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

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## Excess and exaggeration: Louis XIV and the issues of art and sublimity near the end of his reign (1685-1715)

Poetic and theoretical reflections on royal sublimity and the capabilities of language and art continued to be published during the course of the 1680s and around the turn of the century, but their share of highly critical texts began to steadily increase. The last decades knew a series of expensive wars and financial crises, which made the image of a transcendent king more difficult to maintain. This last chapter will explore the numerous efforts to uphold the role of sublime grandeur in the interrelationship between the monarch and his architecture from 1685 onwards.

In this inquiry, particular attention will be paid to attempts at defending the merits of the *merveilleux* in this period. France's heyday of the epic had already passed, but the year of 1685 saw several opportunities to use the slowly dying *merveilleux chrétien* to Louis XIV's advantage. However, the conventional rhetorical fictions that had been represented on paper and in the urban realm of Paris for decades now, needed to remain in keeping with a changed society.

### THE LEGITIMATE MONARCH:

#### ARCHITECTURE AND THE MARVELLOUS IN PROSE AND POETRY

Boileau used his *L'Art poétique* from 1674 to spell out the fundamental rules underlying classical writing, but in addition employed it as a satirical and polemic instrument. As we have seen in the previous chapter, his poem condemns the lengthy descriptions and *ekphrases* of marvellous architecture that enabled the readers of modern Christian epics to mentally construct the imaginary enchanted space from foundation to cornice. By means of a slightly adapted paraphrase from Scudéry's *Alaric* – Boileau cunningly puts his adapted verse line between double quotes: “« Ce ne sont que festons, ce ne sont qu'astragales. »”<sup>1</sup> – Boileau aimed to deliver a crushing blow to this poetic tradition (“Fuyez de ces auteurs

1 See the “Chant Premier” of his *L'Art poétique* in Boileau, *Oeuvres diverses*, 105.

180 l'abondance stérile").<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Boileau similarly employs his "Chant troisième" to proclaim his aversion to the *merveilleux chrétien*, but here rejects the whole genre altogether. In the following verses, Boileau alludes to the works of Tasso and Ariosto and in particular to the more recent work of Desmarets, who all mistreat and impoverish Christian subjects by adding fabulous things, such as demons and magicians:

C'est donc bien vainement que nos auteurs déçus.  
Bannissant de leurs vers ces ornemens reçus,  
Pensent faire agir Dieu, ses saints et ses prophètes,  
Comme ces dieux éclos du cerveau des poètes;  
Mettent à chaque pas le lecteur en enfer,  
N'offrent rien qu'Astaroth, Belzébuth, Lucifer.  
De la foi d'un chrétien les mystères terribles  
D'ornemens égayés ne sont point susceptibles.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Christian epic had become overshadowed by other more popular genres favoured by the Ancients during the end of the century, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes of 1685 and the subsequent demolition of the Protestant church at Charenton provided a new impetus for the *merveilleux chrétien*.

— DEFENDING THE MERVEILLEUX CHRÉTIEN TO THE GLORY OF LOUIS XIV:  
LE NOBLE'S CHARENTON AND BELLOCQ'S INVALIDES

Inspired by these events, Eustache Le Noble (1643-1711) composed the Christian epic *L'Hérésie détruite: poème héroïque* in 1690, which aimed to glorify the king's destruction of the Huguenot community just outside Paris. As Philippe Hourcade shows in his work on Eustache Le Noble from 2015, the subject of his poem justified the use of the *merveilleux chrétien*, which also ensured the continuation of the line of French epics inspired by and glorifying the monarchy.<sup>4</sup> Le

2 Ibid., 105.

3 Ibid., 125. The English edition of Boileau's *L'Art poétique*, published by Sir William Soames and John Dryden in 1683, provides an excellent translation, which retains the original rhyme scheme: "In vain have our mistaken Authors try'd/ These ancient Ornaments to lay aside,/ Thinking our God, and Prophets that he sent,/ Might Act like those the Poets did invent,/ To fright poor Readers in each Line with Hell,/ And talk of *Satan*, *Ashtaroth*, and *Bel*;/ The Mysteries which Christians must believe,/ Disdain such shifting Pageants to receive." See Nicolas Boileau, *The art of poetry written in French by the Sieur de Boileau; made English*, trans. William Soames and John Dryden (London: R. Bentley, 1683), 40.

4 Philippe Hourcade, *Entre Pic et Rétif: Eustache Le Noble, 1643-1711* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990), 170: "Fait remarquable, l'utilisation du merveilleux chrétien, que justifiait le sujet du poème, place *L'Hérésie détruite* dans la lignée ouverte par les épopées françaises, celles notamment d'inspiration monarchique, qui l'avaient précédée dans le siècle."

Noble's poem contains all of the traditional elements of the *merveilleux chrétien* of the epic. In addition to the dynamic imagery of the "vols sublimes" between the different realms of earth, heaven and hell ("Qu'autant que ce Grand Roy le veut, & le permet./ Ce bruyant Messager calant son vol sublime"),<sup>5</sup> the epic also features an instance of heavenly "sacred horror" (in Chant I) that is contrasted with a sense of infernal, demonic horror (in Chant III):

[FROM CHANT I:]

Du Heros attentif quelle fut l'horreur sainte?  
Quel fut l'étonnement, & la pieuse crainte?  
Quand du sein lumineux de ce nuage ouvert,  
Son redoutable Ayeul HENRY se fut offert.<sup>6</sup>

[FROM CHANT III:]

Mais d'un autre costé dans le fond des Enfers  
Au bruit de ce Conseil CALVIN rongean ses fers [...]  
A ses cris douloureux dont il répand l'horreur,  
Vole & se rend vers luy le Démon de l'Erreur.<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein, the poem ends with a *deus ex machina* that counteracts the wrath of Satan and his demons, who had interrupted the demolition of the church at Charenton by means of a grave tempest ("Mais enfin du Très-Haut l'équitable Clemence,/ De ces Tyrans de l'air arreste l'insolence;/ Et d'un signe qui fait trembler tous les Démons,/ Les fait soudain rentrer dans leurs antres profonds.").<sup>8</sup> This allows the workers to resume their work, in the name and to the glory of the poem's royal hero. Like *L'Hérésie détruite*, a great number of texts and artworks produced in response to the creation of the Edict of Fontainebleau imbued the subject of the "destroyed heresy" (or "l'hérésie détruite") with a sense of demonic wonder, thereby underscoring Le Noble's epic. A particularly eye-catching example was a homonymous bronze medallion designed and executed by Martin Desjardins (1637-1694) for the statue of Louis XIV on the Place des Victoires.<sup>9</sup> One of the two heretics represented by the sculptor gazes upwards toward the

5 Eustache Le Noble, *L'Hérésie détruite* (Unknown publisher, 1690), 43.

6 Ibid., 7: "What sacred horror came over the attentive Hero?/ What astonishment, and pious fear?/ When from the luminous centre of this opened cloud,/ His formidable grandfather HENRY was presented."

7 Ibid., 24: "But on the other side, in the depths of Hell/ CALVIN gnawed his shackles at the sound of this Council, / [...] His painful cries, which spread horror all around,/ Attracted the Demon of Error, who flew towards him."

8 Ibid., 58-60.

9 This particular medallion was already ordered on March 9 1685, seven months prior to the revocation itself. See Clio Karageorghis and Bruno Zeitoun, eds., "L'Hérésie détruite," accessed December 4, 2017, [http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car\\_not\\_frame&idNotice=776](http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=776).

figure of Religion and, by removing a mask, reveals a set of large donkey ears and a head of snake-like curls. Another example is Antoine Coysevox's (1640-1720) bronze relief of "Religion Triumphant" from 1687, which features a crouching Heresy with devil's horns, holding a similar mask.<sup>10</sup> The relief was executed for the base of a statue of Louis XIV for the Hôtel de Ville in Paris.

In the context of imaging and image making around the Revocation, one image in particular reveals several striking parallels with Le Noble's epic narrative, although being completely different in nature. In 1685, an unknown printmaker produced a crude engraving of the church's destruction – an image that must have functioned as a piece of protestant propaganda (fig. 34). It shows several of the marvellous ingredients used by Le Noble, but they are employed in such a way that they serve the opposite effect; an anti-Catholic scene of a demonic king and court destroying the Reformed Church of France. On the foreground, a number of royal men are depicted, molesting a group of distressed women, while guided by the figure of Satan behind them. Although the latter is cloaked in a large coat, his large claws and pointy horns leave no doubt about his menacing identity. While gazing at his destruction of Charenton's church building, he is accompanied by his greatest accomplice: a winged dragon with seven heads, which represent the main figures of the Revocation. Among them are Louis XIV himself, his confessor Father François d'Aix de la Chaise (1624-1709), the Grand Dauphin, chancellor Michel Le Tellier (1603-1685), two bishops, and lieutenant-general of the police Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie (1625-1709).<sup>11</sup> Whereas Le Noble affirmed his work as a true Christian epic by means of its concluding *deus ex machina*, the protestant engraving shows a very similar scene that, in this context, achieves a truly dismal effect. Heavenly forces try to stop Charenton's destruction, but to no avail. An angel is depicted hovering above the scene, presenting the tables of the law to God, whose presence is evoked by an opening in the clouds. This particularly melancholy detail must have deeply resonated with its contemporary Huguenot viewers; the heavenly scene above the half-demolished building appears on paper as if frozen in time, reminiscing the last remnants of Protestantism in France, and a final battle against the ungodly, Catholic tyranny of the French court. As Rémi Mathis emphasises, this print not only constitutes "an extremely rare instance of the use of the print to vector effective propaganda related to a specific event at very low cost," but also forms a "visual avatar of the many texts intended to denigrate Louis XIV" near the end of the century.<sup>12</sup>

10 Martha Mel Stumberg Edmunds, *Piety and Politics: Imaging Divine Kingship in Louis XIV's Chapel at Versailles* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 63.

11 Rémi Mathis, "Destruction of the Protestant Church of Charenton," in *A Kingdom of Images. French Prints in the Age of Louis XIV, 1660-1715*, ed. Peter Fuhling, Louis Marchesano, Rémi Mathis, and Vanessa Selbach (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), 210-11.

12 Ibid., 211.

Another pro-royal example of the struggling *merveilleux chrétien* near the end of the century can be found in poetic work *L'Eglise des Invalides. Poème*, written by Pierre de Bellocq (1645-1704), a minor poet and *valet de chambre du Roy* who befriended Boileau, though remained his enemy as a poet.<sup>13</sup> Bellocq's choice to produce a lengthy laudatory poem can be explained by taking into account several factors. First of all, the poem forms part of a steady increase in the production of laudatory poems on royal architecture towards the end of the seventeenth century. In retrospect, we can identify a network of writers that included among others Bellocq, Nicolas Catherinot (1628-1688), François Boutard (1664-1729), Charles Perrault, and the Abbé du Jarry (1658-1730), who all produced poems in Latin and French, and translated each other's works to reach a larger audience. Secondly, to remain in the sphere of Christian values, Bellocq's poetic use of the *merveilleux chrétien* in the context of the Dôme des Invalides fits with the increasing association between the monarch and his canonised forefather, Saint Louis, to which the church is dedicated. Towards the end of the century, Louis XIV's troubles and failures during the Nine Year War (1688-1687), and the country's famine and financial shortages, accelerated a process that separated and isolated the monarch himself from the heroic image of the military conqueror. This very well may have contributed to several major changes in the church's iconographical programme, such as the rejection of a painted scene of "La Gloire du Roi et la prospérité des armes" for the dome's interior, in favour of a scene that focuses primarily on the figure of Saint Louis.<sup>14</sup>

But most importantly, the main goal of Bellocq's poem, and its use of the Christian supernatural, is to reach *beyond* the figure of Saint Louis, towards a sublime unity between the Dôme and the figure of the monarch. Already in the poem's dedication to the king, Bellocq describes the church as an "effort sublime," a crowning achievement that enables the poet to push the comparison between Saint Louis and Louis XIV even further, suggesting the latter surpasses the first:

Cependant, s'il étoit permis de dire son sentiment sur une matière si relevée, j'oserois soutenir que V.M. n'a jamais rien fait de plus grand que l'établissement des Invalides. Cet effort sublime de vôtre magnificence Royale a porté au plus haut point l'amour de vos Sujets, & l'admiration des Etrangers. [...] Si des vûes humaines et politiques ont pû inspirer à d'autres Princes quelque informe crayon d'un si grand dessein, il n'appartient qu'à la charité Chrétienne de le pousser à sa perfection. Celle de S. Louis, quoique tres-vaste, ne s'étendit que sur les Guerriers que la cruauté des Sarrazins avoit privés de la veuë: la vôtre, SIRE, embrasse

13 See Robert Sabatier, *Histoire de la poésie française: La Poésie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 3 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1975), 302.

14 Bertrand Jestaz, *L'Hôtel et l'église des Invalides* (Paris: Picard, 1990), 38.

tous ceux que le sort des armes a mis hors de combat. [...] La superbe Eglise que l'on vient d'achever par les ordres de V.M. a mis le comble à ce fameux Ouvrage.<sup>15</sup>

The poem itself opens with the Genius of Architecture, sent by Faith to Versailles, where he wakes the sleeping figure of architect Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646-1708) in the guise of his famous great-uncle François Mansart (fig. 35). Encouraging the young architect to honour God, the Genius disappears and leaves Hardouin-Mansart in a fury of artistic inspiration. The subsequent construction of the Dôme attracts the Demon of Envy and her infernal accomplices. The Demon explains her intentions to harm the French monarch to the figure of Fortune. While her group flees after being frightened by the golden cross atop the Dôme (fig. 36), the Demon hides in one of the hollow columns of the incomplete baldachin, thereby obstructing the construction (fig. 37). Hardouin-Mansart prays to heaven, and the Archangel Michael, in the guise of a labourer, curses the Demon. She is sent back to hell, and is forced to gaze at the fortunate reign of Louis XIV for all eternity.

After the poem's *deus ex machina* and the disappearance of the Archangel as saviour, the poem ends with its ultimate subject: the visiting monarch and his sublime response to the church:

LOUIS, du noble objet frappé subitement,  
Fut au premier coup d'œil saisi d'étonnement,  
Il en convint luy-même, & ce grand témoignage  
Au faite des honneurs plaça l'insigne Ouvrage,  
Qui peut, par cet aveu pour jamais ennobli,  
Braver impunément & le temps & l'oubli.<sup>16</sup>

Adding to the poem a sense of *vraisemblance*, the verse lines on the king's amazement were in fact based on the royal visit in May and July 1701.<sup>17</sup> The *Mercurie galant* wrote about the first visit that the "Prince was struck with astonishment

15 See the "Epistre" in Pierre de Bellocq, *L'Eglise des Invalides. Poème* (Paris: M. Brunet, 1702), v: "However, if it were permitted to state one's opinion on such an elevated matter, I would dare argue that Your Majesty has never done anything more great than establishing the Invalides. This sublime effort of your Royal magnificence has carried the love of your Subjects and the admiration of foreigners to the highest point. [...] Whereas human and political goals have been able to inspire other Princes towards only an incomplete sketch of a grand design, it is up to Christian charity to push it to perfection. That of Saint Louis, though very vast, extended only to the Warriors deprived of their sight by the cruelty of the Saracens: Yours, SIRE, embraces all those who are put out of action by the fate of war. [...] The beautiful Church that has just been completed by the orders of Your Majesty has crowned this famous Work."

16 Bellocq, *L'Eglise*, 29: "Louis, suddenly struck by the noble building,/ Was seized with astonishment at first glance;/ He himself had to acknowledge that, and this great testimony/ Granted to this Work the highest honour,/ Which, after this confession, will, forever ennobled,/ Defy unpunished both time and oblivion."

17 R.W. Berger, "Pierre Du Bellocq's Poem on the Dôme des Invalides," *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 32, no. 2 (2010): 144.



at first glance” (“Ce Prince fut frappé d’étonnement au premier coup d’œil”), having not expected such grandeur.<sup>18</sup> Upon his return in Meudon, the monarch repeatedly returned on the subject the following days, often repeating that “he had been astonished” (“ce Prince repétant souvent pour le marquer, ‘qu’il avait esté étonné’”).<sup>19</sup>

In fact, this sense of sublime astonishment even returned in official descriptions of the Dôme des Invalides, such as Jean-François Félibien des Avaux’s (ca. 1656-1733) *Description de l’Eglise Royale des Invalides* from 1706 – a work by Félibien’s son which even reused Le Pautre’s prints that were made for Bellocq’s poem, such as images of the supernatural figure of Architecture. Thus infusing his description with marvellous images, they perfectly accompanied a description that evokes the same astonishment as that of the king. Here, the author’s experience strongly echoes the exploratory thoughts of his father André Félibien in his *Entretiens* on an aesthetic sublime in architecture, when the latter described the transporting effect of grand domes (see chapter 3):

[S]i la grandeur & la beauté de tous les dehors de l’église cause de l’estonnement à ceux qui la voyent de plus près; un ravissement qu’on ne peut exprimer surprend en entrant dans cet auguste temple. La vue découvre dès le premier aspect au delà du sanctuaire par une ouverture tres spacieuse, toute l’estenduë du chœur des invalides, d’où la grande hauteur du dome & tout ce qui forme la croix grecque, produit encore un effet surprenant.<sup>20</sup>

In order to push the level of sublimity even further, Félibien des Avaux adds another layer of sublime reaction to the equation, which he recognises in the expressions of the depicted figures of the saints in the Dôme’s interior. He asserts that the spectator inside the church, while gazing at the depicted sensations of divine transcendence and ecstasy, experiences a comparable experience of ravishment:

Le peintre a employé tout l’art de pinceau à marquer dans la figure de ce saint Evangeliste l’elevation & la sublimité qui rendent ses ouvrages si admirables.

18 [“Visit of Louis XIV to the new church of the Hôtel des Invalides”], *Mercurie galant*, May 1701 (vol. 1), 288-90.

19 Ibid., 290.

20 Jean-François Félibien des Avaux, *Description de l’Eglise Royale des Invalides* (Paris: J. Quillau, 1706), 27-28: “[W]hereas the grandeur and beauty of the exterior of the church elicits astonishment in those who look at it more closely, a ravishment that cannot be expressed amazes those who enter this august temple. From here, one immediately discovers, beyond the sanctuary and through the very spacious opening, the whole extent of the choir of the Invalides [FK: the old church]. And here, the great height of the dome and all aspects of the Greek cross also produce an astonishing effect.” A similar sublime experience is described by the contemporary writer Claude-Marin Saugrain: “En entrant dans cette Eglise par la grande porte, l’on découvre jusqu’au fond de l’Eglise intérieure, dont je vous ai parlé; mais la vue se trouve tout d’un coup si occupée & si remplie d’objets admirables, qu’il faut avouer que l’on est également surpris & enlevé. Il faut cependant vous fixer à un seul sujet.” See Claude-Marin Saugrain, *Les Curiositez de Paris* (Paris: Saugrain, 1716), 273.

[...] [O]n voit que transporté hors de luy-mesme par un saint anthousiasme, il est tout occupé de la veüe du ciel [...]. Il n'y a personne qui ne se sente comme ravi hors de soy en regardant à la fois du milieu du dome toutes les peintures.<sup>21</sup>

In this manner, Félibien des Avaux further builds on the sense of sublime astonishment that started with Louis XIV's described visit, which, in turn, informed the poetic construction of Bellocq. All texts and images are connected to each other, and collectively share and try to uphold the same dynamic interrelationship between the grandeur of the monarch and that of his art and rhetoric.

#### REAL FICTIONS, FICTIONAL REALITY: PUBLIC SPACES AND THE ISSUE OF EXCESSIVE GRANDEUR AND IDOLATRY

The literary works by Le Noble and Bellocq invested in a mainly literary dynamic between the *merveilleux* on the one hand, and (architectural) reality on the other. In addition to these texts, the last decade of the seventeenth century saw a number of efforts to take this dynamic a step further, by translating conventional *topoi* of the marvellous into the third dimension and, thus, blending the marvellous and real together. The reign of Louis XIV had already seen several attempts at introducing "imaginary" architecture in the urban sphere of Paris, such as the ephemeral Mount Parnassus at the 1660 entry of Louis XIV and Maria Theresa of Spain. In the year 1689, and ten years later in 1699, two similar ephemeral structures were constructed in the centre of Paris. Other than their 1660 sibling – which constituted a quite conventional example of ephemeral entry-gate architecture – these two new ephemeral "temples" were both built on the occasion of the inauguration of a statue of Louis XIV. The first structure, an octagonal "Temple de l'Honneur," was erected on the Place des Grèves on 14 July 1689 (fig. 38). It celebrated the creation of a new statue of the king as emperor, which was executed by Antoine Coysevox and was destined for the interior of the Hôtel de Ville. The second structure, a quadrangular "Temple de la Gloire," similarly served to glorify the inauguration of the grand equestrian statue of the king and the surrounding Place Louis-le-Grand, on August 13th 1699. This ephemeral temple was built on an artificial island in the middle of the Seine, opposite the Louvre, and formed the centre of a dazzling firework show (fig. 39). Two official descriptions were published to accompany the festivities, and both were written by the Jesuit writer Claude-François Ménéstrier, who

21 Félibien des Avaux, *Description*, 80-81: "The painter has used the art of his brush to express in the figure of this holy Evangelist the elevation and sublimity that make his works so admirable. [...] [W]hile transported out of himself in a state of sacred enthusiasm, we see that he is completely focused on the sight of Heaven [...]. There is no one who does not feel as if ravished out of oneself when seeing all these paintings in the centre of the dome at the same time."

had already built a solid authority as an expert in emblematics and heraldry. In the same manner as Félibien's explanatory description of the *Tapisseries du Roy*, Ménestrier's publications offer the reader a description of the structure's appearance, translations of Latin inscriptions, as well as explanations of the mysterious meanings contained in the numerous devices that adorned the two temples. They both had a strong visual appeal; temples like these were usually employed as imaginary, metaphorical ideas on paper. Therefore, their presence as *fremdkörper* in the capital, suddenly appearing in familiar surroundings like some sort of mirage, must have overwhelmed the contemporary spectator. Their laudatory function stayed the same; they both expressed a poetics of transcendence that had now become conventional, describing Louis XIV as an elevated marvel that marvelled its beholder.

Despite their visual and ideological similarities, the second temple and its accompanying festivities met with far more criticism than the first one – issues that Ménestrier's laudatory descriptions could ultimately not control or prevent. Shortly after the festivities of August 1699, the journalist and pamphleteer Nicolas Gueudeville (1652-1721) published his satirical work *L'Esprit des cours de l'Europe*, in which he focuses on the relationship between the appearance of the temple and the extravagant enthusiasm of the Parisian masses. He opens his commentary by addressing the aim of the festivities, which, according to him, was to render the monarch as the "Divinity of the Temple of Glory." All manner of heroes from fable and history, he continues, had been placed opposite the image of the king, for the sake of a comparison that, in fact, always produces the same result: Louis as the grandest of all:

On voit que le but qu'on s'est proposé dans cette Pompe a été de rendre le Roi la Divinité du Temple de la gloire; & si ce terme de Divinité scandalise les ames scrupuleuses, disons qu'on a voulu faire occuper à S.M. la premiere place de cet édifice imaginaire. On a rassemblé ce que l'on a pu trouver de plus distingué, & de plus fameux parmi les Héros de la Fable & de l'Histoire; on les a tous mis l'un après l'autre vis-à-vis de Louïs le Grand; ils ont subi tour à tour l'examen & le parallele; & la conclusion a été ce qu'elle est toûjours dans ces occasions, c'est que Louïs est plus grand qu'eux; & qu'ils sont obligez en bonne justice de le laisser passer.<sup>22</sup>

22 Nicolas Gueudeville, *L'Esprit des cours de l'Europe*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Frères L'Honoré, 1699), 364: "We can see that the aim underlying this Pump was to transform the King into the Divinity of the Temple of glory; and if this expression of divinity shocks the scrupulous souls, let us say that they wanted His Majesty to occupy the most prominent place of this imaginary edifice. They had drawn from the most distinguished sources, the most famous Heroes of Fable and History. They had placed them all, one after the other, opposite Louis le Grand, and they were all reviewed and paralleled. And the conclusion was, as always on such occasions, that Louis is greater than every one of them, and that they are obliged, in good justice, to let him pass."

The idea of Louis XIV's transcendence was evoked through a wide range of inscriptions, iconographical elements and architectural choices – ideas that were carried out in a much grander and lofty manner than in July 1689. The choice for an island in the middle of the river, Méneſtrier explains, points at the notion of inaccessibility, since the road to Glory can only be travelled by those individuals who are able to elevate themselves above men (“tel est le chemin de la Gloire, & l'on n'y arrive que par des travaux infinis [...]. Il faut s'élever au dessus de l'homme pour le meriter”).<sup>23</sup> In Antiquity, he continues, those men descended from their Gods, and were given divine honours, since their immortality had made them worthy of such things.<sup>24</sup> An inscription applied on one of the pedestals facing the Louvre proclaimed that the king is elevated above all praises and monuments (“*Titulis & nomine Major. Plus grand que son grand Nom & que tous les Eloges*”), which made it only fitting that the temple's crowning medal, pointed at the heavens, expressed the words “*Sic Itur ad astra: C'est ainsi qu'un Heros s'éleve jusqu'aux Cieux.*”<sup>25</sup> In view of these choices, Gueudeville argues, one can still offer those earlier heroes and kings which the monument outranks through the figure of the ever-elevated Louis XIV some small consolation. A temple of glory built on a river, amidst a feast of fireworks, is transient and lacks true solidity. “If there is one foundation on which a Temple of glory can endure,” he states, “it is in the minds of those who are enlightened”:

[U]n Temple de gloire bâti sur une Rivière en Feu d'Artifice est quelque chose de bien peu solide, une partie de la matière tombe dans l'eau & s'enfuit avec son cours, l'autre s'envole en l'air, & se dissipe. S'il y a un fond sur lequel le Temple de la gloire puisse subsister, c'est dans les esprits qui sont éclairés, & qui ne sont prévenus d'aucune passion; fond rare, fond sans prix, mais fond qui se trouve pourtant, & où l'on ne juge point des choses par les flateries outrées de quelques Courtisans affamez, par les loüanges fades d'une plume vénale, ni par les concours, & par les acclamations d'une populace aveugle.<sup>26</sup>

Exaggerated flatteries and blind, gullible praise, he writes, constitute the greatest dangers inherent in the relationship between rulers and people. In public

23 Claude-François Méneſtrier, *La Statuë Equestre de Louis le Grand, Placée dans le Temple de la Gloire* (Paris, Veuve Vaugon, 1699), 3.

24 Ibid., 4: “[C]’est pour cela que les Anciens faisoient descendre ces grands hommes de leurs Dieux, & déferoient mesme les honneurs divins à leurs Heros, c’est-à-dire à ceux que leur vertu avoit rendu dignes de l’immortalité.”

25 Ibid., 7 and 12.

26 Gueudeville, *L'Esprit*, 365: “A Temple of glory built in a River amidst fireworks is something very weak; part of the material falls into the water and floats away in its stream, while the other material flies upwards and dissipates. If there is one foundation on which a Temple of glory can endure, it is in the minds of those who are enlightened, and who are not accused of any passion. It is a rare and priceless foundation, but one that does exist, however, and which does not lead people to judge things by the outrageous flatteries of some hungry Courtiers, nor by the bland praise of a corrupt pen, or by the contests and the cheers of a blind mob.”

responses to art and architecture, Gueudeville recognises a degree of excessive behaviour that the very same people also exhibited at barricades and during the recent civil wars. A sign of a true idolatrous nation (“si la Nation est plus idolatre de son Prince que des autres”), he explains, is when the public has as little respect for reasonable bounds during rebellions as they have during their applause and praise.<sup>27</sup> He continues by emphasising that he not aims to diminish the glory of Louis himself, since according to the author, never has a Prince elevated to such heights as the result of his deeds.<sup>28</sup> But when read within its immediate context, his sharp satire shines through; the problem with glorifying temples and statues, he writes, is that they can, and have been, erected both for tyrannical rulers as for good governors.<sup>29</sup>

Similar charges of hyperbole, flattery and idolatry also returned in many commented editions on the relation between the king and the arts around the turn of the century, both in France as abroad. An interesting case is the Dutch bilingual edition of Félibien’s *Tapisseries du Roy* dating from around 1700. The publisher Pieter van den Berge opens the publication by presenting his “Dedication” to a group of four Dutch gentlemen (probably authors or publishers), in which he openly expresses his disregard concerning the exceptionally high level to which Félibien and his colleagues have elevated Louis XIV:

Myne Heeren, De geneegentheid en liefde, die U Edd alle konsten en voornamentlyk de Historien toedraagt, verschaft my heden, de gelegenheidt om U Edd: deese Tafereelen en Zinnebeelden op te offeren, die hoewel de Roem van den Koning van Vrankryk daar te ver in getrokken is, (die de Franschen onderdanen eigen zyn) evenwel alle Liefhebbers van schone Tekeningen aangenaam moeten voorkomen; want de vleyeryen aen een zyde stellende, so moet een ieder zich verwonderen over de ryke uitvindingen, die men daar in aanmerkt.<sup>30</sup>

27 Ibid., 365-66: “Je ne puis, sans m’en faire un plaisir comparer ces échafaux avec ces Baricades, ces spectacles, & ces jeux, avec les dernières guerres civiles; ces cris de joye avec ces infâmes pasquinades, qui se conservent dans les Bibliothèques qui en sont comme les précieuses Ordures, & qui apprendront à la posterité que si la Nation est plus idolatre de son Prince que des autres, comme quelques-uns le prétendent, c’est quand elle n’a plus d’autre parti à prendre que celui de l’idolâtrer, & qu’elle garde aussi peu de mesure dans la Rebellion, qu’elle en garde dans les applaudissemens, & dans les éloges.”

28 Ibid., 366: “Mon but n’est pas dans tout ceci de diminuer la gloire qui est due à S.M.T.C. j’avoue que jamais Prince n’a plus mérité ces honneurs, non pas tant à cause que jamais Prince ne s’est élevé si haut, que parce qu’il a retabli la paix, la justice, & le bon ordre au milieu de ses Peuples; on peut dire, sans prodiguer l’encens, que Louis le Grand est justement l’homme que cherchoit Horace.”

29 Ibid., 367: “[C]es sortes d’honneurs peuvent aussi bien être les preuves d’une grande tyrannie, que d’un bon, & d’un aimable gouvernement: en effet, n’a-t-on pas bâti des Temples à Tibère aussi bien qu’à Auguste?”

30 Pieter van den Berge, “Dedication,” in André Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roi, ou sont representez les quatre elements, avec les devises qui les accompagnent & leur explication. Tapyten van den Konink van Vrankryk verbeeldende de Vier Elementen, Benefens haar wonderlyke Zinnebeelden, en uytlegging op dezelve* (Amsterdam: Pieter van den Berge, ca. 1700), v-vi: “Messieurs, your inclination for all the arts and mainly for History, provides me today with the opportunity to present to you these paintings and these emblems. Although these images push the glory of the King of France

190 In the foreword, Van den Berge expresses a similar message addressed to the reader of the book. Although he is at pains to convince the reader of the great quality and splendour of Le Brun's designs, he expresses his disgust regarding the all-transcending sublimity of the king equally clearly:

Een ider zal kunnen oordelen hoe hoog de Roem van den Koning hier in getrokken is, door deze uitvinders die zich niet ontzien hebben dezelve selfs boven 't menschelyke te verheffen, doch 't zy hoe het zy, men sal sich over de schoone Kunst en groote uitvinding moeten verwonderen, en stellen de swakheid en sucht, die de onderdaenen in 't gemeen, en wel voornamentlyk de Franzen, hunnen Koning toedragen, aan een zyde.<sup>31</sup>

The ease with which Van den Berge dismantles the innate sublimity of Louis XIV, primarily by pointing at the writers, artists and the French public (instead of a divine source) as being responsible for this transcendence, renders the carefully constructed preterition of Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy* even more superficial. Here, the French dependence on rhetoric, which was employed to be able to approach and maintain the king's sublimity, excites a completely opposite response.

— DENYING IDOLATRY: LEMÉE AND THE PLACE DES VICTOIRES

One of the main reasons why the discourse on the idea of Louis XIV's inner sublimity, to which Félibien so strongly contributed, strongly persisted during the latter decades of century was the interest in the *representation* of his grandeur. Rapin's treatise *Du Grand ou du sublime* could be seen as the climax of the intellectual discourse around this development. But whereas he describes the king's numerous contributing virtues, he does *not* provide a definitive representation of the king's sublimity, because he simply can not do this ("Il ne restoit pour l'accomplissement d'un si grand dessein qu'un stile assez élevé, pour faire encore mieux sentir toute la sublimité de mon sujet: mais c'est un don qui n'est que pour les genies extraordinaires"). Of course, it suited the transcendent and ineffable

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too far, they still appear pleasant to the eyes of all those who love beautiful paintings, because putting aside the customary flattery of the French, everyone has to admire the rich inventions that can be found here." In the second volume, the publisher's 'Dedication' features a similar statement: "[D]e grootste Meesters van Vrankryk zyn hier van de uitvinders geweest, niet alleen om de roem van haaren Koning tot op den hoogsten top, maar zelfs (God vergeeve het haar) ver boven 't menschelyke te verheffen." ("[T]he greatest Masters of France have been its inventors, not only to elevate the fame of her King to the highest peak, but even (God forgive her) far beyond the human." Ibid., v-vi.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., viii: "Everyone can judge whether the glory of the King has not been pushed a bit too far by the artists, who apparently did not have any problem with elevating him even above the human; but one should still be astonished by these beautiful and magnificent inventions, and put aside the weak tenderness that the King's subjects and mainly the French bear for him."

nature of his treatise's principal subject that he ends his book with questions and hopes rather than answers, which he explicitly carries over to a new generation of intellectuals, artists and so forth. Ideally, these thoughts would remain in their elusive state as they would continue to be transferred for the sake of posterity, thereby maintaining the idea of sublimity.

However, the *visual* representation of the monarch's grandeur, as well as its public response, proved much more difficult to control. In fact, the criticism raised by the design and public response to the second *Temple de la Gloire* belongs to a wider debate that was sparked by the inauguration of the controversial monument dedicated to Louis XIV at the Place des Victoires in 1686, the very same year Rapin's treatise was published. The king himself did not attend the inauguration, but the company did include the Dauphin, the *prévôt des marchands*, the *échevins* and the *régiment des Gardes* (fig. 40). As part of the official parade, François III d'Aubusson, duc de la Feuillade (ca. 1631-1691), the initiator of the new Place des Victoires, stopped in front of the statue and dismounted from his horse to salute the image, after which the present officers raised their spears and the dignitaries took off their hats as they passed the monument.<sup>32</sup> Not long after the inauguration ceremony, when the first descriptions and visual representations of the statue and accompanying medals were published, harsh criticism began to arise. As Hendrik Ziegler has pointed out, the hyperbolic and overpowering character of the sculptural ensemble – particularly its inscription *Viro immortalis* (The immortal man) – was strongly condemned.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Louis XIV seemed to be treated as an idol, as the ceremonial responses to the statue strongly reminded of religious practices, such as types of cult worship that were traditionally only reserved for a deity.<sup>34</sup>

In the face of both French and foreign criticism, such as Gueudeville's satire, there were other French contemporaries who were at pains to defend both Louis XIV and the Parisian public against charges of idolatry.<sup>35</sup> The most influential example is François Lemée's *Traité des Statues*, which was published in 1688 and has been intensively studied by Caroline van Eck in her 2013 book *François Lemée*

32 Caroline van Eck, *François Lemée et la statue de Louis XIV: les origines des théories ethnologiques du fétichisme* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2013), 17-18.

33 Hendrik Ziegler, "Der Anlass für die Abfassung des *Traktats über die Statuen*: die in- und ausländischen Einsprüche gegen das Denkmal der Pariser Place des Victoires," in François Lemée, *Traité des Statues*, ed. Diane H. Bodart and Hendrik Ziegler, vol. 2 (Weimar: Verlag- und Datenbank für die Geisteswissenschaften, 2012), 85.

34 Ibid., 85.

35 One of these charges appeared in the anonymous pamphlet *Sur la statue du roy élevée à la Place des Victoires en 1686*, which, Van Eck writes, "presents a conversation between the abbé Louis Feuillet and a group of persons at the court, including Monsieur, the brother of the king, Madame de Guise and the Grand-Duchess of Tuscany, in which the King is accused of presumption, and his subjects who assisted at the inauguration, of idolatry." See Van Eck, *Art, Agency*, 80-81.



192 *et la statue de Louis XIV*, as well as in her book *Art, Agency and Living Presence* (2015). Lemée's text departs from the example of the king's statue on the Place des Victoires, and the ceremonies and practices that had taken place around it. Lemée acknowledges that statues such as this one can bring about veneration, and in this respect, Van Eck writes, "he continues the traditional line of reasoning, going back to the right accorded to Roman emperors to have their images venerated and the mediaeval doctrine of the king's two bodies, which justifies such veneration through the quasi-divine status of the ruler represented."<sup>36</sup> But, in addition, Lemée attempts to deny the accusations of idolatry by stating that we are not at all dealing with an idol here, since an idol "is taken as the thing itself, and not as an image of the thing" ("L'Idole se prend pour la chose même, & non pas pour l'image de la chose").<sup>37</sup> Therefore, he deems it completely normal to act in front of a royal statue as if the monarch himself is actually present, since the statue "works as an index and a companion of the substantial form itself":

Or les Philosophes nous enseignent que cette façon de parler n'est point impropre: car encore qu'il y ait bien de la différence entre la substance de l'un & de l'autre, & que le Roy ne soit pas la moindre particule de sa statuë, comme elle n'est par la moindre particule du Roy. La ressemblance néanmoins, qui se rencontre entr'eux leur communiquant le même nom & la même figure, fait qu'ils paroissent aussi une même espèce: la figure étant l'indice & la compagne de la forme substantielle.<sup>38</sup>

"In the case of the King," Van Eck paraphrases, the adoration of his statues "does not run the risk of degenerating into idolatry because their prototype is 'ferme et stable'."<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, as far as the use of text is concerned, the statue's inscription of VIRO IMMORTALI formed an unfortunate companion to its referent. It appeared in many criticising texts, which were produced by groups that included courtiers, clergymen and intellectuals.<sup>40</sup> To many, the two Latin words must have appeared as an homage that was approved by the monarch himself. Even

36 Van Eck, *Art, Agency*, 88. For the political concept of the King's two bodies (the body politic and the body natural), which can be traced back to the Middle Ages, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

37 François Lemée, *Traité des Statuës* (Paris: Arnould Seneuze, 1688), 11.

38 Lemée, *Traité*, 425-26: "Now, Philosophers teach us that this manner of speaking is not improper. There is, of course, a difference between the substance of the one and the other, and the King is not in the least a piece of its statue, just like the statue is not at all a piece of the King. However, because of the resemblance they both share they also share the same name and the same figure, which is why they appear to be of the same sort. The figure works as an index and a companion of the substantial form itself."

39 Van Eck, *Art, Agency*, 91. For the original sentence, see Lemée, *Traité*, 11.

40 Ziegler, "Der Anlass," 90.



though the monument, commissioned by the duc de la Feuillade, was a tribute to the monarch, the issue of guilt by association sticks to the image: the crown still *appeared* to facilitate or even desire the presence and appearance of the statue.<sup>41</sup> In a small poem on the inscription, which was added to a later edition of the official description of the statue by François-Séraphin Régnier-Desmarais (1632-1713), the poet warns the king against the dangers of flattery and the associated idolatry. A too elevated title can be quickly fabricated, and a truly grand king cannot risk to be struck down by it:

Reçois ces vrais honneurs, mais fuy la flatterie.  
 Preste d'aller pour toy jusqu'à l'idolatrie.  
 Des attributs divins suy [FK: fuis] l'abus criminel,  
 Et souffre jamais qu'on te nomme Immortel,  
 Ce faux titre, qu'on voit au pied de ta figure,  
 Loin de te faire honneur Prince te fait injure [...]  
 J'excuse toutesfois qu'une trop prompte main  
 S'échappe à te donner un titre plus qu'humain.  
 Tout homme est ébloui de ta grandeur suprême,  
 Mais tu ne peux jamais t'en éblouir toy même.<sup>42</sup>

The poet describes Louis XIV as the *victim* of his own imagery. Although meant as an expression of support, thoughts such as these also undermined the king's reputation. The poet warns the king that a fervent belief in the superhuman nature of his representation would also obstruct his ability of assessing its con-

41 Ibid., 89. The *Viro Immortali* inscription also appeared on medals distributed to the various dignitaries present at the monument's inauguration. An engraved version of the first medal was also published in Ménestrier's *Histoire du roy Louis le Grand par les médailles* in 1689. The creators of the *Histoire métallique*, which was drawn up during the 1690s and graphically reproduced in 1702, decided to omit the two medals bearing the Latin inscription. This may have been done, Ziegler suggests, in response to foreign criticism on the monument.

42 François Seraphin Régnier Desmarais, *Description de la statue ou du monument erige a la gloire du Roy Louis XIV* (Paris: Pierre Marteau, 1690), 22-23. Around the turn of the century, even the series of façades that surrounded the monument – they were designed by Hardouin-Mansart to frame Desjardin's centrally located statue – were not spared in the wave of criticism. In addition to the excessive grandeur that many associated with the statue and its inscriptions, others had troubles with the excessive grandeur of the square itself. In the 1714, architectural historian Jean-Louis de Cordemoy issued the second edition of his influential treatise *Nouveau traité de toute l'architecture*, which included a letter written by one of his brothers, written to engineer Amédée-François Frezier in defence of Jean-Louis. In his letter he addresses his issues with the façades of Hardouin-Mansart's Place de Vendôme and his Place des Victoires, since they share the same architectural rhythm. The element that bothers him in particular is the uneasy relationship between the façades' transoms and pilasters, which 'mixes the small with the sublime' and thus affects the dignity of the square: "C'est ainsi qu'on en devoit user dans les nouvelles Place de Vendôme & des Victoires, où il ne s'agissoit point de multiplier les apartemens & les étages: mais seulement d'embellir ces Places, sauf à pratiquer dans les Maisons qui les environnent des Entre-soles. [...] Pourquoi donc y profiler des Impostes contre des Pilastres? vû que cela ne sert qu'à faire remarquer les divers étages d'une Maison, dont les passans ne se mettent guere en peine. C'est faire une chose hors d'œuvre: c'est oublier son sujet: c'est mêler le petit avec le sublime: en un mot c'est ne sçavoir pas se soûtenir avec dignité." See Jean-Louis de Cordemoy, *Nouveau traité de toute l'architecture, ou l'art de bastir* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1714), 190. My emphasis.

194 sequences. The poet's use of "éblouir," which means "to dazzle" or "to marvel" but also "to blind" or "to stun," is key here. Even though everyone is dazzled by the monarch's supreme grandeur, the poet states, the monarch ought not dazzle himself in the process.

ON THE LOCATION OF THE SUBLIME:  
THE DISENCHANTMENT OF ART AND THE SUBLIMITY IN PEOPLE

Lemée's clear distinction between the idol and the statue also enables him to deny Louis XIV any share in the problem, such as presumption or hyperbole that could lead to promoting exaggerated behaviour. The words with which Lemée opens his seventh chapter dedicated on pedestals of statues, for instance, are aptly chosen; like Charpentier in his *De l'excellence*, Lemée directly links the literal elevation of a statue (for example that of Louis XIV) with the moral elevation of its referent, with their sublimity ("Les élévations ne servent aux statuës des grands Hommes que pour les faire voir au dessus des autres. Il est bien raisonnable qu'on leur déferé cet honneur, puisqu'ils les ont surpassez par la grandeur de leur courage & la *sublimité de leur esprit*.").<sup>43</sup> Moreover, his fourteenth chapter on the "surprising effects of statues" ("De quelque effets surprenants des Statuës") discusses the idea that some ascribe to statues any enchanting, miraculous qualities. In the case of Louis XIV, Lemée argues that any powerful effect or sentiment created by one of his monuments and statues is purely the result of his glory and majesty, rather than some mysterious enchantment:

Mais quelle surprise! quand elle verra que les Monumens de Louïs le Grand, sans être enchantez ny sans recevoir d'influences d'aucune constellation auront néanmoins de soy-même le pouvoir de certaines statuës dont parle Photius, qui retenoient le feu du Mont Etna dans ses cavernes, & empêchoient les Barbares d'aborder au lieu où elles estoient posées.<sup>44</sup>

With these words, Lemée almost seemed to put an end to the ever-repeated rhetorical poetics of enchantment of the seventeenth century, which had time and again associated the art and architecture of Louis XIV with a sense of epic mystery.

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43 Lemée, *Traité*, 153.

44 Ibid., 394: "But what a surprise! when she [Louis' offspring] will see that the Monuments of Louis le Grand themselves, without being enchanted nor being under the influence of some constellation, will nevertheless have the same power we also see in certain statues of which Photius speaks – statues that held the fire of Mount Etna in their caves, and prevented the barbarians from entering the place where they were erected."

Amidst the increasing amount of conflicting and criticising voices on the grandeur of the king, we find two figures who aimed to lay a solid theoretical and historical foundation that could serve as an eternal declaration and glorification of their king's innate sublimity. One of these two was Claude Charles Guyonnet de Vertron, the historian whose proposed inscriptions for the Louvre have already been discussed in this dissertation. Around the time of the inauguration of the Place des Victoires, he published his *Parallèle de Louis le Grand avec tous les Princes qui ont été surnommez Grands* (1685), and a year later appeared his *Nouveau Pantheon*. Both works are very much alike, since they propose a great number of inscriptions, devices and sonnets, all underscoring the sublimity of Louis XIV. Although both texts aim to compare the French monarch to other great rulers from the past, Vertron simultaneously and ultimately builds on the central argument that nothing is more sublime on earth than Louis – as an “über-king,” as Maarten Delbeke described Vertron's approach to the French king in his contribution to *A Transitory Star: The Late Bernini and his Reception* from 2015.<sup>45</sup> Most devices and inscriptions from his *Parallèle* express the same lofty message: “Sublimior illis (*Il est plus élevé que tous les autres Grands*),”<sup>46</sup> or “Tout est beau, tout est grand, tout est sublime en vous, Maist nostre GRAND LOUIS, vous a surpassé tous, Et jamais le Soleil n'a rien vû qui l'égale.”<sup>47</sup> Such elevated rhetoric seamlessly connected to iconographic and architectural ensembles such as the Place des Victoires, with its medals and four illuminating lanterns. Already early on in the *Parallèle*, the book seems to arrive at the conclusion that a comparison with great human rulers is not appropriate; the king's grandeur can only be compared to that of himself, or more befittingly, to the grandeur of the heavens.<sup>48</sup> In his *Nouveau Pantheon, ou le Rapport... aux actions de Louis le Grand*, Vertron tends to value the idea of metaphorical architecture and memory far greater than physical monuments. The large number of inscriptions he proposes work just as well on their own, on paper. Alluding to the Place des Victoires, he counterbalances its use of (perishable) marble and bronze with the permanence of memory through words, such as those published in his book:

45 Maarten Delbeke, “Bernini and the Measure of Greatness: The Bust of Louis XIV and Its Pedestal as Seen by La Chambre, Lemée, and Bouhours,” in *A Transitory Star: the Late Bernini and His Reception*, ed. Claudia Lehmann and Karen J. Lloyd (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 27.

46 Claude-Charles Guyonnet de Vertron, *Parallèle poétique de Louis-le-Grand avec les princes surnommez grand* (Le Havre [Le Havre de Grace]: Jacques Gruchet, 1686), 10.

47 Ibid., 11.

48 Ibid., 7-9.

Le temps qui détruit tout, détruira à la fin le marbre & le bronze, mais il conservera toujours avec respect la memoire de LOUIS LE GRAND, & quand même dans les siecles les plus éloignez nos petits neveux ne verroient plus les restes précieux de ce superbe monument, ils repeteront neanmoins par Tradition en faveur de vôtre illustre Mecene [des] beaux vers de Virgile.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, in his opening *Épître* dedicated to the king himself, Vertron dwells on the near impossibility of the mimetic representation of the monarch. Essentially, his grandeur requires that every type of poetic or artistic representation needs some sort of unattainable “langage divin.” Ultimately, Vertron seems to admit in a state of transcendent ecstasy, only the rhetoric of impossibility remains:

Je confesse neanmoins, que dans le paralelle de VOTRE MAJESTÉ, dans mes autres Ouvrages, comme dans celui-cy, je n’ay pu faire qu’un portrait ébauché de cette Grandeur suprême, qui est au-dessus de tout ce qu’on peut imaginer: En effet, pour peindre le SOLEIL, [...] il faudroit sçavoir parfaitement le langage divin.

Reçois ces éternelles marques  
De mes sinceres vœux & fidelles sermens;  
Pouvoit-on élever de moindres Monumens  
AU PLUS GRAND DE TOUS LES MONARQUES?

Ah, SIRE, dans le transport où je suis à la vue de tant de merveilles, que n’ay-je à present l’éloquence de MERCURE, pour me fournir des expressions proportionnées à l’excellence de si beaux sujets!<sup>50</sup>

This “langage divin” was already hinted at in Félibien’s *Tapisseries du Roy*, when he pointed at the new possibilities of the mysterious characters of allegories and devices. Inspired by the “langage divin” of ancient poetry, Félibien proposed that “[f]ollowing this example, when speaking of the august person of His Majesty,

49 Claude-Charles Guyonnet de Vertron, *Le Nouveau Pantheon, ou le Rapport des divinitez du paganisme, des héros de l’antiquité et des princes surnommez grands, aux vertus et aux actions de Louis-le-Grand* (Paris: Jacques Morel, 1686), 17: “The time that destroys everything will, in the end, also destroy the marble and the bronze, but it will always respectfully preserve the memory of LOUIS LE GRAND. And even in the most distant future, our grandnephews, who would not be able to see the precious remains of this superb monument anymore, will nevertheless traditionally recite [the] beautiful verses of Virgil in favour of your illustrious patron.”

50 See his “Épître,” in: *Ibid.*, xix-xx: “I confess, however, that in the parallel of YOUR MAJESTY, both in other Works as well as this one, I have been able to make only a sketched portrait of this supreme Greatness, which lies above everything that we can imagine. Indeed, in order to render the SUN, [...] one would have to perfectly master the divine language. Accept these eternal signs/ Of my sincere vows and faithful oaths;/ Could we really erect lesser Monuments/ TO THE GREATEST OF ALL MONARCHS? Ah, sire, being overcome by a transport at the sight of so many wonders, I only possess the eloquence of MERCURY at this moment, to provide me with expressions that would have to do justice to the excellence of such beautiful subjects!”

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.”<sup>51</sup>

And with Vertron, we finally return to the original issue that started the inquiry of this thesis: the sublimity of Louis XIV as it was established and asserted by Rapin. And in this assertion, Rapin’s treatise foreshadowed Boileau’s adjusted views on the sublime, which he expressed in the tenth of his *Réflexions* around 1710. One view on sublimity that the two shared was its *truth*, which is a point that is rightfully stressed by Ann T. Delehanty in 2005.<sup>52</sup> In the dedication to Nicolas de Lamoignon de Basville (1648-1724) that opens Rapin’s treatise, the latter writes: “[L]et us seek the truth [*le vray*] without moving away from those things solid in what we think, and let us imagine nothing that is not founded on reason, if we want our thoughts to be well received by the public.”<sup>53</sup> Even though Boileau’s tenth *Réflexion* would express ideas on the sublime that were far more progressive than Rapin’s – Boileau now privileged the idea of sentiment (albeit connected to *goût*) instead of reason or genius in the operations of the sublime<sup>54</sup> – both Rapin and Boileau would insist on truth as the basis of sublimity and its experience. Boileau attempted to explain this by using the example of the *fiat lux* passage [FK: “Let there be light” etc.] in the Scriptures:

S’il se trouve quelque homme bizarre qui n’y en trouve point, il ne faut pas chercher des raisons pour lui montrer qu’il y en a, mais se borner à le plaindre de son peu de conception et de son peu de goût, qui l’empêche de sentir ce que tout le monde sent d’abord.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, for Boileau in 1710, only those things that are universally and eternally true can be felt as sublime, which means that those people who do not agree are therefore bizarre, since they lack perception and taste – a thought that corresponds to Rapin’s “tomber dans le bizarre” when drifting away from the truth.<sup>56</sup>

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51 Félibien, *Tapisseries du Roy*, vii. See note 355.

52 Delehanty, “Judgment to Sentiment,” 170.

53 Rapin, *Du grand*, 14: “[C]herchons le vray sans nous éloigner du solide en ce que nous pensons, & n’imaginons rien qui ne soit fondé en raison, si nous voulons que nos pensées soient bien receûes du Public.” Nicolas de Lamoignon de Basville was the son of jurist Guillaume de Lamoignon, who constitutes one of Rapin’s four sublime human beings in his book.

54 Delehanty, “Judgment to Sentiment,” 170.

55 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, “Réflexion X,” in *Oeuvres complètes de Boileau*, ed. Antoine Charles Gidel, vol. 3 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1873), 399-421: “If one were to locate some bizarre man who found no sublimity in them, it would not be necessary to look for reasons with which to demonstrate their sublimity to him, but instead to pity him for his lack of perception and his lack of taste [*goût*], which prevents him from feeling [*sentir*] what everyone else feels [*sent*] immediately.” This English translation is quoted from Delehanty, “Judgment to Sentiment,” 165.

56 Rapin, *Du grand*, 14.

Boileau's views on the sublime had changed significantly in the more than thirty years after his *Traité du sublime* – he now recognised that the sublime is primarily *felt* – but he would not separate it from the idea of universal truth as the sublime's most fundamental condition. Boileau's passage, which Ann T. Delehanty describes as “ostensibly self-sufficient,” is indeed a circular one. Belgian scholar Christophe Madelein, in his 2010 study *Juigchen in den adel der menschlijke natuur* on the sublime in the Low Countries, similarly recognises the problem of “Boileaus circular reasoning” in this passage, since it says that “the sublime is sublime, because it is sublime.”<sup>57</sup>

As the case studies in this thesis have demonstrated, the means of architecture was considered a potent instrument in the creation of truth and reality, both on paper and in the third dimension. Buildings make us think about extreme and lofty matters, and therefore have the political potential to overwhelm, transport and terrify the public. And most importantly, they are often employed and seen as the extension of their inhabitant's virtue. In retrospect, the emphasis of Rapin and Boileau on universal and incontestable truth as a condition and therefore fundamental evidence of the sublime (be it that of Louis XIV or a biblical passage), can already be traced back to the early years of the monarch's life. The artificial creation of the reality of Louis XIV's *gloire* and his personal history, a discourse in which architecture played a key role, would often invoke the rhetoric and virtuous metaphor of the sublime. However, all case studies have also shown the elusive nature of sublimity. In all its subjectivity and mystery, it was a notion that time and again proved difficult to define and agree upon. Moreover, its lofty vocabulary and rhetoric often relied on opposite extremes – and because human reality, in comparison, often disappointed, disproved and counteracted, the construction of a sublime reality could easily topple over, lapsing into ridicule or excess. Opposite extremes are easy targets for political opponents, since they include notions that are fundamentally ambiguous, such as darkness, terror, nothingness, and the demonic.

A source that best summarises these issues is one that originated outside of the reality and truth of Louis XIV's sublimity that writers like Félibien and Rapin attempted to establish: *Les soupirs de la France esclave qui aspire après la liberté*, a highly critical pamphlet against the monarch's absolutism, which was published from 1689 onwards. We do not know who wrote it, but it could very well have been either the French protestant Pierre Jurieu (1637–1713) or the French Oratorian priest Michel Le Vassor (ca. 1648–1718), who later converted to Protestantism.<sup>58</sup> The anonymous author vehemently attacks the political system in

57 Christophe Madelein, *Juigchen in den adel der menschlijke natuur – Het verbevene in de Nederlander (1770–1830)* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2010), 28.

58 Both authors have always been the most likely candidates for the authorship of the pamphlet. On *Les soupirs*, see also Arlette Jouanna, *Le Prince absolu. Apogée et déclin de l'imaginaire monarchique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014) and Władysław Józef Stankiewicz, *Politics & Religion in Seventeenth-century France* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1960), 213.

France as one of “oppression and of tyranny,” governed by a monarch who has taken the place of the State itself, for the sake of himself and at the expense of the State and its people.<sup>59</sup> The issue of the “immense sums” that circulate in this process leads the author to the matter of the king’s excessive grandeur. As political philosopher W. J. Stankiewicz aptly described it in his *Politics & Religion in Seventeenth-century France* in 1960, the pamphlet stresses the idea that “royal authority has become so elevated that all social distinctions appear negligible; the whole machinery serves only the aggrandizement of the king.”<sup>60</sup> The king has replaced one reality by his own (“Le Roi a pris la place de l’Etat [...] Enfin le Roi est tout, & l’Etat n’est plus rien. Et ce ne sont pas seulement des paroles & des termes, ce sont de réalitez”), but one that is a “vast abyss” that ultimately engulfs everything around it.<sup>61</sup> His reign, the author states, is sustained by flattery: his likeness itself is replicated in “gold, silver, bronze, copper, marble, thread, pictures, paintings, triumphal arches, and inscriptions,” while his deeds can be narrowed down to the gain of a few provinces and the dispossession of the rights and means of his inferiors.<sup>62</sup> The “Grandeur of Louis le Grand,” he writes, is in fact nothing more than “a Love for immense grandeur,” but to which so many “sacrificed so much.”<sup>63</sup> Although the argument of the author strikes by its tenacious and angry character, it is at the same time cleverly composed; in many places, the pamphlet employs the same rhetoric once used to the glory of the king, which appears all the more contrived and banal when placed in a new context. For example, the notion “future generations will never believe,” which Rapin connected to Louis XIV’s sublimity, is here connected to the unbelievably high “revenue of the Crown [...] used for the magnificent buildings to the glory of the king.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the thought of palaces or castles “too small to accommodate such a Prince,” which featured in the proposed inscriptions for the eastern façade of the Louvre, here stresses the king’s profound megalomania.<sup>65</sup> The author is at pains to address a situation that cannot be further removed from the Aristotelian virtue of *magnificence*: instead of investing large amounts of money in projects that would benefit the lives of the people, he argues, the king’s projects actually benefited the king’s own glory and even costed people’s lives. Contemplating the creation and ultimate fate of these structures, many of

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59 *Les soupirs de la France esclave qui aspire après la liberté* (Unknown publisher: Amsterdam, 1690), 18: “Après cela, si nous considerons l’usage que l’on fait de ces sommes immenses qu’on lève avec tant d’excès & tant d’exactions, on y verra aussi tous les caractères de l’oppression & de la tyrannie.”

60 Stankiewicz, *Politics & Religion*, 213.

61 *Les soupirs*, 18.

62 *Ibid.*, 19. Here, he also explicitly refers to the monument of Louis XIV at the Place des Victoires, and its inscription “VIRO IMMORTALI.”

63 *Ibid.*, 19.

64 *Ibid.*, 19.



them left unfinished and uninhabited, the author finally turns to the example of Phaeton, which enables him to evoke its age old association with the fine line between sublimity and excess:

C'est pour laisser à la Posterité un monument de sa grandeur par les prodigieuses dépenses qu'on aura faites à un tel ouvrage. Il est vrai qu'il ne subsistera pas, & que les ravines le ruineront la première année qu'on le négligera; & qu'enfin on l'abandonnera, parce que la dépense de l'entretien surpassera de beaucoup le profit. Mais n'importe; ce seront de grandes ruines qui marqueront la grandeur de l'ame de celui qui en a formé le projet, & sur lesquelles on écrira,

*Quem si non tenuit, magnis tamen excidit ausis.*<sup>66</sup>

But what is most important here, is that the author's reference to Phaeton is a very bitter one, because he is aware of the ambiguity of the sublime. Even though the author himself strongly disapproves of the king's failed and excessive projects, he fears and expects that future generations will rather admire the grandeur of the king's attempts – for people would associate a grand attempt with a grandeur of soul (“grandeur de l'ame”). This is why the anonymous author makes his character quote Ovid: while the epitaph expresses that Phaeton had reached too far, the epitaph also commemorates the greatness of his attempt. In the case of Phaeton, Pramit Chaudhuri rightfully argued in his study on Roman theomachy from 2014, “excessive ambition, however disastrous, proceeds from a spirit of admirable daring and allows [...] a glimpse of the world from an extraordinary perspective, a view typically unavailable to humankind,” which are visions “characteristic of the sublime.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, even excess still holds much potential for the experience of the sublime. There is, alas, still hope for the sublimity of Louis XIV.

65 Ibid., 19.

66 Ibid., 20: “It means to leave to Posterity a monument of its grandeur by means of the prodigious expenses that we will make for such a work. It is certain that it will not stand, that the ravines will ruin it as soon as we will neglect it, and that we will finally abandon it because the cost of its maintenance will greatly exceed the benefit. But this all does not matter, for these will be great ruins that will mark the greatness of the soul of the one who formed the project – ruins about which people will write: *And though he greatly failed, more greatly dared.*” See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:328, 82-83: “QUEM SI NON TENUIT MAGNIS TAMEN EXCIDIT AUSIS” (“AND THOUGH HE GREATLY FAILED, MORE GREATLY DARED.”).

67 Pramit Chaudhuri, *The War with God: Theomachy in Roman Imperial Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 138.



To a significant extent, the early-modern French discourse on the phenomenon of sublimity was concerned with the realm of literature. Longinus' treatise *Peri hypsous* and its French edition by Boileau – to name two influential players in this regard – are devoted to the striking, ineffable effect of writing, both in works of prose and poetry. However, were we to exclusively restrict ourselves to the purely literary, we would lose sight of the developments that took place not only at the boundaries of literature or at its intersections with other arts, but also outside of the world of literary possibilities altogether. At the very outset, this thesis has as its starting point two figures that ventured into these regions: André Félibien, through his *Tapisseries du Roy* and *Entretiens* in the 1660s and 1670s, and René Rapin, in his treatise *Du grand ou du sublime* from 1686. Both would agree on the same matter: a new sublimity that resided primarily in their monarch, which could and should be evoked by means of literature, art and architecture, however difficult this task may be. While Rapin adapted the revalued Longinian sublime in order to be able to speak about this elevated virtue, Félibien – who published his work when Longinus had not yet attained such popularity – employed a variety of words to arrive at the same goal.

However, this thesis did not depart from the strength of their work, but from the shared problems underlying both publications and their thoughts on the monarch. To be able to fully come to terms with these issues, another history of the sublime in seventeenth-century France was needed – one which also takes into account the role of the visual arts in this troublesome process.

## — PART I. THE ISSUE OF OPPOSITE EXTREMES

The sublime has always been a quality dealing with the profound, and when and where it is recognised as a quality, writers resort to its vocabulary and rhetoric of extremes. In the construction of the reign of Louis XIV, seventeenth-century France saw an increasing rapprochement of the domains of architecture and literature that invested in the shared poetics and aesthetics of transcendence. This development was to a great extent the result of a revival of the epic poem in early seventeenth-century France, and with it its elevated style, its architectural fictions, and its effect of *le merveilleux*. The political use of this poetics in the discourse on political power and virtue, was further boosted by the more controlled and centralised collaboration of artists, architects and writers for the sake of the glory of Louis XIV's reign.

During the first half of the century, many writers of French poetry used the *topos* of marvellous architecture in their work. The role of the fictional building – and its connotations of the elevated and ravishing – as a major constituent of laudatory poetry, had its origins in ancient and medieval works of literature, and was more directly influenced by sixteenth-century French and Italian prose and poetry. The revival of the epic genre brought with it three key elements that safeguarded its early modern success: the elevation of style (*style sublime*), the central role of heroic virtue, and the effect of *le merveilleux*. Moreover, fictional buildings on paper or in the mind's eye were not subjected to restrictions that applied in reality, such as rules of structural support or financial limitations, and therefore functioned perfectly as metaphors for limitless and ineffable grandeur (such as a *temple de la gloire*). At the same time, these poetics of *le merveilleux* entered descriptions of Parisian art and architecture, which coincided with a fashion for epic themes in the iconography of artworks and buildings. A driving force behind these developments was the extensive patronage of Richelieu and Mazarin. They facilitated the collaboration of artists, architects and writers, which reinforced a cultural climate in which architects responded to writers and vice versa; marvellous fictional architecture became a source of influence for the construction of real architecture, which, in turn, became praised by means of the poetics of marvellous architecture.

However, the idea of sublimity remained very unstable; its broad semantic field, its highly subjective nature, and its danger to lapse into ridicule or excess were significant and, for a long time, largely undiscussed issues underlying French discourse throughout the seventeenth century. The rhetoric of *le merveilleux* was greatly dependent on the use of spectrums of sublimity: the use of extreme opposites that both have a sublime potential, but especially when they are juxtaposed to form a powerful contrast. But still, notions such as “hell,” or “total darkness” are not only powerful but fundamentally ambiguous, since they can easily be associated with vice instead of virtue. Therefore, a spectrum that runs from “heaven” to “hell” can just as well be seen as a scale that runs from the sublime to the vicious. And since those people who greatly invested in these marvellous spectrums were most of all concerned with the construction of an image of virtue, these spectrums often backfired because of their moral ambiguity. This ambiguous character traditionally suited the struggle of the epic's hero, such as Aeneas' descent into the underworld in Virgil's *Aeneid*. But when applied to real people and real situations, this rhetoric can easily blow out of proportion, and would sometimes work better in the hands of a satirist. In fact, this ambiguity was exploited on a vast scale in satirical attacks on the French crown during the first half of the seventeenth century. The idea of the terror of demonic vice – the complete opposite of the idea of virtuous elevation – became adopted by opponents of Mazarin during the Fronde. In these pamphlets, both the interior as

well as the exterior of the cardinal's Parisian palace were transformed into places of infernal, terrifying wonder. In contrast to contemporary Italian poems on Mazarin, which employed poetic images of apotheoses and heavenly architecture, French satirists attempted to achieve the exact opposite.

In the pursuit of royal sublimity, another conflict concerning the use of extreme opposites emerged at Val-de-Grâce. The creation of the church and its Benedictine abbey complex was the result of a friendship between abbess Marguérite d'Arbouze and Queen Anne of Austria. Despite their shared devotion to the pious idea of humility, they had diverging views on how to elevate this idea through architecture. Marguerite's preference for extreme humility (*anéantissement*) contrasted with the queen's wish to use *magnificence* to elevate the humility of the holy stable. Anne's intentions were a response to the miraculous birth of her son Louis XIV, an event that would define the elevated character of the king's future reign. In response to the church's completion and Anne's death, a large number of authors attempted to resolve the difficult relationship between the queen's *magnificence*, on the one hand, and the idea of *humilité* on the other. They argued that the queen gloriously combined the two notions in her character, and in the building of Val-de-Grâce as an extension of her character.

With the advent of Louis XIV's personal rule came a more controlled and centralised collaboration of artists, architects and writers – a development started by Richelieu and Mazarin and perfected by Chapelain and Colbert – which further reinforced the use of the marvellous poetics of the epic for the glory of the monarch. Both in the creation and description of the Palais du Louvre, a deliberate confusion of fiction and reality was pursued. The Louvre had already been the subject of poetic comparisons for centuries, and the enlargement of the palace during the seventeenth century further nourished associations with (epic) enchanted and heavenly architecture. André Félibien, in his *Entretiens*, even aimed to theoretically – albeit rhetorically – explain and underpin the effect of the Louvre's enchantment, by discussing the palace in the context of *le je ne sais quoi*. Moreover, his ideas form part of a growing interest in the ravishing and inexplicable aesthetic effect of architecture and literature – ideas that would imbue the work of his son Jean-François Félibien on the Dôme des Invalides, and would occupy French intellectual circles the following decades.

Whereas the delayed construction of the Louvre strongly appealed to the public imagination, the palace's enlargement also elicited many contrasting responses. Not unlike the fate of the Palais Mazarin, the case of the Louvre demonstrates the failure of the façade's aim to sustain the suspense of wonder and the ineffable; although the magnificent new shell of the Louvre aimed to amplify the wonder it contained, the shell itself became the subject of much criticism. As we have seen in Part I, any attempt to reach for the extreme and the most elevated

involves the danger of provoking the opposite effect – and some writers dared to comment on the vanity and false rhetoric of the Louvre’s magnificence in its pursuit of epic transcendence in both architecture and poetry. The danger associated with expressing criticism during the personal rule of Louis XIV did not, however, silence all. While some writers characterised the Louvre’s aim for sublimity as a thing of ridicule, others put the vain endeavour of the Louvre into the more elevated perspective of the cosmos and the merciless flow of time.

The idea of the ambiguity of sublimity and the associated thin line between sublimity and ridicule or excess would prove difficult to deny or control – a thought that runs through this entire thesis. Therefore, in the case of the monarch, many efforts would be made during the further course of the century to assert, maintain, and evoke his *own* sublimity.

## — PART II. THE ADDED ISSUE OF SUBLIME HUMANS

Félibien’s *Tapisseries du Roy* demonstrates two major elements that would become vital to further critical discourse on the phenomenon of sublimity and its association with the monarch. Firstly, the *Tapisseries du Roy* is built on the idea of the inexplicable and ineffable sublimity of the king *himself*. Secondly, to invigorate this idea, Félibien and his team departed from the need to employ “new characters” in order to be able to respond to this elevated nature of the king (“pour décrire les grandes actions du plus grand Roy du monde, on forme de nouveaux caracteres”). This language was the emblematic genre of the *devise*, and its concise and mysterious effect could be employed both in architecture and literature. Félibien’s interest in the device’s effect was shared by Jesuit writers Pierre Le Moyne and Dominique Bouhours, who saw in the device – and Louis XIV’s device in particular – the perfect means to evoke the powerful effect of *le merveilleux* and *le je ne sais quoi* respectively.

The king’s miraculous birth and the glory of his deeds are central to the message that Le Brun’s allegories and devices (and by extension Félibien’s publication) aim to express. However, Félibien’s idea to explain and disseminate this mysterious language to a wider audience is pursued to such an extent, that his added explanatory texts are detrimental to the concise language of these devices. Here, we see some major symptoms of the problematic claim of Louis XIV’s sublimity: Félibien aimed to evoke the king’s sublimity for all people and for all time – the same aim that would later return in Rapin’s treatise – but could not overcome a dependence on a language that he himself deemed “not powerful enough.” Moreover, the book tries to uphold the bold idea of a supernatural and superhuman sublimity, but uses earthly and highly ambiguous metaphors and similes in this attempt.

The central question that underlies Félibien's book – how do we evoke Louis XIV's sublimity for all people and for all time? – would continue to play an important role during the subsequent decades. In the same period, from the 1670s onwards, a growing critical discourse on the nature of the sublime developed. It was characterised by a necessity to create of a French critical concept of sublimity, which would be able to incorporate ideas that “neighbouring concepts” such as *le merveilleux*, *le je ne sais quoi* and *la magnificence* shared. Boileau's French edition of Longinus' *Peri hypsous* (1674) would succeed in this endeavour, by using the noun *le sublime* to translate the Longinian *hypsos*, and employing *le merveilleux* as its synonym.

In the wake of Boileau's edition, his revalued Longinian sublime provided a favourable means to continue to uphold the claim of Louis XIV's sublimity, and not exclusively from the side of the Ancients. The 1680s saw the publication of several treatises that employed the Longinian sublime in theoretical reflections on rhetoric, with Louis XIV as the ever recurring example. The majority of these works were part of the *Querelle des inscriptions*, the participants of which all agreed that a public inscription for a royal building should convey the virtue of king and country, and in such a manner that it would never lose any of its power. We can find the sublime in François Charpentier's publication *Defense de la langue françoise pour l'inscription de l'Arc de triomphe* (1676), which defends the French language, instead of Latin, as the most appropriate and powerful language to be put on a triumphal arch for Louis XIV. In the wake of this *Querelle*, Bouhours' *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* (1687) dissected and analysed more closely the narrow relationship between architecture and rhetoric, by means of the Longinian sublime. In this discussion, Bouhours – through his dialogue between the fictional Eudoxe and Philante – focuses on matters such as the sublimity of simplicity in inscriptions, and dangers such as the hyperbole and “sublime vicieux” of Italian descriptions. However, many, such as Bouhours, also knew that the idea of sublimity remained something ineffable; that this was a quality that was much more easily and more often felt and recognised, than created or evoked. This was a fundamental albeit latent problem to which most intellectuals and poets responded by resorting to rhetorical figures of speech and inconsistent argumentation, thereby only revolving around the issue, as well as postponing it.

In several efforts to underscore the monarch's religious policies during the 1680s, and well as his proximity to God, the *merveilleux chrétien* of the epic – which at this time had already left its best days behind it – was rekindled through poems on the victory of Catholicism at Charenton and at the Dôme des Invalides. The entire spectrum of the marvellous was once again employed for this purpose; these poems included the struggle of the hero, the final opposition of demonic forces, and the resolving *deus ex machina*. Prose descriptions of the Dôme also invested in this sense of sublimity. Like his father, Félibien des Avaux explored the

aesthetic sublime experience of art and architecture – a total experience evoked through the combined effect of vast architectural space decorated with sacred emotions of sublimity itself.

The dangers of false and exaggerated rhetoric that Bouhours had addressed, for instance in the case of public inscriptions, became increasingly prominent when a number of inscriptions and public images pertaining to the king, as well as their public reactions, evoked harsh criticism because of their exaggerated character. The superhuman status of the monarch that marvels and dazzles the normal human being, an idea that was expounded in the *Tapisseries du Roy*, now returned very explicitly and concretely in public art and architecture. The marvelous, grand *temples* that had mostly been used as literary and metaphorical devices during the course of the century, were now erected as ephemeral structures in the centre of Paris on multiple occasions. Here, the *merveilleux* left the confines of poetic composition, to be transformed into all too real and concrete three-dimensional incarnations. The degree of the monarch's elevation that was evoked in the temples' iconography and inscriptions, combined with the exaggerated, manic response of the Parisian masses, elicited all sorts of critical commentary from both French and foreign writers. While some condemned the artists and architects in their efforts to transcend the king above the human, others carefully warned the monarch himself, lest he marvel and dazzle himself in the process.

But amidst this criticism on royal art, rhetoric and their Parisian public response, the theoretical work of Rapin cunningly aimed to point beyond artifice. In an almost definitive attempt at underscoring the sublimity of the monarch himself, Rapin's treatise *theoretically* established Louis XIV innate sublimity, which can be felt but can hardly be understood or represented. With his treatise, Rapin asserted a paradigm of the sublimity of virtue that had gradually been developing. As Félibien's *Tapisseries* and Vertron's *Nouveau Panthéon* already suggested, albeit poetically, Rapin argued that in addition to the manifested sublime that can be evoked through grand expressions, there exists a hidden sublime (a "sublime caché"). This type resides in certain people; it is only felt by the heart, and exists independently from artifice, expressing more than what is only evoked through art. Nevertheless, Rapin could not avoid the issue of artifice, and he used the closing paragraphs of his treatise to ask, once again, the very same question that underlay the *Tapisseries* and the *Querelle des Inscriptions*: what can poetry and architecture do together to evoke, both publically and for posterity, the elevated level of Louis XIV?

Although Rapin remained optimistic that such a sublime representation of the monarch would eventually be made, the harsh criticism following the publication of his book truly revealed why not only this representation could never be made, but also why an objectively sublime human being could not exist in the

first place. Some of his readers deemed one of his human subjects more sublime than the other, and Rapin agreed and reformulated the premise of his book. In retrospect, we can see what happens here – and this is a key aspect of sublimity which Boileau was only able to discover just after the turn of the century: the sublime is ultimately a subjective quality. It can only be felt, and can therefore never objectively be asserted, for example in a work or person, let alone be wielded as an instrument of power.

As a quality, the sublime has always been around, and people have always experienced it, but each and anyone in their own particular way. Therefore, one cannot pin it down by theoretically asserting it in something or someone, let alone wield it as an overwhelming force; in the end, only the recipient decides what he or she experiences as sublime. This explains why seventeenth-century French intellectuals were never truly able to grasp the sublime as a notion, let alone their foreign contemporaries. To return to Lydia Hamlett's study of John Richardson: however much Richardson and his fellow intellectuals "had tried to define the sublime there was always something out of their grasp, unquantifiable because, ultimately, affect is subjective."

— THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:  
THE QUESTION OF PERFORMATIVITY

It remains very difficult to assess whether thoughts and conventions on the sublime ("Louis XIV is sublime") were seen by their most prominent disseminators as artificial (perhaps Rapin and Félibien did really experience the monarch as sublime). To try and answer such questions, one risks creating an anachronism. Nevertheless, what can be seen is the increasing institutionalisation of the cultural domain in which the public communication of such thoughts played out. A telling example is Ménestrier's *Histoire du roi Louis le Grand, par les médailles, emblèmes, devises, jetons, inscriptions, armoiries, et autres monuments publics* (*History of King Louis the Great, Told through Medals, Emblems, Devices, Tokens, Inscriptions, Arms, and Other Public Monuments*) from 1689, the title of which not only evokes the central thought but also the scope of its communication towards the public. The enterprise of the *Histoire du roy* that Ménestrier refers to, combined many literary genres and visual arts for the sake of creating a single narrative, and thus claimed a significant part of French culture and society. By manifesting and disseminating a thought on such a scale, through various and mainly public media, and by repeating this process for decades, the Crown invested in the *performative* power of artifice. The *Histoire du roy* made an active claim to reality, by constructing a new reality.



While keeping the many problems of sublimity in mind, the performative aspect of literature and the arts under Louis XIV inspires an array of questions for further research. The idea of performativity constitutes a shift towards a perspective on art that inquires into its reality-producing dimension. The notion was first introduced into linguistic theory by the British philosopher John Langshaw Austin. In his lecture series “How to Do Things with Words,” presented at Harvard in 1955, he argued that under certain conditions signs can generate reality, such as effects and experiences that are brought about situationally – in a given spatial and discursive context – and relationally, to a viewer or public.<sup>1</sup> A few decades later, American philosopher Judith Butler further drew on Austin’s work. According to Butler, a “speech act” can produce what it names in a certain context. Acts such as judicial pronouncement are very clear examples, but Butler takes this idea much further and recognises these constructions and their effect in the much broader context of everyday life. She argues that in society, by endlessly citing conventions or ideologies of reality, people enact and “incorporate” this reality; they perform and embody these fictions.<sup>2</sup> We thus make them appear to be natural, even though they remain artificial.

The most striking examples of such instances of performativity can be found at the intersections of text and image, places where the rhetorical capacity of artifice can be exploited by means of several media. Among the case studies that have been discussed in this thesis, two examples in particular contributed to a large extent to the construction of the idea of human sublimity, and both through the performative practice of the “speech act”: firstly, the combination of inscriptions and fresco at the church of Val-de-Grâce, and secondly the publication of the *Tapisseries du Roy* by Félibien. The church building of Val-de-Grâce presented the viewer with numerous assertions of authorship and divine exchange, which would lead the public to contemplate on this process (Anne presented God with her vow, God presented her Louis XIV, Anne and Louis then built and presented the church to God, and God presented himself through the Eucharist). Moreover, these ideas were constantly repeated in many texts and images throughout the century, which stimulated this contemplation and thus contributed to the miraculous and sacred character of Louis XIV’s person and reign. For instance, when contemplating the inscription that is visible behind the tabernacle (“He/she who made me rested in my tabernacle”) it is difficult for the viewer to establish who is actually speaking, and who is referred to. The Val-de-Grâce thus blurs the

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1 John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

2 See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Derived from Dino Felluga, “Modules on Butler: On Performativity,” in *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* (Purdue University, College of Liberal Arts), last modified January 31 2011, <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/genderandsex/modules/butlerperformativity.html>.



distinction between the Holy Virgin and Anne, between Christ and Louis XIV, which was exactly the desired effect. However, in the case of Félibien's *Tapisseries du Roy*, the figure of the speaking Louis XIV (the "je," "me," and "moi") in its poems achieves a much less powerful effect. In short, all mystery and claims of sublimity fall apart: the book deems it necessary to explain both metaphor and poem to the viewer, while the metaphor itself cannot escape its association with all things earthly (and thus corruptible and ephemeral) instead of eternal and ever-transcendent. In retrospect, we can see that the attempts to wield and assert the sublime are the victim of their own artificiality.