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Louis XIV's Versailles

1. A MAN AT THE WINDOW AND THE EYE OF GOD

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Jean-Baptiste Martin's view facing east from the center of the facade of Versailles Palace, painted well into the reign of Louis XIV after most of the construction on the complex had been completed, proffers much: courtiers poised for court and soldiers earnest at drill, coaches arriving from destinations afar (Plate 1). And down what impressive roads the carriages travel! The all-important Avenue de Paris claims the axis, even though the highway will need to veer left beyond this picture's horizon to arrive at the capital. The avenues of Saint-Cloud and of Sceaux enter the broad plaza from either side just beyond the farther of the two gilt barriers. These two roads, somewhat disguised because they parallel the slopes of the Mansart roofs of the nearby Royal Court, also re-emerge beyond the middle-ground Ministers' Wings (those familiar with the town plan's compelling geometry would know to look for them, and they can be seen clearly in Figs. 3 and 4). Between these roads opens up the wide expanse that fills the background of the picture. The three avenues form the three prongs of an acute arrow pointing toward the vantage this image posits. The semicircular courts of the stables to the left and right of the Avenue de Paris, with trains of horsemen flowing across them, further focus attention on this spot. Martin's painting declares the king's private apartments at the center of the palace's facade the proper place for the monarch to oversee his domain. Since 1668 the room at the exact center had been known as the Grand Salon. Before the completion of the Hall of Mirrors in 1679, it served as a principal reception room; afterward it became the king's changing room. In 1701 the room assumed its current configuration as the king's bedroom, with the monarch's bed placed perfectly on the axis defined by the Avenue de Paris that points directly at these windows.¹

The picture has yet higher aspirations for Louis. The viewpoint rises out of his rooms to above the cornices of the facade, visible along the wings. Other images executed for the court lift the vantage further: to a bird's-eye perspective, in Israël Silvestre's drawing of the palace from around 1690; to the view from straight above, in a map engraved by Pierre Le Pautre

[Fig. 3 near here]
[Fig. 4 near here]



3. Israël Silvestre, *Perspective above Versailles*, c. 1690. Drawing. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris / Art Resource, New York.

during the final years of the monarch's reign (Figs. 3 and 4).² This plan, beyond showing how the three avenues target the palace's central facade, proposes an eye capable of ascending beyond such terrestrial traffic to behold the full extent of the palace and its grounds. A painting in perspective and a map: these two artifacts exemplify the two poles of vision made available to the monarch. In the play between them will appear competing claims for the humanity and the divinity of the king.³

Allen S. Weiss, discussing the ideas of René Descartes in relation to formal gardens of the day, remarks: "Every viewpoint can be deduced from the universal position of God, for whom all viewpoints are instantaneously accessible. Such is the basis of the Cartesian model of spatiality, where depth is but a result of the very incapacity of perception. . . . Depth exists because man is not God."⁴ The actual Louis looking out the front window, or the elevated monarch posited a bit higher by Martin's painting, sees a single perspective. Depth exists for him—lots of it. The three avenues, radiating out to cover an ever wider expanse of land, promise to grasp as between fingers the accumulating riches of the vast realm. Nonetheless, in the Cartesian terms described by Weiss, the king claims his kingdom only in a limited way. To the extent that he has it in depth he has it only as a human, not with the omniscience and omnipresence of God.



4. Pierre Le Pautre, *General Map of the Town and Palace of Versailles* (side text panels not included), 1717. Engraving. Cartes et Plans [Ge C 9183], Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

How different the view offered by Le Pautre's map! Devoid of perspective, the map renders each place in the landscape as though from directly above. If the territory can be said to be seen by an eye, then it must be one like God's that can see many places at the same time. The heavy border engraved along the edges of the map, although it hemmed in vision, also represents an arbitrary imposition, for the cartographer, at the whim and command of the



5. Jacques Gomboust, detail from *Lutetia, Paris*, 1652. Engraving. Cartes et Plans [Ge AA 573 Rés], Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

monarch, could move farther north, south, east, or west. The map lacks depth, perspectival or any other sort: it encounters the earth's surface as an impenetrable limit. True, it suggests distance, a remove above the soil on which men tread (or more precisely, a double detachment, which I will discuss later: eye from page and page from land), but the viewer can choose the degree of distance. Holding the map nearer to the eye produces the semblance of a closer approach, where proximity is limited not by the logic of the pictorial form but only by the precision of the engraver's burin. Compare that effect with actual physical movement into perspectival space, where the configuration of things is always changing and depth always extends farther, the vanishing point always infinitely distant. In the cartographer's art, nothing resides in depth; everything is as close as one wants to make it be.



6. Pierre Le Pautre, *General Map of the Town and Palace of Versailles*, 1717. Detail of Fig. 4. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

To whom does Le Pautre's map grant such proximate omniscience? To all its viewers, in a sense, but in the first instance to the monarch. Louis Marin argues that the logic of rational comprehensiveness characterizing the map of Paris produced by Jacques Gomboust in 1652 for Louis when he was a boy depends on the absolute oversight of the king (Fig. 5). "The order of the enterprise, the order of its rational method, and the political order of the absolute monarchy conspire to the same rhythm in the map. . . . The glory and liberality of the king, as well as his wisdom and omniscience according to political truth, have for effect a faithful and exact representation that is absolute because absolutely *subjugated*, in each of its points and in each of its lines, to its principle, which is the prince."⁵ Beyond such general cartographic logic, Le Pautre's map specifies Louis as its first observer—regardless of whether he actually saw it. The words in the escutcheon at the left dedicate the plan to him (Fig. 6). His portrait in bust profile surmounts this shield to peruse the royal seat—from the side in this case—in a manner that designates the king the most privileged of viewers. Dedication and portrait ratify the presumed attribution to the king of the principal orientation from above. The map grants to Louis the power to peruse his domain through God's eye.

All this is not to say that the map, as a set of inked lines on a piece of paper, succeeds in rendering God's vision. It recognizes its human limits: it covers nothing beyond its inscribed frame, it reaches its threshold of precision, and it offers views of the kingdom only from directly above rather than from the infinite angles of divine sight imagined by Descartes. Additionally, even as the map attributes hovering omniscience to the royal eye, it also twice locates Louis on the surface: as a presumed corporeal presence in the rooms at the center of

[Fig. 5 near here]

[Fig. 6 near here]

the palace, and in the inscribed portrait, whose dramatically long, curly hair makes it unconvincing as a depiction of sculpture. Rhetorically, Le Pautre's map gestures toward the mundane situation and containment of the king.

Inversely, Martin's painting seems to aim at achieving a measure of the map's divine omnipresence through its elevation of the king's position. The emphasis on roads, moreover, hints at mobility across the plane for the royal person and eye. The king might circulate through his realm in a carriage like the one at lower right. He would enter into the painting's space and thus obviate its depths—even if, as a moving body, he could do so only provisionally because each new prospect would necessarily distance him from all preceding ones.

Cartography and painting grant predominance to opposing tendencies of royal vision while each manifests both. On the one hand, they render sight as embodied in the precisely located human form of the monarch as he, for example, peers out upon the forecourt of the palace. On the other, they posit a disembodied optic that soars and roams freely, at whatever distance it chooses, over the realm.

2. HUMAN BODY AND DIVINE MAJESTY

On Gomboust's map of Paris from 1652, Marin discerns seamless coordination between the main geometric overview and the set of perspectival vignettes positioned along the image's borders (Fig. 5). “Perfect and total reflexivity of representation, without excess or default, reason of state [Louis in his palace] and state of reason [the map's “totalizing gaze”], here is the map in its product (the map itself) and its production (the oriented pathways [implied by the vignettes along the border])” (176). Yet the juxtaposition of Le Pautre's map and Martin's painting suggests something other than perfect complementarity, without excess, between the two modes of vision. The geographic ubiquity of the map's omniscient oversight, coupled with its power of proximity at will, appear to be ideal means to assess the expanse of the realm, then acquisitively draw it near. In comparison with that plenteous plan, Martin's canvas—despite the obvious territorial continuity from close to far—seems the depiction of sheer, yawning distance. The first layer of nobles in the foreground (to whom I will return) are the exception that proves the rule: everything above them, even the other figures milling this side of the nearest gate, recedes with vertiginous rapidity. The minute size of these subjects emphasizes the space separating them from their sovereign even more than it reveals their exposure to his remote vision. Why insist so on distance?

In order to find an answer, let us reverse direction from Martin's view and look out the back of the palace.⁶ We can imagine Louis, on some limpid morning, standing in the Hall of Mirrors, the ceremonial space just one doorway away from the more intimate space from which (or just above which) Martin's painting affords its view. Assuming the spot at the window on the axis (Fig. 7), Louis would see in the distance the most prominent sculptural group



7. View from the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles Palace. Photo: author.

in the extensive gardens: Jean-Baptiste Tuby's *Apollo Fountain* of 1668–70 (Fig. 8).⁷ The chariot god of the sun drives his horses forward, while muscular Tritons blow their conch shells to announce the beginning of the day. The rays of the actual sun would be shining over the palace, from behind Louis, causing the gilded group to glisten like the solar orb itself. The Sun King watches the sun god rise.

Yet the actual geographic orientation breaks the symmetry. The sculpted Apollo rises in the west, not the east. For the sake of maintaining proper address to the monarch (or is it to the morning sun? or is it to both, as identical entities?), the sculpture turns around to face the palace. Such a turning, such an ability to be troped (etymologically, to be “turned”), marks Tuby's Apollo as not a god but only the mundane representation of a deity, one bit of figuration in the complex rhetorical performance of the court. The real sun rises in the east. Louis rises in the east. Looking at Tuby's fountain, then, Louis perceives two things. First, he sees, as if in a reflection, a representation of what he is: the sun, the being at the di-

[Fig. 7 near here]
[Fig. 8 near here]



8. Jean-Baptiste Tuby, *Apollo Fountain*, 1668–70. Sculpture. Versailles. Photo: author.

vine center of things (centeredness, a characteristic that distinguishes the Olympian deity from the omnipresent Christian God). Second, he sees a representation of what he is not: a representation.

He is what he is—what this configuration would have him be—and unlike the sculpture, he cannot be figured otherwise. Jacqueline Lichtenstein astutely writes, regarding the incomparability of the king’s “image,” which in her analysis is the king himself: “The king’s image . . . resists any attempt at integration with the imaginary, mimetic, and thus analogical universe of representation. Absolutely singular, it is beyond all comparison and as such is the image of the absolute, the only image whose definition coincides with that of reality. The king can be compared only to himself, represented only by himself; no historical or mythological hero can serve as an exemplary figure to represent his image.”⁸ In essence, the relation of the sculpture of Apollo to the king at the palace window reverses the operation of the icon as Jean-Luc Marion describes it, for it allows the king to look across the gap of distance between the god and his representation, yet to do so ostensibly from the celestial side.⁹ Tuby’s figure of a deity provides only a “visible face” for Louis’s divinity, but it can resemble neither his centrality (again, an attribute of the Olympian rather than the Christian divinity) nor his imperviousness to the turns of rhetoric. These are seminal characteristics of the monarch that must remain “invisible” in the peripheral garden, a vast field of figuration. As a form of “negative theophany,” the sculpture, in Marion’s words, “opens in its depth upon an invisibility whose distance it does not abolish but reveals.” The remarkable political twist at Versailles is that the distance between figure and essence disclosed by Tuby’s sculpture projects the difference of divine invisibility back onto that very viewpoint to which the artwork presents its own visible form. The king becomes divine (in an Olympian manner)

not because he is represented as such but because he is distanced from the place from which representation distances itself from the divine. Tuby's *Apollo Fountain* distances distance.

From what, then, does Martin's picture distance the king? The lower half of the picture displays a teeming population of subjects occupying a great stretch of landscape. We might be tempted to say: The king sees the nation, France, as this collection of innumerable people and boundless territory, man-made structures, and natural features. Yet the modern nation-state during this era of its historical emergence may have obtained a precocious coherence only by modeling itself on the monarch's corporeality. The body of the king, centered at the palace, becomes the essence of France. Individuals, with their disparate wills and trajectories, whom Martin captured in his picture as they fall fitfully into military regimentation before breaking ranks again, coalesce into a unified entity only by imitating the intact identity of the person of the king. To be sure, Louis accrued attributes when regarding Martin's scene, as he did when eying the sculptural group in the garden: the manifest riches of the realm were proffered as his. Whereas Tuby enabled the sun to view the sun, Martin gives us France looking at France. Yet just as the position of the *Apollo Fountain* distanced the iconic sculpture from the authentic solar monarch, Martin's depiction of the expanse and the crowd safeguards the coherence of France with Louis, at a remove from the variegated realm, which remains inchoate save for its emulation of him.

"In France, the nation does not constitute a body; it resides entirely in the person of the king." This grand pronouncement, ascribed to Louis, would confirm the king as the corporeal model for France, except that historians have cast serious doubt on its authenticity—like that of the even more famous declaration "L'état, c'est moi."¹⁰ A statement of more certain attribution, in Louis's *Memoirs for the Year 1661*, intended for the instruction of the dauphin, might appear more equivocal but actually provides greater insight into this doctrine of national incorporation: "So finally, my son, we must give much greater consideration to the good of our subjects than to our own. It seems they make up a part of ourselves, since we are the head of a body of which they are the members."¹¹ In one sense, the formulation distinguishes king from crowd: as the head, the monarch is the seat of mind and the source of will that directs the actions of obedient but unthinking limbs. In another sense, it affirms the corporeal unity of sovereign and subjects, for the populace, members of the body whose head is the monarch, becomes "part of" the sovereign. We might thus detect in Martin's view a different valence: its tension between continuous extension and vertiginous expanse might capture the simultaneous connection to and alienation from one's own body that Lei-Lei Fu's self-portrait from 2001 concisely expresses, as the corporeal form, manifestly the artist's own, drops precipitously away into giddy depth (Fig. 9).

Louis was by no means a deep thinker on the subject of political philosophy and deserves no credit for inventing this particular corporeal analogy. The argument about heads and bodies from the *Memoirs* traces its roots back through medieval political theology to the earliest days of Christianity.¹² In the Epistles, Paul maintained that members of the Christian community must combine their individual "gifts" for the purpose of "building up the body

[Fig. 9 near here]



9. Lei-Lei Fu, *Self-Portrait*, 2001. Oil on unstretched canvas. Private collection. Photo: author.

of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–13). Paul cast the Son as a totality that envelops all the faithful within his transcendent corporeal form. Yet he positioned the pious away from the Son's brow, among the sinews: "We must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together by every ligament" (Ephesians 4:15–16). In his most lapidary version of the enabling ambiguity, Paul wrote: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). One and many, body and members: to be adherents, to be in the church, is to suspend the difference between the two possible meanings of belonging to Christ.

Frenchmen were Frenchmen owing to their relation to Louis precisely as Christians were Christians owing to their relation to Christ. We may rely on the authoritative words of Bishop Bossuet, who, because of his scholarly erudition, political savvy, and skills as a homilist and panegyrist, ascended rapidly through the ranks of the clergy to emerge at Louis's court as chief theological apologist for the absolute monarchy. In *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*, the bishop declared: "The title of 'Christ' is given to kings; and everywhere one sees them called Christs or the Lord's anointed."¹³ Thus, we could say that the territorial half of Martin's painting presents an icon—again, in Marion's sense of the term—of the nation. It renders visible the distance between the disparate territory and that divine entity which, were the gap miraculously to be traversed, would bestow upon the realm's variegated nature an encompassing unity it lacks on its own. In the picture, France possesses all its cumulative attributes (just as Tuby's Apollo possessed radiance and other such virtues) with the exception of its identity and coherence (just as the represented Olympian god lacked reality and centrality). For those absent qualities, the milling populace needed to turn back toward the central viewpoint to behold the body of the king, autonomous and whole, and await his beneficent extension of himself into them, his members. Martin's picture, in a sense, looks out on the kingdom through the eyes of a Louis poised as Christ.

If in Martin's scene Louis looks out toward a collectivity that looks in turn to him, the painting raises the question: What precisely do territory and subjects see in the king? If they make visible to the monarch the diversity that so enriches the kingdom, how does he make visible to them the expansive coherence that they lack? (The question had posed no difficulty in the case of Tuby's Apollo, an entity that witnessed Louis's own manifest centrality.) Doctrinally, Christ was simultaneously both God and man; the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 states that he was "of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood."¹⁴ Corporeal coherence clearly derived from the mortal aspect of Christ: the actual physical architecture of living flesh provided the analogy of head and members. Accordingly, Louis's human body needed to stand forth right there, fully visible in the ceremonial rooms of Versailles. The view that Martin delivers, with its symmetrical wings and its avenues pointing back toward the windows from which Louis himself might daily peer, with its hierarchy of courtyards culminating in the king's exclusive apartments, dramatically situates the living monarch at the heart of the palace, apart from the realm that unfolds before him across vast distance into the periphery. Whereas Tuby's fountain centered the classical god, Martin's picture centers the body of the man.

Yet this nodal, corporeal king alone would not suffice for establishing a nation. The king's physical specificity, however requisite as a model of coherence, precluded the ubiquity that would allow the compass of France to extend beyond palace and fief. And indeed, Bishop Bossuet's *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* returns repeatedly to the image of a king who, in spirit and in surrogate, covers and comprehends the kingdom:

Under an able and well-informed prince, no one dares to do evil. One believes him always present, and even the diviner of thoughts. . . . News flies to him from every quarter; he knows how to discriminate between those items, and nothing escapes his knowledge. (123–24)

The prince is himself a sentinel established to guard the state: he must watch more than all the others. (134)

God is infinite, God is all. The prince, in his quality of prince, is not considered as an individual; he is a public personage, all the state is comprised in him; the will of all the people is included in his own. Just as all virtue and excellence are united in God, so the strength of every individual is comprehended in the person of the prince. What greatness this is, for one man to contain so much! . . .

Consider the prince in his cabinet. From thence flow the commands which coordinate the efforts of magistrates and captains, of citizens and soldiers of provinces and armies, by land and by sea. It is the image of God, who directs all nature from his throne in the highest heaven. (160)

God enables the prince to discover the most deep-laid plots. His eyes and hands are everywhere. . . . The birds of the air bring him news of what happens. He even receives from God, in the course of handling affairs, a degree of penetration akin to the power of divination. Once he has penetrated intrigue, his long arms seek out his enemies at the ends of the earth and uncover them in the deepest abysses. (161–62)

Just as Martin's picture depicts human and geographic variegation in want of coherence, it also grants to its royal audience intimations of such an omniscient prospect. We have already seen how lifting the viewpoint above the cornices launches Louis toward the perspective of the avian agents that Bossuet enlists; other images we have seen raise him yet higher, even affording him winged mobility away from the palace (Figs. 1, 3, 4). More important, the sweep of the symmetrical panorama—with its radiating avenues doubling as depthless sight lines, with its bands of uniformly hued paving and roofs and fields and forests culminating in an endless purple ribbon at the horizon—situates each of the persons and objects that populate the kingdom precisely at its own specific place within the isotropic space (space in the singular!) that constitutes the king's field of commanding perception. Even the cloudy sky that fills nearly half of this vertical canvas seems to convey to the monarch a sense of the limitless range of his personal extent. We need not evoke God's heavenly throne mentioned by Bossuet or rely on some anachronistically Romantic notion of the sublime powers of nature in order to recognize how the depicted cumuli suspend spatial recession and allow near to confound with far. How large and distant are those clouds, or how small and close? How vertical and how deep should we read the large curve beginning in the upper left corner? Witness how easily the puffs of smoke that rise from the palace buildings at the right edge bleed into the far-off cirri, pulling them forward. Indifferent to distance in its amorphous expanse, the sky covers the realm like an omnipresent deity.

Martin's painting presents its regal viewer with both components of the kingdom he brings into being: variegated things (including subjects) that resemble the monarch in their materiality yet differ from him in their disaggregation, and the transcendent force that obviates

that incoherence by incorporating all parts of the realm into his whole. The picture, as it centers the king's body in the palace, also registers the effects of his "royal power," which, in Bossuet's words, "holds the whole kingdom in position just as God holds the whole world" (160).

It was not enough for Louis to stand sentinel over his realm and know it thoroughly, or even for his power to be "felt in a moment from one end of the [kingdom] to the other," like the might of God in the world (160). According to Bossuet, the divine aspect of the king, along with his corporeal coherence, should be seen.

The divine, . . . for the good of human affairs, has lent some of its brilliance to kings. (61)

If the power of God extends everywhere, magnificence accompanies it. Nowhere in the universe is there a lack of striking marks of his goodness. You see order, justice, and peace throughout the realm. These are the natural effects of the authority of the prince. (161)

You have seen a great nation united under one man: you have seen his sacred power, paternal and absolute: you have seen that secret reason which directs the body politic, enclosed in one head: you have seen the image of God in kings, and you will have the idea of majesty of kingship. . . .

An undefinable element of divinity is possessed by the prince, and inspires fear in his subjects. . . . You possess in your authority, you bear on your forehead, the stamp of the divine (162).

The nation formed in emulation of the king's physical body was not to take his divine extension on faith. Like his coherence, it had to be rendered visible, given as an image. In a word, the bishop declared, "Majesty is the image of the greatness of God in a prince" (160).

At Versailles, the extravagant disposition of architecture and accoutrements enveloping the king, from the penumbrae of the grounds and the palace to the velvet and ermine caressing his flesh, strove to display divine magnificence, greater than the body of mortal man. Consider Hyacinthe Rigaud's canonical portrait of Louis XIV from 1701 (Plate 2). We need not belabor its specific symbolic details—scepter and crown, robes and column—to recognize how it attributed to Louis a glory that transcended his human nature.¹⁵ The "most important attributes" of "this body in its portrait," Marin summarizes in his essay on Rigaud's painting, "communicated to the spectator with the aim of bringing about recognition and admiration. Thus the spectator will be inclined, not only to say 'That is Louis,' or 'That is the King,' but also 'That is the Monarch in all of his Majesty.'"¹⁶ Let us concede that the impressive cultural panoply could indeed have induced many contemporaries to believe in the divinity of Louis, with at least part of their minds. Let us grant that the attributed quality seemed to sink into his body itself, so that his partially nude physique in Jean Nocret's group portrait of 1670 of the royal family as the gods of Olympus could inspire genuine veneration: Ludovicus, rather than (as it appears to our eyes) ludicrous (Fig. 10). Let us stipulate that the divine expanse of nation could come to reside so easily in Louis's body that when it was depicted in *Franche-Comté Conquered for the Second Time* of 1678–84, one of Charles Le Brun's ceiling decorations for the Hall of Mirrors, Louis himself could person-



10. Jean Nocret, *The Family of Louis XIV Dressed up as Mythological Figures*, 1670. Oil on canvas. Musée des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris / Art Resource, New York.

ify France, whereas Spain needed to rely on the allegorical lion and Germany on the eagle (Fig. 11).¹⁷ Beyond a doubt, Versailles aspired to make of Louis more than a human being.

“Majesty,” however, implied something greater than national compass or even Olympian godliness. The king’s divinity could come from one source alone. Despite his own claims about the Christic character of kings, Bossuet, in extolling the king’s grandeur, shifted emphasis within the Godhead from the Son to the Father. Much more than Christ, the figure of God dominates the bishop’s argument in *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*. “Brilliance” and “magnificence,” as signs of the divine that Bossuet saw reflected in the monarch, are hardly apt terms for the mendicant preacher described in the Gospels, who eschewed terrestrial authority, saying “My kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36), and who accepted that his divinity could well go unrecognized: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 RSV). Such divine qualities were precisely those of which Jesus “emptied himself” in the kenosis of the Incarnation. The French monarch could ill afford such a sacrifice. To garner fealty to his expansive capacities, Louis needed somehow to render visible God’s own magnificence.

The problem is that no earthly thing—no pose struck or ritual performed at Versailles, no artifact of human manufacture created or displayed there, no palace and garden however vast, nothing capable of depiction in Rigaud’s or Nocret’s or Le Brun’s paintings—could

[Fig. 10
near here]
[Fig. 11 near
here]



11. Charles Le Brun, *Franche-Comté Conquered for the Second Time*, 1678–84. Ceiling painting in the Hall of Mirrors. Musée des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles. Photo: Lauros / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library.

ever achieve divine stature comparable to God's. In actual practice, no visual artifact at Versailles even dared compare Louis directly with Jehovah or, for that matter, Christ. Overt Christian iconography virtually disappears outside the chapel, and even in the sanctuary the Father and the Son are presented to the king rather than equated with him (Fig. 2). Figures who did play leading roles in the iconographic program of the palace and the gardens—Apollo and Alexander led the many others—possessed the advantage of being demutable into the field of representation. When juxtaposed with Louis, the mythological or historical figures seemed, in the manner of Tuby's fountain, to emulate or represent the true model provided by the living king. Moreover, they were not God. If evocations of Olympus or depictions of Macedonian heroics declared the monarch's glory, they also acknowledged that Louis, however great or even divine, could never quite be the Father. Had Nocret recast the Bourbon king as the Christian God in heaven surrounded by his progeny as the seraphim, the portrait would have crossed the line into blasphemy.

It is an inescapable paradox: Majesty, to appear in full force, had to be Jehovian, but for majesty to be Jehovian, it could not appear. Contemporaries were hardly blind to the dilemma. Immediately before declaring, "Majesty is the image of the greatness of God in a prince," Bishop Bossuet qualified the claim: "I do not call majesty that pomp which surrounds kings, or that external show which dazzles the vulgar. That is the reflection of majesty, but not its

true self” (160). We can imagine ostentatious ermine and gold, even poised human flesh, falling away from the Louis shown in Rigaud’s portrait, to leave a certain “undefinable” quality that none of these earthly items, or the painter’s depiction of them, could ever possess on their own. Perhaps, then, the key term in Bossuet’s lapidary formulation (again, “Majesty is the image of the greatness of God in a prince”) is “image.” Louis gives a true rendition of God’s majesty—guaranteed with the direct impress of a “stamp,” with the unmediated fidelity of a “reflection”; freed from the contingency of any cultural practice of merely human agency or any turns of human rhetoric—without usurping God himself.

If the king sees in the disparate crowd depicted in Martin’s painting an icon representing its distance from his own Christic coherence, the crowd sees in Louis an idol of God, whom he closely resembles. Marion, whose account of the idol is as nuanced as his explanation of the icon, argues that the worshipper need not mistake the idol for the deity—as Bossuet so obviously was careful not to do—in order to believe that the god shows its face there (or the version of it that falls within human experience): “The idol . . . does not deceive the worshipper who does not see the god in person in it. . . . What, then, does the worshipper worship in the idol? The face that the god, or rather the divine, wants to find in it. . . . The idol does not resemble us, but it resembles the divinity that we experience, and it gathers it in a god in order that we might see it.”¹⁸ There is gain here, but also loss: gain, in that the idol makes present the divine, in the sense of presenting it in a face; loss, in that that face is not the divine itself, but only the mundane image of it. According to Marion: “What the idol works to reabsorb is, precisely, the distance and the withdrawal of the divine: but by establishing such an availability of the divine within the fixed, if not frozen, face of the god, does one not deceitfully but radically eliminate the lofty irruption and the undeniable alterity that properly attest the divine? Compensating for the absence of the divine, the idol makes the divine available, secures it, and in the end distorts it. Its culmination mortally finishes the divine” (7, translation slightly altered). Whereas the icon represents the distance between the mundane and the divine in such a manner as to allow its miraculous traversal, the idol draws the divine so close that it retreats to an impossible remove.

Far from holding contradictory beliefs—claiming that Louis is divine and claiming that he is not—the shrewd Bossuet is executing precisely this trade-off proffered by the idol. For the sake of mustering the appearance of Jehovahian omnipresence to the terrestrial political purpose of allowing Louis’s reign to expand across the realm, the theologian is willing to allow God himself to withhold full conferral of his majesty on its current human legatee.

So great is this majesty that its source cannot be found to reside in the prince: it is borrowed from God, who entrusts it to the prince for the good of his people, to which end it is well that it be restrained by a higher power. . . .

You [princes] are children of the most High: it is he who has established your power for the good of the human race. But, O gods of flesh and blood, of mud and dust, you will die like other men, you will fall like the greatest. Greatness divides men for awhile; a common fall levels all in the end.

O kings, be bold therefore in the exercise of your power: for it is divine and beneficial to the human race; but wield it with humility. It is conferred on you from without. In the end it leaves you weak, it leaves you mortal, it leaves you still sinners. (162)

It might seem that Bossuet is attempting to finesse a potential embarrassment that could compromise royal majesty: the mortality of the monarch. The opposite is the case. Underlying the bishop's formulation—indeed, the entire political system of which he and Louis were a part—is the recognition that the inevitable corruption of the king safeguards the divine character of majesty elsewhere, with God. Consider the extraordinary attention paid at Versailles to all the base human characteristics of the monarch: his need to sleep and to sleep around, what he ate and what he defecated, his inescapable aging and his debilitating gout. Versailles needed the king's body twice over: once cataphatically, as the affirmation of real Christic coherence upon whose model France could be fashioned in the image of a nation; and again apophatically, as the carrier of the image of majesty against which, through negation, God emerged as real.

Attempting to reconcile the competing demands for embodiment and ubiquity placed on the king, Marin, in *The Portrait of the King*, proposes the figure not of Christ but of his “real presence” in the Eucharist:

“The state is me”—thus does the absolute monarch pose himself: the monarch, or power in its singularity; and the absolute, or power in its universality. We discover, then, the paradox of the proposition where some sentences about the young Louis are summarized: if “me” is the proper name of him who says here and now, “The state is me,” then he who utters it localized himself as a singular body in time and space. But the proposition, in the same verbal gesture, identifies him with the state, that is, with universal power in all places and at all times, everywhere present. In other words, the body present here of him who speaks now is none other than one body everywhere and always. Now a body at once local and translocal is precisely what the sacramental host realizes for Jesus Christ in the universal community of the church. (10)

The result, Marin argues in his own version of the Triune One, is a “sole body [which] unifies three, a physical historical body, a juridico-political body, and a semiotic sacramental body, the sacramental body, the ‘portrait,’ operating the exchange *without remainder* (or attempting to eliminate all remainder) between the historical and political bodies” (14). Accordingly, Marin is able to propose that Louis himself and his portrait by Rigaud are perfectly interchangeable, each being a copy of the other: “The King only imitates his portrait just as the portrait imitates the king. . . . The king and his king and his royal representation reciprocally subordinate themselves to each other. . . . They belong to or appropriate each other in a manner that is perfectly reversible.”¹⁹

This is exactly wrong. Louis at Versailles, or Rigaud’s portrait of him, or the view Martin proffered before the king, did not abolish the excess of the king’s body. Rather, they depended on the interminable mismatch and play between that human corporeal entity and the omni-

presence of God. Louis's physical presence mattered at the center of the palace, in a way in which the “accidental” attributes of bread and wine never do to the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist.²⁰ Far from resolving embodiment and expanse in the figure of Christ, Versailles effectively annuls the Council of Chalcedon in relation to the king, affirming his “one substance with us as regards his manhood” by casting his own majesty as merely a reflected image of God’s. Reciprocally, majesty appears as a quality of God precisely because it is not fully embodied in the king. Both human substance and divine image emerge as “remainders” in relation to each other.²¹

Louis could not extend his “long arm” into the peripheries of the realm unless he was first embodied by actual human flesh at its center. God’s majesty cannot sanction that terrestrial extension unless it resides first on high.

3. VIGILANCE AND DISPERSAL

Because of his assimilative powers derived from God, the king was always present throughout the realm, and he or his forebears always had been. Nonetheless, the borrowed character of his extension implied the possibility of some form of corporeality loose within the realm, if not temporally, then conceptually, antecedent to his own. Once again, in the space behind the palace in the protected precincts of the garden, a sculptural group exposes the dynamic with greater clarity than the prospects out in front or from above.

The *Latona Fountain* by Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy of 1668–70 (modified 1687–91), placed directly on the main axis, is the major sculptural group closest to the palace (Fig. 12). Yet owing to a dip in the terrain before the greensward leading to the *Apollo Fountain*, the work cannot actually be seen from Louis’s standpoint in the Hall of Mirrors. It is as if the fountain was the garden’s troubling little secret, the king’s Achilles’ heel, the accidental truth that should not be yet cannot help being revealed. As a mere mortal, one must venture to the lip of the first parterre, or descend a staircase left or right, to gain a view of it (Fig. 13).

This sculptural group tells a tale from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The goddess Latona, mistress of Jupiter and mother, by him, of Diana and Apollo, is fleeing from the god’s jealous wife, Juno. With her children, a parched Latona arrives at the shore of a pond. Here the miserly peasants of Lycia deny her succor and instead mock the divine single-parent family. Latona, protecting her son with one arm and raising the other in supplication, calls vengeance down on the Lycian mob for their ill treatment. Her petition is granted, and the unruly mortals are transformed into frogs. Ovid does not specify the agent of this metamorphosis, but the caption to a contemporary print of the fountain interpolates Jupiter into that role.²² The Marsy brothers can pull out all the stops with such rich thematic material: amphibious heads atop human bodies, hands becoming webbed, anguished mouths jetting water; and, rising above it all, gesticulations of motherly love in distress (with no sign of Latona’s anger described by Ovid).

[Fig. 12 near here] [Fig. 13 near here]



12. Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy, *Latona Fountain*, 1668–70 (modified 1687–91). Sculpture. Versailles. Photo: author.



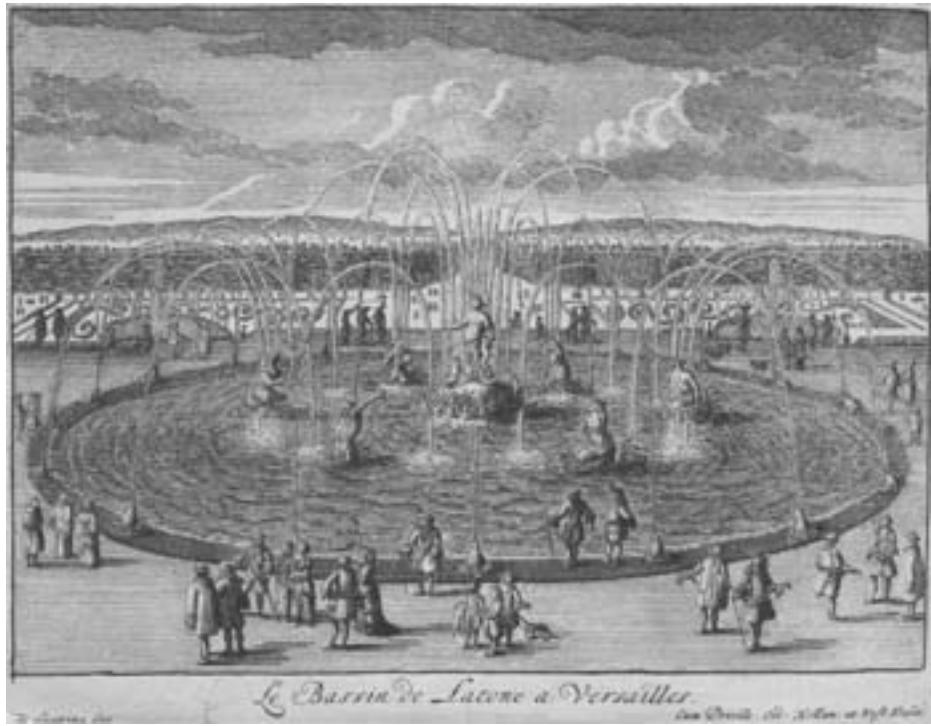
13. View from behind the *Latona Fountain* toward the *Apollo Fountain*. Versailles. Photo: author.

The allegorical meaning seems obvious enough. A divine force ruling the heavens and earth will use absolute powers to crush all insubordination. The inclusion of Apollo as a boy, some interpreters propose, may evoke the period of the Fronde, dating from the early stages of Louis's reign, when nobles and the Parisian Parlement unsuccessfully attempted to wrest power from a monarchy seemingly weakened by having a child as its king.²³ In the sculpture's first installation, Latona, on a lower pedestal, faced toward the palace: her entreaties appear directed toward the now mature Louis (Fig. 14). In a proleptic trick that elides the aid of others—whether Ovid's unnamed godly force or the caption's Jupiter or the youthful king's prime minister Cardinal Mazarin—the Sun King protects himself in his own radiant youth. He does so twice, in fact. First, as the adult Apollo positioned to hear Latona's plea, he turns the peasants into frogs. Second, as the king, Louis transforms the unruly figures into stone. In the first instance, he exiles the peasants from humanity; in the second, he incorporates them directly into the pageant of his own court. By punishing those that would harm his child self, Louis both demonstrates his capacity for violent and effective enforcement and affirms the basis of his identity and power. Two interpretations offer themselves simultaneously. When one regards the group as a sculpture, the king stands as real in contrast to the peripheral representation as he did with Tuby's *Apollo Fountain*. And when one reads the *Latona Fountain* for its content, the sun god in the palace safeguards the sun god in the garden, thereby allowing himself to grow into full and glorious being.

Fine and good. Yet, if identity and power stem from embodiment, then the king may be caught here in something of a predicament. Apollo, compositionally not much more than a column supporting his mother, is not the most interesting body in the Latona group. The peasants of Lycia are far more dramatic: panicked, writhing, divided in their very corporeal being between fiend and frog. Forget the huddled family of gods distanced at the center of the composition; the more proximate metamorphosing mortals must have elicited attention from the members of the court, perhaps even gained their empathy were the courtiers to identify with these other subjects of the king who had already experienced his wrath. Power has shifted. Defiance of the monarch will be punished; that is certain; another century will pass before an uprising against the French monarch succeeds. Yet the force of the nation has been applied and expended here. It has left the body of the Louis figure to register, first, in the altered, tortured bodies of these peasants, and second, in the freezing of their plight into stone. Victims of both Apollo's vengeance and Louis's sculptural program, they now record the displacement of royal might. They now embody it. Viewers, then as now, can well imagine what it must feel like proprioceptively to have such painful bodily distortion imposed upon themselves—imposed twice: humans into frogs and frogs into art. And when that empathy arises, the power that should reside in Louis disperses, incorporated into the subjects of the realm.

With the lesson of the *Latona Fountain* in mind, let us return to Martin's view. I have argued that, thematically, the embodied king perceives in the lower half of the picture a collection of subjects placed at a great remove from him. We can now see that that yawning

[Fig. 14
near here]



14. Willem Swidde [eng. Lespine], *The Latona Basin at Versailles* [1st installation], 1686. Engraving. From *Veues de Versailles: Grauees sur les dessins au naturel par Guillaume Swidde* ([Amsterdam?]: De Lespine ex., 1686). Collection and photo: Research Library [90-B16333], The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

distance allows space for the emergence of a potential threat. Perhaps these figures, like the peasants of Lycia, have bodies and wills of their own. Perhaps they have come into being during that conceptually antecedent moment that anticipates the extension of the king's majesty. The threat, in turn, creates a twofold political imperative, both to make the realm known to the king and to make it part of his greater being. We have heard Bossuet on both aspects: "God enables the prince to discover the most deep-laid plots"; and "The will of all the people is included in his own." Yet the first formulation belies the second, for how can plots be uncovered without first being hatched by wills not included in the king's? Even within the majestic body of the nation, things may grow that are part of the king but also, like a cancer, not part of him. The monarch must remain ever vigilant to protect his national being, modeled on his human body and extended by God's majesty, from such internal infirmities. What is this gathering of courtiers in the forecourt (Fig. 15)? Loyal subjects or a cabal? Benign tissue or a malignant polyp? Can we tolerate this telos that registers, or not, the royal telos? Can it be confirmed as an innocuous inner part of the nation, or need it be extirpated for the general good of Louis that is France?

If Martin's picture raises the specter of deviance from the king's will, it also activates the

[\[Fig. 15 near here\]](#)



15. Jean-Baptiste Martin, *Perspective View from Versailles Palace of the Place d'Armes and the Stables*, 1688. Detail of Plate 1. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris / Art Resource, New York.

powers of scrutiny and assimilation. As if its vision were farsighted, the painting holds the king's subjects at more than arm's length, the better to capture the revealing details of their comportment: each pose struck, each gesture flourished, and toward whom. Stylistically, Martin eschews any temptation to parrot aristocratic gesticulations with a painterly swish of his brush, instead serving the royal viewer with a meticulous report. The picture aspires to render intent visible and then stands ready to integrate the wills thus revealed into the panoramic vision that belongs to the king. Each gathering becomes a cluster in its proper place, situated within the isotropic space of the realm presented here to Louis as his own assimilative mode. Moreover, the medium of painting permits the pictorial device of collapsing far and near, as performed compositionally by the clouds in the upper half of the picture, to descend like a curtain from above onto the lower half of the scene, with its pronounced thematic depth. If the depiction of vast distance hurls each person and item far away into the fictive expanse, their careful rendition in paint pulls them abruptly near again, no farther

away from the monarch's scrutiny than the surface of this canvas upon which he gazes. Whereas the Marsy brothers turned the Lycian peasants into stone, Martin transforms the king's contemporary subjects into flat paint. Inviting the king's artistic eye to dart like Bossuet's birds, Martin's medium and flat support ensure that Louis's attention travels everywhere across the depicted kingdom, with the surface of the picture serving as a figure for the comprehensiveness and proximity of the king's faultless awareness.

The surface as a figure of royal knowledge: therein, precisely, lies the limitation of this representation of the monarch's capacity to draw his realm arbitrarily near through artistic means. When the painting gives the kingdom to Louis as an image, the material substance of its variegated contents disappears behind this flat, opaque screen. The picture occludes the place. While we are dealing here with wholly terrestrial relations, we have encountered this dynamic before. In essence, Martin's painting functions as an idol for the absent realm: it offers a "face" that resembles the kingdom as we—and as Louis, as a living human—experience it rather than the kingdom itself. Much as (according to Marion) onto-theology reduces God to a concept and (by Bossuet's lights) royal accoutrements risk reducing majesty to a courtly performance, landscape painting reduces the realm to an image, so "that we might see it," to repeat Marion's words.²⁴ Like the idol in relation to God, the artifice of the picture "mortally finishes" the possibility that the actual kingdom can be made present. Instead, representation represents itself as such, as just a surface, allowing the kingdom to escape, in "undeniable alterity," into the real and the profound. Louis in front of the picture would then be left with nothing but illusion, hemmed in by the surfaces—Martin's painting in particular, and more generally the acres of canvas covered by his court artists—that encase him like a prisoner in a gilded cell, fundamentally isolated and alienated from the kingdom over which he was meant to rule.

Such abject epistemic failure would condemn Martin's picture, except that the painting is redeemed by its iconic nature—in Marion's sense, which concerns relation across distance rather than resemblance. To be sure, Martin's renditions do resemble the scattered subjects. The details are meant to establish correspondence between paint patches and the appearance of the things; otherwise, scrutiny would fail. Nonetheless, the great gap of space in the lower half, as opposed to the collection of objects that that space contains, grants to the king a powerful kind of distance. That distance both sunders his human self from his realm and allows his divine majesty miraculously to traverse back over it. To paraphrase Marion's assessment of the icon: "the [landscape] conceals and reveals that upon which it rests: the separation in it between the [realm] and its face." The forms of difference and distance that characterize the contents of the kingdom as presented by Martin's painting—geographic remove, material autonomy, physical variety, potentially alien intent, and so on—constitute a "visibility of the invisible, a visibility where the invisible gives itself to be seen as such." Thus they stand both as the initial rationale and as the final culmination of Louis's divine omniscience. They both create the imperative for the human king to borrow majestic expanse from God and enable the efficacy of that borrowing by vouchsafing the pseudoinde-

pendent existence of the wide world that omniscience intends to assimilate. The world is only pseudo-independent, rather than fully autonomous and thus inassimilable, because it is separate from the king only in that conceptually anterior moment that his royal majesty has always already traversed and yet is also always traversing anew with each viewing of the painting or each gaze out the window. Much as the presentation of Louis's expansive majesty to the realm in portrait and ritual depended on the constant transcendence of his base corporeal being, for the realm to appear to Louis as a nation depended on the king's both having already overcome its difference and distance from him, and overcoming that difference and distance again now.

Majesty depends on the distance it must traverse. To the extent that depth in Martin's painting succeeds in conveying a sense of that requirement, Le Pautre's map, with its omnipresence and willed proximity, appears comparatively hamstrung (Fig. 4). Cartographic vision seems unable to evoke the excess of alterity, which is endangering and enabling at one and the same moment. Viewed from the prospect of God, a map in its ultimate and perfected rendition achieves identity with the country it no longer represents but becomes. Jorge Luis Borges, in his short story "On Exactitude in Science," which is as compact as the map it describes is expansive, captures well the possibilities and impossibilities of such a fully completed map. The tale begins: ". . . In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it."²⁵ The flawlessly accurate map becomes indistinguishable, in features and in location, from the territory over which it perfectly lies and with which it necessarily fuses in complete identity—because anything less would constitute a basis for discerning difference and thus inaccuracy. The consciousness presented with such a complete map (but "presentation" is out of the question; instead "presence" is the operative term) would, in grasping its full content, in like manner need to occupy its entire surface without spatial remove. We return to Descartes's God who is not man, who is omnipresent in the world he created, who is that world that he perceives fully, from every angle, without distance (the lack of distance, in fact, rendering the question of angle moot). A divine Louis, occupying the full extent of the fully extended map and thus the territory that that map does not represent but has become, achieves identity with the realm by being coextensive with it.

Though fulfilled by and fulfilling for a god, such a complete map would have no worth for humans. Borges continues: "The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography." The map resurfaces as material artifact only when, destroyed, it peels away from the topography with which it was once identical.

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Le Pautre's map, once we stop thinking about it abstractly as the ideal of the divine king, need not perform any such pulling away. As a piece of paper, its own internal frame engraved, its geographic coverage and material size both limited, the map necessarily has distance from the terrain it depicts. Had he ever held it, Louis would have encountered this map as a material thing. We can imagine him picking it up, unfolding it, orienting it to his own body, holding it up or laying it flat. In holding such a map away from his head, or perhaps even letting go entirely once the sheet was properly situated on a table, his human eyes would need to distance themselves from the cartographic rendition—not too close, not too far—in order to take in information with the degree of specificity required by that particular viewing. In establishing the proper distances, moreover, the king necessarily would view the paper improperly, from the two-point vantage of human binocular perspective rather than from the omnipresent vision of God (for which proximity becomes embeddedness) that the logic of the map itself calls forth. And when the king's human head pulls back from the paper map, the map—constrained in size and lacking depth, accurate only to the degree that human precision allows—lifts itself away from the kingdom, revealing the great gap separating the two. It resembles the realm but also presents itself as just an image, thereby allowing the territory to emerge as expansive excess. The map, like the landscape, provides the distance necessary for majesty to exert itself.

Yet with that launching of the power of assimilation always—hand in glove—arises the threat of disruptive difference. Just as Lycian peasants can refuse succor and gesticulating subjects can plot, items portrayed by the map, once granted provisional autonomy from their image, can threaten to become unruly. Earlier I argued that the layout of roads and garden paths in Le Pautre's map directs attention to Louis at the heart of the palace. Yet the map itself is actually centered on something else: the *Apollo Fountain* (Fig. 8). To be sure, the framing results in large part from the stubborn fact that the huge gardens spread outward from the palace in only one direction. Thus when mapping the estate, Le Pautre faced the practical necessity of shifting his frame westward, which is to say upward. He pushed the palace as close to the middle of the image as he could, leaving some meaningless countryside along the bottom, eastward edge. Still, the fountain is the map's hub. Indeed, a number of avenues in the garden, those radiating outward like spokes from the nearer head of the cross-shaped Grand Canal, seem to point less toward the Apollo in the palace than to the one rising reverse-wise from the pond. The Tritons and the horses, moreover, spread out from the chariot toward the west, much as do the avenues from the monarch's apartments.

Louis creates a garden to complement his royal residence, a garden that should give back to him his own sense of reality in contrast to its playful representations. Nonetheless, in addition to being a sculpted Apollo revealed as mere figuration by being westerly troped, Tubby's main figure may emerge a god that turns on the king. He faces off against Louis XIV, who is looking down at the sculpture from the Hall of Mirrors (Fig. 16). As if in recognition of this shift, Latona, when she was reinstalled atop a higher pedestal by the architect Jules Hardouin-Mansart around 1690 (a decade and a half after her creation), was turned to direct



16. View from behind the *Apollo Fountain* toward the palace. Versailles. Photo: author.

[Fig. 16
near here]

her supplication toward this other Apollo (Fig. 13). In place of the man in the Hall of Mirrors, the sculpture of the god in the chariot rising from the waters becomes the mature Apollo that, proleptically and self-sufficiently, intervenes to save his own youthful self.

The threat to the king has more than doubled because, unlike miserly peasants or plotting subjects who exploit the terrestrial space allowed them by distance, the Apollo in the basin appears to be repossessing nothing less than the king's capacity to know and enforce, which is to say, his majesty on loan from God. The sculpture can do so because Louis—by necessity, in order to have a kingdom to incorporate and a majesty to extend over it—has had to allow both realm and God to exist as something other than himself.

4. NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

What is a king to do? In an obvious sense, the threat is not genuine. The figure is only Apollo, a defunct god; and, like the Lycian peasants, he is only a sculptural representation, serving as a foil to the real king. The prospect may nonetheless have prompted concern because it raises the possibility that the king's powers, not just that upon which he exercises them, might depart the palace. If we are to accept the testimony of a painting by Pierre-Denis Martin (probably the nephew of Jean-Baptiste), one of the ways in which Louis responds is to travel out from the center, across distance, to reclaim whatever has been allowed to take up residence afar (Fig. 17). Mounted on a wee chariot of his own (probably utilized because of some



17. Pierre-Denis Martin, *View of the Apollo Basin in the Gardens of Versailles*, c. 1713. Oil on canvas. Musée des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris / Art Resource, New York.

infirmity of age), the portrayed Louis faces not toward the fountain but in the same direction as the Apollo in the basin.

[Fig. 17 near here]

But then the question arises, at whom or what is Louis looking; the Louis, that is, depicted in Pierre-Denis Martin's painting? And who or what is looking at him? Whose gaze does the painting, and the depicted king's attention, solicit? Latona's, perhaps, to allow the monarch to recoup his displaced task of Olympian autopaternal intervention. Yet from the perspective of the *Apollo Fountain*, Latona is all but lost in her topographic dip (Fig. 16). So instead Louis looks back principally on the palace. He looks up to himself in the Hall of Mirrors—a place proper to the king even when his physical body is not occupying it—looking down on himself in front of the *Apollo Fountain*. A second backs each Louis, either the Apollo ris-

ing in his chariot or the actual morning sun. It matters not, then, whether the king looks from here to there or from there to here. Both center and periphery allow the king to witness his own prowess, from the perspective of his own prowess.

The endless reflexivity of such gazing between the centered and peripatetic kings may even become the object of Louis's own meta-attentiveness. Placing him back in the Hall of Mirrors, we can imagine him focusing on that small spot directly ahead that is the Apollo group in the distance (Fig. 7) and then extrapolating from Apollo's directed attention—which Louis himself has exercised during his excursions into the garden—the view back toward Latona, who stares beseechingly at the god in the chariot (Fig. 16). Whereas in my earlier account the king directed his attention to the charioted god alone, now I have him also discerning the proleptic salvation by Apollo of Apollo being enacted by sculptural groups visible and not visible before him. Accordingly, the reversal of Latona during the reinstallation is not some terrible misjudgment by Hardouin-Mansart but actually becomes a representation within the garden of the sun god's proleptic salvation of himself, against which his own autonomous self-generation in the palace stands, reflected in its difference, as real.

It is a loftier stance, which might seem to recenter the monarch, except that even this meta-attentiveness becomes displaced from the center back again into the field. Imagine a courtier standing behind the *Apollo Fountain*, squinting back toward the palace on the off chance of spying Louis at the opened central window; the courtier imagines the monarch witnessing the face-off between sculptural groups. Imagine Louis witnessing that subject, who is both of the king and potentially not of him, witnessing the monarch, and so on. It should be clear how it goes: back and forth, alternating between center and the expanse of the realm, in unending layers of meta-attentiveness.

So it is not just embodiment that necessarily disperses across the realm. Royal vision, with its capacity for scrutiny and assimilation, its aptitude for discernment and discipline, also leaves the palace to spread out across the kingdom. Moreover, not only bodies as the vessels of power could come to reside with others out in the realm; in the same way others too—sculptured gods or squinting courtiers—could claim to see through the king's eyes. Neither the center nor the monarch's own body located there can keep a firm hold on the king's roving oversight.

But such has been the case all along with the images we have been examining in this chapter. Up to now I have been treating Jean-Baptiste Martin's canvas as if the painting's outlook, like the prospect from the bedroom itself, belonged exclusively to the king. Actually, even the window was not solely the king's: courtiers and even servants undoubtedly also peered out. Martin's picture likewise attracted the passing glances and studied attention of many members of the court other than the monarch. The view in its painted rendition, moreover, traveled away from the center. Martin's canvas was commissioned for placement in the Grand Trianon, the monarch's retreat erected in the gardens well to the northwest of the *Apollo Fountain*, where Louis could be reminded of his omniscience centered in the main palace and, in addition, courtiers could examine the picture. Probably as many people regarded the king's view in Jean-Baptiste Martin's picture as looked upon the king in Pierre-Denis Mar-

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18. Willem Swidde [eng. Lespine], *The Courtyards, Stables, and Avenues of Versailles*, 1686. Engraving. From *Veues de Versailles: Grauees sur les dessins au naturel par Guillaume Swidde* ([Amsterdam?]: De Lespine ex., 1686). Collection and photo: Research Library [90-B16333], The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

tin's painting, which hung in the neighboring room in the Grand Trianon.²⁶ Paintings are like that: they tend to call for an audience of at least dozens, if not hundreds and (over time) thousands. Consider, further, a drawing by Willem Swidde engraved by Lespine in 1686, an image predating the elder Martin's work and showing much the same scene as the painting (Fig. 18). A print, issued in multiple copies meant for dissemination, hardly presupposes the king as its exclusive audience, or even its principal one. It may be issued under royal auspices, but it demands a great many viewers, indeed many owners. As Gérard Sabatier has written of such images: "Volumes and illustrations were distributed by the hundred—as many as 1,700 could be printed at once—to the royal family, dukes, ministers, archbishops, and *présidents* of the *parlements* and other courts, but above all to ambassadors who gave them as gifts when they were received at foreign courts. . . . Colbert set prices himself, at very low levels so that even the most modest of amateurs could have access to royal treasures."²⁷ The process did not end in the seventeenth century, for the prints have continued to circulate to this day, reaching the far corners of the globe.²⁸ In the end, the range of places that have hosted engravings such as Swidde's and the number of viewers solicited by them far exceed the acreage and the crowd depicted in the image itself.

[\[Fig. 18 near here\]](#)

So, many have seen the print, as we see it now. But what are we seeing? It is possible that real or hypothetical viewers might attempt to claim the commanding view as their own. That was the threat represented by the *Apollo Fountain*, to which Louis responded by transporting himself to the chariot's vantage. Were it not for that danger, permanently present and permanently overcome, the king would have lacked part of his mandate for extending his oversight. Nonetheless, the potential for such appropriation cannot be regarded as the principal approach proffered by this image. We, the collectivity of people (past, present, and future) into whose hands the print or secondary reproductions of it have fallen, are not looking at the actual view from the center. It is not our bedroom; for almost all of us it is not even our epoch. Rather, we are looking at the king's act of looking. Perhaps the mild elevation in both Jean-Baptiste Martin's painting and Swidde's image hint at this nuance: only Louis has the majestic stature to see thus from on high. The king's overview in the form of its pictorial representation enters into the territory he surveys, and those in that territory witness his power to view the kingdom.

And what a sight to see! In both Jean-Baptiste Martin's painting and Swidde's view, we witness a realm filled with variety and difference, *and* the capacity of the king to impose coherence over that heterogeneity, converting disparate specificities into the general isotropy, *and* the assurance that the uniformity thus imposed, rather than consisting of only the flat representation placed before the monarch, actually extends out into the kingdom. (Similar things are seen in Le Pautre's map, though it emphasizes the homogenizing effects of the king's rationality more than the kingdom's material variety.) In a sense, the stages replicate those we discovered in Rigaud's portrait, where we saw a Christic body that modeled coherence, *and* an idol of Jehovahian majesty, *and* the assurance, in the form of a fully mortal body, that majesty is something other than its terrestrial appearance. But the landscapes have an advantage. The portrait can manifest majesty only as an idol of human scale, or as that "undefinable element" that remains when all earthly appearances of the idol are stripped away. In contrast, the landscapes demonstrate—in the iconic form of "a visibility where the invisible gives itself to be seen as such" (again Marion's words)—majesty in the process of realizing itself on earth, through the exertion of Louis's assimilative oversight. When seen as actual countryside, the painting and the print show only space and the stuff that occupies spots within it. When regarded instead as Louis's view of the countryside, they depict the nation, made replete by the omnipresence of the glorious king. More even than Rigaud's picture, the landscapes in this manner portray France: Christic corporeal coherence presented not through its human model but in its expanded form, encompassing land and all those living upon it.

To be sure, God's majesty could no more be captured by Martin's and Swidde's depictions of countryside than it could by Rigaud's portrayal of king and accoutrements. Nonetheless, the landscape views provided an excellent means for rendering visible Louis's borrowing of that majesty for terrestrial purposes. In showing France, moreover, such images also gave themselves to be seen by France itself. The diverse individuals toward whom paintings and

prints traveled cohere as a nation precisely by seeing themselves incorporated into the king's vision of them. Nation can be seen only in this form, in the viewer's faith that some ineffable coherence has descended on the land and its people, like grace. Occupants of the territory here regard themselves as French because they see the king seeing them that way, as a majestic extension of his own human body. Analogically, other nations to whose ambassadors prints were given could see, in addition to Louis viewing France and the French viewing Louis viewing them as French, their own status as nations recognized by a France that, modeled on its king's body, modeled coherence.

In one sense, the king enters here on a dangerous form of dependence on the people of the realm. France that is modeled on Louis needs to ratify that the Louis who is France embodies and oversees it. Otherwise, the king is just a man at the window, bereft of majesty. Just as the peasants of Lycia out in the garden need to embody, as victims, the power of the king to inflict his power from the center, so too the distanced viewers of the king's viewing serve the indispensable role of registering out there in the kingdom, and beyond, Louis's capacity to see all from Versailles. Yet in another sense, the dispersal of the king's vision, by giving to everyone far and wide the message that the overview resides in the king's nodal prospect, returns power directly to the embodied eye in the palace. The center travels to the periphery, while the periphery reaffirms the center. The king and his vision must be witnessed by the kingdom, while the kingdom must be witnessed by the king, who in turn must be witnessed by the kingdom, and so on without end. Louis's embodiment of royal identity and power becomes possible only if both his august person and his capacity to see take the risk of extending, dispersing themselves into the realm. They do so with the hope, yet without the assurance, of a proper return, whether through the initial investment or through its manifold derivatives. The monarchy, less than absolute, turns on that ceaseless, uncertain speculation.