PIRANESI BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND SUBLIME (1)

Fatma İpek EK and Deniz ŞENGEL

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century saw an increasing number of debates and polemics in aesthetical theory. One of these concerned the difference between the beautiful and the sublime, which influenced especially philosophical approaches to art and design in poetry, music, painting, as well as in architecture (**2**). Two philosophers contributing to the discussion, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Edmund Burke (1729-1797), held diverse views on the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime: while agreeing that they were essential to appreciating human creativity, the philosophers sustained rather opposite positions concerning their respective origins and whether or not they were inherent to human nature. Moreover, architects and artists utilized the notions of beautiful and sublime in their work both conceptually in their writings and visually in design. In this lively environment flourishing around the two concepts, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) etched in 1765 the fragment of a statement on the sublime by Julien-David Le Roy (1724-1803). The fragment came from Le Roy's 1758 *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* and Piranesi placed the words on the inscription plate at the center of the façade, directly above the entrance of the building he was depicting. The etching was published in Plate VIII of his dialogue *Parere su l'architetture* (**Figure 1**): "*Pour ne pas faire de cet art sublime un vil métier où l'on ne feroit que copier sans choix*": 'In order not to render this sublime art a vile craft where one would only copy without discretion' (Parere, 139, 152-153 n.139). The wider context of Le Roy's words in *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* had called for discretion on the architect's part in situating himself between blind compliance with classical norm and 'accepting no rules whatsoever' ("*n'addmettre aucunes règles*") in the design of monuments (Le Roy, 1758, 1). Le Roy had further warned that,

> A fair appreciation of these principles should help us avoid two very dangerous improprieties in architecture: that of accepting no rules whatsoever and taking caprice as the only guide in the composition of

Figure 1. Piranesi, Plate VIII, *Parere su l'architettura*, detail showing Le Roy's statement.

Figure 2. Piranesi, Plate VIII, *Parere su l'architettura*.

Monuments; and that of accepting too many [rules]; constraining thereby Architects' imagination and making of this sublime Art a species of craft in which each only copies, without discretion, that which has been done by some ancient Architects (1758, 1).

Le Roy was using the term *sublime* to describe the architecture of monuments. Piranesi had used Le Roy's statement as the central inscription of precisely a monument, identifying *sublime architecture* with architecture of monuments (**Figure 2**). Piranesi had changed by one word Le Roy's statement in order to render it more emphatic, substituting "*un vil métier*" (a vile craft) for Le Roy's more neutral "*un espèce de métier*" (a species of craft). Le Roy too, however, had conceived of dogged compliance with classical norm as something lowly -a kind of 'craft' rather than Art. Both Piranesi and Le Roy were obviously within the bounds of eighteenth-century European culture in their view of a hierarchic distinction between art (*art*) and craft (*métier*) (**3**). While the profession of architecture had since Vitruvius been considered to be equally art and craft (*De arch*. Book I: II-III C), the eighteenth century was increasingly separating the two domains and establishing a hierarchical relationship between them in which art superseded craft. The result was discussion in architectural environments as to the implications of this new division for the discipline. Le Roy, as we saw, was alerting his reader that the artist-architect could commit faults that would degrade the work into craft. Piranesi's paraphrase of Le Roy with *vil métier* went further and described *craft* as 'vile' or 'lowly', identified mimetic architecture with craft, and made the difference between sublime architecture and classical imitation even more trenchant. By identifying architecture of monuments with a particular, elevated style, however, both Piranesi and Le Roy participated in a hierarchic genre theory that remained Aristotelian and thus, classical.

The eighteenth-century debate on the beautiful and sublime concerned architecture in a particular way: it engaged the distinction between 'beautiful architecture' and 'sublime architecture' with a view on the degree of presence of classical rules as opposed to freedom from these rules and identified their difference as the gap between 'Art' and 'craft'. Refraining from entering into a discussion of the art/craft distinction as this has been excellently conducted elsewhere (**4**), this article investigates Piranesi's drawings of sublime architecture against the background of the contemporary philosophical debate on the beautiful and sublime, and situates the eighteenth-century notion of sublime architecture in terms of the culture's revisionary, but ambiguous, attitude to classicism. The example of Piranesi should prove particularly significant in the said context as this prolific architect of the sublime was at once firmly rooted in classicism as, among others, Plate VIII of the *Parere* evinced.

A DIFFERENT CLASSICAL TRADITION

Like seventeenth-century neoclassicists, eighteenth century classicists drew on Aristotle's *Poetics*, and to some extent his *Rhetoric*, in areas that required composition and design ranging from poetry and music to architecture, dance, and sculpture. Regardless of whether one had thoroughly read and glossed Aristotle, like Charles Le Brun, Du Fresnoy, and Palomino or not, the Aristotelian rules were received with equal firmness through the shop tradition. What that tradition had handed down as 'classical norm' derived, through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpretations, from the notions of *order*, *decorum* (propriety), and other compositional concepts in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1367a, 1404b 8-12, 1405a 10-14) and the three unities

3. The typifying and familiar example for the distinction would be Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* of 1751, in particular the entries *métier*, *art*, and *architecture*, respectively written by Diderot, Diderot, and François Blondel. See also Kristeller, 1965, 166-67, 172.

4. Kristeller, 1965, 166-74; Rykwert, 1980, 297. But we must also add that since the Renaissance, architects, painters and sculptors had been arguing for the right of their discipline to be registered as art since, unlike craftsmen, artists could be knighted. Also, artists paid no or less tax depending on regional or national law. See Blunt, 1962, 48-57.

contained in the *Poetics* (1447b, 1448a). The Aristotelian conceptions were also handed down through several other interim authors like Democritus and Lucretius and determined the continuity of the discourse on classicism in the architectural sphere (Diels, 1951, 68B125; *De rerum*, 3.94, 4.26). What set the eighteenth century apart from the previous centuries, however, was the additional availability of and importance attached to two ancient works. These comprised for one, the availability of Vitruvius in readable, annotated editions and translations. Vitruvius had assimilated the Aristotelian norms of classicism fully into the discourse of architecture and demonstrated the mode of their practicability (*De arch.*, Book I: II-III C; Book VII: Introduction 1-4; Book IX: Introduction 1-4). Equally significant for our purposes, however, is the importance increasingly attached in the eighteenth century to Longinus' first century AD *On the Sublime*.

Le Roy's alerting to errors that might deter from sublimity for example, derived from Longinus, whose book began with an analysis of faults (*On sub.* 3-5). Fundamental terms such as 'greatness', 'strength', 'nobility', and 'dignity' which Kant, Burke, and others employed in the discussion of the sublime and in distinguishing it from the beautiful, equally owed to Longinus (*On sub.* 1.1, 5, 9.2-3, 12.3 *et passim*). These terms could of course be found in Aristotle and Vitruvius (*Poet.* 1447b, 1448a; *Rhet.* 1361b 12, 1393a 26, 1408a 7; *De arch.* Book V: IV C. 3, Book I: II C. 3-7). Longinus too, had incorporated elements of the Aristotelian tradition (Coulter, 1976, 18). But in Longinus they had become, beyond terms, essential concepts in the appreciation of creative work and were assimilated in the eighteenth century into the domain of architectural and visual works. In the course of the eighteenth century, roughly speaking, Aristotle was increasingly identified with classicism and the 'beautiful' while Longinus was to serve as a conceptual and validating source for a sphere of design that underscored freedom from rules, which would yield the 'sublime'.

A qualification is in order, however -one articulated by Piranesi's near contemporaries themselves: they were not content with the rendition of Longinus' *hypsous* as 'sublime' and in their discussion of the translation of the term into the vernacular, they also generated definitions of the term Finding 'sublime' too narrow for rendering the original term, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote that, "Longinus treats of animated, empassioned, energetic, or, if you will, elevated writing […]. His *hypsous* when translated 'sublimity' deceives the English reader by substituting an etymology for a translation" (Letter to J. Fletcher, 1787-1849, 250). Similarly René Rapin had written in 1701: "I make this sublime consist of the highest summit of perfection, which is the supreme stage of excellence in each condition" (Rapin, 1701, 446). In either case, Longinus' term was identified with an excellence of design and composition in the grand style. These discussions demonstrate not only the importance attached to Longinus in Piranesi's culture, but also offer definitions of the sublime in terms of *energy*, *elevation*, *highness*, and *excellence* as the concept had been taken over from Longinus.

A "DISPOSITION" FOR THE SUBLIME

About a year before Piranesi published *Parere* Plate VIII, in 1766 Kant had published his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. In this early, pre-critical work, the philosopher examined the two concepts under four thematic headings: 'Of the Distinct Objects of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime', 'Of the Attributes of the Beautiful and Sublime in Man in General', 'Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the

Interrelations of the Two Sexes', and 'Of National Characteristics, so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'. Evidently, Kant conceived of the beautiful and sublime fundamentally as the psychological capacity in the viewer to perceive these qualities, just as at the beginning of the century, Rapin had discussed the term in the context of his study of human mores and dispositions and argued its stronger presence in certain cultures than in others. Indeed Kant admitted that beauty or sublimity were characteristics prompted by the object and its physical features (Knox, 1978, 56). Yet beauty or sublimity might be but non-existent except for the viewer's "capacity" of feeling for it. Thus "the feeling of the sublime" and "the feeling of the beautiful" comprised a "capacity" inherent in some persons by which they were able to perceive the beauty or the sublimity in the object. Primary, therefore, was viewer capacity: "The various feelings," wrote Kant, "of enjoyment or of displeasure rest not so much upon the nature of the external things that arouse them as upon each person's own disposition to be moved by these to pleasure or pain" (*Observations*, 45).

In 1757, Burke in his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* had similarly granted some objects the capacity to evoke the feeling of the sublime. Such an object was, according to Burke, "a source of the sublime; that is, it [is] productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (45-47). Though Burke had conceived of the capacity to apprehend the sublime as innate to the human mind, thus as something which all persons were capable of feeling when they encountered a certain kind of object, nevertheless the sublime, he maintained, did not actualize until a viewer perceived such an object and felt its sublimity (*Inquiry*, 35, 55). While Kant maintained that the capacity was present in *some* persons and that objects were inherently beautiful or sublime, and when a person with such innate capacity encountered an object that was beautiful or sublime, he/she could apprehend it; Burke denied that objects were inherently beautiful or sublime and that the quality lay with the beholder. There are considerable differences between Burke's and Kant's views on the topic, attributable to differences between British empiricism and continental rationalism in the eighteenth century. But both of these philosophers' works were part of an eighteenth-century paradigm that attributed substantial formative power to the viewer's mental attributes, which resonated in Kant's notion of the "disposition to be moved." We may surmise that this attribution of the capacity to perceive the sublime derived from the now popular Longinus, who had claimed that, "Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind" (*On Sub.* 9. C. 2-3; Coulter, 1976, 18).

Eighteenth-century architects as well as artists were in fact experimenting with the visual-technical implications of the psychological concept of "disposition." They had translated the concept into the spatial practice of perspective and *vista* as an essential way to generate particular views of beauty or sublimity (**5**). Eighteenth-century landscape architecture, for example, is fertile ground for locating instances of implementation of the philosophical concept of dis-position as the concrete *positioning* of the viewer to lend *vista* and thus establish the circumstances for the perception of beauty or sublimity. The *exedra* -open-air sites for sitting in order to contemplate a view of built or natural environment- that are deployed throughout eighteenth-century gardens are a case in point. The bench, for example, set across the river 'Styx' in the Elysian Fields of the Stowe Gardens near London set the perspective upon William Kent's 1734

Figure 3. William Kent, Temple of British Worthies and the River Styx, viewed in 2005 from bench set by the Temple of Ancient Virtue (Robert Viau).

Figure 4. Vasi, *Ponte Salario, Magnificenze di Roma Antica e Moderna*, 1754.

Figure 5. Piranesi, *Ponte Salario, Vedute di Roma*, 1754.

Temple of British Worthies which the thoughtful viewer was to pursue for the contemplation of national history (**Figure 3**) (Augustyn, 2000, 441n.13) (**6**). Technically, the concept of *vista* coalesced with the theatrical machinations of the *scene per angolo* device which Italian Baroque theater had devised in the preceding century and which Piranesi was amply going to use in his architectural drawings, particularly in the *Carceri* series (**7**). Let us bring in, then, two pairs of further examples for this assimilation of human "disposition" into spatial language in order to demonstrate how the eighteenth century put "dis*position*" to work in the drawing of architecture with an eye to the distinction between beautiful and sublime.

Figures 4 and **5** show the respective renditions of the *Ponte Salario* in Rome by Giuseppe Vasi and Piranesi. The primary difference between Piranesi's representation and Vasi's is achieved by shift of perspective and framing. A cursory comparison of the drawings in **Figures 4** and **5** indicate Vasi's picturesque quality while Piranesi is achieving a different effect, far from anything we might term 'picturesque'. Vasi fixed the vanishing point of the scenery at the height of a viewer looking at the scene from a spot this side of the river so as to position the viewer isocephalus with a human figure standing near the horizon line (**8**). This viewer of average height is standing up on the slope at whose foot the humans in the foreground of the picture are located. Vasi's viewer, we may surmise, is standing flush with the ground of the bridge accessing the ancient tower. This characteristic lends human dimension to the picture. Similarly, the horizon line cuts across the point connecting the end of the bridge and the grounds of the tower, once again emphasizing the point of human access to the ancient architectural work. In fact, a horse cart is about to mount the bridge for the crossing, and it seems not at all an arduous crossing. Vasi's framing is panoramic, moreover, including humans and a built structure this side of the river -where we, the implied viewer of average height, stand in the vicinity of other humans in serene pastoral existence. The built structure in the forefront to the right recalls the illustration in Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753), of Vitruvius' "rustic hut" (**Figure 6**) which the Roman architect had described as the first human dwelling (*De arch.* Book II: I C.), and which referred to the functional principles of nature that provided the base of architecture (Rykwert, 1993, 46-47; Wilton-Ely, 1993, 36). In the illustration to Laugier, the architectural Muse is pointing at the hut, the origin of architecture, as she reclines upon elements of the 'present', the building details indicative of architectural styles and components of eighteenth-century classicism.

Figure 7 indicates the isocephalus perspective construction of Vasi's rendition that depicts a scene of human proportion, assimilating the historical artifacts into the *natural* order of the present. Vasi's drawing belongs to the category of the 'beautiful'. It is like Kent's vista upon the Temple of British Worthies which too, Kant and Burke would claim,
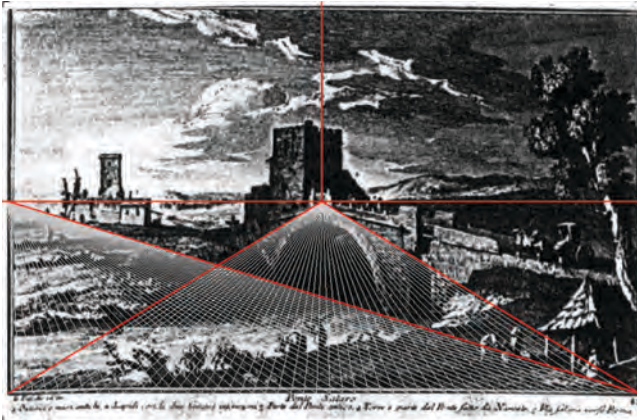

Figure 6. Laugier, *Rustic Hut, Essai sur l'architecture*, 1753.

Figure 7. Perspective construction of Vasi's *Ponte Salario.*

Figure 8. Perspective construction of Piranesi's *Ponte Salario.*

Figure 9. Plate VII, *The Drawbridge, Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, 1745.

Figure 10. *Gruppo di Scale* (Stairs), *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive*, 1743.

prompted the perception of the 'beautiful': "The sight of flower-strewn meadows, valleys with winding brooks and covered with grazing flocks" is beautiful, as in Vasi's drawing, and "the description of Elysium" is beautiful as in Kent's Temple, by Kant's terms (*Observations*, 47). Burke's description, "Beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly," defines the softly rolling hills and shore line in Vasi: "beauty should be light and delicate" (*Inquiry*, 74).

Piranesi (**Figure 5**), by contrast, raises the structure of the *Ponte* onto a plane above the one where the hypothetical viewer is standing. The bridge and the tower become imposing and elusive structures far above us. The placement of the vanishing point in Piranesi's drawing is conducive to the effect of heightening (**Figure 8**): aside from the heightening of the pictured object he achieves by the particular placement of the perspective by which the implied viewer is standing much below the architectural object, Piranesi's framing too, focuses on the *Ponte* to the exclusion of nearly all else. In other words, Piranesi's rendition is not panoramic like Vasi's. The 'heightening' thus achieved by the double action of perspective-placement and narrowed cadre effects a surplus that is absent in Vasi's rendition. The narrowing further enables the articulation of shadow and light. At play in Vasi's rendition too, shadow and light there appeared as natural features embedded in the panoramic view juxtaposing nature and art (architecture in its different stylistic and historical varieties). In Piranesi, the play of light and shadow bear as it were unnatural, even supra-natural effect
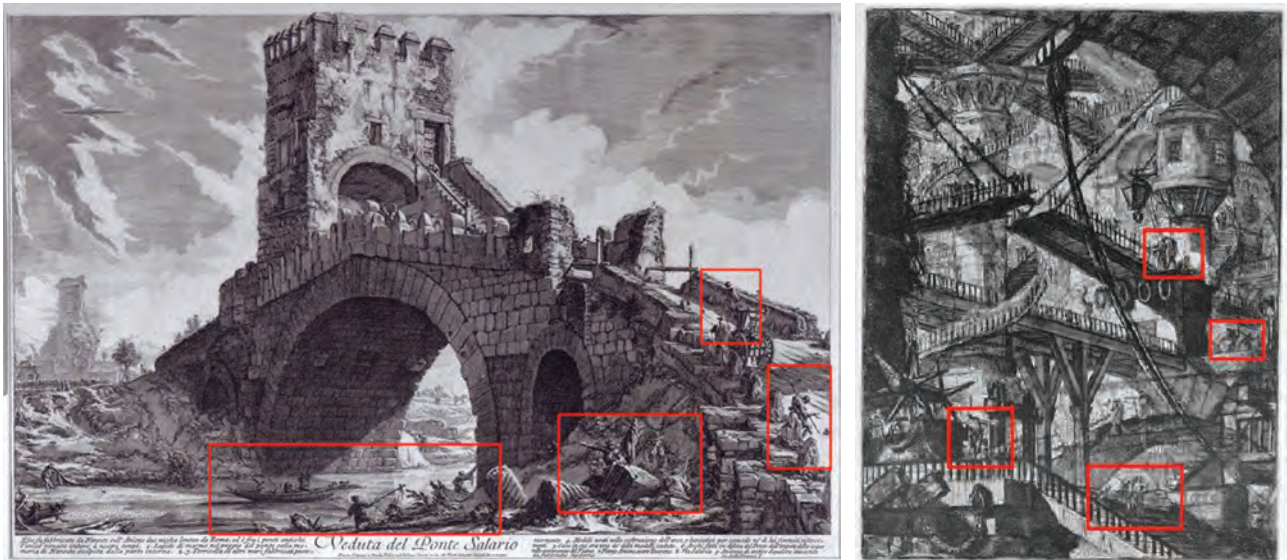
Figure 11. Detail of human figures in Piranesi's *Ponte Salario*.

Figure 12. Human figures in Piranesi's Plate VII, *The Drawbridge, Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760.

(Abrams, 1973, 65-70). "Mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind," wrote Burke, "and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. […] A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light" (*Inquiry*, 67-68). "Quick transition" between light and darkness is characteristic of Piranesi's drawings as is observable in **Figures 9** and **10** and all his interior drawings. Again, Burke devotes particular attention to this feature of the sublime:

> all edifices calculated to produce an idea of the sublime, ought rather to be dark and gloomy, and this for two reasons; the first is, that darkness itself on other occasions is known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light. The second is, that to make an object very striking, we should make it as different as possible from the objects with which we have been immediately conversant; when therefore you enter a building, […] to make the transition thoroughly striking, you ought to pass from the greatest light, to as much darkness as is consistent with the uses of architecture (*Inquiry*, 68-69).

Far from participating in the contented rustic labor Vasi's human figures are engaged in, the human figures in Piranesi's drawing are worn-out toilers (**Figure 11**) much like the inmates of the dark prisons depicted in the *Carceri* series (**Figure 12**) (Augustyn, 2000, 450). Distinguishing between beautiful and sublime in terms of human instincts, Burke identified self-preservation as the primary instinct; described its manifestation as "pain" felt in the face of "danger," and termed its ultimate effect 'sublime' (*Inquiry*, 45). Piranesi's human figures in the *Ponte*, like those in the *Carceri*, are toiling for mere self-preservation and are identifiable in Burkean terms as creating the effect of the sublime. Piranesi's bridge is accessible perhaps by hard physical effort; its steepness is foreboding. The cart setting out up the bridge faces no easy ride. As in Vasi's, there is too a hut on the lower right hand side from the viewer's stance, but this one poses no allusion to the eighteenth-century conception of the Vitruvian hut. It is low, dark, *grotto*-like: grotesque. Laugier's Vitruvian hut, duplicated in Vasi's picturesque countryside, has turned infernal in Piranesi (**Figure 13**).

The publication date of both Vasi's and Piranesi's drawings is 1754. As Piranesi studied with Vasi in the early 1740s (Wilton-Ely, 1978, 12), he
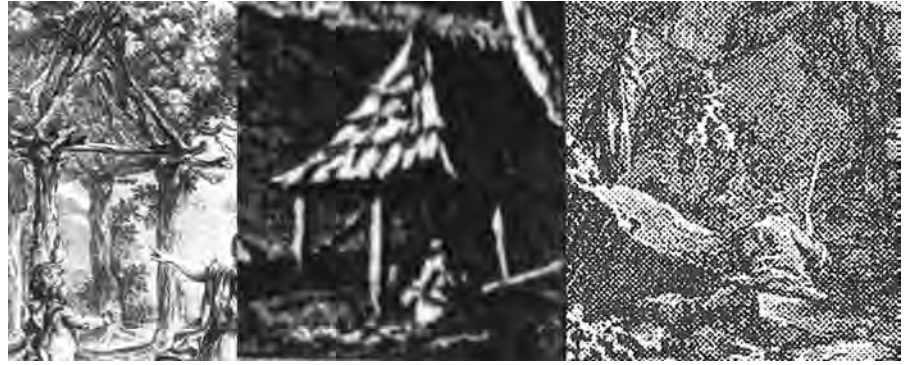
Figure 13. Detail of Laugier's (1753), Vasi's (1754) and Piranesi's (1754) huts respectively.

most likely knew the latter's drawing and re-worked it, transforming a 'beautiful' drawing into a 'sublime' one. According to Piranesi's early biographer Legrand, Vasi and Piranesi split paths upon the former's declaration that, 'You are too much of a painter, my friend, to be an engraver' (Legrand, 1799, 1921). Piranesi may have been making a point directed at Vasi by 'improving' on his former master's work. But Piranesi appears to have engaged rather systematically in such revision of others' drawings as our next example below will demonstrate.

In fact, the same observations may be made in a comparison of François Philotée Duflos's rendition of the Basilica of Maxentius and Piranesi's drawing of the same (**Figures 14, 15**). Unlike Vasi's of the *Ponte*, Duflos's does not invoke the picturesque, however. It rather constitutes a faithful rendition of classical structure in its symmetry and proportion, which too, was included in the philosophical description of the beautiful. In Duflos, the viewer is again on a par with the architectural object, with the distribution of shadow and light following a natural (or, rational) order (**Figure 16**). In its emphasis on classical symmetry and proportion, Duflos' drawing concurs with not only Kant and Burke's descriptions of the beautiful, but also Vitruvius':

> There is nothing to which an architect should devote more thought than to the exact proportions of his building with reference to a certain part selected as the standard. After the standard of symmetry has been determined, and the proportionate dimensions adjusted by calculations, it is next the part of wisdom to consider the nature of the site, or questions of use or beauty, and modify the plan by diminutions or additions in such a manner that these diminutions or additions in the symmetrical relations may be seen to be made on correct principles, and without detracting at all from the effect (*De arch.*, Book VI: II C. 1).

Figure 14. Duflos, Basilica of Maxentius, *Varie vedute di Roma antica e moderna*, 1748.

Figure 15. Piranesi, Basilica of Maxentius, *Le antichità romane*, 1756.
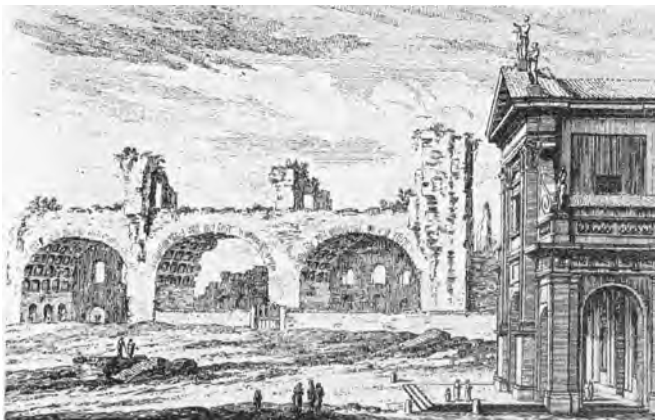
Duflos' drawing may be said to follow the classicist line that adheres to the Vitruvian principle described by the ancient author in the passage above. The principle is illustrated most notably in the obligation of the architect to observe "exact proportions." Duflos' drawing in fact brings out the attention given to proportion in the ancient remains. He further elaborates on Vitruvius' rule to take "a certain part selected as the standard." In Duflos, that "certain part selected as the standard" also assumes historical dimension in interrelating the ancient building and the 'modern' structure on the viewer's right: the modern's repetition of the Roman arch establishes the ancient as the "standard" of the classicist architecture of the present. Duflos' vantage for rendering the drawing has been clearly selected so as to emphasize this historical continuity **(Figure 16)**. Duflos' drawing, which adheres to the Viruvian passage, may be said equally to illustrate Kant's notion of "dependent beauty."

In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant identified, in a first step, "two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritude vaga*) [and] dependent beauty (*pulchritude adhaerens*)." Proportion emerged as the physical feature of dependent beauty:

> […] human beauty (i.e. of a man, a woman, or a child), the beauty of a horse, or a building (be it church, palace, arsenal, or summerhouse) presupposes a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; it is therefore adherent beauty (81-82).

Kant's architectural examples not only reiterate Vitruvius' proposition concerning "use" (Kant's "presuppos[ing] a concept of the purpose"), but imply the prominence of proportion in this particular orientation that yields "dependent beauty." We shall see that Kant's "free beauty" that shirks "proportion" and "standard," and inclines toward 'imaginative freedom' is illustrated in Piranesi's rendition of the Basilica. Kant's "free beauty" is described by Burke as well with reference to an absence of 'imagination'. In proportion, claimed Burke, "there is nothing to interest the imagination" (75). In fact, Duflos's rendition is a mere documentary of classical norm, which emerges all the more as such in comparison with Piranesi's rendition of the Basilica of Maxentius.

Piranesi's drawing of the Basilica of Maxentius bears features of sublimity comparable to those of his *Ponte*, where the viewer was placed at such low level vis-à-vis the horizon line that the architectural structures seemed imposing in their dimensions. The same technique is used in the Maxentius **(Figure 17)**. The absence of isocephaly in Piranesi's perspective constructs

Figure 16. Perspective construction of Duflos' Basilica of Maxentius.

Figure 17. Perspective construction of Piranesi's Basilica of Maxentius.
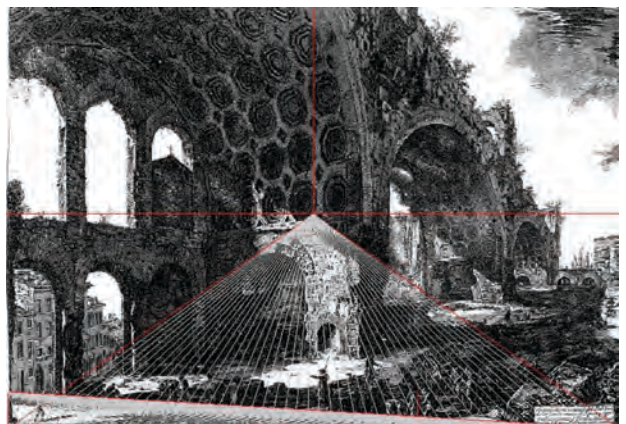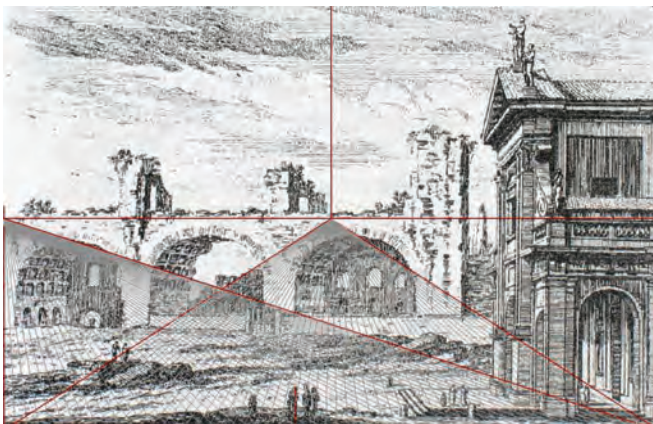
Figure 18. Title page, *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, 1745.

Figure 19. Plate II, *Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1760.

renders the architectural object larger than human scale would warrant. This placement of the viewer equally serves to establish a depth or infinity effect to the picture and underscores its three-dimensionality. Both Kant and Burke list the effect of infinity among those that stimulate the feeling of the sublime (*Observations*, 48-50, *Inquiry*, 62). As in most other drawings by Piranesi, here again we see the *chiaroscuro* effect created especially by the positioning of light and shadow on the cassettes on the inner surface of the arches of the *Maxentius*. But Piranesian *chiaroscuro* generates more shadows than light, which creates darker spaces and a strong feeling of the sublime.

The boldness of Piranesi's innovation notwithstanding, he is nevertheless among those eighteenth-century architects who offer evidence to what extent the period experimented with perspective. The stance from which one elected to view an object bore, of course, technical results and artistic effects. The eighteenth century read these results and effects in psychological terms expressing the artist's "disposition." The architectural drawing of extant buildings, particularly the ruins of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, were the prominent framework for the deployment of this particular conception of "disposition" which spelled the complete coalescence of technique and the artist's or architect's character, and their distribution as beautiful or sublime.

SUBLIME CHARACTERISTICS

Descriptions of the sublime by Kant and Burke almost read as ecphrastic prose glossing Piranesi's drawings. Hagstrum has seminally demonstrated that, as the elaborate verbal description of visual and spatial works, the

9. For a definition of ecphrasis, see Hagstrum (1958, 1987, 18 n.34).

10. Saintsbury states that ecphrasis is "a set description intended to bring person, place, picture, &c., vividly before the mind's eye": see Saintsbury, 1902, I, 491, as cited in Hagstrum (1958, 1987, 18 n.34).

11. For a discussion of ecphrasis in eighteenth-century drawings see Augustyn (2000, 443-44).

linguistic technique of ecphrasis, borrowed from ancient Greek writers, had become the prominent philosophical mode of descriptive writing in the eighteenth-century discussion of architecture, sculpture, and drawing **(9)**. Ecphrasis aimed at explicating the meaning of the architectural work while at the same time bringing the work "vividly before the mind's eye" **(10)**. Augustyn underscores the enormous importance ecphrastic philosophical prose describing architectural works took on in the eighteenth century particularly with reference to Piranesi's drawings of the archaeological ruin **(11)**. Diderot's exclamation, "les sublimes ruines" ('the sublime ruins'), Augustyn points out, implied the new vision of the eighteenth century that allowed, through ecphrastic prose, the re-arrangement, re-assembly, and the re-casting in a new light, of past artifacts so as to foreground their sublime character as opposed to mere classical rendition (Augustyn, 2000, 443). Thus the bringing of the work "vividly before the mind's eye" enabled a vision of the work that evinced its sublimity. It is in this context that the Kantian and Burkean description of the sublime, and their persistence in emphasizing architectural examples, may be read most expediently.

In Kant the sublime is, "Formless, boundless, chaotic in nature of might and magnitude;" it is "the violation of form in nature," and must "always be great" (*Observations*, 47-48; Knox, 1978, 54-58). **Figures 18** and **19** from the two *Carceri* series of 1745 and 1760 are among those illustrating Kantian 'formlessness', 'boundlessness' that indicate the breakdown of classical form. The quality of 'chaos', present in these two plates at first glance implies the antithesis of classicism. The architectonic in the plate in **Figure 19** would however, upon prolonged viewing, show a very co-ordinated classical structure. But Piranesi's particular

-low- placement of the sight point, the play of shadow and light render dominant not classical form but the human and historical debris in the forefront. The feeling of the sublime "is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy," writes Kant, "in some cases merely with quiet wonder [.]" Therefore "a great height is just as sublime as a great depth, except the latter is accompanied with the sensation of shuddering, the former with one of wonder" (*Observations*, 47-49). The reader may be referred to **Figure 9** for the sense of "dread" and "shuddering" at the sight of "great depth." At first glance **Figure 20** casts a view of classical order. The placement of the sight point, the notion of a vantage point towering above even monumental towers, however, robs the orderly of any sense of classical beauty and yields "wonder" at the least.

Kant continues by giving natural examples of the sublime like "the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above clouds, the description of a raging storm, or Milton's portrayal of the infernal kingdom [in his *Paradise Lost*], arouse enjoyment but with horror" (*Observations*, 47). It is this 'horror' that comprises the effect of the sublime. Similarly, Burke describes the sublime as follows:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling (*Inquiry*, 45-47).

Figure 20. Frontispiece II, oblique perspective from *Icnographia*, detail, *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, 1762.

Burke continues to describe the sublime by its concrete physical appearance: "sublime objects are vast in their dimensions […]; the great, rugged and negligent […]; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation […]; the great ought to

Figure 21. Foundations of Hadrian's Mausoleum (later Castel Sant'Angelo), *Le antichità Romane*, IV, 1756.

be dark and gloomy […]; the great ought to be solid, and even massive" (*Inquiry*, 101-102). Piranesi's drawings of the *Ponte* and Maxentius' Basilica clearly fall in the category of Burkean and Kantian sublime, as does the structure depicted in **Figure 21**.

Like Kant's mountain whose peak is invisible, the human eye is dreadfully unable to glimpse the zenith or closure to this structure. We find in it the Burkean "right line" but -again as in Burke- with 'strong deviations' that shun the right angle and result in an added sense of steepness, height, and inaccessibility. The effect of "terror" is the direct source of the sublime and yields a version of aesthetic pleasure in Burke: "[…] terror is a passion which always produces delight" (*Inquiry*, 41). Like Kant, Burke identifies Milton, particularly his description of Death in *Paradise Lost*, as a prime example of the sublime. Burke could be describing a plate, such as that in **Figure 9**, from Piranesi's *Carceri*: "In his [Milton's] description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree" (*Inquiry*, 51). Burke also commented on Milton's description of Satan: "the mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused." "[I]n nature, dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions." While the entire *Carceri* series are replete with a sense of "terror" and "obscurity," **Figures 18** and **19** particularly illustrate Burke's description. The Burkean "vastness" and "magnificence" and the Kantian "eternity" and "profundity," on the other hand, are felt, again, especially in *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma* (1762) (**Figure 20**) and *Le antichità romane* (1756) (**Figure 21**) while "light" effects and "sudden" alterations between light and darkness, white and black are seen in all Piranesi drawings.

As evinced already in such titles as "Magnitude in Building" and "Light in Building," Burke's examples of the sublime, even entire chapters of his discussion thereof, directly derive from architecture (*Inquiry*, 49-73). In "Magnitude in Building" of 1757 (*Inquiry*, 61), Burke wrote as if he were contemplating Piranesi's Plate VII (**Figure 9**) from *Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (1745): "Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime." Piranesi magnified architectural elements by playing on scale, which becomes more striking in comparison with classical human scale. "Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least." Again, the effect of extension in both height and depth is observable in *Carceri*, where in order to obtain the effect of verticality, spaces have been extended upward and downward, even beyond the margins of the plate: "the perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane." Although the figure of the drawbridge seems, at first glance, an inclined element, by lifting it up, Piranesi was able to break its inclined appearance. "[H]eight is less grand than depth," wrote Burke, which is again found in Plate VII: by *chiaroscuro*, Piranesi etched the structures in the background lightly and the figures in the foreground in bold in order to create the effect of depth, and rendered depth dominant by emphasizing the *chiaroscuro*. Finally, Burke writes that, "the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger," which may be discerned in especially the stones of the arches in Plate VII. Apart from the fact of these stones stimulating sublimity by their unrefined appearance, they also reflect the remoteness of past time and thus reflect yet another sublime character: we read in Kant that the remoter the ancient object is in time, the more ruined the ruins of past time, the greater the degree of sublimity (*Observations*, 49, 50).

BEAUTIFUL GREECE AND MODERN SUBLIME

Laugier had included the illustration of the Vitruvian hut (**Figure 6**) in a part of his *Essai* that discussed the origins of architecture. This hut, he had claimed, had derived from nature, in a culture and at a time in history that was close to nature. Like Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Laugier argued that the origins of not only modern architecture but also Roman architecture whence the modern derived, stemmed from Greek architecture. Setting the standard for classical norm, Greek architecture was by definition beautiful, as it comprised the unmediated mimetic duplication of natural order (Laugier, 1753, 1966, 2). Similarly Winckelmann identified Greece as providing the root of Roman and later classical art and architecture. The architectural remains at Paestum in Naples, he claimed, were clearly Greek, as they bore 'noble aura' (1764, 138). In his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst* published in 1755, he described Greek architecture by its character of "edle Einfalt und stille Grösse" (noble simplicity and serene greatness) (24), and maintained that Rome, in copying Greece, had degraded the qualities of 'beauty' of the original. In the 1765 edition of *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst*, Winckelmann had elaborated further on Greek closeness to nature and thus on architecture's originative power of beauty. 'The Greeks alone', he wrote, 'seem to have thrown forth beauty as a potter makes his pot' (264). This claim on behalf of Greek origins, in Winckelmann as in Laugier, served to assign secondary status to Roman architecture and its modern versions as well as explain their difference: the Greeks had copied nature, and they had done so well. The Romans had copied the Greeks, thus were removed from the original source -nature- and they had not copied well. 'Beauty' belonged with Greece.

The defense of Roman architecture thus had to attach itself to a concept and a character other than 'beauty'. As is familiar to us from myriad architectural writings of the past, its character was regarded as public and as having grandeur: Roman architecture was monumental and bespoke moral and monetary *auctoritas* (authority) even in the domestic context (Thébert, 1987, 329) (**12**). Rome clearly came later in history -than Greece, for example. The difference of its architecture from that of Greece demanded explanation, which, in eighteenth-century terms essentially meant identifying a historically precedent culture from which it derived (Cassirer, 1979). In the case of Rome, moreover, there was the underlying stratum of Etruscan architecture and artifacts of which the eighteenth century, as progenitor of the discipline of archaeology, was aware. In this cultural environment, a Piranesi was going to argue that Roman architecture derived from the Etruscan, which in turn, he would claim, had derived from the Egyptian: "The Roman and Tuscan were at first one and the same, the Romans learned architecture from the Tuscans, and made use of no other for many ages," wrote Piranesi in his preface entitled "An Apologetical Essay in Defense of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture" to the *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizi* (Diverse manners of ornamenting chimneys and all other parts of buildings, 1769) (Apologetical Essay, 15). The "Apologetical Essay" aimed at demonstrating the derivation of Etrusco-Roman architecture from the Egyptian by working out a detailed visual vocabulary of ornament and applying it to actual design. Piranesi was by no means alone in this view. Le Roy defended that the Greeks themselves had copied their monumental architecture from Egypt (Le Roy, 1758, 13) and the Fransiscan Carlo Lodoli

12. Vitruvius nothwithstanding, in the absence of a substantial discourse on Roman architecture dating from Antiquity, the eighteenth century excavated a discourse on the grandeur of Roman architecture from epic texts, most notably from Virgil's *Aeneid*. A review of this eighteenth-century literature is not in order in this article. Suffice it to point out that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century translations of Virgil into the vernacular bore wide architectural interest. The elaborate descriptions of the building of Dido's Carthage (see *Aeneid*, Book I: 505-510, 580-597, 606-698, 734-740) and eventually of mainland Rome (see *Aeneid*, Book I: 369-389; Book VI: 1063-1068; Book VII: 85-90; Book VIII: 867-872; Book X: 15-19) found particular resonance in, for example, Dryden's translation of 1697 (see Dryden's translation of *Aeneid*, Book I: 467-470).

Figure 22. *Pyramid of Cestius, Varie vedute di Roma antica e moderna,* 1750.

(1690-1761) went even further and claimed that the Doric order ought to be re-named after its Egyptian origins and called the 'Egyptian order' and that the Tuscan -by which Lodoli, like Piranesi, meant 'Etruscan'-order had too been invented by Egyptians (Memmo, 1833, 296-97). Andrea Memmo, Italian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, who conveys to us Lodoli's arguments, himself claimed that Phoenicians, Jews, Etruscans and Greeks had derived their architectural orders from Egypt (Memmo, 1833, 296-97).

The debate on the origins of European architecture thus coalesced with the contemporaneous philosophical debate on the relationship/difference between the beautiful and the sublime. Monumental Egyptian architecture was sublime in its supra-human scale, its impenetrability (the pyramids were going to be explored substantially starting with the Napoleonic campaign into Egypt at the end of the century), and in the fact that in ancientness it surpassed anything known of Antiquity. Piranesi was going to represent his notion of historical derivation in a drawing of 1750 (**Figure 22**), in which the grandeur of Romanesque architecture was shown to *lean on* the even grander Egyptian pyramid. The two structures were depicted as inseparable; the Romanesque as offspring of the Egyptian and a mere fragment but for the support provided by the older building. The words from Le Roy we found Piranesi etching in Plate VIII of the *Parere* had identified monumental architecture as the sublime art and copying -that very craft in which Winckelmann claimed Romans had fallen short- he had reduced to 'craft'. There was indeed room for this craft in eighteenth-century culture as Kantian and Burkean theorizing on the 'beautiful' and as so much classicist architecture of the period evinces. And Piranesi seems to have acknowledged it in so far as his copying of Vasi's *Ponte Salario* demonstrates that. His aim, however, was the sublime as this provided, via an Egyptian detour circumventing Greece, freedom from classicist norms toward inventing the modern.

Abbreviations

Antichità	Piranesi *Le antichità romane* (The Roman antiquities)
Apologetical Essay	Piranesi, "An Apologetical Essay in Defense of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture"
Campo	Piranesi *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma* (The Campus Martius of ancient Rome)
Carceri	Piranesi *Invenzioni capricci di carceri* (Capricious inventions ofprisons) and *Carceri d'invenzione* (Prisons of the invention)
De arch.	Vitruvius *De architectura libri decem* (Ten Books on Architecture)
De rerum	Lucretius *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things)
Gedanken	Winckelmann *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst* (Thoughts Concerning the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture)
Inquiry	Burke *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*
Les Ruines	Le Roy *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (The ruins of the most beautiful monuments of Greece)

Observations	Kant *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime*
On sub.	Longinus *Peri hypsous* (On the sublime)
Parere	Piranesi *Parere su l'architettura* (Opinions on Architecture)
Poet	Aristotle *Ars poetica* (Poetics)
Prima Parte	Piranesi *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (Part one of architecture and perspectives)
Rhet.	Aristotle *Ars rhetorica* (Rhetoric)
Varie Vedute	Piranesi *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna*
Vedute	Piranesi *Vedute di Roma* (Views of Rome)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABRAMS, M.H. (1973) *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, London.

ARISTOTLE (1887; 1995) Ars poetica, *The Poetics*, trans. W. H. Fyfe (1982) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; William Heinemann, London.

ARISTOTLE (1837; 1994) Ars rhetorica, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (1926) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; William Heinemann, London.

AUGUSTYN, J. (2000) Subjectivity in the Fictional Ruin: The Caprice Genre, *Romanic Review* (91: 4): 433-57.

BLUNT, A. (1940; 1962) *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1660*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

BURKE, E. (1757) *On Taste. A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime and Beautiful with several other Additions. Reflections on the French Revolution. A letter to a Noble Lord*, ed. C. W. Eliot (1937) P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, New York.

CASSIRER, E. (1951; 1979) Die Philosophie der Aufklärung, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. Kölln and J.P. Pettegrove (1979) Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

COULTER, J.A. (1976) *The Literary Microcosm. Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists*, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

DIDEROT, D. and D'ALEMBERT, J.R. (1751) *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 Bde., Paris.

DIELS, H. and KRANZ, W. (1951) *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., Weidmann, Berlin.

DU FRESNOY, C.A. (1668; 1773) De Arte graphica, *The art of painting*, trans. J. Dryden (1695) Bernard Lintot, London.

EDGERTON, S.Y. (1975) *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London.

EK, F. İ. (2006) *The Archaeological Sublime: History and Architecture in Piranesi's Drawings*, unpublished M.Sc. Dissertation, Department of Architecture, İzmir Institute of Technology, İzmir.

HAGSTRUM, J. (1958; 1987) *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

HENDRIX, J. (2003) *Architectural forms and philosophical structures*, Peter Lang, New York.

KANT, I. (1764) Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. F. J. T. Goldthwait (1960) University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.

KANT, I. (1790) Kritik der Urteilskraft, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (1978) Clarendon Press, Oxford.

KNOX, I. (1978) *The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer*, Humanities Press, New Jersey; Harvester Press, Sussex.

KRISTELLER, P.O. (1965) *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

LAUGIER, M.A. (1753; 1966) *Essai sur l'architecture*, Gregg, Farnborough.

LE BRUN, C. (1668) L'expression des passions et autres confe´rences, *The Expression of the Passions, trans.* Julien Philipe (1994) Editions De´dale, Paris.

LEGRAND, J.G. (1799, 1921) *Notice historique sur la vie et sur les ouvrages de J. B. Piranesi, Architecte, Peintre et Graveur... Redigée sur les notes et les pieces communiquées par ses fils, les Compagnons et les Continuateurs de ses nombreux travaux*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; G. Morazzoni, Milan.

LE ROY, J. (1758) *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, H. L. Guerin et L. F. Delatour, Paris.

LONGINUS (1694; 1995) Peri Hypsous, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. H. Fyfe (1995) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

LUCRETIUS (1656; 1975) De Rerum Natura, *On the Nature of Things,* trans. W.H.D. Rouse (1957) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; William Heinemann, London.

MALLGRAVE, H. F. (2005) *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673-1968*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York.

MURRAY, P.J. (1971) *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, Thames and Hudson, London.

PALOMINO, A. (1715; 1988) *Theórica de la pintura*, Lucas Antonio Bedmar, Madrid.

PENNY, N. (1978) *Piranesi*, Oresko Books, London; Hippocrene Books, New York.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1743) *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B., DUFLOS, F. et al. (1745; 1748) *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1745) *Invenzioni capricci di carceri*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1756) *Le antichità romane*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1760) *Carceri d'Invenzione*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1748-78) *Vedute di Roma*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1762) *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, n.p., Rome.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1765; 2002) Osservazioni sopra la lettre de Monsieur Mariette. Parere su l'architettura. Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in europa ne'tempi antichi, *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette: With Opinions on Architecture, and a Preface to a New Treatise on the Introduction and Progress of the Fine Arts in Europe in Ancient Times*, introduction by John Wilton-Ely (2002) Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles and California.

PIRANESI, G.B. (1769) *Diverse Maniere d'Adornare i Cammini ed Ogni Altra Parte Degli Edifizi Desunte dall'Architettura Egizia, Etrusca, e Greca, Con un Ragionamento Apologetico in Difesa dell'Architettura Egizia e Toscana*, n.p., Rome.

RAPIN, R. (1701; 1709) *Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les différentes conditions des hommes, Œuvres, Volume III*, Pierre Mortier, Amsterdam.

RYKWERT, J. (1993) *On Adam's House in Paradise, The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London.

RYKWERT, J. (1980) *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century*, MIT Press Cambridge, Mass. and London.

SAINTSBURY, G. (1902) *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, William Blackwood and Sons, New York.

TAYLOR, C.C.W. (1999) *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary*, Toronto.

THEBERT, Y. (1987) The Domestic Architecture of the Ruling Class, *A History of Private Life from Pagan Rome to Byzantium, ed.* Paul Veyne (1985), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London; 325-352.

VASI, G. (1747) *Magnificenze di Roma Antica e Moderna*, n.p., Rome.

VIRGIL (1892; 1993) Aeneis, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (1697) Folio Society, London.

VITRUVIUS (1914) De architectura libri decem, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (1960) Dover Publications, New York.

WENDORF, R. (2001) *Piranesi's Double Ruin, Eighteenth-Century Studies* (34:2) 161-180.

WILTON-ELY, J. (1993) *Piranesi as Architect and Designer*, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

WILTON-ELY, J. (1978) *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, Thames and Hudson, London.

WINCKELMANN, J.J. (1764; 1880) *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, The History of Ancient Art, trans. G. H. Lodge, Osgood, Boston.

WINCKELMANN, J.J. (1755; 1765; 1992) Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildbauer-Kunst, *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture, ed.* Michele Cometa (1992) Aesthetica edizioni, Palermo.

WORDSWORTH, W. (1787-1849) Letter to J. Fletcher, *Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, Volume II, ed. W. Knight (1907).

KLASİK İLE 'YÜCE' ARASINDA PİRANESİ

On sekizinci yüzyılda, estetik biliminin olduğu kadar mimarlık tarihinin de doğuşu bağlamında ivme kazanan tartışmalar, mimarlık disiplinini doğal olarak etkilemişti. Estetik tartışmaların temeli mimarilerin tarihsel köken tartışmalarına bağlanıyor ve 'güzel' ile 'yüce' olmak üzere iki etki üzerine odaklanıyordu: 'Güzel'i temsil ettiği düşünülen Yunan tarzı, 'yüce'yle özdeşleştirilen Roma ve Mısır tarzlarının karşısına yerleştirilmekteydi. Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) gibi mimar ve düşünürlerin görsel ve yazınsal çalışmalarında söz konusu estetik ve tarihsel savlar takip edilebiliyordu. Piranesi, Roma mimarlık ve uygarlığının kökenini 'güzel' Yunan'a dayandıran Winckelmann gibi çağdaşlarının aksine, Roma mimarî estetiğinin 'yüce' unsurlar barındırdığını, dolayısıyla Mısır medeniyetinden türediğini savunuyordu. Tüm çizimlerinde antik Roma'nın 'yüce' mimarisini resmeden Piranesi, böylece estetik tartışmaların 'yüce' cephesinde yerini alıyordu.

On sekizinci yüzyılın iki önemli filozofu Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) ile Edmund Burke (1729-1797) estetiğin bileşenleri 'güzel' ve 'yüce' üzerine çalışmalarıyla tartışmaları hızlandırmıştı. Bu iki kavram on sekizinci yüzyıl felsefe ve tasarım kuramlarını aynı ölçüde etkilemekle birlikte, makale temel olarak Kant ile Burke'ün 'yüce' tanımları üzerinden Piranesi'nin görsel ve metinsel çalışmalarının karşılaştırmalı okumasını yapmaktadır. Kant ve Burke'ün 'yüce' açıklamalarında küçük ayrılıklar görülmekle birlikte ikisi de temelde aynı şeyi söylemişlerdir. Özellikle Kant'ın *Güzellik ve Yücelik Duygusu Üzerine Gözlemler* (1764) ve Burke'ün *Yücelik ve Güzellik Fikirlerimizin Kaynağı Hakkında Felsefî bir Araştırma* (1757) başlıklı çalışmalarındaki ifadeler Piranesi'nin çizimlerinde takip edilebilmektedir. Piranesi, Kant'ın ve Burke'ün anlattığı 'yüce'yi mimarî çizim diliyle aktarmıştı. Piranesi, on sekizinci yüzyıla egemen olan 'yüce' etkiyi Venedikli bir mimarın gözüyle yeniden yorumluyordu.