Constructing the Sublime: The Discourse on Architecture and Louis XIV's Sublimity in Seventeenth-Century Paris

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Introduction

"Rien n'est plus nouveau que le dessein de cét ouvrage."[1]

With these words, French Jesuit and writer René Rapin (1621-1687) opened the "avertissement" of his treatise *Du grand ou du sublime dans les mœurs et dans les differentes conditions des hommes*, which he published in Paris in 1686 (fig. 1).[2] He was right. To place an entire treatise on the sublime outside of the realm of discourse or literature was highly novel – an idea he described in the following manner:

> On n'en a peut-estre jamais traité de pareil: Car l'idée qu'on se forme du Sublime est tellement attachée au discours, qu'on a de peine a le mettre ailleurs. Mais comme il peut y avoir du Grand & du Merveilleux en toutes choses, j'ay cru qu'on pouvoit aussi y concevoir du Sublime.[3]

The novelty of his work lies in the fact that Rapin considers "le sublime" as a quality of human morality, even though the specific concept of the sublime that he adopts was firmly rooted in the more traditional domain of discourse – of rhetoric and poetic aesthetics. For his book, Rapin relied on the highly influential *Traité du Sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) from 1674, a recent French translation and discussion of the ancient treatise *Peri hypsous*. This treatise on sublimity in great writing was written by a Greek writer in the first or third century AD who we identify as Pseudo-Longinus, and Boileau's edition sparked a renewed interest in the idea of sublimity and its theoretical repercussions.[4] Boileau's publication was not so much a translation as a shift in understanding of the Longinian sublime, for Boileau shifted its dominant association with the style of discourse towards the extraordinary

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1 René Rapin, *Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les différentes conditions des hommes: avec quelques observations sur l'éloquence des bienséances* (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1686), iii: "Nothing is newer than the objective of this book." All English translations in this thesis are mine, unless stated otherwise.

2 In this dissertation, the names of all persons mentioned are accompanied by birth and death dates, except for ancient authors and individuals whose birth and death dates are unknown.

3 Ibid., iii: "It has perhaps never been treated in a similar manner: For the idea that we form of the Sublime is so much attached to discourse, that we have difficulty placing it elsewhere. But since the Great [du Grand] and the Marvellous [du Merveilleux] can exist in all things, I thought that we might just as well conceive the Sublime here."

4 In the first two paragraphs of his treatise, which he addresses to Guillaume de Lamoignon, Rapin writes: "Je pourrois vous renvoyer à la Traduction de Longin," and states on the following page: "Car je prétens mettre à tout ce Sublime de la mesme maniere que Longin l'a mis au seul discours, & vous faire trouver de nouvelles graces, & de nouvelles beautez, en ce qu'il y a de plus ordinaire & de plus commun dans les différens estats de la vie." Rapin, *Du grand*, 2-3.

quality and effect of discourse.[5] Rapin soon recognised its potential and adapted the Longinian sublime to serve his own argument. His book revolves around four different men who are sublime themselves, since they each manifest a different type of sublimity: the sublime "in the *noblesse de robe*" ("dans la robe"), "in the *noblesse d'épée*" ("dans l'épée"), "in private life" ("de la vie privée"), and "in public life" ("dans le public & sur le trosne"), which he respectively found in the French jurist Guillaume de Lamoignon (1617-1677), the Marshal General Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne (or Turenne) (1611-1675), Louis II de Bourbon-Condé (Prince de Condé) (1621-1686), and King Louis XIV (1638-1715) himself.[6]

However, Rapin's book has some major problems. Novel it may be, but the core of his treatise reveals at once all of the vulnerabilities of the sublime. Central to his argument is a bold claim: the king himself is sublime, and therefore he is in need of a sublime representation to be able to evoke it through artifice (literature and the visual arts, such as painting and architecture). Underlying this claim are two problems, which point to the dangerous tipping point that the sublime has always known.

I Firstly, the poetics (or rhetoric) of the sublime used to evoke the effect of sublimity has always been problematic, since it relies on an interplay between opposite *extremes* (such as high-low, great-small, light-dark, everything-nothing). Such a union of opposites makes for a powerful poetic effect, but is therefore very unstable. It can easily topple, lapsing into ridicule or excess even with the slightest failure of artifice (be it a text or a building), or with the slightest push by political opponents, by means of satire for example. When applied to human beings, the sublime easily fails since human life is inherently flawed and rarely comes into contact with true extremes, apart from that of life-death – even the reign of kings such as Louis XIV. This thought also leads us to the second problem underlying Rapin's claim.

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5 In the "Préface" to his French edition, Boileau emphasises that Longinus' understanding of the sublime differs from the idea of the sublime style (or "Stile Sublime"), the highest of the three rhetorical styles in Ancient Rhetoric: "Il faut donc sçavoir que par Sublime, Longin n'entend pas ce que les Orateurs appellent le Stile Sublime: mais cet extraordinaire & ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le Discours, & qui fait qu'un Ouvrage enleve, ravit, transporte. Le Stile Sublime veut toûjours de grands mots: mais le Sublime se peut trouver dans une seule pensée, dans une seule figure, dans un seul tour de paroles. Une chose peut estre dans le Stile Sublime & n'estre pourtant pas Sublime." See Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, "Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours. Traduit du Grec de Longin," in Œuvres Diverses Du Sieur D*** *avec le Traité du* sublime ou *du* merveilleux dans le discours (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1674), x.

6 Rapin, *Du grand*, 12-13. The English translations of these four conditions are quoted from Ann T. Delehanty, *Literary knowing in Neoclassical France: from poetics to aesthetics* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 115. Louis II de Bourbon-Condé will be referred to as "Condé" in this dissertation.

II Secondly, when in spite of these dangers, notable contemporaries of Louis XIV such as Rapin did eventually establish the king *himself* as being sublime, a second problem emerged: how do you successfully represent and evoke the sublimity of a monarch through artifice (art, architecture and literature) – a sublimity that, according to seventeenth-century rhetoric, was in itself ineffable and lay far beyond the scope of normal human beings? This paradox was used by some writers as a cover to uphold the claim of the sublime itself: one could easily state that one's efforts fall short in the face of such transcendence, and resort to commonplaces such as: "Oh, I cannot continue, for this elevated task lies far beyond my humble capabilities." But ultimately, this rhetoric cannot avoid succumbing to its own weaknesses, since it reveals a fundamental inability or impossibility to wield the sublime so that it would evoke the monarch's elevation in all its glory and for all time. Rapin himself also admitted that he was incapable of executing this task.

Together, these two issues, I will argue, are at the core of the problematic claim of Louis XIV's sublimity. To be able to form a better understanding of these issues, my thesis will inquire into the development that had led to this claim. In other words, what is the history of the problem that is the sublime of Louis XIV?

One of the main reasons to turn back this clock is the fact that we can already recognise the same way of thinking about Louis XIV in an earlier work. Roughly sixteen years before Rapin's publication, the French writer on art and royal historiographer André Félibien (1619-1695) already elaborated on the very same case: the ineffable sublimity of Louis XIV himself.[7] In his *Tapisseries* du *Roy, ou sont representez les quatre elemens et les quatre saisons: avec les devises qui les accompagnent et leur explication* from 1670, Félibien focused on the capacity of tapestry and emblematics to best represent the sublimity of the monarch. The core of Félibien's argument, and the tapestries he discusses, expresses the very same idea of the sublimity of Louis XIV ("la grandeur d'Ame de Sa Majesté […] qui ne se propose rien que de magnifique & de sublime")[8] – an inner grandeur that, since his birth onwards, has elevated the monarch above all others towards a level of transcendence that ravishes all those who witness it and surpasses the ordinary scope of men ("Sa Majesté par ses vertus & ses actions heroïques, étonne & ravit tous ceux qui en sont les témoins, & surpasse les forces naturelles, & la portée ordinaire des Hommes").[9]

7 André Félibien, *Tapisseries du roi, où sont representez les quatre élémens et les quatre saisons* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1670).

8 André Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy, ou sont representez les quatre elemens et les quatre saisons: avec les devises qui les accompagnent et leur explication*, rev. ed. (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1679), 19. I will use this particular edition of Félibien's book in my thesis, unless stated otherwise.

9 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, 89.

The two publications by Félibien and Rapin demonstrate a notion of sublimity that operates around and beyond the traditional borders of discourse, by placing it in the domain of morality.[10] The driving force behind these ideas is the elevated status of the French monarch himself. Both works also connect the notion of sublimity with the question of representation: to what extent are not only words, but artworks and buildings able to evoke the transcendence of elevated human beings? These two books alone warrant an approach to seventeenth-century French thought on the sublime that explores more closely contemporary ideas on the grandeur of the French king and its problems, while also taking into account domains other than that of discourse. The fundamental vulnerabilities underlying not only their assertion of Louis XIV's sublimity, but also the role of architecture and literature as tools to evoke it, help us to discover how long these problems already existed. In fact, the question of approaching and representing royal transcendence was already particularly acute at the time of the monarch's birth.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE PROBLEM OF LOUIS XIV'S SUBLIMITY: GENERAL AIM AND METHODOLOGY

At its very core, Rapin's method and approach reveal a number of ambiguities and loose ends. These problems provide us with a vital reference point: they actually reveal several weaknesses in earlier French thinking on the sublime and human beings. These weaknesses can be traced back to the early years of Louis XIV's reign, and are a symptom of the ever unstable and subjective nature of the phenomenon of sublimity itself – a symptom the sublime has always had and always will have. Since the domain of architecture was used throughout the century as a vehicle to contemplate on the question of sublimity, it leads us directly to the heart of this problem. Therefore, the two problems of human sublimity that have just been introduced will inform the structure of my argument. Since both problems point to a development in time, they will be addressed in a two-part structure. The four decades prior to 1670, a time of conflict and power building (both literally and figuratively), expose our first problem and will therefore form part I of this thesis. And since the publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy* reveals our second problem, this case study will introduce part II of my argument.

10 On Rapin and the monarch's sublimity of morality, see Delehanty, *Literary knowing*, 115-125, and Ann T. Delehanty, "From Judgment to Sentiment: Changing Theories of the Sublime, 1674–1710," *Modern Language Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (June 2005): 151-72.

The first of these two issues, which will cover the first part of this thesis, concerns the *markers* of the sublime. This term, coined by James Porter in his comprehensive study *The Sublime in Antiquity* from 2016, refers to the causes which provoke the sublime, and therefore help to locate "sublimity in contexts where the critical term is not being used […] or where it has not yet surfaced as a technical term of aesthetics or criticism."[11] These markers should not be understood as containers of the sublime; they are causes, since they provoke the sublime. As examples of these markers, Porter lists features such as "immense heights (*hupsos* in a literal sense) or profound depths (*bathos* in a literal sense)," as well as "sudden or extreme, often violent, motions or changes," "limits" and "sharp collisions and contrasts (contrastive opposites)." What many of these markers have in common is the interplay between extremes, which we can identify as a fundamental agent of the sublime. Already for Longinus, the first prerequisite of the elevation of thought is "the power of grand conceptions," which often involves the interplay of profound qualities – contrasts and extremes that can only be found on opposite ends of spectrums.[12] Here, the potential of the sublime lies in the moment when the interplay between these opposites becomes too overwhelming for human beings to comprehend, such as a rapid change or transformation from one extreme into the other, or even instances in which the two converge. These are moments, Porter states in his article "Sublime monuments and sublime ruins in ancient aesthetics," in which "*les extrèmes se touchent* in a kind of ecstasy of representation."[13] This idea of a seemingly paradoxical union is vital. As examples of such dynamic unions Porter mentions high-low, great-small, rapid-slow, palpable-impalpable, and everlasting-ephemeral – and to this list one can add other notable examples such as silence-eloquence, humility-magnificence, and brevity-infinity. Porter rightfully describes this interplay as a "tension" that subsists between these extremes, and identifies this tension as a "sublime gap," one that is formed by "the polarities that stretch between any number of extremes."[14]

Even though words such as "tension" and "gap" explain very well the powerful potential of extremes and conflicts that characterises the force of the sublime, they equally well point to its fundamental vulnera-

11 James Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 53.

12 Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe and Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 8, 181, https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.longinus-sublime.1995. The English translation is derived from this source.

13 James Porter, "Sublime monuments and sublime ruins in ancient aesthetics," *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire* 18, no. 5-6 (2011): 690.

14 Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity*, 55.

bilities. Here lies the first issue of sublimity, that of extremes, which can best be explained by examining cause (Porter's "markers") and effect.

Here, it might help to look at the example of the marker of heaven-hell. When a reader or spectator is confronted with an image or idea of the terrific space and contrast between both extremes, this tension can elevate both, as a union, towards the sublime and produces an overwhelming effect in the recipient. This relationship, which Porter explains, can be compared to a *spectrum*.[15] Here, even though hell and heaven are located on opposite ends of the same spectrum, they are both sublime. And especially when they cooperate, they can evoke a powerful sense of sublimity in the recipient.

However, extremes such as "hell," "nothingness" or "total darkness" are fundamentally ambiguous notions, for they can also evoke sensations in us that are very different from the sublime. If we would associate the sublime with the greatness of virtue, then these notions would constitute the opposite of the sublime itself. In this case, we are not concerned with a spectrum but rather with a *scale* of sublimity. Whereas on a spectrum of sublimity, both its ends are sublime (even though they are each other's opposites, such as heaven and hell), on a scale of sublimity only the top end constitutes the sublime (let us say "heaven"), while the other end of the line forms the opposite of the sublime *itself*, the antithesis of sublimity (let us say "hell"). And in the pursuit of the sublime, towards this top end of the line, one can easily fail and fall downwards towards the extreme opposite of the sublime on the lowest end of the scale. Examples such as these are attempts at greatness that are considered ridiculous, excessive, and, most of all, vicious. An illustration of this possibility can be found in those human beings who want to achieve greatness, but fall prey to the dangers of hubris and trip and fall downwards. This metaphor of height returns in the *Traité de la Cour ou Instruction des Courtisans* by Eustache de Refuge (1564-1617), an influential treatise on courtly conduct from 1616:

> L'on monte en ces grandes fortunes par degrez; mais quand l'on est monté jusques au comble, le plus souvent l'on n'en trouve point pour descendre; & le moindre ebloyssement de veuë, qui prend ordinairement à ceux qui sont elevez si haut, leur fait perdre l'assiette du pied, & les precipite en bas tout à un coup.[16]

15 Referring to Longinus' image of "the failed Colossus," Porter writes: "Here we see clearly how the sublime is generated at the nether ends of the spectrum that monuments can occupy: at their moment of greatest possible expansion (at the farthest reaches of the cosmos) and at the moment of their imminent collapse." Porter, "Sublime monuments," 690.

16 Eustache de Refuge, *Traité de la cour: ou instruction des courtisans*, rev. ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1656 [1616]), 349: "Wee ascend to those *Great* and *Eminent* fortunes of the *Court* by degrees and steppes; but when we are mounted, and have attained the top, then we find neither stepps nor degrees whereby to descend; and the least dasling of our eyes (which comonly befalles those who are elevated so high) makes us loose our footing, and in one moment and

Like Refuge's metaphorical stairway, a scale of sublimity thus always carries the possibility of failure, of not reaching the top and falling downwards along the scale towards the sublime's dangerous antithesis. Therefore, a scale of sublimity, instead of a spectrum, can be often found in the ideas of political opponents, such as works of satire. This is why the underlying methodology of the first part of this thesis constitutes the tension that exists between the spectrum and the scale of the sublime.

Rapin's problematic approach to the sublime reveals this issue of extremes very clearly. In his *Du grand ou du sublime*, Rapin shows a strong reliance on the power of opposite extremes. In his discussion of the persons of Condé and Turenne, for instance, Rapin characterises them by using different interplays of extremes: employing those of action-tranquillity and humility-magnificence respectively. In these interplays, Rapin referred to the role of architecture as a key participant: Condé's retirement from military glory at his magnificent castle of Chantilly made him sublime, whereas Turenne's sublimity arose from his humility, for instance when approaching the castle of Versailles. But such was Rapin's confidence in his endeavour that he chose to establish the sublimity of his four human subjects as different types of the sublime, while leaving aside the question of how these multiple "sublimes" related to each other. Soon after the publication of his treatise, he himself became painfully aware of the issues underlying these choices. From his correspondence with several French intellectuals, we know that Condé's son, Henri-Jules de Bourbon-Condé (Prince de Condé) (1643-1709), and his court were very displeased with Rapin's description of his father in the treatise. Startled, Rapin wrote to Roger de Bussy-Rabutin (1618-1693), a memoirist and lieutenant-general to Louis XIV, that several members of Henri-Jules' inner circle at Versailles had complained that Turenne had been treated much better in the book than Condé has. In order to reassure his opponents, Rapin adds that, in response to this criticism, he would argue that the sublime he had given to Condé was actually "more grand and much more extensive than that of M. de Turenne." Because reason, Rapin continues, "is the sovereign perfection of man […], the sublime of spirit and of reason that I give to the Prince is preferable to that of the sword, which I give to the Maréchal." [17]

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blow precipitates, and throwes us downe headlong." The English translation is derived from Eustache de Refuge, *A treatise of the court or Instructions for courtiers Digested into two books*, trans. John Reynolds, vol. 1 (London: Augustine Matthews for Will: Lee, 1622), 188-89.

17 Rapin writes to Bussy-Rabutin: "Il est vray qu'a Versailles quelques gens de la cour de Monsieur le Duc se plaignirent que j'avois mieux traitté M. de Turenne que Monsieur le Prince. A quoy je repondis que le sublime que je donne a Monsieur le Prince est plus grand et bien plus étendu que celuy de M. de Turenne; car comme la raison est la souveraine perfection de l'homme, et que la valeur n'en est qu'un effet et qu'une suitte, le sublime de l'esprit et de la raison que je donne au Prince est preferable a celuy de l'épée, que je donne au Maréchal." See letter "103. *Du P. Rapin*" in Roger de Bussy-Rabutin, *Correspondance avec le Père René Rapin*, ed. C. Rouben (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1983), 220.

Here, Rapin's interplay of extremes backfires. For the circle of Condé's son, Turenne's sublimity outshone that of Condé: Rapin's idea of his father's magnificence at Chantilly sounded far less exalted than Turenne's noble humility in the face of the king's magnificence.[18] In a rather desperate public effort to satisfy his critics and remove any ambiguities, Rapin turned to the protestant philosopher Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), who was about to write a review of Rapin's book in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*.[19] Audaciously, Rapin tried to influence the content of his own review, asking Bayle to underline the following two ideas: Condé's sublimity of glorious tranquillity outshines Turenne's sublimity of military action, but Turenne's sublime humility (*anéantissement*) elevates the king by association even more.[20] The inconsistent twists and turns of Rapin's efforts are obvious, and the result is an indistinct hierarchy of sublimes that would fit better in a poetic panegyric than in a treatise.[21]

In other words, the powerful potential of extremes carries with it many risks, since their use can easily become subject to interpretation, subversion and excess – and this topple-effect becomes particularly clear when human beings are connected to the sublime. The first part of this thesis will examine the use of such interplays of extremes during the first decades of Louis XIV's life, with a particular focus on the role of human virtue in this process.

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18 Rapin explains that Condé's civility and magnificence are qualities that lead better towards grandeur of spirit than Turenne's valour does: "Mais outre que je donne à M. le Prince tout le sublime de la valeur, je lui donne encore celui de l'esprit, de la politesse, de la magnificence et toutes les autres qualités qui font la grandeur d'âme bien plus que la valeur." Bussy-Rabutin, *Correspondance*, 220.

19 Rapin reveals that one of the motives behind his audacious requests to Bayle is "to satisfy those who are not content, perhaps wrongly" with his characterisation of Condé: "[L]'auteur/ seroit obligé à M. Besle de luy ayder à faire sentir cela afin de contenter ceux qui ne sont pas contans peut estre mal à propos du caractere qu'il a donné à Mr. le prince qui en a esté contan[t] luy mesme, et mieux senty que les autres l'excellence de son sublime." René Rapin to Pierre Bayle, March 8, 1686, in *Correspondance de Pierre Bayle*, accessed 3 May 2018, http://bayle-correspondance.univ-st-etienne.fr/?Lettre-531-Rene-Rapin-a-Pierre&lang=fr.

20 Rapin, writing to Bayle in the third person, presents his wishes to Bayle as follows: "C'est sur cela qu'on le prie dans le jugement qu'il fera du livre qu'on luy envoye de vouloir bien en consideration de ses amis insinuer dans le sublime qu'on donne à Mr de Turene, qu'il semble que ce n'est que pour louer mieux le Roy que l'auteur a pris plaisir de si bien louer Mr de Turene : que c'est un tour nouveau qu'il a imaginé de faire l'eloge de ce prince, dont les louanges sont épuisées, bien plus beau, en embellissant celuy de ce grand homme. Rien n'est mieux conceu, et plus nouveau, que de relever le merite de ce guerrier pour en faire hommage au Roy en l'aneantissant devant luy, de la maniere dont il le fait. On voudroit aussy qu'il voulut bien insinuer dans le caractere de M. le prince que l'auteur apres luy avoir donné tout le sublime de l'action par la valeur des armes, luy donne encore tout le sublime du repos et de la gloire qu'il y a [à] en jouir comme fait ce prince ; que ce sublime de la gloire du repos est autant preferable au sublime de la gloire de l'action." René Rapin to Pierre Bayle, March 8, 1686.

21 Rapin described his book as a "petit Traité," Rapin, *Du grand*, iv.

Only with Félibien's publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy* around 1670, which was published by the Imprimerie royale, we start to see large-scale efforts to officially establish the king himself as sublime – and here we reach the second issue discussed in this thesis. In essence, the imperfect and capricious lives of humans are seldom governed by or confronted with *truly* absolute contrasts, let alone absolutes. Of course, you may feel that a person is sublime, but once you poetically or, in Rapin's case, theoretically establish someone as a "sublime human being," you run the severe risk of provoking a public backlash – a problem that only increases when not one but several sublime human beings are involved.[22] After all, sublimity is ultimately a subjective quality, an aspect that has already been stressed by Lydia Hamlett. In her article "Longinus and the Baroque Sublime in Britain," she discussed the empirical ways of judging the sublime in art by pre-Kantian and pre-Burkian authors such as Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745) – authors who tried to define the sublime but realized that, as Hamlett writes, "there was always something out of their grasp, something unquantifiable because, affect, sublimity, is subjective."[23]

While it is complex for the reader of Rapin's book to interpret the mutual relationships between his sublime subjects, Rapin does however attempt to make clear that Louis XIV's sublimity is the most sublime of all. This is the point where our second issue becomes most tangible, since the author needs to address the far-reaching consequences of the question of the monarch's sublimity. At the end of his treatise, Rapin concludes his argument by contemplating the greatness of his most sublime subject, Louis XIV himself. At one moment during his éloge of the monarch, he stops and admits to the reader that he cannot continue. He explains why:

> Voilà le dernier trait de son éloge: mais il faudroit une main plus sçavante que la mienne pour l'achever. Toutes ses actions passeroient pour des miracles, si elles estoient bien représentées. On aura de la peine à l'avenir, parce qu'on n'a rien veû de pareil dans le temps passé; & si j'avois toute la force de genie que demanderoit un si grand sujet, je ferois peut-estre un portrait de Louïs le Grand, que l'envie respecteroit, & où le temps n'oseroit toucher. Mais je laisse faire ceux

22 This is the problem of Rapin's multiple "sublimes": virtually everyone can attempt to elevate a notion towards a sublime extreme (or interplay of extremes), but when one sublime is deemed more profound than the other, the competitive element that arises at once reveals all of the sublime's hidden vulnerabilities.

23 Lydia Hamlett, "Longinus and the Baroque Sublime in Britain," in *The Art of the Sublime*, ed. Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, accessed January 9, 2017, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/acknowledgements-r1141239.

> qui méditent sa vie pour en rendre compte à la postérité. C'est à eux à dire les merveilles d'un Règne si admirable, & de mettre en œuvre le Sublime de son ame & de son cœur par tout le Sublime de leur éloquence.[24]

Confronted with the grandeur of the king, he writes that only a more learned man would be able to carry on this great task. Only if his actions are well represented, Rapin argues, future generations will be able to believe them. Time, in this respect, is a particularly dangerous actor, since it will erode everything it touches. Although Rapin's passage is highly rhetorical – the monarch's sublimity is such that it defies all representation – he seems to address an actual issue here. Rapin's efforts to pin down and instrumentalise the sublime ("faire l'application"), in order to use it, both theoretically and politically, as a quality of virtue and the object of representation, ultimately reveals the impossibility to wield it. Cunningly, Rapin tries to avoid the problem by placing the impossible task with someone else, a third party of future geniuses, thereby rendering this sublime representation as something purely hypothetical.

Starting with Félibien's 1670 publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy*, the second part of my thesis will place this issue – the issue of the king's sublimity and its representation – into a much broader context of contemporary debates on Louis XIV's virtue, and the capacity of literature and architecture to evoke it.

APPROACHING THE SUBLIME IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PARIS

To start this inquiry and to better introduce the relevant, modern scholarship in this particular field, we can use fragments of Rapin's text as points of reference. While Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy* attempts to evoke the king's sublimity in poetry and emblems, Rapin's *Du Grand ou du sublime* opts for a theoretical strategy towards the same end. He builds an argument which is constructed by means of a number of statements that reveal, more clearly than Félibien's text does, the author's own view on the nature of sublimity. As a means of introduction, let us use several of his statements as starting points in order to be able to get acquainted with the nature of our problem of human sublimity. This will enable us, in the thesis itself, to turn back the clock and see how this problem has developed during the course of the reign of Louis XIV.

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24 Rapin, *Du grand*, 89-90: "Here, we have arrived at the last part of his eulogy: but it would take a more learned hand than mine to complete it. All of his actions would pass for miracles, if they are well represented. This will prove difficult in the future, because we have not seen anything like it in the past. And if I had all the power of genius that such a great subject would require, I might make a portrait of Louis le Grand, one which envy would respect, and which time would not dare to touch. But I will let those who meditate on his life to provide an account for posterity. It is up to them to express the wonders of a reign so admirable, and to put into action the Sublime of his soul and of his heart by all the Sublime of their eloquence."

The first of these statements has already been mentioned earlier; in his opening text, Rapin states that since we can find the "Grand" and the "Merveilleux" in all sorts of things, this also might be true for the "sublime" ("But since the Great [du Grand] and the Marvellous [du Merveilleux] can exist in all things, I thought that we might just as well conceive the Sublime here").[25] This short introductory statement in his book provides us with two thoughts that best summarise his argument. On the one hand, he suggests a close relationship between, on the one hand, the ideas of "le Grand" (the Grand) and "le Merveilleux" (the marvellous), and, on the other hand, the notion of "le Sublime". Secondly, by writing "en toutes choses," he identifies the area of interest of his treatise not only as "*all* things," but also "*in* all things."

THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF THE SUBLIME

As far as this first thought is concerned, the importance of examining the close relationship Rapin establishes between "le Grand," "le Merveilleux," and "le Sublime" becomes clear when we compare Rapin's words with those of his main source of influence: Nicolas Boileau. For his edition of Longinus from 1674, Boileau chose the following title: *Traité du Sublime, ou Du Merveilleux dans le Discours*. Unlike Rapin, Boileau regarded the ideas of *le sublime* and *le merveilleux* as having the same meaning, indicated by the word "ou" ("or") that he puts between the two notions in his title. These different viewpoints are emblematic of the semantics of sublimity. The relationship Boileau establishes is synonymous, but with Rapin we move into another, albeit similar domain. If we were to view the notion of sublimity – and this thesis will use the English words "sublimity" and "sublime" as synonymous – as a generic idea that comprises a set of various related words that can be grouped semantically (by meaning) under this specific idea, we speak of a semantic field. In early modern Europe, semantic interrelationships between these specific terms were, however, far from fixed or regulated; sometimes two words would be subjected to a hierarchical relationship, while others would regard the same terms as synonymous. These different semantic relationships are important in understanding the nature of the idea of the sublime, which functioned as a floating concept that included a constantly changing field of "neighbouring terms," such as *le merveilleux*, *la magnificence*, and *le je ne sais quoi* – notions which play a central role in my argument.[26] Modern scholars have

25 Ibid., iii: "Mais comme il peut y avoir du Grand & du Merveilleux en toutes choses, j'ay cru qu'on pouvoit aussi y concevoir du Sublime."

26 The idea of neighbouring terms is derived from Richard Scholar, *The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe. Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50, but I am referencing here in particular the Springer lemma "Sublime." See note 27.

devoted much attention to the complexity of these relationships in early-modern Europe, such as Françoise Graziani, Robert Doran, Richard Scholar, and Eva Madeleine Martin.[27] Most notably, French historian Louis Marin has tackled this issue several times. In his article "Le sublime dans les années 1670. Un je ne sais quoi" from 1986, the author argued that in the seventeenth century the concept of *le je ne sais quoi* (or the I-do-not-know-what), developed in the 1670s by Dominique Bouhours (1628-1702) and Nicolas Boileau, should be considered as a broader term that encompasses the French term of *le sublime*.[28]

My own research will first and foremost depart from the involvement of this semantic field of sublimity, as a group of constantly intersecting terms and shifting relationships. Therefore, the definition of sublimity that I will use in my research, should, on the one hand, reflect the fluidity of the notion in seventeenth-century France, while, on the other hand, encompass the common denominator of all its different conceptions.

The definition I will employ to this purpose is a rather recent one: as part of my ERC-project "Elevated Minds," I co-wrote a lemma on the "Sublime" for Springer's *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy* in 2018.[29] This lemma departs from a newly formed definition that is the result of the project's five-year research and interinstitutional collaboration. It states that the sublime (or sublimity) is "a great or noble quality of literature or art, which is characterized by an irresistible and overwhelming effect and which produces strong and often conflicting emotions such as awe, fear, and admiration in its recipients."[30] What is key here is that, as the lemma also states, this "great or noble quality" operates on an "extraordinary level." This word "extraordinary" is of great importance, since it well reflects the fact that the sublime is always a profound quality, and therefore has such powerful potential. At its core, the sublime deals with a sense of the extreme. This elicits strong reactions in people, since extremes do not often form part of our everyday experiences or frame of reference. However, the power and location of sublimity is and can never be fixed: what might be a moment of wonder and the ineffable to some, will be an example of excess, of hubris, and of ridicule to others. This problematic aspect, I will argue, runs as an ever recurring symptom

27 See Françoise Graziani, "Le miracle de l'art: Le Tasse et la poétique de la *meraviglia*," *Revue des Études Italiennes* 42, no. 1-2 (1996): 130-31; Robert Doran, "The Sublime and Modern Subjectivity: The Discourse of Elevation from Neo -Classicism to French Romanticism" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2004), 88-94, ProQuest (3145499); Scholar, *Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi,* 50; and Eva Madeleine Martin, "The 'Prehistory' of the Sublime in Early Modern France: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," in *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 80.

28 Louis Marin, "Le sublime dans les années 1670. Un je ne sais quoi," *Biblio* 17, no. 25 (1986): 186.

29 Stijn Bussels, Bram van Oostveldt, Wieneke Jansen, Frederik Knegtel, and Laura Plezier, eds., "Sublime," in *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. M. Sgarbi (Springer International Publishing AG, November 20, 2017), accessed January 17, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4_1136-1.

30 Ibid., 1.

through the seventeenth century, without ever being acknowledged. It was only after the turn of the century, when Boileau, in his *Réflexions*, would gradually shift the sublime away from the tradition of poetic creation towards the experience of the audience in the face of a divinely inspired work or thought, such as a Biblical text.[31] He ultimately concluded that the sublime cannot be produced according to rules but is something strictly experiential, and very rare as well (to *feel* universal truth, when present in a work, in all its elevating simplicity).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF LOUIS XIV'S SUBLIMITY: A DISCOURSE AT THE INTERSECTION OF ARCHITECTURE AND LITERATURE

As we have seen, Rapin considered the sublime as a quality that already resides *in* things and people, rather than primarily evoked through words, as argued by Longinus and Boileau.[32] One particularly important argument Rapin uses to further substantiate this idea of the sublimity of human beings, is that it does not only radiate from these individuals themselves, but is also evoked through the things they do or make. He thus directs the attention away from the Longinian capacity of words, towards the capacity of architecture to evoke this sublimity. In other words, in addition to literature, architecture can evoke just as well the elevated quality Rapin finds primarily in people. As an example to explain this point, Rapin discusses the castle and grounds of Chantilly. Constructed originally for the family of Montmorency, the domain was confiscated by Louis XIII (1601-1643) in 1632 and became the property of the Bourbon-Condé family in 1643. In the subsequent decades, Condé (also named *le Grand Condé*) would transform it into a place of architectural innovation and a centre of artistic and intellectual exchange:

> Les pensées qu'il a eûës pour parer son hermitage, sont à proportion aussi sublimes que les grandes actions qu'il a faites dans ses campagnes pour sa gloire & pour celle de l'Estat. Tout enfin répond à la noblesse de son génie jusques aux moindres choses: la grandeur de son caractere se découvre par tout; & il n'y a presque rien qui ne represente l'esprit de celuy qui en est le maistre.[33]

31 Delehanty, "Judgment to Sentiment," 170-71.

32 Boileau does, however, write that Longinus is sublime himself because he is able to talk about the sublime: "En traitant dez beautez de l'Elocution, il [Longin] a emploié toutes les finesses de l'Elocution. Souvent il fait la figure qu'il enseigne, & en parlant du Sublime, il est lui mesme tres-sublime." Boileau, "Traité du sublime," iv.

33 Rapin, *Du grand*, 58: "The ideas he has conceived to embellish his home are in proportion as sublime as the great actions he has performed in his campaigns, for his glory and for that of the State. Everything, in fact, responds to the nobility of his genius down to the smallest detail: the grandeur of his character is revealed everywhere. And there is almost nothing that does not represent the mind of its master."

The ideas, Rapin writes, behind embellishing his castle are as sublime as his grand actions during his military campaigns. This is the aspect that elevates Chantilly in particular; the authorship and execution of its design can be traced back to Condé himself, thereby rendering the castle and park as a magnificent mirror of his own sublime virtue ("Il falloit qu'il en fist luy-mesme le plan, qu'il en conceust le dessein, & qu'il en fust l'ouvrier.").[34] In other words, Rapin states that Chantilly's design evokes the sublimity of Condé's virtues, in the same manner as sublime rhetoric of words can evoke the sublimity of Louis XIV's virtues ("mettre en œuvre le Sublime de son âme & de son cœur par tout le Sublime de leur éloquence").[35]

This thesis will argue that these ideas form the culmination of a much older discourse that exploited the affective impact of monumental architecture to uphold the sublimity of Louis XIV – a discourse that we can trace back to the period of the king's birth. Before Rapin, writers were not yet able to express their ecstatic and elevated ideas on the monarch in such a concrete manner, mainly because prior to Boileau's 1674 edition, the critical concept of "le sublime" did not yet exist. There were, however, various conventional modes these writers could adopt to contemplate on this sublimity: rhetorical styles and figures that had always been associated with the elevated and overwhelming wonder of political power. In the attempt to evoke the sublime, writers used architectural metaphors that deal with profound heights, vast spaces and dynamic movements. In this discourse, architecture and literature often even intersect; while a writer can place a building in a text (and the reader finishes this construction in the mind's eye), a text can also be placed in or on a building (such as inscriptions on façades and triumphal arches).

One key notion that motivated my inquiry into the intimate relationship between architecture and literature is the idea of *phantasia*, the Ancient Greek word for "visualisation." As a rhetorical term, it features in works such as Longinus' treatise and refers to the images that are evoked through speech in the mind of the recipient.[36] The concept of visualisation points to the similarities the domains of architecture and literature share: the construction of worlds. The early-modern interest in these intersections helped push the sublime from the realm of rhetoric and poetry into the visual arts, and nourished an interplay between both domains.[37] Both the writer and the architect are concerned with

34 Ibid., 57.

35 Ibid., 89-90. With "leur," Rapin refers to writers that are far more superior than he is. Only these geniuses, he states, would be able to write a succesfull portrait of the king.

36 Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2015), 48.

the creation of structures, be it in the mind or in the third dimension. Moreover, both are able to inform the work of one another, especially in a political and cultural environment that controls and facilitates the production of texts, images and buildings. For instance, in his description of Chantilly, Rapin states that the grandeur of the Condé's soul and spirit that characterises his design of the gardens at Chantilly (the "grandeur de son génie" and "l'élévation de son ame") can only be found in the realm of historic fable, of mythological prose and poetry.[38]

One literary genre in particular strongly nourished and stimulated these types of intersections and interrelationships between literature and architecture in early modern France. The impact of epic poetry during the first half of the seventeenth century was highly significant. Influenced by the late sixteenth-century revival of the epic in Italy, the 1650s saw a wave of national and Christian poems in French, celebrating royal and religious figures from the nation's past as new epic heroes. The genre's relationship with the notion of sublimity was twofold. First of all, in early modern France, the epic became associated with the highest of three literary styles, usually named the *style sublime*. As the highest of the *genera dicendi*, this mode returns in passages by writers such as Homer, Pindar and Virgil.[39] As Nicholas Cronk writes in his *The Classical Sublime*, "[I]n the seventeenth century, the 'stile sublime' seems to be invoked systematically with reference to the epic poem."[40] For example, Georges de Scudéry (1601-1667), author of the epic *Alaric* (1654), connected the genre with the first of his

37 Already in 1637, the protestant philologist Franciscus Junius the Younger associated the Longinian sublime with the art of painting, in his widely disseminated publication *De pictura veterum* (*On the Painting of the Ancients*). The example of Junius demonstrates particularly well why modern research on the intersections between art and the sublime – whether or not Longinian – in early modern Europe cannot dismiss the vital role of the domain of literature (or discourse). The ideas that Junius and other authors such as Samuel van Hoogstraaten would extend into the world of art were originally rhetorical. Insisting on the powerful capacity of visual images, such as paintings and sculptures, to strike or petrify the viewer, they relied on rhetorical notions from the works of Longinus and Hermogenes, such as the ability to enthral [*ekplettein*] an audience by means of *phantasia*. See Caroline van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, *Ekplexis*, and the Sublime," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016): 3-4, https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.3.

38 Rapin, *Du grand*, 57-8: "[O]n voit jusques dans les ruisseaux, dans les bocages, dans les berceaux, dans les fontaines, dans les canaux, & dans ces grands réservoirs d'eau quelques traits de la grandeur de son génie: tout y respire l'élévation de son ame, & la politesse de son esprit, par certaines traces qu'il semble qu'il ait imprimé par tout de ces douceurs & de ces charmes de cét âge d'or qui ne se trouve plus que dans les fables" ("[E]ven in the brooks, in the groves, in the garden pavilions, in the fountains, in the canals, and in these great reservoirs of water, we see some features of the grandeur of his genius: everything there breathes the elevation of his soul, and the courtesy of his mind, as a result of the marks he has left, which he seems to have invigorated with all the gentleness and charm of the golden age that is only found in mythological fable").

39 C. Stephen Jaeger, "Introduction," in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 1.

40 Nicholas Cronk, *The Classical Sublime: French Neoclassicism and the Language of Literature* (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 2002), 86.

tripartite division of "le sublime; le mediocre; & le bas," while also using the term of *le magnifique* as a synonym for this most elevated style.[41] Secondly, through the Italian sixteenth-century epics by writers such as Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and Giambattista Marino (1569-1625), the poetic ideal of *la meraviglia* (*le merveilleux* or the marvellous) seeped into French thought on poetry. Tasso, who was influenced by both Longinus and Aristotle, translated the Greek word for astonishment or awe (*thaumaston*) – Aristotle's criterion for the epic – as *meraviglioso*.[42] The term coincides with the Longinian notion of *hypsos,* since it combines transport, surprise and elevation, and it was subsequently rendered in French as *merveilleux* or *admirable*.[43] Marino argued the same, writing that the poet's aim is to create wonder ("È del Poeta il fin la meraviglia") and to amaze ("stupir").[44] Thirdly, the epic was an ancient laudatory genre, and has always used wondrous architectural spaces as well as dynamic movement in space, such as journeys or flights, as fundamental tools in the creation of political meaning and elevating effect. In addition, the modern Italian epic provided French poets with a mixture of Christian figures, such as angels and saints, with more pagan elements, such as enchantresses and demons, which suited the struggles and subsequent glory of epic heroes, and by extension contemporary politicians, particularly well.

The repercussions of the success of both ancient and modern epics – from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* – on the ideas, designs and iconography of French royal buildings and artistic programs were great. This is why my research will inquire into the nature and scale of the interrelationships between epic wonder and French cultural policy under Louis XIV, between the realms of fiction and reality. And in addition, how should we understand the contemporary relationship between epic heroes and real people, such as Louis XIV himself? Particular attention will be paid to the role of the semantic field of sublimity in this respect, in order to arrive at a better understanding of the mutual relationship between the neighbouring terms in this field.

Already in Longinus, Richard A. Etlin states, we are able to recognise a "constant interchange between architecture and literature in creating either descriptions or architectural forms capable of imparting a feeling of the sublime."[45] Imaginary buildings could function as powerful poetic metaphors; fictional temples of virtue or glory featuring in laudatory poems fulfilled their encomiastic function by constructing themselves in the mind of the reader, resulting in an

41 Ibid., 86.

42 Martin, "The 'Prehistory,' " 94. See also Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 94.

43 Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 104-5. Doran refers here to Graziani, "Le miracle de l'art," 130-31. See also Martin, "The 'Prehistory,' " 94.

appearance that depended on the power of one's imagination. Moreover, these types of images evoked by grand works of poetry, such as laudatory or larger epic poems, also participated in the design process and experience of real buildings. Here, the two realms of imagination and reality enter into a complex relationship. Let us say, for example, that a poetic image of an imaginary, wondrous building influences the design of an actual palace, the end result will have to compete with the highly fantastical, enchanting and subjective image of its poetic original, an image that changes from one person to the other. In other words, the original poetic image participates in the experience of its real counterpart. This also applies to laudatory poems written in order to glorify the actual building, which have to avoid lapsing into ridicule.

HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE SUBLIME AND THE FRENCH VISUAL ARTS

The "effect of the 'merveille,' " French historian Marc Fumaroli tentatively stated in his École du silence (1994), is "a state of silent rapture caused by admiration and delight," which was "common to poetry, to the arts and to the sciences" in the seventeenth century.[46] Since the publication of Fumaroli's book, which addresses the sublime only briefly, modern studies on the relationship between art and the sublime have become more numerous.

Most of these studies lean heavily on the heritage of Longinus in early modern Europe. While Louis Marin's *Sublime Poussin* (1999) and Clélia Nau's *Le temps du sublime* both placed the work of the French painter Nicolas Poussin in the context of the sixteenth-century rediscovery of Longinus' treatise, a much wider scope of research lay at the basis of the publication *Translations of the Sublime. The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus'* Peri Hupsous *in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre* (2012), edited by Caroline van Eck, Maarten Delbeke, Jürgen Pieters, and Stijn Bussels.[47] Its authors have revealed an early modern network in which Longinus was received and disseminated, which would contribute to the transfer of Longinian ideas into the production and reception of the visual arts, architecture and theatre. Furthermore, Timothy Costelloe's edited volume *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present* (2012) contains two contributions that locate the sublime within

44 "È del Poeta il fin la meraviglia:/ parlo dell' eccellente, non del goffo;/ chi non sà far stupir vada alla striglia." ("The poet's aim is to create marvel: I speak of the excellent, not the akward sort; and may he who cannot amaze be sent to the stables!"). This translation is derived from Nancy L. Canepa, "Literary Culture in Naples, 1500-1800," in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. Tommaso Astarita (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 435. For the original text see "Fischiata xxxiii" in Giambattista Marino, *La Murtoleide fischiate del caualier Marino* […] (Nuremberg: Ioseph Stamphier, 1619), 35.

45 Richard A. Etlin, "Architecture and the Sublime," in *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy M.

early-modern French art and architecture. Richard A. Etlin's "Architecture and the Sublime" is mainly concerned with the dynamic image in Longinus and Ovid, an energetic movement through space that in some instances constitutes a "combination of spatial dynamism and emotional dynamism, both felt emphatically."[48] His argument centres on the chapel of the sixteenth-century Château d'Anet, as an imitation of several Ancient Roman models. The link he establishes between the chapel's architecture and the poetic figure of Phoebus Apollo is particularly important within the scope of my own research, certainly because this connection would return in the creation and reception of Parisian architecture throughout the seventeenth century. Furthermore, Eva Madeleine Martin, in her chapter "The 'Prehistory' of the Sublime in Early Modern France," argues that the semantic fluidity of the term became exploited in order to put the literary or rhetorical notion of the sublime "into conversation with ideas in politics, science and religion."[49] Both Boileau's *Traité du Sublime*, Martin states, and the earlier anonymous translation "De la sublimité" share the conception of *sublimité* as a "divine force," transforming the king into the supreme embodiment of the sublime.[50] However, as Martin indicates, their different vocabularies – Boileau's *sublime* or *merveilleux* and the anonymous translator's *sublimité* or *magnificence* – suggest different ways of employing sublimity.[51]

Martin's chapter embraces a vast amount of contexts and ideas, and therefore reads almost like a manifest or an essay. Its hypotheses and conclusions are nonetheless tantalising, and deserve a broader study. The emphasis the author puts on the fluid semantic nature of the notion of sublimity also runs parallel with the argument C. Stephen Jaeger puts forward in the volume *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, published in 2011. In the Middle Ages, Jaeger states, the "Magnificent and the Sublime as aesthetic principles operated more or less undetected" and "have gone unrecognized in their relatedness to the Magnificence of the Renaissance and to the Sublime as formulated by antiquity and obsessed over in the eighteenth century."[52] "Yet," he writes, "these two principles are infused, not so subtly, in

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Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 237.

46 Marc Fumaroli, *L'École du silence. Le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 126-127.

47 See Caroline van Eck, Maarten Delbeke, Jürgen Pieters, and Stijn Bussels, eds., *Translations of the Sublime. The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus'* Peri Hupsous *in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

48 Etlin, "Architecture and the Sublime," 238.

49 Martin, "The 'Prehistory,' " 84.

50 Ibid., 94.

51 Ibid., 92.

52 Jaeger, "Introduction," 1.

medieval art, architecture, literature and music; they were often practiced, though seldom theoretically reflected on."[53] And perhaps the most prominent reason we know this is because, as Jaeger continues, an "extensive descriptive vocabulary fans out from them."[54]

In seventeenth-century France, notions such as *sublime, le je ne sais quoi*, *le merveilleux*, *la magnificence* bore a close relationship to the Longinian sublime, and were often described as related or synonymous to the latter in the experience of the arts. In order to understand their mutual relationship, one needs to look beyond Longinus and beyond the domain of discourse alone. James Porter, in his publication *The Sublime in Antiquity* (2016), argued as much when he writes that "Longinus may not have been a known quantity in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, but sublimity was, and it enjoyed a vital existence that can be documented in all aspects of culture – in biblical hermeneutics, theology, church architecture; in music, poetry, and pictorial art."[55] My research will further examine this train of thought in the context of the reign of Louis XIV.

LAY-OUT OF THE ARGUMENT

This perspective informs to a great extent the structure of this thesis. The dissertation is divided into two parts, studying a period that runs from 1630, at the height of the success of Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) and just before Louis XIV's birth, until the death of the monarch in 1715.

The first part focuses on our first issue: the central role of extremes in the poetics of sublimity, and how often and easily these extremities would backfire, or would be subverted by opponents. We will discuss the thirty years before the advent of Louis XIV's personal reign in 1661, which were politically very turbulent – an element that would shape the absolute nature of the king's politics as well as his artistic and literary patronage. When constructing a reign in such an unstable climate, to rely on extreme notions because of their powerful potential means to rely on an instrument that is equally unstable. The first chapter will focus on the extensive patronage of Richelieu and Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602-1661), which facilitated the interrelationship between architecture and literature, and between fiction and reality, in the discourse on political sublimity. The interest in the poetics of the epic (and the role of *le merveilleux* in particular), however, served both supporters and opponents of the crown; the French civil war, the Fronde, led to the production of a vast amount of satirical pamphlets against the

53 Ibid., 1.

54 Ibid., 1.

55 Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity*, 18.

crown that invested in the same powerful potential and sublime connotations of epic wonder. The second chapter will continue with a similar train of thought, by focusing on the differences in opinion between the two founders of the abbey of Val-de-Grâce: Queen Anne of Austria (1601-1666) and her friend, the abbess Marguerite d'Arbouze (1580-1626). As a response to the miraculous birth of Louis XIV, a new church building became devoted to the humility of the crib of Christ. This project, however, revealed that both women had opposing views on the elevation of humility towards the sublime in architecture. The third chapter introduces the problematic role of the Palais du Louvre in the construction of the reign of the king, whose new system of *académies* formed a more grand continuation of the patronage of his former ministers. With this perfected system came a more controlled interchange between architecture and literature, which nourished the deliberate confusion of fiction and reality in the case of the Louvre's construction and glorification. However, yet again, this enterprise proved to be a significant challenge, given the problem of the building's incomplete state.

The second part of the thesis introduces a second, and added issue: the idea of the monarch's very own sublimity, and its representation. The fourth chapter examines the prominent role of Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy* in this venture. In addition to writing one of the earliest texts on the sublime aesthetics of architecture, the author considered the emblematic devices used in the king's tapestries as new visual "characters" capable of representing the monarch's own sublimity. The fifth chapter starts with the impact of Boileau's 1674 edition of Longinus' *On the Sublime*, which created the critical concept of *le sublime*. The chapter will inquire into the wave of published critical reflections that adopted the newly popularised ideas of Longinus and Boileau, mainly for the sake of sustaining the monarch's sublimity. These ideas were infused into new theoretical discussions on the use of architectural inscriptions under Louis XIV and their rhetorical role in evoking sublime virtue. The sixth and final chapter deals with late seventeenth-century attempts to revive the outdated epic (Christian) poetics and aesthetics to uphold the diminishing glory of the monarch, who was faced with increasingly problematic public responses to his own representation.