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The Nature of Naturalism : A Trans-Historical Examination
La nature du naturalisme : un examen transhistorique

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lives, as much as they are sites of
limitations and possibilities” (288),
because “difference is real, dynamic and
boundless” (289).
Potvin reiterates that the goal
of the text is to uncover “the narra-
tives of design, domesticity and how
gender and sexuality altered and were
affected by these narratives” (289).
In particular, he makes the provoca-
tive case that shame is key: “Shame
and design make uneasy bedfellows
and yet they comprise the politics
of aesthetics of the modern interior” (288). Shame has an effect on
the material components of interior
design as well as the configuration
of spaces. Shame, Potvin tells us “erects walls” while “materializing phobia
and panic” (288). Shame resists but
also motivates. It “builds things of
beauty” (288). While Potvin makes
the case that shame is an integral part
of queer identity, his conception of the
aesthetics of shame is applicable to
the domestic interiors of other times,
places, and identities.
Potvin asserts that “domestic
spaces materialize the building of
lives, as much as they are sites of
ideological struggle, tension and
resistance, the material stuff of iden-
tity. They form the landscape where-
in... gender and sexual difference are
coded, performed and circumscribed”
(288). In doing so, he sets the agenda
for continuing the important work
modelled by this essential study.

Erin J. Campbell is associate professor of early modern European art in the Department of Art History & Visual Studies of the University of Victoria.—erinjc@uvic.ca


Heather Hyde Minor
Piranesi’s Lost Words
264 pp. 130 duotone illus. $79.95 Cloth ISBN 9780271065496

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI—an inspired interpreter of classical antiquity
whose prolific artistic output and outsized personality made him a fixture
of the Republic of Letters—remains one of the most famous and well-studied
figures of the eighteenth century. Known primarily as an engraver and
printmaker, Piranesi has also been celebrated and studied as an architect,
designer, collector, archaeologist, and antiquarian. In her most recent
book, Piranesi’s Lost Words, Heather Hyde Minor uses a wealth of eighteenth-
century archival sources, many unpublished, to argue that Pirane-
si’s most significant appellation is as author and that his books “were his
most powerfully creative art” (209).

Through this beautifully illustrate-
d book, Minor guides her reader
through four major works in Pira-
nesi’s published oeuvre, showing
how text and image are intertwined in
a composite art-form manufactured through complex material, social,
and intellectual processes. Divid-
ed into two parts, broadly organ-
zied around the concepts of “reading” and the “how” of making, the
book begins with an examination of
Piranesi’s earliest folio, the Antichità
romane (Roman Antiquities, 1756, 4 vols.). Through an anatomical dissection
of the book, Chapter 1 guides the
twenty-first-century reader through
its constituent elements—frontispiece, imprimitur, texts, etch-
ings, paper, ink, etc.—highlighting
conventions of eighteenth-century
book-making while also placing Pira-
nesi’s celebrated plates in their ori-
ginal bibliographic context. Minor
establishes connections between her
material engagement with the Anti-
chità romane and Piranesi’s experimenta-
tion with the expressive potential of
print and its ability to investigate
the antique past through its modes and
methods of representation. Chap-
ter 2 continues this exploration of
the Antichità but from an eighteenth-cen-
tury perspective, bringing to life
Piranesi’s contemporary readers and
the spaces in which they would have
encountered his works, be they librar-
ies, book auctions, or Bouchard &
Gravier’s shop in Rome. By animating
Piranesi’s milieu, his relationship to
various audiences, and the circulation
of his books, the chapter also illumin-
ates eighteenth-century perspectives
on the collaborative nature of the
study of antiquity.

In Part 2, which begins with Chap-
ter 3, Minor turns to the Campus Mar-
tius antiquae urbis (The Field of Mars
of Ancient Rome, 1762), paying particular
attention to Piranesi’s use of frag-
mentary textual and material remains
to both reconstruct and interpret
ancient Rome. Chapter 4 studies Della
magnificenza ed architettura de’ Romani
(On the Magnificence and Architecture of
the Romans, 1761), a work in which
Piranesi engages the contemporary
Greco-Roman controversy, famously
arguing for the relative superiority of
the ancient Romans over the Greeks.
Minor shows how Piranesi expanded
his methodological repertoire by
drawing not just on ancient sources,
but also on modern interpretations
of ancient objects published by peers
like Julien-David Le Roy who believed,
Chapter 5 argues that the contributions of Diverse maniere d’adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizi desunte dall’architettura Egizia, Etrusca e Greca (Different Ways of Ornamenting Chimneys and All Other Parts of Buildings Taken from Egyptian, Tuscan, and Greek Architecture, 1769) are its engagement with Enlightenment practices of cataloguing and classifying, and Piranesi’s rejection of this epistemological framework for recovering lost knowledge. For Piranesi, interpretation is the only means of knowing the material remains of past cultures.

Chapters 6 and 7 serve as Minor’s conclusion. They show how Piranesi’s corpus was “dismembered” after his death—through family disputes and the dispersal of his copperplates—and then “found” again in the present day. This story of loss and recovery carries the book’s focus on reading and the how of making (Minor’s examination of Piranesi’s corpus through its materiality) into a discussion of the state of Piranesi studies and the scholarly practices and disciplinary divisions that “decoupled” Piranesi’s words and images. As a result of increased specialization in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, no one discipline could credibly claim to study the range of topics and sources that Piranesi did, nor could available scholarly tools capture the complexity of his work and the interconnection between his texts and their accompanying plates. In the emergent discipline of art history, for example, its early tools, namely monographic studies and the catalogue raisonné, inadvertently fashioned Piranesi into an artist. Minor argues that Albert Giesecke’s list of Piranesi’s published prints (Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 1911) and Henri Focillon’s Giovanni Battista Piranesi: Essai de catalogue raisonné de son oeuvre (1918) compounded the problem as they became modern foundations for further research. This legacy continues to this day, but was perhaps most tellingly evident in the museum exhibitions and accompanying catalogues of 1978, which marked the bicentenary of Piranesi’s death by celebrating his engravings, displaying them as individual plates on gallery walls.

Even as Piranesi’s texts came to be studied in the mid-twentieth century by an expanded field of scholars, in particular by architectural historians in search of the origins of Modernism, Minor argues that Piranesi was still too narrowly understood. Without grasping Piranesi’s complete oeuvre and the materials and processes that led to its creation, scholars will remain blind to his true achievements.

This historiographic discussion reinforces a methodological argument that accompanies Minor’s central claim. She redefines Piranesi’s status as a pre-eminent interpreter of antiquity through the lens of his work as an author connecting the myriad processes that produced his publications to the approaches needed to understand them. “Although no art historian,” she writes, “claimed to seek methodological inspiration from Piranesi, these ideas can all be found in the pages of his books” (208).

Through her own book, Minor captures these processes of knowing and making, turning them both into an object of study and a powerful and compelling methodology. This approach allows her to make several contributions to Piranesi studies as well as art and architectural history. First and foremost, Minor’s complex treatment of Piranesi as author and her study of his books in their entirety, is pioneering. Even as the Piranesi literature continues to expand, including considerations of him not just as an artist but as a designer (see, for example, Piranesi as Designer edited by Sarah E. Lawrence, with John Wilton-Ely, published in 2008 in association with a series of exhibitions), Minor’s object of study still sets her book apart from recent scholarship. The influence of this approach will be manifold. For example, it allows Minor to implicitly challenge the gloss of most monographs as she shows how the products of “genius” come into being in more complicated ways than are often acknowledged. Minor’s recovery of Piranesi’s lost words demonstrates that new scholarly terrain is often in plain sight, obscured not by a missing theoretical lens, but by a failure to begin research by seeking to understand objects through their own terms.

Piranesi’s Lost Words can also be situated in the context of the proliferation of materiality as a topos in the study of art and architectural history, history, English, and other disciplines in the humanities. Broadly speaking, materials and the material quality of art and other objects of human production has, since the late 1990s, been used by many scholars as a topic of investigation—opposed, for example, to formal investigations—as a way to uncover new meanings. This approach has also illuminated the conditions surrounding the production of these objects, bringing studies and concepts of making and the experiences of an embodied viewer (or researcher, in Minor’s case) to shape historical inquiry.

Through this approach, Minor’s book shares in Piranesi’s joy of research and in so doing, animates her own interpretive and creative scholarly pursuit. In addition to its contributions to Piranesi studies, Piranesi’s Lost Words is a compelling pedagogical text that conveys the delights of academic research to its readers. Examples fill the book, which opens with a description of the author’s experience receiving the four volumes of Antichità romane in the library reading room. By evoking the physicality of the volumes, she brings her readers with her into the library. Similarly, the author’s photographs of Piranesi’s folios sprawling on library tables provide readers with insight into the research process. In a particularly striking moment in the book, Minor locates herself as a
Jocelyn Coutu
*Then and Now: Collecting and Classicism in Eighteenth-Century England*
340 pp. 16 col. + 80 b/w illus.
$77 Cloth & eBook ISBN 9780773545434

Enzy Contogouris

IN THIS BOOK JOAN COUTU FORE-GROUNDS AN IMPORTANT AND UNSTUDIED PERIOD OF TRANSITION IN THE PRACTICES OF COLLECTING AND DISPLAYING CLASSICAL SCULPTURE IN ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. HER FOCUS IS ON FOUR MID-CENTURY COLLECTIONS, WHICH SHE ANALYZES IN RELATION TO THE POLITICS OF THEIR OWNERS—THREE MEMBERS OF THE LANDED ARISTOCRACY AND ONE NEWLY RICH BOURGEOIS, ALL WHIGS—AND TO THEIR COUNTRY’S SHIFTING POLITICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE. THE OPENING AND CLOSING CHAPTERS PROVIDE A HISTORICAL FRAME FOR THESE FOUR CASE STUDIES BY GIVING AN OVERVIEW OF COLLECTING PRACTICES EARLIER AND LATER IN THE CENTURY, SO THAT WE FOLLOW A SHIFT FROM A PRACTICE THAT FAVOURED THE COLLECTING OF PLASTER CASTS AND REPRODUCTIONS OF WELL-KNOWN CLASSICAL STATUARY TO A PREFERENCE FOR AUTHENTIC ANTIQUE PIECES, AND ONE THAT WENT FROM DISPLAYING CLASSICAL STATUARY THROUGHOUT THE HOME TOCLOISTERING IT IN DEDICATED GALLERY-LIKE SPACES.

Coutu’s focus is on acquisition and display. She demonstrates that although the works themselves were not political, they were “activated politically” within their owners’ Whig agendas (6). She rightly insists from the outset that statuary was used differently by each owner, and that “each collection is as much about the collector as it is about the objects within it” (3). Ultimately, though, patterns emerge, revealing how these sculptures came to define the classical canon that was being integrated into contemporary art and aesthetic discourse, most notably in Britain with the practice that allowed for the display of “virtù” (18). Classical statuary and other pieces of virtù had to be exhibited in a way that was tasteful and that served as an example, in order to highlight perceived qualities that the natural aristocracy wanted to put forward, such as their balanced nature and their inherent right to lead.

Each of the central four chapters is then devoted to the practices of one collector from the next generation. The first examines the collection of Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham (1730–82). It begins with Rockingham on his Grand Tour, during which he bought vast quantities of casts of classical statuary on behalf of his father. These acquisitions are contemporaneous with the publication of J. J. Winckelmann’s *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755), and we see in Rockingham’s choices the same preference for the graceful and the beautiful, the same distaste for extreme emotion as displayed, for instance, on Laocoon’s face. When he acceded to his peerage Rockingham became increasingly involved in the affairs of state, and was appointed Prime Minister in 1765. But when the Whigs were sidelined by George III, Rockingham retreated to Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire, his political power base, and the estate became the centre of his political strategizing. Analyzing the different pieces of statuary and their placement, Coutu demonstrates that Rockingham’s collection at Wentworth Woodhouse was at once shaped by his particular Whig agenda and gave voice to it, and that it should be read both as a claim to power on behalf of his class and as an inspiration to virtue.

The second study is dedicated to the sculpture gallery in Whitehall of Charles Lennox, the 3rd Duke of Richmond (1735–1806), which Richmond created in 1758 and made available to young aspiring British artists for the purposes of training. It was established in the midst of calls, by William