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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

Neoclassicism and the ideological appropriation of Culture

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Submitted to the Faculty of Art and Design and Complementary Studies

in

Candidacy for the Joint Honours Degree in Fine Art and History of Art

March 1992

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Niamh O'Sullivan for her advise on the complilation of material for this dissertation, and for her insight and guidance throughout.

I am also grateful to Christine Casey for helping me to focus my research and to Dr. Paul O'Brien and Dr. Sue McNab for their advice and encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION

"Nous pardonnons beaucoup de choses aux Anciens; nous faisons des mystères de leurs imperfections". -

Corneille

Late seventeenth-century thought was defined in terms of a dichotomy which opposed knowledge based on rational intuition, faith or 'logical' deduction, to that based on empirical observation and extended by hypothesis, experiment and induction. This differential logic was undermined by Gianbattista Vico (1666-1744) who postulated the existence of an additional category of knowledge - 'manufactured' knowledge, of which the self-conscious subject is the author (1). Vico's premise was revolutionary, not only in its attempt to question the validity of the rationalist/empiricist dichotomy which dominated the epistemological debates of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but primarily because it in effect, presented knowledge as a socially determined construct. Distinguishing bewteen 'reality' and 'logically demonstrated truths', Vico argued that absolute truth or certainty resided not in Nature or in what can be perceived but in what is created or 'constructed'; in the field of human relationships, in history, culture, language. He maintained that all theories of knowledge were historically determined, perceiving history as a process rather than an accumulation of facts. His understanding of history as malleable and interpretative seems to foreshadow Gadamer and his perception of culture as an institution anticipates the Althusserian concept of the 'ideological state apparatus'. According to Althusser, history, culture, law, education ... function as 'ideological state apparatuses' or vehicles for the dissemination of ideology, through which particular social fictions are sustained and capitalist relations of exploitation reproduced (2). The term 'ideology' itself denotes a mediation of lived experience, a representational mechanism which entails a degree of mystification, since its

effectivity necessarily depends on the effacement of all traces of the process of its articulation. Through the moulding of the public mind, the dissemination of ideology serves as a form of social control. Within any social context, a single ideology renders all others subordinate to itself; this is known as the 'dominant ideology' and is generally complicit with the interests and values of the privileged classes, and committed to the preservation of the status quo.

The concept of ideology may, with equal validity, be applied to the context of eighteenth-century political and social life, when the first rumblings of what became class-consciousness apparently inaugurated the aristocratic impulse to self-definition, and the need for legitimation which was to dominate the pre-Revolutionary era. The broader implications of the 'dominant ideology' thesis, however, extend far beyond the primal scream of bourgeois dissent and aristocratic accountability. The need for ideology attests to a need for legitimation, and entails a fundamental uncertainty, a property which was in no short supply in seventeenth-century Western Europe. A profound uncertainty inspired by imminent social, political and economic upheaval was augmented by the so-called epistemological crisis of the seventeenth century; inaugurated by a triumvirate of thinkers whose 'discoveries' shattered the cosmological assumptions of Western metaphysics and effected a radical subversion of traditional values. This 'crisis' is fundamental to an understanding of the seventeenth century and may ultimately be reduced to the antithesis between conflicting conceptions of knowledge. Its initial importance, however, resides in the fact that behind contingencies such as the methodology or

application of 'knowledge, lay values that were either inimical to or enshrined within the canon of classical Western thought. The seventeenth century was committed to the Ideal of 'progress'; it emphasized the merits of scientific objectivity and instrumental rationality and openly repudiated the superstitious excess of the medieval and post-medieval worlds. 'Progress' itself, however, and later 'enlightenment', came inevitably to represent specific national or class interests. In France, for example, state intervention, through the various Académies, determined all aspects of cultural production between the 1660's and the advent of the Revolution, its ultimate objective being the personal aggrandizement of the monarch and the advancement of the national 'gloire'. The selection of certain models of knowledge over others depended, at least to some extent, on their ideological applicability, their ability to emblematize particular aspects of the culture which produced them.

Any cultural phenomenon is conceived within a particular socio-political context, and cannot be examined independently of that context. Similarly, cultural analysis demands recognition of the fact that any culture contains within itself its own historical memory. Art and architecture, then, are disciplines which incorporate, each into itself, a set of aesthetic 'norms' - the result of historical and cultural accumulation - and ultimately derive their meaning from this (3). 'Neoclassicism', for example, was not merely an eighteenth-century phenomenon; it was authorised and informed by the pioneering classicism of the Renaissance and the Seicento and borne along by the entire weight of the classical tradition. Furthermore, its self-conscious appropriation of the

language of classical antiquity attests to a fundamental understanding of tradition and of the past as a legitimating force - an understanding rooted in the epistemological context of the seventeenth century when the ideological implications of the concept 'history' were first examined. The hegemony of the classical tradition in western Europe depended upon, and was guaranteed by, its ontological status. Classicism itself constituted a model of knowledge and was associated with a particular system of values. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the classical tradition was regarded as normative: it was the yardstick against which all other idioms or modes of representation were measured.

The implications of the epistemological crisis for classicism were twofold. In the first place, it questioned the validity of any theoretical or theological premise dependent upon received authority and demanded that all theories be tested or 'logically' proven. In the second, as the category of 'knowledge' broadened, the 'authority' of the classical tradition was itself subject to scrutiny, its ascendancy threatened by the possibility of other potential models of knowledge and modes of representation. To the pioneers of modern science and philosophy - Galileo, Bacon, Descartes - their enquiries represented not a reaction against the entire classical legacy, but rather, a re-evaluation of certain aspects of an administered tradition. Retrospectively, the epistemological disputes of the seventeenth-century may be viewed in terms of their critique of classical thought, yet it must be remembered that this 'critique' still operated entirely within the conventions of the classical tradition itself. Rationalism still

adhered to the classical belief in 'innate ideas', while Newtonian natural philosophy ultimately endorsed the idea that Nature was ordered mathematically in accordance with divine, universal 'laws'. The classical tradition represented established authority and excellence, and was ratified by its longevity; as such, its capacity to legitimate was enormous. The trajectory of classicism, from the Renaissance and post-Renaissance interpretations of the antique prototype to its co-option by the autocratic Ancien Régime and its subsequent romanticization in neoclassicism, is of fundamental significance to the argument that classicism itself was an ideological tool. Its specific political implications preclude any possible interpretation of classicism as ideologically innocent. Imperial Rome became the vehicle of monarchist and revivalist ideology in both England and France and was subsequently evoked to represent Bonapartism, while Republican Rome and Greece were seen to embody the objectives of nationalist and bourgeois self-assertion in the newly formed U.S. and in pre-Revolutionary France, respectively. The power of historical specificity, articulated within a tradition defined in terms of its atemporality and universality, was fully understood by those whose interests it served. Antiquity was a means, rather than an end (4).

The achievements of antiquity, for the artists and scientists of the Quattrocento, became emblems of a programmatic attempt to order and control the universe; Renaissance theory was seen as the logical extension of this enterprise. The Renaissance was characterized by a strong faith in its contemporary world; it required no legitimation. Art and science were integrated within a larger cosmological scheme to synthesize the human and the divine

and thus achieve a perfection not unrelated to that envisaged by Plato. Its recourse to antiquity was motivated by the search for a formal paradigm which would best articulate contemporary issues. Conversely, the eighteenth-century return to classicism was essentially revivalist, accompanied by elements of poetic reverie, nostalgia and a sense of irretrievable loss (5). The contemporary world was deemed thoroughly unsatisfactory and the forms of antiquity became monuments to a lost arcadian 'purity', symbols of the proto-Romantic yearnings of a newly affluent eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. Seventeenth-century academic classicism fused the cosmological assumptions of Renaissance theory with the heightened self-consciousness characteristic of Neoclassicism, and witnessed the inauguration of an epistemological uncertainty which would have been inconceivable during the Renaissance but was taken for granted during the eighteenth century. It is this uncertainty, coupled with an increasingly deliberate manipulation of what was to become the 'ideology' of classicism, which primarily distinguishes the classicism of the ages of reason and enlightenment from that of their renaissance predecessor. It would be erroneous, however, to regard the period hallmarked 'Neoclassical' and that dominated by the academic tradition as intimately related in terms of stylistic or formal concerns. Neoclassicism did not merely pick up the academic threat where it had been broken by the extravagance of the Baroque and Rococo - it was an almost entirely discrete entity, characterized by its own formal idiosyncracies and determined by a particular historical situation. It did, however, in its attempt to reconcile taste and reason by synchronizing ideology and sensibility, absorb and internalise the contradictions first articulated within the context of the epistemological revolution of

the seventeenth century. The famous 'Querelle entre les Anciens et les Modèrnes lent to this dispute a specifically aesthetic dimension, forcing onto the agenda the issues of taste, and of the nature of the appeal to the Antique, and anticipating an interrogation of the meaning of 'history' itself; issues which would become pivotal to the aesthetic disputes of the eighteenth century.

The Perrault-Blondel dispute effected a complete disruption of seventeenth-century architectural theory, within which it inscribed the terms of the opposition between "tradition" and "progress". It also illustrated the dependence upon a particular perception of history definitive of classical thought. Essentially, seventeenth-century classicism was more closely related to the Renaissance than to Antiquity, just as Neoclassicism owed a greater debt to its immediate predecessors than to the classical past. The former authorised its obsessive drive to order and systematization by referring to the Albertian premise that art is a science and has as its ultimate objective representational correctness - the imitation of nature; - the latter was validated by its dependence upon the classical notion of art as moral instructor, the "exemplum virtutis". Neither had much to do with the revival of Antiquity, yet both were valorised by the classical tradition. The issue is a complex one, far more complex than can be admitted by stylistic or chronological analysis. The epistemological crisis of the seventeenth century and its application to architectural theory extended well into the aesthetic debates of the eighteenth century. It heralded the advent of historicism and romanticism and anticipated the association between eighteenth-century imperialism

and that of ancient Rome. More than this, however, its significance for the eighteenth-century resided in its understanding of history, its ideological implications, and its own relationship to the past. The nature of the appeal to the past and to the authority of tradition which was first examined in the late seventeenth century, was of fundamental importance to Neoclassicism, and to the relationship between the neoclassical idiom itself and the various ideologies it came to represent. Unless Neoclassicism is viewed in terms of its stimulation by various political and economic contingencies, and its determination by the changing requirements of 'history', it appears incoherent and contradictory, in contrast to the more 'uniform' classicism of the Grand Siècle. Certainly, antiquity still provided the canon for the eighteenth century, but it was no longer unquestionable. It was no longer seen as the Ideal wholly out of reach (6).

The epistemological revolution had initiated the impetus to demystify classicism, to expose as deliberately constructed myths the established 'truths' of the classical tradition. As a consequence, the aesthetic debates of the eighteenth century were defined in terms of adherence or opposition to the classical canon and the type of knowledge it represented. Deference to the opinions of the classical authors was regarded as inimical to the seventeenth-century concept of progress; the misconception prevailed that the concept of 'progress' could be applied with equal validity to both scientific and artistic spheres. Modern scientific methods and the writings of Descartes, Gassendi, Malebranche and others had undermined the authority of the classical tradition by questioning its basic premises. Yet, the persistence into the eighteenth century of several of the

transcendental values associated with classicism - its universality, for example, and the endorsement by Newtonian natural philosophy of the 'natural law' hypothesis - ultimately attests to the power and continuity of the classical tradition, and its ability to repeatedly legitimate itself.

The embodiment of the epistemological complications of the seventeenth century in the architectural theory of Claude Perrault is the point of departure for this attempt to 'demystify' certain aspects of Neoclassicism. For reasons of convenience I intend to refer only to what I perceive as the two salient dimensions of Neoclassicism, the 'political' and the 'semantic'. The former refers both to the genesis of the Neoclassical style; the covert ideological manipulation of the idiom to legitimate aristocratic mercantilism, and to its apotheosis as the language of bourgeois self-assertion prior to the Revolution. The latter refers to the aforementioned self-consciousness characteristic of the 'movement', its understanding of itself in relation to the meaning of history and the associative power of the historical past. Both are ultimately dependent upon a particular perception of history; both are reliant upon the legacy of the classical past and indebted to Seicento idealism and the Albertian notion of art as 'exemplum virtutis'. This dissertation is an examination of Neoclassicism as an ideological tool in relation to the process of historical construction and reconstruction, defined in terms of the history of the classical tradition itself.

"Delicate spirits are highly susceptible to curiosity and prejudice, the result of which is that regard is no longer paid the the true savour of the thing; but the soul, having fallen in love with it on trust, as it were, goes out to meet it, and before its individual savour, in its natural essence, can be detected, the soul besprinkles it from afar with the imaginary sweetness to which it is itself disposed, and then, with a closer approach, perceives it as it has itself made it, not as it truly was, and, taking pleasure in itself under the other's image, imagines that it is taking pleasure in the other". -

Lorenzo Magalotti

CHAPTER ONE

Perrault and the case against order

The Significance of seventeenth-century architectural theory for the development of Neoclassicism

The crisis of seventeenth century epistemology centred on the notion of the 'nature' of knowledge - not merely what can be known, but how it can be known. Renaissance thought had implied a synthesis of all branches of knowledge, a closed process leading by necessity to universal truths prescribed by divine revelation (7). Francis Bacon reacted against this tradition by proposing a new type of knowledge which was based on the observation of natural phenomena and was independent of transcendental issues. The 'new science' of Galileo substituted for the diversity of the 'real' world a perfectly intellibible world, determined exclusively by its geometrical and quantitative properties; for visable reality, a world of abstractions, relations and equations. 'Scientific' reality came to be regarded as not merely what can be perceived, but as what can be conceived with mathematical clarity. Cartesian dualism and the New Science of Galileo inaugurated the initial split between the perceptual and conceptual spheres of knowledge -- and the consequent fissuring of every branch of human knowledge along dichotomous lines became the sine qua non of western European thought. Philosophy and science finally toppled the assumption, inherited from Renaissance and medieval cosmology, that number and geometry were a 'scientia universalis'; the link between the human and the divine.

The fundamental conflict of the late seventeenth century is one between two diametrically opposed concepts of knowledge, defined as either a priori or a posteriori - corresponding respectively to the dichotomy between rationalism and empiricism. Insofar as knowledge is held to be a priori, empirical knowledge appears to be random, unfounded, and subject to contingency, and to the extent that

knowledge is held to be a posteriori, then it is a priori knowledge that is subject to uncertainty and dependant upon authority, received ideas and habit. The rationalist philosophy represented by Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz - absorbed within its system the traditional view that 'innate ideas' exist and that science is fundamentally an a priori enterprise based on these ideas. The assumption that within Nature are inscribed divine and immutable 'natural laws' according to which the universe is harmoniously ordered, epistomizes the concept of the 'innate idea' and constituted one of the fundamental tenets of the classical doctrine, and one of the criteria upon which its appeal to the past was based. Knowledge gained by experience and induction had, ultimately, to be measured against this authority. Cartesian rationalism, although it did not abandon this tradition, inaugurated "a search for clarity of concept, rigour of deduction and initutional certainty of basic principles" (8) - exemplified in the writings of Nicholas Boileau-Despréaux, Jean-Phillippe Rameau and François Blondel. The principles contained in these works were in turn derived from an older body of ideas - those of Horace, Cicero, Aristotle and Vitruvius on the one hand and the doctrines of Neoplatonism on the other. In the fifteenth century, when architecture was first constituted as a separate branch of science, architectural theory received its primary articulation within a broader artistic doctrine based on the precepts formulated by the Ancients, the most important element of which was the notion that art was an imitation ofamathematically ordered nature, and that the art of the Ancients, being derived from this 'law', was, by extension, also worthy of imitation.

The reliance of such eminent architectural theorists as Blondel and, later, Brisieux, upon the commentaries of the Ancients is indicative of the relationship between seventeenth century concepts of a priori knowledge and innate ideas and the notion of Ancient Authority. In the eyes of empirical 'science' the rationalist episteme was undermined by its allusion to received authority and by its implicit dependence upon a particular perception of the past.

Against this background of an epistemology divided by an alliance between rationalism and a tentative adherence to transcendental values on the one hand, and an intransigent empirical tradition on the other, was enacted what was known as the "Querrelle Entre Les Anciens et les Modèrnes", a spectacular debate which affected all aspects of French cultural production during the last quarter of the seventeenth century and whose ramifications extended well into the eighteenth century. The dispute, in effect, represented the opposition between tradition and progress, first articulated within the context of seventeenth-century science. 'Modern' science was characterised by a strong dependence upon experiment and observation, whereas the old order of natural philosophy had discouraged experiment, in the belief that it was sufficient to take the 'truth' from literary sources - from Aristotle and his interpreters. In terms of architectural theory, the conflict took the form of a displacement of Vitruvian authority and an interrogation of the canonic laws of classical architecture as they had been laid down in the first century A.D. Central to the dispute and its manifestations in both disciplines was the figure of Claude Perrault, physician, part-time architect and founding

member of the Académie des Sciences. By profession he was inclined towards a Baconian observation of natural phenomena, and was an exponent of the inductive method in scientific experiment, but his theoretical sympathies clearly lay in the rationalist camp. Referring to Perrault's contributions to architectural theory, Rykwert argues that his affinity with Descartes in particular is clear in his "analysis of commonly held opinions and in an attempted synthesis by deduction from the primary intuitions to which the ideas have been stripped" (9). Perrault, however, did not concur with Descartes' persistent attempts to reconcile philosophy and theology, and was clearly more 'modern' in his effort to separate faith and reason. He was more concerned with immediate observation of phenomena, investigation of laws and with a systematic rationalisation of knowledge than with final causes and closed hypothetical systems. This distinction is symptomatic of the protopositivism which was evident in French intellectual circles between the last decades of the seventeenth century and the 1730's, when the natural philosophy of Newton became generally accepted in Europe (10).

Perrault's apparently contradictory position reflected, and was, in fact, determined by, an epistemological environment full of contradictions. The seventeenth century was not positivistic - the Platonic systems of the philosophers were deeply rooted in an Aristotelian world. Most scientists and philosophers were simultaneously traditional and progressive - hence Perrault could espouse the principles of rationalism, and, simultaneously, in his 'Essais de Physique' of 1680, could distinguish between theoretical and experimental physics, emphasizing the secondary value of a

priori conceptual systems. Although he claimed that exactness in the inductive process was much more important than deductive constructions, and realised that all systems were by nature relative, he was wont to emphasise in different contexts the impossibility of "philosophizing without putting forward propositions of a general character". (11) Only in the context of the epistemological 'crisis' can Perrault's architectural presuppositions, and this descrepancy between architectural theory and scientific practice, be understood. His dilemma was the dilemma of seventeenth century epistemology; his assault on tradition was significant not only in terms of its reception but because it had become necessary and inevitable.

Perrault's challenge to ancient authority was constituted by an implicit rejection of the traditional symbolic implications of architectural proportions. The three classical orders (later augmented to five) had been regarded by the Greeks and Romans, and subsequently by the architects of the Renaissance, as the "touchstone and tonic of architecture, the epitome and guarantee of architectural perfection" (12), perfection determined by proportional rule based on eternal laws divinely inscribed in nature. Perrault's denial of the existence of natural laws, of an 'absolute' beauty governed by mathematical proportions, and his rejection of the popular analogy between architectural proportions and musical harmonies, amounted to a refutation of one of the most fundamental tenets of the classical doctrine, an interrogation of the most sacred a priori of traditional thought. A renunication of the accepted relationship between absolute beauty and architectural proportions comprised Perrault's principal challenge to the

dominant orthodoxy. He was not the first architect to acknowledge that the proportional measurements of many 'modern' buildings and even the dimensions of remaining antique monuments, deviated significantly from those stipulated in the theoretical texts of Vitruvius and later architectural commentators. Architects had previously justified these discrepancies by referring to the Vitruvian notion of 'optical adjustments' - which permitted a deviation from the norm in order to correct the perspectival distortion of dimensions. Equipped with exact measurements from a recent volume published by Antoine Desgodetz and a physiological understanding of the relationship between the optical sensation and its neurological reception, Perrault argued that optical refinements were unnecessary and that the discrepancy between theory and practise was wholly unintentional. His observations highlighted a number of contradictions within architectural theory itself. In the first place he questioned the basic classical assumption that architectural proportions constituted a link between the human and the divine, exposing as fallacious the seventeenth-century romanticisation of antiquity as committed primarily to the Ideal of 'order'. Secondly, in an era characterised by instrumental rationality and scientific objectivity, Perrault considered the unquestioning justification of such blatent discrepancies wholly anachronistic. Finally, while contemporary architects and theorists could disavow the significance of the proportional 'modifications' of the Ancients, they themselves took the whole issue of proportions with obsessive seriousness, believing that "the monuments would lose all their beauty if a single minute were taken away from or added to any of these parts" (13). Within the seventeenth century tendency towards uniformity

and rationalisation subsisted a further anomaly; a propensity to ascribe to artistic endeavour a certain 'poetic' licence within the strictures of the classical canon. The particular talent of an artist or architect resided in the application of his skill and judgement to the problem of extending to their extremes the permissible limits - for example, in the "judicious handling of the change in proportions" (14) which determined optical adjustments. The result of this particular measure of freedom afforded to the artist or architect was referred to as the "je ne sais quoi", a popular catchphrase which represented a proto-Romantic view of the act of creation as that which is beyond rationalisation and definition. Francis Bacon had denied the beauty of geometrical proportion and maintained that beauty is created by "a kind of Felicity and not by rule" (15). Even Nicholas Boileau, who advocated reason as never before, concluded that "it is the je ne sais quoi which charms us, without which beauty itself would have neither grace nor beauty" (16). Wittkower defines the "je ne sais quoi" as "the official acquiescence to the demands of sensibility" (17), an "escape clause" which became obsolete in the eighteenth century when the entire field of art became a problem of "sensibility".

Following Leibniz's formulation of two discrete categories of knowledge, Perrault distinguished between two types of architectural beauty - 'positive' beauty (determined by such objective criteria as the "richness of material, the size and magnificence of the building, precision and neatness of execution, and symmetry") and 'arbitrary' beauty (which "depends on one's own volition to give things that could be different without being

deformed, a certain proportion, form and shape".) (18) Perrault's relegation of an absolute, 'objective' value such as the concept of beauty to the corruptible domain of human taste or inclination implied a radical subversion of established values. In this unprecedented association of taste and beauty resides his most significant contribution to aesthetic theory; by attempting to illustrate the fact that 'positive' beauty did not depend on exact architectural proportions, Perrault had inadvertently delineated the agenda for the aesthetic disputes of the following century. He was also the first architect to question the traditional belief that meaning appears immediately through perception; (19) instead he provided an associative, conceptual explanation of architectural value, based on the hypothesis that proportions were identified through association with positive value, an association endorsed by custom and familiarity. His ultimate objective, however, was not to topple convention, but merely to countermand the relativizing influence on architectural practise of the myth of natural proportions and its qualifying counterpart which deemed optical adjustments inevitable.

In seeking to rescue architectural proportions from an increasing relativism, Perrault's objective - the standardisation of proportion through he implementation of a body of fixed rules (independent of any association with 'natural laws') which would govern all areas of construction - was thoroughly appropriate to the spirit of his age. The system of proportion he devised demanded absolute and direct control over the dimensions of the orders, presenting itself as a series of perfect and rational rules whose sole objective was to be easily applicable. Yet the

fundamental intention behind Perrault's rationalisation of architecture was basically modern; (20) its reduction to mathematical reason facilitated the negation of its symbolic role as a source of absolute certainty. Architectural proportion was thus denied its function as a transcendental link between macrocosm and microcosm. His system was based on the calculation of an average that would "reconcile divers opinions and different examples encounter'd in Architecture" (21). Although Perrault would have eschewed any notion of its metaphysical significance, his conception of the arithmetic mean as a rational guarantee of perfection was indubitably conditioned by the intellectual climate in which Pascal's thinking, "built upon the notion of two extremes, between which there must be a mean" (22) was enormously influential. Balancing between the respective 'excesses' of the Ancients and the moderns, Perrault explicitly rejected the extravagance and over overornamentation indicitive of the 'barogue' trend in Roman architecture and opted instead for a re-establishment of the 'Greek' style' known to him only through Vitruvius; by reducing the orders to "commensurate probable proportions" (23), he claimed to return to the simple methods of the Ancients.

Paradoxically, but characteristic of the thinking of his era, Perrault's notion of progress implied less a vision of the future than a dependence upon the past. Those who orbited the Sun King were conscious of living in an age that came "extraordinarily close to perfection" (24), yet tended, nonetheless, to identify the Golden Age of Louis XIV with the mythical excellence of Ancient Rome. Perrault, for example,sincerely believed in the importance of Vitriuvius's theory as the origin of the great symbolic wealth

he admired in the architecture of the Roman empire. He legitimated his own theory by the invocation, in his "Ordonnance de cinq Espèces des Colonnes", of various renowned architects, at one point affirming that his system of proportion, being the most rational, was a type originally recommended by Vitruvius. He had complete faith in the structure and ornament derived from classical antiquity, he never questioned the validity of the classical orders themselves, and appeared to accept their 'essential' role in architectural practise. Perrault unremittingly criticised the "spirit of submission and blind veneration of Antiquity" (25) which still characterized the arts and sciences of the late seventeenth century, and argued that the authority of the Ancients was not based on their inherent greatness or even superiority, but on the need to "structure (our) experience by an appeal to its very continuity" (26), yet he himself frequently resorted to the myth of ancient authority as a means of validating his own theoretical premises. While acknowledging that taste and custom were the primary arbiters of the "beauty" of architectural proportions, and that the rules laid down by Vitruvius were but one possibility among many, Perrault nevertheless continued to maintain that these rules of proportion were fundamental to architectural practise. It has been argued that Perrault invoked the authority of Vitruvius in order to escape the irreconcilable contradictions of his theory (27). Even the set of tables which he formulated for the purpose of determining the mean contained a great number of errors and discrepancies. The system of proportions which he proposed was, in effect, an a priori invention, conditioned only by "the most general appearance of the clasical orders;" (28) he was little concerned to subject it to rigourous tests (29). Systematisation,

regularity and unification were his main objectives, he sought not to 'demystify' architecture, but merely to define fixed proportional rules as he imagined they had once been defined. This was precisely the function ascribed to the Académie d'Architecture - whose members were anxious to claim a scientific basis for architecture - and Perrault's audacity lay in what was perceived to be an attempt to usurp this function and to proscribe the artistic licence of his peers.

The fundamental paradox of Perrault's concommitant faith in the procedures of the new science and his adherence to those traditional precepts which he still considered valid, often serves to obscure the full extent of his contribution to aesthetic theory. His heresy was the implication that the "unsurpassable" achievements of the Ancients could be improved upon, or at least that their methods were not infallible. The dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns represented an "affirmation of faith in progress and militant reason" (30), a faith which rejected the type of knowledge still upheld by Descartes. Rationalism itself was circumscribed by the lingering existence within itself of its Other, and by the empiricist attempts to denigrate it on the basis of this indebtedness.

Perrault's theory found its principle opposition in the form of François Blondel, architectural theorist, practising architect and professor at the Académie d'Architecture. The most salient difference between Perrault and his opponents resided equally in their conflicting conceptions of the nature of knowledge as in their divergent opinions on the symbolic role of architecture.

Blondel's 'Cours d'Architecture' appeared almost simultaneously with Perrault's 'Ordonnance' and his refutation of Perrault's theory, although revealing, amounted to a "reiteration of classical faith" (31). His architectural intentions were still rooted in the Baroque world of the seventeenth century and his understanding of science, philosophy and mathematics, differed fundamentally from that of Perrault, insofar is it presupposed a synthesis of the perceptual and conceptual dimensions of knowledge and a pre-Cartesian ineptitude to differentiate subject and object, a position inherited from Galileo. Blondel subscribed to the belief in innate God-given ideas articulated within geometrical prototypes, and viewed theory as a transcendental justification of architectural practise. Perrault, on the other hand, recognised that theory and practice did not constitute a single, non-contradictory continuum; although he subordinated the practical realm to an a priori conceptual system, he was nonetheless motivated by an obsession to reduce the distance between his rational theory and traditional practice. Blondel, unlike Perrault, refused to accept that progress was inextricably linked to an acceptance of relative values. The Perrault-Blondel dispute may be located within the broader context of the question of architectural meaning itself. Perez-Gomez argues that the new theory, "founded ultimately on the modern mechanistic world-view, was haunted by an incipient subjectivism, which caused it to question its own ability to provide absolute and rational justifications of praxis" (32). The end of the seventeenth century was marked by the development of a new attitude within the rationalist ethos which emphasized the role that both empirical science and subjectivism played in the revelation of "truth", and

which tended to doubt the status of a priori knowledge as much as it had come to doubt the notion of ancient authority. The epistemological schism of the seventeenth century metamorphosed into an eighteenth century epistemology whose aim became the reconciliation of a rationalistic a priorism with "taste" or subjective judgement, and the establishment of a harmonic correspondence between the constitution of the individual human being and certain 'natural' laws.

The Paris of Louis XIV had, by the mid seventeenth century, supplanted Rome as the centre of European art. Architecture under Jean-Baptiste Colbert as Directeur des Bâtiments was instituted, in effect, as a department of the civil service. The Italianate Baroque idiom was transformed, in the hands of a few leading architects - François Mansart and Louis Levau, to name but two - into what Pevnser terms the "classic French Style", a specifically national style unparalleled in England until the mid 1680's. Attributed to Perrault, the Louvre façade goes beyond Mansart and Levau, representing an unacademic but disciplined formality; grandeur combined with precise elegance (33). Perrault had summed up to perfection the various, sometimes seemingly contradictory tendencies of the Grand Siècle, the gravity and 'raison' of late Poussin, Corneille, and Boileau, the restrained five of Racine, the lucid grace of Molière, and the powerful sense of organisation of Colbert" (34). Jules Hardouin - Mansart's St. Louis des Invilides also epitomised this combination of grandeur and elegance, of classical and Baroque, peculiar to French architecture of the mid to late seventeenth century. The establishment of a strong and prosperous state through the creation of a rigourously centralised

administration dominated French political and cultural policy of this period. Art and architecture were an integral part of this system; style was determined by the standards set by the King and his minister. The mid-eighteenth century witnessed the culmination of this drive within French architecture to create a specifically national idiom. The first major architect to turn to more classical forms was Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Premier Architect du Roi, and designer of the Parisian Ecole Militaire, the Petit Trianon, and part of the Northern side of the Place de la Concorde. Perrault's influence on Gabriel is incontestible, on the façades of the latter are reproduced loggias which were used by Perrault on the east front of the Louvre. The work of Jacques-Germain Soufflot, however, marked the apogée of French Neoclassical architecture, and was characterised in part by a self-conscious application of style to the representation of national pride and solidarity. Pevsner considers Soufflot's fusion of strict regularity and monumentality with the 'lightness' of Gothic cathedrals his finest and most original achievement, likening it to what Robert Adam was at that time beginning to do in England. But whereas Adam's interiors were 'lightened' instinctively, Soufflot's were conceived structurally, according to a carefully constructed theory, determined by its rational application. In spite of this innovation, Rykwert identifies in Soufflot's attempt to unite the lightness and transparency of Gothic architecture with the 'correct and just taste of the Ancients' what he terms "another instance of the allusive submission to antique precedent" (35). His structural adventurousness is undermined, according to Rykwert, by the exact reproduction, in the Ste. Geneviève, of the proportion of external to internal Doric order - which Soufflot had measured in the temple of Poseidon at Paestum. Soufflot's theory, definitive of French

Neoclassicism, reflects the fundamental paradox of eighteenth century epistemology: (36) architectural rules can be determined empirically through taste only after one has accepted the premise of a universal, immutable architectural value validated by the observation of Nature.

The abyss between seventeenth and eighteenth century aesthetic theories was bridged by the issue of taste which had been fundamental to the Perrault-Blondel dispute. The implication that subjective taste could act as a determinant of 'beauty' had shaken the canonic system which defined beauty as an absolute, objective value, but, never constituted a serious threat, as the authority of the 'classical faith' was effectively vindicated with the advent, in the 1730's, of Newtonian natural science. Successive generations of architects and theorists, however, were divided over the issue of the nature and application of the terms 'positive' and 'arbitrary' with reference to the concept of beauty. Within architectural theory itself a split was effected between the transcendental or symbolic function of architecture and its specific 'scientific' or constructional basis. Subscribers to the Perrauldian view that proportional beauty was arbitrary and that the natural law hypothesis was unfounded - Michel de Fremin, for example, and the Abbé de Cordemoy - became increasingly inclined towards a protopositivism characterised by indifference to the metaphysical dimension of architectural theory. The majority of eighteenth century theoreticians, however, accepted the mythical belief in proportion as the source of architectural beauty. Amedée-François Frezier concurred with Perrault that positive beauty was not determined by proportion, and that the causes of beauty should be

visible and not merely speculative - yet his theory, founded on the epistemological framework defined by eighteenth century empirical science, sought to recover an explicit, traditional interest in absolute value associated with mathematical proportions and endorsed by reason. Marc-Antoine Laugier, the most influential exponent of French Neoclassical architecture, believed that architectural principles should be grounded in scientific procedure, yet his attempt to establish a 'science of proportions' ultimately represented a last-ditch stand against the attenuation of meaning in architecture, its reduction to an 'ars fabricandi' as envisaged by Perrault. He believed in the fundamental importance of proportion as a source of meaning and asserted that the correct application of architectural rules is presented as self-evident to the 'uncorrupted mind and eye' (37), thus a priori reason is confirmed by empirical experience and by sensation. Laugier's significance lay, ultimately, in his having "translated the differences of opinion between Perrault and Blondel into the current language of the 'philosophes'" (38).

The eighteenth century was marked by the opposition between reason and taste or 'caprice', reason alone being capable of discerning the universal 'truths' which had for so long been the preserve of the classical tradition. Just as it was the task of the classical or Neoclassical artist to imitate the essential Idea lying behind the imperfect reality of Nature, the task of the architect, according to Colquhoun, became the discovery of the Type concealed within the various imperfect examples provided by architectural history. The Neoclassical concept of 'improved nature' was basically a revival of Seicento idealist theory which stipulated

that the 'ideal perfections of art' could be achieved through the selection of only the most beautiful component parts from the imperfect realities of Nature. (Similarly, the concept of universality, the denial of historical specificity, was fundamental to the classical doctrine and proved, eventually, very useful to Neoclassical ideological practice). Architecture, with the revival of this Seicento idealism, was treated, in effect, as a natural phenomenon. The opposition between empirical experience and reason as a divinely implanted faculty which constituted an unquestionable authority was thus dismantled. Empiricism was, rather, married to reason as a supplementary proof of Natural Law. Architects, engineers and philosophers of the Englightenment explicitly identified the principles of Architecture with those of Science, "presuming a fundamental analogy in the methods and sources that led all human disciplines to the attainment of truth" (39). The science of the Enlightenment was the natural philosophy of Newton, whose conception of the universe became a paradigm for all disciplines, including aesthetics and architectural theory. Newtonian natural science constituted a body of laws which rejected the great metaphysical deductive systems of the seventeenth-century and attempted to explain physical phenomena in mathematical terms obtained through induction and experimentation. It appeared that mathematics could be conceived as a mere formal system of relations, with no inherent meaning. Newton's 'empirical science', however, worked precisely because it started from hypothetical and absolute premises. Indispensable to his project was the a priori postulation of the existence of 'independent, geometric and absolute space' (40). Absolute time and space were not merely formal mathematical entities; they were unquestionable premises

which Newton perceived as transcendental manifestations of the existence of God. Newton's natural philosophy simply acted as a surrogate for traditional metaphysical systems as a justification of religion; in effect, it provided a scientific rationale for the traditional conception of the cosmos as a harmoniously and mathematically ordered whole. His assertion that knowledge should always derive from the observation of 'reality' created the belief in the possibility of demonstrating the mathematical and geometrical 'essence' of reality through the observation of Nature.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, architectural theory, influenced by Newtonian philosophy, developed an implicit metaphysical dimension, embodied within a 'passionate defence of traditional positions' (41) such as the endorsement of the traditional role of mathematical proportions. A reconciliation between taste and reason was effected by the recognition that apparently subjective values such as taste originated in Nature and experience. Architects, however, although permitted by the new spirit of rationality espoused by eighteenth century architectural theory to question the validity and authority of every pre-established tenet of their discipline, continued to eschew relativism and subjectivism. The re-establishment of the transcendental dimension of mathematical reason facilitated what Colquhoun terms the "radical coherence of the technical and aesthetic dimensions" (42) of Neoclassical architecture; the marriage of taste and reason epitomized by Soufflot's Ste. - Geneviève.

The connection I wish to establish between seventeenth century architectural theory and Neoclassical artistic practice entails more than an epistemological evolution. Certainly, Neoclassicism re-opened the wounds inflicted during the confrontations of the late seventeenth century; it internalised the uneasy reconciliation of contradictory ideas. But there is also a fundamental conceptual link between the two; a search for the Absolute, a mutal demand for legitimation, a shared perception of the past as a mythical realm of absolute certainty. This appeal to the past was based, as Perrault acknowledged, on a respect for the continuity of such traditions as the classical tradition, and implied a derivation, from this continuity, of notions of excellence and authority. The seventeenth century obsession with the ordering, systematization and rationalization of knowledge and experience, was the only possible articulation, within the context of seventeenth-century epistemology, of this Ideal. It was but one model of 'knowledge', and, as 'loopholes' such as the 'je ne sais quoi' illustrate, its ideological ground was hardly fluid enough to cover all the cracks beneath. Similarly, the eighteenth century return to an idealized, transcendental nature, the increased symbolic capacity of architecture and its Romantic emphasis on purity and simplicity - whose apogée was reached in the works of Ledoux and, later, Boullée - was possible only after the contradictions of the seventeenth century had been 'resolved' and legitimated by Newtonian philosophy; thus the Ideal was sustained. Rykwert correctly identifies the Perrault-Blondel dispute as less a battle about taste than a dispute about the nature of history and "the relation of the past to thinking, to speculation" (43). It concerned the cultural policy of the autocratic French state and, I would argue,

the applicability of the classical tradition and its associative authority, as a mode of ideological control. This, as I see it, is the fundamental significance of the dispute, a significance which would become even more profound during the eighteenth century with the imminent decimation of classicism itself, its reduction by historicism to a specific tradition, whose use was justified purely by convention.

CHAPTER TWO

Taste, Power, Politics: The genesis of the 'true style'

"No catastrophe has ever yielded so much pleasure to the rest of humanity as that which buried Pompeii and Herculaneum". -

Goethe

The crisis of the eighteenth century was a crisis of legitimation. Newtonian philosophy had legitmated the primary objective of classical art - the imitation and 'improvement' of nature; the revelation of the essential Idea obscured by general appearances - and had endorsed the precocious emphasis on elemental simplicity and essence definitive of early Neoclassicism. The need for legitimation, however, extended far beyond the intellectual arena wherein the politics of art, science and metaphysics were determined. The eighteenth century was characterised by an increased self-consciousness at every level. Economic prosperity had occasioned the emergence of a wealthy, educated and socially ambitious middle-class with 'reforming ideas of its own' (44), against which the aristocracy was forced to define itself. The agenda became an explicitly political one. A distinction was effected between Enlightenment rationality and the 'confused' epistemological squabbles which had surrounded the seventeenth century conception of rationalism. Directly inherited from the repercussions of the Perrault-Blondel dispute was an increased awareness of the malleability of history and of the historical past, a recognition of its potential as a legitimating discourse within which particular 'social fictions' (45) could be sustained. The phenomenon which became known as Neoclassicism was, from its inception, constituted as a carrier of ideology by virtue of its dependence upon a particular perception of the historical past, conditioned by the values associated with the classical tradition. By the mid eighteenth century the invocation of ancient authority had come to be perceived as antithetical to the 'progressive' liberal ideology of the Enlightenment. Paradoxically, however, the didactic programme initiated in 1774 by the Compte d'Angiviller and

the subsequent recourse of Neoclassicism to the reconstruction of specific events in ancient history, posited by analogy as moral paradigms, contained an implicit dependence upon one of the fundamental tenets of the classical doctrine; the idea that art should act as a moral instructor. Antiquity thus provided not only the referent for Neoclassicism, but also the moral paradigm and methodological precedent for its development.

Neoclassicism however, or the 'true style' as it was termed in the eighteenth century, amounted to more than an unproblematic appropriation of the formal elements of Antique painting, architecture and applied art. It was determined to an equal extent by context as by purely formal management of imagery or 'style'. And the context within which it developed was characterised by profound epistemological, social and political contradictions. Albert Boime argues that Neoclassical artistic production can be defined wholly in terms of the antithesis between aristocracy and bourgeoisie and the incipient ascendency of middle-class values. This attempt to contain the heterogenity and complexity of Neoclassicism within the strictures of the 'conflicting-class-ideology' hypothesis is, I would argue, dangerously reductive, unless it simultaneously facilitates the perception of the semantic function of the 'movement' - as a site of meaning. A recognition of the co-extensive semantic and ideological dimensions of Neoclassicism is essential to the application of Boime's argument within the broader context of the relationship between the formal concerns of the 'movement' and its understanding of its own historicity. A partial resolution of the myriad contradictions inherent in Neoclassical artistic practice can be arrived at only

if the phenomenon itself is perceived as being instrumental to the co-option of culture by ideology. Such a conclusion facilitates, for example, an acceptance of the fact that the classical vocabulary could be appropriated by Neoclassicism "to meet demands as various as those of French Revolutionary propaganda, Romantic melancholy, Archaeological erudition and enduring Rococo eroticism' (46). Stylistic analysis can overcome these contradictory aspects of Neoclassicism, but in terms of 'meaning' they appear irreconcilable. Its significance as an historical phenomenon derives from its determination by particular socio-political and economic factors - in short, from the specificity of its historical context.

Neoclassicism is commonly perceived as a stylistic - and ethical - reaction to the superficial and frivolous extravagance of Rococo. In this facile interpretation, however, the equation is incomplete. The Rococo constituted a theoretical vacuum (ironically enough, its anti-theoretical and non-transcendental bias was at the time attributed to Perrault), a mere reflection of the concerns of an autocratic élite. By the mid-century it had not outrun its stylistic course, it had outlived its usefulness as a benevolently neutral ideology. The aristocracy became aware of the imperative that official art assume an ideological dimension, to counteract the increasing threat to its hegemony from a newly articulate and power-hungry bourgeoisie. In other words, the autocratic system required the legitimating influence of the Enlightened culture which came to be represented by Neoclassicism. It is within this context that Rykwert can argue that French Neoclassical architecture, for example, danced to the tune played by the Marquis

de Marigny - which dictated that it be perceived as a symbol of national solidarity in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War - and similarly, that the 'style' could be employed by d'Angiviller to construct an image of Louis XV1 as 'enlightened' in the face of liberal opposition to the monarchy (47).

Enlightenment thought was 'a rationalisation of the specific needs of the middle-class, its battle-cry' (48), represented by the naturalistic philosophies of Rousseau and Diderot, who advocated feeling and passion in opposition to the artificial manners of French high society, and by the writings of Voltaire and Montesquieu which attacked systems of privilege (based on favour rather than merit) and proposed new forms of idealized social relationships. This bourgeois ethic was conditioned by the sensualist philosophy of Locke and by Newtonian natural philosophy, and was consummated by the rejection of traditional values and belief systems which were regarded as an impediment to progress and social reform. It received its ultimate articulation within an art closely related to the proto-romantic trend in eighteenth-century literature, which combined the twin demands of sensibility and idealism, exemplified in the sober but melodramatic moralism of Jean-Baptiste Greuze. This art dealt primarily with contemporary themes which were deemed socially pertinent, whereas the Neoclassical appropriation of the forms of Antiquity remained the preserve of the 'official' taste whose Rococo embodiment it had, ironically, sought to overthrow. Insofar as the primary significance of Neoclassicism is located within its alleged function as a vehicle for the dissemination of French Revolutionary propaganda, Boime's assertion that it initially represented the

interests of the aristocracy as opposed to those of the bourgeoisie, appears self-contradictory. This is so only because Boime's' argument does not permit the reductive association of Neoclassical artistic practice with one particular set of class interests. As an ideological tool - and this is precisely the point I wish to make - Neoclassicism could come to successively represent as many conflicting interests as were required of it.

Neoclassicism, according to Boime, was 'sanctioned, stimulated and disseminated by the nobility of western Europe' (49). He defines as the primary impetus to the development of Neoclassicism the collective economic interests of antiquarians, artists and scholars throughout Europe, whose shared correspondence and competition informed and homogenised the movement's evolution, and who were 'quite aware of their role in the spread of Neoclassicism and deliberately created a market for it' (50). Neoclassicism is thus identified as the first fine art movement in history to be 'packaged, advertised and sold on the market as a profitable investment' (51). Boime does not attempt to minimize the enormous influence exerted by the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii (begun in 1738 and 1748 respectively) on the taste and imagination of the period, but he implicitly suggests that these discoveries would have been less influential without the assistance of the collector - artist - dealer superstructure. Joseph Rykwert subtly and brilliantly understates the point in his observation that "the dig at Herculaneum was, it must be remembered, for treasures to adorn Portici-" , (52) the out of town place of Charles III. Furthermore, "it was in (these) 'barochetto' and Rococo interiors that the fruits of the excavations of Herculancum and of Pompeii

were displayed, as were the antiquities found elsewhere in Italy, in Tuscany, or in Rome' (53). Even the most learned antiquarian at this point was familiar only with the 'public' art and architecture of Roman antiquity, 'the private house and its decoration were known by inference only' (54). In the sense that the settings in which the 'admiranda of antiquity' were displayed were increasingly perceived as trivial and inadequate (55), the discovery of Pompeii and of Herculaneum may be said to have stimulated the Neoclassical movement.

The predilection for Antique-collecting began as a common interest among expatriot aristocrats resident in Rome during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and was enormously stimulated by the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii. The discovery of whole societies virtually intact 'piqued the fascination of European aristocrats seeking the cultural complement of their idealised self-image' (56). In other words, the aristocracy were aware of the legitimating potential of this renewed interest in Antiquity and seized the opportunity to locate in ancient history a precedent for every variation in their contemporary dilemma. 'All the qualities associated with Antiquity - simplicity, elegance, order and patriotic virtue - were picked up by certain nobles as an index of their authentic self-worth and social status' (57). Influential middle-class figures of the Enlightenment also supported the analogy in their denunciation of despotism and corruption and their praise of liberty. Boime attributes the 'blandness' of early Neoclassical art to the neutralisation of its political content implicit in the nobles' attack on monarchical privilege in an attempt to defend their own. Both sides, he

argues, ultimately appropriated the language of neoclassicism 'to dissociate themselves from charges of frivolity, corruption, licentiousness, and to project a public image of patriotic duty and defence of liberty' (58). This explicit and unapologetic appropriation - and its successful application - is indicative of an undercurrent in eighteenth - century thought which facilitated the union of sensibility and ideology and resulted in the widespread acceptance of values inimical to those held by an earlier generation. A proto-Romantic nostalgia for the past, for the Arcadian glories of Elysium, for the purity and simplicity of Antiquity (and later, its epic qualities of honour, stoical heroism and patriotism) constituted this undercurrent, without which the values of Neoclassicism would not have been so easily transmitted. It is this Romantic tendency which delineated the common ground between the Enlightenment ethic representative of bourgeois values and mainstream Neoclassicism itself, representative of aristocratic interests; both entailed an apotheosis of the elemental purity and uncorruptibility of Nature, legitimated by Newton and endorsed by the classical tradition. The unearthing of private, intimate dwellings at Pompeii and Herculaneum also entailed a Romanticisation, identified by Mario Praz as the genesis of the myth which popularised the victims of Vesuvius as the discoveries in Rome - the stucco tombs in the Via Lativa - and the ruins of the Imperial Palace of Diocletian at Spalato (Split) had never been popularised. Praz argues that Neoclassicism could, with equal reason, be traced back to Poussin, to Milton's 'Paradise Lost', to Trissino, Palladio and the Mannerists as to Mengs, Vien and David. He maintains that its origins could be discerned in the 'overwrought elegance, Hellenistic in flavour ... certain

preoccupations of ideal Platonic beauty, crystallised in a statuesque enchantment ... the archaeological spirit in which antique statues such as the Laocöon and the Appollo Belvedere had been imitated' (59) - characteristic of Italian, and later French, Mannerism. Clearly, the emergence of Neoclassicism was influenced by the prevailing sensibility and by the nature of its appeal, but it owes its greatest debt, I believe, to the contemporary need for legitimation which it promised to fulfil. In this light, the conjecture that Neoclassical artistic practice was determined by a small, well-informed cultural élite, which became the arbiter of eighteenth-century taste and profited enormously from the aristocratic desire to purchase legitimacy, becomes a possibility.

What Boime is essentially attempting is to define Neoclassicism as a business venture and to attribute its success to the expert manner in which it was presented and marketed. The claim is not an unreasonable one. With an astuteness and self-consciousness characteristic of their age, the purveyors of Neoclassicm could present the 'style' as a continuation of the tradition of patronage which had determined cultural production for centuries, while at the same time inverting its priorities. Neoclassicism simultaneously provided a repository for the wealth of aristocrats gullible or desperate enough to buy into it, and a focus for the newly acquired wealth of the upper-middle classes who were eager to improve their social status. It was aimed at affluent, politically powerful patrons, with or without taste, for whom posterity - and the embodiment of their social and political views - was all. Collectors and dealers of antiquities contributed to an equal if not greater extent in the rise and dissemination of the 'grand

goût' as did the artists themselves. A particular pattern may be discerned within the complex network of factors which underlay the development of Neoclassicism, whose importance lay in the manufacturing of an idiom appropriate to the aristocratic sensibility of this period and the subsequent embodiment of this idiom in 'articles of taste'.

By the mid-century, the precedent had been well established of the 'collection' of antiquities displayed in a particular milieu to particular ends. Rome and Naples abounded with such collections, housed in magniloquent villas, the most influential of which were those of Cardinal Albani, Sir William Hamilton, Baron Philipp von Stosch, and , in England, those of the Duke of Northumberland, Sir William Watkins-Wynn, Lord Bute, Sir Charles Towneley. Behind the seemingly innocent bid for cultural aggrandisement which apparently motivated this collectomania lay implicit mercantile interests.

Collectors and patrons were viewed as arbiters of taste and profited immensely from the increase in their prestige and cultural credibility. Lavish folio volumes displaying printed reproductions of antiquities were distributed throughout Europe, less for the purpose of informing the wider public than for stimulating a taste for antiquities among the European nobility, encouraging art investment and facilitating the appreciation in value of existing collections. Thus the symbiotic relationship between artist and dealer was inaugurated. Many artists, Bartolemo Cavaceppi and Joseph Nollekens, to name but two, were recruited by dealers to 'restore' antique sculptures - a euphemism for the creation of synthetic aggregates of antique fragments, noses, heads, limbs, derived from various sources, assembled, and flogged as 'originals'

for extortionate prices. Gavin Hamilton, the 'protoneoclassical' Scots painter, earned his reputation as an artist and his fortune as a dealer and collector's agent. His work, like that of Mengs, 'retains qualities of the Rococo in the artful and sinuous poses and exaggerated air of sensibility' (60) although 'inspired' by classical bas-reliefs - a clear indication that it was aimed at the type of dilettante - client whose taste he helped form. Hamilton was acutely aware of his own instrumentality in the determination of aristocratic taste, and conscious both of the profitability of his enterprise and of the investment value of the objects he handled. In Thomas Jenkins, the first English banker in Rome, and a collector of enormous wealth and influence, Hamilton found a willing and worthy collaborator whose interest in the promotion, sale and distribution of antiquities was as purely mercantile as his own. Together they established an agency-cum-excavating service whose function was to provide clients and devotees of Neoclassicism with the 'collectibles' they demanded. The aforementioned Joseph Nollekins, sculptor, stockbroker and mass-producer of 'antiques', was often invited to collaborate with Hamilton and Jenkins, his task being the endowment of 'restored' antiquities with an authenticity commensurate to the incapacity of the average collector to discern original from fake. Just as Hamilton, Jenkins and Nollekins operated in the service of nobles such as Sir Charles Towneley - whose prestige as a 'collector of fine Greek sculptures' depended, ironically, on the merits of a collection later declared largely counterfeit or derivative - Mengs and Winckelmann were employed to similar ends by Cardinal Albani. Alessandro Albani was nephew to pope Clement XI and served as an ambassador of sorts to the papal court, in addition to his lesser

role as British informant on the Stuart court in Rome. His influence and prestige as a collector were unsurpassable. He used Mengs' prodigious talent as a vehicle for the articulation of his political and social opinions and for his own personal aggrandisement - an example of which is the 1760 painting by Mengs which allegedly 'inaugurated' Neoclassicism, and which explicitly identifies Albani with Parnassus. The learned antiquarian and art historian, J.J. Winckelmann, was employed to cloak his illicit transactions with a veneer of respectability, and to provide Albani with the information he needed to facilitate his subtle manipulation of public taste. The villa on the Via Salaria which housed Albani's huge collection was, ultimately, uninhabitable, and was actually custom-built for the eye of the Grand Tourist; in effect, an advertisement for Neoclassical taste (61). Winckelmann served not only to 'legitimate' Albani's active involvement in the smuggling of valuable originals on the black market and his endorsement of fakes - by couching this interest in Antiquity in terms such as 'nobility' and 'grandeur' - but also substantially added to the value of Albani's collection through cataloguing and analysis. (Not surprisingly, Winckelmann also catalogued the collection of Baron Philipp Von Stosch, Albani's friend and fellow-informant). Winckelmann was an advertisement not only for the ancient works in the collection of his sponsor but alsofor the new 'style' stimulated by such collections. For it was through the publication of catalogues and folios that the new style was in fact disseminated. The four folio volumes published in 1766-7, for example, which depicted in engraved form Sir William Hamilton's collection of Etrurian vases, were to have an immense impact on the diffusion of neoclassicism; Wedgewood, Flaxman, Fuseli and David

came directly under its influence (62). This publication highlighted the full value of line reduction; the use of contour akin to that exemplified in ancient reliefs was constantly advocated by Wincklemann. Hamilton employed a 'rogue-antiquarian' (63), the soi-distant Baron d'Hancanville to write the text and a printer named Wilhelm Tischbein to engrave the reproductions - in much the same way as Charles Towenely had employed Hamilton and Jenkins. Significantly, d'Hancanville was later to become a close associate of Winckelmann and Albani. Privileged subscribers such as Winckelmann and Wedgewood (who 'found immediate application for his admiration!') (64) received sheets of engravings before the appearance of the first volume; in this way the Empire style was immediately popularised and, because of its easily transmittable linear quality, was accepted very rapidly throughout Europe.

Josiah Wedgewood, the 'pre-eminant potter in the Neoclassical style' (65), was one of the craftspeople who benefited enormously from the vogue which extended beyond the acquisition of antiquities to the desire for residences and objects of decoration which emulated the Antique. He 'aimed at an ideal that denied most of the cherished ceramic virtues and sought a model of simplicity and elegance in line with the taste of the reigning aristocracy" (66). The enormous demand for collectibles was met not only by an increasing proliferation of fakes but also by 'good copies honestly made and sold as such' (67). Wedgewood depended to a large extent for inspiration on the lavishly illustrated publications of the principle collectors. His success, Boime maintains, was due not so much to his ability to undersell his rivals or to produce unique designs, but rather to his capacity to 'manipulate the world

of fashion" (68). He is known, for example, to have relied on the publications and contacts 'emanting from Albani's circle' (69). This, and the modern sales techniques he employed, contributed to Wedgewood's reputation as the populizer of the Neoclassical style in England and on the continent. Wedgewood is known to have collaborated on many projects with the architect Robert Adam, also representative of this tendency to manipulate taste and fashion to serve the ideological needs of the dominant social classes. Adam, like Wedgewood, recognised the importance of royal patronage in the promotion of his product. In an early volume of engravings of the ruins of the Diocletian Palace at Spalato, which he dedicated to George III, he explicitly associated the reign of the new King with the Golden Age of Augustus and advocated that George III adopt the disposition of an imperial ruler rather than that of a constitutional monarch. It was no coincidence that the emergence of Neoclassicism in Britain was concomitant with the emergence of the new regime of George III, which required its own architectural style to mark the transition. Nor was it coincidental that Adam began his career at the height of the Seven Years' War, or that some of his first commissions were from aristocrats enlisted in the British Armed Forces. The need for self-definition, determined by an increasingly nationalist ethos, was prevalent in both Britain and France during this period - and found its ultimate expression in Neoclassical architecture.

During the final three decades of the eighteenth century Adams designed and refurbished most of the major country and town houses of the ruling Tory elite, in addition to those of aristocratic collectors such as Lord Bute. The stylistic subordination of the 'heavy' Baroque - and Mannerist - influenced architecture of the

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to the 'purity' and 'elegance' of Neoclassicism, represented, in effect, a Tory triumph over the Whigs (70). A favoured device of Adam's was the fusion of his patron's insignia with motifs from classical antiquity - a device which pandered to the sensibilities of aristocrats eager to equate their own hegemony with the glory of emperors of Ancient Rome. Adams's 'cool, refined and imposing style' and his use of materials such as marble, stucco and plaster were, according to Boime 'admirably suited for the privileged classes and spoke to their patriarchal ideal of authority and power' (71). The cult of the antique which was inaugurated in Britain with the popularization of Neoclassicism profoundly influenced the development of a number of eminently successful manufacturers - notably Matthew Boulton, Chippendale and Wedgewood himself - in addition to the painter Angelica Kaufmann - who collaborated with Adam to effect a complete transformation of the eighteenth century concept of interior space. Several of the artisan-sculptors employed by Adam studied at the Royal Academy, which has been alleged to have produced 'a work force trained to follow the dictates of the Neoclassical revival' (72) Adam's early exploitation of the prevalent pomp-and-circumstance mentality which had accompanied the accession of George III, and the conception of his own architectural designs as the appropriate context wherein the fruits of wealth and power could be displayed, owed much to a singular astuteness. It was also facilitated, however by his association with the architect Charles-Louis Clérisseau, whom he met through Gavin Hamilton and thourgh whom Adam was, in turn, introduced to Albani. Clérisseau allegedly 'initiated Adam in the profit-making possibilities of Neoclassical practice' (73).

Clérisseau shared the clientèle of Jenkins and Gavin Hamilton, was acquainted with Winckelmann and Albani, and was influential in the initiation of several important 'tastemakers' of Neoclassical bent, such as Catherine the Great, for example, and Thomas Jefferson.

The ideological impact of Neoclassicism was not, however, confined to the domain of architectural design and commercial collecting. In painting, as I have already mentioned, Neoclassicism represented, in effect, a 'repudiation' of the 'corrupt' values associated with Rococo, and a desire to appear enlightened, to seem to espouse values such as sobriety, nobility, virtue, asceticism and, later, patriotism. Its usefulness as an implement of ideology was unlimited. It became the norm to depict any contemporary issue in terms of what was perceived as its antique precedent. This was particularly the case in Britain (and to a lesser extent in France, where architecture supplanted all other idioms as a vehicle of nationalist self-assertion) during and subsequent to the Seven Years' War, which moulded and defined the 'national' art in both countries and accelerated it in the direction of fully-developed Neoclassicism. The associative power of classical antiquity was fully understood by the French critic La Font de St. - Yenne and similarly by the antiquarian Compte de Caylus, both of whom associated order and authority with classical imagery. St. - Yenne longed for a reinstatement of the values associated with the reign of Louix XIV, but knew how to manipulate the language of the Enlightement in a manner which would conceal his autocratic sympathies within the semblance of patriotic duty and vigilance. Caylus's eulogy of the glories of the classical past was concomitant with his desire to be remembered as the figure responsible for the initiation of a French Renaissance. His

'Requeil d'Antiquities' was a testimony to his attempt to 'embrace the whole of antiquity in his collection' (74) and his presentation of this catalogue as through it were an objective study of ancient art fore-shadowed similar attempts by Winckelmann and Sir William Hamilton. Caylus was, however, motivated less by profit than by the promise of power and prestige traditionally associated with the antique Ideal. Beneath his invocation of Colbert and his desire to revive the splendour of the Grand Siècle, and beneath the aspirations of St. - Yenne, lay a sense of 'national honour' - a chauvenism which d'Augiviller would subsequently exploit in his last attempts to provide a cultural legitimation for the unpopular concept of monarchy.

It was generally understood, among the French aristocracy towards the end of the eighteenth century, that somehow the semblance of enlightened and progressive sympathies would redeem them from what was to come. For the bourgeoisie in both France and the U.S., 'enlightened' neoclassicism came to symbolise liberation from the shackles of autocratic tyranny and represented political and economic independence. In Britain the reign of George III was seen to rival that of Augustus and the 'new style' was associated with imperial power and splendour, becoming a symbol of national triumph, of progress. Those responsible for the dissemination of Neoclassicism understood fully the mercantile nature of their enterprise and the viability of their product - and those who patronised and endorsed its dissemination understood that the style was ideally suited to ideological appropriation. The trajectory of Neoclassicism - from its inception as an aristocratic enterprise to gain power and prestige, to its fullscale co-option as the

legitimating discourse of the aristocracy, to its ultimate instrumentalisation as a vehicle for the propagandist objectives of the revolution - is often perceived as problematic. Ultimately, however, Neoclassicism was only an ideological tool, it served a multiplicity of interests. It facilitated its own appropriation by various ideologies, and, chameleon-like, it legitimated all round.

CHAPTER THREE

David: sensibilité or subversion?
Historicism and the Semantic Dimension

"There has been one moment in history in which a tyrannical culture obstructed the flourishing of art; the Neoclassical period; and art came back again when Romanticism freed it from the tyranny of the past" -

Lionello Venturi

The crisis of late eighteenth-century painting was a crisis of identity on two levels. In the first place, Neoclassicism had come to represent both 'enlightened' despotism and bourgeois assertion (75), simultaneously; in the second, the rise of historicism had dealt a fatal death-blow to the hegemonic classical tradition, which was henceforth destined to be perceived as merely one 'style' among many. The historicist view was diametrically opposed to the tradition of eclectism which had facilitated the classical monopoly on all aspects of European cultural production between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eclectism, as defined by Alan Colquhoun, "depended upon the power of certain 'styles' to become a sign or emblem for a particular set of beliefs, depending on a knowledge of, and identification with, the styles of the past, and an ability to subject them to ideological distortions" (76). It implied the superiority of one dominant style over all others. Historicism, conversely, held that all styles or idioms are equally valid, all cultural values relative. It rejected the classical tenet of natural laws and opposed the fixed, immutable Ideal of classicism - the notion the the 'eternal' and 'essential' lie waiting to be revealed beneath the 'accidental' in nature - with the proposition that values and ideas change and evolve with historical time and do not exist as essential 'truths' - and that all socio-cultural phenomena are historically determined. For the 'fixed' ideal of the classical doctrine, historicism substituted the 'potential' (77) ideal of nascent Romanticism.

The ascendancy of historicism was facilitated to a certain degree by the changing perception of the historical process influenced by the epistemological schism of the seventeenth-century. It was also

due in part to the increased 'chronological and geographical mobility' (78) characteristic of the eighteenth century. If eclectism depended on the power of historical styles to emblematise ideas associated with the cultures which produced them, then the dilemma of eclectism in eighteenth-century painting was determined by the proliferation of potential cultural models. The late eighteenth century witnessed, to a hitherto unparalleled degree, the "exploitation of the past for its pictorial resonance" (79). The 'past' that was pillaged, however, was no longer limited to the venerated past of classical antiquity - nor was its 'resonance' confined to the realm of the pictorial. Increased archaeological erudition had not only augmented considerably the classical repertoire - it had also encouraged the exploitation of other idioms anterior to the classical tradition. The post-classical, medieval and contemporary worlds began increasingly to be combed for a 'resonance' appropriate to the moralising fervour which accompanied the post-Rococo sensibility in France and elsewhere.

Post-Rococo art is generally conceived in terms of its dominant moralising tenor. This alleged tendency to moralise, however, did not attach itself to any particular style or idiom. Emulation of the 'flat and Spartan linear style' (80) of Greek vase decoration, for example, did not always represent adherence to the Enlightenment values of morality and sobriety. Anti-Rococo simplicity and sobriety often attested to an understanding, on the artist's part, of the flow and ebb of the tides of fashion; the paintings of Joseph-Marie Vien, to name but one pioneer of Neoclassical 'austerity', were saturated with Rococo sensibility although clothed in antique garb. On the other hand, while the

Greco-Roman world could be culled for paradigmmatic examples of highminded human behaviour, in line with the virtues extolled by the 'philosophes,' similar examples could also be found closer to home. The didactic moralism of Hogarth and Jean-Baptiste Greuze referred almost exclusively to contemporary themes, while the rise of historicism opened the medieval and post-medieval worlds to appropriation by similar didactic interests - exemplified, for example, in the revivalist paintings of Durameau, Menageot and Brenet exhibited in the pre-Revolutionary salons. A one-to-one co-relation of style and subject was as frequently the exception as the rule (81); as Bryson observes, "the case of Greuze proved that painting could be edifying without being antique, while that of Vien proved that the antique could be far from edifying" (82).

In France, Neoclassicism remained for a long time "doomed to recuperation by Rococo" (83). France was unique among the countries of Western Europe insofar as every aspect of its cultural production bore the trace of Government intervention. Even the censure of Diderot's Encyclopédie, for example, had been influenced by the alliance between the censor, Mme. de Pompadour, and the Marquis de Marigny (85). The unrequieted revivalism of such pre-eminant Neoclassical architects as Jacques-Germain Soufflot and Contant d'Ivry (both, incidentally, admirers of Perrault) was transformed, like that of Caylus and St. -Yenne, into a demand for a 'national' architecture which would represent national solidarity and pride. The survival of the autocratic state, even of the monarchy, depended ultimately on the ability of Louis XVI's Directeurs des Bâtiments to portray the monarch as enlightened, liberal, progressive, in the face of growing bourgeois dissent.

The didactic mode - epitomized by Greuze - was populist, and its popularity, according to Rosemblum, was directly related to the growth of bourgeois audiences. D'Angiviller, who replaced Marigny in 1773 as Directeur General, was the champion par excellence of didacticism in France. The paintings of Greuze returned to the traditional classical proviso that art should teach a moral lesson - termed the 'Exemplum Virtutis' - where the spectator was conditioned by the depiction of either the advent or aftermath of a significant moral decision. D'Angiviller understood fully this appeal to bourgeois values and its propagandist potential as a method of courting and conditioning middle-class audiences.

The didactic programme initiated in 1774 by D'Angiviller encouraged 'nationalistic' painting-emotionally simple scenes 'gloryifying on the one hand the heritage of France, on the other the virtues of civic altruism and discipline' (86). Given D'Angiviller's conviction that the arts should be an 'emanation from the throne' (87) and should celebrate the 'national gloire', subjects from French history were invariably more appropriate than subjects from antiquity to the programme's chauvenistic ends. The association of the monarch, through sponsorship of the arts, with the 'legislation of morality' (88) amounted to a clever appropriation of bourgeois ideology. The significance of this appropriation is overlooked by stylistic analysis whose 'teleological bias' (89) makes it wholly inadequate to an examination of the ideological complexities of French artistic production during this period. Stylistics cannot account for the ten-year discrepancy between the adoption of the neo-antique style in Britain and its eventual assimilation in France, where it became the highest expression of the bourgeois bid

for power. British painting, from the mid-1760's was in thrall to the dominance of the 'neo-classical' idiom evidenced in the work of John Trumbull, Gavin Hamilton, and Benjamin West. These painters, despite occasional flirtations with 'patriotic' subjects, identified in the popular association between moral virtue and antiquity a contemporary need for self-definition in terms of antique precedent, and exploited this need appropriately. Robert Adam, likewise, capitalised on the simultaneous chauvinism and insecurity of a nation which considered itself analogous to the Rome of Augustus yet defined itself in terms of an ancient and inapplicable precedent. In Britain, the Neoclassical style and what it represented were of fundamental importance to the ideological manipulation of public taste. In France, however, stylistic considerations were wholly subordinated to the myth of art as instruction. Antiquity was irrelevant to the majority of French painters of the 1770's; any style would suffice to meet the demands of didacticism providing that it did not interfere with instruction or pedagogic intend. The ontological status of classicism was seen to disrupt the seamless message of didactism - which required accurate historical reconstruction with minimal classical intervention, consequently the suppression of neo-classicizing tendencies was actively encouraged prior to the 1780's. For a sense of national heritage to emerge, attention to period detail was essential; neoclassicism entailed a negation of historical specificity and as such was inadequate to the communication of the didactic message. Historicism and the enormous attention paid to historical reconstruction relegated the neoclassical idiom to the status of one style among an unprecedented array of equally valid styles. All styles were

effectively equalised by the 'twin forces of erudition and rhetoric" (90) which determined d'Angivillers' didactic policy, and a new anxiety about the existence of a dominant 'natural'style or idiom was inaugurated with David and his successors.

The problematic figure of Jacques - Louis David constitutes, in many respects, a thorn in the side of Neoclassicism. Commonly perceived as the leading exponent of the neo-classical idiom, perceived in fact, as the one artist who singlehandedly pushed Neoclassicism to its logical extreme, David nevertheless represents an anomalous element within the tradition and his position raises certain questions about the nature of the movement itself. Boime argues that Neoclassicism essentially evolved from the representation of aristocratic interests to that of bourgeois interests, and that the impetus for the transposition was provided by the imminent 'dual' revolution. Bryson, however, while agreeing in principle with this analysis, maintains that the full complexity of the ideological takeover can only be comprehended in terms of painting as 'sign'. According to Bryson, the work of Greuze met the new demand for what he terms 'high narrativity'- entailing the 'transparency of the painterly sign' (91). This transparency permitted an identical reading of paintings stylistically alien to one another, and guaranteed the initial success of d'Angiviller's attempts to level all styles. The narrative function of a work of art and its status as sign within a particular context are inextricably linked, and it is this alliance which facilitated the ideological re-alignment of Neoclassicism. In the advent of the revolution a vague concept of moral virtue was increasingly supplanted by the more specific - and more pertinent - ideal of

patriotic virtue. This Ideal was articulated within the context of the didactic programme, where it was grounded in historical specificity, but also found expression elsewhere; through the unlikely analogy between a quasi-mythological realm of Greco-Roman heroism and the hoary world of eighteenth-century French politics.

Thus an identical message was communicated using two different methods of articulation which had in common only their status as historical reconstructions. I would argue that this disavowal of stylistic differentiation - which occurs when the percipient is forced to consider the work wholly in terms of what it signifies-is accompanied by a similar disavowal of the ideological interests it represents. When the code itself is of paramount significance, little attention is paid to the codifier. Thus the glaring contradiction represented by the aristocratic appropriation of bourgeois values to legitimate early neoclassicism and the subsequent bourgeois reclamation of this language in the 1770's, is annulled. The 'transparency of the painterly sign' is equally applicable to the neo-classical mode as to didacticism; the transparency and materiality of the 'language' itself, validated by the dead weight of classicism, made it ideally suited to appropriation. By the mid- 1780's, according to Boime, 'the self-interested and purely pecuniary motives of the progenitors of Neoclassicism had been almost entirely sublimated in a set of visual symbols that could address a wide public in political terms, a public that had grown accustomed to seeing in ancient history metaphors for contemporary politics' (92).

Even before d'Angivillers' programme had run its course, didactic moralism had ceased to represent the interests of the bourgeoisie.

As the revolution became inevitable, only the language of Neoclassicism was adequate to the representation of bourgeois notions of heroic virtue, self-sacrifice and patriotic duty. It is in this context that David's work becomes problematic. David's 'Oath of the Horatii' (1785), is retrospectively regarded as the definitive 'neo-classical' painting, the culmination of the propagandist interests behind the drive towards revolution. Bryson's analysis of David's development, however, runs counter to this view and ostensibly suggests that, stylistically, David's affinities lay elsewhere. David's early development was influenced by Boucher, and, later, Vien and Le Brun. Bryson argues that even an eminently 'neo-classical' work such as the 'Belisarus Begging Alms' (1782) betays a debt to Greuze and to the sentimental conventions of the 1760's. This has also been implied by Brookner who opposed the alleged 'geometric severity' (93) of David with the notion of 'sentimental classicism' (94). According to Bryson, David's classicism is far closer to that of Poussin and the seventeenth century than to Antiquity; the Greuzian dimension of his work and the influence of the Seicento Italian colourists evident in his treatment of lighting and anatomy belie a fundamental uneasiness within the confines of the Neoclassical style. In paintings such as the 1782 'Curius Dentatus Refusing the Gifts of the Samnites' by François-Pierre Peynon and Jean-Germain Drouais's 'Prodigal Son' of the same year, Bryson locates a similar concern with dramatic lighting and the modelling of flesh and musculature, a concern unprecedented in the canon of 'classical art'. The works produced by Drouais, David and Peyron during the early 1780's are seen to epitomise the basic premises of Neoclassicism, yet the formal innovation which they represent has little to do with the revival of antiquity.

Rosenblum typifies the conventional critical assumption that the 'Oath of the Horatii' 'fuses' didactic theme, reformatory style and classical allusion; (95) and is characterised by its 'synthesis of the most rigorous potentialities of both Neoclassic form and Roman Republican virtue' (96). In Bryson's analysis, however, much of David's work of the early 1780's eschews the didactic intent which it is alleged to possess. He insists that the significance and subtlty of this work has been completely distorted by the popular concept of the 'Oath' as the climax of 'propaganda' painting. Although David's political sympathies clearly lay with the bourgeoisie, his work of the 1780's, with its indubitable political resonances, constituted to a lesser degree a moral didacticism tantamount to revolutionary propaganda, than a unprogrammatic subversion of official didacticism. Bryson argues that didactic painting, broadly speaking, entails audience passivity before a tyrannical, active image. The viewer is not required to make a moral choice, s/he is required to learn a moral lesson. Didacticism 'crudifies the representation of human choice' (97), it basically presupposes, in line with behaviourist psychology, that the individual's response to a given stimulus will accord not with what s/he knows to be morally right, but with what s/he knows to be familiar. Therefore the depiction of 'virtuous' acts, it is hoped, will engender virtue. According to Bryson, several of David's works, - he gives as examples the initial sketch for the 'Oath', the 'Death of Socrates' and the Lictors Bringing Brutus the Bodies of his sons' - define problems or even binary choices; they do not point towards solutions. Instead of 'exempla', David posits genuine moral difficulty, respecting the viewer's capacity to make moral decisions. The ambiguity of David's work of this period, his

deliberate refusal to influence the spectator by tilting the balance of the scenarios he creates, amounts to what Bryson perceives as a textual organisation of the image, which functions at the 'level of construction' as a 'binary, questioning text' (98). This, in effect, precludes any interpretation of David's early work as straightforwardly didactic and unambiguous.

The 'unsuitability' of the leading exponent of Neoclassicism - to which I have briefly referred - is indicative of the uneasy coherence which characterises the entire 'movement'. Neoclassicism had actually very little to do with the revival of classicism. It employed a particular, Romanticised vision of the classical past to serve its own ideological ends - a vision which, for example, denied the heterogenity of Antiquity until the formal possibilities it offered could no longer be disavowed. It was a useful language, whose legitimating potential was widely exploited, but as a tour de force, its efficacy diminished in the wake of the revolution. Boime maintains that, by 1815, Neoclassicism had run its course in France, England and elsewhere, and that 'neither the expanding industrial societies nor the conservative governments of the post-Napoleonic period could rely on it to satisfy their ideological needs' (99). It seems more likely, however, that the neoclassical idiom had outlived its ideological function even before the end of the eighteenth century, David's invocation of the analogy between the reign of Napoleon and the glories of Imperial Rome notwithstanding. Upon his release from prison, David's forced 'return' to a more studied, conventionalized neoclassicism attests to the fundamental stylistic uncertainty which had subsisted within his work from the earliest experiments with an 'imposed'

neoclassical idiom to the innovation of the 'Oath' itself. The work of his successor, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, epitomized the notion of stylistic insecurity engendered by the historicist impulse, and evidenced what Bryson terms 'the alienation from all styles; the result of an obsession with style and styles' (100) - which repudiates any possibility of a 'normative' style or idiom. "Erudition, the idea of art as propaganda and the opportunism of Empire (had) flattened all styles' (101) - just as the formal innovations of David and his peers and their textual interrogation had been levelled by, and subsumed within, the larger ideological function of the neoclassical movement as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Central to the classical doctrine were the ideals of unity, order, systematization and formal coherence. Central to the message of seventeenth century classism was a romanticization of these objectives in accordance with what was represented by the philosophical advances of the Grande Siècle. And central to the popularity of the Neoclassical idiom and its efficacy as an ideological tool, was a fundamental understanding of the associative power of the classical tradition and a dependence upon its ontological status as a means of legitimating eighteenth-century cultural production. Ideology represents the relation of individuals to their conditions of existence (102), (i.e. to capitalist relations of production) and an ability to manipulate the dominant ideology is fundamental to the reproduction of these relations of production. Althusser argues that both the subjectivity and the social role of the individual are determined by ideology, and that no place outside ideology, from which its function can be criticized or its effect resisted, exists. This precludes any possible conception of art as either wholly 'objective' or ideologically 'detatched'; art, according to Althusser, constantly alludes to the ideology or ideological structure which sustains it.

I have attempted to argue that the Neoclassical idiom was deliberately manufactured - and sustained - to serve the dominant ideological interests of the mid-to-late eighteenth century. This dissertation has attempted to define Neoclassicism in terms of its implicit dependence upon the values associated with the classical tradition-treating the phenomenon, in effect, as less a revival of antiquity than a 'resolution' of eighteenth-century problems of

legitimation. The ideological function of Neoclassicism, its specific political dimension and the self-consciounsess which enabled the movement to define itself in relation to the classical past have been the primary concerns of this enquiry. Neoclassicism proved, ultimately, to be a simulation rather than an emulation of antiquity. Its political efficacy rested on its ideological pliability and was conditioned by an awareness of the malleablility of historical interpretation, and by an understanding of itself as an historical construct. This awareness, I would argue, was rooted in the epistemological revolution of the seventeenth century, when the epistemological status of history itself - its exclusive claim to 'truth' and 'objectivity' was first questioned.

Indispensible to the ideological function of the movement, however, was that dimension of Neoclassicism which, in Bryson's words, rendered it "highly vulnerable to discursive control" (103). The innovations of Peyron, Drouais and the "Oath" broke with the 'rococo hegemony of the signifying plane' (104), which had entailed an elimination of the textual dimension of the image. The 'autonomy' of the painterly trace was subordinated to a textual organisation of the image; an organisation which facilitated its appropriation by various didactic interests. The 'transparency of the painterly sign' to which Bryson refers is synonymous with the invisibility of the painterly trace in post-Rococo art and the subordination of the signifying plane to that of the signified - the textual message carried by the image. In the 'neo-Antique' works of Vien, Mengs and Hamilton, textual organisation remained an ancillary concern; style and what it represented were of paramount importance. Conversely, Greuze and those who participated in the didactic

programme exploited the textual dimension of the image to the extent that they risked its depletion or exhaustion; (105) facilitating an over-rapid translation of the image into discourse. The ambiguity of David's work of the 1780's precludes the possibility of such a straightforward transposition; the textual problems he posses countermand any allegations of didactic intent. Stylistic analysis commonly overlooks these multiple currants of Neoclassicism; the didactic element, the dialectic between image and text, style and subject. It has been my objective, in this dissertation, to draw attention to those aspects of Neoclassicism obscured by its larger ideological function, and negated by the destructive force of independent stylistic analysis, while at the same time attempting to define the movement in terms of the various ideological strategies in whose interests it was moulded. I have also attempted to emphasize the importance of the notion of 'history' to the determination of Neoclassicism as a movement. The Neoclassical movement defined history wholly in eighteenth century terms, within which were inscribed the contemporary protest against timeless general laws and rules, and the negation of this project by Newtonian theory. History itself is a cultural construct, a form of self-denfinition. For Neoclassicism, however, it becomes the referent; thus a connection is established between history and culture which operates at the level of signification and is entirely independent of their shared instrumentality as agencies for the ratification of the dominant ideology.

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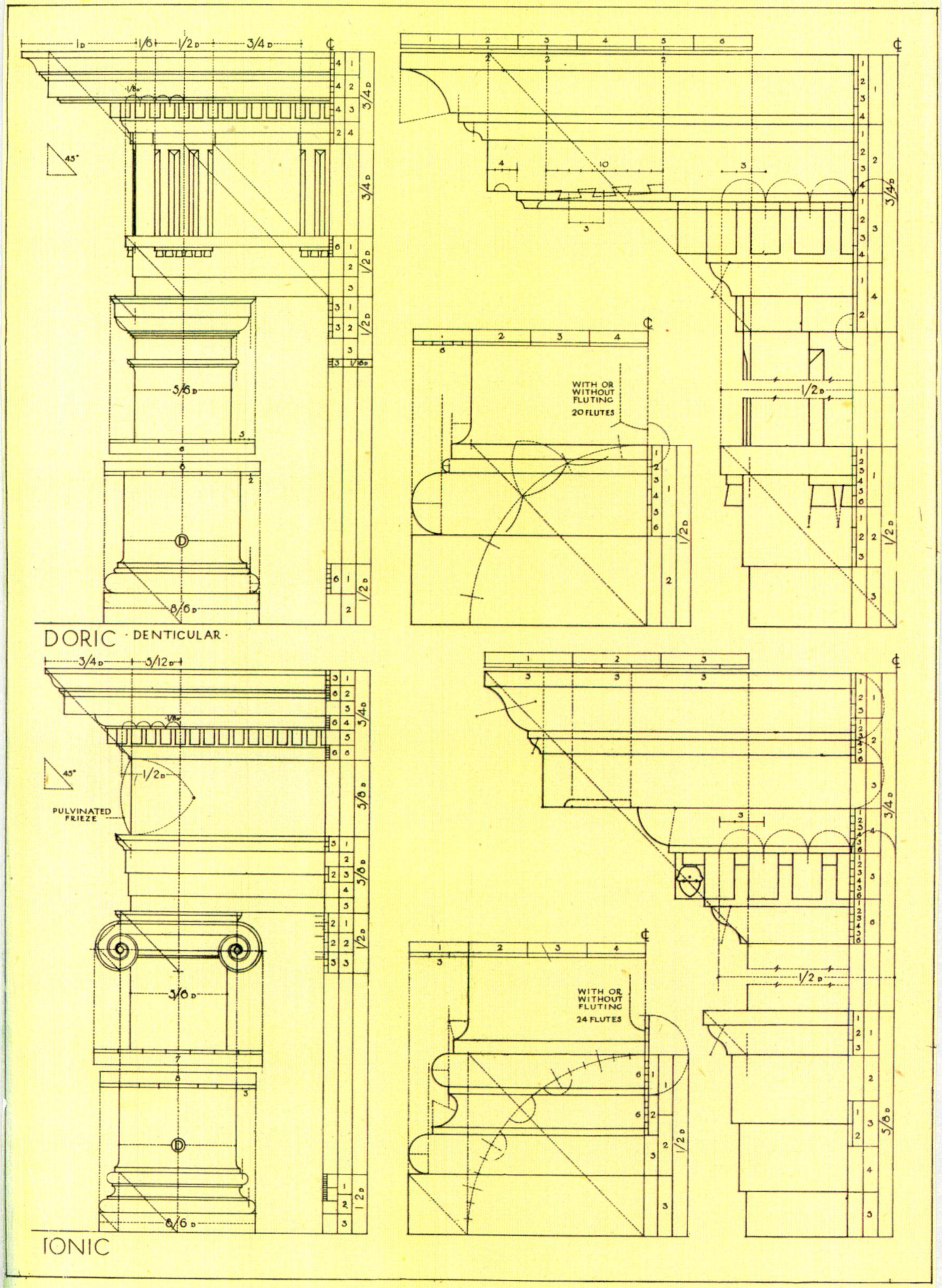
97. Bryson, p. 236
98. Ibid, p. 233
99. Boime, p. 145
100. Bryson, p. 249
101. Ibid, p. 249
102. Althusser
103. Bryson, p. 238
104. Ibid, p. 238
105. Ibid, p. 238

C


1D
1/6
1/2D
3/4D
45°
3/4D
1/2D
1/2D
1/6D
3/6D
D
8/6D
DORIC · DENTICULAR ·
WITH OR WITHOUT FLUTING 20 FLUTES
1/2D
3/4D
3/4D
3/12D
1/2D
PULVINATED FRIEZE
3/6D
3/6D
1/2D
3/6D
D
6/6D
IONIC
WITH OR WITHOUT FLUTING 24 FLUTES
1/2D
3/4D
5/6D

POUR DESSINER LES ORDRES DE LA RENAISSANCE.

Proportions de la colonne et de l'entablement des ordres, exprimées par rapport au diamètre bas (D) de la colonne.

En haut : L'Ordre Dorique (Dentelé).
bas : L'Ordre Ionique.

METHOD OF DRAWING THE RENAISSANCE ORDERS.

Proportions of the column and entablature of the orders, expressed in terms of the lower diameter (D) of the column.

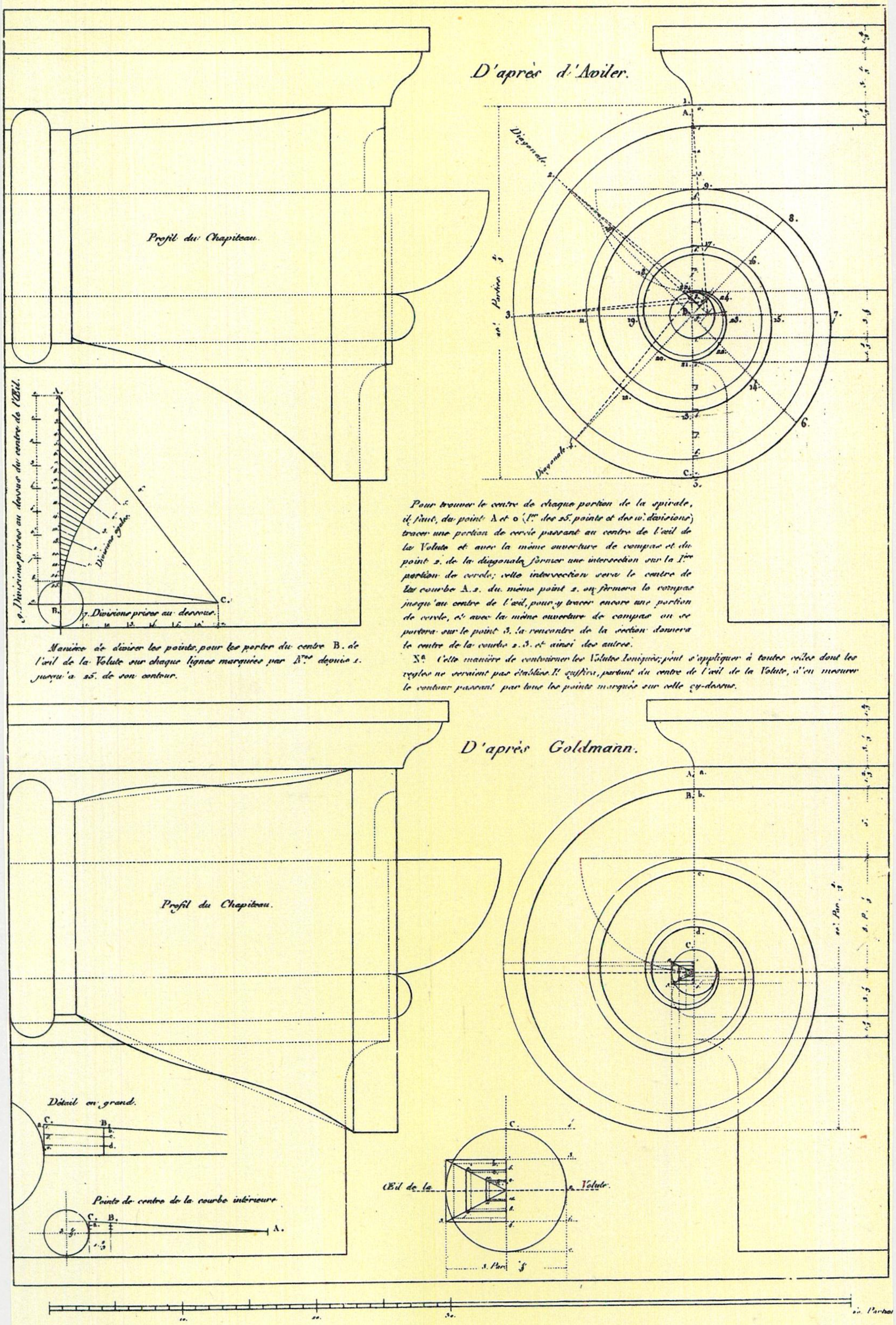
Above : The Doric (Denticular) Order.
Below : The Ionic Order.

MANERA DE DIBUJAR LOS ORDENES DEL RENACIMIENTO.

Las proporciones del entablamento y columna de los órdenes expresadas en términos del diámetro inferior (D) de la columna.

Arriba : El Orden Dórico (Denticular).
Abajo : El Orden Jónico.

Figure 1


D'aprés d'Aviler.
Profil du Chapiteau.
Diagonale.
Diagonale.
10. Parties
9. Divisions prises au dessus du centre de l'Œil.
7. Divisions prises au dessous.
Divisions égales.
A.
B.
C.
D'aprés Goldmann.
Profil du Chapiteau.
Détail en grand.
Points de centre de la courbe intérieure
Œil de la Volute.
3. Part.
10. Part.
10. Parties
10.
20.
30.

Pour trouver le centre de chaque portion de la spirale, il faut, du point A et o (Ier des 25. points et des 10. divisions) tracer une portion de cercle passant au centre de l'œil de la Volute et avec la même ouverture de compas et du point 2. de la diagonale former une intersection sur la Ire portion de cercle; cette intersection sera le centre de la courbe A.2. du même point 2. on fermera le compas jusqu'au centre de l'œil, pour y tracer encore une portion de cercle, et avec la même ouverture de compas on se portera sur le point 3. la rencontre de la section donnera le centre de la courbe 2.3. et ainsi des autres.

Nº. Cette manière de contourner les Volutes Ioniques, peut s'appliquer à toutes celles dont les regles ne seraient pas établies. Il suffira, partant du centre de l'œil de la Volute, d'en mesurer le contour passant par tous les points marqués sur celle cy-dessus.

Manière de diviser les points, pour les porter du centre B. de l'œil de la Volute sur chaque lignes marquées par Nos depuis 1. jusqu'a 25. de son contour.

IONIQUE.
Arrangements de volutes d'après d'Aviler et Goldmann.

IONIC.
Setting-out of volutes according to d'Aviler and Goldmann.

JONICO.
Trazado de volutas a según d'Aviler y Goldmann.

Figure 2

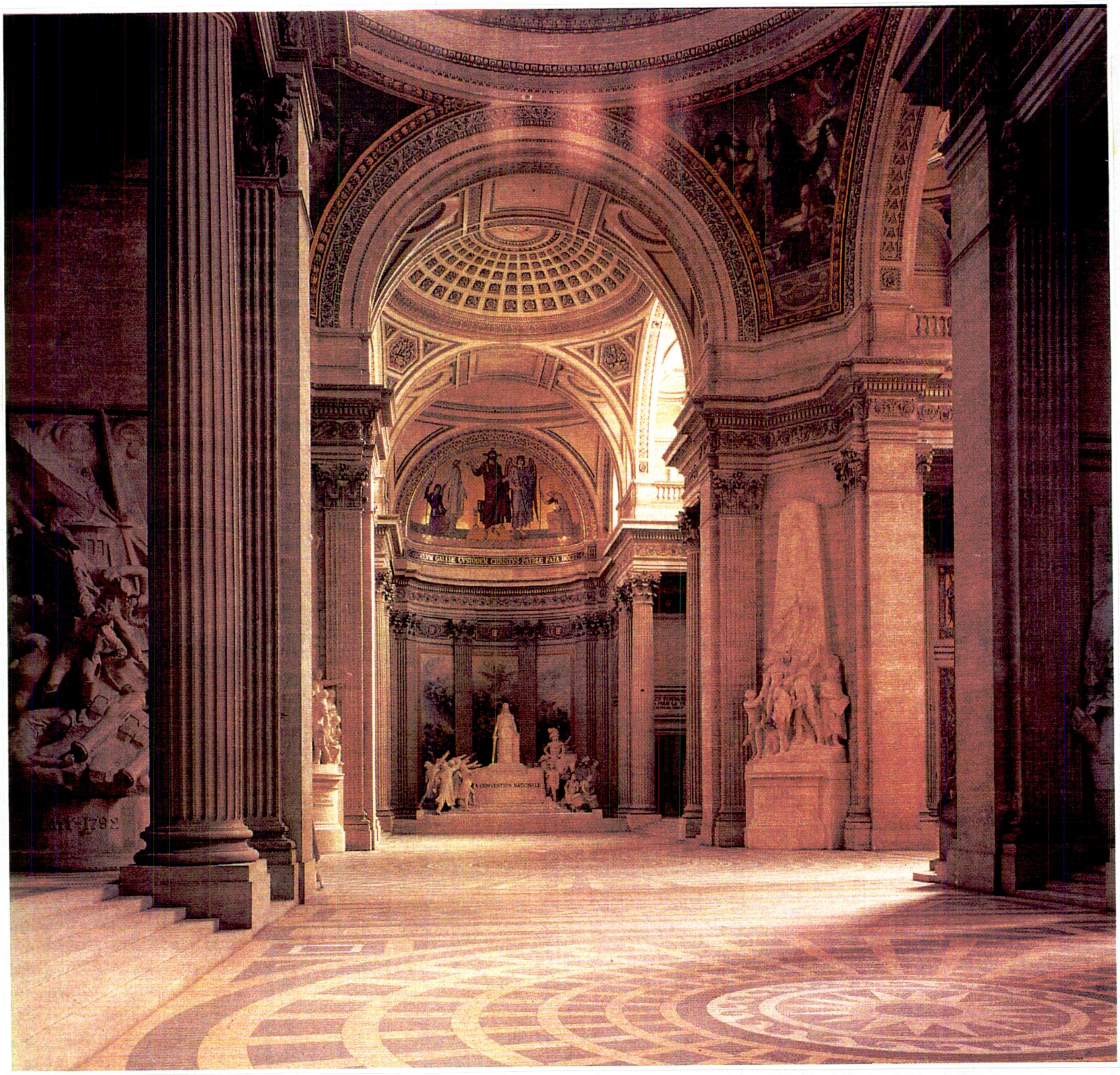


Figure 3

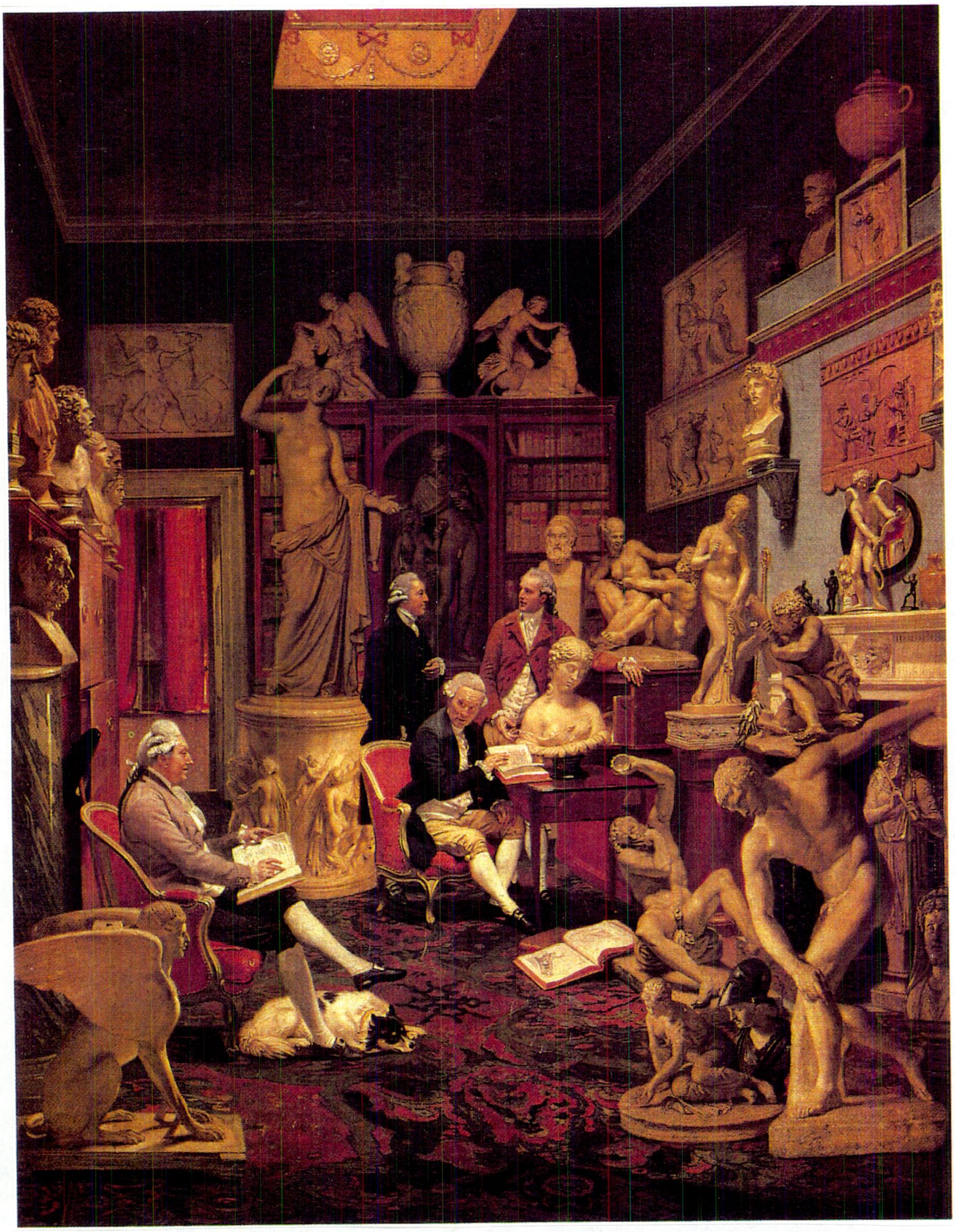


Figure 4

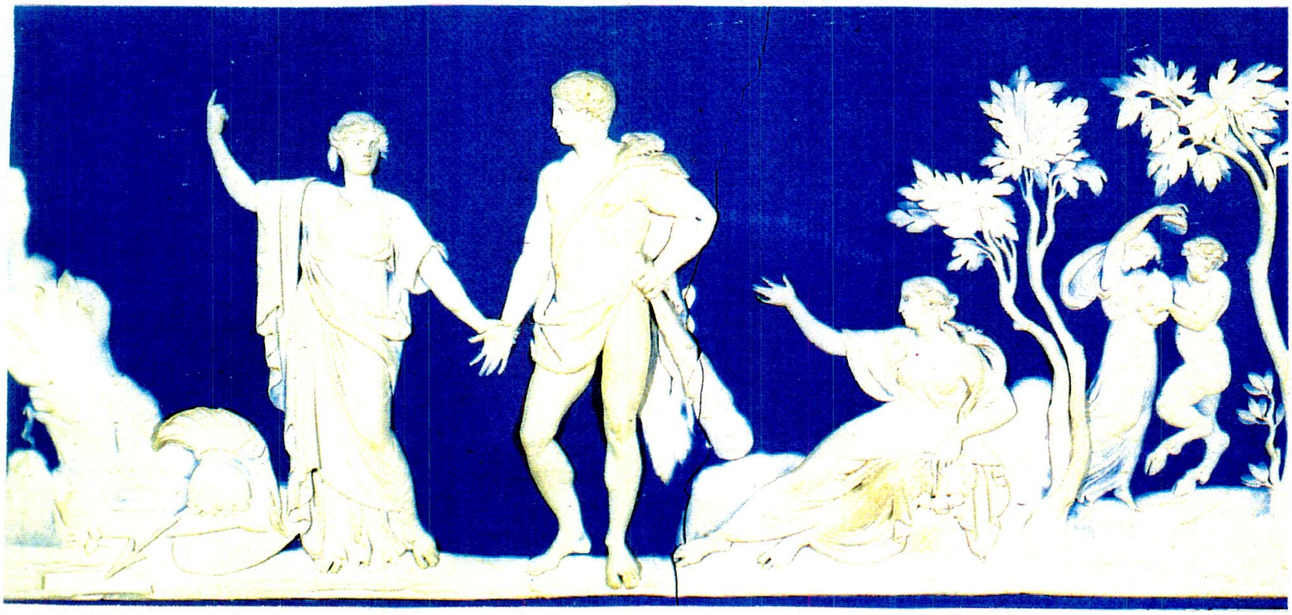


Figure 5

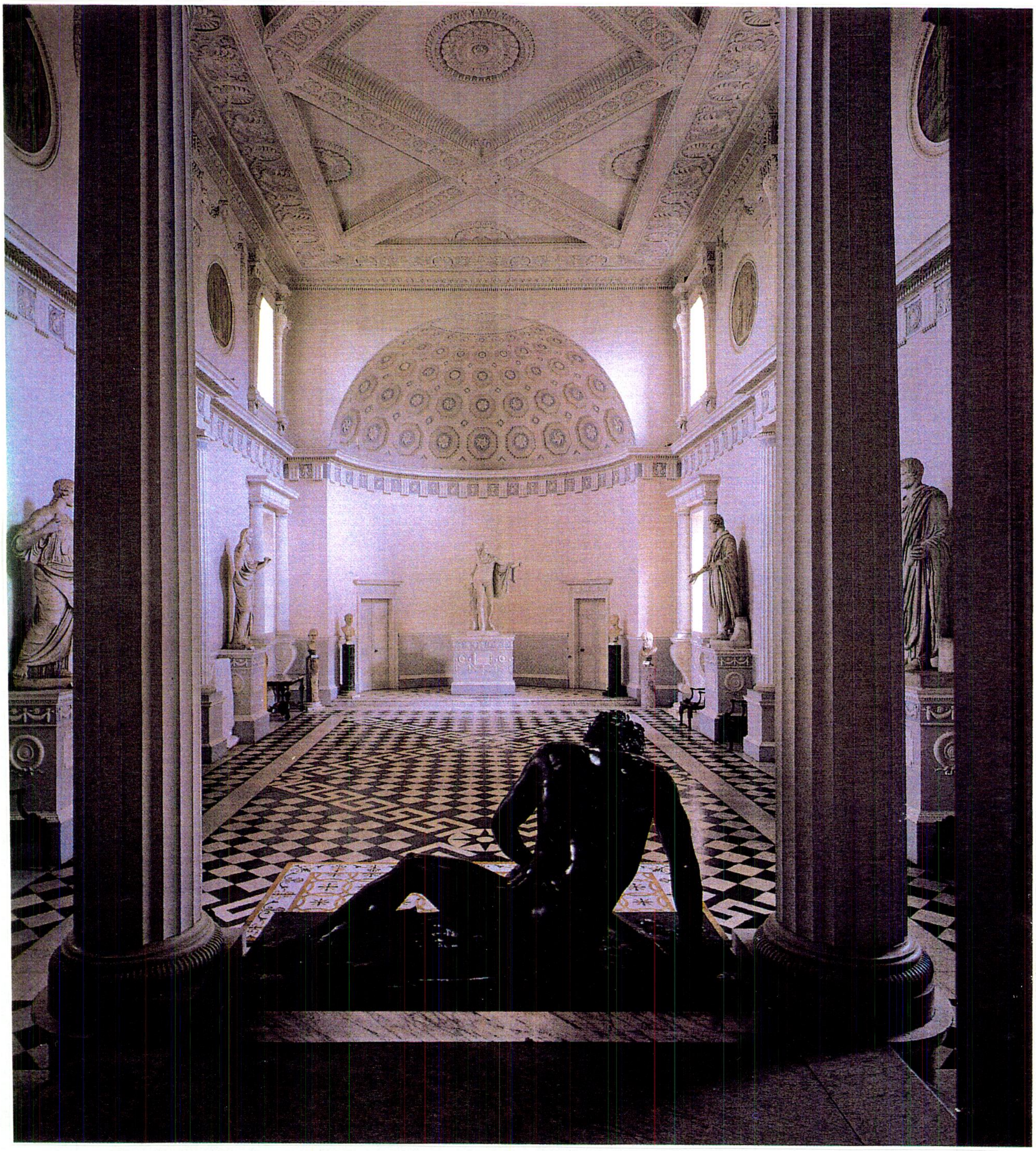


Figure 6

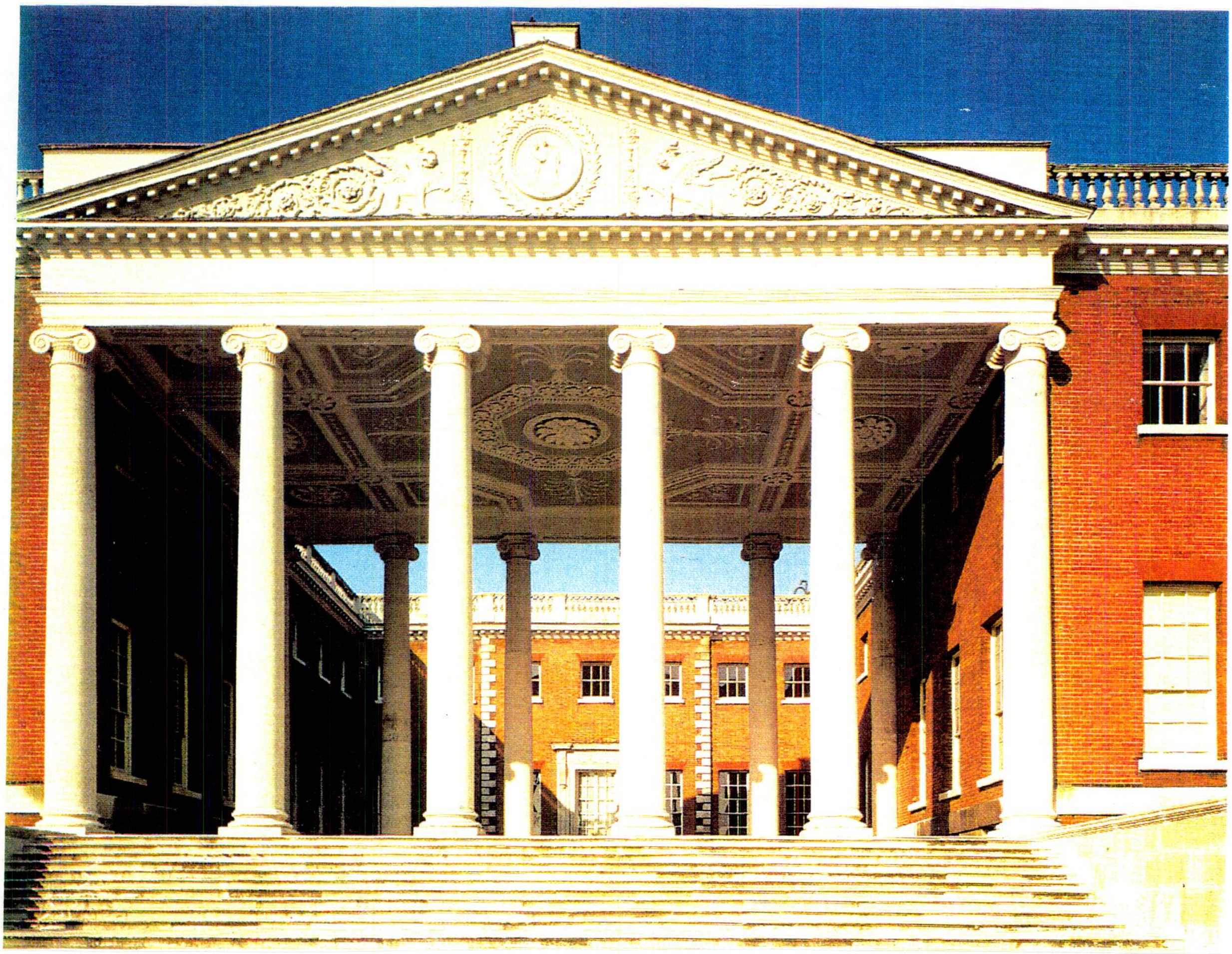


Figure 7

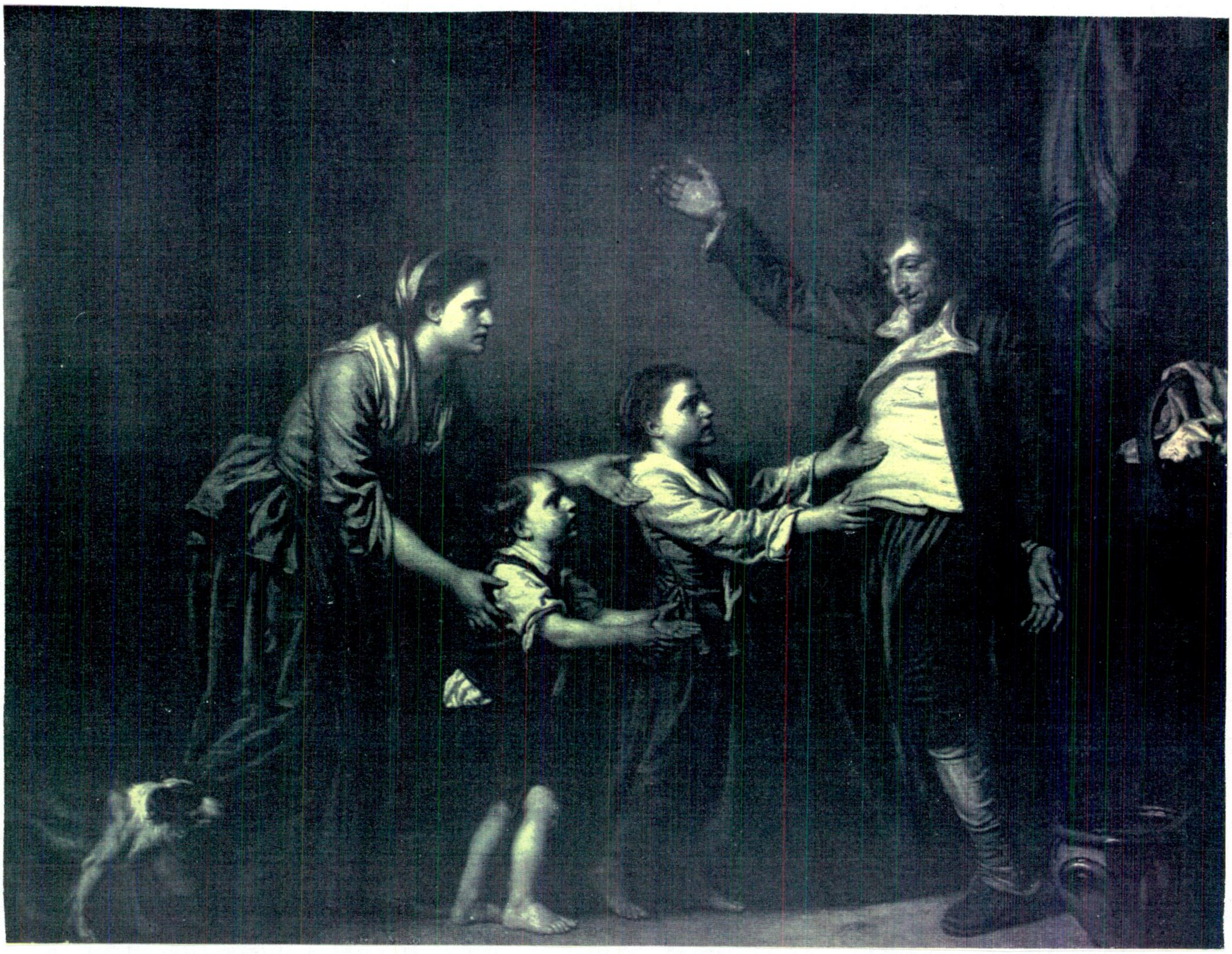


Figure 8

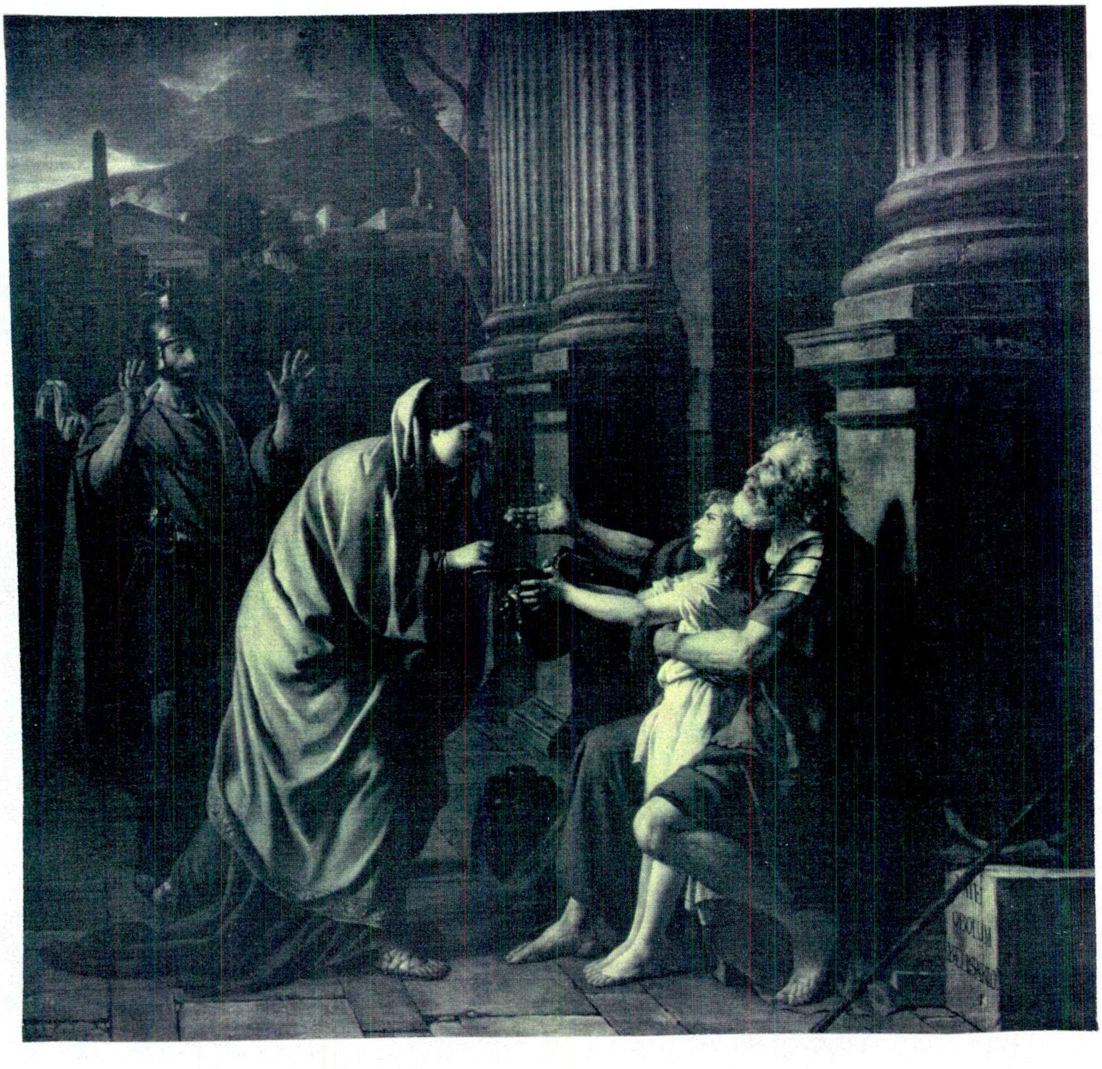


Figure 9

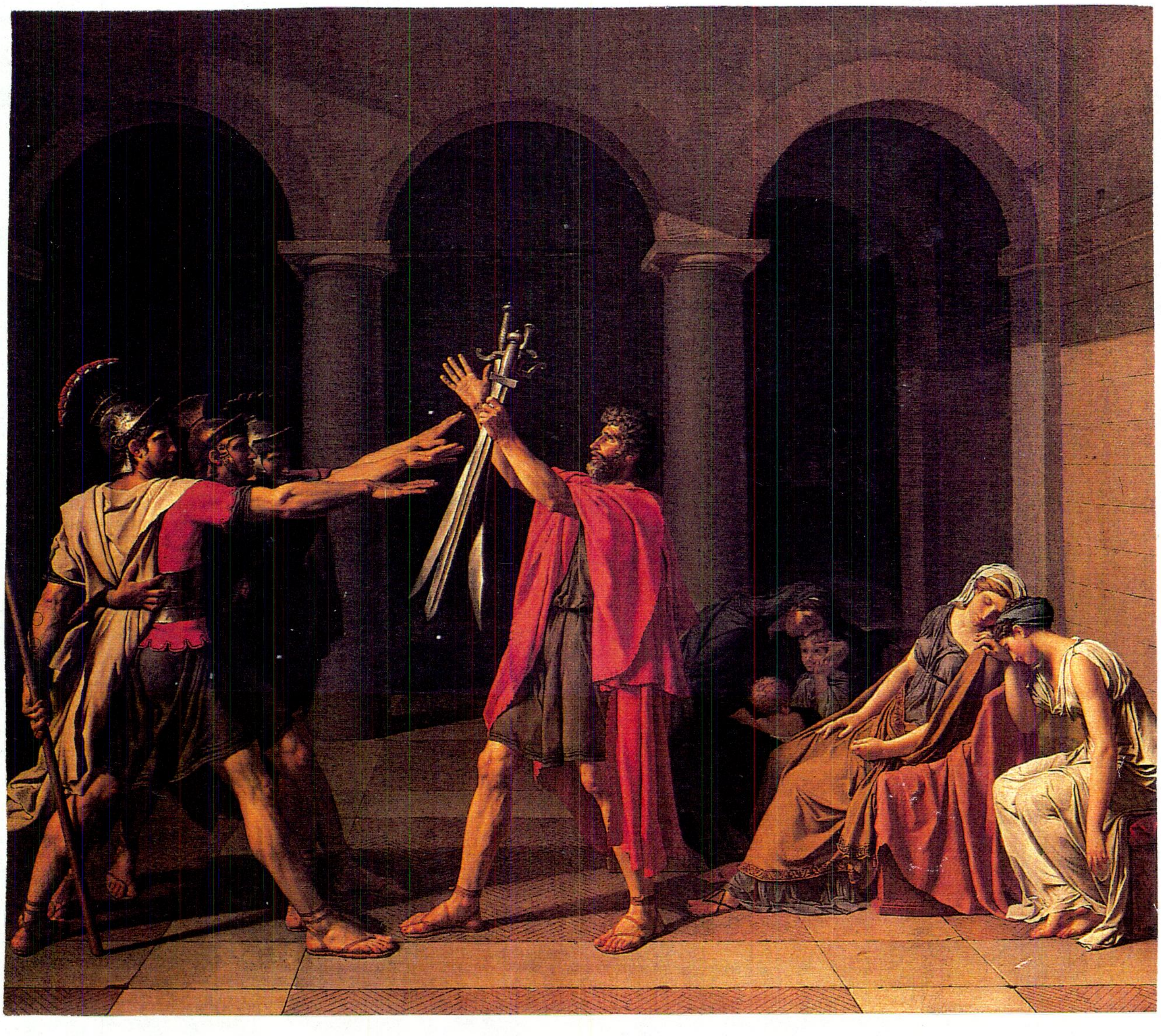


Figure 10