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Chapter 1

Artisans and the Construction of the French State: The Political Role of the Louvre's Workshops

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Accounts of state formation in the social sciences tend to focus on institutional transformations, such as military and legal reform, or the capture of the elites, treating what are functional outcomes of state formation as causes. They do not seek explanations of how institutional restructuring became possible when it had not been possible before. They assume that early states could only become institutionally effective by capturing or organizing known forms of power (Adams 2005; Beik 1997; Brewer 1989; Kettering 1986; Mettam 1988; 1975; Wallerstein 1974). Yet this is precisely what weak states could not do. Their empowerment depended instead on a shift in political logics that made entrenched political formations less compelling. It required a cultural change.

In the 17th century, the French state went from being particularly weak (Machiavelli and Donno 1966) to particularly strong--an absolutist state according to Anderson (1974). The administration did not achieve this shift by wresting control of the army from nobles or impoverishing those at court, but rather, by constructing an art world (Becker 1982). Long after Louis XIV ascended the throne, nobles

still supplied troops to the army even as the state trained them (Lynn 1997), and nobles in favor with the king at Versailles gained special economic opportunities (Cole 1964). It took an organized program of cultural production, an art world nestled in the administration, to advance state power. Political change required a change in political imaginaries, and the state's art world did the imagining.

The artists, artisans and scholars who contributed to this program used classically inspired art and artifacts to craft images of imperial power for France. The sense of political possibility embedded in the art inspired political aspirations in elites that could only be fulfilled by a strong state-- like that of like Rome. Ambition lured high nobles into new relations of power.

The inarticulate objects of desire created in the art world were more effective than political discourse. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's minister of the Treasury and Navy as well as director of the king's household, first tried to promote his patron's imperial ambitions through propaganda, but it failed. People laughed at the idea that a weak king could follow in the footsteps of Augustus and build an empire in the model of Rome (Burke 1992). But the program of classical revival in the arts made no claims; it simply made it plausible that France could revive Rome's heritage, including its political heritage.

The cultivation of political desire through the arts was part of a broader program of logistical governance instigated by Colbert (Mukerji 2009; Mukerji 2010), and one with a particular goal. The classical revival at Versailles was addressed to France's high nobility, the great military elites necessary to the king's dreams for empire. The royal residence where these nobles were invited to live was turned into an immersive environment where classical revival echoed in the art, architecture, furniture, gardens, statuary and multi-day royal festivities known as *divertissements*. Nobles dressed up in costumes and enacted roles as classical gods and heroes, moving through elaborate sets representing Mount Olympus or other classical sites. The semiotic reverberations across statues, stage sets, murals, painted ceilings, costumes, furniture, and clocks built up the sense that France could achieve something more.

Norbert Elias (1983) has already drawn attention to culture-- including material culture-- as an important element in French state formation. But he ended up focusing on the expense of life at court, arguing that the nobility was impoverished by their cultural obligations at Versailles and so became dependent on the king. Elias underestimated the cultural power of Roman revival at Versailles. He did not see how art could shape thought, or how desire could have social effects-- as sociologists recognize today (Benzecry 2011; Hennion 1993; Hennion, Maisonneuve, and Gomart 2000). He sensed

that material life at court mattered, but missed that the pursuit of pleasure could be turned into a serious game (Ortner 2006).

Historians and cultural analysts of Louis XIV's court have been clear about the power of court festivities and the classicism of Versailles (Apostolidès 1981; Marin 1981; Néraudau 1986), but have argued that structures of meaning in the art and rituals at court, not the inarticulacy of artworks, were the source of its political effects. But the nobles at Versailles were not well educated and unlikely to recognize the “meaning” of particular classical myths, gods, heroes, or events in classical history. Walking among statues of Bacchus, Hercules, Diana and Aurora, or acting out classical roles in plays and ballets, they surely felt more than understood the glory of the Roman Empire. Figures like Hercules and Diana conveyed warrior virtues even to those who could not name them: Hercules with his large frame, tight muscles, animal skin and club, and Diana with her bow and arrow, helmet, and physical aggressiveness. The gods and heroes depicted at Versailles looked capable of building and destroying empires, and they were beautiful-- something to desire. Nobles did not need a good education to be seduced by the passion in the art. And the inarticulacy of the cultural forms made them seem innocent. Nobles could become attached to dreams of Roman revival (Benzecry 2011; Hennion 1993) without being sure what it meant or what it implied politically.

The political seduction of nobles through classical culture at Versailles was delegated to the members of the academies given space in the Louvre, and the artists and artisans housed in workshops and lodgings there (Ronfort and Kunst 2009). They constituted an unusual set of administrative figures. Officials of the state were traditionally nobles who exercised personal powers through offices without clear jurisdiction. The members of the administration's art world-- both scholars and artists-- were overwhelmingly not noble, and had only contingent authority, acting like modern bureaucrats in Weber's (1978) terms. They were servants of standing without independent voices, but still exercised enormous impersonal powers even over court nobles. They demonstrated what a state could do in imitation of Rome, and what an imperial France might be if the state could pursue that goal.

Figured Worlds of Power

To make sense of how artists and artisans wielded their power, we need some understanding of material pedagogy. Figured world theory (hereafter FWT) provides a basis for it because it discusses cultural artifacts as cognitive tools (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain 1998; Mukerji 2010; Mukerji 2012). FWT is an activity theory of learning from the psychology of education that explains how children learn to become members of their culture by building up repertoires of

action around cultural imaginaries: enacting roles, organizing and inhabiting sets, using props and putting on costumes that scaffold cultural imaginaries about who they could be and what they might do in the world. FWT argues that participants adopt roles they see in their social and cultural environment, and through their actions, try to manifest the realities they assume to exist. In this way, they learn how to produce the figured worlds of their culture, both the activities and the imaginaries that make sense of and guide social action. The majority of the learning is performative, participatory, but it is scaffolded with material culture that makes it easier to enact some roles rather than others and conjure up some realities rather than others.

FWT, the cultural program at Versailles was a means of constructing a new figured world, changing political imagination and action by material means. The artisans and scholars working for Colbert collaborated on the design of sets, costumes and props that supported performances of Roman revival. The art world erected pedagogical scaffolding for a new political logic that did not foreground patrimonial autonomy (Adams 2007; Mukerji 2012), but rather imperial power.

The figured world of France-as-Rome provided the French court with novel expectations about governance as a practice, suggesting new performances they could try. As Howard Becker (1963; 1983; 2006) writes about art worlds and jazz communities, social worlds are

brought into being and sustained through coordinated forms of improvised social action that are not scripted, but guided by expectations. Cultural imaginaries or figured worlds, I would argue, give form to expectations, providing guidelines for imagining what is expected and building social worlds to meet expectations.

Cultural imaginaries are experiential expressions of what people can do, how social life works, and how social action unfolds. They are forms of inarticulate knowledge, intuitive understandings of what exists. Social worlds embody those expectations in improvised actions and pursue those dreams. At Versailles, dreams of Rome provided the scaffolding for making the French court seem an imperial center, turning play into novel performances of power (Ortner 2006) that encouraged courtiers to see their official powers as less wonderful than imperial glory.

Figured world theory is interesting not only because it describes inarticulate patterns of pedagogy, but also because it has a complex relationship to G. H. Mead's (1964) behaviorism in describing social constructions of reality. FWT attributes mental capacities to people (imagination), but supports Mead's anti-idealism by denying that ideas (articulate discourses) guide social life. It suggests that "behavior" rests on and builds on cultural forms of coordinated imagination: dreams, aspirations and anticipations that are both vague and unspoken. So, in Mead's famous example of a baseball game (Mead

and Morris 1962), the game is not a set of rules but a cultural imaginary about playing based on experience with games that people try to make real. To play, participants improvise and coordinate action as Mead describes, but they perform according to a sense of the game as they imagine it to be-- building their imaginaries from multiple experiences or iterations of practice.

Figured world theorists generally focus on practices of cultural reproduction rather than change. Nonetheless, FWT is useful for analyzing the transformation of French political life at Versailles through art. It explains how inarticulate things could make new desires imaginable, and worth treating as real (Néraudau 1986).

As Elias (1983) has argued, the high nobles who came to Versailles had no reason to give up powers to the king. But the king needed to reduce the autonomy of nobles to have a stronger state (Beik 1944; Elias 1983; Kettering 1986). So, the art world in the Louvre invented the Sun King, blurring the boundary between personal and impersonal rule, patrimonial authority and state power. Louis XIV as Sun King was simultaneously a king with the right to exercise personal will, and a force of nature whose authority was impersonal and his dominance over the earth inevitable. The Sun King was not just any king, but one who ruled the earth because it was in his nature to do so, bringing fecundity and glory to his domain (Quintinie 1692). There were no limits to his power, and his destiny was assured. Louis XIV did

not say, “l'état, c'est moi” but if he had, he would not have been claiming simply personal authority as king, but also impersonal powers as the natural inheritance of a Sun King. This cultural figure, not Louis XIV, could assume new social powers without appearing to threaten patrimonial traditions. He was a figure from the classical past brought to life to lead the new empire.

The Workshop Louvre and Classical Revival

The Louvre became the administrative center for the cultural program, and an art world filled with practitioners, critics, historians and support personnel (Becker 1982). Louis XIV at first functionally and then formally moved his court to Versailles, and the noble officials that had traditionally inhabited the Louvre followed the king, leaving large parts of the old castle empty. Colbert tried repeatedly to remodel and expand the Louvre, enjoining the king to re-establish his court there, but to no avail. Finally, uncomfortable about leaving large parts of the palace vacant, Colbert allocated space to academicians, artists and artisans. He gave meeting spaces to the academies, and workshops and lodgings to artists and artisans. In this way he made the Louvre (and nearby buildings in Paris) into an administrative center and art world (Goubert 1974; Le Roy Ladurie 1996; Soll 2009; Sonnino 1990). (Becker 1963; 2011)

The artists and artisans of the Louvre inhabited a wing along the Seine-- an area that had been redesigned by Louis Le Vau with large galleries for connecting the Louvre to the Tuileries Palace (Bordier 1998) and workshops and lodgings below. The Académie Française , the Académie de peinture et sculpture, and the petite académie also known as the Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres were assigned space in older sections of the Louvre. Thus installed physically, both groups contributed to the figured world of France as heir to Rome.

The academies were charged with deciding how the classical past would be used as a basis for French culture. Their members articulated connections between past and present, debating standards, codifying principles, and outlining the most appropriate ways to present Louis XIV as the Sun King and France as heir to Rome. The scholars understood that the classical heritage was a material legacy embodied in ruins, artworks, coins, and infrastructure, and they collected and curated ancient things, so they designed a material legacy for Louis XIV that would link his reign to Rome, working with artists and artisans to make these objects into objects of desire.

The Académie Française worked not just on purifying the French language, but on creating a dictionary, rooting the French language in Latin and embedding its authority in printed artifacts. The Académie de peinture et sculpture not only debated and taught aesthetic principles, but also curated juried exhibitions, and awarded the prix de Rome to

young artists to study at the French Academy in Rome, where they were expected to copy classical pieces. The antiquarians of Colbert's petite académie collected small artifacts like coins and small sculptures from the ancient world, using their inscriptions and imagery as models for glorifying Louis XIV in contemporary artifacts. In these ways, the academies in the Louvre took material objects seriously as key to ancient history and French destiny.

The artists and artisans, as members of the administration, bound to the state, were not members of Parisian guilds and bound by their constraints. In this sense, they undermined the guilds as autonomous institutions even as they used skills from artisanal traditions. Still, they took appointments in the administration or to the academies because they were badges of honor and respect. They became the equivalent of Weber's faceless bureaucrats (1968) in the sense that their work was treated as an effect of the Sun King, not their personal talents. But they ended up achieving what the king could not: engineer a historical transformation with an immersive environment of imperial desire.

The Royal Print Shop and Mint

The Louvre workshops where this dream world was brought to life included not just studios, but also the royal printing house (Imprimerie royale) and the mint (Monnaies royales). The printing house and mint

stayed at the Louvre because they required only relatively small spaces for producing artifacts like books, prints, coins and medals. The large pieces for the royal household like tapestries were mainly made in larger royal manufactures elsewhere like the Gobelins. In addition, the printing house and mint were particularly important to the cultural program of the Louvre because they produced small artifacts that circulated broadly, and could disseminate public images of Louis XIV, his court, and classical revival. The Imprimerie royale had its own typefaces, including Greek and Roman type to further and foreground classical scholarship in France. The mint was originally intended to make new forms of currency, but centralizing money became politically difficult. Instead, the mint struck a series of medals celebrating great events in the reign of Louis XIV-- following the Greek and Roman use of coins and medals for disseminating stories of glory (Bernard 1966; DeHaye 1970).

There were also artisans at the Louvre that designed prints and medals, including the famous engraver, Israel Silvestre. He served as a visual documentarian of court life, engraving prints of important events, depicting royal houses and gardens, foregrounding the classical legacy in the art, and characterizing life at court by depicting its stages and performances. He provided a means of virtual witnessing the dream world at Versailles, including the plays and

ballets of the *divertissements* that brought the past to life (Delestre and Bouillon 1894).

The coin designers working with mint at the Louvre included the director, V. Delaunay, a silver and goldsmith, who not only designed coins and medals, but in addition, made objects for the royal household out of precious metals, such as glittering gold plates and silverware. Jean Mauger was the engraver who designed the bulk of the historical coins, celebrating Louis XIV's rein. He created 250 of them, illustrating great victories, the opening of academies, the birth of a son, and the establishment of the observatory, among other things (DeHaye 1970). Medals and coins were the kinds of small artifacts used in the ancient world and collected by the *petite académie*, and part of the classical revival improvised in the art world of the Louvre.

The Family Workshops

Most workshops at the Louvre were not royal manufactures, but were workspaces and lodgings for families and apprentices of important artists and artisans. The beneficiaries of the king's patronage included painters and sculptors, decorative artists, instrument makers, and those who produced court entertainments. Each contributed in a distinct way to the cultural imaginary of France-as-Rome, and Louis XIV as Sun King.

The painters and sculptors created the most obvious links both thematically and aesthetically between French art and classical culture. They were trained in classical methods, aesthetics and mythology, and defined what a Sun King was and could do by the way they depicted Apollo. Most of the painters and sculptors had spent significant time in Rome and learned the classical tradition by imitating works of ancient artists. They used this training to depict classical gods and heroes with appropriate attributes and poses, and to evoke events from ancient mythology or history for the requirements of the king's households.

One was Antoine Coyvel, who specialized in painting historical scenes. He had a classical education and studied painting in Rome, and used classical aesthetics to paint scenes from the Bible, including the ceiling of the nave of the final chapel built for Louis XIV at Versailles. He eventually became Premier peintre du roi, and was ennobled finally for his service to the king. Guillaume Coustou the elder, a sculptor, won the prix de Rome, but refused to stay at the French academy in Rome because of the rigid training there. Still, he returned to the king's service. He became a member of the Académie de peinture et sculpture, and in the 18th century, its director (Blunt 1980).

François Girardon, sculptor, was also among the French artists sent to Rome to study art, and one who later found favor with the head of the academy, Charles Le Brun. He made many statues for royal

gardens, including the sculpture for the Bains d'Apollon that helped depict and define the Sun King. For his efforts, he was appointed Inspecteur générale des ouvrages de sculpture (Blunt 1980; Goldstein 2008; Mukerji 2012).

Decorative artists. The decorative artists living at the Louvre made the king's residences fit for a Sun King. They not only did the fine cabinetry for the interiors, but also produced furniture and other items of interior decoration. They made the royal residences glitter with polished brass and gilt on lead. They also provided the cabinetry for the walls of mirrors and windows that brought the sun into the world of the Sun King.

André Boulle, the best known furniture and cabinetmakers of the period, was known for his fine marquetry work, was delegated the most space of those at the Louvre --including some nearby workshops. He was called an ébéniste because he used rare woods as well as brass, pewter and tortoise shell to make elaborately inlaid furniture for the Sun King. (Ramond 2011; Ronfort and Kunst 2009).

Jacques Bailly was another designer at the Louvre who was appointed keeper of the king's paintings. He worked on tapestry designs that celebrated the Sun King, and also illuminated books, including an elegant edition of Perrault's book on the labyrinth at Versailles. (Hyde in Hunt, Conan, and Goldstein 2002:18; Perrault and Bailly 1629). Finally, Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay was a painter who

specialized in flowers for interior design, including flowers for the queen's staircase.

Instrument Makers. The instrument makers housed at the Louvre were “moderns” rather than antiquarians, but still helped promote the image of France as heir to imperial Rome by making tools of empire: instruments useful to territorial expansion and control. They were clockmakers, gun makers, lens grinders, and others who served the navy and scientists in the royal academy as well as the king's household.

Clockmakers were the most numerous and important because pendulum clocks had been recently developed in France, and were being designed to determine longitude at sea. Isaac II and Jacques III Thuret were pendulum clockmakers, father and son, who were brought to France to work with Christian Huygens. Huygens developed a balance mechanism that he hoped would allow clocks to keep accurate time even in rocking ships at sea. The Thurets also created a large number of elaborate and sophisticated decorative clocks-- working with cabinet makers such as Boulle (Ramond 2011).

Balthazar Martinot --also at the Louvre-- was probably the most respected clockmaker of his period in France, and Premier valet de chambre for Louis XIV. In addition to clocks, he made precision instruments and scientific models that depended on elaborate and

accurate clockworks (Da Vinha 2004; Plomb 1999; Ramond 2011; Lachièze-Rey, and Laredo 2001: 111).

In addition to the clockmakers, there was a gunmaker, Bertrand Priaube and a lens maker, Philippe Claude Lebas, who presumably could supply the military with guns and spyglasses, or build instruments of other sorts.

The artisans in charge of court entertainments were members of the *Menus plaisirs du roi* [the King's small pleasures], an the office of the king's household directed by the designer, Jean Bérain. Members of this office were in charge of both the great *divertissements* in the royal gardens and daily diversions at Versailles. They built the sets for court performances, created the technology for special effects, designed the costumes for courtiers playing gods and heroes from the ancient world, and designed the props for these performances (La Gorce, Jugie, and nationales 2010). They were the ones who dressed up nobles to act out stories of Rome and experience new kinds of power.

Vigarani, father and son, created sets and special effects for *Menus plaisirs*, and had both a workshop and lodgings in the Louvre (La Gorce, Jugie, and nationales 2010). They were instrumental in drawing nobles into performances of imperial power, positioning them as gods and heroes in performances of glory. They were also being employed at this point in time in designing a theater for the Tuileries Palace that was attached to the galleries of artisans.

An Empire of Things

To understand better the political work done by the art itself, I will focus on a few objects, illustrating the kinds of collaborations involved in producing the cultural imaginaries of the state: Girardon's statue of Apollo, a pedestal clock by Thuret, Boulle and Bérain, and a stage set by Bérain and the Vigarani for a divertissement at Versailles. These pulled together in different ways fragments of the classical repertoire in art to improvise a vision of the Sun King's reign and the imperial glory it could replicate. The cases help to make the point that the inarticulate world of classical revival was the product of art world that conjured up figured worlds in a social world.

Girardon's Apollo. Girardon's famous sculpture of Apollo in the Bains d'Apollon was the central figure in the grotto on the terrace at Versailles, and one of the most important pieces for defining the Sun King.



According to classical mythology, Apollo carried the sun through the sky on his chariot during the day, bringing light and warmth to the earth, and making it fertile and abundant. At night, he returned to his underworld home to bathe and rest. The sculpted Apollo was a god at rest, and equated with the monarch who rested nearby. The grotto itself echoed architectural forms of the chateau, and on front of the grotto above the doors, there was a golden portrait of Louis XIV with radiating lines around the face like the sun. Nothing needed to be said to make the equation; no one had to argue that the two were the same; they were just associated within a cultural imaginary. This was what a Sun King might be.

The image of Apollo in the grotto was a product of the Louvre. **Gerardin** collaborated on the design with the head of the Académie de Peinture et Sculpture, Charles Le Brun. **Girardin's** Apollo matched Le Brun's Apollos on ceilings and tapestries both at Versailles and at the Louvre. The reverberations among pieces helped to build the immersive environment in which this cultural imaginary became common sense.

The Thuret-Boulle Pedestal Clock. This art world also produced a pedestal clock now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, that celebrated the Sun King. The clock was made by a member of the Thuret family, and the case was by Boulle, the marquetry furniture maker, based on a design by Bérain, the head of the Menus plaisirs du roi. Clocks with interesting mechanisms were entertaining as well as useful, and often provided to the royal family by the Menus plaisirs with the help of artisans at the Louvre. This particular pedestal clock, by combining sophisticated clockwork with evocations of the ancient world, did even more. It advanced dreams by “moderns” about building on traditions of the ancients to create novelties of great value.

It is possible that the the works of the pedestal clock were made by Jacques III Thuret or his father, Isaac. Apparently both had worked on the kind of balance mechanism with Huygens (Plomb 1999). Boulle's pedestal for the clock was classical in form and imagery; used a range of materials for the marquetry; and was centered aesthetically

a large brass face resembling the Sun King. This shining visage had above it radiating lines of pewter turning into forms like plants. It suggested Apollo's power to bring life to the earth with the heat of the sun. The marquetry, on the other hand, in suggestively integrating materials from around the world to create a beautiful whole, provided a vision of empire.

A stage design from the Menuis Plaisirs. One of the many stage sets by from the Menuis plaisirs helps illustrate how the art world centered at the Louvre shaped performances at Versailles to create immersive environments of empire. It depicted gods and heroes in the heavens, on the earth and in the sea, some moving on spectacular vehicles on the earth and in the sky.



In the plays, ballets, and rituals at Versailles, nobles were immersed in a world designed by artisans. They were dressed up in costumes from the menus plaisirs to become gods and heroes from the ancient world. And they were carried through fantasy worlds of classical revival using stage engineering by Vigarani and Bérain. With artful special effects, members of the menus plaisirs took nobles flying through the sky or sailing across the seas in stories of imperial power. The Vigarani used pulleys and levers, ropes, pipes, fans and wheels to create extraordinary worlds and special effects, fitting nobles into their scaffolding to revive the glory of the ancient world. The special effects

helped to give the nobles who played gods and heroes special powers, and the sets provided the environments in which they exercised them. Nobles literally put on scaffolding, and subordinated to narratives to make the performances work, experiencing the power of impersonal rule and the excitement of ruling the earth. They were learning new political logics by enacting them, and making them seem real on stage. Nobles taught themselves to want to belong in the world they were bringing to life.

An Administration of Artisans

When sociologists think of the growth of modern states, they normally do not think about art worlds or the role of artists and artisans in early administrations. They still believe in bureaucracy as the only important form of impersonal rule, but objects can also be wielded as impersonal tools of political pedagogy and objects of desire. When theorists think about the subordination of nobles to the state, they imagine nobles personally subordinating themselves to the king as a personal ruler, but Beik (1985) showed that to be false. Nobles subordinated themselves instead to a cultural imaginary conjured up by an art world built by the administration. The artists and artisans must have enjoyed the joke as they lured high nobles, their social betters, with seductive dreams of France as a new Rome. They were only servants of the

state, working for the administration. But what they produced was a massive shift in relations of power. Their Sun King prevailed.

Once France became a modern state, it was possible to reform the military and rationalize offices, but making the state powerful required something irrational and material, desirable but impersonal: a cultural imaginary and administration to build it. Legal reform, subordination of the Church to the state, and the growth of state territoriality all were part of the transfer of power to the state, but they were legitimated with the cultural imaginary of France-as-Rome and the authority of Rome's logistical practices. Rome had great armies, developed legal archives to reduce noble autonomy, and built massive infrastructure to integrate its lands -- all techniques of power cultivated by the French state. These were tools of power that Roman history made available, but they could only be exercised by the state once French elites set aside some of their traditional autonomy to seek glory-- the dreams of glory built collaboratively at the Louvre.

The inarticulacy of the cultural forms used to construct the New Rome and the Sun King at Versailles was crucial to their effectiveness. Arguing that France could pick up the mantle of Rome was laughable when said out loud, and expressing the desire for empire was dangerous. To make any of this credible, it had to be demonstrated, not represented, felt rather than reasoned. France had to become more Roman as though by magic and to fulfill the will the king, and this

required an art world constituted by objects created by artisans and used in performances at Versailles.

