The Portrait of the Sovereign

Painting as Hegemonic Practice in the Work and Discourse of Charles Le Brun and the *Académie Royale de Peinture*.

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Introduction

In the words of Erica Harth, "in seventeenth-century Europe we begin to recognize our own".[1] In the same way, it's in the seventeenth-century that French painting and its communities began to behave like our own modern art world. Released from guild structures and their mechanical identity, painters began to be organize themselves in academic institutions whose concerns and discourse began to shape the nascent independent field of the *beaux-arts.*[2] At the same time, the rise of bourgeois art lovers and a new market for artworks allowed for the flourishing of a literature dedicated to the discussion of painting and taste from which the philosophic discipline of aesthetics would take most of its concepts[3]. Finally, the debates fomented by artists and *connoisseurs* would begin to open the space for a public sphere which would later shape the main political events of eighteenth-century Europe and the ideals which still shape our democratic world view.[4]

However, this first episode of art's modernity in France took place during its period of greatest subjugation to the interests of one autocratic ruler: Louis XIV.[5] Despite the new aesthetic régime painters began to shape for themselves, they did so in one of final most defining episodes of the *Ancien Régime.* Furthermore, this development was not only simultaneous but mutually inspired: the crown was not only the main defender and patron

[1] Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 17
[2] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. Pp. 178-9
[3] Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne*. pp- 35 - 40
[4] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. P. 2-5
[5] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 69

for these academic painters but would also become the main object of these artists' discourse and production.

French classicism was as conservative politically as it was innovative aesthetically, and its advent intimately linked to the political developments of the time. As such, rather than paradoxical, the modernity of these painters should be understood as determining and determined by the social developments of its time.

Painting as hegemonic practice

This thesis studies the first decades of French painting's classicist period with specific attention given to the academic system and its intimate link to the figure of Louis XIV – a period ranging from 1650 to 1690. The analysis of this study develops around one central hypothesis: painting's liberal academic identity and its theoretical advances resulted from the discursive hegemonic function it held during Louis XIV's reign.

This hypothesis will guide the interpretation of the period's documents aiming at a more nuanced depiction of the symbiotic relationship between power and art which greatly characterizes the Sun-King's reign. This period of art's history has been for too long subjected to either a positivist or deterministic reductionism. The former creates a self-enclosed historical narrative of autonomous fulfilment, while the latter reduces art practices to a propagandistic model and the production of "false consciousness"[6].

[6] These two approaches are still very operational in various works on the subject, two of the most significant ones being Lichtenstein's "The Eloquence of Color" and Burke's "The Fabrication of Louis XIV" with which this thesis will heavily engage.

Though both approaches have offered positive and valuable insight they inevitably fall into the same essentialist trap. The first, positivist approach, tends to regard the elements and concepts of the artistic sphere as unchanging or independent from their social and historical context. The second, reductionist approach, tends to see art as a mere reflection of the wider social and political realities of the time, a secondary superstructure wholly determined by the base of social life. Both result in a teleological reading of political and aesthetic developments in which changes in both sphere gain a linear necessity and struggle and negotiation are not taken into consideration in the reading of historical facts. Rather, the thesis aims at a reading of art and power in which these two elements are seen as mutually engendering.

The academic system, and its liberal ideal, was as much an importation of an Italian humanist tradition, as it was a political project aiming at the Sun-King's glorification. The development of painting's rise as an autonomous activity ran parallel and depended on a centralized system of cultural production which, as Antony Blunt observed, amounted to "the closest and most complete State control ever exercised before the present century".[7]

As such the liberal artistic identity painters crafted for themselves aimed at their monarch's service: their independence was a better form of subjugation. The theoretical apparatus developed by these painters was firstly used to describe the paintings in the king's collection as well as to shape the works representing his presence and feats. Charles le Brun, leader of this movements, was both Chancellor of the *Académie de Peinture* and *Premier Peintre du Roy* - the perfect example of power and culture's marriage.[8]

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[7] Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France, 1500 to 1700.* P. 322
[8] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. P. 47

Painting's newfound liberal nobility radiated from its ruler and meshed itself with other arts and discourses fabricating a complete work in the image and resemblance of the glorious king. The discourse of painters was tailored to fit the new functions demanded of their activity. The existence of painting was shaped by the ambitions it served, becoming the visual imagination of power: it presented itself as the sovereign's discourse.

And once painting is understood in this discursive function, we can begin to understand artistic practices as both reflection and producers of the social reality from which they spring. Art is political, rather than politicized or politically inclined: it does not represent or distort a pre-existing political reality but rather participates in its advent.

Expanding discourse

The conceptual framework underpinning the analysis of this thesis has been strongly influenced, though not dictated by, the writings of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, in particular their co-authored "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy". First published in London in 1985, the work proposed a post-structuralist confrontation with the crisis of left progressive politics of the early 1980's – the twilight years of the Soviet Bloc.[9] Laclau and Mouffe's book aimed at Marxism's renovation through the critique of its limited conceptual frame, until then unable to fully comprehend the field of social change and struggle.

The main targets of the authors' critique were the essentialist approach to the formation of classes – in particular the exceptionality of the working class as "the prime mover" of society – and the reduction of all social elements to their determination by the economic, in the last

[9] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. P. xvii

instance.[10] As an alternative Laclau and Mouffe proposed a return to the concept of "hegemony" as an analytic tool capable of explaining social alliances and struggles normally and avoiding Marxist class bias.[11] Though claiming to be "post-marxist" the work resulted in a deepening of Marxism's historical materialism, allowing the antagonistic field of social struggle to expand beyond class and include all social relations without any privilege.[12]

Though the authors limited their historical analysis to the twentieth-century, their work can serve as a privileged starting point with which to understand previous historical events and epochs. Particularly productive is their expanded theory of discourse which, coupled with an extended concept of hegemony, allows for a more subtle understanding of the social as a state of flux. For Laclau and Mouffe, institutions and subjects are unfixed and always negotiated identities and their different moments and structures the result of constant hegemonic struggle.[13]

Departing from the Saussure's unfixed signifier/signified link, and Wittgenstein's concept of "word game", the field of discourse is expanded beyond its common "abstract" understanding*:*

> *"Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the*

[10] Ibid. p. 13
[11] Ibid. p. 43
[12] Ibid. p. 155
[13] Ibid. p. 103

> *linguistic and behavioral aspects of social practices, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities."*[14]

For the authors discourse now includes *the entire realm of human meaningful action.* Departing from this axiom, Laclau and Mouffe go on to affirm the *material* character of every discursive structure, denying the common linguistic/non-linguistic dichotomy relinquishing the category of discourse to the latter. Rather than denying the existence of objects external to the linguistic, they posit that the constitution of objects *qua* objects cannot exist outside any discursive condition of emergence and vice-versa the denial of any transcendental subject position:

> *"The linguistic and non-linguistic elements are not merely juxtaposed, but constitute a differential and structured system of positions – that is, a discourse."*[15]

The discursive substance of the social and the material nature of discourse are two vital insights for this study. They allow us to engage with art and its political nature without falling into a defense of its autonomy, or an accusation of its subjugation to political pragmatics. There is no realm of pure aesthetic self-fulfillment nor is there a crude "zero-level" of politics; both the aesthetic and the political are part of the same discursive totality.[16]

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[14] Ibid. p. 107
[15] Ibid. p. 111
[16] Jameson also posits an equally interesting relationship of these two spheres in his "The political unconscious", which was used in Hart's seminal "Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France".

Furthermore we are able to construct a far more coherent and encompassing field of the artistic, beyond the community of artists engaging with society at large as the *locus* of aesthetic development. An analysis of painting's academic moment will also be required to include the network of patrons as well as the ways in which academic discourse shaped social behaviors outside the *Académie* – namely courtly culture.

Finally, the depiction of the social as a permanent state of flux will force a greater specificity in the analysis of the *Académie's* development as well as that of its discourse. The different moments of this development lose their inner logic and must be understood as reactions to a vaster social reality. Painting and its institutions come to have very different identities before, during and after the influence exerted by individuals such as Jean-Baptiste Colbert or Charles le Brun. Also, political and cultural developments such as the civil strife of the *Frondes* or the rise of the natural sciences must be accounted for when dealing with the plastic arts.

Rather than see the academic movement and its liberal theoretical discourse as proof of a new ontology of painting, the *Académie* becomes a site of struggle where this very ontology was disputed. Rather than a denial of the inherent unfixity of meaning, institutions and their apparatus hint at a series of hegemonic practices attempting to stabilize a particular discursive formation against the flux of the social:

> *"The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed, are what we call "hegemonic practices". […] What is at a given moment accepted as the "natural order",*

jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic strategies."[17]

The development of a new identity for painting is the result of a series of strategies and reactions to a changing social field, of struggles motivated by needs of competing social groups. As such, we must also deny the characterization of certain artists as "impure" due to their proximity to power – such as many art historians' depiction of Charles le Brun.[18] All painters played a political role at the time. That this political aspect is so apparent in some artists and institutions is where the exceptionality of French academicism lies.

The bourgeois ideal of the *beaux-arts* which we later witness is a result of these sedimented hegemonic practices rather than the fulfilment of any modernist telos or historical necessity. There is no "common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle".[19] Though such an analysis puts the stability of certain aesthetic concepts (such as taste and genius) into question as well as the linear analysis of art and its régimes, the field of hegemony allows for a political reading of the artistic without losing its aesthetic specificity. More than painting simply representing/signifying power or that this representation/meaning is influenced by political interests, these very interests and the power they serve only exist *qua* representation/signification.

And here lies Laclau and Mouffe's final theoretical contribution to this thesis: if the hegemonic field presupposes a *structural undecidability of the social*, there can never be a foundational or transcendental center holding the social together. This leads to this thesis'

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[17] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. P. 115
[18] For one of the most extreme examples of this see Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis." P. 207
[19] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. P. 63

hypothesis that certain artists were more aware than others of their political potential, as they forged their new identity. Dependent as this identity was on its institutions and the social field in which they were situated, French classicism is ridden with an anxiety which pierces through its narratives of order and harmony.

Therefore understanding the art and culture of this final episode of absolutism can become a vital tool for its political analysis. As the thesis wishes to expand this lack of a transcendental foundation is common to both painting's academic edifice as well as the French reign. The incoherences and breaks in the academic apparatus and practice may allow us to situate equally significant blind spots in the absolutist project and to question the validity of its narratives.

Absolutism and Social Collaboration

Another body of work upon which this thesis bases its analysis of the *quatourzienne* period is best summarized and represented in William Beik's article: "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration". Connecting regional studies, analysis of central government, military history and works on courtly culture Beik proposes an overarching hypothesis: though absolutism did exist in theory and discourse, its practice was less straightforward.[20] Several works hint at a much more heterogeneous field of strategies and social compromises:

> *"They present a governmental system that had its own rules and momentum. It was no longer medieval but not yet modern. Some of its distinctive features were venality of office, patronage networks, a hierarchical social system which*

[20] Beik, "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration." P- 196

> *put much stress on unequal rights (privileges), the continuing importance of powerful grandees both at court and in the provinces, and a traditional-minded king whose government was based more on personal relationships than on bureaucratic regularities."*[21]

More than a denial of Louis XIV's autocratic rule, these works provide a nuanced understanding of this narrative as a result of a particular constellation of different parties and their struggles: a hegemonic formation. Without a foundational act or element of power, society and its rule, in these studies, were the result of a careful and fragile equilibrium of forces.[22]

This does not make Louis XIV's reign any less exceptional, as one of the few examples of actually existing absolutism. Before his rise, though absolutism already existed in theory, it was far from a successful project: Henri III and Henri IV (Louis' grandfather) had been assassinated in 1589 and 1610 respectively; Louis XIII (his father) had to fight his mother to be accepted as monarch; Charles I of England (his uncle) had been executed in 1649.[23] In February of 1651, at the height of the civil war known as the *Frondes*, the 12-year-old Louis himself had been held hostage by a mob of rebellious Parisians.[24]

Furthermore, the XVII-century was also marked by the secularization of political philosophy with clear attacks on the theory of divine right, best represented by the writings of John

[21]Ibid. p. 197
[22] Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 15
[23] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. P. 32
[24] Ibid. p. 29

Locke. Though monarchic power was still seen as absolute – sovereign – its source no longer sprung from a sacred anointment but the consent of *the people:*

> *"[…]there remains still in the people a Supream Power to remove or alter the Legislative, when they find the Legislative to act contrary to the trust reposed on them."*[25]

The rise of Louis XIV to the throne in 1661 and the first decades of his personal rule, however, appear as a period of unparalleled wealth, social cohesion and peace.[26] Coupled with a series of impressive international military victories, the figure of the monarch was shrouded in an invisible aura awakening the wonder and discipline of his subjects.[27] We should, nonetheless, avoid the common historical narrative which seeks to portray the *quatourzienne* period as one of centralization of power and dispossession of a previous caste system. It is reductive to see the reign of Louis XIV as a simple, though privileged, pivot point from disperse feudalism to centralized capitalism.[28]

On the contrary, the rule of Louis XIV only saw the outdated feudal system be revitalized in order to secure the crown's stability. This system was further complicated by the creation of a complex bureaucratic system as well as the saturation of the elites with new noble posts granted to the rising bourgeoisie.[29] Rather than "robbing the provincial estates of their last measure of authority" by "luring them [the nobility] into Versailles and tantalizing them with

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[25] Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*. Sec. 134
[26] Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 13
[27] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 24
[28] Beik, "The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration." P. 197
[29] Ibid. p. 221

status shorn power",[30] the project of Louis XIV's cultural hegemony aimed at the maintenance and stabilization of its exceptional state of grace.

This insight into the reliance of absolutism on social alliances and their stability allows us to reframe the importance of the academic discourse of the arts. As a discursive practice, painting was part of a wider hegemonic project which aimed at the preservation and naturalization of a contingent political moment. That we still think of Louis XIV's reign as a straightforward autocratic rule is proof of this project's success. We should be reminded that what we witness as a stable social reality is but the result of a series of inner struggles which different discourses aim at erasing:

> *"Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a center."*[31]

The link between sovereign and his painter is vital to this constructed center, leading to both the creation of painting's new identity and the representation power in its constant negotiation. The political analysis of academic painting, aimed at by this thesis, must thus focus on one privileged object: the portrait of the sovereign. It is the painter in creating his sovereign portrait who fabricates the visibility of the king's power as well as the invisibility of its origin.

The king's portrait as icon

The social and political moment which saw the rise of Louis XIV and one of the final moments of actually existing absolutism, gave a renewed centrality to figure of the monarch

[30] Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 15
[31] "Chantal Mouffe: Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention | Eipcp.net."

and his body. The king and his presence became the main safeguard for meaning and social stability in his reign – its function was that of suturing and fulfilling the wholeness of the social body and to mitigate its disparities and struggles.[32]

This centrality of the monarchic image in giving a visual manifestation of a realm's invisible union, give the king's portrait an iconic nature. Since antiquity icons were "symbols of social identity and a community's ideal and were given protective roles and responsibilities for the security and prosperity of the city".[33] The portrait of the monarch and the awe it elicited from its viewers became a central icon in French society, reproduced and distributed within and without the borders of Louis XIV's realm.[34] The portrait gave "visual form to the invisible powers"[35] of the monarch uniting sovereign with its subjects and the different social groups into a common people.

But this episode of intense iconophilia took place at a time in which the very relation between the visible and invisible realms came under question as secular political philosophy gained momentum. *Quatourzienne* portraiture, a symptom of absolutism's final resistance required an endless visual production in the attempt to hide the lack of a referent – the invisible and mystical source of the king's power. The monarchic icon became a floating signifier, in the sense of a "zero-value symbol"[36] which can hold a multiplicity of meanings and become the *locus* of social struggle as different groups attempt to claim and stabilize the symbol's meaning.

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[32] Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*. P. 44
[33] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 37
[34] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. Pp. 178-86
[35] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon."P. 39
[36] Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*.

In the same way that the king's body safeguards the possibility of social unity and harmony, it also points to the very impossibility of this social wholeness[37].

The hegemonic task of the painter can thus be seen to be focused on two main goals: the expansion and multiplication of the monarchic image while guarding it from the dangers of misinterpretation. The whole of the *Académie's* theoretical apparatus could be said to aim at the discipline and control of the means of pictorial interpretation (*qua* reproduction of meaning). Furthermore the privilege given to the more straightforward and clear parts of painting such as *dessein,* and the preference for a more literal style of painting all point to a certain anxiety to avoid different readings of the same work.[38] The *Académie* tried to protect painting against the same danger that threatened its monarch: all those who viewed his portrait should have no choice but be subjected to this sovereign image.

One small caveat must be made: this does not mean that there was no Louis XIV, or that his power was false or merely illusory. We do not claim that social coercion, military victories and political economy were a question of interpretation. However, absolutist sovereignty – the theory under which all of these social phenomena come together and find their meaning – cannot exist outside a particular discursive structure of which the painter becomes one of the main architects (at least during the first few decades of the *quatourzienne* régime).

The portrait of the sovereign, its execution and the social elements which articulate its diffusion and interpretation become the main object of this thesis. To portray is to give

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[37] This is very close to the Laclau's definition of ideology whose function is that of suturing the social into a whole, while its existence is the marker of this very same impossibility. See, Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*. P. 52

[38] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 45

authority an image – and thus its existence – displaying painting's full discursive significance. By means of this discursive significance, it becomes the symbol that holds the academic structure and its apparatus together, avoiding their becoming empty abstract structures. And finally, it secures the patronage network and the monarchic protection required for the painters' to maintain their newfound liberal identity.

It is in this way that we can escape an essentialist understanding of academic art as a pivot point in art history from the merely mimetic craft of image making to the medium-specific modernity of bourgeois art. Rather, academic painting will be put forward as a unique moment in history in which art began to fulfill its deepest aesthetic and political ambitions.

Overview

This thesis will develop its analysis throughout three chapters, each providing a close reading of the relationship between painting and power at three different though mutually determining levels.

The first chapter will give an overview of the first decades of the *Académie Royal de Peinture et Sculpture's* history. It will first draw a parallel of the institution's foundation with that of the struggles between royalist and parliamentarian factions during the *Frondes.* It will then show the clear royalist allegiance of the academic painters and its determining role in the *Académie's* expansion and its members' privileges: the creation of the academic system led by the *Surintendent* Jean-Baptiste Colbert. At the zenith of this development, conclusions will be drawn as to how this new institutional reality was structured in order to give painters the tools and means with which fulfill their discursive function.

The second chapter, building upon the connection between the absolutist project and its alliance with academic painters, will turn to the *Académie* sanctioned theory of painting. One of the new facets of painter's production was that of a literary practice, a growing corpus of theoretical works leading to a new understanding of the image. Special attention will be given to the works of the institution's historiographer, André Felibien. The author's work will be comparatively read in connection to different works and trends in political theory and philosophy – particularly, Cartesian rationalism and the theory of the king's double body. The new relationship created between thought and image tasks painting with the crafting of the king's portrait as proof and testament of the monarch's power.

The third and final chapter will focus on the works and writings of Charles Le Brun, and their direct connection to the absolutist project. Both the leader of the academic movement and the king's *Premier Peintre,* Le Brun appears as a privileged character, closest to power and thus best fit for the task of the monarch's portrait. An analysis of his writings on expression as well as his sketches and drawings exploring the limits of physiognomy will be given in close relation to the rising field of the natural sciences. His work and thought will be shown as a direct engagement with the problematic of power's representation and recognition.

The thesis does not aim at a completely redesigned theory of painting, or a detailed criticism of all works on the French Classical period. It merely wishes to showcase a series of documents and events under the light of new developments of social theory, opening the debate on the relationship between power and art for which the *Quatourzienne* period has so many times been used as paradigm.

Chapter I – Hegemony and Academic Strategy

At the turn of the seventeenth-century, French painting was still at a considerable disadvantage when compared to the theoretical leaps and social renown that the same art had garnered in Italy. There, inspired by classical sources, in an effort to emulate them, painters defended an identity of their practice which could lift it from the condition of mere mechanical craft – a liberal, humanistic tradition which would only arrive in France more than a century later.[39]

This tradition however, once in a French context, altered the artistic class and its institutions with such speed and to such a degree that it would be easier to describe its arrival in terms of a reformulation rather than an importation. Particular to this reformulation were the clear political interests guiding the liberalization process and its immediate adoption of an institutional model in the French context. It took but fifteen years for liberal painters to establish their *Académie* and grant it a prominent role in French society[40] - a stark difference when compared to the Italian tradition, taking more than a century to be given institutional form in the *Academia di San Lucca*.[41]

Furthermore, the clear royalist allegiance professed by members of the *Académie*, showed a clear intermingling of the artistic and the political spheres at the very genesis of the institution. "Liberal" was redefined as "academic" which, in turn, was determined by its

[39] Until the most concise analysis of this importantion remains Renselaar Lee's, "Ut Pictura Poesis."
[40] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 178
[41] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 52

royalist agenda: liberalization marked a both an aesthetic as well as a political turning point for French painting. Lichtenstein writes:

> *"[…]unlike in Italy, painting did not attain the dignity of a "liberal art" through an internal process of autonomization, but by a political act and through the claims of a group of painters to protect a freedom that the favour of their ruler had made possible. Freedom came through royal authority and took the form of authority, just as the painters' desire had from the start assumed an institutional form."*[42]

But this political influence did not tarnish the "liberal dignity" sought by the *Académie*, as Lichtenstein argues later in her work.[43] We do not arrive at an ideologically distorted version of the humanistic ideals of Italian painters. Rather, as was earlier proposed, we witness a very specific episode in this humanistic tradition. In this episode, painters became "artists" by politicising themselves: allying themselves to a royalist faction as a reaction to their changing social and political context.

The *Académie Royale de Peinture*, was both a defense of painters' privileges, as well as a tool serving the absolutist project of securing the crown's monopoly of artistic patronage.[44]

This chapter will analyze the first decades of the French academic movement in painting - its institutions and members as well as the discourse they produced. This analysis will focus on this movement's close connection with contemporary political struggles. A clear connection

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[42] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 139
[43] Ibid. pp. 140-3
[44] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. Pp. 69-71

will be drawn between certain episodes in the *Académie's* life and certain socio-political developments, presenting these episodes as reactions to a wider social reality. Artistic practices and its institutional forms answered to both the needs of a specific political elite while securing painters' means of production.

Ultimately, the academic episode can be seen as a political becoming. Painting became a privileged discursive practice fulfilling the *Académie's* newly appointed function: overseeing all aspects of the production and distribution of the monarch's symbolic life.

Academic ambitions

In the eve of the *Académie's* foundation, France was still home to a system of mercenary trades that defined painting as a mechanical craft. As craftsmen painters were at the same level as pork butchers and millers and beneath barbers and hat makers. Most importantly, a painter was unable to represent or defend himself before higher organs of society.[45]

Painters has little protection against organizations such as the *Maîtrise* – a prohibitive guild-like institution "excluding all non-members from openly selling their works in France".[46] Only an exceptional few were able to escape the guild's grasp due to their status of *Peintres du Roy*.[47] It was precisely the *Maîtrise's* attempt to reduce the number of these crown sanctioned painters, which led a group of young artists to present a proposal for the foundation of the *Académie* before the *Parlement* in 1646.[48]

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[45] Posner, "Concerning The 'mechanical' parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth Century France." P. 585
[46] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P 89
[47] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 125
[48] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 237

These painters, a young generation of artists, returned from their Italian stay at the *Academia di San Lucca,* and led by the young Charles le Brun, were an already privileged group. Their status as *Peintre du Roy,* not only allowed them to escape the *Maîtrise's* control but also left them free to form their own unofficial networks of patronage with some of the richest members of French society.[49] The initial motive for *Académie's* foundation was, thus, more concerned with the protection of these already existing privileges, rather than an inner process of artistic autonomization.[50]

In close cooperation with Martin de Charmois – a legislator and art lover from the rising *noblesse de robe* - and with the protection of both Chancellor Séguier and Charles Mazarin, these painters were able to present their case before the *Conseil* on January 20 of 1648.[51] Its success resulted in the foundation of the *Académie de Peinture*, the writing of their first *statuts,* and the election of their first leader.[52] Most importantly, the *Conseil* ordered the *Maîtrise* to cause "no more problems" to those belonging to the *Académie,* giving academic painters their sought for protection.[53]

Though the *Académie Royale de Peinture* has been characterized as a French version of the *Accademia di San Luca* – training institution for many of these young painters – its structure and function placed it much closer to the *Académie Française.* Not only did both *Académies*

[49] Ibid. p. 228
[50] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 127
[51] Vitet, *L'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, étude historique,*. Pp- 195-207
[52] For a more detailed, though possibly biased account, see *Relation de ce qui s'est passe en l'établissement de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.*
[53] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 236

share protectors – Chancellor Séguier being the most notable – but also many of the older *Académie's* members were already patrons of the academic painters.[54]

More importantly, the close connection with the *Académie Française*, helps us place the *Académie de Peinture* in a more encompassing political strategy: namely, the royalist project of centralizing cultural production and its networks. In founding an institution opposed to the *Maîtrise* painters took a clear political position in a divided France.[55]

What made the *Académie de Peinture* so unique at the time was how the institution included members of supposedly opposed socials castes: the two nobilities and the third estate. The unofficial networks of patrons, vital as they were to the painters, by being given a clear institutional existence, brought together otherwise disparate social groups.[56] Though a necessary condition for the foundation of the *Académie,* the protection and favor of their patrons was only a starting point.[57] The institution's foundation fostered a climate of social collaboration, exceptional in a context of civil strife, which soon allowed painters to aim at new privileges and a higher status.

With the *Académie* painters were able to manage their patronage more efficiently while also distancing themselves from their mechanical/artisanal past. A medal with the inscription *Libertas artibus restituta*, commemorated the institution's birth, inaugurating the liberal, classical age of French painting.[58] But before academic painters could reap the rewards of

[54] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 238
[55] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 60-4
[56] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 25
[57] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 115-6
[58] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 139

their newly politicized identity, the *Académie* would have to survive the more violent years of the *Frondes.*

It was only after these two civil wars that the *Académie* arrived at its more defined and structured identity. Also, only when motivated by the clear threat of social collapse, painters would develop one of the defining traits of French Classicism: its reliance on the production of an abstract theoretical discourse.

Academic discourse

The fate of academic painters ran parallel with the fate of the monarch they served. As such, much like the royalist faction during the *Frondes*, the first years of the *Académie* were ones of struggle. The institution in itself was not sufficient to alter the long-lasting and structured hierarchy of occupations in France. Though ranked at the same level as lawyers and university professors, the *académiciens* still had to endure the *Maîtrise's* attacks in various court cases and pleas to a still traditionalist *Parlement.*[59]

This was only made worse by the defeats suffered by the royalist faction during the second round of civil unrest which marked the beginning of the *Fronde des Nobles* in 1650. The fall from grace of Chancellor Séguier as well as the forced exile of Jules Mazarin[60] meant the *Parlement* became the remaining stable center of power. This centrality of the *Parlement* was only strengthened as the insurrectionists stormed the Louvre palace taking the child-king Louis as their hostage.[61]

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[59] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 239
[60] Ibid. p. 242
[61] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. P. 29

Though necessary for the *Académie's* foundation, the choice of sides in the civil war left painters defenseless against the *Maîtrise*, clearly favored as it was by the parliamentarian forces. As Heinich remarks:

> *"It was through the two parties' struggle - the corporative **maitres** supported by the parliament [...] and the **académiciens** protected by the king - that the two great forces involved in the [french] civil war confronted each other."*[62]

A pragmatic decision at the time, the academic painters attempted a merger with the *Maîtrise* in order to calm hostilities during the *Frondes'* most troubled years:

> *"to ease the harsh hand of the opposition which the jury [of the Parlement] had shown against the registration of the letters patent, and to lift all obstacles to the verification of the establishment of the Académie, as it was perceived that several counsellors of the Parlement were ready to reject these novelties"*[63]

However, the *académiciens* had overestimated their own position, and the plan was foiled, owing to the same weakened state they wished to overcome. Most importantly, they had greatly underestimated the capacity of the *Maîtrise*, a far larger and more mature institution than the *Académie.*[64]

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[62] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 94
[63] *Relation de ce qui s'est passe en l'établissement de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.*. In Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 239
[64] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 69

Not only the *Maîtrise* counted with the *Parlement's* direct support – which would never extend to the *Académie* – the *maîtres* far outnumbered the *académiciens,* internal votes becoming a vehicle for the quick redistribution of executive power. The merger benefitted the *maîtres* to such a degree that many of the *Académie's* original members abandoned the institution. Others preferred to remain absent - including Le Brun during the whole second half of 1652 - claiming to be "unhappy with the junction".[65]

Finally, the lack of a defined institutional identity meant liberal painters had lost any means to differentiate themselves from the mechanical/artisanal world of craft they had initially rebelled against. The *Académie* had become an empty symbol, and the liberal project left with no resources.

It is at this point of identity crisis that the theoretical discourse of liberal painting became a vital tool in the *Académie's* resistance. In 1653, Henri Testelin – one of the *Académie's* founders – presented a proposal for the establishment of formal lectures. This proposal, inspired by Charles Le Brun's pedagogical preoccupations, defined the topics proper to these events:

> *"On all the parts of painting and sculpture, wherein the principles of which they consist should be explained* ***methodically and clearly*** *[méthode et clairté], and with that* ***superior understanding*** *[cette superiorité de lumière] that only*

[65] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 241

the Académie was capable of bringing to this ***project of instruction*** *[plan d'instruction]"*[66]

Though a novel activity for the *Académie*, these lectures were liked to supposed already existing informal sections and therefore a logical extension of the institution's project. The *mémoires* of the institution illustrate this argument:

"At first these were limited to private advice: later they were more general observations, which imperceptibly turned into learned and enlightening dissertations on the principles of drawing as a simple imitation, on the way to enrich and ennoble that which was drawn from nature with the beauties of the antique, on the character and merits of the great men of the Roman school and that of Bologna, and ultimately on everything that could have a bearing on that fundamental part of the fine arts."[67]

The themes selected for these meetings were of little interest to the *maîtres* wishing to distance themselves from any abstract concerns.[68] The proposal was accepected and by August of that same year both the order, procedure and content of these lectures had been decided upon. The basic topics upon which these were "the outline, light and shade, colour and expression"[69] - the same basic categories which were outlined in the many treatises of the Italian liberal tradition of painting.

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[66] Dussieux, *Mémoires Inédites Sur La Vie et Les Ouvrages Des Membres de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*. In Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions* P. 69
[67] ibid.
[68] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 93
[69] Montaiglon (Anatole de), *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648-1792*. P. 265

It is from this point that the "importation" of the Italian theoretical corpus became an official part of the *Académie's* production. Once again we how the choice, more than aiming at an aesthetic fulfillment, used the aesthetic as a political means. Though these lectures would have little influence over the *maitres,* Testelin managed to create a secluded space where the *académiciens* could gather, throughout the harshest period of the merger.

Furthermore, the officialization of these lectures effected a shift in the painters' liberal identity and its dependence on the rational faculties of the intellect. Initially the liberal strategy was one of showcasing the relationships between painting and other liberal arts, as well as other occupations held in higher social esteem.[70] With Testelin's lectures however the strategy of intellectual supplementation was radicalized into one of intellectual essentialism – showcasing how the core elements of the art were themselves intellectual requiring no analogy - very much influenced by French Cartesianism.

This change became all the more significant with the return of the royalist faction in 1654, allowing the *Académie* to dissolve the merger and take a more aggressive stance towards the world of craft and its institutions.[71] Whereas before the connection to the rational faculties allowed painters to attain a higher social status, these faculties now became an *a priori* for any pictorial practice. As Félibien, historiographer of the *Académie* wrote in one of the institution's first documents after the merger: "Painting is first and foremost an intellectual activity".[72]

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[70] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P.126
[71] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 253
[72] Félibien, *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture, pendant l'année 1667*. F. 3

If before the academic painter wished merely to safeguard his privileges, distancing himself from the world of craft, this new intellectual essentialism led the painter to claim superiority over all visual crafts. The liberalization of painting became the denial of craft, a prejudice was established against any artisanal or technical aspect of image making[73].

The lectures first proposed by Testelin, would continue to be a central part of the *Académie's* activities, gaining the name of *Conférences* with the new *statuts* of 1657.[74] A new discourse on and of the arts began to form. Painters, rather than discussing techniques, investigated painting's "being and **rationale** *[raisonnement]"*[75].

Young artists wishing to enter the institution were required to provide a theoretical defense of their entry work. Also, they were expected to interpret works of previous masters by correctly applying the *Académie's* concepts.[76] This newly formed theoretical apparatus also aimed at becoming the standard for *conoisseurs* and aspiring *amateur* painters – a discursive tool unifying the different social strata which the institution depended upon.

The self-proclaimed abstract purity of these discussion should not, however, lead us to consider it as a merely linguistic device. On the contrary, as an institutionally sanctioned theory, we witness the *juxtaposition of linguistic and non-linguistic elements,* being best defined as ***discourse***. Classical academic theory, and its application to all aspects of cultural production, would re-organize artistic labor and exchange, restructuring the distribution of its means of productions.

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[73] McTighe, "Abraham Bosse and the Language of Artisans." P. 6
[74] Montaiglon (Anatole de), *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648-1792*. P. 266
[75] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 92
[76] McTighe, "Abraham Bosse and the Language of Artisans." P. 5

This same discursive production – first developed as a defense against the *Maîtrise* – would make the *Académie* a palatable institution and model for the victorious royalist faction and its hegemonic project. The rise of Louis XIV in 1661 – and, as importantly, his *Surintendent* Jean-Baptiste Colbert – inaugurated a new stage in the academic project's expansion leading it to become the paradigm for French knowledge production.

Academic expansion

Though the *Académie's* foundation and discourse were the fruit of the struggle painters endured for their liberal identity during the threatening years of the *Frondes*, the cessation of this threat would not lead to their reformulation. The intellectual essentialism and institutional identity of liberal painting would remain the *Académie's* cornerstones throughout the years of its expansion.

In the Summer of 1661, with the death of Mazarin, the start of the young Louis XIV's personal reign came unchallenged. The *Frondes* slowly became part of history and the weakening of the opposing noble houses and the *Parlement* cemented the newfound power of the Bourbon house.

Two months later, on August 17, the young Louis XIV made the first display of that power, when attending the festivities organized by his *Surintendent,* Nicolas Fouquet. Inaugurating his recently finished and lavish Vaux-le-Vicomte palace, with the monarch's presence, the minister flaunted a court far more glamourous than that of any French king to that time.[77] The events following are well known: Fouquet, accused of embezzlement and charged with

[77] Foerster, *Das Barock-Schloss*. p. 41

treason for "usurping the cultural role of the king", was imprisoned in September 5 and sent away to a Piedmontese fortress where he would remain until his death nineteen years later.[78] In what was the first major political act of his personal rule, Louis XIV set himself the right to France's cultural monopoly – a task he handed to his new *Surintendent*, Jean-Baptiste Colbert[79].

The influence Colbert would have in the cultural panorama of his time cannot be overstated, amounting to what Antoine Schnapper described as the "Colbert miracle".[80] In few cases was this "miracle" more apparent than in the *Académie de Peinture's* immediate future. A *protégée* of both the deceased Mazarin and Chancellor Séguier, Colbert's interest in the *Académie Royale de Peinture* was clear since the very first months of the statesman's activity. In the early Summer of 1661, few weeks before Fouquet's arrest, Colbert met in secret with Séguier, resulting in the young *Surintenden* being handed the position of the *Académie's Vice-Protecteur* by the older Chancellor.[81]

In September 13 of that same year, little over a week after Fouquet's arrest, the *Académie's* headquarters were moved to the *Palais Brion* under direct dependence of the Royal Palace.[82] The painterly institution's economic hardships were instantly brought to an end with an

[78] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. P. 33
[79] Ibid. p. 48
[80] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 141
[81] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 254
[82] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. p. 142

official budget of 4000 *livres*[83] – far beyond the 500, fought for in 1651 – as well as several pensions for its most important members.[84]

The defining step in the establishment of the *Académie's* privilege was achieved with the *Statuts* of 1663.[85] In this careful reworking of the 1657 version, we see the institution taking full advantage of its newfound prominence – henceforth it took but three years of training within the *Académie* for a painter to gain full independence from the *Maîtrise.*[86] The *Académie* was soon flooded with a growing number of applications, leading their numbers to rise from 35 to 86 members in little over a year.[87] The rising numbers, though never truly a majority in the community of French painters,[88] pointed to a moment of expansion in which the goals and responsibilities of the *Académie* required more elements to be carried out.

With an almost direct access to the crown coffers and independent from the *Parlement* or the *Maîtrise*, the *académiciens* turned their efforts to shaping the exterior from which they had first isolated themselves.[89] The *Académie* now looked to impose their own ideals and structure as a universal standard.

To this end, theory and discourse became primary tools, allowing *académiciens* to sort activities and establish chains of command and production, by levels of abstract intellectual purity. A hierarchy of genres, already discussed in the *Académie's* first lectures, was

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[83] *Relation de ce qui s'est passe en l'établissement de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.* P. 57
[84] Montaiglon (Anatole de), *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648-1792.* Pp. 203-204
[85] Vitet, *L'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, étude historique,*. Pp. 261-71
[86] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 144
[87] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 312
[88] The *Maîtrise*, even at its weakest, would always count with at least five times the number of the *Académie's* members.
[89] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 157

translated into a hierarchy amongst its members. Upon entering the institution, artists were labelled and sorted, with history painters at the very top and any craftsman in a semi-honorary status with as little power as possible.[90]

The prejudice against the manual aspects of artistic labor would be further radicalized as the official discourse was purged of any mechanical or technical jargon. The academic ideal became that of a transparent canvas, concealing all traces of the painter's brush.[91] The liberal painter's knowledge of his art's intellectual principles allowed him to overcome the canvas' physical limitations, through the nobility of the topics and objects he chose to represent.[92] In the *Conférences* – far more formal and prestigious events than Testelin had first imagined – paintings became examples of principles, an inverted *ekaphrasis* in which description preceded image.[93]

As theory became the *a priori* for image making, *académiciens* – as producers and defenders of this theory – appointed themselves as taskmasters of the realm's visual arts. Two satellite institutions were created to expand the *Académie's* influence: a network of factories, the most notable being that of *Gobellins* (1663) and the *Académie Française de Rome* (1666).[94]

In *Gobbelins*, more than 200 workers were separated into different tasks in a quasi-Fordian system, directly supervised by the members of the *Académie.* Overseeing the usage of different techniques and technologies towards the creation of the lavish furnishings for palaces, academic painters saw their rational purity translated into concrete work relations in

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[90] McTighe, "Abraham Bosse and the Language of Artisans." P. 5
[91] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P.43
[92] Marin, *Le portrait du roi*. P. 258
[93] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. Pp. 78-79
[94] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 70

which "all tasks were divided and hierarchically organized". Only the *académicien* "had full knowledge of the various steps needed for the completion of a work" and *"*would enhance the techniques and invent new ones" to be applied by the disciplined artisans.[95]

The shift from craft to manufacture which characterized the *quatourzienne* régime depended on a new category of *intellectual* labor, of which the academic painters held the monopoly. This labor, for which the *Académie* was responsible, aimed at importation of foreign techniques and technologies – such as Venetian glasswork or Dutch porcelain - to further Colbert's mercantilist policies. The goal was to make France self-sufficient in all aspects of cultural production, becoming a new center for international artistic excellence, to be emulated by its foreign counterparts.[96]

The training of these academic taskmasters was the responsibility of the second satellite institution: the *Académie Française de Rome.* Founded in 1666, its goal was that of systematizing the Italian training trips from which the original members of the *Académie* had benefited – the Vouet brothers, Charles Errard (who became the satellite *Académie's* director*),* and Charles Le Brun himself.[97]

With this Roman satellite, the *Académie de Peinture* attained complete control of its members' training process, including its final stages.[98] Colbert himself oversaw the terms of this final pedagogical phase, having the young artists copy all works present in the city as their main priority:

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[95] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 47
[96] Réau, *L'Europe Francaise Au Siecle Des Lumieres.* P. 13
[97] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 148
[98] Ibid. P. 151

> *"[…] that the painters should make copies of all the beautiful paintings in Rome, that the sculptors create sculptures after the Antique ones, and that the architects draw the plans and elevations of all the beautiful palaces and buildings"*[99]

With the end of their Italian sojourn, the newly trained artists would supply the crown with a steady stream of artworks fully emulating the now official style of the *Académie.* Also the copies resulting from the painters' training – translated into plans and techniques – were applied and industrialized in factories such as *Gobbelins.*

The aesthetic and discourse endorsed by the *Académie* reshaped the distribution of labor and its relations of production and exchange. The ideal of the transparent canvas was not a mere aesthetic goal but a social paradigm which sought, at each level of production, to efface the signs of labor and their recognition. In the same way the individual artist sought to overcome the physical limitations of his art, the *Académie* aimed at overcoming the limits of production imposed by the previous organization of the artistic community. And in the same way the painter-theorist divided painting into its principles, transcending it with the cold transparence of reason, the academic-taskmaster divided pictorial process into production lines imposed through royal authority. The corporations and guilds were both fragmented and dissolved into an all-encompassing academic principle, the physical reality of labor being covered by the seemingly cold and detached universality of neo-classic ideals.

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[99] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 150

We should not however characterize this process and the resulting system with the reductive labor of propaganda. The academic system was more than a propaganda machine disciplining the arts to cover and embellish the crude reality of power. The academic system ***was*** the reality of power, all aspects and fields of knowledge and culture were shaped by this new paradigm in which form and content were locked in a mutually engendering dialectic.

The system was only made the more encompassing as Colbert sought to expand the academic model to other areas of knowledge production. Already in 1661 the king inaugurated the *Académie de Dance,* more out of personal caprice then political strategy. However, with the *Académie de Peinture's* success, an academic system began to form with the *Académie des Sciences* (1666), the *Académie d'Architecture* (1671), the short-lived *Académie d'Opéra* (1671), which later became the *Académie Royale de Musique* (1672), and also a failed attempt at an *Académie des Spectacles* (1674).[100]

At the center of this expanding network the unofficial but highly influential *Petite Académie* was established in 1663, composed of few members from the other *Académies* and directed by Colbert himself.[101] Though officially responsible for the composition of inscriptions for the crown,[102] the small institution became the eyes of the *Surintendent*, unifying the otherwise fragmented system of *Académies.*[103] No project would be accepted without first being approved by its members.

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[100] For more on these different institutions see, Hahn, *The Anatomy of a Scientific Institution*., Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King*.Hess and Hess and Ashbery, *The Academy*. Pp. 29-37

[101] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 70

[102] Becoming the *Académie des Inscription* in 1696, years after Colbert's death.

[103] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. Pp. 29-30

Though this surveillance had a stifling effect, it also gave the crown's cultural policy an unheard level of coherence – thus the liberalization process paved the way for a state-controlled academic system. Only the members of the *Académie de Peinture,* armed with their theoretical eloquence and institutional power, could navigate this new bureaucratic complex, further ensuring their élite status. In no case is this truer than in Charles Le Brun – both director of the *Académie* and a close collaborator with the members of the *Petite Académie*[104].

But the expansion of the academic model was not only disciplinary, but geographic as well. Colbert would call for the foundation of six provincial general *Académies*[105], as well as smaller institutions dedicated to painting reaching a total of 28 by the year 1786.[106]

Against this discourse and resulting infrastructure, the *Maîtrise* was mostly defenseless, suffering a crisis which had both economic and social repercussions. Not only were craftsmen underpaid but they were stripped of their previous dignity, now mere cogs in an academic industrial complex organized by degrees of intellectualized abstract purity. In little over twenty years the means of image production had passed from a disperse guild system to a centralized academic one, supervised by painters and under direct control of the crown.[107]

But with the system's expansion came also the need to maintain a delicate balance between a unified cultural production and a fragmented social reality. The *académicien's* task would exceed the confines of its own institution, becoming preoccupied with naturalizing the new

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[104] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 257
[105] Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province*. Pp. 19-20
[106] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*.P. 257
[107] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 67

system in society at large. Only if the conditions of social collaboration were maintained, could the painters' safeguard both the crown's cultural monopoly and their prominence, therein dependent.

Academic hegemony

If the expansion of the *Académie* ran parallel with the meteoric rise of Louis XIV, the same parallel leads painters' anxieties to mirror those of the crown. Once fully established, academic painting aimed at arresting the process of change from which painter's had initially benefitted.[108] One of the *académicien's* most important goals became the maintenance of the exceptional and seemingly spontaneous social collaboration which had given rise to their monarch.[109] For academic painters this unity of the social should become a unity of taste, further bonding the social groups in their cultural consumption; a goal best achieved by the application of the *Académie's* theoretical discourse.

By its abstract nature, free from the specialized jargon of artisanal craft, academic theory gained a unique horizontality, able to transverse different social groups.[110] Reception theory had become the cornerstone in the *Académie's* discussions: the success of a painting was measured by its capacity to transmit information and elicit specific emotions from its audience. These theoretical discussions were open to a growing community of art lovers and enthusiasts. This new undefined group included individuals from both the nobility and the

[108] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. p. 147
[109] Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 12
[110] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 132

bourgeoisie who, though not official painters, could enter the ranks of the *Académie* as honorary members.[111]

These *amateurs* soon became a priority for academic painters, especially as their institution's success depended on the control of an ever-changing art market which escaped Colbert's centralizing efforts. The *Maîtrise,* though unable to directly influence the *Académie,* still held greater sway in the consumption of artistic goods. Even at the height of the academic system, the ancient institution still boasted five times more members than their academic counterparts, a number which doubled by 1697, as the *Académie* began to stagnate.[112] Most importantly, the *Maîtrise* did not suffer from the academic elitism which allowed it to influence vaster social groups.

The rising interest in cultural consumption, though beneficial for the *Académie,* also lead to a growing demand for artistic goods among the non-aristocratic wealth quarters of French society. This entry of artworks into the French market, unsanctioned by academic taste, was a direct consequence of this of the *Académie's* incapacity to fulfill these new demands.[113] Even the *Académie's* theoretic monopoly was threatened with the birth of a new literary genre: the painting companion and tutor. Composed of works aiming at the training of *conoisseurs* in both the creation of their own works and the appreciation of others', this literature offered new set of concepts, many times opposed to academic ideals.[114] Chambray,

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[111] Posner, "Concerning The 'mechanical' parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth Century France." P. 591
[112] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 145
[113] Posner, "Concerning The 'mechanical' parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth Century France." Pp. 583-4
[114] McTighe, "Abraham Bosse and the Language of Artisans." P. 11

one of the initial defenders of the liberal project, describes this new discourse, already in 1662:

> *"They have even invented a Jargon expressly for them, with which, accompanied by gestures and very emphatic expressions, they exaggerate magnificently in order to make one admire the Freshness and Loveliness of the Coloring, the Freedom of the brush, the bold Touches, the Colors thickly impasted and well nourished, the separation of the Masses, the Draperies well cast, the rare Folds, the Masterful Strokes […] that one never saw in the Works of the great Ancient Painters…"*[115]

These were dangerous developments for an *Académie* tasked with the monopoly of all cultural and artistic production, including its discourse. Though the *Académie's* structure – and with it the *Gobbelins* factory and the *Académie de Rome* – managed to control and secure the monopoly of all Roman painting in the French realm, this monopoly was still too local and specific.

Reacting to this changing reality, there appeared from Colbert's own initiative a new project aimed at the legitimization of the crown's taste. During one of his visits to the *Académie* in 1666, the *Surintendent* called for the realization of monthly *Conférences* in which painters would "present and give an explanation of one of the best pictures from the King's collection".[116]

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[115] Chambray, *Idée de La Perfection de La Peinture*. P. 118

[116] Montaiglon (Anatole de), *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648-1792*. p. 298

Mirroring Testelin's initial lectures, these *Conférences* supplemented the king's collection with a conceptual logic of "reason", "adequacy" and "decorum". Under the banner of Nicola Poussin's classicist ideal, the *Académie* aimed at supplying Roman style with a universal value. Roman style became *Grand Style* which described itself as Classical and thus managed to transcend history.[117]

It was in this moment that academic discourse reached its most developed and hegemonic formulation. The classical theory of the academic painters was not only preoccupied with justifying their own production, nor controlling the overall production of the artistic community as it also aimed at establishing the conditions for the reception of any work by any element of society. Academic discourse, as hegemonic, in Mouffe and Laclau's formulation, was created "*to dominate the field of discursivity"* and *"to arrest the flow of differences".*[118] By becoming classical – connected with the two previous Golden Ages of antiquity and the Renaissance – the style of the *Académie* acquired a mytho-historical value, transcending the taste of any individual.

This classical ideal was then diffused to the *Académie's* exterior, with the publication of the *Conférences* in 1668, and other works by members of the *Académie* as an antidote against the non-official literature consumed by art lovers.[119] Furthermore, the *académiciens,* able to attend the higher social circles, were able to infuse these preoccupations in the élite of the different *états.*[120]

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[117] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 54
[118] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.. P. 112
[119] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. Pp. 275-6
[120] Craveri and Waugh, *The age of conversation*. P. 48

This new elite, a careful social construction of the régime, would not only emulate the academic ideals in their artistic tastes but also in their own behavior. The classical ideal shaped the new social category of the aristocratic *Gentilhomme*: a state-sanctioned cultural elitism ridiculed in *Molière's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme"* (1670). Each member of this educated circle crafted its image as an (academic) artwork,[121] through strict self-monitoring and a growingly complex series of rules compiled in publications on manners and *decorum.*[122]

The academic discourse attempted to shape the behavior of the country's *élites* but this social body would never be fully controlled. The rise of the public sphere, the growing art market and the heterogeneous views on artworks ensured that the *Académie's* own practice would be one of constant struggle.[123] In that sense, the *Académie's* behaviour mirrored the anxiety of the political project which it served, dependent on a social collaboration it could never fully secure.

As such, the more dependent an individual was upon an institution, the greater his preoccupation in securing the discursive coherence of his action with the institution. In the case of the *Académie Royale de Peinture.* Charles Le Brun and André Felibien, the institution's director and historiographer respectively, are prime examples. To secure the validity of classical painting, a constant negotiation characterized the definition of painting's

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[121] For a careful analysis of the Salons and their culture see Lecoeur, "Conversation and Performance in Seventeenth-Century French Salon Culture."
[122] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 42
[123] An interesting application of the concept of public sphere from Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. can be seen in both Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. and Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Though the refutation of these works' thesis would be far too lengthy for the present text, this thesis also aims at supplying a starting point with which to question the Habermasian structural essentialism and teleological approach to the social.

identity and its relationship to power. The following chapters will analyze the discourse and practices in which this negotiation was most apparent during Louis XIV's reign.

Chapter II – The empty portrait

The academic discourse and its proximity to power had effects beyond the community of painters and their means of production: it also reformulated the very identity of painting. The importance of the painting and its institutions as one of the crown's main tools can best be understood once we look at the more granular relationship between painter and sovereign.

This relationship was defined by two seemingly opposed directions. On one hand, painting gained an ever greater independence from all other discursive practices, even claiming a superiority over genres such as poetry and history. On the other, this rise in power is inversely proportional to the complete subjugation of painters to the monarch Louis XIV. Competitions were held annually at the *Académie* to distinguish the best portrait of the monarch.[124] All paintings discussed in the *Conférences* – one of the sources and proofs of painting's discursive superiority - belonged to the monarch's collection.[125] All of the *académiciens'* works were addressed to their sovereign and were allowed existence by his privilege alone.[126]

Historical painting, highest of genres and symbol of painting's nobility, lost its mythological and biblical theme, as painters opted to portray the king as their privileged object.[127] The monarch, no longer content with being represented as Alexander or Hercules, became a symbol of himself and his own power – a self-signifying icon. All painters became portrayers,

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[124] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 74
[125] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 146
[126] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. p. 48
[127] Ibid. p. 38

all their works were but fragments of a mystical all-encompassing monarch, which was both object, source and creator of all images. Chapelain, member of the *Académie Française* as well as the *Petite Académie*, wrote to painters as a warning, lest they forget their allegiance:

> *"In this way, as your laborious hands forever*
> *Pursue the glorious history of Louis (…)*
> *Forget not that you owe to him your inimitable traits*
> *Which come from his glory, and that so you and your equals*
> *Belong to the Prince and to him are reserved."*[128]

This chapter traces the process through which painting attained its conceptually autonomous identity while, at the same time, became entirely dependent on a monarchic figure. Two texts by André Félibien, historiographer of the *Académie de Peinture*, show how these seemingly paradoxical formulations – independence and subjugation – are necessary for the philosophical coherence of absolutism. This reading aims to provide a glimpse into the nature of absolutist power which painters alone were privy to.

The fate of the image

The institutional independence of the *Académie* was mirrored by the same conceptual independence that painters wished for their art. The unity of institutional praxis and theory was manifested in a pictorial paradigm, in which all disciplines and social behaviors looked to painting as a standard. This pictorial paradigm aimed at the reversal of the discipline's previous dependence on other discursive practices.[129]

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[128] Perrault, "Oeuvres Choisies de Ch. Perrault ..." in Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 36
[129] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. 117-37

A privileged tool for this task, the *Académie's* theoretical apparatus imported the concepts of the Italian humanist tradition, reformulating them in order to fit the French context. We witness the compilation of the fragmented body of literature belonging to the *Ut Pictura Poesis* doctrine of the Renaissance. These texts and their authors fashioned a liberal identity for painting by proving its semblance to other liberal arts such as poetry and music.[130]

However, this doctrine was severely limited by its reliance on examples and arguments native to other arts. Painters found themselves in the paradoxical situation of "picking up the quill to praise the superiority of the brush".[131] This limitation was only strengthened by the still active Platonic prejudice towards the image and its mimetic nature. Even at the beginning of the seventeenth-century, the image was still regarded as a copy of the real, twice detached from the purity of the Idea, which scholastic philosophy alone could grasp in its discursive/linguistic superiority.[132]

But as this humanist tradition was emulated by the *Académie* – through its official lectures and *Conférences* – a clear reformulation of its precepts took place. This reformulation can be traced in the many texts produced by the academic community, in particular those of André Félibien, the *Académie's* official historiographer, responsible for the institution's chronicles. In Félibien's texts we see most notably the influence of Cartesianism would radicalize the cognitive significance of the image, reversing previous debates and arguments. The clearest of the author's engagements with Cartesian debates was "*Le Songe de Philomathe",*

[130] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 134-5
[131] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 118
[132] Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne*. P. 42

published in 1682 in one of his collections of *Entretiens* – informal conversation-like texts on artists, their work and its appreciation.[133]

In this work, the character Philomathe recounts a dream to his companion Cleogène. In this dream, lost in a garden, Philomathe stumbled upon a debate between Painting and Poetry, each claiming its superiority over the other.[134] By depicting a competition between two arts Félibien was using one of the most common tropes of the *Ut Pictura Poesis* tradition – the *Paragone.* The arguments used by either Painting or Poetry were therefore *clichés* borrowed from centuries of Italian literature from Da Vinci to Carraci.[135]

The novelty of this text, however, lies in its framing, used by Félibien as a means of giving Painting the upper hand over her literary sister. Firstly, the choice of a dialogue as a genre places the written word at a disadvantage, as it becomes the representation of spoken words. Secondly, the dialogue between Philomathe and Cleogène is itself a representation of the dialogue between Painting and Poetry. Félibien places the written word at a second degree of distance from the original conversation, in the same way images were accused of being twice detached from reality. Finally, the "original" conversation is set within a dream – the realm of images so "excellent" they confuse the dreamer's limits of wake and sleep:

> *"So many excellent images filled my eyes and* ***spoke to my mind*** *in such pleasant reveries that I believed I was still in the rich Pavillons de la Renomée."*[136]

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[133] Félibien, *Entretiens Sur Les Vies et Sur Les Ouvrages Des plus Excellens Peintres*.
[134] Ibid. T. 10
[135] Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis." Pp. 250-1
[136] Félibien, *Entretiens Sur Les Vies et Sur Les Ouvrages Des plus Excellens Peintres*. T. 10 p. 441

If in the *Paragone* the standard for an art's virtue is its degree of direct relationship with the reality of things, the framing of this debate already precludes Painting's victory.[137] The stage is set in such a way that Poetry is left always at a secondary distance from reality: in the realm of dreams only images have the capacity to transverse its limits into reality. Félibien further ridicules Poetry by writing all her interventions in Alexandrian metric.

But it is not only against Poetry that Painting's victory is aimed at in Félibien's work. In this debate Poetry stands for the discursive superiority flaunted by all other liberal arts, sustained by the non-immediate, mimetic relationship with reality imposed on the image. However, in Félibien's work, Painting comes to possess a new arsenal of arguments, springing from a philosophy wholly foreign to the *Ut Pictura Poesis* doctrine – Cartesian rationalism:

> *"What you see so extraordinarily painted on trees and rocks was done by Chance who, watching what I was doing, gathered what fell from my colors and with them tried to imitate me, representing an infinity of things."*[138]

We witness a reversal of reality and image: reality becomes an image of an original pictorial act. It is here that we feel the clearest presence of Descartes' influence, for whom painting was a privileged metaphor with which to describe the process of cognition. It was also in a dream state that Descartes invited his readers to enter in his "Meditations", reaching the conclusion that thoughts were "like images of things".[139]

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[137] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 119
[138] Félibien, *Entretiens Sur Les Vies et Sur Les Ouvrages Des plus Excellens Peintres*. P. 453
[139] Descartes and Ariew, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*. 3rd Meditation P. 93

But if objects in themselves are but reflections of these images, the distinction between artifice and reality becomes meaningless. This is Descartes' main argument in his *Discourse on Method:* that all we believe to be real – our body, the objects surrounding it and our sensations – could be but an illusion created by the artistry of an evil genie.[140] For Descartes "there are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep",[141] - individuals are trapped, in the same way as Poetry, to a dream realm of images. Descartes' attempt to safeguard the possibility of any knowledge of the real then becomes a crucial argument for the reformulation of painting's status:

> *"Nevertheless we must at least admit that these things which appear to us in sleep are like painted scenes and portraits which can only be formed in imitation of something real and true, and so, at the very least, these [general] things – namely eyes, head, hands and [all the rest of the body] are not imaginary entities but real and existent."*[142]

Mimesis, rather than a sign of limitation, becomes the very basis of reality which results from this very process of imitation. For Descartes our possession of a mimetic capacity is the only link left to an actually existing world, to which our body and senses react. But, for this to be true, *mimesis* – the accurate imitation of a pre-existing object – can no longer be used to distinguish images from reality. Reality and images spring from the same mimetic act which comes to define all cognition.

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[140] Ibid. p. 5
[141] Ibid. p. 77
[142] Ibid. p. 78

Between sensation and reality (and their undifferentiated identity as images) a new standard must be installed with which to discern one from the other. A new process must be installed with which to sort the two Cartesian realms of raw impression and filtered truth: the process of thought, a movement of the mind from opinion, through doubt and into knowledge.[143] Painting comes to provide the best analogy for this all-encompassing cognitive process:

> *"I found myself in the same state as painters, who cannot equally well represent in a two dimensional painting all the various faces of a solid body, and so choose one to bring to the light and leave the other in shadows, so that they can be seen only while viewing the selected side"*[144]

But it is not only an added prestige which painting gains with this new function as a cognitive metaphor: it has also become freed from the imposition of the *mimetic* standard. It is no longer resemblance which allows one to judge images: *mimesis* becomes representation, and appearance gives way to meaning.[145] And so the nature of the image is irrevocably unshackled from its Platonic subservience:

> *"You must also take care not to assume, as our philosophers commonly do, that in order to sense, the soul needs to contemplate some images that the objects transmit to the brain; or at the very least you must conceive the nature of these images entirely differently from the way they do."*[146]

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[143] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 133
[144] Descartes and Ariew, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*.Pp. 31-2
[145] Marin, *Études sémiologiques.* P. 169
[146] Descartes and Bridoux, *Oeuvres et lettres.* P. 203

Between image and object a new standard discerns the limits and validity of their relationship: painting itself. As part of the cognitive process shared with the rational faculties, painting is no longer asked to make images resemble objects, but to make images be recognized as these objects. Painting no longer obeys the laws of *mimesis*, its superiority residing precisely, in its capacity to transgress these same laws:

> *"Thus very often, to be more perfect images and to represent the object better, the engravings must not resemble it."*[147]

Illusion is not a curse but a condition of existence, springing from reality itself. And thus knowledge and truth are not the result of a process of purification from artifice, but of perfecting the art through which reason represents reality. There is no realm of pure thoughts and ideas, but rather a trained rational faculty which raises its image-making to an art form, becoming the most "excellent painter". Knowledge is not the deduction of the pure abstraction governing images; knowledge is the very production of images. Descartes summarizes this point in his *"Recherche de la Vérité"*:

> *"Just as your artist would do much better to begin the picture once again, first taking a sponge to erase all the features, than to waste time trying to correct it, so each man which, reaching the stage called the age of knowledge, must make a resolve to rid his imagination of all the imperfect ideas that have been drawn upon it."*[148]

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[147] Ibid. p. 204
[148] Ibid. pp. 886-7

This new conceptual seal uniting image and the cognitive faculties breaks away the linguistic shackles which held painting subservient to other liberal arts. Painting now holds seniority over all of them, flaunting its pre-linguistic faculties and becoming the mediator of the very condition of discourse and meaning production.[149]

Aided by this Cartesian supplement, Félibien captures Poetry within a dream world of images whose limits Painting alone can transverse. Knowledge is but the result of a cognitive pictorial act shining the light of reason upon its images. In her last moment of victory Painting exclaims to her lowlier sister:

> *"Light was but created for allowing my Work to be seen."*[150]

But to attain this freedom Painting must accept a new sovereign, one which both secures the conditions of Painting's rule while chaining her to an infinite task of representation.

Painting's sovereign

Before Philomathe's dream can end, a final character enters the debate, interrupting Painting's final winning arguments: Love. Divine Eros, a conciliatory figure *par excellence*, asks both sisters to cease hostilities, reminding them of a higher power which they should concentrate on serving.

> *"Follow the order of this great King whose presence embellishes these grounds and who, today, is the world's arbiter and delight […]. It is for him and to hear his esteem that each of you must work."*[151]

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[149] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 127
[150] Félibien, *Entretiens Sur Les Vies et Sur Les Ouvrages Des plus Excellens Peintres*. P. 455
[151] Ibid. p. 464

The entrance of royal authority into the dream debate in a divine guise is a vital step within Félibien's theoretical strategy in three ways. Firstly, it allows the debate to be given a definite conclusion – rather than become another episode within the *Paragone* tradition, Philomathe's dream puts an end to the competitive bonds holding each art analogous to all others.

> *"To receive his praise work on different subjects. This powerful Prince will provide you with plenty, through which you may best represent the many noble qualities that make him so admired in the world."*[152]

The monarch as main theme and destinatary of each art's efforts puts an end to the debate by making the need to establish a primacy of one art over the other superfluous. As Eros is careful to explain, the Prince, far exceeding the capacity of any one medium to represent him, allows each art to exhaust their resources without the need to compare one's work to that of others'.

> *"While the first [Poetry] tells of his incomparable Prince's great virtues and* ***evokes an image*** *of his soul's beauty, the other [Painting] has as her task to express his heroic actions, which are the whole world's admiration."*[153]

The monarchic object leads to very different artistic results depending on which art takes up the task of its representation. However, Félibien is careful to ensure that this separation does not result in a simple horizontality between different arts. On the contrary, Eros only enters

[152] Ibid. p. 465
[153] Ibid.

the stage omce Painting's discursive superiority over a written medium has been established. As such, Poetry's goal remains that of "evoking an image" of her sovereign.

This brings us to the second step of Félibien's strategic closing of his text: the choice of Love as the emissary of the reconciliatory message. Rather than solving the quarrel, Eros' entrance adds a greater advantage to Painting, due to the allegory's mythological bond with the divinity. Félibien is careful to establish this relationship before the divinity even appears. In one of her arguments with her sister, Painting recounts how she was brought by Love down to earth:

> *"He was the first god to be represented by me […] That is how I began to be known […] Love, delighted to see my efforts to teach men so many marvels,, spoke of me everywhere he happened to be and made me sought after by everyone. I taught lovers to declare their passions through mysterious characters. I showed them the very person who they loved, though this person was absent and I made images of them […] in which nature seemed to have formed a second person."*[154]

Love's predilection for painting not only gives the art the upper hand but also reveals its most valued ability: that of making present a distant object of desire. This capacity to make the invisible visible is the ideal all arts must attain, and for which painting is best equipped. Eros' entrance is therefore a reminder to artists of their newly appointed task: that of making their monarch present in all corners of his realm before for each one of his subjects. Félibien's

[154] Ibid. p. 456-8

efforts to establish a new ontology of the image are thus intrinsically linked to the new political reality of the *quatourzienne* régime. The new academic autonomy of each art can only exist once both its allegiance to the monarch has been ensured and its task has been clarified.

Which brings the third and final way in which the entrance of the monarch into these last moments of Philomathe's dream is so vital for the text: it allows the king to cross the boundaries of dream and reality, and thus be given the same control of images as the arts and the gods. By invisibly entering and controlling the discussion between the sister arts in their dream gardens, the monarch becomes a ubiquitous ruler, determining Félibien's textual frame both within and without.

The authors' initial choice of a garden as the stage for both Philomathe and Cleogène's dialogue mirrored by the sister arts' debate gains a new layer of meaning. Rather than harken to a distant mythic arcadia, Félibien's *mise-en-abyme* brings the dream world into the strict dependence of the Versailles monarchic project. In 1683, the year of the text's completion, the gardens of the castle were not yet complete but their creation had been, since 1682, one of the crown's main cultural exploits, mobilizing the entirety of Colbert's academic edifice. Both the *académiciens* and the allegorical figures were trapped in the same garden: mythology was but a reflection of the political present and the artistic but the manifestation of a political project.

Having established this unbreakable link between Painting and its sovereign, Félibien has Philomathe awaken to an even grander apparition than his dream:

"I half opened my eyes; and seeing on the path closest to the place where I had fallen asleep, the entire court following the King, I was ***astonished****."*[155]

This passage from dream to reality is short-circuited by the king's presence. Before he is able to situate himself outside the dream world, Philomathe is astonished, left in the same state of fascination which had first brought him into the mirror garden of his dreams. The king is thus presented as sharing the same properties as the images of his dreams, crossing and blurring the boundaries of sleep and wake. And as Philomathe tries to discern these two different spheres, the dream world begin to pour into the gardens of Versailles, in the same way the monarch had entered his dream.

"Finding myself nonetheless still in the error of my dream, I tried to join the true and the false. It was as though I watched Love approach the great Monarch […]"[156]

If the monarch is invisibly present in the dream world, the king's body makes dreams visible in the real world. The King exceeds any allegory or divinity which Philomathe might encounter. He not only shares the nature of images but also rules them, setting and dissolving the boundaries of the visible and the invisible. His body fascinates those who regard him for they witness the visible manifestation of his invisible almighty potency: the king is an icon an image ruling images, artists and viewers.

[155] Ibid. p. 466
[156] Ibid.

The King's iconic body

The king's fascinating presence operates within the logic of the icon, traversing the realms of the visible and the invisible. Managing to cross the Platonic divide of idea and image (far before the Cartesian shift), icons were doubles of unseen or departed objects, from divine entities to souls of the dead.[157] Icons made the invisible visible while at the same time the visible drew the mind to the invisible "from obscure images to the single cause of everything". It was in this way that sacred images managed to survive the aniconic traditions of the West – Jewish, Muslim and Christian iconoclasts. Images were vital for believers as "in a divine fashion we need perceptible things to lift us up to the domain of conceptions".[158]

Supplementing this mystical character of the iconic image was the Christian tradition of the *archeiropoietoi* – "not painted by the human hand" – which situated the origin of these images outside human artifice.[159] The iconic image not only manifested the invisible properties of its object but also was freed from the constraints of artifice, as the act of its appearance was deemed beyond human.

One of the greatest triumphs of the Christian theology was that of having this logic of the icon at its very core: the incarnation of God in his Son, Jesus Christ. Saint Paul himself argued that Christ was the image of God (ColI:15), the "word made flesh" which gave plastic form to the relationship between the human and divine Logos.[160] Christology supplemented the

[157] Vernant, Zeitlin, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Mortals and Immortals*. P. 168
[158] Pseudo-Dionysius and Campbell, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. P. 199
[159] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon.", p. 37
[160] Ibid. p. 42

aniconic theology of God's eternal and invisible essence with the historical theology of the economy of Christ's body and its dispensation.[161]

If indeed Christ was word made flesh, then flesh could be made image, thus giving these icons radiating properties which not only validated their existence but also made it a necessary part of religious practice. This basic understanding of Christ as *Imago Dei* was what gave such strength to the great iconophiliac traditions of Christianity from Byzantium to the Vatican.[162]

This same tradition would later trickle down into temporal power as emperors and kings were ready to adopt similar positions with regard to the portrayal and dissemination of their images.[163] In an exact copy of the eucharistic mystery of Christ's transfiguration, the foundations of feudalism saw the body of European kings as possessing a double nature.[164]

In the same way that Chris's body was divided into the suffering one at the cross and the mystical one multiplied in the mystery of the host and the collective congregation of the *ecclesiam,* the king was seen as possessing two bodies. The first one was his private one, fallible and subject to decay, while the second one was a mystical one, infallible, unchanging and present in the totality of the realm.[165] The connection between these two bodies was the proof vital for the monarch's divine right but also to the sense of belonging for the members of a community.

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[161] Pelikan, *Imago Dei*. P. 99
[162] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 44
[163] Ibid. p 46
[164] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*. P. 15
[165] Ibid. p. 198

In this way a king could be Louis, the eternal and unchanging king, but also the fourteenth in a succession of physical hosts of the undying monarch. It was customary in France that the successor to the crown should take in the dying breath of the previous king in order to accept this divine entity into his body. At the same time, the heart of the deceased king would be removed from the corpse and "returned" to the reliquary of Saint Louis kept in the *Sainte-Chapelle.*[166]

Most importantly, this double body ensured that the king could exist as individual while validating and gathering within it the totality of the realm – the invisible power holding a realm together was manifested and protected by the iconic body of the king. The king was not just the realm's ruler but the privileged signifier which gathered and mitigated within his body the totality of opposing groups and struggles into a harmonious organism.[167] As such the monarchic body could transcend the sin of its birth – much like the *archeiropoietoi* of orthodox icons transcended the hands of their painters.

From this initial union of the mystical body of the realm and the private body of its ruler stemmed the production of images and works which dispensed these mystical qualities. This explains both the saturation of images of the rulers – from coins and medals, to tapestry and sculptures – but also the analogic model of the *Ut Pictura Poesis* regime. The image of the monarch was an icon that did not so much resemble the ruler but rather shared in its divine nature. To portray Louis XIV as Apollo was only to mix the essences of these two iconic entities – an aesthetic alchemy of sorts.

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[166] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 13
[167] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*. P. 203

The image of the monarch would then fascinate and interrupt the gaze of its viewers with its divine properties leading the viewer to contemplate and accept his condition as subject of his ruler. This pre-modern sublime potential of the icon was one of the most unsurpassed tools for feudal rulers in the political and philosophical justification of their power.[168]

However the religious civil wars which had plagued Europe throughout the XVI and XVII century as well as the philosophical developments of secularised political philosophy and its new theory of power and sovereignty (best represented by the writings of Locke) led to a weakening of these mystical bonds. Not only did the specific relationship between community and ruler – so vital to feudal rule – begin to mutate but also the first signs of obsolescence of monarchic mysticism began to be felt in Europe. Against the holistic mysticism of bodies, the rise of the public sphere reshaped the basis of power and its representation.[169]

This was not however a linear and even transition throughout Europe. On the contrary, with the rise of Louis XIV, France experienced a rebirth of the theory and defence of the monarch's divine right and mystical nature. From the writings of Bodin to those of Bossuet we see a continuous defence of the king as the only safeguard for the unity and survival of the French community:

> *"The whole state is within him: the will of the entire people is enclosed with His."*[170]

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[168] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 46
[169] Goodman, "Introduction." P. 1
[170] Bossuet, *Oeuvres. Textes établis et annotés*. P. 373

Louis XIV's reign only radicalised this mystical union, leading the king to identify himself with his state: the apocryphal "l'état c'est moi". If the king would confuse himself with his people when affirming that "our greatness is that of our state",[171] he was simply renewing the mystical bonds of political eucharisty: "this is my body" / "this is my state".[172] Throughout the *quatourzienne* régime we catch glimpses of the theory of the king's double body in full strength:

> *"The king is the leader of the people and the three orders are his members; and together they are the political and mystical body whose union is indivisible and inseparable."*[173]

The rise of Louis XIV, simultaneous with a period of exceptional social harmony and prosperity, only seemed to further cement the union of the king's private body and the collective body of the realm. The rituals surrounding the king's *coucher* and *lever*, the carefully choreographed life of Versailles, were all continuations of the iconic logic which left French élites so invested in their monarch's body.[174]

The vanishing monarch

This monarchic iconology was not however free from danger. The new political developments in England, Germany and the Low Countries soon inspired various subversive attacks at the theory of the monarch's divine right.[175] At the same time, the disappearance and subjugation of many noble houses as the result of the Frondes had left a trauma in most

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[171] Fox, "Louis XIV and the Theories of Absolutism and Divine Right." P. 136
[172] Marin, *Le portrait du roi*. P. 16
[173] Coquille, *Les Oeuvres de Me Guy Coquille, Sr de Romenay*. P. 323
[174] Johnson, "Il N'y a plus de Pyrénées." P. 30
[175] see Keohane, "Nonconformist Absolutism in Louis XIV's France."

of the French élite, many of them turning to the rising numbers of the Jansenists.[176] Though the double body metaphor was still active and influenced the running of the French realm, it no longer possessed the same vitality nor was it left unquestioned. It was the very unity of the visible monarch and his invisible powers which came under attack during the years of Louis XIV's reign.

The debates concerning both the eucharistic actualization of Christ's body as well as the structures of signs were a constant concern for all fields of knowledge. Within the halls of the *Académies* the official views concerning all aspects of representation from the drawing of biblical stories to the writing of political history strived for an airtight coherence, with debates present in all aspects. The greatest of concern laid in protecting the bond established between realm and monarch and the various artefacts which actualized this connection.[177]

At the same time, some of the most subtle and well-orchestrated attacks to the iconic logic were also formulated during these period, both from Jansenist sources: the logic of *Port-Royal* and the writings of Blaise Pascal. Louis Marin aptly demonstrates how the work of the *logiciens, by* clearly defining the boundaries of signification and representation – separating the logic of the sign from that of the eucharistic transfiguration – posed such an immense threat for Louis XIV.[178] Also Lucien Goldmann 's close reading of Pascal's doubtful faith reveals it to be far more than a crude attempt at pessimistic atheism. On the contrary, by

[176] For a detailed study of this phenomenon see Goldmann, *Le dieu caché; étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine.* Pp. 115-56
[177] Marin, *Le portrait du roi*. Pp. 64-9
[178] Marin, *La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques*. Pp. 195-7

allowing doubt into the experience of faith (the actual possibility of god's inexistence), Pascal created a subversive and dangerous meditation for absolutism.[179]

Both works endangered the monarch's double body though from opposite directions. The first questioned the possibility of a link ever being established between a visual form and an invisible (transcendent or simply distant) object – a subtle iconoclasm. The second, more dangerous even, posed the doubt if there could even be said to be an invisible origin, endangering the very source of the monarch's divine right. It is understandable that the crown would not only close the *Port-Royal* monastery as well as actively persecute its associates (including Pascal himself).[180]

The ambiguity of the sign and the hidden god both spelled the disappearance of the king's mystical body. Classicism's anxiety could be said to stem precisely from this constant threat of a vanishing monarch, leaving the whole of the academic edifice with no foundation. Also we can see why the previously exposed Cartesian ontology of the image was so welcome into the halls of the *Académie.* The weakening of the bonds of the visual to the transcendent could only be remedied by a radicalization of the importance of images and of their production. Images now participated in the ***creation of invisible ideas***, rather than point to them.

The weakened monarchic icon led to a perverted iconophilia in which the image no longer pointed or tended toward its invisible mystical source but rather created the very invisible

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[179] Goldmann, *Le dieu caché; étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*. P. 228-45
[180] Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*. P. 190

realm. The act of recognition became a creative one, a reversal of the mimetic order in which without the image the object did not even exist.

The centrality of this act of recognition leads us therefore to the king's portrait as the single most important sign for the whole of the French structure – a master signifier ensuring the stability of absolutism's discourse. The painter was tasked with supplying the king's body with a ubiquitous presence, free of any ambiguity, being exposed to each element of the realm, subjecting them by their very recognition of the portrait. "There is my king", the viewer recognizes and, in doing so, he also claims "there is the body of which I am a part". The portrait is not made possible by the monarch but rather makes the monarch possible.

The painter becomes undeniably one of the main political players within the *quatourzienne* regime, his task both a vital and unending one. Much like Eros, uniting the separated bodies of the loving couples, the painter must united fragmented France into one mystical body, by presenting to each fragment the individual image upon which all must reside. The portrait does not mirror the king but endlessly performs the moment of recognition and creation of his mystical body. In this way we can understand the new task set out by both Love and Colbert to the painters of the *Académie:* infinite portrayal. To endlessly capture and reproduce their monarch, lest the portrayed body vanish and reveal the empty centre of political power.

The infinite portrait

The rise of the academic system leads painting to become present in all domains of classical culture as a paradigm underlying its orders and various modes of representation. The artistic was expanded into both the political, the philosophical and the worldly. Whatever the

difference between these spheres the imperatives of behaviour an intellect governing them turned to painting as metaphor, model and example.[181]

However the pictorial act's prominent role lasted only insofar as the painter managed to protect and control the conditions which had led to his art's newfound dignity. Vital to this maintenance, the painter was expected to fully portray the sovereign, the iconic body in which painting found the source of its powers. The relationship between painter and sovereign became a tortuous one due to the circularity of its nature, the king's portrait short-circuiting the *Académie's* theoretical edifice. Furthermore, the struggle of painting bespoke of a struggle within the very project of absolutism leading the monarch's representation to become its central cultural exploit.[182]

It is again from the pen of André Félibien that we find one of the most articulate interpretations of the monarchic portrait and its qualities and its tortured circularity. In 1671, the author published a collection of texts in which he painstakingly described several of the works found in the king's cabinets.[183] The writing of these texts were part of his task as court historiographer, and amounted to an exercise in the art of *ekaphrasis*: textual renditions of the visual. At the centre of this collection we find "Le portrait du Roy", a description of one of Charles le Brun's depictions of his sovereign.

Between this text and the previous "*Songe de Philomathe"* could be initially thought of as paradoxical. If in the previous text the monarch's power unshackled painting from the textual, in the second text we find a return of painting's subservience to the written form. René

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[181] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 127
[182] Marin, *Le portrait du roi*. P. 13
[183] For a summary of these texts see Rosenberg, "André Félibien et la description de tableaux."

Démoris aptly formulated an interpretation in which Félibien's description of the king's portrait directly denied his own defence of painting's superior discursivity. On the contrary Démoris claims we witness painting returning to the state of crude and imperfect imitator of the monarchic reality.[184]

Though this reading is a productive one it fails to take into consideration the act of monarchic portrayal in its specificity. The reading of this text as a return of painting to *mimesis,* is only valid insofar as we accept a universal equality between images which would deny the iconic nature of the monarch. More so, in Félibien's text we see an effort to demonstrate this exceptionality while still attempting to defend painting's status as a privileged cognitive metaphor. I would like to start with one of the passages most crucial to Démoris argument:

> *"He [Le Brun] represented [in his painting], as if through very pure glass, all those high attributes which make You so loved by your subjects, feared by all your enemies and admired by all the world. [...] Regardless of the Painter's abundant imagination he has however one object he is forced to imitate, such excellent a subject that there are no ornaments that may represent it sufficiently."*[185]

Indeed a first reading would accuse Félibien of returning painting to a mere copyist of reality, the painter being tasked with the simple reproduction of an object as close to reality as possible as though we would witness this object "through very pure glass". Furthermore, the many discursive tools and ornaments the painter might possess are useless when confronted

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[184] See Démoris, "Le Corps Royal et L'imaginaire Au XVIIe Siècle."
[185] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 104

with the monarchic object. Painting seems to be reduced to a mediocre art incapable of surpassing the limits of *mimesis.*[186]

However I would like to point the Félibien does not so much critique painting, but rather the painter and his tools. In the first paragraph, when speaking of a "very pure glass" Félibien's refers to the medium, while the second paragraph refers to the humility of the artist. Two previous passages follow this logic:

> *"He [Le Brun] painting in a medium-sized canvas the image of Your Majesty, enclosed in such a mediocre space the portrait of a King whose name fills the whole Earth."*[187]

It is the canvas which is accused of mediocrity for its size when compared with the object for which it becomes the vessel. The act of painting is not reduced to a mimetic function but rather it is able to transfigure the materials touched by the painter enlarging them and ennobling them so they may fit their object. The same transfiguration is true of the painter:

> *"I must confess that the Painter that has worked to make visible all which is great and majestic in your person, has surpassed himself to such an extent that my pen cannot imitate the traits of his brush and I do not have any expression strong enough to worthily represent all which is admired in this rare work."*[188]

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[186] Démoris, "Le Corps Royal et L'imaginaire Au XVIIe Siècle." P. 27
[187] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 94
[188] Ibid. P. 103

Not only is painting the art through which the painter is able to surpass his limitations, but the painting therein resultant is beyond any attempt of written description. Yet again the act of painting transfigures the artist and his work, transcending the limitations of *mimesis* or representation: the logic of the transcendent icon.

The trope of the painter who, through painting a transcendent object, transcends his own nature and the limitation of his craft is one of the founding tenets of the *archeiropoietoi* theory of Christian icons. For the Orthodox Church the painters of icons were taken into a mystical trance and they are unable to recognize the finished icon as their own work.[189] There is no paradox between this text and Philomathe's dream. Félibien is actually establishing painting as the privileged medium to represent the monarch's transcendent nature.

He takes this argument one step further by further making explicit the monarch's divine provenance:

> *"Heaven which has spread in Your Majesty so many graces and treasures seems to have tried, [in creating Your majesty], to* ***make a masterpiece of His power*** *by giving the Earth the perfect model of the great King, Heaven, I say, made visible in your person an accomplished Monarch."*[190]

This small passage is perhaps one of the most articulate transcriptions of christologic iconology into a semi-secularized theory of power and its representation. The monarch is the visual manifestation of Heaven's power, his presence is the very affirmation of his divine right. Félibien's attempt however goes beyond simply affirming the divine source of his

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[189] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 38
[190] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 87

monarch's power: he also attempts to install painting as the act which describes the icon's transcendent origin. Heaven "makes a masterpiece", pointing to a *Deus Pictor:* the divine Logos fulfils itself in a pictorial act. Thus the divine's ultimate manifestation is a temporal one, a dangerous argument for actual sacred iconology as it easily leads the icon to become a fetish.[191]

But this is not the only way in which Félibien begins to pervert the logic of the icon. Whereas the icon should lead the mind to meditate on its invisible origin,[192] Félibien stops the process of divine contemplation short.

> *"This front and this form, so noble and gracious [...] are so well imitated in this portrait that there is no one that would not recognize You within it and that would not recognize You as when You, appeared at the head of your armies, inspire a new ardour in the souls of all those who have the honour of following you."*[193]

The monarchic icon in the canvas or in the flesh becomes self-referential in its allure. It does not inspire the viewer to contemplate the higher powers of the divine right which the monarch exudes. Rather, the portrait of the monarch only leads the viewer to recognize the person of the monarch, its qualities are intrinsically bound to the physical private body of the monarch. The same is true for the very body of the king which, when appearing, only leads the viewer to further subject itself to his sovereign. The spectacular display of the monarch's body (in both person and portrait) hides the missing mystical link which justifies and grants these

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[191] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 42
[192] Ibid. P. 45
[193] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 102-3

qualities. And as the result of this evanescent mystical body, the hierarchy of images which ruled proper sacred iconology is broken, leading to a perverted equality of all images:

> *" It is possible to say, today with greater truth that in your Person and your Portrait we have two Kings which, all two of them, will never have any comparison."*[194]

Though it is indeed true that the icon was seen to share the same properties as its object – and thus require the same treatment[195] – what Félibien claims in this passage can be read to be a more radicalized understanding of the relationship between images and objects. The king is himself an image – a portrait of divine monarchy for Félibien – thus, the portrait, as an image of the king, shares his qualities. But once the king becomes self-referential – no longer inspiring in his subjects the desire for the higher unknowable order of logos – monarchic power never leaves the level of the image. Body and portrait become strictly identified with each other.

Here lies the circularity of this text's argument: the king's image (body or portrait) once being recognized as the king's image proves the king's divine right and attributes. The author's circularity is not a mistake: it manages to secure monarchic portraiture from being accused of fetishism. To revere the king is no more than to revere the king. Félibien's sleight of hand is almost imperceptible were it not for the moments in which the author is pressed to actually explain why and how he recognizes his sovereign:

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[194] Ibid. P. 110
[195] Douzinas, "Prosopon and Antiprosopon." P. 46

> *"It is true that to speak of the greatest King of the world, is a subject far beyond my capacity that we might accuse this attempt of temerity, were not the subject."*[196]

The qualities of monarch, since they are beyond human, cannot be described or mirrored in any human attempt. Félibien is now in the same position as the painter's initial one, finding both his medium and his own mastery to be far too mediocre for the nobility of their object. Even the attempt of doing so could be charged as an affront to the monarch's clear divine selection. Thus much like the divine icon, the first effect it creates in the viewer is of arresting his discourse, muting him in an astonished stupor – the same described when Philomathe wakes to find his king before him.

We should however be careful before characterizing this effect as a sublime one, for this stupor is a short-lived one. Upon confessing his own incapacity to represent the monarchic object, Félibien is then compelled by this image to go beyond himself.

> *"I will however apply my strengths to speak of those great qualities that the whole earth admires in your august person and which are mysteriously painted in this work which I wish to describe."*[197]

Unlike the previous iconic logic we do not see a super-natural display driving the mind to contemplate the unknowable realm of Logos – *qua* Burke's or Kant's later formulation of the sublime. Nor is the viewer compelled by the artist's mastery to contemplate it as if part of the non-artificial nature which is represented – *qua* the pre-modern formulation of the

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[196] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 85
[197] Ibid. P. 90

sublime in the work of Longinus.[198] On the contrary, Félibien still recognizes the portrait as portrait and his amazement is such he is led into a creation of his own making.

> *"[The Heaven] willed the creation of craftsmen capable of worthily representing it [Your Majesty] so that it spread in the spirit of these wise men such penetrating lights that they expressed themselves in such a manner that* ***I feel sweetly forced to make a portrait of Your Majesty's portrait*** *and to give it to the public, not as a mark of my capacity, but as testimony of my passion and respect for your sacred person."*[199]

There is no return to the transcendent realm of ideas nor to the natural world of objects. The viewer, trapped by the royal craftsmen's artifice cannot escape it and becomes himself a producer of this same portrait. The vanishing mystical body is overcome by the portrait's capacity to "sweetly force" its viewer to perform the image's reproduction. And in Félibien's world where object and image are equal, this infinitely reproduced project leads to an infinitely present monarch.

The moment of recognition does not prove the king's mystical properties, but rather actualizes them. The divine right of Louis XIV becomes the result of a political *trompe-l'oeuil*. The *académicien's* task is that of creating the portrait as a *mise-en-abyme*, hiding in the individual image the means of its infinite reproduction. The image need only spark the

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[198] Coincidentally, the works of Longinus would have a revival of sorts with the translation of his text on the sublime by Antoine Boileau, a member of the *Académie Française.*
[199] Félibien, *Tableaux du Cabinet du Roi avec la Description*. P. 88

initial fascinated passion for the viewer to be trapped in an ever expanding body of which he has now become a reproducing organ.

And it is therefore up to the academic painter to delve into the qualities of his monarch, beyond his mere visual presence but deeper into the passions which the visual is able to awaken in the viewer. The painter becomes a monarchic *pathologist* capable of infecting any viewer with a fervour which re-enacts the monarch's mystic properties.

Chapter III - Painting the sovereign

The previous chapter drew the argument that in the king's portrait was encapsulated the nature of both painting and the power it represented. It was this link which granted and justified the *Académie's* hegemonic function outlined in the first chapter. The production of academic painters can then be understood as a gradual process which articulated these different elements.

The formation of identities and their social influence at the institutional and theoretical level ran parallel to their deployment in the main cultural task of managing the king's symbolic existence. The speed in which both the academic discourse was emulated[200] and the glorious aura which covered the monarch during his own lifetime are a testament to the success of this cultural task, as well as its necessity.[201]

Manifested in huge multimedia artistic objects and events, the project of the king's glorification found its pinnacle in the construction of the Versailles castle, its gardens, and the spectacular events therein organized.[202] By 1682, the court had finally moved to this ever-growing complext, which soon became a small society having the representation and enforcement of Louis XIV's glory as their sole purpose.[203] At the head of the *Petite Académie,* Colbert orchestrated the efforts of the different *Académies* from architects to musicians in creating the stages and activities of the many events that surrounded court life.

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[200] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 178
[201] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. P. 90
[202] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*. P. 37
[203] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. p. 36

Beyond their disciplining effect on the realm's élites the huge *Ballets* and *Fêtes* were breeding grounds for new cultural strategies where art became a performance of power.[204]

One name took center stage in the creation of this castle and its visual wonders: Charles le Brun – both director of the *Académie de Peinture,* Colbert's close collaborator and Louis XIV's own *Premier Peintre.* From the decorations of the castle's inner halls, its gardens' architecture and even the festivities' scenery, Le Brun's presence was a constant.[205] As the painter closest to power, the *Premier Peintre* would also devote his efforts in devising a theoretical apparatus with which to grant a greater coherence to his work.

This final chapter aims to draw a link between the painter's work and the political preoccupations which informed its developments. The artist's production will be shown as a paradigm for academic painting and an exception for aesthetic thought, difficult to insert in the general histories of art. In Le Brun we see the concretion of a fully engaged political art, whose objects and discourse are both mirror and element of the absolutist political process. An analysis of his work will delve into the particular passions and anxieties inspired by the monarchic object, hinting to a monstrosity Charles Le Brun was able to capitalize.

Le Premier Peintre

Both before and throughout the reign of the Sun-King, Charles Le Brun was a central figure in the rise of the academic institution. His training and ascension as an artist mirrored the rise of classicism, its patronage network and the concerns for the accurate representation of

[204] Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos*. P. 25
[205] Ibid. p 19

power.[206] Since his early childhood as a student of Vouet, Le Brun had been a staunch defender of the royalist faction, quickly becoming a protégé of Chancellor Séguier.[207]

It was thanks to Séguier that Le Brun was able to complete his studies in the city of Rome during the early 1640's. It was there he came in contact with his most important teacher, Nicolas Poussin.[208] The self-exiled painter was the source of most of Le Brun's training as well as the stylistic and aesthetic preoccupations which informed his artistic maturity. The official training trips sponsored by the *Académie Royale de Rome* took Le Brun's own Italian sojourn as their model.[209]

Upon his return in 1645, the painter was almost immediately noticed by the French élite, gaining the status of *Peintre du Roy.* Accumulating commissions from the higher figures of state such as Fouquet and Mazarin, the young Le brun always remained faithful to his original patron, Séguier.[210] During these first years back in france, Le Brun became acquainted with the circle of painters which would give birth to the *Académie Royale de Peinture* in 1648.

Though the youngest of the group, it is undeniable that Le Brun took a leadership role due to his kinship with Nicolas Poussin, but also possessing Séguier and Mazarin's clear favor.[211] Furthermore, it was Le Brun who formulated the request for *Académie's* creation, creating the document together with Martin de Charmois – a fan his work.[212]

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[206] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. Pp. 175-204
[207] Nivelon and Pericolo, *Vie de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages*. P. 9
[208] Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*. P. 198
[209] Schnapper, *Le métier de peintre au Grand Siècle*. P. 148-9
[210] Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*. P. 210
[211] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 184
[212] Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*. P. 62

The painters of the *Académie*, in seeking a higher status, by coordinating their patronage network and giving it an institutional form, had Le Brun as their model. This did not mean that Le Brun's work was limited to the nascent institution. The painter showed a clear detachment from the *Académie* throughout its first decade of existence, more concerned with growing his own social circle.[213]

Preoccupations with the *Académie* only became central for Le Brun with the inauguration of Louis XIV's reign, and the rise of Colbert as main architect of the reign's cultural policy. Colbert was the direct successor of Mazarin and a political protégé of Chancellor Séguier – patrons of Le Brun and defenders of the *Académie*. The Chancellor probably advised the new *Surintendent* to associate himself with the rising star of the academic movement. It is more than a coincidence that Le Brun was one of the artists responsible for the Vaux-le-Viconte palace of the then soon to be imprisoned Nicolas Fouquet. By claiming his right to Fouquet's artistic possessions, Louis XIV officiated the exclusivity of Le Brun's work, naming him *Premier Peintre du Roy.*

From Colbert's assumption to his death, in 1683, collaborating with le Brun would be a central part of his cultural policy, with several anecdotal remarks on their proximity.[214] More importantly, it was at this time that Le Brun's devoted himself to his monarch's representation and the management his reign's symbolic and visual production.

His new responsibilities were accompanied by an accumulation of posts, each more grandiose and bestowing him with a higher status. Already *Premier Peintre du Roy* in 1661, he would

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[213] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 185
[214] Gould, *Bernini in France*. P. 91

gain his letters of nobility in 1662, directorship of the *Gobbelins* factory upon its founding in 1663 and lifelong chancellorship of the *Académie de Peinture* in 1666, the Roman *Académie's* foundation, of which he became vice-rector.[215] With his close collaboration with Perrault and Chapelain - respectively members of the *Académie Française* and *Académie de Sciences,* and both belonging to the select *Petite Académie* – Le Brun's influence quickly expanded to the whole of the academic system. Furthermore, Le Brun went as far as to propose directing the *Académie de Architecture* by merging with the *Académie de Peinture,* claiming its dependence to the visual arts.[216]

Le Brun's thirst for titles was but a condition of his prolific production and the ambitious scope of each of his projects. From tapestries made at the *Gobellins* factory, *arcs de triomphe* for all of the monarch's celebrations, huge canvases for the palace halls, sketches of garden sculptures, and exquisite ornaments and decorations for the Tuileries, Le Brun's rise was as much owed to his social network as to his unmatched production.

None of these works however could reach the scope of his ultimate project: the halls and gardens of the new Versailles castle. Beyond painting solitary works or adorning pre-existing structures, designing a castle from its very root, was the best demonstration of the artist's capacity as well as his command of a team of artists and artisans.[217] All aspects of the palace's decoration were under his direct surveillance, from the fountains of the gardens to the frescoed ceilings of the *Appartements.*[218] If the academic system and its centralization of

[215] For a detailed and thoughtful study of Le Brun's rise see Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*.
[216] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P 41
[217] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 243
[218] Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos*. P. 29

labor made it possible for a project of such size to be executed, it still required an individual such as Le Brun to envision it.

But beyond his remarkable production, we must also note his exceptional care for the systematization of artistic knowledge into a coherent theoretical apparatus. In the years of 1667 and 1668, at the height of his production, Le Brun took care to prepare his most notable lectures, including those on Expression and Physiognomics.[219] As such, regardless of his status, Le Brun never disdained the pedagogical responsibilities expected of his position within the *Académie.* It was the theorization of his practice which gave his work, and those of the artists he supervised, the level of coherence necessary for a project as vast as Versailles.[220]

All of these aspects and their study have led to a reconsideration of the general assumptions of art historians, portraying Le Brun as a bureaucratic and unimportant painter.[221] Le Brun could well stand out as the most influential character in French Classical painting and its institutions. However, there has yet to be drawn a connection between these theoretical preoccupations and the discourse therein resultant, with the political and artistic responsibilities carried out by the *Premier Peintre.* Only in doing so can we begin to perceive the degree to which the painter had become aware of the realities of power and its representation.

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[219] See Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*.
[220] An impressive demonstration of the parallel between Le Brun's practice and theory can be found in Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. Pp. 31-49
[221] Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis."

The study of the painter's work has also been hindered by the general attitude of introducing Le Brun's output into the more general debates of the time – typical of an art historiography which views political involvement as a threat to artistic coherence.[222] It is a commonly accepted trope to situate Le Brun within a binary logic: a painter of *dessein* fighting the partisans of *couleur*; a *Poussiniste* censoring the *Rubinistes* led by Roger De Piles; as a literary painter against the more modern currents of artistic genius.

Regardless of Le Brun's possible allegiance with one faction or another, the fact remains that the painter found little support in either sides of these debates. His system broke with the very foundations of each of these debates. Furthermore, Le Brun as the most powerful painter in France was, if not above, at least impervious to the consequences of these debates during his lifetime.

More importantly, Le Brun's own theoretical endeavours would further isolate him from the wider academic community. His approach to the affects, psychology and their depiction amounted to a revolution of academic discourse; a scientific one.

A science of Expression

Few painters were as concerned with the theoretical aspects of painting as Le Brun, and even fewer were as consistently engaged in the same themes as he was. The painter's identity is intimately linked to the topics of Expression, one of the main components of painting as outlined in the Italian humanist tradition, upon which the *Conférences* of the *Académie* were based.

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[222] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. Pp. 138-68

But Le Brun's work with expression would take a unique turn, most clearly, his *Conférence sur l'expression*: an adaptation of the Cartesian theory of the passions to previous painting traditions.[223] Rather than look at this lecture as an exceptional document, we would do better, as Montagu aptly states, to look at Le Brun's output as a whole:

> *"To write of the Conférence sur l'Expression as if it were an isolated statement, containing the whole of Le Brun's theory on the subject of expression would be a serious distortion of what Le Brun really believed, and one against which he warns his audience in the Conférence."*[224]

The centrality of Expression in Le Brun's thought and practice – especially the link between the physiognomic and the psychological – were a constant in his life. This can be traced as early his service of Séguier, when, the Chancellor's physician, Cureau de La Chambre befriended the teenage painter[225]. De La Chambre's personal research on physiognomy and physiology provided the young Le Brun with ample knowledge on anatomy, vital to his training. But most importantly, the physician's work gave the painter his first contact with the theory of the passions. Decades later, the *Premier Peintre* would provide engravings for the physician's monograph, *"Les Charactères des Passions"* – and exploration of the passions and their anatomical origins.[226]

The interest in Expression would only grow with the young painter's travels to Rome and his tutelage under Nicolas Poussin. The elder painter's symbiotic practice of art and philosophy

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[223] See Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. Pp. 125-40
[224] Ibid. p. 9
[225] Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*. P. 28
[226] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 17

would become a constant influence for the painter. Le Brun would many times express his own opinion through different anecdotes featuring his master. The *Premier Peintre* would inherit Poussin's preoccupations with composition but also shape them to fit his own research.[227]

With Le Brun's return from France and the painter's rise to prominence these different theoretic themes would be systematized into a common search for the basic psychological elements of images. Montagu accurately demonstrates a connection between the different parts of the same theoretical concerns, divided into the three separate areas; the general comments expressed by Le Brun on disposition throughout the first *Conférences* of 1667; his own *Conférence sur l'Expréssion* (1668); his incomplete work on physiognomy.[228]

In Expression, we see painting at its most discursive: it concerns the effective representation of psychological facts through images. As Montagu points out:

> *"[...] the whole theory of expression arose from the needs of seventeenth-century history painting, an art in which narration was the principal aim, but narration less of the stark facts than of their psychological effects. These effects on the participants in the event had to be portrayed, but the emotional resonances of the event had to be felt also by the spectator. For this it was necessary for the artist to use every means at his disposal, to set the character of the scene and to ensure that it ran through all the elements: background, lighting and even the most minor incidents depicted. But the facts of the story*

[227] Ibid. p. 77
[228] Ibid. p. 9

were conveyed by the figures and these required a clear and unambiguous vocabulary of expression."[229]

What determined the painting's success was not its mimetic capacity - the level of resemblance with its object - but rather its representational effectivity - the degree to which it can move the viewer. Le Brun's explorations are the closest manifestation of the Cartesian ideal of the image: the *Premier Peintre* aimed at creating the tools most fitting the task of monarchic iconology, presented in the previous chapter.

One of the main claims of this thesis is that Le Brun's proximity to power fueled his work on Expression, to the point of an obsessive research. By supplementing the study of Expression with the Cartesian psychological structure and the methodologies of the rising natural sciences, Le Brun would radicalize this discipline.

Le Brun's position within the academic structure enabled him to synthetize the previously existing traditions of humanist painting, making them coherent with the courtesan ideals of *quatourzienne* élites. But most importantly, the power of his status allowed him to break with this same tradition. No longer would Expression be a simple accumulation of anecdotes on painting's discursive properties, or a mere grafting of literary and exegetic traditions into a pictorial context: with Le Brun, Expression became a science of its own.

And it is here that we must diverge from Montagu's reading of Le Brun's work. Though her study on Le Brun's *Conférence* is invaluable in its contextualizing and biographical efforts, this contextualization tends to normalize what, to the time, would be perceived as a radical

[229] Ibid. p. 3

turn. Furthermore, by defending an overarching continuity in Le Brun's work we miss a clear shift that occurring in the artist's discourse. It is precisely this shift that can guide us to understand the artist's own ambitions and the political project which they served.

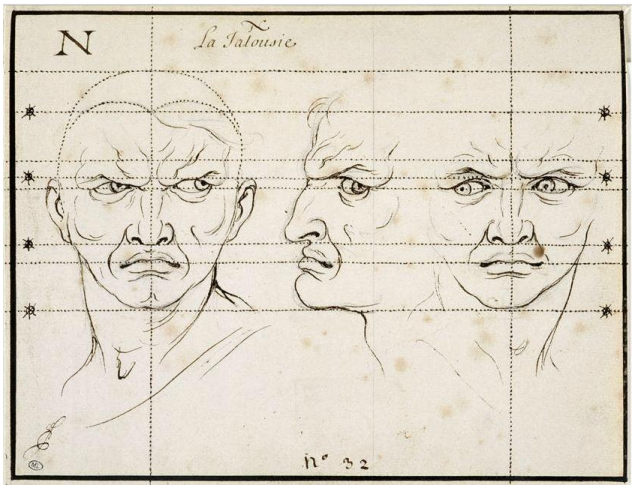
Passions and Monsters

Presented before the Académie in 1668, Le Brun's *Conférence sur L'Expression* marked a turning point in the painter's output, breaking with his own institution's tradition of inductive theory. In his previous *Conférences* of 1667 – one on Raphael's *Saint Michel terrassant le démon*, another on Poussin's *Les Israélites recueillant la manne dans le désert*[230] - Le Brun took a painting as his starting point, abstracting the basic principles operating in different works. However, in 1668, Le Brun took the abstract principles as an *a priori*, never abandoning them and creating a self-enclosed system of different passions, wholly independent from painting proper. No reference is made to any actual painting or sculpture, nor is there any mention of practical applications of his system, throughout the whole of the lecture and its transcripts.[231]

Even the famous drawings and plates Le Brun prepared for his *Conférence* were used as paradigms; *a posteriori* renderings of absolute psychologic types. The images describe the theory – an inverted *ekphrasis* which occurs in no other theoretical work of the *Académie*. These *Pathos-formulas* – abstract types, geometrically organized according to their inner

[230] See Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*. 133-89
[231] Ibid. 51-121

bodily sources and outward muscular expression[232] - are the clearest manifestation of the institution's intellectual essentialism, referred in the previous chapter (Fig. 1).



1 – Le Brun, Jalousie

But Le Brun's break was not a mere formal one. The material of the *Conférence* was itself alien to the other *académiciens*: the work presented itself as a wholly "scientific" enquiry sharing both the methodology and the corpus of the natural sciences. Passions appeared as "facts detached from explanation, illustration or reference"[233], no attempt made to connect them with any previous body of painterly literature or more general and overarching theories. Though some of Le Brun's images could be said to be extracted from previous paintings, no attempt was made by the author to reinsert them into the already existing traditions and outputs of other painters. [234] Instead, Le Brun turned to the recently published works of Descartes and De La Chambre – the first's *"Passions de l'ame"* (1649) and the latter's *"Les Charactères des Passions"* (1640).[235] Against academic conventions, the *Premier Peintre* transcribed these texts into his own theory, supplementing them with paradigmatic images. [236]

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[232] Cottegnies, "Codifying the Passions in the Classical Age." P. 144
[233] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P. 220
[234] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 151
[235] Le Brun himself provided the engravings for De La Chambre's work.
[236] To see the extent to which Le Brun's *Conférence* was a transcription see Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. Pp. 156 - 62

Though, as Montagu argues, Cartesianism was an influential current of thought at the time, Le Brun's choice of literature and method were highly unorthodox for the *Académie.*[237] Descartes was still seen as a controversial thinker, and the literature favored by academic painters belonged to the traditions of Platonism, Aristotelianis and biblical exegesis. Even someone such as Michel Anguier, a staunch critic of Le Brun's work and one of the *Académie's* most inventive thinkers, would never depart from the more conventional Italian humanism and the less innovative psychological systems of scholasticism.[238]

The creation of an abstract system of Passions and their deduction from the faces of those who are under their influence, is far from an addition to Poussin's original work on Expression. The old master's efforts were guided towards the harmonization of a painting's whole and elements – his goal was a holistic one, inheriting the Renaissance ideals of *decorum.*[239] Le Brun broke with this tradition by creating a systematic approach which would allow the extraction of a Passion not only from its context but from its object as well. A Passion – its "formula" - became an object in itself and no longer an element within a canvas (Fig 2 and Fig.3 demonstrate this abstracting process of the same Passion). The reaction, rather than the fact, became the object of

2 – Le Brun, Study for Fleeing Persian

[237] Le Brun and Philippe, *L'expression des passions & autres conférences ; Correspondance*. P. 21
[238] See Dabbs, "Characterising the Passions."
[239] Montagu, "The Theory of the Musical Modes in the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture." P. 235

representation; all bodies were seen as neutral hosts of these extremities of emotion floating across centuries of image making.[240]

3 – Le Brun, Colère

This attitude – coherent with the new non-mimetic conception of painting as a cognitive practice – would continue in the painter's work on physiognomy. Though no original transcript survives, Le Brun mentioned a second lecture Expression, to be given that same year, presenting it as a natural continuation of his enquiry:

> *"When it is my turn to address you again in this Assembly I shall endeavour to talk to you on Physiognomics, and the different effects which the passions produce according to the diversity of those who are subject to them."*[241]

Montagu points out that it is quite probable that this second *Conférence* never took place.[242] However, two accounts by Testelin[243] and Nivelon[244] give us an idea of its theme, material and aims. Most importantly, many of the painter's own sketches and studies exploring the theme have survived, allowing us to speculate what the expanded system might have been. If the *Conférence sur l'Expression* dealt with Passions as abstract, universal entities, Le Brun's work on physiognomy sought to explore all possible variations of these Passions. The

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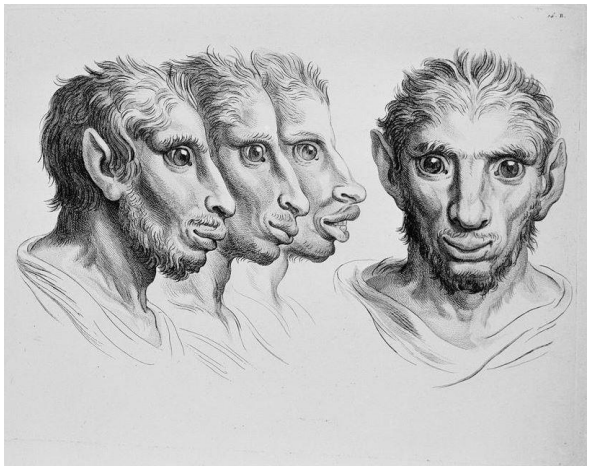
[240] Indeed we can call these *Pathosformel* after Aby Warburg's own formulation of the concept.
[241] Le Brun, *Conférence sur L'expression* in Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 240
[242] Ibid. P. 9
[243] Testelin, *Sentimens de plus habiles peintres du temps, sur la pratique de la peinture*.
[244] Nivelon and Pericolo, *Vie de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages*. P.212-22

aim was to show how the qualities specific to each object might influence the representation of the imprinted passion.

Though fragmented and incomplete, Nivelon's account of the system allows us to divide it into three separate, though interconnected areas: the comparison of heads of men to those of animals, studies of the heads of famous ancient rulers and philosophers, and detailed studies of eyes, both human and animal.

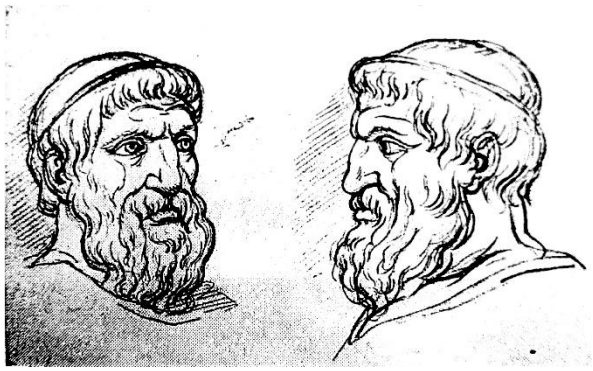
The comparison of human and animal features was itself part of a long lasting tradition, whose most notable practitioner was the XVI century nobleman Giambattista della Porta. In his *De Humana Physiognomia* (1585), Della Porta sought to connect the bestial and the human through unique hybrid busts. However, in Le Brun's attempts these monstrous creations gain an awry almost lifelike quality, due to his superior drawing technique.

The *Premier Peintre* was able to fully extract the qualities commonly associated with animals - the intelligence of the Horse, the cruelty of the Wolf, etc. – giving them a hyperbolic quality in their human counterparts by underlining these already present features. Whereas Della Porta's approach was analogical - crudely grafting the animal into the human - Le Brun's process was deconstructive. Le Brun started from the animal's character, extracted its smallest features and then imprinted them in human counterparts, by a surgical process of small alterations with increasing degrees of bestiality (Fig. 4).



4 – Le Brun, Study of Goat-Man

The same careful methodology took place when Le Brun passed from his monstrous creations to the heads of wondrous individuals. From Cato (Fig. 5) to Nero (Fig.6 – paradigms of the virtues and vices of great leaders – it was a custom copy their faces and us them in other works, creating an "unbroken" chain between the political present and the mythohistoric antiquity.[245] However, Le Brun's approach became far more subtle (subversive, even) due to its level of abstraction and quasi-scientific methodology. Le Brun did not stop at the copying of the faces, but deconstructed these into their components – mouths, eyes, ears – to further explore their interchangeability (Fig. 6).



5– Le Brun, Cato of Utica

6– Le Brun, Nero

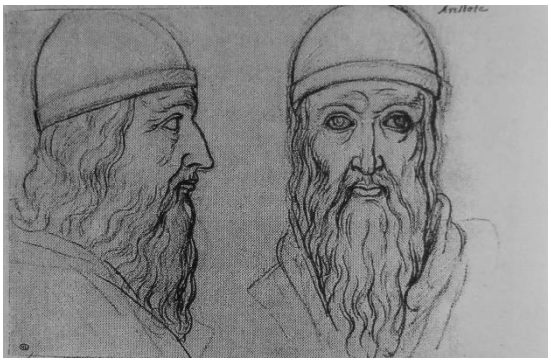
[245] Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine*.

The interchangeability and its possible applications were the function of the third section of Le Brun's explorations on eyes and eyebrows. By focusing on the eyes as a face's most defining feature, Le Brun was actually following an established principle in both the arts and the natural sciences. However, his exploration showed the painter's deconstructive skills at their maximum and, most importantly, their potential to connect all of his previous studies – on expression.

7 – Le Brun, Antonius Pius with sloping eyes

8 – Le Brun, Horse and Lyon with horizontal eyes

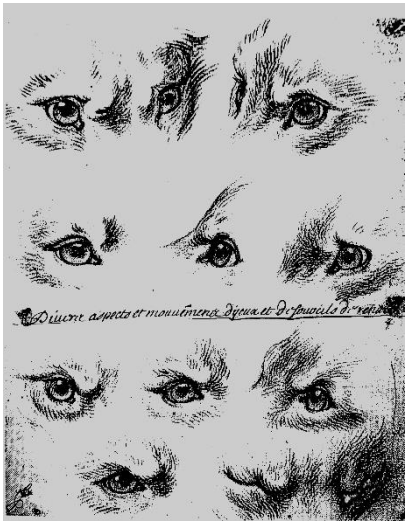
In his study of Antonius Pius, Le Brun switched his horizontal eyes for a set of sloping ones, producing a bestial effect (Fig. 7). In his animal counterparts, Le Brun gave both a horse and a lion horizontal, melancholic eyes (Fig. 8) – belonging to Aristotle (Fig. 9) – supplying the beasts with a human-like sagacity.



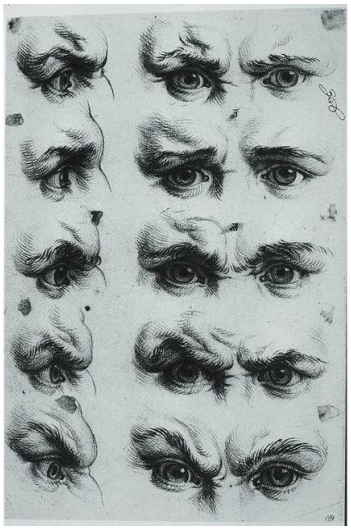
9 – Le Brun, Aristotle

The spheres of human virtues and animal traits were brought closer and closer together: in his tables of eye studies we could mistake those of a wolf (Fig. 10) for those of a human (Fig 11). Though Le Brun is careful to note that there are

particular eye movements unique to the human race (Fig. 12), this exception is only functional as can by attested by his hybrid busts.



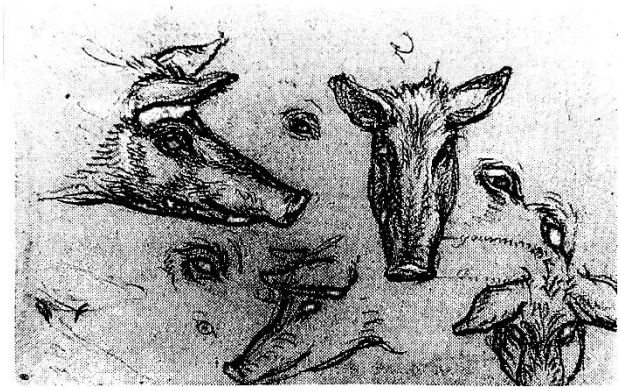
10 – Le Brun, Wolf eyes study



11 – Le Brun, Human eyes study

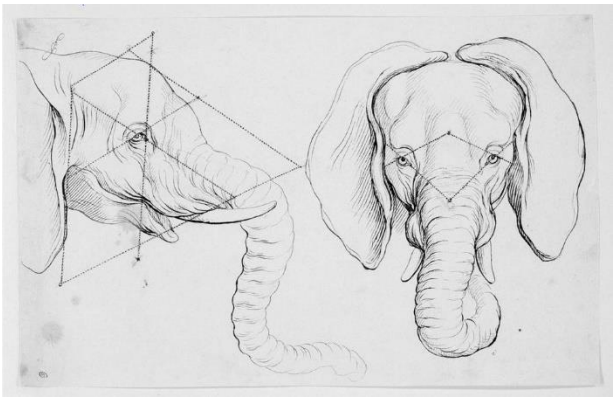
12 – Le Brun, A movement Peculiar to Humans.

The system showed signs of limitless expansion as can be seen by the initial studies on other facial elements such as the lips and nose of different animals. Even the abstract Passions became part of this hybrid this system, "gourmandise" being written under a pig's face (Fig. 13). Through this analysis we can infer one of Le Brun's aims for his system, had it ever been complete: the possibility of infinite permutation. Any facial element could be borrowed from one species to the other, from one person to the other and these same features could then be plastically expanded and altered to supply any meaning the painter wished to convey. We catch glimpses of this plasticity in the sketches of Nero where studies of his nose and mouth subtly mutate into a snout (Fig. 6).

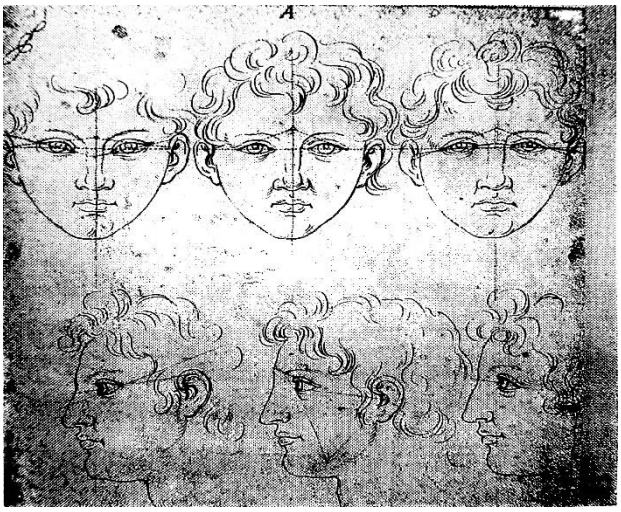


13 – Le Brun, Study of Pig's face

An extra layer of geometric abstraction was added with the combination of lines and triangle being drawn on top of many of his studies. According to Nivelon, Le Brun sought to discern the geometric similarities between species such as their "force" or their "genius".[246] We find these lines drawn on animal (Fig. 14), hybrid and human faces (Fig. 15) – including those belonging to his 1668 *Conférence (Fig. 1)*. It can be advance that, had he been given the time and opportunity, Le Brun would ultimately seek a union of all of these branches.



14 – Le Brun, Study Elephant head



15 – Le Brun, Diagrammatic Heads

True, the study of the passions and the analogy between animal traits and the disposition of ancient characters were part of previous traditions. But in seeking a union of these disciplines into a coherent system, Le Brun broke their most basic tenets, blurring the lines dividing the monstrous, the natural and the virtuous. We can begin to understand the general resistance his system elicited from most of the *Académie's* members. Even his close collaborator, Félibien, would criticize the former headmaster, few years after his death[247].

[246] Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*. P. 24
[247] Ibid. P. 82

Le Brun's system was the accomplishment of Félibien's *"Songe de Philomathe"* in which painting's control of images gave it the pre-discursive capacity to manipulate the very elements of meaning. The cost though would be that of into question the stability of signs and meanings which had allowed the *académiciens* to claim the literary and liberal superiority of their art. Le Brun, in fashioning a new identity and methodology for painting made it coherent with the rising field of the natural sciences. But the knowledge from which he drew came from a repudiated history of objects: the preternatural realm of the wondrous and the monstrous.

Preternatural curiosity

It was Le Brun's ravenous curiosity which led him to not only blur the boundaries between different traditions and discourses, but also to risk the balance of *decorum.* An overarching concept, *decorum* organized the thought of XVII century artists between the spheres of nature and artifice, wondrous and monstrous, sensual and reasonable.[248] Disruptive as his curiosity might have been, Le Brun's methods were fully coherent with both the objects of his work – the wondrous monarch and his great feats – and the discourse from which he drew most heavily – Cartesian rationalism. One need only read Descartes' own description of the first of the passions – Wonder:

> *"Wonder [admiration] is a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinaire*

[248] See Tocanne, *L'idée de nature en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle*. Pp. 325-46

[...] and this surprise is sometimes so powerful [...] that it pushes the spirits towards the place whence the impression of the object is received"[249]

Wonder begets curiosity and curiosity begets an impulse to reach closer to the object, to find within it the source of the wondrous passion. A cognitive passion – the paradoxical status of a passion which, rather than cloud judgement, enhances it - wonder was seen as vital to the attentive disposition necessary for any form of enquiry. Its presence on all cognitive processes was felt since antiquity.[250] It was, for Aristotle, "the beginning of philosophy" and it remained so until Descartes' writings.

As Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park have stated in their study on the historical development of the preternatural: "wonder, as a passion, registered the line between the known and the unknown" and "to register wonder was to register a breached boundary, a classification subverted".[251] The process of making and breaking the limits of categories was intimately linked with the cognitive passions, bringing together an objective order as well as a subjective sensibility.

Previously separated as two morally distinct passions, wonder and curiosity became sides of the same coin during the brief second half of the XVII century.[252] By emulating this double passion, Le Brun accompanied the most innovative developments of his era; innovations which the found their *locus* in the nascent *Académie des Sciences.*[253]

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[249] Descartes and Voss, *The Passions of the Soul*. P. 56
[250] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P. 16
[251] Ibid. pp. 13-4
[252] Ibid. p. 303
[253] Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 223

The *Académie des Sciences,* the naturalist branch of Colbert's academic system, was charged with creating collections and catalogues of objects, occupations and techniques, aiming at their betterment.[254] As though infected with ravenous curiosity, we see a shift in the crown's priorities and expenditure, with increasing sums allocated to the newly founded institution each passing year. At the same time, disciplines such as historiography or emblems and the traditionally predominant institution of the *Académie Française* were soon abandoned for these new interests.[255] Within the halls of the new *Académie,* the brightest minds of France gathered with those from other countries – Huyghens being the most notable case – sharing a new world view, inspired by the previously ostracized Descartes.

But this Cartesian view, and the curiosity shared by the academic scientists did not translate directly to a scientific method, nor a cold objective attitude towards the world. The Cartesian methodology sprung from a society in which "the imperatives of behavior and of the intellect" complied with "the conditions of representation for which painting provided at once the metaphor, the model and the example".[256] More so, it is important to remember that painting itself had also emulated Cartesian philosophy towards a new identity image. Curiosity was a "concupiscence of the eyes" and, as such, the pictorial arts played a determinant role in the definition of the rising sciences.[257]

More importantly, curiosity still depended on the initial spark of wonder, which only a few privileged objects could elicit. Scientists longed for the excited "surprise of the soul" which fostered "the diligent, private, and severe examination of those little and almost infinite

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[254] Ibid.Pp. 230-1
[255] Ibid. p. 161-2
[256] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 127
[257] Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*.P. 228

curiosities, on which the true Philosophy must be founded".[258] As such, wonder was no longer an unexpected surprise but an actively sought experience – the mark of a heightened intellect. Those who failed to experience wondered were "ordinarily very ignorant",[259] the attitude of natural philosophers becoming permeated by an urgency as "the observer's focus of attention spread to encompass an indefinite number of particulars, all potentially hints" as to the forms governing these wondrous particulars.[260] Wonders, the objects eliciting such inquisitive states, would become one of the most important elements in the newly developed ontologies of scientific enquiry. *Wunderkammers* and *cabinets de curiosités*, a long lasting tradition of intellectual and political elites of the Middle Ages, would find new breeding grounds in the newly formed scientific institutions of Europe.[261] In these now institutionalized repositories of the preternatural, naturalists aimed to amass the greatest variety of extraordinary *naturalia* and *artificialia*.

The halls of the *Académie des Sciences*, were filled with natural object as well as artistic ones, both awakening the so sought for curious wonder. This co-habitation of science and art is best exemplified in the *Carnets de Voyages* and *Observations* of the time. A new literary genre - personal accounts of encounters with distant cultures and new inventions – it required illustrations to make itself more appealing to the general audience and more convincing for the scientific community.[262] Le Brun himself had been a part of this genre, providing the

[258] Sprat, *History of the Royal Society;* p. 8
[259] Descartes and Voss, *The Passions of the Soul*. P. 119
[260] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P 312
[261] Ibid. p. 204
[262] Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 253

engraving for Cureau de La Chambre's *"Les Charactères des Passion",* as well supplying anatomic plates of severed heads.

The alliance of wonder and curiosity – and the scientific method therein resulting – was as much informed by pragmatic concerns as it was by subjective taste and aesthetic sensibility.[263] This alliance was mirrored by the one fostered between the scientists and the painters of the academic system. The *Académie de Peinture* proved its hegemonic superiority by fitting its production to the new scientific paradigms of Colbert's system. Though not officially partnered, the academic system foresaw the intermingling of different fields of knowledge in the service of the same absolutist project. Therefore it is no surprise that Le Brun, painter closest to this absolutist project and leader of one of the *Académie's* would engender such a hybrid system of Expression.

Both Le Brun and the naturalists of the *Académie des Sciences* drank from the same sources and explored objects of the same nature: the realm of the preternatural, between the ordered reality of nature and the miraculous strata of the divine or the monstrous.[264] Le Brun's object however was of a much higher and more powerful nature than any the scientists/*académiciens* could hope to analyze. The *Premier Peintre* devoted himself to that supreme body which the king made constantly present, and as such his wonder was permanent and his curiosity incessant. And whereas the scientist's aimed at understanding the wondrous objects, for Le Brun, this was but a secondary step to the ultimate goal of replicating the object's powers.

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[263] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P. 14
[264] Ibid. p. 122

Le Brun's work plunged into the preternatural nature of the monarchic figure; the God-given and nature surpassing qualities of power. And this plunge brought the painter dangerously close to the hidden passions and seductions of power, for which Versailles became his greatest unfinished work.

The sovereign's preternatural realm

The already explored duplicity of the monarchic iconic body – its position both within and without the order of the visible and knowable – were the result of the king's preternatural qualities. The centrality of the monarch. in which the fallibility of the flesh meets the infallibility of divine will, was a constant since the first scholastic explorations of political philosophy.[265] The category of the preternatural was indispensable in the monarch's mediation of temporal and spiritual powers, a division which only lost its hold in the eve of modernity with the advent of secular political philosophy.

In Thomasian philosophy, the preternatural was one of the main components of the human nature. It was the preternatural which gave proof of humanity's link to God and guided men beyond the goals of nature. The preternatural established the conditions through which the imperfect humanity could prepare for the perfect happiness of God's grace[266].

By appealing to the preternatural Aquinas was able to create a case for the central importance and positive understanding of secular/temporal political power. Revolutionary for the previous scholastic traditions - which saw temporal power as a mere tool to control and punish the worst offences - Aquinas defended the crown's mediating function, owing to the

[265]White, *Political Philosophy*. P. 180
[266] Ibid. p. 182

preternatural nature of humanity's virtue,[267] The existence of the preternatural made it possible that a law would not only create worldly peace but prepare heavenly virtue:

> *"[...]that they themselves, by being habituated in this way [i.e. by being restrained from evil by force and fear], might be brought to do willingly what hitherto they did from fear, and thus become virtuous. Now this kind of training, which compels through fear of punishment, is the discipline of laws. Therefore, in order that man might have peace and virtue, it was necessary for laws to be framed."*[268]

The possibility of law leading to the cultivation of virtue, and thus fulfilling the preternatural end of humanity also gave a greater importance to the figure of the monarch:

> *"Therefore since the beatitude of heaven is the end of that virtuous life which we live at present, it pertains to the king's office to promote the good life of the multitude in such a way as to make it suitable for the attainment of heavenly happiness, that is to say, he should command those things which lead to the happiness of heaven and, as far as possible, forbid the contrary."*[269]

The king's task was to unite individuals into a virtuous community through a law which restricted nature's influence and prepared for the purity of heaven - the king's power was preternatural, existing in the natural realm while also evading it. The king's double body, and

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[267] Ibid. p. 188
[268] Thomas et al., *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In White, *Political Philosophy*. P. 190
[269] Thomas et al., *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In White, *Political Philosophy*. P. 194

its simultaneity, was the result of the preternatural field, beyond the limits of nature yet fully subservient to the heavenly commands which the monarch vowed to uphold.

The "wonder" experienced by both Philomathe and Félibien, when confronted with their sovereign's presence, was a symptom of preternatural exposure, rather than sublime inspiration. Wonder resulted from the presence of the divine, the blurring of the lines of the known and the unknown, "the proper expression of humility before the omnipotence of God".[270] It is in this disciplining power of wonder that we find the actualization of the previously explored mystical body, formed by the multitude, actualized by the iconic monarch.

But though wonder remained one of the main attributes of monarchic preternaturality, this passion, became suffused with anxious curiosity in the seventeenth-century. The stupor viewers felt was immediately followed by their attempt to reach closer to their object. And the closer they got, the more apparent it became that it wasn't only the miraculous which inhabited this realm. The preternatural - *praeter ordinem naturalibus inditum rebus*[271] - was "made up of unusual occurrences that nonetheless depended on secondary causes alone and required no suspension of God's ordinary providence" and, as such, was also home to the magical and the thaumaturgic, the marvelous and the monstrous.[272]

Perhaps due to this, we see, within the more conservative academic circles, a reawakened interest in *decorum* and *bienséance,* aiming at instilling in the élites a placid attitude towards

[270] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P. 122
[271] "apart from the order implanted in natural"
[272] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. P. 17

their senses and behavior.[273] French Classicism's anxiety stemmed precisely from its dependence on passions which it never fully managed to control.

However, Le Brun's veered opposite to this conservative direction, fully accepting the *concupiscentia oculorum* which scholastic traditions so condemned. More than a paradigm of classicism, Le Brun was the central figure of an academic project, for which classicism was a veneer. Rather than an artistic ideal, the painter was guided by a monarchic imperative, for which works of ever greater proportions were required to expand its power and wonder.[274] The excessive absolutism, for which Versailles became the ultimate manifestation, was only possible through a structure as vast and resourceful as Colbert's academic system, and a painter fully aware of what his art's discursive potential could achieve.[275]

Le Brun's method and production, its intermingling of the wondrous and the monstrous, the never completed lectures, the ever expanding system of abstraction and hybridization and its break with tradition and convention stemmed from his direct engagement with these multiple realities of the political and the artistic. Le Brun had to ensure that whoever entered Versailles would become part of the gigantic complex, trapped in the preternatural realm of which Louis XIV was both sovereign and source. His work demonstrates how far the preternatural wonder was "tightly bound up with the history of other cognitive passions such as horror and curiosity".[276]

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[273] Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos*. P 258
[274] Ibid. p. 131
[275] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. p. 41
[276] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*.

To achieve this Le Brun planned a vast garden filled with labyrinths and dark caverns, luxurious greeneries and depictions of decay, populated by both proud historical figures and lascivious satyrs, fountains housing both placid gods and monstrous hybrids.[277] Springing from this chaotic realm of bestial nature and mythology the Palace arises with the clear defined lines of Italian Humanism. But this palace itself never ceases to grow, the new additions breaking with the order which it wishes to celebrate. New apartments, a chapel, a second chapel, galleries, architectural elements multiply as though building were an ever expanding *chaosmos*.

> *"The great lines, sober, equal, powerful and peaceful of the Versailles Castle fool us […]. They dissimulate an intention that was neither peaceful nor sober nor reasonable […]. The harmonious order of Versailles springs from what we can call a classic taste: but the conception, the construction, the moving principle, the initial sketch cannot be explained by Classical reason. It comes, very irrationally, from outside."*[278]

At the very center of this political *chaosmos* stood the quiet stoic image of Louis XIV, expressionless, a cold empty signifier, as abstract and formulaic as Le Brun's pathos-plates. The absence of any facial passion and the neutrality of the body's stance, replicated in the many images adorning the castle's walls and saturating the outside realm, were a necessary condition of his representation. The king stood as the source of all events and passions

[277] Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos*. P. 18 - 22
[278] Beaussant, *Versailles, opéra*. Pp. 52-3

surrounding him, while never participating in this reality, crossing and blurring its boundaries.

Academic art is the concretion of a "politicized aesthetics", in which art and artist are not only accomplices to the reality of power, but co-authors of its world. Louis XIV cannot exist outside this great artistic work, an ever expanding image in which all individuals and objects become part of the sovereign's portrait. Versailles was planned to be equally magnificent and traumatic, a political *trompe-l'oeil*, a visual trap seducing the viewers and feeding them to the ever expanding body of the monarch.

Conclusion - A fragile system

It is the complex tissue of coincidence, context and will which makes the academic episode such a unique one in art's history and political becoming. However, this fabric was as fragile as it was ambitious, making the academic system such a fleeting constellation. Through the exploration of different angles and contexts of the academic episode of painting each element is shown to be both mutually engendering as well as dependent on the others. Furthermore, the historical and political contexts aided and affected by this academic becoming were also a necessary pre-condition for this same academic event to occur.

As such the conclusion of this thesis aims at a short meditation on the fleeting nature of this symbiotic whole made by the art and power of Louis XIV's early reign. The academic event depended on carefully crafted power and patronage relations, being sustained by a period of exceptional social cohesion and wealth as well as the presence of specific individuals. Three specific events mark the limits of these condition, and thus the scope which this thesis and its methodology can address.

First and foremost, the death of Colbert in 1680 marked the end of the system he himself had erected around his monarch. Furthermore, the rise of Louvois, Colbert's main antagonist, to the position of *Surintendent des Battiments* denied any possibility of continuity. It is important to note how different this succession was to the previous one. Though opposed to Fouquet, Colbert's nomination as *Surintendent* was carefully prepared by both Séguier and the dying Mazarin – the two main architects of the royalist project. However, no such continuity or wider project took place in the case of Louvois by some of his earliest measures

upon accepting the position.[279] First he removed Le Brun as the head of the Versailles project, giving it over to his protégé, Jules Hardouin-Mansart. Denied his main project, the *Premier Peintre* would be reduced to the precious task of creating biblical scenes to his monarch, and overseeing the *Gobbelins* factory in a merely managerial function.[280] Furthermore, the *Petite Académie* and its members were stripped of their supervisory role, the institution finally becoming the *Académie des Inscriptions,* thus breaking the coherent centralization of the crown's cultural production.[281]

The second event would take place five years after when in 1685, Louis XIV promulgated the Edict of Fontainebleau, more commonly known as the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The nullifying of the previous edict – the basis for religious tolerance within the French realm – signified the end of the social cohesion which had so benefitted the early years of Louis XIV's reign.[282] Not only did the persecution of social minorities return but also, this political act would directly aid in the rise of a movement far more troubling for absolutism than the previous protestant traditions: Jansenism. Already a dangerous development before the Edict of Fontainebleau, the movement gained momentum as the seeming unity of the French realm collapsed. A general disinvestment in the absolutist project by the élites of all *États* became the norm.[283] The monarchic body lost its allure and as such the systems of representation created to capitalize on its wonder became empty symbols. This can also be seen as a further denial of the propaganda hypothesis, since the power of monarchic representation was based

[279] Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. Pp. 85-105
[280] Gady and Le Brun, *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun*. P. 343
[281] Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. p. 43
[282] Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 35
[283] Jeanneret, *Versailles, ordre et chaos*. P. 266

on a certain of voluntarism of the population to accept the state sanctioned interpretation. Without its mystic, the monarchic body was just another ageing sovereign, and the halls of Versailles just an oversized Chateau with exaggerated ornaments.

Third and final event, the ruinous War of the League of Augsburg (1688-1697) left the crown heavily in debt and its coffers could no longer sustain the smooth running of its cultural and artistic endeavors.[284] All *Académies* suffered from this decline in state budget, as well as satellite institutions such as the *Gobellins* and the *Académie de Rome,* thus unable to ensure the crown's cultural monopoly. As such, the academic painters were powerless against the flood of imported paintings from schools opposed to academic taste and the ever growing market for these works.[285] This unregulated cultural consumption would also lead to a new understanding of painting, far less concerned with the rational aspects of painting and their application. The defense of painting's more expressionistic and self-contained identity was made famous by the *amateur* Roger de Piles, a discourse which soon entered the halls of the *Académie* precluding the bourgeoisie's cultural hegemony.[286] By this time, however, Le Brun had already died, the *Académie* becoming an empty husk for the inevitable *embourgeoisement* which spelled the twilight of the Bourbon dynasty.

Beyond this point the discursive means of academic painting lost its hold on society. This is not to say that the *Académie de Peinture* did not continue to be central for the identity of painting, that Louis XIV no longer held a great power over his nation or that the classical style did not erect great artifacts of sculpture, painting and architecture. However, each of

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[284] Harth, *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*. P. 163
[285] Posner, "Concerning The 'mechanical' parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth Century France." P. 588
[286] Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*. P. 197

these elements was re-articulated into different discursive structures, and as such their own identity had changed. We should therefore avoid any illusion of each of these part's integrity.

The best example is perhaps the great "project" of Versailles, taken over and abandoned by several generations of artists. Though still standing and visited by countless tourists, the complex is a testament to the failure of the *quatourzienne* project. Parts of Le Brun's initial garden plans were either left incomplete, many of the sculptures never becoming more than a sketch, or even effaced, such as the *Grotte de Thétis*. Also, the new additions, far more sober and ordered, effaced the more anxious and tortured aspects of academic art which Le Brun knew to exploit. In one of the few remainders of the original plans, the Latona fountain, surrounding the stoic goddess we witness impressive jets of water and eerie hybrid frog-men. This disturbing imagery seems lost in a complex whose coherence was never fully achieved.

Within the halls of the Chateau, the same occurs once more, as different layers of ornamentation discourage the viewer from perceiving the initial unity aimed for its whole. Starkest of contrasts, the great semiotic and mythohistoric compositions Le Brun created for his sovereign in the *Gallerie des Glaces* have to share the same walls as Rigaud's famous portrait of an aging king isolated and trapped in the realm of the worldly. Ironically, it is known Louis XIV was a great fan of this portrait.

The exploration of this thesis' hypothesis aimed at a subtle and complex reading of these artworks as manifestations of the institutions and discourse. As such we begin to see how these artifacts articulated a wider social context and its political struggles. However, it also ended up revealing the unfinished quality of the academic project and its dependence on elements normally seen as completely dissociated from the artistic sphere. As such a

condition for the hegemonic and discursive study of painting is a historiography whose methodology must be as fragile as the object of its enquiry.

To conceive the social as a heterogeneous field of a continuous flux of struggles, forces any attempt to situate art within this field (as part and player), to relinquish the most fundamental tenets of traditional art history. We must forego the presupposed essence of structures and elements, and any seeming continuity or overarching necessity connecting different events. If art is a co-creator of different worlds and different social configurations, its identity must become as fluid and ever-changing as the political projects into which it is inserted.

What makes the academic event such a unique one is the level of coherence and coordination each part of this structure showed, from the institutional to the social, through the individual. This uniqueness also makes it a privileged starting point for the re-evaluation of art's modernity, a development in which the different elements and angles explored seem to drift apart developing each their own semblance of autonomy. The promise of this critical engagement with art's social and political potential is that each event may become an exception, each work a node in the complex network of differing worlds, each author a political player and each viewer a departure point.

Rather than a series of incremental increases of abstraction or a teleological spiral into an inevitable essence of painting, the different discourses and theories of art begin to have the same quality as those of the academic period. Artistic regimes lose their unity and can be seen as collections of different tropes and rhetorical formulas which try to suture or reveal the traumatic incoherence between a society and its ideals. The social study of art no longer remains a catalogue of the ways in which the social determines the artistic or the artistic reacts to the social. Rather, the social study of art provides a revitalization of our

understanding art objects and practices as parts of an ever evolving social field. A first step of such a study is precisely to question previously created narratives of art. To deconstruct any seemingly stable identity given to the means, modes and objects of this production.

Finally, this approach wishes to rekindle the social and emancipatory potential of different artistic practices, to make them be understood as a society's means of aesthetic reproduction. In doing so, however, we must forego the naïve view of art's "true" form as a field of resistance or utopic promises. We must look directly at the art work and its aura and accept that it never had an aura nor was it ever ***one*** work to begin with. Only when our discourse on the arts has shed all traces of messianic transcendentalism or crude determinism, can art once more become a tool within the wider context of social change and the many struggles of emancipation.

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