4 ORNAMENT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

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The *Parere su l'architettura*, a late polemical text by Giambattista Piranesi published in 1765, championing the cause of Roman Imperial architecture over that of Periclean Athens, records a lively debate between two imaginary interlocutors, Protopiro and Didascalo, regarding rules for invention in architecture. Their discussion centers on ornament.

Protopiro, defender of the *rigoristi*, Greek architecture, Palladio, and Vitruvius, criticizes Piranesi's designs for their overabundance of motifs. Echoing the rationalists' project to purify architectural forms by a reasoned critique of their origins in Vitruvius' rustic hut, Protopiro rejects all architectural forms that do not derive from that original. Shouldn't the section of a column be simply circular, in imitation of a tree, and not oval, triangular, or octagonal as in extravagant baroque confections, he asks? Shouldn't the arabesques, hippogriffs, and all manner of sphinxes return to their proper place, the poet's imagination? In short, shouldn't architects simply model their work on the buildings erected by the ancient Greeks—timeless models of restraint and reason?[1]

Didascalo, Piranesi's mouthpiece, is quick to ridicule his opponent's program. In a lengthy *reductio ad absurdum* of Protopiro's position, he derides the futility of seeking rational explanations behind the shape and assembly of architectural members. If architects were to bring a building's forms back to their presumed origins in nature, Didascalo argues, they would be forced to do away with walls, columns, pilasters, friezes, cornices, vaults, and even roofs: their buildings would vanish altogether. Didascalo claims that the art of building did not originate from the rational imitation of rustic dwellings, nor did its ornamental forms emerge from construction techniques. Architects never followed rules in their designs, and the ornaments

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they employed have always been irrational and "strange."[2] The fantastic compositions for façades Piranesi included at the end of the *Parere* eloquently illustrate Didascalo's contention. Richly encrusted with ornament, these heterogeneous collages of fanciful columns, intricate moldings, and enigmatic bas-reliefs are certainly among the strangest architectural compositions ever to come out of Piranesi's imagination (Figure 4.1).

In spite of its polemical intent and caricatural tone, the *Parere* captured accurately, if in very broad strokes, the range of positions eighteenth-century authors adopted in the matter of ornament. On the one hand the rationalists and traditionalists represented by Protopiro sought guidelines for ornamenting architectural forms in the doctrine of *imitation*. Protopiro's adherents held that these guidelines were to be found through a critical emulation of the best models from antiquity and a reasoned analysis of the wooden originals described by Vitruvius (in *De Architectura* 4.2.1–5 the Roman author explained the origin of the Doric and Ionic entablatures in wood construction). While the traditionalists admitted that reason alone might not entirely account for all forms, they maintained that decorum—the appropriateness of a building's aspect to its intended use—at least provided the principles necessary for designers to avoid indiscriminate use of

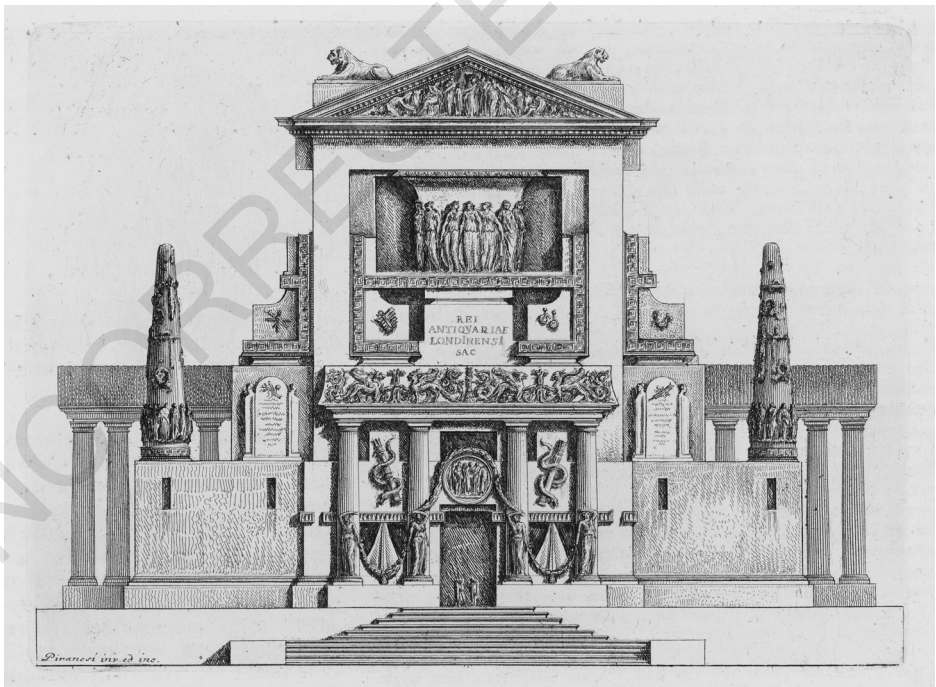

Figure 4.1 Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78), draftsman and printmaker. Elevation for an imaginary building. Plate IX from the Parere su l'Architettura (Rome, 1765).
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ornament. Conservative theorists thus sought to reduce ornament to a supporting role in architectural expression, a role confined within the strict boundaries of decorum. They neutralized the potential excess of ornament into orderly *decoration*.

On the other hand, the proponents of invention personified by Didascalo not only challenged the regulations imposed on ornamentation by decorum, but also questioned the very boundaries of the discipline of architecture. They refused to curtail the architect's imagination by appropriateness. They strove to integrate into architectural practice an expanded canon of forms, beyond selected models from the Greco-Roman past. They championed non-canonical examples from antiquity and other European, or even extra-European, shapes that authorities dismissed. They also desired to overcome the rationalists' tectonic bias that prescribed that all forms must find their logic in a built original. Looking outside the strict confines of the art of building, they found inspiration in the adornment of interiors and objects. Theirs was a pursuit of visual delight *beyond* reason. By highlighting divergent attitudes toward imitation and invention, reason and pleasure, and ultimately mind and body, ornament both focused Enlightenment thinking about the visual arts and grounded the nascent discipline of aesthetics.

While Enlightenment thinkers on ornament drew upon traditional critical categories developed by earlier theorists of the visual and poetic arts, they also responded to the accelerated modernization of European societies. Consolidation of the bourgeoisie's political power coupled with the gradual decline of absolutist models of kingship challenged the role ornament had played in European societies until then. Ornament's purpose of broadcasting individual rank within reputedly stable social structures—a purpose reflected in the etymological connection between the Latin *ornare*, to adorn, and *ordinare*, to put in order[3]—lost its traction, as the burgeoning of capitalism blurred the formerly sharp contours of social orders. Cities, the primary sites of early market economies, orchestrated the expansion of the monetarized exchange of goods that bore ornamental and other visual signs. As Katie Scott and others have discussed, the commodification of ornament—best exemplified by that quintessential modern medium, the reproductive print—undermined its usefulness as a stable marker of privilege.[4] The deterioration of ornament's valence in the bourgeois public sphere ultimately resulted in Adolf Loos' claim of its irrelevance for the twentieth century, as suggested by the title of his well-known 1910 essay "Ornament und Verbrechen" ("Ornament and Crime"). Paradoxically perhaps, a new-found depth compensated for the decline of ornament's usefulness as a social emblem. The bourgeois ideal of sensitive individuality and the importance it placed on aesthetic experience carved out a quasi-metaphysical role for beauty.[5] In the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) Kant used ornament as the perfect example of "free beauty," separated from any contingent human interests, including the long-standing political use of ornament to convey regal splendor.[6] As "free beauty," ornament shed its role as a superficial marker of prestige to become the object of aesthetic experience.[7]

Ancients and Moderns

Decorous repository of traditional forms or herald of invention, public sign of social status or private object of aesthetic contemplation: the wide range of meanings eighteenth-century theorists projected onto ornament derived from their understanding of its additive character. The seventeenth-century French writer and translator of Vitruvius Claude Perrault provided a synthetic definition of the moderns' conception. For Perrault, ornament in architecture were "all things that are not essential components, but that are added only to enrich and embellish the work, such as sculpted leaves, flowers, and geometric motifs that one carves into moldings, on friezes, and on coffers, and in other places that one wants to adorn." [8] As Perrault himself remarked, this had not been Vitruvius' view. Pierre Gros has pointed out how, unlike more recent authors, Vitruvius used the term *ornamenta* to designate the three parts of the entablature.[9] As the horizontal components of trabeation, Vitruvian "ornament" played a fundamental role, at once semiotic and tectonic, in the design of temples, the supreme instance of the art of building, according to the Roman writer. For Vitruvius, the forms of *ornamenta* did more than announce the god to whom the temple was dedicated: without *ornamenta*, the temple—reduced to a mass of columns, its vertical support—would simply not exist. Vitruvius' definition of ornament, so different from the eighteenth-century view of it as accessory, persisted well into the Renaissance. In codifying the architectural orders, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's immensely popular manual *Regola Delli Cinque Ordini D'Architettura* (1562), still referred to the constituent components of the orders, and not the motifs carved on them, as *ornamenti*.[10]

While Vitruvius' original definition still resonated in Renaissance thinking, John Onians has located the initial split between ornament and a building's more fundamental qualities a century before Vignola, in the writings of Leon Battista Alberti.[11] In the *De ~~re~~ ~~a~~edificatoria*, written in the mid fifteenth century, that humanist defined ornament as:

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> a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows, I believe, that beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament [*ornamentum*], rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional.[12]

To be sure, as Caroline van Eck and Alina Payne have noted, Alberti's *ornamentum* was far less restrictive a concept than the one proposed by Perrault.[13] For Alberti, *ornamentum*, unlike what came after it, comprised all phenomenal manifestations of a building's beauty, the latter determined by the abstract operations of lineaments and their role in *concinnitas*, the harmonious relationships among a design's parts. Yet Alberti's *ornamentum*, despite its comprehensive definition, was soon misconstrued to imply a separation between the appearance of buildings and some more authentic, invisible principles that begot true beauty. Misreadings

of Alberti's distinction led to the much narrower eighteenth-century conception of ornament. This ultimately resulted in the divide between a building's structure and its envelope, implemented in actual buildings with the advent of large-scale steel frame construction.

Using his knowledge of ancient rhetoric and poetics, Alberti could focus his architectural discourse on the role ornament played in endowing a building with *decor*. Vitruvius had identified *decor* as one of the fundamental principles of the art of building (Vitruvius, *De Arch.*: 1.2.5–7).[14] He held that *decor* was bound by three imperatives: *statio*, *consuetudo*, and *natura*. To conform to *statio*, the external appropriateness of an architectural form to its destination, the forms of a temple should, for example, suit its dedicatory god: a temple to Jupiter Tonans should be hypaethral (without a roof). Similarly, the architectural orders, from the solid Doric to the slender Corinthian, should correspond to the strength or delicacy of a given divinity. Second, respect for *consuetudo*, or custom, required *decor* to attend to the internal logic of a building's forms. Vitruvius advised that a splendidly decorated house should not have a simple façade any more than distinctive attributes of the architectural orders could be mixed (dentils must not appear in a Doric frieze, or triglyphs in an Ionic one). Finally, to conform to *natura* (the natural order of the world), *decor* must ensure that a building's site was suited to its purpose. Vitruvius stated for example that a sanctuary to Aesculapius, the god of healing, should be situated in a salubrious location. The "natural causes" of *decor* also determined a building's orientation according to its internal distribution: they ensured, Vitruvius pointed out, that bedrooms faced east to receive the morning light and that picture galleries pointed north to benefit from even illumination.

Alberti reinterpreted the first two imperatives of Vitruvian *decor* by reading the Roman theorist with an eye to ancient authors on ethics and rhetoric. Echoing Vitruvian *statio*, Alberti maintained that, to comply with what we may call "external" decorum, a building's forms should coincide with the prestige of the program and its patron.[15] Guardian of architecture's social role, external decorum corresponded to the ethical prescriptions, outlined notably by Cicero in *De officiis*, which stressed that individuals' actions and dress should conform to their social stature.[16] External decorum thus regulated the outward display of ornament. Alberti also adhered to Vitruvius' *consuetudo*, governing the second imperative of *decor*, which may be designated as "internal" decorum. *Consuetudo* presided over the correspondence of ornamented forms within a particular composition. Alberti discussed internal decorum under *compartitio*, one of the six aspects of building. *Compartitio* determined the subdivision of site and building into "close-fitting smaller units, joined together like members of the whole body," Alberti wrote.[17] He emphasized that in order to maintain internal decorum, none of a building's parts should be more adorned than the others, so "the harmony is such that the building appears a single, integral, and well-composed body, rather than a collection of extraneous and unrelated parts."[18] Like orators in their speeches, Albertian architects needed to abide by internal and external decorum to achieve not only a coherent but also a

Capital "O"

socially appropriate style in their designs. For Alberti, only orators and architects instructed in decorum could generate the effective forms essential to fulfill the social role of their respective arts.

Between Truth and Verisimilitude

Enlightenment theorists retained only the most "modern" aspect of Alberti's consideration of ornament, which they interpreted as a supplement. Eighteenth-century traditionalists such as Jacques-François Blondel even pushed ornament firmly outside the strict disciplinary concerns of architecture. For Blondel, whose monumental *Cours d'Architecture* stands as a veritable summa of the century's doctrine, ornament was the province not of architecture, but of sculpture.[19] Blondel argued that, unlike ornament, the architectural orders and their moldings were never mere enhancements: they functioned as repositories of an architectural beauty rooted in geometry and proportion.[20] He noted that architects could nonetheless rely on *sculpteurs ornementistes*—as he called sculptors who did not specialize in statuary—for figurative or abstract motifs sanctioned by tradition to enrich the orders' profiles.[21] Architects wanting to make those parts of a composition already decorated with orders more resplendent could, he stated, also add subordinate sculptural elements such as urns, vases, statues, and bas-reliefs. Blondel considered ornament to be merely additive, at best an enrichment to the more essential, mathematical beauties of architecture, at worst a brilliant cloak woven to mask an architect's want of taste.[22]

By relegating ornament to a marginal role, Blondel wished to prevent it from disrupting the system of architectural meaning he founded on truth (*vérité*) and verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*), in the tradition of earlier considerations of architectural form inspired by rhetoric inaugurated by Alberti. Decorated buildings were true, Blondel argued, when architects respected the same decorum (*convenance*) in ornamental matters as they sought in other aspects of their designs. Like his Renaissance forerunners, he advocated a precise match between a building's form and its intended purpose, a form that encompassed both its utilitary function and the outward expression of its patrons' social standing. He also made a case for the coherence of a composition's decorative forms. Architects needed first to select the appropriate order for a particular composition, Blondel prescribed; the order would provide the expressive basis that guided all degrees of ornamental embellishments, from simplicity, to moderation, to richness. Paramount for Blondel was the unity of a building's character, implied by a given order, for only a "caractère décidé" (a "precise character") led to truth in building.[23] Charles-Augustin d'Aviler's *Cours* (1691) had upheld much the same ideas. For d'Aviler, the moldings that made up the orders were to architecture what the letters of the alphabet were to writing: from their combination emerged the diversity of the "words" used in buildings.[24] Their precise geometry—moldings being straight, curved, or a

combination of both—demonstrated their "natural" origin in mathematics. Ornament, which d'Aviler defined as the "sculpture that decorates architecture," should never conceal the shape of moldings, he admonished; it also must adhere strictly to the overall character of the orders selected by the architect.[25] Like Blondel, d'Aviler cautioned architects against ornament obscuring the built "utterances" society expected them to produce (Figure 4.2).

However, Blondel admitted that architects could not always achieve truth in their buildings. Considerations of local custom and a patron's whims, the imperative of visual pleasure afforded by variety and contrast, even the contingencies of particular commissions, such as the renovation of existing constructions, often prevented the implementation of the essential components of architectural truth. If unable to attain this goal, architects could nonetheless rely on verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*). Unlike truth, verisimilitude took into account the compromises architects routinely faced in construction. Guided by verisimilitude, they could manipulate an order's proportions through optical corrections, choose simulated materials when genuine ones were not available, or even adapt canonical forms to reflect local customs.[26] If architects could not implement the strict principles of truth, Blondel believed, they must then embrace verisimilitude in order to give a building the *appearance* of truth.

Ornament held a key role in bringing about apparent truth. The intrinsic verity of ornaments had always been questionable, Blondel conceded: unlike the orders and their moldings, sculpted motifs did not originate in a natural order improved by mathematics, and their presence was never essential to architecture. But, with verisimilitude as guide, ornaments—so Blondel believed—conjured a special charm that focused viewers' attention.[27] Alberti had observed a similar spellbinding effect resulting from extravagant form. Describing fanciful capitals, Alberti warned architects against forgetting the requisite *concinnitas* in their assemblies. However, he acknowledged that outlandish forms had the power to "entertain the viewer with a charming trick—or, better still, to please him by the wit of his invention."[28] Similarly, for Blondel, ornaments could forgo the proper rules of architectural beauty to heighten a building's effect on viewers, the more so since ornaments were mere accessories to this more fundamental quality.

Custom and the Interior

With his two-tiered system of architectural value organized on *vérité* and *vraisemblance*, Blondel accommodated custom's appeal to viewers within the seemingly inflexible rules of architecture. Custom affected some domains of architectural practice more than others, he recognized, particularly the ephemeral forms that more closely fitted fluctuating social rituals. Such were interior decoration, garden architecture, and temporary structures for festivals and the theater. But these were subordinate to architecture's public mission, which predicated a dignified

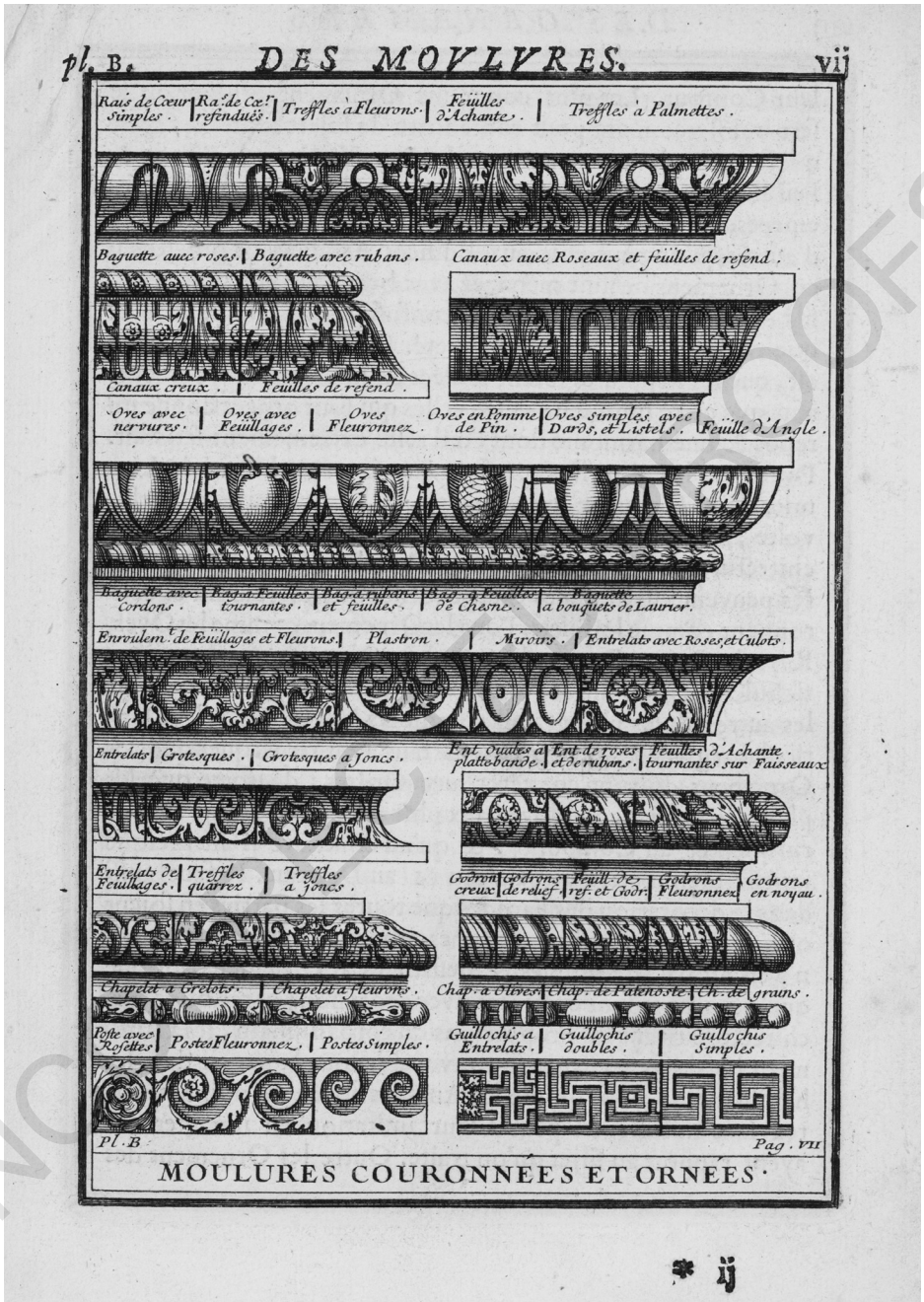

Figure 4.2 Sculpted ornaments for moldings. Plate B, vol. I from Augustin-Charles d'Aviler, Cours d'architecture (Paris, 1691). © Collection Canadian Centre for Architecture/Centre Canadien d'Architecture.

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permanence in the form of a timeless monumentality. Like ornament, these more whimsical practices remained on the periphery of properly architectural concerns. In these areas architects could relax the restrictions that decorum and verisimilitude normally imposed on ornamentation. Blondel nonetheless suggested carrying on to interiors the decorative principles he promoted for exteriors. In both cases he recommended that architects emphasize the geometric regularity of the principal components of a design. Architects could easily fix a building's character by relating its parts to the formal logic of a given architectural order.[29]

Published in his *De La Distribution Des Maisons De Plaisance* of 1737–38,[30] Blondel's earlier pronouncements on interior design had been equally uncompromising. In it, as in the *Cours*, he repeatedly stressed the importance of "male simplicity" in interior decoration and the imperative of a room's overall architectural organization commanding its ornamentation. Yet, Blondel had illustrated *De La Distribution* with fanciful rococo designs that undermined his calls for restraint and regularity (Figure 4.3). This inconsistency revealed the need for even the most traditional of theorists—those most committed to upholding precedent and decorum—to embrace the sway of custom and fashion in architectural matters. Blondel's compromise no doubt reflected the importance of interior decoration and the decorative arts in the Parisian luxury trade. Eighteenth-century Paris set the tone on fashionable elegance in dress, as well as in decor, furniture, and domestic objects for the whole of Europe.[31] The author's concession also revealed the ambiguous role interiors had played in architectural theory since its origins.

Already in the seventh book of *De Architectura* Vitruvius had grown weary of contemporary frescoed decors. He attacked the grotesque decorations that had replaced, in Roman interiors, the simulated depiction of materials, illusionistic landscapes, and mythological scenes. Vitruvius deplored their mixture of plant, animal, and human forms, which resulted in "monstrous" compositions that eluded the laws of gravity. If he decried their makers for not depicting objects found in reality, he also censured their sponsors for applauding these purely imaginary inventions (Vitruvius, *De Arch.*: 7.5.1–4). Unintentionally, Vitruvius' criticism located the most fertile site for formal invention in interior decoration. In interiors, designers could pursue endless variety by freeing ornament from the fetters of verisimilitude and decorum. Vitruvius' tirade succeeded in linking "irrational" decors with visual pleasure.[32]

Variety, Pleasure, and the Grotesque

> [E]ven the grotesk has its beauty, and gives pleasure; and that, tho the Chinese manner be as far distant from the Grecian, and perhaps more so than the Egyptian and Tuscan, we are delighted to have our rooms and appartments fitted up after the Chinese manner. Mankind is too fond of variety to be always pleased with the same

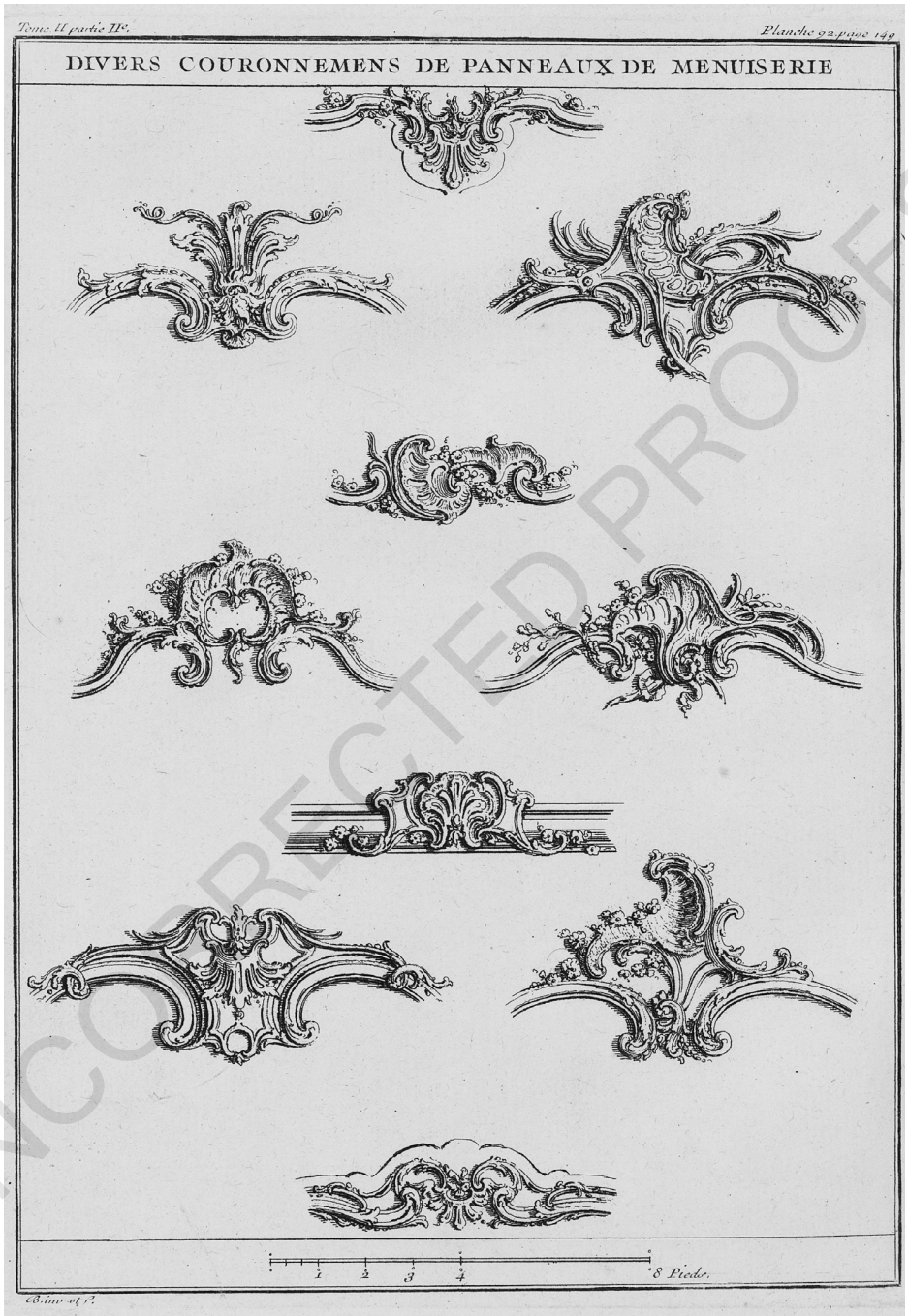

Figure 4.3 Jacques-François Blondel (1705–74), draftsman and printmaker. Models for paneling ornaments. Plate 92, vol. II from Jacques-François Blondel, De la distribution des maisons de plaisance (Paris, 1737–1738). © Collection Canadian Centre for Architecture/Centre Canadien d'Architecture.

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> decorations: we are alternately pleased with the gay and the serious, and even with the pathetic, nay the horror of a battle has its beauty, and *out of fear springs pleasure*.[33]

To assuage human thirst for variety: this was how Piranesi, in this excerpt from *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizij*, explained the singular power of grotesque ornament in pleasing its audience. Unlike inventions that derived from imitation and complied with decorum, grotesque compositions exhibited the extreme formal variety that generated a wide range of responses from their viewers, from festive to horrified. Piranesi suggested that designers of grotesques could even consider exotic forms beyond Greco-Roman antiquity to achieve their effects. Indeed, despite their origins in ancient Rome—such decors were first discovered during the excavation of Nero's Domus Aurea in the 1480s and widely imitated thereafter—grotesques hardly aligned with Greco-Roman formulations of beauty. Unlike the orders, grotesque forms displayed no geometrical regularity, nor were their parts related by fixed proportions. They did not exhibit canonical motifs sanctioned by imitation, nor did verisimilitude guide their assembly. Without concern for appropriateness, painters of grotesques freely combined elements copied from art and nature with those from pure imagination. *Varietas* (variety) and *inventio* (invention) guided their art as it did the orators' and the poets'.

A creative strategy that transcended specific media, the grotesque was not limited to the painted walls of rooms or the inlaid surfaces of furniture and objects. Renaissance designers had in fact used "grotesque" ornamental *mélanges* frequently in the design of the orders themselves. Even after Vignola's codification, they emulated the antique columns and entablatures whose mixed forms did not fit the canon. These they defined generically as "composite."[34] Composite capitals and entablatures were particularly prevalent on triumphal arches, a building type Vitruvius failed to discuss. However, as Alina Payne has remarked, triumphal arches provided the most elaborate examples of ornamental treatment to be found among Roman antiquities.[35] The composite "order" secured its prestige as a model through the association with the political power expressed in triumphal arches. It sanctioned amalgams of forms despite the Vitruvian imperative of *consuetudo*.[36]

Designers reveled in the variety afforded by grotesques. Their popularity with patrons was secured by a concern for the viewer's pleasure—the second component of their effectiveness identified by Piranesi. Grotesques and their eighteenth-century derivations—arabesques, *chinoiserie*, *turquerie*, the Rococo—appealed particularly to aristocratic sponsors and their imitators. As ornamental surfaces that provided a setting for domestic rituals, grotesque forms mirrored noble deportment, displaying the elegance, lightness, and playfulness essential to noble self-perception and self-fashioning.[37] An album by Gilles-Marie Oppenord, first architect of the Philippe II d'Orléans, regent of France during Louis XV's minority, strikingly illustrates the close relationships between the invention of ornament and the social behavior of the consumers of these forms. Engaging in

a graphic dialogue with the printed illustrations of an emblem book, Oppenord emulated, in the creation of decorative motifs, the conversational mode privileged in noble exchanges. Carved in paneling that lined the rooms of *hôtels*—the primary urban sites of noble performance in France—Oppenord's ornamental inventions in turn activated the very verbal games and conversations that sparked their creation.[38]

Custom and the Exotic

Blondel's reluctant acceptance of custom in architecture paralleled the progressive expansion, in the course of the eighteenth century, of the range of accepted ornamental forms available to European architects. Ever since Claude Perrault had brought to architectural theory the notion that beauty might partially rely on associations made in the viewer's minds, custom had lodged itself in the closed aesthetic system founded on imitation. In the notes to his translation of Vitruvius and in his subsequent treatise on the architectural orders, the *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes selon la méthode des Anciens* (1683), Perrault had divided a building's beauty into two distinct components.[39] The first, "positive" aspect of beauty encompassed for Perrault self-evident characteristics that could be appreciated without any exercise of judgment: the quality of the materials, the size and magnificence of the building, the care taken in its construction, and bilaterial symmetry. The second component of beauty Perrault called "arbitrary." He applied this term to all other features of architectural form that rested, in his view, solely on custom (*accoutumance*). Thus, Perrault boldly asserted that contemporaries appreciated the classical orders not because of their presumed origin in nature but because of the association established over the years between these Greco-Roman forms and other "positive" beauties invariably present in ancient monuments.[40]

Perrault was far from advocating the rejection of antique forms on the grounds that they originated solely from custom—his *Ordonnance* proposed instead to "regulate" the arbitrary rules of the orders so as to transform them into immutable "positive" laws. But others drew the logical conclusion from his system. Johann Fischer von Erlach, in his *Entwurff einer historischen Architectur* (1721; first English edition 1730), embraced the complete relativity of national tastes. Closely paraphrasing Perrault, he asserted that "custom may indeed authorize certain whims in the art of building; such as the trivial & superfluous ornaments of carving in the gothick buildings, on steeples, indian roofs, and the like" since "nations dissent no less in their taste for architecture, than in food and raiment."[41] However, like Perrault, Fischer stressed that buildings from all cultures derived their worth from "general principles": in emulation of Perrault's positive beauties, Fischer mentioned symmetry and "apparent" stability as universal qualities in good architecture. To his brief introduction, Fischer appended 86 plates that brought the Seven Wonders of the ancient world and non-European buildings like the Blue

Mosque in Istanbul and the Porcelain Pagoda in Nanjing together with building designs of his own creation. Thus furnished with a visual encyclopedia, artists could, "by comparing one [nation's taste] with the other, themselves make a judicious choice."[42] For the first time in architectural theory, an author submitted the diversity of world architecture—until then only an object of curiosity for lovers of travel literature—to the scrutiny of designers. Fischer vividly illustrated the combinatory—indeed, "grotesque"—process his compendium enabled. After documenting ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Greek vases from various collections, he generated his own fantastic compositions inspired by these antique originals (Figure 4.4).

Blondel's contemporary, Pierre Vigné, known as Pierre de Vigny, pushed Fischer von Erlach's cultural relativism even further. In his "Dissertation sur l'architecture" printed in 1752 in the *Journal Œconomique*, De Vigny asserted that classical architecture itself was nothing more than a contingent sort of fashion (*mode*). Unlike painting and sculpture, De Vigny argued, architectural principles were not bound by the imitation of nature.[43] For De Vigny, as for Perrault, the persistence of classical forms since their revival during the Renaissance did not reflect any

Figure 4.4 Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656–1723), draftsman. Projects for vases on the theme of Galathea and the Tritons. Plate 11, Book I, from Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, Entwurff einer historischen Architectur (Vienna, 1721). © Collection Canadian Centre for Architecture/Centre Canadien d'Architecture.

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natural "truth" they might possess. Rather, for de Vigny, it only demonstrated his contemporaries' unimaginativeness and prejudice (*prévention*) against alternate formal traditions such as the gothic. De Vigny argued that, since the ornamentation of interiors changed radically within a man's life, couldn't that of exteriors vary as well? Why, he wondered, couldn't architects emulate Borromini and, like him, follow their own genius instead of slavishly copying antiquity? Why couldn't they borrow freely from what was beautiful in Ottoman and Gothic architecture, to generate new forms from this mixture?[44]

With his *Diverse maniere*, Piranesi answered De Vigny's call for unbridled invention. Like his French counterpart, Piranesi believed that the endless repetition of Greek models had transformed architecture from a noble art into a debased, "mechanical" pursuit. He suspected that, in ancient Rome, Greek forms had replaced older Etruscan ones only because of the human thirst for novelty and the ancient Romans' misguided awe for Greek culture. To reenergize ornamental design, Piranesi urged his contemporaries to consider anew the formal heritage of the Egyptians and the Etruscans. From a well thought-out combination of these two traditions with that of Greece, he believed architecture could generate new ornaments and thereby launch altogether new forms.[45] Significantly Piranesi chose interior decoration, a minor genre akin to Fischer von Erlach's vase designs, to test novel compositions. His *Diverse maniere* focused on mantels (Figure 4.5).

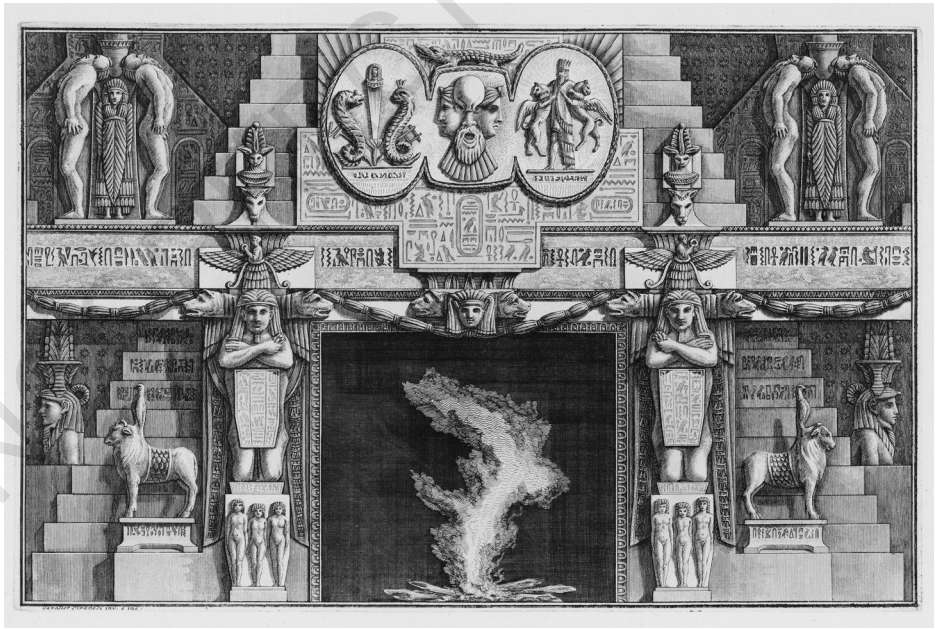

Figure 4.5 Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78), draftsman and printmaker. *Elevation for a mantel in the Egyptian style*. Plate 36 from *Diverse maniere di adornare i cammini* (Rome, 1769). © Collection Canadian Centre for Architecture/Centre Canadien d'Architecture.

The ancients had not left any examples of these important elements in contemporary interiors, Piranesi explained, nor had the moderns provided convincing models. Piranesi criticized Palladio, the most respected of the moderns, for his repetitious treatment of interiors; others he condemned for decorating mantels as if they were doors or porticoes, building features that he felt had little affinity with fireplaces. Piranesi predicted that critics might object that his Egyptian and Etruscan forms were too bold for interiors. Yet because they derived from nature—Piranesi insisted that Etruscan potters' vase shapes imitated shells—they displayed a variety and beauty that he believed guaranteed their success in contemporary decors.

Blondel would undoubtedly have tempered Piranesi's optimism. The French author had condemned the fashionable *goût à la grecque* that, like Piranesi's proposals for mantels, had made the stark, geometric architectural forms usually deployed on exteriors desirable in interiors. This blamable breach of decorum pushed Blondel to long for the Rococo and Chinese ornament of earlier decors.[46] British experiments in "Gothick" architecture would surely have alarmed Blondel even more. Pioneered in the 1740s by the amateur architects Sanderson Miller and Horace Walpole, these essays in medieval design obscured the boundaries of appropriateness even more as they brought to residential architecture "picturesque" forms hitherto reserved for painting, the stage, and gardens. Later promoters of the gothic orchestrated the complete collapse of the decorous classical ornament upheld by conservative authors such as Blondel as an ideal in architecture (Figure 4.6).

The Ends of Ornament

In the *Critique of ~~Judgment~~*, Kant asserted that it was unnecessary for humans to know the purpose of flowers, birds, and shells to appreciate their beauty. It is ironic that for manmade examples of "free beauty" he chose the least *meaningless* forms of ornament.[47] His first example, designs *à la grecque* (*Zeichnungen à la grecque*), had played a key role in the mid eighteenth-century debate over the reform of the decorative arts. Kant was referring to frets, a band pattern formed by intersecting straight lines, which architectural theorists had traditionally recommended for the enhancement of the flat surfaces of building profiles. Because of their rigid geometry and associations with antiquity, anti-Rococo reformists had advocated regular architectural motifs like frets to order the unruly, curvilinear, "chimerical" interiors born out of the grotesque imagination. Kant's second example of free beauty, foliage for borders (*Laubwerk zu Einfassungen*), possessed an equally distinguished pedigree. In monuments like the Ara Pacis, Augustan propagandists had used scrolls of acanthus leaves (a plant associated in antiquity with funerary rituals) to proclaim the "rebirth" of Rome after the troubled times of the Republic.[48]

Judgement

To become examples of Kantian disinterestedness, frets and foliage scrolls needed to shed these earlier symbolic associations. As we have traced it, the history

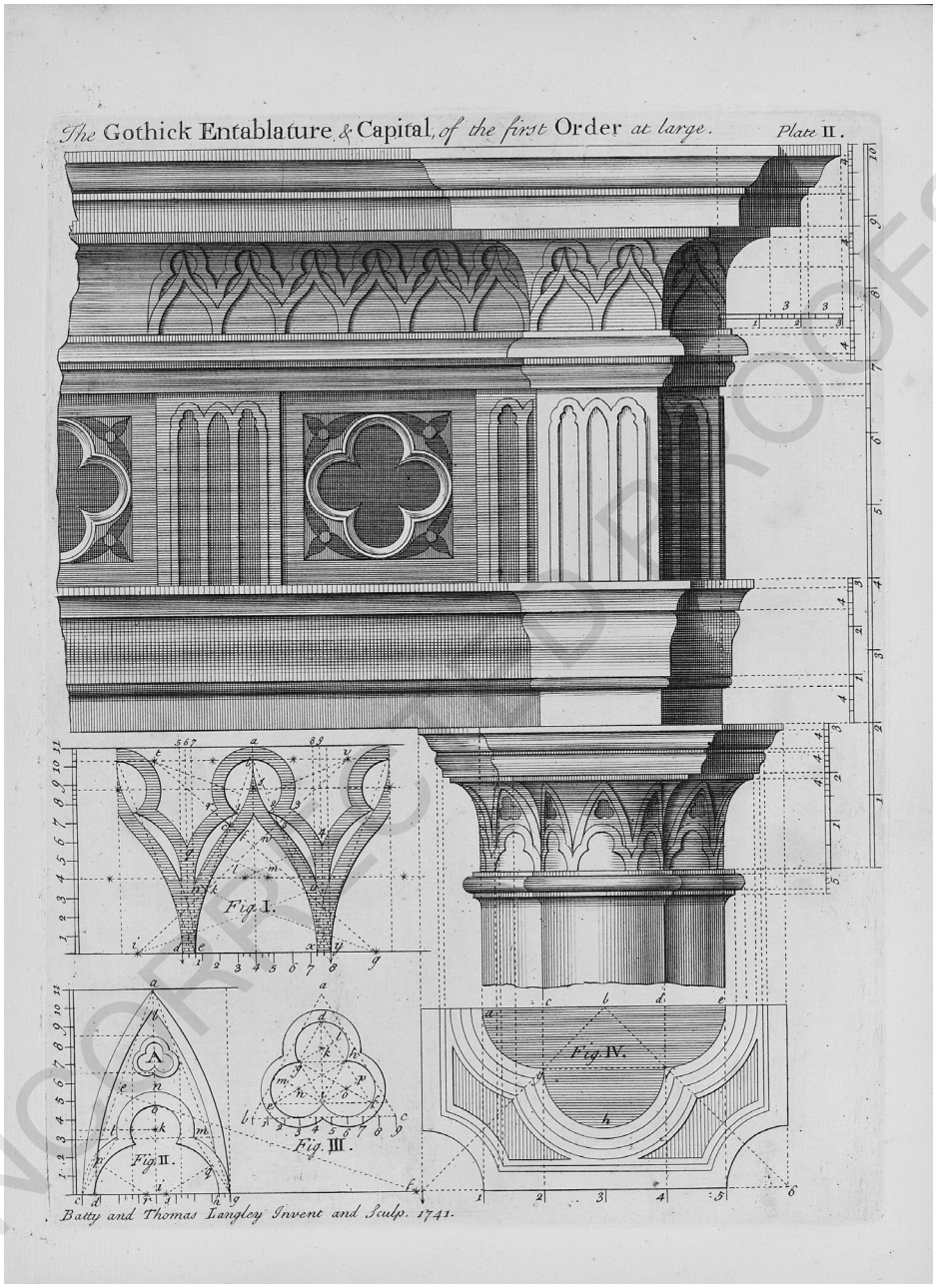

Figure 4.6 Batty Langley (1696–1751) and Thomas Langley, draftsmen and printmakers. *Elevation of the entablature and capital of the first Gothic order of architecture*. Plate II from Batty Langley and Thomas Langley, *Ancient architecture, restored, and improved* ([London], 1741–42). © Collection Canadian Centre for Architecture / Centre Canadien d'Architecture.

of ornament in architecture charted this process. Vitruvian *ornamenta* had been indissociable from the physical and symbolic role of religious structures since it designated the entablature, an essential component in the construction of temples. Rejecting its Vitruvian associations, modern interpreters of Alberti's *ornamentum* posited a complete separation between the appearance of a building and some more "authentic" beauty. They detached the latter, founded on proportional and geometrical operations, from a building's materiality, its *ornamental* manifestation. To secure disciplinary autonomy, eighteenth-century theorists ceased altogether to consider the orders and their moldings as ornamental. Academic authors such as Jacques-François Blondel relegated ornament to sculptural enhancements that needed to be managed by decorum and verisimilitude. Other eighteenth-century voices, however, from peripheral domains that embraced grotesque compositional strategies—interiors, the decorative arts, theater, painting, or garden design—promoted a free ornamental practice. Embracing non-Greco-Roman styles such as the gothic, they advocated an expanded range of forms that soon claimed a stake in "legitimate" architecture. As Greek frets mingled with Chinese fretwork and acanthus scrolls combined with *chicorée*—the pejorative term used to describe Rococo foliage—ornament, stripped of the social relevance it possessed in an architecture inspired by rhetoric, excited instead the privatized aesthetic delight of the modern beholder.

Insert space

I wish to thank Caroline van Eck and Sigrid de Jong for their suggestions in improving this chapter.

Notes

1. Giambattista Piranesi, *Parere su l'architettura. Dialogo* (Rome, 1765), 10. Reprinted in Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Polemical Works, Rome 1757, 1761, 1765, 1769*, ed. John Wilton-Ely (Farnborough, 1972).
2. "Il sofistico siete voi, che dettate all'Architettura delle regole, ch'ella non ha mai avuto. Che direte, se vi provo, che la severità, la ragione, e l'imitazione delle capanne, son incompatibili con l'Architettura? Che l'Architettura, lungi dal volere ornamenti desunti dalle parti necessarie a costruire, e tenere in piedi un edifizio, consiste in ornamenti tutti stranieri?" ("The sophisticate, it is you, who dictates for architecture rules that it never had. What would you say if I proved that severity, reason, and the imitation of huts are incompatible with architecture? That architecture, far from desiring ornaments that come from those parts of a building that hold it up, consists in ornaments all strange?"), Piranesi, *Parere*, 10. The translation is mine.
3. Pierre Gros, "*Ornamentum* chez Vitruve: le débat sur le décor architectural à la fin de l'époque hellénistique," in *Vitruve et la tradition des traités d'architecture: fabrica et ratiocinatio: recueil d'~~etudes~~* (Rome, 2006), 392–93.
4. Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT, 1995).

"études"

Roman type (i.e. "reverse italics")

5. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990).
6. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford, 1980).
7. Karsten Harries, *The Broken Frame: Three Lectures* (Washington, D.C., 1989).
8. "Le mot *d'ornementa* dans Vitruve signifie particulierement les trois parties qui sont posées sur la Colon[n]e, sçavoir l'Architrave, la Frise & la Corniche, qui est une signification bien differente de la signification ordinaire, qui comprend toutes les choses qui ne sont point des parties essentielles, mais qui sont adjoutées seulement pour rendre l'ouvrage plus riche & plus beau, telles que sont les sculptures de feüillages de fleurs & de compartimens que l'on taille dans les moulures, dans les frises, dans les platfonds, & dans les autres endroits qu'on veut orner." Vitruvius, *Les Dix Livres D'Architecture De Vitruve,* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1684), 6, note 14; cited in Gros, "*Ornamentum* chez Vitruve," 389. The translation is mine.
9. Gros, "*Ornamentum* chez Vitruve" and Pierre Gros, "La notion d'*ornementum* de Vitruve à Alberti," *Perspective* (2010–11): 130–36.
10. Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, "Regola Delli Cinque Ordini D'Architettura" [1562], in *Trattati. Con l'aggiunta degli scritti di architettura di Alvise Cornaro, Francesco Giorgi, Claudio Tolomei, Giangiorgio Trissino, Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Elena Bassi et al. (Milan, 1985), plate III.
11. John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 152.
12. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 156.
13. See for instance Caroline van Eck, "Architecture, language, and rhetoric in Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria*," in *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c.1000–c.1650*, ed. Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley (Cambridge, 2000), 72–81; and Alina Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture* (Cambridge, 1999), 70–88.
14. On Vitruvian *decor*, see also Payne, *The Architectural Treatise,* 36–41.
15. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 37 and 94.
16. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, 151–53.
17. Alberti, *On the Art of Building,* 8.
18. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 23–24.
19. Jacques-François Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture, Ou Traité De la Décoration, Distribution & Construction Des Bâtiments* (Paris, 1771–77), vol. 1, 336.
20. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 337.
21. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 337.
22. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 135.
23. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 391.
24. Augustin-Charles D'Aviler, *Cours D'Architecture qui comprend Les Ordres De Vignole* (Paris, 1691), i.
25. D'Aviler, *Cours D'Architecture*, respectively 715 and vi–viii.
26. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 392–93.
27. "Il est vrai qu'il n'est pas toujours possible à l'Architecte de rendre raison de tous les ornements qu'il emploie; il suffit communément de les rendre vraisemblables, & de

faire en sorte qu'ils puissent fixer agréablement les regards" ("It is true that it is not always possible for the Architect to explain the reason behind every ornament he employs; it is sufficient to make them believable, & to ensure that they focus pleasurably the [viewer's] gaze"). Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture*, vol. 1, 133.

Insert: "The translation is mine."

28. Alberti, *On the Art of Building,* 294.
29. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture,* vol. 5, 4–5.
30. Jacques-François Blondel, *De La Distribution Des Maisons De Plaisance, Et De La Decoration Des Edifices En General. Par Jacques-François Blondel. Ouvrage enrichi de cent soixante Planches en taille-douce, gravées par l'Auteur*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1737–38).
31. See notably Daniel Roche, *La culture des apparences: Une histoire du vêtement (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle)* (Paris, 1989); and Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets. The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London, 1996).
32. Perrault, in his notes to Vitruvius, remarked sarcastically that the Roman author would have been better advised not to discuss grotesque paintings at all, had he wanted to prevent future painters from imitating his licentious contemporaries. Perrault found in any event Vitruvius' complaint about the lack of rationality in grotesques futile, since no one expected fanciful decors to be rational, any more than spectators of Italian comedies believed that Harlequin was credible, with his costume and black mask, when he impersonated the goddess Diana or pretended to be a bunch of grapes. "Et cét Autheur [Vitruvius] a bien mieux reüssy à instruire nos peintres de l'estat de ces sortes d'ouvrages, qu'il n'a fait à les détourner de les imiter, avec le beau raisonnement par lequel il prouve qu'il est impossible que des Chasteaux soient fondez sur des roseaux, & que des moitiez d'animaux sortent du milieu des fleurs. Car c'est la mesme chose que si quelqu'un vouloit décrier la comedie Italienne, en disant qu'on n'y represente rien de vraisemblable, & en prouvant par de bonnes raisons qu'il est impossible que Harlequin avec son masque noir soit pris pour la Deesse Diane ou pour une grappe de raisin." Vitruvius, *Les Dix Livres D'Architecture*, 242, note 8.
33. Giambattista Piranesi, *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizij* (Rome, 1769), 10. Reprinted in Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Polemical Works, Rome 1757, 1761, 1765, 1769*, ed. John Wilton-Ely (Farnborough, Hants, 1972).
34. Yves Pauwels, "*Varietas* et *ordo* en architecture: perception de l'antique et rhétorique de la creation," in *La* Varietas *à la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique de Courcelles (Paris, 2001), 70–71.
35. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise*, 119–20.
36. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, 150.
37. Alain Génétiot, *Les genres lyriques mondains (1630–1660). Étude des poésies de Voiture, Vion d'Alibray, Sarasin et Scarron* (Geneva 1990), 183.
38. Jean-François Bédard, *Decorative Games: Ornament, Rhetoric, and Noble Culture in the Work of Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1672–1742)* (Newark, DE, 2011).
39. Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance Des Cinq Especes De Colonnes Selon La Methode Des Anciens* (Paris, 1683).
40. Perrault, *Ordonnance*, vii–xi.
41. Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *A Plan of Civil and Historical Architecture in the Representation of the Most noted Buildings of Foreign Nations*, S.l., 1730, f. A2*v*.

42. Fischer von Erlach, *A Plan*, S.l., 1730, f. A2*v*.
43. Pierre de Vigny, "Dissertation sur l'architecture," *Journal Œconomique* (March 1752): 70–71.
44. Vigny, "Dissertation," 100–1.
45. Piranesi, *Diverse maniere*, 33.
46. Blondel, *Cours d'architecture*, vol. 1, 136–37.
47. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §16.
48. Gros, "*Ornamentum* chez Vitruve," 396; and Gros, "La notion d'*ornementum*," 133.

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Abstract

Academic authors such as Jacques-François Blondel saw a clear division between ornament and architecture. Blondel understood ornament as sculptural decoration distinct from a building's essential forms that included the orders and their mouldings. Previous writers had a different point of view, one in which ornament played a vital role in buildings. Vitruvius designated as *ornamentum* the three parts of the entablature, an essential component of trabeated buildings. Alberti understood ornament as the phenomenal manifestation of a building's geometric design. For eighteenth-century rationalists, however, ornament was by nature excessive and needed to be regulated. They believed that ornaments should stem from *imitation*, the doctrine according to which architectural forms originated in wooden construction. For these, they maintained, the architects of antiquity provided the best models. They also advocated that *decorum* should guide architects in the handling of ornament, much as orators calibrated their vocabulary according to the purpose and audience of their speeches. Other authors, on the contrary, celebrated the auxiliary nature of ornament as a platform for unconstrained invention. Piranesi for instance claimed that designers should eschew the rationality of imitation and the strictures of decorum: like the designers of grotesques, he believed architects should forgo tectonic considerations and incorporate to their creations forms unknown to the Greco-Roman tradition. Liberated from their historical underpinnings and their social purpose, ornaments became at the end of the century the exemplars of free beauty on which Kant grounded his aesthetic theory.

Key Words

Ornamentum; decorum; imitation; invention; rationalism; free beauty; grotesques; custom; variety; verisimilitude; Vitruvius; Leon Battista Alberti; Giovanni Battista Piranesi; Jacques-François Blondel.