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

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PART II

SECOND ISSUE

*Louis XIV's own sublimity
and the problem of representation
(1670-1715)*

The claim of human sublimity: Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy* and the problem of the representation of Louis XIV

Three years after the edition of his first *Entretiens* in 1666, Félibien published his *Tapisseries du Roy* (1670), an engraved and commented edition of two of Charles Le Brun's tapestry series commissioned by Louis XIV.¹ These tapestries together allegorically visualise the four elements and the four seasons, glorifying the king through emblematic devices. Like the many prose and poetic texts that have been discussed in the previous three chapters, the *Tapisseries du Roy*, which was a true panegyric, relied on the poetics of the sublime in its aim to evoke the grandeur of the monarch.² However, the publication also marked an important shift in thinking about the very nature of this sublimity. In fact, the *Tapisseries du Roy* is the first clear and confident declaration of Louis XIV's inner sublimity, which was a claim that would eventually form the foundation of Rapin's treatise *Du grand ou du sublime*, roughly sixteen years later. In other words, in addition to Félibien's discussion on the sublime effect of art, which we explored in his *Entretiens*, he attempts to use his *Tapisseries du Roy* to further demonstrate the possibility of art to represent a sublime person.

To designate a human being as sublime also required a new way of thinking about how the poetics of the sublime should change with it. The explanatory texts by Félibien in the *Tapisseries du Roy* are very clear about this shift, and emphasise the prominent role emblematics play in this process. Moreover, Félibien's ideas should also be read against the background of the broader, and rapidly developing, discourse on the nature of sublimity that took place in the same period – the scope of which being much broader than the study of (poetic) literature alone. From the 1660s onwards, various French writers attempted to tackle the issue of the absence of a unifying critical notion that would cover the still “floating” notions of sublimity. This trend increasingly brought together notions such as *le merveilleux* and *le je ne sais quoi*, and *sublime* and eventually culminated in Boileau's

1 This chapter is a revised version of an article I published in the edited volume *Emblems and the Natural World*, which appeared as the 50th volume of the BRILL Intersections series in 2017. See Frederik Knegt, “Transcending the Natural World: A Developing Sublime in André Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy*,” in *Emblems and the Natural World*, ed. Karl A.E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 383–418.

2 As I have stated in the introduction of this dissertation, I will make use of the following edition of Félibien's publication: André Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy ou sont representez les quatre elemens et les quatre saisons avec les devises qui les accompagnent, et leur explication* (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1679).

1674 edition of Longinus: his *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours*.

But like the poetics of elevation, to connect the notion of sublimity to a quality of innate superhuman virtue also means to confront its pitfalls. The majority of these obstacles concern the problematic implications of Félibien's claim for the accomplished representation of Louis XIV's sublimity, an issue that is addressed only positively in the book but is actually much more acute and complex than is suggested. In fact, the scope of the problem is made very evident through the publication's many conflicting choices.

In order to fully understand the role of tapestries during the reign of Louis XIV, we need to briefly return to the report presented by Chapelain to Colbert in 1662 "for preserving the splendour of the king's enterprises." The use of the tapestry was given particular attention in the creation of new modes of royal representation, and in the context of architecture, Chapelain states, tapestries could be added to the exterior walls of buildings ("tous monumens historiques auxquels on pourroit ajouter nos riches fabriques de tapisseries"). The visual language manifested by the tapestry itself could thus participate in the effect that the building evokes. Félibien's publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy* further adds to the complex dynamic of political narrative and aesthetic effect that the presence of these tapestries creates.

BETWEEN EARTHLY AND LOFTY: ART AND NATURE IN THE TAPISseries DU ROY

In 1664, two tapestry series were designed by Charles Le Brun in close collaboration with Colbert's Petite académie (the later Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres) in order to glorify the still relatively early, but successful reign of Louis XIV. Four tapestries represented the Four Elements, four others the Four Seasons (fig. 24). In the central part of each of the eight tapestries, Le Brun depicted an allegorical tableau representing a classical deity connected to each of the seasons and elements. Additionally, Le Brun and his team placed four personalised emblematic roundels, or *devices*, in the corners of the more expensive *haute lisse* versions of the two tapestry series (fig. 25). These devices each had a Latin motto and corresponded to the theme of the tapestry, representing metaphorically the virtues and deeds of Louis XIV. A total of around twelve tapestry sets of the *Éléments* and *Saisons* were produced during the reign of Louis XIV, and only a small number of these sets had the elaborate border with four devices in each corner.³

3 See Jean Vittet, *La collection de tapisseries de Louis XIV* (Dijon: Faton, 2010), 128. In fact, since an early *haute lisse* tapestry set of the *Éléments* (with devices) was presented by the king to Cosimo III de' Medici (Grand Duke of Tuscany from 1670) in September 1669, a similar set was made to replace this earlier version. Thereby, the Gobelins and the king ensured that this elaborate and powerful set remained within the walls of the court and could be presented to the king's subjects.

In order to underscore the value of these tapestries – both within court circles and for a larger public – André Félibien, a royal historiographer and writer on art, published a non-illustrated description of the tapestries' devices in 1665.⁴ In a 1667 edition, poetic madrigals were added. The majority of these short poems were devised by Charles Perrault, and they were supplemented by members of the Petite académie, including Jean Chapelain, Jacques Cassagnes (1636-1679), and François Charpentier (1620-1702).⁵ Around this time, the painter Jacques Bailly (1634-1679) finished a collection of colourful miniatures on vellum depicting the tapestry devices, which Bailly himself had redesigned for this purpose (fig. 26).⁶ In 1668, the madrigals and engraved versions of Bailly's work by Sébastien Le Clerc were brought together and published by Bailly under the title *Devises pour les tapisseries du roy: Ou sont representez les quatre elemens et les quatre saisons de l'année*. Félibien later expanded this edition with descriptions of the two tapestry sets and gave the new edition of 1670 a more complete title: *Tapisseries du Roy, ou sont representez les quatre elemens et les quatre saisons. Avec les devises qui les accompagnent, et leur explication* (fig. 28-30).⁷ The publication reappeared in several editions in the course of the following decades, as well as in Dutch and German translations.

In 1669, the first sets of the actual tapestries were completed.⁸ The expensive *haute lisse* woven sets were hung in the chateaux of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Versailles and were displayed to an audience of courtiers and guests on special occasions. Other sets of both series were sent to foreign courts and officials as diplomatic gifts. The *Mercurie galant* of July 1677 mentions that the month before, a large procession was led through several courtyards at Versailles, the walls of which were adorned with at least thirteen highly propagandistic tapestry sets, including both the *Éléments* and the *Saisons*.⁹

Both in the central scene of each tapestry, and in the devices around them, the realms of nature and architecture adopt several forms and intersect in various ways. These intersections range from allegorical interrelations between imaginary buildings and the natural world to juxtapositions of animals and plants in the rich architectural framework that

4 Alison Saunders, *The Seventeenth-Century French Emblem. A Study in Diversity* (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 296.

5 Ibid., 296.

6 For a facsimile of and commentary on this Bailly edition, see Marianne Grivel and Marc Fumaroli, *Devises pour les Tapisseries du Roi* (Paris: J. Guiffrey, 1988). Painted reproductions of the tapestries themselves were added to the manuscript several years later.

7 Grivel and Fumaroli, *Devises*, 115-16.

8 Alison Saunders, "Emblems to Tapestries and Tapestries to Emblems: Contrasting Practice in England and France," *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 21, no. 1 (1999): 249. I want to thank Alison Saunders for generously giving me a copy of this article.

9 Thomas P. Campbell and Elizabeth A.H. Cleland, eds., *Tapestry in the Baroque: New Aspects of Production and Patronage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 345-46.

surrounds the emblematic devices. This vibrant interplay of nature and architecture reflects the contemporary activities of the king in several ways.

Firstly, while the two tapestry sets contain a large variety of wild animals, plants and landscapes, they emphasise royal dominance over the untamed natural world. The *Éléments* tapestries show a large number of birds and plants in their wild environment, but the presence of allegorical figures and human tools both appropriate and cultivate the depicted savage landscape. More importantly, while the tapestry of *Le Feu* demonstrates the raw force of thunder, and while *L’Air* and *L’Eau* show a multitude of wild birds and sea creatures in their respective natural habitats, the final tapestry of *La Terre* depicts exotic animals such as a lion and a camel in the park of a classical country house. The fourth and culminating tapestry of *La Terre* reacts to the three previous elements: Louis XIV, having calmed the natural fury and disorder of fire, air and water, works miracles on the earth.¹⁰ This idea of shaping the natural world into palaces and gardens, is carried over into the tapestry set of the *Saisons*, each of which is dedicated to one of Louis XIV’s palaces. Versailles is shown in spring, Fontainebleau in summer, Saint-Germain-en-Laye in autumn and the Louvre in winter. Mythological gods are shown floating gloriously in the gardens of each palace. The palaces themselves are visualised in the background of each central *tableau* and function in the season concerned as political headquarter or country seat. Construction or enlargement of these buildings, as well as the transformation of their rough natural surroundings into formal gardens by André Le Nôtre, actually coincided with the production of these tapestry scenes. One excellent example is the central scene of the *L’Été* tapestry (fig. 29). The figures of Minerva and Apollo are depicted in front of the palace at Fontainebleau, and they hold an image of the central pavilion of the Tuileries palace, which was considerably enlarged at that time.

Secondly, Le Brun’s compositions in the central scenes allegorically relate the floating mythological figures to the landscapes behind them. Both speak about the king’s virtues.¹¹ A similar visual language returns in the surrounding devices, which are each visualised in detail in Félibien’s publication. In the device’s central medallion, the king’s virtues and deeds are metaphorically represented by examples taken from the natural world and from the realm of the visual arts. For example, two devices in the *L’Été* tapestry refer to the king’s building practice. While the first, a carpenter’s square with the words “Dirigit Obliqua” (“He Makes the Slanted Straight”), symbolises the king’s dedication

10 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, 35. Félibien opens his description of *La Terre* with the following words: “Si sa Majesté sceû dissiper les foudres & les orages qui menaçoient incessamment nos testes; si Elle a rendu l’air serein & tranquille; si Elle a calmé les flots de la Mer, & dompté sa fureur: Elle n’a pas fait de moindres miracles sur la Terre. Et c’est ce que l’on a tasché de représenter dans le quatrième Tableau qui figure cét Elément.”

11 Fumaroli, *L’École du silence*, 12. Fumaroli’s text can also be found in Grivel and Fumaroli, *Devises*.

in reforming problems of State, the other device – a halcyon building a nest at sea, together with the words “*Miratur Natura Silens*” (“Nature is Astonished in Silence”) – is actually concerned with the king’s buildings:

Pour les Bastimens, Divertissement. Dans la piece de la saison de l’Esté.

Un Alcion bâtissant son Nid sur la Mer, qui se tient calme, pour ne pas troubler un Bâtiment si merveilleux, avec ce mot, *MIRATUR NATURA SILENS*; pour exprimer la beauté des Bâtimens du Roy, qui est telle, qu’il semble que toute l’Europe ne se soit tenuë en Paix, lors que Sa Majesté a recommencé d’y faire travailler, que pour en admirer mieux la structure surprenante & incomparable.

*Lors que de l’Edifice où je dois habiter,
Et que le temps doit respecter,
J’entreprends la structure à nulle autre pareille,
La Nature s’impose une profonde Paix,
Pour mieux considerer l’incroyable merveille
Du Bâtiment que je me fais.*

Perrault.¹²

Félibien’s description and Perrault’s accompanying madrigal, describe Louis XIV’s architectural projects as “incredible wonder[s],” and explain that during construction, the natural world – symbolizing all of Europe – imposes a profound peace that enables one to better admire the marvellous structure of the building.¹³

Here, the device not only speaks about beauty and good government, but about something much more powerful, namely the potential of the arts and of literature to stupefy and astonish, to the point that the beholder cannot express his or her feelings in words. Many of the madrigals in the book are written in the first person singular – using *je*, *me* and *moi* – which suggests that the device’s ultimate subject, Louis XIV, is talking about himself to the reader. The Halcyon device is actually one of a great number in the *Tapisseries du Roy* to deal with the overwhelming and the elevating. These devices – the Bird of paradise, the Fir Tree, the Lily, the Ivy-covered Pyramid, and the Theatrical Machine – and their

12 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, 69: “For the Buildings, Entertainment. In the piece of the season of Summer A Halcyon is building its nest at Sea, which keeps calm as not to disturb a marvellous building, with the words, *MIRATUR NATURA SILENS*; to express the beauty of the King’s Buildings. This beauty is such that it seems that all of Europe maintains peace when His Majesty has resumed his building activities, only to better admire the amazing and incomparable structure. *When I start the unparalleled construction of the Building where I have to live and which time should respect, Nature imposes a profound Peace, in order to be able to better consider the incredible wonder of a Building that I am making.*” My emphasis.

13 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, 69.

use of the natural world seem to work as vehicles of the sublime, a phenomenon that became reconsidered and increasingly conceptualised during this period, partly in order to answer to the grandeur of Louis XIV.

The two tapestry sets and Félibien's book *Tapisseries du Roy* have not yet been extensively studied within the domain of the sublime or related notions, certainly not in a separate investigation. Marc Fumaroli only briefly touches on the relation between the devices of the *Tapisseries du Roy* and the sublime when he writes that Jacques Bailly celebrates the variety of the world's "wonders" with, and I paraphrase, a lyricism that may carry with it a development of the sublime.¹⁴ Moreover, Claire Goldstein, in a chapter dedicated to the tapestries in her book *Vaux and Versailles*, also briefly mentions the sublime in relation to Félibien's publication: "The text presents the king as immanent and immediately perceptible – revealed in an instant like the lightning strike of Boileau's Longinian sublime."¹⁵ Upon closer investigation of the devices, Fumaroli's and Goldstein's caution actually seems unnecessary. The *devises* belong, in several respects, to the seventeenth-century discourse on the overwhelming and transporting power of text, image, and human virtue. In this chapter, I wish to argue that the publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy* illustrates two currents of the developing seventeenth-century French sublime. Firstly, I will discuss the notion of the sublime that was understood as the overwhelming effect that is created when noble ideas are powerfully conveyed through text and image. Secondly, I will inquire into the problematic shift the publication makes towards the claim of Louis XIV's own sublimity, which is virtually impossible to represent.

I. A SUBLIMITY THROUGH MOTTO AND PICTURA: THE DEVICE

In order to be able to convey someone's virtues of personality, a device could be created to adorn surfaces such as facades, chimneys, shields, banners or tapestries. The device relies on the combination of an image (*pictura*) and a succinct sentence or soul (*motto*). In a multitude of elaborately depicted devices, the reader of the *Tapisseries du Roy* is confronted with an array of these images. One is first drawn to the central metaphor, reinforced by the accompanying Latin *motto* above it. In rhetoric, as described by Quintilian and Cicero, an orator or writer is able to use figures of speech in texts to evoke vivid images before the mind's eye of the receiver.¹⁶ As Aristotle wrote, effective metaphors

¹⁴ Fumaroli, *L'École du silence*, 557. He writes: "Bailly, comme Binet, célèbre la variété du monde, ses merveilles avec le même lyrisme qui peut avoir l'essor du sublime (les Alcyons, le Phénix)."

¹⁵ Claire Goldstein, *Vaux and Versailles: the appropriations, erasures, and accidents that made modern France* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 102.

¹⁶ Van Eck, *Art, Agency*, 19.

animate that what is essentially inanimate. However, the viewer of the tapestry devices or the devices reproduced in Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy* is simultaneously and visually confronted with a thought and image.¹⁷ At the time when the tapestries of the *Éléments* and *Saisons* were first produced and displayed, several French intellectuals wrote about this particularly striking power of the device, connecting it to the concepts of *le merveilleux* and *le je ne sais quoi*.

One of these writers was Pierre Le Moyne. In the following passage, from his work *L'Art des devises* from 1666, he stresses the power of devices to evoke an idea almost instantaneously:

[I]l est de la Devise en cela, comme de ces images universelles données aux Esprits superieurs, qui representent en un moment, & par une notion simple & degagée, ce que les nostres ne peuvent représenter que successivement, & par une longue suite d'expressions, qui se forment les unes apres les autres.¹⁸

Le Moyne calls devices "the language of a mysterious passion," one that is concise and secret.¹⁹ What should be present, Le Moyne adds, is that one should add to the *corps* of the device a sense of *le merveilleux*: "Le beau & le noble ne suffisent pas aux corps des Devises. Le grand & le merveilleux y veulent estre adjoutez."²⁰ The content of a device must enlighten the mind of the spectator; "it resembles," he writes, "the sublime and heroic, and approaches grandeur and the majestic."²¹ Le Moyne argues that one needs rare and surprising things, but no monsters. A key prerequisite of this *merveilleux* was a sense of verisimilitude (*le vraisem-*

17 Quoted from Saunders, *French Emblem*, 288-289. This connects to Félibien's fascinating message about the king's glory, published in the *Tapisseries du Roy*: "C'est par ces Peintures ingénieuses qu'on veut apprendre la grandeur de son Nom à ceux qui viendront après nous, & leur faire connoître par ces Images allégoriques ce que des paroles n'exprimeroient pas avec assez de force. En effet, de quelle manière pourroit-on assez bien écrire tout ce que S. M. a fait depuis qu'Elle est montée sur le Trône, & comment pourroit-on assez dignement représenter les avantages arrivez à l'Etat, depuis qu'Elle en a pris la conduite? Cependant, toutes ces merveilles sont si misterieusement dépeintes dans les quatre Tableaux que je veux décrire, que l'oeil les découvre d'abord avec plaisir, & l'entendement les connoist avec admiration."

18 Pierre Le Moyne, *De l'art des devises* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1666), quoted from Kate E. Tunstall, "Hieroglyph and Device in Diderot's *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*," *Diderot Studies* 28 (2000): 167-68: "It is a Device in that sense, like these universal images that are within the power of superior minds, that represent in one moment, and by a simple and clear notion, that which our minds can only represent successively, and by a long series of expressions, which are formed one after the other."

19 See Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 66-67.

20 Le Moyne, *l'art des devises*, 110: "The beautiful and the noble are not sufficient in the *corps* of devices. The grand and the marvellous need to be added to it." This idea is shared by a contemporary of Le Moyne, Monsieur Clément, who writes in his *Regles pour la connoissance des devises*: "Les Devises doivent estre fondées sur le merveilleux ou, pour mieux dire, sur quelques propriétés rares, & singuliers, des Corps qui s'y représentent, afin que l'esprit de ceux qui les voyent, en soit agréablement surpris." For Clément's text, see Daniel S. Russell, "Two seventeenth-century French treatises on the art of the device," *Emblematica* 1, no. 1 (1986): 79-106.

21 Le Moyne, *l'art des devises*, 14. He writes: "La Devise tient plus du sublime & de l'Héroïque, approche plus de la grandeur & de la majesté."

134 *blable*), which pertains to the believability and the recognizable character of the core of the device. Therefore, the natural world constituted the ultimate source of metaphors that were powerful enough to evoke the epic or heroic quality of a person. These metaphors in turn create a sense of the *merveilleux* in the viewer. Le Moyne writes:

Or l'Heroïque, comme chacun sçait, ne va pas à petit train ; il luy faut de l'appareil & de la suite [...] & le grand ne doit pas manquer à son appareil, non plus que le merveilleux à sa suite. Mais dans la Devise, aussi bien que dans le Poëme, il faut prendre garde, qu'au lieu du merveilleux qu'on cherche quelquefois où il n'est pas, on ne tombe dans l'obscur & dans l'inconnu. Qu'on n'aille donc point chercher [...] des Fleurs, des Herbes, & des Plantes qui ayent besoin d'inscription & d'étude : qui ne soient connus que de [...] ceux qui sont versez [...] en l'Histoire de la Nature. [...] Qu'on ne prenne donc que des Corps connus.²²

In other words, one has to retain a sense of verisimilitude for the device not to become obscure, bizarre or hyperbolic. The device's core must be recognizable and knowable for all, while still retaining a sense of surprise.

This idea – the natural world as a powerful means to transmit *le merveilleux* through a device – was further developed by Dominique Bouhours in a discussion of the device in *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* from 1671. Bouhours knew Le Moyne's work and also combined the notion of the instantaneous with the notion of *le merveilleux*, but geared it more towards an exploration of the somewhat problematic notion of *le je ne sais quoi*. One of the central thoughts of his *Entretiens* is the potential of nature as a powerful metaphor; he first uses the example of the sea and claims that although art is not always able to imitate nature, art still is of crucial importance, since the natural world, when used in art as a metaphor, can evoke a wholly different response.²³ Here, Bouhours's argument resembles that of Longinus, who discusses the human tendency to admire natural phenomena, but only restricts the true sublime to the rhetorical use of these natural events (as metaphors or analogies) in discourse.²⁴ Bouhours's *Entretiens* culminates with a discussion dedicated to the device, which he re-

22 Le Moyne, *l'art des devises*, 110-111: "Now, the Heroic, as everyone knows, does not go in small steps; it needs a design and a consequence [FK: or "effect"], and *le grand* should not be absent in its design, nor should *le merveilleux* be absent in its consequence. But in the Device, like in a Poem, one must be careful that instead of *le merveilleux* for which we sometimes look where it is not, we fall into the obscure and unknown. One therefore should not look for [...] those Flowers, Herbs, and Plants that are in need of description and study, or that are known only to those who are well versed in Natural History. Therefore, we only take a well-known *Corps*."

23 Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 53.

24 For Longinus and the natural metaphor, see: Theodore Gracyk, "The Sublime and the Fine Arts," in *The Sublime. From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 222.

gards as a powerful vehicle of *le merveilleux*. He explains that the device depends upon the interaction of two levels of meaning; the full meaning depends on the comprehension of the *motto* and the *pictura*.²⁵ Bouhours argues: “[La devise] cache [...] à la façon des mysteres beaucoup plus de choses qu’elle n’en découvre ; et l’on y conçoit je ne sçay quoy d’admirable que l’on ne voit point.”²⁶

More important, Bouhours continues, is the idea of brevity that is implied by the use of a metaphor, since a device is designed to convey both the visual and textual level of meaning simultaneously. By means of its “similitude metaphorique,” this metaphorical structure compels the viewer to establish a connection between two separate objects, and functions as a mask that surprises us (“un masque qui nous surprend”).²⁷ The devices thus combine image and text to convey one powerful thought, Bouhours argues. Referring to Aristotle on metaphors, he concludes that the device strikes the senses and sight (“elle frappe les sens, & particulièrement la veüe”); it ultimately creates a sense of astonishment and thus arouses *le merveilleux*: “Les devises ne sont point parfaites, si le merveilleux ne s’y rencontre” and “les excellentes devoient avoir quelque chose de piquant & de relevé; que c’étoit le merveilleux qui leur donnoit cette pointe.”²⁸

This interdependence of mystery and striking wonder brings us back to the tapestry sets of the *Éléments* and *Saisons* themselves, since these notions lie at the very heart of the tapestries’ production and their accompanying publication. These sets were among the most prominent examples of the use of the device in the visual (and public) arts during the 1660s and 1670s, and also provided the contemporary viewer with a large number of examples. The viewer would first be struck by the richness of the tapestry’s vibrant colours and gold thread. Subsequently, the design would draw the viewer’s attention towards the central allegorical *tableau*, and finally towards the four devices in each corner. This is where the tapestry aimed at keeping hold of its viewer, who would ponder on the hidden message of the images.²⁹ Through their light, vibrant background and thick pearl border, the devices greatly contrasted with their much darker sur-

25 Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 68. The device, as Nicholas Cronk writes, disrupts the normal mimetic process.

26 Bouhours, *Les Entretiens*, 378: “[The device] hides, in the manner of mysteries, many more things than it reveals; and we conceive here a wonderful *je ne sais quoi* that we do not see.”

27 Ibid., 377. See also Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 67.

28 Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 69: “Devices are not perfect if we cannot find in them a sense of *le merveilleux*” and “the most excellent ones need to have something piquant and elevated; it is *le merveilleux* that gives them this striking subtlety.” See also Daniel S. Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985).

29 Actually, when comparing the devices with the central *tableau*, viewers would discover that many of the devices’ animals and plants also returned in Le Brun’s central *tableaux*. For example, this is the case in the tapestry of *L’Air* (in the *Éléments*), in which the bird of paradise of the device in the upper-right corner (*SEMPER SUBLIMIS*) is also included hovering in the skies of the central allegorical scene.

roundings, making them appear as four illuminated circular windows. Moreover, their simple design and brevity similarly contrasted with their highly abundant pictorial context.³⁰ Apart from Félibien's short Latin inscription that was included in the lower part of each of the borders, the abundance of meaning of the tapestries remained hidden. The main language of these tapestries was that of marvellous and suggestive imagery; his argument, which is further expounded in his explanatory texts on the eight tapestries, is completely in line with the ideas of Le Moyne (and Bouhours) on the striking power and *merveilleux* of the device.³¹

But as far as *le merveilleux* of the device is concerned, Félibien's book causes a problem. Ultimately, Félibien's book and the manner in which he presents the devices, ultimately subvert and harm the marvellous power of these devices. He and his colleagues add to the isolated devices a large number of explanatory texts; a new title, a short explanation of both *pictura* and *motto*, a madrigal of six lines, as well as lengthy explanations of the tapestries elsewhere in the book. Keeping Le Moyne and Bouhours in mind, these added components actually seem to weaken the striking mystery of the device, since its *sens caché* is made less cryptic.³² Thus, instead of preserving the marvellous rhetoric of the isolated device, Félibien and his team dismantle it.

The addition of these texts, are a symptom of a major problem underlying Félibien's project. The publication essentially tries to shift the notion of sublimity from its traditional understanding as a quality evoked through art and literature – as explained by Le Moyne and Bouhours – towards an understanding of sublimity as a human virtue, which can be found as an innate quality in Louis XIV himself. Here, we already recognise a philosophy of sublimity, and in particular of the monarch's transcendence, that would reach a climax in Rapin's 1686 treatise *Du Grand ou du sublime*. However, the many problems such an understanding creates, which underlie Rapin's treatise and which he admitted not being able to solve, also underlie Félibien's publication and point us towards the instability of his project.

30 In the tapestry set of the *Éléments*, The viewer was also able to compare the ambiguous content of the devices with two small panels or *tableaux*, which were located in the same border (on the left and right side of each tapestry). These panels depict more familiar scenes relating to the actions of Louis XIV, such as festivities, cityscapes, and scenes of war.

31 Félibien. *Tapisseries du Roy*, vii: "C'est par ces Peintures ingénieuses qu'on veut apprendre la grandeur de son Nom à ceux qui viendront après nous, & leur faire connoître par ces Images allégoriques ce que des paroles n'exprimeroient pas avec assez de force. [...] [T]outes ces merveilles sont si misterieusement dépeintes dans les quatre Tableaux que je veux décrire" ("Through these ingenious Paintings we want to make the grandeur of his Name known to future generations, and to make them aware – through these allegorical Images – of that which words would express less powerfully. [A]ll of these wonders are so mysteriously depicted in the four *Tableaux* that I wish to describe").

32 Madrigals were often added to published versions of devices, and were even read during ceremonies (see Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Discours prononcez [par MM. P.-D. Huet et Fléchier] à l'Académie françoise* (Paris: Pierre Le Petit, 1674). Le Moyne adds madrigals in his *De l'art des devises*, and Bouhours actually praises the madrigal that accompanied a sun-device of Louis XIV, since it completely expressed his thoughts ("le madrigal qui accompagne cette Devisé, exprime admirablement ma pensée." See Bouhours, *Les Entretiens*, 324.

The main claim of the *Tapisseries du Roy* is that Louis XIV radiates an intrinsic sublimity, which has nothing borrowed and is visible to all, which ravishes the spectator and surpasses the forces of nature and the ordinary scope of man, and thus remains a secret and striking mystery. The use of the French word “sublime” by Perrault and his colleagues as applied to Louis XIV, alludes to a quality *inherent* in certain things and beings, instead of only created through words or images.

In that respect, it already prefigures the parallel Bouhours would later establish in his *Entretiens* between the *je ne sais quoi* and the king’s *magnificence*. But most importantly, this notion of the sublimity of virtues and actions in Félibien’s *Tapisseries* constitutes an early version of the idea of the “Sublime en toutes choses” that would later return in the writings of René Rapin and Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) during the 1680s.³³ In his famous letter to Charles de Sainte-Maure, duc de Montausier (1610–1690) from March 1683, Huet would make a categorisation of four types of sublimity;³⁴ above the Longinian “sublime des pensées,” he places the “sublime des choses” (“sublime of things”), which is an intrinsic sublimity that “depends solely on the grandeur and dignity of the subject that is treated, and manifests itself without the author even needing to use artifice (rhetoric) to make it as grand as it really is.”³⁵ Huet, who sees God as the ultimate example of this fourth type, concludes the following – and here we recognise the same ideas that were expressed in the aforementioned Lily device (“*Rejetton glorieux d’une tige sublime [...] [Je] brille d’un éclat qui n’a rien d’emprunté*”):

[L]e sublime des choses est le véritable sublime, le sublime de la nature, le sublime original, et les autres ne le sont que par imitation et par art. Le sublime des choses a la sublimité en soi-même, les autres ne l’ont que par emprunt...³⁶

33 Rapin, *Du grand*, iii.

34 Pierre-Daniel Huet to Charles de Sainte-Maure, duc de Montausier, March 26, 1683, in *Mémoires de Daniel Huet*, ed. Charles Nisard (Paris: Hachette, 1853), 286. He distinguishes the following four categories: “le sublime des termes” (an apparent elevation of discourse by choice of beautiful or grand words), “le sublime du tour de l’expression” (elevating by a certain arrangement or disposition of words), “le sublime des pensées” (a sublimity that immediately departs from the mind, and is felt just by itself, given that it is not weakened by low words or a wrong arrangement, and “le sublime des choses” (which depends solely on grandeur and dignity of the subject that is treated, without needing artifice (rhetoric) to make it as grand as it really is).

35 Huet, *Mémoires*, 287. The original French reads: “Pour le sublime des choses, il dépend uniquement de la grandeur et de la dignité du sujet que l’on traite, sans que celui qui parle ait besoin d’employer aucun artifice pour le faire paraître aussi grand qu’il est.”

36 Ibid., 288: “The sublime of things is the true sublime, the sublime of nature, the original sublime, while the other ones are sublime only by means of imitation of art. The sublime of things has sublimity in itself, the other ones as a result of borrowing.”

Three years later, in 1686, Rapin published his *Du Grand ou du sublime*, in which he argued that the sublime Longinus found in discourse can also be found in things and people.³⁷ According to Rapin, the most elevated sublimity of human beings resided in the person of Louis XIV. The sublimity cannot be understood, he claimed, only felt.³⁸

But what was, then, the true purpose of Félibien's enterprise? The author's introductory text reminds the reader quite quickly that the book seeks to teach to "those who come after us the grandeur of his name." Félibien repeatedly makes sure that the reader does not overlook this key motive, which is the representation of profound grandeur, of the monarch's own, inner sublimity. And only the means of emblematics and allegory, Félibien argues, can achieve this:

Lors que les hommes eurent trouvé l'art de faire des vers, ils n'employèrent cette noble façon de s'exprimer, que pour parler des Dieux ; & crurent que la Poésie estant un langage divin, ils ne s'en devoient servir que pour chanter leurs louanges. C'est sur cet exemple, que pour parler de l'Auguste personne de SA MAJESTÉ, on cherche aujourd'huy d'autres paroles que celles qui ont esté en usage jusques à présent, & que pour décrire les grandes actions du plus grand Roy du monde, on forme de nouveaux caracteres.³⁹

Félibien boldly implies here that both the seventeenth-century artist and poet are at the threshold of a new era: where the ancient man had once learned that only a divine language can answer to the divinity of the gods, the emergence of a new type of profound grandeur makes man, again, ask the very same question. In other words, Félibien points to an ideal language that would be able to evoke true greatness. The search for such a language had already existed for centuries, and was philosophised over and over again. For instance, works such as *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* (Rome, 1635) by Leone Allacci (ca. 1586-1669) were the product of an antiquary milieu around Francesco Barberini (1597-1679) that studied the "remnants of a lost knowledge, [and] remnants of a language of this

37 See Rapin, *Du grand*, 3: "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."

38 Ibid., 13: "Vous trouverez, Monsieur, [...] que vous n'aurez pas de peine à comprendre ce que c'est que ce Sublime dont je vous parle, tout incompréhensible qu'il est : & ce sera par l'admiration & par l'étonnement qu'il vous causera, que vous le comprendrez" ("You will find, Monsieur, [...] that you will have no difficulty in understanding this Sublime of which I speak, although it is incomprehensible: only through the admiration and astonishment it will cause you, you will be able understand it").

39 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, vii: "When man had discovered the art of composing verses, he only employed this noble manner of expression for speaking about Gods; and believing Poetry to be a divine language, he only used it when singing his praise. Following this example, when speaking of the august person of HIS MAJESTY, we now look for other languages than those that have been in use until now. And in order to be able to describe the grand deeds of the greatest King in the world, we now form new characters."

knowledge” during the 1630s.⁴⁰ Allacci’s book, which includes his translations of passages from Longinus, departs from the original language God gave man in Paradise, which eventually lost its universality with the confusion and scattering of speech at the Tower of Babel.⁴¹ In sublime eloquence, which is highly figural, the orator approaches this original language very closely, reducing the distance between inner and outer speech.⁴² Even Longinus himself, Clélia Nau writes, built his treatise on a similar thought: through his book he contemplates the primitive ideal language that Greek and other more ancient authors possessed, and by collecting the many scattered fragments of examples of the vestiges of Greek “great art” such as Homer’s work, he thus hopes to better approach this echo of a language.⁴³

Through the *Tapisseries du Roy*, Félibien aims at establishing the means of emblematics as such a language. This means, Félibien argues, that poetry will simply not suffice anymore; only emblematics and allegory can communicate “the grandeur of his Name to future generations” while making them aware “of that which words would not express with enough force.”⁴⁴ The sentence that follows is meant as a rhetorical question: “Indeed, in what manner could one describe well enough all that His Majesty has done since he ascended the throne; and how can we represent most worthily [“assez dignement représenter”] the benefits that have come to the state, since he started his leadership?” With “représenter,” Félibien, and later Rapin, means a true *evocation* of the monarch’s sublimity, so that it can be expressed in its entirety and thus can be felt and experienced by the recipient looking at a building, or viewing a text or image. In a sense, it means trying to harness his sublimity for the sake of evoking it, thus protecting from the destructive force of time. But even though Félibien’s question aims to convince the reader of the importance of the *Tapisseries du Roy* as an answer to the question of the monarch’s representation, it actually, I would argue, articulates the book’s largest problem.

Félibien’s question reveals the following issue underlying his book, which concerns his general aim: while Félibien claims to have found a means that is powerful enough to *represent* the monarch’s sublimity in order to evoke his grandeur

40 See Marc Fumaroli, “Hiéroglyphes et lettres: la « Sagesse mystérieuse des Anciens » au XVII^e siècle,” *XVII^e siècle* 158 (January-March 1988): 7-20. Quoted from Clélia Nau, *Le temps du sublime. Longin et le paysage poussinien* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 36.

41 Caroline van Eck, “Figuring the Sublime in English Church Architecture,” in Van Eck, Bussels, Delbeke and Pieters, *Translations of the Sublime*, 240.

42 Ibid., 240.

43 Nau, *Le temps*, 36.

44 Félibien. *Tapisseries du Roy*, vii: “Through these ingenious Paintings we want to make the grandeur of his Name known to future generations, and to make them aware – through these allegorical Images – of that which words would express less powerfully. [...] [A]ll of these wonders are so mysteriously depicted in the four *Tableaux* that I wish to describe.”

for posterity, Félibien and his team structurally and repeatedly only *refer* to the idea of his sublimity and its representation – in such a forced and explanatory fashion, that they disrupt and break down the power (“la force”) that the original devices were said to evoke. Their various attempts to contain and cope with the underlying tension that is the monarch’s transcendence, all point to the dilemmas that arise when shifting the sublime towards human virtue. Moving the sublime from texts and artworks to persons opens up a gap between representation and the represented – a gap that, by the very fact itself, can no longer be bridged with literary or artistic techniques of representation. In fact, Félibien’s book shows the first symptoms of the problem with which Rapin was faced in his treatise roughly twenty years later: to evoke Louis XIV’s sublimity, Rapin himself stated, you need a sublime representation, which Rapin admitted he was incapable of, and therefore postponed the problem, advancing it towards other people (“C’est à eux à dire les merveilles d’un Regne di admirable, & de mettre en œuvre le Sublime de son ame & de son cœur par tout le Sublime de leur éloquence”).

There are various signs and inconsistencies that give the impression that Félibien and the Petite académie already seem to have been aware of the far-reaching implications of their sublime shift of the monarch himself. The most extensive one deals with a contrast that exists between the introductory text and the framework of the rest of the book. While arguing that only the means of device and allegory, instead of poetry, should be powerful enough to represent the king’s sublimity (“representant les plus hauts mistères” or “représenter ces effets merveilleux”), the authors make the contradictory decision of using poetry, as well as lengthy prose texts, to explain the power of these devices and the message they hide. Félibien even apologises in advance for this decision:

On m’excusera donc bien si j’ose entreprendre d’expliquer à ceux qui ne sont pas accoustumés à voir ces caracteres misterieux, de quelle sorte on a figuré les grandes actions que Sa Majesté a faites dans chacun de ces Elémens, & combien le Peintre a caché de merveilles sous le voile de ses couleurs.⁴⁵

Félibien’s book essentially breaks down the mysterious power that he himself deemed instrumental in the monarch’s true representation, sacrificing it by means of a less powerful medium for the sake of communicating the hidden message to the reader (“ce n’est pas avec moins de force & d’éloquence”). For instance, by means of words such as “ainsi” and “de même,” the short prose texts that

45 Ibid., 2: “Therefore forgive me when I dare to explain to those who are not accustomed to see these mysterious characters, in what manner the grand actions of His Majesty are figured in each of these Elements, and the manner in which the painter has hidden these wonders under the veil of his colours.” He explains that the painter’s “activité merveilleuse” is able to create “Peintures misterieuses” that evoke the king’s own “effets merveilleux.” The “voile” resembles Bouhours’s explanation of the device’s metaphorical structure as a “habit étranger.”

are added above the engraved devices change the structure of the device from a metaphor into the related but much less powerful figure of a simile. Ultimately, the added madrigals and explanations accompanying the *pictura* and *motto* do not primarily seek to create a manifestation of a sublime effect through artful or technical means, but rather to show Louis XIV's own sublimity. In Félibien's description of the tapestry of *L'Air*, he describes the king as a person capable of provoking conflicting and powerful emotions: "The mere sound of his name and the radiant light of his qualities," he writes, "are able to create in the beholder a sense of fear mingled with admiration."⁴⁶ The king does not need artifice to create a sense of sublimity. In the madrigals and explanatory texts accompanying the devices, Félibien and the authors of the *Petite académie* evoke the same ideas.

Firstly, there are the two devices of the Skyrocket (Perrault, in the Element of *Le Feu*) and the Bird of Paradise (Perrault, in the Element of *L'Air*). Although the first is taken from the world of art and spectacle, and the second one belongs to the realm of nature, they both convey the same idea: the king's elevated glory. The ardour of his soul elevates *itself*, while dazzling all the eyes of the beholders, and transports the king above all others. But given the fact that a skyrocket must also come down, the following device with a bird of paradise was perhaps more effective in symbolising this idea (fig. 28). The explanation teaches us that, according to naturalists, the bird of paradise never touches the ground, which is why the motto reads "Semper Sublimis" (Always Elevated):

Pour la Magnanimité, Dans la piece de l'element de l'Air.

L'Oyseau que l'on appelle de Paradis, si l'on en croit les Naturalistes, se sôtient toujours élevé dans l'Air, sans jamais toucher à terre ; ce qui, joint avec ces paroles, SEMPER SUBLIMIS, exprime assez bien la grandeur d'Ame de Sa Majesté, qui est toujours occupée à de grandes choses, & qui ne se propose rien que de magnifique et de sublime.

*Il n'est rien de si relevé,
Où si son vol n'est arrivé,
Il ne monte sans peine & sans trop entreprendre.
Il ne cesse d'agir, & jamais il n'est las;
Il regarde sur nous, & voit sans y descendre,
Tout ce qui se passe icy bas.*

Perrault.⁴⁷

46 Ibid., 15: "[T]outefois le seul bruit de son Nom, & les lumières éclatantes de ses grandes qualitez ont toujours tenu nos esprits dans une crainte respectueuse, & pleine d'admiration."

47 Ibid., 19: "For Magnanimity, in the piece of the element of Air. The Bird which we call 'of Paradise', if we are to believe the Naturalists, is always elevated in the Air without ever touching the ground: this, together with the words

"The king," Perrault writes, "never proposes anything but that what is magnificent and sublime." There is nothing as "relevé" ("elevated") as he is, and he sees everything that happens below him without ever having to descend. Whereas the *pictura* in the device seems to have been taken from Le Moyne or from the earlier work by Joachim Camerarius the Younger (1534-1598), Perrault's madrigal is quite unique.⁴⁸ Whereas Le Moyne in his device and madrigal uses the bird of paradise to evoke both man's divine inspiration and the idea of fiery poetic and artistic enthusiasm, Perrault equates the bird with Louis XIV himself. By employing the word "sublime," the explanatory text seeks to enforce the king's elevated status, while the use of prose transforms these explanations into declarations. The same notion of elevation is evoked in Perrault's device of the Fir Tree (in the Element of *La Terre*). The device's explanatory text tells us that the king's love for all things elevated transports him as high as the heavens, in the same manner as the tree that sits on the highest mountains and is still able to rise even further:

Pour la Magnanimité, Dans la piece de l'element de la Terre.

Un Sapin, & ce mot RECTA SE TOLLIT IN ALTUM. Sa Majesté qui se plaist dans les choses grandes & élevées va droit à la gloire, ainsi que le Sapin qui se plaist sur les montagnes les plus hautes, & qui s'élève droit en haut sans jamais se gauchir.

*Plein d'une fierté magnanime
Jusqu'aux Cieux j'éleve ma cime
Affermy par mon propre faix,
Rien ne peut faire que je plie,
Moins encor que je m'humilie,
Je m'éleve tousjours & ne gauchis jamais.*

Perrault.⁴⁹

SEMPER SUBLIMIS, expresses quite well the grandeur of Soul of His Majesty, who is always occupied with great things, and who only proposes that which is beautiful and sublime. *There is nothing so elevated, / Where does his flight not arrive, / He ascends without trouble and without too much effort. / He never ceases to act, and he is never weary; / He looks at us, and sees, without having to descend, / Everything that happens here below.*"

48 See Le Moyne, *l'art des devises*, 330 for the obvious similarities.

49 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, 39: "A Fir Tree, and the words RECTA SE TOLLIT IN ALTUM. His Majesty, who revels in grand and elevated things, rises straight to glory, as well as the Fir Tree, which is most pleased on the highest mountains, and which rises upwards without ever warping. *Filled with a magnanimous pride, / Towards the Heavens I elevate my crown, / Strengthened even by my own burden, / Nothing can make me bow, / Let alone, make me bumble myself, / I will always elevate and will never warp.*"

Similarly, in the device of the Lily (in the Season of *L'Été*), the king rises towards the heavens, like the flower, as the 'glorious offshoot of a sublime stem', while his radiance has nothing borrowed. In other words, the king does not need to rely on artifice such as rhetoric, his sublimity is intrinsic. And while his actions and virtues are visible to everyone, their source and power remain a mystery and a miracle:

Pour l'Esté, Dans la piece de la saison de l'Esté.

Un Lys, & ce Mot, CANDORE OMNIA VINCIT. Le Lys, qui est le Symbole de la Candeur & de la Sincérité, a esté choisy pour représenter le procédé noble, sincere, & genereux de Sa Majesté dans toutes ses Actions.

*Rejetton glorieux d'une tige sublime,
Je monte vers le Ciel d'un effort magnanime,
Et brille d'un éclat qui n'a rien d'emprunté ;
Rien de ce que je suis aux mortels ne se cache ;
Mon front toujours ouvert, aussi bien que sans tache,
Sert de parfait symbole à la Sincérité.*

Charpentier.⁵⁰

And in the device of the Ivy-covered Pyramid (in the Season of *L'Automne*), the plant refers to a sublimity that emanates from the king himself and knows no limits whatsoever:

Pour l'Automne, Dans la piece de la saison de l'Automne

Une Vigne de Virginie, qui de ses branches couvre une grande Pyramide, & s'étend encore au dela. On luy a donné pour Ame ces Paroles, CRESCIT IN IMMENSUM; pour marquer la vaste étendue de l'Ame & de la Puissance de Sa Majesté, qui ne trouvant point de bornes en elles-mêmes, ne sont limitées que par les sujets où elles peuvent s'étendre & s'appliquer.

*Un progrès sans pareil a suivi ma Naissance;
Par une merveilleuse & secrète puissance,
On me voit élever toujours;*

50 Ibid., 65: "For Summer, in the piece of the season of Summer. A Lily, and this word, CANDORE OMNIA VINCIT. The Lily, which is the symbol of Candor and Sincerity, has been chosen to represent the noble, sincere and generous process of His Majesty in all his actions. *Glorious offshoot of a sublime stem / I ascend to the heavens in a magnanimous effort / And shine with a radiance that is not borrowed / Nothing of what I am is hidden to mortals / My forehead is always lifted, as well as unblemished / And serves as a perfect symbol of Sincerity.*"

*Il n'est obstacle, ny limites,
Qui puissent retarder mes démarches subites,
Ny qui puisse borner mon cours.*

Charpentier.⁵¹

To “mark the vast expanse of the soul and power of His Majesty,” the ivy in François Charpentier’s madrigal accompanying this device refers to “une merveilleuse & secrette puissance” (“a marvellous and secret force”) that has elevated Louis XIV from his birth onwards. This force may seem to have been impeded by certain obstacles such as political enemies or domestic issues, he writes, but still keeps extending itself beyond these apparent limits.

With every added explanatory and poetic text, Félibien leads the book increasingly further away from his introductory proclamation of a new era of noble and forceful representation. It shows an inability to refrain from the use of praise or *louange* (“faites à la louange de SA MAJESTÉ”) in the face of the construction of an all-transcendent monarch – an issue Rapin would describe in his treatise twenty years later as a growing symptom of his sublime reign:

On est si accoustumé à le voir faire des choses louables & glorieuses, qu’on n’a plus rien de nouveau à luy dire sur ses louanges. C’est un sujet épuisé que son éloge: & l’éloquence qui ne parle que trop par tout ailleurs, est devenue muette quand il faut parler de luy. Ces grands nom de Cesar & d’Alexandre, si usez dans ses Panegyriques, n’ont rien d’assez fort pour exprimer toute sa vertu.

Rapin emphasises, in particular, the fact that most comparisons that were used in relation to Louis XIV are usually “not virtuous enough to enter into a comparison with those of the monarch” (“pas assez vertueuse pour entrer en comparaison avec la sienne”). The same tensions already grew underneath the surface of the project of the *Tapisseries*. The core of Félibien’s argument, and the final device of the Theatrical Machine in particular, expresses the idea of an innate grandeur which has elevated the monarch towards a level of transcendence “that ravishes all those who witness it, and surpasses the forces of nature and the ordinary scope of men” (fig. 30):

⁵¹ Ibid., 73: “For Autumn, in the piece of the season of Autumn. A Five-leaved Ivy, which covers with its branches a large pyramid, and extends itself even beyond it. The following words serve as the *Ame*, CRESCIT IN IMMENSUM; to mark the vast expanse of the soul and power of His Majesty, which find no bounds in themselves, and are only limited by those subjects on which they can extend and apply themselves. *An unparalleled progress followed my birth; / By a marvellous and secret power, / One will always see me rise; / There is no obstacle, nor limit, / That may delay my sudden actions, / Or can limit my course.*”

Pour les Ballets et Comedies, Divertissement. Dans la pièce de la saison de l'Hyver.
 Une Machine, avec ce mot, NATURAM SUPERAT; pour dire qu'une Machine
 par ses mouvemens surprend & charme les spectateurs, & surpasse les effets
 ordinaires de la Nature. Ainsi Sa Majesté par ses vertus & ses actions heroïques,
 étonne & ravit tous ceux qui en sont les témoins, & surpasse les forces natur-
 elles, & la portée ordinaire des hommes.

*Quel merveilleux objet, quel auguste miracle,
 Par son rapide cours surmontant tout obstacle,
 Ravit les yeux & les esprits?
 D'un art victorieux sa force est animée,
 Et de ses mouvemens la Nature charmée,
 L'admire, & luy cede le prix.*

Cassagnes.⁵²

If the monarch surpasses the ordinary forces and effects of the natural world – an idea that also returns in the device's *motto* "Naturam Superat" ("He Surpasses Nature") – the project's fundamental reliance on comparisons with examples from the natural world to represent his sublimity, creates yet another tension. Instead of representing the king's sublimity, a comparison with a lesser, surpassed object would only downgrade the initial claim of the sublimity of the main subject. From this viewpoint, the presence of dogmatic explanatory texts accompanying the devices appears as an attempt to counterbalance this instability; the *pictura* can easily be misinterpreted, and the *motto* can easily be reversed by opponents and satirical writers. A telling example of this subversive nature is the device of the Ivy-covered Pyramid in the tapestry of *L'Automne*. In his *Memoires*, Pierre de Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantôme (1540-1614) writes that a similar version of this device was used by Charles, cardinal de Lorraine (1524-1574), and that its *pictura* and *motto* (an ivy-covered pyramid with the words "As long as you endure, I will flourish") at one point elicited the derogatory pun "If you endure, I will perish."⁵³ One cannot escape the reputation of ivy as a destructive, uncontrollable plant, gravely damaging and destroying the structure

52 Ibid., 89: "For the Ballets and Comedies, Entertainment. In the piece of the season of Winter. NATURAM SUPERAT. A machine, through its movements, surprises and charms the spectators, and surpasses the ordinary effects of Nature: So his Majesty, by his virtues and heroic actions astonishes and ravishes all those who witness it, and surpasses the forces of nature and the ordinary scope of man. *What marvelous object, what august miracle,/ Overcoming all obstacles by its rapid course,/ Ravishes the eyes and spirits?/ Its force is animated by a victorious art,/ And Nature, charmed by its movements/ Admires him and gives him the prize.*"

53 Pierre de Bourdeille, *Memoires de Messire Pierre de Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantome. Contenant les vies des hommes illustres & grands capitaines estrangers de son temps*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Jean Sambix le Jeune, 1666), 8: "Charles le Cardinal de Lorraine, lequel portoit pour devise, une piramide entourée de lierre avec ces mots, *Te stante virebo*. Mais

on which it proliferates. Other devices that feature in the *Tapisseries du Roy* also share this ambiguous character, since almost all plants and animals are perishable and corruptible. For example, in the device of the Tree struck by lightning (in the Element of *Le Feu*) or the Falcon attacking its prey (in the Season of *L'Automne*), an unsuspecting viewer or political opponent could easily view the tree and the prey themselves as metaphors for the French king.

A third, and related, attempt of the *Tapisseries du Roy* to deny any gap between representation and the represented can be found in its use of madrigals. In a number of these added poems, their authors made it appear as if Louis XIV himself is proclaiming his own sublimity directly to the reader, by making use of the first-person. Notable examples include the Lily device (“Rejetton [...] d’une tige sublime, je monte vers le ciel”), as well as the Fir Tree device (“jusqu’aux Cieux [...] Je m’élève tousjours”). It seems as a clever way to try and bypass the artificiality of these metaphors, in order to achieve a type of agency that appears unmediated. However, this effect too becomes unstable, since these and other examples are alternated with madrigals that refer to Louis XIV in the third person, underscoring the role of the writer and artists in presenting the monarch before the reader.

In retrospect, we can see that the publication tried to balance itself between the necessity of artifice to evoke grandeur, and a denial of this artifice as the original source of this grandeur. The poetics of the sublime ultimately aims to give the impression of a sudden, unmediated transfer of greatness – and this idea seems to underlie the decision of the Petite académie to invest in the medium of the device. Contemporaries like Bouhours saw in the device the ideal means to evoke wonder in the most striking way possible. Moreover, the choice of adding madrigals to make some devices speak for themselves, as if the king addresses himself directly to the reader (“I dazzle all eyes by my vivid splendour, and nothing is equal to the ardour that transports me”), appears as an attempt to only further reinforce their striking potential. In other words, instead of only referring to his grandeur, the book wants to evoke it. In this regard, Félibien clearly realised and admitted that the royal devices – his “nouveaux caracteres” that the world *needs* to be able to express and experience the grandeur of the king – should ideally be understood by everyone and for eternity. To achieve this, he made the problematic decision to explain the mystery behind these images and mottoes, by resorting to the less powerful means of words. Adding text after text to the tapestries’ images, the book ends up dismantling the devices. These measures testify to the many challenges that

le Pasquin le tourna au contraire, *Sed te virente peribo*. Estant le naturel du lierre de ruiner & faire perir ce qu’il estraint.” (“Charles Cardinal de Lorraine, who had a pyramid covered in ivy as his device, with the words *Te stante virebo*. But the *pasquin* turns it around, to *Sed te virente peribo*. It is in the ivy’s nature to ruin and destroy that which it constraints.”).

the notion of an elevated monarch posed for seventeenth-century writers, architects and artists. In addition to these twists and turns, the publication attempts to further sustain the expression of sublimity by investing in dangerous supernatural and superhuman extremes. These exclamations and metaphors of the monarch's eternal transcendence posed a genuine problem: to elevate the king to the ineffable, means to arrive at a claim which, Rapin would admit sixteen years later, can hardly be evoked, let alone represented – a symptom of the sublime's ever elusive and subjective nature. In fact, as we shall see, these lofty claims would elicit much criticism outside of the kingdom, even in the Dutch edition of the *Tapisseries du Roy* itself.

The many efforts that were needed to sustain the claim of the king's sublimity, as well as its evocation, simultaneously disturbed its balance. The *Tapisseries du Roy* uncovered many problems that would be debated extensively and vehemently in the following decades, which is a topic that will be discussed in the next chapter.