, following Richard Wagner's fundamental innovation at Bayreuth, created a new kind of boundary between actors and spectators inside the theatre. By visually isolating its spectators, the nineteenth-century theatre clearly anticipated the private, individual, and unidirectional vantage point of contemporary theatres – ultimately the place of the "voyeur." Karsten Harries looks at this important transition in his article "Theatricality and Representation," *Perspecta* 26 (1990), 21–40.

⁴⁷⁸Daniel Rabreau and Marianne Roland-Michel, *Les Arts du théâtre de Watteau à Fragonard* (Bordeaux: Galerie des Beaux-Arts, 1980), 40; Mullin, *Development Of The Playhouse*, 96.



Figure 55: The stage of the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux, by Victor Louis (1780).
[Pariset].

This colonnade inside the auditorium appears in Ledoux's engraving "Coup d'oeil du théâtre de Besançon." (See Figure 56.) Paradoxically, it seems to assimilate the space of the audience and the space of performance. The engraving represents the auditorium as it is reflected in the iris and pupil of a gigantic eye. This unusual representation has been interpreted as a manifestation of the hegemony of vision at the theatre, the eye being the "first frame" through which the world is seen, and the preferred sense being addressed by the performance.⁴⁷⁹ Anthony Vidler has pointed out that the complex geometry of the flattened arch of the proscenium in Besançon was derived from the shape of the eyelid sectioning the pupil in the engraving: the *frame* of vision in the engraving "follows a contour exactly that of the proscenium."⁴⁸⁰ What the eye sees, however, is not the stage but the auditorium, suggesting an implicit reversibility of the roles of spectator and actor. This suggests another interpretation of the *coup d'oeil*: the auditorium, rather than being reflected in the eye of a spectator, is seen from the virtual world, that of the actor.⁴⁸¹ Until the end of the eighteenth century, the word *théâtre* referred to the stage, while the entire building was called *salle de spectacle*. Consequently, *coup d'oeil du théâtre* can be translated as "a view," "a glance *at* the stage," or "a glance *from* the stage." The reversibility of the French expression places the audience simultaneously in two positions:

⁴⁷⁹Ledoux writes: "Tout est en rapport avec l'oeil ... dans ma salle, on voit partout et on est vu partout." Ledoux, *L'Architecture*, 222. Anthony Vidler suggests that in Ledoux's engraving, the eye "remains the frame of vision for each individual member of the audience. The proscenium, focusing the collective vision of the *salle* at a single point, thus echoed in its form the natural boundaries of sight." Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 172. See also Rittaud-Hutinet, *La vision d'un futur*, 67.

⁴⁸⁰Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 172.

⁴⁸¹Vidler also points out that the beam of light that comes from behind the eyelid seems to cast light on the auditorium as on a stage; instead of being contained within the eye, the light is projected out (as in the extramission theory of light), emulating "the commonplace *all-seeing eye* of Freemasonic iconography." Ibid., 184.

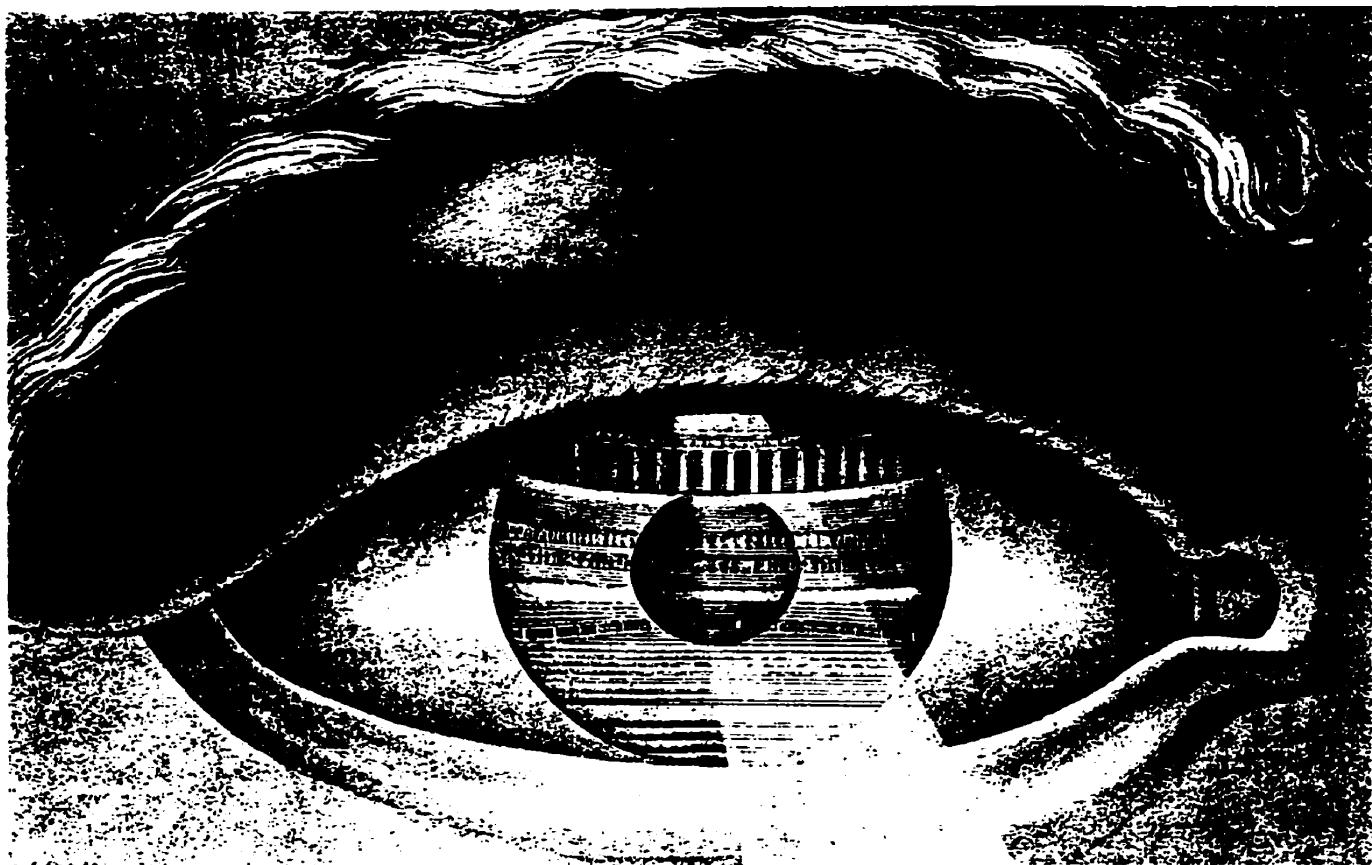


Figure 56: *Coup d'oeil du théâtre de Besançon*. From C.-N. Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* (1804) [reprint 1981].

observing the place of performance (in "a glance *at* the stage") and being observed by the actors (in "a glance *from* the stage"). Associating the auditorium with the place of performance - *le théâtre* - equates the "real life" of the spectators with the world of illusion and play-acting. This interpretation is further confirmed by Ledoux's insistence that the spectators - especially women - animate and decorate the auditorium. Ledoux recommends that men not sit in the front rows so that the natural beauty of women may be displayed: "les femmes embellissent les premières lignes avec la grâce inhérente à leur sexe."⁴⁸² In Ledoux's engraving, the "real life" of the auditorium and the theatrical world of the stage are collapsed onto the reflective surface of the eye. Ledoux also plays on the parallel between the real and illusive theatrical worlds in other instances. Justifying the need for the stage to be of ample dimensions, Ledoux compares it to the outside space, ultimately the space of the city:

La salle étant à la scène, ce que la pièce habitée est au vuide [sic] que l'on découvre au-dehors, le théâtre [i.e., the stage, including the wings and service areas] doit être plus large, plus vaste que l'espace qui contient les spectateurs. C'est la véritable place des illusions magiques de la scène.⁴⁸³

Associations between theatre and architecture were common in the second half of the eighteenth century. Le Camus de Mézières, in his architectural treatise, draws important lessons from this tradition and compares the expressive dimension of architecture to the art of creating emotions at the theatre through changes in scenery. Using Servandoni's innovative *jeux d'optique* as a point of comparison, Le Camus draws an

⁴⁸²Ledoux, *L'Architecture*, 219. Boullée also had this idea of using the spectators as "decoration" for his coliseum. Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 179. Vidler emphasizes that in his treatise, Ledoux pushes this notion of the theatricality of real life further, since in his text, entire passages describing the life of the inhabitants of the Salines (such as the blacksmiths) "read like descriptions of dramatic scenes." Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 185.

⁴⁸³Ledoux, *L'Architecture*, 229.

analogy between the production of true emotion in architecture and the use of theatre decorations that imitate works of architecture to evoke specific emotions.⁴⁸⁴ Like Ledoux, Le Camus believed it was important to involve the beholder in order to complete the architectural work. While the visibility of spectators in Ledoux's theatre continued to emphasize their role as social actors, however, in *Le génie de l'architecture* Le Camus emphasized the complex role of the spectator, oscillating between social actor and peeping "voyeur."

The theatricality of the marketplace

Le Camus devoted an entire publication to the design of theatres. The primary concern of his *Mémoire sur la manière de rendre incombustible toute salle de spectacle* was clearly technical, dealing exclusively with problems of fire propagation in theatre buildings and how architects can prevent deadly tragedies. Although he was unconcerned with the shape of the auditorium and the architectural expression of his incombustible theatre, Le Camus produced one of the most intensely theatrical structures in Paris at that time: the Halle au blé. With its perfectly circular shape inscribed in a dense urban context, it is also an imaginative redefinition of an architectural program, fulfilling both the requirements of a new public institution devoted to the exchange of grain and the representational role of a place for public gathering.

Le Camus de Mézières's commission for the new *halle au blé* resulted from a competition.⁴⁸⁵ The *halle* was to be erected on the former site of the hôtel de Soisson, on land that the city of Paris had acquired from the creditors of the Prince de Carignan in 1755. This transaction was made possible by the King's commitment to finance the construction of the new Halle au blé, but due to political interference and financial hardship

⁴⁸⁴Le génie, 5–7.

⁴⁸⁵Le provincial à Paris ou l'état actuel de Paris (Paris, 1787) 4:47.

caused by the Seven Year War, the project was delayed until the beginning of the next decade.⁴⁸⁶ Although the city had acquired this coveted piece of land, it remained reticent to endorse the project of a new *halle* in Paris, and this was the main obstacle to its development. The city considered that "le carreau de [la halle] de la Grève où se fait la vente principalle [des grains] est plus que suffisant pour les recevoir."⁴⁸⁷ A few years later, however, the city recognized that Le Camus's project was a necessity for the public good and the appropriate functioning of the city. Le Camus was given responsibility not only for the design and construction of the *halle*, but also for the division of the urban fabric around it (*son lotissement*). A housing development around the new building was supposed to finance the construction of the *halle*, and this was a major selling point to convince the city.⁴⁸⁸ (See Figure 57.) Le Camus started working on this project as early as 1761, and the first stone was laid on 13 April 1763. The official opening took place on 12 January 1767, but the construction of the surrounding buildings prevented access to the new market, and even though the new streets were traced and parcels of land were sold in

⁴⁸⁶In his book on the *halle au blé* in Paris, Mark Deming is interested primarily in the urban impact of the original construction of the municipal institution of the granary. He investigates very carefully the difficult negotiations that led the city to acquire the land of the hôtel de Soisson, as well as the transactions and development of the parcels of land surrounding the new building, in which Le Camus de Mézières was directly involved. Deming's book owes much to an article published about ten years earlier by Françoise Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: Le terrain de l'Hôtel de Soisson," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32/4 (1973): 267–307. Like Deming, she traces a careful history of the development of the parcel of land on which the *halle au blé* was erected, and carefully analyzes the residential development that surrounded the central building.

⁴⁸⁷Arch. nat. H^{2°} 1859, Registre des délibérations du Bureau de la Ville, 31 octobre 1740 f° 78v^o. Quoted by Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation," 275.

⁴⁸⁸In order to maintain the value of the land surrounding the new *halle* at an acceptable price, Le Camus, in association with the brothers Oblin, acquired most of it. The selling of this land was meant to finance the construction of the granary. The enterprise, however, led to lawsuits and marked the beginning of financial hardship for both Le Camus and the Oblin brothers. Deming, *Halle au blé*, 39–43.



Figure 57: Elevation of the Halle au blé in Paris, by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1767), surrounded by its residential development. From N. Le Camus de Mézières, *Recueil des différens plans et dessins concernant la nouvelle halle aux grains* (1769) [reprinted in Deming].

1765, the surrounding buildings were not completed until January 1769, delaying the actual opening of the new building.⁴⁸⁹

The residential development around the new Halle au blé was harshly criticized by Le Camus's contemporaries for the meanness of its parcel division and the monotony of its facades. (See Figure 58.) The blame was placed on the private interests of the developers and their greater concern for financial gain than public good.⁴⁹⁰ However, the contrast between the new public institution and its surroundings was not based entirely on financial concerns. It reflected an architectural intention: the expression of monumentality. The Halle au blé, containing its treasures of subsistence, appeared as a gem in a box (*écrin*), surrounded by a fortress of massive buildings around it. The *ordonnance* of the granary followed Le Camus's preoccupation with conveying the destination of the building. Its grandeur was expressed by the symmetry, the harmony of proportions, the relationship of masses and parts to the whole, the calculated use of moldings, and the refined contrast between light and shade in protruding and receding parts.

Pour inspirer le respect, la considération, on doit recourir au caractère du grand. Observer de belles masses, qu'elles soient bien proportionnées, bien prononcées; que les profils soient nobles; ne donnez pas trop de jeu à la lumière; que les ombres soient égales, & qu'il y ait un peu de réflet.⁴⁹¹

The "typological" antecedents of the Halle au blé are usually traced back to the

⁴⁸⁹Ibid., 37–39.

⁴⁹⁰"Qui ne sera pas indigné de voir qu'un si vil intérêt que celui du loyer de quelques maisons l'a emporté sur la perfection de cet édifice public et sur les facilités nécessaires pour les voitures qui apporte dans Paris une denrée aussi précieuse que celle du blé?... Tout ce qui peut contribuer au bonheur et à l'avantage des citoyens ne saurait balancer aujourd'hui l'avidité du gain et l'enrichissement des propriétaires par toutes sortes de voies, pour fournir aux dépenses excessives d'un luxe sans borne." Jean-Aymar Piganiol de la Force, *Description historique de la ville de Paris* (Paris, 1765), 3:492; quoted by Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation," 278.

⁴⁹¹*Le génie*, 67.



Figure 58: Residential development surrounding the Halle au blé; watercolour by Gildran (1887). Musée Carnavalet, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Boudon].

eighteenth-century market, which was usually an open-air public place. The new granary in Paris combined both the traditional exterior area for the exchange of grains (*le carreau*) with a covered area for storage. The ground floor was divided into two concentric arcades that provided cover for receiving and transporting merchandise, while the single vault of the second floor was used for storing grains. (See Figure 59.) The open courtyard was used for "the daily sale of oats, barley, peas, beans, lentils, etc."⁴⁹² The two-story building was applauded by Le Camus's contemporaries for the fire-resistance of its brick construction and for the mastery of its stone-cutting, particularly in the complexity of its two staircases. However, the circular shape of this annular building was most innovative. As a novel form for a civic building in the urban context of eighteenth-century France, it would have great repercussions in the architecture of the last decades of the Ancien Régime, and it directly influenced the generation of "revolutionary architects." Its circular plan was used a few years later in various civic buildings, including a hospital project by Peyre, Ledoux's gates, many theoretical projects by Boullée, and various market projects including De Wailly's and Loret's.⁴⁹³ (See Figure 60.) Even during its construction, the shape of the Halle au blé was praised by famous theoreticians such as Marc-Antoine Laugier, in his *Observations sur l'architecture* (1765). Laugier concludes his chapter on "De la forme des bâtimens" with the example of the most innovative building in Paris at that time:

Le mérite de cette halle est la forme nouvelle, & ce mérite n'est pas médiocre. Ce bâtiment rond, parfaitement isolé, percé à jour de toute part, entouré de maisons & de rues dont la construction contrastera avec la sienne, ayant au surplus la solidité

⁴⁹²It was a brick and stone construction; the facade was made of ashlar masonry (moellon). *Journal des bâtiments civils* 9, no.222 (28 vendémiaire, an x), 121; 9, no.238 (24 frimaire, an xi), 392–93. Dora Wiebenson, "The Two Domes of the *Halle au Blé* in Paris," *The Art Bulletin* 55, no. 1 (March 1973): 262–63.

⁴⁹³Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation," 282.

N° 28.



Figure 59: View of the second floor of the Halle au blé. From *Vue pittoresque des principaux édifices de Paris* (1787) [reprinted in Deming].

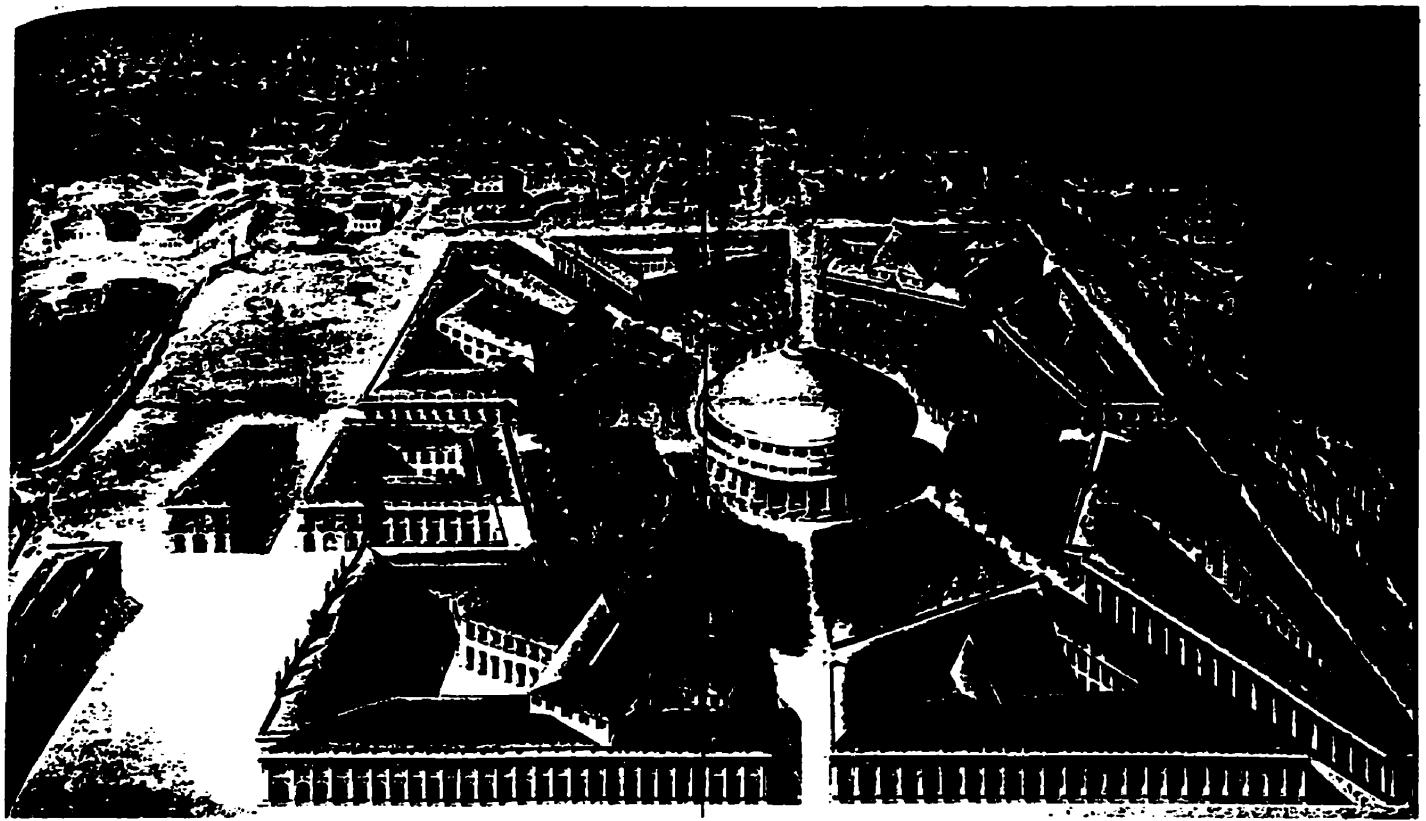


Figure 60: Market project by Loret (end of eighteenth century). Musée Carnavalet, Cabinet des estampes, Rés. Dessins, Paris. [Boudon].

& la simplicité requise, sera dans Paris un de nos plus agréables morceaux.⁴⁹⁴

Another important architectural innovation of the new *halle* was its undifferentiated access: of its 25 arches, six were aligned to the new streets and provided access for carriages. No architectural element marked the importance of one access over the others, so there was no monumental entry. Interestingly, this undifferentiated access was defended by Chaumont in relation to theatre architecture in his treatise, *Exposition des principes qu'on doit suivre dans l'ordonnance des théâtres modernes* (1769): "Dans une forme circulaire, des ouvertures égales sont admissibles, même pour une entrée principale."⁴⁹⁵ This "patriotic monument" was also praised by J.-F. Blondel, who writes: "Il manquait à Paris une Halle au blé, la ville vient d'en faire ériger une sur les dessins de M. Le Camus de Mézières. Cet édifice intéressant est remarquable par sa forme circulaire et par la régularité de son appareil."⁴⁹⁶

Soon after its completion, however, the new *halle* proved to be too small to accommodate the growing commercial activity, and as early as 1769, Le Camus de Mézières published a project for covering the central courtyard. (See Figure 61.) Within the existing open ring, this project proposed to inscribe a second structure that would support a hemispherical masonry dome on twelve columns. Although this solution showed that the existing structure could not support a significant additional load (the main defect of the new building was attributed to faulty craftsmanship and poor building materials), it was nonetheless consistent with Le Camus's aim to preserve the integrity of the internal spherical space.

⁴⁹⁴Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Observations sur l'architecture* (The Hague: Desaint, 1765), 196.

⁴⁹⁵Chevalier de Chaumont, *Exposition des principes qu'on doit suivre dans l'ordonnance des théâtres modernes* (Paris: C.A. Jombert, 1769), 109.

⁴⁹⁶J.-F. Blondel, *Cours d'architecture*, 1:108. For a description of the positive reception of the *halle au blé*, see George-Louis Le Rouge, *Curiosités de Paris, de Versailles et de Marly* (Paris, 1771).

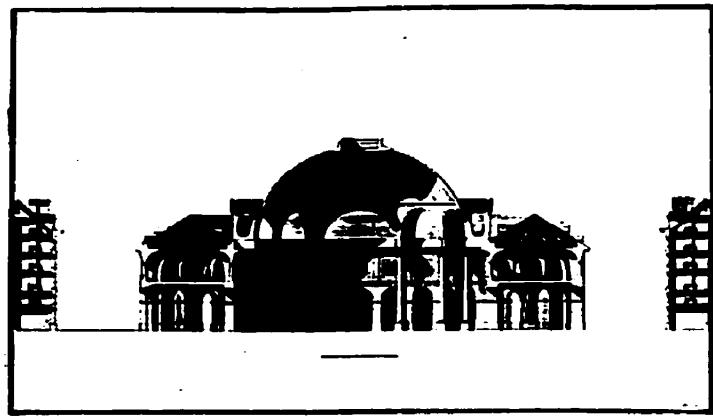


Figure 61: Project for the dome of the Halle au blé, by Le Camus de Mézières.
From N. Le Camus de Mézières, *Recueil des différens plans et dessins
concernant la nouvelle halle aux grains* (1769) [reprinted in
Wiebenson].

The need for a dome in the new Halle au blé inspired many competitions during the following decade, and many architects proposed ingenious solutions to the complex problem of covering this circular open space, 120 feet in diameter.⁴⁹⁷ The project by J.G. Legrand and J. Molinos was selected for the lightness of its carpentry structure and the originality of its vaulting method, based on the writings of the sixteenth-century architect, Philibert de l'Orme. (See Figure 62.) The project submitted by the two architects was not inspired by a desire to revive Renaissance building methods, but rather by a specific event that took place in the Halle au blé on 21 January 1782. To celebrate the birth of the dauphin, a ball was held in the courtyard and the building was temporarily covered with canvas or velum to protect the central space while letting light enter: "une banne immense qui mettait à l'abri le peuple joyeux rassemblé dans cette enceinte et qui réuinssoit les rayons de la lumière distribuée à sa circonférence, offroit à la fois le spectacle le plus pitoresque et le plus imposant."⁴⁹⁸ The day after the celebrations, "Molinos chanced to observe the temporary arrangement, and claimed to have been inspired immediately by its shape to conceive of a similar, but permanent, vault."⁴⁹⁹ Because of its shape and large internal space, Le Camus's monument was considered most appropriate for such celebrations, and Legrand and Molinos decided to install a new balcony above the cornice of the new interior space. The balcony, reached by a stair in the Medici Column, provided

⁴⁹⁷The history of the covering of the *halle au blé* has been studied by Dora Wiebenson in her exhaustive article mentioned previously. I do not intend to repeat her findings in the present dissertation, but I did rely on her careful documentation of the two successive domes to complete the argumentation.

⁴⁹⁸Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Ms Cp 4823, "note pour le journal 22 septembre 1782"; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 124–25.

⁴⁹⁹*Journal des bâtiments civils* 11, no. 291 (21 prairial, an xi), 403, reported by Wiebenson, "The Two Domes," 264.

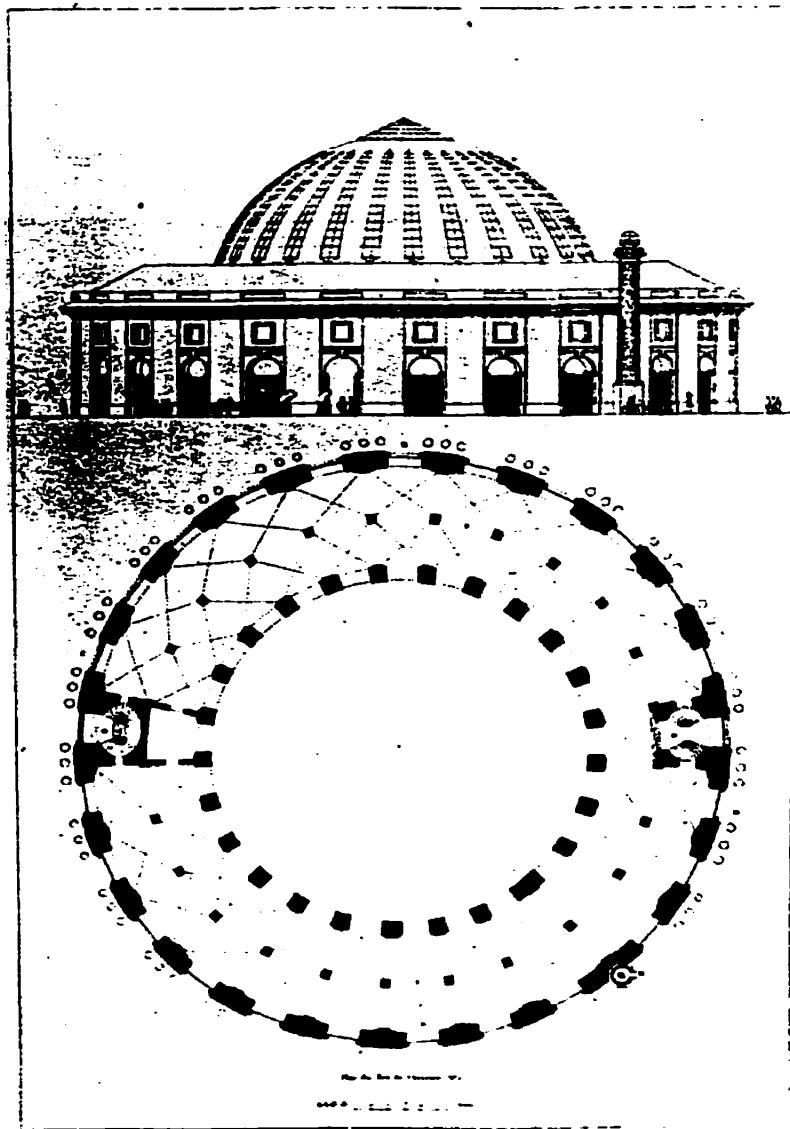


Figure 62: Plan and elevation of the Halle au blé, with the carpentry dome by Legrand and Molinos (1783). From J.C. Krafft and N. Ransonnette, *Plans coupes élévations des plus belles maisons et hôtels construits à Paris et dans les environs* (1801). [Deming].

an additional 900 to 1200 places during public celebrations.⁵⁰⁰ The construction of the new permanent dome and balcony began in September 1782 and was completed a year later.⁵⁰¹

This double function of the Halle au blé, as the heart of commercial life in Paris and the centre of public celebrations, was not merely a coincidence but was implied in the basic shape of the building, which had always been associated with the Roman Coliseum.⁵⁰² This parallel between the Halle au blé and theatres of antiquity was already acknowledged in the eighteenth century. Blondel had described the new *halle* as a "circus" because of their formal resemblance. Interestingly, the building was easily converted, and was turned into a *salle de bal*, an improvised vauxhall, on various occasions during the political upheaval that shook France at the turn of the century. Public events were held there as early as 1770, when the celebrations honouring the marriage of the Dauphin, the future Louis XVI, and Marie-Antoinette that were supposed to take place in the Colisée on the Champs-Élysées had to be relocated because the new vauxhall was not yet completed.

⁵⁰⁰"Comme ce monument est très propre par sa forme et son grand espace à donner des fêtes nous avons cru devoir placer sur la corniche un balcon ce qui forme une galerie de trois pieds de largeur et qui pourrait contenir neuf à douze cents personnes. Le devant de la construction est garanti jusqu'à la hauteur de cinq pieds dans tout le pourtour de cette galerie par un mur de brique sur champ qui ote toute espèce d'inquiétude dans le cas où l'on voudrait éclairer cette partie par des lampions." Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Ms Cp 4823, "Abrégé des moyens employés successivement à la construction de coupole de la halle..."; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 125.

⁵⁰¹Deming, *Halle au blé*, 125. Deming follows the successive phases of the transformation of the building: the construction of a wooden dome by Legrand and Molinos in 1782–83; the fire of 1802; the construction of a cast iron cupola by Bélanger in 1808–13 (the first metal structure in France); and its partial destruction and integration into the Bourse du commerce in 1889.

⁵⁰²Deming emphasizes the importance of the circular shape of the *halle au blé* and its association with the image of the Colisée. "Les formes imposent leur logique, et la Halle de Le Camus eut, de fait, à assumer le rôle d'un amphithéâtre lorsqu'à plusieurs occasions elle fut convertie en salle de bal public." Deming, *Halle au blé*, 18.

Commentators from the eighteenth to the twentieth century have noted the formal similarities between Le Camus de Mézières's Halle au blé and vauxhalls of the same period, especially Louis-Denis Le Camus's *Colisée* on the Champs-Élysées: both had a central circular area surrounded by a colonnade that supported a balcony or an attic reserved for spectators.⁵⁰³

In her study of the land formerly occupied by the hôtel de Soisson, Françoise Boudon compiled the most important projects proposed for this site, from the beginning of the century to the construction of Le Camus's Halle au blé. Interestingly, many projects proposed building an opera house on this site. She writes: "L'idée d'édifier un opéra est, à la vérité, au moins aussi constante (on continuera d'ailleurs d'y songer bien après que la ville ait acheté le terrain pour y construire la halle)."⁵⁰⁴ It is likely that Le Camus was aware of this dual destination for the site. While his project responded to the city's need for a granary, it could also be transformed easily into a performance hall, and Le Camus thus provided his building with a second (implicit) public role.

The most impressive celebration that took place in Le Camus de Mézières's Halle au blé was in honour of the Peace of Versailles on 14 December 1783. (See Figure 63.) Bachaumont describes the event in his *Mémoires secrets*, and points out the "theatrical" setting of the celebrations. The public was divided in two distinct groups: on the ground floor, the general public was dancing, entertained by an orchestra in the centre of the circular space. This rejoicing "public" became *acteur malgré lui* for an audience located at the level of the attic and balcony: "Comme l'enceinte d'en bas était uniquement destinée au peuple, on avait aménagé en haut des galeries pour en procurer le spectacle aux gens de la

⁵⁰³Deming, *Halle au blé*, 123. As mentioned previously, the *halles au blé* housed the celebrations in honour of the birth of the Dauphin in 1782. Coincidentally, it was the year the *Colisée* on the Champs-Élysées was demolished.

⁵⁰⁴Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation," 274–75.

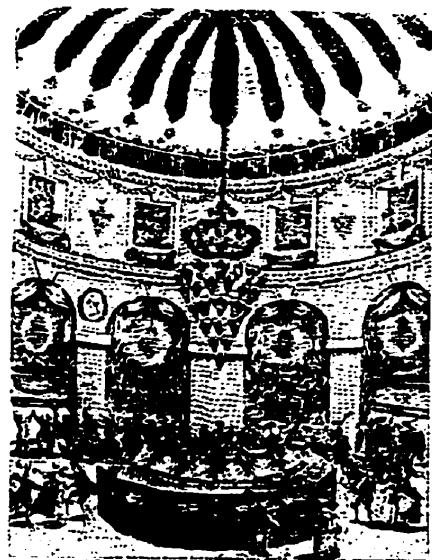


Figure 63: Celebration in honour of the Peace of Versailles in the Halle au blé (1783); anonymous engraving. Coll. Hennin, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Deming].

Cour et de la ville."⁵⁰⁵ This veritable theatre gallery could receive 1500 people, who were admitted by presenting tickets delivered by the merchants' provost. The distribution and internal decoration of the Halle au blé followed the same desire for social differentiation that guided the organization of theatres at the time:

La ville de Paris et le magistrat qui veille avec tout le zèle et l'ardeur qui est nécessaire à cette capitale se sont réunis pour que rien ne manque à cette nouvelle fête. L'immensité du lieu a été donnée, sa belle forme et sa régularité la manière simple et noble dont il étoit décoré l'éclat la légèreté du dessin formé par les lumières et surtout le concours prodigieux [crossed out: des citoyens] du peuple qui s'y est rendu de toutes parts et dont la joie n'a été troublée par aucun incident aucune inquiétude sont tous les moyens réunis qui ont été donné à la noblesse françoise placée dans les galeries de ce monument le spectacle le plus imposant et le plus nouveau pour elle. [crossed out: jamais elle n'avoit pu voir en France ou dans d'autre royaume tant de citoyens rassemblés dans une salle émule du Panthéon de Rome et plus propre que lui a donner une fête.]⁵⁰⁶

Descriptions of these celebrations and others during the French Revolution all tended to establish a parallel between the Rome of antiquity and the glorious city of Paris. An anonymous letter, dated 14 December 1783, describes Le Camus de Mézières's Halle au blé:

Ce temple qui rivalise aujourd'hui par sa coupole avec le Panthéon de Rome, est aussi un Colisée: on y donne ce soir en spectacle aux gens de la cour un bal populaire en l'honneur de la Paix de Versailles. Et la colonne de Médicis, heureusement sauvée de la démolition, est la colonne Trajane de Paris, devenue une nouvelle Rome.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets* 24: 89–91, entry dated 15 December 1783.

⁵⁰⁶"Description des réjouissances données à la nouvelle halle le dimanche 14 décembre 1783 à l'occasion de la paix," Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Ms Cp 4823; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 238.

⁵⁰⁷Anne-Marie Lecoq, "A propos de la nouvelle halle au blé." *Archives d'architecture moderne* 28 (1985), 94.

During the revolution, this formal association with the architecture of antiquity acquired an additional meaning due to the patriotic preoccupation of the political power. On 14 July 1790, the celebrations for la fête de la Fédération took place in the Halle au blé. Interestingly, they reused the decorations created by Legrand and Molinos seven years earlier for the Peace of Versailles. On 21 July 1790, a funerary ceremony was held there following the death of Benjamin Franklin, a renowned free-mason.⁵⁰⁸ Mirabeau explained that this location was chosen for the ceremony because "on ne pouvait pas honorer la mémoire de Franklin, né hors de l'Eglise, dans un de nos temples."⁵⁰⁹ As if to echo Boullée's cenotaph to Newton, the central area of the *halle au blé* during this occasion was filled with benches and its circumference was lined with black curtains; in the centre, a bust of Franklin was erected on a sarcophagus covered with branches of cypress.⁵¹⁰ Throughout the Revolution, Le Camus's *halle* was the site of many public manifestations and upheavals.⁵¹¹ (See Figure 64.) Its dual function, as a centre for the public food supply and for popular celebrations, implied a symbolic meaning that was already obvious to Legrand: "Les besoins du peuple et la gloire nationale se trouvaient réunis, confondus, et pour ainsi dire enchaînés par la mâle pensée de l'artiste."⁵¹² While the formal innovation of the Halle au blé had a great influence on the architecture of the late eighteenth century, its double function was considered a meaningful model to be followed in other public

⁵⁰⁸The *Journal de la municipalité*, no. 119, wrote on 20 July 1790: "l'antiquité eut élevé des autels à ce vaste et puissant génie qui, au profit des mortels, embrassant dans sa pensée le ciel et la terre, sut dompter la foudre et les tyrans." Quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 128–29.

⁵⁰⁹"Discours de Mirabeau à la mémoire de Franklin prononcé à l'Assemblée nationale, le 11 juin 1790," Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Ms 773, f° 109 v°; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 129.

⁵¹⁰Deming, *Halle au blé*, 129. Boullée's project for Newton's cenotaph is dated 1784.

⁵¹¹Ibid., 123–29, 159–61, 237–39.

⁵¹²J.G. Legrand, *Essai sur l'histoire générale de l'architecture* (Paris, 1809), 104; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 125.

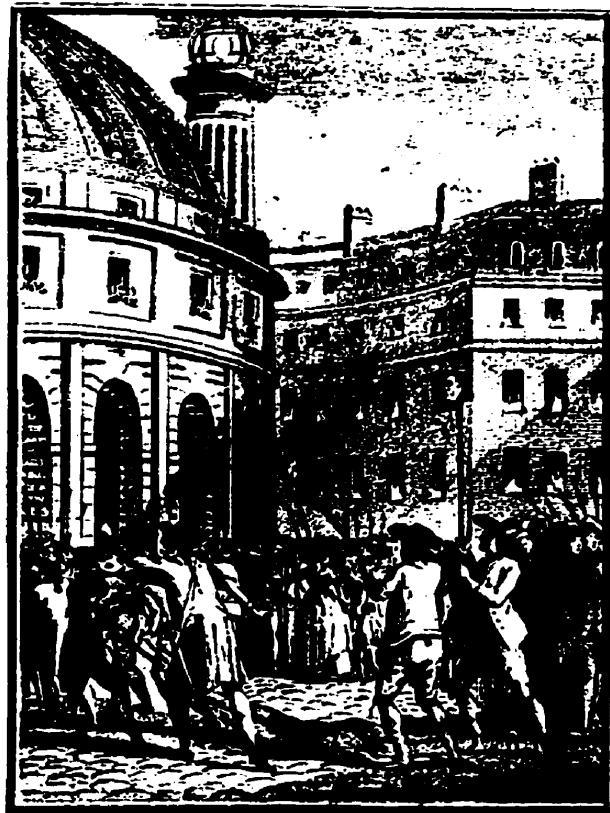


Figure 64: "The heads of MM Foulon and Berthier carried by the people to the Halle au blé, 23 July 1789"; anonymous engraving. Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Deming].

buildings:

On pourrait aisément par la suite multiplier dans cette capitale les monuments du genre de celui-ci [la halle au blé], et construire de cette manière la Douane, la Halle aux Vins, etc.... de sorte qu'à l'objet d'utilité première de ces établissements put se réunir celui d'y donner des Fêtes au Peuple.⁵¹³

Charles de Wailly, who belonged to the same Masonic lodge as Le Camus de Mézières and shared his interest in theatre, also proposed two projects for public buildings with a multiple function. One of them, proposed in 1789 (the beginning of the French Revolution), was a project for a second *halle au blé* that also took the shape of a ring. It would have been located on the bank of the river Seine, adjacent to a port for direct access by boats. This concept was originally proposed by Oblin and developed by Le Camus de Mézières in their own proposal to the city. The internal space of De Wailly's *halle au blé* opened onto a vast basin that could receive barges filled with grain. The rotunda of De Wailly's project housed public baths, and could have been used occasionally for nautical games, a form of public entertainment familiar to the French public and reminiscent of the *naumachia* of antiquity.

De Wailly's second project played on urban theatricality. It was a proposed transformation of the public square in front of the Comédie française, remodeled in an attempt to save the theatre, which had been threatened with demolition for its monarchic overtones.⁵¹⁴ The interior of the building underwent many physical transformations to

⁵¹³ *Journal de Paris*, no. 351, 17 December 1783, 1444; quoted by Deming, *Halle au blé*, 125.

⁵¹⁴ After the events of July 1789, the Comédie française reopened under the name Théâtre de la Nation. The performance of a play not considered patriotic enough by the Convention montagnarde caused the theatre to be closed down once again, and the author of the play and comedians to be arrested. They were about to be guillotined when a public petition saved them. The theatre was reopened under the name Théâtre du Peuple, and was thereafter devoted to performances "données de par et pour le peuple." Radicchio and D'Oria, *Les théâtres de Paris*, 27–28.

include *tous les attributs de la liberté*, and was renamed successively Théâtre de la Nation and Théâtre du Peuple.⁵¹⁵ In 1794, it was reopened under the name Théâtre de l'Égalité. Further modifications, endorsed by Louis David, changed its basic relation to the city by adding a colonnade and steps (*gradins*) around the semicircular space, covered with velum to transform it into an arena for popular events and *l'instruction publique*.⁵¹⁶ (See Figures 65 and 66.) In this project, the main entrance to the theatre was transformed into a stage, and the facade was converted into a backdrop for an exterior amphitheatre. The angles of the surrounding streets were intended to be modified to converge at the central door of the facade, with a tribune for speakers erected in front of the theatre. It is not clear to what extent this project for an outdoor amphitheatre was realized, but it reveals nonetheless the revolutionary objectives.⁵¹⁷

This dramatic insertion of a theatrical square in urban Paris would have applied the internal organization of a theatre onto this public place. However, this was not necessarily due to recent political upheavals. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the city had been transforming gradually into a theatre, and the expansion of the performing space of De Wailly and Peyre's Comédie française onto the square and the connecting streets had

⁵¹⁵In an article on the opening night at the end of June 1794 (9 Messidor), the reporter for the *Moniteur* commented on the new arrangement: "It appears that this time they have had the aim of creating a more popular theatre, one in which the citizens will not be separated from each other in boxes but where they will join together and intermingle in the circular amphitheatres. This arrangement calls to mind equality, republican brotherhood, and justifies the name given to this new theatre." *Moniteur*, vol. 21, no. 282 (12 Messidor, an ii [30 June 1794]), 96; quoted and translated by James Leith, *Space and Revolution* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 145.

⁵¹⁶Deming, *Halle au blé*, 126.

⁵¹⁷Among the multitude of projects for buildings with new programmatic revolutionary overtones, the theatre, properly adapted to the revolutionary program, was believed to be a potential "school of civic virtue." Concerning De Wailly's project for transforming the Comédie française into a revolutionary theatre, see Leith, *Space and Revolution*, 141–50, 190.

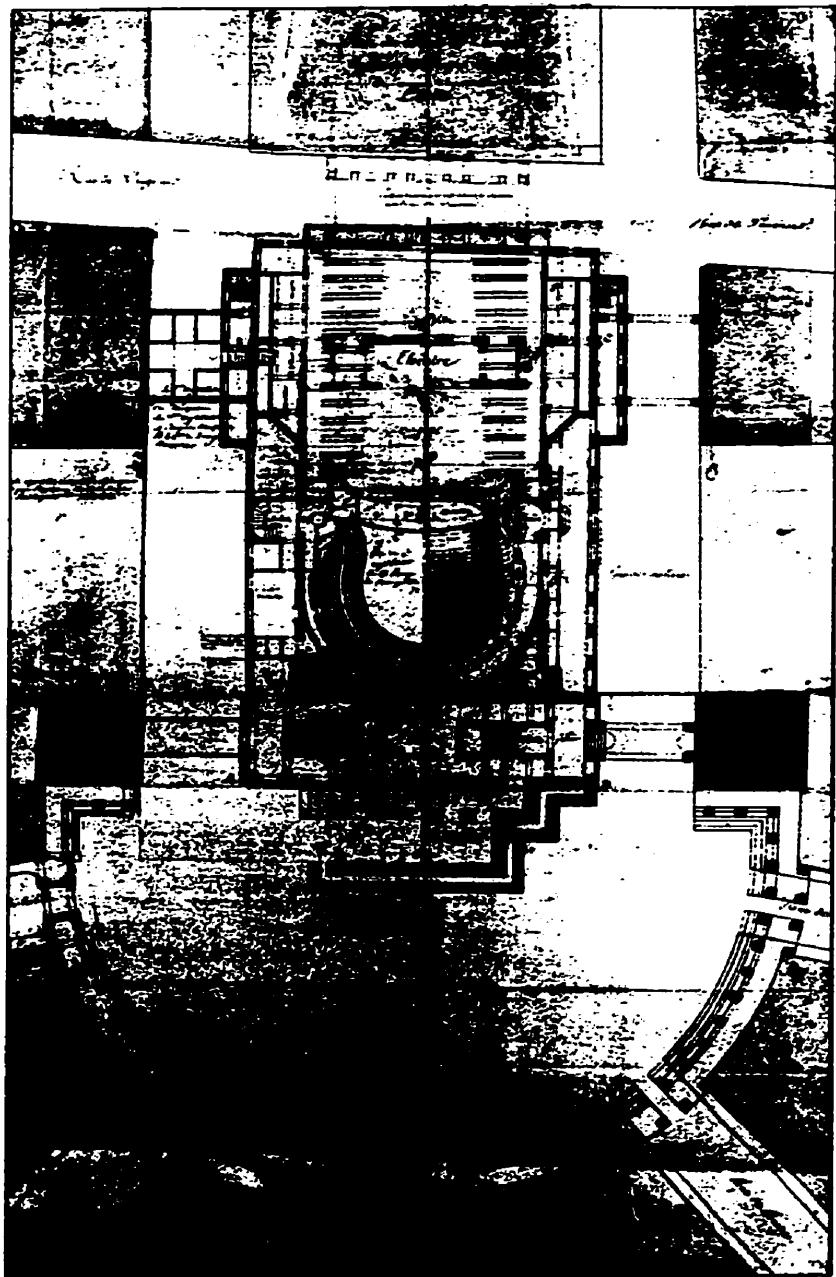


Figure 65: Project to convert the public square in front of the Comédie française into an outdoor amphitheatre, by Charles de Wailly (1794). [Leith].



Figure 66: The square in front of the Comédie française, converted into an amphitheatre and covered with canvas, by Charles de Wailly (1794) [Leith]

already been anticipated by Le Camus's *Halle au blé*. By associating his public monument with the theatres of antiquity, Le Camus helped expand the theatricality of eighteenth-century public life beyond the physical limits of the theatre and initiated a movement in France that transformed the city architecturally itself into a place for public expression and theatrical manifestations.

PART 3: *LE GÉNIE DE L'ARCHITECTURE, OU L'ANALOGIE DE CET ART AVEC NOS SENSATIONS*

As was suggested earlier, Le Camus de Mézières's most important architectural treatise was written when his theatrical involvement was at its peak, and this would explain the recurring use of theatrical metaphors in the text. *Le génie*, however, is important not only for its novel way of presenting architectural theory in terms of staging, characterization of spaces, and dramatic progression through successive rooms. It also participated in eighteenth-century aesthetic debates by acknowledging contemporary artistic theories, stating a position on the nature of architectural theory, discussing concepts such as "genius" and "taste," and defining architecture in terms of eighteenth-century sensationalist philosophy. These issues would have far-reaching consequences for modern architecture.

The title of the treatise, *Le génie de l'architecture, ou l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations*, invites interpretations more than it defines the content of the book. In the eighteenth century, the word *génie* usually referred to a discipline distinct from architecture, and in Diderot's and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* it is defined as "la science des Ingénieurs": for example, military engineering (*génie militaire*). When referring to architecture, it meant "le feu & l'invention qu'un architecte, un dessinateur, décorateur, ou tous autres Artistes mettent dans la décoration de leurs ouvrages."⁵¹⁸ "Genies" in architecture were also ornamental figures of winged children (or cherubs with childlike attributes) that represented virtues and passions (See Figure 67.):

Il s'en fait de bas-reliefs, comme ceux de marbre blanc dans les trente-deux

⁵¹⁸Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 7:584. The authorship of the article "Génie" from the *Encyclopédie* remains unclear. Paul Vernière attributes its initial version to Saint-Lambert; he emphasizes, however, that its final form betrays some explicit influence from Diderot, and was most likely indebted to him. Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 5–8.



Figure 67: Winged child or *génie*. From the frontispiece of M.-A. Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (1755) [reprint 1979].

tympons de la colonnade de Versailles, qui sont par groupes [sic], & tiennent des attributs de l'amour, des jeux, des plaisirs, etc.⁵¹⁹

For Le Camus de Mézières, the "genius of architecture" certainly included these meanings related to ornamentation, since much of his treatise was devoted to distribution and decoration, but it also included the pre-Romantic notion of a creative fire, as well as the natural attributes of taste and talent that an architect must have. In the French language, the word *génie* also indicates a distinct character, as in *le génie d'une langue*, which refers to the cultural horizon of a language.⁵²⁰ This linguistic notion of character as a distinctive trait or feature is synonymous with the figurative notion of character.⁵²¹ When ascribed to an individual, "character" refers to that person's expression and originality. The concept of character in architecture, as we saw in Chapter 1, became a fundamental notion in architectural discourse during the first half of the eighteenth century, and for Le Camus de Mézières, it was the basis of his architectural theory:

Nous avons parlé des caractères relatifs à chaque endroit, à chaque pièce d'une Maison, sans oublier ce qui est propre & convenable à l'état des personnes qui doivent l'habiter.⁵²²

The complex meaning of the word *génie* and its various ramifications in the eighteenth century are the subject of Chapter 8. The second part of the title, "the analogy of [architecture] with our sensations," includes two equally complex terms. The notion of "sensation" in eighteenth-century France was influenced by empirical philosophy, such as the writings of Condillac and Edmund Burke's treatise on the sublime and the beautiful. These philosophers opposed the traditional notion that innate ideas in the mind provided a

⁵¹⁹Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 7:584.

⁵²⁰"Caractère propre et distinctif," *Petit Larousse illustré* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1977), 466.

⁵²¹"Trait distinctif: les caractères dominants de la race humaine. Ce qui est propre à une chose: le caractère d'une œuvre." *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵²²*Le génie*, 8.

pre-understanding of objects. "Analogy" on the other hand, means "la relation, le rapport ou la proportion que plusieurs choses ont les unes avec les autres, quoique d'ailleurs différentes par des qualités qui leur sont propres."⁵²³ "The analogy of architecture with our sensations" suggests architecture's ability to affect the human soul and to be perceived like natural phenomena. In other words, by assuming an analogy between architecture and our sensations, Le Camus addressed the liminal space between art and nature, and between nature and culture. These two terms, "sensation" and "analogy," will be discussed in Chapter 9.

⁵²³Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 1:399.

CHAPTER 8: THE ROLE OF GÉNIE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AESTHETICS

Comparing two great thinkers of the previous century, John Locke and the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), the article "Génie" from the *Encyclopédie* praises Locke for the vastness of his sharp and just reasoning. Shaftesbury, however, is regarded as a genius.

Il y a bien peu d'erreurs dans Locke & trop peu de vérités dans milord Shafsterbury [sic]: le premier cependant n'est qu'un esprit étendu, pénétrant & juste; & et le second est un génie du premier ordre. Locke a vu; Shafsterbury a créé, construit, édifié: nous devons à Locke de grandes vérités froidement apperçues, méthodiquement suivies, sèchement annoncées; & à Shafsterbury des systèmes brillans souvent peu fondés, pleins pourtant de vérités sublimes; et dans ses momens d'erreur, il plaît & persuade encore par les charmes de son éloquence.⁵²⁴

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, is known as a great defender of morals of sentiment. He advanced concepts such as enthusiasm, the sublime, and disinterested pleasure as foundations of ethical behaviour, and "fashioned the rudiments of a doctrine of creative imagination."⁵²⁵ He is also considered to be the first link in the lineage of romantic sensitivity that developed in the eighteenth century.⁵²⁶ Paradoxically, Locke, a leading figure in Enlightenment philosophy, played an active role in Shaftesbury's education. Although Locke rejected the notion of "innate ideas," Shaftesbury did not embrace his master's position uncritically. Instead, he questioned some of Locke's fundamental assumptions, arguing that even those who "denied the principles of religion to be natural," or claimed the ideas of beauty to be vain, were tacitly

⁵²⁴Ibid., 2:582.

⁵²⁵Stanley Grean, introduction to Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. J.M. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), xv.

⁵²⁶Gusdorf differentiates between two kinds of romanticism. He says that the romantic mind of Shaftesbury led to a romanticism of conciliation rather than the romanticism of rupture that will impose itself in the nineteenth century. Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 227.

forced to admit that "they were yet in a manner innate, or such as men were really born to, and could hardly by any means avoid."⁵²⁷ Locke believed that sensations were objective and homogeneous, and that moral judgment, aesthetic judgement and happiness were based on a rational comparison of levels of pleasure and pain. Even though he respected his master, Shaftesbury understood that the logical consequences of Locke's position were untenable, since, for Locke, good and bad would appear to be completely arbitrary:

[V]irtue, according to Mr. Locke, has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom; morality, justice, equity, depend only on law and will, and God indeed is a perfect free agent in his sense; that is, free to anything (sic), that is however ill; for if He wills it, it will be made good; virtue may be vice, and vice virtue in its turn, if he pleases. And thus neither right nor wrong, virtue nor vice, are anything in themselves; nor is there any trace or idea of them naturally imprinted on human minds.⁵²⁸

Shaftesbury's criticism of Locke's arbitrariness of moral judgment casts some light on the changing role of customs and the status of conventions throughout the eighteenth century. The great influence of empirical philosophy, in which all knowledge is acquired from the world via the senses and imprinted rationally onto the mind, as on a clean slate, assumed that conventions were a form of rationalized behaviour inherited from the seventeenth-century world view. Although conventions were raised to the status of acquired nature and could overrule some innate human behaviours, they originated not from nature but from a rational concept of social situations.

In architecture and especially theatre, for example, theoreticians and practitioners such as Charles-Nicolas Cochin and Pierre Patte knew that the traditional shape of theatres

⁵²⁷Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:35; 2:178.

⁵²⁸Anthony Shaftesbury, "Letter to Michael Ainsworth, June 3rd 1709," in *The Life, Unpublished Letters And Philosophical Regimen Of Anthony, Earl Of Shaftesbury*, edited by Benjamin Rand (London, S. Sonnenschein & co., lim.; New York, The Macmillano., 1900), 404.

in France was acoustically irrational, but they believed that a superior acoustical shape, such as the Greek amphitheatre, would have been unacceptable to French customs. Consequently, during the first half of the eighteenth century, social conventions in the theatre overruled rational acoustics and sightlines. It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that a growing attention to romantic sensitivity (characterized by the belief that the physical world is given to humankind with an intrinsic spontaneous intuition) enabled natural principles (such as acoustics) to be considered alongside social conventions.

Until the seventeenth century, it was believed that all humans were born with an instinctive knowledge of natural laws. Locke's refutation of innate ideas led to a depersonalized view of the human being. In their place, Shaftesbury proposed the notion of a secular "inner light," a "natural light" that reinstated the importance of the subject - not only as a thinking subject, but also as a feeling subject. This inner light was a crucial notion for writers on aesthetic experience, from Abbé Du Bos to Alexander Baumgarten (1714–62). Baumgarten's treatise, *Aesthetica* (1750), was the first work to define artistic sensitivity as a philosophical discipline. In the context of Enlightenment philosophy, it restored unity and originality to individuals.⁵²⁹ The word "aesthetic" itself came from Baumgarten, who defined it as an inferior, indistinct knowledge of things.⁵³⁰ The

⁵²⁹Gusdorf reproaches the scholastic *lourdeur* of Baumgarten's treatise but praises the originality of its title and its "parti pris de constituer le domaine de la sensibilité artistique comme une province de la philosophie." Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 297.

⁵³⁰The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) defines the origins of the word "aesthetic" in these terms: "Applied in Germ. by Baumgarten (1750–58, *Aesthetica*) to 'criticism of taste' considered as a science of philosophy; against which, as a misuse of the word found in German only, protest was made by Kant (1781, *Crit. R. V.* 21), who applied the name, in accordance with the ancient distinction of *αἰσθητή* α and *νοητά*, to 'science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception,' a sense retained in the Kantian philosophy, and found in English c 1800. But Baumgarten's use of *aesthetik* found popular acceptance, and

objective of the new philosophical discipline was "the perfection of sensitive knowledge in itself, it is to say beauty."⁵³¹ Baumgarten's position is complex, and in some ways contradictory. Its high level of abstraction presumes a belief in the intelligibility of rational discourse. The most original part of Baumgarten's work was its defense of the absolute autonomy of art, the notion that beauty is not based on utility, nor on its capacity to be pleasing or good. Art carries in itself its own justification. He also strongly opposed the traditional theory of imitation in the arts. Regardless of the historical details surrounding its development as a discipline, aesthetics defined a new mode of being in the world and marked a reversal of values that enabled it to be regarded as the very meaning of life.⁵³²

The aesthetic path toward an inner sense led the individual to a new form of absolute, to an ontological restoration. This new absolute was no longer identical in every individual (that had become instead the scientific, rational absolute), but by what was different and original. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Confessions* (published posthumously in 1782 and 1789), epitomizes this quest for otherness.⁵³³ The epigraph of the first book was *Intus et in cute*, which means "inwardly and under the skin," indicating his aim to explore the interiority of the individual. In architecture, this new importance of the self and the personal imagination marked a new role for innovation as a productive rather than a reproductive form of imagination. In Le Camus de Mézières's practical work, the most important innovations were the form and program of his *halles au blé*. As we shall see in the last part of this dissertation, the major innovations in his architectural treatise

appeared in Eng. after 1830, though its adoption was long opposed."

⁵³¹ Alexander Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Francfort-sur-l'Oder, 1750), T.1, §14, 6. Quoted by Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 423–24.

⁵³² Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 424–25.

⁵³³ He writes: "Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaux pas mieux, au moins je suis autre." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les confessions* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 1:43.

were his use of language to reconfigure qualitative space and his use of narrative to restructure architectural program.

Génie and the Encyclopédie

By the middle of the eighteenth century in France, the expression "fire and genius" had become a "cant term of praise" in architectural discourse.⁵³⁴ Despite its complex meaning, in Le Camus de Mézières's treatise the term *génie* mainly addressed the nature of individual creation and the status of imagination. The article "Génie" in the *Encyclopédie* describes a mind of genius not in its rationality or its ability to formulate complex abstract concepts, but rather in its great sensitivity. A mind with a fertile imagination combines ideas to create new concepts, by transcribing abstract ideas into sensitive ones. The philosophical constructions of a mind of genius do not rest on reason, nor can they be appreciated in terms of truth or falseness. They are more akin to poems, revealing their meaning through the beauty of proportions.

The article "Génie" also traces the origin of the word in classical mythology. The *génies* were beings whose bodies were made of an aerial substance and who inhabited the vast realm between the sky and the earth. These subtle spirits were considered to be ministers sent by gods to mediate in human affairs, since the gods were unwilling to be directly involved but did not wish to neglect the human world entirely. As inferior divinities, the *génies* were immortal like gods but felt passions like humans. They were assigned to protect specific humans during their life and to guide their souls after death. From this interpretation, *génie* came to mean the human soul delivered and detached from the human body. Once supernatural constructs became suspect during the Enlightenment, the notion of freedom of the mind remained the most powerful attribute of the genius:

⁵³⁴Middleton, Introduction to *The Genius*, 18.

"L'étendue de l'esprit, la force de l'imagination, & l'activité de l'ame, voilà le *génie*."⁵³⁵

With the surge of Newtonianism and empirical philosophy, eighteenth-century philosophers such as Condillac investigated the mind, the body, and the process by which ideas were carried from one to the other through the senses. In his article on *génie* for the *Encyclopédie*, the author insists that how we receive ideas affects how we remember them. Humans receive their ideas about the world through sensations, and for most people sensations will be vivid only if they are immediately related to one's needs, taste, passions, etc. Everything else will not make a significant impact and will be forgotten. The man of genius, on the other hand, is touched by every sensation in nature:

L'homme de *génie* est celui dont l'ame plus étendue frappée par les sensations de tous les êtres, intéressée à tout ce qui est dans la nature, ne reçoit pas une idée qu'elle n'éveille un sentiment, tout l'anime & tout s'y conserve.⁵³⁶

When the soul is affected by an object, perception is intensified by the memory of specific events related to that object. This is one of the basic principles of Condillac's empirical philosophy. Memory behaves as a sixth sense, a bridge between sensation and understanding. In the act of remembering, imagination plays a crucial role because it combines different memories of sensations and creates new meanings according to the changing context. For a person of genius, this faculty is intensified:

Il se rappelle des idées avec un sentiment plus vif qu'il ne les a reçues, parce qu'à ces idées mille autres se lient, plus propre à faire naître le sentiment. Le *génie* entouré des objets dont il s'occupe ne se souvient pas, il voit; il ne se borne pas à voir, il est ému: dans le silence & l'obscurité du cabinet, il jouit de cette campagne riante & féconde; il est glacé par le sifflement des vents; il est brûlé par le soleil; il est effrayé des tempêtes.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 7:582.

⁵³⁶Ibid.

⁵³⁷Ibid.

The genius not only uses memory and association to create new meanings for a particular object, but also engages her/his mnemonic faculty to transform the tragic into the terrible and the beautiful into the sublime, to animate matter and to colour the mind by reenacting every sensation: "dans la chaleur de l'enthousiasme, il ne dispose ni de la nature ni de la suite de ses idées; il est transporté dans la situation des personnages qu'il fait agir; il a pris leur caractère."⁵³⁸ In the arts, as in the sciences and businesses, the genius seems to change the nature of things, as it casts its light beyond past and present to shine into the future: "il devance son siècle qui ne peut le suivre."⁵³⁹ Similarly, in the article on the adjectives *éclairé* and *clairvoyant*, Diderot expands on the discerning quality that distinguishes the genius from enlightened (*éclairé*) and perceptive (*clairvoyant*) persons. While an educated individual knows things, an enlightened one knows how to apply them in an appropriate way. Both have acquired their knowledge (*lumières acquises*) through education. The discerning or perceptive person, on the other hand, knows how to read the human mind and is *clairvoyant* through natural wisdom (*lumières naturelles*). However, a man of genius is superior to both an enlightened person and a discerning one because of his ability to interpret knowledge and create new things:

L'homme de génie crée les choses; l'homme *clairvoyant* en déduit des principes; l'homme *éclairé* en fait l'application; l'homme instruit n'ignore ni les choses créées, ni les lois qu'on en a déduites, ni les applications qu'on en a faites; il sait tout mais il ne produit rien.⁵⁴⁰

The process of association and interpretation with which the genius creates a new world and new meanings is free from dogmatic or external rules. No rule of judgment, such as those dictated by taste, can restrict the creative ability of a man of genius, since he

⁵³⁸Ibid.

⁵³⁹Ibid., 7:584.

⁵⁴⁰Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Hermann, 1976), 7:35.

perceives and creates directly from nature. Taste, on the other hand, must conform to a model of beauty that is dictated by acquired rules. Therefore, genius is often distinct from taste because rules governing taste often hinder the free expression of genius.⁵⁴¹ This mutual exclusion was pervasive in eighteenth-century artistic discourse. During the second half of the century, it led to the notion of a decadent taste in the arts, especially in theatre.

Theatre theory and the decadence of taste

The Académies created by Richelieu under Louis XIV were the major institutions contributing to Enlightenment rationality, in the ongoing search for universal principles in the arts. The Académie française had long been reflecting on the question of taste and the rules of the art when, in 1761, a project to publish an annotated collection of the classics proposed to include seventeenth-century texts, thus raising authors of the *Grand siècle* to an exemplary level that had always been reserved for the authors of antiquity.⁵⁴² Even though the project was never seriously developed, this proposal from the Académie itself suggested that a level of perfection in art had been reached and should be perpetuated. This new attitude gave credence to a system of conventions that was established to regulate the art of poetry.

The rules of the art ceased to be a springboard for the creative imagination and became more of a mental obstacle. To some extent, the growing importance of

541 "Le génie est un pur don de la nature; ce qu'il produit est l'ouvrage d'un moment; le goût est l'ouvrage de l'étude & du temps; il tient à la connaissance d'une multitude de règles ou établies ou supposées; il fait produire des beautés qui ne sont que de convention. ... Les règles & les lois du goût donneroient des entraves au génie; il les brise pour voler au sublime, au pathétique, au grand." Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 7:582.

542 In a letter to Duclos dated 1761, Voltaire writes: "Vous me faites grand plaisir en m'apprenant que l'Académie va rendre à la France et à l'Europe le service de publier un recueil de nos auteurs classiques, avec des notes qui fixeront la langue et le goût." Quoted by Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 49.

conventions led to the mummification of the past as an absolute model to be imitated. This was how some eighteenth-century writers diagnosed the cultural context in which many treatises on theatre theory were written. Louis Charpentier's *Cause de la decadence du gout sur le theatre* (1768) begins precisely with an evaluation of the art of poetry, arguing that the decadence of taste was caused by the same thing that led to its progress: the predominance of rules.

L'homme de génie, guidé par un sentiment pur, par un enthousiasme qui tient de l'instinct, suit les principes de son art, quoique leur influence soit insensible. Homère savoit toutes les règles du sublime & de la poésie, parce qu'il avoit l'idée du beau, mais il sembloit ne s'occuper que du dernier. Tous les grands hommes qui sont venus après lui, s'abandonnant au seul enthousiasme, ont enfanté des chef-d'oeuvres. Mais ceux qui ont sacrifié cette fureur divine à l'observation des préceptes, ou ceux qui éclairés par ceux-ci, n'étoient point animés par celle-là, n'ont fait que de froides compositions.⁵⁴³

According to Charpentier, the danger in relying on rules to produce a work of quality is the illusion that theory can rule over experience. He was well aware of the potential for theory to become prescriptive, and warned that an excessive respect for rules would repress even the most brilliant genius:

Que produisent les règles dans un Auteur? Rien, ou du médiocre. Rien: si elles ne l'empêchent pas de se livrer tout entier à son génie. Alors elles ne sont pour lui que ce qu'elles étoient à l'égard d'Homère. Du médiocre: qui ne sait que ces pédantes minutieuses enchaînent le génie par une exactitude languissante, par une attention qui refroidit, par des scrupules qui découragent.⁵⁴⁴

The historical times marked by the decadence of taste abounded in principles, Charpentier continues, but lacked in works of genius. He blames the desire to perpetuate

⁵⁴³Louis Charpentier, *Cause de la decadence du gout sur le theatre* (Paris: Au Parnasse François, 1768), i–ii.

⁵⁴⁴Ibid., iii.

the great works of a previous era by blindly following their example, and by giving priority to theory over experience and talent. The mind of a genius does not require rules to attain excellence. Paradoxically, a work of genius, with its inevitable flaws, is more desirable than perfection itself. Like the interlude in a theatrical play or the irregularities in a landscape, imperfections in poetry are necessary to confirm the genius in its making:

Ce que sont pour les connoisseurs, les intermèdes dans les Pièces de Théâtre, & quelques pointes de rocher dans une colline tapissée de verdure, les défectuosités le sont pour moi dans un ouvrage de génie.⁵⁴⁵

To illustrate his point that imitating great works from a previous era and relying blindly on their rules leads to the decadence of art, Charpentier compares Greek and Roman theatre and demonstrates that the latter is inferior. While the intention in both cases was to fight boredom, he writes, the art of the Romans was inferior because it imitated the art of the Greeks from such a close proximity:

Pour tirer avantage de l'imitation, il faut qu'il s'écoule des siècles entre l'imitateur & le modèle. Alors le changement de circonstances fournit d'heureuses applications, des intérêts différens, des situations neuves qui déparent, dénature en quelque sorte les objets & effacent ces traits d'une ressemblance trop marquée.⁵⁴⁶

While the Greeks invented tragedy first and arrived at comedy later, the Romans began with comedy and even surpassed their predecessors in this area. In Charpentier's view, until Louis XIV and the writings of Corneille, theatre in France had been only a pale reflection of what it had been for the Greeks. Writing only a few years after Charpentier, Louis-Sébastien Mercier confirmed his predecessor's diagnosis in *Du théâtre, ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773). Similarly, for Mercier, the decadence of theatre in

⁵⁴⁵Ibid., viii.

⁵⁴⁶Ibid., 14–15.

France was rooted not only in its mystification of the *Grand siècle* and its inheritance of rules and principles, but in its very origin in Greece. Mercier is very critical of the theatre in France during the second half of the eighteenth century, criticizing its origins in the burlesque and its transplantation from Greece into a soil that had led to its degradation:

Notre Théâtre ... gothiquement conçu dans un siècle à demi barbare, enfant du hazard & rejetton parasite, a conservé l'empreinte de sa burlesque origine. Notre théâtre n'a jamais appartenu à notre sol, c'est un bel arbre de la Grèce, transplanté & dégénéré dans nos climats.⁵⁴⁷

Mercier complains that the real objective of theatre should be moral, but unfortunately, poets too often neglect their moral role by trying to please the more frivolous taste of the time. He warns, however, that theatre should not move to the other extreme: the dogmatic moralism of classical tragedy.⁵⁴⁸ In fact, Mercier was one of the most passionate defenders of the *drame bourgeois* that flourished in France during the second half of the eighteenth century. Like Charpentier, Mercier believed that the art of poetry and theatre communicated best through the senses, touching the emotions of the spectator instead of relying on pre-established rules. Dramatic art, Mercier writes, is the art that most excellently "exerce toute notre sensibilité, met en action ces riches facultés que nous avons reçues de la nature, ouvre les trésors du coeur humain, féconde sa pitié, sa commisération, nous apprend à être honnêtes & vertueux."⁵⁴⁹

Both Charpentier and Mercier were convinced that this role could be fulfilled only by relying on one's intuition and artistic passion. No treatise on poetry can teach the man of genius how to write; it can communicate only common knowledge and trivial truths, and

⁵⁴⁷Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Du Théâtre, ou, Nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773), vii.

⁵⁴⁸"L'effet du Théâtre consiste en impressions, & non en enseignemens. Retire-toi, froid moraliste, emporte ton gros livre; que signifie l'enfilage de tes maximes sèches, auprès du peintre éloquent qui montre le tableau armé de toutes ses couleurs?" Ibid., 10–11.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid., 7.

burdens real talent with useless rules: "Obéis à ta fougue, suggests Mercier, elle en sait plus que les règles."⁵⁵⁰ The dogmatic rules criticized by Charpentier and Mercier during the second half of the century were not unique to poetry, however. A similar phenomenon appeared in architecture as a reaction to the rigidity of mid-century neoclassical architectural theory.

Le Camus de Mézières and the complex relationship between rules and talent

In 1780, shortly after the publication of *Le génie de l'architecture*, some chapters of Le Camus de Mézières's treatise were read at a session of the Académie Royale d'Architecture. In the same session, this reading was followed by the article on "taste" by Montesquieu written for the *Encyclopédie* more than two decades earlier.⁵⁵¹ It is significant that these texts were read together and one can even speculate that some parallels between the two works may have been discussed by the academicians during that session. In his article, Montesquieu defines the object of taste as "the pleasures of the soul": variety, symmetry, surprise, etc. Montesquieu describes the importance of sensuous perception on the discernment of taste. Although he believed that the pleasures of our soul are sometimes independent from the senses, Montesquieu did not oppose the empirical philosophy of Locke and Condillac, for he himself believed that the appropriate level of ornamentation in architecture is dictated by the acuity of our senses:

Si notre vûe avoit été plus foible & plus confuse, il auroit fallu moins de moulures & plus d'uniformité dans les membres de l'Architecture; si notre vûe avoit été plus

⁵⁵⁰Ibid., 318.

⁵⁵¹"L'Académie étant assemblée, il a été fait lecture de quelques chapitres du livre intitulé: *Le génie de l'architecture*; ensuite on a repris la lecture de l'article "Goût" dans l'*Encyclopédie*, fait par Montesquieu, et cette lecture, arrêtée à l'article "Contraste" sera continuée à la séance suivante." June 5, 1780. *Procès-Verbaux*, 9: 17–18. Left unfinished when he died in 1755, the article on "taste" by Montesquieu was somewhat completed by Voltaire and published in the sixth volume of the *Encyclopédie* in 1756.

distincte, & notre ame capable d'embrasser plus de choses à-la-fois, il auroit fallu dans l'Architecture plus d'ornemens.⁵⁵²

Le Camus's understanding of the relationship between sensations and the external world is indeed very close to that of Montesquieu. His definition of taste as "ce qui nous attache à une chose par le sentiment" adds a layer of meaning that may explain more appropriately Le Camus's own position on taste and the rules of convention. Montesquieu, however, is concerned mainly with "natural" taste. Unlike acquired taste, he writes, natural taste does not require theory, since it is "une application prompte & exquise des règles mêmes que l'on ne connoît pas," placing taste and genius in a similar category. Another objective of taste, however, is order, and here Montesquieu reintroduces the importance of rules: it is not sufficient for the soul to be presented with a great number of beautiful objects; they must be ordered so that we can remember what we saw and begin to imagine new combinations. In this way, order is not a hindrance but a prerequisite to imagination.

In an additional section in the *Encyclopédie* on "taste in architecture," J.-F. Blondel specifically addresses the notion of "acquired taste" and distinguishes between genius and taste. He argues that they are equally necessary to an architect, but genius comes from a natural disposition whereas taste can be acquired, educated and ultimately perfected.⁵⁵³ As we shall see, Le Camus believed in the importance of both natural and acquired taste. Natural taste is common to all humans and enables a work of art or architecture to be shared by all. Acquired taste, on the other hand, provides a necessary limit to the excesses of frivolous imagination.

Unlike most previous treatises on architecture, the architectural orders are given

⁵⁵²Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 6:761.

⁵⁵³Ibid., 6:770.

little importance in *Le génie de l'architecture*; Le Camus devotes only a few paragraphs to the proportional relations among the five classical orders. Furthermore, his emphasis is on their specific character and their ability to be combined with other elements of decoration to characterize diverse architectural spaces for appropriate human habitation. Le Camus de Mézières nonetheless tries to place *Le génie de l'architecture* in the lineage of architectural treatises from past centuries. As we have seen, he acknowledges the natural foundations of architecture, stating that the proportions of the architectural orders are analogous to those of the human body. The Doric order, for example, is analogous to the body of an elegant man because its composition is rich and male, while the Ionic order is graceful like a beautiful woman.⁵⁵⁴ Le Camus also believed strongly in the analogy between harmonic proportions in architecture and music. "Le son de la trompette anime le guerrier & les chevaux mêmes; le ton, les proportions, l'harmonie de l'Architecture ont le même droit sur notre ame."⁵⁵⁵ Describing the base of an Ionic column, the musical metaphor is pervasive:

Cette base dans l'accord de ses parties peut s'assimiler à celui de la tierce & de la quinte de la Musique, ainsi que l'observe très-savamment M. Ouvrard. En effet le premier tore, la scotie, & le second tore semblent produire à l'oeil ce que les tons de *sol, si, ré*, font à l'oreille. C'est le même calcul. Les filets sont comme les passages & ports de voix.⁵⁵⁶

In a section of his treatise on "L'art de plaire en architecture," Le Camus declares that harmony is the only way to please in architecture, and as in painting, these principles are derived from *la belle nature*. Harmony of proportions in the elevations, in the volumes, and in the relations among all of the parts and the whole leads to pleasure and intellectual enjoyment, which is the ultimate goal of the fine arts.⁵⁵⁷ A lack of harmony among the

⁵⁵⁴Le génie, 31–37.

⁵⁵⁵Ibid., 272.

⁵⁵⁶Ibid., 32.

⁵⁵⁷Ibid., 41–42.

parts of a building affects the eyes like a wrong note disturbs the ears: "les yeux en sont choqués, ainsi que les oreilles peuvent l'être par un faux ton de musique."⁵⁵⁸ Harmony can induce a wide range of emotions in both the listener and the beholder. It can even affect human behaviour:

Alexandre, animé par une musique trop passionnée, tua Clytus l'un de ses favoris. Il y a un air fort commun en Suisse qu'on appelle la danse des vaches, on défend à tout soldat, sous peine de prison, de le chanter lorsqu'il est hors de son pays, autrement la maladie le prend, il déserte. Aristote fait mention d'un usage établi chez les Grecs d'adoucir les horreurs du supplice par la mélodie. Le célèbre Tirtée, en partant du ton Lydien au ton Phrygien, décida de la victoire que Sparte remporta sur les Messéniens. Pourquoi donc l'Architecture n'auroit-elle pas les mêmes avantages & les mêmes droits sur notre ame?⁵⁵⁹

Although Le Camus drew an analogy between architecture and our sensations, he did not distinguish between arbitrary and positive beauty. His discussion of rules and conventions, however, is very complex and even seems contradictory at times. Symmetry and proportion, he claims, are the fundamental rules of good taste, and he warns against the dangers of excess in virtuosity and ornamentation, implicitly criticizing the Rococo fashion.⁵⁶⁰ In his introduction, Le Camus also criticizes Perrault for questioning the need for rules. He argues that Perrault was wrong when he wrote that

il ne doit point y avoir de proportions fixes, que le goût seul devrait décider; qu'il étoit nécessaire que le génie eût ses écarts, que les règles strictes & trop multipliées

⁵⁵⁸Ibid., 57.

⁵⁵⁹Ibid., 181.

⁵⁶⁰Le Camus quotes Voltaire's *Temple du goût* (1733) as an ally against the excess of ornamentation: "Simple en étoit la noble Architecture. / Chaque ornement à sa place arrêté. / Y sembloit mis par la nécessité: / L'art s'y cachoit sous l'air de la nature; / l'oeil satisfait embrassoit sa structure, / Jamais surpris & toujours enchanté." *Le génie*, 106.

le rétrécissoient, sembloient le circonscrire & le rendoient pour ainsi dire stérile.⁵⁶¹

Le Camus instead insists that rules are important for an imagination that otherwise tends to be unstable and even licentious: "Disons qu'il faut nécessairement des points d'après lesquels on puisse partir, & des loix pour fixer notre imagination qui en général, est licencieuse."⁵⁶² Le Camus defends the importance of rules of architectural proportion in his discussion of parallels between harmony in architecture and harmony in music, referring specifically to René Ouvrard's *Architecture harmonique* (1679) and Father Castel's colour harpsichord. Like Ouvrard and Castel, Le Camus assumes that proportions in architecture are guided by natural principles of harmony that affect the sense of sight like music affects the ears. Father Castel's colour harpsichord was undeniably the most direct application of this principle. Applying some very complex and ingenious calculations, Le Camus explains, Father Castel devised a musical instrument that could produce a simultaneous concert of colour:

Les couleurs se succédoient harmoniquement, & frappoient les yeux avec la même magie & autant d'agrément pour l'homme instruit, que les sons combinés par le plus habile Musicien peuvent flatter les oreilles.⁵⁶³

Le Camus saw in Father Castel's experiment a proof of his own theory: that harmony is natural and therefore universal, and can be applied in analogous ways to

⁵⁶¹Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶²Ibid. Saisselin suggests an interesting interpretation of Le Camus's need for rules, claiming that "architecture thus acted like a species of fixed spectacle and just as the stage and its frame and the action on the stage fixed the attention of the spectator, thereby in effect disciplining it, so the proportions and orders of architecture fixed the imagination and it is this which allowed a communication or rapport between edifice and observer, for both were removed from the arbitrariness of pure fantasy and mere chance." Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 245.

⁵⁶³*Le génie*, 10. For more about Father Castel's experiment on colours and sounds, see Szambien, *Symétrie*, 182–83.

various art forms. Like Le Camus, Ouvrard believed in the importance of harmonic proportions in architecture, without which the architectural orders would be little more than "des amas confus de pierres sans ordre et sans règles."⁵⁶⁴ Ouvrard acknowledged the origin of this tradition in antiquity, and praised Vitruvius and other masters for following the principles of harmonic proportion. However, he thought his predecessors lacked rigour in their application of natural proportions to architecture.

Ils semblent ne les avoir regardées dans la pratique, que comme arbitraires & dépendantes de la seule volonté de l'ouvrier & nullement des principes de l'Art. En effet quand ils en ont voulu faire l'application, ils ont pris d'autres mesures, et n'ont eu aucun égard à l'harmonie des Proportions.⁵⁶⁵

Ouvrard was interested in applying his theory of harmonic proportions to architecture. He explains that an octave combines two sounds produced by cords whose lengths have a proportion of 1:2, the fifth has a proportion of 2:3, and the fourth has a proportion of 3:4. Ouvrard reiterates that sounds that do not follow these harmonious proportions are unpleasant to the ear, and in architecture the forms that do not follow these proportions are shocking to the eye. Vision is less discriminating than hearing, he admits, but if the totality of architectural proportions were in harmonious relation, "la beauté en seroit charmante & se feroit sentir."⁵⁶⁶ Ouvrard distinguishes further between sounds and formal proportions, saying that in music, harmony concerns only the sounds that touch the ear simultaneously, while in architecture, sight can capture more than one thing at a time and composition is therefore more complex. Yet, the direct applicability of musical harmony to architecture remains a priority for him. Ouvrard provides specific examples of

⁵⁶⁴René Ouvrard, *Architecture harmonique ou application de la doctrine des proportions de la musique à l'architecture* (Paris: Chez Robert Jean Baptiste de la Caille, 1679), 2.

⁵⁶⁵Ibid., 5.

⁵⁶⁶Ibid., 9.

proportions in buildings that translate literally into musical sounds:

Et pour les faire entendre à l'ouïe, comme on les represente à la veue, on pourroit creuser le bois des croisées en façon de tuyaux d'Orgues, & mettre aux extremitez des especes de goutieres ouvertes suivant ces proportions par un ordre renversé, en mettant l'Ut au 32 pieds, & les autres accords à la proportion: Et comme cette Maison est exposée au grand air, on ne manqueroit pas d'entendre ces harmonies, quand le vent souffleroit dans ces tuyaux.⁵⁶⁷

For Le Camus, what relates the late-seventeenth-century writings of Ouvrard to the mid-eighteenth-century experiments of Castel is the striking *literal* connection between sound and vision, confirming his theory that harmony is not sense-specific, but truly universal. Le Camus admits that Ouvrard's work, like that of many geniuses, was harshly criticized by his contemporaries, and Perrault was probably one of his leading opponents. In fact, Perrault rejected all forms of association between architectural proportion and musical harmony because he believed that the senses were totally autonomous and that proportions in architecture were based on conventions produced by a consensual agreement among architects. It is precisely this aspect of Perrault's theory that Le Camus de Mézières criticizes in the introduction of *Le génie de l'architecture*.

In comparing architecture to music, Le Camus insists that because music can induce passions in the soul, so can architecture.⁵⁶⁸ In this sense, his discourse repeats a familiar concept in European architectural theory since the Renaissance: the natural rules that guide musical harmony also apply to architecture, determining the harmonic relation of the parts to the whole, "la convenance des différentes parties pour former un tout relatif." For Le Camus, the proportions in architecture are like rules of musical harmony that can be combined in an infinite number of ways, while continuing to follow the predetermined

⁵⁶⁷Ibid., 10.

⁵⁶⁸*Le génie*, 181.

rules. As every mode in music corresponds to a specific character, the expression of every order in architecture is unequivocal.⁵⁶⁹

Throughout *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus insists on intimate connections between architecture and music, and between colours and sounds, since all forms of harmony induce passions and affect the soul in similar ways. However, unlike his predecessors, such as Ouvrard, these associations remained at an analogical level. Le Camus did not look for a one-to-one connection between sight and hearing, nor did he attempt to translate the theory of harmonic proportions in architecture into a systematic method as Briseux attempted to do in the *Traité de beau essentiel dans les arts* (1752).⁵⁷⁰ Instead, Le Camus was interested in the general principles that linked the two senses, and retained the narrative implications of such an association:

La Ville de Thèbes, suivant la fable, fût bâtie aux sons de la lyre d'Amphion, fiction qui nous apprend au moins que les Anciens sentoient combien l'Architecture étoit liée à l'harmonie, qui n'est autre chose que la convenance des différentes parties pour former un tout relatif.⁵⁷¹

Describing the classical orders of architecture and their subdivisions, Le Camus

⁵⁶⁹The association of musical harmony and architectural proportions in the eighteenth century is a complex issue and not without contradiction. Theories of music at that time opposed those who, following Rameau, believed in the evocative power of every chord to create harmony, to those, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the importance of the temporal unfolding of melody. Although Le Camus de Mézières does not explicitly enter this debate, he speaks about musical harmony as opposed to melody and this would suggest a more traditional, static reading of character, in contradiction to his apparent interest in the temporal/theatrical unfolding of architectural spaces in his treatise. It could also be related to the modes based on musical intervals, and thus closer to the Vitruvian tradition. I do not intend to expand on the question since Le Camus himself does not develop it further than the two cited examples.

⁵⁷⁰Three decades before the publication of Le Camus's *Le génie de l'architecture*, Briseux insisted that reason and proportion were the essential conditions of beauty in the arts, and developed his essentialist aesthetics into an applicable method in architecture.

⁵⁷¹*Le génie*, 11–12.

reiterates the traditional rules governing the diameter of a column, its height, the proportions of its pedestal and its entablature. The Tuscan column, he writes, including its base and capital, is seven diameters in height; the Doric one is eight diameters; the Ionic, nine; and the Corinthian and the Composite are both ten diameters in height. The proportions of a column, chosen for its specific character, determine the proportions of all the other architectural elements. Contrary to what could be expected after his initial criticism of Perrault, Le Camus grants every architect great liberty in establishing the exact proportion of these elements: "A l'égard des subdivisions de chaque membre, elles varient suivant les ordres & le goût de chaque Artiste." Ensuing from this new freedom, Le Camus questions why the orders of architecture should be restricted to five. Like many of his contemporaries, he considers the possibility of a French order:

D'après ce que nous venons de dire, sommes-nous au dernier terme de l'Architecture? Emules des Grecs & des Romains, pourquoi en qualité de Français n'envierions-nous pas un Ordre qui caractérisât la Nation?⁵⁷²

Although the proportions of any new order would tend to fall within the range of the existing orders (since the Tuscan order was already very massive and the Composite order was as slender as possible without being frail), Le Camus suggests giving some latitude to the imagination: "Pourquoi ne pas étendre ses désirs, & donner essor à l'imagination, en sortant des bornes ordinaires?" Le Camus's prime example again is Perrault's attempt to establish a new French order. Nothing is more ingenious than the French order conceived by Perrault, Le Camus writes, even though its proportions are the same as a Composite order, and therefore, would result in no new sensations. Le Camus soon concludes that a new order could vary only in its ornaments and its height. However, more important than the desire to create a new order for the French nation was the license

⁵⁷²Ibid., 37.

given to the imagination:

Il est des bornes que l'esprit ne franchit plus, en suivant les routes déjà frayées. Certains écarts peuvent occasionner de nouvelles découvertes; il s'échape quelquefois à travers les nuages des rayons de lumière; un génie subtil peut les saisir, & la noble émulation en perfectionner les avantages.⁵⁷³

When Le Camus criticized Perrault in the introduction of *Le génie de l'architecture*, it followed his discussion of music and the importance of harmonic proportions. His aim was to ally himself with traditional treatises on architecture, to give legitimacy to his own theory. His discussion of the architectural orders nevertheless points to a new role for the architect's imagination. Beauty, he writes, appears in the purity and harmony of proportions, but is evident only to the genius: "Le Génie seul peut y conduire. C'est un rayon de Divinité, dont la moindre lueur porte l'empreinte d'une source enflammée."⁵⁷⁴ Unlike his contemporaries who wrote on the creative power of the genius in poetry and in theatrical writing, and how rules limited the truly creative mind, Le Camus regarded rules as a complement to the creative flame that inhabits the genius:

Efforçons-nous, par des recherches multipliées & par nos réflexions, de nous former le goût; souvent il développe & rectifie le Génie, souvent même il le décide & le détermine.⁵⁷⁵

As noted in Chapter 1, Le Camus introduces the notion of *convenance* in his section on exterior decoration, and gives a new modulation to the importance of rules. Customs and (cultural) conventions are more important than fixed (natural) rules, he writes. This part of architecture that we call *convenance* "est déterminée, & s'acquiert moins par l'étude des règles que par la parfaite connaissance des moeurs, des usages du

⁵⁷³Ibid., 39–40.

⁵⁷⁴Ibid., 54–55.

⁵⁷⁵Ibid., 55.

siecle, & du pays où l'on vit." In his discussion of *convenance* or appropriateness, Le Camus refers to the public dimension of architecture: its ability to communicate its use and the status of the owner. In giving priority to conventions over rules, Le Camus acknowledged the possibility of social and cultural change, and thus allowed for innovation in architecture. This fundamental transformation in the architectural theory of the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe originated paradoxically in Perrault's initial subversion of traditional theory. As became even more explicit in the theories of Ledoux and Boullée, the understanding of history as a series of human-generated changes allowed humankind to transform its future, and every individual to reinvent one's social condition. This new belief in the power of human actions to change the course of things was manifest most clearly in the emergence of the bourgeoisie, which created for itself a new social status above that of the mercantile tradition.

Giving more importance to changing human customs than to rigid rational rules also seemed to justify the use of innovative forms in public buildings. For example, the Halle au blé, completed in 1767, inscribed a perfectly circular building and a circular street in one of the densest areas in Paris, and became the first free-standing circular architectural monument in the city. (See Figure 68.) Anticipating the projects of Ledoux and Boullée, Le Camus de Mézières's innovative design demonstrated the important role of the architect's imagination and his power to challenge established rules.



Figure 68: General view of the Halle au blé and its surroundings (ca. 1886).
Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris. [Deming].

CHAPTER 9: EMPIRICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE NATURE OF "SENSATION"

In *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus defines a theory of expression that assumes that all shapes, colours, light, and textures employed in the design of a building act "upon the senses to induce certain predictable sensations in the observer."⁵⁷⁶ Although he makes no explicit reference to the empirical philosophy that was transforming the very nature of knowledge in the eighteenth century, the subtitle of his treatise, *L'analogie de cet art [architecture] avec nos sensations*, suggests a connection to the sensationalist philosophy of John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac. For them, knowledge was directly tied to sensory perception because the senses reacted consistently to particular forms, just as particular combinations of musical tones were associated with different moods.⁵⁷⁷ They also rejected the existence of innate ideas. Like Locke and Condillac, Le Camus believed that knowledge is acquired through sensory perception. He obliquely acknowledges the influence of empirical philosophy when he writes in his introduction:

Nos principes sur l'analogie des proportions de l'Architecture avec nos sensations sont calqués sur ceux de la plus grande partie des Philosophes. On n'erre point en suivant la nature.⁵⁷⁸

However, his primary aim in basing his architectural theory on an analogy with human sensations was to ensure that the resulting architecture would not only speak to the rational mind but would also move the very soul. Architecture would thus become a new metaphysics.

C'est de ce principe qu'il faut partir, lorsqu'on prétend dans l'Architecture produire des affections, lorsqu'on veut parler à l'esprit, émouvoir l'ame, & ne pas se contenter, en bâtiissant, de placer pierres sur pierres, & d'imiter au hasard des

⁵⁷⁶Cleary, "Beauty," 57.

⁵⁷⁷Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸*Le génie*, 9.

dispositions, des ornemens convenus ou empruntés sans méditation.⁵⁷⁹

Traditional scholarship on Le Camus de Mézières, such as the article by Rémy Saisselin and Robin Middleton's introduction to the English translation of *Le génie*, all assume a direct genealogy from Condillac to Le Camus. In *Le génie de l'architecture*, however, Le Camus often contradicts Locke's notion of a *tabula rasa* and the rejection of innate ideas by empirical philosophers. Le Camus instead emphasizes an inner sense, an a priori understanding of the world that approaches the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who brought together empiricism and the postulate of a priori geometrical space and time. Because of the unresolved status of his philosophical alliances, it is important to pursue parallels between Le Camus's architectural theory and contemporary philosophical positions.

Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and the nature of imagination

In 1754, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac published his *Traité des sensations*, in which he maintains that all human understanding, from our first impressions of the external world to our very ability to think and imagine, relies on the five senses alone. Impressions recorded by the senses are preserved and compared by memory. Imagination is a subtle form of memory in which various sensory impressions are combined to create new ones.⁵⁸⁰ This definition of imagination echoes architectural theories of the time, in which the creation of new works relied on history. Building on his two previous works, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) and *Traité des systèmes* (1749), Condillac proposes in *Traité des sensations* a mental exercise that enables one to return to a state of complete ignorance, the *tabula rasa* postulated by Locke. Condillac demands that we imagine

⁵⁷⁹Ibid., 7.

⁵⁸⁰Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Oeuvres philosophiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), 229.

ourselves as a statue whose mind is like an empty box, devoid of innate ideas. He then guides the reader through a journey in which the statue acquires, one by one, the senses that make it aware of its surroundings, and integrates various impressions from the external world to acquire knowledge of itself and of otherness:

Il faut commencer d'exister avec elle [the statue], n'avoir qu'un seul sens, quand elle n'en a qu'un; n'acquérir que les idées qu'elle acquiert, ne contracter que les habitudes qu'elle contracte: en un mot, il faut n'être que ce qu'elle est.⁵⁸¹

The acquisition of knowledge through individual senses was widely studied from mid-century until the last decades of the eighteenth century. Diderot himself reflected on the question in his *Lettre sur les aveugles*, published in 1749 and translated into English the following year as *An Essay on Blindness*. The controversial work of Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*, published in France in 1748, also explored human dependence on the senses for knowledge of the external world. La Mettrie believed that the states of the soul were related to those of the body, and like Locke, he claimed that it would be impossible for a man deprived of all his senses to acquire a single idea.⁵⁸²

The new empirical model for acquiring knowledge, however, was not without opposition. Many resisted its rational premises and claimed instead that innate desire and passions are the true motors that incite the acquisition of knowledge. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, refused to admit that intellectual faculties are independent; he believed in the reciprocity of different modes of knowing. He thought that, without passions or the desire for pleasure, no one would even feel the need to think. He writes:

L'entendement humain doit beaucoup aux passions, qui, d'un commun aveu, lui doivent beaucoup aussi. C'est par leur activité que notre raison se perfectionne.

⁵⁸¹Ibid., 221.

⁵⁸²Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine: L'homme machine* [1748] (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 26, 38.

Nous ne cherchons à connaître que parce que nous désirons de jouir, et il n'est pas possible de concevoir pourquoi celui qui n'aurait ni désirs ni craintes se donnerait la peine de raisonner.⁵⁸³

Condillac, on the other hand, believed that desires and passions, including love, hate, hope, worry and will, originated from our capacity to compare different sensations. The motor that incites us to acquire knowledge, he claimed, was activated by the three natural needs: feeding oneself, avoiding accidents, and satisfying one's curiosity.⁵⁸⁴ In his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, published almost a decade before his *Traité des sensations*, Condillac first notes the affinities between his empirical philosophy and that of Locke. Condillac was familiar with the French translation of Locke's *Essai concernant l'entendement humain*, in which the English author compares the human mind to an empty cabinet:

A mon avis, l'entendement ne ressemble pas mal à un cabinet entièrement obscur, qui n'aurait que quelques petites ouvertures pour laisser entrer par dehors les images extérieures et visibles, ou, pour ainsi dire, les idées des choses: de sorte que si ces images venant à se peindre dans ce cabinet obscur, pouvaient y rester, et y être placées en ordre, en sorte qu'on pût les trouver dans l'occasion, il y aurait une grande ressemblance entre ce cabinet et l'entendement humain, par rapport à tous les objets de la vue, et aux idées qu'ils excitent dans l'esprit.⁵⁸⁵

Using a similar analogy, Condillac conceived his statue as having an empty mind on which every new sensation would make a fresh impression. The extroverted attitude of the Enlightenment mind has been explained in part through its affiliation with Locke and Condillac. Because empirical philosophers no longer believed that truth was accessible

⁵⁸³Rousseau, "Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes, I in *Oeuvres (Pléiade)* 1:143; quoted by Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 126.

⁵⁸⁴Condillac, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, 330.

⁵⁸⁵John Locke, *Essai concernant l'entendement humain* [1690], translated into French by Coste in 1700. Condillac owned a fourth edition published in 1742.

intuitively but proceeded from the external world to the interior of the individual, intrinsic personality characteristics and intuitive moral knowledge disappeared along with innate ideas. This new experimental philosophy moved the ground of convictions from the internal to the external world, and thus transformed moral matters into what some philosophers have described as a *science des moeurs*. Conventions in the eighteenth century thus became a way to control social behaviour, compensating for the loss of innate moral convictions.⁵⁸⁶

Although Condillac's *Traité des sensations* does not recognize the role of conventions in acquiring knowledge, he certainly insists that any awareness of one's existence is induced originally by an external stimulation. Exploring the impact of each individual sense, Condillac's statue is first given the sense of smell. A flower brought to its nose creates a new sensation but the experience of this single smell cannot generate a desire for the smell to disappear or to continue, even if it creates suffering or pleasure, because the statue has no point of comparison: "Elle n'a encore aucune idée de changement, de succession, ni de durée. Elle existe donc sans pouvoir former des désirs."⁵⁸⁷ It is with memory that the statue can compare and make judgments; memory becomes another way of smelling. This ability to compare and judge creates two kinds of pleasure or suffering: the first one is more "sensitive" and pertains to the physical body; the other is more intellectual or spiritual and it belongs to the realm of memory and affects the soul. Condillac, however, warns that this distinction is not simple because "il n'y a à proprement parler que l'âme qui sente ... le corps en est la seule cause occasionnelle."⁵⁸⁸ Memory itself has different modulations, imagination being its most refined aspect:

La mémoire est le commencement d'une imagination qui n'a encore que peu de

⁵⁸⁶Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 113.

⁵⁸⁷Ibid., 225.

⁵⁸⁸Ibid., 227.

force; l'imagination est la mémoire même, parvenue à toute la vivacité dont elle est susceptible.⁵⁸⁹

Imagination in fact becomes a third mode of awareness, in addition to smell and memory. Its purpose is to fix the impressions of the senses and to combine them in new ways the absence of the action of external objects.⁵⁹⁰ Condillac's statue, endowed with the single sense of smell, has not learned to discriminate between a sensation and the imagination of a sensation, since it has no other sense to warn it of the absence of the object it is imagining. The statue has no concept of doubt toward the senses either, and can imagine freely. Since it is devoted to a single sense, Condillac speculates, its faculty of imagination must be more developed than ours. Condillac was convinced that, with the sense of smell alone, the statue already possessed a soul, which in turn contained the seed of all its faculties:

Si nous considérons que se ressouvenir, comparer, juger, discerner, imaginer, être étonné, avoir des idées abstraites, en avoir de nombre et de durée, connaître des vérités générales et particulières, ne sont que différentes manières d'être attentif; qu'avoir des passions, aimer, haïr, espérer, craindre et vouloir, ne sont que différentes manières de désirer; et qu'enfin être attentif et désirer, ne sont dans l'origine que sentir: nous concluons que la sensation enveloppe toutes les facultés de l'âme.⁵⁹¹

Condillac argues that his reasoning could be extrapolated to the other senses because they behave in a similar fashion. The sense of hearing, however, can move the statue more powerfully than smell or taste ever could, since sounds can affect the body directly and can convey sadness or joy without relying on acquired ideas. Sounds also create a very strong sense of duration because the pleasures of hearing are created mainly

⁵⁸⁹Ibid., 229.

⁵⁹⁰Ibid.

⁵⁹¹Ibid., 239.

by melody, which is a succession of harmonic sounds to which time provides a specific character. When the statue identifies with sound as it did with smell, it will not be satisfied with a single note and will want to become an entire melody. Even though the sense of hearing does not contribute more than smell or taste to indicate the presence of an external realm, combining different senses will enable the statue to perceive that it has acquired a more complex existence.

Of all the senses, Condillac gives predominance to touch because it is the most spatial of the senses, and it distinguishes most clearly between the body that perceives and the outside world. He refutes the Cartesian notion that sight is our primary means of perceiving the world.⁵⁹² To demonstrate this primacy of touch over sight, Condillac recounts an experiment on a person who had been blind since birth, and to whom the sense of sight was given by removing cataracts. After the operation, the patient perceived that objects were touching the surface of his eyes. This was because his organ of vision had not learned to discern the distance of objects, as could his sense of touch. This person, newly endowed with sight, could not distinguish visually between a cube and a sphere, but relied instead on his tactile knowledge of the world to educate his sense of vision.⁵⁹³ When he began to distinguish shapes and sizes, Condillac says, the objects that gave the patient most pleasure must have been those that best reflected light, and those whose composition could be grasped most easily. This preference for simple forms seems to foreshadow the developments of neo-classical art and the architectural innovations of Boullée, for whom simple forms were superior because they were more natural.

In this story of the blind person, Condillac is in fact expanding on Locke's

⁵⁹²Descartes in *Dioptrique*, Discours VI, and Malebranche in *De la recherche de la Vérité*, liv. 1, chap. 6–9, deal with perception of distance, place, size and figure as visual phenomena.

⁵⁹³Condillac, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, 243–45. This experiment was published in *Philosophical Transactions* (1728), and Voltaire recounted it in his *Elements de la philosophie de Newton*, Part 2, chap. 7.

speculations on a similar experiment published in the *Essay on Human Understanding*. Locke in turn was transcribing a question from his friend William Molyneux, who speculated that a person blind since birth to whom the sense of sight is given would still need the sense of touch to distinguish between a sphere and a cube. Condillac criticizes Locke for failing to acknowledge the need to educate the eye. He also disagrees with Locke for believing that judgment occurs at the level of perception. Moreover, Condillac argues against Locke who, in his view, attributed to vision ideas that come only from the sense of touch. Touch indeed teaches the other senses to recognize external objects, Condillac maintains. It instructs the eye to perceive distances, shapes, sizes, and movements, whereas sight alone would perceive the external world only as an extension of itself. Condillac explains that the statue to whom is given the sense of sight in addition to the other senses does not need to learn how to see, but it needs to learn how to look. His position again is an explicit criticism of Locke:

Il ne suffit pas de répéter, d'après Locke, que toutes nos connaissances viennent des sens: si je ne sais pas comment elles en viennent, je croirai qu'aussitôt que les objets font des impressions sur nous, nous avons toutes les idées que nos sensations peuvent renfermer, et je me tromperais ... Nous nous en faisons [des idées] qu'autant que nous regardons et que nous regardons avec ordre, avec méthode.⁵⁹⁴

In other words, sensations need to be analyzed in order for ideas to be formed. For Condillac, this capacity for analysis appears to be innate in humans. It indicates an interesting complexity in which the mind remains analytic and Cartesian, but despite his emphasis on touch, Condillac is not yet describing an embodied consciousness processing sensory information. This analysis of tactile observations leads the statue to develop some kind of geometry, as well as an understanding of dimensions and places. The statue that

⁵⁹⁴Condillac, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, 271.

relates to the external world only through touch perceives that all of its sensations "ne sont à son égard, que des modifications de l'étendue,"⁵⁹⁵ announcing somehow the Kantian spatial a priori. Unlike the other senses, tactile perception is more powerful because it lasts longer and cannot be forgotten as easily, for the statue endowed with touch is always aware of its body and can never be entirely deprived of all sensations. With touch, imagination not only enables the statue to remember and imagine a known sensation, it develops a reflective faculty with which the statue can combine previous sensations to create new ones. Imagination, therefore, is "une faculté qui combine les qualités des objets, pour en faire des ensembles, dont la nature n'offre point de modèle."⁵⁹⁶ Nature, however, is not being challenged or dispensed with. On the contrary, nature remains a model of perfection that must guide any process of creation. Condillac emphasizes that no greater perfection can be achieved than what is found in the very organs of perception, since they are naturally perfect. The organs of touch, for example, could not be improved; twenty fingers instead of five would be more confusing than helpful, since the complexity of an external object can be perceived only through contact with our *simple* perceiving organs: "Il ne manque donc rien à la statue à cet égard."

If the statue were given only the sense of touch, Condillac continues, it would gradually recognize the extent of its body by touching itself and by recognizing the acts of both touching and being touched. It would then recognize the extent or the otherness of the world by touching but not being touched in response. With the sense of touch, the statue develops curiosity and this becomes one of the principal motives for action.⁵⁹⁷ The statue also learns to recognize the shapes of figures that sight alone cannot grasp, and to understand principles such as duration, immensity, and eternity. The statue acquires

⁵⁹⁵Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷Ibid., 256–60.

"ideas," which are a remembrance of sensations, but it cannot develop more theoretical ideas because it lacks language.

It is only through language that notions such as good and beauty, which express qualities that contribute to our pleasure, can be developed.⁵⁹⁸ Good is what pleases smell and taste; beauty is what pleases sight, hearing, and touch. These notions of good and beauty, Condillac specifies, are not defined in absolute terms, but constitute the judgment of one isolated man: "Le bon et le beau ne sont point absolu: ils sont relatifs au caractère de celui qui en juge, et à la manière dont il est organisé."⁵⁹⁹ Condillac seems to deny the possibility of absolute judgments in favour of a unity of perception. Even though some may appreciate the taste of honey while others despise it, all would agree on its sweetness. Condillac warns, however, that even though sensations are created when certain objects act upon the senses, the emotions induced by those sensations are not intrinsic to the objects that produced them. In other words, a specific object will not necessarily produce an identical emotional response in every context, or for every individual. This is an issue on which Le Camus de Mézières's theory of sensations differs fundamentally from that of Condillac. In Le Camus's theory it is crucial that architecture convey specific emotions to the observer by acting directly upon the senses. The analogy between architecture and our sensations assumes that all external stimuli that can affect the senses, such as shapes, colour, light, and even textures and smells, must induce specific sensations in the observer, and that the senses consistently respond to specific forms in specific ways.

Indeed, although Le Camus is indebted to empirical philosophy, there are important differences that should be emphasized. Unlike Locke and Condillac, Le Camus is not concerned with determining how individual senses respond to external stimuli and how the

⁵⁹⁸Ibid., 304.

⁵⁹⁹Ibid.

various senses interact with each other. Instead, he is interested in how architecture can affect all the senses so as to create a unified character: shapes, colours, and smells should all combine to offer a spatial experience that encompasses all the senses. Le Camus does not explicitly acknowledge his allegiance to Condillac or Locke because his notion of an analogy between architecture and our sensations was derived not from a scientific analysis of the senses, as carried out by Condillac, but from an analogical and sometimes even metaphoric comparison among the different senses. As musical harmony could point to the need for visual proportions in architecture, so could the other senses.

The meditation on "sensations" in *Le génie de l'architecture* differs from the systematic scrutiny of sensory perception by the empirical philosophers. Le Camus's intention was to recover architectural meaning not only through the sensory experience of the external world, but also through the emotions (*les sensations*) and passions created in the observer. This search for meaning in the emotional *sentiments* of the individual was in fact one of the foundations of romanticism, which had been latent in France since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Le Camus's description of architectural experience does not presume the absence of an a priori, unlike Condillac's statue, whose knowledge of the world was acquired exclusively through the senses. The judgment of architectural proportions and character in *Le génie de l'architecture* is not elaborated from a purely rational framework either. Instead, the judgment of architectural character comes from an innate sense, common to all men. Describing a Chinese garden in England, Le Camus writes:

L'expression n'en est jamais équivoque; personne n'hésite sur le caractère qu'elle présente, elle est à la portée de tout le monde. La sensibilité, dont presque tous les hommes sont partagés, suffit pour faire ressentir l'étendue de ses effets.⁶⁰⁰

⁶⁰⁰*Le génie*, 14.

The notion of *sensibilité* described here by Le Camus, and what Gusdorf associates with the "birth of romantic consciousness" during the Enlightenment, is not yet the romantic "inner sense" that would emphasize the individuality and originality of every human being in the nineteenth century. The distinction is an ontological one; it opposes the belief that one can attain a universal and absolute truth by returning to a natural sense that links all individuals ("la sensibilité, dont presque tous les hommes sont partagés") to the belief that would preserve the difference of every individual and would lead to relativism in the nineteenth century. This distinction is crucial and constitutes an important modulation in the emerging concept of a romantic consciousness prior to the French Revolution, yet it also adds a new dimension to eighteenth-century art and philosophy: beyond the scientific objectivity, beyond the general submission to conventions under the Ancien Régime, it announces the emergence of a new subject, different from Descartes's transparent *ego cogito* and its innate ideas.

Burke on the Sublime and the Beautiful

The main objective of sensationalist philosophy was to understand how knowledge is acquired through the senses, and how sensation leads to judgment. In his *Lettre sur les aveugles*, Diderot comments explicitly on the question of the blind person that was originally raised by Locke and Molyneux, and the subsequent criticism by Condillac. Diderot was already aware of the limits of the sensationalism promoted by Condillac. Three years after the publication of Condillac's *Traité des sensations*, the English philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–97), directly influenced by the sensationalism of Locke, investigated some aspects of human perception that would become relevant to the discourse on the arts during the second half of the century. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, published in England in 1757 and translated into French in 1765, Burke tries to isolate the psychological causes of emotions

that produce the effects of the sublime and the beautiful. In his "Introduction on Taste," Burke announces that his epistemology and his linguistic approach are greatly indebted to Locke's fundamental belief that "the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures."⁶⁰¹ The philosophical foundations of Le Camus de Mézières's architectural theory seem to have direct affinities with Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, either directly or through Diderot's reading of Burke. As with Condillac, Le Camus makes no direct reference to Burke's work, but many of the issues discussed in the *Philosophical Enquiry* have direct counterparts in *Le génie de l'architecture*.

Discussing the notion of taste and absolute judgment, Burke argues that even though there seems to be a great "diversity of tastes both in kind and degree" when comparing different individuals, taste is nonetheless based on principles that are the same for everyone. These principles are based on what he calls "natural powers in man" that establish a connection between human understanding and the external world; these natural mediators are the senses, the imagination and judgment. Like Condillac, Burke assumed that since the organs of the senses are nearly the same in all humans, so is their perception of external objects. If similar senses produced different images of the external world, Burke continues, the resulting skepticism would make "every sort of reasoning on every subject vain and frivolous,"⁶⁰² thus implicitly criticizing Malebranche and the Cartesian philosophy of doubt. Burke admits, like Condillac, that there are acquired tastes (such as a preference for vinegar over milk), yet these acquired tastes do not prevent one from distinguishing between sweetness and sourness, which is a natural form of taste or judgment.

Unlike Condillac, Burke does not attempt a meticulous analysis of the senses but

⁶⁰¹Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* [1757] (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 23. Burke is referring to John Locke, *Essay*, II, i, 3.

⁶⁰²Burke, *Enquiry*, 13.

instead elaborates on general concepts such as taste and delight, as well as pleasure and pain, to determine the sources of the sublime and the beautiful. For Burke, taste is a refined form of judgment that is initiated in sensory perception. The impressions made on the senses are mentally recognized and associated through the imagination, and they lead to a form of discernment that characterizes taste:

What is called Taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these, and concerning the human passions, manners and actions. All this is requisite to form Taste, and the ground-work of all these is the same in the human mind; for as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all, and therefore there is a sufficient foundation for a conclusive reasoning on these matters.⁶⁰³

In this way; taste recovers a natural ground by claiming its origin in the senses that are common to all. Taste varies among individuals because it depends on sensibilities that can fluctuate.

Also subject to great variation is the perception of pain and pleasure. These two feelings and their many variations dominate the wide array of human passions. "Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind," Burke writes, are derived from either pain or pleasure, and are dictated by two general categories of human reaction: the instinct of self-preservation and the behaviour of man as a social and sexual being. As "the ideas of *pain, sickness, and death* fill the mind with strong emotions of horror," the passions that most powerfully incite man to self-preservation are imbued with pain. "The society of the sexes, which answers the purpose of propagation," on the other hand, induces passions that originate in pleasure:

⁶⁰³Ibid., 23.

The passions therefore which are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger*, and they are the most powerful of all passions. ... Those which belong to *generation* have their origin in gratifications and *pleasures*; the pleasure most directly belonging to this purpose is of a lively character, rapturous and violent, and confessedly the highest pleasure of sense.⁶⁰⁴

Delight also originates in the senses, but is distinct from pleasure, and even opposed to it in nature. To explain the distinction, Burke suggests that both pain and pleasure are positive characteristics: the abrupt termination of pleasure leads to disappointment or grief, not to pain, for pain is not the absence of pleasure. Similarly, distancing oneself from pain results not in pleasure but in delight; this awareness is essential to appreciate the painful and terrifying in artistic productions. Here Burke disputes Locke's notion that the removal of pain is a form of pleasure.⁶⁰⁵ Since delight depends on a relation to an external context, it is a *relative* form of pleasure. This definition of pain and delight is crucial for understanding Burke's notion of the sublime. The source of the sublime, he writes, can be found in "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the idea of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible."⁶⁰⁶ The sublime explicitly addresses death, horror and danger; it is produced only by the strongest emotions, and only from pain can such emotions arise. The sublime, however, is not all that is terrible, but rather a form of terror that can be appreciated from "certain distances," so as to create delight. Sources of the sublime, therefore, include not only terror but also power and all "general privations" such as vacuity, darkness, solitude and silence "because they are all Terrible."⁶⁰⁷ It also includes vastness and infinity.

Burke's definition of the sublime as a transmutation of pain into delight is not

⁶⁰⁴Ibid., 38–40.

⁶⁰⁵Locke, *Essay*, I, 2, c.20, section 16. Burke, *Enquiry*, 32–34.

⁶⁰⁶Burke, *Enquiry*, 39.

⁶⁰⁷Ibid., 71.

unlike the dramatic distancing of Greek tragedies. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle had already defined this phenomenon: "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies."⁶⁰⁸ For Aristotle, the pleasure derived from observing painful events from an artistic distance comes from the potential to learn:

To learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general ... Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, "Ah, that is he."⁶⁰⁹

For Burke, however, the creation of intense, sublime emotions did not necessarily aim to teach other individuals the consequence of their action; sublimity became an end in itself. This obsession with creating sublime effects was not restricted to poetry and the art of tragedy; it pervaded every field of artistic production. In his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke indeed devotes some thoughts to the sublime in architecture. Succession conveys the idea of progress beyond limits, and uniform parts continue that unbroken progression: these "are what constitute the artificial infinite." The noble effect of regular and especially circular shapes in architecture is due to this notion of artificial infinity. The rotunda, for example, is a clear manifestation of this effect because "you can nowhere fix a boundary."

Turn which way you will, the same object still seem to continue, and the imagination has no rest. But the parts must be uniform, as well as circularly disposed, to give this figure its full force; because any difference, whether it be in the disposition, or in the figure, or even in the colour of its parts, is highly prejudicial to the idea of infinity, which every change must check and interrupt, at every alteration commencing a new series.⁶¹⁰

Interestingly, this description of the sublime in architecture could have been

⁶⁰⁸Aristotle, *Poetics*, 15.

⁶⁰⁹[ibid.]

⁶¹⁰Burke, *Enquiry*, 74–75.

referring to the circular structure of Le Camus de Mézières's *halle au blé* in Paris. A lover of architecture described the building in this way a few months after the cupola by Legrand and Molinos was completed in 1783 (See Figure 69.):

la halle compte sans nul doute parmi les créations les plus fortes de notre temps et les plus beaux exemples à méditer pour les générations futures ... l'idée de présenter un monument public à la fois en l'isolant noblement au centre d'une place circulaire vers laquelle convergent six rues, et en l'accordant aux maisons environnantes dont les façades et la hauteur ont été conçues en fonction de lui. C'est le règne du cercle et de l'étoile, aujourd'hui complétés par la sphère [the cupola], formes simples et satisfaisantes pour la Raison comme pour l'Imagination ... sans entrée monumentale, sans décor autre qu'architectural, [la halle] ne parle que par les masses et les proportions. Tout y concourt à créer une sensation de noblesse et de simplicité à la fois, caractère convenable au Temple de l'Agriculture, à la Tholos de Cérès.⁶¹¹

The predominance of regular geometrical figures that create "sublime" effects in architecture came to mark the last decades of the Ancien Régime in France. It was thoroughly developed in the work of Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728–99). Only a few years younger than Le Camus de Mézières, Boullée exploited sensationalist philosophy in architecture and elaborated an architectural notion of the sublime in his theory of natural bodies, *la théorie des corps*:

Il est donc démontré que la proportion et l'harmonie des corps sont établies par la nature et que, par l'analogie qu'elles ont avec notre organisation, les propriétés qui découlent de l'essence des corps ont du pouvoir sur nos sens.⁶¹²

Boullée's debt to sensationalist philosophy and to Le Camus de Mézières is pervasive. The masses and shapes in architecture convey the appropriate character of a

⁶¹¹Lettre d'un amateur d'architecture à son fils Antoine, 14 décembre 1783, quoted by Anne-Marie Lecoq, "À propos de la nouvelle halle au blé," in *Archives d'architecture moderne* (Brussels, 1985), 28:94.

⁶¹²Boullée, *Architecture*, 64.

building, Boullée writes; they are also fundamental elements that can affect the senses directly. For Boullée, they hold the greatest expressive power for "nos émotions naissent de l'effet du tout ensemble et non pas des détails."⁶¹³ This attention to the unity of masses and their expressiveness echoed Le Camus's concern in *Le génie de l'architecture*:

On ne sauroit être trop attentif aux masses d'un édifice, à l'effet qu'elles doivent produire dans leur élévation ... C'est par le grand ensemble qu'on attire & que l'on fixe l'attention; c'est lui seul qui peut intéresser tout à la fois & l'ame & les yeux ... Les grandes parties, la pureté des profils, des jours ni trop vifs ni trop sombres, de beaux percés, les masses bien cadencées, beaucoup d'harmonie annonce la grandeur & la magnificence.⁶¹⁴

Various combinations of masses obviously could produce different effects. To create softness and tranquillity in a building, Le Camus writes, the architect will combine similar masses to avoid excessive projections and recesses. If more harshness is needed to express the character of a different kind of building, the succession of masses will be less regular, and transitions will be more frequent. Simplicity is expressed by avoiding divisions, while richness and profusion are rendered by using many masses and subdivisions. A character of vivacity and gaiety may be imparted in a similar way, by using string courses and cornices to increase variety. A majestic character is conveyed by a grand style with imposing dimensions. For Burke, magnitude was another way to express the sublime in architecture. He stresses "greatness of dimensions" but notes that dimension alone does not necessarily lead to the sublime, and excessive length in buildings

⁶¹³For Boullée, architecture is no longer controlled by social conventions but uses the natural effect of masses and volumes to create its images: "L'art de produire des images en architecture provient de l'effet des corps et c'est ce qui en constitue la poésie. C'est par les effets que produisent leur masses sur nos sens que nous distinguons les corps légers des corps massifs et c'est par une juste application, qui ne peut provenir que de l'étude des corps, que l'artiste parvient à donner à ses productions le caractère qui leur est propre."

Boullée, *Architecture*, 35.

⁶¹⁴*Le génie*, 62–64.

can even have the opposite effect, for

the perspective will lessen it in height as it gains in length; and will bring it at last to a point; turning the whole figure into a sort of triangle, the poorest in its effect of almost any figure, that can be presented to the eye.⁶¹⁵

Burke gives some specific examples, comparing "colonnades and avenues of trees of a moderate length" to those that "run to immense distances," and concludes that the former are much grander. A true artist, he says, should create the noblest design not only by using vast dimensions, since this is always "the sign of a common and low imagination." Rather, he should use his art to "put a generous deceit on the spectators."⁶¹⁶ Le Camus de Mézières was also opposed to immense distances in architecture. His argument, however, was based on the principle of proportions: there cannot be proportional relations among elements of incommensurable size, and since beautiful proportions occur only where precise relationships exist, the use of immense dimensions in architecture would lead to visual confusion.⁶¹⁷ Echoing Burke's concern for magnitude, Boullée criticizes the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome for looking smaller than it really is. Instead, a temple to God should produce precisely the opposite effect, Boullée argues:

Ce temple doit offrir l'image la plus frappante et la plus grande des choses existantes; il faudrait, si cela était possible, qu'il nous parût l'univers. Descendre à ce qu'on appelle nécessité en composant un temple, c'est oublier son sujet.⁶¹⁸

Boullée considers immensity to be an essential quality of this kind of monument. Like Burke, he associates immensity and horror with the sublime:

L'image du grand a un tel empire sur nos sens qu'en la supposant horrible elle excite toujours en nous un sentiment d'admiration. Un volcan vomissant la flamme

⁶¹⁵Burke, *Enquiry*, 76.

⁶¹⁶Ibid.

⁶¹⁷*Le génie*, 57.

⁶¹⁸Boullée, *Architecture*, 82.

et la mort est une image horriblement belle!⁶¹⁹

Le Camus de Mézières also adheres to this association between terrifying horror and the sublime. In his chapter on exterior decoration, he discusses various characters in architecture, including the *genre terrible*, which is produced by a combination of magnitude and force. The *genre terrible* in architecture, as in nature or a dramatic scene, can shake the soul, he writes, but the sensations it produces will be pleasing only if the terror is not shocking. Like Burke before him, Le Camus emphasizes the need for an artistic distance to transform terror into delight. The resources of art will then be used to heighten the sensations caused by terror. In composing a facade, an architect can evoke the character of terror through great contrasts in masses and lighting:

Les avant-corps saillants sont un des moyens dont on peut se servir; quelques percés qui se terminent sur un endroit sombre & obscur, où la vue puisse à peine pénétrer à travers les ténèbres, seront une vraie ressource: d'un autre côté on laissera appercevoir, si l'occasion le permet, de ces lointains vagues & non déterminés, où il ne se présente aucun objet sur lequel la vue puisse se reposer. Rien de plus terrible, l'âme est étonnée, elle frémit.⁶²⁰

Lighting was indeed a crucial element to evoke a wide range of emotions in the spectator and to convey a feeling of horror that can ultimately become the sublime. The power of light in architecture was well known to Burke, for whom darkness is "more productive of sublime ideas than light," since in architecture, darkness is "known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light." Therefore, all buildings destined to "produce an idea of the sublime, ought ... to be dark and gloomy." Burke, however, also emphasizes contrast in creating a sublime effect. During the day, darkness is important when one enters a building because "you cannot pass into a greater light than

⁶¹⁹Ibid., 84.

⁶²⁰*Le génie*, 60.

you had in the open air"; the opposite rule applies at night, when "the more highly a room is ... illuminated, the grander will the passion be."⁶²¹

Burke's emphasis on light had a major impact on Le Camus de Mézières and other late-eighteenth-century architects. Boullée's cenotaph for Newton attempted to recreate the effect of a starry sky during the day and the all-powerful light of the sun at night. For Boullée, architecture is

l'art de nous émouvoir par les effets de la lumière ... car dans tous les monuments susceptibles de porter l'âme à éprouver l'horreur des ténèbres ou bien, par ses effets éclatants, à porter à une sensation délicieuse, l'artiste, qui doit connaître les moyens de s'en rendre maître, peut oser se dire: je fais la lumière.⁶²²

Boullée developed what he called an architecture of shadows, exploiting the theme of death to evoke terror and the sublime. His funerary monuments or cenotaphs, as ultimate dwellings of death, suggested a buried architecture. However, the architecture of death that epitomizes Boullée's fascination with the sublime is his cenotaph for Newton. (See Figure 70.) Boullée started from Newton's scientific accomplishment, using the shape of the earth as his point of departure. The spherical shape exemplifies Burke's definition of the sublime, using a perfect volume that does not allow the eye to fix the boundary. The inside of the monument responds to the law of universal attraction, as if gravity forced the spectator to remain at the centre, "dans un éloignement propre à favoriser l'illusion des effets."⁶²³

Like Boullée, Le Camus believed that different degrees of contrast between light and shadow can expressively convey different characters of a building, from softness to

⁶²¹Burke, *Enquiry*, 80–81.

⁶²²Boullée, *Architecture*, 35.

⁶²³Boullée writes: "En me servant, Newton, de ton divin système pour former la lampe sépulcrale qui éclaire ta tombe, je me suis rendu, ce me semble, sublime." *Ibid.*, 138–39.

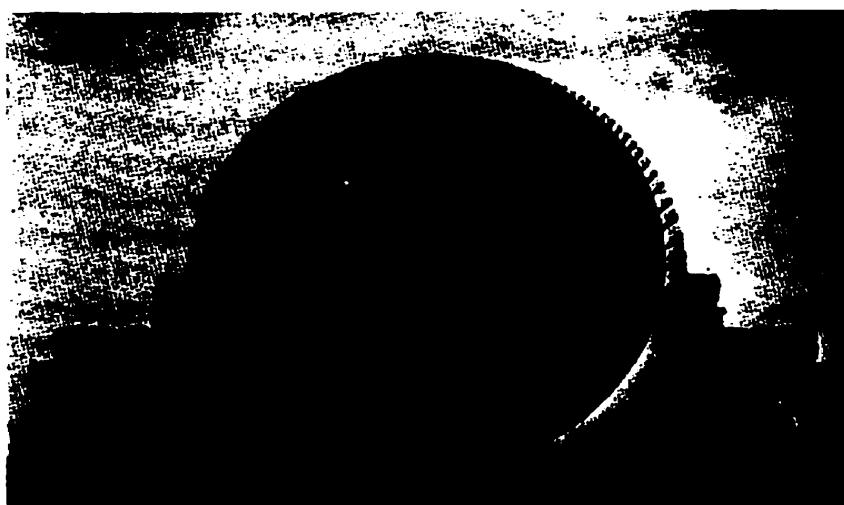
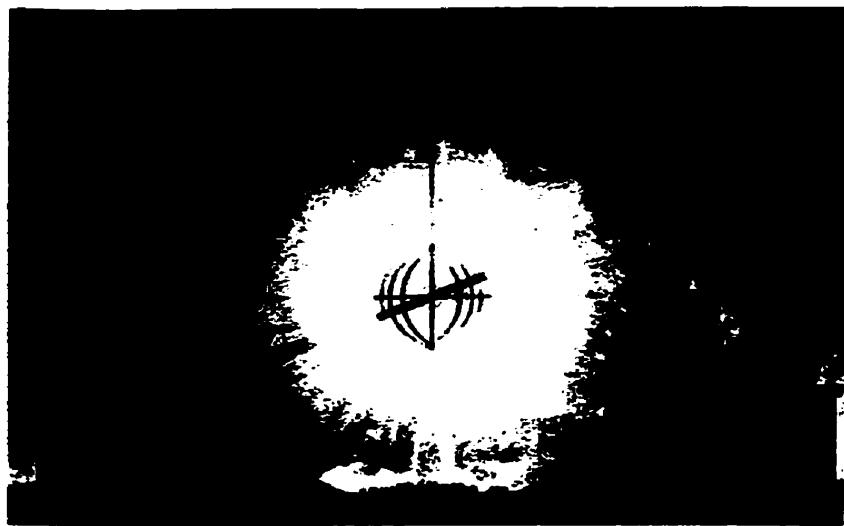


Figure 69: Contrasting lighting effects in the Cenotaph for Newton, by Etienne-Louis Boullée (1784). Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des estampes, Paris. [Pérouse de Montclos].

terror. He also believed that the architect is the ultimate creator who masters the laws of nature - in this case, light - to evoke a wide range of emotions in the visitors to his monuments. For Le Camus, however, the terrible and the sublime in architecture remained complex concepts that could be conveyed only through analogy. Their effect on the senses needed to be illustrated with images from nature, and mediated through language:

Sommes-nous placés sur le bord d'une rivière, la simple agitation de l'eau engourdit nos sens, nous endort; plus de rapidité nous réveille & nous anime; si cette rapidité est portée à l'excès, elle jette l'alarme dans nos sens; c'est un torrent dont le fracas, la force & l'impétuosité inspirent la terreur, sensation étroitement liée avec la sublimité.⁶²⁴

Opposite the sublime in Burke's theory is the beautiful. Whereas the sublime inspires terror and admiration, Burke argues, beauty can be found in the qualities "in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it." Nevertheless, beauty is comparable to the sublime because it also relies primarily on the senses and induces passions in the soul. For Burke, however, beauty in architecture was distinct from proportions, for it did not rely on reasoning but was recognizable at first glance.

Proportion relates almost wholly to convenience, as every idea of order seems to do; and it must therefore be considered as a creature of the understanding, rather than a primary cause acting on the senses and imagination.⁶²⁵

Burke ridicules the notion of beauty in proportions, as illustrated in the drawing of the Vitruvian man (See Figure 71.): "Men are very rarely seen in this strained posture," he writes, "it is not natural to them, neither is it at all becoming."⁶²⁶ Burke argues that the attempt to establish a proportional analogy between a man's body and architectural elements is a post-rationalization intended to validate the works of architecture:

⁶²⁴*Le génie*, 61.

⁶²⁵Burke, *Enquiry*, 92.

⁶²⁶*Ibid.*, 100.

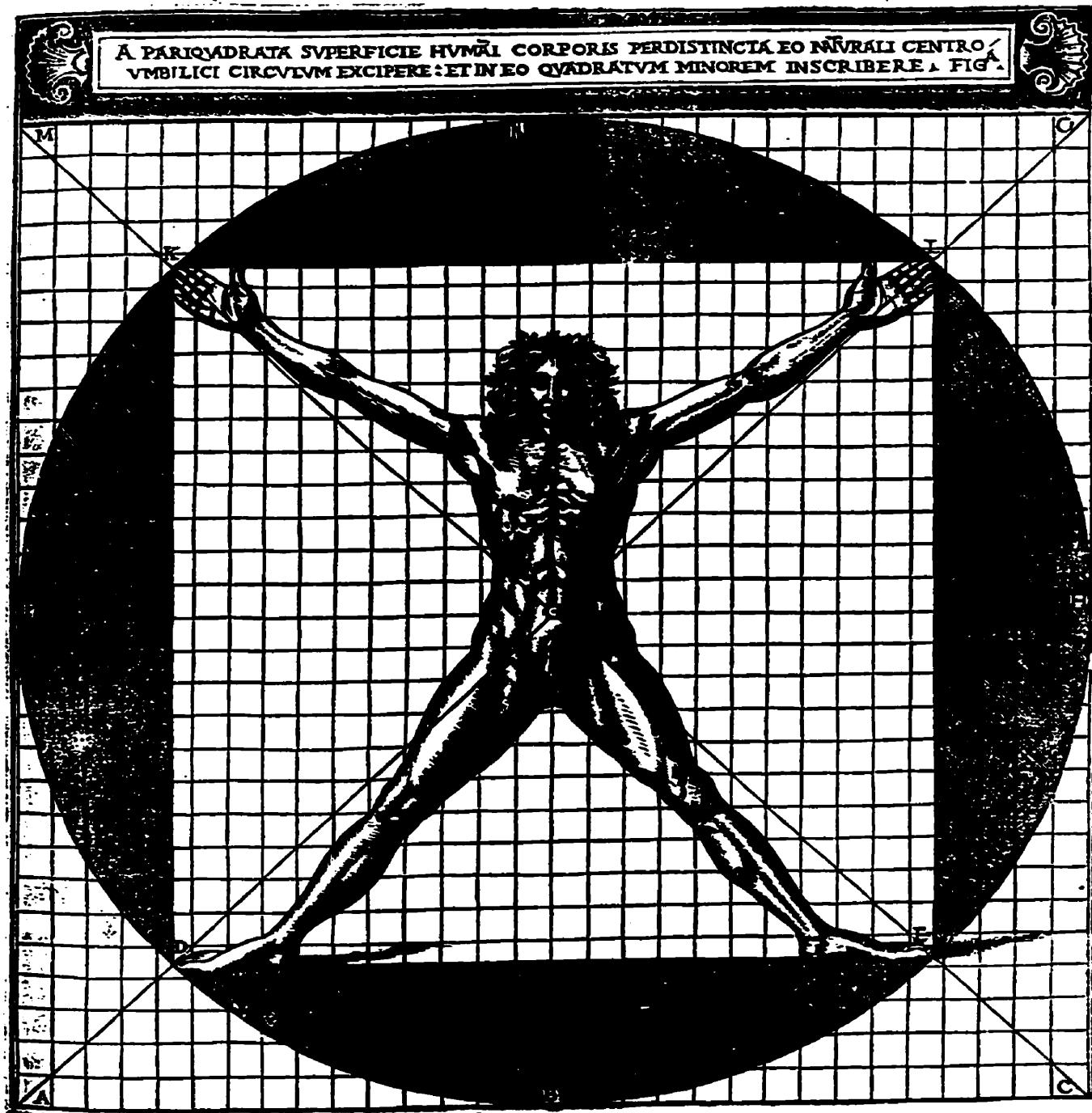


Figure 70: Vitruvian man. From C. Cesariano's translation of Vitruvius, *De architectura* (1521) [reprint 1968].

These analogies were devised to give a credit to the works of art, by shewing a conformity between them and the noblest works in nature, not that the latter served at all to supply hints for the perfection of the former ... The patrons of proportion have transferred their artificial ideas to nature, and not borrowed from thence the proportions they use in works of art.⁶²⁷

Burke also opposes the idea that "utility" or "fitness" is a source of beauty. If this were the case, he argues, "the wedge-like snout of a swine, with its tough cartilage at the end, the little sunk eyes, and the whole make of the head, so well adapted to its offices of digging, and rooting, would be extremely beautiful." Furthermore, "if beauty in our own species was annexed to use, men would be much more lovely than women; and strength and agility would be considered as the only beauties."⁶²⁸ Instead, the real causes of beauty can be found in what inspires love, such as smallness, smoothness, gradual variation, delicacy and colour. Smallness is not only a cause of love, it is also its manifestation in language: "The objects of love are spoken of under diminutive epithets," Burke says, and he provides examples in various languages, in which diminutives are used to address loved ones. Admiration and love, however, should not be confused:

The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance.⁶²⁹

The opposition between the sublime and the beautiful recalls the dual nature of Eros, the bitter-sweet, for Burke argues that the former is founded on pain, and the latter on pleasure. Also, the properties that Burke considers a source of beauty, such as "smoothness" and "gradual variation," are described in very sensual terms, using the body

⁶²⁷Ibid.

⁶²⁸Ibid., 105–6.

⁶²⁹Ibid., 113.

of a beautiful woman as an example. The smoothness of skin and the absence of angular parts and straight lines are sure indications of beauty.

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface continual and yet hardly perceptible at any point which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?⁶³⁰

Beauty affects the beholder in concrete physical ways, comparable in every way to the effects of love. The gestures of a body affected by a beautiful object, like that of a body transformed by love, betray an "inward sense of melting and languor." Like love, "beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system." This relaxation, below what Burke calls the "natural tone," is for him the physical manifestation of "all positive pleasure."⁶³¹ If true beauty causes pleasure, as the sublime induces a terrifying pain, however, Burke rejects the notion that they could be reconciled in the same subject. Instead of heightening their dual status, the beautiful and the sublime would mutually lessen their effect, since they stand on foundations that are completely different.⁶³²

Although beauty was a requisite of *all* the genres in architecture, whether it be terrifying, majestic or voluptuous, Burke's theory of the sublime and the beautiful nonetheless had great repercussions. His expression of these concepts in formal and spatial terms, such as immensity and smallness, harshness and softness, angular and

⁶³⁰*Ibid.*, 115.

⁶³¹*Ibid.*, 149–50.

⁶³²"The sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions." *Ibid.*, 114.

curved lines, may explain why Burke was one of the philosophers that most explicitly influenced late-eighteenth-century architects. The qualities attributed to the sublime and the beautiful by Burke were recombined in architecture to create specific characters that would in turn express the destination of a building or the social status, personality and story of a client.

Denis Diderot and the importance of language

In the eighteenth century the notion of analogy, either formal, proportional, or functional, underlay the entire system of knowledge, enabling fundamentally different objects to be compared. In the article "*Analogie*" from the *Encyclopédie*, for example, the authors, M. du Marsais and M. l'Abbé Yvon, compare the "foot of a mountain" (*le pied d'une montagne*) to the foot of an animal, and admit that they are fundamentally different but nonetheless inform each other through analogy. In the natural sciences, birds and butterflies were grouped together because of their formal resemblance. Various elements were also grouped according to their function: again in the *Encyclopédie*, the gills of fish were said to be analogous to the lungs of land animals.

In the subtitle of Le Camus de Mézières's *Le génie de l'architecture*, the analogy between architecture and our sensations suggests a similar functional analogy, since both architectural proportions and sensory perceptions can affect human feelings and induce passions. By substituting the word "art" for "architecture" in his title, and by comparing art to "our sensations," Le Camus was in fact positioning himself in the contemporary debate on the status of art and its relation to natural phenomena. In his article on taste from the *Encyclopédie*, Montesquieu writes that we like to see many objects at once, and we wish we could extend our sight to perceive great distances. Our sense of vision, however, is limited and needs the assistance of art to provide this pleasure. Art is so esteemed that it is even preferred to nature:

L'art vient à notre secours, & nous découvre la nature qui se cache elle-même: nous aimons l'art & nous l'aimons mieux que la nature, c'est-à-dire la nature dérobée à nos yeux ... la Peinture ne prend la nature que là où elle est belle, là où la vue se peut porter au loin & dans toute son étendue, là où elle est variée, là où elle peut être vue avec plaisir.⁶³³

Although Diderot's understanding of the role of language in analogy is totally unacknowledged in *Le génie* and secondary sources, it was perhaps even more influential on Le Camus than were Burke or Condillac. Diderot was also interested in the notion of the sublime in the arts, and carefully read Burke's work on the sublime and the beautiful. The *Philosophical Enquiry* had the greatest impact on Diderot's aesthetic writings in the years immediately following its French translation in 1765.⁶³⁴ Diderot understood that the effect of sensations on human understanding needed a form of mediation. Similarly, he realized that the sublime no longer could be experienced directly from nature, but must be mediated through language and the creative imagination of the artist. His descriptions of paintings for the Salons of 1765 and 1767 are especially eloquent on this matter.

The tradition of accompanying paintings with a written text began a century earlier, at the inception of the Académies in France. In 1663, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Minister of Louis XIV, instituted an "artistic state monopoly" in creating the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, distinct from the guild that previously had held a monopoly over this craft. Under the directorship of Charles Le Brun, the Académie became intensely concerned with the relationship between painting and language. This interest became explicit in 1666, when Le Brun introduced a monthly practice in which the members of the Académie publicly discussed a painting from the royal collection. This Discourse marked a radical break from the earlier guild tradition of teaching through practical examples. These

⁶³³*Encyclopédie* 7:763.

⁶³⁴Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot critique d'art* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde et Bagger, 1982), 103–13, traces Diderot's affinities with Burke's work.

oral debates were transcribed by the official stenographer and later published in the *Livrets*, complex explanatory pamphlets that accompanied the paintings.⁶³⁵

Speech would not be entirely subordinated to the written text until the end of the eighteenth century, however. The works of Condillac and Burke, for example, still have the density and texture of story-telling. As apparent transcriptions of spoken text, they retain the temporality of life and led to a form of aesthetics that celebrated the importance of language. Eighteenth-century critics no longer judged works according to pre-established canonical principles, but instead focused on the experience of a given work and sought to define how art can reveal the human condition. These critical reviews of a paintings gradually addressed the spectators' imagination, and eventually would be raised to the status of creation itself.⁶³⁶

The French institution of the Salons contributed greatly to raising the level of discourse on art, from the first exhibition in 1667 by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture to the regular event held every two years from 1737 to 1795 in the Salon Carré of the Louvre. It even promoted a new literary genre, art criticism, by publishing critical reviews of the Salons, including La Font de Saint-Yenne's account, as well as Diderot's writings for Grimm's *Correspondances littéraires* from 1759 to 1781. For a few years between 1765 and 1769, Diderot's use of language in the Salons created a tension between paintings and their literary description. Diderot's texts not only described the paintings exhibited at the Louvre but were also "verbal scores" that awaited their performance and

⁶³⁵The Discourse around Poussin's *Israelites Gathering Manna in the Desert*, for example, raised an intense debate. Poussin was criticized for excluding from the painterly representation the camels of the biblical text. Le Brun defended Poussin's painting for its disposition and unity of the narrative message. On the creation of the Academy and its practice of the Discourse, see Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30–33.

⁶³⁶This was stated by Addison in *The Spectator*, n. 421 (3 July 1712). For more on this, see Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 419–20.

were designed to produce original mental images almost autonomous from the paintings themselves. The most famous texts were fictional promenades through pictorial landscapes that transformed the spectators at the Salon of 1767 into active participants in the creative process. Diderot even wrote literary descriptions of imaginary paintings: word-paintings that described in detail how he would have depicted certain scenes. This narrative description prior to the making of a painting resonates directly with the elaboration of an architectural program and emphasizes the temporality of architectural experience, as in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Like Le Camus de Mézières's description of architectural spaces, Diderot's narration of paintings addressed the reader's *sensibilité*.

The process by which Diderot was drawn into the world of a painting and could express his *sensibilité* to the subjects is described by Michael Fried as a phenomenon of "absorption." Using examples such as Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Une jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* (Salon of 1765) (See Figure 72.), Fried explains that the figures - in this case a young girl - are completely absorbed in their own drama and entirely oblivious to everything else. Diderot observes that "sa douleur est profonde; elle est à son malheur, elle y est tout entière."⁶³⁷ In turn, this complete absorption compels viewers such as Diderot to become personally involved with the subject of the painting.⁶³⁸ He engages in a conversation with the subject of the painting: he consoles the child over her loss and speculates that her grief is due not merely to the fate of her bird, but perhaps also the loss of her virginity:

Ça, petite, ouvrez-moi votre cœur: parlez-moi vrai; est-ce la mort de cet oiseau qui vous retire si fortement et si tristement en vous-même? ... Vous baissez les yeux; vous ne me répondez pas. Vos pleurs sont prêts à couler. Je ne suis pas père; je ne

⁶³⁷Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 533.

⁶³⁸Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 57–59.



Figure 71: “Une jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort”; drawing by J.-B. Greuze.
The painting was presented at the *Salon* of 1765. [Fried].

suis ni indiscret ni sévère ... Eh bien, je le conçois, il vous aimait, il vous le jurait, et le jurait depuis si longtemps ... Ce matin-là, par malheur votre mère était absente. Il vint; vous étiez seule: il était si beau, si passionné, si tendre, si charmant! Il avait tant d'amour dans les yeux! ... Il tenait une de vos mains; de temps en temps vous sentiez la chaleur de quelques larmes qui tombaient de ses yeux, et qui coulaient le long de vos bras. Votre mère ne revenait toujours point. Ce n'est pas votre faute; c'est la faute de votre mère...

When the subject portrayed in the painting is absorbed in her own personal condition, the beholder of the painting is often denied or left ambiguous. For example, in Greuze's *Une jeune fille qui envoie un baiser par la fenêtre, appuyée sur des fleurs, qu'elle brise* (Salon of 1769) (See Figure 73.), the girl faces the beholder but looks through him, ignoring his very presence, and instead blows a kiss to her lover. Although the beholder's presence is denied, he is compelled to participate (by consoling the girl who lost her bird or by witnessing a lover's kiss). In many ways this ambiguous position of the beholder is similar to the status of the spectator described by Diderot in *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* a decade earlier. As a transparent voyeur of a private performance - ignored by the actors, yet sitting on the stage of a family drama - the spectator of the *Entretiens* was not deliberately expelled from the action (as implied by Fried). Instead, the complete absorption of the actors/characters in their own drama was intended to make the spectators believe that the emotions unfolding before their eyes were authentic. Only through this appearance of authenticity (whether performed on stage, in a painting or in a sculpture) could art truly reach the human soul; appreciating it was the ultimate sign of sensitivity. In *De la manière*, written as an appendix to the Salon of 1767, Diderot contrasted this expression of authenticity in the arts to the artificial politeness or behaviour that often betrays an affectation:

Il est rare qu'un être qui n'est pas tout entier à son action ne soit pas *maniéré*. Tout personnage qui semble vous dire: "Voyez comme je pleure bien, comme je me



Figure 72: “Une jeune fille qui envoie un baiser par la fenêtre, appuyée sur des fleurs, qu’elle brise”; drawing by J.-B. Greuze. The painting was presented at the *Salon* of 1769. [Fried].

fâche bien, comme je supplie bien," est faux et maniére.⁶³⁹

This false expression was not restricted to the arts, but was in fact borrowed from society itself. In both art and society, Diderot writes, there are false expressions such as mincing ways, preciosity, ignominy, false dignity, false gravity or pedantry, false pain, and false piety.⁶⁴⁰ Only the expression of *naïveté* can appear more truthful than the grimacing, the mannered, and the theatrical, and Diderot characterizes it as being very close to the sublime: "C'est la chose, mais la chose pure, sans la moindre altération. L'art n'y est plus."⁶⁴¹ This notion of *naïveté* was itself related to the truthfulness of nature. In the arts, it implied a complete return to a natural state. For example, although the figures in Poussin's and Raphaël's paintings belong to the category of "history painting," the highest form of painting, they were imbued with this natural *naïveté*: "[Ils] sont naïfs, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ont une certaine originalité de nature, une grâce avec laquelle ils sont nés, que l'institution ne leur a point donnée."⁶⁴² Diderot's notion of the *naïf* resembled Le Camus's principle of naturalness in a work of architecture: "L'Art ne doit y paroître en aucun point, tout doit y avoir une forme aisée, simple & naturelle."⁶⁴³ Moreover, Le Camus insisted that the labour should not be apparent in great works of architecture:

Qu'on ne s'apperçoive pas du travail: il faut, quand le morceau d'Architecture est terminé avec beaucoup de soin, qu'il semble n'avoir presque rien coûté. C'est l'effet du grand Art de ne pas se laisser appercevoir.⁶⁴⁴

Although Greuze's paintings were admired by Diderot and many of his

⁶³⁹Denis Diderot, *Diderot's Salons*, 3:1767, ed. J. Seznec (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1983), 338.

⁶⁴⁰"On fait grimacer tous les vices, toutes les vertus, toutes les passions; ces grimaces sont quelquesfois dans la nature; mais elles déplaisent toujours dans l'imitation." *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹Denis Diderot, "Pensées détachées sur la peinture," in *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 824.

⁶⁴²*Ibid.*, 825.

⁶⁴³*Le génie*, 65.

⁶⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 63.

contemporaries for the truthfulness and intensity they conveyed to the beholder, they were classified as "genre paintings," a category inferior to "history paintings" according to many eighteenth-century authors such as Abbé Du Bos, La Font de Saint-Yenne, Laugier and Grimm. This distinction between history painting and genre painting was challenged by Diderot's suggestion that Greuze and other painters such as Joseph Vernet (1714–89) ought to be considered at the same level as history painters because they succeeded in representing the human soul. Vernet, a landscape painter, became famous for the authentic light portrayed in his paintings and for the intense emotions engendered by his depiction of sea storms and shipwrecks. The hierarchy of painting genres in the eighteenth century was greatly influenced by André Félibien's *Conférences* of 1667. In it, landscape painting was described as an inferior form of art, far below history painting and even portraiture. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, it had been elevated to a position only slightly below that of history painting, due partially to Diderot's insistence on the "expressive powers of the sublime effects of nature."⁶⁴⁵

Diderot indeed believed that work by landscape painters such as Vernet, Loutherbourg, Hubert Robert and Casanove could stimulate spectators' creative imagination by presenting pictorial sites for exploration and by evoking emotions. Diderot's descriptions, such as the famous "Vernet promenade" written for the Salon of 1767, take the form of imaginary walks through pictorial worlds where the paintings themselves seem to disappear. This use of fiction to "enter" a painting was consistent with Diderot's plea for absolute realism in the arts. The frame and the physical surface of a painting seem to disappear when the spectator "enters" its represented space and engages in the scene through virtual inhabitation. The beholder becomes literally "absorbed" in the

⁶⁴⁵For a brief history of the hierarchy of genre in paintings and particularly landscape painting from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, see Ian J. Lochhead, *The Spectator and the Landscape in the Art Criticism of Diderot and His Contemporaries* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 2–14.

painting and in the emotions it induces, and becomes an active participant in the creative process. This use of fiction as a form of art criticism is most brilliantly expressed in Diderot's description of Vernet's landscape paintings. Instead of enumerating the elements that composed these landscapes, Diderot suggests narrating a fiction in which he would "enter" the painting:

J'avais écrit le nom de cet artiste au haut de ma page, et j'allais vous entretenir de ses ouvrages, lorsque je suis parti pour une campagne voisine de la mer et renommée par la beauté de ses sites. ... J'allais, accompagné de l'instituteur des enfants de la maison, de ses deux élèves, de mon bâton et de mes tablettes, visiter les plus beaux sites du monde. Mon projet est de vous les décrire, et j'espère que ces tableaux en vaudront bien d'autres.⁶⁴⁶

Diderot, accompanied by an abbot, begins his journey by describing a landscape that we recognize as *La source abondante* by Vernet. (See Figure 74.) The scene is so authentic that Diderot's companion refuses to admit that any artist could have imitated nature so perfectly. Which artist, asks the abbot, could have imagined such harmony, such charm in breaking the continuity of a stony road with a clump of trees; who could have rendered the warmth and effervescence of this light that fondles the tree trunks and branches; which genius could have recreated the immensity of space that vanishes into the distance? Diderot replies that this work of nature could be equaled only by Vernet, and says that an intelligent artist could not have dispensed with any detail of a composition so perfect. Although clouds for many artists only darken the sky, here they serve to push back the sky and establish a new plane in front of our eyes. Vernet certainly would have recognized the importance of these details in nature. Still incredulous that nature's perfection could ever be equaled by a work of art, the abbot objects to Diderot's praise of Vernet:

⁶⁴⁶Diderot, *Diderot's Salons*, 3:129.



Figure 73: *La source abondante*, by C.-J. Vernet. *Salon of 1767.* [Lochhead]

Vous avez beau dire Vernet, Vernet, je ne quitterai point la nature pour courir après son image; quelque sublime que soit l'homme, ce n'est pas Dieu.

-- D'accord; mais si vous aviez un peu plus fréquenté l'artiste, il vous aurait peut-être appris à voir dans la nature ce que vous n'y voyez pas.⁶⁴⁷

For Diderot, the true work of art is not simply an imitation of nature but a translation that reveals hidden sensations and induces emotions in the soul that would otherwise remain unknown. "Je substitue l'art à la nature, pour en bien juger," he writes later.⁶⁴⁸ The work of art, like the work of nature, can move not only the soul, but also the physical body of the beholder. Approaching a new site as admirable as the first one, Diderot is entranced by the spectacle of nature in front of his eyes: "ma voix coupée, mes idées confondues, je restai stupéfait et muet."⁶⁴⁹ Diderot's evaluation of the artistic value of a painting indeed emphasized its capacity to touch and to involve the spectator. His literary descriptions of virtual promenades through landscapes were almost as evocative as Vernet's paintings themselves, and thus potentially raised art criticism to a new art form.

As Diderot and the abbot continue their journey, his companion's admiration for the scenes of nature becomes a pretext for Diderot to expand on the notion of beauty in the arts. Diderot notices that every time a detail of the landscape touches his friend, he goes into ecstasies over the charms of nature and refers to the object he admires as "beautiful." The steep rock, the finicky forest that covers it, the torrent that whitens the shore and makes the gravel quiver - all receive the epithet of "beautiful." Diderot points out to the abbot that he ascribes the term "beauty" equally to humans, animals, plants, stones, etc. , yet there is no physical quality common to them all. This is because different physical attributes can evoke similar sensations in the soul, Diderot explains, but the sensation that

⁶⁴⁷Ibid., 130–31.

⁶⁴⁸Ibid., 135.

⁶⁴⁹Ibid., 133.

leads to the idea of beauty is not a simple one:

La généralité de votre panégyrique vient, cher abbé, de quelques idées ou sensations communes excitées dans votre âme par des qualités physiques absolument différentes.

-- J'entends, l'admiration.

-- Ajoutez et le plaisir. Si vous y regardez de près, vous trouverez que les objets qui causent de l'étonnement ou de l'admiration sans faire plaisir ne sont pas beaux, et que ceux qui font plaisir sans causer de la surprise ou de l'admiration, ne le sont pas davantage. Le spectacle de Paris en feu vous ferait horreur; au bout de quelque temps vous aimeriez à vous promener sur les cendres. Vous éprouveriez un violent supplice à voir expirer votre amie; au bout de quelque temps votre mélancolie vous conduirait vers sa tombe et vous vous y asseieriez.⁶⁵⁰

Unlike Burke, for whom beauty and admiration were two different kinds of emotions, Diderot believed that the sublime and the beautiful could merge into an intensely engaging artistic expression and intensify their emotional effect on the beholder. As we shall see, this is closer to Le Camus's architectural space of desire. However, this apparently contradictory combination of horror and admiration was inspired directly by Burke's notion of delight, including the necessary distance that enables pain to be transformed into a relative pleasure and the most sensitive person to appreciate the overwhelming effect of the sublime.⁶⁵¹ Diderot expands on Burke's notion of a delightful pain by quoting La Rochefoucauld, who says that "dans les plus grands malheurs des personnes qui nous sont le plus chères, il y a toujours quelque chose qui ne nous déplait pas."⁶⁵² In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke discusses at length the importance of a physical or temporal removal from the terrifying event to appreciate its sublimity. The combination of admiration and horror, however, is expressed most eloquently in Vernet's

⁶⁵⁰Ibid., 142.

⁶⁵¹Burke, "The effect of sympathy in the distress of other," *Enquiry*, 45–46.

⁶⁵²Diderot, *Diderot's Salons*, 142–43;

depiction of sea storms and shipwrecks, and in Diderot's retelling of these events. (See Figure 75.) Recounting a dream inspired by landscapes visited the previous day (but later acknowledged as Vernet's paintings), Diderot describes a scene of horror caused not only by reckless nature but also by human cruelty, and again imagines himself in the painted scene:

J'étais éperdu sur le rivage à l'aspect d'un navire enflammé. J'ai vu la chaloupe s'approcher du navire, se remplir d'hommes et s'éloigner. J'ai vu les malheureux, que la chaloupe n'avait pu recevoir, s'agiter, courir sur le tillac du navire, pousser des cris; j'ai entendu leurs cris, je les ai vu se précipiter dans les eaux, nager vers la chaloupe, s'y attacher. J'ai vu la chaloupe prête à être submergée, et elle l'aurait été, si ceux qui l'occupaient, ô loi terrible de la nécessité! n'eussent coupé les mains, fendu la tête, enfoncé le glaive dans la gorge et dans la poitrine, tué, massacré impitoyablement leurs semblables, les compagnons de leur voyage, qui leur tendaient en vain du milieu des flots, des bords de la chaloupe, des mains suppliantes, et leur adressaient des prières qui n'étaient point entendues.⁶⁵³

Although Diderot confesses that the scene is not real but the work of a great artist, the impact of its effect is in no way diminished by this admission. Diderot is terrified at the sight of this commotion and mourns the fate of these unfortunate travelers. Through sympathy, he feels their suffering and desperation in his own flesh, yet he cannot take his eyes from the painting due to this intense experience of the sublime:

Tout ce qui étonne l'âme, tout ce qui imprime un sentiment de terreur conduit au sublime. Une vaste plaine n'étonne pas comme l'océan, ni l'océan tranquille comme l'océan agité.⁶⁵⁴

This definition of the sublime in painting was evoked in very similar terms by Le Camus de Mézières as he describes the *genre terrible* in architecture: "un torrent dont le fracas, la force & l'impétuosité inspirent la terreur, sensation étroitement liée avec la

⁶⁵³Ibid., 163.

⁶⁵⁴Ibid., 165.



Figure 74: Shipwreck, by C.-J. Vernet. *Salon of 1767*. [Lochhead]

sublimité.⁶⁵⁵ The effort to embrace a painting's subject and surrender to its illusion also is similar in many ways to Diderot's plea for a perfect illusion at the theatre. When Mirmoza in Diderot's novel *Les bijoux indiscrets* advocates realism in the theatre, stating that a perfect performance requires its actions to imitate reality so exactly that "le spectateur, trompé sans interruption, s'imagine assister à l'action même," Diderot is applying to the theatre the same criterion he uses to valorize landscape painting. The aim is to transport the spectator into its illusion.⁶⁵⁶ Diderot's concept of an invisible fourth wall of the stage, through which the audience witnesses the action, as in the *drame bourgeois*, also is similar to his theory of painting, in which the figures in a painted scene are unaware of the beholder. The notion of illusion in eighteenth-century painting and theatre, however, is not a simple concept. Diderot often remains indifferent to minor imperfections in depictions of nature or in constructed stage sets. The illusionism he advocates is not intended solely to deceive the eye, but to reach the spectator's heart. This relies more on the authenticity of the emotion than on the reproduction of a visual image. His promotion of the *drame bourgeois* over heroic plays is consistent with his aesthetic convictions at that time. As we have seen, he defends the *drame bourgeois* because a spectator can relate more intimately to the hardship of an ordinary person than to the imminent defeat of a king or an emperor. This marks the victory of empiricism - of what is knowable through the senses and emotions - over ideal concepts.

Language remains an important mediator because art, whether a theatrical performance or a landscape painting, is not only a copy of nature, but man's own creation from nature. Although the description of a painting and the experience of the real world seem to be equivalent in Diderot's writings for the Salons from 1761 to 1767, a distance is

⁶⁵⁵ *Le génie*, 61.

⁶⁵⁶ Lochhead, *Spectator*, 47–68.

always maintained between painting and nature, and language (narrative) helps define this distance. Similarly, in the second half of the eighteenth century, architecture again reassessed its relationship to nature. In Boullée's terms, architecture is defined as "nature put into work" ("la nature mise en oeuvre"): not a copy of nature but a translation. The new vocabulary of sensationalist philosophy made architects such as Boullée, Ledoux and Le Camus de Mézières aware of a wider "range of nuances and emotive responses" that architecture can convey to its inhabitants. As in Diderot's narrative description of paintings, the new terminology of emotions introduced to the architectural language enriched the perception and the very experience of architecture.⁶⁵⁷

Toward the end of the 1760s, after having radically transformed art criticism, Diderot abandoned this narrative description of paintings intended to address the reader's *sensibilité*. From 1769 onwards, he was more interested in what resists translation into discourse. For this apparent contradiction he was criticized by some of his contemporaries, and later would be criticized even more strongly by twentieth-century art critics. For Diderot, this progressive self-alienation from the Salons coincided with a renewed interest in the theatre. Coincidentally, the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which marked a change of ideology in his theatre theory, was initiated precisely during that period. Written over a period of ten years, the *Paradoxe* seemed to overturn Diderot's previous insistence on emotion and authentic expression. It seems that Diderot's post-

⁶⁵⁷As Remy Saisselin puts it, "the introduction of sensationalist notions into architectural theory increased the awareness of the effects of an edifice by displacing sensibility and attention from the eye, which perceived proportions and rapports, to the skin, the entire body, which thereby became, however vaguely or emphatically, aware of surfaces, light and shade, mass, so that the heart became affected by those phenomena which were not strictly derived from the more intellectual aspects of proportions and orders." Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 246–47.

1769 aesthetic was based on a belief "that nature knows neither perfection nor imperfection," an idea first argued in his *Essai sur la peinture* (1766). Therefore, the idea of beauty in the arts cannot be derived from nature, and must be a human concept.⁶⁵⁸

From Le Brun's *Conférences* to Diderot's Salons, text had become less important for structuring and explaining paintings. This also marked the beginning of a new form of discourse that was less like the translation of a codified image, as in Le Brun's notion of physiognomy, and more like interpretation, open to a wide range of meanings.⁶⁵⁹ In architecture, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières brought the debate on the importance of language to a new level. His theory of architecture as an expressive language relied not only on sensuous perception, but also on mythological stories to ensure its communicability. Both forms of narrative became crucial elements of his architectural staging.

⁶⁵⁸S. Bryson, *The Chastised Stage*, 200.

⁶⁵⁹The work of Louis David (1748–1825), who eloquently marked the triumph of neo-classicism in painting during the mid-1780s, redefined the relationship between painting and language by giving new life to historical and mythological stories. The radically different interpretations of his work during the French Revolution certainly illustrates the new role of discourse in painting, and is a clear sign of this flexibility of interpretation. For more on this, see the last chapter of S. Bryson's book, *The Chastised Stage*.

PART 4: THE PLOT: AN ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE

CHAPTER 11: THE STAGING OF A *HÔTEL PARTICULIER* AND THE SPACE OF SEDUCTION

The staging of an intimate architecture

The theatre as an art form, building, and metaphor had a determining influence in Le Camus de Mézières's life and work. As previously suggested, his treatise on the architecture of the *hôtel particulier*, *Le génie de l'architecture*, proposes a distribution of architectural spaces and a gradual increase in the level of ornamentation that are inherently theatrical. The decoration of each room is meant to convey a specific character, with the entire set expressing a great range of human emotions. The progression of ornamentation is reminiscent of how dramatic action is built up in a play. By using architecture to evoke certain emotions in the users of these interior spaces, Le Camus conceived architecture as an active component in social interactions, as a "silent partner in the action."⁶⁶⁰

This active role of architecture is brilliantly illustrated by Jean-François Bastide's *La petite maison*, originally published in 1758, an example of a genre somewhere between an erotic novel and an architectural treatise.⁶⁶¹ In it, architecture is conceived as a powerful device for seduction. The story of *La petite maison* begins as a wager between the marquis de Trémicour and Mélite, an educated young woman who is sensitive to beauty in artistic works and proud of her virtuousness in resisting libertine advances. The marquis, who has been unsuccessful in seducing Mélite, invites her to his *petite maison*, a clandestine country house, betting that she will be unable to resist the architectural charms

⁶⁶⁰Rémy G. Saisselin, "The Space of Seduction", 418.

⁶⁶¹Bastide was not an architect, although he collaborated on other occasions with Jacques-François Blondel, particularly for a novel entitled *L'Homme du monde éclairé par les arts* (Amsterdam, 1774) that also associated the erotic novel and the architectural treatise.

of the place.⁶⁶² As in Le Camus's *Le génie de l'architecture*, the fundamental assumption of the novel is that architecture has the power to create feelings in its inhabitants that are equivalent in essence and intensity to sensations induced by a lover. Another basic parallel between these two works is the temporal unfolding of action that gradually leads the reader to an emotional climax. The admitted objective of architecture, in both *Le génie* and *La petite maison*, is indeed to create this culmination:

La marche de [la décoration] est prescrite, mais elle est fine & délicate, elle exige beaucoup de goût & de prudence. On doit passer de la simplicité à la richesse. Le vestibule alors est moins orné que les antichambres, les antichambres moins que les sallons & les cabinets, &c ... Chaque pièce doit avoir son caractère particulier. L'analogie, le rapport des proportions décident nos sensations; une pièce fait désirer l'autre, cette agitation occupe & tient en suspens les esprits, c'est un genre de jouissance qui satisfait.⁶⁶³

Bastide's novel is staged in an isolated house on the bank of the river Seine. The setting is so varied and the openings disposed so ingeniously that visitors feel compelled to explore every room and every garden of the property. Mélite is no different, but she resists

⁶⁶²In his article "The Space of Seduction," Saisselin opposes the notion of *petite maison* to the more public role of the *hôtel particulier*, describing it instead as a hiding place "to escape the *regard* of the other." This reading, however, appears to be a modern misinterpretation, for the *petite maison* also expressed the social status of its owner, and in many novels of the time, such as Vivant Denon, *Point de lendemain* (Paris, 1777), the risk of being caught was not without importance. Saisselin suggests that "the *petite maison* need not be a separate edifice, but private apartments within a larger palatial structure, as were the *petits appartements* of Louis XV within the vast public magnificence of Versailles." Saisselin, "Space of Seduction," 419. If the *petits appartements* in Versailles indeed can be equated to the concept of *petite maison* in the eighteenth century, these private apartments, flagrantly occupied by Louis XV's mistresses (such as Madame de Pompadour and her theatre), did not represent a place of hiding, but rather the social recognition of the King's intimate life.

⁶⁶³*Le génie*, 44–45. It seems significant the the last *genre* described by Le Camus is indeed the *genre galant*.

Trémicour's eagerness to take her to his private apartments because, she says, she wants to savour all the beauties that the place offers. She is also careful to conceal her desire to proceed any faster on these dangerous grounds of Trémicour's illicit love abode, aware that the little house has a reputation for sheltering its master's deceitful love affairs: "cette maison est dès longtemps le théâtre de vos passions trompeuses."⁶⁶⁴ In response to the exasperated Trémicour, who accuses her not to play fair by lingering too long in the gardens, she answers:

Je suis plus dans mon rôle que vous. Vous m'avez dit que votre maison me séduirait; j'ai parié qu'elle ne me séduirait pas. Croyez-vous que me livrer à tous ces charmes soit mériter le reproche d'infidélité?⁶⁶⁵

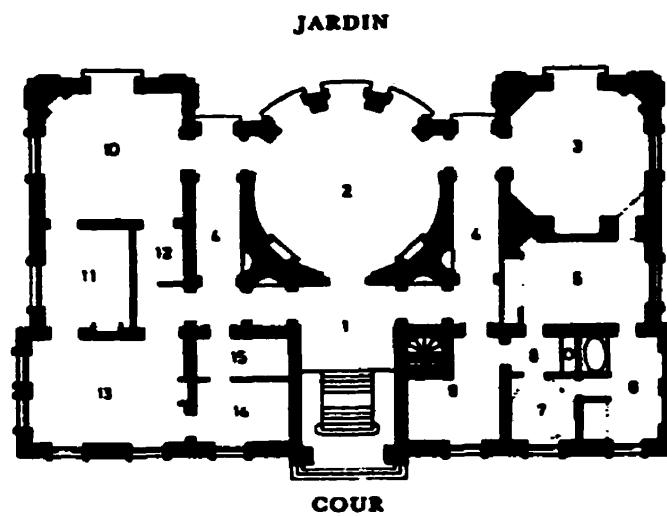
As Mélite finally catches a glimpse of the principal courtyard, she is attracted by the elegant proportions and the fragrant vegetation that surrounds it, and is drawn to the entrance of the first vestibule. (See Figure 75.) From there, Trémicour guides her to a living room (the *Salon*) facing the garden. With its circular shape, its painted vault, and its sensuous ornaments, this living room is so voluptuous, Bastide writes, that "on y prend des idées de tendresse en croyant seulement en prêter au maître à qui il appartient."⁶⁶⁶ The calculated placement of light is most important in this lovers' abode, for it heightens the emotions of its inhabitants. As the day is coming to an end, a black servant comes into the room to light thirty candles on a porcelain candelabra reinforced with golden supports. This new brightness is reflected in the mirrors and makes the place look more spacious; it also reminds Trémicour of "l'objet de ses impatients désirs."⁶⁶⁷ Mélite also remembers why she is here in this house, and troubled at the idea that she may lose the wager, she

⁶⁶⁴Jean-François de Bastide, *La petite maison*, ed. M. Delon (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 132.

⁶⁶⁵Ibid., 111.

⁶⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷Ibid., 112.



- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Vestibule | 9 Garderobe |
| 2 Salon | 10 Cabinet de jeu |
| 3 Chambre à coucher | 11 Cabinet |
| 4 Corridor | 12 Buffet |
| 5 Boudoir | 13 Salle à manger |
| 6 Appartement de bains | 14 Boudoir |
| 7 Cabinet de toilette | 15 Garderobe |
| 8 Cabinet d'aisance | |

Figure 75: Reconstructed plan of the little house in Jean-François de Bastide, *La petite maison* (1758, 1763); drawing by L. Vasquez. [Delon].

restrains from confessing to Trémicour her true feelings; she keeps for herself any compromising compliments. The young lady, sensitive to the subtleties and artistry of the decoration, nonetheless tells her host that his *petite maison* is a real "temple du génie et du goût."

She stands up to continue her visit, and the marquis, pleased to see how touched she is by the living room alone, becomes increasingly confident for he knows that he has much more to show her. He takes her hand and together they enter a room on the right: a bedchamber. Square in shape, this room is covered by an arch painted with a scene of Hercules in the arms of Morpheus, awakened by Love.⁶⁶⁸ The bed, covered with a most colourful fabric, is placed in a niche facing the garden. Mirrors are situated in every corner of the room, while various carefully chosen objects and furniture inspire tenderness and sensuousness: "des formes les plus relatives aux idées partout exprimées dans cette maison, forcent les esprits les plus froids à ressentir un peu de cette volupté qu'ils annoncent."⁶⁶⁹ Mélite no longer dares to praise the marquis and even fears her own emotions: "elle commençait même à craindre de sentir."⁶⁷⁰

In an attempt to escape this threatening territory, she enters the next room, only to find herself in a boudoir, "lieu qu'il est inutile de nommer à celle qui y entre, car l'esprit et le coeur y devinent de concert."⁶⁷¹ Bastide again describes at length the spatial qualities and ornamentation of this temple of love. Here, more than anywhere else before, the lighting effects are carefully controlled to create the magic and optical effects of a natural grove enhanced by art: candlelight provides a modulated luminosity diffused by various

⁶⁶⁸This description is faithful to Bastide's novel. The reconstructed plan of the little house by Lydia Vasquez, from Delon's edition of *La petite maison*, however, depicts the bedchamber as octagonal in shape.

⁶⁶⁹Ibid., 114–15.

⁶⁷⁰Ibid., 115.

⁶⁷¹Ibid.

layers of gauze more or less tightly folded and reflected in mirrors. All the senses are simultaneously stimulated in the boudoir, and Bastide describes a method, attributed to Danrillon, by which the paneling is made to smell like violet, jasmine, rose, or any fragrance appropriate to a given room.⁶⁷² The walls of the boudoir are thinner than the partitions in the rest of the house, and in a wide corridor surrounding the boudoir the marquis has placed musicians who have been waiting for the marquis's signal to begin playing.⁶⁷³ Mélite is surprised to hear a charming concert beyond the walls. Disconcerted and deeply touched by the unexpected music, she listens for a moment, but soon looks for an escape from this place where she fears for her virtue. The marquis could have stopped her but instead lets her proceed into the next room, hoping that the architectural charms of the following apartments will convince her to concede his victory: "il voulait devoir les progrès de la victoire aux progrès du plaisir."⁶⁷⁴

The new room she enters is the bathroom. All is drawn in curves and arabesques, and made of marble, porcelain and muslin. Amidst the sea plants, shells, and crystals in this room, there are two niches for a bathtub and a bed covered in embroidered Indian muslin. The wall paneling is painted with fruits, flowers, and exotic birds, intermixed with medallions of amorous subjects. Erotic paintings frame the door thresholds, and the

⁶⁷²"C'est encore à cet artiste qu'on doit la découverte non seulement d'avoir détruit la mauvaise odeur de l'impression qu'on donnait précédemment aux lambris, mais d'avoir trouvé le secret de mêler dans ses ingrédients telle odeur qu'on juge à propos, odeur qui subsiste plusieurs années de suite, ainsi que l'on déjà éprouvé plusieurs personnes." *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁷³Again, this description follows that of Bastide. The reconstructed plan by Vasquez shows a corridor adjacent to one side of the boudoir only. It is possible that in Bastide's mind, the boudoir was surrounded by one of these hidden corridors described by Le Camus de Mézières in *Le génie de l'architecture*: "On sait que, dans la plupart des maisons, il y a des faux-fuyants, on peut croire que vous en avez profité pour sortir, pendant que vous êtes occupé dans l'intérieur. La chambre à coucher ne sera pas éloignée..." *Le génie*, 163.

⁶⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 118.

well-chosen furniture completes the festive character of the room. Mélite is overwhelmed by these wonders and is forced to sit down. Visibly moved by the artistic beauty of the place, Mélite confesses that she is seduced by the charms of the *petite maison*. Although Trémicour senses his victory, he delays Mélite's defeat and lightens his tone. Mélite is allowed to retreat once more, this time to the gardens, after proceeding through a series of closets, a dressing room, a vestibule and a lobby. As in Le Camus's own description of similar passageways, in Trémicour's *petite maison* "on a pratiqué un escalier dérobé qui conduit à des entresols destinés au mystère."⁶⁷⁵

Mélite and the marquis return to the living room, where he opens the door to the garden. Although Mélite hoped to enjoy a few moments of fresh air in the garden and regain control of herself, she is astonished to find an amphitheatrical garden lit by two thousand candles. The vegetation of the entire garden takes on an entirely new dimension under this glinting light. Water fountains and expanses of water reflect the sparkling candlelight and increase its effect exponentially. Tremblin, a former decorator at the Opera and at the *petits appartements* in Versailles, is credited as the author of these theatrical lighting effects:

Tremblin ... avait gradué ces lumières en plaçant des terrines sur les devants, et seulement des lampions de différentes grosseurs dans les parties éloignées. À l'extrémité des principales allées, il avait disposé des transparents dont les différents aspects invitaient à s'en approcher.⁶⁷⁶

Under the spell of this extravaganza, Mélite remains speechless. She can only utter cries of admiration while the garden itself is filled with music of all sorts: a band can be heard in the distance, while elsewhere a voice sings some ariettes from *Issé*. Here, a charming grotto echoes the movement of impetuous waters; there, the cascade of a small

⁶⁷⁵Ibid., 122.

⁶⁷⁶Ibid., 122–23.

stream produces a touching murmur. The entire garden presents itself as a theatre of seduction, offering various hiding places for those who wish to indulge in the pleasures of love:

Dans les bosquets divers, mille jeux variés s'offraient pour les plaisirs et pour l'amour; d'assez belles salles de verdure annonçaient un amphithéâtre, une salle de bal et un concert; des parterres émaillés de fleurs, des boulingrins, des gradins de gazon, des vases de fonte et des figures de marbre marquaient les limites et les angles de chaque carrefour du jardin, qu'une très grande lumière, puis ménagée, puis plus sombre, variait à l'infini.⁶⁷⁷

Trémicour guides his guest through the garden like a playwright directing spectators through a dramatic sequence. Nothing was spared to impress his young prey, including fireworks by the famous Ruggieri that introduced the gleam of a tender and submissive love into the eyes of the marquis. As Mélite realizes she is falling for the charms of Trémicour, she anxiously rushes back inside to escape the enchanted garden. She quickly passes through the *cabinet de jeu*, decorated with Chinese lacquer and Japanese and Dresden china, before entering the dining room, where a meal is waiting for them. By now, all of Mélite's senses are stimulated, and the room literally becomes a stage where she becomes most vulnerable to the seductive powers of the place - and to the marquis de Trémicour himself. The domestics are excluded from the room to create the perfect intimate scene, and the change of courses is operated by complex machinery worthy of the most sophisticated opera set:

Lorsque le moment [du dessert] fut arrivé, la table se précipita dans les cuisines qui étaient pratiquées dans les souterrains, et de l'étage supérieur elle en vit descendre une autre qui remplit subitement l'ouverture instantanée faite au premier plancher, et qui était néanmoins garantie par une balustrade de fer doré. Ce prodige, incroyable pour elle, l'invita insensiblement à considérer la beauté et les ornements du lieu où

⁶⁷⁷Ibid., 123.

il était offert à son admiration.⁶⁷⁸

A similar theatrical device was known to exist in the Château de Choisy, the residence where Louis XV received some of his favourites, such as Mme du Barry. In fact, this castle is thought to have been one of the contemporary inspirations for Bastide's *La petite maison*. As in Bastide's novel, every room of the château was adorned with famous paintings and refined objects, and the dining room resembled that of *La petite maison* in a striking way: the domestics, "espions payés par ceux qu'ils trahissent," were not allowed in the dining room during the meals. "Un mécanisme, dû à quelque émule de Vaucanson faisait s'entr'ouvrir le plancher et, lentement, comme dans une scène de féerie, la table montait des sous-sols, chargée de plats."⁶⁷⁹ This mechanical device, directly inspired by theatrical machinery of the time, was most fashionable in libertine houses, for it transformed these clandestine meeting places into private theatres where the inhabitants were simultaneously actors and spectators.

Another similar device was introduced into the residence of La Popelinière (1692–1762), a *fermier général* who acquired the domain of Passy and built a private theatre there. His guests were diverse: from the painters Latour and Carl Vanloo to Marmontel and Rameau.⁶⁸⁰ More interesting, however, was the illicit guest of his wife, the Duc de Richelieu (1696–1788), her official lover and *libertin par excellence* during the eighteenth century. Together, they devised a secret entrance to her bedroom so the Duc could come and go unnoticed. Using a false name, Richelieu rented the *hôtel* next to that of the *fermier général*. A mere wall separated it from the room of Mme de La Popelinière, and an opening was cut to correspond precisely to the location of the fireplace in her bedroom. A

⁶⁷⁸Ibid., 129–30.

⁶⁷⁹Henri D'Alméras and Paul d'Estrée, *Les Théâtres libertins au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: H. Daragon ed., 1905), 64.

⁶⁸⁰Ibid., 248–49.

system of hinges enabled it to revolve and open a passageway for the Duc. It became known as "le truc de la cheminée tournante," and for some time the husband was apparently the only person in Paris who was unaware of its existence. In his *Mémoires*, Marmontel describes how it was said to have been discovered. Warned by an anonymous letter that the Duc de Richelieu had found a way to smuggle himself into his wife's apartments through a mysterious trap door, the husband turned to his friend Vaucanson, a renowned engineer of automatons and stage machinery, to help him find the secret entrance. After inspecting the entire house, they arrived in Ms. de La Popelinière's bedroom, and Vaucanson sat for a moment in front of the fireplace:

Ah! Monsieur, s'écria tout à coup Vaucanson en se tournant vers La Popelinière, le bel ouvrage que je vois là! et l'excellent ouvrier que celui qui l'a fait! Cette plaque est mobile, elle s'ouvre; mais la charnière en est d'une délicatesse! ... Non, il n'y a point de tabatière mieux travaillée. L'habile homme que celui-là! -- Quoi! Monsieur, dit La Popelinière en pâlissant, vous êtes sûr que cette plaque s'ouvre? -- Vraiment! j'en suis sûr, je le vois, dit Vaucanson, ravi d'admiration et d'aise; rien n'est plus merveilleux. -- Et que me fait votre merveille? il s'agit bien ici d'admirer. -- Ah! Monsieur, de tels ouvriers sont fort rares! J'en ai de bons, assurément, mais je n'en ai pas un qui ... -- Laissons-là vos ouvriers, interrompit La Popelinière ... et qu'on fasse sauter cette plaque. -- C'est dommage, dit Vaucanson, de briser un chef-d'œuvre aussi parfait que celui-là.⁶⁸¹

The revolving chimney became the subject of many stories and even inspired a new fashion: "Il y eut des éventails, des tabatières, des coiffures à la La Popelinière."⁶⁸² This unusual device is interesting because it shows how theatrical tricks and magic from stage design were used in the architecture of a *hôtel particulier*, and how they came to influence the theatrical imagination of an entire society. It is also significant that La Popelinière did not turn to the police or potential witnesses to solve the intrigue, but instead relied on a

⁶⁸¹Marmontel, quoted by D'Almérás and D'Estrée, "Les Théâtres libertins," 257–58.

⁶⁸²Ibid., 259.

theatre mechanic.

On the stage, a *coup de théâtre* performed with the assistance of complex machinery often marked an important turning point where dramatic tension unravels. In Bastide's story the descending table in the dining room marks the final downfall of Mélite's defenses. Suddenly aware that she can no longer resist the charms of the place and its owner, Mélite attempts one last escape, but in her confusion, she takes the wrong door and finds herself in a green boudoir where she ultimately loses the wager, or so we read. Thus ends the second and most widely known version of *La petite maison*, published in 1763. Its original version, published in 1758, ended with the triumph of virtue over seduction: Mélite escapes from the house, only to confess in writing her love for the marquis, who in turn is believed to be transformed by this revelation and swears his devotion to Mélite.⁶⁸³ Because the dramatic action in the original version unravels only after Mélite's departure from the house in an exchange of letters, the story's unity of time and place breaks down. However, this unity is recovered in the final version, whose structure more closely follows the rules of theatre in use at the time.

Le génie de l'architecture and the distribution of a hôtel particulier

The space of desire expressed in Bastide's novel was representative of a body of literature that expanded rapidly throughout the century. In eighteenth-century France, marital unions, if not "arranged," were often carefully calculated. Until the fall of the Ancien Régime, the choice of a life partner was very much a political decision: both parties tried to ensure for themselves fortune or nobility, while love, either "real" or libertine, was often

⁶⁸³*La petite maison* was published for the first time in *Le nouveau spectateur* (Amsterdam and Paris, 1758), 2:361–412. The story was republished in a slightly modified form and with a different ending in *Les Contes de M. de Bastide* (Paris, 1763), and then in 1784 in *Bibliothèque universelle des romans*, 2:66–102.

relegated to illicit relationships. This practice certainly expressed the political aspect of the union between man and woman, as well as the complex relationship between the public and social realms, especially in matters of love and seduction. Under Louis XV, with his openly acknowledged mistresses and the growing importance of individual and personal emotions, libertine novels portraying illicit love flourished in France.

The spatial settings of these libertine novels often played a significant role in the art of seduction. In Denon's novel *Point de lendemain*, the architectural setting and the erotic tension progress toward a narrative climax as the characters approach a love pavilion in the garden, similar to Mélie's progression toward the fateful boudoir in Bastide's story. The garden of seduction is a metaphor that illustrates the emotional wandering of the main characters:

Nous suivions, sans nous en douter, la grande route du sentiment, et la reprenions de si haut, qu'il était impossible d'entrevoir le terme du voyage. Après beaucoup d'écart, presque méthodiques, on me fit apercevoir, au bout d'une terrasse, un pavillon qui avait été le témoin des plus doux moments.⁶⁸⁴

The prospect of being taken to the love pavilion increases its enjoyment. Gradually approaching the denied temple (his hostess claims not to have the key to this jewel of the night), the main character imagines a perfect arrangement that can be confirmed only by the actual abode of love:

On me détaillait sa situation, son ameublement. Quel dommage de n'en avoir pas le clef! Tout en causant, nous approchions. Il se trouva ouvert; il ne lui manquait plus que la clarté du jour. Mais l'obscurité pouvait aussi lui prêter quelques charmes. D'ailleurs, je savais combien était charmant l'objet qui devait l'embellir.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴Vivant Denon, *Point de lendemain* [1777], edited by Michel Delon (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995),

85.

⁶⁸⁵Ibid.

The description of the love pavilion continues:

Nous frémîmes en entrant: c'était un sanctuaire, et c'était celui de l'amour! ... La lune se couchait, et le dernier de ses rayons emporta bientôt le voile d'une pudeur qui, je crois, devenait importune ... L'obscurité était trop grande pour laisser distinguer aucun object; mais, à travers le crêpe transparent d'une belle nuit d'été, notre imagination faisait, d'une île qui était devant notre pavillon, un lieu enchanté ... La rivière nous paraissait couverte d'amours qui se jouaient dans les flots. Jamais les forêts de Gnide n'ont été si peuplées d'amants, que nous en peuplions l'autre rive. Il n'y avait pour nous dans la nature que des couples heureux, et il n'y en avait point de plus heureux que nous. Nous aurions défié Psyché et l'Amour.⁶⁸⁶

As with her calculated approach to the love pavilion, Mme de T. periodically excites Denon's anticipation of being taken to her private cabinet; this makes him desire the place even more than he desires his actual lover: "Il faut l'avouer, je ne me sentais pas encore toute la ferveur, toute la dévotion qu'il fallait pour visiter les saints lieux; mais j'avais beaucoup de curiosité; ce n'était plus Mme de T. ... que je désirais; c'était le cabinet."⁶⁸⁷

Throughout Bastide's novel, the reader is seduced along with the young lady: both are led through a succession of rooms, each more richly decorated than the last. Mélite compares this gradual increase in ornamentation to the notion of "gradation," an important term in both eighteenth-century aesthetics and the erotic novels of the time. In his *Dictionnaire des moeurs* (1773), Bastide devotes an entry to this central concept:

Gradation: Méthode nécessaire pour prévenir l'envie, et pour perfectionner l'amour. En arrivant par degrés jusqu'au trône de la fortune et au terme des plaisirs, on se prépare une possession plus tranquille et une jouissance plus douce:

⁶⁸⁶Ibid., 86–87. The connection with the love pavilion in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) is explicit in this passage.

⁶⁸⁷Ibid., 92.

c'est la science du cœur et de l'esprit.⁶⁸⁸

In boudoir novels of the time, architecture often played an active role in portraying the state of mind and emotions of its inhabitants. In La Morlière's *Angola*, discussed earlier, the disarmingly naïve Prince is led to the most suggestive places by women who wish to seduce him. Similarly, La Morlière entices the reader into a series of linked rooms (*en enfilade*) that are charmingly decorated, "voiloptueusement meublé, couvert de glaces et de panneaux lascifs," in a succession that seemed to have been imagined "pour donner une idée naturelle de toutes les différentes *gradations* de la volupté, par les différentes sortes de plaisirs auquels elles [the various rooms] étaient propres."⁶⁸⁹

Le Camus de Mézières compares this gradual progression of architectural ornamentation to the development of dramatic action in a play. He also uses the notion of "gradation," an explicit term of seduction, to explain the central concept of his architectural theory. "C'est la *gradation* de richesse, à mesure qu'on pénètre dans les dedans, qui fait la magie & excite la sensation."⁶⁹⁰ Describing the intimate relationship between the serving room (*Salle du Buffet*) and the dining room that follows it, Le Camus emphasizes that their ornamentation must display the same character, and that their finishing materials must also be related. However, if the dining room is finished with marble, one must use a more common marble for the serving room: "il doit toujours y avoir *gradation* de richesse, c'est un principe que nous répétons, & dont on ne doit pas s'écartez."⁶⁹¹

The intimate connection between *Le génie de l'architecture* and the sensuous architecture of Bastide's novel is based on more than their shared language of seduction.

⁶⁸⁸Jean-François de Bastide, *Dictionnaire des moeurs* (The Hague and Paris, 1773); quoted by Michel Delon in an endnote to *La petite maison*, 205.

⁶⁸⁹My emphasis. *Angola*; quoted by Michel Delon, preface to Denon, *Point de lendemain*, 12.

⁶⁹⁰*Le génie*, 152; my emphasis.

⁶⁹¹Ibid., 187–88; my emphasis.

While the first third of Le Camus's book is devoted to general considerations about architecture, including "The Art of Pleasing in Architecture," the rest of *Le génie* is a room-by-room description of the distribution and decoration of a *hôtel particulier*. Le Camus literally takes us on a tour of the house: "Pour ne pas tomber dans la confusion, marchons pas à pas."⁶⁹² The progression of rooms in Le Camus's treatise is not haphazard. Interestingly, it follows exactly the same progression as Mélite's seduction, and thus implicitly reveals the architectural space of desire in *Le génie de l'architecture*.

As in Bastide's novel, the sequence of rooms in Le Camus's treatise begins in the vestibule. (See Figure 76.) It should be decorated in accordance with the general character of the whole house; since it is the first room to receive visitors, "il doit caractériser l'édifice."⁶⁹³ The vestibule is followed by a series of anterooms that best exemplifies Le Camus's notion of gradation. This first progression toward the main apartments of the *hôtel* is an extended threshold that delays the penetration of the visitor into the centre of the house while gradually increasing the level of decoration, and with it, the emotional tension. The first anteroom, immediately following the vestibule, is designated for servants. Its decoration is simple and the ceiling may have no cornice. The second anteroom is for the *valets de chambre*, and must be more ornate. Some sculptural ornaments may be employed, but their genre and character must be appropriate to the status of the master. It is in this room that one must start feeling the sensations in the rooms that follow: "C'est pour ainsi dire, une avant-scène à laquelle on ne peut apporter trop de soin pour annoncer le caractère des Acteurs."⁶⁹⁴ The third anteroom is a waiting room for persons of distinction. (See Figure 77.) It is more ornate than the previous one, but its decoration should not be too profuse so that the following rooms can continue to be progressively

⁶⁹²Ibid., 86.

⁶⁹³Ibid., 98.

⁶⁹⁴Ibid., 101.



Figure 76: Principal entrance to the Hôtel de Bauveau in Paris, by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1769). [Bouteiller, 1995]

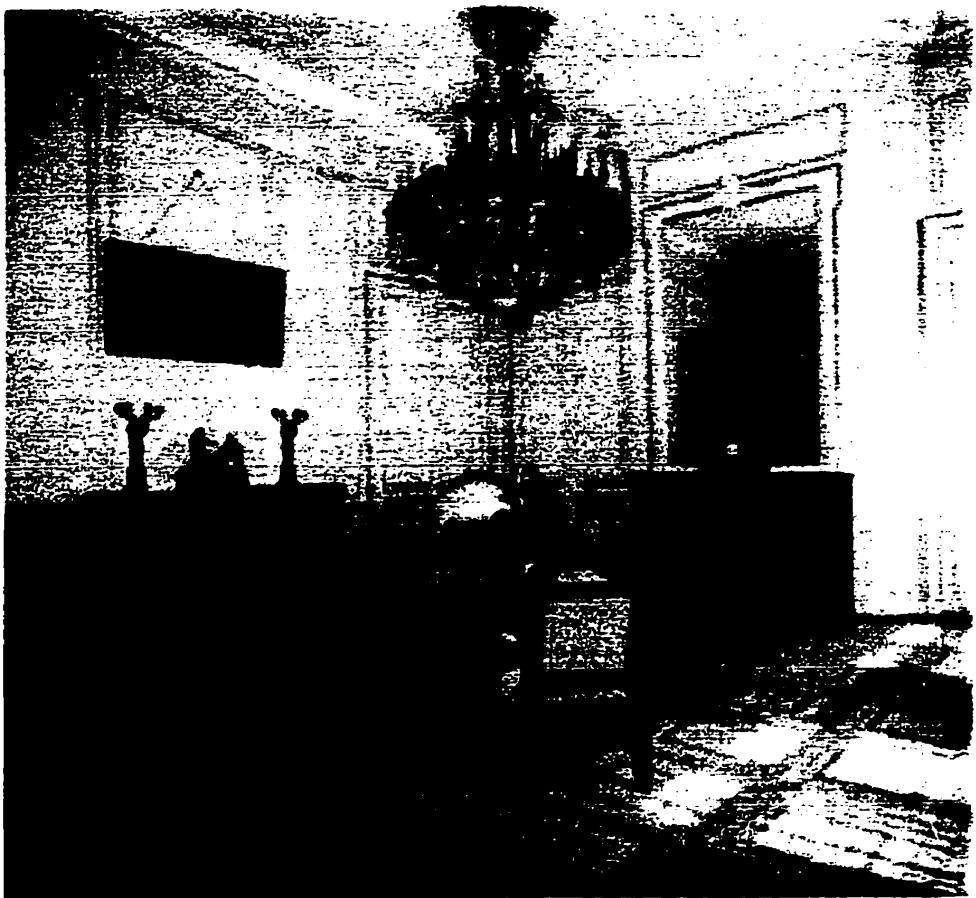


Figure 77: Anteroom to the salon in the Hôtel de Bauveau. [Bouteiller, 1995]

enriched:

Sur-tout que l'Artiste mette un frein à son imagination, le génie qui le guide doit lui faire sentir les beautés & les richesses qu'il faut réserver pour son sallon, sa chambre à coucher, ses cabinets, & pour nombre d'autres pieces qui ne sont pas moins intéressantes.⁶⁹⁵

This sequence gradually leads the reader to the living room (*Sallon*). (See Figure 78.) This room is used for festive occasions and must display the magnificence of the place. Wealth must be lavish and forms must be noble and majestic. This room should proclaim the master's opulence, Le Camus writes, but it can also convey the character of gaiety, or even soberness and solemnity. In either case, "il faut que le ton général en impose; & quelque caractere qu'on choisisse, il est essentiel de le bien faire sentir."⁶⁹⁶ This is precisely why architectural spaces are developed to be analogous to various sensations. The shape of the living room is variable: it may be square, circular, oval, or even octagonal. Its shape, as well as the richness and elegance of its ornamentation, can pleasantly move the soul, and it is in France, Le Camus insists, that such impressions are most varied because "le génie de sa nation est porté à l'invention."⁶⁹⁷ In the past, he notes, the masterful decoration of a single room could have immortalized its artist but such an accomplishment would no longer be sufficient for a refined individual of the late eighteenth century. Real perfection now depends on a gradation of richness from one room to the next, to ensure that "l'ame fût parfaitement satisfaite." Therefore, let us pursue the precious nuances that can "flatter & surprendre nos sens."⁶⁹⁸

The next room is the bedchamber. Le Camus's treatise is obviously more didactic

⁶⁹⁵Ibid., 103.

⁶⁹⁶Ibid., 107.

⁶⁹⁷Ibid., 109.

⁶⁹⁸Ibid., 110.



Figure 78: Salon vert in the Hôtel de Bauveau. [Bouteiller, 1991]

than Bastide's erotic novel: in *La petite maison* any technical or factual information that departs from the primary plot of seduction is indicated in footnotes, whereas *Le génie de l'architecture* includes lengthy historical descriptions of how certain rooms have been transformed. The bedroom, for example, is often used only for parade. Traditionally, the bedroom had an important representational role, especially the King's bed, which was often regarded as the real seat of power. The political importance of a visitor would be indicated by his proximity to the King's parade bed.⁶⁹⁹ Although Le Camus felt that the bedroom in his own time was often too large and open for one to feel comfortable sleeping in it, to be proper ("par bienséance & par usage") an apartment still needed a bedroom "qui réponde au reste de l'appartement."⁷⁰⁰

For Le Camus, the exterior of a house should convey the character of its owner. Although the interior distribution should reflect the character of the exterior, it is expected to follow a more complex rule of decoration and ornamentation. Each of the rooms should play a specific role, like individual characters performing a story. Within a general choice of architectural order for a given apartment, the ornamentation should be refined to the smallest detail; colour, lighting, furniture, and even the choice of flowers and specific smells become integral parts of the architecture. In the boudoir, which immediately follows the bedroom, the level of detail is developed to the highest degree in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Its decoration appeals to all the senses: "Le ramage des oiseaux, une cascade ingénieusement pratiquée, dont les eaux enchantent les yeux et les oreilles, semblent appeler l'Amour."⁷⁰¹ Here, Le Camus says, the beauty and mildness of spring will always prevail if one maintains the freshness of shrubs and flowers: "renouvez-les

⁶⁹⁹Middleton, Introduction to *The Genius*, 33.

⁷⁰⁰*Le génie*, 111.

⁷⁰¹Ibid., 118.

suivant les saisons, il ne faut que du soin."⁷⁰² The boudoir invites a visitor to abandon any resistance to the pleasures of the senses: "C'est ici que l'ame jouit d'elle-même, ses sensations tiennent de l'extase."⁷⁰³ Everything in the boudoir, from its spatial proportions to the paintings, sculptures, and even the colour of the curtains, must be chosen to inspire love and voluptuousness:

*Cette retraite délicieuse ne doit occasionner que des émotions douces, porter la sérénité dans l'ame, la volupté dans tous les sens. Il faut tendre au dernier degré de perfection, & que le desir soit satisfait, sans donner atteinte à la jouissance.*⁷⁰⁴

This room for frivolity evokes a character of lightness. Ideally, the plan is circular, for this shape agrees with the character of the place: "elle est consacrée à Vénus."⁷⁰⁵ The shapes, curves, and softness also recall the contours of a beautiful woman: "Les contours en sont doux & bien arrondis, les muscles peu prononcés; il regne dans l'ensemble un suave simple & naturel, dont nous reconnaissions mieux l'effet que nous ne pouvons l'exprimer."⁷⁰⁶ Of all the rooms described in Le Camus's treatise, the boudoir most closely resembles the description in Bastide's novel: it is "le séjour de la volupté."⁷⁰⁷ Le Camus's description of its ornamentation is taken almost word for word from Bastide's novel:

Le boudoir ne seroit pas moins délicieux, si la partie enfoncee où se place le lit étoit garnie de glaces dont les joints seroient recouverts par des troncs d'arbres sculptés, massés, feuillés avec art & peints, tels que la nature les donne. La répétition formeroit un quinconce qui se trouveroit multiplié dans les glaces. Les bougies produisant une lumière graduée, au moyen de gazes plus ou moins tendues,

⁷⁰²Ibid., 119.

⁷⁰³Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴Ibid., 123.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid., 121–22.

⁷⁰⁶Ibid., 122.

⁷⁰⁷Ibid., 116.

ajouteroient à l'effet de l'optique. On pourroit se croire dans un bosquet; des statues peintes & placées à propos ajouteroient à l'agrément & à l'illusion.⁷⁰⁸

In *Le génie de l'architecture*, as in *La petite maison*, the boudoir is followed by the bathroom. Le Camus first introduces the anteroom, then expands on the various closets and the adjacent bedroom. The bathroom is the refuge of Diana and therefore is characterized by elegance and lightness: its proportion is Corinthian. It is the apartment whose decoration is determined most specifically by its occupant. Le Camus suggests surrounding the bathtub with a curtain of the whitest fabric to create more intimacy. However, Diana sometimes roams through the forest, where her skin may be tanned by the scorching sun. In this case, "des rideaux d'un fond bleu réussiroient mieux." Foresight is all, he claims: "ce qui convient à une blonde n'a pas le même avantage pour une brune."⁷⁰⁹ The decoration of the bathroom thus becomes an extension of one's clothing, an interface between skin and walls.

The bathroom is also the apartment that offers the most freedom for an architect to imagine new forms of decoration. Why not represent Amphitrite's grotto with all the richness of the sea, or the palace of Neptune, Le Camus suggests. The bath itself could be modeled on the chariot of the Sovereign of the sea. In French theatres, the *baignoire* (bathtub) is a term that designates the ground floor boxes, and Le Camus does not miss this opportunity to expand on the analogy of architecture and theatrical staging. To enrich

⁷⁰⁸Ibid., 119. Bastide writes: "Toutes les murailles en sont revêmes de glaces, et les joints de celle-ci masqués par des troncs d'arbres artificiels, mais sculptés, massés et feuillés avec un art admirable. Ces arbres sont disposés de manière qu'ils semblent former un quinconce; ils sont jonchés de fleurs et chargés de girandoles dont les bougies procurent une lumière graduée dans les glaces, par le soin qu'on a pris dans le fond de la pièce, d'étendre des gazes plus ou moins serrées sur ces corps transparents, magie qui s'accorde si bien avec l'effet de l'optique que l'on croit être dans un bosquet naturel éclairé par le secours de l'art." Bastide, *La petite maison*, 115.

⁷⁰⁹*Le génie*, 140.

the composition, he writes, "préparons l'*avant-scene* par des masses de terrasses, des herbes aquatiques & differens coquillages répandus sur les berges."⁷¹⁰ Moreover, if nature cannot be brought inside, then silver gauze may approximate the appearance of crystal waters, and some other device may imitate their murmur. Silver gauze in fact was commonly used to represent water on stage during the eighteenth century.⁷¹¹ While giving free rein to his imagination, the artist's inventions may be prompted by "l'étude des tableaux & des estampes, par celles de nos décosrations de théâtre."⁷¹²

At the point where Mélite escapes to the gardens, Le Camus also interrupts his progression with a diversion on how the character of the apartments should be related to the client for whom they are built. This discussion, under the title "Linen Room," seems somewhat out of place in the overall structure of the treatise (as an interlude during which we await the return of the coveted lover), but it serves to remind the reader of the true purpose of the description: each room and the entire sequence must express the specific character of its inhabitant. Moreover, like Trémicour who used his *petite maison* to convince Mélite of his good taste and refinement, the *hôtel particulier* in *Le génie* becomes a proof of its owner's purity of heart: "Un de principes sur lequel nous ne pouvons trop appuyer, c'est que, par l'harmonie du tout & par l'accord de l'ensemble, on connoisse que le coeur de celui qu'on vient solliciter est pur."⁷¹³ This expressive power of architecture is not a vague system, Le Camus emphasizes; it is based on firm foundations. Indeed, architecture can move the soul and induce emotions in its visitors:

Il y a peu de personnes qui, en entrant dans de certains appartemens, n'éprouvent subitement un mouvement de l'ame, tout contraire à celui avec lequel elles étoient

⁷¹⁰Ibid., 141; my emphasis.

⁷¹¹See, for example, "Recueil de planches" from the *Encyclopédie*, 2443.

⁷¹²*Le génie*, 142.

⁷¹³Ibid., 151.

entrées: c'est le lieu seul qui l'inspire; l'ensemble d'un appartement porte à la confiance, de même qu'une prison excite l'horreur.⁷¹⁴

In *La petite maison* the gardens are an important element of seduction but they are absent from the spatial progression in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Le Camus nonetheless understood their expressive power, for he devoted an entire treatise to the garden and fountains of Chantilly a few years later. In *Le génie*, Le Camus explains this omission: if his treatise were about castles or country houses he would have expanded on their outdoor extensions, but the *hôtel particulier* is an urban building so he must limit himself to describing the stable yards and their related buildings.

After a moment of hesitation in the arms of the marquis, Mélite runs from the garden and returns to the house, where she first visits the game cabinet (*cabinet de jeu*). A *hôtel particulier* is more complex than a *petite maison*, so Le Camus describes not only the grand cabinet, but also the library, a private study, the cabinet of medals and antiquities, the cabinet of natural history, the cabinet of machines, and their adjacent closets and lobbies. (See Figure 79.) In accordance with Le Camus's theory of gradation in richness and ornamentation, the main cabinet must be preceded by two others that announce the character of the room and provide an appropriate progression in sophistication.⁷¹⁵

The apartment that concludes the chapter "On Distribution and Decoration" is the dining room and its adjacent serving room. As in *La petite maison*, where the "flying" table was inspired directly by theatrical devices, the dining room in Le Camus's treatise is also where the analogy with the theatre is most explicit. A cupboard and tables must be provided for serving dishes and for dishes removed from the table: "Il faut une place marquée pour poser ce que l'on dessert. Par ce moyen, tout sera placé sur la table principale en aussi peu de tems qu'il en faut pour le changement d'une décoration

⁷¹⁴Ibid., 151–52.

⁷¹⁵"La richesse y doit marcher par progression." Ibid., 157.

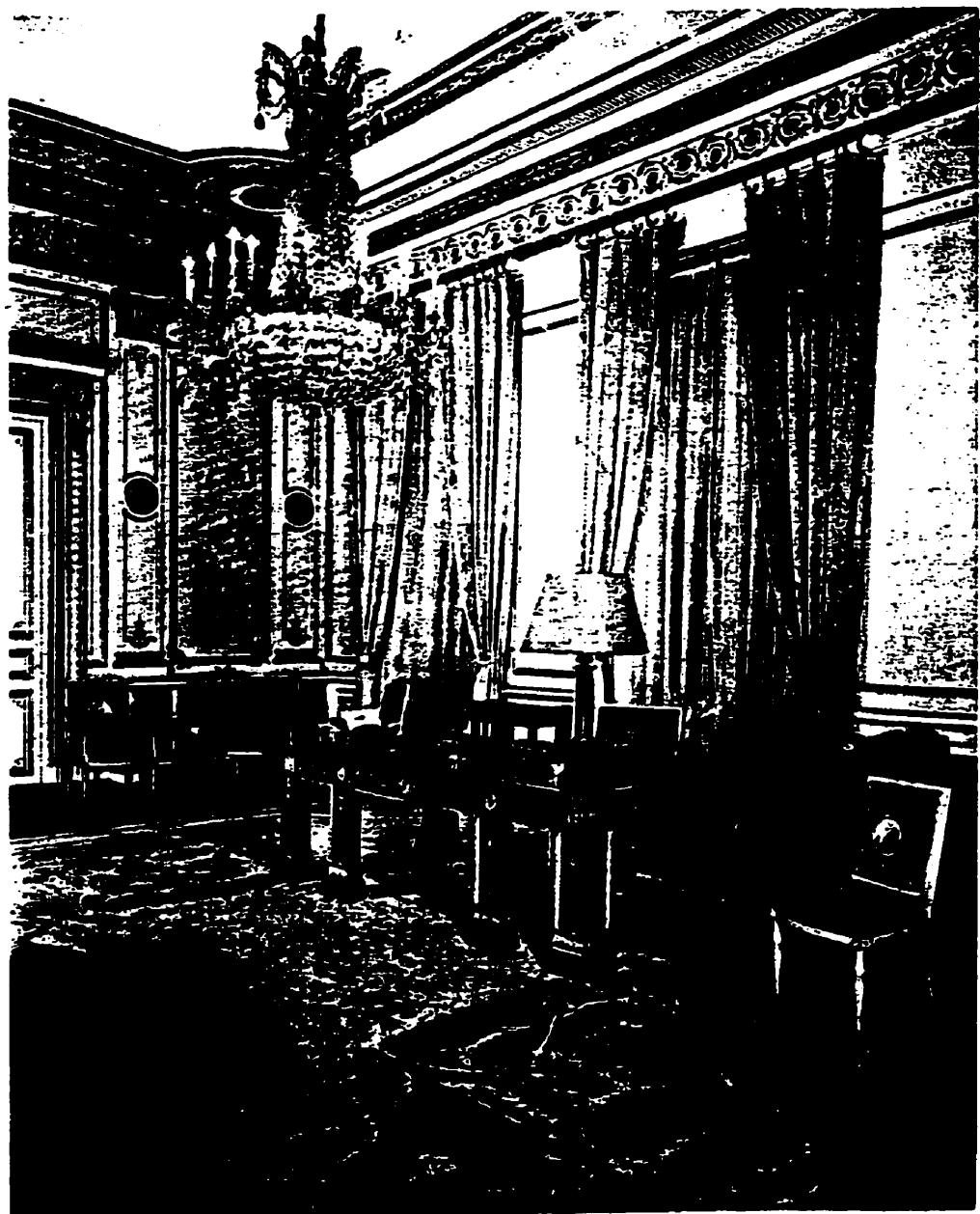


Figure 79: Cabinet in the Hôtel de Bauveau [Bouteiller, 1991]

d'Opéra." The serving room is compared to the backstage: "Le port & le transport des plats ne doit pas se faire par les pieces principales d'un appartement, à peine peut-on le permettre par la premiere antichambre."⁷¹⁶ Just as theatrical machinery must be hidden to preserve the illusion of the scene, the enjoyment of the feast cannot be disrupted by the process of its preparation. The dining room also has an amphitheatrical organization, surrounded by a few steps ("deux ou trois gradins") destined to receive flowers. Suggesting a theatre in a garden, Le Camus notes that the general décoration and lighting of the room change throughout the day:

Les parterres, les bosquets, les fontaines, les cascades embelliront ce lieu pendant l'heure du dîner: le soir la décoration changera; les lustres, les candélabres remplaceront l'éclat, les beautés de la nature.⁷¹⁷

During dinner, after seeing so much beauty and experiencing such intense sensations, Mélite finally realizes for the first time in her life that "l'amour s'offrait à elle avec son caractère."⁷¹⁸ What ultimately seduces her is not the confrontational insistence that Trémicour had displayed earlier in the novel, but the almost feminine tenderness he revealed during dinner. "Ce qui la séduisait ici, c'était l'inaction de Trémicour en exprimant tant de tendresse."⁷¹⁹ Accordingly, the dining room in *Le génie* indeed is dominated by the character of Hébé, goddess of youth, and Flore, goddess of the gardens:

Les statues d'hommes n'y réussiroient pas, il faut donner la préférence aux objets agréables; rien de sévere, rien qui puisse en imposer; les plaisirs ne veulent pas de contraintes, tout doit respirer l'aisance & la liberté.⁷²⁰

The dining room concludes a crucial chapter of Le Camus's treatise that explicitly

⁷¹⁶Ibid., 188.

⁷¹⁷Ibid., 175.

⁷¹⁸Bastide, *La petite maison*, 131.

⁷¹⁹Ibid.

⁷²⁰*Le génie*, 178.

addresses the architectural space of desire. The sequence of rooms defines the "plot" in a scheme of seduction, for it follows exactly the same sequence as Mélite's visit to Trémicour's *petite maison*. Mélite, however, does not lose her virtue in the dining room. Like Bastide, who describes Trémicour patiently observing Mélite's every gesture and hesitation as dinner unfolds through an elaborate series of courses presented for the enjoyment of all the senses, Le Camus takes us through a long interlude describing where such a meal would be prepared. Le Camus enumerates a long list of specialized rooms that evoke the pleasures of taste, as if to make us languish like Mélite anticipating her defeat. Various larders, such as the fish larder, are followed by the wood cellar, the roasting chamber, and the pastry kitchen. An entire section is devoted to places for desserts: the workroom for confectionery, the room for preparing desserts, the room for storing confectionery, and the room for storing fruits. Also included are rooms where trays, porcelain and silver are kept. As if to delay the final enjoyment of the artist's victory, Le Camus also describes the various officers' quarters, the apartments of the maids and employees of the house, and the stables. These quarters should be close enough to the main apartments to fulfill the master's every need, but carefully distributed to avoid interfering with the activities of the master. In other words, the employees should be as invisible as possible, as in the dining room scene in Bastide's novel, when Trémicour pretends that all the domestics have gone for the night. This intimacy is propitious to the expression of love.

Mélite loses her virtue in a second boudoir she enters by mistake, thinking that she was leaving the house. Trémicour sees that she is taking the wrong door, but does not try to warn her. Instead, he distracts her at the threshold by putting his foot on her dress. As she turns her head to free her dress, she does not notice the room she is entering. *Le génie de l'architecture*, on the other hand, ends its long enumeration of rooms with the riding

school (*manège*). It is here that the young nobleman masters the horse and proves his skill and cleverness. Le Camus asks us to imagine two young masters competing side by side, trying to overcome in the briefest time "les difficultés qu'ils auroient pu se proposer, & auquelles auroient présidé le goût & le jugement!" The riding school is where the master fights the opponent, and ultimately *wins the wager*: "un jeune Seigneur n'auroit-il pas plus de mérite à gagner lui-même la gageure," a direct reference to Bastide's novel and the initial wager between Mélite and the marquis.⁷²¹ The decoration of the riding school should be in accordance with the proportions of the Doric order, for it is the order of the warrior. Since part of the composition needs to be covered, the upper part could become a terrace for a most pleasant garden.

After visiting the riding school, the reader is distracted for a moment and, like Mélite, is returned unexpectedly to the final boudoir which incidentally concludes the description of architectural spaces in *Le génie de l'architecture*. Le Camus asks if the boudoir and its related apartments might be so disposed that they could extend out onto the roof garden above the riding school. No situation could be happier, for "Mars & Vénus s'accordent toujours bien."⁷²² This last boudoir is characterized by a contrast of light and shade that envelopes architectural elements in the most voluptuous way. Le Camus describes the slow and sensuous movement of light wrapping around columns, with vivid contrasts between protruding and receding parts:

la lumière en sera adoucie par la rondeur des futs, mais elle se réunira en grandes masses sur l'aire de l'intérieur du péristile qui la réfléchira avec beaucoup d'éclat: elle frapperà pleinement & sans interruption tout l'entablement, & marquera distinctement chaque membre; elle se trouvera tellement distribuée, que les ombres feront un contraste d'autant plus précieux que les jours seront plus vifs. Dans un autre moment des rayons affoiblis éclaireront encore les parties latérales, quand la

⁷²¹Ibid., 265.

⁷²²Ibid., 268.

partie supérieure se couvrira de la première obscurité du soir. Que de beautés! que de charmes!⁷²³

Thus ends Le Camus's enumeration of rooms and apartments in great and splendid houses known by the name *hôtel*. It also concludes his discussion of how the character of each room relates to the social status of the client. The magnificence of the present age has forced architects to include many rooms that previous generations could not even imagine: "combien le raffinement a-t-il fait naître de besoins."⁷²⁴ The sight of such opulence and art amazes, but he asks if the soul is completely satisfied. Unfortunately, a series of rooms often lacks the necessary relationships to ensure that the whole distribution expresses a particular character. It is essential for the architect to determine the primary narrative that the house must convey. Throughout *Le génie de l'architecture*, the narrative is clear: the delayed fulfillment and extended threshold of the *hôtel particulier* defines an architectural space of desire.

Although some may argue that Le Camus simply follows the typical sequence of rooms in a *hôtel particulier*, this would not explain the unexpected return to the boudoir at the end of *Le génie de l'architecture*. Moreover, the organization of the treatise does not acknowledge Le Camus's insistence on important relationships between specific rooms in a *hôtel particulier*. For example, the first anteroom preceding the living room must be adjacent to the dining room, he writes, yet the section on the dining room appears much later in the treatise, in accordance with the unfolding of Bastide's story.

Moreover, Le Camus does not follow his own written description of the distribution of the Hôtel de Beauvau, a *hôtel particulier* that he built ten years earlier. In the contract document listing every room to be included in the *hôtel* for the Prince de Beauvau,

⁷²³Ibid., 269–70.

⁷²⁴Ibid., 86.

the enumeration begins with "the courtyard for the stables and carriage houses"; however, the stables appear only at the very end of Le Camus's treatise. Then comes "the lodgings of the officers and servants employed therein, together with the infirmary," corresponding to the second last chapter of *Le génie de l'architecture*. Before describing the "ground floor of the main fabric," the contract document for the Hôtel de Beauvau lists the remaining services: "the kitchens, pantries, and subordinate offices," as well as the cellars, the basements, and the garden for which "Madame de Beauvau shall supply the design and provide the fruit trees."⁷²⁵ This concern with services was not unusual in the eighteenth century. In his treatise *L'art de bâtir les maisons de campagne*, Briseux also began by describing the appropriate location for kitchens, related services, and stables before addressing the distribution of the main house. The progression through the Hôtel de Beauvau begins with two anterooms, followed by a third anteroom that also serves as a dining room. (See Figure 80.) Adjoining the second anteroom is a reception chamber, followed by the bedchamber of the Prince, the cabinet, and some back closets. Then comes the salon, the bedchamber of Madame la Princesse, her dressing room, boudoir, bathroom and water closet. Only this last sequence of rooms, which constitutes the private apartments of the Princess, is grouped together in *Le génie de l'architecture*, and the order is slightly different.

Le Camus's treatise has often been criticized for the apparent lack of coherence among its various parts, and for its many digressions in enumerating rooms in the *hôtel particulier*. Some have argued that *Le génie de l'architecture* can be read as "an assemblage

⁷²⁵All English references to the contract document for the construction of the *Hôtel de Beauvau* are taken from Appendix B following the English translation of *The Genius of Architecture*. The archival document was first published in French by Paul Bouteiller in an article in the review of the Ministère de l'Intérieur, *L'administration*, no.151 (April 15, 1991).

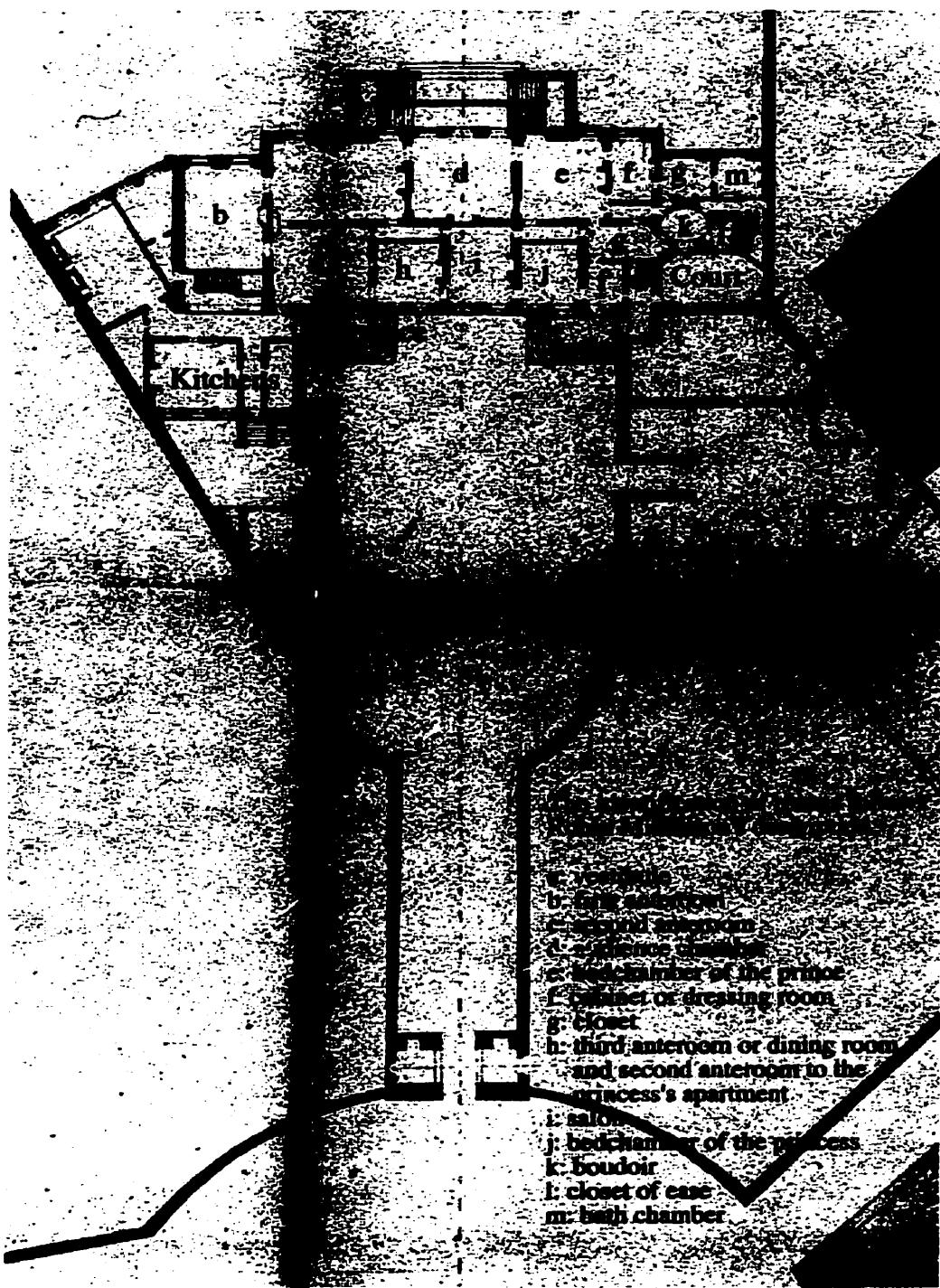


Figure 80: Ground-floor plan of the Hôtel de Bauveau. [Middleton, 1992].

of tenuously linked parts."⁷²⁶ Others have reduced it to its technical content, overlooking the deeper implications of the work.⁷²⁷ The general consensus among historians is that "there is in Le Camus's work a curious mix of somewhat rarefied theory and ordinary, commonsensical issues." Moreover, "Le Camus's theory ... is not always fully worked out. It remains uncertain."⁷²⁸ However, given Le Camus's repeated use of the theatrical metaphor to explain his theory of an architecture of expression, and his explicit use of Bastide's tale of seduction to structure his own treatise, it is clear that the unfolding of spaces in *Le génie de l'architecture* is nothing less than an expression of the erotic tension in architecture.

⁷²⁶This diagnosis is provided by Middleton in his introduction to the English translation of *Le génie*.

⁷²⁷Michel Delon refers to *Le génie de l'architecture* as "un traité technique." Delon's edition of Denon's *Point de lendemain* and Bastide's *La petite maison*, 24.

⁷²⁸Middleton, Introduction to *The Genius*, 17–18.

CHAPTER 12: THE EROTIC TENSION OF NARRATIVE SPACE

Hidden in the narrative structure of *Le génie de l'architecture* is its true message: the ultimate objective of the architect is to maintain the erotic tension of architectural space. However, one should not assume that Le Camus sought to reproduce the libertine space of seduction, typical of this gallant eighteenth-century society. The nature of this erotic tension becomes clearer when considered in the light of his later literary works. Although Le Camus's novel, *Aabba* (1784), and his description of a picturesque garden, *Description des eaux de Chantilly et du hameau* (1783), are often neglected by architectural historians because they seem to hold little architectural significance, they epitomize Le Camus's interest in expressing erotic tension in narrative space. However, their tension is not manifested in games of deception, typical of the boudoir novels of the time. When Le Camus writes explicitly about the space of desire in a literary form, he returns to classical sources and tries to redefine the role of Eros, the bittersweet, as an agent of disruption that perpetually delays fulfillment and characterizes the destiny of human life.⁷²⁹

Aabba, a romance

Le Camus's only novel, *Aabba, ou le triomphe de l'innocence*, is set in Thessaly, a region of Greece south of Mount Olympus, and specifically in a village close to the Vale of Tempe. In the eighteenth century, the Vale of Tempe was regarded as "un séjour de délices et de tranquilité" and was the ideal model for pastoral settings and picturesque gardens: "Les éloges qu'ils ont donné à ce pays charmant, ont fourni les premières idées des Pastorales et des Bergeries dont les modernes ont fait un usage si agréable."⁷³⁰ Protected

⁷²⁹Jean-Pierre Vernant, "One... Two... Three: Eros," in *Before Sexuality, The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, edited by D.M. Halperin, J.J. Winkler, and F.I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 465–78.

⁷³⁰Claude-Henri Watelet, *La Vallée de Tempé*, published together with Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières,

by gods and goddesses, who often visited the valley to renew their heart and their desire, the inhabitants of this idyllic place were said to be ignorant of vices.

In this village Chloé and Théogènes are a happy peasant couple who had remained childless and are now getting old. With help from offerings given to the gods, Chloé soon becomes pregnant. To thank the gods, they go to the Temple of Vesta and offer a lamb, a symbol of innocence. They want the gods to witness their happiness, but neglect to thank the immortal Venus (Aphrodite), the goddess of Beauty and Love. As soon as they emerge from the Temple, they note their omission, and even dare to praise themselves for this oversight. However, Venus is infuriated at being excluded and runs to Jupiter to ask for retribution. Jupiter tries to calm her down and promises to consider what can be done, but without waiting she returns to Amathonte, where festivities are being held in her honour, and prepares her revenge.

Chloé eventually gives birth to a girl, Aabba, who fills the couple with joy. She grows up to be full of grace, beauty and wit, and possesses all the attributes of Hébé, goddess of youth. She becomes the most coveted girl in the village, and all of the shepherds try to seduce her. Aabba's heart falls for Hilas, the most honest and talented. At this point, however, Venus lets her son Cupid (Eros) take revenge for the earlier offense committed by Aabba's parents, so he hits Hilas with one of his arrows and hits Aabba with a lead-plated dart soaked in gall. Hilas falls passionately in love with Aabba, but she becomes indifferent and even repulsed by all that should please her: "son caractère est entièrement changé."⁷³¹

Aabba's heart is now filled with a sombre melancholy and she decides to withdraw to the Temple of Vesta to devote her life to the service of the goddess. Théogènes and

Aabba, ou le triomphe de l'innocence (Paris: Chez Gueffier, 1784), 112.

⁷³¹Nicolas Le Camus de Mézieres, *Aabba; ou le triomphe de l'innocence, suivie de la Vallée de Tempe* (Paris: Chez Gueffier, 1784), 15.

Chloé reluctantly agree to let her go because they do not dare oppose what they believe to be an order from the gods. Since her birth, they had placed Aabba under Vesta's protection. Aabba devotes herself to Vesta, but Venus still wants revenge and sends her son Cupid into the temple by hiding him in a basket of flowers. When Aabba sees Cupid, she tries to escape, but he hits her with an arrow and she falls in love with him. (See Figure 81.)⁷³² After chasing Cupid, she finally catches him and cuts his wings so that he won't escape again. Cupid is infuriated and hits Aabba with a second arrow that induces a passionate love for Hilas. She leaves the temple in search of Hilas and returns to her parents, who are delighted to see her. They nonetheless worry that she may have infuriated the gods by leaving the Temple. Aabba learns that Hilas fell into desperation and disappeared from the village after she rejected him. She then faints in grief.

In the second part of the story, Aabba's parents offer many sacrifices to the gods for the liberation of their daughter, and their wishes are granted when she comes back to life. It appears that Venus is satisfied and has abandoned her pursuit for revenge. Aabba's revival symbolically coincides with the arrival of spring. However, she cannot taste the pure pleasures of nature because her heart still feels the wound inflicted by Love. Exhausted by sadness and melancholy, she falls asleep in a field. Zephyr, the western wind, who wishes to uncover Aabba's charms, opens "le voile léger qui couvrait sa gorge naissante, il laisse appercevoir sur des monceaux de lis, deux boutons de rose."⁷³³ This is the state in which Tircis, a shepherd with a corrupted heart, finds her. Even though he is debauched, Tircis is nonetheless touched by the pure innocence of Aabba and, like a

⁷³²There are no pictures in Le Camus's work, except for the *halle au blé* (a built project where the conceptual ideas have already been crystallized) and three images in his novel *Aabba* (where one would least expect images). This absence is deliberate, in my view, for Le Camus is using narrative as a way to depict ideas, and the presence of images in a work such as *Le génie* would only restrict the realm of imagination.

⁷³³*Aabba*, 38.



Figure 81: “Aabba tries to escape but is hit by Love’s arrow.” From N. Le Camus de Mézières, *Aabba; ou le triomphe de l’innocence* (1784).

chameleon, he adopts her purity of heart. When she awakens, he hides at first to observe her better, then comes out of hiding. Aabba is initially scared by this unknown shepherd, but then seems to fall under his charm. After escaping the numbness of love, she returns home with her herd. She describes this encounter with the stranger to her parents, who know Tircis's reputation. Her father warns her about Tircis, who is more dangerous, he says, than an infuriated lion. Aabba and her parents keep praying to the gods that destiny will stop hounding her, and Jupiter is finally touched by their prayers. He convinces the other gods to reward Aabba's virtue, and they crown her the most virtuous shepherdess of the canton.

Because of this triumph, Aabba is now respected by all, and the beginning of the third part seems to announce new hopes for happiness, but her good fortune awakens jealousy from Venus, who once more threatens her with retaliation. Cupid (Eros) is sent to Aabba to inflict again his mother's vindictiveness, but at the sight of such virtue and innocence, he falls in love with her, and himself takes the form of a shepherd: "il ne respire que pour elle: la cour des Dieux n'est rien pour lui. Le petit Dieu devenu Berger, en a les sentimens et les affections."⁷³⁴ Venus, who hasn't seen her son for a moment, asks Zephyr to look for him. When he returns and tells Venus that her son is in Thessaly, disguised as a shepherd, under Aabba's charms, Venus is infuriated and swears revenge. She goes to Jealousy herself to get help. Throughout the story, Le Camus uses the Greek and Roman names of various divinities interchangeably, implying that their inherent characters are directly translatable. Interestingly, he also personifies various passions and vices, adding to the classical mythology new characters that relate more closely to human emotions. Le Camus carefully personifies the tormented Passion sought by Venus:

[Venus] va frapper à l'antre de la Jalouse. La vapeur empestée qui y règne ne lui

⁷³⁴Ibid., 60.

forme aucun obstacle, rien ne l'arrête. Différens spectres se présentent, elle les écarte; le Mensonge et l'Artifice jettent sur elle des regards égarés, obliques et incertains, pour ne rien laisser échapper du fond de leur cœur. La Déesse, loin de s'en affecter, n'en est que plus animée. Elle avance, et parvient jusqu'à la Jalousie, qu'elle trouve entourée de ses ministres, armés de torches empoisonnées et de poignards homicides. Ses yeux étoient hagards, son visage pâle et livide. On voyoit au bas de son trône, un autel chargé de coeurs sanguinaires, dont elle assouvissoit ses regards enflammés. Il falloit être Vénus insultée, pour ne pas reculer d'horreur.⁷³⁵

Trouble and Discord are called upon to assist Venus, but her son is soon attacked by other shepherds, and Venus discovers that it is her fault. She calls upon her son, who hurries back into her arms. After appeasing his mother, Cupid (Eros) returns to Aabba and tries even harder to seduce her. Aabba scorns him and sends him away. Licidas, another shepherd who witnessed the actions of the unknown shepherd (Eros in disguise), proposes to Aabba and her parents that he seek revenge for Eros's indecent behaviour. They refuse, insisting that revenge be left to the gods. Tircis then reappears and, provoked by Jealousy, declares that he also wants revenge from his dangerous rival. He finds Aabba and proclaims his love for her in front of the other shepherdesses, who watch in astonishment as Aabba rejects him. Eros comes forward and is about to punish Tircis when Aabba stops him: "What gives you the right to pretend to defend my interests?" she asks Eros. "My love for you, divine shepherdess," he replies. To this declaration of love, Tircis retorts that if the unknown shepherd truly loved her, he would understand his own agonizing pain at being rejected by Aabba:

Quoi! vous parlez d'amour, repart Tircis, et vous êtes surpris qu'on tombe aux pieds d'Aabba; s'il en est un dont le feu soit plus pur que le mien, réservez-le, grands Dieux, en faveur de la Bergère que j'adore; lui seul est digne d'elle; mon cœur sera toujours pénétré de sa flamme: elle seule peut m'animer ... Non ... non

⁷³⁵Ibid., 64–65.

... jamais l'Amour n'eut pour Psiché ... A ces mots le bel inconnu rougit, mais Tircis ne put achever; la pâleur se répand sur son visage; une sueur froide s'empare de tout son corps; il perd l'usage de ses sens.⁷³⁶

Le Camus tells us that Tircis was punished less for being Eros's rival than for addressing him sharply on the delicate subject of his love for Psyche: "Il n'appartient pas aux mortels de vouloir pénétrer les décrets des Dieux."⁷³⁷

The final part of the story begins during grape harvest, when everyone is working to collect the divine fruit. When the grapes are taken to the wine press, Aabba follows the group and tries to get rid of Eros, the mysterious shepherd who follows her everywhere. She climbs onto a wooden board that leads to the top of the wine vat, and when Eros follows her, she jumps off and causes him to fall into the vat. (See Figure 82.) Everyone makes fun of him, and as he is about to faint, they pull him out and advise him to stay away from their canton. At that moment, Eros sees the Satyrs and the Fauns that precede Bacchus's chariot. Ashamed, Eros is presented to Bacchus and recounts the story of his unfortunate fall into the wine vat. When Bacchus finally recognizes him as Venus's son, he takes Eros away in his chariot, and they drunkenly vow to punish those who dare make fun of the gods.

In the meantime, the wine is ready and is distributed among the villagers. Théogènes, Aabba's father, organizes a feast to celebrate Bacchus, and his daughter serves the wine. Under the spell of Bacchus himself, she gets intoxicated by the wine's vapours, and becomes a Bacchante. Her mind is taken over by the spirit of the god of wine, and she goes to the mountain and encounters terrifying animals. At some point, a ray of light guides her into a cave and illuminates a young man who looks dead. It is Hilas. (See Figure 83.) Aabba ceases to be a Bacchante and tries to revive Hilas. She returns to the

⁷³⁶Ibid., 75–76.

⁷³⁷Ibid., 77.



*Elle s'élance et saute à terre,
la planche tourne, et le Berger
tombe dans la Cuve.*

Figure 82: "Love, disguised as a shepherd, falls in the wine vat." From N. Le Camus de Mézières, *Aabba; ou le triomphe de l'innocence* (1784).



*S'il respire, c'est en poussant
des cris douloureux.*

Figure 83: "Aabba finds Hilas in a cave." From N. Le Camus de Mézières, *Aabba; ou le triomphe de l'innocence* (1784).

village for help and sees her father coming toward her. He has aged. They return to the cave and give Hilas a magical drink (one assumes it is wine) that gives him enough energy to return to the village. Théogènes has a revelation in a dream: Aabba's happiness can only come if she is united with her beloved. Hilas and Aabba are married, and live a very happy life, protected by the gods.

The story of *Aabba* is inspired by a number of classical romances and alludes to many mythological references. In *Aabba*, as well as in classical romances from Antiquity, Venus (Aphrodite) plays the major role in maintaining the tension between purity and sensuality.⁷³⁸ In the relationship between Aabba and Venus's son, Cupid (Eros), one easily recognizes the story of Love and Psyche, to which Tircis alludes, in which Eros falls in love with a beautiful young girl. In the classical myth, Eros takes the girl to a palace where he joins her every night, promising her eternal love if she agrees never to try to see his face. One night, she approaches with a lamp and sees Eros; a drop of oil wakes him up and he runs away. After many adventures, Psyche finds Eros again. The myth of Love and Psyche was interpreted as the destiny of fallen souls in constant search for complete and divine love.

The plot of *Aabba* also has a direct precedent in Longus's story, *Daphnis and Chloe* (second century A.D.). In this pastoral romance two young peasants display a "natural innocence" with regard to sexual matters. Living in nature, their environment changes progressively from wilderness to a delectable garden as they gradually become educated in love.⁷³⁹ In his preface, Longus states that the story was motivated by his encounter with "a painted image of Eros" that moved him profoundly, for it was the most beautiful thing

⁷³⁸ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 80.

⁷³⁹ Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Poetics of Eros: Nature, Art, and Imitation in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*," in *Before Sexuality*, ed. Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin, 417–21.

he had ever seen. A desire to "create a rival image in writing" inspired him to start working on his story.⁷⁴⁰ It defines the erotic tension between the perfect painted image of Eros and the author's longing to create a rival image in words. These images are like two parts of a metaphor, and the tension between them is filled by the work of the imagination.⁷⁴¹ As in *Aabba*, the primary theme in *Daphnis and Chloe* is not the fulfillment of an amorous relationship, but rather the continuation of the erotic tension, which is resolved only at the very end. The longing for completeness evokes a quest for the missing other, yet the distance must be maintained for the meaning of the work to be perpetuated.

The erotic tension reciprocates the aesthetic distance of the work of art, comparable to the distance between actors and spectators in Greek theatres of antiquity.⁷⁴² Tragedy itself originated in the Dithyramb, the Dionysian spring ritual celebrating the return to life and the power of nature.⁷⁴³ Accordingly, the story of *Aabba* unfolds after the intervention of Bacchus, the Roman equivalent of Dionysius, the Greek god of wine and peasant celebrations. After being taken over by the power of Bacchus, Aabba becomes a Bacchante and confronts the forces of nature. Once she is freed from any cultural restraint (her behaviour is compared to that of an animal), Aabba is reborn into a primordial state; it is the return to a purified nature, after the decadence of culture in the eighteenth century.

The space of desire characterizes humanity, a bittersweet condition between nature and culture. In literature, it coincides with the beginning of alphabetic writing: when ephemeral speech was fixed in arbitrary signs and written words, it needed narrative tension to complete its meaning. Anne Carson explains that the introduction of vowels into the Greek alphabet around the early eighth century B.C. was a major modification of the

⁷⁴⁰Quoted by Carson, *Eros*, 88.

⁷⁴¹Ibid., 86–87.

⁷⁴²Pérez-Gómez, "Chora," 10–16.

⁷⁴³Aristotle, *Poetics*, IV:12, 19.

written language. It amounted to an act of abstraction, dividing the pronounceable syllable into mute consonants and the sounding vocalic breath, thus isolating the consonants that could not exist on their own for the human ear or voice. The consonants, Carson emphasizes, mark "the edge of sound," and since Eros becomes manifest in the liminal space, "to the edge of things," it is not surprising that this transformation of written language led to the beginning of erotic literature.⁷⁴⁴ Interestingly, in the eighteenth century, when architecture became understood as an expressive language, the erotic narrative was recovered as a model for meaningful architectural space.

Chantilly, a picturesque garden

Mythological stories and classical erotic narratives were to become the precedents for a tradition in architectural theory that began with Francesco Colonna's treatise, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published in 1499. *Hypnerotomachia* is the story of a dream in which the main protagonist, Poliphilo, visits many ancient marvels and classical architectural monuments in a search for his beloved Polia, the embodiment of architectural meaning. Poliphilo's journey takes him through a series of initiatory experiences in which he successively dies and is brought back to life following his "encounter with the five senses in the form of five nymphs."⁷⁴⁵ After acknowledging their mutual love, Poliphilo and Polia cross the water in Cupid's chariot and arrive triumphantly at an enchanted island, the island of Cytherea, where geometric gardens and ornate fountains epitomize the

⁷⁴⁴Carson, *Eros*, 55. The earliest example of a literary genre that became identified as romance is *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by the Greek author Chariten (third century B.C.). The plot of such romances in antiquity were typically love stories in which the lovers are kept apart and made miserable until the very end. *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁴⁵Preface of the original edition of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), quoted by Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Polyphilo or the Dark Forest Revisited. An Erotic Epiphany of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), xi.

perfection of unearthly love. *Hypnerotomachia* is an original narrative articulation of the architectural space of desire. "It expounds a poetic vision that sets a temporal boundary to the experience of architecture, emphasizing that architecture is not only about form and space but about time, about the presence of man on earth."⁷⁴⁶ It demonstrates the potential of architectural meaning to involve the individual not only intellectually but also in an embodied way.

Le Camus de Mézières's other quasi-novel, *Description des eaux de Chantilly et du hameau*, published a year before *Aabba*, is another eloquent example of a constructed plot that maintains a space of desire through the use of narrative. As in Colonna's story, in which the garden offers a privileged setting for the lovers to express their passions, Le Camus's description of a garden defines the erotic space in which an architectural intention (embodied in a beautiful naiad) is translated into built form. *Description des eaux de Chantilly* is usually defined as a description of a picturesque garden designed by the architect Jean-François Le Roy in 1780 for Monseigneur Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, on an island formed by the river Nonette and other sources of fresh water. This is factually correct but the implications of the work go far beyond the simple description of a garden. Le Camus describes the peregrination of Nonette, the river, who becomes a beautiful naiad traveling through the countryside. She encounters the Prince de Condé, with whom she falls deeply in love. The garden of Chantilly and its fountains then become a testimony to Nonette's feelings for her beloved Prince. For Le Camus, the narrative structure of the garden and its theatrical form of expression were again primary concerns.

The relationship between architecture and nature, explicit in the garden, changed radically during the eighteenth century, and these changes greatly influenced architectural

⁷⁴⁶Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili by Francesco Colonna," in *Paper Palaces*, edited by Vaughan Hart with Peter Hicks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 92.

theories, especially in the transitional period at the beginning of the Enlightenment. This complex relationship between nature and architecture was also the basis of an important distinction between Le Camus de Mézières's theory of character and similar theories in the first half of the eighteenth century. While Boffrand, Blondel, and even Briseux used the architectural orders or their general proportions to "imitate" particular characters taken from nature (very much in the Aristotelian tradition of *mimesis*), for Le Camus de Mézières, and later Ledoux and Boullée, nature became an obscure realm that could no longer be simply imitated but had to be recreated in a narrative form. Le Camus clearly embraced this pre-romantic perception of nature, as is evident in his *Description des Eaux de Chantilly*. In this quasi-novel, published only three years after *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus does not describe nature as a model to be imitated nor as a primordial state to be sought; instead, he personifies it. As in *Le génie de l'architecture*, the description of the garden includes many mythological stories. Using language to mediate between nature and architecture was a fundamental part of Le Camus's theory. Through his narration of a love story, the description of Chantilly reveals the erotic tension that makes the picturesque garden into a work of art.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is the writer who contributed most directly to this new interpretation of nature. Throughout his work, nature seems to reflect his state of mind and advance his ecstatic perception of the world:

Il avait fait très chaud ce jour-là, la soirée était charmante; la rosée humectait l'herbe flétrie; point de vent, une nuit tranquille; l'air était frais, sans être froid; le soleil, après son coucher, avait laissé dans le ciel des vapeurs rouges dont la réflexion rendait l'eau couleur de rose; les arbres des terrasses étaient chargés de rossignols qui se répondaient de l'un à l'autre. Je me promenais dans une sorte d'extase livrant mes sens et mon cœur à la jouissance de tout cela.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁷Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les confessions*, ed. M. Launay (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 205.

The first signs of an emerging "romantic consciousness" in the eighteenth century appeared not in literature nor in philosophical writings, but in English gardens whose natural style was a reaction to neo-classical formalism.⁷⁴⁸ The profound difference between continental gardens and English gardens was based not only on their concepts of nature and geometry, but also on their "staging" of architecture. The classical French garden typically surrounded the house or castle, with an axial geometry emanating from the doors and windows of the house; in the English version, however, the house was merely placed "in" the garden, without being its centre or *raison d'être*. The English garden also could not be perceived at one glance from within the building; its irregular paths invited exploration. During the second half of the eighteenth century, this transition in garden theory coincided with an important shift in French sensitivity to landscape. In 1766, Scottish gardeners began to design a park for the Marquis de Girardin at Ermenonville, where Rousseau spent his last days. At Versailles, the gardens of the Trianon were transformed after 1774 in accordance with the new fashion of the picturesque garden.

Roger de Piles, in his *Cours de peinture par principes* (1708), introduced the notion of the "picturesque" (*pittoresque*) into the French critical vocabulary. The term originally referred to a painterly view, and only later was appropriated by "landscape-gardening theorists" to describe a site whose spatial organization was qualitatively different from the Baroque geometric gardens.⁷⁴⁹ De Piles believed that landscape painting could be expressive because all elements "of which they were composed were imbued with intrinsic qualities."⁷⁵⁰ Rocks, for example, "'sont d'elles-mêmes mélancoliques & propres aux solitudes.' But it was water in its various states, from turbulence to calm, that stirred

⁷⁴⁸Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 359.

⁷⁴⁹Middleton, Introduction to *The Genius*, 30–31.

⁷⁵⁰Ibid., 31.

passion most deeply; water was to be regarded as the soul of the landscape.⁷⁵¹ For Le Camus de Mézières, water was certainly the soul of the garden in Chantilly, and it was personified as Nonette, the river/naiad whose character guided the distribution of the garden as she ran through it.

Le Camus's acknowledged source on gardening, however, was his friend and fellow writer, Claude-Henri Watelet, to whom *Le génie de l'architecture* was dedicated. Independently wealthy from an early age, Watelet devoted himself to the arts, and liked to consider himself a connoisseur.⁷⁵² Sometimes credited with creating the first picturesque garden in France, in his estate at Moulin-Joli on the banks of the Seine near Bezons, Watelet also wrote the first French treatise on the picturesque garden, *Essai sur les jardins* (1774). By promoting a new fascination for non-geometric gardens and exotic Anglo-Chinese landscapes, this book marked an important moment of transition in French taste.⁷⁵³ Watelet and Le Camus shared some fundamental assumptions about art. According to Watelet, works of art not only must please the senses; they must also touch the mind and the soul:

L'esprit & l'ame éprouvent à leur occasion des sentimens & des impressions qui les remuent & les attachent. C'est là la marche naturelle de l'esprit exercé dont les desirs s'irritent, & de l'ame qui, lorsqu'elle est active, s'efforce d'accroître son existence.⁷⁵⁴

From the outset, Watelet establishes that nature is the ultimate escape from the turmoil of society and the passions. Like all eighteenth-century philosophers with a

⁷⁵¹Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris: J. Estienne, 1708), 219; quoted by Middleton, *Introduction to The Genius*, 31.

⁷⁵²For more on Watelet, see Middleton, *Introduction to The Genius*, 180, n. 1; and 46–49.

⁷⁵³Gusdorf, *Naissance*, 394.

⁷⁵⁴Claude-Henri Watelet, *Essai sur les jardins* [Paris: Chez Prault, Saillant & Nyon, Pissot, 1774] (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 2.

romantic inclination, including Rousseau and Diderot, Watelet criticizes the city as a place of perversion. The complete enjoyment of a more "natural" state, however, almost demands that one be deprived of it for some time. Only someone arriving from the city can fully appreciate the sweetness of the countryside. The nature where many seek escape is not a wild primordial unknown but a controlled expanse that provides its inhabitants with a sense of order and purpose, even without symmetry. As with Le Camus, Watelet's ordering principle was a coherent plot underlying the distribution of the garden. Watelet compares making a country retreat to writing a novel:

Comme il n'est pas d'homme qui n'ait imaginé quelque fiction relative à ses penchans, il n'en est guère qui n'ait, surtout au printemps, formé le projet d'une retraite champêtre. C'est un des romans que chacun se compose, comme on fait celui de ses amours, de son ambition & de sa fortune.⁷⁵⁵

Not surprisingly, the text reads like a long poem whose structural clarity is often blurred for the sake of literary concerns. Describing the disposition of the *ferme ornée*, the ultimate pastoral landscape, Watelet suggests how one can enjoy nature to its fullest: "Les jouissances de la campagne doivent être un tissus de désirs excités sans affectation, & de satisfactions remplies sans efforts."⁷⁵⁶ Through art, man can "embellish nature," and give to elements such as flowers "des perfections que la Nature sembloit leur avoit refusées."⁷⁵⁷ If man is initially led to improve nature for personal enjoyment and to perfect the art of gardening (*emblème de la personnalité*), it is necessary that "au désir d'une jouissance personnelle se joigne l'idée d'une jouissance communicative." This "communicative" quality of gardens would have a direct impact on architectural theories of expression, in particular that of Le Camus de Mézières. Watelet suggests that the owner of a garden can

⁷⁵⁵Watelet, *Essai*, 7.

⁷⁵⁶Ibid., 22.

⁷⁵⁷Ibid., 14–15.

increase his pleasure by sharing it with a friend, but the ideal friend, clearly, is the self:

Si la jouissance de cette sorte de plaisir peut convenir à une solitude absolue, un ami à qui l'on parle du bonheur qu'on goûte ne la trouble jamais: on le met à la place de son ame; on lui dit ce qu'on a besoin de dire. C'est le soi qu'on personifie sans avoir d'égoïsme à se reprocher, & ce plaisir si sensible & si pur s'accroît lorsqu'on le partage.⁷⁵⁸

This notion of oneself as a friend seems directly inspired by Diderot's description of artistic perfection in his writings for the *Salon* of 1767. The perfect work of art, he writes should make one feel the delirium and "le plaisir d'être à moi, le plaisir de me reconnaître aussi bon que je le suis, le plaisir de me voir et de me complaire, le plaisir plus doux encore de m'oublier." Where am I in this moment? What surrounds me? Diderot asks. I do not know, I ignore it. What do I miss? Nothing. What do I desire? Nothing. "S'il est un Dieu, c'est ainsi qu'il est, il jouit de lui-même."⁷⁵⁹ Watelet relies even more on Diderot to define his theory of the picturesque garden. He uses a promenade as a transition among the various buildings or activities in the garden, similar to Diderot's description of Vernet's paintings in the *Salon*:

Mais prêt à m'éloigner des lieux où j'ai vu préparés & disposés par ordre les vers [à soie], les cocons, les écheveaux propres aux ouvrages les plus artistements combinés par l'intelligence & l'industrie, je me sens entraîné par les cris de différents animaux; & mes pas se dirigent vers la ménagerie.⁷⁶⁰

The disposition of trees, rivers, and benches invites the *promeneur*, guides his steps, and protects him, in a way that recalls the unfolding of spaces in Le Camus's *hôtel particulier*:

Toujours je me trouve garanti du soleil par des arbres qui semblent venus au hasard

⁷⁵⁸Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹Diderot, *Salon de 1767*, 139.

⁷⁶⁰Watelet, *Essai*, 37.

... Mes pas se trouvent insensiblement ralenties: & prêt à les suspendre pour mieux jouir; l'ombrage d'un groupe d'arbres, sous lequel est un banc de gazon & une petite fontaine, m'arrête & m'invite à quelques instants de repos ... Engager & non contraindre; voilà l'art de tous les Arts agréables.⁷⁶¹

As in *Le génie de l'architecture*, the theatrical metaphor recurs in the *Essai sur les jardins*. A house must convey a real simplicity, Watelet writes. It is by living in it that its owner becomes "acteur de sa scène pastorale."⁷⁶² Because of his insistence on the narrative structure of gardens and their theatrical temporality, Watelet openly criticizes traditional parks in the French manner: "Le plaisir qu'on y cherche est la promenade, qui, sans objet d'intérêt, a peu d'agrément."⁷⁶³ If he could transform these parks, he would much prefer "aux scènes les plus artistement décorées, des hameaux dont les habitans heureux de mon bonheur, aisés de mon superflus, soulagés dans leurs maux, offriroient des tableaux animés & intéressants pour les âmes sensibles."⁷⁶⁴ Again, the theatrical analogy is explicit, as the peasants are compared to actors in a pastoral setting.

Like de Piles before him, Watelet also acknowledges the origin of the picturesque in painterly views. To convey his intention, a painter assembles various objects from nature and chooses the most favourable angle to depict them. The garden designer (*décorateur*) also must create pleasing views, but the work is more difficult because of restrictions due to the quality of land, the climate, and the character and shapes of the landscape. Watelet was most interested in what distinguished the picturesque garden from the notion of a painterly view; he insists that a garden designer is more like a sculptor who composes in a figurative way using various natural elements. Perhaps the major distinction is that the garden designer can create pastoral scenes with a temporal structure, by tracing

⁷⁶¹Ibid., 25–26.

⁷⁶²Ibid., 42.

⁷⁶³Ibid., 47.

⁷⁶⁴Ibid., 52.

paths and establishing rhythms of elements for the visitor:

Celui-ci [the sculptor] composant une figure ou un groupe, emploie son génie à les rendre satisfaisans pour la vue des différents côtés d'où l'on peut les considérer: mais le compositeur de scènes champêtres a un moyen de plus que le sculpteur; la liberté de tracer ses routes, & de placer ses repos.⁷⁶⁵

A visit to a garden indeed can resemble an experience at the theatre. Just as the movements and voices of actors create dramatic action, the movements and noises of natural elements can guide a visitor in the garden: "Les eaux, le frémissement des feuillages, ou le chant des oiseaux, sont les seules ressources contre le silence & l'immobilité."⁷⁶⁶ For Watelet, the principal characters in a garden are the rivers and streams, the rustling of leaves, and the singing of birds. Waters can give the most life to a garden: "plus elles sont animées, plus elles corrigent le caractère silencieux & morne des aspects même les plus artistement composés."⁷⁶⁷

This analogy between garden and theatre was not unusual in the eighteenth century. Since the Renaissance, theatrical performances had often taken place in gardens. Colonna's influential *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* indeed culminates in a garden with an amphitheatre at its centre. At this place there is a fountain devoted to Venus and Adonis, and the participants witness an amorous encounter between Mars and the Goddess of Love, just like on the terrace above the riding school in Le Camus's *hôtel particulier*. In Colonna's story, however, this centre of perfect love is associated with the afterlife, the ideal realm of fulfilled love epitomized by the pure geometry of Renaissance gardens. In this theatre of desire the sensuous experience of the world is most perfectly accomplished, as Poliphilo's senses are attracted equally by the beautiful nymphs, the sweet perfumes,

⁷⁶⁵Ibid., 58–59.

⁷⁶⁶Ibid., 58.

⁷⁶⁷Ibid.

and the joyful sounds of nature:

J'ignorais, en vérité, auquel de mes pouvoirs sensitifs je me devais fermement arrêter pour bien goûter cette jouissance fortunée, ce voluptueux plaisir, et je m'amusais de cette ignorance. Toutes ces belles, ces très douces choses m'offraient un attrait d'autant plus charmant, d'autant plus précieux que je voyais ma céleste Polia y participer et s'en délecter paisiblement, en ce bel endroit, ainsi que de la perfection de cette fontaine admirable.⁷⁶⁸

Two years after the publication of Watelet's treatise on gardens, Jean-Marie Morel published his own *Théorie des jardins* (1776), in which the analogy between gardens and theatres is also explicit. Although Le Camus never acknowledged the influence of Morel's treatise on his own architectural theory, the parallels are evident, for Morel's work was an investigation of the role of sensations in the art of gardening. Morel believed that, more than any other art form, landscape design offered the spectator a "thrust of sensations in constant flux."⁷⁶⁹ Morel also discusses the role of convention in terms that were later borrowed literally by Le Camus in his own treatise on architecture. The second volume of Morel's treatise begins with a chapter on buildings, in which he insists that his interest lies neither in the science of architecture nor in the rules of decoration, but in the exterior appearance of buildings, their relation to the site, and their intended destination. In other words, he was interested primarily in how the character of a building can complement a picturesque landscape. Architecture must be integrated into a landscape with great care, he warns. Because it comes from convention rather than from nature, the appropriate

⁷⁶⁸Francesco Colonna, *Le songe de Poliphile ou Hypnériotomachie*, translated by C. Popelin [Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1883] (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 2:242.

⁷⁶⁹For a discussion of Morel's influence on Le Camus de Mézières's architectural treatise, see Middleton, Introduction to *The Genius*, 50–51. The year following the publication of Morel's treatise on gardening, the Marquis René de Girardin published his own *De la composition des paysages* (1777). Although Girardin similarly explored the relation between the philosophy of sensationalism and garden theory, Le Camus makes no mention of it either.

character of a building must be "assujetti à celui de la scène dans laquelle on les place."⁷⁷⁰ Architecture can complement a picturesque scene only by respecting established conventions and by participating in a shared language:

La convenance qui, en architecture, consiste dans le parfait accord entre la forme et la caractère d'un bâtiment et sa destination, est une partie fine et précieuse de l'art qui tient au sentiment, et dont la connaissance s'acquiert moins par l'étude des règles que par celle des moeurs, des usages du pays et du siècle où l'on vit.⁷⁷¹

According to Morel, every building in the city or the country must obey the laws of propriety. However, the art of gardening follows a different kind of appropriateness (*convenance*): "elle consiste dans la relation que les productions de l'architecture ont avec les scènes champêtres dans lesquelles elles figurent."⁷⁷² Whereas every building in the city has a different character and decoration, thus giving every street "sa phisionomie particulière," buildings in a garden must respond primarily to the landscape in which they are situated. Since they are not the work of nature, their very existence "suppose un but et une intention dans celui qui les a fait éléver; ce but et cette intention doivent se manifester, non-seulement par la place qu'ils occupent, mais encore par leur forme et leur caractère."⁷⁷³ The notion of *convenance* in gardens therefore presumes a contrast between nature and architecture: the appearance of buildings "fait naître des pensées morales et agit conséquemment sur l'imagination et le sentiment."⁷⁷⁴ By combining them with different

⁷⁷⁰Jean-Marie Morel, *Théorie des jardins, ou l'art des jardins de la nature* [Paris, 1776] 2d ed. (Paris: D. Coles, 1806), 180.

⁷⁷¹Ibid., 1–2. As noted in Chapter 8, Le Camus introduces his section on exterior decoration by defining appropriateness in terms literally borrowed from Morel: "Cette partie de l'Architecture que nous nommons la convenance, est déterminée, & s'acquiert moins par l'étude des règles que par la parfaite connaissance des moeurs, des usages du siècle, & du pays où l'on vit." *Le génie*, 56.

⁷⁷²Morel, *Théorie des jardins*, 3.

⁷⁷³Ibid., 6.

⁷⁷⁴Ibid., 15–16.

natural scenes, a wide variety of impressions and characters can be created.

Watelet's work on the picturesque garden was partly indebted to Thomas Whateley's *Observations on Modern Gardening*, published in England in 1770, and soon translated into French. Although, like Watelet, Whateley was neither an architect nor a landscape designer, he is considered by some modern scholars to be the first English writer to consider the notion of character to the same depth as French theoreticians. With apparently no prior interest in these art forms, Whateley was in the midst of writing *Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare* when he decided to interrupt this work to write his treatise on gardening. His book on Shakespeare would focus specifically on the notion of character.⁷⁷⁵ He believed that the main character was the central and most important feature of a play. It is therefore not surprising that his treatise on gardening expands on the three important components of his character theory: the prevailing or predominant character who pervades the entire play; the capacity of characters to affect the sensibilities of spectators; and the associative process that conveys an expressive character. Whateley's notion of "affectivity" (how a character affects a spectator) was intimately related to English theories of acting during the eighteenth century. Whateley writes: "The scenes of nature have a power to affect our imagination and our sensibility ... The art of gardening aspires to more than imitation: it can create *original* characters."⁷⁷⁶

As in architecture, a garden designer can produce various characters by combining elements from nature. In *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus himself comments on English gardens and how their character is expressed directly by proportions derived from

⁷⁷⁵Whateley died two years after the publication of his treatise on gardening and his study on Shakespeare was published by his brother in 1785. John Archer, "Character in English Architectural Design," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12/3 (Spring 1979): 349.

⁷⁷⁶Thomas Whateley, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), 153, 155–56; quoted by Archer, "Character," 351. For more on Whateley's theory of gardening, see Archer, "Character," 349–53.

nature. "L'expression n'en est jamais équivoque," he writes, "personne n'hésite sur le caractère qu'elle présente, elle est à la portée de tout le monde."⁷⁷⁷ English gardens, he continues, offer innumerable scenes and *tableaux* when they are well conceived in the appropriate genre and derived from "la belle Nature."⁷⁷⁸ The analogy between architecture and garden design was especially relevant, since both use spatial compositions and successions of elements to create an experience of movement and transformation: "La variété des niveaux supplée en partie dans cet art [garden design], au défaut de mouvement; ainsi dans l'Architecture, les colonnes isolées & le jeu des plans produisent à chaque pas qu'on fait, des aspects différents."⁷⁷⁹ They also express various characters in an analogous way. The Noble, the Rustic, the Pleasant, the Serious, and the Sad are characters that depend on the nature of the soil, its fertility, and the combination of various elements in the landscape, Watelet writes. The Majestic, the Terrible, and the Voluptuous can also determine the character of a scene, but they usually require accessories from the artifice of garden design to convey their effect.⁷⁸⁰ While certain characters are easily recognizable, others are more nuanced and require artificial objects to convey their meaning. Watelet suggests that this is why the *poétique* and the *romanesque* should be added to the more fundamental elements of a picturesque garden.

The poetic in gardens borrows from myths, but very few people have a real knowledge of them, Watelet argues. Even the stories depicted in temples and monuments are not always recognized. Therefore, he suggests, it is helpful to inscribe on these buildings (and this is the primary meaning of the word "character") the names of the divinities to whom they are dedicated. Watelet's position here differs from that of Le

⁷⁷⁷ *Le génie*, 14.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

Camus, for whom mythological stories translated into built form could be understood easily and shared as a common language. The distinction, however, is primarily one of emphasis, since both Watelet and Le Camus believed that proportions and dimensions can express a specific character, like an actor on stage:

[Même] si ces accessoires poétiques peuvent ajouter au plaisir des imaginations flexibles, & des hommes instruits; ... si les proportions sont incorrectes; les caractères mal exprimés, les dimensions mesquines: l'appareil poétique devient puérile, & la prétention ridicule. Un Acteur ignoble ou mal habillé nous fait rire, lorsqu'il se présente sous le nom d'un héros.⁷⁸¹

Poetic scenes, more than the picturesque or pastoral, suffer from lack of movement and action. To perfect this genre, Watelet considers including pantomimes with literal actors in the landscape. Romanesque scenes, on the other hand, permit a wider range of invention but are less comprehensible than the poetic, which have appeared widely in ancient stories that have become "des conventions adoptées & communes à tous ceux qui ont quelque instruction."⁷⁸² Romanesque ideas, which Watelet associates with allegories in general, tend to be more vague and personal: "elles appartiennent, pour ainsi dire, à chacun en propre; & elles tendent par ces raisons plus directement au dérèglement de l'imagination, & aux égarements du goût."⁷⁸³ Yet, the romanesque has such a great power to create magical illusions that pantomime would not even be necessary.

Le Camus's description of the garden in Chantilly, with its river personified as a beautiful naiad in a love story with the owner of the garden, would be characterized as romanesque, although mythological figures are also included in certain parts of the garden.

⁷⁸¹Ibid., 80–81.

⁷⁸²Ibid., 86.

⁷⁸³Ibid., 87.

The story begins when Nonette, the river, is impersonated as the radiant naiad who leans on her urn, watches the water pouring out, and exclaims:

C'est ainsi ... que s'écoule la vie des humains. Efforçons-nous de contribuer au bonheur de leur jours. Les Dieux doivent se faire connaître par les bienfaits. Fertilisons ces campagnes; embellissons ces lieux.⁷⁸⁴

As she makes her way through the countryside, the naiad enters the domain of the good Prince de Condé. When she sees him she is enthralled, and wishes to seduce him and to be loved by him. The behaviour of the river follows the conventional manners of a woman in love: "Nonette porte un regard timide sur Condé, ne peut le soutenir & laisse tomber; elle fait un nouvel effort, s'approche, lui offre hommages & tributs; en ce moment rien ne lui coûte, elle veut plaire."⁷⁸⁵ Abundance and fertility are her greatest assets, and she takes advantage of them to impress her beloved Prince. He responds by invoking architecture, laying out for her the most delectable gardens in which she is the principal ornament. Nature and architecture complete each other and create a perfect scene. Her pure waters attract flocks of swans and various kinds of colourful fish. Like Mermaids of the Tyrienne Sea, Le Camus writes, the fish appear when one approaches the edge of the water because they wish to seduce you and please you. Moreover, the garden is the meeting point of all the gods:

Mais qu'entends-je? ... Est-ce le son du cor? Diane vient-elle chasser? Chantilly rassemble tous les plaisirs, c'est le rendez-vous des Dieux. J'aperçois une partie du cortège de Bacchus. Sans doute ce vainqueur des Indes vient pour participer à quelque fête.⁷⁸⁶

A Satyr expresses the generosity of the Prince by whistling a seductive hymn that

⁷⁸⁴Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Description des eaux de Chantilly et du hameau* (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1783), 8.

⁷⁸⁵Ibid., 12.

⁷⁸⁶Ibid., 20–21.

activates all the creatures of the water and transforms the calm scene of the pond into a colourful spectacle. Nonette can no longer be contained in this limited space, and is soon carried away in other directions, creating cascades and other such wonders. She runs to the island of love, aware that she is the principal ornament wherever she passes:

On lui a élevé une statue de marbre, du bas de laquelle sort une nappe d'eau abondante qu'y reçoit un Bassin où toute les Nymphes d'alentour viennent consulter leurs charmes & leurs appas.⁷⁸⁷

This enchanted island is the part of Le Camus's narrative that most closely resembles Colonna's perfect garden, where Cupid takes the two lovers following Poliphilo's trip into the underworld. As in Le Camus's account, Colonna's sacred island is populated by nymphs who come to pay tribute to their goddess at the fountain of Venus:

Là-dessous se tenaient, en nombre, des nymphes qui ne cessaient de danser au beau milieu de l'arcade, dans une tenue élégante, s'inclinant toutes vers la fontaine, de temps en temps et en mesure.⁷⁸⁸

At the tip of the island in Chantilly stands the Temple to Venus, decorated with Ionic columns. Above the door are Venus's doves, as well as her torch and Love's arrows, decorated with vases and baskets of flowers: another direct reference to the Temple of Love in Poliphilo's story. (See Figure 84.) Le Camus notes that this is the Temple of the goddess of Cythera, and mystery is at the door. Inside, Beauty is holding hands with the Graces and Pleasures. The naiad is pleased to contribute to the ornamentation of this place, producing fountains and cascades of water that collect in alabaster vases decorated with sculpted images of Cupid. The naiad Nonette is impatient to produce new miracles and to enjoy all the advantages of the beautiful space that opens in front of her.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁷Ibid., 39.

⁷⁸⁸Colonna, *Le Songe de Poliphile*, II: 236.

⁷⁸⁹Ibid., 41–43.

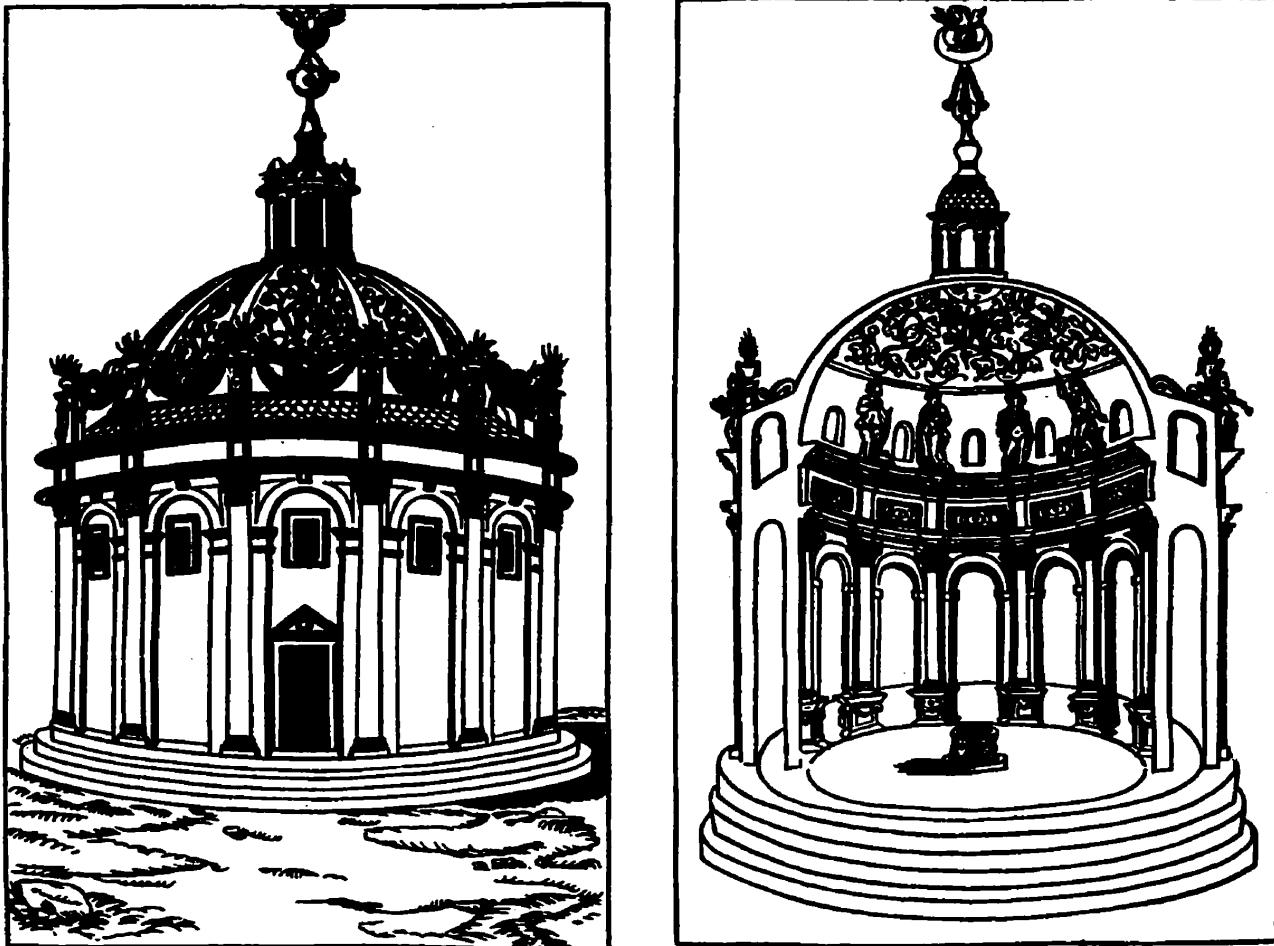


Figure 84: "Temple to Venus." From F. Colonna, *Le songe de Poliphile ou Hypnériotomacie* (1499; reprinted 1883).

She indicates to the Prince the appropriate location for creating an enchanted island where a pleasant hamlet could be built. She also indicates that a good architect must know how to penetrate "la marche de nos sensations, les saisit & les fait jouer à son gré."⁷⁹⁰ Indeed, in the hamlet, all the senses are excited: various perfumes fill the air, the birds create a symphony, and the entire composition provides a most pleasant scene. Nonette concludes her voyage through the Prince's domain by surrounding the castle and the upper part of the property. Seduced by the beauty of the castle, she departs from her normal appearance as a water stream to become a truly embodied form that comes to rest on the grass: "On l'a vu trois fois (si l'on en croit quelques vieux habitants) au milieu des Nymphes du canton, épuisée en contemplation, sommeiller sur la pelouse."⁷⁹¹

Various fountains and waterworks are created by the different forms and movements of the river. From her initial state of rest, lying in a pond, she leaves Morpheus's arms to become fountains in the stables. Then she proceeds through the vegetable garden, where is no need for elegant forms: her abundance alone is sufficient to convey her charms. She continues into the three rooms of the Roman pavilion, two of which have an elliptical shape. A recess in each room receives the emerging water that decorates this seductive place. In the centre, a bathtub completes the grotto where Diana comes to bathe with her nymphs after running through the forests. The decoration of this idyllic place represents the perfection of nature: the ceiling is painted as a sky with birds, and the walls portray espalier trees climbing up a trellis, with fruits appearing so natural that many are fooled, like the birds by Zeuxis's grapes.⁷⁹²

Nonette's voyage culminates in the *grand jet*: upon seeing a statue of the Prince de Condé, she wishes to express her attachment to the lord of this illustrious house. The

⁷⁹⁰Ibid., 43.

⁷⁹¹Ibid., 97.

⁷⁹²Ibid., 113–15.

naiad "fait un dernier effort, elle exige contribution de tous ses vaissaux, & forme un jet superbe de soixante pieds."⁷⁹³ Following this ultimate ejaculation, Le Camus resists commenting on Sylvie's pond, on the menagerie in which every courtyard has a fountain decorated by animals that represent a fable by La Fontaine, on Narcissus's fountain, on the Pheasantry, or on the Dairy house. We must be content to admire the incomparable naiad, he writes: "ce que nous en dirions de plus ne pourroit qu'affoiblir le tableau."⁷⁹⁴ The generosity of this charming naiad, he continues, "fait les délices de Chantilly, y répand ses trésors & cherche continuellement à l'embellir. C'est à vous, Prince généreux, que nous devons ces avantages."⁷⁹⁵ In effect, Le Camus concludes that the beauty of Chantilly originated from the mutual attraction of Nonette, the river-nymph, and the generous Prince.

In addition to characterizing the various parts of the picturesque garden as mythical figures and stories, Le Camus's description follows a narrative structure that links the elements of the garden into a story that maintains its erotic tension from the first encounter of the two lovers until the final outburst of passion. Like *Le génie de l'architecture*, in which a concealed seduction plot reenacts a spatial narrative, *Description des eaux de Chantilly* presents an architectural program as a temporal unfolding, and thus confirms Le Camus's quest for an architecture of desire.

As if to provide an additional key to the narrative enigma of his architectural treatise, Le Camus concludes the chapter in *Le génie de l'architecture* on exterior decoration with a discussion of the appropriate relationship between gardens and buildings. "Les jardins donnent beaucoup de jeu aux bâtimens, quand ils sont bien mariés ensemble," he writes, when every part is well proportioned, while maintaining a disarray that is characteristic of the productions of nature. Yet, he also suggests that the ideas in his

⁷⁹³Ibid., 121.

⁷⁹⁴Ibid.

⁷⁹⁵Ibid., 125.

treatise could be considered *un beau songe*, an implicit reference to Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which ends with Poliphilo awakening after a long dream. Although these ideas may be nothing but a beautiful dream, they can nonetheless be made to come true. Their purpose is to spur our imagination, Le Camus concludes, and to provide new ways "d'émouvoir, de satisfaire nos sensations, de rendre nos demeures analogues à nos goûts, à nos désirs, & aux différens besoins que le luxe enfante chaque jour."⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁶*Le génie*, 78–79.

CONCLUSION: THE TEMPORALITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In the decade preceding the French Revolution, *Le génie de l'architecture* proposed an innovative theory of architecture that used language to define the erotic tension of architectural space and to reconfigure it qualitatively with an analogy between architecture and human sensations. It also relied on narrative structure to expand the role of architectural program. In a time of great political turmoil at the end of the eighteenth century, Boullée and Ledoux devised theoretical projects with a belief that human inventiveness could recover a lost order. In *Le génie de l'architecture*, Le Camus de Mézières looked to character theory for a way to compensate for the crumbling traditional order. By defining architecture as an expressive language that can announce the destination of a building, or convey the social character of its owners, he attempted to recover a higher order previously pursued by political life.⁷⁹⁷

Le Camus concluded *Le génie de l'architecture* by proposing a second part to his treatise that would be devoted to public buildings. "Ce seroit ici le moment de parler des édifices publics," he writes, "de leur usages, des sensations qu'ils doivent exciter chacun dans leur genre, & des ressources qu'il faut employer pour y parvenir."⁷⁹⁸ This grand project, however promising, was never developed beyond this initial statement of intention. Le Camus never wrote his treatise on public buildings, yet he left behind an

⁷⁹⁷ Twentieth-century philosophers and sociologists, such as Sennett and Arendt, have argued that the overwhelming dominance of the private realm after the fall of the Ancien Régime could only result in a dead end for public arts such as architecture, and consequently, they offer little hope for a significant architectural practice. Since the private and social realms truly dominate our contemporary world, a nostalgic remembrance of the past era can lead only to muteness, and only by acknowledging our condition, by "working through" these private and social forms of interaction, can we find an appropriate alternative to act in the world.

⁷⁹⁸ *Le génie*, 275.

important public monument, the *halle au blé* in Paris, and some important clues in *Le génie* itself that suggest what might have been the central concerns of his treatise on public buildings. Le Camus believed that even residential buildings could contribute to the public role of architecture: by expressing the social status of its owner, the character of a *hôtel particulier* would convey its destination in the public realm.

In Le Camus's treatise, the expressive character of the *hôtel particulier* was conveyed through a temporal unfolding of the architectural program. This temporality, as should be obvious by now, was based on an analogy of architecture with theatrical staging, following the narrative structure and dramatic development of a plot. In late eighteenth-century theatre theory, however, temporality itself was reconsidered and underwent some radical changes. Two opposing views of the three dramatic unities (particularly the unity of time) were based on diverging concepts of realism on stage, with profound consequences not only for theatre but also for architectural distribution.

For Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, on the one hand, the simultaneous depiction of different places was no longer acceptable. His treatise *De l'art du théâtre* (1769) demanded a linear series of events - except at the Opera, where complex leaps were accepted as part of the magical (*merveilleux*) nature of the performance. In any other situation, collapsed time spans and rearranged places on stage were deemed to be incongruous. Nougaret even argued that the duration of the performance should match the duration of the action it portrays: "Il faudrait que le Poète intelligent rendit l'action de sa Pièce égale au temps qu'on emploie à la voir représenter."⁷⁹⁹ Moreover, the time of day represented in the play should coincide with the actual time of the performance. This identification between real time and fictional time was intended to achieve a greater realism that, in Nougaret's view,

⁷⁹⁹Nougaret, *De l'art du théâtre*, 221.

could only contribute to the enjoyment of a play: "Plus on peut faciliter au Spectateur les moyens de s'imaginer que ce qu'il voit est réel, plus on est certain que son plaisir est vif, & qu'il s'intéresse à l'action."⁸⁰⁰

Nougaret's defense of linear temporality at the theatre anticipated the nineteenth-century notion of *la marche* in architecture. This mode of representation, based on a linear promenade, was intended to present the distribution of a building within a rationally organized, homogeneous space. Nougaret's position, however, was not universally shared, and various writers began to question the theatrical principle of unity of time and place. The temporality of architectural narrative during the eighteenth century, particularly in the work of Le Camus de Mézières, also questioned Nougaret's premise. Its suggestions of non-homogeneous time and narrative tension could make hours seem to collapse, or an instant be suspended indefinitely.

This flexibility of theatrical time was defended in Louis-Sébastien Mercier's treatise, published four years after that of Nougaret. In *Du Théâtre* (1773), Mercier challenged the sacrosanct unity of time by rejecting the 24-hour convention that limited the virtual duration of a play. He argued that a strict rule would be detrimental because it would hinder beauties of a new order: "Avec de l'adresse et de l'intérêt soixante heures peuvent s'écouler comme vingt-quatre. Le spectateur a-t-il la montre en main, lorsqu'il est ému ou fortement intéressé?"⁸⁰¹ Unity of place is equally irrelevant, Mercier maintained, for it stifles the action and unduly restricts the imagination of the poet. The only unity that really mattered for Mercier was the unity of action (*unité d'intérêt*) that holds the story together: "C'est elle qui attache le spectateur, qui fixe son ame toute entière, & qui ne lui permettant aucune distraction réunit en un seul point le faisceau de ses idées."⁸⁰²

⁸⁰⁰Ibid., 222.

⁸⁰¹Mercier, *Du théâtre*, 145–46.

⁸⁰²Ibid., 147.

Given the analogy of theatre and architecture, this fragmentation of linear time on stage led to a rethinking of architectural program as a temporal sequence. This theatrical temporality was already at work in other forms of expression, such as the *Carceri* engravings of Giambattista Piranesi, which anticipate the radical temporal fragmentation and reconstitution of non-linear compositions of current art work. The most far-reaching architectural consequence of this eighteenth-century concern with time and unity of action was the implicit admission that the traditional architectural orders were no longer sufficient to express the complexities of an architectural program. For Le Camus de Mézières and Bastide, for example, the character of each room should be expressed by paintings, sculptures, and even lighting. Every element of the composition was expected to contribute to this unified narrative. Thresholds and doorways provided transitions from room to room and permitted gradations in the dramatic tension. A similar concern led Ledoux to transform architectural program in an even more radical way. The narrative structure of his treatise, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* (1804), was no longer confined to the internal spaces of a *hôtel particulier*. Although each individual continues to inhabit a house with an appropriate character, Ledoux's architectural intention had expanded to the scale of an ideal city, in which the configuration of each institution adheres to a unified program.

Le Camus de Mézières's architectural theory, like that of many of his contemporaries, developed a spatial interpretation of current experiential perception of temporality. In his case, the theatrical temporality with a beginning, an emotional climax, and an ending that resolved the dramatic tension, was the acknowledge model. However, this temporality was not unique to the theatre: it was prevalent also in literature, including boudoir novels; in gardening, where a visitor would be led through various scenes; and even in music, where a debate had been raging throughout the century between those who

favoured melodic (temporal, horizontal) composition and those who favoured harmonic (simultaneous, vertical) composition.

A feeling of boredom (*l'ennui*) was the *mal du temps* of the eighteenth century. It afflicted the most brilliant minds with an unforgiving awareness of the passing of time and their linear journey from life to death. The various art forms that engaged this linearity of human experience were considered to be the most effective means to fight it. In his treatise, *Réflexions critiques*, Du Bos devotes the first section to this dreadful affliction. In "De la nécessité d'être occupé pour fuir l'ennui, & de l'attrait des mouvements que les passions ont pour les hommes," Du Bos indicates two ways in which the soul can be kept busy and fight boredom: by feeling and by thinking. The second option is the most fastidious, he says, and without a well-trained imagination and a strong critical sense, one can be led to delusion and an even deeper boredom. Most people, he writes, rely on feeling to avoid boredom. The fear of boredom is so great that even when people are disgusted by the world and decide to abandon the absurdity of it all, they can rarely live up to their decision after tasting the boredom of inaction, and usually return to the torment of the passions. This introduces his concept of "artificial passion" and his declaration that art should create powerful, yet controlled emotions. The principal merit of poetry and painting - and implicitly, theatre and architecture - is their ability to excite real passions, without the negative consequences that normally follow. During the eighteenth century, boredom could be avoided by letting oneself be seduced by architecture and theatrical performances.

Now that time and narrative are becoming fundamental elements of architectural theory at the end of the twentieth century, the radical changes in architectural program during the eighteenth century offer a fertile ground for speculating on contemporary

architectural practice.⁸⁰³ However, the architecture of the twenty-first century should not mimic that of the Ancien Régime, nor should architectural programs suggest a theatrical organization of space reminiscent of a past era. It would be naïve to assume that a simple extrapolation could lead to a meaningful contemporary architectural practice. Nevertheless, architecture does have the capacity to convey meaning (*sense*), and stories can be told through its program and its built form. For architects to operate ethically in a cultural context, we must avoid the pitfalls of empty formalism. To do so, we may consider not only modern functional requirements and cultural conventions, but also more complex notions such as the perception of time in our fragmented world.

Today, time is no longer the linear continuum that encompasses the totality of human life, between birth and death; we perceive it with a different texture, a different mode of unfolding than in the eighteenth century. We have come to discover the irrational temporality of dreams, the fragmented juxtaposition of cinematographic montage, and more recently, the "risomatic" logic of the internet. Our primary neuroses are no longer defined in terms of "boredom", but anxiety (the fear of accelerated time) and depression, which makes one forgetful of the past and blind to the future, in an unbearable and inescapable fragmentary present. For architecture to be meaningful in the twenty-first century, it must address the fragmented time of human experience, while projecting a space/time in which we might recover a sense of our wholeness as mortal beings who belong to a more-than-human world.

⁸⁰³The work of prominent architects such as Le Corbusier, John Hejduk, Carlo Scarpa, and others, clearly offers promising alternatives, for they address alternate forms of architectural program and consider new modes of temporal fragmentation that characterize the arts at the end our millennium.

APPENDIX: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following section is a review of books and articles devoted specifically to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières. Other sources are discussed in the main text of the dissertation

Scholarship on Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1721–ca. 1793) is rare. Articles usually focus on a single aspect of his work. The most recent is Robin Middleton's introduction to *The Genius of Architecture*, an English translation of his treatise.⁸⁰⁴ Middleton defines the context for Le Camus's treatise by tracing its roots back to classicism. Following a brief history of the architectural orders, from the Greeks to Claude Perrault and Marc-Antoine Laugier, Middleton turns to the notion of "character" and theories of expression in the arts, from classical aesthetics to eighteenth-century architecture, including the theories of Charles Le Brun, Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, Roger de Piles, Jacques-François Blondel, Germain Boffrand, and Charles-Étienne Briseux. Middleton then traces the use of specific rooms, such as the bedroom (or bed chamber) and dining room, to traditions established by successive kings, followed by transformations of the rules of distribution in the eighteenth-century French *hôtel*. Middleton carefully outlines the trends in architectural theory at the end of the Ancien Régime, and acknowledges the probable philosophical relation between Le Camus's treatise and Condillac's *Traité des sensations*. He also discusses how Le Camus's architectural theory was influenced by the picturesque garden theory of Claude-Henri Watelet and Jean-Marie Morel. Surprisingly, Middleton fails to analyze Le Camus's text or its philosophical and theoretical implications.⁸⁰⁵ He concludes his introduction with

⁸⁰⁴Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or, the Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations*, translated by David Britt, introduction by Robin Middleton (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center, 1992).

⁸⁰⁵Middleton himself acknowledges the non-specificity of his introduction: "I have assumed that Le

a short biography of Le Camus de Mézières's life, which is indebted to Mark Deming's recent book on the Halle au blé in Paris,⁸⁰⁶ and a brief description of Le Camus's other publications

The section of Deming's book devoted to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, the first architect of the Halle au blé in Paris (1763–67), is the most extensive biography available. Deming's book focuses primarily on the urban impact of the construction of the Halle au blé. He carefully investigates the difficult negotiations that enabled the city to acquire the land of the hôtel de Soisson, the eventual site of the Halle au blé, as well as the transactions and development of the surrounding parcels of land, in which Le Camus was directly involved. His book owes much to an article published about ten years earlier by Françoise Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: Le terrain de l'Hôtel de Soisson."⁸⁰⁷ Like Deming, she carefully traces the history of the development of the parcel of land on which the Halle au blé was erected, and analyzes the residential development, also by Le Camus de Mézières, that surrounded the central building. She also compiles other projects that had been developed for the same site since the beginning of the century, many of which proposed to build an opera house on the site. Deming also looks at some of these alternate projects for the site of the hôtel de Soisson, but is interested mainly in the typological antecedents of the Halle au blé and traces its genealogy from the eighteenth-century market, which was usually an open-air public place. He follows the successive transformations of the building: the construction of a wooden dome by Legrand

Camus's text will be read and that readers will respond to it, each in his own way, afresh." Ibid., 56.

⁸⁰⁶Mark K. Deming, *La halle au blé de Paris, 1762–1813* (Brussels: Archives d'architecture moderne, 1984).

⁸⁰⁷Françoise Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: Le terrain de l'Hôtel de Soisson," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32/4 (1973): 267–307.

and Molinos in 1782–83; the fire of 1802; the construction of a cast iron cupola by Bélanger in 1808–13 (the first metal structure in France); and its partial destruction and integration into the Bourse du commerce in 1889. Deming emphasizes the importance of the circular shape of the Halle au blé and its association with the image of the Colisée.

Le Camus's contemporaries celebrated the theatricality of the new Halle au blé in Paris. This seems to have led to some confusion about the attribution of the Colisée on the Champs Élysées, a public theatre built shortly after the Halle au blé. The shape and programmatic distribution of this theatre paralleled Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières's own building and theoretical work, but the Colisée is now attributed to his namesake, Louis-Denis Le Camus. The attribution of the Colisée was first questioned in Alain-Charles Gruber's article "Les 'Vauxhalls' parisiens au XVIIIe siècle."⁸⁰⁸ Before the publication of this article, all commentators were in agreement that Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, architect of the Halle au blé, was also the architect of the Colisée.⁸⁰⁹ In his *Mémoires secrets*, Bachaumont was very specific about this. He writes: "Un certain *Camus de Mézières*, architecte de M. le Duc de Choiseul, est chargé de la construction ..."⁸¹⁰ The Duc de Choiseul was a leading speculator on the land surrounding the Colisée, and was very influential in promoting the urban development of the area known as Faubourg Saint-

⁸⁰⁸Alain-Charles Gruber, "Les 'Vauxhalls' parisiens au XVIIIe siècle," *Société de l'histoire de l'art français* (1971): 125–43.

⁸⁰⁹Louis Hautecoeur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France* (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1950–52), 4:452; Émile Dacier, *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin* (Paris: Les Éditions G. Van Oest, 1931), 83–84; Paul d'Ariste and Maurice Arrivetz, *Les Champs Élysées. Étude topographique, historique et anecdotique jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Emile-Paul Éditeur, 1913): 221–27.

⁸¹⁰Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France, depuis MDCCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou, Journal d'un observateur ...* (London: Chez John Adamson, 1780–89), IV:249. Italics appear in the original.

Honoré. Coincidentally, a few metres east of the Colisée, the hôtel de Beauvau (now the Ministère de l'Intérieur) was being built the same year the plans of the Colisée were approved by the King. Its attribution to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières is well accepted because of precise archival documents.

Even though Gruber often refers specifically to Bachaumont, he does not acknowledge the problem of attribution, and even confuses the issue by reversing the architects of the Colisée and the Halle au blé. "L'exécution des plans," he writes, "fut confiée par la société du grand *vauxhall* au jeune architecte Louis-Denis Le Camus, architecte habituel de Choiseul, qui avait remporté un grand succès avec sa construction hardie de la halle aux blés de Paris."⁸¹¹ To confuse the matter even further, Gruber writes: "Le Camus de Mézières exprime dans son plan du Colisée (*sic*) des idées que son homonyme résumera plus tard dans un remarquable ouvrage théorique d'architecture intitulé *Le Génie de l'Architecture ou l'Analogie de cet Art avec nos Sensations*, paru en 1780."⁸¹² These blatant mistakes cast some doubt on the scholarly value of Gruber's analysis. The attribution of the Halle au blé to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières has never been questioned, nor has *Le génie de l'architecture*.⁸¹³

Part of the confusion may come from the wording of the official document approving the construction of the Colisée. The royal decree refers to the architect of the new Colisée in these terms: "... sieur Le Camus, architecte, élève de l'Académie ..."⁸¹⁴ Louis-Denis Le Camus was indeed a student at the Academie Royale d'Architecture between 1738 and 1742, as confirmed by the *Procès-verbaux* of the institution, but in

⁸¹¹Gruber, "Vauxballs," 132.

⁸¹²Ibid., 133.

⁸¹³Boudon, "Urbanisme et spéculation," 276, n. 31.

⁸¹⁴D'Ariste and Arrivetz, *Les Champs Élysées*, 221.

1743, he was no longer a student but an *ancien élève de l'Académie*.⁸¹⁵ On the other hand, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières was an *architecte expert bourgeois*, as confirmed by an entry in the *Almanach Royal* of 1751. On the first plate of his *Recueil de differens plans* (ca. 1769), concerning his Halle au blé,⁸¹⁶ he signed under the scale: "Inv. et del. le Camus de Mézières, Expertus Regis, Academiae que studii Parisiensis Architectura." Although the "que" in this quotation is somewhat ambiguous, and the punctuation inconsistent with a similar reference on another plate in the same treatise, it can be translated as either "Le Camus de Mézières, expert of the King and of the Academy, who studied architecture in Paris" or "... expert of the King's Academy of Architecture who studied at Paris." Moreover, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières described himself as "Architecte du Roi et de son Université" in the title of his *Recueil*, which suggests a close association to the Academy without being an official member, and thus appears to justify the appellation "élève de l'Académie." It is also significant that the *Recueil* of the Halle au blé, with its ambiguous Latin reference, was dedicated to the King's Librarian in 1769, the same year that the plans of the Colisée were approved by the Conseil d'État du Roy.

The attribution of the Colisée to Louis-Denis Le Camus, rather than Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, is based on Louis-Denis Le Camus's letter of candidacy to the Academie Royale d'Architecture, published only recently by H. Ottomeyer in "Autobiographie d'architectes parisiens, 1759–1811."⁸¹⁷ In it, Louis-Denis Le Camus

⁸¹⁵ *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale d'Architecture 1671–1793*, edited by Henry Lemonnier (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1911), 5:230, 240, 256, 273, 331, 343.

⁸¹⁶ *Recueil de differens plans et desseins concernant la nouvelle Halle aux grains situee au lieu et place de l'ancien Hotel de Soissons, par N. Le Camus de Mezieres, architecte du roi et de son Université, Expert des Bâtiments* was never published. Each existing copy has a different number and order of plates, and seems to have been issued at a different time, but all are assumed to have been printed after 1769. For more on this, see Middleton, introduction to *The Genius*, 215–20.

⁸¹⁷ H. Ottomeyer, "Autobiographie d'architectes parisiens, 1759–1811," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire*

clearly states that "le Colisée qui se construit dans les Champs Élizées se fait sur mes desseins, et sous ma conduite."⁸¹⁸

The problem of attribution of the Colisée is also related to recent questions concerning the attribution of two other projects carried out for the Duc de Choiseul. The first one is the *château* in Chanteloup, with its garden and pagoda, where the Duc de Choiseul resided during his exile from the court between 1770 and 1774; the second is the residential development surrounding the new Comédie italienne that was built in 1783 on a site that also belonged to the Duc de Choiseul. Both projects, originally attributed to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, are now believed to be the work of Louis-Denis Le Camus.

In an article entitled "Documents inédits sur l'histoire du Château et des jardins de Chanteloup,"⁸¹⁹ Édouard André traces the history of the *château* and the domain. The castle was built by Robert de Cotte for the original owner, the Princesse des Ursins. D'Aubigny inherited the domain after the death of the Princesse in 1722, and the Duc de Choiseul acquired it in 1761. At that time, the southern part of the domain remained in its original form as a *jardin à la française*. André describes the rapid ascension of the Duc de Choiseul onto the political scene from 1758 to 1761, and how he expanded his domain by exchanging the lands of Pompadour and Bret in Corrèze for the castle, the city and the forest of Ambroise. Choiseul asked the architect Le Camus - and here, André assumes that it was Le Camus de Mézières - to transform the castle, including the reorganization of internal spaces and the addition of a peristyle leading to the baths on the east side and to a

de Paris (1971): 177–78.

⁸¹⁸Ibid., 178.

⁸¹⁹Édouard André, "Documents inédits sur l'histoire du Château et des jardins de Chanteloup," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire de l'art français* 1 (1935): 21–39.

new chapel on the west. After the death of Louis XV, Choiseul was reinstated in the court, and he asked Le Camus to transform the geometric French gardens into *jardins à la mode* in the English style. A pagoda was also erected to serve as a monument to friendship. The room on the ground floor is lined with marble plates on which the names of those who remained faithful to Choiseul were said to be engraved. These plates apparently were reversed and cemented over during the Revolution. André provides important information concerning the architectural transformation of the castle, its garden and the pagoda in Chanteloup, but is unaware of the controversy concerning their authorship.⁸²⁰ In his letter of candidacy to the Academie Royale d'Architecture, Louis-Denis Le Camus again confirms his involvement at Chanteloup: "... quant à mes travaux les plus considérables ils sont à Chanteloup pour M. le duc de Choiseul."⁸²¹

There has also been debate over the authorship of the residential development around the Comédie italienne that was built on land originally occupied by the hotel of the Duc de Choiseul. Ferdinand Boyer wrote an article specifically about the new Comédie italienne, "Lotissement à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: de l'hôtel de Choiseul à la Comédie italienne."⁸²² As with the articles on the construction of the Halle au blé, the author of this article is interested primarily in the urban impact of the development of a parcel of land. He follows the successive transactions and political manipulations that enabled the new theatre

⁸²⁰In the "Journal du voyage de Richelieu en 1800," *Archives de l'art français* (Paris, 1910), 389, Richelieu describes the pagoda and specifies: "... ce monument a été élevé sur les dessins de Louis-Denis Le Camus ..." More recent articles on Chanteloup, however, still attribute the pagoda to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières: for example, Claude d'Anthénaise, "Chanteloup ou l'éclat de la folie," *Beaux Arts Magazine* 105 (Oct. 1992): 82-92; and Marie-France Boyer, "Pagode de Chanteloup," *World of Interiors* (May 1990): 120-27.

⁸²¹Ottomeyer, "Autobiographie," 177-78.

⁸²²Ferdinand Boyer, "Lotissement à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: de l'hôtel de Choiseul à la Comédie italienne," *La vie urbaine* 4 (Oct. 1962): 241-60.

to be constructed on a rather controversial site. Le Camus de Mézières is also assumed to be the architect not of the theatre itself but of the surrounding buildings. As for the Colisée and the transformations in Chanteloup, the architect of this development is mentioned as "Le Camus" in official documents, and the article provides no further proof of its authorship.

The article by Rémy Saisselin, "Architecture and Language: The Sensationalism of Le Camus de Mézières,"⁸²³ is the only secondary source that investigates the philosophical implication of the theory of architecture presented in *Le génie de l'architecture*. For Saisselin, Le Camus instigated a tradition in which architecture was conceived as an expressive language, and would develop into *architecture parlante* toward the end of the eighteenth century. Saisselin defines this *architecture parlante* as an aesthetics of expression rather than imitation, but this definition also needs to be refined. The aesthetics of expression in architecture is different from "the more familiar doctrine of the expression of the passions shared by poetry, painting, as well as music and dance," Saisselin writes. Architecture does not express passions *per se*, but it produces or induces "sensations which could be identified with certain sentiments."⁸²⁴ Du Bos's distinction between two types of passions helps to clarify this notion of sensation in architecture. In his interpretation of *catharsis*, Du Bos distinguishes painful passions that one experiences in real life from the artificial passions produced by art, which are weaker than the natural ones and therefore bearable to the spectator. In architecture, however, the sensations are of a *natural* kind, since "they are connected with one's body ... so that the spectator of an edifice was before

⁸²³Rémy Saisselin, "Architecture and Language: The Sensationalism of Le Camus de Mézières," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 15 (1975): 239–53.

⁸²⁴Ibid, 241.

it much as he was before natural phenomena.⁸²⁵ Consequently, the sensations created by architecture are more like those created by a stage set - to use Le Camus's own theatre analogy - than the actual performance on stage.

In his treatise, Le Camus emphasizes that the character of a *hôtel particulier* should be determined by the social role of its owner.⁸²⁶ Saisselin traces this connection between social rank and aesthetic considerations to Abbé Cordemoy's *Nouveau Traité de toute l'architecture* (1714). In the case of Cordemoy, however, custom (*accoutumance*) was the reason for distinguishing among the houses of *les Gens de Finances* (magistrates, princes and kings). The hierarchical distinctions that Le Camus established among various kinds of buildings went beyond the need for social identification: "Les sensations qu'ils excitent ne sont plus les mêmes; conséquemment les proportions de l'ensemble, celles des masses et des détails demandent des caractères qui leur soient propres."⁸²⁷ The linguistic distinction among palaces for sovereigns, *hôtels* for the nobility, and houses for the *bourgeoisie* and *riches particuliers* no longer corresponded to the social reality of the time, Saisselin argues, "for it was money more than social rank which determined the nature of what one could build."⁸²⁸ Consequently, "the social meaning of the old architectural order" became blurred, and a more subtle character theory was needed.

Even though Le Camus drew an analogy between architecture and our sensations, he did not distinguish between arbitrary and positive beauty, since the analogy "was not incompatible with a desire for universal rules." Nonetheless, he criticized Perrault, who claimed that "il ne doit point y avoir de proportions fixes, que le goût seul devrait décider."

⁸²⁵Ibid.

⁸²⁶*Le génie*, 9.

⁸²⁷Ibid.

⁸²⁸Here one might think of the luxurious residences built for actresses, such as Mlle Guimard's hotel by Ledoux. Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 243–44.

Le Camus rather invokes "rules in order to fix the imagination, which is regarded as an element of instability."⁸²⁹ Saisselin suggests an interesting interpretation of Le Camus's need for rules, claiming that "architecture thus acted like a species of fixed spectacle and just as the stage and its frame and the action on the stage fixed the attention of the spectator, thereby in effect disciplining it, so the proportions and orders of architecture fixed the imagination and it is this which allowed a communication or rapport between edifice and observer, for both were removed from the arbitrariness of pure fantasy and mere chance."⁸³⁰

Since Le Camus insisted on rules of proportion and harmony in architecture, it is consistent that he also established a parallel between architecture and music - specifically Ouvrard's *Architecture harmonique* and Father Castel's colour clavichord. Le Camus compares architecture to musical harmony, which he defines as "la convenance des différentes parties pour former un tout relatif." For him, proportions in architecture are like rules of musical harmony because they are predetermined but may be combined in infinite ways. In music every mode corresponds to a particular character, and in architecture the expression of every order is unequivocal. Le Camus did not question the orders as the basic language of architecture.⁸³¹ Saisselin suggests that this reliance on a "theory of

⁸²⁹Le génie, 13; translated by Saisselin in "Architecture and Language," 245.

⁸³⁰Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 245.

⁸³¹The association of musical harmony and architectural proportions in the eighteenth century is a complex issue and not without contradiction. Theories of music at that time opposed those who followed Rameau, who believed in the evocative power of every chord to create harmony, and those who followed Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the importance of the temporal unfolding of melody. Although Le Camus de Mézières does not explicitly enter this debate, he speaks about musical harmony rather than melody, and this would seem to suggest a more traditional, static reading of character, in contrast to the temporal/theatrical unfolding of architectural spaces in his treatise. It may also be related to the modes based on musical intervals, and thus would be closer to the Vitruvian tradition. This question is not pursued here because Le Camus does not develop it beyond the two cited examples.

"harmonic proportions" and an "essentialist aesthetics" was borrowed from Briseux's *Traité du beau essentiel dans les arts* (1752). Three decades before the publication of Le Camus's *Le génie de l'architecture*, Briseux had insisted on the importance of "reason and proportion as the necessary conditions of beauty in the arts." Le Camus clearly builds on Briseux's *Traité du beau essentiel* when his own treatise associates the five orders of architecture with human traits. Yet, his aim was only to establish a common language that could develop his analogy of architecture with our sensations. The new philosophical language of sensationalism gave architects such as Le Camus a new "terminology with which to describe and discuss what the more classical and essentialist aesthetic based on the orders and their proportions, that is on mathematical rapports, had tended to neglect."⁸³²

Like Middleton after him, Saisselin outlines the ideological alliance between Le Camus and other theoreticians such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Étienne-Louis Boullée. More general writings on the architectural theory of the late eighteenth century consider Le Camus's contribution to the notion of architecture as an expressive discipline. Emil Kaufmann was one of the first writers to consider Le Camus de Mézières's theory of architecture in relation to Ledoux and Boullée.⁸³³ Kaufmann's seminal *Architecture in the Age of Reason* notes the Romantic insight of Le Camus's treatise, but makes a sharp distinction between the treatise and his built work. Kaufmann devotes only one page to Le Camus de Mézières and his architectural treatise, and concludes in a rather open way that "Le Camus stands at the crossroads of the Baroque, Rationalism, and Romanticism."⁸³⁴

In his influential *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, Alberto Pérez-

⁸³²Saisselin, "Architecture and Language," 246.

⁸³³Emil Kaufmann, "Three Revolutionary Architects, Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 42/3 (October 1952): 469.

⁸³⁴Emil Kaufmann, *Architecture in the Age of Reason* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), 150.

Gómez points out the complexity of Le Camus's work by describing the apparent contrast between *Le génie de l'architecture* and two other books by Le Camus on technical problems of construction. Whereas in *Le génie* Le Camus clearly states that "the objective of architecture is to move our souls and excite our sensations," and that "this could only be achieved through the use of harmonic proportions," the intention of his *Traité de la force du bois* was clearly technical: "the systematization of experimental results with the purpose of designing wooden structures scientifically."⁸³⁵ Pérez-Gómez demonstrates that such divergent interests were not contradictory within the epistemological landscape of Newtonian natural philosophy, with its empirical emphasis and its implicit metaphysics of number. His commentary on Le Camus is especially helpful, for it places his theory of a harmonic architecture in the century-long debate about arbitrary and positive beauty that stemmed from Perrault's questioning of the status of architectural orders.

Debates about proportion and harmony rely on a complex set of terms such as character (*caractère*), appropriateness (*convenance*), and taste (*goût*). *Symétrie, goût, caractère*, by Werner Szambien, traces the semantic transformations of these terms in dictionaries and in treatises on architecture and the architectural orders, from the sixteenth century to the French Revolution, and it includes various references to Le Camus's *Le génie de l'architecture*. The most interesting sections are on the proportions of architectural orders, the notion of imagination established by Condillac, and the complex transformation of the term *caractère*.⁸³⁶

In his article "Character in English Architectural Design,"⁸³⁷ John Archer also

⁸³⁵Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 74.

⁸³⁶Werner Szambien, *Symétrie, goût, caractère* (Paris: Picard, 1986), 42–43, 121–22, 174–99.

⁸³⁷John Archer, "Character in English Architectural Design," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12/3 (Spring 1979): 339–71.

looks at transformations in the notion of character. However, his article focuses on English architectural theory, particularly the formulation of character theory in Thomas Whateley's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770). Archer first traces a brief history of character theory in the French tradition. He begins with Claude Perrault, who described the "proportion and character" of each order in his *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes* (1683). He then discusses Jacques-François Blondel's notion of appropriateness, which gave a central role to character, parallel to the Vitruvian notion of decorum. In his *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance* (1737–38), Blondel emphasizes that the decoration of a building should convey its use, and that a house should be appropriate to the character and dignity of its owner. Moreover, every room in a house should clearly indicate its destination through a proper use of decoration: "on doit toujours caractériser l'usage de chaque pièce."⁸³⁸ Clearly, the unifying value of character treated decoration as more than just an addition to an independent structure; decoration, in Blondel's theory of character, was an essential part of the design.⁸³⁹

In her Ph.D. dissertation, "The Quest of an 'Arbitrary' Authority in Early Modern Architectural Theory,"⁸⁴⁰ Lily Chi looks at the premises of character theory in architecture, specifically the debate about Claude Perrault's introduction of the notion of arbitrary beauty, then investigates early eighteenth-century theories of character in the works of Germain Boffrand and Jacques-François Blondel.⁸⁴¹ Like Blondel, Boffrand attributes a

⁸³⁸ Jacques-François Blondel, *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance* (Paris: 1737–38), 2:122.

⁸³⁹ Archer, "Character," 341.

⁸⁴⁰ Lily H. Chi, "The Quest of an 'Arbitrary' Authority in Early Modern Architectural Theory: Claude Perrault and the Idea of *Caractère* in Germain Boffrand and Jacques-François Blondel. (PhD. dissertation, McGill University, 1997).

⁸⁴¹ Beginning with Boffrand and Blondel, Chi says that "the formulation of architectural character was an effort of retrenchment: an attempt to reformulate the classical ideal of harmonic form without recourse to the foundational premise of a harmonic, analogical universe." Chi, "The Quest," 8.

specific character to each order, and suggests an appropriate use or situation. In *Livre d'architecture*,⁸⁴² he emphasizes that character must have a direct effect on the senses of the spectator, and uses terms such as *ressentir*, *imprimer*, and *faire sentir*. He says it is necessary that "le spectateur ressent le caractère qu'il [l'édifice] doit imprimer," and that "un homme qui ne connaît pas ces différens caractères, & qui ne les fait pas sentir dans ses ouvrages, n'est pas Architecte."⁸⁴³ In his *Cours d'architecture*, which was not published until 1771, Blondel expanded his notion of architectural character to include a parallel with facial physiognomy, inspired by Descartes and Le Brun, according to which variations in the expression of the face "directly represented the internal passions and character of the soul. Blondel proposes that elements of a structure could suggest a facial physiognomy and therefore a character for the program of a building as a whole."⁸⁴⁴

Building on Blondel's and Boffrand's theories of character, Le Camus de Mézières emphasized that a unifying theme throughout the building would have a direct effect on the senses of the spectator, suggesting a parallel between the experience of a building and the experience of a play. Indeed, his description of every room conveys dramatic action, and his emphasis on character calls for dramatic unity: "Comme dans les pièces dramatiques une seule action remplit toute la scène, il faut de même dans un édifice observer l'unité de caractère, & que cette vérité fixe d'abord l'imagination, en frappant les yeux."⁸⁴⁵ A few decades later, Ledoux proposed an additional meaning of character that tended toward moral edification: "Le caractère des monuments, comme leur nature, sert à la propagation et à l'épuration des moeurs."⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴²Germain Boffrand, *Livre d'architecture* (Paris, 1745), 24–27, 33.

⁸⁴³Ibid., 26–27; quoted by Archer, "Character," 342.

⁸⁴⁴Archer, "Character," 342–45.

⁸⁴⁵*Le génie*, 63.

⁸⁴⁶Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation* (Paris, 1804), 12.

In her article "The Use of Architecture: The Destination of Buildings Revisited,"⁸⁴⁷ Chi develops an aspect of her Ph.D. dissertation by expanding on the theatrical metaphor in the characterization of architectural use. Boffrand, for example, in his *Livre d'architecture*, compares the character of buildings to theatrical *scenes*, announcing their destination - later conceived as *function* - through their disposition, structure, and ornamentation.⁸⁴⁸ Chi also emphasizes the importance of the "spectator" in theories of architectural *caractère* from Boffrand and Blondel to Boullée, Le Camus de Mézières and Ledoux. She says: "The *spectateur* is specifically identified as the site and confirmation of [architecture's moral and expressive] effects - a distinct but intrinsic term for a theory of expressive architectural form."⁸⁴⁹ In other words, while classical architecture was regulated by principles of cosmic harmony, eighteenth-century architectural theories were influenced by an unspecified, yet embodied observer whose very presence could validate architectural invention.

⁸⁴⁷Lily Chi, "The Use of Architecture: The Destination of Buildings Revisited," in *Chora 2* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 17–36.

⁸⁴⁸Boffrand, *Livre d'architecture*, 16; Chi, "The Use of Architecture," 27.

⁸⁴⁹Chi, "The Quest," 291.

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