

Mechanics of an Architectural Sublime: from Sublime Philosophy to Architecture  
Parlante and a Translation into Design

Benjamin E. Baaske

Contributing chapter to *Architectural Philosophy: Pleasantly Pretentious*  
Department of Architecture  
College of Architecture  
Texas A&M University

Instructor: Robert Warden

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## Abstract

The sublime encompasses an opposition of amplified attributes of emotion and experience. These attributes are not commonplace, but are deeply entrenched in human thought, in a place designated the sublime. Throughout history, the sublime has experienced redefinition and reinterpretation since its inception by Cassius Longinus in the first century of the Common Era (or the age of Christ, AD). Nicolas Boileau's translation of the text in 1674 influenced and popularized the little-known theory. The sublime is typically pitted against beauty in the philosophy of aesthetics. The sublime affixes itself to meanings of "elevation", "loftiness", or "height." Beyond meaning, it has culminated relationships to "ecstasy, grandeur, terror, awe, astonishment, wonder, and admiration" (Doran, 2015).

In architecture, the idea of "the sublime" is often applied to the French "visionary architects" of the late 18th century: Étienne Louis-Boullée, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Jean-Jacques Lequeu, Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, et al. Another term applied to the works of these visionaries is "architecture parlante", or "speaking architecture" (Gargus, 2011). A slate of examples across their works show designs communicating the architecture designation of their respective concept. Boullée uses vague and ambiguous titles for his projects such as, "Conical Cenotaph", "Entrance to a Cemetery", "City Gate", etc. [Figures 1-3]. While Ledoux uses a similar technique in creating titles for his projects, the works all indicate a site and context for their application. Lequeu, like Boullée, is apt to assign function to his designs, and does not indicate specific site context: "Cow's Stable on a Cool Meadow", "The Prince's Hunting Gate", "A Small House in the Egyptian Style", etc. [Figures 4-6] (Lemagny, 1968).

Discussion on the French visionary architects can digress into debate on their stylistic lineage and connection to future styles, or movements in architecture. These designs rely on classical elements and emerge at a time when Neoclassicism is heavily criticized (Perouse de Montclos, 1974). However, the classical elements composing these compositions are manipulated in ways which distance them from a Neoclassical rhetoric in design: deconstruction (Ledoux's "House of the Director of the City of Chaux") [Figure 7], scale (Boullée's "Metropolitan Cathedral") [Figure 8], or asymmetry (Lequeu's Meeting Place of Bellevue) [Figure 9]. The simplification of architectural elements, or "purity of form", can also be interpreted as a kind of proto-Modernist style (Campagnol, 2015). This technique of simplification amplifies the geometric qualities of the composition, an attribute key to the Modern aesthetic. Another interpretation lies in the movement's name (architecture parlante) and its more absurd examples. By definition, the architecture is communicating itself, its purpose. This stance harkens to a postmodern reading, not unlike Robert Venturi's "Duck" (Venturi, 1966). Reiterating "communicating itself" as a governing principle to their designs, the French visionary works may liken themselves to even more contemporary ideas in design, such as object-oriented ontology. Instead of asking (as with Louis Kahn's brick) a building material what it wants to be, object-oriented ontology (and possibly architecture parlante) asks, "What does the building want to be?" (Godel, 2012).

The architecture of the 18th century, French visionaries fascinates in the grandiose, the absurd, and the terrifying. Boullée, in particular, builds massive monuments and fantastic infrastructural projects, imposing mass and grandeur upon their helpless subjects. Ledoux applies a more meticulous and orderly imposition through careful symmetry and manipulation of scale elements

within a composition. Lequeu delights in the absurd, while (at times) applying similar techniques of pure form and scale manipulation within a composition. The effectiveness of this juxtaposition of beauty and terror with the compositions of architecture parlante create an inherent comparison to, or encompassing of, the sublime.

Beyond the designs themselves, the French visionaries represented their work in deliberate ways. While some examples of Boullée stand out in the realm of the fantastic, his techniques, and that of the other visionaries are not unique in their own right. However, the techniques in representation applied to their respective designs create compositions of that which can be undoubtedly understood as sublime. Their works echo the aspects of grandeur, terror, and awe. Within their work, a conflict is rendered out. Works termed “architecture parlante” do not reside in a realm of beauty, a realm where an absolute is subjectively applied. Rather, these works reside in the realm of the sublime, where pleasure and terror are amplified and allowed to create fantastic expressions of paradoxical unities.

This work will examine the concept of the sublime, architectural works labeled as “sublime”, and seek to extract the underlying connections from a sublime concept into a sublime architecture. Through this examination of the philosophical sublime and the architectural sublime, techniques in expressing sublimity in architectural design and representation can be discussed. This discussion can add to the discourse of architectural philosophy by exploring the mechanics of the sublime and how those mechanics translate to an architectural sublime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In other words, this paper seeks to explain the philosophical sublime, make a case for certain examples of architecture as having high concentrations of sublime qualities (building a “sublime toolkit”), in turn, making a case for what an “architectural sublime” might be.

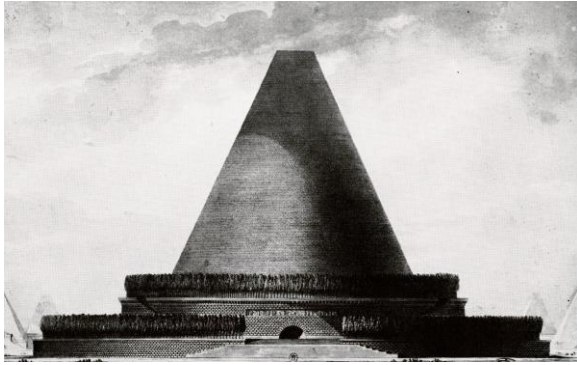


Figure 1. "Conical Cenotaph" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

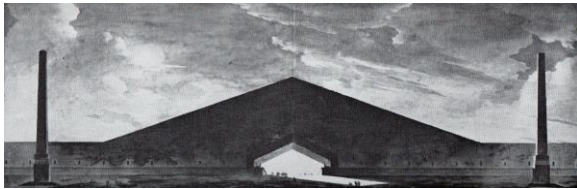


Figure 2. "Entrance to a Cemetery" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

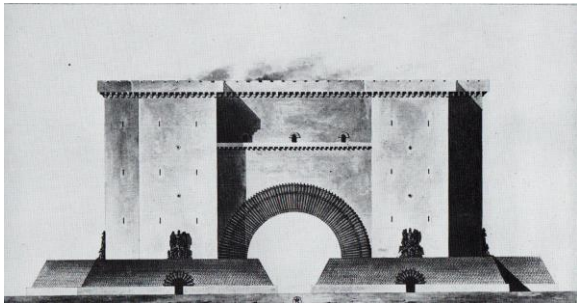


Figure 3. "City Gate" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

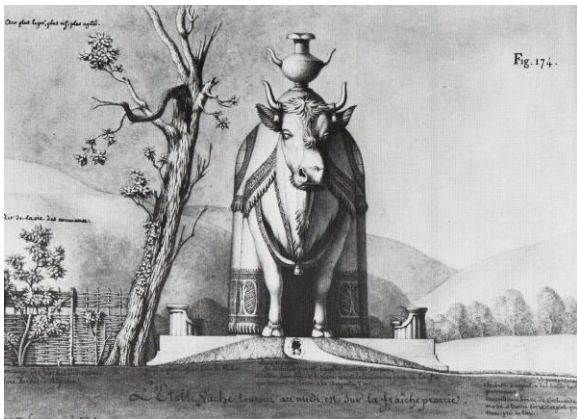


Figure 4. "Cow's Stable on a Cool Meadow" | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

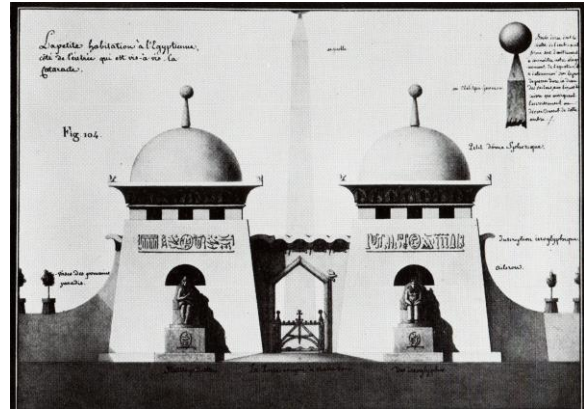


Figure 5. "A Small House in the Egyptian Style" | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

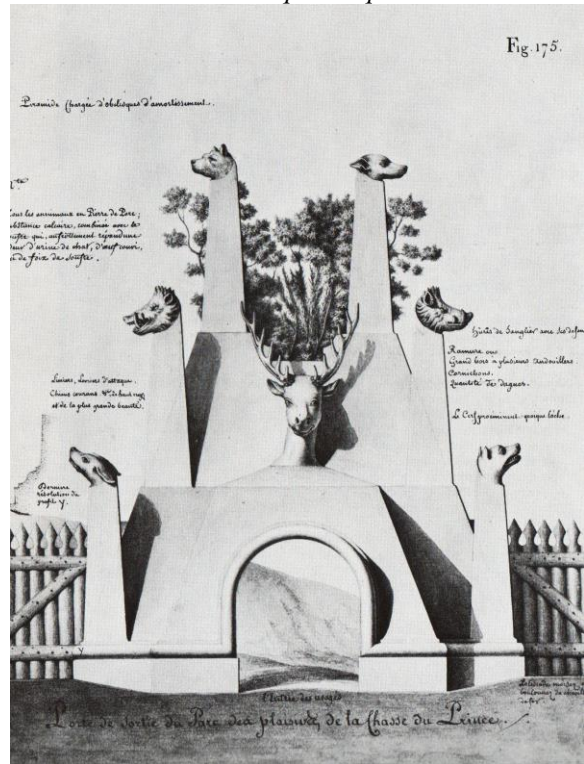


Figure 6. "The Prince's Hunting Gate" | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

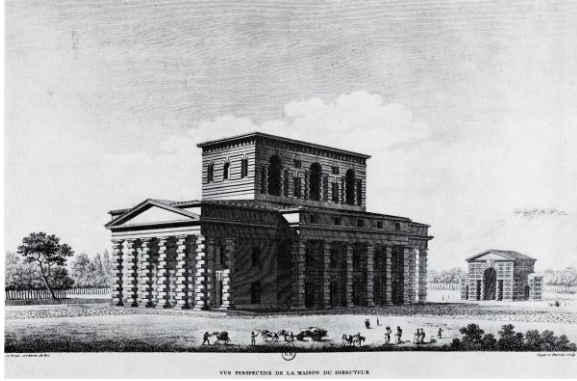


Figure 7. "House of the Director of the City of Chaux" | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

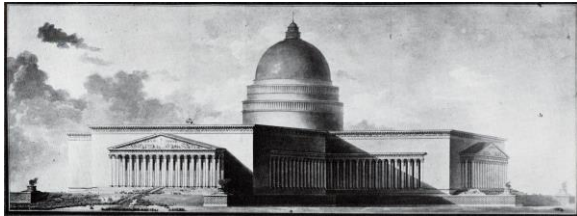


Figure 8. "Metropolitan Cathedral" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

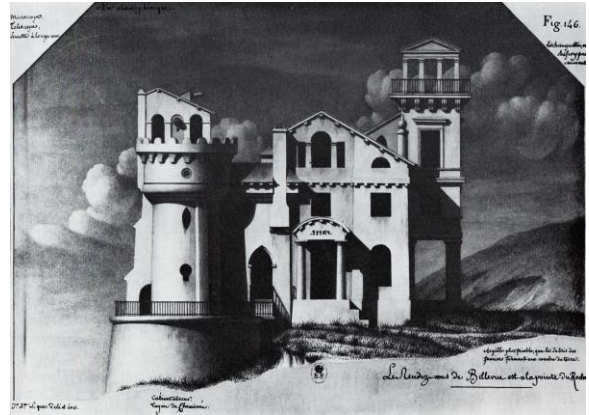


Figure 9. "Meeting Place of Bellevue" | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

## **Introduction: Sublimity in a Philosophy of Architecture**

The sublime is understood to be “loftiness”, or “elevated”, evoking feelings of awe, wonder, astonishment, ecstasy, while also evoking terror and fear. Sublime is often discussed alongside “beauty” in the philosophy of aesthetics. The feeling of sublime is described as being subjugated, submitting to the grandeur and power of something outside the self, while at the same time feeling the self-rise in stature as a result of the experience of a higher, elevated concept or entity.

This kind of paradoxical dichotomy is at the core of the sublime. The sublime is a heightened sense of the most extreme case; awe, wonder, astonishment, ecstasy, fear, terror, amplified to their highest extreme. Where beauty is considered and understood in the most positive sense, the sublime is this ambivalent state of contradictory, stronger emotional sensations of existence (ecstasy, terror), two opposing notions existing in a singularity.

Where is pain in all of this? While the notion of pain suggests a strong relation to the more extreme emotional sensations of existence, like ecstasy and terror. Pain lies at an interface between the mind and the environment. Terror can be understood as induced by the *thought* of pain. Why does terror exist if not for the indication of pain of some sort? So, if terror exists in the mind in respect for pain (pain is when terror becomes “real”), then what is ecstasy? Look no farther than the common concept of “pleasure and pain.” Is ecstasy really felt in an interface sense as with pain? Or, is ecstasy the *thought* of pleasure, reaching a state of “exaltation of the most high,” reaching a state of height, loftiness,

elevation, the sublime, as it has previously been defined.

If ecstasy and terror exist in thought, in the state of the sublime, in the state of loftiness, height, and elevation, then causality can be brought into question. What causes a sublime response? Without going into the question of external stimuli, and whether or not those stimuli “exist,” a sublime response is caused by the other, the environment, the non-subject.

First, the notion of the non-subject, and external stimuli, is a broad notion. In the realm of the non-subject, there may not be a more appropriate course of examination than that of the built environment, the elements of the non-subject created by the minds of “subjects.” This may be a misnomer, as in a case-by-case consideration, there is only one “subject.” However, for this discussion, the premise of a population of “subjects”, subjects termed, “humans,” is established. This examination is inherently introspective. An examination of the built environment is an examination of the spaces shaped by minds. These spaces (shaped by minds) then, in turn, shape the minds of those that follow.

Second, the built environment, the spaces shaped by minds, is a broad field. Reaching back to the interest and examination of the sublime, and the associated cognitive responses (ecstasy, terror, astonishment, etc.), how might these mind-shaped spaces evoke feelings of ecstasy, terror, and awe? What mind-shaping techniques i.e. architectural, or design techniques, elicit the sublime? What mind-shaped spaces exhibit a concentration of these sublime-eliciting techniques, making them suspect as “sublime architecture”?

Third, “sublime architecture” is still too broad. The mind-shaped spaces are too numerous, and their variables too dynamic. A mind-shaped space may sound, look, or feel sublime today, but not tomorrow. The mind-shaped space may be *presented* in specific ways that indicate a sublime architecture.

### **Peri Hypsous: Astonishment, Ecstasy, Terror, and Excellence**

Longinus’ use of “hypsous” (sublime), while translated as “elevated, loftiness, awe, astonishment, ecstasy, terror,” etc., focuses on the mind of the expresser and the effect of the experience on an audience. Furthermore, Longinus indicates an element of excellence that must be present in order for a work to achieve sublimity. Sublimity also pertains to the aforementioned attributes acting with a temporal factor; this astonishment, ecstasy, terror, and excellence must occur at a specific time. Where time is even more critical for Longinus is the position of seemingly sublime work in the context of history. He argues that a sublime work must transcend its historical context. The excellence of the work must transcend time and become almost inherently excellent, not in a particular historical context, but excellent in a definitive and eternal way. “‘Sublimity is the means by which the greatest writers have given *eternal* life to their own flame’ (1.3, my emphasis); what is sublime is ‘worthy of eternity’...” (Doran).

How is the elevation, loftiness, astonishment, awe, ecstasy, terror, excellence, and eternity of something quantified, understood, and agreed upon? These aspects are all apparent as incredibly subjective and particular to their historical context and the background of those

producing the work being considered as sublime. This discussion is not likely to be one of definitive conclusion (while the irony of Longinus’ eternal excellence is not lost), but rather a fruitful insight into the aim of expression, exercising the question of “why do things?” Why express inner concepts through different mediums if not to create lasting (eternal) works of excellence? Now, that may seem lofty, delusional, and pretentious. However, if the question is tweaked to, “why express inner concepts to create temporary works of mediocrity?” this aim may seem dim and absurd. Maybe the aim is to create temporary works of excellence, because it is difficult to the point of impossibility to comprehend eternity and further in the direction of unfathomable to understand “excellence” in the past or the future.

Shelving the notion of a “present excellence”, Longinus’ ideas of elevation, loftiness, awe, astonishment, ecstasy, and terror pertain more to mental elements than external experience.<sup>2</sup> He speaks of elevation or loftiness with respect to the sublime as high-mindedness, where the writer (in most of his discussion) has transcended typical human comprehension. The writer has exceeded the standards of their expression to the point of divine comparison. Despite this fixation on height of mind, elevation and loftiness are not only within the realm of the mind. While Longinus indicates elevation and loftiness of mind to be a kind of internal hierarchy one can temporarily reach (outputting an eternal expression of excellence), linguistically, these words (elevation and loftiness) indicate the

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that Longinus is claiming sublime to be only “in the mind”, but that he is discussing a mental sublime, a state of high-mindedness capable of creating high-minded works. He speaks specifically to literature, sublime writings.

external experience of height and a kind of counterintuitive sensation of gravity.

How else might “height” be understood? How else might a “counterintuitive sensation of gravity”, i.e. floating or flying, be understood? Furthermore, why would these external experiences be considered sublime? Why would the terms synonymous or definitive of a term be used to describe it? Height might indicate a head-distance-above-ground relationship, relative height between adjacent surfaces, the reduction of surface to where any adjacent surface is no longer visible i.e. an elevated island effect, and so on. Individual height seems lackluster, and less likely to create an experience of sublime on its own (although that could certainly be disputed). The latter examples given of relative height between adjacent surfaces and a lack of any adjacent surface lend themselves well to a brief tangent into architectural sublimity.

Why would standing on a surface higher (or lower) than an adjacent surface elicit a sensation of sublime? Do both positions (above and below) elicit a response, and how are those different and the same?

This indication of height and architectural spaces leads to an understanding of some architectural conditions discussed by Rudolf Arnheim in *Dynamics of Architectural Form*.

There is also the notion of meaning i.e. what does it mean to *mean* something? Meaning could be defined as an agreed upon value and authenticity inherent within a word, phrase, expression, etc.

### **Longinus: Sublime Before it was Cool**

Longinus establishes sublime as a philosophical concept in the treatise, *Peri*

*Hypsous (On the Sublime)*, and is often credited with creating the concept. Was there no “hypsous” (“sublime”) before the first century C.E.? Before Longinus? Longinus helped to articulate this complex and extreme concept for the first time, a concept which would not again be discussed with credence and rigor for 1,500 years (Jaeger, 1). The text is obscure, likely missing a third of the complete treatise, and speculation exists concerning which Longinus the treatise should be attributed to; rhetorician and historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60-7 B.C.E.), and philosopher and political advisor, Cassius Longinus (213-273 C.E.), are both indicated as contributors in 10th century manuscripts, *The Problems of Aristotle* (Doran, 30). Regardless of the author(s) and their origin, *Peri Hypsous (On the Sublime)* provides foundation of a philosophical sublime.

In the treatise, Longinus explains three basic principles to sublime: intrinsic relationship to *logos* (discourse), indicates literary value spanning the general, and “*hypsous* is universal and transhistorical” (Doran, 34). “*Logos*” is not simply a rhetorical tool, but concerns thought and expression as well. Throughout discussion on the Longinian sublime, it is important to keep in mind that Longinus is primarily (if not entirely) focusing on sublime thought and expression as it is applied to prose and oratory.

### **Edmund Burke: Sublimity and Beauty**

Burke’s clarification and distinction on the sublimity of objects states that, “...sublime objects are vast in their dimensions.” As he continues, his distinction between the sublime and the beautiful creates a clear parallel to architectural works to be discussed in the paper. Of the sublime, Burke describes “the great,” and lists



attributes that align with “greatness.”<sup>3</sup> Burke describes the sublime as being “rugged and negligent,” “dark and gloomy,” and “solid and massive.” He also describes the behavior of a sublime choice in expression when he states that the sublime, “...in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation...” Burke’s claim that “...beauty should not be obscure...” implies that the sublime *should* be obscure (Burke, 157). This idea aligns with a concept discussed by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*.

### **Immanuel Kant: Looked on a Feeling**

“Night is sublime, day is beautiful.” (Kant, 47).

The beautiful is a bounded, determined concept, where the sublime is indefinite and boundless. The sublime is understood as a sort of negative pleasure. The beautiful relishes in a foresight of life, while the sublime in an indirect output of pleasure. Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* discusses the differences between what is understood to be beautiful and (or rather what is inherently misunderstood in itself) sublime. Of the sublime, “...it is produced by the feeling of a momentary checking of the vital powers and a consequent stronger outflow of them, so that it seems to be regarded as emotion-not play, but earnest in the exercise of the imagination.” (Kant - *Critique of Judgement*, 83). A feeling produced when powers are checked, only to be met with a “stronger outflow” of those same powers. This idea indicates the state of being overwhelmed discussed in previous sections. The very resistance to “vital powers” invites the projection of those powers upon the subject. What is more imposing and overwhelming than being met with higher

out flux upon resisting that same out flux? The latter of this quote adheres to Kant’s firm stance of “mind over matter”, regarding the state as emotional and an “exercise of the imagination.”

No natural element is inherently sublime but has sublimity acquiesced to its character through the imagination. “...the feeling of the sublime may appear...to violate its purpose in respect of the judgement...and as it were to do violence to the imagination.” This progression, then, only allows the sublime to be classified further as “more sublime”. Meaning (possibly), further investigation into the sublime does not extract deeper concepts within the sublime. This search for deeper meaning, a “thick description” (Geertz), only reinforces the sublime’s only characteristic, its sublimeness. Well, that notion bodes ill for this enterprise. If the character of the sublime is that it is *sublime*, then how can the sublime be described, in concept, and furthermore in an architectural sublime?

However, despite Kant’s description of a self-referential, self-reinforcing character of the sublime, he does describe certain attributes before logical paradox. For instance, he describes the sublime as an indefiniteness, without boundary. Removing that attribute from context and logical progression of Kant’s argument, a sublime understood as indefinite in the realm of art and expression is possible. However, does that raise question on the sublimeness of the art and expression? Referring back to Longinus, this questioning of an expression’s sublimeness is unacceptable. For Longinus, literary excellence, which transcends its temporal and geographical context, is sublime; the literary expression has a loftiness, high-minded inherent within it.

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<sup>3</sup> Burke distinguishes between the sublime and beauty, but exchanges “great” for sublime.

Could the sublime, or rather an entity's sublimeness dependent on its incompleteness? Is an entity's sublimeness dependent on its incomprehension and open-endedness? Is any "complete" work of architecture sublime? Does any "complete" work of architecture have any attributes constituting the sublime, or a sublimeness?

Kant's quote which opens this section, "Night is sublime, day is beautiful." hold an indication for understanding the sublime? What is night, but the world draped in darkness? What is darkness, but the unknown, the undefined? What is day, but the known, the defined, with clear, distinct borders? Kant is creating a dialectic in which beauty and sublime are antithesis to one another. Both concepts, beauty and sublime, are of the highest state of mind, they are pinnacles of human thought and expression. However, where beauty is a defined and understood pleasure, the sublime is an undefined and misunderstood pleasure. Not misunderstood and undefined in that deeper understanding and knowledge must be sought, but that to be "sublime" is to be misunderstood and undefined. If something were defined and understood on the highest plane of being, then it would be beautiful.

This establishes the works of the architecture parlante in firmer standing as sublime architectural works. These works are predominantly not realized, not manifest as buildings i.e. they violate their purpose "in respect of the judgement". These designs are so absurd and insane, the very notion of building most of them is irrational, even impossible. Because they are designed in such a way as to make them unachievable, they are sublime. However, it is not enough to make an impractical, impossible architectural work. Reaching back to Longinus and Burke, these works must be

excellent, transcend temporal contexts, and evoke the strongest of emotions of astonishment, terror, and ecstasy. Architectural sublime is the pinnacle architectural work that is inherently unachievable. The architectural work that can only exist in the mind and through other mediums outside the discourse where its genesis lies. This architectural work can be imagined, represented, and experienced, but never realized.

### Architecture parlante, the French Visionaries, and Architectural Sublime

*Spirit in will to express  
can make the great sun seem small.*

*The sun is.  
Thus the Universe.*

*Did we need Bach  
Bach is  
Thus music is.*

*Did we need Boullée  
Did we need Ledoux  
Boullée is  
Ledoux is  
Thus architecture is.*

Louis I. Kahn, "Twelve Lines" (Lemagny).

When the concept of the sublime is used in architecture, the discussion concentrates on the French visionaries of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes termed "architecture parlante." While these works are certainly not alone in their "sublimeness", or rather, what one might consider to be sublime methods in architecture, theirs are the architectural works that are discussed with higher frequency. Similar to the notion of the sublime in philosophy, loftiness, grandeur, and a kind of ecstasy and terror are apparent in the architectural sublime.

The premier examples of sublime architecture, or sublime architectural moves, reside in the fabrication or alteration of a “real” scene. This “scene” includes all characters, not just the natural environment, sky, etc., but also the design, its new, built environment, and the negotiations between characters.

The instant a moment is framed, filmed, captured, it is inherently fabricated and altered. This notion is imperative to a discussion on the architectural sublime, more so if the concentration of discussion is to be on a body of architectural works primarily understood through two dimensional rendering. The works to be discussed, those of the French visionaries, are incredibly framed, fabricated, or altered versions of reality. Some scenes do not exist, and others exist in a deliberate way.



Figure 10. “The Business Center” | Hugh Ferriss

Examples across architecture indicate a sublimeness. From the architecture parlante to Piranesi’s etchings to the renderings of Hugh Ferriss, these examples, and others, get referred to as an architectural sublime. Why is that? Why do the renderings of Hugh Ferriss elicit a response commonly associated with a philosophical concept, rooted in aesthetics, which translates into concepts such as loftiness, grandeur, terror,

and ecstasy? Why do the etchings of Piranesi appear “unreal”? Along the same thread, why do the works of architecture parlante seem so “unreal”? Why are almost none of these works built? Why are these works arguably the largest collection of unbuilt projects discussed in architectural theory, with the possible exception of the paper projects of the likes of the Manhattan Five?

In archaeological and historical rendering, not all that far removed from Piranesi’s aesthetic, there is a certain methodology in representation. The documentation efforts of the Princeton University Press certainly present a collection of historical works in a closely coordinated manner e.g. *Description de l’Egypte* and *Edifices de Roma*. Collected, curated, and published by Princeton, these works almost appear to be done systematically in the same aesthetic, a historical aesthetic. Unlike Piranesi’s etchings which delight in the application of entropy to ruin (which almost completely distracts from the visual moves of lighting, scale, and frame), the renderings in *Description de l’Egypte* and *Edifices de Roma* in differing systematic means. This systematic method allows for a well-coordinated collection of illustration which amplifies the conditions of light, texture, and surface of the artifacts, buildings, and scenes. While *Description de l’Egypte* uses a system akin to museum curation, an archaeological system of organization, *Edifices de Roma* system akin to high architectural drafting standards, boarding on engineering.



Figure 11. “Tomb of the Three Curatii Brothers in Albano” | Giovanni Battista Piranesi



Figure 12. “Remains of Funerary Structures along the Via Appia Antica” | Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Do these examples of historic representation have aspects that could be considered to be sublime? Are these apparent indicators of a sublime aesthetic merely representational moves or is there an inherent sublime quality being extracted by the renderer?

In addressing the issue of historical representation, there is an issue of interpretation. Meaning, real artifacts, buildings, scenes, are being rendered in a specific way. Why are they being represented like this? Now, if the works of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century French visionaries are considered, the rendering is now more than just representative of something separate from the renderer. The renderings *are* the *thing* i.e. the rendering is the “realist” manifestation of that expression. While

acknowledging the separation from mind to rendering or drawing, this initial expression of the idea is closer to the conception of the idea than a manifestation in the three dimensions, or the four dimensions if entropy and ruin have their way.<sup>4</sup>

“They were Romantic classicists. Their wish was to touch the soul through *une architecture parlante* - “architecture that speaks” - an architecture that would make each building express its character and function.” (Lemagny, 14). This resembles an indication of proto-modern design, “building express its character and function.” not unlike Louis Sullivan’s “form follows function”.<sup>5</sup> However, that communication, expression of character and function draw from aesthetics rather than perhaps the programming or use of the building. Lequeu may need removed from this discussion because his designs are incredibly insane. Lequeu will not be removed from the paper entirely, but from this deviation discussing architecture parlante’s relationship to modernism. Although, before Lequeu is dismissed, his works must be acknowledge as brilliant work of “architecture that speaks.”

Lequeu is making stables shaped like cows, hunting gates with various animal heads, earth temples depicted as globes, houses with Egyptian pylons and statues, etc. If Ledoux’s aim is excellence and Boullée’s is grandeur and mass (meaning if they’re reads are grossly oversimplified), then Lequeu is an eccentric, throwing out convention. Ledoux-Boullée to Lequeu could be understood as the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, the

<sup>4</sup> A recurring thought throughout the following descriptions and interpretations of architecture parlante works...who the hell am I to describe and interpret these works and pass judgements on them, categorize them as “sublime”?

<sup>5</sup> Louis Sullivan, 1896.

antithesis to a seemingly pretentious and delusional dogma. Lequeu is not always so confrontational to Ledoux and Boullée, but his ability to culminate a reputation as eccentric relative to two exceptionally eccentric designers themselves should be commended.

The architecture parlante projects communicate the aesthetic of a building's character and function i.e. an essence. The projects use larger-than-life manifestations of the ideal building for that character and function. Not in a pragmatic distinction, but these projects express an ideal look of a certain kind of building.

Could that expression of “an ideal look of a certain kind of building” still be considered proto-modern? They are not “doing modernism,” but they want to be i.e. they want their form to follow function.

### **Claude-Nicolas Ledoux**

Unlike some collections that will be discussed in later sections, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux does not rely on the effects of a well-textured, high contrast sky.<sup>6</sup> However, the play of light and shadow are imperative to Ledoux's renderings.<sup>7</sup> These deliberate shadows, also associated with the representation of historical documentation and reconstruction discussed in the previous section, are critical in monochromatic illustration when there is only ink and parchment. This great reduction requires a mastery of the design and the elements which compose it.

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<sup>6</sup> This does not imply a hierarchy, but merely a dialectic.

<sup>7</sup> While all the works are represented through images of varying architectural drawings, they will be collectively referred to as *renderings* for the remainder of the discussion.

In Ledoux's case, the aspects of his designs that may be interpreted as sublime reside less in the atmospheric inception of an otherworldly environment, but more in his sensibility and rigor with regards to composition and symmetry. Ledoux also challenges more comfortable notions of scale, but within compositions themselves. This method of manipulation of scale within a composition i.e. manipulation of scale within the frame of the building, allows for deliberate moves by pure geometric forms without employing the monumentality seen by other late 18th century French visionary architects e.g. Étienne-Louis Boullée, Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, etc.

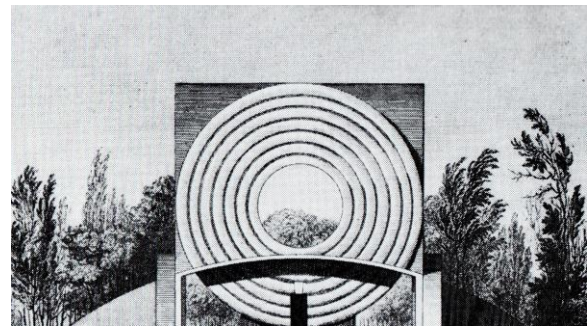


Figure 13. “Cooper’s Workshop” - Elevation / Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

### ***Cooper's Workshop***

Ledoux's first work in this examination is his “Cooper's Workshop”, a cube with concentric circles imposed on each of its four facades that are perpendicular to the ground plane. The foundations of the main cube of the building are two pairs of arcs; these arcs indicate the segment of a larger circle which aligns with the innermost concentric circle of each respective facade. From the workshop's elevation, to its section, and finally to its plan, Ledoux allows the idiosyncratic nature of the circle to fade away, while maintaining a centralized symmetry. While the circular figure is considerably reduced in section, it

is still visible with an either vaulted or ornamented ceiling. The circular opening (window/door) becomes the main compositional player in section as the seven concentric circles of the facades fade. Within the floor plan, no circular elements remain, except for the possible interpretation of circle centers, diameters, and radii indicated at intersections and other central-symmetrical relationships.

These “central-symmetrical” relationships can also be understood as “point symmetrical” relationships. This concept describes composition where elements are not merely symmetrical along a plane, but are also symmetrical to a point.

While “Cooper’s Workshop” may be read simply as some odd little box, the project’s oddness and apparent control in executing such an oddness plays to its excellence and unconventional thinking.

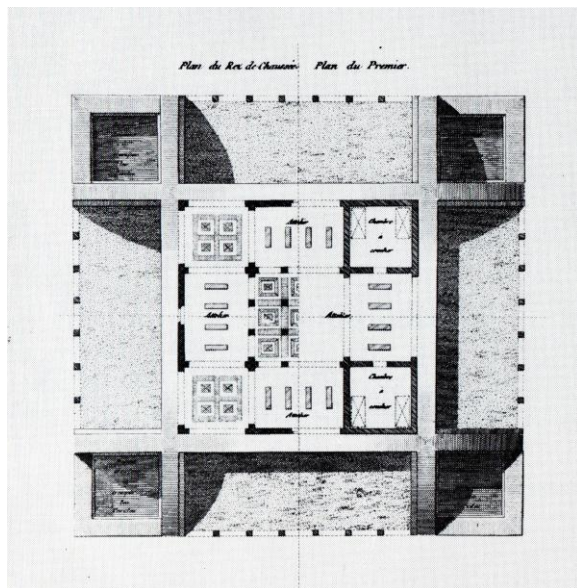


Figure 14. “Cooper’s Workshop” - Floor Plan | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

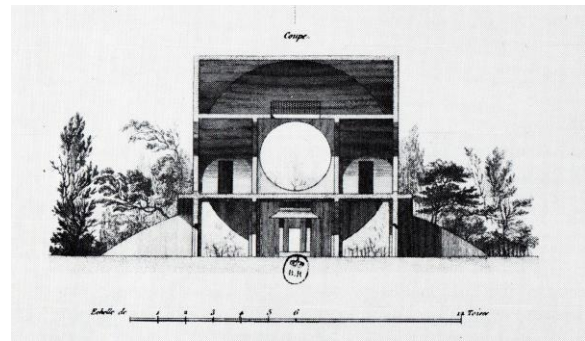


Figure 15. “Cooper’s Workshop” - Cross Section | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux



Figure 16. “Cemetery at Chaux” - Elevation | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

### Cemetery at Chaux

Similar to Boullée’s Cenotaph for Newton (which will be discussed in the following sections), Ledoux’s “Cemetery at Chaux” creates, not a domed space, but a complete, spherical space [Figure 17]. In addition to this seemingly uninhabitable, spherical space, Ledoux renders an “elevation” of the project [Figure 16]. The connection between this rendering and the following figures is unclear, undefined (Lemagny, 123). Ledoux’s description does little to aid the imagination in making such a connection, “there is the architect, up among the whirlwinds and clouds that battle to dominate the skies.” (Lemagny, 123). Beyond appearing rather pretentious, and perhaps overstating the importance of “the architect”, what could this statement mean? There is some disjoint here between the

cemetery project, the “elevation” rendering, and Ledoux’s commentary (commentary that is trusted to refer to the elevation of the cemetery; an elevation, which, in turn, is trusted to refer to the “Cemetery at Chaux”).

This apparent missed connection contributes to a reading of the “Cemetery at Chaux” as unbound and undefined. The idea being that this unboundedness and undefined character make the cemetery a clear candidate for a sublime architecture. However, the counterpoint might be that an undefined, or *unfinished*, architecture is not architecture at all. This disbelief in an undefined/unfinished architecture will be suspended for the time being, and reevaluated at length in the concluding section when design strategies for an architectural sublime are discussed.

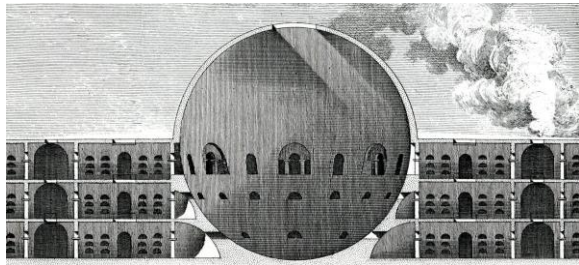


Figure 17. “Cemetery at Chaux” - Cross Section | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

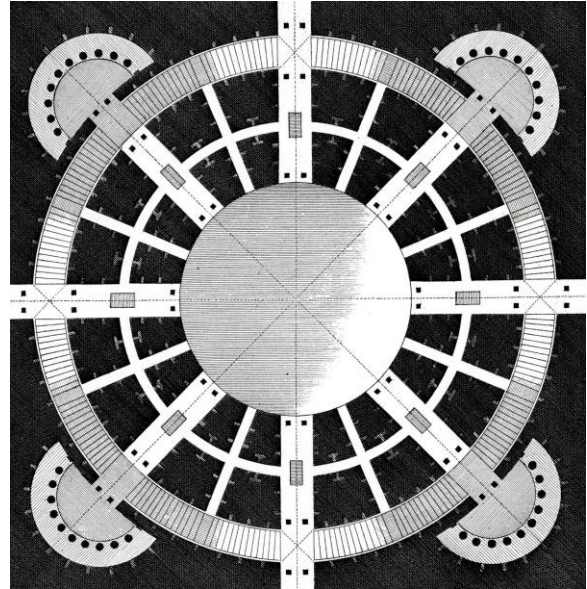


Figure 18. “Cemetery at Chaux” - Site Plan | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

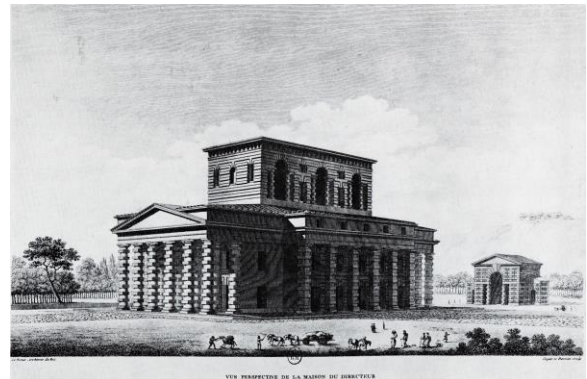


Figure 19. “House of the Director of the City of Chaux” | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

### **Salt Works at Chaux**

One of Ledoux’s most prominent works, his plan for the City of Chaux, while maybe not the highest concentration of sublime elements, is a fantastic example of his excellence in architectural composition. In relation to his “excellence in architectural composition”, the excellence pertains specifically to Ledoux’s mastery of proportion, that is, his control and utilization of scale within a composition.

More specifically, the “House of the Director of the City of Chaux” revisits column orders with the creation of a new order with pediments and façade techniques that harken to Greek and Roman compositions. Ledoux’s new column order alternates circular and square profile column drums, creating striated and fragmented appearance while almost using this altering of drum profiles to accentuate construction of a column. Columns in classical Greek architecture (as well as Roman and Maya architecture, and likely other cultures) were assembled using individual drums, stacked high to create the column. Fluting was incorporated to accentuate verticality, creating a vertical articulation of surface that would amplify as well hide horizontal seams of the drums.

The composition of elements on the main façade (the façade with the pediment in Figure 19) is ordered and proportioned in a way which reflects the classical Greek order. On the adjacent façade of the house, a similar balance of elements is struck, with the entablature extending upwards (in a sense) to the height of the pediment mentioned previously.



Figure 20. “Quarters for the Rural Caretakers” - Elevation | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

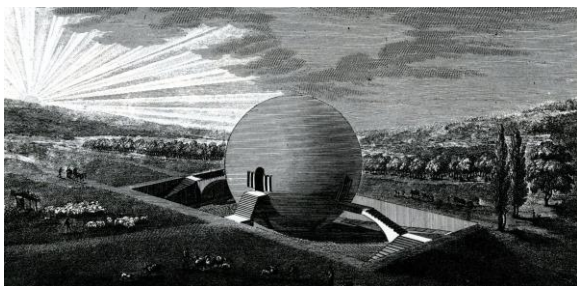


Figure 21. “Quarters for the Rural Caretakers” | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

**Quarters for the Rural Caretakers**

Ledoux’s “Quarters for the Rural Caretakers” is fantastic in metaphor; its excellence in this sense along with its aesthetic attributes make it a project consisting of a high concentration of sublime techniques. Ledoux’s fantastic metaphor stems from the name of the project, “Quarters for the Rural Caretakers.

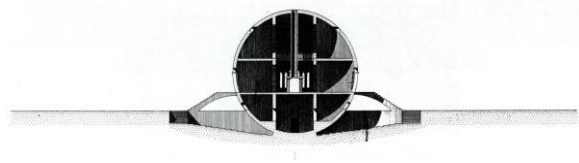


Figure 22. “Quarters for the Rural Caretakers” - Cross Section | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

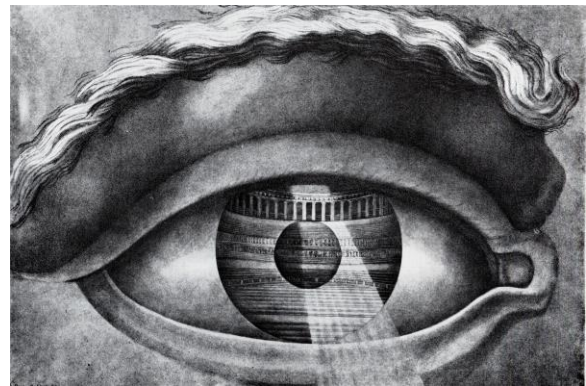


Figure 23. “Theater of Besancon” | Claude-Nicolas Ledoux

**Theater of Besancon**

Maybe not the premier project of Ledoux, but this project boasts, arguably, Ledoux’s most powerful rendering. Who thinks to exhibit a perspective rendering of an architectural design reflected in the eye of a human subject? Similar to Ledoux’s “elevation” of his “Cemetery for Chaux”, Ledoux deviates strongly from Burke’s “right line”.



This move by Ledoux, similar to his rendering of the “Cemetery at Chauv’s” elevation, indicates an importance in not only the design itself, but also how the designer *sees* or is imagining the design. This does not mean a visual imagining of the built design in the designer’s mind, but rather an essence of the design; not what the built design would look like, or what the built design is, but what the *design is*. The design does not simply seek, or rather the designer does not simply seek to represent a function through functional manifestation of building elements, Ledoux is designing and representing that design in a way that the building’s purpose and essence is the premier driver of framing.

There is a reason when designers speak of Ledoux, they reference this rendering of the “Theater of Besancon” and his elevation rendering of the “Cemetery of Chauv”. In these drawings, Ledoux attempts to communicate a purpose and essence of project. He does not limit himself to the conventions of architectural drawing, and create only plans, sections, elevations, perspectives, etc. Ledoux manipulates the conventions and becomes more an artist communicating a feeling than an architect communicating a building. This kind of stretch and strong step toward a grandeur of *knowing* is sublime. These reads on Ledoux’s projects do not mean that the projects are “sublime”, rather these extracted attributes, these layers of meaning, and these design mechanics used by Ledoux *are* sublime.

### Étienne-Louis Boullée

Étienne-Louis Boullée’s works are generally massive works, over scaled and rendered in sinister environments. This combination of over scaling and sinister environment

creates an equally impressive and terrifying landscape where the building, the sky, and the earth almost blend together.

Boullée excites and delights in the grand, in the monumental, and vastness of scale. While Boullée’s portfolio is extensive, a peer doing Boullée-esque work, Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, would go on to become the chief architect of Napoleon Bonaparte (Lemagny, 233).

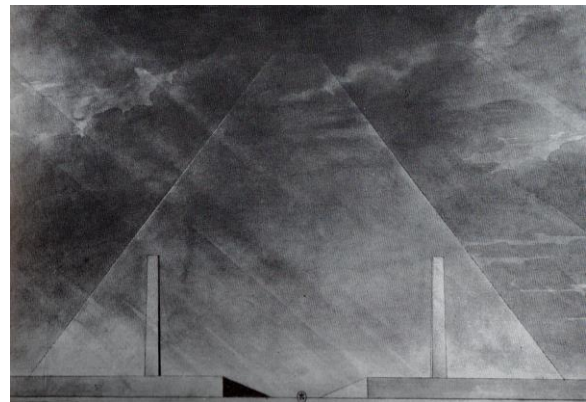


Figure 24. “Cenotaph in the Shape of a Pyramid” | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### Cenotaph in the Shape of a Pyramid

This project will at times be touted for “extreme simplicity”, “pure geometry”, and “abstract forms of de Stijl and the Bauhaus.”<sup>8</sup> Such reads grant further credence to dubbing this work and the collection of architecture parlante as “proto-modern”.<sup>9</sup> However, that is a discussion for another paper.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Jean-Claude Lemagny, *Visionary Architects: Boullée, Ledoux, Lequeu*, (Houston, Gulf Printing Company, 1968), 23.

<sup>9</sup>Gabriela Campagnol, (lecture, Texas A&M University, 2015).

<sup>10</sup>Although, I will concede de Stijl to be a well-enough application to most of the works, Boullée’s “Cenotaph in the Shape of a Pyramid” in particular.

The lone rendering of the project presents a massive pyramid in a foreboding landscape. There is little in the composition to indicate an accurate scale, besides a small figure in the center of the base of the pyramid. The figure could be read as an entrance. However, that element in itself is unclear, furthermore, the elements that comprise the entrance are increasingly unclear. Beyond the ambiguous figure, the composition consists of the main pyramid, a flanking pair of flat-topped obelisks, and a flanking pair of plinths or walls. These figures bear no surface pattern to indicate the tectonic nature of the building materials, furthering their “pure geometry”.

The significant characteristic of this work is the cenotaph’s ability to blend with the rendered environment *or* the environment’s ability to blend with the cenotaph. Here, Boullée blurs the defining edge between the built environment and the natural environment. The cenotaph appears to be camouflaging itself, entering a paradoxical reading of visibility and scale in relation to the “monument”. The monument, meant to be hyper visible and imposing upon its human subject, is rendered almost invisible, or at least to the point where boundaries are uncertain.

This might be reduction of the imposition of a figure on its environment, allowing a kind of balance and tranquility between natural and built environments. However, there is a kind of fright and terror, astonishment and awe, in the scenario of the unsuspecting human subject who comes upon this work. What is experienced when the head tilts, the eyes squint, and a sort of “truth” becomes apparent? The “Cenotaph in the Shape of a Pyramid” that no one even knew was there.

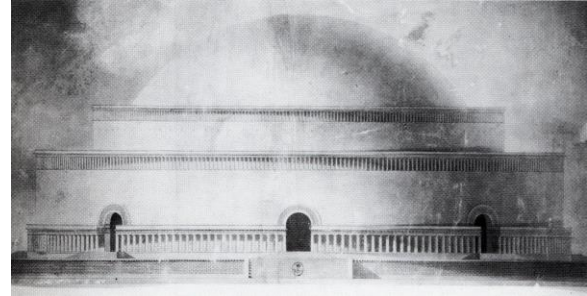


Figure 25. “Temple of Nature” - Elevation | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### *Temple of Nature*

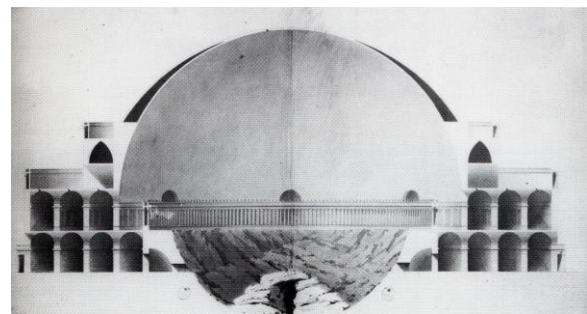


Figure 26. “Temple of Nature” - Cross Section | Étienne Louis-Boullée

Boullée’s “Temple of Nature” consists of a central, domed space with a series of concentric rings of barrel vaults. The renderings produced by Boullée indicate a “departure” from “Newton’s Cenotaph”, which will be discussed in a later section, with a darker, almost sinister aesthetic to a considerably lighter tone. The work reads as almost white, and the sky and environment in which the work is situated is also considerably less ominous. Less ominous than the atmosphere used in “Newton’s Cenotaph” as well as Boullée’s other cenotaphs and cemetery gates. Furthermore, here, Boullée deviates strongly, in a deliberate way, from his pure geometries and simplicity of form.

This deviation is not fully manifest until the interior rendering is examined, which follows a more Boullée-esque exterior

facade treatment. The exterior facade sinks the pristine dome down into two concentric drums of nested, circular, vaulted spaces. Prior to entry, the first drum is enclosed with a colonnade and the entrances are arched portals. The number of entrances is also quite different from the other projects, which tend to have one entry point. However, this multiplicity does not go without a clear indication of a singular, primary entry with a monumental staircase.

The main interior space begins much like the exterior, but with a strong move reflecting the building's program. Upon entering the interior dome through arched portals, similar to the exterior entry, the subject is met with another circular colonnade. Passing through the colonnade, a paradoxical treatment of sequence occurs. The passage through the concentric vaults, only to open through and into architectural elements mirroring that which were experienced in entering, implies a re-entry to the building exterior, to the natural environment. Boullée does not disappoint this implication, opening the ground, completing the sphere of the dome, but exposes a raw, geologic exhibit. In the "Temple of Nature", the interior ground opens up and exhibits the earth. Boullée negotiates the texture and character of the earth along his geometric guide of the complete sphere.

This technique of mirrored promenade creates a counterintuitive experience. The sequence disorients and implies the crossing of some threshold, a threshold where sequence folds in on itself. Somewhere within the labyrinth of the concentric vaults, the human subjects loses sense of direction and may be inside or outside. This experience, throwing reality and movement into question, evokes a sensation, a disorientation, which may be felt as fear.

The carving of the ground, the bright quality of the dome, and the inverted colonnade sculpt a vast interior space of an exterior phenomena evoking astonishment and awe.<sup>11</sup>

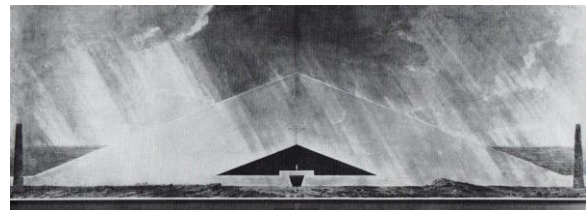


Figure 27. "Entrance to a Cemetery" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

Figure 28. "Funerary Monument, Typical of Sunken Architecture" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

Figure 29. "Chapel of the Dead" | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### ***Entrance to a Cemetery / Funerary Monument / Chapel of the Dead***

This section will examine three similar works: a cemetery entrance, a chapel, and a funerary monument. Depending on the order in which one is exposed to Boullée's work, a pattern of projects pertaining to death is apparent: cenotaphs, tombs, funerary monuments, etc. He also has two other "Projects for a Pyramid", which debatably

<sup>11</sup>Very presumptuous to indicate "fear", "astonishment", and "awe" as the emotions felt; consider the "emotions felt" my interpretive conclusion to the description of the space. This will apply to all the descriptions and "readings".

have inherent associations to burials, or tombs.

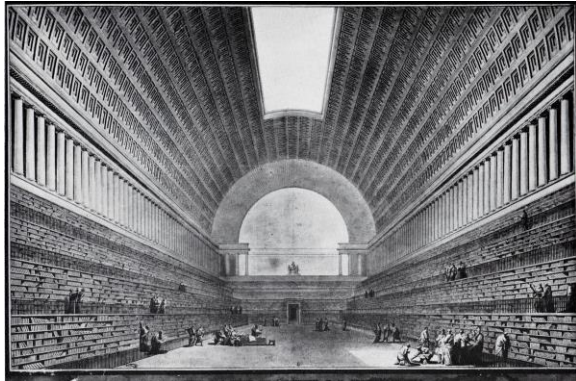


Figure 30. “Expansion of the Royal Library” | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### **Expansion of the Royal Library**

“Deeply moved by that sublime conception of Raphael, *The School of Athens...*” (Lamagny, 63). Again, with Boullée’s project, “Expansion of the Royal Library”, Boullée designs and represents in a grand, vast atmosphere, lining a massive corbelled, barrel vault with book shelves. This particular rendering (above) is debatably Boullée’s most powerful and iconic of Boullée’s work (with the elevation rendering of his “Newton’s Cenotaph” challenging). While vast and grandiose in its own right, the “Expansion of the Royal Library” is not nearly as imposing and grand if not for the human figures populating the rendering, or the construction and material detail rendered into their respective massing.

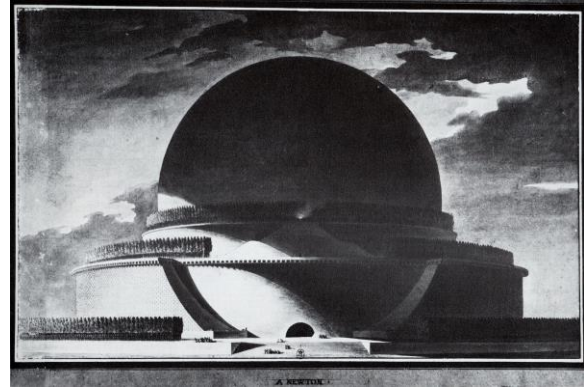


Figure 31. “Newton’s Cenotaph” - Elevation | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### **Newton’s Cenotaph**

“Newton’s Cenotaph” by Boullée expresses a sublimity on a surface level from its mass and scale. Boullée’s works are not for the faint of heart, and are massive, monumental, and impose on the human subject.<sup>12</sup> Within the composition, pure geometric conditions and the huge scale reduce the classical and material elements to where the composition becomes aesthetically minimal and allows the forms to become the focal point. This allows the composition itself to become the focal point, the world where light and shadow play.

Accentuating this play of shadow and light within a world is Boullée’s treatment of the interface between the exterior and interior. His interface in itself is incredibly powerful and harkens to the program for the cenotaph, a cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton. Newton is known primarily for his work in the understanding of gravity and the movement of celestial objects. What is a more perfect manifestation of form to create a cenotaph for Newton than a sphere? A fundamental geometric manifestation of particles, on various scales. Furthermore, Fuller’s

<sup>12</sup> “Newton’s Cenotaph” is also known as the “Project for a Newton Memorial”, and I have, on occasion, referred to the project as the “Cenotaph for Newton”.

definition of a sphere as a “plurality of events” equidistant from a single point. There may be no better, self-referential, idiosyncratic geometry than a circle, or a sphere.

The interior space created by Boullée is a “perfect” sphere, not unlike the interior space Ledoux expressed in his cemetery at Chaux, or in Boullée’s “Temple for Nature.” This treatment of space references the geometry’s two dimensional origin of the circle within the various architectural drawings. In addition to the section, Boullée’s elevation treatment of the concentric terraces allows the sphere to be read as a sphere and not just a half sphere or dome. This “facade” treatment also indicates a clear entry to the cenotaph. The top view/plan composite drawing displays the circle of the sphere’s top elevation, as well as the shell’s thickness profile in the plan cut. Beyond the central sphere, the top view shows two concentric terraces that encapsulate the sphere with the exception of the entry point, although it maintains a visual continuity.

How does this design exhibit a sublime architecture? The massive and imposing scale provides the height, elevation aspect, which here is to look up, the lower of the relative surface heights discussed previously. However, one might imagine the higher of the relative surface heights from the position of the massive terraces. From the lower of the relative surface heights, there is the experience of the astonishing and imposing, maybe even terrifying, experience of the exterior, but there is also the interior. This is also a condition of the “lower of the relative surface heights.” Although, the experience inside the cenotaph, while still massive and imposing, now turns more to an awe and ecstasy, a delight.

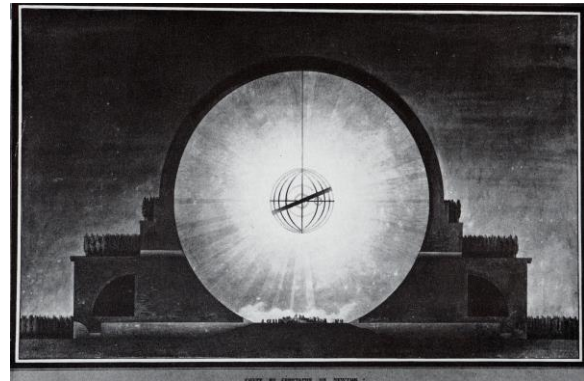


Figure 32. “Newton’s Cenotaph” - Cross Section (Night) | Étienne Louis-Boullée

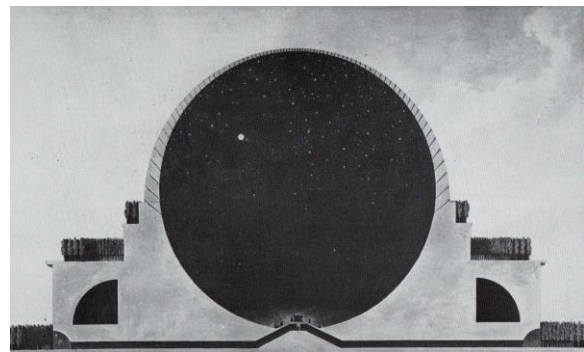


Figure 33. “Newton’s Cenotaph” - Cross Section (Day) | Étienne Louis-Boullée

In addressing Boullée’s masterful treatment of the sphere as interface, the very different conditions depicted between day and night are essential to Boullée’s expression. The portion of the sphere that clears the concentric terraces is faintly perforated with small channels, small pinholes where light can pass through. These perforations can be seen in the daytime section of the cenotaph. In that same section, the effect of the perforations is realized; the perforated sphere allows light from the sun to create the stars of the night sky on the interior surface of the sphere. During the night hours, an almost gyroscopic globe illuminates the interior space, washing the spherical surface in light. The effect of this interior illumination is not rendered on the exterior

sphere surface, but it can be inferred; the interior light (much like the daylight from the sun) can now create the night sky on the exterior surface of the sphere. When the earth rotates this imagined surface out of the sun's light, and the night sky is visible, the building reflects that night sky. This creates a spherical "beacon" that almost camouflages itself in the evening hours.



Figure 34. "Newton's Cenotaph" - Detail Section (Day) | Étienne Louis-Boullée

The brilliance of this design move by Boullée is that the very celestial objects (the sun and the earth primarily, but possibly the moon if it is full on a clear night) that were foundational to Newton's work, are not only referenced in the form, but also change the experience of the building as an object and as a space. Beyond the grandeur, astonishment, awe, and ecstasy of the space created by Boullée, the *excellence* with which he composes the architectural elements to amplify light and shadow, in a self-powering metaphor of celestial movement.

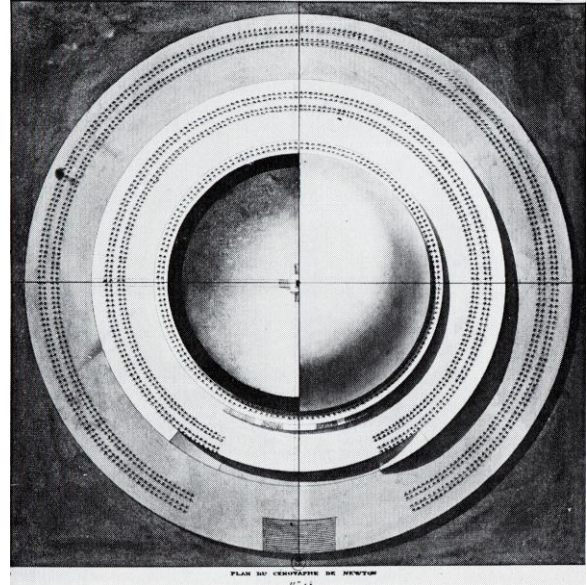


Figure 35. "Newton's Cenotaph" - Floor Plan / Top Elevation | Étienne Louis-Boullée

### Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine

While only one work of Fontaine will be discussed, it is one of the more sublime works in the collection to be discussed. Fontaine's work is incredibly similar to Boullée in its mass and rendering of environment. Their similarity is almost to the point where one could become confused if two of their respective works are placed side by side. In fact, Boullée's "Cenotaphs with Surrounding Wall" and Fontaine's "Sepulchral Monument for the Sovereigns of a Great Empire" could be confused as the same project, at first glance.



Figure 36. "Cenotaphs with Surrounding Wall" | Étienne Louis-Boullée



Figure 37. “Sepulchral Monument for the Sovereigns of a Great Empire” - Elevation | Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine

### Sepulchral Monument for the Sovereigns of a Great Empire

Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine contributes one project to the discussion on the architectural sublime, his “Sepulchral Monument for the Sovereigns of a Great Empire.” Similar to Boullée and Ledoux, Fontaine uses this ideologically specifically, but realistically vague nomenclature. Fontaine is also incredibly similar to Boullée in this project. The scale of the project is vast and excessive, and achieves this through the use of pure geometric form and symmetry. Much like many of Boullée’s projects, Fontaine renders a sinister environment, both inside and out. While light and dark seem to be in an eternal battle in the sky, applying a mixture of textures to the clouds, the sepulchral monument brings a different kind of tension to light and shadow. The natural setting created by Fontaine blends and balances with an ambiguity to the border between light and shadow. However, the pure geometric figures of the truncated pyramids, obelisks, columns, and central, conical pyramid begin to guide light and shadow in deliberate ways. The sharp edges of the truncated pyramids and obelisks create planes of stark contrast, where an illuminated plane is abruptly terminated and the adjacent plane is engulfed in shadow.



Figure 38. “Sepulchral Monument for the Sovereigns of a Great Empire” - Cross Section | Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine

### Jean-Jacques Lequeu

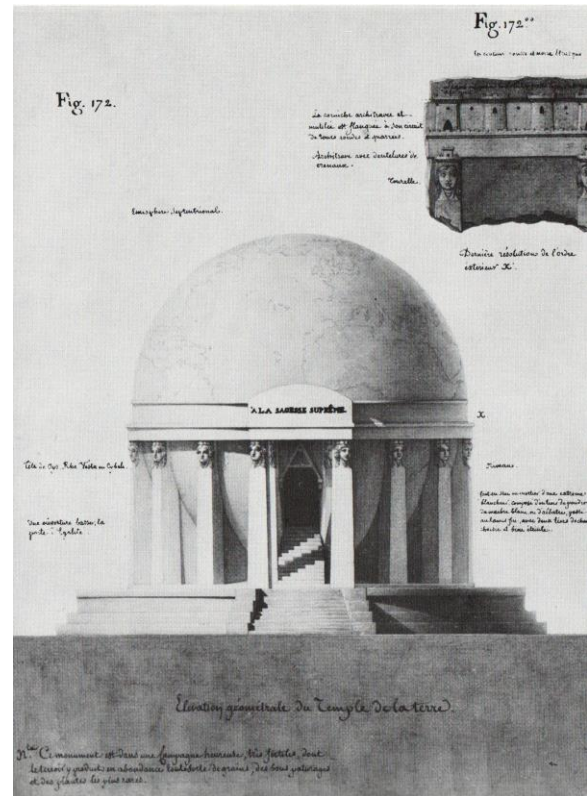


Figure 39. “Temple of Earth” | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

### Temple of the Earth

The “Temple of Earth” by Lequeu is one of his more conventional designs, as will become increasingly apparent in the following sections. Here, Lequeu’s temple quite literally embodies the Earth; the sphere in which the temple resides has the Earth’s surface superimposed upon it. Unlike Boullée and Ledoux, Lequeu uses few noticeable classical elements in his composition. Lequeu prefers here to use pure geometrical elements, smooth and unarticulated, undefined in terms of their material and tectonic qualities. One might imagine the architecture parlante designers would have had been ecstatic to see concrete as a building material, making their outrageous, materially consistent depictions more...concrete.

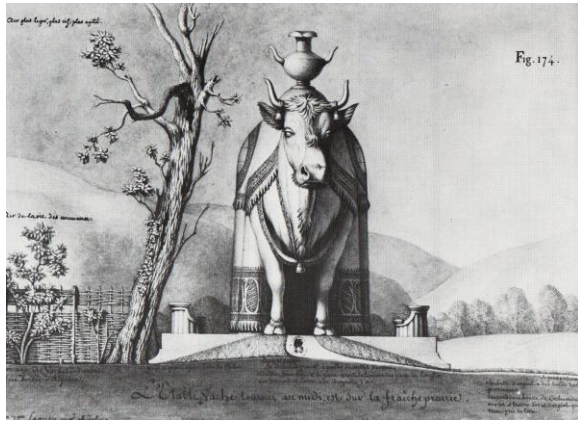


Figure 40. “Cow’s Stable on a Cool Meadow” | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

### *Cow’s Stable on a Cool Meadow*

Here shows a strong distinction in Lequeu’s designs versus those of Boullée and Ledoux, where he goes into an almost parody of architecture parlante. In Lequeu’s “Cow’s Stable on a Cool Meadow”, he designs the stable to be “a cow”. While this has no credence for the modernist “form follows function” (how does a stable *shaped* like a cow function better as a stable?), it does predicate Venturi’s idea of “the duck”. This is essentially making the hat store a hat, or the pizza parlor a pizza. Lequeu is branding the function of the building into the design. This does not light the building *as* a beacon stating, “Cows go in here”, rather he’s *making* the building a beacon that states, “Cows go in here.”

Despite the fantastic absurdity of this design put forth by Lequeu, he still takes its representation as a design project seriously. This might further the inherent joke; take an absurd concept and drape in the conventional language of the discourse. Take a banana, make it the scale of building, build it out of concrete, make it a banana stand, then draw its elevation, center it, shade it, etc. Lequeu may very well be

designing and representing a joke, a parody, which he again demonstrates in “The Prince’s Hunting Gate” and subtly in his “Meeting Place of Bellevue”. The rigor and sensitivity to conventional architectural drawing apparent in the rendering enhances this potential joke, a parody dressed in a discourse.

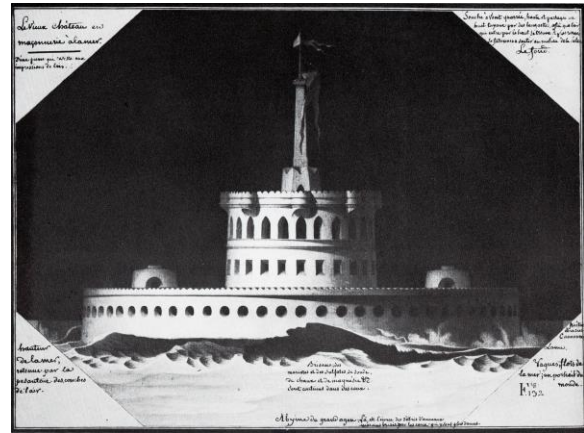


Figure 41. “Seaside Castle and Wind Pump” | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

### *Seaside Castle and Wind Pump*

Little to do with parody, Lequeu’s “Seaside Castle and Wind Pump” is an exceptional example of light and shade contrast. Thanks to the environment for which the project is designed (the sea), the castle is shrouded in darkness of a night or storm. The castle itself, however, is (almost unnaturally) illuminated. The design is also credibly (not incredibly) symmetrical; why would it not be? This might not be incredible, but why would a castle be asymmetrical? A castle would be asymmetrical as a result of style or perhaps in response to site conditions. The same could be said of Lequeu’s “Seaside Castle and Wind Pump”. However, Lequeu’s nature, interpreted from his designs, might indicate a more meaningful reasoning behind the castle’s symmetrical composition, both in the elevation (figure) and what can be inferred about the castle’s



plan view. First, Lequeu made the island where he has designed his castle; this is not a natural feature in the landscape upon which he “builds”. This means Lequeu has the opportunity to sculpt and idealized landform. What would be an efficient or a liberated form of land “adrift” in the sea? The island needs not to cut through the sea like a steamship, but the island does need to resist the oceans ceaseless effort to erode. There are other dynamic force variables that can be considered, but this discussion will conclude here and indicate Lequeu’s choice of a circular island as seemingly ideal both pragmatically and metaphorically (in terms of free form organization of entities, circles and spheres. (Arnheim-Entropy) Liberated from any terrestrial, site constraints, or rather, with the liberal creation of landmass by Lequeu, the castle’s plan profile can be made circular. The potential reasoning is similar to that for the island’s shape.

### The Prince’s Hunting Gate

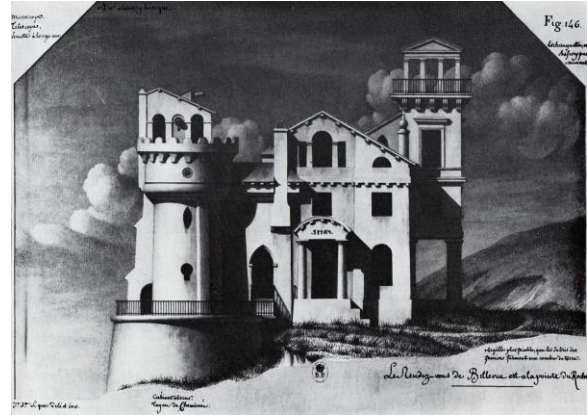


Figure 43. “Meeting Place of Bellevue” | Jean-Jacques Lequeu

### Meeting Place of Bellevue

### Louis-Jean Desprez

Louis-Jean Desprez concludes this discussion on the architecture parlante designers in appropriate fashion, with visions of death and darkness. This also brings the discussion back to an aspect which Boullée designs at length in several of his projects, architecture of transition from the material into the supernatural. This fixation is not unique to the architecture parlante, or even architecture; some of the earliest structures studied in architectural history and design are pyramids and mortuary temples. Desprez illustrates dark scenes of tombs and coffins often with death depicted in a human-like form, burning what can inferred to be incense. Desprez also continues the strong use of light and shadow in his design compositions. He also centers and balance his compositional elements in manner which permeates through most, if not all, of the architecture parlante examples discussed in previous sections.

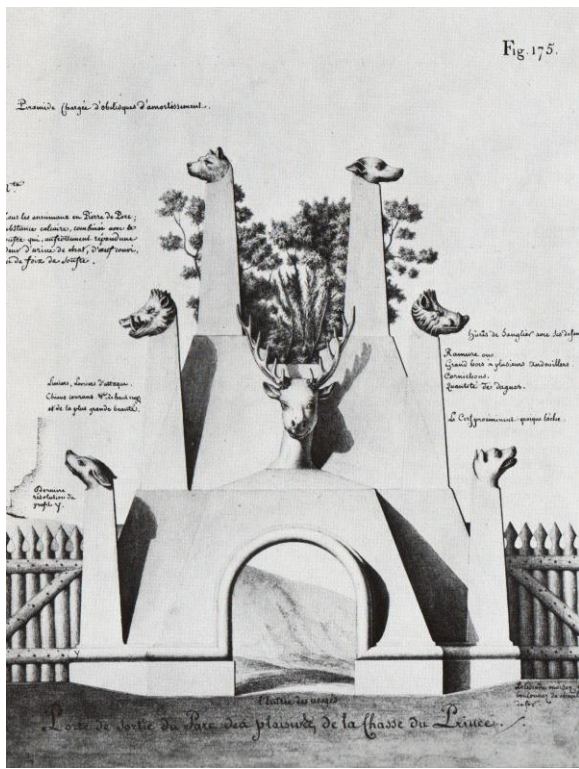


Figure 42. “The Prince’s Hunting Gate” | Jean-Jacques Lequeu



Figure 44. “Imaginary Sepulcher with a Representation of Death Carrying a Lamp” | Louis-Jean Desprez

### ***Imaginary Sepulcher with a Representation of Death Carrying a Lamp***

Between the two examples depicted in this discussion, “Imaginary Sepulcher with a Representation of Death Carrying a Lamp” and “Imaginary Sepulcher with Death in a Seated Position” serve visual inverses of one another, the former draped in darkness and backlit and the latter basked in light with a dark, shadowy background. Desprez balances all the defined (or what might be called “linear”) objects, allowing the undefined smoke from the lamp to balance the composition in an asymmetrical fashion.<sup>13</sup>

This discussion might prove brief. Desprez utilizes light and shadow in strong contrast. There is a strong symmetry in the composition with the aforementioned smoke from the lamp balancing, in a sense, asymmetrically.

<sup>13</sup> The smoke being what might be considered to be a “non-linear” object; here the reference is to linear and non-linear equations, the governing structures of more platonic objects and swarm, parametric-like objects.



Figure 45. “Imaginary Sepulcher with Death in a Seated Position” | Louis-Jean Desprez

### ***Imaginary Sepulcher with Death in a Seated Position***

#### **How-to Design Sublime Architecture**

Similar to how theorists, such as Rudolph Arnheim, have created critical examinations of design elements in the creation of architectural forms, this concluding dialogue will examine *sublime* elements. Specifically, the dialogue seeks to connect sublime philosophical concepts to their respective design concepts. This should result in a collection of what could be considered “architectural sublime concepts”, or “sublime design strategies”. This section’s purpose is not to dictate a sublime architecture that “must be done”. Rather, this sections examines and discusses sublime techniques to be considered in design. Some of the most sublime projects discussed in the previous sections would be horrifying to see manifest in the built environment. Furthermore, some projects might have crippling environmental, economic, or sociological implications. Grand, boundless, and timeless design is not without negative connotations despite the visions, or delusions, of grandeur of the designer. The use of sublime design strategies is essential to architecture, but it must also reflect the degree to which it is to

permeate and interact with the material world.

## **Unbounding & Undefined**

### **Grandeur, Vastness, and Imposition**

#### **Excellence and Temporal Transcendence**

Oh yeah? You want to talk about how to “excellent”? That’ll go well. How you make in the “temporal transcendent”? If you designed something “excellent” in its impossibility of being built, does that allow it to transcend temporality? Is it “excellent” if it cannot be built? Or rather, is it “excellent” if it *should not* be built? Not in that it’s an abomination, but that the design is so imposing, terrifying, and massive, it would bring an ecstatic terror to life.

#### **Darkness, Gloom-and-Doom: the Sinister**

First of all, lose the color, it doesn’t go with the terror. Secondly, color distracts from the treatment of light and shadow upon surfaces. The high contrast characteristic of an architectural sublime benefits from the reduction of color to a binary: black and white. Between this binary, the negotiation between light and shadow is represented through gradients upon surfaces.

#### **Conclusions: Resolving a Conflict**

The conflict which the title of this section refers is that of the association architecture parlante should have to the rest of architectural history. In particular, the discussion on conflict of association deals with the architecture parlante designers being termed either “proto-modern” or “proto-postmodern” (modern as in 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist architecture, and postmodern as in the movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present which combatted

modernist concepts). Furthermore, this section seeks to examine the notion of sublime architecture. Should sublime architecture, as it has been understood through the discussion of architecture parlante and the design strategies in the preceding sections, be an important focus for architecture students and for architecture as a discourse? In other words, does it matter that designers strive to incorporate design strategies that might be considered sublime? Is it important for a design to strive for greatness? Excellence? High-mindedness? Boundlessness? Darkness? Should a design strive to incorporate strategies that invoke strong feelings of ecstasy and fear?

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<sup>14</sup> Originally written by Burke in 1757.

<sup>15</sup> Originally published in 1929 by Ives Washburn, Publisher, New York.

<sup>16</sup> Original edition published in 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Original edition published in 1790.

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<sup>18</sup> Originally written by Kant in 1763.

<sup>19</sup> Original edition published in 1966.