One of the questions that some critics of architecture have recently grappled with has been the way in which gender and architecture intersect in a mutually reciprocating dynamic: as gender constructs about the “feminine” and the “masculine” can determine certain architectural choices, so can architecture—both as a tool of visual representation and a mechanism of spatial distribution—reinforce already existing gender constructs. As architectural theorist Mary McLeod (1994) has observed, the vocabulary of gender has been entrenched in architectural discourses since the writings of Roman architectural theorist Vitruvius to the modern day. In his treatise De Architectura (B.C. 1), Vitruvius compares the architectural Orders to the human body, and equates the Doric order to “the strength and beauty of the body of a man,” the Ionic order to the matronly woman, and the Corinthian Order to the body of the young maiden (McLeod 41). Vitruvius’s association of the male body with simplicity, nudity, and brute strength, and of the female body with adornment and clothes, McLeod maintains, is a juxtaposition that has “persisted into twentieth-century architectural rhetoric” (42). Yet, she adds, it is not until the end of the seventeenth century that these descriptions of the Orders begin to adopt a “moralistic and judgmental tone” to become, by the eighteenth century, a discourse in which “femininity tend[s] to be associated [...] with change, fashion, capriciousness, play, artifice, frivolity, charm, delicacy, ornament, and masquerade” (43). While McLeod’s observation can be confirmed in the treatises of the period, especially in the intriguing Parallèle de l’architecture antique avec la moderne (1650) written by Roland Fréart de Chambray, a treatise I will comment in
detail here, I find that this is also the moment in history when the discourse on architecture begins to free itself from what is at the root of such morality. For it is in 1672, when Claude Perrault (1613-1688), brother of Charles Perrault, and himself a medical doctor, biologist, member of the Académie Royale des Sciences (1666) and a founding member of the Académie Royale d'Architecture (1671), published a new translation of Vitruvius’s treatise, filled with footnotes that, informed as they were by his Galilean worldview and Cartesian methodology, questioned the absoluteness of fixed notions of Beauty and Proportion, and provided re-definitions that eliminated the gendered language inherent to the vitruvian system. In what follows, I examine the mechanisms through which Vitruvius’s text led architectural discourse to the moral overtones it took in the seventeenth century, and the process through which Perrault’s writings represent a watershed in architectural discourse, leading it to a mathematical language that removes the gender bias that had so far permeated it.

Vitruvius’s *De Architectura*, the first treatise to address theoretical and practical aspects of the discipline, was “re-discovered” and translated by Italians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and then by the French in 1547, when humanist Jean Martin (1507-1553) offered a translation that saw several reprints throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a result, Vitruvius’s text informed much of the theory and practice of Renaissance architecture, an architecture that, contrary to the medieval aspiration to reach the divine, was centered around man, and based on three principles—*firmitas, utilitas, and venustas* (solidity, utility and beauty.)

*Venustas*, or beauty, stemmed from the notion of “ordinatio,” the Order or “ordonnance,” also known as “Proportion,” as in the quantitative relation between the parts and the whole—in a building as well as in a human body. Still, the term “ordonnance” also means order, as in the organization of things, which by definition implies establishing categories and differences, in this case, not only between the parts and the whole of a building but also among the types of people or deities who dwell in them or to whom these buildings are dedicated. As a result, “ordonnance” also carries implications that are both aesthetic and socio-political. Aesthetically, it entails a concept of absolute beauty rooted in a fixed ideal given from above and manifest in the human body. Politically, it creates a hierarchy of gendered beauty that

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2 As with many texts originating in Antiquity, the identification and authenticity of Vitruvius’s manuscript has often been subject to debate. In addition, Renaissance translators were notorious for embellishing and modifying entire passages of the original texts they translated. Still, comparisons between Martin's translation and the treatises of other writers who adopted the vitruvian notion of the Orders indicate that Martin closely reproduced Vitruvius’s narrative on the Orders.
associates the male body with the fundamental and structural solidity of a building, and links the female body to the secondary, inessential, and ornamental aspects of this building.

Consequently, Vitruvius prescribes the use of the Orders in sacred temples according to the symbolic and social organization they establish. According to Martin’s translation, the Doric order should be made “sans mignotises,” without adornments, and used for temples dedicated to Minerva, Mars, and Hercules, which are important deities that stand for strength and virtue. In contrast, temples for lesser divinities such as Venus, Flora, Proserpine, and nympha should be made in the Corinthian order. As Vitruvius explains, “pour exprimer leurs natures delicatet, on fait toutes ses parties plus simples & moins fortes que les precedentes, & davantage l’on les orne de fleurs, feuillages, volutes ou tortillemens, en quoy la grace & iuste decoration est observee” (I, iii, 7.) For temples dedicated to such deities as Juno, Diana, and Bacchus, Vitruvius adds, “on leur fera des temples Ioniques, afin de tenir le moyen : car l’ordre Ionique temperera uniquement la severité du Dorique, & la mignardise de celuy de Corinthe : & par ainsi sera entretenue bonne & vraye proprieté” (I, iii, 7.) Thus, Vitruvius assigns the Orders to anthropomorphic deities organized in terms of political importance as much as gender differences. Gods of war such as Minerva and Mars and the hero Hercules embody “masculine” physical power, whereas deities connected to nature and fertility stand for the “feminine,” that is, the reproductive capability of the female body. That Minerva and Bacchus appear in the opposite-gender camp reminds us that abstract attributes such as “feminine” and “masculine” do not need to correspond to female or male bodies. Minerva’s masculinity stems from being a goddess of war and of rational power, having sprung out of Jupiter’s head rather than from a mother’s womb, and remaining an effective guardian of her chastity—thus never falling prey to male desire. As such, she is neither a sex object nor a maternal figure. Bacchus, on the other hand, is a much messier creature, primarily associated with fertility, madness, excess, fluids, and the disorderly.3 Placing him along with female deities not only reproduces mythical

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3 According to Harry Thurston Peck’s *Harper’s Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965), this son of Jupiter and the mortal Semele was the god of “luxuriant fertility, especially as displayed by the vine; and therefore the god of wine [....]. After [his mother’s] death [due to Hera’s jealousy], the nymphs of Mount Nysa [....] brought him up and hid him in a cave [....] As the god of the earth, Dionysus belongs, like Persephone, to the world below as well as to the world above [....]. Festivals [....] in celebration of the extinction and resurrection of the deity were held by women and girls only, amid the mountains at night, every third year, about the time of the shortest day. The
connections between Bacchus and female figures, but also relegates to the category of the “feminine” the traits he stands for.

As McLeod had observed, in Vitruvius’s sequence, severely straight, simple, and clean lines, “sans mignotize” best represent the masculine might of the Doric order. Certainly, Martin’s translation deploys a vocabulary that reinforces the gendered distinction. For, in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French, the term “mignotise” was associated with “mignot” or “mignon”, and, as Furetière tells us, denoted the “flatterie, caresse qu’on fait à quelqu’un.” Accordingly, “un amant gagne sa maîtresse par mille petites mignotises et flatteries. Les vieillards aussi bien que les enfants aiment fort les mignotises, les caresses.” (s.v. “mignotise.”) Thus associated with female lovers, children, and old people, the term carries connotations of frivolity, frailty, and sexuality. As to “mignardise,” Furetière defines it as a “délicatesse de quelque chose, soit qu'elle vienne de la nature, ou de l'art.” (s.v. “mignardise”) In other words, these are terms that point to feminine “delicacy”, which can be associated with gracefulness and refinement, but also with fragility and flimsiness. As synonyms of “flatterie” and “caresses”, they also carry a connotation of “affectation,” or falsehood—two qualities that are tropes in early modern stereotypes of the “feminine.” Further, the pejorative connotation implied in the diminutive endings of “mignotizes” and “mignardises” reinforces the notion of qualities that hierarchically inferior and morally opposed to the manly “force & vertu.”

Vitruvius’s second category includes goddesses connected with nature and fertility: Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, but also a deity of the sea, gardens, groves, springs, plants and flowers (Harper 96); Flora, a deity of flowers; Proserpine, a goddess of fertility that ruled the seasons of the year; and the fountain nymphs or Naiads, the goddesses of the “nourishing and fructifying water,” nurturing “plants, herds, and mortals,” also considered as guardians of marriage and caretakers of children of the gods (Harper 1116). As such they are best represented by adornments (flowers and foliage) evoking nature and fertility and by soft, curved lines (“volutes” and “tortillemens”) suggesting fluidity.

The third group supposedly stands for a “middle” or moderate ground but in fact, again, it comprises a mixed category populated by male and rites, intended to express the excess of grief and joy at the death and reappearance of the god, were wild even to savagery, and the women who performed them were hence known by the expressive names of Bacchae, Maenads, and Thyades. They wandered through the woods and mountains, their flying locks crowned with ivy or snakes, brandishing wands and torches, to the hollow sounds of the drum and the shrill notes of the flute, with wild dances and insane cries and jubilation.” (524-5).
female figures evoking nature and fertility: Juno is the goddess of family and—as Jupiter's wife—the matron par excellence; Diana, a chaste hunter who lives in the wilderness, is associated with assisting child-birth (Harper 136); Bacchus, on the other hand, far from standing for moderation, is the god of wine and “luxuriant fertility,” and is usually represented, as seen above, in a “soft and feminine shape,” surrounded by animals and covered with vines and ivy (Harper 525). This mixed category embodying at once motherhood, chastity, and excess meshes together qualities that are attributed to the “feminine,” even as they conflict with one another.

Vitruvius’s narrative of the “origins” of the Orders follows a similar hierarchy. According to him, the Doric order came first, when Dorus, son of the patriarch Hellen and a nymph, built a temple of this style in Argos. The people of the region followed his example and called the style “Doric” (IV, i, 46) for columns that they wanted to make:

fortes, & commodes a supporter grand fardeau, avec ce qu’elles eussent bonne grace, & se rendissent agreables a la veue: ilz se prindrent a mesurer l’impression de la plante du pied d’un homme: & trouvans que ceste mesure faisoit une sixieme partie de sa haulteur, ilz donnerent ceste proportion a leurs colonnes […] Voyla comment la colonne Dorique fut premierement formée sur la proportion du corps de l’homme (IV, i, 46-8).

Thus, the Doric, standing for the beginning of architecture itself, is modeled on an ideal male body whose beauty is articulated not only in terms of clean, straight, and severe lines, but also on the relation between its height and the size of its foot. Thus shaped by, centered on, and measured by the male body, the beauty conceived in this passage becomes inherently gendered.

To further emphasize the perfection of the male body demonstrated in mathematical terms (i.e. quantitative proportions), Vitruvius employs visually efficacious geometrical shapes (i.e. circles and squares):

Or le centre ou poinct du mylieu du corps de l’homme, est naturelement le nombril: car si ledict homme estoit couché tout plat, ayant les piedz & les mains estendues, puis que l’on meist une iambe du compas sur icelluy nombril, & qu’on allast de l’autre faisant un rond, la ligne de la circumference toucheroit iustement aux extremitez des doys de ses piedz & de ses mains. Encores tout ainsi qu’il fait la figure ronde, ne plus ne moins se treuve en luy la perfectement quarree: car si lon mesure depuis la plante des piedz iusques au plus hault de la teste, & que l’on tire une pareille ligne par-dessus ses mains estendues, lon trouvera que ceste la sera autant large que l’autre est longue, & que lon en pourra former le quarré perfect aussi bien que des choses plates esquarries au moyen de la regle. Si donc nature
This passage establishes the geometrical perfection of the male body by means of two figures that are intrinsically perfect: the circle, which is a curved line thoroughly completed unto itself, and the square, which is an area whose altitude and latitude are equal. Vitruvius’s apparently innocuous geometrical explanation conceals an ideal of beauty that is both anthropo- and phallocentric, as two tools of geometry can easily demonstrate. A compass, acting as a dual vertical limb erected from the navel, draws the circle around the body in a gesture that, as it aligns the center of the circle with the navel of man, creates a perfectly male-centered universe. For the square, two straight diagonal lines drawn over a ruler from each of its opposite corners will show that its center converges exactly on the man’s genital (Fig. 1).

Vitruvius’s narrative about the origin of the Orders succeeds equally well in establishing the supremacy of man already demonstrated in mathematical and geometrical terms. For instance, while the Doric order has been endowed with a lengthy story of its invention and propagation, the Ionic order is presented as a modification of the first Order, without an etiology of its own:

Quelques temps après le plaisir de ces Ioniens fut d’édifier encore un temple à Diane: parquoy cherchans une facon nouvelle, ilz par semblable invention transporterent la gayeté feminine a l’usage des colonnes, & tendrent la grosseur de leurs tiges d’une huitieme partie de la haulteur, afin qu’elles eussent une especie plus relevee. En la base ilz supposerent la Spire ou Bozel en lieu de soulier: & au chapiteau colloquerent des volutes comme perruques ou chevellures crespes entortillées & pendants tant d’un costé que d’autre: puis enrichirent leurs frontz de cymaises ou doulcomes, les ornant de beaux festons de feuillages pour representer une teste de femme bien ornee. En outre, tout al’entour du corps de la colonne depuis le haut jusques au bas, feirent des canelures creuses, afin d’exprimer les pliz des vestemens des dames. Et ainsi avec deux inventions differentes pervindrent à l’effect de leur desir, considéré qu’ilz en formerent […] une sur la facon du corps masle, (& ceste là nue de tous ornemens) puis l’autre sur la delicature de la femme, qu’ilz parerent de beaux ouvrages (IV, i, 48, my emphasis).

As in a biblical Genesis, the ‘matronly’ Order appears only secondarily, taking the already existing male column, curving its lines and displacing the focus from certain body parts. While the male body represents austere beauty and strength, the female offers “gayté.” And far from being severe, straight, clean, and erect, the Ionic lines are concave, convex, curled, volute-like, fluted, folded, dangling, and disorderly. The column displays
“cannelures creuses,” hollow or sunken grooves representing the “pliz” or folds of ladies’ robes, and topped with “chevellures crespes entortillees,” curly, twisted, wrapped-up hair—a description that might even evoke pubic hair. The female head is then adorned with “cymaises ou doulcines,”—figures in the shape of vases, perhaps reminders of the domestic functions assigned to women—and “festons” or garlands, symbols of fertility. Her foot, unlike man’s, is appropriately enclosed by a “Spire ou Boze en lieu de soulier,” that is, convex moldings representing the shoe. In other words, while the male body is signified by the exposed navel, penis, and feet, the female is marked by the hair and the folds of robes that cover her body and assign her the status of matron. Throughout, man is bare in his entire splendor; woman is chastely covered and hidden.

If the female body is concealed in Vitruvius—so are her stories. The only instance in which a woman’s legend seems worth telling is to relate how the death of an unnamed young maiden inspired a male architect, Callimachus, to invent the Corinthian order in imitation of her slender body. According to Vitruvius, upon her death:

sa norrice, après sa sepulture assembla tous les vases ausquelz la fille en son vivant souloit prendre delectation, & les meit en un pannier: puis les porta dessus son monument: ou afin qu’il se gardassent plus longtemps au vent & a la pluye, les couvrit d’une tuyle. Ce pannier fut d’avanture posé sur une racine d’Acanthe, ou Branque Ursine: & par succession de temps, pour estre icelle racine pressee du fardeau, environ le printemps getta ses tiges qui croyssoient al’entour du pannier, mais estant rabatues par les coingz de la tuyle, force leur fut de se courber contre bas, comme lon veoit faire a rouleaux ou cartoches. Ce temps pendant, [l’architecte] Callimachus […], passant de fortune par aupres de ceste sepulture, getta sa veue sur le pannier, & sur la tige d’ou procedoient ces feuilles: a quoy prenant plaisir, & se delectant en la nouveauté de tele forme, feict a la semblance de cela puis après des colonnes aux Corinthiens (IV, i, 49-50, my emphasis).

In this passage, death, woman and nature sustain life, the male architect, and architecture itself. Twice silenced through anonymity and death, the virgin female provides a deceased body (or sepulture) on which the male architect can create a new Order (or sculpture.) Buried under the plant of acanthus, with her body covered by a tile, pressed down by its weight and penetrated by the roots of the plant, she yields the shoots and leaves that will replace her body in the column that is meant to represent her. The

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4 In his footnotes to Vitruvius’s De Architectura ([1684] 1996), Perrault explains that the term “Spire” comes from the Latin “spira” which means “les replis d’un serpent quand il est couché en rond, ou ceux d’un cable de navire qui est plié” (74, footnote 3). Thus, again, the shape is clearly that of a curled and folded figure.
reference to the architect/sculptor’s gaze reinforces the sexual innuendo as he “getta sa veue sur le pannier” and created the new Order out of the pleasure he took from the sight of the foliage. Further, far from growing erect and dignified, like the male, the leaves representing the virgin body sprout “rabattues” and “courb[ées] contre bas,” curved and facing downwards, as if evoking the physical expression of reverence performed by someone in a socially or symbolically inferior position. Finally, while the passage intends to relate how a sculptor invented the third Order “à l’imitation du gent corps de quelque pucelle,” he never actually sees this body. The passage has thus effectively buried, hidden, and denied the female body of any possible presence and agency within the narrative.

As in the mathematical and geometrical accounts, Vitruvius’s narrative carries an inevitably gendered notion of beauty. The male body represents a primary, monumental form that can stand on its own, while the female body stands for a secondary, inferior, and decorative beauty that depends on the former to exist. Indeed, monuments can stand without adornments but no adornments can exist separate from the monument.

In sum, Vitruvius’s hierarchy of values associates strength and durability—the aim of the ideal architectural endeavor—with the masculine, and links their opposite—weakness, fragility—with the feminine. This hierarchy overlaps with that of the two kinds of beauty embedded in his conception of the Orders: the masculine, austere and monumental grace, and the feminine, coquettish and decorative delicacy. In what follows, I examine sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries architectural treatises that followed and/or challenged the hierarchies established by Vitruvius.

From the Body to the Minute: Early Modern Treatises of Architecture

Jean Martin’s translation of Vitruvius was part of a larger project that served to transmit Italian Renaissance thought into French, including his translations of the first two books (1545) and the fifth book (1547) of Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554)’s treatises on architecture, and De Re Aedificatoria (1553), a treatise by humanist and architect Leon Batista Alberti

5 Further, the dichotomy that separates the “masculine” and the “feminine” in the Orders reappears, in traditional art and architectural history books, in the gendered hierarchy that differentiates the Classic from the Baroque—the Classic being identified, like the Doric order, with straight, clean and severe lines, while the Baroque is associated with curly, disorderly, concave and convex, and profuse lines.
(1404-1472). Both authors rework Vitruvius’s ideas and adapt them to their historical context. In their treatises, gender constructs of space surface in different ways than in Vitruvius’s: for the Orders, they maintain Vitruvius’s anthropocentric conception. Still, whereas Serlio reproduces Vitruvius’s gendered hierarchies, Alberti associates the Orders with people belonging to the upper, the middle, or the lower class. In addition, he was the first to draw from Cicero’s moral distinction between honestas and utilitas to treat architecture by addressing separately utilitas and pulchritudo/ornamentum (Onians, 1990). With this dichotomy, Onians argues, “Alberti formulated for the first time the opposition between structure and ornament” (153). As to Serlio, who presumably was the most influential of all Italian architecture treatise writers since he came to France in 1539, he adopts Vitruvius’s gendered conception of the Orders, but adds two “Latin” orders that he identifies as invented by the Romans, the Tuscan, which he sees as the “most solid [sodo] and the least ornate [ornato] order... the most rustic [rustico] and the most strong and of the least thinness [sottigliezza] and slenderness [gracilità]” (Book IV, 126v, quoted in Onians, 271), and the Composite, which is a conflation of both the Ionic and Corinthian orders, and consequently the most ornate of the Orders. As a result, Serlio sees the Orders as a series of five arranged in both increased proportions and richer ornaments (Onians, 271).

By contrast, in France, Philibert Delorme (1515-1570), the first French architect to write architectural treatises, reads Vitruvius with caution, and downplays the importance of the Orders. First of all, he sees them as merely ornamental and decorative (1567, V, 129) and rejects the view that the Orders (or beauty for that matter) are the fundamental principles or goals of architecture. He finds Vitruvius’s discussion of the Orders obscure, confusing and difficult (V, 135), and refuses to repeat his narratives on the origins of the Doric order (V, 142). As he describes the Ionic order, he explains why he chose it for the Tuileries:

I’ay voulu accommoder le present ordre à sondit Palays pour autant qu’il n’est gueres usité, & que encore peu de personnes l’ont mis en œuvre aux bastiments avec colonnes [...]. L’autre raison pourquoi i’ay voulu figurer & naturellement representer ledict ordre Ionique au Palays de la maiesté de la Royne [Catherine de Médicis], c’est pour autant qu’il est femenin, & a

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6 Author of Nouvelles Inventions pour bien bastir et a petits fraiz, trouvées nagueres par Philibert de L’orme, Lyonnais, Architecte, Conseiller & Aulmonier ordinaire du feu Ray Henry, & Abbé de S. Eloy les Noyons (1561) and Le Premier Tome de L’Architecture (1567), Delorme was architect of king Henri II, and built Diane de Poitier’s chateau of Anet, and after Henri II’s death, Catherine de Médicis’s palace of Tuileries.
Like Vitruvius, Delorme sees the Ionic as the “feminine” order, but, as an architect commissioned by women, he avoids being contemptuous towards “les femmes” or the “feminine,” and employs the respectful terms of “reine,” “dames,” and “déesses,” queens, ladies and goddesses—all of which refer to highly placed female figures, both socially and symbolically. Further, Delorme seeks to innovate and bring into the French architectural landscape a form, the Ionic, which had been “gueres usité,” rarely used so far—thus casting it as an architectural innovation. While he does repeat the gendered narrative of the Orders (V, 155, 162, 175-7, 201), he also justifies his preference for the Ionic order with the changing architectural needs of his times:

Delorme recasts the beauty of the Ionic and Corinthian orders as superior to that of the Doric. What Vitruvius saw as a “masculine grace” or austere and monumental beauty, is “rude” or rough to Delorme. In this sense, he aligns his preference with Alberti’s, who considered the Ionic and Corinthian as improvements on the Doric due to their refinement and elegance (Onians 155). Further, as this passage testifies, in the period of relative peace and prosperity that followed the end of the Hundred Years War, civil architecture had less need for mighty defensive fortresses made of thick, high and bare walls, narrow windows and dark rooms. Thus, masculine gods of war could now leave room to the “feminine,” as the “rude” or rough was being replaced by the “delicat,” “grande beauté,” and “enrichy de singularitez” in the new palaces of pleasure and wealth built for the lords and princes who populated the French landscape.  

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7 Not surprisingly, this “feminization” of castles coincides with a period in which women assume a new dominance in the political landscape. Indeed, women had a
Still, although these sixteenth-century authors maintained the gendered binary initiated by Vitruvius, they clearly kept their discourse relatively free from moralistic overtones. In the seventeenth century, however, not only do some treatise writers reproduce the masculine/feminine dichotomy inherent in the Vitruvian notion of the Orders, but they enmesh it with an opposition between ancient and modern architecture that foreshadows what would be known in the last two decades of the century as the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, a heated literary debate led by Boileau and Racine, on one side, who championed the merits of ancient authors, and Charles Perrault and Fontenelle, on the other side, who advocated the superiority of the “modern” authors of their times.

As Boileau would do with ancient literary figures in 1693, in his *Parallèle de l’architecture antique avec la moderne* (1650), Roland Fréart Sieur de Chambray (1606-1676) favors ancient architecture, which he sees in the “true,” “best,” and superior Greek Orders, and condemns as inferior the relatively modern Tuscan and Composite orders, invented by the Romans. To him, the Greek orders represent “order,” purity, beauty and excellence, whereas the Tuscan and Composite stand for either “pauvreté” and “rusticité”, or disorder and confusion. To Fréart, the Doric Order (Fig. 2) is the highest, the “héroique et gigantesque” that shows a certain “beauté male et naïve qui est proprement ce qu’on appelle la grande maniere” and the lowest order is the “composite,” the result of “les compositions libertines de nos ouvriers,” “un avorton de l’architecture... qui n’a ni règles, ni mesures, ni principes, ni especes ni propriété particulière et par consequent ne saurait etre compris sous le nom d’ordre” (98). The Composite evokes such disorder and messiness that he even refuses to describe it in detail. But a close look at it shows that what bothers him is clearly the abundant profusion of curved lines: on the capital, the foliage of the substantial role in important political events, from Anne de Bretagne (1477-1514), Louise de Savoie (1476-1531), and Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) during the first half of the sixteenth century, to Diane de Poitiers (1499-1566) and Catherine de Médicis (1519-1642) during the last quarter of the century and the first of the seventeenth century.

Other important sixteenth-century French architectural treatises include *Les plus excellens bastimens de France* (1576), a visually and textually descriptive catalogue of castles of France written by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau’s (c.1520-84), and *Reigle generalle d’architecture des cinq manieres de collones* (1564), by Jean Bullant (c.1520-78) and Salomon Brosse (1571-1626) a text that also adopts the human body as the model for architecture. In addition, Rabelais’s abbey of Thélème in *Gargantua* (1534) combines ideal architecture and an utopian society for the first time in French literature.
Corinthian and the volutes of the Ionic constitute a surplus of curls whose sight Fréart finds difficult to tolerate.  

In the same spirit, Fréart carves an opposition between the architects who follow the rules and those who bend them, and disqualifies modern architects who tend to favor the Ionic and Corinthian orders over the Doric, or who want to innovate and modify the allegedly pure Orders. To him, they are lower and vulgar architects who do nothing but “gotthizer” and “fantastiquer,” and who are “emportés au libertinage” because they deviate from the purity of forms (79). Indeed, Fréart adds, the “licence” the modern architects take to break the rules is as bad as an incurable disease and as morally undesirable as an act of “libertinage” (4). Thus, contrary to Renaissance architects such as Delorme, not only does he revive a phallocentric notion of beauty, but he injects strong moral overtones to a discourse that is intended to address the proper use of bricks and mortar and the visual shapes they may take.

That we, and hopefully modern architects too, can approach architecture without such overt moral bias, in my view, is the result of the work of groundbreaking theorist Claude Perrault, who in 1672 published a new translation of Vitruvius’s *De Architectura*. Under the guise of clarifying and correcting what he saw as Vitruvius’s obscurities, Perrault inserted numerous and lengthy footnotes that questioned the notion of absolute beauty and acted as a counter-discourse challenging the authority of the very author he was translating. In the process, he dismantled the gendered binary that had heretofore permeated the Vitruvian system.

Following a Cartesian approach,¹⁰ Perrault classified beauty in two categories: one “positive,” grounded on “raisons evident et necessaires,” and

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⁹ Fréart could not bring himself to draw the Composite order as others have described or drawn it, which is a column whose capital combines both the volutes of the Ionic and the acanthus plant of the Corinthian (Fig. 3). Instead, he drew the columns according to what he claims Italians Palladio and Scamozzi did (Fig. 4.) As both illustrations show, Fréart basically "straightened" the curls of the Composite order, by eliminating the acanthus plant and replacing it with orderly straight lines.

¹⁰ See Alberto Pérez-Gómez’s Introduction to his edition of Claude Perrault’s *Ordonnance* (1993). Perez-Gómez explains that Descartes’s views were well-known to the Perrault brothers. In addition, they also received the influence of the new scientific method, which advocated the Galilean conception of the universe, and which, by the last third of the seventeenth century, had been accepted by many philosophers and scientists. “The new science,” Pérez-Gómez reminds us, “aimed to substitute for the felt reality of the living world [...] a perfectly intelligible world determined exclusively by its geometrical and quantitative properties” (9). Galileo subverted traditional worldviews by describing “in mathematical language
the other “arbitraire,” subject to what the “Authorités” and customs establish (I, ii, 12). His second book of architecture, *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes selon la méthode des anciens* (1683), develops these ideas with dazzling rhetorical dexterity and philosophical complexity. First, he compares the proportions of architecture with those of music (iii–iv), and establishes an opposition between the beauty of musical proportions or “accords” as “naturelle” and “evidente”—and, consequently, as a true and absolute foundation—and the beauty of architectural proportions as “arbitraire,” the result of mere social constructions. While musical beauty arises from “[d]es accords qui sont tous de nature à ne pouvoir changer” (iv) without hurting the ear, architectural beauty is not necessarily affected by changes in the proportions of a building. Thus, “la beauté positive” is based on “raisons convaincantes” such as “la richesse de la matière, la grandeur & la magnificence de l’Edifice, la justesse & la propreté de l’exécution, & la symmetrie […] qui consiste dans le rapport que les parties ont ensemble à cause de l’égalité de la partie de leur nombre, de leur grandeur, de leur situation, & de leur ordre” (vii), while “la beauté arbitraire” depends on “accoutumance” and “prévention,” which is nothing but the acceptance of the opinion of others and has little connection with “beauté positive et convaincante” (viii). In other words, architectural beauty is neither an absolute ideal passed on to us from above, nature, God or the Platonic realm of Ideas, nor is it an anthropocentric concept that privileges the masculine above the feminine. On the contrary, it is either the product of concrete, material elements and processes, or the result of “accoutumance,” habit, custom, and the uncritical adherence to and excessive reverence for the opinion of “others,” the Ancients—an excess that he condemns throughout the Préface.11

11 Especially in the following passage: “Car il n’est pas conceivable jusqu’où va la reverence & la religion que les Architectes ont pour ces ouvrages que l’on appelle l’Antique dans lesquels ils admirent tout, mais principalement le mystère des proportions, qu’ils se contentent de contempler avec un profond respect, sans oser entreprendre de penetrer les raisons pourquoy les dimensions d’une moulure n’ont pas esté un peu plus petites, ou un peu plus grandes […] Il est pourtant vray que ce respect excessif des Architectes pour l’Antique qui leur est commun avec la pluspart de ceux qui font profession des sciences humaines, dont l’opinion est que rien ne se fait aujourd’hui de comparable aux ouvrages des Anciens, prend sa source, tout deraisonable qu’il est, du veritable respect qui est deu aux choses saintes […]. Cet esprit de soumission dans la maniere d’apprendre & de traitter les
For instance, architectural proportions, deemed as the foundation of architectural beauty, are far from being easily subsumed in one, true, and fixed system, for “tous ceux qui ont écrit de l’Architecture, sont contraires les uns aux autres; en sorte qu’il ne se trouve point, ny dans les restes des Edifices des Anciens, ny parmy le grand nombre des Architectes qui ont traitté des proportions des Ordres, que deux Edifices ny deux Auteurs qui se soient accordez & suyvy les mesmes regles » (ii-iii). Such diversity of opinions, he argues, shows that architectural theorists have built their authority on a shaky foundation. Further, if architectural beauty should be “réglée” by the imitation of nature, that is, by replicating the proportions of the human body in those of buildings, as the Vitruvian system aims, then architecture is far from achieving this goal “Car il est certain que le chapiteau, qui est la teste du corps, que toute la colonne represente, n’a point la proportion qu’une teste doit avoir à l’égard d’un corps” (ix). Thus, Perrault concludes again, architectural beauty “qu’on croit voir dans la proportion, dans la disposition, & dans l’arrangement des parties d’une colonne” is founded not in the imitation of nature, reason, or “bon sens,” but in “accoutumance” (x).

As he departs from this “accoutumance” in his own view of the Orders, Perrault appropriates the Ancients’ simile of the Orders with human bodies, strips it of its gendered stereotypes, and rewrites it with a vocabulary that evokes class categories rather than those of gender:

Les Anciens ont cru avec raison que les regles des proportions qui font la beauté des Edifices, ont esté prises sur les proportions du corps humain, & que de mesme que la nature a formé les corps propres au travail avec une taille massive, & qu’elle en a donné une plus legere à ceux qui doivent avoir de l’adresse & de l’agilité; il y a aussi des regles differentes dans l’art de bastir pour les diverses intentions que l’on a de rendre un Bastiment plus massif ou plus delicat. (Preface, i).

Sciences & les Arts s’est tellement nourry & fortifié par la docilité naturelle aux gens de lettres, que l’on a beaucoup de peine à s’en defaire; & l’on ne peut s’accoutumer à faire la distinction qu’il y a entre le respect deu aux choses saintes, & celuy que meritent celles qui ne le sont pas; lesquelles il nous est permis d’examiner, de critiquer, & de censurer avec modestie, quand il s’agit de connoistre la verité.” (xvii-xix, my emphasis). In a clear announcement of the stance that his brother Charles would hold in the literary debate a few years later in his Parallèle des anciens et des modernes (1688), Perrault suggests that architectural authority, contrary to religious authority, is neither sacred nor divine, but the result of those who have deified what for the Ancients was only the result of “fantaisie,” “accident” and “negligence.”
As Alberti did before him, Perrault divides the bodies that the Ancients regarded as the basis of beauty into two new categories: “les corps propres au travail,” the bodies of the workers who carry heavy loads, and those “plus legere[s],” the bodies of the people (perhaps aristocrats and upper bourgeois) whose contributions to society require “adresse” and “agilité” (rather than “delicatesse”)—qualities that are both physical and mental. Rather than discussing the appearance of bodies, he focuses on their “diverses intentions” or functions, thus precluding further references to the shape of female and male bodies.

Still, this reference to human bodies and their functions does not ground Perrault’s rules for the proportions. In fact, he writes his rules for proper proportions exclusively in terms of modules and minutes, that is, mathematical units of spatial measurement, a new kind of regulation. Except for this brief reference, nowhere in the entire text does he mention the “matronly,” the “maiden” body, the footsteps of man, or the laborers and aristocrats for that matter. This pure mathematical language strips the architectural discourse, for the first time in the history of architectural theory, of the gendered hierarchies implicated in the anthropocentric notions of his predecessors. In other words, not only does Perrault propose architecture as an object of mathematical measurement rather than a representation of the human body, but, in so doing, he also frees the discourse from one of its gender biases.

Still, while architects can no longer use human bodies as units of spatial measurement, gender constructs do permeate general conceptions of visual shapes, and have deeply ingrained in us the notion that curly lines are “feminine” and straight lines are “masculine,” both in the built environment and in the shapes of bodies and hair. The next question then would be how these constructs have continued or not to be enmeshed with notions of moral adequacy. And while cultural studies focusing on representations of the body have addressed the question at length, much remains for inquiry regarding discourses about shapes in the built environment.

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Fig. 1. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). *The Vitruvian Man*. Proportions of the Human Body according to Vitruvius. Ca. 1492. Pen and brown ink, brush and some brown wash over metalpoint on paper, 13 9/16 x 9 5/8 in. Inv. 228. Location: Accademia, Venice, Italy. Photo Credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 2. Illustration of the Doric order at the Marcellus Theater in Rome. Fréart Sieur de Chambray, Roland. *Parallèle de l'architecture antique avec la moderne*. Paris: Martin, 1650. p. 15.
Fig. 3. Davent, Leon (active 1540-1556) (after Francesco Primaticcio). *Capital of Composite Order*. French. Etching, sheet: 11 1/2 x 13 in. (29.2 x 33 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1941 (41.72(2.11)). Location: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Photo Credit: Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 4. Illustration of the Composite order as drawn by Palladio and Scamozzi, according to Roland Fréart Sieur de Chambray. *Parallèle de l'architecture antique avec la moderne.* Paris: Martin, 1650. p. 43.