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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Eros and the Materialism of the Rococo:
François Boucher, Print Culture, and Modernity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Edward L. Sterrett

Committee in charge:

Professor Sheldon Nodelman, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson
Professor Page duBois
Professor Jean-Pierre Gorin
Professor Jack Greenstein

2015

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

Dedication

For Mimi, who reminded me that writers write.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Eros and the Materialism of the Rococo:
François Boucher, Print Culture, and Modernity

by

Edward L. Sterrett

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California, San Diego

Professor Sheldon Nodelman, Chair

This dissertation traces the origins of the Rococo style in French painting as the emergence of a unique aesthetic regime drawn from the broader cultural and epistemological transformations of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France. It follows the work of François Boucher, from his early successes as an engraver and designer in the print trade to his most celebrated achievements as a history painter, in order to examine a series of interrelated points of intersection between the extraordinary pictorial ingenuity which brought him to the forefront of French painting and a network of philosophical, scientific, aesthetic and political discourses whose convergences in this period were strongly marked by an unprecedented

expansion of the production and circulation of printed images, and ultimately became an essential aspect of the emergence of a proto-modern public sphere.

Conventionally, the Rococo has been dismissed as being a purely decorative, rather than a properly critical or experimental style. It is figured as *style* in its most superficial sense, which is to say, the mark of nothing but an essential frivolity at the heart of a mentality which expressed the waning of the *Ancien Regime*. This dissertation joins a growing field of scholarship working against that model. It is therefore also engaged with a broader effort to develop alternative histories of modernism by re-examining and reframing the forces which shaped the European Enlightenment. One could describe the project as an *archaeology of frivolity*, borrowing the phrase from Derrida's study of Condillac, but taking *archaeology* in its properly Foucauldian sense, which is to read frivolity as a mechanism which canalizes the anxieties and exhilarations of epistemological transition across a series of distinct but structurally convergent discursive fields. Thus the persistent refrain of erotic themes, the demure, anti-heroic, narrative opacity, and the formal exuberance, at once ornamental, richly mimetic, and perspectively vertiginous, which structure the Rococo picture, become a signal and a point of entry into an exploration of a system of countervailing aesthetic currents engaged in a dialectical process which we might call broadly: the rationalization and technicalization of vision in early eighteenth-century France.

Introduction: Under the Sign of the Rococo

I. Aurora and the Nymphs

Something happens to French painting under the sign of the Rococo. Gravity loosens its hold. Architectural space softens, covered over by lush extravagant folds of fabric. Bodies tend more toward horizontality than verticality. They are inevitably lounging. Even as they traverse mythological ethers, they do not fly or swim; they float with the same casual expansiveness as the clouds and waves that carry them, and as a result, one never gets the sense that there is very far to go. Images do not recede into anything but the vaguest sense of illuminated celestial backdrop. Everything swirls at the surface.

The softening of bodies and spaces in Rococo painting produces a correlative softening of the vectors which organize classical pictorial space.¹ The geometries which would typically interlock perspectival and figural composition into centralized narrative forms in the classical mode are loosened and subjected to new systems of correspondence. Centrality is dispersed and constellated. Balance is expressed more by gradations and juxtapositions of tonality than by architectonic geometries. The illusion of depth

¹ This is the fundamental thesis regarding Rococo painting proposed by Norman Bryson. see Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 89-121.

is superseded by the interleaving of surfaces. The fundamental hierarchy of figure to ground, from which emerges the potential of pictorial narrative, dissipates in the softened boundaries and material fluidity of the Rococo picture.

This new form is addressed towards a particular kind of visual pleasure, a kind of looking which luxuriates in the very desire to look, with all of its ineluctable deferral and subterfuge. Painting addressed to this kind of looking is less concerned with capturing a subject and displaying it in its plenitude, than with captivating the viewer by extending, attenuating, and inflecting the impulse which draws the gaze into the image. It is in this sense that the Rococo image never fully presents itself, which is to say that rather than constructing pictorial space as a transparent container which presents the explicit content of the image, the Rococo image manipulates the relations of container and contained, of pictorial space and pictorial subject, so that through a system of feints, of detours and partial disclosures, the image submits to the pleasure of the viewer only as a filigree of labyrinthine complexity, woven into a rhythm of folded surfaces.

This is, of course, a tendency, not an absolute condition of all Rococo painting. But it finds its epitome coincidentally in two works which also in many respects mark the apogee of Rococo painting; these are François Boucher's *The Setting of the Sun* (1752) and its pendant, *The Rising of the Sun* (1753) (fig. 0-1 & 0-2). Commissioned by Louis XV's famed *maitresse-en-titre*,

Madame de Pompadour, to be made into tapestries for her *Chateau de Bellevue*, they were first displayed at the Royal Academy's biennial Salon in 1753, where they elicited substantial critical response, which galvanized the anti-Rococo position in public criticism, as well as initiating one of the first public debates on pictorial aesthetics.² Measuring almost eleven feet tall and eight and a half feet wide, these were by far the largest works of Rococo painting ever displayed at the time, and they effectively transposed a style which developed in overdoors and intimate cabinet pictures to a monumental scale. The subject matter of the paintings is loosely drawn from the beginning of book two of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (II, 1-160), which describes Apollo in his role as the sun god, rising from and returning to the oceanic embrace of Tethys. In the paintings, the central figures are encircled by Tethys' entourage of nymphs, tritons and putti, who collect in groups of two or three, bounded forth on pillows of sea foam, dolphins, and clouds. Some lounge in the foreground; others spiral up to draw back the curtain of night, or retrieve the horses of Apollo's chariot at his return.

While familiarity with Ovidian mythology was common in eighteenth century France, the figure of the Apollonian sun had been so capitalized upon by Louis XIV as the vessel of his apotheosis that for many viewers the Ovidian narrative itself would have been eclipsed by the allegorical association of

² This has been well documented in Thomas Crow, "La critique des Lumières dans l'art du dix-huitième siècle," *Revue de l'art*, no. 73 (1986): 19-16

Apollo with the King.³ The extant commentaries on the paintings from the time do not mention this association explicitly, but the royal allegory left its mark in the form of a peculiar mistake which appears uniformly among them. They all confuse the figure of Tethys with another goddess named Thetis. Historians have suggested that this confusion stems from a project initiated by Louis XIV at Versailles for a garden grotto, known as the *Grotte de Thetis*, in which the central sculptural program, executed by François Girardon, featured Apollo tended by Thetis' sea nymphs.⁴ The grotto itself was destroyed in 1686, but it was memorialized in the works of La Fontaine and in a text by André Félibien, which would have lent it substantial currency in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁵ The iconographic program of Apollo and Thetis was also repeated in paintings by Charles de la Fosse in 1688 and Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet in 1701. Both paintings reinforced this alteration of the Ovidian text, portraying a romantic connection between Apollo and Thetis which underscored the allegorical associations of Apollo with the King and his lover Thetis with the

³ For the centrality of Ovidian mythology in 17th and 18th century education see Phillippe Le Leyzour, "Myth and Enlightenment, On mythology in the eighteenth century," in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David*, ed. Colin Bailey (New York: Fort Worth: Rizzoli; Kimbell Art Museum, 1992). For the popularity of Ovidian themes in the arts in the 17th century see Henry Bardon, "Ovide et le grand roi." *Les Études Classiques* (October 1957): 401-16. For the familiarity of the relation of Ovidian themes to the Royal iconography see John Ingamells. *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Pictures* (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1985), 68.

⁴ Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection*, 71.

⁵ On the repetition of the iconographic program see *Ibid.* For the continued relevance of the grotto in the early eighteenth century see Laurence Grove, "La Fontaine, Emblematics and the Plastic Arts: *les Amours de Psyché* and *Le Songe de Vaux*," in *Emblems and Art History: Nine Essays*. ed. Alison Adams and Laurence Grove (Librairie Droz, 1996), 23-40. André Félibien, *Description de la grotte de Versailles* (Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1674), and André Félibien, *Description de la grotte de Versailles* (Imprimerie Royale 1679).

nation of France welcoming her beloved.⁶ Recalling these allegorical associations, Boucher's pendants emphasize Pompadour's privileged relation to the King.

But the iconographic program, and the relative centers of mythological and allegorical legibility are simply the armature for a problem which is far more complex and compelling. The problem is essentially semiotic, which is to say that it is a problem of how a network of relations between pictorial form and iconographic armature produce a particular mode of pictorial expression. Because these are mythological paintings, and because they operate at the grandest scale of mythological painting, which is royal allegory, one could have reasonably expected them to follow the conventions of classical history painting, and specifically history painting in the heroic register. Indeed, this was precisely the expectation that Boucher's critics accused him of failing to meet. Very little of the strict narrative clarity that characterizes classical history painting is available in these works, and this is because Boucher has constructed them out of a new set of relations between pictorial form and iconographic armature. The profound resonance of this novelty is not only how fully realized this new set of relations becomes in these paintings, but that in representing the royal body, they assert themselves at the point where iconography achieves an almost epistemological density.⁷

⁶ Stephen Duffy and Jo Hedley, *The Wallace Collection's Pictures: A Complete Catalogue* (London: Unicorn Press and Lindsay Fine Art, 2004), 52-3.

⁷ Jay Caplan has discussed the power of the Royal iconography of Louis XIV as a structuring mechanism for a broad range of social, literary, artistic and political discourses, and the effects

The diegetic space of the paintings, the setting which contains the narrative action, is an impossible space: the mythological point where the sun meets the sea. It is the horizon. And this is already in one sense why there can be no horizon in these pictures, no distant signifier promising the infinite extension of a unified visible space: because these images are mythical condensations of that infinite circumference. Faced with the paradox of orienting themselves without recourse to horizon as distance, they produce horizon as presence. In this sense, they are less emphatically about space than about light, not so much light as symbol, but light in its most variegated modes of diffusion, as though one could see the sun rise or set from behind. In the mythological and iconographic register they are presided over not by Apollo, but by Aurora, who reaches out with rose petals at her finger tips in the upper right of *The Rising of the Sun*, and draws up the cover of night in the upper center of *The Setting of the Sun*. Despite the shallow sense of depth indicated by her foreshortened body, she is represented at the same scale as the primary figures of the composition. She is not *in* the background, rather, she is the personification of the space of the image, and she allegorizes the passage of figural representation as it emerges from and returns to the material ground. In *The Setting of the Sun*, Aurora literally envelops herself in a billowing swath of deep nightshade blue on a cushion of cloud, gently dappled in gold and pink. In *The Rising of the Sun*, she leaves the entire

of the dissipation of that structure in the early eighteenth century; see Jay Caplan, *In the King's Wake: Post-Absolutist Culture in France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

material substrate of the image spiraling in her wake as she draws Apollo into sharp relief against the clearing sky.

Here, under the sign of Aurora, the perspectival aspect of the horizon is fully dissipated, but it retains its function as a threshold operating within the image and beyond which the promise of visibility no longer pertains. Rather than naturalizing this function spatially and unilaterally by marking the threshold of visibility as a uniform axis (as would a distant horizon), it is dispersed, atomized, and allegorized. The fundamental polarity marked off by the horizon, visible/invisible, now decoupled from the grid which orients pictorial space, conjugates through a series of relations: figure/ground, center/periphery, oceanic/celestial, rising/setting. At each point in the series, the speed of these polarities is attenuated by a system of gradations, already strongly implied in the opposition rising/setting. These are not opposite states, but opposing valences. They are processes in motion, and when they reference the sun, as they do in the case of these paintings, they indicate this motion by producing gradations of color and tone as well as line and curve. Because the threshold of visibility is not uniform, and is no longer anchoring a uniformly visible space, the relations of figure and ground, of center and periphery, and of foreground and background, are unstable. They are modulated and reconstituted in a series of adjacencies and overlays, and these instabilities generate a kind of kneading and folding of space.

The fundamental adjacency is in the form of the diptych itself. There are two paintings. They are pendants, and in this sense they are meant to be thematically and formally complementary images. However, they do not produce the conventional formal symmetry common to diptychs.⁸ Despite the equal repetition of figures in each image, their arrangement is such that they form at once a stuttered series and a single continuous image. As they are hung in the Wallace Collection, with *The Setting of the Sun* on the left and *The Rising of the Sun* on the right, an immense cloud rises up and arcs across the center of the combined panels, forming a kind of atmospheric spiral which draws in sea, cloud, billowing drapery, nymphs, and putti; indeed, everything seems to spin into or out of this single cosmic vortex. They are two opposite and correlative spaces, which are also one space, and two opposite and correlative movements which are also one movement. They are East and West, rising and setting, but they are also the unified circumference which links the oceanic underworld to the celestial realms, and that single cosmic movement which produces both the rising and setting of the sun. The shifting balance between polarity and continuity sets the composition in motion both formally and thematically, and it repeats itself across the image as a vertiginous system of bifurcations and convergences, which produce secondary, tertiary and tangential forms.

⁸ It has been suggested that the lack of formal symmetry is an indication that they were not meant to be hung on the same wall; see John Ingamells' entry on these paintings in Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection*, 76.

Conventionally, in classical history painting, figural composition overlays perspectival composition such that the orientation of postures, gestures, and facial expressions converge on a singular and spatially central narrative event.⁹ Perspectival composition structures and stabilizes the relations of figure to ground, and within this structure the coordinated attentiveness of the figures, and the manifest legibility of these signs of attentiveness direct the viewer toward the appropriately central narrative and iconographic event. Thus, every detail accelerates vision toward the exalted unity of an idea. In these paintings, Boucher has systematically destabilized the conventional interrelation of perspectival and figural composition by inverting the functions of polarity and continuity. At the level of figure/ground relations, where conventional clarity calls for unequivocal distinctions, he emphasizes continuity. And within the circuit of attention established between figures, where continuity produces the narrative clarity of figural composition, he inserts a series of interruptions and oppositions which form secondary and countervailing figurations.

The most striking figure of this secondary circuit is the Nymph in *The Setting of the Sun* who nestles into the bosom of Thetis while shielding her eyes from Apollo. She occupies a peculiar blind spot at the narrative center of the composition. Apollo and Thetis extend their arms and lock gazes as though on the verge of embrace. This is the primary axis of narrative energy. It

⁹ Thomas Puttfarcken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400-1800* (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 245-62.

moves diagonally downward from left to right, and it is indicated by the angle of Apollo's outstretched arms, by the tilt of his shoulders and head, the slope along which he seems to slide out of his chariot with one leg extended and the other compressed, and above all the angle of his gaze which is reciprocated by Thetis. The Nymph, raising her right arm to shield herself from Apollo's radiance, obstructs this convergence. Her face falls into shadow, highlighted only by the rose of her cheek and mouth, and the gesture at once cuts across the primary axis of narrative energy and blocks the line of visibility. Her other arm seems almost to lie perpendicularly across Thetis' forearm, redirecting Thetis' embrace as the two come to rest on the spiral base of Thetis' shell, transformed here into the arm rest of a sofa or chaise lounge.

Everything in Thetis' posture which indicates her enthusiasm for Apollo's return, her uplifted torso, her outstretched arms and lifted chin, are at once supported and interrupted by the body of this Nymph, still half obscured by the sea foam from which she emerges like an extension of the billowing fabric which cushions Thetis shell. Her gaze moves diagonally downward, perpendicular to the primary axis linking Thetis and Apollo, and meets the gaze of a Triton in the lower left corner. The finger of her left hand points up toward the action from which she also serves as distraction, and the two putti which bisect this mutual gaze, reiterate the perpendicular diagonals with the orientation of their bodies. This subordinate and almost invisible figure sets into motion a series of inversions and interruptions that operate like a kind of

turbulence in the compositional machine, generating eddys of secondary pictorial structure which warp the valence of the central event.

The role of this central nymph is recapitulated in the cluster of nymphs at the bottom right. One lounges full length across the foreground, ankles crossed, one arm draped across her belly with hand resting on the opposite hip, the other arm resting along the brow of a dolphin, fingers trailing in the sea foam. Her head tilts up so that her face, viewed in profile, presents itself fully to the arrival of Apollo. Though her attention is directed upward, her entire body is drained of tension. This contrast is punctuated by the second nymph on the back of whose head she rests her own, and whose face, hidden in shadow, turns down and away, as she lays her cheek on her interlaced fingers and drapes her arms around the dolphin from behind. The heads of these two nymphs are pressed into a peculiar kind of off-axis Janus, which echoes the trope of torqued polarities that structure the composition.¹⁰ The cluster is balanced by a third nymph with arched back and upturned gaze. Her exposed rump is framed in a spiral of dolphin tail and cresting wave, which mirrors the spiral at the base of Thetis' shell, and anchors a supplementary compositional circuit that arcs up through Thetis to the cluster of putti floating above the scalloped edge of her shell, and back down through the Nymph and Triton on

¹⁰ Janus is the God of transitions, and was closely associated with Apollo by Ovid and Cicero. It is unlikely that Boucher was explicitly invoking Janus in the configuration of these nymphs, and in any case, it would be extremely difficult to substantiate such a reference, but the effect of the twinned gaze, and its reiteration of the central theme, certainly resonates with the iconographic logic of Janus.

the far right emerging from vaporous transformations of cloud and water to present a smaller scalloped shell, like a platter of offerings.

The Rising of the Sun is similarly anchored in the bottom right by a group of nymphs. One leans into the frame propped on the back of a triton, and presses herself against the shoulder of a second nymph whose back is turned. The heads of these two nymphs are close enough together that they form a second janus-like figure; one looking straight out at the viewer while the other turns away accentuating the torqued oblique of her serpentine posture. Unlike the corresponding pair of janus-nymphs in *The Setting of the Sun*, neither figure directs her attention to the central action of the painting. Rather, they turn outward and inward, mapping a tertiary axis - not in the virtual space of a euclidian grid, but in the virtual space of scopic desire figured here as erotic encounter. One pole marks the valence of reciprocity, the gaze which looks out, interpolating the viewer and allegorizing the frontality of the image. It is the face of scopic availability, but also the returning of the gaze. Here vision is reciprocal and recursive. To see is also to be seen looking. The second warps inward, withholding signs. Against the blunt frontality of her twin, the blankness of her body becomes hieroglyphic, a radiant lacuna that counterpoints Apollo's ascendant arc.

In both paintings the Nymphs mark out the contours of a secondary, supplementary and paratactic figuration. It comes into focus against the classical pictorial paradigm, which it both invokes and disorients. At the root of

this disorientation is a reconfiguration of address, from didactic clarity to coy seduction. The sure footedness of the erudite gaze, which grasps the image ultimately in order to transform it into discourse, finds itself slipping along the surface, incapable either of penetrating or fixing the image. In this moment of drift, it is rather the viewer who is fixed and penetrated by the image, suddenly aware of the urgency of looking as it loses traction. Eros returns the gaze to the body, and in this flood of sensation, the entire architectonic device, according to which the eye seems to be stabilized and guided through the image by a constellation of iconographic and spatial vectors, gives way to another kind of looking, which implicates itself in a field of intensities. The *connoisseur* becomes *amateur*, and this movement from logos to eros defines the Rococo image according to a parallel shift from poesis to aesthesis, and from discourse to sensation

II. Contexts

Boucher's pendants have been at the center of a turn in contemporary art historical scholarship that theorizes the Rococo as a unique pictorial regime. Norman Bryson's essay, "Transformations in Rococo Space," was foundational in establishing this approach. He recognized in the ambiguity of relations between figure and ground in Rococo painting, a willful erasure of the realism of perspectival composition, and in this erasure, a radical break from

the conventions of pictorial representation since the Quattrocento.¹¹ Rococo pictorial space, he suggests, is the primary indicator of an underlying shift in the structure of the pictorial sign as it capitulates to the erotic valence of Rococo painting, and he takes Boucher's *Setting of the Sun* as an exemplary instance of this. In the painting, anything that could indicate a spatial setting, such as architecture, or furniture, has been reduced to what Bryson calls "mysterious filler, which looks like cloud but behaves like cushioning." The world of discrete objects and surfaces has evaporated, leaving only, "amorphous substances – cloud, water, and tinted steam – which cannot be precisely located in space."¹² As a result of this systematically cloudy, amorphous dislocation, Bryson explains, Boucher's exquisitely rendered figures are no longer enclosed within the logic of perspectival composition that conventionally separates the viewer from the world of the image. Rather, they are fully available to the erotic gaze which seeks to appropriate them. Eros thus operates here as an accelerant. It moves the virtual body of the image across the boundary of the picture plane into the stable grasp of the desiring gaze.

The kernel of Bryson's argument, and what remains his overwhelming contribution to studies of early eighteenth century French painting, is the connection he draws between the eroticism of the Rococo and its fundamental reorganization of pictorial space. But this kernel, as it is presented, remains

¹¹ Bryson, *Word and Image*, 89-121.

¹² *Ibid.*, 93-95.

somewhat conflicted, in as much as it is wedged between two theoretical devices; the first is Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze, and the second is his own semiotic analysis of the history of European painting. Bryson himself later articulated the problematic limitations of Mulvey's theory, which is essentially a bipolar and ultimately monological account of the power dynamics of scopic pleasure: the viewer is a dominant subject for whom the image remains a passive object.¹³ Mulvey's theory fails to grasp the eroticism of the Rococo, largely because it cannot account for the profound instability of address that characterizes the Rococo as a scopic regime. Bryson's semiotic analysis, in fact, lends itself far more effectively to understanding this instability, which operates across the multiplicities of rhetorical address rather than the strict bipolarity of the optical field that subtends Mulvey's model.

The central concept of Bryson's semiotic analysis is the relative transparency or opacity of the pictorial sign. As it dramatizes its materiality, the pictorial sign loses its objective transparency and its narrative clarity. It moves from representing a conventional system of iconographic ideas (which Bryson refers to as its discursive function), to displaying its status as representation (what Bryson refers to as its figurative function). In doing so, the pictorial sign locates the image at the nexus of a convergence of material forces - the hand of the artist, the process of production, the body of the viewer - which destabilize the conventions of viewership. If in its transformations of pictorial

¹³ Norman Bryson, introduction to *Looking In: the Art of Viewing*, by Mieke Bal (Amsterdam: G&B Arts international, 2001), 11-12.

space the Rococo materializes the pictorial sign, it is not so much to fully deliver the object of erotic desire, now unfettered by the virtual world of pictorial representation, but rather to complicate the illusion of objective immediacy that characterizes the signifier in its transparency. It is in this sense that the conjunction of eroticism and the transformation of pictorial space in Rococo painting must be understood as a rhetorical device in which the erotic does not reside in a transferable and appropriable object of representation, but rather in a game of viewership which sets desire in motion as a material, pictorial effect.

Thomas Crow's essay, "La critique des Lumières dans l'art du dix-huitième siècle," similarly suggests that a new pictorial idea manifests in Rococo painting, which privileges pictorial form over iconographic content.¹⁴ Crow traces the roots of this idea through the critical discourse that emerged in the wake of the Salon of 1753 in response to the display of Boucher's pendants, *The Setting of the Sun* and *The Rising of the Sun*. One article in particular draws his attention; a defense of Boucher written by Charles-Nicolas Cochin. The recurring theme of Cochin's praise of the paintings, and precisely what he accuses Boucher's critics of being incapable of appreciating, is what he calls *l'harmonie general*. In Crow's analysis, Cochin's concept of *harmonie* refers to a painter's capacity to create an imaginary world, and to order that world according to its own internal logic. This internal logic was primarily

¹⁴ Crow, "La critique des Lumières dans l'art du dix-huitième siècle,"

pictorial rather than narrative, so in praising the general or totalizing harmony of Boucher's pendants Cochin points to their finely rendered depictions of light and form, counterposing these aspects to the strictly conventional iconographic elements that translate the image into an explicitly legible mythological or allegorical narrative.¹⁵

Crow suggests that Cochin's concept of *harmonie* is drawn from a theory of painting developed almost half a century earlier by the critic Roger de Piles. De Piles described the effect of successful painting on the viewer as the result of an immediate visual coherence, which does not exist in the world as we see it, but nonetheless mobilizes certain patterns of attention that precede it in order to transport the viewer into the fictive world which it represents. He gives a number of examples for this visual coherence: the way the eye sees a bunch of grapes by focusing on the details of a single grape, leaving the others to play a less visually distinct supporting role, or the way a convex mirror gently draws the eye into the center. The concept is essentially about blurring the periphery and emphasizing the center in order to maximize the sensorial immediacy of representation. Crow sees De Piles' convex mirror at work in the spiraloid composition of Boucher's pendants, reinforcing a reading of the Rococo that echoes modernist concerns with total pictorial effect, and relations of form and perception superseding the narrative or representational content.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

Searching out the consistency of the model of the convex mirror across a range of Boucher's paintings, Crow's argument gets neither to the erotic nor to the semiotic significance of pictorial form in the way that Bryson's does, but his theory regarding a connection between Cochin and De Piles brings to light a fundamental alignment with Bryson, in as much as both look to the privileging of formal over iconographic order in Rococo painting as an indicator of a tendency toward modes of pictorial autonomy. What remains of signal importance in Crow's analysis is the suggestion that De Piles' aesthetic theory might contribute to our understanding of Rococo painting. But De Piles' greatest contributions to eighteenth century aesthetics have less to do with prescriptions about pictorial form than with theorizing aesthetic perception, and as Jaqueline Lichtenstein has persuasively demonstrated, desire is the central metaphor of De Piles' aesthetic theory.

In a way quite similar to Bryson's suggestion that eros pushes the semiotic structure of the pictorial sign away from discourse and toward figuration, for De Piles aesthetic pleasure begins where discourse is interrupted, and where, incapable of grasping its object, the gaze submits to its seductions.¹⁶ Despite this shared equation of eros with vision's flight from discourse, De Piles and Bryson propose radically divergent readings of its destination. In Bryson's account, the correlative dissipation of spatial and narrative coherence in the Rococo image reduces the distance between the

¹⁶ Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 198.

viewer and the object of his gaze. The image of the body, shorn of its narrative duties, fully materializes for the viewer's delectation. For De Piles, spatial and narrative coherence do not block the gaze. They are precisely what allows the gaze to fully grasp its object. As these dissipate, what the image materializes, when it seduces, is the body of the viewer, now profoundly disoriented. This distances the viewer, disintegrating the totality of the gaze, and prolonging and accentuating the pleasure of looking by complicating it with the sting of uncertainty.¹⁷ Like bittersweet eros, aesthesis arrives from elsewhere; it subjects the viewer to its charms, rather than submitting to his gaze.¹⁸ These are essentially opposite theorizations of scopic desire, and the opposition turns around the metaphor of touch. On the one hand, looking grasps; it takes possession, and it controls. On the other hand, looking reaches out, but its touch is fleeting and uncertain. A gap opens between desire and its object, and it is rather, the image which fascinates and holds the viewer.

Critics of the Rococo shared a neat vocabulary for the seductiveness of an image, but one word in particular captures the polyvalence of desire. The term is *papillotage*. It appeared in the Salon criticism of Boucher's pendants to describe the superabundance of surface effects, which produce a kind of brilliant lustre.¹⁹ It was also defined in more general accounts as a description

¹⁷ Lichtenstein, *Eloquence*, 165.

¹⁸ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁹ See comments by the abbé Garrigues de Froment on Boucher's contributions to the Salon of 1753 quoted in Melissa Lee Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Texts & documents. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 94-5.

of the practices of bodily adornment characteristic of aristocratic culture (make-up as it were), and this was an extrapolation from its common meaning which deploys the metaphor of the butterfly to describe the gesture of batting one's eyelashes.²⁰ The term was frequently used pejoratively and in this sense it takes part in that lexicon of anti-Rococo criticism which feminizes what it sees as the disingenuousness of Rococo painting.²¹ More recently Mimi Hellman has returned the focus of the term from object to viewer. In her account, *papillotage* describes the gaze of the viewer as it flits gently across the surfaces of a well furnished salon, never lingering or fixating. This is a social kind of looking. It is aware of being *looked at* as it looks, and for the sake of politeness it cannot be caught staring, and certainly not appraising.²²

These two forms of *papillotage*, one a mode of display, and the other a mode of attention, correspond perfectly in the complexity of the decorative ensemble, and in the social context which that ensemble served to contain and to mirror. Here, the codes of bodily comportment require a fluidity and easiness of attention that is completely at odds with the kind of focused attentiveness that renders images into legible iconographic programs. That painters were highly aware of such exigencies and not always particularly

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Hyde's text treats this subject in depth.

²² Mimi Hellman, "*Forms of Distraction: Towards a Decorative Imagination*," (paper presented at a conference at UCSD in May, 2009), and more recently, Mimi Hellman, "*Forms of Distraction: Towards a Decorative Imagination in Eighteenth-Century France*," (paper presented in March, 2011 at Bard College)

pleased with them is attested to in a 1745 letter from Charles Joseph Natoire to Antoine Duchesne:

In a word, we must work with a thousand disagreeable constraints, and our paintings are looked upon less as paintings than as some sort of furniture that can be linked to every bizarre element of the room.²³

Natoire's commentary appears only one year before the seminal Salon critic, La Font de St. Yenne, delivered the first public criticism of Rococo painting.²⁴ It is a peculiar irony that Natoire was one of the targets of this criticism, because La Font shared Natoire's sense of the diminishment of painting, of painting being literally restrained by the exigencies of the decorative ensemble, and this came to be a central trope of anti-Rococo criticism. *Papillotage* also plays at the center of this critical narrative, both in its reference to coquetry and makeup (and all of the metaphysics of representation that express themselves against these as trick or disguise, as that which is disingenuous or false), and in its reference to distraction, and to that manner of viewership that cultivates the mobility of the gaze, making it nimble, almost fleeting.

In as much as the two modes of *papillotage* achieve a perfect correspondence, an image need hardly exist at all; the gilded ornamental

²³ Charles Natoire, "Letter to Duschesne," in Baldine Saint-Girons, *Esthétiques du XVIIIe siècle: Le modèle français* (Paris: Phillipe Sers, 1990). Also quoted in Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, 192.

²⁴ Etienne de La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France. Avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d'août 1746* (Jean Neaulme, 1747), 74-7.

frame might well be enough to reflect the gaze across to another rhythmically consonant surface in the ensemble. Indeed, a certain aspect of the Rococo begins from the potential energy of this instability between frame and image. At one extreme, *papillotage* would seem to produce a blurred and agitated sort of fluttering of attention, like a nervous flurry of glances ricocheting across surfaces. Certainly under such conditions Natoire's sense that painting is becoming *less than* painting, or even merely furniture, seems perfectly accurate. What, after all, is painting, if it is not being made to be looked at?

To actually look at Rococo painting, to imagine it as a surface which is capacious enough to accommodate vision rather than simply to redirect it, is also to slow down the figure of *papillotage*, interrupt its blinding flutter, and return it to the conversational pace which structures it. As a mode of display, *papillotage* becomes a signal which calls vision to itself. It is the sociable gaze acknowledging its reciprocity. To bat one's eyelids might be to acknowledge the desire to be seen, however delicately. It also acknowledges the desire of the one who looks, whether such acknowledgement is welcome or not. In this sense, it produces a kind of dynamism; it dramatizes the conditions of display as a gesture to the fundamental reciprocity that structures the fluidity of the social field. As a metaphor for looking, *papillotage* complicates vision. It opens up the strict polarities marked off on one side by the stable, unilateral, disembodied gaze of Albertian perspective and on the other by the confusion

of mobile, polyvalent, corporeal glances.²⁵ In doing this it also recalls the De Pilean dynamics of scopic desire. In the blink of an eye it embodies vision and locates it in time, precisely those aspects of looking which must be erased if vision is to stabilize and grasp its object in its totality. No longer purely voyeuristic, the gaze slides into reciprocity. It does not consume or possess. It flits gently from surface to surface, and it transforms the metaphor of tactility from grasping to caressing.²⁶

This relay, whereby vision comes to be understood as a kind of touching was integral to De Piles' arguments for the supremacy of color in the academic debates between *Rubenistes* and *Poussinistes* that fueled his theoretical writing.²⁷ According to De Piles, like sculpture, drawing can only represent the blunt materiality of the objective grasp, but color is uniquely suited to capturing the subtle evanescence of the living world. As Lichtenstein has eloquently described:

... it allows painting to represent things that move, things that are unstable, the whole world of diversity too subtle or delicate for the hand to grasp and that thereby eludes drawing's mastery. Hair is one of these elusive things... Others are fabrics, draperies, the changing coloring of a face, the transparency of flesh tones.²⁸

The question of what kind of touching vision does was at the center of late seventeenth-century aesthetic debates. In the eighteenth century, the

²⁵ see chapter titled "The Gaze and the Glance," in Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 87-132.

²⁶ Lichtenstein, *Eloquence*, 167-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

relationship between vision and touch took on renewed importance among philosophers, prompted by the influence of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Because Locke rejected the notion of innate knowledge, which was central to Cartesian metaphysics, and put sensation in its place as the root of knowledge, the relationships between sensation and cognition became of central concern. In a thought experiment, which came to be known as Molyneux's problem (named after the friend who proposed it to him), Locke framed this issue as a hypothetical question concerning a congenitally blind man who learns to recognize and name three-dimensional geometric objects by touch; the question is: if he were to be given the ability to see, would he recognize the objects by sight alone?²⁹

Molyneux's question recurred in over fifty years of philosophical debate, and answers addressed a range of issues with regard to the nature of sense perception, the interactions of sensation and cognition, and especially the potential a priori existence of geometrical forms of knowledge (precisely that aspect of Cartesianism which Locke was rejecting). Among the later responses from French philosophers such as Denis Diderot and Etienne-Bonnot de Condillac, touch was awarded preeminence in the hierarchy of the senses, prompting radical reconfigurations of the relationship between sensation and cognition, and indeed, of the metaphysical edifice that opposes the dematerialized and idealizing system of distinctions that structures vision

²⁹ Michael J. Morgan, *Molyneux's Question: Vision, Touch, and the Philosophy of Perception* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

to the manifold materiality of touch. Diderot and Condillac radicalized Locke's empiricism by proposing a model of subjectivity whose coherence emerges from a kind of extended proprioceptive awareness, making it both permeable to and continuous with its surroundings in an expanding and reciprocal exchange of material and psychic forces.

Two essays by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch: Difference in Representation," and "Pompadour's Dream: Boucher, Diderot and Modernity," have brought these philosophical debates to bear on Boucher's paintings. Lajer-Burcharth's essays draw on the work of both Bryson and Crow to propose a compelling thesis about the philosophical framework within which Rococo pictorial space may have developed, and the implications this carries regarding the creative relationship of the painter François Boucher and his patroness Mme. de Pompadour.³⁰ While they follow Bryson's attentiveness to the construction of pictorial space and Crow's analysis of the contemporary discourse on the relative autonomy of the pictorial sign, Lajer-Burcharth's essays make substantial advances in attributing specific philosophical implications to the structure of the Rococo picture.

Drawing on the theories of Diderot and Condillac, Lajer-Burcharth suggests that the characteristics of Rococo pictorial space be understood as a recalibration of the sensual apparatus to which the painterly sign is addressed,

³⁰ Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch: Difference in Representation," *Representations*, No. 73 (Winter, 2001): 54-88. and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Dream: Boucher, Diderot and Modernity," in *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury, Issues & debates 15, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006)

a movement away from the strict relay between vision and cognition, towards a kind of synaesthetic where pictorial relationships unfold by a principle of continuity and adjacency. She calls this “Boucher’s haptic logic,” suggesting that Boucher was in some sense a philosophical painter, which is to say that he was interested in depicting the essential tactility of experience.

In the first of the two essays, Lajer-Burcharth develops this concept of haptic logic by exploring a series of metaphors for the relay between sensation, cognition, and selfhood in the works of Condillac and Diderot, and then proposing analogies between these and the formal relationships between figure and ground in Boucher's 1756 portrait of Mme de Pompadour (fig. 0-3). The central theme of her interest in Condillac and Diderot is the idea that with touch as the primary coordinator of sensation and cognition, sentience emerges from and remains continuous with a living innervated material continuum. She finds this idea expressed in its most concise form in Diderot's *Reve de d'Alembert*, through the voice of Mlle de l'Espinasse, who, as she ponders her place in the universe, exclaims, "I am a bundle of sensitive particles and everything is touching me and I am touching everything else."³¹

Lajer-Burcharth proposes that this materialist concept of self organizes Boucher's 1756 portrait of Pompadour. She describes the lack of perspectival depth in the image compressing everything into a shallow space, which articulates itself as a proliferation of contiguous surfaces and folds rather than

³¹ Lajer-Burcharth, “Pompadour's Touch,”

through the opticality of perspectival geometries. The folds of Damask curtain which frame the scene, the folds of her dress, the ruffles, ribbons, and rosettes, which frame her arms, chest and head, her fingers lingering between the partially open pages of the book in her lap, the half open drawer of the side table: everything which defines Pompadour is figured as a multiplicity of interconnected textures and surfaces which continually open onto yet further possibilities in a sensuous and reciprocal transformation of interiority and exteriority.

In the second essay, she imports this haptic reading into the mythical space of Boucher's pendants. Rereading Bryson's semiotics of "amorphous substances" through a radical empiricist epistemology, the amorphous becomes polymorphous as it shapeshifts from a logics of erasure to one of continuity. In a strictly visual-cognitive relay amorphous substances like cloud, water and steam suppress efforts at spatial location, but in the context of a tactile-cognitive relay these same substances amplify spatial location by activating the sensual apparatus immediately and all over. In Lajer-Burcharth's reading of the pendants, the interaction of waves, sea foam, and cloud with the bodies nestled in them becomes one not only of support but of continuity, as she suggests that they "seem not so much to emerge *from* it as to have been made *of* it."³² Within the movement of this generative theme, the spiraloid fluidity of Boucher's compositions is figured as a cosmological dream

³² Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Dream," 236. (emphasis hers)

space of pre-gendered psycho-sexual fusion reflecting Pompadour's privileged relation to the King.

Lajer-Burcharth's analysis is particularly compelling because it addresses the nuances of Boucher's formal innovations in terms of contemporaneous philosophical discourse. In doing so, it lends a degree of philosophical sophistication to a painterly practice which has generally been characterized as *merely* seductive. It also begins to link the transformation of Rococo pictorial space to much broader epistemological transformations within early eighteenth century European culture. Bringing the philosophical materialism of Diderot and Condillac to bear on Boucher's painterly practice reframes the ambiguity of figure/ground relations in Rococo painting as the sign of a particular mode of subject formation. And because Lajer-Burcharth's analysis is focused within the regime of portraiture, the relationships she draws between the representation of bodies and the construction of pictorial space reflect specifically on the production and presentation of identity in pictorial terms. The ideal spectator of these works is the sitter herself, and this fundamentally transforms the role of the spectator in general, which is no longer to possess the image as beholder, but to identify vicariously through it - if not literally with the sitter herself as a personage, then through the process of constructing and displaying a subjectivity which the image exemplifies. A mode of reciprocity emerges here which is no longer structured strictly in

terms of the image as the locus of desire, but of the image as a model of subjectivity.

Between De Piles' aesthetic theories and the radical materialist philosophies of Diderot and Condillac, two distinct discursive fields seemingly converge in Boucher's pendants under the sign of reciprocity, suggesting not only that they represent a substantial transformation of pictorial space, but the development of a new spectatorial regime. The question remains, how and in what ways might Boucher have become the conduit for this confluence of discourses.

If it was through Pompadour that Boucher encountered the materialist theories of Condillac and Diderot, as Lajer-Burcharth suggests, then the beginning of her patronage would be marked by a noticeable shift towards the corresponding *haptic logic* in Boucher's work, but it is not clear that such a rupture occurs.³³ Lajer-Burcharth's having found the pictorial manifestations of this logic to be consistent across such divergent genres as portraiture and mythological scene actually enhances the recognizability of these formal characteristics across a broad range of his work: the lack of perspectival depth and correspondingly shallow, even distorted sense of space, the billowing fabrics and intricate folds, the jumble of objects, the interlacing of bodies with their immediate surrounds, the meandering, sinuous, spiraloid arrangement of

³³ Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch," 67-8.

these features into perilously balanced asymmetries. Once attuned to these features they appear throughout his oeuvre with remarkable consistency.

Already in some of his earliest paintings, such as *Renauld et Armide* (1734) (fig. 0-4), and *Hercules and Omphale* (1735), this fascination with the sumptuous complexity of interlaced and overlapping surfaces and textures renders the erotic scene as an experience of profoundly tactile and weightless fluidity. Even in *Renauld et Armide*, where the massive columns of Armide's palace frame the scene on one side and recede along an orthogonal which establishes a certain degree of perspectival depth, the figures themselves seem to float off the surface in a sea of drapery, cushions, and fabrics whose sensuous fluidity is allegorized in the bodies of the putti that emerge from the folds. If anything, Pompadour's patronage allowed Boucher to produce on a grand scale what was the culmination of a prolonged development of a signature pictorial idiom.

Similarly, while the persistence of certain aspects of De Piles' aesthetic theories is evident both in academic discourse as well as in public criticism, as Crow has demonstrated, there is little evidence that Boucher was much engaged in theoretical matters. We know from the inventory produced after Boucher's death that his book collection was made up almost entirely of collections of engravings (picture books), and the academy notes indicate that although he was regularly present in academy sessions, his participation was

extremely limited and never ventured into theoretical topics.³⁴ We cannot say, in other words, that hovering just behind the materiality of the Rococo image there is a theoretical model or a philosophical text.

Moving beyond issues of the intentionality of an idea or the execution of painting as philosophy, the question turns to what conditions of pictorial production and reception made possible the development of a novel pictorial idiom, and how these conditions might have been porous to the discourses of materialist philosophy and of aesthetic theory. This is not to suggest that Boucher's pictorial ingenuity was merely the product of larger forces or conditions, but rather to situate that ingenuity in a context which can begin to account for the polyvalence of its resonances across seemingly disparate discursive fields.

Throughout his career as a painter Boucher worked widely across a range of modes of pictorial production, which greatly informed what came to be known as Rococo painting. He worked as an engraver after Watteau on the *Receuil Jullienne*, which was the first comprehensive monographic reproduction of an artists' work, and transformed the relationship between graphic reproduction and artistic identity in eighteenth century Europe. He was a prolific designer of ornamental motifs, book illustrations, and ephemera such

³⁴ The Academy notes featuring Boucher have been collected in the *Tableau Chronologique* which opens the first volume of Alexandre Ananoff, *François Boucher* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1976). The sales catalog for Boucher's estate is: P. Remy, *Catalogue Raisonné des Tableaux, Desseins, Estampes, Bronzes, Terre cuites, Laques, Porcelaines de différentes sortes, montées et non montées; Meubles curieux, Bijoux, Minéraux, Cristallisations, Madrépores, Coquilles & autres Curiosités qui composent le Cabinet DE FEU M. BOUCHER, Premier Peintre du Roi* (Musier, 1771).

as trade cards in the early years of the boom in Rococo ornament, which placed him at the apex of a unique moment in the commodification of images, and deeply attuned to the effects this process had on the ways in which images could be seen and used. He also produced stage designs for the Académie Royale de Musique, the Opera-Comique, and Madame de Pompadour's private theater, where he experimented with lighting and surface treatments in order to generate pictorial effects in theatrical space.³⁵ Many of his paintings were designed to be remade as tapestries at Beauvais and the Gobelins, and on porcelain at Sèvres, and he is even said to have painted directly on carriage doors and harpsichords.³⁶

In a certain respect, Boucher conceives of painting as an image like another, and more than any other, it is the medium of print which makes such generic fluidity possible both as an idea and in practice. Boucher's work as an ornamentalist is thus particularly rich terrain for mining the origins of the Rococo, because it is with respect to ornament that this generic fluidity took on its most characteristic pictorial forms. The problem is not ultimately to bracket a constellation of thematic and formal motifs under the capital "R" of the Rococo figured as style, but to plumb the pictorial practicalities of that

³⁵ For recent scholarship on Boucher's involvement with the theater see Mark Ledbury, "Boucher and Theater," in Hyde and Ledbury, *Rethinking*, 133-160. For Boucher's formal experimentation with theater design see l'Abbé Gougenot, *Lettre sur la peinture, la sculpture et l'architecture*. Paris: n.p., 1748. Reprinted in *Collection Deloynes: Collection de pièces sur les beaux-arts (1673-1808)* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1980), microfiche, vol. 3, no. 32.

³⁶ For an overview of the breadth of Boucher's artistic endeavors see Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury "The pleasures of Rethinking Boucher," in Hyde and Ledbury, *Rethinking*.

constellation, in hopes of re-authorizing the Rococo image as an idea that was born in the visual imaginary, rather than in a discourse which institutionalized and officiated its deployment.

The following chapters turn to Boucher's work as a designer in the Parisian print market, with the goal of understanding the specific formal developments that emerge in Rococo ornament, the broader epistemological backdrop that gave traction to these developments, and the ways in which these were brought to bear on Boucher's painterly practice. The first chapter looks to early manifestations of pictorial experimentation in Boucher's Rococo ornamental prints. Situating them between the influences of Watteau's arabesques via the *Receuil Jullienne* and Meissonnier's seminal *Livres d'ornements*, it argues that the hybridization of ornamental and pictorial modes of representation that characterize Rococo ornament prints emerged as a fantastical condensation of the increasingly kaleidoscopic visuality of the flourishing print culture of early modern Paris.

The second chapter explores the broader epistemological implications of the expanding visual culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century print trade, with a particular focus on the role of images in pedagogical and popular scientific texts. It demonstrates the ways in which hybridizations of representational modes - diagrammatic, pictorial, and ornamental - were not just decorative or supplementary representational strategies, but rather operated as crucial figures in the production of a modern worldview.

The third chapter follows the convergence of Boucher's work as an ornamentalist with the rise in popularity of natural history. Looking to frontispieces and other ephemera that Boucher produced for such figures as Edmé-François Gersaint and Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, and reading them within the framework structured by the imbrications of aesthetic and scientific collecting practices, the chapter situates the development of Rococo aesthetic strategies against the backdrop of the shifting definitions of nature that characterized the rise of materialist and empiricist modes of scientific knowledge and philosophy.

The fourth chapter looks to a little known aspect of Gersaint's shop, his business as a dealer of clandestine libertine books, in order to search out specific interrelations between radical materialist philosophy and that emergent aesthetic space between Rococo ornament and natural history which Gersaint cultivated. It argues that the rise of radical materialist philosophy took its momentum from the same conjunction of semiotic fluidity and epistemological fragmentation that propelled the Rococo aesthetic.

The fifth chapter turns to the emergence of eros as a primary topos of the Rococo aesthetic. An extended meditation on Boucher's treatment of the erotic scene, it addresses the specific resonances that he developed between ornamental form and the erotically displayed body, but it also takes up the ways in which the ornamentality of a body figures the eros of an image. Looking to materialist notions of the ubiquitous movements of desire and

pleasure as a model for how eros is imbricated within the sensuousness of the pictorial sign, it moves across conceits of Ovidian mythology and coquettish genre scene, to the secularization of the reclining female nude, concerned fundamentally with the particular figure of beauty described by the oscillations between making the image of a body and making a body for the image.³⁷

³⁷ I borrow this concept of juxtaposing the image of a body and the body of an image from Giorgio Agamben's essay, "Nymphs," published in Khalip, Jacques, and Robert Mitchell. *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 66.

Chapter 1: Ornament and the Origins of the Rococo Picture

III. Boucher Ornamentalist

Boucher was first recognized as a young artist of extraordinary potential by Jean de Jullienne, who brought him on as an engraver for the *Recueil Jullienne* in 1722 at the age of 19. Jullienne was impressed with both the facility with which Boucher worked as well as how uniquely suited his touch was to reproducing the spirit of Watteau's.¹ Despite his early success as an engraver, Boucher's artistic ambitions already reached well beyond the print trade. He had already briefly served as an apprentice to François Lemoyne, and in 1723 he won the Academy's *Prix de Rome* for history painting.² It is not entirely clear why he did not receive the usual support to travel to Rome as a *pensionnaire du Roi*, which traditionally accompanied this prize, but he made the trip at his own expense in 1728, traveling with Carle Van Loo and his two sons, who had arranged for an official welcome in Rome at the French Academy.³

Nicolas Vleugheuls, then head of the French Academy in Rome, accommodated Boucher on his arrival, but Boucher's presence and participation were not officially recognized by the Academy in Paris, and historians have

¹ Émile Dacier and Albert Vuaflart, *Jean de Jullienne et les graveurs de Watteau au XVIIIe siècle*, 4 vols., (Paris, 1921-29), 10-12.

² Beverly Schreiber, *François Boucher's Early Development as a Draughtsman, 1720-1734* (New York: Garland Pub., 1986), 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

suggested that this accounts for the dearth of information about his time there, as well as a more general tendency in art historical scholarship which has suggested that the novelty of his style is the result of a lack of interest or knowledge of classical culture.⁴ Nonetheless, Boucher is occasionally mentioned in Vleughels' letters, and he appears to have been an avid student, participating in all of the formative studies of the antique and classical repertoire as well as the contemporary Italian masters. There is also some indication that he studied the Venetians - Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese - and was producing small works in that manner for the Roman market as a way of supporting himself during his stay.⁵

On his return from Rome in the early 1730s, Boucher found the Parisian print market in the middle of an unprecedented upsurge, spurred in part by the success of the *Recueil Jullienne* and the emerging popularity of the Rococo style. He quickly found work producing ornament designs for the engravers and publishers that he had met through Jullienne. He designed decorative vases, garden fountains, frontispieces and cartouches, which were published in small suites of between five and ten plates. Despite the seemingly modest nature of ornament design, the remarkable fluidity of the print market and the beginnings of a blossoming culture of print collecting made the genre uniquely

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-18. Also see Françoise Joulie, "François Boucher's apprenticeship and culture: 'whose disciple was he then?'" in *Boucher, Watteau and the Origin of the Rococo: An Exhibition of 18th Century Drawings from the Collection of the École Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, 2004), 82. Also in Alastair Laing, J. Patrice Marandel, and Pierre Rosenberg, *François Boucher, 1703-1770* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 21-2, 52, 65.

suited both to formal experimentation and to advancing one's career as a contemporary artist. Accustomed to navigating the vicissitudes of uncertain patronage, Boucher plunged into the print market.

Among Boucher's most elaborate designs, was a set of five vertical, ornamental panels for folding screens titled, *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents* (1737). One design among the five has garnered the continued interest of scholars of Rococo ornament (fig. 1-1). This is in part because of its title, *Rocaille*, a term borrowed from garden architecture which came to denote a specific kind of form in the Rococo ornamental vocabulary, and eventually to stand in for the style in its entirety.⁶ It also marks the only instance in which this term was used as the title of a single design, and as such it is an important part of the shift of the term *rocaille* from the specificity of one form among many to the metonymic stand in for a whole set of formal and thematic motifs which it brackets off as a coherent style. The design has also been pointed to as a model for a number of frontispieces which Boucher provided for the cover of Edme-François Gersaint's *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités* (1736), as well as Dezallier d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* (1744) among others, making it an important material and iconographic link between Rococo ornament and the taste for natural history which emerged in Paris contemporaneously, a shared appeal whose implications remain to be

⁶ Hermann Bauer, "Rococo", in *Encyclopaedia of World Art*, vol. XII, (New York, Toronto, London, 1966), 231-3.

fully explored.⁷ Perhaps above all *Rocaille* stands apart from the other designs in the set because of its uniquely spiraloid asymmetrical composition, which is one of the central formal innovations of Rococo ornament.⁸

Boucher's *Rocaille* is his most exemplary work as an ornamentalist in the Rococo style, particularly for the ways in which it shows both the influence of other Rococo designers as well as some important points of contact in the network of corresponding interests which found resonances in the Rococo style, and each of these must be attended to closely for a comprehensive understanding of his unique success as both ornamentalist and painter. Indeed, if we are to search out concrete points of contact for the broader epistemological implications in Boucher's formal ingenuity, it is precisely along these networks that such implications should be traced, and the following two chapters explore this issue in depth. But a number of important considerations are lost in removing *Rocaille* from the context of the full set of the *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, considerations which demonstrate Boucher's understanding of the Rococo style both within a broader evolution of ornamental forms as well as in the immediate context of the print trade. Both of these frameworks ultimately offer important insights into the kinds of slippage that Boucher produced between the low world of ornament and the

⁷ This issue is developed in the third chapter of this study, with respect to the role of Edme-François Gersaint in the transformation of collecting practices across the realms of art and natural history. see in particular section XIV. "Ornament and the order of nature - Double Vision," 160

⁸ Fiske Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, (New York: Norton, 1964), 153.

printed image, and the upper echelons of pictorial production toward which his ambitions were ultimately aimed, namely academic history painting.

The panels of folding screens lend themselves to the vertical format of the arabesque, which had been popularized in designs for wall panels during the Regency by artists such as Claude Audran III, Jean Berain, and Antoine Watteau.⁹ Boucher engraved many of Watteau's arabesques in the late 1720s when he worked as an engraver for the *Recueil Jullienne*,¹⁰ and Watteau's influence is apparent in the *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, in the dramatic pictorial density of the designs and the complexity this brings to the interlacing of different registers of the image. Positioning *Rocaille* within the formal conventions of the arabesque and the innovations that Watteau brought to bear on those conventions, underscores Watteau's influence on Boucher, and the ways in which Boucher's engagement with the formal innovations of Rococo ornament were already an extension of Watteau's experiments with blurring the distinctions between decorative and pictorial composition.

There is another, and in some sense more material aspect to the influence of Watteau's arabesques on Boucher's *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*. As part of the *Recueil Jullienne*, the engravings of Watteau's arabesques were aimed at the tastes of collectors, and they tended to be quite

⁹ Bruno Pons, "Arabesque ou nouvelles grotesques," in *L'Art décoratif en Europe: Classique et Baroque*, ed. Alain Gruber (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 1992), 161-289. see also Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in 18th Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 58-60.

¹⁰ For a chronology of the Oeuvre Gravée de Watteau see Dacier and Vuafart, *Jean de Jullienne*, 60-4.

large, around 50 x 25 cm, making them more than half the size of an average genre painting, and two or three times the size of a typical Rococo ornament print. Boucher's *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents* were drawn and printed at the same size as the engravings after Watteau's arabesques, so while the form of *Rocaille* is borrowed from Rococo ornament, its format is resolutely that of the engraved arabesque. This is of particular importance because it suggests that Boucher was highly attuned to the pictorial potential of ornamental design in terms of how shifts in scale and format affect the reception of images in the print market, signaling their collectability, and their capacity to operate as objects of disinterested contemplation, rather than being merely practical designs for use by craftsmen. Rococo ornamental engravings were becoming extremely popular with collectors at the time that Boucher designed the *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, and his interest in producing larger, more elaborate designs and higher quality prints is a strong indicator of his investment in elevating Rococo ornament towards higher genres of pictorial production.

IV. The Arabesque

The arabesque form emerges from the *grotesque*, a style of Roman wall decoration, which saw a revival during the Renaissance and again in the early years of the eighteenth century in France. In the French revival it

typically consisted of a sparse and highly symmetrical interlacing of scrollwork, foliage, and ornamental fragments, framing human and animal forms, which were frequently hybridized and depicted emerging from the abstract, ornamental elements of the frame. A good example of this style of arabesque can be seen in a series of twelve panels designed in 1709 for the *appartement du Grand Dauphin* at château neuf de Meudon by Claude Audran III, and later engraved by his brother Jean Audran in 1726.¹¹ Each panel represents a month of the year and a corresponding classical deity and zodiac sign. All twelve panels follow approximately the same format, consisting of a primary central register depicting the figure of the god or goddess, with a series of upper and lower registers dedicated to attributes and emblems, and the uppermost register depicting the associated sign of the zodiac.

For instance, the month of September is paired with the god Vulcan and the zodiac sign of Libra (fig. 1-2). The central register shows the figure of Vulcan wearing his tunic and cap, seated on his anvil, resting his feet on a suit of armor and clutching his hammer in one hand. He is framed on either side by columns wrapped in chains, which secure his tongs and bellows. More chains hang in arcs above him from the ends of two large foliated scrolls, which curl up from the tops of the columns to form a pediment supporting another suit of armor, which becomes the central figure of the upper register. To either side of

¹¹ Bruno Pons, "Le décor de l'appartement du Grand Dauphin au château neuf de Meudon (1709)" *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th 5er, 117 (February), 59 -76. A full set of these engravings is in Special Collections at the Getty Research Institute. They are also in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, and they are available online in the digitized archive of the BnF.

this suit of armor smaller versions of the attributes of hammer and tongs hang from a more complex and diagonally oriented latticework of foliated scrolls, which reach up to frame the cartouche depicting the scales of Libra at the center of the uppermost register. Below the central register depicting the figure of Vulcan, the scroll work becomes more emphatically foliated, reaching out in two symmetrical arcs to frame a scene of three monkeys around an anvil wielding hammers and tongs. One wears Vulcan's hat, another his tunic. Their bodies literally sprout from the vegetal scrollwork that frames them. Monkey-flowers, they hammer mock diligently at one of Jupiter's thunderbolts. Below them, forming the lowest register of the image, sits Vulcan's smoking cauldron, and throughout the design its smoke wafts from trumpet-like floral forms that cap bits of scrollwork.

As is typical of the arabesque, the space of these images is almost completely flat. They achieve only enough depth to depict the central objects and figures with a minimum degree of dimensionality. Take the figure of Vulcan in the central register for example. His body is posed at a diagonal such that the left side of his body extends forward with respect to the picture plane and the right side recedes. His left foot rests on a pile of armor that spills out in front of the framing element that supports him, while his right foot disappears behind this arrangement. Likewise, his right arm bends at the elbow, and his right hand disappears behind his hip where it ostensibly rests, while his left arm extends forward prominently displaying the grip of his hand

on the base of his hammer. These simple details create a sliver of pictorial depth within which we perceive the representation of a three dimensional figure in space.

The columns which frame Vulcan are shadowed from right to left to give the illusion of dimensionality, but at their bases they flatten and blend into the two dimensionality of the ornamental forms which support them. The major registers of scrollwork above and below are shaded to give them the illusion of very low relief, but their relation to the blank space of the page around them is completely literal in as much as they organize the two dimensionality of the page into a complex framing device for the series of central figures and objects. These are organized hierarchically, producing a gradient of extremely shallow, but nonetheless mimetic spaces of pictorial depth, with the most depth being at the center, and the least at the upper and lower registers. For instance, the central monkey in the lower register is clearly depicted as occupying a space behind the anvil, and his body very slightly mimics the diagonal of Vulcan's. Where his legs appear on either side of the anvil the left one comes slightly forward to rest on the vegetal frame that supports the scene, and the right one disappears behind a breast plate that rests against the base. But the monkeys on either side sprout so literally from the scrollwork of the frames that only the shallow perspectival dimensionality of the surface of the anvil can ground what little illusory space exists.

This constant play between the literal dimensionality of ornamental form and the fictional dimensionality of pictorial space is part of the fundamental logic of the arabesque, and it extends the characteristic figural hybridity - of the monkey-flower, for instance - into an underlying spatial hybridity, which is essentially about the relationship between the illusion of an image and the literality of the frame which contains it.¹² In the arabesque before Watteau the interval between these modes is extremely compressed. Watteau's transformation of the arabesque opened that interval, attenuating the speed with which we move between illusion and frame.

Watteau was an apprentice to Audran III, and certainly he absorbed from him some of the tedious and systematic process of composing an arabesque that is attested to by the thousands of preparatory drawings from Audran's studio, which have been preserved at the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.¹³ However, very little evidence exists regarding Watteau's working methods in his own studio. One notable exception to this is a red chalk drawing now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., titled *The Arbor* (fig. 1-3). The sheet on which the original drawing was made appears to have been folded in half, with the ornamental elements drawn on one side and then copied in counterproof to produce a symmetrical latticework

¹² F.R. Ankersmit, "Rococo as the Disipation of Boredom," in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History*. Claire J. Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 132-155.

¹³ Martin Eidelberg, "How Watteau Designed his Arabesques," *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 8, (2003): 68-79. See p.69 for mention of Audran's studio methods and the collection of his drawings in Stockholm.

of framing elements over which the figural and pictorial elements would be super imposed.¹⁴ One of the obvious but nonetheless important implications of this technique is a focus on the underlying biaxial symmetry of the design, which is only broken in the more figural and pictorial elements forming the second layer, or in certain very small details in the lattice work.

For the most part, the only comprehensive record of Watteau's work as a designer and painter of arabesques is the *Recueil Jullienne*. There is little if any indication of the dates of Watteau's original designs in the collection, and as a result, no assessment of Watteau's arabesques can demonstrate an evolution from the more conventionally sparse and flat designs, which reflect the influence of Audran, to the more definitively pictorial designs, which lead to his innovations in other genres and particularly to the genre of the *fête galante*, which he is credited with inventing.¹⁵ He certainly worked across this range, and moving progressively from the simpler designs to the more complex will at least lend some formal clarity, if not historical progression, to the task of understanding his particular contributions to the arabesque.

Watteau's transformation of the arabesque was both formal and thematic. He largely replaced the iconography of earlier arabesques with pastoral scenes and emblems drawn from popular theater and folklore.¹⁶ One

¹⁴ Pons, "Arabesque," 210.

¹⁵ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 63. Also, for a discussion of the ambiguities surrounding the naming of the genre and Watteau's status in the academy see Julie-Anne Plax, *Watteau and the Cultural Politics of Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 108-9.

¹⁶ Crow *Painters and Public Life*, 62.

of the consequences of shifting the subject matter of the central vignette away from iconic resonances is an amplification of pictorial density around the far less recognizable figures of the scene of pastoral leisure. Sometimes this was simply a matter of including multiple figures, whose postures intimated an underlying narrative tension, but frequently it also included a heightened illusionism. This can be seen quite clearly in an engraving after Watteau by François Boucher, titled *Le Printemps* (fig. 1-4), one of a set of four panel designs depicting the four seasons. It is typical of Watteau to be drawn into the subtlety of detail in the positioning of his figures, and the intimacy of an exchange that might be read in the angles of their bodies, the interlacing of their arms, the hands that seem to fidget with a small bouquet of flowers or the hem of a petticoat. The most striking element is not to be found in the figures themselves however, but in the effect of the wispy clouds of the sky above them, the little clumps of grass below their feet, and the trees which reach up on either side to frame them. A space which had heretofore been blank, reinforcing the flatness of the surface of the image, is absorbed into the illusionary space occupied by the figures.

Within the frame created by the trees on either side, the texture and detail of foreground and background establish the depth of pictorial space. The leafy branches extending into the picture appear markedly closer to the viewer than the sky in the background, but those that extend outward over the blankness of the page hover at the same level of depth as the ornamental

motifs that frame them. Only at the very edge of the foreground where a few stray clumps of grass hang over the inverted pediment and delicate scrollwork that forms the bottom element of the frame, and again at the very uppermost branches of the tree on the left, which obscure part of the transversal element at the base of the floral cartouche which forms the upper register, does a hint of depth spill out into the sparse flatness of the space established by the ornamental framing elements.

In another decorative panel designed and painted by Watteau and engraved by G. Scotin for the *Receuil Julienne*, titled *Partie de chasse* (fig. 1-5), a far more complex spatial arrangement emerges from the interlacing of pictorial, theatrical, and ornamental motifs. As in *Le printemps* the outermost framing element is a slightly darkened but otherwise flat mat with delicate scrollwork at the corners extending into the blank space of the page which contains the central arrangement. At the base of the design the corner scrollwork mirrors and repeats the curves and foliated motifs of the two symmetrical central spiral scrolls that frame the emblems of the hunt - horn, powder flask, and canteen - which appear to hang from the intersecting angle of latticework above. A single, sinewy, sparsely foliated vine spiraling along the central axis of the outermost frame forms a delicate rinceau which links the scrollwork at each corner.

This same sparsely foliated vine winds along the more complex system of angles and scrolls which form the primary framework of the arabesque,

becoming at some points more naturalistically disarranged and at others almost geometrically symmetrical. The scrollwork frames two distinct pictorial scenes. The lower scene is a completely bounded image depicting a pastoral landscape. The central figure in this image is a tree whose starkly bare trunk and splintered branches is offset by a single leafy branch extending off to the left and forming a "Y". A road or a stream winds from a deeply set background into the foreground below, and off to the left on a seemingly distant hill sits the most delicate trace of an architectural facade. A few featureless human figures dot the landscape. It is a miniature picture window, concentrated, like an inset jewel opening onto a scene which is completely self contained.

The upper scene rests on a stage like platform whose lower edge is shadowed in such a way that it gives the impression of being looked up at from below. In the foreground a woman seated at the base of a tree holds a hunting rifle. A man standing immediately to the right of her holds the leash to a pair of dogs; one sniffs at the spiral scroll that marks the outer edge of the stage and the other turns away toward the blankness of the page. Another man leads a horse from behind the tree that the woman is seated in front of. On either side trees angle away from the central axis, echoing the dispositions of the figures, and behind them another layer is registered by a few soft traces of brush. Despite this layering of pictorial elements, the space of the scene is quite shallow. There is no texture to indicate an atmosphere which contains it and separates it from the network of ornamental motifs.

The scene is framed on either side by ornamental columns whose material presence has been so reduced that they are hardly more substantial than the vine which spirals up them. Nonetheless, they appear to support an architrave whose starkly orthogonal depiction reinforces the stage-like pictorial depth below it. This rigid dimensionality diffuses in the arch of flowers and leaves that begins at the outermost and seemingly foremost corners of the architrave, which meet at the center of the image just below the upper edge of the frame and to either side of a bouquet emerging from a vase positioned at the top of a latticework of scrolls. In this design the interlacing of pictorial and ornamental registers is still quite delicate despite its complexity, and the overall density of the entire image is still relatively sparse.

A design such as *Le dénicheur de moineaux* (fig. 1-6), engraved after Watteau by Boucher in 1727, marks the far end of the spectrum of pictorial density in Watteau's designs. It still deploys a range of different graphic modes, from pictorial illusionism to emblematic representation, to ornamental abstraction, but the transitions from one mode to another are no longer organized by the ornamental interlacing of discretely framed vignettes. Instead, the pictorial ambiguity which operates delicately at the borders of the central scene in designs like *Le printemps* and *Partie de chasse*, here radiates out across almost the entirety of the design. Only the scrollwork at the four corners and the sunburst demi-cartouche at the center of the very uppermost

register have maintained the kind of ornamental flatness that is conventional in the arabesque form.

Already at the base of the design a central architectural platform is depicted with illusionary perspectival depth so that the plane which forms its upper surface visibly supports the figure of a resting sheep nestled between a pair of symmetrical acanthus scrolls. At their center the scrolls have a monumental density like the platform that supports them, and they recall the twin scrolls of an ionian capital. At their outer tips they bifurcate, one part sprouting into highly naturalistically depicted acanthus leaves, the other folding out into angular ornamental abstractions which become platforms supporting emblematic objects - an inflated bagpipe beneath a caged bird, a cast off hat and shawl. Above the sheep a covered basket hangs from the base of a cartouche which is framed by two satyrs perched on the tops of the acanthus scrolls and supporting the outer corners of another architectural platform, which is also depicted perspectively, this time as though viewed from below.

The emblematic elements of the lower register seem to exist at the same scale and in the same illusionary space as the figures above them. Only the logical disjunction of a forest scene sprouting from the top of a monumental assemblage marks the transition from one register to the next. From the dispositions of the central figures, the *denicheur* who peers fascinated into the sparrow's nest in his hands and the young woman who seems to swoon at his side, the emblematic objects clearly operate

allegorically as symbols of lust and soon to be lost innocence, but formally they shift ambiguously across registers from the illusionism of the scene to the abstraction of an ornamental framing device. Similarly, the trees that frame the central scene are unruly; rather than forming neat arcs, they curl and bend back on themselves, expanding across every register of the image. And the continuity they establish with the pictorial space depicted behind the central figures is broken by the interplay of branches and ornamental motifs at the upper borders, where the background is framed in such a way as to highlight its illusionism and flatten it into a theatrical backdrop.

Watteau's transformation of the arabesque form consists in a systematic confusion of the abstract and emblematic elements of the border with the illusionism of its central vignette,¹⁷ but also a transformation of the modes of hybridity from the formal rhythms and planar abstraction of ornamental fantasy to pictorial games of illusionary space. It is thus not only an amplification of pictorial density within the ornamental framework of the arabesque, but the introduction of a pictorial logic into the kinds of operations which animate the play of spatial hybridity. With this understanding of the mutual infiltration of pictorial and ornamental orders in Watteau's arabesques, the dizzying complexity of Boucher's *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents* begins to stabilize within the formal conventions of the arabesque. Pushing pictorial density out to the limits of ornamental form, Boucher's designs almost

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-2.

completely obscure the underlying logic of the arabesque, but against the backdrop of that logic, the formal ingenuity that animates them comes into focus.

V. Nouveaux Morceaux pour des Paravents

Perhaps the simplest of the designs in *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, titled *Hommage champêtre* (fig. 1-7), recalls *Le Denicheur de moineaux* in a number of respects. Its monumental base supports the figures of an amorous couple in a pastoral scene of leisure and seduction, and a middle ground recedes behind them into a distant sky capped with an arabesque framework. However, a number of details already mark a substantial difference from Watteau's model. The monumental base extends all the way out to the corners of the lower register, even occupying most of the mat frame. This is true of all of the designs in the set. They push the architectural elements of the base out to the bottom corners of the image, leaving the elements of abstract ornamental border design only in the very upper register. This alters the frontal address of the images, giving them more of a sense of gravity and extending them forward into the space of the viewer, when compared with the effect generated by Watteau's more conventional treatment of the bottom edge of the frame, which retains a certain weightlessness and remove.

Two other designs in Boucher's *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, *Triomphe de Pomone* (fig. 1-8) and *Leda* (fig. 1-9), incorporate the motif of the inset picture window in the lower register which can be seen in Watteau's *Partie de chasse*. But while Watteau's scene establishes a point of pictorial density amid the sparse, symmetrical latticework of abstract ornamental forms, Boucher's inset scenes establish a space of relative lightness amid the density of ornamental forms that surround them, and a point of tonal balance in the lower register against the lighter tonalities of the upper. While Boucher continues a certain ornamental logic inherent in the arabesque as a genre, he is clearly putting to use his strengths as a draughtsman and as a painter to push Watteau's pictorialization of the arabesque toward increasingly sophisticated ends. The rhythms of ornamental scrollwork that establish the continuity between registers in the conventional arabesque have been replaced with tonal balances that are characteristic of painterly composition. Similarly the relationship between ornament and figure is described by a continuous gradient of contour and density, while the figures themselves, in the rhythms of their interlocking postures, have become fully absorbed by the fluidity of ornamental line. The pile up, or jumble of forms, is the residue of the continuity of the ornamental scroll form as it transforms linearity into planarity and planarity into dimensionality.

This fluidity, a hybridization of the "s" curve and the spiral, which is the underlying rhythm of vegetal ornament, the continuing curve that links scroll,

acanthus and rinceau, has also come to displace the vertical line which defines the central axis of Watteau's arabesques. Boucher's designs tend to be offset at the base, with the central arrangement establishing a curve across the center to balance the image. This asymmetry is extremely subtle in *Leda*, *Triomphe de Pomone*, and *Hommage Champêtre*, where it is expressed in the arrangement of the central figures and motifs. It is more clearly established in *Triomphe de Priape* (fig. 1-10), where the diagonal orientation of the stairs and architectural platform in the lower register clearly establish a pictorial foreground which follows the arrangement of putti diagonally up to the taut verticality of the satyr herm on the left, and a parallel diagonal in the lightly sketched backdrop of trees and foliage recedes at a strong angle off to the right. The entire scene seems to be facing off to the left, and only the symmetry of the ornamental scrollwork in the upper framing register grounds the planar frontality of the image in the tradition of the arabesque.

Among the designs for *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents*, only *Rocaille* eschews the biaxial symmetry of the upper register entirely, in some sense saturating the ornamental logic of the arabesque so fully with pictorial density that the two modes fold in on each other.

The centerpiece of *Rocaille* is a marine still life comprised of a base of large scalloped shells which supports a jumble of smaller shell and coral forms and extends up towards a filigree of branching coral and seaweed. Bathed in a light which descends uniformly from the upper right, the arrangement spills

across the foreground of the image from left to right, ending in a scalloped edge which drops off into a vaguely aquatic undulating surface. Hiding in the shadow of the arrangement of shells and coral is the curved base of an architectural fragment, below which two chimerical figures (angry monkeys?) face off, their notably mammalian features clashing oddly with the oceanic theme. As the arrangement extends upwards it is capped by a palm tree that leans off to the left edge of the image and then curls back in towards the center at the top, connecting to a smaller arrangement of shells, coral, seaweed and feather-like branches, which form a frame for a second image that, although its surfaces face the same direction and reflect the same uniform angle of light as the arrangement in the foreground, occupies another space entirely.

In the foreground of this second image, an almost featureless head of Neptune sits at the top of a series of terraced waterfalls in the center of a monument whose concentric arrangement of starkly vertical columns and angular pediments warps inwards at its center, mirroring the concave surfaces of the shells in the foreground and the arch of the palm that frames it. At the base of the monument, supported by a sturdy column, is a decorative urn topped with putti, and in the background an oddly slanted surface of rectangular blocks that could be the side of a pyramid. The entire composition spirals in toward an unknown point just beyond the right hand edge of the

frame, where the interlaced registers of frame and image, of decoration and representation, seem to meet at an impossible angle.

The interaction between the framing elements and the central vignette spirals out from the central motif of the marine still life towards the border at the top, but also spirals inward towards the inset scene of fountain and pyramid. The illusionism lent to the objects which constitute the decorative frame never flattens out into the pure abstraction of ornament, and at the same time, the spiral composition of the frame, and of the image in its entirety, mimic the voluted marine forms which make it up. Despite the dense pictorial nature of the image, no element ever fully escapes the emblematic and allegorical mode of the frame, such that if a viewer is tempted to project himself into an illusionistic space of representation, he is always pushed one register further, into an imaginary space which exceeds the image itself. This vertiginous excess, pressed from the torsional play of frame and image, unmistakably draws on the treatment of pictorial space in Rococo ornament, as well as on the whole complex of motifs which cohere in that vexed and spiraloid vision.

VI. Meissonnier and the Development of Rococo Form

The greatest influence on Boucher's experiments with Rococo ornament, and perhaps along with Jacques de Lajoue, the most important

artist of Rococo ornament design, was Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier. Boucher would have been familiar with his designs, as would most of his contemporaries, through the publication in March of 1734, of Meissonnier's *Livre d'ornemens*, which consisted of some forty engravings illustrating designs for chandeliers, snuff boxes, pocket watches, trophies, cartouches, frames, architectural fragments, all manner of ornamental designs for domestic interiors, personal accessories, and the printed page.¹⁸ Though clearly Meissonnier was influenced by earlier designers of the French Regency, such as Nicolas Pineau and Jean-Bernard Toro, who incorporated dense illusionistic modeling and a taste for hybrid and chimerical figures in their designs, as well as by Italian designers such as Stefano Della Bella, whose auricular cartouches and richly foliated rinceaux were popular in the Parisian market for ornamental engraving in the 1720s,¹⁹ the striking novelty of Meissonnier's designs is immediately evident in his distinctive synthesis of oceanic and vegetal forms, and the systematic asymmetry of his compositions, which seems to unfold from these undulating natural forms.

The rush of ornamental designs that flooded the Parisian print market following the publication of Meissonnier's *Livre d'ornemens* attests to the remarkable novelty and popularity of these designs, and to his place at the forefront of that aspect of the Rococo which emerged in this fluorescence of

¹⁸ There is some debate as to precisely which of Meissonnier's designs were included in this first set. see Peter Fuhling, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: Un Génie Du Rococo (1695-1750)*, Archives D'arts Décoratifs (Turin: U. Allemandi, 1999), 54-7.

¹⁹ See the *Seau à rafraichir pour Louis de Bourbon*, 1723; reproduced in Fuhling, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 167.

ornamental engravings.²⁰ Boucher took part in this rush of designs following Meissonnier, but there is some evidence that his relationship to Meissonnier was more immediate. For instance, he must have been aware of Meissonnier's designs before the announcement of the sale of the *Livre d'ornemens*, in 1734, because he incorporated them into a handful of the thirty-three plates that he designed for a 1734 edition of the *Oeuvres de Molière* (fig. 1-11).²¹ In his selection of scenes, Boucher based his illustrations loosely on the plates from an earlier edition, but he gave his images a decidedly modern treatment by dressing his characters and decorating his interiors in a contemporary style.²² Meissonnier's designs feature as details such as chandeliers, overdoors, wall paneling and mounted clocks, which show not only Boucher's familiarity with them before their initial release in the print market, but his prescient awareness of the style as a sign of fashionable modernity.²³

Boucher would also likely have been familiar with Meissonnier's designs through Gabrielle Huquier, who was involved at the time in the production and sales of engravings after both artists, and who, by the middle of the following decade, would be the primary source for the most comprehensive collections of their works in print. There is also some evidence

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹ *Oeuvres de Molière* (Paris, 1734). see the final page of the 6th volume of the first edition for the printers note and date: 1733 by Pierre Prault,

²² Jean-Richard Pierrette, *L'œuvre Gravé De François Boucher Dans La Collection Edmond De Rothschild* (Paris: Éditions des musées nationaux, 1978)

²³ *Ibid.*, 128.

of a personal relationship between Meissonnier and Boucher. The certificate of baptism for Boucher's third child, Juste-Nathan, dated May 4, 1736, names Meissonnier and his wife as godparents.²⁴ It is difficult to gauge what kind of a working relationship this indicates between the two men. It certainly becomes tempting to imagine Meissonnier sharing his designs personally with Boucher, although there is no immediate evidence for this. Even so, there can be little doubt that Boucher was already well aware of Meissonnier's designs when the *Livre d'ornemens* was published, and that his own work in ornamental design in this period was greatly influenced by Meissonnier. But what is far more significant than how these historical particularities establish the scene of influence, is how pictorial and sculptural ideas developed by Meissonnier are taken up by Boucher and transformed in turn. Boucher's *Rocaille* is one of the more compelling examples of this movement of artistic ideas because it so explicitly deploys the idiomatic peculiarities of Meissonnier's designs while pushing them towards Boucher's more large scale pictorial aspirations.

Despite his skill as a draughtsman (and not so much as a painter), Meissonnier was not a picture maker first and foremost. He was an *orfèvre*, a silver and goldsmith, and this had been his family's trade for at least three generations.²⁵ His commitments were thus more to small scale and low-relief ornamental sculpture than to picture making, more to the frame than to the image itself. Of course, it was precisely in the tension that his work exploits

²⁴ Fuhling, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 402.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

between image and frame that it was to have the most far-reaching influence, but Meisssonier's work was not entirely motivated by such a tension.²⁶

Much of the mimetic intensity which he brings to his treatment of the ornamental fragments that make up the conventional elements of frame form developed in his designs for tableware such as salt cellars, terrines, and candlesticks. Some of these designs included forms so precisely rendered and so free of ornamental abstraction that they seem to have been simply plucked from nature; for instance, his *Differents desseins de Sallieres* (fig. 1-12), where the shells serving as salt containers are held upright by encrustations of coral, barnacles and smaller voluted shells which act as legs. In other designs, such as the celebrated *Kingston terrines* (fig. 1-13), the emphatic realism of the dishes, with their bulbous shell forms topped with mounds of shellfish and leafy legumes, transforms at the base into abstracted and elongated overlapping curves and spirals, which end in scalloped edged confluences of sea shell and lettuce leaf. This movement between the hyper-realism of his natural forms and the complexity of his asymmetrical overlapping ornamental abstractions speaks as much to a kind of virtuosic engagement with the sensuous materiality of molten silver as it does to a purely formal interest in the vocabulary of ornament.

One early example of this play between ornamental form and material potential is Meisssonier's 1728 design for a chandelier, for which he produced

²⁶ Bauer, "Rococo," 253.

three drawings rendering it from multiple angles (fig. 1-14). This was not only unusual, but generally unnecessary for the production of such a relatively simple object. In this case, the complexity of the design necessitated a more comprehensive approach. The essence of this complexity, and what becomes one of the distinguishing characteristics of Rococo ornament, is the fully bi-axial asymmetry of the composition.²⁷ The base of the chandelier is composed of three distinct arrangements of shell and scroll forms which twist together as they rise to support the bodies of two putti whose spiral embrace is interrupted by intertwining tendrils of scroll and palm. A warped cartouche supports the back and draped arm of one figure, whose legs and torso emerge from the coil of a scroll. One leg supports the back and draped arm of the other putto in a posture which mirrors that of the first. The diagonal of their locked gaze follows the spiral of palm fronds rising above their heads to support the socket at the top.

Here a vocabulary of ornamental fragments is subjected to a system of transformation and recombination that pulls its momentum in part from the thematic content of its elements, which play on loosening and reanimating the sedimentation of vegetal and architectural metaphors, and in part from the material potential of the chandelier, which proposes a warping and torsioning of forms that dramatizes the liquidity of molten silver. One of the unifying characteristics of the Rococo style is a tendency toward dissolving

²⁷ Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 153.

architectonic stability and emphasizing the liquidity of forms, and we find it in one of its earliest manifestations in Meissonnier's chandelier, which displays this tendency in its overall spiral composition, as well as in its softened and torqued architectural fragments. But there is another relatively overlooked design for an *ecritoire* (fig. 1-15), which unmistakably takes this transmutation of solid into liquid as its organizing principal.

The *ecritoire* was designed, and produced by Meissonnier for the *Compte de Maurepas* over the course of 7 months in 1731. Like most of Meissonnier's early designs for silver, it reflects a very specific material influence on the Rococo style, in as much as his work in the foundry was as much a part of the design process as his work at the drafting table.²⁸ The actual *ecritoire* no longer exists, but the drawing can be found in the eleventh book of the collection of engravings after Meissonnier's designs by Huquier. It is composed of many of the same elements that make up the 1728 chandelier – foliated scrolls, scalloped edged shells, bulbous fluted gourd-like forms – but because of the distinctly horizontal arrangement of most of the elements, and of the *ecritoire* itself, in comparison to the marked verticality of the chandelier; and perhaps also because, unlike the chandelier, the *ecritoire* is not immediately recognizable as such; it almost seems to have been composed by subjecting the silver of the chandelier to the heat of the forge, allowing it to

²⁸ Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 203.

collapse as the increasing liquidity of molten metal gives way to the force of gravity.

In its lack of verticality and its insistent submission to gravity, it is atypical of Rococo design in general, but there is something here that comes specifically from the curvature of molten forms –it visible in the slightly asymmetrical bulbousness of the central form of the *ecritoire*, or the ribbed underside of the foliated scroll at the left that folds limply before spiraling so tightly that it becomes a voluted shell. It is a kind of mellifluent sensuousness that matches the rhythmic curves emerging from the increasingly mimetic representation of vegetal and aquatic forms.

For the most part, the architectural fragments that make up the *ecritoire* and the chandelier, and a good deal of the Rococo ornament that follows, come from the decorative elements found in classical columns and capitals, such as the fluted shafts and scroll corniced capitals of the ionic order, as well as from the voluted acanthus leaves and central basket form of the corinthian order. The Rococo follows the spirit of the corinthian capital in its fascination with pushing geometrically abstracted decorative forms back towards mimetic representations of the natural forms which inspire them. But by the time these forms are being deployed in Rococo ornament they are so conventional from an architectural standpoint that they can retain their material reference to stone as much as to vegetation, so that in designs such as the *ecritoire* their mimetic force emerges as much from their asymmetrical arrangement and

variations of scale and torsion, as from a kind of straightforward resemblance to natural forms.

When Meissonnier brings these torqued asymmetries from the dinner table and the writing desk to the picture frame, their strongly mimetic resonances take on a new valence in relation to the signifying potential of the image. Seemingly syphoning the mimetic density of the image, they invest it in a newly extravagant vocabulary of the frame, wandering outside ornamental conventions, loosening the role of the frame as mediator between architecture and image. They seem to reanimate the ossification of oceanic and vegetal forms that underlie the conventional vocabulary of the frame – fluted column, voluted scroll, etc. – with precisely that mimetic energy which it was de-signed to contain. At a certain point of saturation, the frame, newly reanimated, begins to wander – zombie/hybrid – dragging its strange logic back into the image. Charting the multivalence of these movements as the vertigo of folding (frame: image: frame), the space of the Rococo image emerges as a fermentation of the mimetic energies invested in the frame, an excess or surplus with its origins in the corners and crevices of frame form.

The cartouche is taken up by the vocabulary of Rococo forms as precisely this kind of hollowing out of ornament; no longer a surface surrounded by framing elements but a dilation of framing element into the possibility of a surface. This is well illustrated in a design by Meissonnier for the frame of a royal portrait (1727-30)(fig. 1-16). The corner elements, which

lend themselves to asymmetry as a result of their bending across perpendicular borders of the frame and repeating at opposite corners, are essentially leveraged into fully asymmetrical forms at the center points of the vertical and horizontal borders. Here hybridized shell and vegetal forms become the center of an interlocking system of curves and counter-curves within which appears a newly asymmetrical surface (or blank). These asymmetrical, hybridized shell/leaf forms become one of the characteristic elements of the Rococo ornamental vocabulary, eventually giving their name, *rocaille*, to the style as a whole.²⁹ But it is in the emergence from within these ornamental forms of another surface of inscription, the *rocaille* form figured as cartouche, that we find the germ of a Rococo pictorial logic.

The cartouche comes from the tradition of illumination, and typically represents a partially unfurled scroll of paper on which might appear a title, a dedication, or information about the publication of a text. Often the surface of the scroll wavers slightly or turns in toward one side of the image in order to accentuate its dimensionality, and it may also be framed by small emblematic objects or figures. The purpose of the cartouche is to dramatize the surface of representation, in order to underscore and accentuate the importance of the textual information it contains. In this respect it overlaps with the conventions of the picture frame.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

It was the singular invention of Rococo ornament to transform the central element of the cartouche from the scroll into the asymmetrical half shell. We can see this in comparing a 1713 design for a cartouche by Jacques de Lajoue for the Marquis de Maillebois (fig. 1-17) with some of the designs from his 1734 *Receuil nouveau de differens cartouches* (fig. 1-18, and 2-19). The early design is notable for the precocity of its asymmetry, which is particularly apparent in the upper cartouche featuring the Maillebois coat of arms.³⁰ It is also an apt illustration of the motif of the paper scroll functioning to dramatize the surface of inscription, with the curl forming its bottom edge beginning to rhyme and repeat in the curvatures of ornamental detail in the framing elements. In figures 18 and 19 the scroll forms in the framing elements as well as the surface of inscription itself are rendered in increasingly organic forms. Within the logic of the frame, shifts of scale and texture abstract the echo and overlap of spiral and curve, and a formal homology develops between the increasingly vegetal scroll and the asymmetrical half shell, even to the point of fully absorbing the textual surface in the pictorialization of the frame.

By embedding a textual mode of representation within a pictorial representation, the cartouche always risks the possibility of overflowing its boundaries and allowing the pictorial to interfere with the textual. It is precisely the potential for playful ambiguity in this interference that motivates the space

³⁰ Marie Roland-Michelle has pointed this out in her catalogue description, Marianne Roland Michel, *Lajoue et L'art Rocaille* (Arthena, 1984), 313-4.

of the Rococo image to bend in on itself, always one register of representation theatricalizing its relation to another register which it contains. When the underlying form of the cartouche ceases to propose a surface for inscription, and instead becomes the location of a pictorial vignette, this torsion points towards an impossible space of non-representation, at once interior and exterior to the image.

A good example of this can be seen in the second of three plates illustrating Meissonnier's designs for a frame for the *Carte chronologique du roi* (fig. 1-20). The fragment on the left depicting one of the vertical sides of the frame features - in the place of what would conventionally be a trophy-like arrangement of emblematic objects - a warped pediment receding behind a protruding cornice to form a cartouche whose surface is so torqued that it almost seems to be turning diagonally away from the viewer. Inside the frame established by the cartouche is the gradation of a sky dappled faintly with foliage, the figure of a woman turned away from us and looking back into the obliquely framed space, her hair up in a bun exposing the back of her neck and her loosely fitting dress hanging off her shoulder; across from her another figure, too small to make out the details, and below them a roughly sketched putti spills out of the cartouche into the frame. Bristling with mimetic energies, the logic of the frame seems almost accidentally to engender this second and secondary pictorial space, where traces of Watteau's pastoral garden hover discretely.

This movement from ornamental motif to extravagant pictorial space takes on a systematic relation to the entire picture plane in Meissonnier's *Panneaux d'ornements*. The panels are horizontally formatted and fairly small, approximately 12 x 20cm. Most feature elaborate cartouches constructed from interlocking ornamental and architectural fragments framing inset pictorial motifs. In the more conventional designs, there is little interaction between these two registers, and the cartouches were frequently reused without the original inset picture.³¹ But in the more innovative designs the potential for this kind of simple pastiche is deflected by the inseparability of the framing elements from the inset motif. In some cases the frame seems to unfurl and radiate out from a central asymmetrical shell form with only a sliver of illusionistic depth producing a kind of pulsating resonance of curves spiraling out from the central motif, (as in. fig. 1-21 & 2-22). In others, the rhythmic asymmetries of ornamental fragments are transformed into fantasy architectural scenes depicting palace gardens complete with fountains, decorative urns, nude figures of lounging river gods and nymphs, as well as groups of casual garden goers, (as in fig. 1-23 & 2-24). Ornamental flourishes amplify into monumental architectural forms, ruins of a fragmented frame reintegrated into a pictorial space whose strangely curved and interlocking orthogonals still vibrate with the oblique and torqued frontality of Meissonnier's asymmetrical central shell motif.

³¹ For an example see Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 330.

One panel gives full expression to this systematic, scale-shifting play between decorative frame and architectural fantasy (fig. 1-25). It is not possible to enter this image from a single point, nor to remain at a purported center, nor even to begin from a stable frame. All of these devices, which are directional and designed to orient the viewer in a rational visual circuit have been ungrounded, disconnected and rerouted. Bits of ornamental frame plunge into signifying pictorial spaces, burrowing into the rhythmic proliferation of fragments, each twist becoming another arch in a system of arcades that open into cavernous and towering spaces, and then again and further into spaces just out of view. The license given to the frame to repeat, to mutate, to transfigure itself within the logic of ornament, which is the logic of the grotesque, now literally becoming grotto, cave, vertiginous proliferation of fantastical pictorializations.

What does it mean to get lost in such an image, to slip along the spiral of its ebullient liquidity? What invites such dazzling and fascinated looking?

VII. Afterlives: Practical and Fantastical

Meissonnier's ornamental panels had some rather practical afterlives. Ink sketches and lead models for snuffboxes based on the ornamental panels have been attributed to prominent Parisian jewelers of the 1730s such as

Daniel Govaers and Pasquier-Remi Mondon,³² and Meisssonier himself incorporated the elements from the panels into his own designs for pocket watches and snuff boxes.³³ Between these designs and the ornamental panels, which inspired them we can see the traces of an underlying ornamental logic. For instance, Meisssonier has a design for a snuffbox (uppermost design in fig. 1-26) that relies heavily on the panel in figure 25. Borrowing the sweeping spiral from the center of the design, he reconfigures the balustrade of the staircase into a theater balcony, omitting the fountain, but keeping the vaulted arches, and anchoring one end of the spiral in the shallow architectural space of the foreground, while the other end projects out over the hazy distance at the center and wraps forward into the ornamental frame. In the more compact 's' curve at the left side of the frame, a water nymph borrowed from the grouping of figures at the top of the stair case in figure 25 cradles her overturned urn from which flows a stream that blends into the lower curve of the frame below the balustrade.

In this extremely compact presentation, Meisssonier merges the primary thematic topoi of the Rococo – the theater, the garden, the fountain and the grotto – and the formal system which holds these spaces together: the extrapolation of the asymmetrical central spiral form into a series of interlocking curves and counter-curves. Equally remarkable is the overall shape of the frame when seen in the context of the other designs in this plate

³² Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meisssonier*, 189, 310.

³³ See the eighth book of the *Oeuvre gravé*, reproduced in Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meisssonier*, 338-342.

(particularly those immediately below this one and at the bottom on the left), which suggest that the contours of the outline are extrapolated from the characteristic *rocaille* conflation of lettuce leaf and sea shell that makes up their central motif; and this extrapolation from ornamental fragment to compositional form is strongly reminiscent of the movement from the more ornamental to the more pictorial panels in his *Panneux d'ornemens*. Perhaps as we approach the radical imbrication of ornamental and pictorial space that characterizes the panel design in figure 25, what we see is a pictorial fantasy that is actually a diagram, whose seductive multivalent illusionism maps the potentialities of its recombinant logic like the grammar of an ornamental language to be exchanged between designers and craftsmen.³⁴

But the image slips this circuit of usefulness, when it gives rise not only to copies of its forms, but to a whole genre of ornamental designs which are resolutely unconcerned with their applicability in any practical sense. These were completely fantastical assemblages; confluences of cartouche, grotto, nymphaeum, rustic garden, and architectural fantasy, featured in suites such as Jacques de Lajoue's *Livre nouveau de douze morceaux de fantaisie utile a divers usages* (1736), Pierre Quentin-Chedel's *Livre de fantaisies nouvelles* (1738), François-Thomas Mondon's *Livre de nouveaux Caprices d'ornements* (1738), and François de Cuvilliers' *Morceaux de caprices a divers usages* (1745), among many others (fig. 1-27, 2-28). The titles of these suites only

³⁴ For a discussion of the ambiguous uses of ornamental prints see Alain Charles Gruber and Bruno Pons. *The History of Decorative Arts* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 348.

begin to render the total capitulation to fantasy that characterizes this flood of ornamental engravings.

They deploy the vocabulary of Rococo ornament, and the propositional mode of ornamental engraving (note for instance the implications of “à divers usages” in the title to the suites by Lajoue and Cuvilliers), but they are without any reference to a potential and objective existence as ornament. They are images of ornamental effects, and in this sense they propose ornamental form as pictorial subject.³⁵ Even titles announcing seemingly practical designs, such as Jacques de Lajoue's *Livre de cartouches de guerre*, *Livre de buffet* (both 1735), and *Livre de vases* (1738-40) present the viewer with images in which the fantastical and protean logic of the frame so extravagantly dominates the compositions that it is difficult to decipher the functionality of the underlying form (fig. 1-29).³⁶ Boucher's designs for fountains and vases follow this same vein, and while the *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents* are explicitly proposed as designs for something, the size and quality of the prints strongly indicate that they were aimed as much at collectors as craftsmen, which is to say that they were primarily images rather than models.

In as much as it is tied to the grotesque, ornament has always had a relation to caprice. One need only look to the canonical texts of Horace or Vitruvius to see the hybridity of forms encountered in the grotesque depicted

³⁵ Bauer discusses this idea of the ornamental fragment becoming pictorial subject in Bauer, “Rococo”, 231-3.

³⁶ I draw my dating of Lajoue's *Livres de Vases* from Roland-Michel's discussion see Roland-Michel, *Lajoue et l'Art Rocaille*, 345.

pejoratively as something which arises from the fantasies of artists rather than the realities of the world.³⁷ This opposition of the fantastical and the actual has specific resonances in the tradition of Greek aesthetics, where *phantasiai* and *mimesis* are two distinct representational modes.³⁸ *Mimesis* is the representation of what is given to the sense of sight, while *Phantasiai* is the process by which the mind forms a mental image without or beyond that which is given to the senses. *Phantasiai* has an explicitly substitutive function, which opens it to the translation into visual form of poetic procedures such as metaphor and metonymy, as well as more complex systems of reference such as allegory and symbol. Its forms might be constructed from remnants or fragments of mimetic operations, but its content is essentially affective, closer to the world of dreams. *Phantasiai* is always at work in representation in as much as representations point beyond themselves, and its subordination to convention is fundamental in establishing the boundaries of decorum between what can be shown and what should be inferred from what is not shown. The veil is one of the conventional motifs in this operation, covering over that which cannot be represented and simultaneously providing a screen onto which the mental image of a viewer can be projected.³⁹

The transgressiveness of the grotesque as it is figured by Vitruvius, and indeed all of the criticism which follows his mode of conservatism in the

³⁷ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, Book I pp. 1-5. Vitruvius 7.5.1-7; quoted in *Ibid.*, 345-6.

³⁸ Michael Koortbojian "Mimesis or Phantasia? Two Representational Modes in Roman Commemorative Art", *Classical Antiquity*. vol.24, iss.2, (2005): 285-306.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

eighteenth century, is not simply that things have slipped out of their rightful place - that ornament has taken the place of structure, or that a woman has been given the body of a fish - but that in doing so the relations of *phantasiai* and *mimesis* have become confused. The imagination has been rerouted, reflected and projected back into the realms of representation, crystallizing on the surface of the real. In this sense, the fantasy image is always fundamentally excessive, a perversion of the conventional contract between artist and viewer, and a mark made in a space which must remain blank.

Of course, this transgression is precisely what drives the delight in fantasy against which conventional models of representation are always barricading themselves, because it reanimates the signal of that blank space, populating it with the pluripotent signs of the imaginary. And this reminds us that the imaginary is radically porous, and that its instrumentalization by convention is always provisional and susceptible to the momentum of other kinds of forces. In works such as Meissonnier's *Panneux d'ornemens*, Boucher's *Rocaille*, and much of the Rococo ornamental engraving that followed, the confusion of the hierarchy between frame and image produces this same exhilarated and dazzling sense of license that haunts Vitruvius' conservatism. And the same Vitruvian arguments against the unbridled

fantasies of artists can be found in the eighteenth century criticism of Rococo ornament.⁴⁰

Jacques-François Blondel, one of the foremost French architectural scholars of the eighteenth century, penned some of the more sober criticism of the Rococo style in ornament. He was the first to identify Meissonnier and Lajoue as the progenitors of the style, and to suggest the influences of Italian mannerism through Borromini, and of the grotesque through Bérain.⁴¹ In a short article on architectural *Caprice*, which appeared in the second volume of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, he singled out Lajoue and Bérain as primary examples of the impropriety of contemporary design.

CAPRICE, s.f. (in Architecture.) This word is used metaphorically to describe a composition which is bizarre although ingenious, but far removed from the precepts of Art, as are the works of the Italian architect Borromini, the French painters and designers Berin [sic] and de la Joue [sic], and several others of our day; by an imagination as fertile as it is deranged, they take licenses which authorize most of the young, inexperienced, and untrained Architects to imitate them, and from there to render Architecture susceptible to variations, just like clothing, fashion, &c.⁴²

⁴⁰ Le Blanc, cites Horace as he condemns the monstrous hybridity of Rococo ornament; see Abbé Le Blanc, *Lettres d'un François*, (La Haye: Jean Neaulme, 1745), 48. Cochin's witty reprisal of Le Blanc's argument opens with a characterization of the prolific imagination of artists working in the *gout nouveau*, before reproducing most of Le Blanc's text word for word. The supplicative tenor of Cochin's text and its publication in the *Mercure* lend it a parodic resonance, which differentiates it substantially from the shrill critical voice of Le Blanc; see Charles-Nicolas Cochin, "Supplication aux orfèvres, ciseleurs, sculpteurs," *Mercure* (Dec, 1754), 178. On the bizarre imagination of artists also see J.F. Blondel, *Cours d'architecture*, (Paris, 1777), 57.

⁴¹ J.F. Blondel, *l'Homme du monde éclairé par les arts* (Amsterdam, 1774), 1:47,53,102-3. see Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, Appendix D, for an exhaustive transcription of critical opinions of the Rococo, and 434-5 in particular for Blondel on Meissonnier.

⁴² Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*. 2:637-8. My translation

This characterization of the artist's imagination as fertile, deranged, and licentious, along with the inevitable corruption of youth, capitulation to fashion, and disappearance of tradition which it engenders, traces the outline of the prototypical conservative critique of the collusions of fantasy and decadence. Indeed, these are precisely the criticisms that anti-Rococo Salon critics launched against Boucher's paintings,⁴³ and this correspondence underscores the extent to which Boucher's ingenuity as a painter was implicated in a general current of anti-classical forms for which the fantastical hybridity of the grotesque is perhaps the deepest reaching of pictorial motifs.

Despite his criticisms of the Rococo style, Blondel was marginally involved in its production and dissemination at the time of its initial efflorescence.⁴⁴ In 1737 he published *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance*, in which he included over one-hundred and fifty engravings, including some which showed wall paneling and overdoors in the Rococo style – albeit a somewhat toned down version. One particularly remarkable detail of this book is an explanation that he gives in a footnote regarding certain engravings which he excluded from the book for fear that they were too “licentious,” and others which he altered, giving them “less fluid contours,” in order that they be more appropriate to the authoritative purposes of a treatise. Those that were excluded he suggested would be offered, “*en feuille* to the

⁴³ See an interesting review of these criticisms built around an analysis of Diderot's criticisms of Boucher in René Démoris, 'Boucher, Diderot, Rousseau', in *Rethinking Boucher*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 201-228.

⁴⁴ Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 153.

Public, separately, not as examples to be followed absolutely, but as general pieces in which one might find useful parts, that could be applied in different decorative contexts..."⁴⁵

Blondel's note provides a rare contemporary characterization of the role of the print market in the dissemination of ornamental designs in Paris. He distinguishes the canonical function of the bound and annotated architectural treatise from the sales of loose-leaf suites of designs, whose ephemeral quality lends both those designing them as well as those putting them to use greater license in experimenting with variations of form and application. This relationship between the medium of engraving and ornament design was not new, but it took on renewed and unprecedented momentum under the influence of the Rococo.

Already in the early sixteenth-century, the success of the intaglio process of print making in ornament design marked the beginning of a confluence of the thematic resonances of fantasy, hybridity, and caprice within the image and the capacity of the medium itself to amplify the multivalence of the designs, both in the range of their applications as well as in their susceptibility to fragmentation and variation. This enhanced capacity for proliferation and transformation, which engraving lends to ornament, would occasionally take on pictorial form, as it did in the frontispiece to Christoph Jamnitzer's *Neue Grottesken Buch* (Nuremberg, 1609) (fig. 1-30). The image

⁴⁵ J.F. Blondel, *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance* (Paris, 1737), 76-7. My translation.

depicts the stall of a merchant of engravings where the ornamental forms have taken on lives of their own. Instead of images, customers scan the shelves and dig through a basket of seemingly animate monstrous forms. Some of these forms harass the customers, and others literally take flight. It was unusual for ornamental engraving to explicitly address this peculiar operational homology between its forms, its medium, and its uses, but the idea that ornamental engraving is addressed to a range of possible uses, and that part of this plurality is not only emblemized, but made possible by the spirit of caprice which animates the designs, is in some sense fundamental to this genre of pictorial production.⁴⁶

The unique provision of Rococo ornamental engraving is the extent to which, as it reaches its most fantastical expressions, the diagrammatic representation of fragmentation, variation, and hybridity is pictorialized in the designs themselves, and indeed produces the possibility of another kind of picture. Jamnitzer's frontispiece could never have served the Rococo precisely because there are no pictures in it; they remain closed up in the book under the merchant's arm, while the grotesque mutates into throngs of embodied forms. Rococo fantasy is eminently pictorial. It draws its caprice into the very structure of pictorial space, and in so doing divorces itself radically from the context of the architectural interior which it purportedly populates. In the

⁴⁶ For a compelling exposition of this development in Germany see the chapter titled, "Guidebooks to chaos," in Christopher P. Heuer, *The City Rehearsed: Object, Architecture, and Print in the Worlds of Hans Vredeman de Vries* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 99-135.

liquidity of the print market the Rococo takes up an extraordinary momentum. It mutates. It proliferates. And under that acceleration it begins to loosen and transform aggregated associations, and to shudder with the speed of new psychic resonances. In this sense, its engagement with the medium of engraving is also deeply embedded in a new kind of *phantasiai*, one which allegorizes shifting relations between what can be seen and what can be known in an early eighteenth century Paris under the influence of an unprecedented saturation of the printed image across a vast array of cultural production.

VIII. A Convenient and Curious Voyage

The ascendancy of the printed image was at the center of an unprecedented transformation of the production and reception of images in eighteenth century France. Printmaking's capacity to reproduce and disseminate great quantities of images was celebrated in the contemporary literature as a way to bring near what was previously far, such as the inhabitants of distant lands, great works of art, and collections of rare objects, but also as the source of a kind of democratization of the image.⁴⁷ Because it was relatively inexpensive to produce engravings, the possibility of owning images was open to a broader public. More images were encountered more

⁴⁷ George Levitine, "French Eighteenth-Century Printmaking, in Search of Cultural Assertion," in *Regency to Empire: French Printmaking, 1715-1814*. exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Baltimore Museum of Art ; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1984) 11.

frequently and with greater intimacy than ever before, and at the same time they lost a certain element of preciousness. One could hold them, touch them, flip through them. Engraving amplified the capacity of images to open onto a private, imaginary space. At the same time, it produced an increasingly shared, public iconography, which celebrated this new found imaginary. In this new relation to the image, a new mode of looking was born.

In the expanding print market of early eighteenth century Paris, images appeared across increasingly diverse fields of interest from the reproduction of art works to the production of illustrations for works of literature, architectural, scientific and technical treatises, as well as more ephemeral uses such as fashion prints, political satire, trade cards and signage. They proliferated with such rapidity and ubiquity, that they began regularly to exceed their intended uses within a given context, and through their seemingly boundless capacity for repetition, juxtaposition and reconfiguration, to generate a kaleidoscopic fluidity.

Perhaps the most tangible manifestation of this fragmented and mutable visuality was to be found on the tables of itinerant street vendors, or *étaleurs d'images*, who would set up along the *quai* of the Seine in Paris, and on bridges such as the Pont Neuf and Pont Royal (fig. 1-31). A casual glance along one of these tables would have been enough to encounter a dizzying arrangement of religious iconography, portraits, exotic vistas and cityscapes, prints of the newest fashions in court, political satire, bawdy and erotic images,

and ornamental designs. The popularity of these *étaleur d'images* is attested to by legal records documenting the ongoing attempts by city authorities to disperse the crowds that would block circulation on the sidewalks as they gathered around the tables to look at the displays. In the winter the problem was compounded by the makeshift braseros that the street vendors used to heat themselves, which drew further crowds and increased the threat of fire.⁴⁸ This lively street scene was also a point of intersection for people of vastly different means and interests, not only in the physical proximity of their bodies and gazes as they hovered around the street-side tables, but also in the leveling effect of the table itself, which flattens hierarchies of taste, and produces the possibility of both accidental and deliberate cross-pollinations between otherwise distinct categories.

The day books of print sellers indicate not only that engraved ornament designs were relatively affordable, but that engravings by the most sought after Rococo designers, such as Juste-Aurele Meissonnier and Jacques de Lajoue, were produced in large volume and sold in great quantity at multiple locations, particularly among these itinerant street vendors that operated along the banks of the Seine.⁴⁹ The same engravings are also found in great number and often in complete sets in the inventories and sales catalogues of the most

⁴⁸ Corrine Le Bitouzé, "Le Commerce de L'Estampe a Paris dans la premiere moitié du XVIIIe siècle" (PhD. diss., l'École Nationale des Chartres, 1986) 147-8. Also see Krzysztof Pomian, "Marchands, connaisseurs, curieux a Paris au XVIIIème," *Revue de l'art*, no. 43, (1979): 23-6 and Marianne Grivel, *Le Commerce de l'estampe a Paris au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1986)

⁴⁹ Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 247-8.

prolific collectors of the 18th century, so there is little doubt that Rococo ornament flourished precisely in this scene of unregulated eidetic fluidity.⁵⁰ Interestingly, the role of the table as a surface for negotiating the comparison, juxtaposition and evaluation of engraved images was also common to both the *étaieurs* and the collectors, as was the relative fluidity of social classes that found on its surface a common field for negotiating their overlapping scopic desires. Descriptions of the collector's table suggest a far more controlled scene of looking, but they also explicitly address the profound novelty and broader aesthetic implications of this mode of viewing.⁵¹

Perhaps the most comprehensive and insightful account of the usefulness and appeal of prints in the early part of the eighteenth century is an essay by Roger de Piles, titled *De l'utilité des Estampes, & de leur usage*, which was published as an addendum in the second edition of his *Abrégé de la vie des peintres* (1715).⁵² It opens with a reflection on the nature of human knowledge, invoking the innate desire for knowledge and the twin obstructions to this desire: the difficulty of learning and the facility with which one forgets.⁵³ In the face of the ever-increasing accumulation of artifacts that weigh on

⁵⁰ Michel, *Lajoue Et L'art Rocaille*, 138.

⁵¹ William MacGregor has made a similar comparison in his essay "The Authority of Prints", though he takes less interest in the recurrence of the figure of the table and its role as physical support for systems of reconfiguration. MacGregor's work towards establishing early modern frameworks for the reception of the printed image, have been deeply informative to my attempts to situate the Rococo within those frameworks. William B. MacGregor, "The Authority of Prints: An Early Modern Perspective." *Art History* 22, no. 3 (1999): 389-420.

⁵² Roger De Piles, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres avec des réflexions sur leurs ouvrage et un traité du peintre parfait, de la connaissance des desseins, de l'utilité des estampes*. 2ème éd. rev. et corr. par l'auteur, avec un abrégé de sa vie et plusieurs autres additions [par l'Abbé Fraguier] (J. Estienne, 1715).

⁵³ Roger de Piles, *Abrégé*, 74.

efforts at understanding the world, engraving appears as an explicitly modern cognitive aid, and its effectiveness in this regard is said to have reached a degree of technical perfection, combined with a ubiquity of subject matter, such that by the turn of the century, it had become “the repository for all that is beautiful and curious in the world.”⁵⁴

De Piles thus perhaps unwittingly proposes what will later become two systems of value for engraving. The first is its encyclopedic potential, its ability to document and disseminate knowledge about the world. The second is its aesthetic potential, its participation in an economy of scopic desire that operates across the twinned figures of beauty and curiosity. Of course, it is the imbrication of these two systems which characterizes De Piles’ account of the value of engraving, and links it in many ways to the broader aesthetic criteria that organize the tables of the *étaleurs d’images*.

In his discussion of the role of prints in the expanding field of collecting practices, de Piles explains that collections of prints were beginning to stand in for collections of masterworks in the cultivation of taste by those of lesser means. While economy is one factor in the usefulness of prints, the benefits of their physical format - the ease with which one may flip through a range of images, arrange, juxtapose and rearrange them in order to formulate comparisons or gather the character of an artists’ oeuvre - seems to De Piles not only to serve as an adequate but inferior replacement to a collection of

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

paintings, but to supersede the usefulness of a collection of actual paintings in certain respects. At the center of this process of cumulative and juxtapositional looking is the collector's table` :

By means of prints, one may easily see the works of several masters on a table, one may form an idea of them, judge by comparison, make a choice, and through this practice contract a habit of good taste and good manners, providing that it is done in the presence of someone that has discernment in these sorts of things, and who knows how to distinguish the good from the mediocre.⁵⁵

De Piles description of the process of acquiring taste as an accumulation of layers of visual experience is based on a positive assessment of taste as a residue of previous aesthetic experience, rather than an inborn and unchanging quality.⁵⁶ In this, he is closely aligned with John Locke's description of the development of cognition as an accumulation and juxtaposition of sensorial experiences on the tabula rasa of the mind. And indeed, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is fraught with metaphors drawn from print technology.⁵⁷ De Piles' notion of residual aesthetic experience is also an important aspect of a theory that he developed in his *Cours de peinture* regarding the fundamentally sensorial relationship between art object and aesthetic experience.⁵⁸ He named this realm of experience *l'enthousiasme*, and he explains it as a kind of aesthetic charge which is

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

⁵⁶ G.L. Van Roosbroeck, "The Original Version of Voltaire's 'Temple du goût'," in *The Romantic Review*, XXV, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934): 326.

⁵⁷ MacGregor, "The Authority of Prints,"

⁵⁸ Roger de Piles and Pierre de Rochefort, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris : Chez Jacques Estienne, 1708).

collected and channeled by the artist into the arrangement of forms and colors at the surface of the picture, from where it strikes the receptive viewer in the first instant of perception before any cognitive function could begin to interpolate a narrative action or setting.⁵⁹ *Enthousiasme* is the highest order of aesthetic experience according to de Piles, precisely because it is purely aesthetic, which is to say that it operates only on the senses. It is also, according to de Piles, something to which one may naturally be more or less attuned, but for those with less sensitivity to *enthousiasme*, it can be developed through contact with great works of art.⁶⁰

This last detail is clearly at work in his description of the scene at the collector's table, where the aesthetic moves more tentatively, maybe even systematically, as layers of visual experience tune aesthetic sensitivities. It may seem asymmetrical to compare the forcefulness of his description of *enthousiasme* to the rather tame pedagogical process unfolding on the collectors' table, and certainly the ecstatic immediacy of *enthousiasme* would seem to be at odds with the plodding studiousness of comparison and judgment. But it is important to note that the immediacy of aesthetic experience, its precedence to any interpretive act, does not mean, for de Piles, that it is universally or freely available. The necessary degree of receptivity is only natural in rare instances, otherwise it requires a process of attunement, for which collections of engravings are uniquely suited.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-122.

It is this concept of attunement that makes de Piles aesthetic theory so interesting in the broader context of the proliferation of engravings, because it suggests not only that engraving served to amplify aesthetic receptivity, but that it inevitably produced distortions, new sensitivities, and potentially engendered its own hybridized aesthetic. De Piles' description of the collector's table as a place for the cultivation of 'good taste' sets it decidedly apart from the likely far more chaotic scene on the tables of the *etaleurs*; and the presence of the discerning companion, as well as the conflation of good taste with good manners, underscores his careful attenuation of a process which may very well spiral out of control. Indeed, he recommends against over-exposure, as only those of a highly developed pictorial intelligence could possibly absorb the vast quantity of images available with any degree of clarity. It is precisely this sense of vertigo threatening the controlled development of conventional aesthetic sensibilities, which I would like to suggest begins to manifest in the fantasy spaces of Rococo ornamental engraving as a new form of pictorial intelligence. And this is not only an effect of the sheer quantity of images, but of the aesthetic and cognitive implications of a mode of viewership that figures experience as a series of impressions that can be collected, arranged, compared, and organized according to a range of different classificatory schemes however idiosyncratic these may be.

De Piles' addresses these idiosyncrasies in his description of the many kinds of interest that people take in engraving. He celebrates individual taste

as the criterion for selecting and organizing collections of prints, explaining that some collect according to the engraver, some according to particular painters or schools of painting, others may collect according to subject matter. In one particularly detailed example he describes an amateur historian who organizes his collection according to nation states, such that he would have portraits of a particular royal family and the associated court and political functionaries, maps of the territories, views of the palaces and important architectural and artistic monuments, depictions of important moments in the histories of the principle towns, all images which would have been available, though not necessarily produced for and organized according to the system which this collector had generated.⁶¹

Because the printed image takes a fairly uniform material format, it allows a wide range of different kinds of visual information to appear within the framework of a single, relatively stable phenomenological experience of looking. And because it is also both mobile and highly receptive to manipulation and recontextualization, a viewer is able to generate a personalized relationship to the value and meaning of an image. At his most lyrical, De Piles is less interested in the quality, scope, or organization of a collection than he is with the far more personal attachments one might develop with one's collection, which he frames in the suggestion that at the end of ones

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 85-6.

life, engravings begin to stand in for memories of lived experience and for fantasies of experiences that never were.

... we search out this pleasure simply to enjoy the beauty and singularity of objects that engraving offers, because [in it] we find all of the countries, cities, and places that we have read about in History, or that we have seen ourselves in our voyages, so much so that the great number of rarities that we encounter in engravings can even become a voyage in itself, a convenient and curious voyage for those who have never taken one, or who are no longer in a state to begin.⁶²

As it acquires this retrospective and nostalgic currency, the internalization of the printed image is given a level of emotional resonance through which it becomes more than an underlying cognitive metaphor. Its encyclopedic and aesthetic fluidity are here fully leveraged to stand in for the space of the imagination, and in this movement is an idea of the image radically abstracted from the exigencies of its material, social, and even ideological support. In a way which was unlike any other experience of viewership, everyone could be alone with the image.

Rococo fantasy was born in this new relation to the image, at once individuated and radically public. It built its fantastical visions precisely out of the ruins of frame form, whose function had always been to signal the containment of the image within the architectural and social frameworks which dictate its context. Rococo fantasy is the evacuation of this context: the vertigo of ornament set loose in the slippery semiotic fluidity of the printed image. In

⁶² *Ibid.*, 88.

that kaleidoscopic spin, the centrifugal evacuation of context also gave way to a centripetal osmosis, absorbing the giddy energies of anxiety and desire set loose by the shifting epistemological terrain of a world increasingly understood as and through a picture.

Chapter 2: The Printed Image in the Terrain of Knowledge

IX. All That is Beautiful and Curious

Boucher's work as an ornamentalist in the Rococo style produced some of his earliest experiments with pictorial space, and these were part of a broader current of formal innovation that pushed ornamental forms toward increasingly pictorial ends. The success of this experimentation in the print market was motivated in part by the emergence of a new culture of collecting, which extended from the collector's cabinet to the tables of the *étaieurs*, and reveled in the unique aesthetic potential of the eidetic fluidity encouraged by the format and mobility of the printed image. But it was not just the profusion of images in the print market that led to the kaleidoscopic effects of such fluidity. As the production and circulation of knowledge was increasingly linked to images in novel ways, engraving was becoming both a dominant cognitive metaphor, and the primary medium for the rationalization and technicalization of vision.¹ The protean and fantastical spaces of Rococo ornament took on epistemological resonances in as much as they were manifestations of a countervailing but nonetheless correlative current of irrational forms, which emerged in the inevitable surplus of aesthetic pleasure that accompanied the image in its more sober duties.

¹ William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (1953; repr. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1985).

The pedagogical value of the printed image was already widely accepted by the beginning of the eighteenth century when de Piles was writing his essay on the usefulness of prints. But his fascination with the encyclopedic aspect of that value, as a "repository for all that is beautiful and curious in the world," coincides with an important shift in the use of images in pedagogical contexts in France, and with a more general permeability to the printed image on the part of the formal institutions of knowledge production and dissemination. At a very elementary level this can be seen in the texts tasked with teaching morality to young children, which increasingly turned to concrete examples rather than mythological personifications of virtue and vice.² This shift toward empirical rather than idealized forms was facilitated by a number of changes in the print trade. The success of copper plate engraving had all but eliminated the older technology of wood-cut engraving in France by 1620,³ so that by the turn of the century, even relatively inexpensive pedagogical texts for children could incorporate these higher quality images. Also, the ability to render detail in copperplate engraving meant that images could rely more on concrete particularities rather than iconic attributes in conveying meaning, so that already at a very early age, educated children were being exposed to an imbrication of text and image in which the detail of the image could surpass its pedagogical function in novel ways. This tension was to mark

² Claudine Billot, "Le Role de l'image dans la litterature enfantine jusqu'a la Restauration," in *Gazette des beaux-arts*, vol. 80, (1972): 165-172.

³ Grivel, *Le Commerce de l'estampe*, 48.

the role of images in all kinds of pedagogical and scientific texts well into the second half of the eighteenth century.

By 1700 all of the major printmakers had moved to the rue Saint Jacques, which was already the center of the book trade.⁴ The importance of this location lay in its proximity to the University as well as to a number of schools, churches and convents. The arrival of the engravers in the rue Saint Jacques marked in a quite literal sense the entrance of the printed image into the heart of intellectual terrain, to which it had heretofore remained decidedly adjacent. The street was very narrow, bordered by three-story houses with pitched roofs and dense signage, and it had an equally dense concentration of economic and intellectual exchange. The book trade became one of the primary consumers of engravings, and increasingly, no book was complete without some form of image.

One of the most compelling examples of the effects that the rapprochement between these two trades was to have on the role of images in the dissemination of knowledge is Sébastien Le Clerc's *Pratique de la géométrie, sur le papier et sur le terrain*, first published in Paris in 1669. Its popularity was such that it went through over twenty-five editions, and was translated in five languages.⁵ The book is a duodecimo, essentially palm-sized, collection of exercises in Euclidian geometry. Most of the material in the book is organized in double page spreads, with the verso consisting of text

⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵ William MacGregor, "Illustration and its afterlife: the visual uses of Sébastien Le Clerc's *Pratique de la géométrie*," *Visual Resources* 17 (2001): 37-94.

presenting a series of instructions for manipulating geometrical figures, and the recto presenting a plate which is loosely divided into two registers (fig. 2-1) At the bottom is a vignette depicting any of an assortment of rural landscapes and quotidian views, and at the top, occupying what passes for the sky of these vignettes are diagrams corresponding to the text on the opposite page.

What is peculiar about *Pratique de la géométrie*, and what has reserved its place in the history of the book, is the difficulty with which one draws meaningful connections between the diagrams and the vignettes. The juxtaposition of ideal forms with the forms of the material world is as old as geometry, but unlike previous illustrated geometry books, in Le Clerc's book there is rarely any indication that the geometrical theorems and their corresponding diagrams share a direct relation with the accompanying vignettes.⁶ There are sometimes vague formal correspondences between shapes in the upper geometrical register, and the angle of a roof, the convergence of a line of perspective, or the curve of a blouse in the lower. Sometimes the diagrams bear a remarkably strong relation to the gestures and actions of the figures below them, as in figure 3-2, where the stark horizontals and wispy arcing curves and diagonals of the upper register seem to form a kind of notation for the parries and thrusts of the dueling swordsmen below. There are occasionally figures in the vignettes whose gaze lifts toward the geometry floating above them (fig. 2-3), proposing the sky as a space of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-5.

mental projection which the viewer experiences vicariously through the figure in the image. Despite these many suggestive correspondences, there is no consistent logic. Some images seem to be willfully devoid of any connection whatsoever, such as a depiction of the classical emblem of putti wrestling a stubborn goat below a series of rectangles drawn from portions of a single straight line (fig. 2-4).

The looseness of association between these images and the diagrams and text they accompany combined with their richness of visual detail have led some historians to mark LeClerc's *Pratique de la géométrie* as the beginning of the scientific *livres à vignette*, a genre of illustrated book that emerged in the early eighteenth century, in the context of the convergence of text and image that was cultivated in the rue St. Jacques.⁷ The great *vignettiste* of the eighteenth century Paris book trade was Charles Nicholas Cochin Fils, so much so that vignettes were also frequently called “*des Cochins*.”⁸ Most of the scientific books for which Cochin produced engravings were published in the rue St. Jacques by Charles-Antoine Jombert.⁹ Cochin's vignettes followed a fairly rigid format. They appeared always at the head of each chapter, and they thematized the subject matter of the chapter either allegorically, with various mythological beings, mostly putti, demonstrating for instance the turning of the heavens, or else by setting the scene in a more literal way, such

⁷ Etienne Cluzel, *De quelques livres scientifiques à vignettes des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris : Librairie d'Argences, 1960)

⁸ Gravure originale p43

⁹ Cluzel, *De quelques livres scientifiques à vignettes*.

as in his depiction of an electricity experiment (fig. 2-5), in which a gentleman hangs from the ceiling as part of an elaborate assemblage of oddly illuminated objects. This format was standard for vignettes and it served not only to establish a straightforward framework for the interpretation and enjoyment of the richly detailed images, but for clearly distinguishing the technical and didactic illustrations within the chapters from the more ludic and figurative images of the vignettes.

There is some argument among historians as to whether Le Clerc's miniature illustrations can be categorized as vignettes with any degree of precision, because they do not comply with this almost universal standard.¹⁰ But perhaps more important than establishing precisely what to call these images is the task of understanding exactly what they do, particularly in as much as their combined modes of visual address introduce a kind of slippage which breaks the didactic stability of the relation between text and image. Le Clerc's images produce a sensuous alternative space, which seduces the eye into the pictorial potential of the trace. In this sense they enact part of the volatility of the converging technologies of the image and the book in a way which the formal rigidity of other illustrated works occludes. In them we see the expanding capacity of engraving to imagine the world, as well as the remarkable importance of the role that the pleasure of looking plays in this process.

¹⁰ William MacGregor has explored this issue in depth. See particularly MacGregor, "Illustration and its afterlife," 37-50.

Le Clerc's vignettes also speak to a more general appreciation for the ambiguity of images and for the pleasure of interpretation. No small part of their visual appeal arises out of the confusion one encounters when confronted with the juxtaposition of precisely abstracted geometric ideas in the text and diagrams with the surplus of visual detail in the vignettes, which produces a kind of paradox – the closer the descriptive force of visual detail seems to get one to the world, the further one seems to get from any conceivable correspondence with the geometric and diagrammatic reality espoused by the text. Inevitably, a sort of game emerges in which the visual detail of the vignette is culled for potential associations. This hermeneutic game is not just an effect of historical distance. It corresponds with a well documented shift in the use of images in education, where increasingly the iconographic stability of allegory, which traditionally challenged students to discover a single proper interpretation, was submitted to a performative scene in which students proposed competing interpretations. In the latter case success was determined more by the creative combination and juxtaposition of elements rather than by fidelity to a predetermined idea. Eloquence and wit were cultivated over dutiful precision.¹¹

Le Clerc's vignettes share this more general valence, which we find articulated in contemporary accounts that describe them as *Divertissements*,

¹¹ Jennifer Montagu, "The Painted Enigma and French Seventeenth-Century Art," *Journal of the Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 31 (1968): 307-335.

distractions or amusements.¹² This is not to say that they served no pedagogical purpose, but rather that their ambiguity could be easily associated with a concept of the image in pedagogy, which conflated the ludic and didactic potential of images in the service of enriching the interpretive scene.¹³ The vignettes do sometimes thematize the act of observation in as much as they frequently include figures that seem to be attentive, if not to the diagrams floating above them, then at least to the landscape itself.¹⁴ In this they could be seen to serve the pedagogical purpose of capturing and redirecting wandering attention, keeping it within the confines of the page. At this level of remove, even the emblem of the putti wrestling the stubborn goat gains some traction as it was frequently deployed as an allegory for the importance of protecting the fragility of youth; the goat being the emblem of reckless desire, which, if it is not reigned in, will consume the sprouting garden before it is ripe. The positioning of this lone allegory as the final plate in the book lends some weight to this interpretation.

Keeping in mind this idea of the vignette as a kind of soft corrective device, designed to provide a distraction that nonetheless sustains attention within the book reading experience, some of the other images which stand out from the succession of vistas that characterize the bulk of the vignettes, such as the four dueling swordsman, the battlefield scene framed in close up behind

¹² Pierre-Jean Mariette, "Table des oeuvres de Sebastien Le Clerc," *Abecedario de Pierre-Jean Mariette et autres notes manuscrites sur les peintres et les graveurs* (Paris, 1740-1770), vol. 4, "tome" 3e

¹³ MacGregor, "Illustration and its afterlife," 37-94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

a canon, or the remarkable scene of aristocrats posing on a terrace overlooking a French garden, seem at the very least to make reference to some of the pursuits for which a geometric education might be useful preparation.

According to an introductory section of the book titled, *De Son Utilité*, along with the indispensability of geometry to the work of astronomers, geographers, architects, engineers, and artists, a young aristocrat might find it useful on the battlefield for building fortifications or arranging soldiers, and as part of a general education which would allow him to present himself with wit and artfulness. Framed by this introduction, certain recurring characteristics of the vistas also begin to align in the loosely associative web of references that links the usefulness of geometry to the material world. The profusion of bridges, arches, and pitched roofs which populate the vistas, or the tight single point perspective demonstrated in some of the more narrowly framed architectural views, even the boats, windmills and dams begin to take their place within the geometry of human ingenuity (fig. 2-6).

What offsets this tightening web of associations is the consistency with which we encounter another feature in the series of vistas: the ruin - the toppled column, the cracked edifice, always capped by scraggly bits of vegetation (fig. 2-7). The ruin recalls the inescapable entropy of the natural world, the force against which all that human ingenuity will inevitably crumble.

And it pushes the geometrical order against the wilderness of the *informe*.¹⁵ But the presence of ruins in Le Clerc's vignettes is not especially dramatic or menacing. They take their place in the landscapes like a stray tree in the foreground, or a cluster of buildings in the background, and human figures are as likely to appear among them as among any other buildings. There is another allusion which some of the ruins seem to make more directly than others, and that is to the ruins of antiquity. The lure of antiquity certainly recalls the importance of geometry in the classical canon, but the ruin introduces a layer of the present, which is perhaps better understood in terms of a fascination with the foreign and the exotic, more on a par with Le Clerc's description of the work of the geographer, who, "gives us in a single glance the immensity of the entire earth, the vast expanse of oceans, the divisions of empires, of kingdoms, and of provinces."¹⁶ Thus Le Clerc's vignettes do not produce their iconographic coherence within the closed system of the book, rather, they operate as a general backdrop for the study of geometry, for the *promise* of its practical uses rather than for specific examples of worldly application, and also and more importantly for the spirit of curiosity which might just as well lead one to wander out into the world as to sit down with a book. In this sense they are a catalog of that world to which geometry might lead you.

¹⁵ Barbara Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), 140.

¹⁶ Le Clerc, Sébastien. *Pratique de la géométrie, sur le papier et sur le terrain: Ou par une methode nouvelle & singulière l'on peut avec facilité & en peu de temps se perfectionner en cette science* (Paris, 1682), 3.

Judging by the increasingly vibrant exchange that characterized the seventeenth-century print trade, we can be certain that Le Clerc did not invent the iconography of *Pratique de la géométrie*. If anything he borrowed freely and widely from the rich culture of images of which he was a part. Printmakers such as Jacques Callot and Stephano Della Bella introduced a profusion of views of distant landscapes, foreign cities, characters and current events into the tradition of popular imagery, appealing to a taste for novelty and exoticism, which print images were in a unique position to encourage (fig. 2-8).

If *Pratique de la géométrie* is to be understood as the entrance of the image into a new relation with text, it is because in it we see the first awkward steps that a particular technology of the image makes possible in the terrain of knowledge occupied by the book, and we see that the image brings with it a kind of sensual excess, which is present precisely in the articulation of burin against copper, and which reflects the sensuality of the world, of its immensity and diversity, and of its capacity for novelty and difference. It is not only to the idea of the worldly that Le Clerc's collection of vignettes refers, but to the context of the printed image in as much as it stands in for the world.

X. This Beadwork of Worlds

The increasing use of copper plate engravings in scientific texts in the early decades of the eighteenth century marked a certain convergence of the

visible world with a resolutely diagrammatic scientificity, but the enduring success of that movement was also a function of a shift in the focus of scientific discourse itself. The vignette was in many ways the sign of a new audience to which the scientific text was being addressed, an audience composed not strictly of academicians, but of nobles, aristocrats and the expanding bourgeoisie. But this shift of address in scientific discourse was accompanied by a shift of focus within the pursuit of scientific knowledge as well. And the image had effects internal to this process, as illustrations facilitated new forms of exchange between specialists and became increasingly central to the process of identifying common objects of knowledge as well as methodologies for investigating them. What was peculiar to this moment in the role of images in scientific texts was how these two functions of the image produced overlapping iconographies, which reflected the imbrication of what would become distinct discursive trajectories. One was the popularization of scientific discourse, its interpellation by the language of literature. The other was the socialization of scientific discourse, which instituted a shared system for empirical, experimental research. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, both gained momentum from a fascination with remarkable and singular phenomenon and the infinite variety of the natural world to which they bore witness. The printed image increasingly made possible the reproduction and circulation of these visions of singularity, which

at once accelerated the fascination as well as the process which would eventually disenchant the discourse of empirical science.

Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, was the first to explicitly address scientific discourse to a non-specialized audience in France. The book which initiated this effort would become his best known work, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. It went through over thirty editions between 1686 and 1764, eight of them printed in Paris under the direct editorship of Fontenelle. Its success was due in equal measure to his skill as a stylist of prose as to his ability to articulate the most recent advances in scientific and philosophical discourse. Already at the release of the first edition, it was excerpted and reviewed in journals such as *Journal des Savants*, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, and the *Mercure Galant*.¹⁷ That it was of interest to scientific journals as well as to those concerned with literature and fashion, points to its place at the forefront of a broader but no less deliberate attempt to bring scientific and philosophical discourse into contact with polite society.¹⁸

The Paris editions were published in duodecimo, and illustrated with a single fold out plate bound at the beginning of the text (fig. 2-9). The image is a representation of the heliocentric solar system supported by the vortices of celestial matter that Descartes had theorized to explain the orbits of the

¹⁷ Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes*, (Paris, 1686). For the history of editions see Suzanne Delorme, "Fontenelle, Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes. Digression Sur Les Anciens Et Les Modernes." *Revue D'histoire Des Sciences Et De Leurs Applications* 10, no. 4 (1957): 375–377.

¹⁸ G.V. Sutton, *Science for a Polite Society : Gender, Culture, and the Demonstration of Enlightenment*, (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1995).

planets. It is constructed from an imaginary point of view, looking down on the solar system so that it shows the orbit of the planets diagrammatically. The vortices are represented as irregular bulbous cloudlike forms, each with its own luminescent sun surrounded by planets. They are arranged in progressively smaller rings as they approach our sun at the center, so that the universe seems to pucker into this point of extreme depth. This is counterbalanced by the framing of the entire ensemble of solar system and vortices in a curtain strung up from the upper edge of a picture frame and forming a theatrical cartouche. Below the frame are listed the names of the seven known planets. The image at once demonstrates the modern astronomical understanding of the universe, which forms the conceptual center point of the text, and plays on the metaphor of the theater and of spectacle, which operates as one of its primary rhetorical mechanisms.

But Madam, I continued, you are so well disposed to enter into everything that I wish to tell you, that I believe that all I have to do is pull back the curtain and show you the World.¹⁹

Introducing the topic of astronomy into the context of polite sociability is not a straightforward task. It requires a system of ruses to set the discourse in motion and sustain its momentum. In the text, the spectacle of the night sky emerges first as a kind of seductive device. It induces a state of reverie in the two characters of the dialog, and, “a certain disorder of thought into which we

¹⁹ Fontenelle, *Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes*, 27-8.

fall not without pleasure."²⁰ From within this pleasurable disorder, the narrator, who plays the role of philosopher and pedagogue, let's slip the idea that the stars of the sky are so many worlds. This in turn piques the curiosity of his interlocutor, the Marquise, who, despite the resistance of the philosopher, insists that she will believe whatever he tells her about the stars so long as she finds it pleasing.²¹ Pleasure thus resonates as the necessary condition of philosophy, and this is not simply a matter of social convention, in which romantic repartee is the proper mode of address for an evening stroll, nor strictly speaking of literary convention, for which gallantry was a primary subject. It is a problem that is close to the center of Fontenelle's project; not just how to demonstrate the rationality of the scientific worldview, but how to make it preferable, how to connect it to the irrational, to give it traction in the collective imaginary, and thus how to integrate it into the social world.²²

Before he pulls back the curtain on the night sky, the philosopher frames the problem of understanding as a question of vision: "All philosophy, I told her, is founded on only two things, that we have curious minds and bad eyes."²³ He then sets the stage of what he calls the 'spectacle of nature' as though it were an opera, and the problem of understanding the world as a problem of the difficulty of seeing the mechanism of the spectacle from the position of the spectator. The theater serves a double role; first, as the space

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² Isabelle Mullet, *Fontenelle ou la machine perspectiviste* (Paris: Champion, 2011) 11.

²³ Fontenelle, *Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes*, 19. My translation.

of entertainment, of the pleasure of spectacle, and then as a problem of the relation between seeing and knowing, where the role of the spectator is precisely to change her point of view. Once the curtain is pulled back, and the discussion of astronomy begins, the framework of the theater disappears, but the repositioning of the spectator, the shift of perspective, remains as the major recurring rhetorical device.

The first astronomy lesson consists of demonstrating the fallacy of the geocentric solar system, and putting in its place the Copernican, heliocentric model. This is the fundamental displacement of man from the static center of the universe, and it establishes the primary shift of perspective out of which the rest will follow. The conversation revolves around the problem of motion; how to show the movement of the planet from the perspective of one who cannot feel it. The narrator suggests the metaphor of a ship whose inhabitants maintain the same relation to the objects on board and to each other, but whose relation to the world outside the ship is constantly changing. The earth becomes a vessel swimming in the oceans of celestial matter, but to see its motion requires another kind of imaginary voyage, which begins first by lifting off from the surface of the earth in order to look down and see it turning below.

Sometimes, for example, I imagine myself suspended in the air, unmoving while the Earth turns below me in twenty-four hours, and that passing beneath my eyes I see all the different faces, some white, others black, others tan from the sun, others olive, that I see first hats, and then turbans, and then long hair, and then shaven heads, then I see towns with church towers, and then with long needles capped with crescents, then cities with towers of porcelain, and then huge countries with only cabins;

here vast seas; there terrible deserts; in the end, all the infinite variety that is on the surface of the earth.²⁴

This initial voyage around the world continues throughout the conversations, becoming a voyage through the solar system and eventually out into the milky way; but the conversations frequently return to the figure of cultural difference as a metaphor for interplanetary and intergalactic difference, imagining the inhabitants of each planet, how they might look, what kind of weather they might endure, and what they see in their night sky; not just to watch the variety of the world go by from a distance, but to inhabit that variety, and to see the universe from an infinity of perspectives. This is the great task of Fontenelle as a popularizer of scientific knowledge, not simply the construction of quotidian metaphors for complex problems, but the production of a new mentality, which can situate human life within a universal order of which man is no longer the center, and of which relativity rather than certainty is the operative principle.²⁵ So that ultimately the goal of the *Entretiens* is to develop in the reader a modern world view, one which can engage multiplicity and change. As he wrote in the beginning of the third conversation, "One must give only half of ones mind to things which one believes and keep the other half free for the opposite to be admitted if necessary."²⁶

Fontenelle's *Entretiens* carried a tremendous influence in establishing lines of mutual interest and exchange between the world of fashionable

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

²⁵ Mullet, *Fontenelle ou la machine perspectiviste*, 17.

²⁶ Fontenelle, *Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes*, 161.

society and that of the *Académie de Sciences*, bringing modern philosophical and scientific topics into polite conversation, but also fashioning a modern way of seeing and thinking. Despite the popularity of the scientific *livre a vignette*, which emerged in its wake, the *Entretiens* was not fully illustrated until more than forty years after its first publication, when it appeared in a 1728 edition of Fontenelle's collected works published in Amsterdam. This edition was printed in octavo, lavishly illustrated by Bernard Picart, and is widely considered one of the great illustrated scientific books of the eighteenth century.²⁷ The project collected and illustrated the entirety of Fontenelle's works, providing a single full page illustration at the head of each work, and adding the standard form of the vignette - *à la Cochin*; a narrow, horizontally formatted image in a simple rectangular frame - at the beginning of each chapter, as well as a *cul de lampe* at the end.

Picart adapted the fold out front plate from the original edition of the *Entretiens* for his illustration (fig. 2-10). He removed the framing device of the theatrical curtain, and inserted the central planetary diagram into the sky of a garden scene, which depicts the two characters of the dialog, seated on a bench facing each other in conversation. A garden wall extends away from them to the left along a terrace with fountains, and in the far distance one can make out some hills overlooking the property.

²⁷ Cluzel, "De quelques livres scientifiques à vignettes", 135.

The illustration sets the scene for the six conversations that make up the book, but along with this rather plainly narrative function, there is something quite complex at work in the image. Picart's juxtaposition of diagrammatic and perspectival representation recalls LeClerc's vignettes for *Pratique de la géométrie*. Each register emerges from its respective terrain of thought, and in the ambiguity between the two, the same question arises, how will the relationship between the material and the abstract, between the visible and the invisible, be reconfigured? These questions were inevitable in Fontenelle's project, not just for the *Entretiens*, but throughout his career. Producing continuity between the scientific worldview and that of social convention necessitated precisely such a reconfiguration. Perhaps the intricately filigreed gradient radiating out from the sun at the center of the diagram is Picart's nod to the ambiguity of what representation does at the borders between worlds.

Picart was no stranger to these questions. His 1723 book, *Illustrations de Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, is an extraordinary illustrated encyclopedia of religious practices, which explicitly aims to leverage the documentary capacities of engraving towards propagating a rational anthropological understanding of religion. The introductory essay, titled, *Dissertation sur le culte religieux*, opens with the following lines: "Most men would ignore the presence of God, if the attention that one is supposed to give to him were not accompanied by some external

markers.”²⁸ Picart’s illustrations produce a comparative analysis of these external markers, using his encyclopedic collection as a way to make visible the plurality of relations that humans construct between the visible and the invisible. But Picart’s plates for the *Entretiens* were far less explicit about the kind of visual argument that they make than those of the *Illustrations de Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses*. They were likely guided by the format of the project as a whole, and so were restricted in number and size to the single front illustration and a vignette at the beginning of each conversation. Despite these restrictions, they reflect a compelling perspective on Fontenelle’s project.

Four of the six vignettes are ornamental arabesques in the style of Berain and Audran (fig. 2-11). The other two are depictions of scientific illustrations, one an imaginary star map whose tight arrangement of solar systems recalls the narrator’s description of the Milky Way (fig. 2-12), and the other a strikingly accurate portrayal of one of Cassini’s drawings of the surface of the moon viewed through a telescope (fig. 2-13).²⁹ Given the ubiquity of the metaphor of cultural difference in the *Entertiens*, one might have imagined Picart to be tempted to put to use some of his encyclopedic iconography of the worlds’ cultures in his illustrations. But his choices reflect an equally compelling perspective of Fontenelle’s project. The juxtaposition of arabesque iconographies of hybridity with scientific illustrations of telescopic vision figures

²⁸ Bernard Picart, *Illustrations de Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (Amsterdam, 1723)

²⁹ Henri-Jean Martin, *Fontenelle : 1657-1757 : exposition organisée pour le troisième centenaire de sa naissance et le deuxième centenaire de sa mort*, exh. cat. (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1957)

the convergence of the discourses of science and social convention as a convergence of representational systems. The curled edges of the scientific illustrations, punctuated by the pins which fasten them to their support, dramatize the materiality of the surface of representation in a way reminiscent of the cartouche, and the playful addition of faces to the suns of the star map reinforce this subtle play on the conventions of representation. But these convergences are not simply a matter of making light of the serious affairs of astronomy, they place what is only visible through a telescope within the realm of an imaginary which still engages the invisible through the archaic forms of fantasy and the grotesque.

The telescope is an interesting figure in Fontenelle's text because it grounds the imaginary in the observable world. It gives immediate sensorial access to the celestial realms, effectively extending the visible world and its concrete materiality into the territory of the invisible. In this sense it is a kind of propulsive device; it launches the imagination. In traversing the border between visible and invisible, it participates in a certain exhilaration, as well as a kind of distortion and disfigurement of vision, which requires new narrative frameworks.³⁰ These frameworks shift throughout the *Entretiens*, alternately ludic, fantastical, erotic, and anxious. Many of the marvels which Fontenelle describes throughout the *Entertiens* are completely imaginary, such as

³⁰see Barbara Stafford "Artificial Intensity: Images, Instruments, and the Technology of Amplification," published in *Collection, Laboratory, Theater: Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century*. eds. Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte, and Jan Lazardzig (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 338-354.

extraterrestrial life forms or the views of the night sky from other planets, but the telescope also allows the text to touch down from its imaginary voyage: "And what is this certain news, she interrupted? It is the news that the scientists bring us who travel there everyday by way of telescope."³¹ Becoming like a kind of empirical anchor line, telescopic viewing generates reproducible sensorial facts. It also generates a kind of elated generosity, as the narrator wishes for the Marquise herself to be able to look through a telescope, and transform the narrative of visible facts into the sharing of technical vision.

You see this whiteness that we call the Milky Way, can you imagine what it is? An infinity of little stars invisible to the eye because of how small they are, and set so close to each other that they seem to form a continuous white. I wish that you could look through a telescope at this ant colony of stars, this beadwork of worlds.³²

The metaphor of the insect and the jewel is particularly prescient in light of the direction that popular interest in the sciences would take by the end of the second decade of the eighteenth century, when the interest in astronomy was largely overtaken by an interest in natural history. The fascination for the infinitely large and infinitely distant, was replaced by the fascination for the infinitely small and the infinitely close. The microscope makes a brief appearance in the *Entretiens*, to demonstrate precisely this shift of perspective.

...there are as many species of invisible animals as visible ones, We see from the elephant to the mite; there ends our vision; but at the mite there begins an infinite multitude of animals invisible

³¹ Fontenelle, *Entretiens Sur La Pluralité Des Mondes*, 120.

³² *Ibid.*, 317-8.

to the naked eye, for which it is the elephant. With microscopes we have seen many liquors full of tiny animals that we would never have suspected of being there. There is some indication that the taste they give comes from the stings of these tiny animals on the tongue and palette ... After all everything is alive, everything is animated.³³

Fontenelle's foray into the invisible world of the infinitely small touches on a number of themes, which attended the reconfiguration of knowledge about the natural world that, through the lens of the microscope, took center stage in scientific discourse of the eighteenth century. It transfers the uncertainty about our place in the immensity of the universe, to a kind of bodily anxiety about our place in the chain of being; that we are surrounded by animals that we cannot see, that we consume them or they consume us, that our boundaries are fluid, and that effectively everything is alive.

This hylozoic animism becomes a major component of the popularization of natural history in the 1740s, when speculating on the metaphysical implications of natural historical facts gains a certain kind of cachet in polite society. But the success of natural history as a field of study had begun to gain momentum already at the beginning of the century, and it was propelled by a shared fascination for this newly discovered invisible world, whose marvels captured the imaginations of eminent academicians, as well as appealing to a growing taste in fashionable society for the rarities of the

³³ *Ibid.*, 203-4, 207.

natural world.³⁴ Reflections on the microscopical world that appear in academy notes and the *Journal des Savants* from the last decades of the seventeenth-century and the early decades of the eighteenth century consistently express awe and bewilderment, not only at what they see but at the implications of a living material existence that extends beyond the threshold of our senses.³⁵ By the early 1730s, the same fascination for remarkable natural phenomenon, and for the effects of wonder and estrangement, propelled the market for the collection of natural specimens, and blossomed in the iconography of Rococo ornament. In the interim, the microscope itself underwent technical advancements, standardization of its construction and use, as well as the beginnings of the stabilization of its role in scientific discourse, and the printed image was at the center of this transformation.

XI. Joblot

Part of the wonder associated with the microscopic world in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was the result of the technical difficulty of constructing and using microscopes. There were very few microscopes, and those who had mastered their construction and use were

³⁴ Daniel Mornet, *Les Sciences De La Nature En France Au XVIIIe Siècle Un Chapitre De L'histoire Des Idées* (Paris: A. Colin, 1911), 3.

³⁵ Jacques Roger, *Les sciences de la vie dans la pensée française du XVIIIe siècle; la génération des animaux de Descartes à l'encyclopédie* (Paris: Colin, 1963), 182-3. Also in G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, *The Ferment of Knowledge: Studies in the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 255-283.

secretive about their methods. The best example of this is Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek, who frequently built his microscopes for each specific sample, and was notoriously stingy about allowing others to look through them.³⁶ He was unwilling to share his methods with Leibniz despite repeated requests, and John Locke, who managed to get a supervised look through one of Leeuwenhoek's microscopes containing a sample of blood, was elated, but also unable to see most of what Leeuwenhoek described.³⁷ When the 26 microscopes, which Leeuwenhoek had bequeathed to the Royal Society, arrived in England after his death in 1723, no one was able to reproduce his findings. Despite a detailed letter he had written to the academy in an attempt to outline his methods, his legacy essentially went dormant for almost 20 years.³⁸ The microscope was already a difficult instrument for experimental science. A total lack of standardization regarding production and lens quality, as well as nomenclature and iconography, both for the instruments and the objects of observation, limited the ability of researchers to share knowledge effectively.³⁹ Leeuwenhoek's secrecy worked against all of these constraints, and this combined with his building methods, which effectively made the object of observation inseparable from the device, contributed to a mystification of the microscopic world.

³⁶ Marc Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible: Microscopy in the Enlightenment* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2009), 78-9.

³⁷ Wayne Glasser, *Locke and Blake, a conversation across the eighteenth-century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998). 173, note 38.

³⁸ Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible*, 27-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

By the early decades of the eighteenth century, the situation in France was quite different. Elements of microscopical construction and research were discussed openly in treatises such as Nicolas Bion's *Traité de la construction et des principaux usages de plusieurs instruments de mathématique* (Paris 1709), and Louis Joblot's *Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes, tant simples que composez* (2 vols, Paris, 1718).⁴⁰ Both texts were printed in the Rue St. Jacques; Bion's being a collaborative effort between some four separate printers. Joblot's text was the first treatise dedicated entirely to microscopical research, and with it he essentially created the genre of the handbook of microscopy.⁴¹ His approach was exactly the opposite to Leeuwenhoek's.

In the *avertissement*, Joblot expresses the paramount importance of the sharing of knowledge and reproduction of experiments for the advancement of knowledge, and he explains his motivations for producing the book as well as his decisions about its structure in terms of this system of socialization.⁴² With copious illustrations including scale drawings and cut away views of microscopes and tools for handling samples that were detailed enough to allow others to fabricate them accurately, advice on how to handle the tools and samples in order to produce optimal viewing conditions, and narrative accounts of experiments and observations, Joblot's treatise aimed to

⁴⁰ Nicolas Bion, *Traité de la construction et des principaux usages de plusieurs instruments de mathématique* (Paris, 1709); Louis Joblot, *Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes, tant simples que composez* (2 vols, Paris, 1718)

⁴¹ Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible*, 81.

⁴² Joblot, *Description et usages*, 1: *Avertissement*.

effectively diffuse as much useful information as possible to the broadest possible audience.

Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes was typical of the ethos of the print culture in the Rue Saint Jacques, which aimed to maximize potential readership. The avertissement suggests that the text would be of use to physicists, doctors, surgeons, anatomists, chemists, designers, painters, engravers, fabricators of instruments, jewelers, medalists, antiquarians, epigraphers, clockmakers, and spectaclemakers.⁴³ The breadth of Joblot's address was partially motivated by the financial interest of the publisher, but it also reflects the social context which characterized the emergence of natural history as a field of study in France, which mirrored in some sense the deep eclecticism of intellectual exchange in the Rue St. Jacques. Joblot was not a member of the *Académie de sciences*; he was a professor of geometry and perspective at the *Académie de sculpture et de peinture*. In part, this explains the inclusion of painters, designers and craftsmen in the list of those who might find the book useful, but it is also indicative of the novelty and open-endedness of microscopical viewing, which was such that it attracted people from many different fields of study.

Some of the most important microscopical research in the first half of the century was done by those working outside of, though frequently also in

⁴³ *Ibid.* Note that the use of the term *Physiciens* refers to the Aristotelian definition of physics, which included the study of natural objects. This corresponded with the Cartesian mechanistic understanding nature. The study of microscopical objects would have a major impact on the development of the study of life as a non-mechanical phenomenon.

collaboration with the academy; people such as Charles Bonnet and Abraham Trembley, as well as Joblot himself. And this was a function of a profound transformation within the academy effected by the rise to power of a generation of academicians of science who entered in the early decades of the eighteenth century as mathematicians, and proceeded to make their careers as naturalists. Figures such as René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur and Jean-Jacques Dortous de Marain not only shifted their own studies from the abstract world of geometry to the empirical observation of nature, they brought with them the momentum of academic discourse, and this was in large part the result of a willful and strategic convergence of the interests of the academy with the interests of the court and of fashionable society.⁴⁴

Joblot's opening sentence to the first chapter encapsulates the cosmopolitan ethos of natural history characterized by the convergence of general public interest and experimental exploration:

Having the intention of reporting on that which is the most singular and the most imperceptible to the naked eye in a range of mixtures, both solid and liquid, and especially to describe the little animals that can be seen once the eye is armed with an excellent microscope; I thought that after having prepared different infusions and other liquids that would serve as the material for this Natural History, it was necessary first to explain all the instruments that I used in this research. Those that have a taste for these discoveries will be able to verify my experiments, and push them even farther than I did.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ John Bennett Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 97-8.

⁴⁵ Joblot, *Description et usages*, 1:1-2. All translations from Joblot by me.

One can see how the text is organized around these twinned systems of social appeal: the invocation of the aesthetic of singularity, around which a modern scopic desire is slowly forming; and an increasingly collective effort towards understanding, which will make possible the standardization and rationalization of the protocols of microscopical research. The latter also takes part in the spirit that animates the broader project of the enlightenment epitomized for instance in Diderot's project for the *Encyclopédie*, which takes the democratization of knowledge as a necessary condition for its progress.

The invocation of singularity is repeated frequently throughout Joblot's text, often paired with or indicated by terms such as marvelous, curious, beautiful, magnificent, spectacular, extraordinary, surprising, alluring etc., and it is central both to Joblot's choice of specimens, as well as to his development of a vernacular vocabulary for describing the shape and behavior of the animals he investigates.⁴⁶ In one description, he suggests that the spectacle beneath his microscope was so enjoyable that even the theater and fairground amusements of Paris could not be compared; and in another, he compares the synchronized movements of the animals he observes to the movements of dancers and to acrobats.⁴⁷ It is tempting to recall here the arabesques of Audran, which integrated acrobats and *danseur de corde* drawn from scenes of fairground entertainment, and incorporated them into the fashionable

⁴⁶ Some examples are in *Ibid.*, 1:51, 2:49. The sociability of Joblot's text is also discussed in Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible*, 38-9.

⁴⁷ Joblot, part 2 pp.29, 54-6.

interiors of his elite patrons.⁴⁸ Surely Joblot was calling on this same sensibility in his description of the pleasures of microscopic viewing.

The distinctly social appeal of natural history is also evident in the descriptions that Joblot makes of his experiments. He frequently mentions friends and visitors participating in his experiments, and he discusses experiments made by acquaintances, as well as including illustrations of some of their observations in the plates.⁴⁹ Joblot even goes to some trouble to reassure a number of people who had stopped eating salad after seeing the microscopic 'eels' living in his vinegar infusions, outlining three separate experiments that he did to prove that they are neither the cause of the taste of vinegar, nor capable of causing harm to humans.⁵⁰ At one point in the text he suggests that despite his best attempts at written explanation, there is no better way to learn than through conversation.

I feel obliged to warn that a written explanation, however long it is, will never supply full understanding. In less than two hours of conversation ..., one will learn more than one could in eight days of reading.⁵¹

With the invocation of theater and conversation, the consistent recourse to the language of spectacle, the return to the concerns about salad, and even a repetition of the analogy of the elephant and the mite, the influence of

⁴⁸ Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 60.

⁴⁹ Joblot, *Description et usages*, 2:57 and Plate 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:2-6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:59.

Fontenelle resounds in these passages.⁵² And Joblot's inclusion of vignettes and illuminated script at the beginning of each volume places *Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes* squarely within the tradition of the scientific *livre à vignette*, with its aims of attracting a non-specialist audience (fig. 2-14). One can also see how the strangeness of the microscopic world was still a primary factor in its popular appeal as well as an organizing principle for its observation.

Joblot's engagement with the marvelous takes visual form in his illustrations of microscopic specimens, such as in plate 6 (fig. 2-15), whose heading reads, "Cette planche contient tout ce qui s'est vu de plus remarquable dans neuf sorte d'infusion." Specimen number 12 features the face of a man with a moustache depicted on its body, which Joblot describes in his notes as a "mask," and accompanies with the requisite mentions of the diversity of nature and the singularity of its beauty. But the most striking instance is in plate 13 (fig. 2-16), where a scale drawing of one of his microscopes features a small and slightly limp looking dragon staged under the gaze of a disembodied eye.

The appearance of the iconography of the marvelous within Joblot's technical and scientific illustrations places them on the cusp of a fundamental transition in the structure of knowledge about the material world, in its relation to visibility and invisibility, and in the place of the extraordinary and the

⁵² For the elephant and the mite see *Ibid.*, 1:2.

marvelous in defining and describing the order of nature. These illustrations are not simply humorous concessions to an archaic mentality. Joblot organizes his observations around “remarkable” specimens, and he describes their morphology and behavior in a vernacular vocabulary. He makes no attempt at addressing their ambiguous status within the traditional classificatory system of species, which would become the primary domain of microscopical research later in the century.⁵³ He is interested, rather, in observing and sharing the observation of new phenomenon, and the appeal of that novelty still very much partakes in a general fascination with exoticism, rarity, and singularity, qualities which indicate the infinite variety of nature, and whose appreciation is the domain of curiosity, and of cultivating ones knowledge of the world beyond the commonplace. At the same time, Joblot’s text contributed to furthering the practical sharing of knowledge, which would enable the distinction between the scientific project of observing and classifying the microscopical world, and the popular project of philosophizing and spectacularizing it. His illustrations simultaneously figure the convergence of natural history and vernacular culture and make possible their inevitable distinction.

Part of Joblot’s spirit of generosity is to be found in the copiously detailed didacticism of the project, which would give anyone with access to the book the knowledge to reproduce his observations. But the engravings

⁵³ Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible*, 34.

themselves also serve as an iconographical solution to the sharing of microscopical observations. They allow the image to function as a kind of evidence, and in so doing they take on an analogous role to the microscope itself; isolating and magnifying, making the observable out of the invisible.⁵⁴

The ongoing importance of engraving to the sharing of microscopical research can be seen in letters exchanged between Trembley and Bonnet in France, and in the success of the network of engravers, publishers and researchers that developed in Holland.⁵⁵

Through such instruments as the telescope and the microscope, engraving opened and magnified the invisible world, as well as substantiating its material co-existence with the visible, and this is the paradox and complexity of the power of engraving to generate authority as well as exhilaration, to enter the imaginary through the very fissures that it helps to create in the systems of conventional knowledge, and for this brief moment in the early decades of the eighteenth century, to picture this upwelling of singularity emerging from the friction between the known and the unknown through the iconography of the marvelous and the grotesque.

⁵⁴ Barbara Stafford makes a similar point about the relation between the cabinet of curiosities and the microscope in her essay, "Artificial Intensity," 338-354.

⁵⁵ Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible*, 15-16. Also see Virginia P. Dawson, *Nature's Enigma: The Problem of the Polyp in the Letters of Bonnet, Trembley, and Réaumur*, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, v. 174 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1987), 227-230.

Chapter 3: The Aesthetics of Natural History

XII. Chez Gersaint

In the 1730s, the near simultaneous efflorescence of shell collecting and Rococo ornamental engraving in Paris brought the aesthetic charge of decorative ornament and natural history into definitively shared terrain. One of the major centers of this confluence was Edme-François Gersaint's shop on the Pont Notre-Dame, immortalized (though largely fictionalized) in Antoine Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* (1721-2) (fig. 3-1). Gersaint was a member of the *marchand-mercier*, an elite corps of merchants of luxury goods who were also some of the few to retain rights to sell paintings outside of the strict control of the *maitrise*.¹ At the time that Watteau pictured Gersaint's shop, Gersaint's taste as a purveyor of luxury goods was signaled above all by his taste for painting, but during the 1730s he was refashioning the image of his shop under the sign of exotic curiosities. This was made official with the change of the shop's name in 1739 from *Au Grand Monarque* to *À la Pagode*, and pictured in a new *carte-adresse* designed by François Boucher in 1740 (fig. 3-2).

L'Enseigne de Gersaint is a far more substantial and nuanced pictorial undertaking than Boucher's *carte-adresse*, which is essentially equivalent to

¹ Guillaume Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint: Edme-François Gersaint, marchand d'art sur le Pont Notre-Dame, 1694-1750* (Seyssel: Champ vallon, 2002), 136. Victor Ginsburgh and C. D. Throsby. *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture* (Elsevier, 2006), 106.

a large-sized business card. However, both images were motivated by an interest in depicting the shop as the locus of an idealized matrix of scopic desire and exchange. Reading the distance between these images in terms of their shared valence gives a sense of Gersaint's shop as a primary node in the network of discourses that enabled the exchange of aesthetic energies between natural history and Rococo ornament, and helps to situate that exchange in terms of the culture of collecting that preceded it,² as well as the substantial role of Boucher in picturing that exchange.

L'Enseigne de Gersaint depicts a cut-away view of the interior of the shop. The image is divided across two large panels. On the left, porters pack a portrait of Louis XIV in a wooden crate, and a woman enters from the street, crossing the invisible threshold into the shop's interior. She glances downward across her left shoulder toward the portrait of Louis XIV, and just off to her right a gentleman turns to her and beckons her in. The right panel depicts two groups of figures. Toward the rear of the shop, a man and a woman appraise a large oval painting, while a gentleman gestures from behind the frame as though presenting it for their view. The second group is arranged at a counter; three figures lean together to look at what might be a small painting or perhaps a mirror, which is presented by a woman from behind the counter. The walls of the shop are covered in paintings hung in the salon style, from floor to ceiling,

² Dietz describes Gersaint's public auctions as, "social, intellectual and commercial nodal points." in Bettina Dietz, "Mobile Objects: The Space of Shells in Eighteenth-Century France," *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 39, 03 (2006): 363-382.

with the exception of the center of the back wall, where a glass paned door opens onto an illuminated hall.

Scholarly analyses of *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* have frequently treated it as a historical document, seeing in the details of paintings depicted on the walls and the dress and demeanor of the figures an accurate portrayal of Gersaint's business.³ It is a testament to how effectively the painting has played in historical accounts, that the recent monographic study of Gersaint by Guillaume Glorieux makes an extensive effort at distinguishing between what is revealed by architectural diagrams, inventory lists, and first hand accounts, from what is depicted by Watteau.⁴ Glorieux's research firmly establishes that *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* does not depict the actual shop in terms of its architectural layout, nor the arrangement or even the selection of available paintings. Art historical interpretations which have gained traction by treating the image as an inventory lose some of their persuasiveness in the face of this research. However, while the image is clearly a fiction, as fiction it arguably does depict an idea about what kinds of exchange were facilitated there between Gersaint, his clients, and the paintings and luxury goods around which attention is largely figured in the image. *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* both portrays and facilitates a certain kind of looking. In this sense, it brings into relief the complex interlacing of pictorial aesthetics and the broader social dynamics within which Gersaint's business as a dealer was embedded that a

³ Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*

strictly archival approach tends to occlude. Watteau's depiction can serve as a point of entry through which to reconstitute the interrelations of aesthetic looking and the shifting field of social identity, which Gersaint's shop put into motion.

The most compelling study in this vein is Mary Vidal's analysis of *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*, which describes it as a pictorialization of conversational aesthetics. She defines conversation as the overarching cultural form of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, and an art in its own right. In this sense conversation was an ethos - a rhetorical mode in which content was always subsumed into the sustained momentum of a system of refined sociability, which found its most sophisticated articulation in the cult of *honnêteté*.⁵ We have already seen how integral the conversational mode was to the success of Fontenelle's *Entretiens*, and how effusively conversation was lauded in later books of popular science, such as Joblot's *Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes*. The dialogical mode of the *entretiens* was widely deployed, not only in popular scientific books, but in all books aimed at addressing specialized knowledge to a general audience. In a field more immediate to Watteau and his patrons, Roger de Piles popularized the aesthetic debates of the *Académie de Peinture et Sculpture* in several dialogical texts, such as *Dialogue sur le coloris* (1673)

⁵ Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature, and Talk in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Yale University Press, 1992). See also B. Beugnot, *L'Entretien au XVIIIe siècle* (Montreal, 1971). For the cult of *honnêteté* in regards to Watteau see Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 62-77. For a general discussion see Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne 1680-1715* (Paris: Fayard, 1935), 299.

and *Conversation sur la connoissance de la peinture* (1677).⁶ The conversational form in literature operated as a kind of ruse, which allowed what might otherwise have been overly specialized or arcane topics to enter the realms of sociable exchange, and to flourish there. The success of this literary mode also attests to the ubiquity and preeminence of polite conversation, a shared and wandering sort of mutual attentiveness whose rhythms follow the pleasures of reciprocity.⁷

Vidal's analysis is particularly interested in the ways in which Watteau's pictures not only depict conversation, but function conversationally. The latter is a concept she identifies with what Gombrich called the "beholder's share" - that aspect of painterly execution which elicits a response or act of completion from the viewer.⁸ According to Vidal, conversation is pictorialized in the *Enseigne* as a system of exchanges between figures and objects that is directed by gestures, postures, and various kinds of looking - roughly, from the casual glance to the studied gaze. Conversation might be literally about discussion, but it is also a structuring discourse for all forms of exchange, so that in the *Enseigne*, while none of the figures appear to be talking, the ways

⁶ Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations*, 104. That these texts contributed significantly to the aesthetic discourse emerging within the new forms of private patronage which championed artists such as Watteau is evident in the introductory essays accompanying some of Gersaint's later auction catalogs.

⁷ Daniel Mornet. *French Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), 21-37. Mimi Hellman. "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (June 1, 1999): 415-45. see p.432-4 specifically.

⁸ Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations*, 130.

in which attention is depicted and directed figure aesthetic appreciation as a conversational mode.

For instance, the group on the right leans in together such that their postures seem to produce a calculated distance from the fixed point of their gazes. They share a point of attention and attentiveness in a way which mimics the dynamics of a conversational group focused on a particular speaker. The object of their attention is not a speaker, but the mode of their shared attentiveness is conversational. This literal (and what might be called synchronous) representation of shared attentiveness is not the only conversational form. As the gentleman kneeling in front of the painting at the back examines it with an eye glass, the seeming myopia of his attention is still a manner of conversation, now shuttling between his appreciative gaze, the erotic scene displayed in the painting, and the trace of the painter at the surface of the canvas. Similarly, the pastiche effect of varied iconographic resonances in the array of paintings depicted on the walls, or between figures in the *Enseigne* and previous paintings by Watteau and other artists such as Rubens, becomes another modality of exchange, akin to a popular form of dialog written at the time, which staged conversations between contemporary figures and those of antiquity.⁹ Who or what appears in the image need not be a literal representation of a specific client or painting. Rather, these

⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

representations operate emblematically, registering a matrix of potential exchange, which brings the *work* of art into the pleasures of conversation.

Perhaps above all, reading the painting in terms of conversation lends it a kind of elevating effect, which transmutes the coarse exchange of the marketplace by displaying it in the visual language of aristocratic leisure that Watteau had so long perfected in his *fêtes galantes*. As one enters the shop, moving from the hay strewn disarray of the street into the polite embrace of the interior, as does the figure of the woman in the foreground of the left panel, the awkwardness with which the objects are handled by the porters on the left is sublimated by the fineness of handling inscribed in the postures of the proprietor and his assistant, whose subtle tilt of the head and gently arcing gestures render the act of commercial exchange within the codes of polite conversation. Looked at through Watteau's conversational aesthetic, Gersaint's shop emerges as a locus for the confluence of sumptuous acquisition, aesthetic appreciation, and polite sociability. In this sense, we can imagine it as a material manifestation of a particular discursive formation that defines the activities of this emerging aspect of the Parisian art market.

Aside from underscoring the imaginative license taken by Watteau, one interesting consequence of taking the archival materials into close account when considering the *Enseigne* is that they indicate that the picture which Watteau makes of the shop may have preceded, or at least greatly amplified, the kinds of sociable exchange that went on there. The network of Gersaint's

clientele whose codes of sociability are figured in the *Enseigne*, corresponds with those collectors and patrons of Watteau whose appearances in Gersaint's sales records post date Watteau's *Enseigne*.¹⁰ One could thus say that Watteau literally created the scenario which he imaginatively depicted. Accounts in the *Mercure de France* suggest that all of the great collectors and painters in Paris came to see the sign during the two weeks that it hung above Gersaint's shop. It was later purchased by Claude Glucq, who passed it to his cousin, Jean de Jullienne. Jullienne had it engraved in 1732 as part of the *Receuil Jullienne*, after which the painting ended up in the collection of Frederick the Great.¹¹ If the *Enseigne* is an emblem of Gersaint's efforts to naturalize his shop within a circuit of polite sociability, its ascendant provenance paralleled Gersaint's dramatic success among the Parisian elite,¹² and its reproduction for the *Receuil Jullienne* reiterated and disseminated the sign of this ascendance along the networks of popular luxury consumption.

Gersaint's connection to Watteau also led to his close involvement with the *Receuil Jullienne*, which expanded his relations with many of Watteau's collectors. Beginning in 1727 Gersaint worked with the engraver, editor, and print dealer Louis Surugue to sell prints made after Watteau.¹³ Through Surugue, Gersaint became one of four principal editors working with Jullienne, along with François Chereau, Chereau's widow (after April, 1729), and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170,175.

¹¹ Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 88.

¹² Andrew Mclellan, "Watteau's Dealer: Gersaint and the Marketing of Art in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 78, No. 3, (1996): 439-53; see p.440 in particular.

¹³ Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 181.

Gabrielle Huquier.¹⁴ The editors were allowed to advertise and sell the prints individually before Julienne had them assembled in 1735 into the four volumes of complete works. Gersaint and Huquier were responsible for printing most of Watteau's arabesques, which were very popular, in no small part due to the announcements placed in the *Mercure de France* after each printing.¹⁵ By the mid 1730s Huquier and the widow Chereau were following this same model to great success as the primary purveyors of Rococo ornamental prints. Gersaint's involvement with the *Receuil Jullienne* also connected him to Boucher, whose remarkable facility as an engraver after Watteau was recognized by Jullienne during the very early phases of the project.¹⁶ Though Boucher did not work closely with Gersaint on the *Receuil* as he did with Huquier, they were at least well acquainted.

Through Watteau, Gersaint entered a network of collectors, print dealers, publishers, artists and engravers, whose interactions galvanized around an expansion of private collecting practices and the mass dissemination of new models of aesthetic production in print. These same channels, which publicized, published, and financed the popularization of Watteau's oeuvre, also brought both Rococo ornament and popular conchology - or what would come to be called *conchlyomanie* - into the expanding field of aesthetic interest, which linked private collection to the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁶ Dacier and Vuafart, *Jean de Jullienne*, 1:10.

burgeoning market for popular luxury, and Gersaint was positioning himself precisely at their intersection.

Gersaint's success was deeply connected to and in many ways directly catalyzed by his relationship with Watteau, but it was also accompanied by a substantial transformation of his sales catalog away from its early emphasis on painting towards exotic objects of both natural and cultural curiosity. Boucher's *carte-adresse* marks the culmination of this shift of emphasis from picture dealer to dealer of exotic objects, and corresponds with the beginning of a broader shift in collecting tastes, which Gersaint both influenced and encouraged. The image presents a constellated network of scopic desire through the sheer juxtaposition of objects, and this leaves the social aspects of exchange less emphatically represented than in the *Enseigne*. Although not figured *in* the image, the image itself circulated along these channels of sociability in as much as it became not only a depiction of collectible objects, but a collectible object in itself. Despite its ephemeral and resolutely promotional status, Boucher's *carte-adresse* was held in high enough esteem to be preserved in some of the finer eighteenth century collections of prints.¹⁷ Gersaint's success as a dealer of prints after Watteau, and Boucher's growing notoriety as a painter, designer, and engraver surely contributed to the

¹⁷ For an account of its immediate popularity among collectors see Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 266. The image was also painted in large scale on a corner cabinet in the Comte de Tessin's Akero Manor. A photograph of the cabinet is reproduced in Gruber and Pons, *The History of Decorative Arts*, 282. A watercolor of the comtesse Ulla Tessin, in this room can be found in Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie : The Vision of Cathay / Hugh Honour* (London: JMurray, 1961), pl.34.

immediate interest of collectors, but this transformation of mundane ephemera into objects of particular and enduring value was also characteristic of Gersaint's strategies as a dealer in general. His sales catalogs are another example of one of the devices which he managed to transform from what could be a simple, practical tool designed to facilitate sales into an important reference work for collectors, which also asserted his own position as a tastemaker.¹⁸

Notwithstanding these parallels, which in some sense make possible the comparison of such markedly different orders of pictorial production as Watteau's *Enseigne* and Boucher's *carte-adresse*, the differences between these images in terms of how they characterize Gersaint's shop remain so striking as to elicit further review. Boucher's *carte-adresse* depicts a jumbled array of porcelain tea sets and assorted oriental fans and figurines surrounding an elaborate marine still life, framed above by an ornate lacquer cabinet, capped with an almost life-sized figure whose bare feet, plump belly and visible navel identify him as a god of good fortune known as *Hotei* in Japan and *Putai* in China, and whose likeness was among the most popular for reproduction in the form of miniature figurines known as *magots* or *pagodes* in France.¹⁹ A partially lifted curtain doubles as an immense, almost roof-like, foliated hat, and also transforms the upper register into a sort of cartouche, which along with the tacit acknowledgement of the viewer signaled

¹⁸ Dietz, "Mobile Objects", 377.

¹⁹ Danielle Kisluk-Grosheide. "The Reign of the Magots and Pagods," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 37 (2002): 177-197.

by the presentation of a miniature figurine in the *Hotei's* outstretched hand, lends the scene a degree of self-reflexive theatricality that is comparatively understated in the wistful innocence of Watteau's painting, where the delicate signals of polite exchange promise the experience of the sales room to mirror the casual sociability of the collectors' cabinet.

It is tempting to read the distance between the *Enseigne* and the *carte-adresse* as a descent from painting to knick-knack and correspondingly from polite conversation to fairground theatrics, but Gersaint's sales records show that his elite clientele expanded throughout the 1730s and 40s in more or less direct proportion to his activities as a purveyor of curiosities, and notes in his catalogs suggest that the most reputable collectors consulted with him about how to stage his sales events to generate a certain tenor of elevated sociable exchange.²⁰ In other words, the exoticism figured in Boucher's design was in many respects continuous with that field of aesthetic sensibility characterized by Watteau's transposition of the *fête galante* into the sales room.

Unlike the *Enseigne*, the objects represented in Boucher's *carte-adresse* correspond quite closely with Gersaint's actual stock, and even the jumble of their arrangement seems to be a fair representation of what customers encountered chez Gersaint, although Boucher's characteristically elegant composition is clearly unencumbered by actual issues of space that

²⁰ Edmé-François Gersaint, *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités* (Paris: 1736), vi.

likely left much of Gersaint's stock more cluttered than arranged.²¹ The list at the top of the card doubles in text what can be seen below:

À la Pagode,
Gersaint merchant jeweler, on the pont Notre-Dame,
Sells all the newest and most tasteful gilded hardware, jewels,
mirrors, cabinet paintings, pagodes, lacquer and porcelain from
Japan, shells and other natural history items, rocks, agates
and generally all things curious and foreign.

It would seem that Boucher chose to represent largely the second half of the list, leaving the paintings tucked away against the side of the lacquer cabinet, and foregrounding the juxtaposition of natural and cultural artifacts that make up *generally all things curious and foreign*.

In 1738 Gersaint began to import *pagodes* from Holland, along with porcelain and lacquer from both China and Japan. The *Hotei* figured in the *carte-adresse* is thus in a very straightforward sense an emblem representing the name of the shop, *À la Pagode*, and its association with available wares, just as the portrait of Louis XIV in the foreground of Watteau's painting is an emblem for the previous name of the shop, *Au Grand Monarque*, where indeed portraits of the King and other nobles were a consistent feature of the sales catalog.²² The transformation from *Au Grand Monarque* to *À la Pagode* began in 1733 when Gersaint travelled to Holland and Flanders for the first of what would be over a decade of almost yearly buying trips. He was encouraged by Antoine de la Roche, editor of the *Mercure de France*, and one

²¹ Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 293-4.

²² *Ibid.*, 44.

of Watteau's major patrons, whose ongoing support of Gersaint's commercial efforts also included consistent and generous advertisements of all of his sales events in the pages of the *Mercure*.²³ La Roque travelled extensively in Holland in 1710, where he amassed a substantial collection of paintings, prints, and exotica, as well as a level of insight into the practices of Dutch collecting that he was able to pass on to Gersaint.²⁴ Gersaint returned from his first trip with mostly prints and drawings, but the following year he began to import shells and natural history specimens, of which the Dutch were early collectors. In 1736 he organized his first public sale, effectively importing the public auction format from Holland. With the help of La Roque, who advertised the sale in the *Mercure*, the success of this first auction catapulted his financial revenue as well as his public renown.

Gersaint was not just importing objects from Holland, but a field of relations which constituted the value of those objects. This manifested at the level of concrete practices such as the auction format, which socialized the relations of acquisitiveness and inquisitiveness into a shared space of intellectual and material exchange.²⁵ It also took shape in the systematic imbrications of natural and cultural artifacts, which reflect the shifting relations of natural history, world trade, imperial expansion, and intellectual cosmopolitanism that characterized late seventeenth and early eighteenth

²³ *Ibid.*, 303.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1998), 310.

century Dutch collecting. Of course, the logic of these relations would undergo substantial transformation in the encounter with French sensibilities and with the particular forces that shaped these discourses in France. Certain associations would be naturalized, others would be invisible or inappropriate. The *carte-adresse* bares the imprint of these variegated associations in a number of respects, but particularly in the way that it frames the appeal of natural curiosities under the sign of pan-Asian trade.

Shells had been taken up in early 17th century Dutch collections as signs of the wealth generated by the vast trade networks dominated by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). By mid-century they appear frequently in portraits and still lives, where they retained this allusion to successful commerce and colonial ambitions.²⁶ During the last quarter of the seventeenth-century the Dutch lost most of their near monopoly on global trade, but as they gave ground to the French and English, and increasingly took the role of middlemen, the project of Dutch geography blossomed.²⁷ As the Dutch became less concerned with controlling the world, they became increasingly invested in describing it.

²⁶ G.D. Atwater, *The impact of trade by the Dutch East India Company on seventeenth-century Netherlandish art* (PhD. diss., University of Kansas, 1992).

²⁷ I base my discussion of Dutch geography on the work of Benjamin Schmidt, particularly the following essays: "Mapping an Exotic World: The Global Project of Geography, circa 1700," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore and London, 2003), 19-37. "Geography Unbound: Boundaries and the Exotic World in the Early Enlightenment," in *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan, Marybeth Carlson, and Laura Cruz, *Studies in Central European Histories*, vol. 48 (Leiden, 2009), 35-62. "Collecting Global Icons: The Case of the Exotic Parasol," in *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (Philadelphia, 2011), 31-57.

The Dutch trade in exotic curiosities took part in this broader effort of representing the world, which included lavishly printed maps, atlases and globes, as well as exotic landscapes, proto-ethnographies, travel literature, natural histories, and books of wonders, all of which focused their energies on pictorializing the world, rather than mapping it for strictly practical purposes. This expansion of Dutch geographical practices was marked by a shift of emphasis from specific representations of colonial power toward decontextualized displays of exotic rarity and variety.²⁸ Natural and cultural artifacts from around the globe shared a generalized and mutable appeal as objects of wonder, and signs of an enlarged cultural awareness of the immensity and complexity of the world.

Natural history acquired renewed and unprecedented popularity in the general momentum of this universalizing geographical project, and because of the remarkable beauty of many exotic shells, and the ease with which they could be transported, it was conchology that was most readily absorbed into the culture of collecting.²⁹ At the time that Gersaint was in Holland, the appeal of shell collecting had expanded downward along the spectrum of economic means, and simultaneously acquired more broadly humanistic overtones, marking the accumulation of intellectual rather than merely material wealth.³⁰

²⁸ Schmidt has analyzed this shift quite elegantly in his essay, "The Global Project of Dutch Geography," *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bert van de Roemer, "Neat Nature: The Relation between Nature and Art in a Dutch Cabinet of Curiosities from the Early Eighteenth Century," *History of Science* 42, no. 1 (2004): 47–84. see particularly pge. 50.

³⁰ Henry E Coomans, *Conchology before Linnaeus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 264.

The dominance of east-Asian motifs in Boucher's *carte-adresse* positions shell collecting within this expanded sphere of exoticism, but if the waning of Dutch colonial power influenced a shift from the rhetoric of geopolitical specificity to that of a generalized admiration of wonder and diversity, the signs of pan-Asian trade retained substantial cultural specificity in France, even if this was coded under a largely fantastical exoticism and according to a system of cultural forces which remained resolutely French. In the eighteenth century this was widely recognized as *le gout pour la chine*, which took root with the arrival of the Siamese embassy in 1686, and blossomed along with the Rococo in the late 1720s and early 1730s into the mass incorporation and distribution of designs inspired by oriental motifs, what came to be known as *chinoiserie*.³¹ The reference to China in the term *chinoiserie* is misleading, as many of its forms, figures, and motifs were drawn or even physically appropriated from objects arriving from a range of east Asian cultures including China, Japan, and Thailand (then called Siam), as well as Vietnam, Laos, Nepal, and Tibet, if not also India and Sri Lanka.³²

³¹ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie : The Vision of Cathay*. Oliver Impey, *The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (Oxford, 1977). Madeleine Jarry, *Chinoiserie: Chinese Influence of European Decorative Art, 17th and 18th Centuries*, transl. G. Mangold-Vine, (London: 1981). J. Paul Getty Museum, F. J. B Watson, Gillian Wilson, and Anthony Derham. *Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, Calif.: The Museum, 1982).

³² Martin P. Eidelberg and Seth A. Gopin. "Watteau's Chinoiseries at La Muette." *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 6 (1997): 19–46. The consistent use by Boucher of figures and architecture drawn from Montanus' *Gedenkwaardige gesantschappen der Oost-Indische Maetschappy in't Vereenigde Nederland, aan de kaisaren van Japan* for many of his *chinoiserie* designs attests both to the ubiquity of Dutch images of the far East, as well to the fundamental lack of concern with specific origins in the iconography of *chinoiserie*. see Perrin Stein, "Boucher's Chinoiserie: Some New Sources," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.112 (Sep., 1996): 598-604.

Although the geographical, political, and cultural differences between these places were certainly discussed and documented in travel accounts, which were a major source for Asian motifs at the time, one rarely encountered these differences marking off distinct spheres of taste. *Le gout pour la chine*, at least on its own terms, unproblematically encompassed all these.

Interestingly, it is another shift from Watteau to Boucher and from painting to print that best illustrates the cultural and ideological contexts of the popularity of *chinoiserie* in the 1730s and 40s, and ultimately the forces that drew together shell collecting, *chinoiserie*, and Rococo ornament. Watteau's *chinoiserie* designs at the château of La Muette (usually dated between 1708-12) represent the first substantial incorporation of east-Asian motifs into the French decorative vocabulary of the *arabesque*.³³ *Cabinets chinois* did exist previously in the houses of the French nobility, where they functioned as part of an elite luxury economy that marked one's distance from the King, but their iconographic programs were constructed around the display of imported objects, such as porcelain vases, and the wall decoration consisted of fragments of lacquer-work pulled from imported furniture and inserted into oak wall paneling.³⁴ The originality of the decorative scheme of the *cabinet chinois*

³³ Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*, 89-90. O. Impey, *The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration*, 80. M. Jarry, *Chinoiserie: Chinese Influence of European Decorative Art*, 13.

³⁴ Katie Scott, "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de La Muette." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (January 1, 2003): 231, note 146.

at La Murette thus marks a significant transformation of this aspect of court culture.

Katie Scott has argued that the ideological context of this transformation emerges from the opening of the elite luxury economy to the effects of the growing force of capitalism.³⁵ Joseph-Jean-Baptiste Fleuriau d'Armenonville, who commissioned the *cabinet chinois* at La Murette was an *intendant des finances*. He was a member of the new financial and office holding elites, whose displays of wealth were a necessary part of their participation in the signifying system of noble privilege that assured the attentions of the court.³⁶ Scott has demonstrated how the coherence of east-Asian motifs within the structure of the arabesque designs at La Murette replicates at no small expense and with remarkable originality the incorporation of exotic objects and dress into the court culture of masquerade. In this sense, it was a sign of d'Armenonville's participation in and mastery over the nuances and tastes of court life.

What little remains of the *cabinet chinois* at La Murette has been preserved in prints made after Watteau's panels, which were published by the widow Chéreau and Louis Surugue in July of 1731 (fig. 3-3). Boucher served as one of three principal engravers of this suite, and these were his last contribution to the *Recueil Jullienne*, after which he began to engrave prints of his own designs, and then increasingly to leave the work of engraving to

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

others. The reproduction of Watteau's designs initiated a second wave of *chinoiserie*, over which they exercised a substantial influence not only in terms of their formal and iconographic aspects, but as an indication of the value of these designs in an expanding print market.

In the middle years of the 1730s artists such as Jacques de Lajoue and Jean Mondon incorporated Chinese motifs into fantastical scenes typical of the more extravagantly pictorial suites of Rococo ornament prints (fig. 3-4), so that not only did *chinoiserie* follow the same channels of production and distribution as Rococo ornament, but they were expressed as part of the same vocabulary of forms. In 1738 Boucher began working with Huquier on his own *chinoiserie* designs, which transformed the otherworldly fantasies of Mondon and Lajoue into scenes of pastoral leisure and domestic comfort. Some of these would eventually form the basis of his designs for a series of tapestries to be produced at Beauvais, which were first exhibited as paintings at the Salon of 1742.

These mark the high point of the second wave of French *chinoiserie* in terms of its ascension within the hierarchies of pictorial production and reception, but for the most part *chinoiserie* designs circulated in print at a moment in which print was becoming the primary medium for the diffusion and inevitable reconfiguration of the signs of elite luxury. It is in this last respect that the imbrications of natural and cultural exoticisms in Boucher's *carte-adresse* ultimately signal the fundamentally transversal nature of Gersaint's

business, which served to move signifying systems between distinct material, geographical, cultural and economic spheres, and to play on the tropes of mobility both literal and metaphorical inherent in those systems. Far from simply designing a sign in the fashion of the times, Boucher was at the center of a reconfiguration of aesthetic sensibilities which operated at the nexus of an expanding vision of the cultural world and the emergence of a new relation to nature.

XIII. Symmetry and Bizarrerie

Along with the quality and rarity of the goods he was able to import from Flanders and Holland, one of the primary factors in the success of Gersaint's first major auction was his extensive auction catalog. Titled, *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités* (1736), it includes a comprehensive bibliography of all the major works available on shells, a list of all of the major collections in Paris, Amsterdam, and the Hague, including brief descriptions of each, and an introductory essay, which displays remarkable erudition and a broad familiarity with the nature of shell collecting and its appeal across various interests, from the scientific work of naturalists to the more aesthetically driven interests of the collector. Gersaint's ability both to articulate the aesthetic appeal of these collections, as well as to address the

more technical concerns of naturalists, situated him at the center of the convergent cultures of elite sociability and natural historical research.

That these categories were themselves highly mutable at the time is attested by the considerable exchange of letters and specimen between collectors and naturalists, as well as by the many important contributions of amateurs to the field of natural history in the eighteenth century.³⁷ Indeed, the interests of private patronage and collection had a substantial impact on certain protocols, not the least of which was the generalized momentum it produced toward the standardization of procedures for recognizing and naming specimen across an increasingly pan-European community of scholars and collectors interested in a range of specimen of increasingly global scope.³⁸

The list of collections in Gersaint's catalog mentions, along with the most esteemed collectors and connoisseurs, many of the major naturalists in Paris with whom he had ongoing exchanges. It also briefly describes the work of these naturalists, including figures such as René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, director of the *Académie de sciences*, whose six volume *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes* (1734-42) was in the early stages of

³⁷ Bettina, Nutz, Thomas Dietz, "Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29, no. 3 (2005): 44–75. esp. 64. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, *The Ferment of Knowledge: Studies in the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 260.

³⁸ Gersaint addresses this explicitly in the introduction to his catalog (see note 27), 1-3. See also, Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, vii. Also, Dániel Margócsy, "'Refer to Folio and Number': Encyclopedias, the Exchange of Curiosities, and Practices of Identification before Linnaeus," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan., 2010): 63-89.

publication, and Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, whose *Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux principes, la lithologie et la conchyliologie* (1742), was forthcoming. The catalog demonstrated Gersaint's expertise in a way which ingratiated him to both established collectors and naturalists, and at the same time provided a generous introduction and substantial guidance for those in the early phases of their interest. He was positioning himself not only at the center of an extant field of interest, but at its point of greatest potential expansion.

Recent analysis of Gersaint's sales tactics suggest that he developed a tiered approach to collecting, which facilitated the expansion of taste both laterally across fields of potential interest, as well as vertically across levels of financial means.³⁹ Both the carefully attenuated sociability of the public auction and the exhaustive documentation in the catalog played important roles in this process. On a practical level, they assured that everyone was equally aware of the range of objects in the sale as well as their potential value, and could therefore find something which suited their individual tastes and financial means. But Gersaint's sales were motivated as much by their social as by their commercial function, and arguably the success of the latter depended in large part on the ways in which the former could help to generate a shared sense of value. Carl Gustaf, Comte de Tessin (1695-1770), who was the Swedish ambassador to Paris from 1739 to 1742, a major patron of new

³⁹ Neil De Marchi & Hans J. van Miegroet. "Transforming the Paris Art Market" in *Mapping markets for paintings in Europe 1450-1750* / ed. Neil De Marchi & Hans J. van Miegroet (Turnhout : Brepols, 2006), 383-402.

French art as well as an early supporter of eminent Swedish naturalist, Carl Linnaeus, and a regular at Gersaint's events, described Gersaint's shop as a place where you "rubbed shoulders with all kinds," comparing it to the notorious fairs which transformed Paris for several months each year.⁴⁰ No doubt the appeal of this *frisson* across boundaries of class was very much in keeping with the culture of *modernité* cultivated by many of Gersaint's patrons.⁴¹ Gersaint himself was quick to praise this aspect of collecting culture in general, which brought people of differing social status into a shared space of curiosity and enthusiasm, and he explicitly cited the value of the auction event, even for those with no immediate interest in buying, who would nonetheless benefit from the discussions of those learned collectors and scientists who took the events as an opportunity to socialize.⁴²

Along with cultivating his shop as a place of both fashionable and learned exchange, Gersaint was very much engaged in the transversal

⁴⁰ Jan Heidner, "Edmé-François Gersaint: Neuf Lettres au Comte Gustaf Tessin," *Archives de l'art Français* 26 (1984): 185-196, marginal note by Tessin to letter I, 187. Also noted in De Marchi and Van Miegroet. "Transforming the Paris Art Market", 389; for a description of the fairs see Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 45-55.

⁴¹ On the modern sensibilities of Gersaint's clients see Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint*, 157-8. It is worth mentioning here that *modernité* was a loosely and very broadly defined category in early eighteenth century Paris, still carrying over a substantial residue of the very well publicized *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* of the previous century. The entirety of French public (or popular) science, in as much as Fontenelle can be considered its progenitor, was an extrapolation of the efforts of the moderns to move the force of authority away from erudition and towards observation. see Joan E. DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making Of a Fin De Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). More specifically on conceptions of modernity, empiricism and natural history see Jacques Roger, *Les sciences de la vie dans la pensée française du XVIIIe siècle; la génération des animaux de Descartes à l'encyclopédie* (Paris: Colin, 1963), 184, 192-5.

⁴² Gersaint, *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités* (Paris, 1736), vi. and idem. *Catalogue d'une collection considérable de curiositez* (Paris, 1737), p.64; and idem, *Catalogue raisonné des diverses curiosités du cabinet de feu M. Quentin de Lorangère*, (Paris, 1744), 2,3.

expansion of aesthetic criteria, and the language of his announcements and catalogs reflects an attunement to the historical modes of connoisseurship as well as the cultivation of new forms of aesthetic appreciation. Here, in a passage from the introductory essay of the 1736 sales catalog, he weaves his way through the splendor of the collection, from the metaphor of the garden to the marvel of the microscope, only to finish off quoting Pliny:

Effectively, nothing is more seductive than a drawer of beautifully enameled shells; the best flowered parterre is not more pleasing, and the eye is struck with such wonder, that one is at pains not to remain transfixed. What's difficult is to know what to admire the most, whether the perfection of this one's form, or the vivacity of this one's color, the marvelous symmetry of this other one, or the harmonious irregularity of this last. In the end everything astonishes, down to the very smallest, of which you sometimes cannot discover its perfection without the help of a microscope, which will reveal beauties that you would never have imagined, making you cry out that Nature is nowhere so great as in her smallest creations.⁴³

Despite not being a man of letters (something for which he apologizes in the *avertissement* to this catalog), Gersaint displays a remarkable capacity for articulating the scopic pleasures of the shell collector. He narrates this pleasure as a succession of apprehended views; beginning with the initial *éclat* of the drawer ordered as *parterre*, whose glossy array simply strikes and transfixes, but then zooming-in to a series of individual appraisals, specificities of form brought into focus by the language of aesthetic appreciation - harmony, color, symmetry, irregularity - and finally beyond the frame of the

⁴³ Gersaint, (Paris, 1736), 7.

aesthetic into the more acutely specialized visuality of microscopic viewing, where in the promise of unimaginable beauties, nature effectively surpasses art, and at precisely this moment the text is punctuated by allusion: the modernity of the microscope ventriloquized in the ancient voice of Pliny.⁴⁴

Beauty frames Gersaint's paean, but it is twinned at all points - bifurcated between perceiver and perceived, so that as much as it traces the form of an object, beauty also traces the shape of a perception. It is seductive, pleasing, striking, astonishing. It makes you cry out. This erotically inflected depiction of the innervated sensorium reflects the influence of the aesthetic discourse of Roger de Piles, who posited the objective quality of beauty as a measure of the relation between its forms and its effects, and who insistently described these effects in this same language of erotic encounter.⁴⁵

It was de Piles who first theorized the truth in painting as a rhetorical rather than a metaphysical proposition. The truth in painting according to De Piles is precisely its persuasiveness. It calls out to you. It seduces you. It forces you to stop. It draws you in. It ravishes you. And this pleasure, the pleasure of the viewer, is an extension of the pleasure of the painter. The truth in painting is figured as a continuous circuit of sensation triangulating painter, painting, and viewer in a correlative system of receptivity. Painting is not the impoverished sign of some objective world external to it, but the repository and embodiment of aesthetic pleasure. At the moment that it relinquishes its

⁴⁴ Gersaint literally punctuates. Placing the original Latin in the margin below.

⁴⁵ Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 182.

responsibility to the fidelities of mimetic truth, painting luxuriates in representation.⁴⁶

While De Piles' aesthetic theories exercised a significant influence on Gersaint and his clientele (notably in the tremendous freeing up of potential aesthetic value made available by privileging the sensitivity of the viewer over the subject matter, provenance, and attribution of the work), the transposition of De Piles' model of aesthetic response from painting to the natural history cabinet brought with it a constellation of paradoxes, which ultimately severed the aesthetic from what would become systematic natural history. But in the interim, the aestheticization of natural history was indissociable from the larger network which facilitated its emergence, and this was nowhere in greater evidence than in the culture of collecting that Gersaint both cultivated and encouraged. It is also important not to overemphasize that aspect of the aestheticization of natural history which could be characterized as the imposition of aesthetic discourse on to the field of natural historical facts. The aesthetic response was figured as a recognition of the beauty inherent in nature, a beauty which emerged precisely from its creative force, and was fundamentally beyond the order of human knowledge. In this respect, aesthetic response was analogous to technological vision; like the microscope, it transformed the field of visibility in order to bring the unfathomable work of

⁴⁶ This same circuit is outlined under the concept of *enthousiasme* in the previous chapter.

nature to light, and in doing so it redefined both the subject and object of vision.

This dialectical production of visibility magnetized more than natural objects into its circuits of pleasure. The novelty of its aesthetic potential surged across modes of visibility, reanimating the archaic fascination with zones of ambiguity between art and nature, how these multiply the ways in which one can be figured in terms of the other, and the meanings which cohere in these ambiguous figures. Gersaint makes this point quite literally when he encourages artists to take shells as inspiration for new forms in architecture, sculpture and painting. He proposes as one example, the currency of the term *escalier en limaçon*, used in architecture to describe a spiral staircase, which he suggests indicates the origins of the form in the study of shells.⁴⁷ Of course, the formal development of the spiral staircase predates this terminology, and there is no indication that shell forms had any influence on its actual invention, but perhaps Gersaint's somewhat whimsical ruminations emerged from a more immediate context. Meissonnier's *Projet pour la décoration du feu d'artifice de l'ambassadeur d'Espagne à l'occasion de la naissance du Dauphin*, 1729, shows an early instance of biaxial asymmetry in his designs being generated by the profile of a spiral case, which forms a kind of irregular tower at the top of the facade for a monumental stage (fig. 3-5). The combination of arcing balustrade and asymmetrical overhanging facade

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

presages some of his cartouche designs, particularly evident in the design which ultimately serves as the frontispiece to the publication of his complete works (fig. 3-6). Gersaint also remarks in the following paragraph on the recent successes of jewelers who made use of shell forms to extraordinary effect, and while he mentions no names, the preeminence of Meissonnier in the field suggests a very likely association.⁴⁸ Boucher too could be seen to incorporate forms drawn from exotic shells into some of his ornamental designs, most notably in one example from his *Livre de vases (1736)*, where a spiral rising from the bottom of the vase forms a series of axially oriented knobs, which mimic the formations of certain shells that we find represented in d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* (fig. 3-7, 4-8).

The literal transposition of new forms from nature into art is certainly one way in which the efflorescence of Rococo ornament could be seen to have canalized the aestheticization of natural history, but it was the underlying conceptual ambiguities between art and nature that made such interplay broadly resonant, and in a sense, unavoidable. Early in the introductory essay to his catalog Gersaint suggests that an illustrated guide to conchology be published in French (precisely that work which was forthcoming from d'Argenville), "with regular engravings of the different faces and profiles [of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

shells], and the diverse characters or ornaments that Nature has imprinted on their surfaces."⁴⁹

Gersaint's phrase interleaves the movements of metaphor between art and nature so tightly as to make them almost invisible. Already figuratively anthropomorphized, the shells are described as having faces and profiles; the work of the naturalist becomes that of the portraitist. But then shells are also described like objects of art; they have surfaces like a porcelain vase on which appear characters and ornaments. The naturalist copies these forms as engravings to be printed in a book, but nature too has imprinted its designs on the surfaces of the shells, so that almost unwittingly the entire mimetic mechanism of natural historical production - even its ornamental supplement - has been mapped metaphorically onto the very nature which it proposes to represent.

The announcement for the auction published in the *Mercure de France* (anonymous, but likely authored by de la Roque), takes up the theme from a slightly different angle, which begins to signal the definitively shared lexicon of the taste for natural history and Rococo ornament: "There are in this collection, singular accidents in which Nature seems to play, sometimes by an outrageous and unlimited *bizarrerie*, sometimes by a symmetry of such precision that the most refined Art could not achieve it."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Gersaint, (Paris, 1736), 2.

⁵⁰ *Mercure* (Feb. 1733), 285-91. (my translation)

In the stark juxtaposition of symmetry and *bizarrierie* framing the slippage between rational and irrational forms as nature's visual play, the personification of nature as artist gains a tonality particular to the Rococo, in which the singular, the marvelous, the accident or exception no longer form the imaginary periphery of an ordered unity, but come to occupy and destabilize its center. Several years earlier, in the February 1733 edition of the *Mercure*, de la Roque published a poem entitled *Les Coquillages*, which stages this instability in the language of myth. The poem was addressed to the editor by Mlle. de Macras. Taking the form of an apology for a lost gift of shells, it wittily substitutes its own beauty for theirs. The following passage describes the cave in which the shells were purportedly found:

a Salon,
 Whose naive Architecture is uniquely due to simple Nature,
 There, the rough Rock begets Portraits
 Of a singular structure, which escape the eye,
 And lose all of their traits
 When we look at them closely.⁵¹

Producing architecture and portraits, the role of nature as artist here recalls Gersaint's description of shells as faces, imprinted with characters and ornaments, but the poem emphasizes the underlying ambiguity of these forms in a way which situates the cave as a space of dream-like disorientation. The mask-like forms depicted through the lens of Joblot's microscope and the

⁵¹ *Ibid.* , See also, Alastair Laing, "French ornamental engravings and the diffusion of the Rococo," in *Le stampe e la diffusione delle immagini e degli stili*, ed. Henri Zerner, (Bologna : CLUEB, 1983), 109-27.

recourse to the theme of singularity and marvel that accompanied these early microscopic visions resonate here in the poetics of the cave,⁵² where the faciality of the grotesque comes to function as an emblem of the perceptual mutability that attends the puzzled gaze, which does not yet know what it sees.

The poem's description of rough rock decor recalls the early use of the term *rocaille* in garden architecture, where it referred to decorative fragments of rock and shell, which were arranged into ornamental patterns and also into masks or faces to decorate the walls of garden grottos. Such motifs were also a significant part of the iconography of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century conchology, as can be seen in the frontispiece to the volume of plates for Buonanni's *Ricreatione dell'occhio e della mente nell'osservatione delle chioccioline* (1681) (fig. 3-9), which was the first practical illustrated guide for shell collectors, as well as in plates from Albertus Seba's *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri* (1734), which was among the most lavish and comprehensive of Dutch natural histories (fig. 3-10).⁵³ Seba's description of this plate details the composition of the satyr face by naming the shells which make it up, and then goes on to mention two grottos in Amsterdam gardens that deployed similar motifs. Here, the ornamental and the apodictic overlap

⁵² On Joblot's microscopical manual see Chapter 2, section XI, 114.

⁵³ Buonanni's text circulated widely in Europe as well as in Holland, and Gersaint cites it extensively in his 1736 catalog. Gersaint's familiarity with Buonanni's text is further underscored by his inclusion of substantial information about its upcoming translation at the hands of a French publisher. Seba's text also appears in the bibliography to Gersaint's 1736 catalogue.

across both the natural history cabinet and the garden.⁵⁴ Engravings published in 1679 documenting the *Grotte de Thétis* at Versailles, show similarly constructed mask like forms, as well as the usage of the terms *rocaille* and *coquillage* (fig. 3-11), which appear together with such frequency in descriptions of Rococo ornament that most scholars agree they form the etymological root of the term *Rococo*.⁵⁵ The description of the *Grotte de Thétis*, for which these engravings serve as illustrations, begins with the same conceit of the cave whose beauty shifts ambiguously between art and nature,⁵⁶ and the allusion extends back to Ovid's description of Thetis' cave in the *Metamorphoses*: "There is a cave in the center, whether fashioned by art or nature is uncertain, but probably art. Often, Thetis you used to come there, naked, seated on a bridled dolphin."⁵⁷

Although the figure of the cave as site of ambiguity between art and nature is a longstanding poetic convention, the specific resonance of this theme for the Rococo is deeply attuned to the epistemological stakes of such instabilities. These are registered in Mlle. de Macras' poem and Gersaint's description of the drawer of shells by their dramatization of the perceptual

⁵⁴ Seba, Albertus. *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri accurata descriptio, et iconibus artificiosissimis expressio, per universam physices historiam*. Vol III. (Apud J. Wetstenium, & Gul. Smith, & Janssonio-Waesbergios, 1758), 112. For a discussion of the spatial and conceptual proximity of gardens and natural history cabinets see, John Dixon Hunt, "Curiosities to Adorn Cabinets and Gardens," in *The Origins of Museums*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, (Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University, 1985), 193-203.

⁵⁵ see C. T. Carr, "Two Words in Art History: Il Rococo," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 1(1965): 268-269. and Nicholas Newman, "In the name of Rococo," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 40 (Autumn 2001): 129-134.

⁵⁶ André Félibien, *Description de la grotte de Versailles* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1679)

⁵⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI: 221-265

effects of ambiguity. In the poem, the eye is the point around which the ambiguity of nature's art turns, and it is the viewer who modulates these effects by the closeness of her gaze. Similarly, in Gersaint's description of the drawer of shells it is the particular inflection of the gaze that tracks the shifting ambiguities of beauty: first struck dumb by sheer brilliance, though whether the beauty of this enameled parterre is the effect of art or nature is unclear, then becoming specific as the language of form enumerates a series of differential traits, and finally becoming technological, as the microscopic eye reveals another and unfathomable order of beauty. Within this emergent aesthetic, the mythical cave and the collectors' cabinet are mapped across each other, and the garden forms the imaginary nexus of their convergence: the space which is both art and nature, where natural forms are ordered by decorative logics - the parterre or the grotto for instance - which imitate a mythical order of nature.

The recourse to Ovid is an aspect of the fashion for shell collecting particularly favored by the French, and it reflects how central gallant mythology was to the discourse of elite sociability in eighteenth century France. The two principal themes of Ovidian mythology - metamorphoses or mutability, and the triumph of love over valor - were powerfully interrelated metaphors in the shifting terrain of that discourse, and they were as operative chez Gersaint as in the not so distant salons of Paris. As it moved from the strict codifications of court culture to the casual intimacy of urban salons, the diffusion of *honnêteté*

as a social form, with its emphasis on the pleasurable reciprocity of conversation, took the triumph of love over valor as its emblem.⁵⁸ Within this context, metamorphosis, figured as fluidity and mutability was both the form which polite conversation took - nimble and witty, as opposed to didactic or pedantic - as well as the characteristic most cultivated by its participants, able to blend into the vast array of social spheres of the emerging urban culture. We can also find substantial parallels in De Piles' aesthetics, where the rhetorical function of beauty supersedes over didactic or narrative content, and where aesthetic receptivity, like metamorphosis, is marked by the transformative power of eros. Despite the seemingly archaic weight of tradition implied by references to Ovid, these themes had remarkably modern implications, and we see them at the heart of that aspect of Gersaint's project which sought to bridge the forms of elite sociability and the burgeoning market of popular luxury with the production of new aesthetic forms.

In the March, 1734 issue of the *Mercure Galant*, an announcement appeared for the first suite of Rococo ornamental engravings, Meissonnier's *Livre d'ornemens* [sic]. Though it does not explicitly invoke the theme of aesthetic transference between art and nature, the announcement draws on its vocabulary of forms and effects.

There has appeared a suite of engravings *en large*, in the taste of Stephano della Bella, which should pique the curiosity of the public and collectors of better taste. These are fountains,

⁵⁸ Katie Scott, "D'un siècle à l'autre: History, Mythology, and Decoration in early eighteenth century Paris," in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York : Fort Worth: Rizzoli ; Kimbell Art Museum, 1992), 46.

cascades, ruins, rocailles and coquilleages, architectural fragments which produce bizarre, singular, and picturesque effects, by their piquant and extraordinary forms, of which often no part corresponds to any other, without the subject appearing less rich or less pleasing. There are also different kinds of ceilings, with figures and animals grouped intelligently, of which the frames are extremely ingenious and varied. The cartouche which serves as a frontispiece, carries this title: *Book of Ornaments, invented and drawn by J.O. Moissonnier [sic], Architecte, Dessinateur de la Chambre et Cabinet du Roy. These prints are for sale rue S. Jacques chez la veuve Chereu, aux deux Pilliers d'or. there are approximately fifty engraved by Laureolli.*⁵⁹

Rococo ornament deploys the vocabulary of the garden - fountains, cascades, ruins - and especially the grotto, where rocaille and coquillage become not just ornamental edifice but central motif and underlying compositional form, what is called "harmonious irregularity" by Gersaint and appears here less concisely as, "extraordinary forms, of which often no part corresponds to any other, without the subject appearing less rich or less pleasing." These (a)symmetries emerge as the formal expression of that perceptual vertigo figured in Mlle. de Macras' poem, in Gersaint's description of the enameled parterre of shells, and in the recourse to the language of marvel and wonder, of singularity and bizarrerie, which register the alternating currents of pleasure and uncertainty, of *dépaysement* and disorientation shared by Rococo ornament and natural history.

⁵⁹ *Mercur*, (March 1734), 558-59. (my translation)

XIV. Ornament and the Order of Nature

Gersaint enlisted Boucher to produce a frontispiece for the *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités* (fig. 3-12), and the similarities it bears to his design for *Rocaille* have made it another consistently noted point of contact between the taste for shell collecting and Rococo ornamental engraving.⁶⁰ The designs were published within a year of each other, and both feature a dramatically foregrounded marine still life, but the overall composition of the frontispiece lacks the kinds of complex, spatial imbrication of multiple registers which mark *Rocaille* so distinctively as Rococo ornament. In the frontispiece Boucher centers the marine still life in a stable foreground against a grid-like laboratory backdrop of glass-jarred specimens featuring squiggles of snake, fish, and insect like forms. Although it does not deploy the vertiginous aspects of Rococo ornament that we find inscribed so elegantly in *Rocaille*, the frontispiece nonetheless charts something of the double vision that animates the convergence of aesthetic and scientific discourses, for which the natural history collection was a privileged terrain.

The marine still life at the center of the frontispiece is an overtly artificial display of beautiful forms, but its artifice mimics the beauty of nature by presenting what appears to be a haphazard arrangement, and transmuting it into a delicately balanced composition. In the background, a far less lyrical

⁶⁰ Andrew McClellan, "Watteau's Dealer: Gersaint and the Marketing of Art in Eighteenth-Century Paris.," *The Art Bulletin* (1996): 439–53. see particularly 446.

arrangement of visual pleasure is on offer, but one perhaps no less exciting for the amateur or professional naturalist. The grid, having not yet come to dominate organizational systems for the display of natural historical knowledge, here in the curvature of its concavity mirrors the dimensionality of the jar, which promises untold exoticisms - little squiggles of aquatic singularity.⁶¹ Hovering quietly between these two registers are two small butterflies, one just behind, and the other just in front of the upper branch of the madreporite which dominates the composition. There is nothing immediately remarkable about these butterflies. Because they are treated with the same loose hand as the rest of the image, one hardly notices them. But the butterflies are reminders about the relationship between natural and ornamental orders, and about how the pleasures of looking facilitate the pleasures knowing. The beauty of the butterfly, like the beauty of the shell, is in its revelation of the artful hand of nature.

This was an aspect of the natural history collection inherited from the Dutch, with which Gersaint was well acquainted through his visits to Dutch collections such as that of Levin Vincent and Simon Schijnvoet.⁶² In 1719, Vincent published an extensive and lavishly illustrated catalog of his collection

⁶¹ Such arrangements would have been familiar to admirers of natural history from the arrangements in famous cabinets, such as Bonnier de la Mosson's, which was open for public viewing.

⁶² Bert van de Roemer, "Neat Nature: The Relation between Nature and Art in a Dutch Cabinet of Curiosities from the Early Eighteenth Century," *History of Science* 42, no. 1 (2004): 47-84.

in several languages, including French.⁶³ It was featured in Gersaint's bibliography, and likely influenced his own publications as well as French ideas about ordering and displaying shell collections.⁶⁴ The book is structured like a tour, beginning with a large foldout print showing the hall which contains Vincent's twelve cabinets (fig. 3-13), and then offering close up views of each. The hall bustles with visitors. Many converse animatedly in groups of two and three, some peering into drawers pulled out and placed on the long tables that line either side of the hall, others looking up at the display cases mounted on the wall, and still others browsing the books on the shelves below. Even from this pulled back perspective, the preference for ornamental arrangement is visible in the panels of specimen mounted on the walls and in the open drawers on the tables.

This picture of the collection as a place of sociable exchange is typical of publications both in Holland and in France in the first half of the eighteenth century. In Georg Eberhard Rumph's *D'Amboinische Rariteitkamer* (1705), which documents another important Dutch collection visited by Gersaint, the frontispiece depicts his cabinet as a receding series of rooms in *enfilade*, each populated with studious and curious interlocutors. Very similar scenes are presented as frontispieces for many of Gersaint's catalogs (fig. 3-14), as well as those of his friend and competitor Pierre Rémy. These place an important

⁶³ Vincent, Levinus, and Romeyn de Hooghe. *Elenchus tabularum, pinacothecarum, atque nonnullorum cimeliorum, in gazophylacio Levini Vincent* (Harlemi Batavorum : Sumptibus auctoris, 1719).

⁶⁴ E. C. Spary, "Scientific Symmetries," *History of Science* 42, no. 135 (2004): 1–46. esp. 9, 12.

emphasis on the cabinet as a shared space of exploration, delectation, conversation, and study.⁶⁵ Something of the sociability depicted in Watteau's *Enseigne* resonates in these multiple and variegated modes of attentiveness, and this is one sense in which that mode of curiosity particular to the early eighteenth century conjoined connoisseurship and natural history. Within this context, sociability did not preclude the possibility of fascinated and studious looking, and ornament was not necessarily the sign of frivolous or merely decorative display.

The close up views of each of the cabinets in Levin Vincent's catalog illustrate the practical and theoretical place of ornamental arrangement with remarkable concision. They depict both the objects as well as the drawers and cabinets which contain them, and the accompanying texts go into substantial detail describing the size and build of the actual furniture, down to the measurements of sub-compartments, and labeling of the drawers, such that the practicalities of display are given almost equal treatment to the catalog of objects. And this is reinforced in the plates, which strongly emphasize the relationship between the objects in the collection and the modes of organization and display.

The first plate shows the cabinet of insects (fig. 3-15). The upper half of the image is completely dominated by the grid-like array of a chest of carefully labeled drawers. Below several drawers have been pulled out and leaned up

⁶⁵ Daniela Bleichmar, "Learning to Look: Visual Expertise across Art and Science in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 85–111. see esp. 96.

against the base of the chest displaying geometrical arrangements of pinned butterflies. In the foreground seemingly oversized insects are scattered pell mell in various positions, giving the impression that they are still alive, almost like taxidermy; one is even perched on the edge of the drawer on the left. Because the insects in the foreground are depicted at such a large size, the patterns of their markings are easily viewable, and the relationships between these patterns and those of the butterflies', both each individual butterfly, but also the geometrical arrangement of the butterflies in each drawer, form a kind of resonant order. The imposed order of the human hand, marked off starkly by the labeled grid of closed drawers, and extending downward into the ornamental arrangement of each drawer is thus by implication continuous with the symmetries and geometries of natural form displayed on the specimens themselves.⁶⁶

For Vincent there was an explicitly theological implication to this continuity, which made the ordering of his cabinet an expression of a more general tendency prominent in the Protestantism of the Dutch Republic, which saw the ordering of nature as a way to re-create paradise.⁶⁷ This was true of the geometries of Dutch gardens as well as in natural history cabinets such as Vincent's, where the parterre was the privileged formal expression of this pre-

⁶⁶ E. C. Spary, "Scientific Symmetries," 8,9.

⁶⁷ Van de Roemer, "Neat Nature," 64-66.

lapsarian will.⁶⁸ One publisher compared Vincent and his wife to Adam and Eve, "arranging nature in paradise."⁶⁹

These kinds of references did not make their way back to Paris, where the divinity of nature frequently took on far less biblical tones. In the current of *modernité* that conveyed much of the empirical ethos of natural history in France, the praise of nature as divine artist was just as frequently leveraged to question theological dogma as to reinforce it.⁷⁰ But the leap from empirical specificities to speculative metaphysics remained a consistent theme in the context of the cabinet, even if only as a conventional mode of attributing philosophical import to the fascination with nature's minutiae.⁷¹ Diderot articulates this position in his *Pensées Philosophique* (1746), when he suggests that the observation of the intricate complexity of a butterfly's wing is better proof of the existence of God than any theoretical abstraction could hope to be.

Despite the seeming piety of Diderot's argument, this was a subversive proposition in France, where the Catholic Church was actively asserting its authority over any interpretation of the nature of divine revelation. Diderot's own philosophical metamorphosis from deism toward atheism, and his imprisonment at Vincennes in 1749 for the publication of his *Lettre sur les*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Vincent's wife was known to have strung and embroidered many of the smaller shells and other specimens into patterns on the cloth backgrounds that supported them.

⁷⁰ Diderot's entry on *Jouissance* in the *Encyclopédie* is one good example. More generally on conceptions of modernity, empiricism and natural history see note 41.

⁷¹ Gersaint's quotation of Pliny is a good example of this. It recurs in modified form throughout d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie*, where it takes on slightly more Christian tonalities.

aveugle à l'usage de ceux qui voient are good indicators of the more radically anti-clerical and generally seditious implications that empiricism and natural history could carry in the French intellectual context.⁷² This was in stark contrast to northern European countries in which the effects of the Reformation opened theological discourse to alternate modes of reading, which could relatively unproblematically absorb the notion that the empirical world of nature was a theological text of its own.⁷³

What the French inherited more transparently from the Dutch collectors was the imbrication of aesthetic and systematic methods of ordering the collection, and while this was never without its tensions, neither can one say that the strict distinctions which would come to mark these as radically different kinds of order were yet fully apparent. There were mutually reinforcing convergences between aesthetic sensibilities and the production of natural historical knowledge, and these largely followed the development of methodologies of empirical observation for natural specimens within the framework of the studied gaze of connoisseurship.⁷⁴ This is precisely what Gersaint was narrating in the alternation between dazzling *éclat* and analytical appraisal that characterizes his description of viewing a drawer of shells. The

⁷² Aram Vartanian, "From Deist to Atheist: Diderot's Philosophical Orientation 1746-1749." *Diderot Studies* 1 (January 1, 1949): 46–63. Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990), 71-74.

⁷³ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800* (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Polity Press ; Basil Blackwell, 1990). Charlotte Guichard, *Les amateurs d'art à Paris au XVIIIème siècle*, (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2008). Bleichmar, "Learning to Look," 95.

connoisseurial gaze was already structured around this same process: being sensitive to the immediacy of a work's beauty, then bringing into focus progressively finer levels of detail in order to identify styles and establish attribution, as well as to savor the aesthetic merits of specific works. It is effectively in this dialectical process of refinement, which produced the essential momentum of the emerging culture of connoisseurship, that aesthetic viewing became integral to the project of natural history.

XV. Empiricism and Connoisseurship

Antione-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la lithologie et la conchyliologie* is the work that most fully addresses the issue of synthesizing the aesthetics of the connoisseur with the systematics of the naturalist. D'Argenville had been a student of Roger de Piles, Bernard Picart, and Alexandre Le Blond, with whom he studied drawing, painting, the history of art, and architecture. He spent several years in Rome studying ancient and modern art, and before turning his attentions to natural history he published a work on garden architecture, *La théorie et la pratique du jardinage* (1709), which went through four printings, and earned him substantial renown. After the *Histoire naturelle éclaircie*, he would go on to publish one of the most important art historical texts of the eighteenth century. His approach to natural history was in no uncertain terms

that of a connoisseur, but this perhaps only further underscores the difficulty of separating these fields at the time, because d'Argenville was not just assembling a compendium of available conchological knowledge conveniently illustrated and translated into French for the use of collectors. He explicitly sets out to address the shortcomings of the classificatory schemes proposed in previous conchologies. Along with the classical texts of Pliny and those of sixteenth-century natural historians, such as Aldrovandi and Belon, he was well aware of the latest advances in the field represented by the works of Buonanni, Rumphius, and Martin Lister, and he outlines the specific shortcomings of each of their works in the first chapter of the *Conchyliologie*.⁷⁵

Interestingly, he attributes the success of his method in view of the shortcomings of his predecessors to his skill as a draughtsman. According to d'Argenville, no tool is better suited to the classificatory task than the attentiveness to form developed in the work of the illustrator, whose hands, eyes, and mind must work over the object of study, notating the surfaces across which classification produces difference.⁷⁶ D'Argenville was also deeply influenced by the work of Tournefort, whose *Idée générale de la botanique* he quotes extensively in order to explain those elements of Tournefort's classificatory scheme which he borrowed, adapting them only slightly for his conchological uses.

⁷⁵ Antione-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la lithologie et la conchyliologie* (Paris, 1742), 113-115.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

The plates in d'Argenville's *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* organize the specimens according to species and genus, and refer the reader to specific objects in Parisian collections, thus linking image, text and object in a network of reference that mirrors the matrix of study required of the illustrator.⁷⁷ While d'Argenville includes textual references to specific collections in his plates, he does not illustrate cabinets in the way that Vincent did. His images make no pictorial reference to the architectural spaces, furniture or individual drawers which might have contained the objects illustrated. It is possible that this was simply the result of an attempt to maintain formal continuity while featuring objects from a broad range of collections, which might have been furnished quite differently, but it also points toward the importance that d'Argenville places on using the illustrations to develop an analytical gaze rather than to foreground modes of display.

The 1780 edition, published posthumously, includes an expanded collection of plates, which are organized, much like the drawers of collections, into elaborate parterres (fig. 3-16). It is curious that d'Argenville used this approach to the drawings only very sparingly in the first edition, which display little more than a gentle symmetry, or occasionally an understated starburst pattern (fig. 3-17), but lack any consistent logic to their symmetries, and overall seem to be more concerned with spacing the specimen evenly on the page so as to maximize visibility. He certainly advocates the arrangement of

⁷⁷ Bleichmar, "Learning to Look," 89-91.

shells into parterres as a method of display for collectors, but for his drawings the only aesthetic concern he explicitly raises is that he preferred to place the shells *en cul de lampe* (more or less with their wide-point up). Otherwise, his comments are largely technical, having to do with his attempt to remedy the problem of reversal introduced by the engraving process. Left uncorrected, the reversal would produce severe taxonomical errors by representing the predominantly dextral spiral of shells as sinistral, which would make the illustrations almost useless in the context of the cabinet.

This underscores both his active role in producing the illustrations, as well as his conceptualization of the work as an accompaniment to handling and viewing the actual objects depicted, which would be easier to recognize when they matched the orientation of the plates. While they may have served other purposes, d'Argenville's illustrations were designed specifically to be used as reference materials in a cabinet, and to augment its pedagogical function. They were not supposed to operate as a virtual stand in for the experience of the cabinet in the way that a catalog such as Vincent's was. Perhaps because of how integral illustration was to d'Argenville's conception of natural historical research, the illustrations in his book are reserved to this purpose. And it is a testament to his success in this respect that his book could be found in the libraries of many of the most important naturalists

throughout the eighteenth century, including the Comte de Buffon and Carl Linnaeus.⁷⁸

Despite its sustained utility from the perspective of the naturalist, d'Argenville's text did not operate according to such strict divisions. It was quite literally drawn from the emerging culture of natural history collection, and it took these collectors as well as their visitors and budding emulators as its primary audience. Following the example of Gersaint's *Catalogue Raisonné de Coquilles et Autres Curiosités*, d'Argenville enlisted Boucher to design the frontispiece for the *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* (fig. 3-18). In this case, Boucher produced a far more lyrical composition, and one more plainly reminiscent of Rococo designs. The characteristic branches of coral and madrepore of his earlier marine still lives sit at the base of an immense asymmetrical half shell, which forms the cartouche displaying the title. Below, a bearded triton seems to lift the arrangement above the waves, and next to him the figure of a naiad lounges, cradling another half shell full of smaller shells and coral. A menagerie of aquatic creatures is scattered across the foreground, and in the background an elephant and a camel look on. The torqued and straining figure of the triton contrasted with the relaxed body of the naiad recall the figures of Rococo mythological paintings, such as Boucher's *Triumph of Venus* (1740), and this likely signaled to d'Argenville's readers that natural history shared a

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

realm of aesthetic appreciation with contemporary fashions in painting.⁷⁹ Of course by 1742, when *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* was published, it had been almost a decade since the near simultaneous efflorescence of shell collecting and Rococo ornament marked by Gersaint's first public sale of shells and Meissonnier's *Livre d'ornemens*, so to suggest that Boucher's frontispiece simply packaged natural history in a popular style would be to ignore the co-productive effects of their shared aesthetic appeal. While d'Argenville's commitments to a rationalized classificatory scheme position the *Histoire naturelle éclaircie* as a precursor to the methodical and dispassionate observation of nature called for by later natural historians, the aesthetic was still very much at the center of his project.

Nature, folded into the deepest secrets of the bowels of the earth and abysses of the sea, will never fully reveal to us her mysteries. It seems that she only shows herself to make herself more desired.⁸⁰

This passage from the opening of d'Argenville's introduction would serve as an apt caption for Boucher's frontispiece, which figures the riches of nature in the idiom of gallant mythology, and it points to the ways in which the seemingly rigid dichotomy of the pleasure of the eye and the work of the mind, were always troubled by the tripartite lexicon of collecting which traversed them: the *amateur*, the *curieux*, and the *connoisseur*. Love, curiosity, and

⁷⁹ E.C. Spary "Rococo readings from the book of nature," in *Books and the Sciences in History* eds. Marina Frasca-Spada and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 255-275

⁸⁰ d'Argenville. *L'histoire naturelle éclaircie*, 2.

knowledge mingled in the culture of the natural history collection, and d'Argenville's position within this context is well illustrated by his substantially detailed chapter outlining instructions for displaying a collection. It includes architectural arrangements, proper furniture, cleaning and mounting, and even accessorizing. His guidelines are largely drawn from what he takes to be the finest cabinets in Paris, as well as those he visited while traveling in Italy and Holland, such that his recommendations can in part be read as a general account of display practices from the perspective of an eighteenth century Parisian connoisseur. He also makes his own contributions to ideas about ordering a natural history collection so that it incorporates current scientific ideas into its modes of display.

For example, d'Argenville suggests separating the collection into rooms by kingdom - mineral, vegetable, and animal. Similarly, he recommends a uniform array of cabinets divided by class, genus and species. When it comes to the shells, he is very specific about how many drawers there should be and how they should be divided according to the families of shells, which his new method has set out.⁸¹ All of these recommendations point to emerging taxonomic concerns, which propose to reflect in the order of the cabinet an order inherent in nature. But once inside the drawer, he loses the sure-footedness of this approach. The variety and symmetry of the parterre take precedence, and the question of how to maintain the systematic divisions

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

without losing the ornamental effects is something he finds admittedly challenging and leaves largely unresolved. The parterre thus represents rather than resolves the central problematic of d'Argenville's synthetic motivations. That he does not theorize this lack of resolution between ornamental and systematic order suggests that rather than standing as the sign of an incommensurable divergence between two orders, as it would soon do, it was simply one compositional challenge among many in what was still a coherent because essentially omni-discursive approach. The goal of his taxonomic efforts was not ultimately to transform the structure of the collection according to a single unifying system, but to integrate a new systematic approach into the recently expanded conchological aspect of the collection.

This becomes particularly apparent when it comes to the display of larger objects, which are positioned on open surfaces rather than stored in cases, and seem to migrate across the strict order of the rooms blending in with other objects of display. For instance, he mentions that certain aquatic plants could be well displayed on the tops of the shell cases; and these combined with other objects such as busts and porcelain as decorative accoutrements, effectively destabilizing the natural order which he at first proposed.⁸² In fact, porcelain was frequently featured either within or immediately framing some of the most celebrated natural history cabinets in

⁸² *Ibid.*, 196.

Paris,⁸³ and the chapter dedicated to listing and describing all of the cabinets that d'Argenville has visited attests to this.

The Duc de Sully's cabinet provides a perfect example. The collection comprises five rooms, which are described in series, beginning with a general description and then noting the specific contents and their arrangement within and on top of various furnishings for each room. The general descriptions give the impression that the rooms are organized around neat typologies, but as he describes the specific contents of the rooms, nothing seems entirely in its place. For instance, the first room contains maps, prints and drawings, but also antique marble busts and urns, and a chest containing fossils on top of which are cases with precious stones and exotic butterflies. The second room, which is designated for painting, has paintings by great masters, but also a series of shelves containing Egyptian vases, precious stones, agate, jasper, birds, fish, rocks, crystals, oriental alabaster, amber, and antique stones. The third room has two large cabinets full of shells, divided into forty-eight drawers by family, as well as a collection of antique bas-reliefs and busts. The fourth room also has a cabinet of smaller shells, as well as jewels encrusted in gold and silver, a collection of porcelain, figured stones, gems, crystals, figures made in ivory and amber, marine plants, madrepores and coral mixed in with smaller porcelain and enameled figurines. D'Argenville's description pretends to organize itself around the idea of strict divisions by room, but in each room

⁸³ Smentek, Kristel. *Rococo Exotic : French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* (New York: Frick Collection, 2007), 116.

the brief description of primary contents is completely overwhelmed by the sheer multiplicity of accessories.⁸⁴

What is most striking is the alternation between different modes of order. Rooms, cabinets and drawers are given relatively stable classificatory roles; they identify by marking off differences of kind through differences of space, but at each progressive level of specificity the order is contaminated in some way. A room full of prints and drawings contains cases of fossils and butterflies. The drawers of a shell cabinet are divided by family and then ordered into ornamental parterres. At each level classificatory boundaries are broken both by heterogeneous objects as well as heterogeneous systems. It is as though the will towards rational order was an accessory among others in an arrangement still largely unified by a vision of nature in which the aesthetic stands in for the unfathomable. Mounted porcelain, shells, gems, figured stones, coral, and marine plants, intermingle on the surfaces of shelves and cabinets, forming an essentially aesthetic display of rare and beautiful artifacts. The luster of surfaces and exotic provenance blur classificatory boundaries into a continuous and brilliant sheen in which opalescence registers as the sheer sign of opulence. Here, opulence is not simply a sign of wealth on the part of the collector; it is that aspect of nature which is beyond utility, and the reminder of that unknowable abyss toward which nature's beauty calls us.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 200-1.

Like the faciality of the grotesque in Mlle. de Macras' poem, whose anthropomorphosis has come unmoored from its physiognomic relation to knowledge, finding instead the immanence of non-knowledge figured as the perceptual mutability of ornament, beauty registers the aporia of non-knowledge around which the mimetic edifice of natural history constructs itself as a movement of desire. It is worth returning here to the erotic triangle which underlies de Piles' aesthetics, because it underscores the shock of aesthetic receptivity as a reconfiguration of the sensorium. It is not the recognition of a form *a priori*, but the production of an opening onto the unknown around which cognition forms itself. In this respect, it is akin to the sensationalist epistemology of John Locke, which was fundamental to the blossoming of the empirical sciences. That these should be brought together in the space of the cabinet is far from capricious. What has often been characterized as the *tabula rasa* of the mind in Locke's description of the relation between sensation and cognition was never explicitly formulated in those terms by Locke. As William MacGregor has pointed out, Locke's analogy for the receptivity of the mind is not a surface, but a cabinet.⁸⁵

The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet; and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ MacGregor, "The Authority of Prints," 399.

⁸⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690 (Scolar Press, 1690), 8.

The furnishing of a cabinet operates as a primary cognitive metaphor in Locke's empiricist epistemology, and the adaptation of such a metaphor to the lexicon of eros was perfectly suited to the discourse of amateur science. Recall Fontenelle's "certain disorder of thought into which we fall not without pleasure," which figures the interrelations of pleasure and disorder as the necessary condition of philosophy.⁸⁷ The very possibility of reshuffling the order of the known begins from this relationship between receptivity and pleasure, which characterizes the aestheticization of natural historical knowledge.

For this reason we should be careful not to overemphasize the instrumentalization of the attentiveness to morphological difference cultivated by d'Argenville in the terrain of connoisseurship, or to characterize it as a univalent precursor to taxonomical abstraction, which, as it came under the influence of Linnaeus, was increasingly directed toward a reduction of the visual to a kind of diagrammatic system of differences - or what Foucault has described as the reduction of the simultaneity of the visual to the linearity of a linguistic series.⁸⁸ If the underlying order of nature is reducible to its taxonomy, as Linnaeus' asserted,⁸⁹ the *éclat* of the beautiful in Gersaint's account of the drawer of shells and the blur of opalescence in the Duc de Sully's cabinet would seem to register only a kind of naive excess, which, along with

⁸⁷ see p. 104 of this study.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 134.

⁸⁹ Gunnar Broberg, "Linnaeus and Genesis: a preliminary survey," *Svenska Linne-Sällskapet Arsskrift*, (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978): 30-42.

Boucher's frontispieces, is little more than the ornamental facade of an intellectual procedure, a sign by which natural history ingratiate itself to the tastes of those whose motivations are peripheral to its essential function. These were the kinds of critiques raised by some naturalists in the second half of the century, such as Michel Adanson, Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, and Buffon, and they characterize the contemporary response to Rococo books of natural history.⁹⁰ But it is precisely against this reading of the ornament as pure supplement that any understanding of the epistemological relations between connoisseurship and natural history must situate itself if it is to go beyond relativizing aesthetics as a socially constructed sign of prestige or distinction.⁹¹

Far from peripheral or secondary, for the connoisseur the beautiful is what makes attentiveness meaningful. The analytics of the connoisseur were not directed primarily at attribution, but at appreciation, which is to say, not strictly concerned with naming the object of vision but with refining one's sensitivities to its beauty. In as much as Pre-Linnaean conchology can be understood as part of an aesthetic, it was still invested in a concept of natural beauty which brought an enchanted attentiveness to the specificity of things. Unmoored from the neo-platonic system of similitudes that ordered the Renaissance cabinet, and not yet reduced to the universal mathesis of pure taxonomy, it was buoyed by radically and ceaselessly expanding visibilities.

⁹⁰ Spary, "Scientific Symmetries," 1-2, 21.

⁹¹ see also, Spary, "Rococo readings of the book of nature," 261-62

XVI. Boucher, Collector

In his work as a designer, Boucher found himself at the center of an emerging aesthetic regime which took its momentum from a convergence of scientific, literary, philosophical and artistic discourses, and reflected the epistemological transformations taking shape in eighteenth century France in its consistent recurrence to the alternating themes of ambiguity, rupture, and fluidity, which were reconfiguring such things as the structure of the collection, the circulation of images and knowledge, even the hierarchies of social and natural order. The popularity of Rococo designs in the print market has frequently led scholars to undervalue the relationship between Rococo ornament and natural history, suggesting either that the Rococo signals a superficial interest in science, or that their interrelations are merely a coincidence of fashion.⁹² One might also argue that Boucher's designs for Gersaint and d'Argenville represent a relatively inconsequential aspect of his pictorial production, so that emphasizing a relationship between the discourse of natural history and the formal and pictorial characteristics of Rococo design makes the mistake of over-reading the arbitrary. But Boucher's commitments to the visuality and visualization of natural history are brought into stark relief in light of his own remarkable collection of natural historical objects. The record of that collection dates from the later part of his life, but its

⁹² *Ibid.* . and Katie Scott, *Rococo Interior*, 166-176.

comprehensiveness points toward a longstanding development, and its installation in his painting studio at the Louvre suggests that the aesthetic of his natural history collection served as a constant backdrop to his pictorial production.

A recent study of his collection by Jessica Priebe has shown that along with the traditional *coquillier*, which displayed his shells in drawers and cases following the manner prescribed by d'Argenville, Boucher had some sixteen tables of varying shapes and sizes arranged around his studio for displaying larger and more prized specimen in a more open and visually capacious perspective.⁹³ The tables were covered in reflective glass to augment and accentuate the arrangements of shells, and visitors frequently commented on the dazzling brilliance of the display.⁹⁴ These tables were also a remarkable literalization of the kind of expanding, fragmented, kaleidoscopic visuality characteristic of the tables of print dealers and collectors, as well as the distorted and fantastical opticality of early microscopic viewing, so that at the material center of Boucher's pictorial production lies a startling metaphor for this broader eruption of visual potential that forms the epistemological backdrop of his work.

⁹³ Jessica Priebe, *Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie: The Cabinet of François Boucher, 1703-1770* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sydney, 2011), 164-7. Jessica Priebe's work has only just come to my attention in the last phases of preparing this dissertation. I apologize for not yet having accounted for other overlaps in our research in which she precedes me. She has also looked closely at Boucher's involvement with conchyliologie, though our purposes differ substantially with respect to the theorization of this connection with the Rococo as a broader phenomenon.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Priebe has also argued that the marine still life in Boucher's design for *Rocaille* and the frontispieces for Gersaint and others, can also be found literalized in various forms throughout the inventory of his collection.⁹⁵ She has called these forms *mélanges* because they frequently consist of an arrangement of different shells, coral, madrepores, and sometimes agates and crystals. Notes in the *catalogue après décès* suggest that Boucher's arrangements reflected a careful attentiveness to form, color, and texture, such that a nimble playfulness developed between the hand of nature and the hand of the artist. Indeed, it would seem that Boucher's fascination with natural history turned precisely around this kind of ambiguity which was so deeply characteristic of the movements of the Rococo aesthetic. Although the display of Boucher's collection described in the *catalogue après décès* post-dates his early ornamental designs by several decades, it is clear that he was among those attendees of Gersaint's early sales events and visitors of collections that actively participated in the kind of aesthetic and intellectual expansion cultivated by Gersaint and his patrons,⁹⁶ and that far from providing them with a conveniently appropriate but ultimately superficial emblem of their taste, Boucher turned his talents to pictorializing a shared fascination with natural history, to which he was himself highly attuned, and from which he also drew his own ideas about contemporary beauty.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

Chapter 4: The Philosophical Rococo

XVII. Philosophy Chez Gersaint

Boucher's involvement in the print trade, his work as an ornamentalist, and his participation in the culture of natural history, placed him at the center of an emerging network of discourses which were deeply embedded in the rise of empiricist models of perceiving and knowing the world. But the extent to which he was exposed to the contemporary philosophy which theorized these models remains a matter of some speculation. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has suggested that Boucher would have been exposed to the philosophical ideas of authors such as Condillac and Diderot through his association with Mme. de Pompadour, whose support of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* brought the currents of philosophical materialism into her drawing rooms.¹ But as I have previously argued, the pictorial manifestations of Boucher's engagement with materialist philosophy, which Lajer-Burcharth has so convincingly analyzed, precede his involvement with Pompadour.² In part, this can be attributed to Boucher's participation in a broader field of discourses which explored, in less explicitly philosophical forms, many of the same ideas that influenced thinkers such as Diderot and Condillac. However, there were also some notable points of contact.

¹ Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Touch," 67-8.

² See the introduction to this text, 29-33.

One of the little known aspects of Gersaint's business was his operation as an unlicensed book dealer. Not only did he illegally sell books, but he sold illegal books. The 1750 inventory of Gersaint's shop includes well over two thousand titles, and the copy preserved in the Bibliotheque Nationale is annotated by hand with seventy-two further titles that were best left unpublicized, including texts by Spinoza and La Mettrie, Diderot's *Pensées Philosophiques*, and a whole host of Jansenist, anti-clerical, seditious and pornographic works, which represent a remarkable cross-section of the libertine literary underground.³ Whether or not the contents of Gersaint's library could reflect his own philosophical and political proclivities, he was clearly well aware of the currents of libertine thought, and so were at least some of his clients. The comte de Caylus, l'abbé Haranger, and Légrit de La Faye, are some of those frequently named clients and collaborators of Gersaint who were known to have substantial collections of libertine literature.⁴

The chevalier de la Roque, who was both a client of Gersaint and a great supporter of his business through the ads he published in the *Mercure*, was also an important connection between Gersaint and contemporary libertinism. He lived in a tiny apartment above the Café Procope and conducted all of his business for the *Mercure de France* from the café, where he was surrounded by many of those luminaries of the Republic of Letters and the *Academie de sciences* whose interests extended into the libertine

³ The list has been republished in Glorieux, *À l'Enseigne de Gersaint*. 579.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

underground; Voltaire, Diderot, Crebillon fils, Fontenelle, Maupertuis, Nicolas Fréret and La Mettrie, to name a few of particular interest.⁵ There is no evidence that these men were clients of Gersaint, but all of them authored works listed in his catalog. At least on the bookshelves, the heady philosophical debates of the Café Procope reverberated chez Gersaint, but to gauge the extent to which they might have been absorbed into that emergent aesthetic space between Rococo ornament and natural history requires a closer look at the reciprocal permeability of these discourses.

One compelling point of correspondance is Gersaint's notably large selection of texts published in the context of the Chinese Rites scandal, a heated and widely publicized debate in France since the last decades of the seventeenth-century, which brought the political, theological and philosophical implications of a Chinese worldview to the center of popular ideas about China.⁶ Historians have loosely suggested that the playful formal exuberance shared by Rococo and Chinoiserie motifs reflected contemporary ideas that associated Chinese philosophy with French libertinism,⁷ but a closer understanding of what these associations consisted of reveals a complex

⁵ François Moureau, "De Watteau à Chardin: Antoine de la Roque, journaliste et collectionneur," in *Mélanges en hommage à Pierre Rosenberg: Peintres et dessins en France et en Italie XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001), 352-3. Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution: ptie. XVIIIe siècle* (Presses universitaires de France, 1954), 545. E.C. Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment: Food and the Sciences in Paris, 1670-1760* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 113.

⁶Kors, *Atheism in France*.

⁷ Hans Sedlmayer, *Le siècle du Rococo. Art et Civilisation du XVIIème. Siècle: Quatrième exposition sous les auspices du conseil de l'Europe 15 juin - 15 septembre 1958. exh. cat.* (Munche: Hermann Rinn, Munchner Buch, 1958), 27.

ideological convergence between chinoiserie and natural history, which brings them into explicit contact with philosophical discourse.

It was the activities of Jesuit missionaries that exerted the strongest influence on contemporary French ideas about China. The Jesuits had been the first missionaries to make substantial inroads with the Chinese court, and because of their diplomatic success, they had a strong interest in depicting Chinese culture, and Confucianism in particular, as a highly developed moral system, which was essentially Christian in character, and thus susceptible to conversion from within. They translated Confucian texts, and produced interpretations that emphasized the congruence between Confucian ideas about divinity and the dogma of the Catholic Church.⁸ These efforts intensified in the face of a controversy raised by other orders within the church regarding the Jesuit integration of Confucian rites into Catholic practices. Although the motives were largely political, the argument turned around philosophical debates as to whether Confucianism could be characterized as properly monotheistic.⁹

Opponents of the Jesuits within the Church quickly associated Confucianism with atheism and particularly with Spinozism, which was recognized at the time as the most dangerous contemporary philosophical attack on theology. Nicholas Malebranche's *Entretien d'un philosophe chretien et d'un philosophe chinois sur l'existence et la nature de Dieu* (1707), was

⁸ Thierry Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum philosophus (1687): the first translation of the confucian classics* (Rome: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011).

⁹ Kors, *Atheism in France*.

probably the most widely read anti-Jesuit response. Malebranche maintained that Confucian concepts of a unified divinity were not metaphysical in the Christian sense, but rather suggested a single, all pervasive animating force with no clear distinction between soul and matter, or between god and the universe. This was essentially the epistemology proposed by Spinoza - *Deus sive Natura* - and maintained by later French Enlightenment philosophers either as a form of deism or in the more radical cases, atheism.

Malebranche was arguably one of the foremost Catholic authorities on Spinoza, but his knowledge of China was limited and entirely second hand. Despite never mentioning Spinoza, the work was quickly recognized by his Jesuit adversaries as an attack on them, couched in a veiled comparison between Confucianism and Spinozism. He later admitted in a letter to Fénelon that he had no intention to enter into the Chinese Rites controversy, but had been pressured into publishing the *Conversation* by his more polemically minded colleague, who had been the source of his characterization of Confucianism. He had naively hoped that rather than stirring debate over China, it would help to combat what he saw as an increasingly entrenched Spinozism in Europe.¹⁰

Comparisons of Confucianism and Spinozism first appeared in libertine literature in the 1660s. Early friends and admirers of Spinoza such as Sir William Temple, Saint-Evremond, and Isaac Vossius, all developed a degree

¹⁰ David E. Mungello "Malebranche and Chinese Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1980): 551-578, see p.561

of sinophilia based on parallels they perceived between Confucianism and their own Spinozist, atheist and Epicurean libertinism.¹¹ It was Pierre Bayle who later addressed the comparison most directly, though with mixed intentions. Bayle was capitalizing on the Chinese Rites controversy to press the argument for atheism as a sustainable basis for moral and social order; he was, in other words, more concerned with disempowering the Church than with substantiating his interpretations of Confucianism. Like Malebranche, he asserted that both Confucianism and Spinozism laid their epistemological foundations on a non-metaphysical concept which makes God immanent to Nature, and therefore grounds the order of nature in the manifest physical realm rather than in a separate and transcendent intelligence.¹²

The comparison was of interest to atheist, materialist and libertine thinkers of the European enlightenment in part because it lent Spinozism a tremendously practical sense of authority. That such ideas had gained wide acceptance in China as well as elsewhere in Asia led many to speculate on the universal applicability of Spinoza's philosophy, even suggesting that it might in a sense be man's *natural* mode of thought.¹³ At the same time, the prolonged success of Chinese civilization stood as proof of the possibility of a moral and social order not beholden to divine revelation, and thus to the authority of the Catholic Church.

¹¹ Jonathan I. Israel, "Admiration of China and Classical Chinese Thought in the Radical Enlightenment (1685-1740)" *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (June, 2007), 1-25.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Bayle's assessment was repeated by writers such as Jean Levésque de Burigny in his *Histoire de la philosophie payenne* (1724), André-François Boureau-Deslandes in his *Histoire critique de la philosophie* (1737), Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens in his *Lettres Chinoises* (1739),¹⁴ and perhaps most importantly by Nicolas Fréret, whose observations were based on extensive correspondence with missionaries, and his own intensive studies of both the written Chinese language and Chinese history, which were published over the course of several decades between 1715 and 1739.¹⁵ Fréret's analysis was far more sophisticated than most, and thus less attached to the comparison with Spinozism. He nonetheless maintained the basic contours of the argument set forth by Bayle, replacing Spinozism with the more precise attribution of *hylozoism*, which conceives of a general and unified animating force pervading all material existence.¹⁶ Even authors supporting the Jesuit position, such as Leibniz, who published *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois* in 1716, presented Chinese theology as having developed in relation to natural principles rather than a scriptural adherence to revelation,¹⁷ and these were precisely the kinds of arguments presented by Diderot in his *Pensées Philosophiques*, and other less radically atheistic philosophes who tasked themselves with wresting the moral high

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Voltaire Foundation. *Nicolas Fréret, Légende et Vérité: Colloque Des 18 et 19 Octobre 1991, Clermont-Ferrand*. Edited by Chantal Grell and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷ Mungello, "Malebranche and Chinese Philosophy," 575-7.

ground from what they perceived as the irrational dictates of scriptural authority.

The perceived libertinism of Chinese philosophy was deeply linked to deist and atheist accounts of the natural order, and in this sense it marked a profound rupture with the conventional Christian world view. This rupture was closely tied to the philosophical and theological aspects of libertinism, which were aimed at expanding individual agency by redefining the relationship between natural and political order. China came to represent a kind of irreconcilable exception, a disruption in the closed system of religious and political authority. It was a reminder that the old order was losing traction.

Most of the texts published in the context of the Chinese Rites scandal were available chez Gersaint: the works of Temple, St. Evremond, Bayle, Levésque de Burigny, Boureau-Deslandes, the marquis d'Argens; as well as many of the travel accounts published by the Dutch and most of the Jesuit literature on China. The comprehensiveness of this aspect of Gersaint's library suggests that not only was he a purveyor of material goods from China, but of ideas about China as well, and to the extent that the interest in these overlapped and reinforced each other, we can perhaps re-read that phrase on the trade card designed for him by Boucher - *generally all things curious and foreign* - in another light. More than a simple reification of the privileges of expanding trade and a loosely articulated sense of worldliness, the convergence of chinoiserie and natural history emblemized in Boucher's

trade card for Gersaint carried substantial philosophical resonances. Under the sign of the aesthetic, it marked the permeability of the natural order to radical difference, and a fashionable willingness to plunge headlong into a new world.

XVIII. Libertinism and Natural History

It was not only by way of China that French natural history encountered the currents of contemporary libertinism. As we have seen, there were already traces of hylozoist tendencies in Fontenelle's brief foray into microscopic worlds in his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*.¹⁸ And the rise in popularity of microscopical viewing had been exercising a general destabilizing effect both on natural historical research as well as on popular understandings of the natural world. But in 1741, by which time the Parisian fashion for natural history was in full swing, the microscopical investigations of an independent Swiss naturalist named Abraham Trembley sent a shock of metaphysical speculation through the networks of public science, and quickly became the touchstone in a resurgence of materialist philosophical speculation.

Between the 22nd and the 25th of March, 1741, French academician René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur reproduced the experiments of Abraham

¹⁸ see Chapter 2 of this work, 112-3.

Trembley, demonstrating the remarkable regenerative capacities of the *Hydra*, or “polyp” as Reaumur would name it, for an audience of academicians as well as members of the court of Louis XV. Trembley had been collecting the polyp from the ponds of Sorgvliet in Holland, fascinated by the apparent contradiction between its plant like body, consisting of a kind of gelatinous stalk with a small opening from around which extend eight or ten branches, and its capacity to manipulate these branches in order to capture and deliver prey to its mouth-like orifice for digestion. Furthermore, in dissecting the polyp, he discovered that having been cut into pieces, each transformed into a new, fully formed polyp. This remarkable combination of the capacity for mobility characteristic of species in the animal kingdom, and the regenerative capacity of species in the plant kingdom confounded conventional categorical boundaries and raised inevitable metaphysical questions regarding the divisibility of the animal soul and the doctrine of preformation. Contrary to the dominant Cartesian theories, which located the soul in the head, it seemed that the soul of the polyp was active uniformly throughout its body, and that without any eggs or reproductive organs (where according to preformationist theories God's miniature preformed animals awaited birth), it could simply regenerate itself ad infinitum.

The Academy notes reporting on Réaumur's restaging of Trembley's experiment are uncharacteristically enthusiastic about the extraordinary regenerative properties of the polyp:

The story of the Phoenix who is reborn from its ashes, fabulous as it is, offers nothing more marvelous than the discovery of which we are going to speak. The chimerical ideas of Palingenesis or regeneration of Plants & Animals, which some Alchemists believed possible by the bringing together and reunion of their essential parts, only leads to restoring a Plant or an Animal after its destruction; the serpent cut in half, & which is said to be rejoined, gives but one & the same serpent; but here is Nature which goes farther than our chimeras. From one piece of the same animal cut in 2, 3, 4, 10, 20, 30, 40, pieces & so to speak, chopped up, there are reborn as many complete animals similar to the first.¹⁹

Rarely does one encounter references to mythological creatures, alchemists and chimeras in the Academy notes, but the extent to which Trembley's discovery unsettled the fundamental frameworks of contemporary zoology could not be overstated. The report ends with this provocative call to interpretation:

We leave it to the reader to draw out the implications, & to follow the reflections & the new perspectives that such a phenomenon is capable of bringing to light on the generation of animals, on their extreme resemblance with Plants, & maybe on even more elevated issues.²⁰

News of the polyp spread quickly, and it soon became the most important topic of natural historical research throughout Europe.²¹ In the 6th volume of his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes* (1742), Réaumur

¹⁹ *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences avec les mémoires de mathématique et de physique tirés des registres de cette Académie* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1744), 33-4. Translation from Dawson, *Nature's Enigma*, 7-8. Dawson points to these passages to illustrate the same sense of radical novelty among members of the *Académie*, as does Vartanian in Aram Vartanian, "Trembley's Polyp, La Mettrie, and Eighteenth-Century French Materialism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 11, no. 3 (June 1, 1950): 259-286.

²⁰ *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences*, 35.

²¹ Marc Ratcliff, "Abraham Trembley's Strategy of Generosity and the Scope of Celebrity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century." *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004): 572.

dedicated a substantial portion of the introduction to discussing the polyp, expressing both the fundamental challenge that the polyp introduced for zoology, and particularly for embryology, as well as his own profound and ongoing sense of shock and disbelief upon witnessing its regenerative properties, despite having conducted the experiment hundreds of times.²² Réaumur was well aware of the potential metaphysical implications of these discoveries, and indeed he raised them directly, but he also immediately cautioned against the actual pursuit of such questions, which he deemed beyond the realm of the physical sciences.²³ Réaumur used the authority of his position to impose a strict censure on metaphysical speculation in scientific discussions, but news of the polyp was already enormously popular in the cafés and salons, where the most radical implications of Trembley's experiments fueled the materialist and atheist speculations, which would later appear in the works of authors such as La Mettrie, Maupertuis, Buffon, and Diderot.²⁴

The first to publish a work that capitalized on the subversive implications of the polyp's regenerative capacities was the esteemed academician, Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis. It is a work whose style and content reflects the complex interrelations of scientific discourse with the broader social and public sphere of literary production, polite conversation,

²² René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, *Memoires Pour Servir À l'Histoire Des Insectes* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1742), liv, lv.

²³ *Ibid.*, 396, 639

²⁴ Ratcliff, "Abraham Trembley's Strategy of Generosity", 562-6.

and clandestine libertine philosophy. First published anonymously in 1744 under the title *Dissertation physique à l'occasion de Nègre Blanc*, and then republished the following year under the title *Venus Physique*, the essay sets out to explain the process of generation in such a way as to account for the existence of a young albino boy who was born to dark-skinned parents. The boy was brought to Paris in 1744, and toured a number of private salons, where he was displayed as a kind of 'natural curiosity'.²⁵

The first edition hardly touched on the albino boy, and later editions discussed him briefly in added chapters on hereditary abnormalities, or 'monstrosities' as they were commonly referred to at the time. But popular interest in the albino boy was in large part a pretext for advancing the central theoretical concern of the work, which was to displace the dominant preformationist model of generation. It was the example of the polyp that led Maupertuis into the furthest reaches of speculation, where he developed a kind of erotic, materialist ontology that proposed desire as the fundamental vital principle, animating everything from the microscopic scale of the smallest living particle to the macroscopic order of human civilization.²⁶

Despite Maupertuis' considerable theoretical intentions, the work was not addressed to an academic audience. Indeed, Réaumur's injunction had pushed speculative theoretical reflection on the polyp into the less

²⁵ For a discussion of the implications of Maupertuis' text on the history of race see Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 90-95.

²⁶ Mary Terrall, "Salon, Academy, Boudoir: Generation and Desire in Maupertuis's Science of Life," in *ISIS: Journal of the History of Science in Society*, Vol. 87 Issue 2, (June, 96), 216.

conservative terrain of café and salon conversation, and Maupertuis' text was aimed at this audience where it would surely be encountered by academicians, but in the context of a broader literary culture whose tastes were less influenced by concerns with propriety.²⁷ The style of the prose shifts between conventional academic exegesis and an exaggerated gallantry, which pushes the model developed by Fontenelle in his *Entretiens* to almost pornographic extremes.²⁸ Much like Fontenelle, he addresses the text to a lady, makes overtures to her beauty and apologies for the occasionally gratuitous detail of his discourse. At the same time, he opens his discussion of generation with a paean to the incomparable pleasures of consummated desire, which borrows its more colorful euphemisms from the language of contemporary pornography.²⁹ Here, innuendo is more than a humorous acknowledgment of prurient undertones in an otherwise scholarly discussion on generation, though anything less would likely have been considered witless and overly pedantic in the conversational context for which the book was written.³⁰ Ultimately, Maupertuis is interested in leveraging natural historical facts to develop a new theory of generation which makes desire the underlying continuity and organizing principle of organic life - essentially to make desire the fundamental law of nature.

²⁷ Daniel Mornet, *French Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, tr. Lawrence Levin (Hamden, Conn. : Archin Books 1969), 27-28.

²⁸ Terrall, "Salon, Academy, Boudoir," 216.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁰ Daniel. *French Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 27-29.

After reviewing the conventional explanations of the process of generation, Maupertuis proposes to loosen the ossifications of simple analogical reasoning that underlie them by delivering a short dissertation on the extraordinary variety of mating rituals in the animal kingdom. His tone mocks the expressions of pious wonder which had become characteristic of popular natural history texts, and stages the observations of the naturalist as a kind of prurient voyeurism.

The impetuous bull, proud of his strength, doesn't bother with caresses: he throws himself immediately onto the heiffer, and penetrates deeply into her entrails where he spills forth the liquor of fecundity. The turtle dove announces his love in gentle cries: a thousand kisses, a thousand little pleasures precede the last ...³¹

Simultaneously titillating and amusing, the insinuation of an anthropomorphized pleasure shifts the position of the reader from passive observer to vicarious voyeur. The author describes the timidity of the fish who fertilizes the female eggs only after she has set them down somewhere - a sure sign, he suggests, of the fish's extreme sensitivity to pleasure, which requires only a glance to encounter the necessary *jouissance* to fulfill his reproductive duties.³² The dragon flies are the great exhibitionists of the animal kingdom, attaching themselves and then taking flight and leaving themselves to the wind. As the mating rituals increasingly diverge from the simplicity of coupling that sets the theologically approved standard for generation, their

³¹ Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, *Venus Physique* (Paris, 1745), 70.

³² Maupertuis, *Venus physique*, 74.

seeming perversities are relished as marvels and wonders of nature. The mating rituals of bees are compared to a matriarchal seraglio in which the males are subjected to total massacre at the hands of the eunuch worker bees after satisfying the queen. He describes the growth of a spikey barb that accompanies the hermaphroditic mating of snails, which might be used to spur the otherwise passive animals into a state of excitation, and this launches him on a tangent about certain humans who require similar forms of stimulation. Finally, the polyp emerges as the most perplexing and perverse of marvels, whose regenerative capacity is distributed everywhere throughout its body, and Maupertuis muses on the pleasure that the polyp might receive when it is cut into pieces.³³

It is not only in the gratuity of detail and the repetition of certain euphemisms that Maupertuis' readership would have recognized the allusion to pornographic literature. The theme of the voyeur, the progressive complexity of the act of pleasure, and the naturalization of sexual desire wielded as an affront to dogmatic religious beliefs - these were all conventions of the pornographic novel, which was finding a resurgence in Paris in the 1740s.³⁴ The polyp, whose regenerative capacities are at the far end of the spectrum of natural marvel in Maupertuis' abridged encyclopedia of mating rituals, also displays the deepest perversities of pleasure. And in the

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁴ P. M. Cryle, *La Crise Du Plaisir: 1740-1830* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2003), 8-9. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1996).

conclusion, the ubiquity of its animating force becomes an analogy for the political organization of a republic, opposed to the centrality of the head in a monarchical political body.³⁵ The aesthetic momentum of natural wonder is here repurposed as an ideological solvent, which plays on the recursive exchange of erotic energies and reconfigurations of natural and social order.

While those operating within the official channels of natural historical research increasingly shielded themselves from the controversial implications of the polyp's peculiar regenerative capacities, libertine philosophical speculations took these implications to their logical extreme. Maupertuis was not alone in staging his interest in the polyp in the explicitly shared context of libertine eroticism and anti-authoritarian religious and political philosophy. La Mettrie also enthusiastically embraced the polyp as a powerful example in his own hedonistic and vitalist philosophy, and in many respects he incorporated it into a far more comprehensive and fully committed materialism than had Maupertuis.³⁶ Their influence is apparent in later writings of materialists, most notably in Diderot's celebrated *Rêve de d'Alembert*, which perhaps articulates better than any other the imbrications of erotic and philosophical discourse that characterized contemporary libertinism. The polyp brought the giddy public fascination with the exoticisms of natural history into contact with the more radical strains of contemporary libertinism, where the aesthetic charge of the marvel and the monster collided with the erotic imaginary, and the polyp's

³⁵ Maupertuis. *Venus physique*, 113.

³⁶ For an analysis of Trembley's influence on La Mettrie see Aram Vartanian, "Trembley's Polyp," 259-286.

capacity to divide and repeat itself infinitely set loose a radical reconsideration of the role of desire in the natural order, and indeed of the very nature of material existence.

Diderot's *Reve* begins with precisely this central problem of materialist philosophy, how to get consciousness into matter without the animating principle of a transcendent God.

For if you put some principle of sensitivity or consciousness in its[God's] place, if you say that consciousness is a universal and essential attribute of matter, then you will have to admit that stones can think.³⁷

The figure of the thinking stone contains the basic cosmological principle of *D'Alembert's Dream*. On one side the stone is the absolute point of inert, inorganic matter, and on the other side thought is the movement of the soul. Between these two poles Diderot weaves a continuous fabric, which overflows its container precisely by making the distinctions between matter and mind close in on themselves.³⁸ There is no absolutely inert matter. Between the movement of organic matter and the seeming inertia of a stone there are only differences in speed, differences and speeds which are themselves constantly interacting. Between the movement which animates the micro-organism and the movement which animates the mind there are simply differences of complexity and organization but not differences of kind.

³⁷ Denis Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream*, published in *Rameau's Nephew and other works*. tr. Jacques Barzun and Ralph Bowen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1964), 92.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

- a fabric of sensitive matter assimilated to the other one by the contact between them – so you have active sensitivity here, inert matter there, and the sensitivity communicates itself just as motion does.³⁹

Contact communicating sensitivity; this is touch figured as the primary mode by which matter organizes itself into consciousness, the fundamental tactility which brings empiricism into a fully committed materialism. The process of organization is reproduced in a thought experiment through the metaphor of a swarm of bees. If the entirety of the matter in the universe is a great swarm of bees, then the unity of an individual creature is like a cluster of bees, each particle linked to the other just as the bees connect to each other by their legs and feet.⁴⁰ This same metaphor of the cluster describes through analogy how the organs of the human body are distinct animals held together by a unifying principle.⁴¹ Having constructed a living being out of a cluster of sensitive particles, the thought experiment reverses itself. The cluster of bees is carefully dissected. In the process the bees become infinitely small, and the cluster reproduces itself at decreasing orders of magnitude. As the bees descend to a molecular scale, the cluster is transformed into a polyp.

At the invocation of the polyp, *D'Alembert's Dream* becomes a meditation on the nature of reproduction, inverting the theory of preformation by making a human polyp that divides itself into an infinity of tiny men, and proposing a proto-darwinian evolution, by which one species is simply the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

breeding ground for another which has yet to be.⁴² Just as the figure of man is toppled from his place in the great chain of being, the name of another early natural scientist punctuates the text of the *Dream*, John Needham, whose theory of spontaneous generation was heavily influenced by research on the polyp and widely discussed in the early 1750s. In *D'Alembert's Dream* it triggers the rhetorical center point of the text.

In Needham's drop of water everything is over and done with in an instant. In the world the same phenomenon occupy little more time; but what is our human lifetime in comparison with the infinite duration of the universe? Less, surely, than this drop, which I take on the point of a needle, is in comparison with the boundless space that surrounds us. You have an infinite succession of tiny animals inside the fermenting atom, and the same infinite succession of tiny animals inside the other atom that is called Earth. Who knows how many races of animals preceded us? Who knows how many will follow the races that now exist? Everything changes, everything passes away – only the Whole endures. The world is perpetually beginning and ending; every moment is its beginning and end; there has never been any other kind of world and there will never be any other. In this immense ocean of matter there is not one molecule that is just like another, not one that is exactly like itself from one instant to the next. *Rerum novus nascitur ordo* – a new order of things is born – this is the unchanging device of all that is...⁴³

It is a moment at which the materialist cosmology becomes pure lyricism, a rhythmic invocation of alternating infinities of scale – the instant of time and the duration of the universe, the point of a needle and the boundlessness of space, the atom and the Earth, infinite change and infinite endurance, the stuttering paradox of perpetual beginning and ending, the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 114-116.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117.

singular immensity of the ocean and the infinite variation of the molecules which compose it. This insistent musicality drives the text to a fever pitch, and in this moment the dream transforms itself. Comically, but also in a pointedly rhetorical flourish, it literally becomes a wet dream. A new order of things is born.

Here the problem of recounting the philosophical content of the *Dream* as though it were just that, reaches an impasse, because it is something much more complex than a device to excuse the radicality of the material.

D'Alembert's Dream is constructed as a dialog, and the structure of the dialog is invested at every turn with inserting the content of its discourse into the materialist vision of the world that it produces. In other words, rather than constructing the systematic legibility of a treatise, the text itself becomes a kind of resonant fabric, which touches the reader in every sense of that word.

The preface to Condillac's *Treatise on the Sensations* displays this same insistence, albeit in a much less elegant form, when he suggests that it is of utmost importance that the reader put themselves *exactly* in the place of the statue that serves as the armature of the treatise.⁴⁴ In this way, as Condillac describes the arrival of the senses in the body of the statue, the reader is compelled to experience that arrival vicariously. If the materialist understanding of thought is that it emerges from the senses, then a materialist text must aspire to operate on the senses. And if in the materialist view touch

⁴⁴ Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Traité des sensations, à Madame la Comtesse de Vassé, par M. L'Abbé de Condillac, de L'Académie Royale de Berlin. Ut potero, explicabo: nec tamen, ...* (A Londres [i.e. Paris?], M.DCC.LIV. [1754]), iv.

is the primary sense perception, a text which proposes to demonstrate that thesis must engage the tactile imagination of its reader to the same end. At the opposite pole from Condillac in terms of a certain blunt lack of elegance, would be the pornographic text, which produces the crudest possible conjugation of a text becoming tactile, what were often called, "*ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une main.*"⁴⁵

But the elegance of Diderot's text is not that he literalizes the masturbation of one of his characters, neither is the specificity of that rhetorical moment a singular eruption of erotic content. The text is endlessly punctuated with the kind of ellipsis, interruptions and shifts of address, which dramatize the polyphony of dialog as a rhythmic series of openings and closings, literally producing the fabric of the text, and inviting the reader to become a part of that fabric. If, on the one hand, the scene of D'Alembert's *jouissance* signals in the form of the *petit mort* the disintegration of man and of the order of the universe and at the same time the possibility of their (re)generation, it is also the moment at which the separate voices in the text become indistinguishable, and this eroticized moment of transference, when two voices become one, analogizes the movement of consciousness from text to reader.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "these books the we read with only one hand." see the book by the same title, Jean Marie Goulemot, *Ces Livres Qu'on Ne Lit Que D'une Main: Lecture Et Lecteurs De Livres Pornographiques Au XVIIIe Siècle*. Collection De la pensée (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1991). For more on the resurgence in publication of pornography in the 1740s see Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*.

⁴⁶ Wilda Anderson, *Diderot's Dream* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 67.

Certainly the distance from the aesthetics of the shell collection to the peculiar, libertine erotics of the polyp would seem to be so great as to make their mutual relation to natural history little more than an historical detail, and their coexistence on the shelves of Gersaint's shop a matter of eclecticism rather than convergence. The polyp was never an object of aesthetic contemplation in the way that shells were, for instance. But in many respects the polyp is not an object so much as it is a shock to thought. It insists that thought radically reconsider its relation to matter and to sensation, and in this sense it is an aestheticization of thought, which shares a certain sensibility with the aestheticization of natural history. At the same time it decouples the old metaphors of reproduction that link eros to fecundity. It sets fecundity loose, so that it proliferates without recourse to the systems of paternity that regulate the old order. The polyp compels thought across this newly expansive imaginary, which mutates, repeats, disintegrates and recombines. This fluidity is starkly reminiscent of the material movements of the printed image, and of the semiotic promiscuity of ornament under the influence of the Rococo. Indeed, the pleasure of the collector in his cabinet was as much to put things in their place as it was to intermingle, to reconfigure, even to produce a careful jumble of forms and objects. The Rococo imaginary borrowed its hybridity from the grotesque, but in as much as it coincided with the currents of contemporary libertinism, the polyp resituated that hybridity under the sign of a radical eroticism.

Chapter 5: The Nymphs

XIX. Andromeda

We have seen that in his work as an ornamentalist Boucher experimented with pushing ornamental forms toward pictorial ends by hybridizing ornamental and pictorial logics. But it is not yet clear how he transposed these experiments into higher genres of pictorial production, under what circumstances such a transposition would have found a logic of its own, or if that logic would have correspondences in the broader epistemological backdrop to which the previous chapters have been dedicated to exploring. There is not a singular work that demonstrates a comprehensive answer to this question; rather there are a series of approaches that probe the problem under different pictorial circumstances. One unifying feature, however, is the centrality of the figure in Boucher's painterly practice. Unlike his production as an ornamentalist, in which the presence of figures is fully subordinated to the ornamental forms in which they are bound, in his paintings, Boucher's figures carry the weight of psychic projection and allegorical reference that the conventions of narrative painting bestow upon them. Indeed, these two modes are seemingly so perfectly opposed that one wonders what motivations Boucher might have found for combining them. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is not in a painting, but in a very early print that the germ of this motivation is to

be found.

The September, 1734 issue of the *Mercure Galant* advertised the sale of Gabrielle Huquier's first print after a design by François Boucher, titled *Andromède*.¹ (fig. 5-1). It depicts the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus, described in the closing verses of the fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.² Historians have suggested that Boucher's composition follows directly from the 1723 painting of the same subject by François Lemoine (fig 5-2).³ Both images feature the same vertical format, with nude Andromeda chained to a cliff face in the right half of the picture, Perseus in flight, bearing his shield and drawn sword in the upper left, and Cetus menacing skyward from the turbulent seas depicted in the lower left corner.

It would have been typical of an engraving such as Boucher's to be designed as a reproduction of a painting, as this was considered one of the foremost values of engraving at the time.⁴ Writings which addressed the topic, such as Roger de Piles' *De l'utilité des Estampes*, or Voltaire's *Temple du Gout*, celebrated above all engraving's capacity to reproduce great works of art, expanding their viewership and guaranteeing them for posterity.⁵ Boucher's time as a student of Lemoine also makes it all the more likely that

¹ *Mercure de France* (September, 1734), 2026.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. Anthony S. Kline, (Ann Arbor, MI: Borders Classics, 2004). 4:663-764.

³ Collection Edmond de Rothschild. *L'œuvre Gravé De François Boucher Dans La Collection Edmond De Rothschild* (Paris: Éditions des musées nationaux, 1978), 79.

⁴ George Levitine, "French Eighteenth-Century Printmaking," 13.

⁵ Roger de Piles, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres*, 79. And Voltaire, *Temple du Gout* (Rouen : Jore, Chez Heriosme à l'enseigne de la Verité, 1733).

he would have known and appreciated the work of his former teacher. But a number of details complicate this account.

The *Mercure* announcement makes no mention of Lemoine; it is rather Boucher's talents as a painter and status as a member of the *Académie Royale de Peinture* which are celebrated. This is in marked contrast to the typical emphasis placed on the original work, evident in the previous announcement on the same page, which makes a concerted effort to address both the quality and provenance of the original painting on which the advertised engraving is modeled, as well as the skill of the engraver as a copyist. It is clear that the Boucher engraving is presented not as a reproduction, but as an image in its own right, and the engraving itself confirms this degree of autonomy, as it is far from producing the kind of facsimile that was standard for reproductions of paintings. It varies in a number of notable respects from Lemoine's painting; enough that despite the conventionally subordinate status of the medium of engraving, Boucher's picture could be considered as much experimental as derivative.

The *Andromeda* print is an anomaly among Boucher's designs for Huquier, and among his designs for the print market in general, which were always presented in sets consisting of ornamental and decorative motifs. These were part of that repertoire of design motifs that targeted the needs of artists and artisans producing luxury goods and architectural decor, which also appealed to the growing base of amateurs and collectors whose desires for

novel forms and increasingly encyclopedic collections were beginning to impact the print market.⁶ Boucher's *Andromède* seems to have been aimed somewhere between the more conventional market for intaglio reproductions of masterworks and this burgeoning fascination with ornamental and pictorial ingenuity that precipitated the popular success of Rococo ornamental prints. It thus brings into focus a number of compelling points of contact between the conventions of academic painting and innovations in contemporary ornament design, which make it an unusual and compelling sketch or *essais* on the Perseus and Andromeda theme.

The fundamental pictorial reference is Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda* (fig. 5-3). One of his *poesie*, painted for King Phillip II of Spain in 1554-6, Titian's picture initiated the sub-genre of the mythological nude in peril, and was part of a matrix of Venetian painting that brought explicitly erotic themes into the high genre of narrative mythological painting.⁷ Titian foregrounds the sensual appeal of Andromeda's body much as he had in his earlier reclining nudes, but adjusts her posture to engage with the narrative energy of the heroic drama unfolding behind her.

Although they draw on this fundamental thematic structure, the arrangement of figures in both Lemoine's painting and Boucher's engraving, are closer to Veronese's reprise of the late 1570s (fig. 5-4), which stages

⁶ See section titled "A convenient and curious voyage" in Chapter 2: Ornament and the Origins of the Rococo Picture, 80.

⁷ David Rosand, "Tactile Vision," in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston; New York, N.Y.: MFA Publications ; D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009).

Andromeda on the right and flips the orientation of Perseus' body, such that his head and torso extend toward the viewer rather than away, bringing the narrative action into the foreground. Despite this marked similarity, neither Lemoine nor Boucher were precisely copying Veronese's painting in the way for instance that Natoire would do in 1735.⁸ Rather, they develop variations on the postures and relations between the figures in order to modulate the interaction of formal and narrative tension. Tracking these variations brings their pictorial effects into sharper focus, and underscores the ways in which these images respond both to the momentum of iconographic convention as well as to a shifting engagement with the Ovidian narrative.

In Veronese's composition Perseus twists his torso to the left, raising the sword in his right hand over his left shoulder such that his elbow is tightly bent. The shield attached to his left arm points skyward and his glance turns across his right shoulder to look straight down at Cetus below him. His legs float behind him, radically foreshortened, so that his bent knees and elbows form a pinwheel of torqued energy. Andromeda's torso, neck and arms follow the rigid diagonals of Perseus' limbs and sword, and she too glances downward over her right shoulder at Cetus. Her palms are open signaling fright, but her entire body is fixed like a hieroglyph of the unfolding action. Cetus aims toothy jaws and claw tipped wing aloft toward Perseus, and in the sfumato background between the two, is the silhouette of the city whose

⁸ Painting is in the Musée Saint-Loup, Troyes.

destiny, like that of Andromeda, hangs in the balance.

Lemoine follows Veronese's frontal arrangement and clarity of detail, but by placing Cetus in the extreme lower left corner, Lemoine brings the struggle between Perseus and the sea monster further into the foreground than had Veronese, such that the entirety of the narrative energy occupies the same relative space of the image. Andromeda's body arcs away from Cetus. The curve of her arms above her head accentuates the spiral of water breaking against the rocks at her feet and following her upturned gaze, extends toward the curved blade of Perseus' sword. Cetus' open jaws are turned away from the viewer such that we see the top and back of its head, and Perseus' torso is turned toward us, with his sword raised above his head in his right hand, and round shield attached to his left arm pointing downward. The narrative energy of the image circulates smoothly between the three bodies rather than ricocheting across diagonals as it does in the Veronese. In the position of her legs, the arc of her arms and also in the way in which her face turns slightly toward the viewer and her eyes turn upward toward Perseus, Lemoine's depiction of Andromeda recalls Titian's, and similarly emphasizes the beauty and anguish of Andromeda's exposed body.

Boucher's composition intensifies Lemoine's compression of narrative energy into the foreground by bringing not only the figures, but the entire material support of the pictorial space as close to the picture plane as possible. Cetus has become a feathery swirl of head, fins, and tail, blending into the

jagged spiral spray of the turbulent sea against the rocks at Andromeda's feet. The drapery that hangs behind Andromeda against the cliff face is as animate as the sea below, and it echoes the extension of her outstretched palm and fluttering hair at an angle which reaches down toward Cetus. Perseus floats in the far upper left corner. His arms follow Veronese's composition but the rest of his body is almost completely obscured by a billow of cloud so that the curve of his blade and shield only faintly accentuate the characteristic spiral of the composition. Unlike the Veronese, in which the energy of the image ratchets out from the torsion of Perseus' body and the perpendicular line of tension that it forms with the upturned jaws of Cetus, Boucher's image accentuates the animation of pliable forms – the coiled surface of the sea, the billowing folds of drapery, even the curls of Andromeda's tousled hair – as resonant material expressions of narrative energy, and as a compositional technique which brings that energy resolutely from the arrangement of expressive bodies to the texture and animation of mutable surfaces.

Following Titian, all of the images take the Ovidian narrative as a pretext to dramatize the relation of heroic action and erotic gaze, to bifurcate the spectator's attention, as it were, around two points in the text. The first is Perseus' recognition of the beauty of Andromeda, and the second is the battle between Perseus and Cetus. Both points turn on seeing and not seeing.

Ovid describes the beauty of Andromeda only once. We see her through the eyes of Perseus;

As soon as Perseus, great-grandson of Abas, saw her fastened by her arms to the hard rock, he would have thought she was a marble statue, except that a light breeze stirred her hair, and warm tears ran from her eyes. He took fire without knowing it and was stunned, and seized by the vision of the form he saw, he almost forgot to flicker his wings in the air.⁹

Notice her beauty is already that of marble, frozen except for the wind in her hair and the warmth of her tears. The vision of that beauty is stunning. It stops Perseus, “seized by the image of that beautiful form.” In the original Latin, *visae correptus imagine formae* – a phrase which appears also in book three, at the moment when Narcissus sees his reflection. Beauty is thus always already represented as image in the *Metamorphoses*. It has stopping power, but also the power to incite action. Perseus only *almost* forgets to move.

Instead he fights Cetus, saves Andromeda, and the City.

It was as far from the rock as a Balearic sling can send a lead shot through the air, when suddenly the young hero, pushing his feet hard against the earth, shot high among the clouds. When the shadow of a man appeared on the water’s surface, the creature raged against the shadow it had seen. As Jupiter’s eagle, when it sees a snake, in an open field, showing its livid body to the sun, takes it from behind, and fixes its eager talons in the scaly neck, lest it twists back its cruel fangs, so the descendant of Inachus hurling himself headlong, in swift flight, through empty space, attacked the creature’s back, and, as it roared, buried his sword, to the end of the curved blade, in the right side of its neck.¹⁰

Here, monstrous vision is false vision. Cetus sees only shadows of Perseus, but Perseus sees with the eyes of Jupiter’s eagle. He slices through

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4:663-705.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

empty space, his blade marking the distance between false vision and true. Perseus transforms erotic vision into heroic vision, stasis into action, pleasure into virtue. Perhaps it is Veronese who renders this most faithfully, when he transforms the arched back and open chest of Titian's *Andromeda* into a system of compressed angles that deflect the viewer toward the diagonal of Perseus' sword. Lemoine softens this element; shifting back towards the circularity of Titian's treatment, while the frontality of his arrangement and clarity of detail stabilize the image so that Perseus seems to be suspended by the compositional arc rather than motivating it, and the heroic and erotic drives complement each other in a kind of muted scopic harmony.

Boucher's *Perseus* is almost invisible. He has no clear line of intention, staged as he is behind a cloud that completely obscures the cityscape over which he conventionally hovers protectively. While the cloud figures the invisibility of Perseus to Cetus, with his arm and helmet covering his eyes, it would seem almost as though Perseus were the blind one in Boucher's rendering. All of the drama is unfolding between Cetus in the raging sea and *Andromeda* couched in her electrified wardrobe. This interface between oceanic monstrosity and erotic availability is all the more peculiar for the extent to which the energy of the exchange is transmitted almost entirely through the repetition of spiraling curves and counter curves, the emblem of which sits perched in the foreground almost like the crest of a wave crashing against the rocks; the spiral of a conch shell adorned with a branch of coral and a leaf of

seaweed. This detail, hardly noticeable at first, precisely because the rhythm of the entire composition has been extrapolated from it, is not unique to Boucher, but here it has almost completely saturated the formal system of the image in a way which generates a unique connection to the *Metamorphoses*.

According to Erwin Panofsky, it was Titian who first inserted a scatter of shells and coral in the foreground beneath Andromeda's feet.¹¹ This detail, along with the curvature of Perseus' sword, was of particular interest to Panofsky in asserting Titian's engagement with the original Ovidian text. Although Titian's composition, and those that follow his, simplify the narrative by focusing only on three figures, they do not, strictly speaking, isolate a single moment, generating pictorial unity from the illusion of spatio-temporal unity. Rather, they dramatize tensions that develop across distinct moments in the narrative. The depiction of shells and coral function more emblematically here than scenically, which is to say that rather than representing an element of the battle scene itself, they reference a temporally distinct moment in Ovid's telling of the story. It is worth looking closely at this passage, as it will shed some unexpected light on Boucher's *Andromède*.

Immediately after his victory, deciding to wash the blood of the sea monster from his hands, Perseus is forced to put down the head of Medusa, which he has been carrying in Hermes satchel. In an oddly gratuitous moment of detail, Ovid describes Perseus making a bed of seaweed to protect the

¹¹ Panofsky, Erwin. *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*. The Wrightsman Lectures v. 2. (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 167-8

Gorgon head from the rough sand. The blood dripping from the head ossifies the seaweed, making coral. Nymphs appear, and marveling at these strange plants which have transformed into precious stones, they are moved to spread the seeds of coral across the seas.¹²

This interlude functions as a point of transition, which allows Ovid to do a number of things. It reminds the reader of the Gorgon head, which Perseus did not use while battling the sea monster, but which he will shortly wield against a good portion of Andromeda's extended family, when her uncle Phineus shows up to try to reclaim her hand in marriage in the first part of book five. It also allows Ovid to return to the aetiological theme of the *Metamorphoses*; that is, to the explanation of the origins of worldly things.

Ovid's relationship to aetiology is not simple. He composed the *Metamorphoses* as a challenge to the generic conventions of epic poetry, which revolve around the theme of the hero and the quest, and tend to generate aetiologies of cultural forms, such as the foundations of cities, and the origins of the gods -Virgil's *Aeneid* is the primary example contemporary with Ovid. In this context aetiology has a conservative function, as it serves to reinforce the conventional systems of correspondence that link cosmologies with the social and political structures that use them as signals of authority.¹³

Ovid emerges as a force in Roman poetry amidst a current of anti-heroic sensibilities, favoring short forms and self-reflexive aesthetic refinement over

¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4:740-752.

¹³ Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1986), 67.

pomp and conventional narrative authority. He approaches the realm of natural philosophy as a potential middle ground for this refined anti-heroic style both to take up and to challenge the long form and aetiological credibility of epic poetry.

The *Metamorphoses* includes a substantial number of aetiological narratives that explain the origins of natural forms - the origin of dew, or of thunder and lightning, and of course, the origin of coral - and the language of these passages reflects Ovid's engagement with didactic poetry such as Lucretius' *De Rarum Naturum*.¹⁴ Natural philosophy offered alternate accounts of the origins and destiny of the material world, and in doing so challenged the traditional aetiological authority of epic poetry.

The *Metamorphoses* thus situates itself between these distinct sensibilities, borrowing and weaving together countervailing elements from each genre using intertextual and self-reflexive humor, and ultimately foregrounding the production of literary pleasure to harmonize the seemingly disjunctive vectors of the narrative. The origin of coral is particularly resonant in this respect, because it is completely incidental to the narrative in which it is framed. The mythological literally bleeds over onto the aetiological, as the blood of Medusa's head accidentally transforms the malleability and compliance of natural forms into the marvel of precious stone. Under the appreciative gaze of the sea nymphs, the monstrous gives form to the

¹⁴ K. Sara Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology In the "Metamorphoses"* (University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6..

beautiful.

The Gorgon head is at the center of another system of gazes which frame the story of Andromeda's rescue. To look at Medusa's head, even after Perseus has chopped it off, is to be turned to stone. Even as Perseus wields the head like a weapon against the treacherous Phineus, he speaks to him, saying that he will transform him into a statue commemorating his cowardice.¹⁵ Although it functions across different channels of vision – terror rather than beauty - this power of transformation is analogous to the holding power of the erotic gaze. Both reiterate the allegory of the iconic force of the image as the moment in which life is transformed into art, or within the literary context of the *Metmorphoses*, what could be called the aestheticization of vision. Perseus sees the beauty of Andromeda as though she were a statue, and then being frozen by that beauty, becomes like a statue himself – at least momentarily.

In the origin of coral story, the transformation of life into art revolves around the convergence of the beautiful and the marvelous, and their mutual capacity to fascinate, which is of course to be fastened in place, to be stopped. This kind of scopic effect is systematically at the center of Ovid's treatment of natural philosophy, and in this sense Ovid reiterates one of the primary rhetorical conventions of Lucretius' *De Rarum Naturum*, and much of the natural philosophy to come. But unlike Lucretius, who invokes the wonder of the natural world only in order to subject it to the exigencies of rational

¹⁵ Ovid 200-249

explanation, Ovid lingers on the pleasure of wonderment, weaving it into the literary pleasure that sustains his text.¹⁶

When Boucher obscures the hero and the polis in his *Andromède*, extrapolating his composition from the rough-hewn spiral beauty of the marine still life in the foreground figured as convergence of oceanic chimera and erotic availability, he is tapping into an element of the Ovidian ethos which would characterize a central element of his work for the rest of his career. Both worked across generic conventions to assimilate the refinement of lyrical forms into the grandeur of epic scale, and both turned to the popular appeal of natural philosophy though perhaps for radically different reasons. For Ovid, it was a way of re-routing the conventions of aetiological credibility in epic poetry. For Boucher it would begin to transpose a new pictorial idiom from the relatively low realm of decorative ornamental engraving into the upper echelons of academic painting.

The origin of coral has very rarely been taken up as a subject in European painting. Claude Lorrain produced a version of the Perseus narrative featuring the origin of coral in 1674 for Cardinal Camillo Massimo. Massimo also owned a preparatory drawing by Nicolas Poussin of the same subject, which was made in 1627, and likely served as an inspiration for the later painting. Neither of these images foregrounds the erotic display of Andromeda. Rather, judging by the interests of Massimo, these images deploy

¹⁶ K. Sara Myers, *Ovid's Causes*, 6.

the Ovidian narrative as a pretext for pictorializing intricately coded allegories based in stoic philosophy in a way which attenuates rather than emphasizes the erotic content of the myth.¹⁷ More closely related to Boucher's treatment is Giorgio Vasari's *Perseus and Andromeda* of 1570, which actually depicts nymphs collecting branches of coral from beneath Medusa's head and distributing them in the sea. While Vasari's is in no way a response to Titian's painting, and iconographically the image seems to be based more on a famously inaccurate translation of the *Metamorphoses* by Giovanni Anguillara published in 1561,¹⁸ the context for which Vasari's image was painted is closely related to what likely drew Boucher to the conchyological theme. Vasari's painting decorated the door of a cabinet in the *stanzino* of Francesco I de Medici's Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, which housed his collection of coral, shells, and other wonders of the sea.¹⁹

Whether or not Boucher was ever aware of the Vasari painting, his connection to the resurgence of natural history collection in Paris through figures such as Gersaint and d'Argenville, and the role he played in explicitly linking the emerging idiom of Rococo ornament to the project of popularizing shell collecting, frame his treatment of the Andromeda theme as an early pictorial expression of the aesthetic continuity driving this convergence.

¹⁷ Victoria Curtin. Gardner, "Cardinal Camillo Massimo, Nicolas Poussin, and Claude Lorrain: A Study of Neostoic Patronage in Baroque Rome" (PhD diss. University of Michigan, 1998), 200-201.

¹⁸ Philippe Morel, "La chair d'Andromède et le sang de Méduse, Mythologie et rhétorique dans le *Persée et Andromède* de Vasari" in *Andromède, ou, Le héros à l'épreuve de la beauté*. ed. F. Siguret and A. Laframboise (Louvre : Klincksieck, 1996).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Boucher's debt to contemporary ornament design is visible in *Anromède* in his unique treatment of certain details, such as the oddly foliated tail and dorsal arch of Cetus, as well as the rhythmic curves and jagged froth of the agitated ocean. And of course, we can see it in the spiral conch shell and coral of the marine still life in the foreground. These forms are pulled directly from the vocabulary of Rococo ornament, first widely popularized only six months earlier by the publication of Juste-Aurelle Meissonnier's *Livre d'ornemens* in March of 1734.²⁰ Coupling these novel ornamental forms to the figure of Andromeda, Boucher reroutes the Ovidian allegory of desire through this supplementary aetiological motif, folding the erotic impulse into the strange beauty of the sea.

It was not unusual in the context of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century collection for a Venus figure to personify the generalized desire of the senses for the objects of the world,²¹ and we have seen this sensibility repeated in the conchyological literature, where nature is personified as a mysteriously veiled woman, who reveals herself only partially, to make us desire her more,²² but Boucher's Andromeda print dramatizes the confrontation of monstrosity and beauty in a way which is uniquely suited to the Rococo. Bypassing the heroic drama of the conventional Venetian theme, Boucher's treatment proposes a hybridization of the scopic drive, which

²⁰ see Chapter 2 of this study for a discussion of Meissonnier's *Livre* and his connection to Boucher.

²¹ Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, 67-8.

²² d'Argenville. *L'histoire naturelle éclaircie*, 2.

capitulates to fascination, now no longer figured as the precursor or anti-thesis to action, like Perseus' seized by the image of Andromeda, or Phineus turned to stone by the gaze of Medusa, but as a lingering and expansive wonderment, like that of the Nymphs who marvel at the strange beauty of coral and spread its seeds throughout the sea.

The conventional relay between erotic desire and heroic action is short circuited, such that beauty is no longer subsumed into the patrimonial function of myth, rather it bleeds out into the world, it repeats itself, becomes expansive, becomes oceanic. This is ultimately the function of the nymph in Boucher's iconography. She multiplies desire, but she also unfixes it, makes it mobile. So that in this early print we already see the strange fluidity of Rococo ornament beginning to reconfigure the status of the body in the image, and this fluidity is rendered in relation to the body as an intensive and rhythmic field, measured in the agitation of the sea and the fluttering expansiveness of Andromeda's drapery. The dramatic energy is no longer contained in the contours of the erotic body, but amplifies and resonates across the material space of the image. Boucher treats drapery here as an auratic field which extends the expressive force of the figure, radiating out through curves and folds, flaring like the palms of her hands above and the crash of the waves below. Between Cetus and Andromeda the texture of the image pictures a kind of harmonic convergence of monstrosity and beauty, with the spiral shell as its emblematic form.

XX. Le Peintre des Voluptés

Boucher's treatment of the Andromeda scene is unique in its rhythmic imbrications of expressive figure and material ground, and this is a trope that he revisits and reconfigures consistently throughout his career as a painter. He never returns to the Andromeda theme, but this relationship between the erotic figure and a ground of vibrant materiality becomes a recurring feature of his treatment of the scene of scopic desire. A kind of equivalence emerges between this expansive, manifold ground, often registered in a swath of supporting drapery as a luxuriant overabundance of folds and creases, and the body itself, whose soft contours are delicately punctuated by muted folds. In her implicit role as surrogate Venus, the nymph becomes the mark of this equivalence, signaling the fluidity of scopic desire as it meanders and pools along bodies and surfaces.

This is rendered quite explicitly in the 1741 painting of *Leda and the Swan* (fig. 5-5), where rather than being intertwined with Jupiter in the form of a swan, Leda is intertwined with a nymph whose role is entirely of Boucher's invention. The conventional phallic inuendo of the swan's long neck is deferred by this enigmatic doubling of the erotic body, which turns into itself, expanding and repeating, so that the body becomes a flourish of curves and folds, interlaced by a diaphanous band of striped tissue, and couched in an expansive swath of coral taffeta, which bunches into cushiony creases. Leda

raises her hand in alarm, a movement mirrored by the outstretched wing of the swan, but neither Leda nor the nymph seems much disturbed by this intrusion. Rather, a radiant and dreamlike calm presides over the lounging figures. Their supine bodies press in casual embrace, the fluidity of their interlocking contours echoing in the creases and folds of fabric that support them.

In the 1730s Boucher was already widely praised for his masterful treatment of the erotic scene. Reviews of the Salon of 1737 called him the *peintre des voluptés*, and the following year Salon reviews of the series of overdoors he presented, including the *Trois Graces* for the Hotel de Soubize, mention his particular talent for painting women, and the extraordinary appeal he gives to them, which is reiterated in the seductiveness of his *coloris* and the graces of his brush. This displacement of the erotic charge from the literal content of the image to its form and execution recalls the persistence of De Pilesean aesthetics, which figures beauty as a moment of seduction, transforming, even distorting, the sensorium. For Boucher this displacement was never fully sublimated. Rather, it overflowed the iconic figure of beauty to become beauty as an effect of surfaces, both surfaces depicted within the image, and the surface of the image itself, literally, but also as a palpable sensation of the image as percept.

Boucher's chalk studies of female nudes demonstrate his consistent fascination with rendering the folds of cushion and fabric that supported his mostly reclining models with as much care and detail as the models

themselves. Even his rare studies of the standing female nude stage the body in relation to a formless mass of drapery. There is a certain practicality at work here. The Academy's life drawing courses were dedicated exclusively to the male nude. As a result, the female nude could only be studied in the privacy of the artist's studio. This meant that drawing from a female model was a totally unofficial practice, despite the consistent inclusion of paintings made from such drawings in Academy sponsored exhibitions. The lack of regulation affected everything from procuring models to staging postures to codifying anatomical norms.²³ Boucher's skill in depicting the female nude was thus also a sign of his facility with these extra-curricular tasks. The private scene of study seems also to have become an opportunity to experiment with less conventional arrangements of drapery. In Academy studies, drapery was minimal and modeled after the antique, but in Boucher's studies of the female nude the drapery is always more abundant, more like a bed than clothing.

A rare surviving detail of his time studying in Rome with Nicolas Vleughels casts some light on the kinds of formative studio practices which might have emboldened his experimentation with drapery. Vleughels encouraged his students to contrast their studies of the classical conventions of depicting drapery with a rigorous study of drawing drapery from life. As he described it:

The figures are draped naturally, sometimes partly nude and

²³ For a discussion of the necessarily private study of the female nude in eighteenth century France see Candace Clements, "The Academy and the Other: Les Grâces and Le Genre Galant," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25, no. 4 (July 1, 1992): 469–94,

partly dressed; we leave something to chance. We let things fall naturally, and this almost always produces new and marvelous things.²⁴

In its conventional iconographic role, drapery simplifies and idealizes form in the interest of situating the body within the structure of timeless and transcendent narrative. Releasing drapery from iconographic convention, Vleughels opened the possibility of searching out newly expressive forms. Very little of Boucher's work from his time in Rome remains, and certainly no specific work that could be attributed to this particular studio practice, but perhaps something of its effects are registered in an engraving made after a rare surviving drawing produced by Boucher in Rome of the Borghese Hermaphrodite (fig. 5-6). The rather sparse and placid drapery that supports the body and loops across the calf and one arm of the original sculpture, has been greatly augmented in Boucher's drawing, spilling off of the bed in his characteristically voluminous folds, and this effect is redoubled by another swath of drapery which forms the even more extravagantly billowing backdrop.

Whatever the practicalities of combining his studies of the recumbent nude with studies of drapery, the consistency with which Boucher deployed this combination in his finished compositions speaks to a deliberate thematic development of this underlying formal fascination. Michel Aubert's 1735 engraving made after Boucher's now missing painting of a sleeping Venus, shows another early experiment with rendering the nude immersed in a

²⁴ *Ibid*, 119.

depthless field of billowing forms (5-7). Perhaps no other image more explicitly and almost reductively illustrates the idea that the erotic structure of the Rococo image is linked to the systematic obfuscation of any definitive sense of space.

A similar painting of sleeping Venus survives in the *Musée Jacquemart-André* (fig. 5-8).²⁵ Eros is pictured looking coyly at sleeping Venus and fingering his arrow. In the background a bit of column emerges from behind the billowing backdrop of drapery, and at Venus's feet a silver tray holds a jewelry box overflowing with ribbon and strings of pearls. There is nothing architecturally specific in the arrangement of fabrics that make up Venus' bed. Rather, they form a secondary field of figuration, which celebrates the rendering of purely incidental surfaces in such a way as to form a counterpoint to the primary figure. Carefully rendered highlights, transform folds into delicate gradations, which mimic in amplified form the creases defining the back of Venus' knee, her arm as it meets her torso, and even the auricular folds of her ear. It is not simply that in this relation, the body is rendered explicitly as material form, but that materiality itself is vivified in response to the body, so that the gaze cannot come to rest on the sleeping Venus because there is no empty space in the image. The scopic field is overflowing, constantly pressing vision into motion.

In the early 1740s Boucher began to produce a series of very finely

²⁵ The Museum dates the painting to 1760, but Ananoff has dated it to 1735, and its very strong resemblance to the engraving after the same subject, which has been securely dated to 1735, makes Ananoff's dating more convincing. see Ananoff, *François Boucher*, 248.

finished cabinet pictures, for which he transposed this erotic formula, conjugating it into more complex compositions. Some of these took up subjects from gallant mythology, such as the aforementioned *Leda and the Swan* (1741), or *Diana Leaving the Bath* (1742), relatively simple compositions, which added secondary and tertiary figures, as well as simple, narrowly framed arcadian settings. The masterwork in this vein was *The Triumph of Venus* (1740) (fig. 5-9), a slightly larger composition whose intricacy was rarely repeated by Boucher at this scale. Here the figure of Venus is the crowning jewel in a beadwork of lounging nymphs, for which Boucher has leveraged the range of his studies of the female nude into a panoply of erotic display. These are interlaced with plump putti, dolphins, and swaths of billowing fabric, and punctuated by muscular tritons bearing conch shells, the largest of which becomes Venus' throne.

The Triumph is conventionally a procession, displayed as a somewhat chaotic array of bodies in motion, coordinated by a coherent underlying momentum. The fluttering loop of fabric above Venus is the conventional iconographic indicator of this transit, but here the lounging goddesses that surround her seem rather to be carried along by the elements than to display any movement of their own. Indeed if there is transport, for these nymphs it is internalized, as in the case of the foremost nymph in the procession, who is displayed in one of Boucher's most provocative postures, her legs open, her head thrown back toward us so that we look diagonally almost over her

shoulder at her exposed chest and belly in three-quarter view, and her rosey fingers meeting a feathery white dove positioned coyly at the base of her thigh. All around, the sea is in a state of agitation. Its surface becomes a play of textures, translucencies, gradations and arabesques capped with daubs of froth. It is the hand displaying its virtuosity as technique, the touch of the brush presenting itself as a mark at the surface. No longer fully sublimated in the transparency of representation, the ocean becomes the unconscious of the image.

During this same period Boucher produced a series of similarly small-scale, carefully finished cabinet pictures depicting contemporary domestic interiors, a subject which had yet to achieve a stable categorical status in the official academic hierarchy of genres. The relative looseness of codification meant that these pictures provided particularly rich opportunities for artists to experiment with generic boundaries, and their popularity among the expanding field of collectors and connoisseurs insured that ambitious artists had plenty of incentive to include them in their repertoire. For Boucher, these were occasion to display his accute tastes in contemporary fashion, from dress to interior decor, and thus to insinuate his handling of pictorial pleasure within the broader network of scopic desire that fueled contemporary sensibilities.

They range from scenes of charmed domesticity such as *The Morning Coffee* (1739) and *The Milliner* (1746), to more coquettish scenes such as *Woman Fastening her Garter* (1742) (fig 5-10), and *A Lady on her Daybed*

(1743) (fig. 5-11). The novelty of the genre has frequently led to interpretations of these paintings as simple illustrations of contemporary life, and even as portraits. *The Morning Coffee* has been said to depict Boucher and his family at breakfast. *Lady on a Daybed* has also been titled *Mme. Boucher*. But none of these assertions has sustained close scholarly scrutiny.²⁶ Rather, the images seem to take part in a similar sort of fictionalization of everyday life that has been attributed to Watteau's paintings. They resemble contemporary life, but they are rife with allusion and delicate circuits of formal play, by which they accede to a resolutely fictional status, and thus to a kind of playfulness which folds them back into contemporary sensibilities of sociability.²⁷

It is particularly in the more coquettish scenes that this playfulness is fully developed. Here Boucher transposes the focus of scopic desire across a series of objects and surfaces, so that the viewer is at once presented with the blunt fact of visual appeal, the voyeuristic titillation of a revealed moment of intimacy, and led across an endless and meandering series of displacements which draw the gaze out, attenuating and rerouting its pleasures, so that looking itself is inscribed within the composition.

Lady Fastening her Garter is constructed out of a series of narrow vertical planes, each offset and partially obscuring the other, so that they rhythmically invite and repel the gaze. The sharp angle of the firescreen jutting

²⁶ See Colin B. Bailey, "Marie-Jeanne Buseau, Madame Boucher (1716-96)" in *The Burlington Magazine* CXLVII (April 2005): 224-30. Also see Anne Dulau, "In Focus *Lady Taking Tea* and *Woman on a Daybed*" in *Boucher & Chardin: Masters of Modern Manners*. ed. Anne Dulau (Glasgow: Hunterian, University of Glasgow, 2008), 8-25.

²⁷ Crow has treated this topic in relation to Watteau. See Crow, *Painters and Public Life*. 63.

into the foreground on the far left converges acutely with the plane of the wall behind it, strongly marked by the horizontal of the mantel and planarity of the mirror above, which is immediately interrupted by the dark gap left by a partially open door. The angle of the door, accentuated by its vertical glass panes, forms another acute angle with the back wall, which, though largely obscured by the zigzag panels of a folding screen, is visible enough in the far upper right hand corner of the image to see it interrupted by a vertical strip of moulding, falling away into an ambiguous threshold marked by coarse vertical strokes. Even this almost incidental panel is interrupted by a final series of horizontal marks which suggest a distinct plane, leaving a tiny pale rectangle in the far corner of the image. Below, just in front of the screen, the up-angled surface of another mirror completes the circuit, as it matches the tilted posture of the standing figure, and even the angle of the chair back which disappears off the left edge of the composition.

The panels of the folding screen, intricately decorated in an avian themed chinoiserie motif, form an inset allusion to the structure of the image itself, which takes each successive plane as an exquisitely rendered composition, linked to the next by carefully placed detail. Both also play on the trope of opening and closing, folding and unfolding, and the titillation of that uncertainty which makes what is partially open draw the gaze in, compressing into the angle of a stolen glance. The central figure of this trope is of course the lady herself, whose splayed legs expose a sliver of flesh between the pink

garter, which she ties loosely just above her right knee, and the cascade of ruffled hem that spills down to the floor where between her legs the coy double entendre of a cat mimics her splayed-legs as it stares directly out at the viewer. Between its legs a ball of thread unravels, looping across the floor and tracing a circuit of objects in casual disarray, a hand fan, a fire broom and a bellows, extending up along the fire screen to the rumpled blue pouch of sewing kit, and then on to the mantle piece, where a candle, an open letter, a cassolette, and a small figurine of a pheasant lead to a pink garter which dangles down, rhyming with the garter that the woman is fastening on her right leg. The twinned apertures of the stoked hearth and the lady's open legs produce one circuit of attention, which is completed by the chain of contiguous objects along the mantel and across the floor, each rendered with lustrous precision so that the gaze travels along them, enamoured with their surfaces. Another circuit moves across an undulating continuum of fabrics, blue taffeta, white silk, gold damask, crumpled lace, red velvet and golden brown fur trim. At the center, the taut armature of the attendant's posture - all elbows - rhymes with angles of the folding screen behind her. Directly above, mostly hidden by the compressed panels of the folding screen, the eyes of a portrait barely peak over into the space.

Many of these features are deployed in reduced and somewhat altered form in *A Lady on her Daybed*, which was painted in the following year. The fundamental distinction derives from the relative simplicity of the composition.

Because there is only one figure in *A Lady on her Daybed*, the tendency to vicariously follow a circuit of attention between the figures of a composition is here reduced to an almost portrait-like singularity, in which the lady's gaze projects out of the image, but falls just off to the side of meeting the spectator. This obliqueness, by which we are both invited and deflected, is reinforced in the effect of spatial compression produced on the one hand by the lack of windows and doors, but also by the flattening out of the corner of the room behind the lady's head, where the pattern in the damask wall paper registers almost no parallax as the angle of the surfaces shifts. Similarly, the little writing table next to the daybed doesn't seem to meet the wall behind it, but tilts down into the center of the picture as though painted from a higher angle than the rest of the composition. The dimensionality of the lady's body is also flattened beneath the surfaces and textures which support it, her porcelanate complexion and bust, and her delicate hands and exaggeratedly slight feet emerging from under the voluminous folds of her dress, which blend into the heavy folds of damask curtain descending from one side of the image.

One surprising detail torques the apparent stability of the image and sends it spiraling in on itself. What begins as the wall of the lady's boudoir, supporting a delicate cabinet with shelves holding a tea set, a small oriental figurine and a letter, somehow, behind the left edge of this hanging cabinet, becomes not a wall but a drape, folding and bunching its way down to the day bed and describing the beginning of an extension of folds that continue across

the figure's dress and down to the ottoman at the side of the bed. It is a line which counter-balances the line extending from the tip of the figure's outstretched toe to the top of her head, and forming at the crux of the two lines, where the white of her dress meets the gold of the drapery, this ubiquitous crease, which repeats itself everywhere: in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the drapery extending off from her left knee, in the folds of the cushions by her head. But also, other and more complex folds as well; cavernous and mysterious folds like the one below her right hip, or in the jumble of her sewing kit, stray fabric, and thread spilling off the ottoman.

It is precisely the wall as boundary, determining one kind of interiority, the privacy of the boudoir, as the beginning of another kind of interiority, one that is eminently tactile, textural, material, sensory. And exactly at this point where the folding of architectural and erotic interiority would seem to promise psychic interiority, the coquettishness of her pose, and the disengagement of her gaze, which function exactly to capture the gaze of the viewer and to circulate that gaze across the energy of the surface, introduce another kind of screen. The sheer artifice of the construction of space produces, instead of psychic traction, a dizzying theatricality, which returns us ultimately to the sense that we are looking at a stage set rather than an intimate interior.

The decorative screen that blocks off the right edge of the image sustains this stage-like spatial compression, its deep vertical crease underscoring the negation of perspectival depth which flattens the angle

between wall and floor and repeats itself in the slight angle of the daybed extending out towards the picture plane, and again in the steeper angle of the writing table and ottoman, which almost seem to slide off the bottom edge of the canvas. This progressive reiteration of a space which produces itself only by sliding away from itself is figured in the unlikely extension of fabric that begins with the strap of the sewing kit hinged around the key in the drawer of the writing table, crosses the twinned openings of the sewing kit and the bunched folds of fabric, and follows one white strand off the edge of the ottoman and down on the floor to a ball of thread, as though the entire image might unravel if one pulled the thread.

In 1743 Boucher also painted the first of a series of small and finely rendered pictures of solitary lounging women in contemporary interiors (fig. 5-12). It was the same size as *Lady on a Daybed*, and also shares some of the same motifs and compositional characteristics - the same highly compressed space, and the same sense that the pictorial depth is generated entirely out of the extension of folded surfaces, from the heavy folds of blue taffeta in the upper right corner diagonally across the picture plane to the bunches of rug and pillow that frame the low side table in the lower left corner. The depth produced along this diagonal axis is underscored by the eminent flatness of the opposite corners; the muted rectilinear geometry of the wall above the woman's head in the upper left corner, and the flattened horizontal bands of blue, gold and red that describe the carpet on the lower right. The woman's

body follows the opposing diagonal, as though she had spilled out of the upper right corner in a torrent of taffeta and silk, which pools out across the center of the image. She is essentially weightless, supported by a formless, luxuriant plenitude of textures and folds, which collect in the clutter of objects on the little side table, the same cassollette from the mantelpiece in *Lady Fastening her Garter*, the same pink garter slipping off the edge of the table under an open jewelry box with ribbons and pearls. The very tip of her extended left foot spills off of the cushion, leaving the dark stain of a shadow in the seemingly vertical flatness of the carpet. Likewise, the chalky highlights in the delicate filigree of golden braid and red feather of her headpiece flit across the grey blankness of the wall behind her. Her left hand extends from the sleeve of the negligée draped across her lower back, and fingers a string of pearls winding its way down out of her headpiece. At the very centerpoint of the image, offset by the singularly blank expanse of her thigh, the dark crease of her buttocks emits a gentle pink glow.

Though its composition is in some ways quite similar to Boucher's earlier erotic scenes, this painting inverts the central trope. In the earlier works the erotic charge is displaced from the primary figure onto secondary figures and objects and ultimately to the formal construction of the image itself. Here the very centrality of the most highly charged point of erotic interest is constructed out of the same folds that produce the entire material expanse. In terms of eros, this is not about displacement, but emergence and proliferation.

The 1743 painting, as well as a copy painted by Boucher in 1745, have been titled *l'Odalisque brune*, to distinguish them from another pair of pictures painted in 1752 and 1753, which have been titled *l'Odalisque blonde* (fig. 5-13). The latter have been presumed to be portraits of a young woman who became an infamous young mistress to Louis XV, and so have also been named after her, *Mlle. O'Murphy*. All of these titles are misleading, and though substantial scholarship has been done to clear up many of these errors, it has been largely ignored.²⁸ The confusion is interesting in itself, because it reveals the underlying uncertainty that opens in the face of an image which so provocatively displays a body without any reference to the conventional mythological place holders - attributes of Venus, for instance, or more complex constructions of mythological narrative, such as Ovid's *Loves of the God's* - that generally temper erotically themed paintings, at least those circulating in the official cultural channels.

This confusion is compounded by the brazen rumpishness of the posture, which is the most definitive link in terms of content between the paintings of the 1740s and those of the 1750s (although the former are somewhat more deliberately so), and certainly what sets them apart from any other painting featuring a reclining female nude. Art history has often been at pains to explain what they are, and to distinguish them in as much as is possible from the invitation to a purely pornographic voyeurism which they

²⁸ MET 1986 216-220 & 258-263

seem to propose. The litany of titles arrives as one form of redemption; the blond is Mlle. O'Murphy, mistress to Louis XV, celebrated in the memoirs of Casanova, and the brunette is her older sister, Victoire, who preceded her as a model for Boucher.²⁹ None of this is true, but it still circulates in didactic panels and catalogs.³⁰ It is as though the potential historical importance of the figure will explain or justify the otherwise unmotivated display. There is some indication that the model for the *Odalisque blonde* might have passed from Boucher's studio into the *Parc-aux-cerf* at Versailles where Louis XV housed his unofficial mistresses, but the nature of this passage and its relationship to the picture remains unverifiable, and in any event she was not the young Mlle. O'Murphy.³¹

One thing that is known about the circumstances of the latter version of the *Odalisque* is that a copy was in the collection of the Maquis de Marigny in February of 1753. In a letter to Natoire, Marigny requests a painting from him to decorate a private cabinet in which he has already hung a Vanloo, a Boucher and a Pierre, and for which he would like him to produce a fourth in order to complete the set.³² He mentions that he has included a piece of paper cut to the precise measurements he requires, and then suggests that

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 259-60.

³⁰ The reference to Victoire has largely been dropped, but the O'Murphy story remains both at the Alte Pinakothek and the Wallraf-Richert, which house the 1752 and 1753 versions respectively.

³¹ Alastair Lang, *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, 260-2

³² Accademia di Francia (Rome, Italy), and Société de l'histoire de l'art français (France), *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome avec les surintendants des bâtiments* (Charavay frères, 1900). 10:438-9. This letter has also been partially reproduced in Alastair Lang, *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, 262.

because of the nature of the cabinet, which he describes as "fort petit et fort chaud," he would like only nudes. One assumes that the "heat" of the space has more to do with its erotic determinations than with its actual temperature. He lists the three paintings that he already has, so that Natoire can choose a unique subject. "Carle's picture shows *Antiope Asleep*, that of *Boucher*, a *Young Woman Lying on her Stomach*, that of *Pierre*, an *Io*."³³ In a later letter, Natoire proposed to do a *Leda and the Swan*, suggesting that it would complete the set well, as the others also represent the loves of Jupiter.³⁴

There is no mention of the Boucher. Two things are clear. The first is that Boucher's *Jeune Femme Couchée sur le ventre* slipped seamlessly into a particular, and even very specifically determined, decorative schema that deployed a genre of images constructed around displaying the eroticized female body. The second is that unlike the other paintings in the set, which couched this display within a mythological narrative, thus producing a classical and relatively stable cultural reference point, Boucher's picture slips just as easily out of place.

One historian has addressed this ambiguity head on. Paul Frankl, in perhaps the only scholarship that has actually looked closely at these paintings, set out to get a better understanding of the circumstances that

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For the reference to *Leda and the Swan* see *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie*, 440-1. There is no indication that Natoire ever delivered the painting. For reference to the collections of Marigny see Alden Gordon, Carolyne Ayçaguer-Ron, Maria Leilani Gilbert, Elizabeth A. Spatz, and Patricia A. Teter. *The houses and collections of the Marquis de Marigny* (Provenance Index of the Getty Research Institute, 2003).

would lead Boucher to depict a reclining nude on her belly, presenting her bottom as the central feature of the composition.³⁵ His answer is relatively tame, but it points toward that aspect of an artist's production where the nude could appear without any mythological narrative to temper it: the study, or sketch. Frankl rightly points out that the rumpish posture was quite common in Boucher's depictions of naiads and nymphs. There is no purpose in retracing the entire filiation, but it is noteworthy that they appear in several of the cabinet pictures of the early 1740s, such as *Leda and the Swan* and *The Triumph of Venus*, as well as in *The Setting of the Sun* of 1752. It is this latter painting for which he suggests the *Odalisque blonde* began as a sketch. In a moment of charmed inspiration, as Frankl describes it, Boucher simply whips up one of these studies into an ad hoc portrait.³⁶ The posture is perfectly innocent, a necessary feature of some other composition, which has accidentally appeared at the center of this one.

The couch in the studio represented the ocean, the cushions represented the waves, the arm of the couch represented the naiad sister, and the model was the swimming naiad of the right corner. Now the conclusion seems inescapable that the painter was suddenly struck by the scene before him and ceased to regard it as a study for another picture. The couch was truly a couch, the cushions were cushions, and the model was not a naiad, but the fourteen year old girl, Louise O'Murphy. What he isolated from the big picture was not a portrait, nor a study for a mythological picture, nor a so called genre-scene; he simply reproduced an accidental situation which he wanted to capture for its own sake.

³⁵ Paul Frankl, "Boucher's Girl on the Couch," in Millard Meiss and Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton, N.J.), *Essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky* ([New York]: New York University Press, 1961).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 148

... poor, uneducated, open and natural in her behavior, a maiden lost in dreams, seductive without wishing or knowing it, the born representative of the Rococo.³⁷

Frankl's analysis falls short in a number of ways. It relies too heavily on the later historical importance of the identity of the sitter to establish her symbolic value. It over emphasizes the mythical lost innocence of the Rococo characteristic of its nineteenth century revival, and it masks the studied and deliberate deployment of the posture as simply a practical necessity (she's swimming!), or incidental detail in an otherwise unpremeditated moment of generic transformation. His "moment of inspiration" theory fails to account for Boucher's long history of experimenting with generic boundaries, as well as the very simple fact that almost a decade earlier Boucher produced another painting of a young woman swimming in a couch, which we now call the *Odalisque brune*.

The title *Odalisque* is somewhat more appropriate to the earlier paintings. In the case of the 1743 and 1745 paintings, a number of details allude to the contemporary iconography of *turquerie*. The low sofa which supports the figure and the cushions against the wall, as well as the accompanying low side table were common features in depictions of Turkish seraglios that circulated in France in the early eighteenth century. The earliest of these was a collection of prints titled *Recueil de cent estampes représentant les diverses nations du Levant*, published in 1707-8 by Charles de Ferriol after

³⁷ *Ibid.*

paintings he commissioned from Jean-Baptiste Van Mour in Constantinople. These became a major inspiration for those incorporating Turkish fashions into Court culture, and they were also some of the primary sources for artists tasked with representing Turkish scenes.³⁸

A now lost sketch by Boucher of a Turkish woman reading on her sofa was among the works that Tessin brought back to Sweden in 1742, including the 1740 *Triumph of Venus*, as well as the 1742 *Lady Fastening her Garter*, which places not only the taste for Turkish scenes, but specifically for women lounging on sofas very directly within the realm of Boucher's erotic cabinet pictures. Boucher also contributed a dozen sketches to Jean Antoine Guer's *Moeurs et Usages des Turcs*, published in 1746, some of which draw explicitly on the Ferriol prints.³⁹ One of these depicts a woman reading, surrounded by cushions on a low sofa, placed on a carpet and framed by billowing curtains. She has a small feather in her headpiece, not unlike the one in the *Odalisque brune*, and it is entirely likely that this image represents a version of the Tessin sketch. In any case, there is no doubt that Boucher was producing turquerie in the early 1740s, and that some of the motifs appear in the *Odalisque brune*.

If Boucher's *Odalisque brune* was meant to conjure the signs of the seraglio, it is surprising that it was never identified as such in any of the

³⁸ Jennifer M. Scarce, *Women's Costume of the Near and Middle East* (Routledge, 2014), 62.

³⁹ see Jean-Richard, *L'œuvre Gravé De François Boucher*, pl. 880 in comparison to plate 49 of the Ferriol *Recueil de cent estampes*; aspects of the bather's posture, her arms, the attendant plaiting her hair and the small fountain on the wall are all borrowed by Boucher from the Ferriol. The second attendant, who turns to look at the bather while he bends to put down a tray is pure Boucher, most notably deployed to delicately erotic effect in *Diana leaving her bath* (1742).

contemporary accounts. The title 'Odalisque' itself would have been an available point of reference. Guer's *Moeurs et Usages des Turcs* dedicated several pages to a discussion of the role of the odalisque in the Turkish seraglio. But all of the catalogs that mention this painting, refer to them with some variation of the title, *Femme nue coucher sur le ventre dans son lit de repos*. Even the sofa escaped the titles assigned to these paintings throughout the eighteenth century, a feature which seems easily recognizable in the contemporary iconography, and which in fact was widely repeated in explicitly Turkish themed images, notably the many portraits *à la turque* by Jean-Étienne Liotard, which had already begun to circulate in Paris in 1743.⁴⁰ The glare of this omission is only further reinforced by the title of the 1742 sketch for Tessin, *Femme Turque, qui lit, coucher sur un sofa*.⁴¹ It would seem that if art history has been particularly concerned with naming these paintings, in their contemporary context they remained perplexingly anonymous.

Part of this anonymity is likely due to the explicitly erotic nature of the image, in which the body is literally stripped of the more explicit signs of cultural identity provided by clothing. But it is also worth considering more broadly what kinds of associations these signs carried. *Turquerie* was not new in 1740s Paris, although the embassy of Said Efendi Pacha to Louis XV in 1742 prompted renewed interest.⁴² The popularity of 18th century *turquerie*

⁴⁰ Jo Hedley, *François Boucher: Seductive Visions* (London: Wallace Collection, 2004), 80.

⁴¹ Alastair Laing, *The Drawings of François Boucher* (New York: American Federation of Arts in association with Scala Publishers, 2003), 39 (note 6), 120, 236.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 120.

goes back to Antoine Galland's translation of *Les mille et une nuits* beginning in 1704, and Ferriol's *Recueil de cent estampes* in 1707. There was a resurgence in the 1720s with the publication of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, which took up the guise of the Orient not to authentically depict a foreign land, but effectively to critique his own. This theme was replayed among libertine writers in the coming decades, notably Crebillon fils, who published *Le Sopha* in 1739, which drew from both *Les mille et une nuits* and *Lettres Persanes*, to produce a work which is at once erotic tale and social critique.

George Brunel has explored the potential connection between Boucher's *Odalisque* and Crebillon's *Le Sopha*, though not in terms of their shared connections to contemporary *turquerie*.⁴³ He finds Boucher's *Odalisque* to be reminiscent of a passage in *Le Sopha* in which a woman is depicted pleasuring herself on a couch. In fact there are several similar episodes in *Le Sopha*, and the first one involves a woman reading, which would seem to link it even more directly to the constellation of images which we have been tracking. Brunel is primarily interested in showing how Boucher and Crebillon might share an erotic mentality that could be more broadly characteristic of their time, what he calls a certain modernism, a scientific approach to the impressions of the senses. This is a compelling assertion, but Brunel directs us to the apparent blankness of expression of Boucher's figures, to what he

⁴³ Georges Brunel, *Boucher* (London: Trefoil, 1986), 117-8.

calls a machine-like lack of individuation, which is ultimately to cast both Boucher and Crebillon's eroticism as a kind of dehumanized affair in which, as he describes it, "human beings appear as empty and interchangeable puppets."⁴⁴ While the reference to puppets certainly recalls the strangely diminutive status of the limbs protruding out from under an enormous dress in *Lady on the Daybed*, Brunel's insistence on a kind of passionless, mechanical quality seems hardly to capture the complexity of either Crebillon or Boucher's eroticism, both of which are concerned as much with eroticizing the way the form of a work interpellates its audience as with depicting an erotic scene or narrative.

Whatever Boucher and Crebillon shared, they likely had opportunities to do so directly. They were both members of a literary club that met twice monthly at a restaurant called *Le Caveau*, where each member was tasked with composing poems, stories, or songs - generally bawdy, celebrating intoxication, sexual dalliance, or wittily excoriating their fellow diners. Boucher was frequently called upon to provide illustrations, which would fuel the imaginations of his fellow guests.⁴⁵ They sometimes published their productions in the *Mercure*, which was being run by the Chevalier de la Roche in the nearby *Café Procope*, and there were strong ties with the *Théâtre de la foire*, which was likely the beginning of Boucher's connections to theater production.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁵ Brigitte Level, *Le Caveau: A Travers Deux Siècles: Société Bachique et Chantante, 1726-1939* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1988), 42.

The most famous of Boucher's interventions at the *Dîners du Caveau*, was a series of illustrations which he had provided to Tessin for a fantastical story titled *Faunillane ou l'Infante jaune*, and were subsequently taken up by the group as part of a competition to write a different story with all of the illustrations in reverse order. Around this time the group ceased meeting at *Le Caveau*, and migrated to become a literary salon under the guidance of Jeanne-Françoise Quinault.⁴⁶ It was renamed the *Société du Bout de Banc*, where figures such as Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, and Maupertuis, began to lend it a more philosophical tenor.⁴⁷ If the *Odalisque* shares something with *Le Sopha*, it would have to be situated in this milieu, somewhere between the punning wit of the *Dîners du Caveau* and the rise of the philosophes in mondain salons of the 1740s.

Though generally overlooked as frivolous fantasy or the simple travesti of the masqued ball, or else framed as the roots of colonialist cultural appropriation, *turquerie*, like *chinoiserie*, had some specifically libertine, which is to say anti-authoritarian resonances in mondaine culture, and particularly in the context of the enlightened patronage of the salonnière. The fashion for Turkish dress among women was greatly influenced by the letters and reputation of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who returned to London from Turkey in 1718, arriving in loose fitted Turkish dress, which became for her, a

⁴⁶ Graffigny, Françoise d'Issembourg d'Happoncourt de. *Correspondance de Madame de Graffigny*, ed. J. A. Dairard (Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 1985), vol. 6., 8.

⁴⁷ Jacqueline Hellegouarch, "Un atelier littéraire au XVIIIe siècle : la société du bout-du-banc," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol.1 (2004), 59-70.

symbol of the freedoms of women that she witnessed in Turkish culture and subsequently championed at home.⁴⁸ She had been writing letters describing her travels, and these circulated in manuscript form among the lettered elite in England and France. They were well appreciated by figures such as Pope, Addison, and Voltaire.⁴⁹ Though they were not officially published until much later, Montagu's unconventional views on the rights and roles of women were as widely known as her careful descriptions of Turkish dress, and her experiences as a foreign woman in the bath houses and seraglios of Constantinople.⁵⁰

She came to be best remembered for these last, in part because she had achieved unprecedented access to what seemed the most carefully guarded of cultural territory, but also because she emphasized precisely this point, and advertised her skill as a cultural informant in a way which was bound up with her identity as a woman. The seraglio was thus a complex figure in Montagu's letters, because in Europe the rule of the Sultan over his harem had become the ultimate symbol of despotic tyranny, yet for Montagu her penetration of that space, her ability to report dispassionately about her experiences there, signaled her power as an enlightened woman in a literary sphere dominated by men.⁵¹ What is even more important is that she reported

⁴⁸ Charlotte Jirousek, "Ottoman Influences in Western Dress," in *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*. ed. S. Faroqhi and C. Neumann, (Istanbul: Eren Publishing, 2004), 231-243.

⁴⁹ Cynthia J. Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 80-113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

on the greater rather than lesser freedoms of Turkish women, both in their legal and financial status as well as in their amorous pursuits, which she understood to be inextricably intertwined.⁵²

To present oneself *à la turque* was thus in part, and particularly for elite women, to identify with a perspective which looks in at European culture from the outside, however artificially constructed that outside might be. The critique which it engendered was nonetheless, if not even more so, part of a growing suspicion of the structures of conventional authority in Europe, and was in this way consistent with the general thrust of mondaine culture in as much as it embraced a certain philosophical libertinism. It was also, perhaps paradoxically, for the upper classes of European women the sign of increased freedom, which was exercised in relation to material culture as luxury and fashion, to literary, artistic and scientific culture as patronage and production, and to expanded autonomy in their amorous pursuits.

It is worth recalling that Boucher painted the *Odalisque brune* in precisely those years when the polyp was generating a flurry of metaphysical speculation in the salons and coffee houses of Paris, and the early materialist philosophical texts of Maupertuis and La Mettrie were in their germinating phases. The *Odalisque* could thus be interpreted as a secularization of the classical figure of erotic desire and fecundity - literally, in Maupertuis' words a "Venus Physique," - which takes up that thread of an elicited and even

⁵² *Ibid.* 100-1

monstrous eroticism in the inverted posture of the conventional reclining female nude. There is no shortage of examples of such postures in the blossoming contemporary culture of pornographic prints, (Figure 5-14) but the full implications of that illicit charge have to be taken into account.

Pornographic discourse carried strong political and philosophical overtones, which resonated in those early texts of philosophical materialism in as much as they emphasized the radical nature of eros - both radical in its opposition to the strictures of conventional morality and authority, but also radical in the sense in which eros is figured as the root of existence, so that the philosophical vitalism drawn from Spinoza is given positively erotic connotations.

Here, what Lajer-Burcharth has described as Boucher's "haptic logic," that compression of pictorial space which transforms optical distinctions into tactile systems of continuity, takes on its most overtly erotic function. And the polyp serves a kind of double duty in this respect because it calls not only on the body to be the site of new relations to pleasure, but on the entire material expanse to resonate with that pleasure, so that the weightlessness of the body amidst the luxuriant plenitude of textures and folds draws everything into its material embrace. The body achieves a kind of sensuous continuity with its surrounds that recalls both the fluid hybridity of Boucher's ornamental logic and the radical eroticism of materialist philosophy. Read as a materialist paen

to the goddess of love, the *Odalisque* emblemizes Boucher's engagements with contemporary libertinism.

Perhaps by way of conclusion, it is worth returning to Frankl's swimmer, not so much in her role as origin and explanation, but as a figure whose weightlessness emblemizes the ease with which the image floats along a network of associations. When Frankl traced the filiation of the rumpish posture in Boucher's oeuvre he found himself at a peculiar endpoint. It was a sketch for an overdoor in the Hotel de Soubise depicting the climactic scene of the story of Pan and Syrinx: the moment at which Syrinx realizes she is about to be seized in his lustful embrace and calls out for help from her fellow naiads lounging by the river. The appearance of the posture here is perhaps of less immediate interest than the narrative event in which it is situated, which neatly allegorizes the eroticization of the aesthetic so characteristic of Rococo sensibilities. Syrinx escapes Pan's grasp only by being transformed into a bunch of reeds, and Pan, in the very moment when he believes himself to be seizing hold of the object of his desire, finds himself clutching at straws. But it is ultimately Pan's response to this confounded state which resonates with the broader field that makes aesthetic production a resolutely social form in early eighteenth-century France. He fashions the reeds into a flute, and forgoes the linearity of conquest for the circuitous arts of seduction. It is less a moral tale than an ethical one, in as much as it points not at a singular transcendent

judgement, but toward a principle of reciprocity which requires not atonement but attunement.

This is precisely the ethos of the kind of *modernité* that links De Piles' aesthetics and Fontenelle's polite science. It is resolutely conversational, not just because of the dialogical form of the discourses which disseminated it, but because it proceeds towards the unknown by taking pleasure in a nimble sensitivity, which is at all points heightened by the uncertainty of its position. No longer erected in the monumental architecture of a treatise, thought needs the mobility, fluidity and hybridity of ornament, and of the frame, in order to navigate the slippery semiotic polyvalence of a world increasingly emitting signs beyond those of extant systems of signification.⁵³ Whether these emanate from the expansion of visibilities into telescopic and microscopic realms, the heightened epistemological density of cultural exoticisms, or the sheer ubiquity of the medium of the printed image, ultimately the technicalization of vision which facilitates this kaleidoscopic proliferation both demands and produces its own paratactic libidinizations. The aesthetic, in as much as it proposes to canalize these libidinizations, takes on a sensuous epiricism, an attunement to the resolute materiality of the world and of the sensorium itself.

⁵³ Claire Colebrook uses a similar formulation to describe the semiotics of Gilles Deleuze in Claire Colebrook, "Signifier/Signified," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*. ed. Adrian Parr, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 248-249.

Illustrations



Figure 0-1.
Francois Boucher, *The Setting of the Sun*, 1752
318 x 261 cm
oil on canvas
London, The Wallace Collection



Figure 0-2.
Francois Boucher, *The Rising of the Sun*, 1753
318 x 261 cm
oil on canvas
London, The Wallace Collection



Figure 0-3.
Francois Boucher, *Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour*, 1756
201 x 157 cm
oil on canvas
Munich, Alte Pinakothek

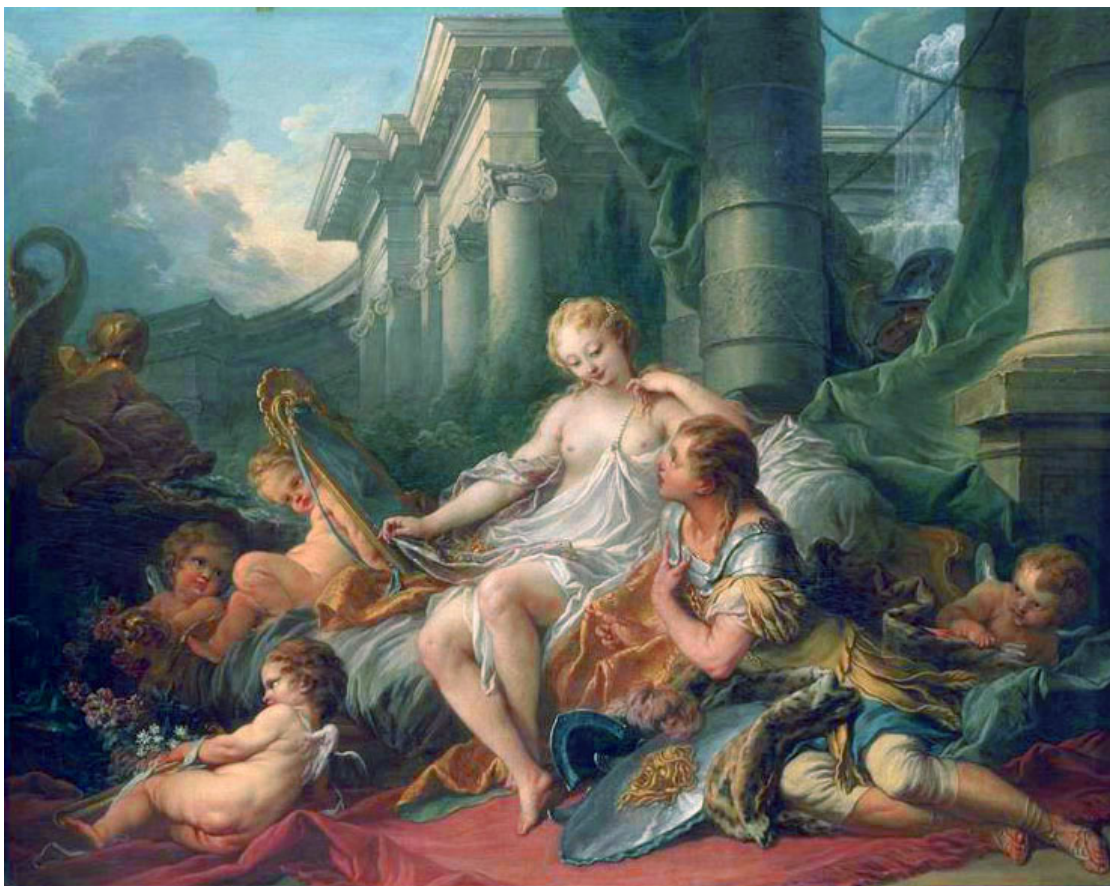


Figure 0-4.
François Boucher, *Renald et Armide*, 1734
135 x 170 cm
oil on canvas
Paris, Musée du Louvre



Figure 1-1.
 Francois Boucher, *Rocaille*,
 Etching and engraving by Claude Duflos, 1737
 48.8 x 24.8 cm
 Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Collection Edmond de Rothschild



Figure 1-2.
Claude Audran III, *Septembre*
Engraving by Jean Audran, 1726
Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-3.
Antoine Watteau, *The Bower*, 1716
40.2 x 28.6cm
Red chalk drawing
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 1-4.
Antoine Watteau, *Le Printemps*
Engraved by Francois Boucher, 1729
49 x 21.8 cm
Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Collection Edmond de Rothschild



Figure 1-5.
 Antoine Watteau, *Partie de chasse*
 Engraved by G. Scotin, 1731
 59 x 35cm
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes



Figure 1-6.
 Antoine Watteau, *Le Denicheur de Moineaux*
 Engraved by Francois Boucher, 1727
 Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes



Figure 1-7.
 Francois Boucher, *Hommage Champêtre*,
 Engraved by Claude Duflos, 1737
 50 x 25.5 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-8.
 Francois Boucher, *Triomphe de Pomone*
 Engraved by Cochin fils, 1737
 52.3 x 26.3 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-9.
François Boucher, *Leda*
Engraved by Claude Duflos, 1737
50.8 x 26.2 cm
Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-10.
 Francois Boucher, *Triomphe de Priape*,
 Engraved by Claude Duflos, 1737
 51 x 25.5 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-11.
François Boucher, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*,
Engraved by Laurent Cars, 1734
in *Oeuvres de Molière*, Paris: Pierre Prault, 1734



Figure 1-12.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Differents desseins de Sallieres*, 1730-5
 Engraved by Gabrielle Huquier, 1742-8
 25.6 x 19.6 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-13.

Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Projet du surtout de table et des deux terrines pour le duc de Kingston*, 1730-5

Engraved by Gabrielle Huquier, 1742-48

27.9 x 19.7 cm

Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-14.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Chandelier*, 1728 (3 views)
 Engraved by Desplaces
 26 X 21cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum

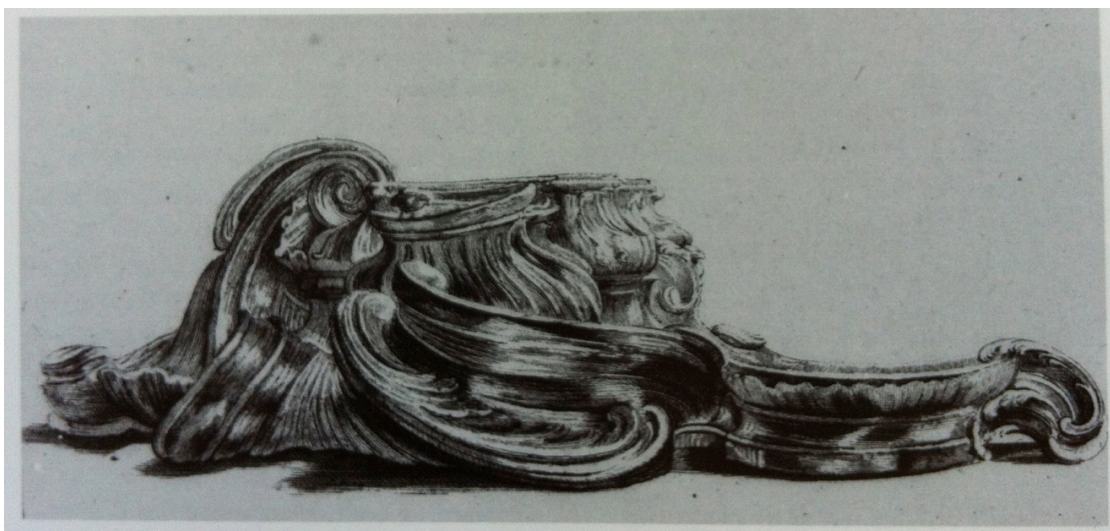


Figure 1-15.

Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Ecritoire for the comte de Maurepas*, 1731

Engraved by Huquier

15.5 X 25.6 cm

Cooper Hewitt Museum

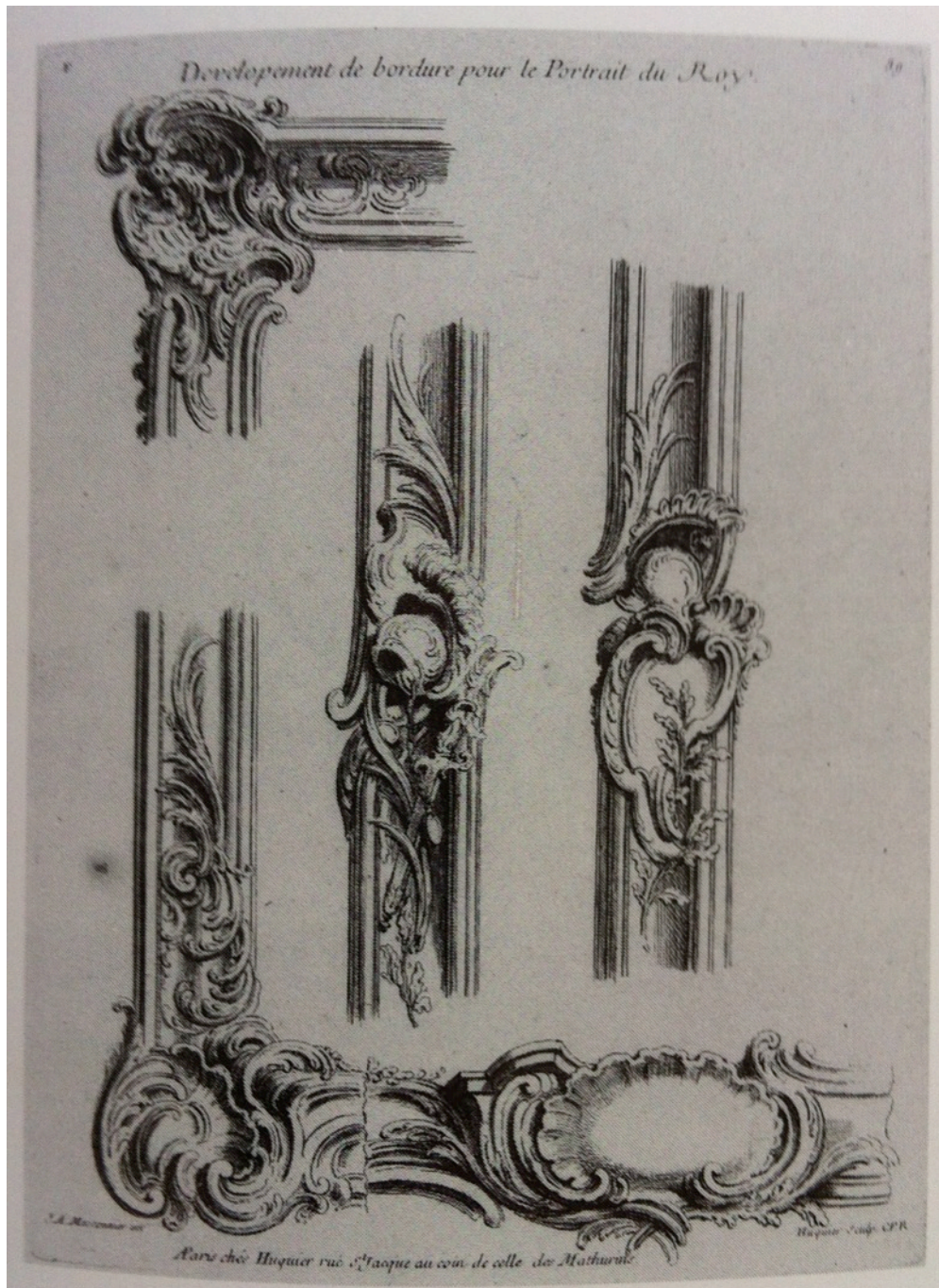


Figure 1-16.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Developement de bordure pour le portrait du Roi*, 1727-30
 Engraved by Huquier
 30 X 22 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum

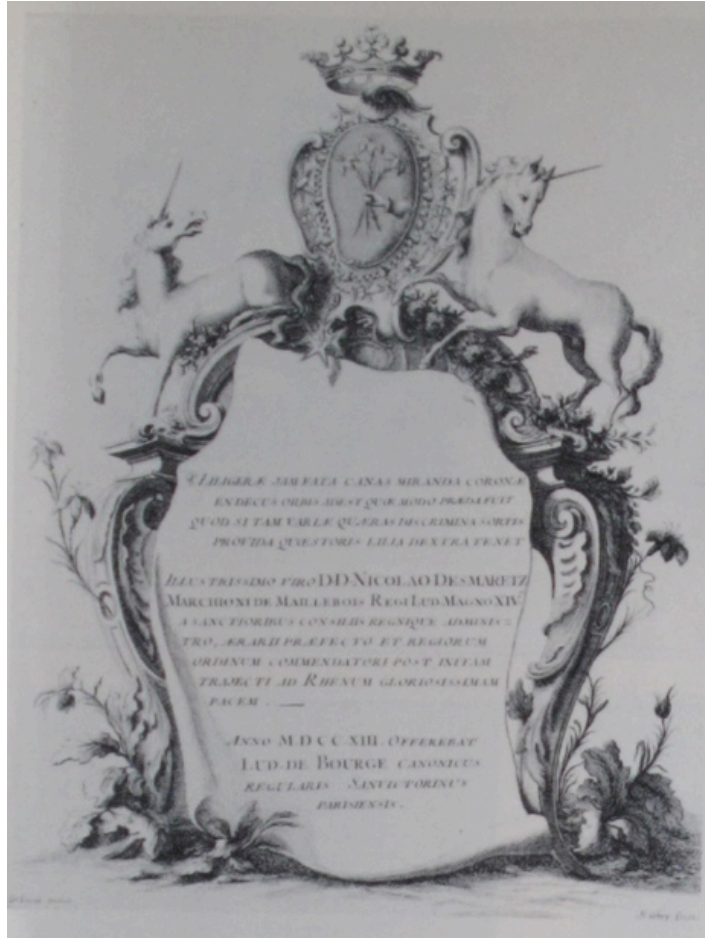


Figure 1-17.
 Jacques de Lajoue, *Maillebois Cartouche*, 1713



Figure 1-18.
Jacques de Lajoue, *Cartouche*, 1734
Engraved by Huquier
20 x 17 cm
Collections de l'École nationale supérieure des beaux arts, Paris



Figure 1-19.

Jacques de Lajoue, *Coquillage en cartouche*, 1734

Engraved by Huquier

20 x 17 cm

Collections de l'École nationale supérieure des beaux arts, Paris

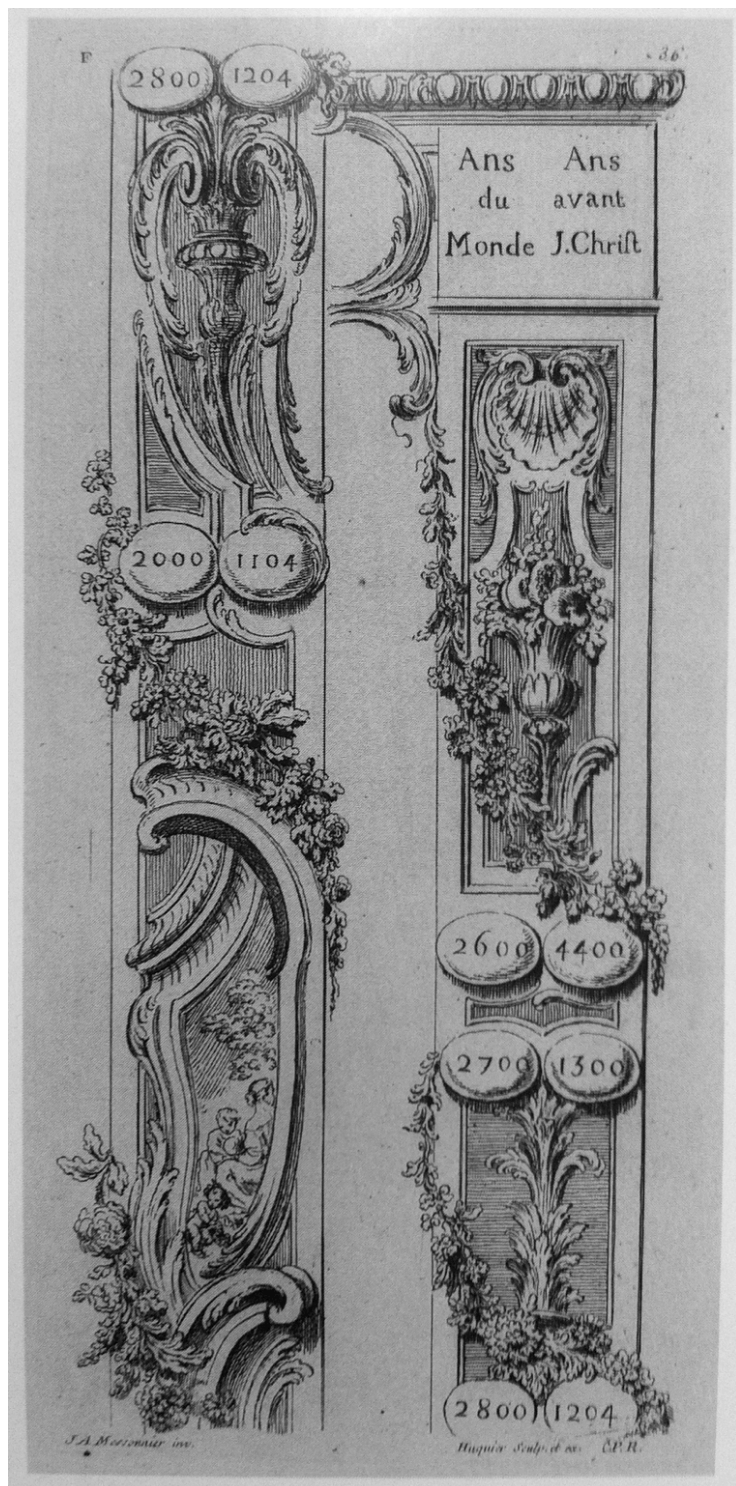


Figure 1-20.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Bordure pour la carte chronologique du Roi*, 1727-33
 Engraved by Huquier
 32.5 X 15 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-21.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Panneaux d'ornements*, 1734
 Engraved by Laureolli
 32.5 X 15 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-22.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Panneaux d'ornements*, 1734
 Engraved by Huquier
 12 X 20 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum

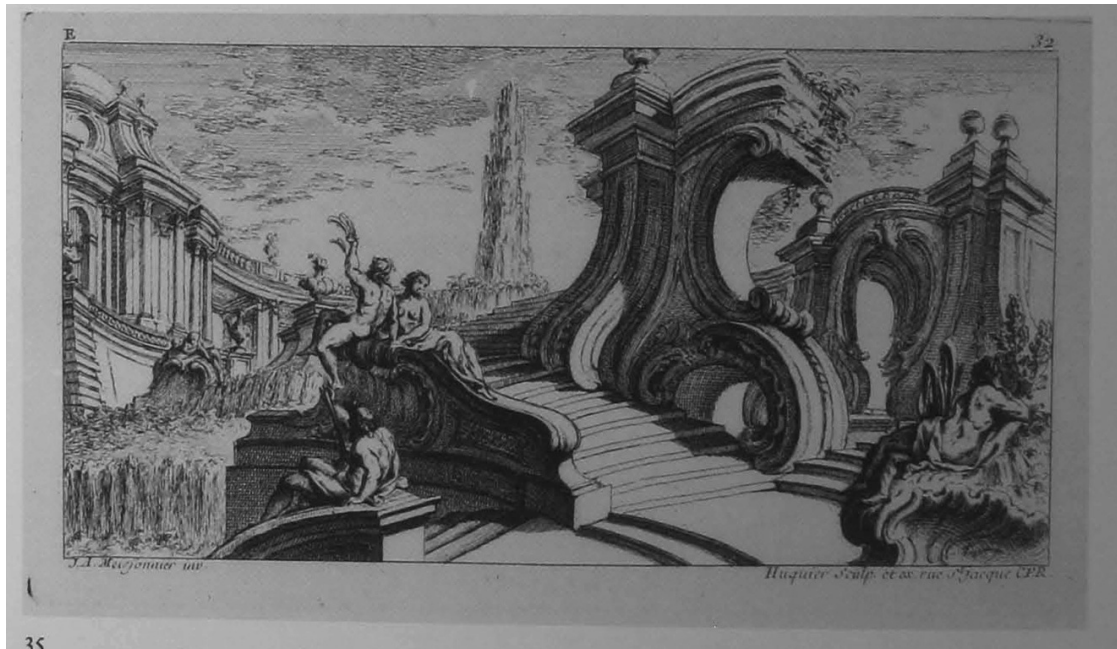


Figure 1-23.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Panneaux d'ornements*, 1734
 Engraved by Huquier
 12 X 20 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-24.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Panneaux d'ornements*, 1734
 Engraved by Laureolli
 12 X 20 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-25.
Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Panneaux d'ornements*, 1734
Engraved by Huquier
12 X 20 cm
Cooper Hewitt Museum

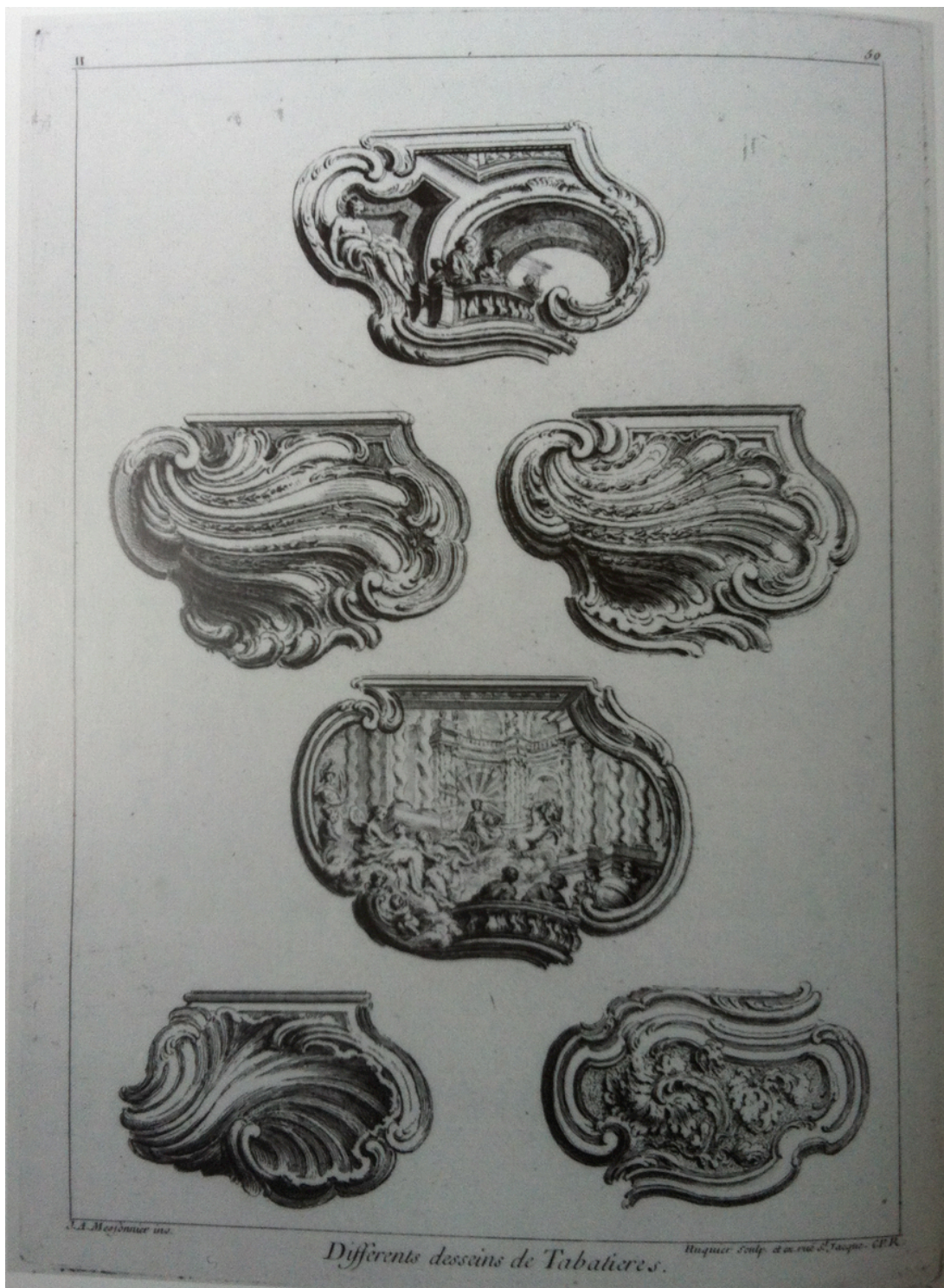


Figure 1-26.
 Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, *Différents desseins de Tabatieres*
 Engraved by Huquier, 1742-48
 30 X 21.9 cm
 Cooper Hewitt Museum



Figure 1-27.
Jacques de Lajoue, *Fontaine Glacée*, 1736
from *Livre Nouveau de Douze Morceaux de Fantaisie utile a divers usages*
Etching
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 1-28.
Pierre-Quentin Chedel (1706–1763) *Fountain of Pinaeus*, 1738
from *Fantaisies Nouvelles*
Etching
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 1-29.
Jacques de Lajoue, plate from *Livre de Vases*, 1738-40
Etching
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 1-30.
 Christoph Jamnitzer, frontispiece from *Neue Grottesken Buch* (Nuremberg, 1609)
 Etching
 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 1-31.
Jacques Callot, frontispiece from *Varie Figure di Iacopo Callot* (Florence or Lorraine, 1621–24)
Etching
British Museum, London

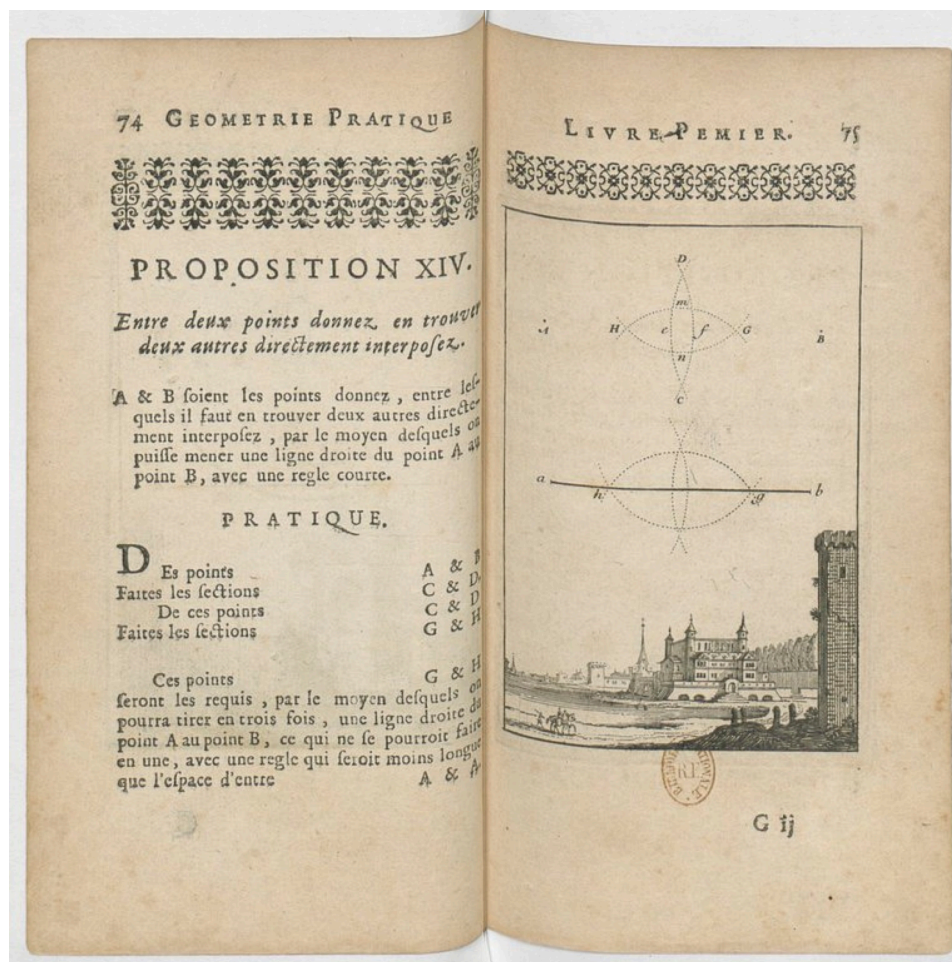


Figure 2-1.
Sebastian Le Clerc, *Proposition XIV*, 1682
from *Pratique de la géométrie*, p.74-75
Bibliothèque nationale de France
gallica.bnf.fr

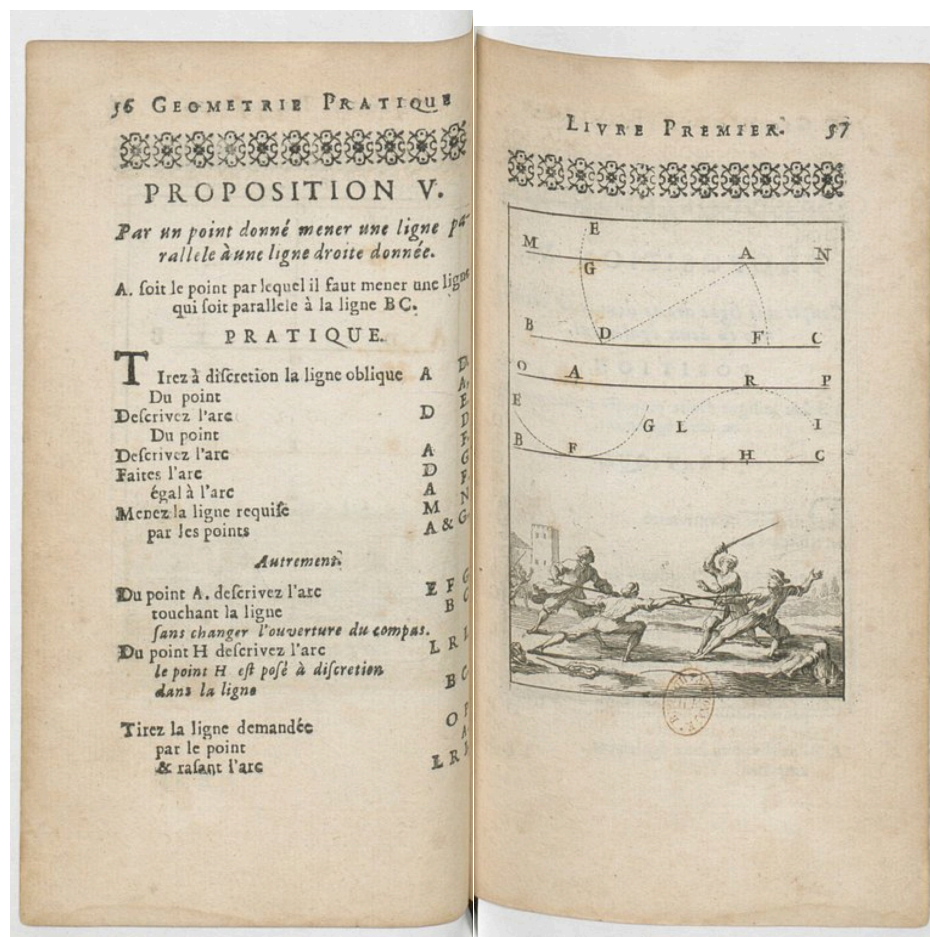


Figure 2-2.
Sebastian Le Clerc, *Proposition V*, 1682
from *Pratique de la géométrie*, p.56-57
Bibliothèque nationale de France
gallica.bnf.fr

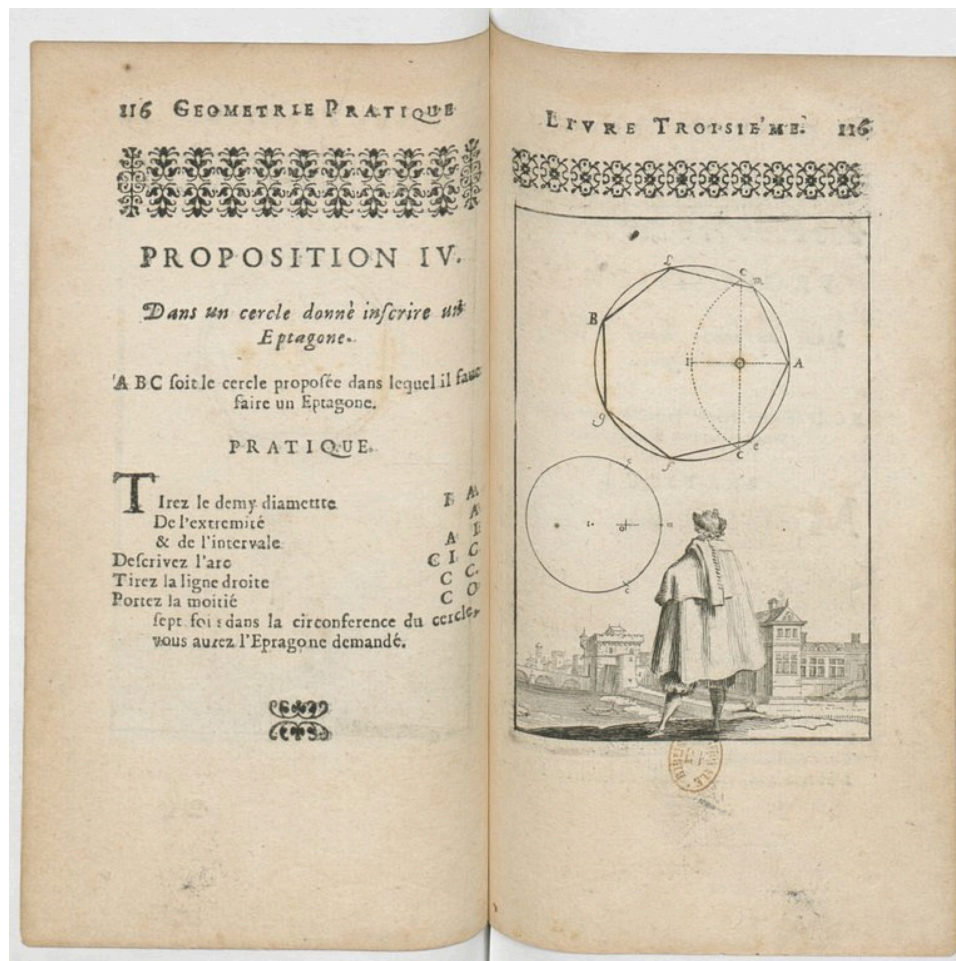


Figure 2-3.
 Sebastian Le Clerc, *Proposition IV*, 1682
 from *Pratique de la géométrie*, 1682, p116-7 (this page misnumbered in original)
 Bibliothèque nationale de France
 gallica.bnf.fr

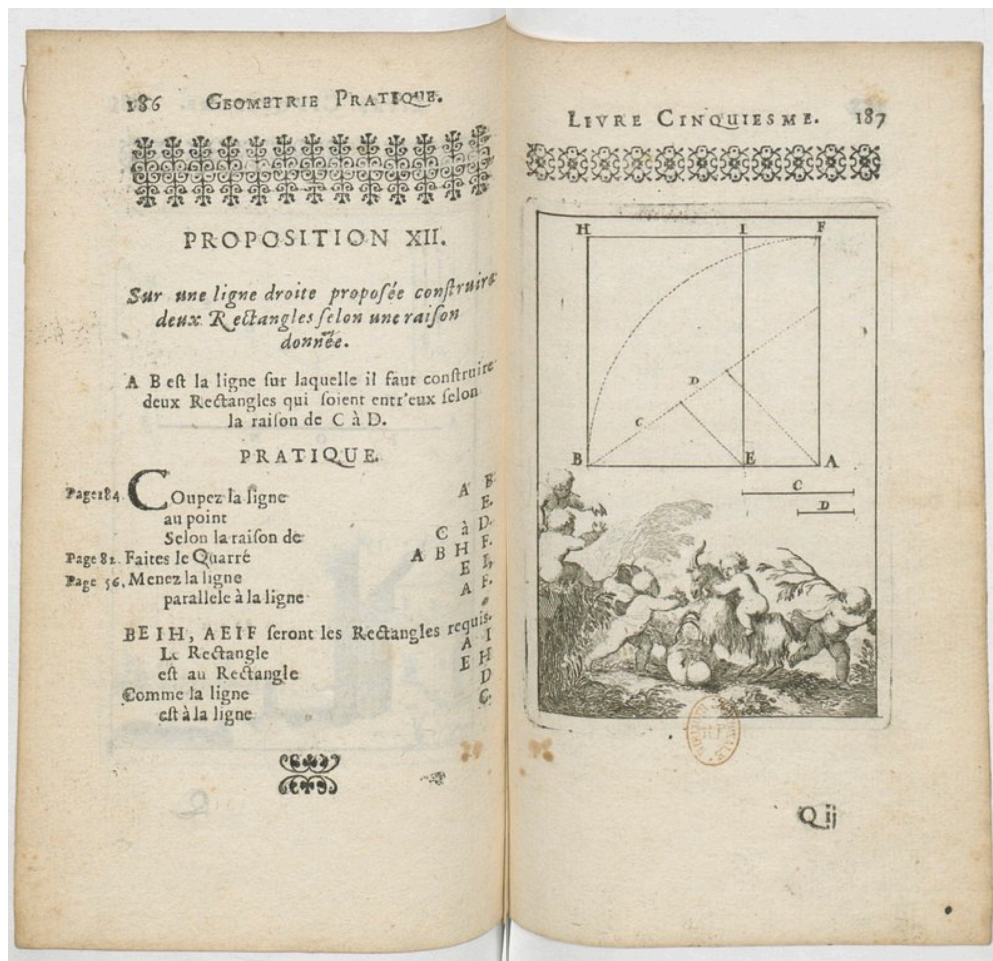


Figure 2-4.
 Sebastian Le Clerc, *Proposition XII*, 1682
 from *Pratique de la géométrie*, 1682, p186-7
 Bibliothèque nationale de France
 gallica.bnf.fr

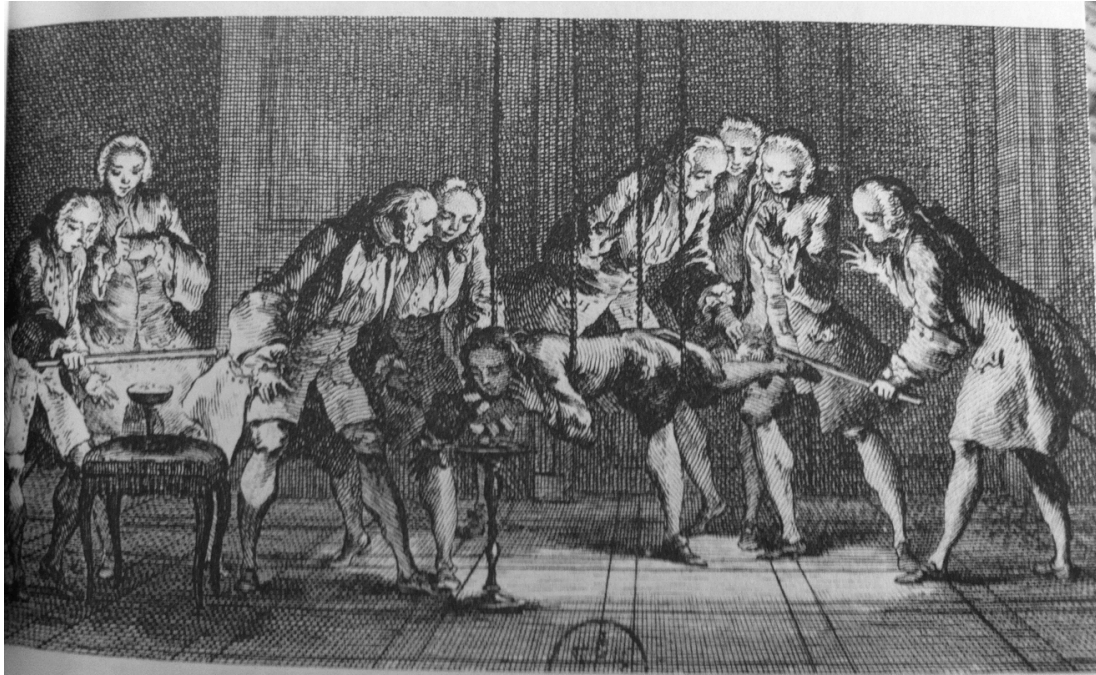


Figure 2-5.

Cochin, *Experience de l'électricité*

Reprinted in Jean Adhémar, *La Gravure originale au XVIII^e siècle*

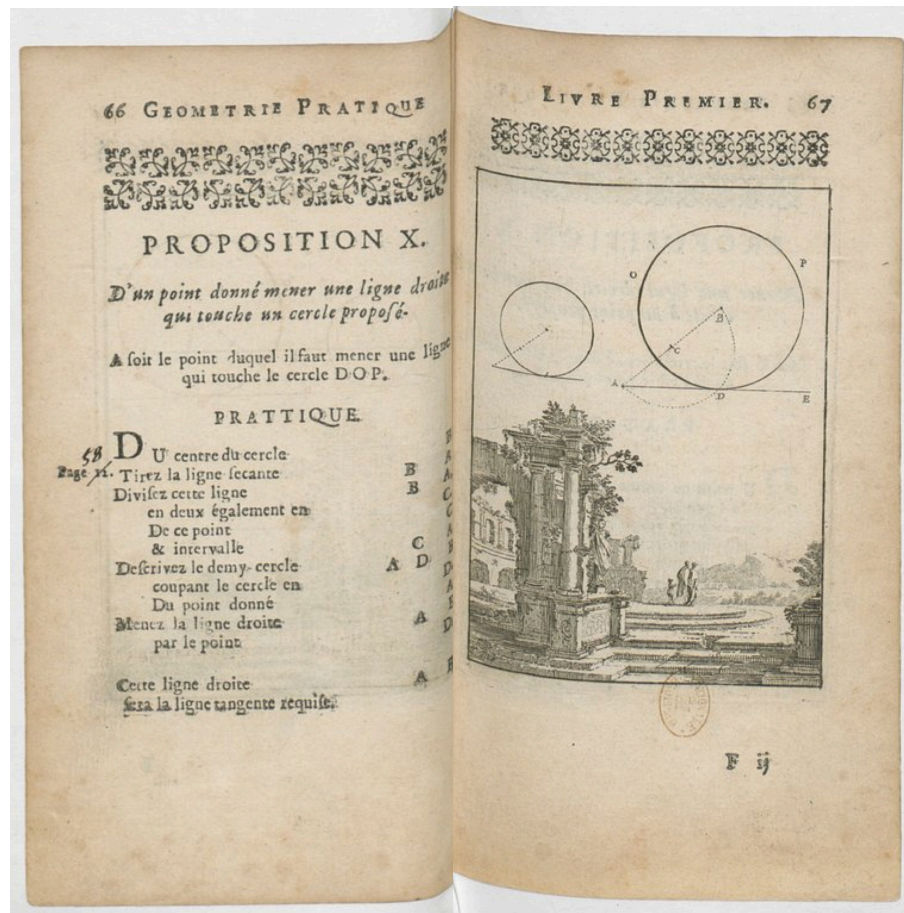


Figure 2-7.
 Sebastian Le Clerc, *Proposition X*, 1682
 from *Pratique de la géometire*, 1682, p66-7
 Bibliothèque nationale de France
 gallica.bnf.fr

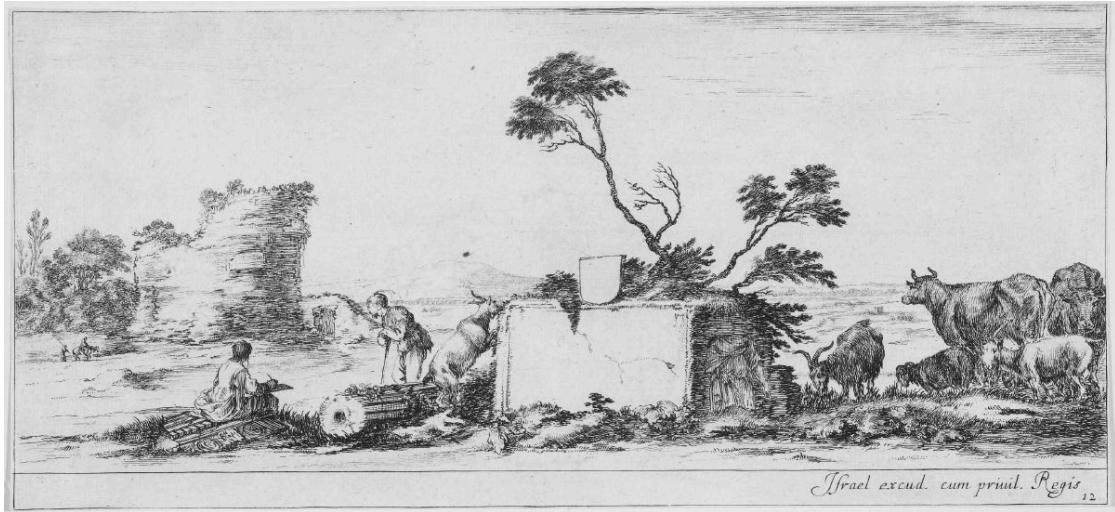


Figure 2-8.
Stephano Della Bella, *Draftsman in a pasture*
Etching
12 x 26cm
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

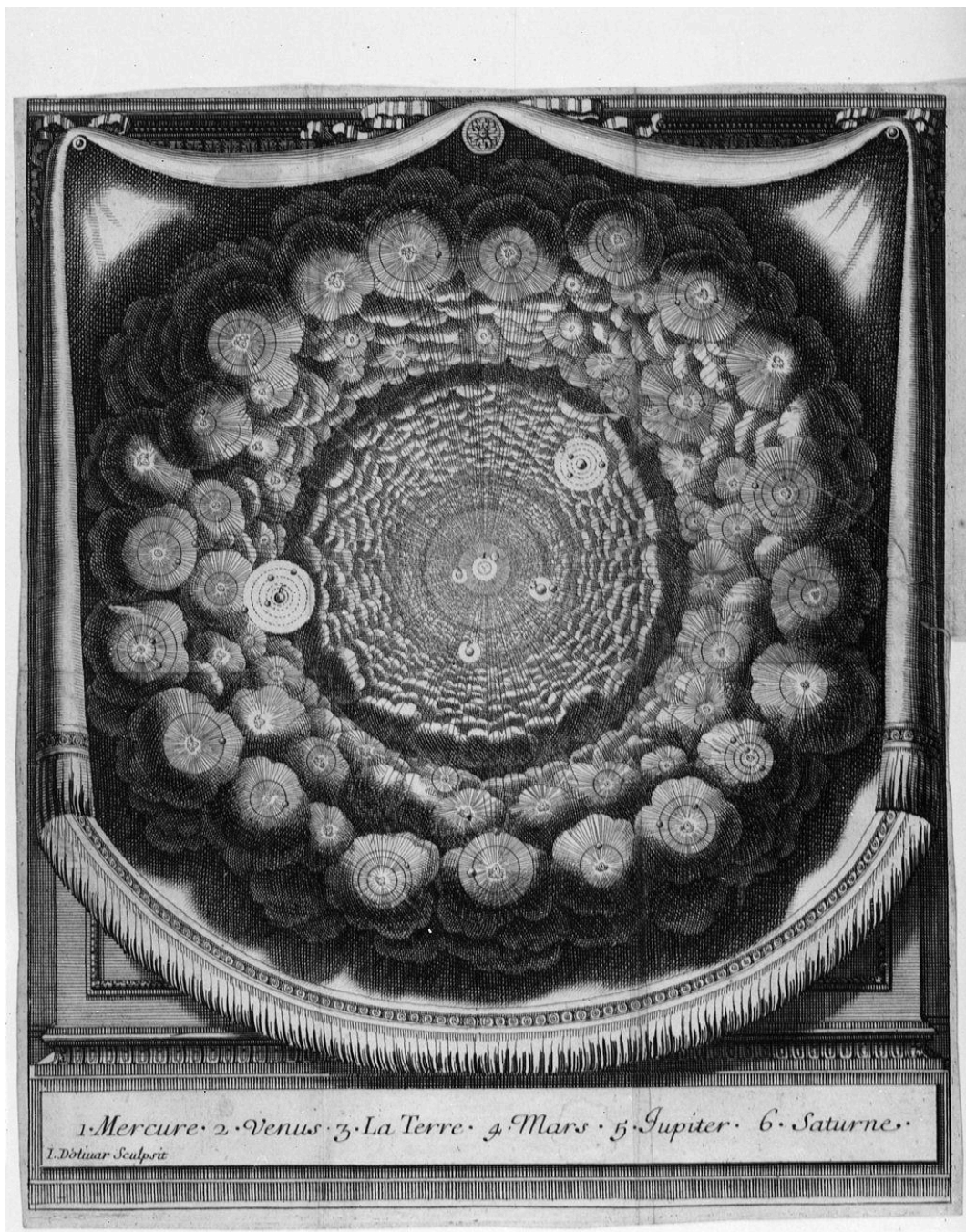


Figure 2-9.
Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes, frontispiece, 1686



Figure 2-10.
Bernard Picart, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, frontispiece, 1728

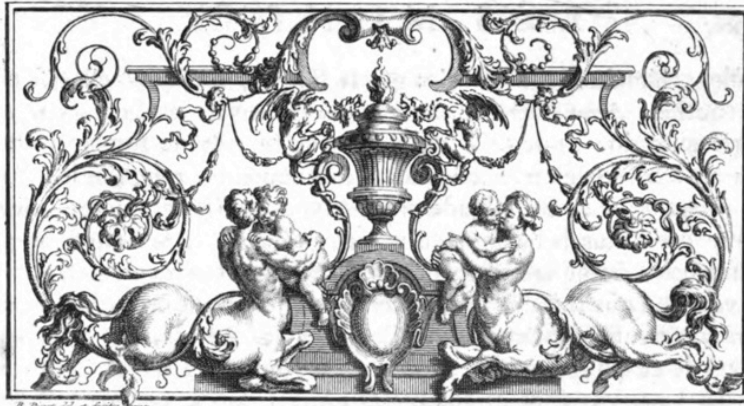


Figure 2-11.
Bernard Picart, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, vignette, 1728

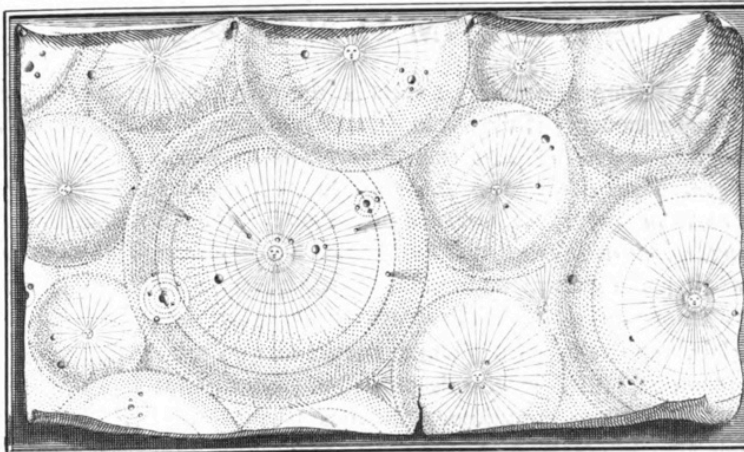


Figure 2-12.
Bernard Picart, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, vignette, 1728

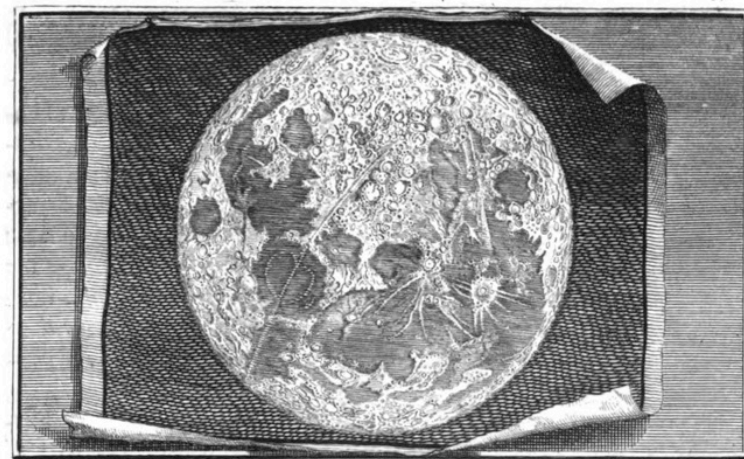


Figure 2-13.
Bernard Picart, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, vignette, 1728



NOUVELLES OBSERVATIONS

Faites avec des Microscopes tout nouveaux, sur une multitude innombrable d'insectes, et d'autres Animaux de diverses especes qui naissent dans des liqueurs préparées et dans celles qui ne le sont point

PREMIERE PARTIE

CHAPITRE PREMIER

Description des Microscopes dont je me suis Servi.



yant dessein de rapporter ce qui se peut Observer de plus singulier, et de plus imperceptible à la simple vûë dans divers mixtes, soit solides soit liquides, et sur tout de décrire les petits Animaux que les yeux armez, d'exelents Microscopes, y aperçoivent; J'ay crû

Figure 2-14.

Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes, 1718. p.1

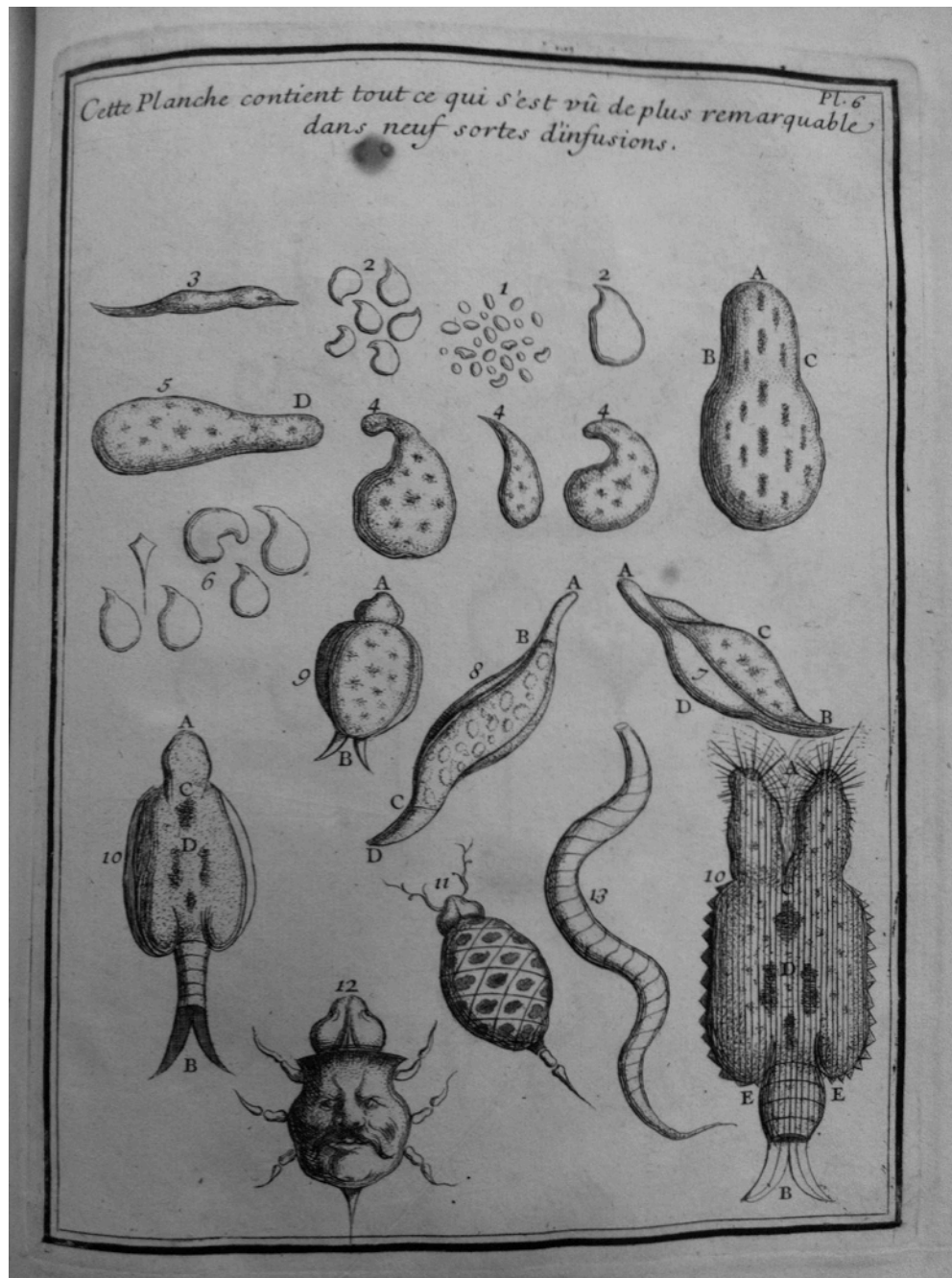


Figure 2-15.
Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes, 1718. plate 6

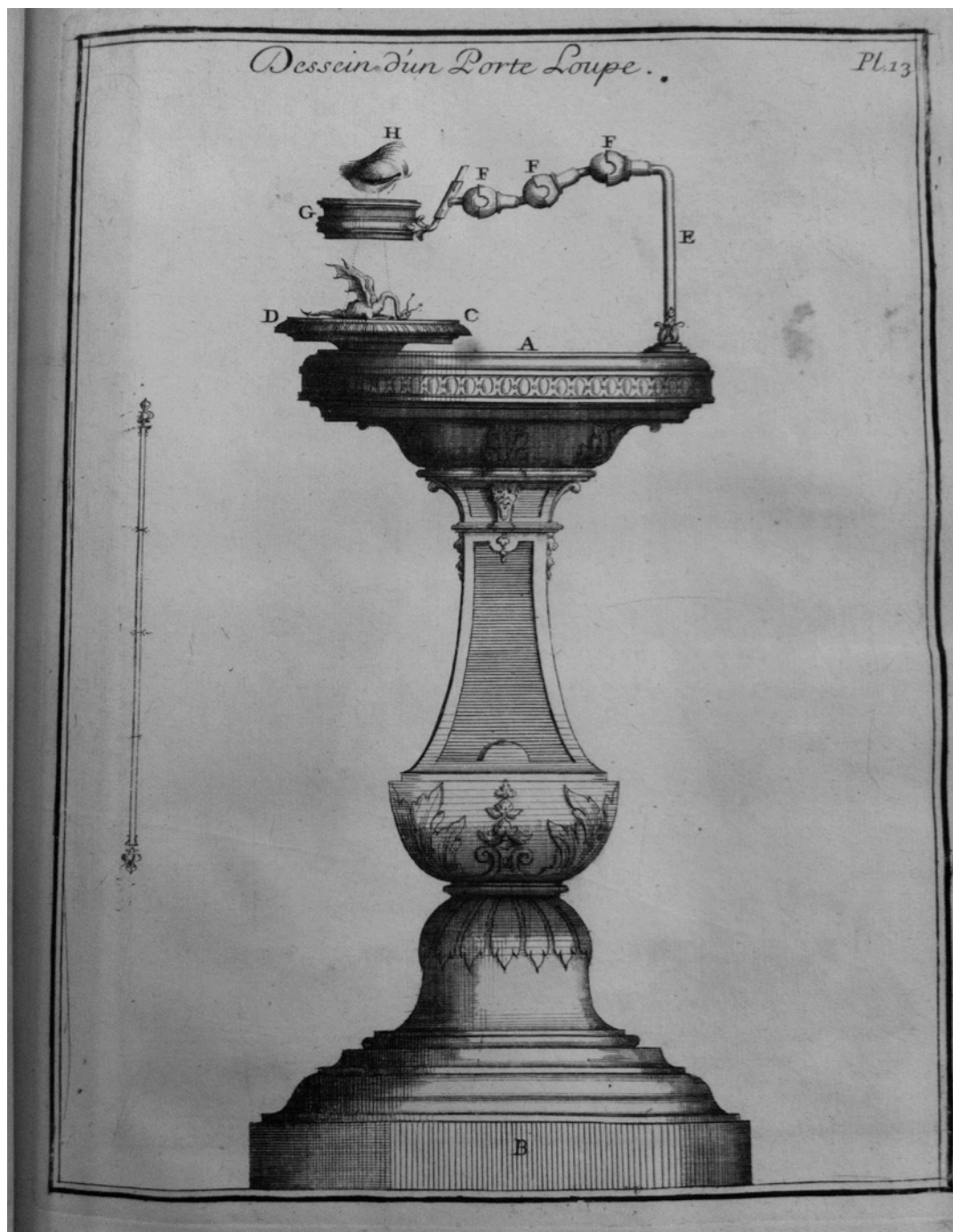


Figure 2-16.
Description et usages de plusieurs nouveaux microscopes, 1718. plate 13



Figure 3-1.
Antoine Watteau, *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*, 1721.
163 x 308 cm.
Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin



Figure 3-2.
 Francois Boucher, *À la Pagode*, 1740
 Engraved by the comte de Caylus
 27.9 x 18.5 cm.
 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes.



Figure 3-3.
Antoine Watteau, *Lao Gine ou Veillard Chinois*,
Engraved by François Boucher, 1731
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes



Figure 3-4.
Jacques de Lajoue, *Divertissement Chinois*, 1736.
35 x 20 cm.
Engraved by Basan
Berlin, *Kunstabibliothek*



Figure 3-5.

J-A. Meissonnier, (Detail) *Projet pour la décoration du feu d'artifice de l'ambassadeur d'Espagne à l'occasion de la naissance du Dauphin, 1728-9*

Drawing, ink & wash.

Montréal CCA

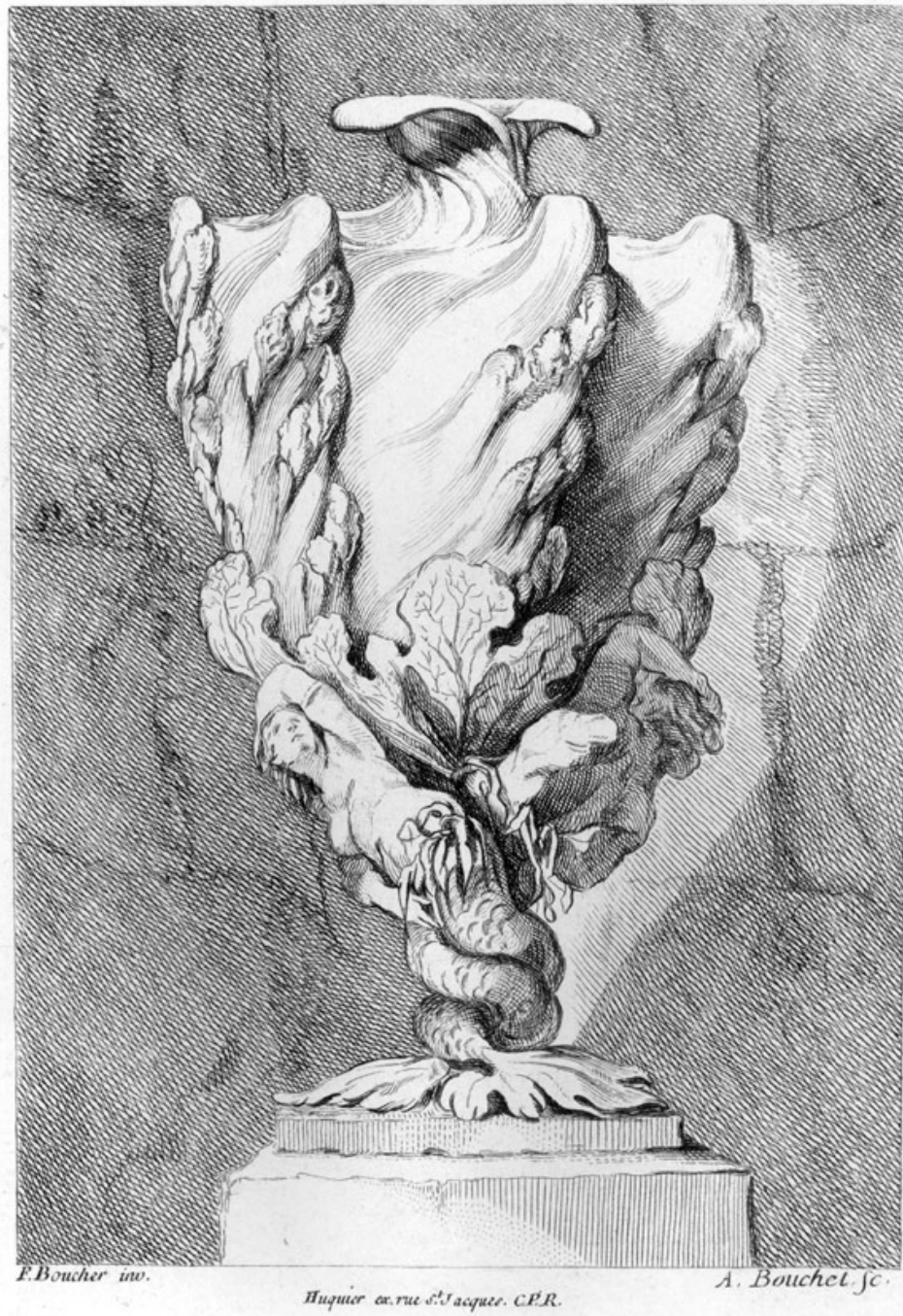


Figure 3-7
François Boucher, Vase, 1736



Figure 3-8.
Plate 16 (detail) from A.-J. Dézallier D'Argenville. *L'histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales*,. Paris: De Bure, 1742.



Figure 3-9. Frontispiece to part four of Buonanni's *Ricreatione dell'occhio e della mente nell'osservatione delle chiocciolle* 1681, engraving

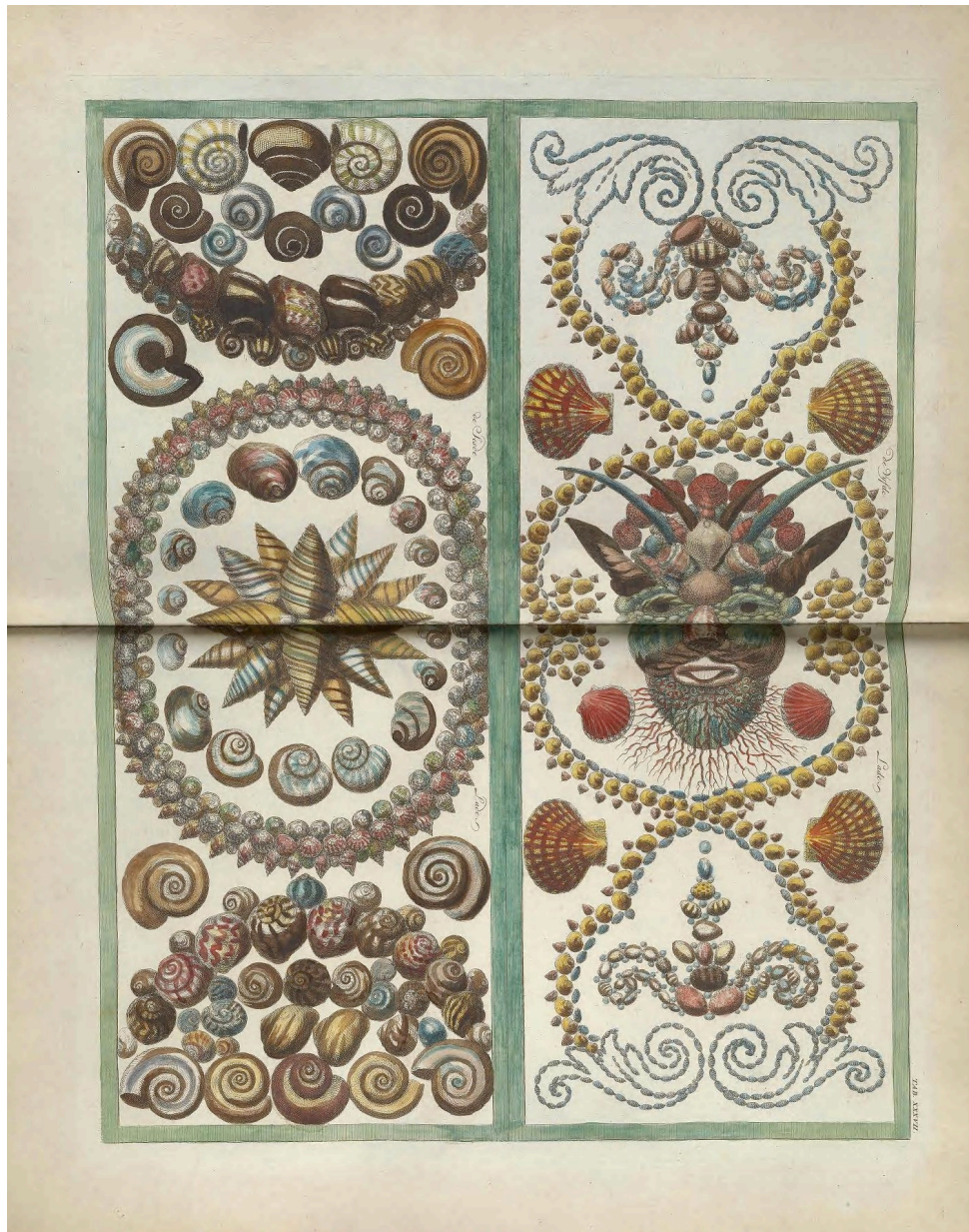


Figure 3-10. Plate 37 of Albertus Seba's *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri* (1734), Engraving and guache.



Figure 3-11.
 Charles Le Brun, *Masques de coquillages et de rocailles*,
 Engraved by Francois Chauveau
 plate 15 from *Description de la grotte de Versailles*. Paris, Imprimerie Royale 1679,
 from a copy at the Institut national de l'histoire de l'art, Paris



Figure 3-12.
Francois Boucher, frontispiece designed for E.-F. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles...* 1736,
Engraving by Duflos



Figure 3-13. Foldout plate from Vincent, Levinus, and Romeyn de Hooghe. *Elenchus tabularum, pinacothecarum, atque nonnullorum cimeliorum, in gazophylacio Levini Vincent.* Harlemi Batavorum : Sumptibus auctoris, 1719.

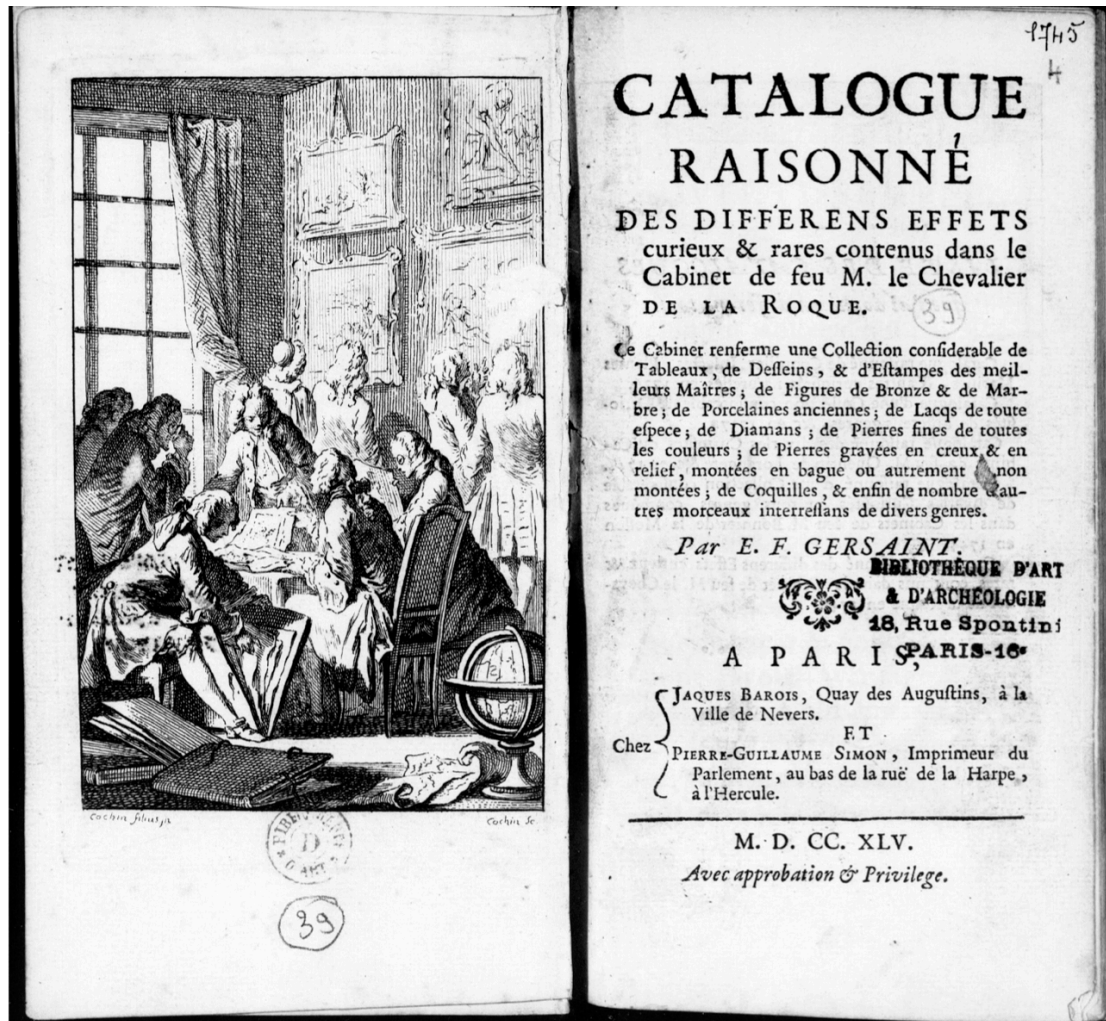


Figure 3-14.

Cochin fils, Frontispiece for E. F. Gersaint *Catalogue raisonné des differens effets curieux et rares contenus dans le Cabinet de feu M. le Chevalier de la Roque*, 1745 Paris

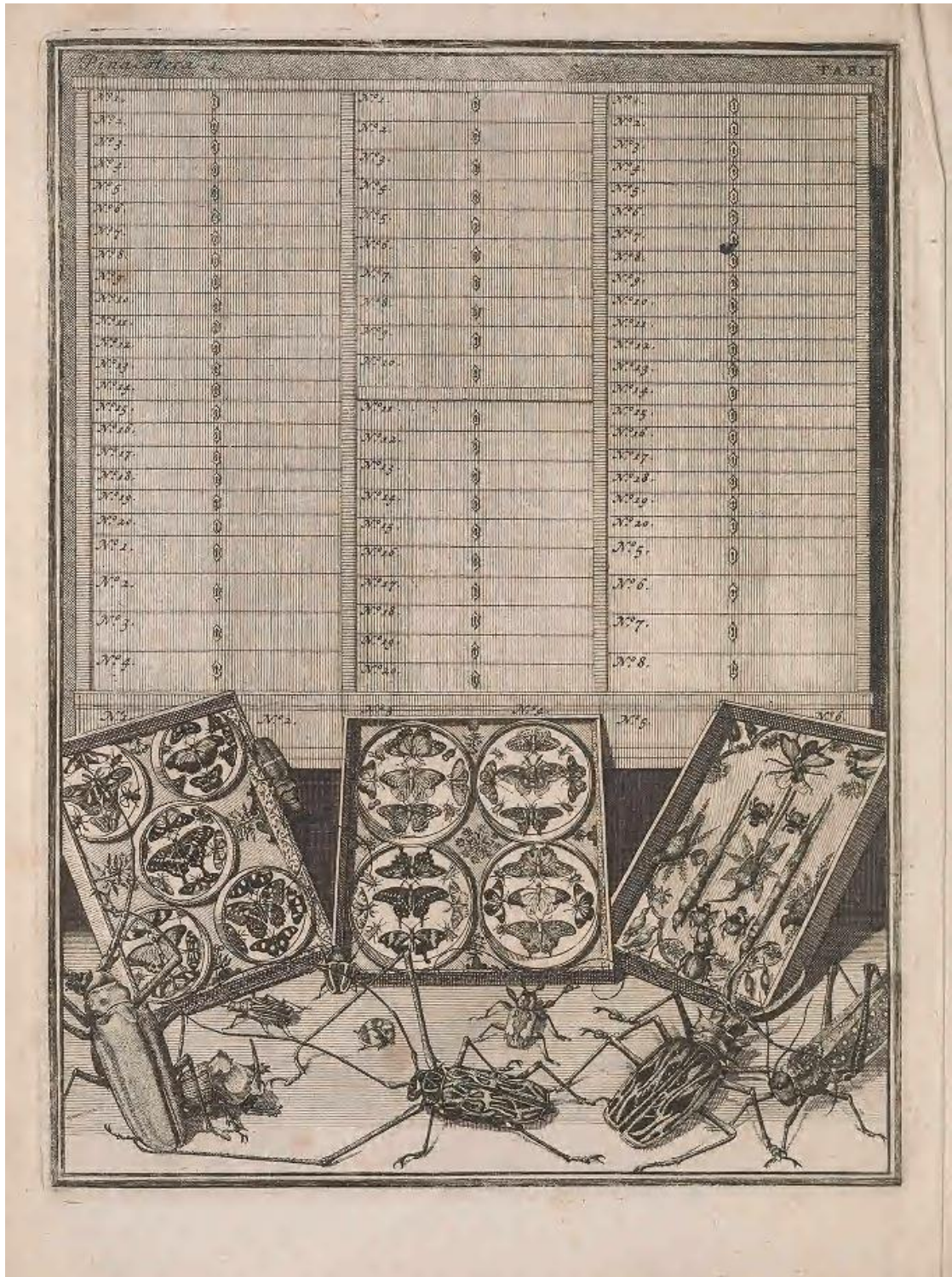


Figure 3-15. *Pinacotheca 1* from Vincent, Levinus, and Romeyn de Hooghe. *Elenchus tabularum, pinacothecarum, atque nonnullorum cimeliorum, in gazophylacio Levini Vincent. Harlemi Batavorum : Sumptibus auctoris, 1719.*

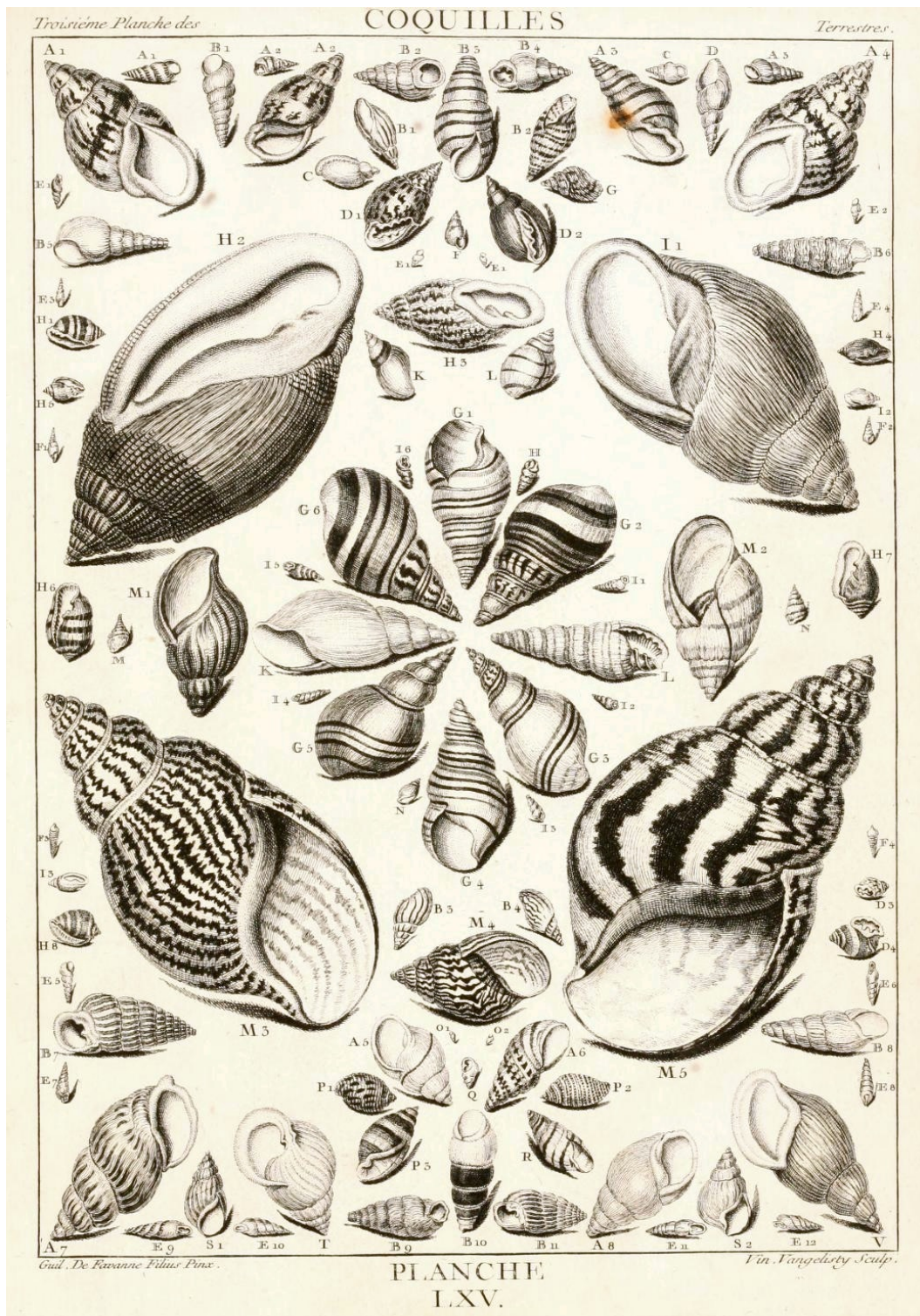


Figure 3-16.

Guillaume de Favannes, "Troisième planche des coquilles terrestres". Plate 65 of A.-J. Dézallier D'Argenville, *La conchyliologie, ou Histoire naturelle des coquilles de mer*. Paris: 1780

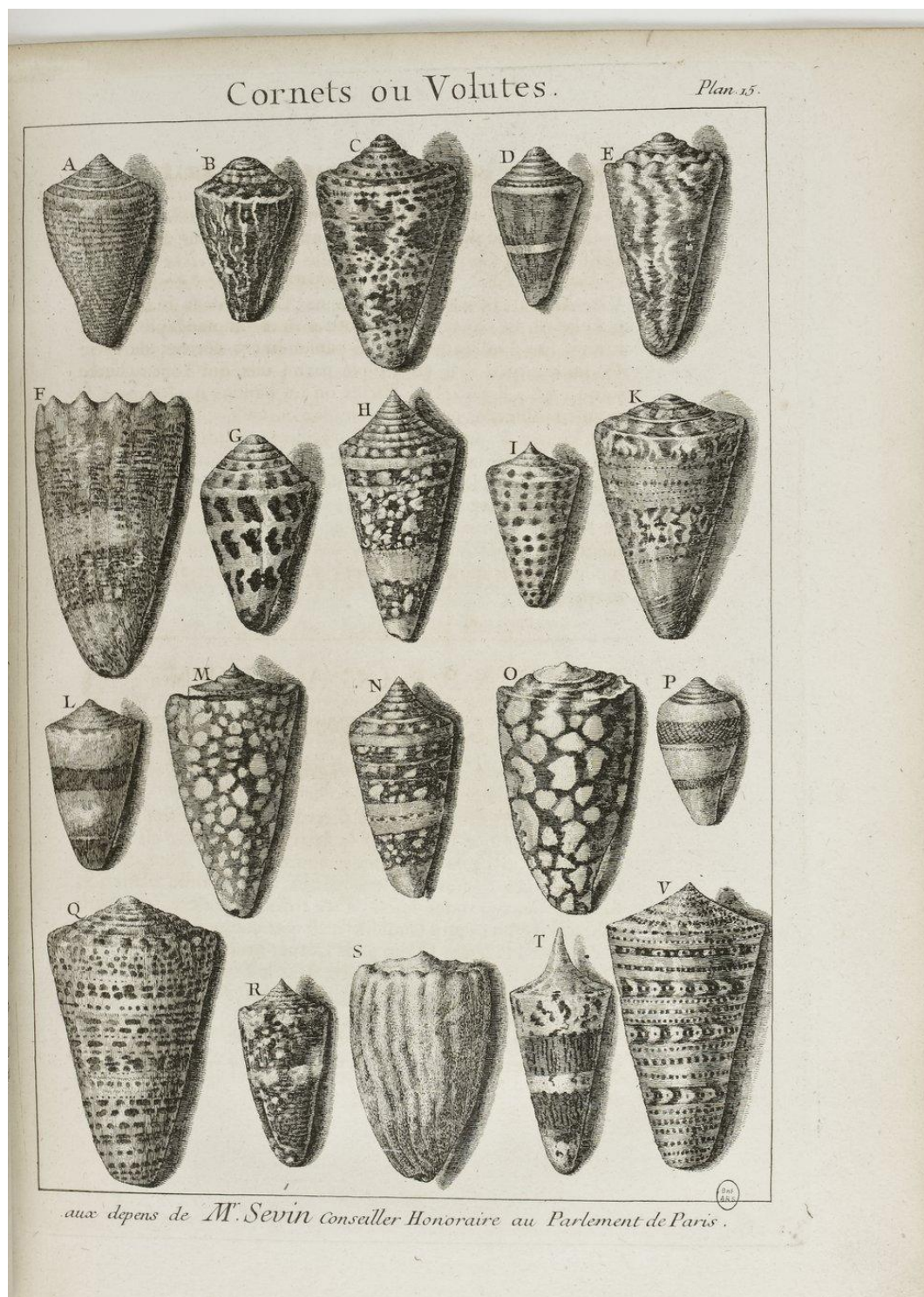


Figure 3-17.

"Cornets ou Volutes", Plate 15 from A.-J. Dézallier D'Argenville. *L'histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales.* Paris: De Bure, 1742.

Bibliothèque nationale de France



Figure 3-18.

Francois Boucher, Frontispiece from Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux principes, la lithologie et la conchyliologie*, 1742

Engraved by Charles Jombert

Bibliothèque nationale de France



Figure 5-1.
François Boucher, *Andromède*, 1734
Engraving
35 x 24 cm
Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Collection Edmond de Rothschild, Paris



Figure 5-2.
Francois Lemoine, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1723
Oil on canvas
183 x 149.7 cm
Wallace Collection, London



Figure 5-3.
Titian, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1554-56
Oil on canvas
175 x 189.5 cm
Wallace Collection, London



Figure 5-4.
Paolo Veronese, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1584
Oil on canvas
260 x 211 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes



Figure 5-5.
François Boucher, *Leda and the Swan*, 1742
Oil on canvas
59.4 x 74 cm
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Figure 5-6.

François Boucher, *Hermaphrodite*, 1728-30

Engraving by L. Desplaces, 1741

Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Collection Edmond de Rothschild, Paris



Figure 5-7.

Francois Boucher, *Venus endormie*,

Engraved by Michel Aubert, 1735

20 x 26 cm

Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Collection Edmond de Rothschild, Paris



Figure 5-8.
François Boucher, *Venus endormie*, 1735
Oil on canvas
143 x 96 cm
Musée Jacquemart-André



Figure 5-9.
François Boucher, *The Triumph of Venus*, 1740
Oil on canvas
130 x 162 cm
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Figure 5-10.
François Boucher, *Woman Fastening her Garter*, 1742
Oil on canvas
52.5 x 66.5 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



Figure 5-11.
Francois Boucher, *A Lady on her Daybed*, 1743.
Oil on canvas
57.2 x 68.3 cm
Frick Collection, London



Figure 5-12.
François Boucher, *Odalisque brune*, 1743.
Oil on canvas
53 x 64 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 5-13.
François Boucher, *Odalisque blonde*, 1752.
Oil on canvas
59 x 73 cm
Alte Pinakothek, Munich



Figure 5-14.

Suzon et Saturnin

*Histoire de Don B***, portier des chartreux, écrite par lui-même....*

Planche face page 98

Jean-Charles Gervaise de Latouche (1715-1782), Paris, 1741.

BnF, Réserve des livres rares, Enfer 326

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