The Art of Pleasing the Eye
Portraits by Nicolas de Largillierre and Spectatorship with Taste for Colour in the Early Eighteenth Century

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Abstract
This study examines the interaction between portraits by the exponent of French colourist painting Nicolas de Largillierre (1656–1745) and elite spectatorship in the early eighteenth century as enactment of the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye. As developed in the theory of art of Roger de Piles (1635–1709), the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye coexisted with the classicist view, which in turn emphasised the potential of painting to communicate discursive meanings and hence to engage the mind. The idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye was associated with a taste that valued the pictorial effects of painting and related to the ideal of honnêteté, which expanded on the art of pleasing in polite society by means of external appearances as a sign of social distinction.

The aim of the study is to explore how portraits by Nicolas de Largillierre address the spectator and how such paintings might have come to have meaning for spectators in the early eighteenth century. To do this, the study takes a performative approach and defines meaning as a product of the interplay of pictorial effects and spectatorial response, progressing from the initial encounter throughout the sustained exploration of the paintings. Building on close analyses of selected paintings and readings of texts that bear on issues of pictorial imitation, spectatorship and social interaction, the study brings into focus the interplay of cognitive and sensory activities, including verbal articulation and bodily movement, which come into play in the production of meanings through the act of spectatorial experience. The study also emphasises the interplay of the mimetic and the material aspects of the paintings as an important bearer of meanings and identifies several interrelated sites of tension in which the pictorial effectiveness of the portraits resides.

The study concludes by suggesting that to infer such meanings, the spectator should be prepared to respond to the address of the paintings actively, by engaging the mind, the senses and the body. Such an interpretation of the interaction between portrait paintings and spectators proposes a complex view of the ways in which artistic and spectatorial practices in the early eighteenth century might have interacted to create meanings while reproducing at the same time social and aesthetic conventions and ideals, such as the art of pleasing the eye.

Keywords: spectatorship, pleasure, meaning, body and mind, senses, illusion, imagination, touch, colour, attention, attraction, detail, display, portraiture, art theory, amateur, conversation, honnêteté, performativity, Nicolas de Largillierre, Roger de Piles.

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SPECTATORSHIP WITH TASTE FOR COLOUR IN THE
EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Introduction

Language often seems ill-suited to express what we feel […] In the face of the overwhelming presence of works of art, the task of expressing in words what they say to us seems like an infinite and hopeless undertaking. … One says this, and then one hesitates.

--- Hans-Georg Gadamer*

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words … They show themselves.
--- Ludwig Wittgenstein**

Theme of the study

Where ‘words become superfluous’: point of departure

Musée du Château in Versailles houses part of the collection of self-portraits and portraits of artists from the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture.1 The portraits are displayed in rows, on two levels, against sumptuous damask-lined walls. The arrangement invites the spectator to experience the portraits as an ensemble, rather than one at a time.

When viewing the collection for the first time, my impression was as if entering in the midst of a lively gathering. The portraits seemed as if involved in an animated conversation – the artists assuming various poses, gesturing, heads and gazes turning towards each other but also towards the spectator. The elaborate frames surrounding the paintings punctured and in this sense orchestrated the effect. While looking at this lively ‘performance’, a portrait displayed at eye level attracted my attention. The depicted painter’s face, the wig adorned with a blue ribbon and the right hand appealed to me with their illusionism. I approached the painting. The depicted painter – Nicolas de Largillierre (1656–1746) – gazing slightly from above, appeared as if in the

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moment before he would speak (Plate 1). A lively brushstroke in orange-red colour on the painter’s sleeve stood out, applied as if at random yet highlighting clearly a deep fold in the brown, velvet coat. The transformation suggested by the painting of what I could imagine as if being present into what was materially present, invited to a fascinating interplay. I stepped forward – as close as the rope barrier allowed.

In the autumn of 1981, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts held an exhibition titled Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait. The overall aim of the exhibition was to situate Largillierre’s œuvre in its historical context. Specifically, the aim was defined as twofold: to show ‘how his work related to the court portrait at the end of the reign of Louis XIV and how he affected the development of French portraiture during the eighteenth century’.3

In the Foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Pierre Rosenberg observed that whereas history and still-life painting have offered art historians opportunities to elaborate at length on their various meanings, portrait paintings have remained bound to their value as likenesses.4 Portrait painters, therefore, fall victim to their own fame – they become symbols of a period, readily associated to particular styles or portrait types. Consequently, Largillierre has come to signify the idealised ‘portrait of a Junoesque, richly clad lady, her gaze turned heavenward’.5 Rosenberg, however, suggested looking at Largillierre’s works differently:

Let us, like Largillierre, look without prejudice, for our own pleasure, at the paintings … which in their colour also owe something to the Flemish school, and yet are so French in style. Once the virtuosity of their rendering and the bravura of their technique have been acknowledged, words become superfluous. Largillierre wanted it that way, for he saw painting above all as a source of pleasure for the senses, a feast for the eye.6
Rosenberg’s observation raises important issues. On one hand, if experienced beyond prejudice, Largillierre’s paintings give rise to a particular emotion – ‘pleasure for the senses’. On the other hand, such an experience ultimately leads the spectator’s response to silence – once the virtuoso rendering and the technical ‘bravura’ have been recognised, ‘words become superfluous’. But then, how is meaning produced and what happens to interpretation?

Seemingly, this ‘silent’ level of spectatorial experience does not relate to the subject of the paintings. To look at the paintings with an interest for their subject would have implied observations on the portrayed person’s identity, facial features, expression, pose, gestures, the accessories. Although such aspects necessarily condition the spectatorial experience, Rosenberg refrains from mentioning any. Rather, he focuses on the formal qualities of the paintings and emphasises their value for the opportunity they offer for a spectatorial experience for the sake of visual pleasure. Rosenberg’s account might seem, therefore, close to a formalist practice of interpretation. 7

Seemingly, his account also relates to an interpretative strategy that ascribes to paintings that emphasise the qualities of the medium the purpose of enchanting the spectator’s eyes and, as Mary Sheriff has observed, regards them ‘as if they can be understood without intellectual effort’, as ‘mere objects of delectation’. 8

Rosenberg’s account, however, equally suggests an invitation to view the paintings historically, leading back to the late seventeenth century and to the heart of colourist art theory. The way of looking at Largillierre’s paintings, which he proposed, recalls the proper way of viewing and judging paintings, as defined by Roger de Piles (1635–1709) in his Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture (1677). In the ‘First conversation’, after a visit at the Gallerie Royale, Damon and Pamphile engage in a discussion about the knowledge and judgement of painting. According to Pamphile, who likewise puts forward the opinion of de Piles, true knowledge of painting consists in being able to differentiate what is good and what is bad in a painting and to provide explanation for such a judgement. 9 To arrive at such knowledge, the spectator

7 I use ‘formalism’ in a broad sense, as an approach that abstracts the formal properties of an artwork, i.e. colour, line, and clair-obscure and understands these properties as determining the style, the meaning and the experience of painting. Philip Sohm has employed the term ‘regressive formalism’ to designate analyses that focus on pictorial technique by way of abstracting the painting’s literary content, leading thus to readings of narratives ‘as if they were plays of light and color, a kind of proto-Impressionism’. Philip Sohm, Pittorese: Marco Bacchini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xv.


9 ‘… la veritable connaissance de la Peinture, consiste à sçavoir si un Tableau est bon, ou mauvais; à faire la distnction de ce qui est bien dans un mesme Ouvrage, d’avec ce qui est mal, & de rendre raison du jugement qu’on en aura porté.’ Roger de Piles, Conversations sur la
ought to discard all prejudice and look at the paintings as if for the first time.\textsuperscript{10}

As for the question of what effect the painting should make upon the spectator at first sight, Pamphile leaves no doubt:

I am then asking you to tell me, what effect do you think that a painting should make the first moment one looks at it? / I believe, answered Damon, that the first effect should be to develop the subject clearly and to inspire the principle passion. / What you say is correct, resumed Pamphile, and it regards the pleasure of the mind. However, something ought to come prior; it is the pleasure for the eyes, which consists in being surprised first, while the pleasure for the mind comes only by reflection.\textsuperscript{11}

This *something*, conceived as *pleasure for the eyes*, which in the account of Rosenberg amounts to words becoming superfluous, is the point of departure of the present study.

**Aim of study**

The study examines the interaction between colourist portrait paintings and spectators in the early eighteenth century. As the title indicates, at the centre of the study stands the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye. By the turn of the eighteenth century, this idea was associated with a taste that valued the pictorial effects of painting and related to the ideal of pleasure that permeated elite society. In the present study, the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye is hence regarded as a dynamic idea, negotiated and enacted in artistic and spectatorial practices. Focus is on selected works by Nicolas de Largillierre, chosen for the example they offer of a colourist pictorial idiom, which acknowledged the material presence of painting in subtle ways, supporting thus the experience of the paintings as an art of pleasing the eye. The aim of the study is to explore how such portrait paintings address the spectator and how they might have come to have meaning for spectators in the early eighteenth century.

The meaning pursued in this study signifies more than the identification of subject matter and the interpretation of its discursive content. *Meaning*, here, is conceived in a broader sense, to include the response to *meaningful* aspects of

\textsuperscript{10} "Tâchez donc si vous le pouvez de vous défaire de toute préoccupation, & d’estre comme si vous n’aviez jamais entendu parler de Peinture, & que vous n’en eussiez rien veu.’ Piles, *Conversations*, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Je vous prie donc de me dire, quel effet vous croyez que doit faire un Tableau dans le premier moment qu’on le regarde. / Il me semble, répondit Damon, que le premier effet doit estre de déveloper nettement son sujet, & d’en inspirer la principale passion. / Ce que vous dites est fort bien, repartit Pamphile, & c’est le plaisir de l’esprit; neantmoins il y a quelque chose qui doit aller devant; c’est le plaisir des yeux qui consiste à estre surpris d’abord, au lieu que celuy de l’esprit ne vient que par reflexion.’ Piles, *Conversations*, 77.
the painting as material object. Meaning thus signifies the production of effects in the complex process of spectatorial experience as it might progress in time — ideally, from the initial encounter with the painting throughout its sustained exploration. This process involves a whole set of cognitive and sensorial activities, such as recognition, attention, imagination, emotion and verbal articulation; it involves bodily movement as well. These activities are interrelated and depend on each other. The question of how this interrelation is sustained and how it might have been enacted in the encounter between painting and spectator runs as a central theme throughout the study.

More particularly, the study explores the following questions: How, by what means did the paintings engage the spectator? What elements in the paintings might have generated a response of the kind described above — a response that seemingly cannot be expressed in words? What role might such elements have had in the process of spectatorial experience? What meanings might such elements, and their effects, have had for spectators? What spectatorial situations, conditions of viewing and display did such elements entail? How did such meanings relate to spectatorial demands, expectations and to the broader issues of social life and identity?

To explore these questions, the study builds on close analyses of selected paintings and a selection of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts that bear on issues of pictorial imitation, spectatorial experience and social interaction. Three conceptual pairs, central to the questions pursued in this study, inform the analyses: eye (also senses) and mind; surface, or appearance (also the painting as a material device) and depth, or substance (also subject matter); and, finally, involvement and awareness.

Painting, pleasure and elite spectatorship: transformations of taste

Involvement, or the question of how painting engages and comes to have meaning for the spectator, is integral to the conception of the aims and the value of painting. As the passage from de Piles quoted above suggests, two ways of conceiving the means and the ends of painting permeated the theoretical discourse in the late seventeenth century: classicist and colourist. In 1671–2, these two positions met in an open debate at the Academy — a debate better known as the quarrel of drawing and colour (la querelle du coloris). Most notably, this debate opposed Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne (1631–81) and Charles Le Brun (1619–91), proponents of the primacy of drawing and Gabriel Blanchard (1630–1704), proponent of colour.12 Outside the Academy, Roger de

Piles published *Dialogue sur le coloris* (1673) in which he explicitly referred to the quarrel of drawing and painting and took stance for the primacy of colour. Four years later, in *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture*, mentioned above, de Piles developed further the argument for the primacy of colour and the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye, emphasising the spectator’s experience of painting. At the same time, André Félibien (1619–95) continued the publication of his *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres*, begun in 1666. Between 1672 and 1688, Félibien published eight more *Entretiens* (conversations) in which he vindicated the primacy of drawing over colour and pursued the idea of painting as essentially an art of pleasing the mind.

The quarrel of drawing and colour, and the subsequent discursive articulations of these two ways of conceiving the means and the ends of painting, brought to the fore a range of oppositions. These oppositions related in various ways to the complex relationship between reason and the senses, mind and eye, substance and appearance, depth and surface; between internalised idea (also ideal) or the narrative content of painting and the representational device or the painting as a material, tangible object. The classicist position evoked the primacy of line (*dessin*) and favoured the idea of painting as a vehicle of instruction. The ultimate expression of this idea was the hierarchy of the genres, which granted primacy to history painting for its commitment to the imitation of Nature conceived as an ideal form and implied the painter’s exercise of intellectual faculties in distinction to the mere copying of how things appear to the eye. The ideal model of classicism, embodied in the art of Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), was a painting that offered a transparent view of the subject matter and its discursive meanings; transparent in the sense of being unobstructed by the accidental qualities of colour and, at a further remove, by the material surface of the representational device. The colourist position in turn evoked the primacy of colour (*coloris*), bringing thus to the fore

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the troubling issue of the materiality of both painting and the visible world. Emphasis was on the sensuous appeal of painting and its capacity to deceive and seduce the spectator. To justify this idea, the proponents of colour defined painting by pointing at its difference from poetry, rather than its similarity as suggested by the dictum ut pictura poesis. Painting was an essentially visual art and addressed hence the sight first, the colourists maintained. 16 The colourist ideal model, embodied in the art of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), was a painting that by means of artful exaggeration (fard) privileged the overall visual effect. The appeal of artifice as a source of pleasure for the eyes, challenged in this sense the beauty of ideal imitation as a source of pleasure for the mind (esprit). Nevertheless, although distinct, the classicist and the colourist positions were not mutually exclusive. The theoretical affirmation of painting as a liberal art was of outmost importance to both classicists and colourists.17 In addition, both positions equally embraced the idea of pleasure/delectation as integral to the aims of painting, albeit in different ways. The difference was one of emphasis.18

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the idea that the value of painting derives from its capacity to please the eyes was espoused by the French art theoretical discourse and the practice of the art.19 Although never discarded, the theoretical prominence of subject matter with its pictorial clarity and reliance on text for the production of meaning had given way, in part at least, to the appreciation of the effects of painting.20 Likewise, the privilege granted to colour, however, allowed ‘silence’ to lure into the spectator’s response to the eye.

18 Svetlana Alpers has interpreted the difference between the views of poussinistes and rubenistes as a reversion of the priorities in which the rubenistes gave precedence of the means of the art over its ends. Svetlana Alpers, ‘Roger de Piles and the history of art’, in Peter Gantz et al. (eds), Kunst und Kunsthistorie: 1400–1900 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 177–8.
19 Scholarship singles out 1699 as the year of the official ‘victory’ of the colourists in the Academy, when Jules Hardouin-Mansard replaced Édouard Colbert de Villacerf at the post of surintendant of the Academy, Charles de la Fosse (1636–1716) was elected director and Roger de Piles conseiller honoraire. See Teyssèdre, Roger de Piles, 451–73.
painting. It was this prospect, or rather risk, which Charles Le Brun aimed at implicitly in 1671 when he observed that, whereas colour represents but what is accidental, drawing imitates everything that can be seen and hence expressed in words. From a colourist point of view, however, such a ‘silent’ level of spectatorial experience was not an issue. Rather, colourist painting opted for a different venue for the creation of meaning. True painting, according to de Piles, was ‘such as not only surprises, but, as it were, calls to us; and has so powerful an effect, that we cannot help coming near it, as if had something to tell us’. This definition, which de Piles advanced in a lecture at the Academy in 1702, later published in his Cours de peinture par principes (1708), implied that in the encounter between painting and spectator, the painting was expected to ‘speak’ first. This initial effect, nevertheless, was attainable only by means of colour and hence beyond what could be expressed in words. Yet, the spectator was not expected to remain silent. True painting, according to de Piles, strikes the spectator, it attracts, ‘and the surprised spectator must go to it as if to enter into conversation with the figures it represents’. Who was this spectator?

The preoccupation of the Academy with the question of how appearances might (or should) embody substance and the corresponding tension between reason and pleasure - with all implications of this tension for the transmission of knowledge, ideas and values - were closely linked to issues of power and authority and their embodiment in representational practices as a strategy of justification and maintenance. Seventeenth-century Academic art theory has

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21 As Jacqueline Lichtenstein has argued, painting in which colour (and its appeal to the eye) is put in the first place, ‘reduces all discourse to silence’. Lichtenstein, Eloquence of Color, 195. Nicholas Mirzoeff has in turn called the tension that such a strategy creates a ‘gap between the representation and its object’, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Pictorial Sign and Social Order. L’Académie royale de peinture et sculpture 1648–1752, PhD diss. (University of Warwick, 1990), 5.

22 ‘Premièrement, on doit savoir qu’il y a deux sortes de desseins: l’un qui est intellectuel ou théorique, et l’autre pratique. Que le premier dépend purement de l’imagination, qu’il s’exprime par des paroles … il [le dessein pratique] peut aussi s’exprimer par des paroles. … le dessein imite toutes les choses réelles, au lieu que la couleur ne représente que ce qui est accidentel.’ Charles Le Brun, ‘Sentiments sur le discours du mérite de la couleur’ (9 January 1672), in Conférences I, 450.


24 ‘…je conclus que la veritable Peinture doit appeller son Spectateur par la force & par la grande verité de son imitation; & que le Spectateur surpris doit aller à elle, comme pour entrer en conversation avec les figures qu’elle représente’. Piles, Cours, 6.

been interpreted as articulating the tenets of the classicist mode of painting, conceived in view of a spectator beholding the magnificence of the King in its various representations to epitomise institutional power. Along these lines, Suzanne Pucci has described the seventeenth-century ‘spectator’ as a subject with the right to pass judgements as ‘invisible’. According to Pucci, before the death of Louis XIV in 1715, ‘the Spectator was the subject of and the subject to the King and was relegated to a separate space where he remained distant from the spectacular representations of royalty’. At the same time, issues concerning representation and its relation to the dyad reason/senses were inherent in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century theories of taste. The Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns articulated clearly the significance assigned to these issues and the linking of taste to power and identity, including the right to judge. Likewise, matters of taste related closely to seventeenth-century theories of social comportment and the cult of honnêteté, which retained the bond to reason while emphasising at the same time pleasing social performance embodied in appearances as a sign of aristocratic distinction. As


Pucci, Sites of the Spectator, 4.


Martin Weyl has pointed out, the *bonnête* urge towards reasonable behaviour, combined with the wish to please in polite society, paralleled the requirement of art theory that painting should equally instruct and please the spectator.  

Scholars have noted that by 1660 already a number of art consumers sought pleasure in viewing and discussing paintings in ways that were different, if not essentially antithetical, to the principles of French classicism. Joan DeJean has argued, in turn, that a new kind of spectatorship, a new ‘public’ entitled to exercise judgements of taste, emerged in the late seventeenth century in the form of ‘cultural controversy’, embodied most notably in the *Querelle* between the Ancients and the Moderns. Indeed, it is important to emphasise that the term ‘public’ can be applied on art viewers of this period only with reservations. Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century ‘public’ was limited; it belonged to the noble, *bonnête* elite. Yet, DeJean’s observation on the importance of the late seventeenth-century cultural debates for the formation of a ‘public’ opinion on matters of taste is pertinent. In 1675–8 evolved yet another debate. Less famous but not less fervent than the quarrel of drawing and colour, this debate was conducted through anonymous *libelles*. Its starting point was the acquisition of a large number of paintings by Rubens for the collection of Armand Jean de Vignerot du Plessis, second duke de Richelieu (1629–1715), until then recognised as admirer of Poussin. The debate engaged members of the elite sphere of art consumption. They were concerned with the status of their art collections and their taste.

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32 Weyl discusses the intertwining of pleasure and reason and observes that as pleasure (*delectation*) implied moral conduct in social life and moral content in the arts, reason implied not only the wish to promote clarity and order, but also the skill of pleasing. Martin Weyl, *Passion for Reason and Reason of Passion: Seventeenth-Century Art and Theory in France, 1648–1683* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), esp. 143–96.


It is possible to view the ‘shadow’ debate of 1675–78 as a symptom of an emerging ‘public’ interest for the arts. For this ‘public’, the ability to pass judgements of taste was an important aspect of the creation of social identity. It was in this milieu that the ideas of de Piles were shaped and first embraced.37 It was also in this milieu that a new kind of spectator emerged – a ‘new kind of amateur’, as Thomas Crow has put it; the preferred mode of communication of this amateur was by suggestion and allusion, modelled on the late seventeenth-century ideal of the bonnête homme.38

The spectator addressed in the present study is part of this limited, elite field of art consumption in France in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. The link between spectatorship and bonnête culture is central to the idea of a spectator with taste for colour pursued in study and the exploration of the ways in which colourist portrait painting might have sustained meaning in the encounter with a spectator prepared to respond to its properly visual address. Although not every elite spectator might have shared such an interest for colourist painting or taste for colour and its ineffable qualities, a number of them apparently did.

A new taste for portraiture

The new taste for colour brought forth another important consequence. Through the privilege granted to pleasure over instruction, the proponents of colour opened for an appreciation of all kind of painting thus challenging, if not contesting, the hierarchy of the genres. In 1699, de Piles raised the question if fidelity to history was the essence of painting only to answer it negatively. The essence of painting was the imitation of nature, de Piles maintained, therefore ‘if they [paintings] instruct us so much the better; if they don’t, we shall still have the pleasure of viewing a kind of Creation that will both divert and move us’.39 Consequently, a landscape or a portrait could be as valuable as the representation of historical subjects, if it succeeded in its task to address the spectator’s eyes pleasingly.

The impact of this change is equally suggested by the relative rise in formal status of portrait painting in the Academy. According to article XIII of the Academy’s regulations of 1663, the higher ranks were reserved for history
Consequently, painters usually sought reception in the Academy as history painters and so did also de François de Troy (1645–1730), Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743) and Nicolas de Largillierre. Yet, although they devoted their careers to portrait painting, in the period 1699–1735 de Troy, Rigaud and Largillierre were able to attain even the highest academic ranks. This episode in the history of the Academy was brief. As Tony Halliday has observed, the status of the genre declined in the second half of the century.

The raise in status of portrait painting in the formal hierarchy of the Academy in the early eighteenth century may be explained with the raise in popularity of the genre and the growth of public interest. Theorists of art too were sensitive to this change. Roger de Piles for instance included in his *Cours de Peinture* a chapter on portraiture. Furthermore, the general characteristics of the pictorial idiom practiced by portrait painters by the turn of the eighteenth century suggest a flexibility that was likely to appeal to commissioners with different demands and tastes.

In a discussion of French portrait painting in the period 1660–1715, Emmanuel Coquery has described the transformations of the genre in terms of synthesis. According to Coquery, this synthesis emerged gradually out of the tensions between two more or less distinct modes, which were practised during the early reign of Louis XIV: the court portrait (*portrait de cour*) and the so-called

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41 François de Troy in 1674, Hyacinthe Rigaud in 1700; also, for example, Jean-Marc Nattier (1685–1766) received in 1718 and Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755) in 1719. Some painters were received twice, as for example Robert Levrac-Tournières (1668–1752), received as portrait painter in 1702 and as history painter in 1716. *Procès-verbaux de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, 1648–1792*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon, 10 vols (Paris: J. Baur/Charavay Frères, 1875–1892) (henceforth *PV*), 2: 34; 3: 285, 339; 4: 232, 273, 379.

42 Received in 1685, Largillierre rose successively to the posts of assistant professor (1699), professor (1705), chancellor (1733), superintendent (1735–38) and director (1734; and 1738–46). The records of the Academy on the day of Largillierre’s reception (30 March 1686) do not specify if he was received as a history painter or as a portraitist. *PV*, 2: 322. However, Largillierre was received upon the presentation of one painting only, which was the standard procedure for reception as history painter. For the other genres, the Academy required two paintings. Rosenfeld, *Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 173.

43 Halliday, *Facing the Public*, 5.

44 According to Georges Wildenstein, the number of portraits listed in various early eighteenth-century inventories was ‘incredible’ and hence suggested that more or less every household in Paris possessed family portraits. Georges Wildenstein, “Le goût pour la peinture dans le cercle de la bourgeoisie parisienne, autour de 1700”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 48 (1956), 118 and n. 10.
aristocratic realism (réalisme aristocratique). The court portrait favoured flattering idealisation combined with strict following of the rules of propriety; the realistic, properly aristocratic mode of portrait painting, in turn, favoured minute attention to facial expression and details. By the end of the seventeenth century, these two modes of portrait painting merged in the colourist portrait (portrait coloriste), most notably in works by de Troy, Rigaud and Largillierre. The colourist portrait mode thus satisfied the requirements of splendour in the court of Louis XIV and the emerging upwardly mobile social stratum that needed an equally sumptuous exposal of wealth, while it offered at the same time detailed renderings of the face to suggest psychological depth. Although privileging the visual effectiveness of appearances, the colourist portrait in this sense could also embody substance. Dominique Brême, currently responsible for the completion of the painter’s catalogue raisonné, has interpreted Largillierre’s portraits in a similar manner, as examples of the idealised yet resembling and highly illusionistic images sought by commissioners with a taste determined by the exuberance of pomp and the appreciation for the beauty of appearances. The present study extends these observations by posing the question of how such paintings related to contemporary colourist taste conceived as a manifestation of the interest in appearances in early eighteenth-century society and how they addressed elite spectators who valued painting as an art of pleasing the eye.

Theoretical perspectives and methodology

Performativity and performative meaning

To explore the ways in which colourist portrait painting might have come to have meanings for spectators in the turn early eighteenth century, I adopt a performative approach. A performative approach to the experience of colourist portrait painting is suggested equally by de Piles’ definition of the essence of painting and the proper response of the spectator, discussed above. True painting in his definition is conceived as a painting that strikes the spectator – it

surprises, it deceives. Moreover, the painting calls on the spectator as if it has something to say, as if to engage the spectator in conversation. Painting is thus active – it does something; it acts on the spectator. In this sense, the experience of painting emerges as a performative act.

Performativity acknowledges the importance of the context in which a performance takes place – here and now – and in which meaning occurs. Performativity also emphasises the potential changeability of the performance. Catherine Soussloff, for instance, has defined ‘performativity’ as ‘a complex social action engaged with both context and language, gesture, and the body’.49 Thus, performativity recognises the complexity of the means (cognitive and corporeal) through which meaning is enacted and experienced in various social settings. In this sense, performativity calls attention to the creation of meaning as an ongoing process; it does so by shifting focus from meanings encoded by conventional, discursive means to the continuous creation of meanings through the conditions of usage and the effects that occur in various encounters. As defined by Mårten Snickare, such a use ‘might be formal as well as informal; it might be performed by large collectives, governed by strict rituals, as well as by individuals or smaller groups, following less defined patterns’.50 Focus shifts likewise from authorial intentions to the patterns of interest, the habits of spectators and the specific situations and occasions of experience of the paintings. The meanings that occur in such encounters are neither stable nor exhaustive, yet neither arbitrary nor unlimited.51 Rather such meanings can be seen as fragments, as enacted possibilities.

I approach the paintings as sites in which representation and spectator interact and conceive of this interaction as enactment, or materialisation, of effects. Such an approach entails an understanding of the encounter between spectators and portrait paintings as a performative act, which incorporates traditions of production and usage and therefore reiteration. Likewise, this act is potentially unstable. Its actualisation depends on the ‘here and now’ of the performers – the paintings but also the spectators have in this sense the potential to influence the unfolding of the performance and hence of the production of meanings.

My understanding of the encounter between paintings and spectators as an act in which both agents have the potential to influence each other is indebted to Erika Fischer-Lichte’s notion of the ‘transformative power’ of live performances, which refers to the interaction between actors and spectators in


51 Snickare, ‘How to do things with the Piazza San Pietro’, 75.
which anything can happen.\textsuperscript{52} Although it is important to maintain a difference between live performances and the ‘performance’ that takes place between a painting and a spectator – the latter being a performance in a derived sense – the analogy helps understand the performance of spectators in the experience of painting. The spectator passing by without noticing the painting and the spectator destroying the painting are the two extremes of such an experience.\textsuperscript{53} The analogy brings also focus to the potential of paintings to influence the spectator’s response in multiple ways.

Approaching painting: recognition as process

What mechanisms sustain the unfolding of meaning in the interaction between painting and spectator? Michael Podro captures poignantly the essence of this interaction in the opening sentence of his book \textit{Depiction} (1998): ‘Paintings address us, and they do so in part through creating uncertainty; our engagement with them involves a continuous adjustment as we scan them for suggestions on how to proceed and for confirmation or disconfirmation of our response.’\textsuperscript{54}

The understanding of recognition advanced in the present study is informed by Podro’s main thesis that ‘the recognition of the subject is extended and elaborated by the way its conditions of representation, the medium and the psychological adjustments the painting invites become absorbed into its content’.\textsuperscript{55} In the present study, such ‘adjustments’ are conceptualised as phenomenological and therefore performative in the sense that they involve both the body and the mind. Further, as recognition brings forth the difference between the representational device (canvas, paint, etc.) and the represented subject matter/object, it also implies a difference between what is present in the re-presentation and what the spectator imagines.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the process of recognition comprises the identification of the represented in the representational device.\textsuperscript{57} The emphasis on the artifice of painting in colourist art theory suggests a similar understanding of the process of visual experience.

The identification of elements in the paintings that create uncertainty as sites of interest for the analysis is also central to the approach of Michael Baxandall,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Michael Podro, \textit{Depiction} (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1998), vii.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Podro, \textit{Depiction}, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Podro, \textit{Depiction}, 5.
\end{itemize}
for instance in his celebrated analysis of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s (1699–1779) A Lady Taking Tea.58

Building on the shared aspects of the methodologies of Podro and Baxandall, in the analyses of the paintings, I explore elements that create uncertainties and thus uphold the spectator’s visual interest.

The spectator’s response to the paintings is in turn conceived as potentially consisting of processes of recognition and imagination; verbal articulation and silence; bodily movement and arrest. More particularly, in the analyses of the paintings, I work my way through the experience in a temporal sequence, starting from the initial moment of the encounter through various levels of sustained viewing. The paintings are examined from various viewing distances. Elements analysed include the overall composition of the paintings; the construction of pictorial space in the paintings; degrees of distinctness in the depiction of elements such as faces, hands, draperies, wigs, accessories and surrounding objects; the relationship between levels of distinctness and the effects of various juxtapositions of elements on different levels of distinctness.

The performance of painting: spectacle and conversation

To explore further the performative meaning of painting as it emerges in the act of viewing, I use the analogies with spectacle and conversation – two practices relevant in the culture of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century elite spectators.

The arts of spectacle, conversation and painting were parts of the same larger socio-cultural context. Spectacle and the art of conversation, as conceived and performed in the context of the aristocratic, bonnête culture in France, emphasised pleasure in a manner similar to that of colourist art theory. The exploration of the relationship between painting and spectatorship in analogy to these practices allows the tracing of patterns of experience and response relevant for the socio-cultural performances that emphasised the splendour of appearances. These practices shared similar visual configurations in their emphasis on pleasing appearance and refinement and their appreciation for the ineffable.59 Likewise, the analogy between painting and spectacle, on one hand, and painting and conversation, on the other hand, were employed frequently in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. In de Piles’ definition of true painting quoted above, the emphasis on the initial effect of

painting and its characterisation in terms of surprise suggests the analogy with spectacle implicitly. Conversation, in turn, is proposed explicitly as analogy for the sustained experience of the painting. At this stage of experience, which ideally follows on the initial moment of the encounter between painting and spectator, the spectator approaches the painting as if to enter in conversation with the represented figures; or, elsewhere, as if the painting had something to tell.

In the present study, I use this analogy between painting and spectacle as well as, more particularly, the analogy between theatrical machines and the painting conceived as a machine as a tool for the understanding of the initial encounter between painting and spectator. The analogy between conversation and painting/the experience of painting serves as a tool for the understanding of the spectator’s experience from up-close.

Performing spectatorship

The view that since paintings are made in order to be seen the spectator is prescribed in the picture implies that the spectator’s ‘imaginative use’ of depiction is bound to what the painting affords. As Michael Podro has put it, the spectator does ‘not freely project or associate round’ the painting but attends ‘to what projections it corroborates or confirms – confirms through other aspects of the painting itself, or through the traditions of usage, which it brings to play’.

The observations on the paintings analysed in this present study are my own. I cannot share the understanding of the spectators for whom the paintings were produced and whom they addressed. Moreover, the particularities of portrait painting as a genre entail a wide range of possible spectatorial situations. Depending on the context within which a portrait was displayed, it could take on various roles. The situations of display in which I can conceive the paintings are scholarly constructions. These constructions are based, on one hand, on the conditions of display in a twentieth-century museum setting, in which my experience of the paintings has taken place and, on the other hand, on the conditions of display suggested by the paintings, for which they seemingly have been produced.

61 Podro, Depiction, 5.
62 Settings such as those offered in the Musée du Château and the Château du Versailles, the Musée Condé in Chantilly as well as Musée Jacquemart-André and Musée Carnavalet in Paris, can be regarded as places in-between the conventional twentieth-century museum and the milieu in which portrait paintings might have been viewed in the early eighteenth century. This applies to the conditions of spectatorial distance and movement, but less so to the conditions of light.
Likewise, the spectator in this study is a scholarly construction. At the basis of this construction resides the acknowledgement of the difference between my own understanding, viewing and interpretation, on one hand and the experiential habits, interests and aspirations of spectators in the early eighteenth century, on the other hand. This approach is influenced by the methodology of Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, especially her conception of the process of scholarly analysis in analogy to ‘the layered process of controlled identification that actors and scenographers use to recreate figures on stage’. In this sense, I conceive of my role as the enactment of a performance, in which I can take on different roles and examine the paintings, their structure, effects and responses relevant to elite spectators in the early eighteenth century.

This methodological aspect is also reflected in the use I have made of the material. The readings of art theoretical resources have provided tools for the analysis of the paintings. The continuous, attentive looking at the paintings has equally added to my understanding of aspects of the theory and consequently to the ways in which I use it in the analyses. In this sense, my own analysis can be described as interplay – a continuous act in which images and texts elucidate each other. The double role of the texts is most notable in the case of Roger de Piles’ writings. On one hand, de Piles’ theory serves as material for the study in the sense that aspects of it are singled out and studied in detail as facets of a shared discourse that relate to the issues of pleasure and spectatorship by the turn of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, de Piles’ version of colourist theory and particularly his definition of true painting as an active participant in the process of spectatorial experience, resides at the core of my approach, described as performative. In this later sense, de Piles’ theory (or key aspects of it) provides one of several theoretical perspectives employed in the present study.

Material and scope of analysis

Images

The main body of images studied consists of a selection of portraits by Largillierre produced in the first two decennia of the eighteenth century. In this sense, a chronological account for the stylistic features of Largillierre’s pictorial idiom is not in the scope of the study. The selection of paintings is based on the examination of 350 works by Largillierre, painted from 1678 to his death in

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1741, most of which, however, from the period 1690–1735. More than eighty portraits have been examined in original. The portraits analysed in this study have been selected from this later group and can be described as representative of the painter’s œuvre.

The focus of the study on the interaction between portraits in a distinct pictorial idiom and spectators implies that knowledge of the sitters’ identity has not been a determining factor for the choice of the portraits. Moreover, the identity of many sitters in early modern portraiture has remained unknown or rests on assumptions. Such is the case of Largillierre’s œuvre as well. On the other hand, portraiture at the time employed a range of conventional types to figure the social identity and the character of the sitters. The awareness and expectations of spectators of the ways in which these portrait types signified aspects of character and social identity cannot be isolated from the production of meaning in the process of spectatorial experience without the loss of relevant layers of meaning. The selection of paintings for the present study includes therefore several portrait types. The size of the portraits has been taken into account; the standard sizes three-quarter length and half-length have been selected for analysis.

Other visual material studied includes works by contemporary, earlier and later painters, notably by Hyacinthe Rigaud. The comparison between the work of Largillierre and Rigaud as well as their lives and careers was established already in the eighteenth century. In addition, the visual material studied comprises engravings after portrait paintings and prints, notably so-called fashion prints of the period 1680–1720.

The focus of the present study on the material aspects of the portraits and their effects in the process of spectatorial experience entails a consideration of the material condition and state of preservation of the paintings. Studies of the materials of painting frequently point out that the transformations of a painting begin as soon as it is completed. Ageing is an important aspect of the material transformation of paintings. With time, the transparency of oil paint increases, obscuring gradually effects of modelling produced by variations in the thickness of paint. Whereas parts modelled in thick layers of paint (particularly lead whites) barely change with time, mid-tones produced by the application of thinner layers of paint become darker and tend to merge into the shadows. Gradual modelling of forms becomes therefore sharper with the result that


65 The prints studied are part of the vast *Collection Michel Henin. Estampes relatives à l’histoire de France*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, esp. vols. 65-75; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, http://gallica.bnf.fr/


richly nuanced areas tend toward two-tone renderings and sharp transitions from light to dark. Another aspect of the physical transformation of painting is the changeability of the finishing layer of varnish. Typically, varnish darkens or becomes discoloured with time and hence alters the overall pictorial effect of the painting. Similarly, later interventions cause various transformations. The process of relining, for instance, flattens the colour layers and hence reduces the relief and the effects of impasto.

For the purposes of the study, information on the material condition and the state of preservation of the paintings have been consulted in the Department of the Study of Paintings (Service documentation des Peintures) at Musée du Louvre, at bibliothèque-musée de la Comédie Française in Paris and Musée Condé in Chantilly.

Texts

The justifications of the spectatorial and pictorial practices analysed in the present study were shaped gradually in the second half of the seventeenth century. Conversely, the upholding of these practices in the eighteenth century and their transformations to accommodate changing attitudes towards the practice and the experience of painting provides a context that allows for an exhaustive understanding. Consequently, the study engages resources from c. 1660 to c. 1760.

The main body of texts examined in this study consists of published resources on art theory and the theory of connoisseurship from the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. The writings of Roger de Piles offer the most comprehensive articulation of the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye in French theory of art and connoisseurship at the time. The study explores therefore several key aspects in the theory of de Piles. Svetlana Alpers has pointed out that the theory of de Piles falls in two distinctive parts: one is concerned with the spectator, the other with the painting in view. Whereas Cours de peinture par principes (1708) focuses mainly on theoretical and practical issues of the art of painting, Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture (1677) discusses painting in relation to the spectator and the practice of connoisseurship. On one hand, the writings of de Piles provide a link between art theory and the practice of painting. On the other hand, they provide a link between spectatorship and the fields of art theory and connoisseurship as a repository of knowledge of the principles of painting and hence judgement. For the purposes of this study, I have examined the entire body of Piles’ texts. In the discussion of key aspects of his theory of art and connoisseurship, however, I focus mainly on Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture (1677) and Cours de

Peinture (1708), mentioned earlier, alongside his annotated translation of Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy’s De arte graphica (1668) and Abrégé de la vie des peintres, including the treatise Idée du peintre parfait, published in one volume (1699).

André Félibien’s Entretiens (1666-88) is another important part of the theoretical texts studied. Félibien’s Entretiens provide the most elaborated presentation of French classicist art theory of the late seventeenth century and offer therefore an important source for the identification of essential points of conceptual and stylistic differences from colourist art theory, particularly as presented by de Piles. A comparative reading of segments from Félibien’s and de Piles’ texts has been undertaken for the purpose of tracing variations and shifts in meanings, which point to or elucidate issues related to the questions pursued in the study. For the same purpose I have also conducted readings of key conferences held at the Academy in the 1670s and Abbé Du Bos’ Réflexions critiques sur la poesie et sur la peinture (1719).

Another key resource consists of the three main French seventeenth-century monolingual dictionaries, particularly the dictionaries of Pierre Richelet (1680), Antoine Furetière (1690 and subsequent editions) and Académie Française (1694 and subsequent editions). Published in the short period of fourteen years, these dictionaries addressed elite readers. Dictionaries published in the first half of the seventeenth century such as Jean Nicot’s Le Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que moderne (1606) or Philibert Monet’s Inventaire des deux langues francoise et latine (1636) were French-Latin. The monolingual dictionaries from the later part of the century have been interpreted as a symptom of the growing French elite culture, consciously independent from an earlier, predominantly humanist, tradition. Nevertheless, the dictionaries of Richelet, Furetière and the Académie Française offer definitions that differ from each other in important ways. Richard Scholar, among others, has pointed out that late seventeenth-century French monolingual dictionaries exemplify two contrasting tendencies: one favoured ‘the norm of “correct” usage (le bon usage)’, the other favoured the ‘“elegant” usage (le bel usage)’. Whereas the dictionary of Furetière exhibited the former tendency, Richelet and the dictionary of the Académie Française shared the latter. In this sense, the definitions that each of these dictionaries advanced do not always agree on conventional, already established meanings, shared by their readers. Consequently, a comparative

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71 Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology*, 55.

72 According to Laurent Bray, Richelet’s dictionary differs in important respects from that of Académie Française. Accordingly, Richelet’s dictionary belongs rather to group favouring ‘correct’ usage of language, Laurent Bray, ‘Richelet’s “Dictionnaire Français” (1680) as a source of “La porte des sciences” (1682) and Le Roux’s “Dictionnaire comique” (1718)’, in Reingard Hartmann (ed.), *The History of Lexicography: Papers from the Dictionary Research Centre Seminar at Exeter* (Exeter: John Benjamins, 1986), 13–21.

assessment of various definitions in these dictionaries offers the opportunity to consider variations and transformations of meanings assigned to concepts in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century.

To pinpoint aspects of portrait painting relevant for early eighteenth-century elite spectators, texts studied also include Dézallier d’Argenville’s *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* (1745 and subsequent editions) as well as later eighteenth-century accounts of the lives of painters. For the purposes of the present study, the main interest of these texts resides in their articulation of views on the art of painters, and hence indication of ways of perceiving and judging their qualities while reiterating, at the same time, shared concepts and practices of looking at paintings, relevant to spectators in the early eighteenth century.

Records concerning portrait painting from the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century appear in a variety of written accounts, letters and memoirs. As this is not a study of reception, the selection of such accounts has been mainly limited to the correspondence of Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626–96). As a source rich on evidence of various aspects of the cultural and political life of French aristocratic society in the second half of the seventeenth century, the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné has been utilised as a research material in a wide field of scholarship, not the least in studies of portraiture. I reread familiar passages but extend earlier analyses to infer further meanings relevant for the understanding of late seventeenth-century attitudes towards portrait painting, its practice and usage. The monthly *Mercure Galant* (*Mercure de France*, as of 1722) includes numerous references to portrait paintings. These references follow a conventional mode of description, mentioning the sitter and the painter with the addition of a prise for the work, usually a portrait or an engraving after a portrait of the King, in terms of *portrait ressemblant*. Material of this kind has been limited to a few accounts that offer evidence of ways of experiencing portrait paintings, discussed in Chapter 1.

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76 Research on references to and discussions of issues of portrait paintings in the monthly *Mercure Galant/Mercure de France* 1672–1770 has been conducted at an early stage of my work on this study, via the published index for the *Mercure Galant/Mercure de France* and through content search at the digital library of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, http://gallica.bnf.fr/

77 The amount, the length and the complexity of issues in texts about portraiture published in *Mercure de France* increases notably from the 1750s onwards. These accounts have not been included in this study.
Complementary materials examined include late seventeenth-century texts, particularly the writings of Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré (1607–84) on social comportment, the art conversation and speaking/rhetoric. In the readings of these texts and the selection of relevant passages, focus is on the articulation of aspects that bear on the means of visualisation of the self and the experience of the self in terms of enactment and perception.

Previous Research

The questions examined in the present study touch on various fields of production and consumption of painting and portraiture in particular – its practice; art theory; connoisseurship; conventions and practice of display; the history of taste and social comportment. The questions examined also point to the various intersections of these fields. Each of these fields has generated, separately and in intersection, a series of rich and stimulating studies, many of which already mentioned above.

Painting, imitation and spectatorial experience

In 1980, Michael Fried addressed the interaction between spectators and art works in his seminal *Absorption and Theatricality*, structured around the notions *theatricality* used to designate a pictorial strategy that addresses spectators by acknowledging their presence and hence and *absorption* as a pictorial strategy that neutralises the awareness of spectatorial presence. Marian Hobson, in her *The Object of Art* (1982), has addressed similar issues but with different approach and different result.78 Through the distinction between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ illusion Hobson calls attention to the centrality of the seeming contradiction between illusion and artifice and their simultaneous upholding in early to mid-eighteenth century art, literature and theatre. In contrast to Fried, Hobson argues that whereas in the early eighteenth century spectators were encouraged to see art works as both ‘real’ and the products of artifice, in the course of the century spectators were increasingly encouraged to experience art works as unmediated. Hobson’s emphasis on the dual nature of pictorial imitation has been particularly influential for the present study.

Jacqueline Lichtenstein in *The Eloquence of Colour* (1989) has examined the controversy between drawing and colour in the second half of the seventeenth century in relation to rhetorical theories. Taking the insufficiency of language to account for the effects of colour in painting, Lichtenstein offers a lucid analysis of the concept of imitation in relation to deception, seduction and cosmetics. Lichtenstein’s analysis of the various effects of distance and proximity in the

painting and their significance for the experience of the painting has contributed significantly to my understanding of the mechanisms behind the pictorial and spectatorial processes relevant to the period under investigation. However, whereas Lichtenstein analyses written material, the present study addresses these issues in relation to actual paintings and arrives therefore at conclusions that are more specific.

The interaction between painting and spectators has been explored in a number of studies from various perspectives, many of which addressing the material aspects of painting as sites in which meaning occurs as well as the role of spectators in this process. Among these, several important studies have been focused on eighteenth-century French painting and notably on the work of canonical painters such as Watteau, Chardin, François Boucher (1703–70) and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806).79

As indicated earlier, for the present study I have benefited particularly from Mary Vidal’s *Watteau’s Painted Conversations* (1992) in which she has addresses the relationship between the pictorial procedure of Watteau and the practices of refined conversation in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century.80 Central to my work has been also Mary Sheriff’s study *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism* (1990), which examines the interrelation between the manner of execution and the main theme of the paintings, identified as ‘eroticism’.81 I also benefited from Sheriff’s study of enthusiasm, in her *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (2004). Likewise, the issues advanced in the present study relate closely to Jennifer Milam’s *Fragonard’s Playful Paintings: Visual Games in Rococo Art* (2006), in which she explores the interaction between spectators and paintings by Fragonard in terms of ‘a playful response’. Milam defines meaning as ‘the unfolding process of cognition that produces meaningful visual experience’ and examines the ways in which the paintings sustain an active spectatorial experience, stressing the import of pictorial procedure for the spectator’s experience.82 In addition, Milam extends the earlier works of Vidal and Sheriff.

Other works that have been important for the present study attend to colourist painting as a vehicle for seduction. Nicholas Mirzoeff has examined

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the ambiguity of address in paintings by Watteau, arguing that these works give visual expression to the unsettling nature of seduction as Watteau ‘was supposed to do’ according to the views of de Piles. 83 Melissa Hyde in Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics (2006) explores in turn the meanings that the art of Boucher produced on his contemporary spectators and his critics, by focusing on aspects that sustained the ideals of aristocratic sociability with emphasis on appearances, seduction and gender play as well as the colourist aesthetics of Roger de Piles.

Although not explicitly addressing the interaction between paintings and spectatorship, Sarah Cohen has explored the meanings that a spectator might have inferred from appearances in her Art, Dance, and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime (2000). Taking the idea that the social world of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France was a world governed by appearances, Cohen examines representations of the ‘artful body’, by which she designates the various physical and pictorial manifestations that the aristocratic body could take at the time.

Todd Olson, in his Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style (2002), has explored the taste for the art of Nicolas Poussin among members of the seventeenth-century nobility of the robe (noblesse de robe). Focusing on later developments, Thomas Crow in his Painters and Public Life (1985) has explored issues related to the changing tastes of spectators in relationship to painting in the Academy and various related cultural practice in the eighteenth century including the values of the aristocratic bonmède culture to the theories of art and spectatorship of de Piles. The work of Olson and Crow has been important for my understanding of spectatorship and art theory as practices that shared a common discourse.

David Rosand in his Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto (1982, 1997) has discussed various effects of pictorial space in works by Veronese and Tintoretto in relationship to sixteenth-century conceptions of the scenic space. Although the paintings discussed by Rosand differ significantly in both subject and scale from the paintings analysed here, his analyses have been important for my understanding of the effects of pictorial space advanced in the present study. 84

Portrait painting and its performative aspects

Research on portrait painting in the past three decennia has been particularly vital. Focus has shifted from individual painters, their lives and stylistic


development towards commissioners and consumers and the complexity of the
genre has been examined from various perspectives. Richard Brilliant, in
*Portraiture* (1991), has examined the relationship between the portrait and its
object of representation and emphasised the double nature of portrait images –
art objects but also ‘living’ in a derived sense – and their power to elicit a variety
of mental and bodily responses. Marcia Pointon, in *Hanging the Head* (1993),
has examined the complex nature of portraiture in relation to its various
cultural and socio-political functions and practices through the general notions
‘the self in art’ (the portrait as a social object) and ‘the self as art’ (the portrait as
an aesthetic object), focusing on eighteenth-century England. Joanna Woodall,
in the introductory essay to the anthology *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (1997),
has brought focus on the dualism inherent in the theoretical discourse on
portrait painting, conceived as a representation of an essential individual.
Informed by these arguments, in the present study I strive at a transgression of
the inherent dualism of the genre and its practices, by addressing the
intersection of these ways of conceiving and experiencing portraiture.

A number of studies have also examined portrait paintings as actively
partaking in the production of meaning in the process of spectatorial
experience. Joseph Leo Koerner has addressed such issues in his monumental
*The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (1993), particularly
focusing on the self-representation of Albrecht Dürer. Harry Berger, in *Fictions
of the Pose* (2000), has explored the socio-political and the aesthetic aspects
portraiture as determining factors for the development of pictorial styles in
early modern portrait painting, focusing on Italian and Dutch examples. Berger
conceives of the portraits as representations of acts of posing and hence
advances an approach that can be described as performative. In the essay
‘Pompadour’s touch: difference in representation’ (2001), Ewa Lajer-Burcharth
has examined the phenomenology of touch in portraits of Madame de
Pompadour. More recently, Hanneke Grootenboer has examined the
performative character of Dutch seventeenth-century portraits.

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86 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*
(New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1993), 1. See also Sabrina Norlander Eliasson,
*Portraiture and Social Identity in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Manchester/New York: Manchester
University Press, 2009), esp. 15–16.
87 Joanna Woodall, ‘Introduction’, in Joanna Woodall (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).
88 Harry Berger Jr., *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 2000), see esp. 117–36; and an earlier version by the same author, published
as ‘Fictions of the pose: facing the gaze of early modern portraiture’, *Representations* 46 (1994),
94–8.
89 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, ‘Pompadour’s touch: difference in representation’, *Representations* 73
90 Hanneke Grootenboer, ‘How to Become a Picture: Theatricality as Strategy in Seventeenth-
Century Dutch Portraits’, in Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels (eds), *Theatricality in Early
departs from Michael Fried’s understanding of theatricality to emphasise instead the interplay between, the representation of the subject, on one hand, and the presence of the subject in portraiture, on the other hand. In these studies, however, the properly pictorial aspects of the portraits and particularly their materiality are mainly understood as performing the part of the subject in the portrait. Building on these accounts, in the present study, I shift focus from the subject in the portrait to the spectator as a subject of the portrait’s address.

Nicolas de Largillière

The exhibition *Visages du Grand Siècle: Le portrait français sous le règne de Louis XIV 1660–1715* (1997) offered new insights in the field of French portraiture. The exhibition catalogue featured essays highlighting a range of important aspects, such as the issue of likeness in a social and art theoretical context, various portrait types and their social meanings and the production of portraits. The essays also present rich evidence of the ways in which spectators received portrait paintings at the time. In the passage quoted in the opening of this introduction, Pierre Rosenberg remarks that his observations on Largillierre’s portraits may appear ‘well-worn’. Indeed, there is hardly any account of Largillierre’s work, from Charles Blanc and Adolphe Siret in the nineteenth century to Myra Nan Rosenfeld in the 1980s and, more recently, Dominique Brême, which does not touch on the painter’s prolific use of colour and relate it to his early training in Antwerp. The catalogue to the exhibition *Visages du Grand Siècle*, mentioned above, made no exception to this.

Studies of Largillierre’s art concentrate mostly on his life and the stylistic features of his works, the later usually defined as a development in time and divided in three, more or less distinct, periods: early, middle and later. These studies, particularly the essays in the catalogue to the exhibition *Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century* (1981) and the work of Dominique Brême, in various articles and the exhibition catalogue *Nicolas de Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle* (2003) have been essential for my understanding of the recurrent features in the painter’s idiom.

The emergence of the colourist portrait has been also linked to the transformations in taste in the late seventeenth century, particularly to the victory of the proponents of colour. In this context, scholarship usually singles out the art of Largillierre as example that fully responded to the tenets of colourist art theory and taste, linking his pictorial idiom to the theory of art of

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de Piles. Scholars have found support for the perceived relationship between the pictorial idiom of Largillierre and the theory of de Piles in the observation that Largillierre attended several of the lectures held by de Piles at the Academy in the period 1700–5.

In the catalogue to the Montreal exhibition, mentioned earlier, Rosenfeld discusses similarities in the ideas of de Piles and Largillierre’s student Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755); the later developed in Oudry’s lectures Réflexions sur la manière d’étudier la couleur en comparant les objets les uns avec les autres and Discours sur la pratique de peindre, held in 1749 and 1755 respectively. Hal Oppermann, in turn, discusses the practice of Largillierre and the lectures of Oudry as expressions of a shared understanding (in Oudry’s case also inherited) of the means and aims of painting, against the background of the quarrel of drawing and colour but without mentioning the theory of de Piles. This view has been contested by Christian Michel who has argued in his Charles-Nicolas Cochin et l’art des lumières (1993) that the principles of de Piles differ in important respects from those of Largillierre. Also drawing on Oudry’s lectures, Michel maintains that Largillierre rather than de Piles introduced the tradition of Northern painting in the Academy, alongside a new technique of painting and a new conception of painting’s pictorial effects.

Although the relationship between the theory of de Piles and colourist portrait painting, particularly the pictorial idiom of Largillierre has attracted attention, analyses have been limited. Notable exception to this is William MacGregor, who analyses a portrait by Largillierre in his article, ‘Le Portrait de gentilhomme de Largillierre: une exercice d’attention’ (1993), focusing on the ways in which the painting sustains the spectator’s attention in the context of the eighteenth-century discourse about painting and vision and twentieth-

94 According to the records of the Academy, Largillierre was present on the following lectures held by de Piles: On draperies, 1 March 1704 (PV, 3: 384–8); On disposition, 3 September 1704 (PV, 3: 402); On disposition, reread with the addition of a Reply to some objections, 8 November 1704 (PV, 3: 406–7); On the truth in painting, 7 March 1705 (PV, 4: 5). The lectures held by de Piles, which Largillierre did not attend or no signatures have been recorded, are as follows: On clair-obscur, 8 May 1700 (PV, 3: 294); On clair-obscur, 5 June 1700 (n.s.) (PV, 3: 295), reread 3 July 1700 (n.s.) (PV, 3: 297); On invention, 7 August 1700 (n.s.) (PV, 3: 299), reread 6 November 1700 (n.s.) (PV, 3: 304); Dissertation in which it is examined if poetry is preferable to painting, 7 May 1701 (PV, 3: 214–15), reread 20 June 1701 (n.s.); Description of the School of Athens, to serve as an example of a treatise on invention, 4 June 1701 (PV, 3: 316); On draperies (rereading), 5 April 1704 (PV, 3: 390–1); On drawing, 7 August 1706 (PV, 4: 32); On the order to be observed in the study of painting, 4 September 1706 (PV, 4: 33); The idea of painting, 4 February 1708 (PV, 4: 57–8). See also Teyssèdre, Roger de Piles, 649–50, 674–8.
95 Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 172–78.
While in agreement with the idea that there is a notable relationship between the theory of de Piles and the pictorial idiom of Nicolas de Largillierre, in the present study this relationship is not understood as one of dependence or influence in either direction. Rather, it is viewed as dialogical in the sense that theory and paintings addressed shared concerns – artistic and social – and offered solutions particular to their specific medium as a means of communication with the spectator.

Outline

The present study is set in three main chapters, each divided in two parts.

The structure of the analysis follows mainly a sequential line, from a larger to a more focused perspective. Chapter one situates portrait painting and elite spectatorship within the broader context of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century art theory and aristocratic culture, particularly the context of sociability. The first part of the chapter examines ways of looking at portrait paintings relevant to seventeenth century spectators. Likewise, likeness is discussed as a notion in which character and body, social and aesthetic converge. The second part of the chapter discusses classicist and colourist views on the proper ways of experiencing paintings and the growing at the time language for painting.

Chapters two and three are devoted to a close analysis of the interaction between portraits by Largillierre and spectators. The idea that colourist portraits embody an invitation to a dynamic spectatorial experience and the question of how such an invitation is enacted by the picture runs throughout the analysis.

More particularly, Chapter two examines ways in which the portrait’s ‘subject’ appears. Focus is on the initial moment of the encounter between the paintings and the spectator. The first part of the chapter examines Largillierre’s Self-portrait of 1711 and its presumed pendant, a Self-portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud, exploring the ways in which the paintings influence each other in a comparative viewing. The second part of the chapter explores the means by which the paintings address the spectator at first glance and hence attract spectatorial interest. The analyses are anchored in the definition of pictorial composition of de Piles and aspects that contribute to its visual unity. The means of sustaining an immediate effect of illusion and tensions implied are considered in relation to the concepts grace (grâce) and enthusiasm (enthousiasme) as well as in analogy with theatrical machines.

Chapter three addresses the spectator’s experience of the paintings from up-close and examines how the initial interest for the painting transforms into a

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sustained viewing – attention. Focus is on the seeming tension between illusion and artifice, seen as essential for the maintenance of spectatorial attention. The chapter examines the relationship between the whole and the detail, the spatial relationships between the painting and the spectator, the role of bodily movement in the visual experience as well as the material aspects of the painting as representational device. Finally, the chapter explores ways in which the paintings invoke the sense of touch, mimetically as well as in the imagination of the spectator.

A final discussion concludes the study.
I. Portraiture, spectatorship and sociability

Ways of experiencing portrait painting

‘Who’ and ‘how’ in portrait painting

In a letter from 4 September 1675, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626–96) recounted to her daughter Françoise-Marguerite countess de Grignan (1646–1705) a scene that had occurred when a visitor had viewed her portrait by Pierre Mignard (1612–95) (Plate 3).99

I wish M. de Grignan and you could have witnessed the unaffected admiration with which he was struck, the praises he bestowed on the likeness, and particularly on the excellence of the painting, on the head which protrudes, the neck which seems to breathe, and the figure that advances: he was like a fool for half an hour. I spoke to him of the portrait of Madame Saint-Géran; he had seen it. I told him that I thought it better painted. I expected he would have beaten me; he called me ignorant, and what was worse, a woman. He called masterly touches those parts that I considered the crudest: it is what makes the carnation, the brilliance, the flesh, and the head to protrude from the canvas. In brief, my girl, you would have laughed at his manner of admiring.100

Madame de Sévigné’s account offers evidence of ways experiencing portrait painting relevant to spectators in the late seventeenth century. The apparent

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99 Another portrait of Madame de Grignan, in half-length, attributed to Pierre Mignard, is housed at Musée Carnavalet, Paris.
100 ‘Je voudrais que vous et M. de Grignan vous eussiez pu voir l’admiration naturelle dont il fut surpris, quelles louanges il donna à la ressemblance, mais encore plus à la bonté de la peinture, à cette tête qui sort, à cette gorge qui respire, à cette taille qui s’avance; il fut une demi-heure comme un fou. Je lui parlai de celui de Mme de Saint-Géran; il l’a vu. Je lui dis que je le croyais mieux peint. Il me pensa battre; il m’appella ignorant, et femme, qui est encore pis. Il appelle des traits de maître ces endroits qui me paraissaient grossiers: c’est ce qui fait le blanc, le lustre, la chair, et sortir la tête de la toile. Enfin, ma fille, vous auriez ri de sa manière d’admirer.’ Marie Rabutin-Chantal Sévigné, ‘Letter to Madame de Grignan’ (4 September 1675), Correspondance, ed. Roger Duchêne, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1972–78), 2: 91; Letters of Madame de Sévigné to Her Daughter and Her Friends, 9 vols (London: J. Walker, etc., 1811), 3: 147–8. Translation altered. It is interesting to note the alteration of the original in the nineteenth-century translation, as it offers a conspicuously colourist vernacular: ‘He says the features are masterly, and what I considered as the worst parts of the picture became beauties in his description. Here was colouring! there was brilliancy! Here the flesh seemed to yield to the touch! there the head and neck projected from the canvass, as if offering to meet you! you would have died with laughing at his manner of admiring every thing.’ Letters, 3: 148. Emphasis added.
amusement that permeates her account of the visitor’s, way of appreciating the portrait, suggests a difference in the practice of viewing as well as talking about portrait painting. The visitor, a certain Monsieur Faucher, shared Madame de Sévigné’s approval of the portrait. Thus, the degree of likeness was not an issue. Neither was the effect of the portrait, which obviously induced an involvement with both. Rather, Madame de Sévigné’s amusement stemmed from the turn that her visitor’s experience took after he had considered the likeness and the overall effect of the portrait had taken hold of his attention. At its most general, this difference suggests a difference in the interest that guides the spectator through the experience of the portrait. Whereas the experience of Madame de Sévigné seemingly depends on her interest for the subject of the portrait, the experience of Monsieur Faucher suggests an interest for its pictorial qualities. In a preliminary manner, this difference may be defined as an interest for who in painting and an interest for how of painting.

Following the account of Madame de Sévigné, it is possible to single out several stages in Monsieur Faucher’s experience of the portrait. Initially, he considers the likeness and obviously finds it praiseworthy. Upon this, his attention turns further, towards the ‘excellence’ (bonté) of the painting. He admires the manner in which the painter has endowed the image with life (presence): the head protrudes, the body advances; the neck breaths. At this stage, the effects of the painting engage Monsieur Faucher’s senses. He not only ‘sees’ the depicted person advancing but also ‘feels’ her breathing. Finally, he directs his attention towards the ‘marks’, the touches of the painter (traits du maître). In these subsequent steps, the interest of Monsieur Faucher in the portrait shifts gradually from the likeness to the painting and its pictorial qualities; from the portrait as a representation of Madame de Grignan to the painting as an artefact and to its artifice; the latter becoming the focus of his attention. It is in this last stage of spectatorial experience that Monsieur Faucher’s opinion diverges from that of Madame de Sévigné – he admires the painter’s marks, she deems them crude.

For Madame de Sévigné the portrait appears to fulfil different function and elicits therefore a different response. To judge from her amusement at her visitor’s way of immersing himself in an admiration for the painter’s traits, it is possible to assume that her attention was directed towards the imaginative

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101 Apparently Mignard’s portrait of Madame de Grignan was also much admired in the circle of Madame de Sévigné. See e.g., ‘Votre portrait a servi à la conversation; il devient chef-d’œuvre à vue d’œil. Je crois que c’est parce que Mignard n’en veut plus faire.’ Sévigné, ‘Letter to Madame de Grignan’ (19 August 1675), Correspondance, 2: 63. (‘… your [portrait] served to enliven the conversation; it appears every day more excellent. It is perhaps because Mignard has left of painting’. Letters, 3: 127).


content of the painting, that is to say, to the subject represented in the portrait, rather than the portrait as a demonstration of the painter’s artistic skills. Focus is on the painting’s capacity to offer a substitute for an absent subject and the spectator’s interest in the portrait derives from the relationship between the painted image and its referent in nature. Such an imaginative experience of a portrait, properly understood as an emotional experience, relates to the essential function of portraiture and implies an experience as if the sitter is present in the moment of viewing. Such an emotionally charged viewing prevailed in the early modern period. In such an experience, the spectator indulges in the pleasure sustained by the effect of presence. Yet, Madame de Sévigné did not discard the possibility of viewing the portrait with an interest for the painter’s procedure. She responded to Monsieur Faucher’s observations on the painter’s manner of creating a sense of physical presence with a remark on another portrait by Mignard, which she ‘thought better painted’.

To maintain a difference between the spectator’s interest for the sitter and the sitter’s ‘presence’ in the moment of viewing, on one hand, and an interest for the painting as an artefact, on the other hand, does not imply incompatibility. While experiencing a portrait as if the sitter is present in the moment of viewing, the spectator does not lose awareness of the pictorial procedure behind the representation. Rather, this difference is a matter of spectatorial attitude. It depends on the complex web of interrelated circumstances that may influence the act of viewing, including the occasion (formal or informal), the kind of portrait and the conditions of display. Similarly, the choice of spectatorial attitude may depend on the pictorial procedure proper. Looking at a portrait for the opportunity that it offers to view the sitter as if present, does not contradict an interest for the manner of execution. The difference between these two ways of looking is one of emphasis.

The purpose of the analysis above was to explore some of the ways in which portrait painting might have come to be experienced in the late seventeenth century. The point of departure of the analysis was that the difference in experience depends on the spectator’s interests and preferences – visual as well

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as emotional. In a preliminary manner, this interest was defined as an interest in the subject or the sitter, his or her likeness and the effect of presence — who in the portrait — and an interest for the painter’s procedure and the pictorial qualities of the portrait — the bow of the portrait. Obviously, this distinction is not clear-cut.

Colour in question
Madame de Sévigné referred explicitly to the skills of the painter in another letter to her daughter. However, she did so on occasion when she had judged the relationship between the painted image and its referent in nature distorted. Having finally consented to the wish of Monsieur de La Garde to borrow the portrait of her daughter for copying, she lamented the outcome of this project.106

... you will see what a daub it is. I hope the last touches will be better; but yesterday it looked shockingly. This is the effect of so earnest a desire to have a copy of that beautiful portrait of madame de Grignan, and which it would have been cruel [i.e. barbarous] in me to refuse. Well, I did not refuse; but I rejoice that I never before met with so horrid a profanation of my daughter’s face. This painter is a young man from Tournay, to whom M. de la Garde pays three guineas a month; his intention, at first, was to employ him in painting screens, and now he is to do no less than copy Mignard.107

Madame de Sévigné deemed the work of the young and apparently unskilled painter from Tournai a complete failure. Although she could yet hope that the final touches would reduce the damage, she described the copy as a horrible profanation of her daughter’s face. The important issue was not the act of copying the original portrait. The fact that painters other than the author of the original frequently executed the required copies suggests that in such cases the primary interest regarded the sitter rather than the qualities of a particular painter’s work. If the copy did not alter the sitter’s likeness, it fulfilled its commemorative or representative function.108 However, Madame de Sévigné did not refer to the likeness in terms of distortion — she did not refer to likeness (ressemblance) at all. Rather, reference is to the effect of the painting; an effect,

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107 “… vous verrez, vous verrez ce que c’est que ce barbouillage. Je souhaite que les derniers traits soient plus heureux, mais hier c’était quelque chose d’horrible. Voilà ce qui s’appelle vouloir avoir une copie de ce beau portrait de Mme de Grignan, et je suis barbare quand je le refuse! Oh bien! je ne l’ai pas refusé, mais je suis bien aise de ne jamais rencontrer une telle profanation du visage de ma fille. Ce peintre est un jeune homme de Tournai, à qui M. de La Garde donne trois louis par mois. Son dessein a été d’abord de lui faire peindre des paravents, et finalement c’est Mignard qu’il s’agit de copier.’ Sévigné, ‘Letter to Madame de Grignan’ (16 July 1677), Correspondance, 2: 492. Sévigné, Letters, 4: 288–9.

which in this case elicits a forceful, negative response – the copy obviously being badly painted. Madame de Sévigné’s choice of words is suggestive of the difficulties that colour could cause in pictorial representation, particularly the impact of colour on recognition. Rather than the deficiencies of the copy compared to the original in terms of bad drawing or faulty proportions, she refers to the copy as a daub (barbouillage) – a term that in a derived sense was employed with reference to the work of a painter to signify a mediocre painting, a work of poor quality. The definition of the word in Furetière’s dictionary puts particularly strong emphasis on the pejorative meaning of the word. Dauber or barbouilleur, in turn, referred to an artisan who painted with large brushes surfaces such as floors, walls and windows; in this sense, the word barbouilleur connoted the use of colour in a mechanical manner and referred to a bad painter. With his lack of excellence, the young painter from Tournai had corrupted the sanctity of Madame de Grignan’s face, as depicted in the original painting by Mignard and, undoubtedly, as it was in life.

In this sense, Madame de Sévigné’s reference to the copy as barbouillage suggests that the profanation of her daughter’s face – the distortion of the relationship between the painted image and its referent in nature as well as in Mignard’s portrait – stems from the copyist’s use of colour and his painterly technique; his brushwork being probably too visible or rough. Indeed, although the reference to the painter as being from Tournai might suggest the influence of Rubens, such a conclusion should be drawn with caution. As Pierre-Ives Kairis has observed, the influence of Rubens and Anthonis Van Dyck (1599–1641) on Flemish painters from the South, including painters from Tournai,

109 ‘BARBOUILLAGAGE, s. m. Ouvrage de barbouilleur, méchante peinture.’ In addition, according to Richelet, the word barboillage in popular parlance and in a figurative sense (†*) referred to a satirical portrait in prose or in verse: ‘Portrait satirique qu’on fait en prose, ou en vers.’ Pierre Richelet, Dictionnaire françois, contenant les mots et les choses, plusieurs nouvelles remarques sur la langue française (henceforth DF) (Geneve: Jean-Herman Widerhold, 1680), 64.


111 ‘Barbouilleur, s. m. Celui qui avec de l’ocre barbouille le haut & le bas des murlailles des chambres, les cheminées, les solives & les poutres. (Ce n’est pas un peintre, ce n’est qu’un miserable barbouilleur). / †† Barbouilleur. Méchant auteur.’ Richelet, DF, 65; and ‘BARBOUILLEUR, EUSE. subst. M. & f. Qui peint grossierement avec la brosse, qui enduit d’une couleur une muraille, un plancher. … / On dit aussi des mauvais Peintres, & des mauvais Auteurs, qui gastent de la toile, ou du papier, que ce sont des Barbouilleurs.’ Furetière, DU, 1: 228. See also the definition of Académie Française: ‘BARBOUILLEUR, s. m. Artisan qui peint grossierement avec une brosse, des planchers, des murailles, des portes, des fenêtres. J’ai fait venir un barbouilleur pour noircir ce jeu de paume, pour blanchir mon escalier. / On appelle fig. Un mauvais Peintre, Un barbouilleur. On dit fig. Barbouiller du papier, pour dire, Mal escrire, soit pour les caracteres, soit pour la composition.’ D’AF, 1: 83.
was less evident than that among painters from the North. Yet, the pictorial procedure of the painter in this case does seem to have been an issue. Colour in this sense could become an obstacle for what Emmanuel Coquery has called ‘savoir-faire-paraître’ or the painter’s ‘knowledge of making appear’, which enabled the distinction between a good and a bad portrait and between a skilled and an unskilled portrait painter.

The last point relates to the idea that a successful portrait is a portrait in which the painter has succeeded in hiding art (i.e. artifice) by art. It also points to the inherent challenge of representing a face in a manner that would allow for the display of individual skills and facility in the execution, while simultaneously satisfying the sitter’s amour propre. It is for this reason that in Charles Perrault’s Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes, the Abbé, who voices the ideas of the Moderns and one of three interlocutors, observes with disapproval that many people would rather see no traces of clair-obscure on the faces of their beloved. In consent with the observation of the Abbé, the Chevalier recounts of the distressed reaction of a certain woman to a portrait in which she found a black stain beneath her nose: ‘I showed it yesterday, she told me, to my entire family who had dinner at my place and everyone was scandalised. … I do not wish to be flattered, I told them, but I do not wish to be given deficiencies that I do not have either. Everyone shared my opinion and shrugged their shoulders at the fantasies of painters who smear the faces with their ridiculous and impertinent shadows.’

As recounted by the Chevalier, this anecdote is but an example of the similar anecdotes reiterated in various versions, which flourished in the discourse on portrait painting. Paolo Pino, for instance, included a comparable episode in his Dialogo du pittura (1548) in a discussion of the complications that colour could pose for illusion. As late as 1781, the Swiss portrait painter Jean Étienne Liotard (1702–89) recounted in his Traité des principes et des règles de la peinture a conspicuously similar incident.

Madame de Sévigné’s description of the copy as barbouillage also echoes the manner in which the defenders of design/drawing referred to works of painters with pronounced interest for colour and its effects, particularly in the context of the quarrel of drawing and colour. In a lecture entitled ‘Against M

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115 ‘Je le montray hier, me dit-elle à toute ma famille qui soupoit chex moy, il n’y eut personne qui n’en fut scandalisé … Je ne veux point que l’on me flate, leur disois-je, mais je ne veux pas aussi qu’on me fasse des defauts que je n’ay pas; ils furent tous de mon avis & haussoient les épaules sur le fantasie qu’ont tous les Peintres de barbouiller les visages avec leurs ombres ridicules & impertinentes.’ Perrault, Parallèle, 1: 147–48.
116 Quoted in Cranston, Muddied Mirror, 107, n. 29.
Blanchard’s lecture on the merits of colour’, held at the Academy on 9 January 1672, Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne rejected the idea that colour was more essential to painting than drawing. According to Champaigne, colour could not please the spectator unless it was subjected to drawing. If put in the first place colour would lead the painter astray eventually turning him into a dauber (barbouilleur).118

Moral concerns underpinned the submission of colour to drawing.119 For the defenders of classicism, the main trouble with colour was its capacity to dazzle the painter by its external lustre (éclat extérieur). This concern is most obviously expressed by Philippe de Champaigne in his lecture on Titian’s The Virgin and the Child with St. Agnes and the Infant Baptist, held on 12 June 1671, which eventually became the starting point of the quarrel of drawing and colour, followed by Blanchard’s reply to Champaigne, ‘On the merits of colour’ (7 November 1671).120 In his lecture, Champaigne asserted that a painter, dazzled by colour, neglected the essential in painting, the later being equal to the search for the inner/ideal, for the soul that animates the external beauty of bodies.121

A letter from Madame de Coulanges to Madame de Sévigné reveals a similar understanding of the role of colour in portrait painting. On 20 October 1694, Madame de Coulanges described her experience of another portrait by Pierre Mignard, the Portrait of Françoise d’Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon as St Frances (Plate 4).122 Madame de Coulanges wrote:

I have seen, madam, the most beautiful thing that can be imagined: it is a portrait of madame de Maintenon, by Mignard; she is dressed in the costume as Saint

118 ‘Dans le dernier article, il [Blanchard] dit que la couleur est aussi nécessaire que le dessein. C’est ce qui est absolument insoutenable, puisqu’elle ne peut plaire dans notre art qu’à mesure qu’on la soumet et qu’on la captive dans les règles du dessein … Car elle [la couleur] sert au dessein sur une toile de la même manière que fait le crayon sur le papier, et du moment qu’elle ne sert plus à ce premier mobile de notre art, elle ne sert qu’à égarer et changer le nom de peintre en celui de barbouilleur.’ Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne, ‘Contre le discours fait par M. Blanchard sur le mérite de la couleur’ (9 January 1672), in Conférences I, 1: 448–9.


120 Moshe Barasch (eds), Conférences I, 1: 406-9.

121 ‘Ce n’est pas que cette partie [la couleur] ne soit très nécessaire. Mais l’étudier plus que le principal et en faire sa seule étude, c’est se tromper soi-même, c’est choisir un beau corps, se laisser éblouir de son éclat et ne se pas mettre assez en peine de ce qui doit animer cette belle apparence, qui ne peut subsister seule, quelque beauté qu’elle puisse avoir, parce que la beauté d’un corps ne fait rien à sa vie, si l’âme et l’esprit ne l’animent.’ Philippe de Champaigne, ‘La Vierge à l’Enfant de Titien’ (12 June 1671), in Conférences I, 1: 409.

122 The original portrait (destroyed) was painted for the Maison d’éducation Saint-Cyr, established by Madame de Maintenon. Multiple versions of the portrait in reduced formats exist, among which those in Musée du Château, Versailles, and in Musée du Louvre, Paris. See further, Thierry Bajou, La peinture à Versailles: XVIIe siècle (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, Buchet/Chastel, 1998), 266.
Frances. Mignard has embellished her; but it is without fulesomeness, without the lily, without the carnation, without the air of youth; and though all these perfections are wanting, he shows a countenance, a physiognomy, superior to any thing that can be said of it; animated eyes, perfect grace, no ornaments, yet the most beautiful picture [i.e. portrait] that ever was seen.\textsuperscript{123}

Apparently, Madame de Coulanges directed her attention towards the sitter – her garments and most notably, her face. Likewise, her observations relate to a consideration of the painter’s work. Although Madame de Coulanges did not mention the painter’s traits, as Monsieur Faucher had done some twenty years earlier when viewing another portrait by Mignard, she admired the manner in which the painter has captured the sitter’s likeness. At the same time, she did not let the painter’s art seduce her.\textsuperscript{124} With a hint of disapproval, she commented that Mignard had idealised the sitter, yet she praised him for creating a beautiful countenance and physiognomy without resorting to make-up or other superficial perfections. Further, Madame de Coulanges described the beauty of the portrait in terms close to the fashionable expression \textit{je ne sais quoi} (‘superior to any thing that can be said of it’), which designated the union between body and soul. Finally, Madame de Coulanges located this ineffable beauty in qualities such as ‘perfect grace’, seemingly detached from the material aspects of the painting.

The account of Madame de Coulanges offers also support for the idea of the intertwining between \textit{who} and \textit{how} pursued earlier. The interest of Madame de Coulanges for the subject of the portrait or \textit{who} in the painting apparently involves attention to the \textit{how} of painting. The portrait visualises ‘perfect grace’ through a compound effect, which comprises all the elements in the painting: the dress, the hands, the attributes (the two later, however, not mentioned) and the face, particularly the ‘animated’ eyes. The consideration of the sitter’s appearance (likeness, dress/costume) anchors in this sense the experience of Madame de Coulanges experience in a consideration of the painter’s work. Nevertheless, her interest in the painter’s work does not become the focus of her spectatorial interest in the same manner as it had been for Monsieur Faucher. Apparently, the response of Madame de Coulanges to the portrait entails a distinction between the beauty of the portrait, its truthfulness to nature (that is, likeness) and its grace, on the one hand, and flattery, finery and the implied superficiality of make-up, on the other hand. Invoking subtly this distinction, Madame de Coulanges not only makes a refined eulogy of

\textsuperscript{123} ‘Au reste, Madame, j’ai vu la plus belle chose qu’on puisse jamais imaginer: c’est un portrait de Mme de Maintenon fait par Mignard. Elle est habillée en sainte Françoise romaine. Mignard l’a embellie, mais c’est sans fadeur, sans incarnat, sans blanc, sans l’air de la jeunesse et, sans toutes ces perfections, il nous fait voir un visage et une physionomie au-dessus de tout ce que l’on peut dire: des yeux animés, une grâce parfaite, point d’atours, et avec tout cela aucun portrait ne tient devant celui-là.’ Madame de Coulanges, ‘Letter to Madame de Sévigné’ (29 October 1694), \textit{Correspondance}, 3: 1067.

Mignard’s skills but also denounces painters who idealise the sitter immoderately or else rely excessively on the embellishing powers of colour. In this sense, the interest of Madame de Coulanges in the portrait of Madame de Maintenon regards its moral content and Mignard’s work proper is evaluated accordingly.

Accordingly, in the accounts discussed above, likeness or who in the portraits and the purposes that the images served were an issue. The spectators’ judgements of the portraits included also a consideration and evaluation of the pictorial qualities of the portrait. In this sense, the appreciation (or the disapproval) of the representation of who in the painting was also closely linked to the overall effect and essentially to the how of the painting.

Alike or well-painted?

An announcement published in the September issue of *Mercure Galant*, in 1685, offers further evidence of the ways in which late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century spectators might have viewed and judged portrait paintings. The announcement informed the readers that the portrait of the composer Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–87), originally painted by Paul Mignard (1639–91) has been engraved by M. Roulet and was available for purchase. The announcement offered also an opportunity for the anonymous writer, perhaps the editor of *Mercure Galant*, Jean Donneau de Visé (1638–1710), to praise the abilities of Paul Mignard as a painter. In addition, the author stated that Paul Mignard’s portraits, although not always judged resembling enough, were good paintings and sold as such. This, however, was a rare occurrence as ‘painters who work with portraits are usually less attached to good painting than to likeness, which is what one is looking for in portraits’. Finally, the author assured the readers that for this opinion, he was relying on the judgements of ‘the most skilled connoisseurs and the persons of best taste’.

The distinction between good painting (portrait bien peint) and good likeness (portrait ressemblant), mentioned in the account of *Mercure Galant*, provided one of the most persistent topos for evaluating portrait painting. The distinction brings forth the uneasy relationship between, observation (i.e. imitation of nature), on one hand, and artistic skill and creativity (i.e. imagination) on the other hand, hence pointing to the inherent dualism of the genre. Traditionally, this dualism implies a distinction between outer and inner, bodily resemblance and inner

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126 ‘Quand les Portraits qu’il [Paul Mignard] fait ne seroient pas aussi ressemblans qu’ils sont, ils pourroient passer pour de bons Tableaux, & se vendre sur ce pied là; ce qui est assez rare, les Peintres qui travaillent aux Portraits s’attachant ordinairement beaucoup moins à la bonne Peinture qu’à la ressemblance, qui est ce que l’on cherche le plus dans un Portrait. Quov que j’en aye veu plusieurs de Mr [Paul] Mignard, & tous également beaux, je ne m’en fie ny à mes yeux ny à mes lumieres, & je parle sur la foy des plus habiles connoisseurs, & des personnes du meilleur goust.’ *Mercure Galant* (June 1685), 332–3.
character. Further, concerning the work of the portrait painter, this dualism implies a distinction between direct, mechanical imitation, or the exact copying of the sitter’s bodily features and mediated, intellectual imitation or invention.\textsuperscript{127} Records of the issue abound already in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{128} Giorgio Vasari, for instance, pointed out in his \textit{Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architetti} (1550, 1568), that ‘many excellent masters have made portraits artistically perfect, but resembling neither little nor much those they are supposed to represent’.\textsuperscript{129} Two decennia later, Giovanni Battista Armenini observed in his \textit{De veri precetti della pittura} (1587) that ‘most times portraits made by excellent artists are found to be painted with better style and more perfection than those of others, but most often they are less of likenesses’.\textsuperscript{130} According to Armenini, the reason for this was that a good painter was so used to an idealised rendering of nature that he or she was no longer capable of capturing the particularities of external appearances.\textsuperscript{131} The immediate consequence, obviously, was to the detriment of portrait painting. In order to succeed in likeness the painter had to renounce the ability to render nature perfectly.

The passage from the \textit{Mercure Galant}, quoted above, shows that the French discourse on portraiture integrated the distinction between good painting and good likeness as well.\textsuperscript{132} Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French dictionaries invariably included the distinction. Furetière’s dictionary, for instance, recalled it in the definition of the word ‘Portrait, in the revised second edition: ‘It has been said of a great painter who did not succeed in making the likeness that he was making bad portraits and good paintings’.\textsuperscript{133} The first edition of the dictionary of Académie Française, in turn, defined the word ‘semblance’ (semblance) as a ‘relation or conformity between people or objects’ and offered the following example: ‘this portrait is very well painted,
but there is no resemblance in it.’\textsuperscript{134} In 1752, the \textit{Dictionnaire universel François et Latin} reiterated this definition but added ‘mediocre painters capture the resemblance. Great painters lack it sometimes’ and directed the readers to Félibien’s \textit{Entretiens}.\textsuperscript{135}

Félibien discussed the distinction between good painting and good likeness in his seventh \textit{Entretien}, first published in 1685.\textsuperscript{136} In the section devoted to the art of Van Dyck, Félibien invoked (through Pymandre) the question of why a mediocre painter might sometimes succeed in capturing the resemblance better than a painter with greater skills and knowledge.\textsuperscript{137} Félibien’s answer to this question is thorough if not entirely straightforward. One explanation – the traditional – is that the skilled painter might sometimes neglect likeness in order to make a beautiful head. However, Félibien added promptly, although some mediocre portraits might appear alike at first sight, a further examination reveals the insufficiency of likeness; such a likeness was only momentous and pleased but the ignorant. The idea that a mediocre painter might succeed at all in capturing the likeness was therefore a deception; as for some well-painted portraits that might not seem alike, these were the works of painters not skilled enough in the genre.\textsuperscript{138} Félibien refuted thus the distinction between good painting and good likeness. In a portrait, likeness entailed good painting and vice versa.

Félibien’s views on portrait painting in the seventh \textit{Entretien} and elsewhere reveal the complexity of the French classicist notion of imitation. As Jacques Thuillier has pointed out, the French seventeenth-century conception of imitation balanced between two seemingly opposite principles, namely \textit{ars imitatio naturae} and the doctrine of the \textit{beau idéal} (also designated as the doctrine

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} ‘Ressemblance. s. f. Rapport, conformité entre des personnes, entre des choses. Grande, parfaite ressemblance. … il n’y a guère de ressemblance de cette copie à son original, entre la copie & l’original. ce portrait est fort bien peint, mais la ressemblance n’y est pas.’ D.A.F, 2: 458.
\item \textsuperscript{136} On Félibien’s views on portrait painting see also Pommier, \textit{Théories du portrait}, 235–55.
\item \textsuperscript{137} ‘Je veux, dit Pymandre, vous faire une question qui vous marquera mon peu d’intelligence. D’où vient qu’un Peintre médiocre réussit quelquefois mieux à faire ressembler, qu’un tres-sçavant homme?’ Félibien, \textit{Entretiens}, 4: 145.
\item \textsuperscript{138} ‘Cela peut arriver, repartis-je, lorsque les habiles Peintres negligent la ressemblance, pour ne travailler qu’à faire un belle teste. Mais prenez garde, que ce qui paroist souvent ressemblant dans ces portraits médiocres, n’est rien moins que cela. Je conviens avec vous, qu’il y a d’assez mauvais portraits qui d’abord ont quelque marque assez forte de la personne qu’on a voulu peindre, & par là plaisent davantage aux ignorans, que certains autres portraits beaucoup mieux peints. Mais il faut considérer, que si ces derniers manquent dans la ressemblance, c’est qu’ils n’ont pas esté faits par des gens assez entendus dans ce genre de peindre …’ Félibien, \textit{Entretiens}, 4: 145–6.
\end{itemize}
of *les belles idées*), which were understood as complementing each other in ‘pragmatic equilibrium’.\(^\text{139}\) Félibien’s conception of likeness was in conformity with the classicist notion of imitation as a learned distillation of the ideal and the essential from the unceasing flow of visual impressions. Consequently, he defined a good portrait as a picture that not only captured the physical features of the sitter in a compound *air ordinaire*, but as one that also rendered visible the sitter’s natural inclinations and emotions.\(^\text{140}\)

Jacqueline Lichtenstein has interpreted this passage in Félibien as an example of the classist attempt to affirm the primacy of ideal imitation over the mere imitation of appearances, ‘to distinguish a true from a false resemblance or rather the real resemblance that defines good imitation from a merely apparent resemblance that resembles only a resemblance’.\(^\text{141}\) Portrait painting was inscribed between the notions of exact and ideal imitation, between likeness and invention. The intermediary position that portrait painting occupied in the hierarchy of the genres reinforced the distinction between good painting and good likeness. The imperative of likeness obliged the portrait painter to focus on the observation of the particular in order to register the appearance of the sitter in a satisfactory and immediately recognisable manner. Likeness tied the portrait as representation to nature too closely, impeding thus the achievement of perfection.

As defined by Félibien, the hierarchy of the genres incorporated the theoretical distinction between the intellectual and the practical (or mechanical) parts of painting, essential for the affirmation of the noble character of the painter’s activity in distinction to the mechanical practice of the simple artisan. In Félibien’s definition, the intellectual parts of painting regarded theory and entailed the intellectual faculties of the painter – the invention and the setting up of subject matter in the mind in an agreeable and elegant manner, following the rules of verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*) and decorum (*bienséance*) and presenting the appropriate expression of passions. The practical or mechanical parts of painting regarded the hand or practice and consisted of the actual arrangement of the composition on the canvas (*ordonnance*), for which the painter employs the skills of drawing, proportion and the application of colour.\(^\text{142}\) In this sense,


\(^{140}\) E.g. ‘... l’esprit & la vie qu’il [un sçavant Peintre] inspire sur ce visage qu’il peint; les inclinations & les affections de l’ame qu’il y fait voir; l’action & les mouvemens necessaires pour l’expression des passions les plus fortes ...’ Félibien, *Entretiens*, 4: 144.


the hierarchy of the genres, which Félibien had sanctioned in his ‘Préface’ to the 1668 publication of the seven conferences, circumscribed his effort to avoid the distinction between mechanical record of temporary appearances – ‘a resemblance that resembles only a resemblance’ – and learned rendering of timeless substance – true, or ideal resemblance. Whenever portrait painting was brought up for discussion in the Entretiens, the distinction between the vast competence entailed by the genre of history painting and the specific requirements of portrait painting was never far away.

In spite of these theoretical impediments, Félibien elevated the notion of likeness from the domain of simple observation to the realm of learned discrimination and synthesis. Indeed, although emphasising that a portrait required less knowledge and skills, he added that in view of the requirements for a portrait to be good – that is, both alike and well-painted – and in order to be as successful in the genre as Van Dyck had been, the painter should observe many things and acquire many skills. In this sense, Félibien transformed portrait painting into a genre that involved both mastery and refined judgement if not less knowledge than history painting.

Alike and well-painted: likeness as effect

De Piles did not discuss the view opposing likeness to good painting explicitly. If Félibien, some twenty years earlier, had done his best effort to make a virtue of a vice assigning the pursuit of likeness the qualities of discrimination and synthesis, de Piles approached the issue from a different angle. In Cours de peinture, he devoted an entire chapter on portraiture, entitled ‘On the manner of doing portraits’. The chapter on portrait painting begins in a traditional way by affirmation of the primacy of likeness for the genre. Further, de Piles stated that if painting was the imitation of Nature, portrait painting was twice imitation because a portrait represented not only a person in

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143 This point has been emphasised in Pommier, Théories du portrait, 235.
144 ‘… si l’on s’attache à cette quantité de connoissances qu’ont eus Raphaël & Jules Romain, on pourra dire que l’ouvrage d’une teste n’en est que la moindre partie. Mais si l’on veut bien se renfermer dans la considération particulière des choses necessaires à bien faire un portrait, on verra pourtant que pour y réussir comme a fait Vandéik, il y a bien des observations à faire, & des connoissances à acquérir.’ Félibien, Entretiens, 4: 141. It is interesting to note that this passage is preceded by the observation that Van Dyck was not in command of either the skill of drawing/design or the other qualities necessary for compositions with historical or mythological subjects. ‘Pour les sujets d’Historire, il est vray qu’il n’a pas eu les mesmes avantages, ne possedant pas ny le dessein, ny les autres qualitez necessaries pour les grandes ordonnances.’ Félibien, Entretiens, 4: 140.
145 On de Piles’ views on portrait painting, see Pommier, Théories du portrait, 279–86. See also Olivier Bonfait, ‘Du masque au visage: le portrait dans la littérature d’art’, in Visages du Grand Siècle, 35–41.
146 Piles, Cours, ‘Sur la maniere de faire les Portraits’, 260–301. This short treatise was the first of the kind on the genre in the history of French art theory. Pommier, Théories du portrait, 284.
general but also a particular one; therefore extrême ressemblance was the first perfection of portrait painting.\textsuperscript{147} For de Piles, such a likeness in portraiture required something more than the conformity of the image with the physical features. True likeness (ressemblance esentielle) implied the rendering of inner qualities visible.\textsuperscript{148}

De Piles understanding of likeness in portraiture is in agreement with that of Félibien but with one important difference. According to de Piles, true likeness was bound to a particular, properly pictorial effect that sustains recognition at first glance, rather than to the successive revelation of distinctive qualities of the sitter’s mind and soul.\textsuperscript{149} Thus, de Piles distinguished between a portrait that succeeded in creating a lifelike effect and attracted the spectator at first glance, and a portrait that failed to do so. He stated: ‘We see several portraits, which, though correctly designed, have cold, languishing, and stupid air; while others, less correct in design, strike us however, at first sight, with the sitter’s character.’\textsuperscript{150} Consequently, while correct drawing might sometimes lead to a cold and lifeless overall effect, deficient drawing might allow for an immediate effect and a lifelike impression of character. Harry Barger has argued that definitions of ‘good likeness’ were informed by the dual criteria of ‘graphic clarity’ and ‘mimetic idealism’. (359)

Following the idea that colouring is the most essential part of the art, de Piles granted colouring a vital role in portrait painting, particularly concerning the rendering of the sitter’s character. Colouring in portraiture, he stated, ‘is an effusion of nature, discovering the true tempers of persons; and the temper

\textsuperscript{147} ‘Si la Peinture est une imitation de la Nature, elle l’est doublement à l’égard du portrait qui ne représente pas seulement un homme en général: mais un tel homme en particulier qui soit distingué de tous les autres, & de même que la première perfection d’un Portrait est une extrême ressemblance …’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 260.

\textsuperscript{148} The definition of likeness of Piles in \textit{Cours de peinture} runs as follows: ‘… la ressemblance essentielle est un juste rapport des parties peintes avec celles du naturel, en sorte que l’on connoissose, sans hesiter, l’air du visage, & le temperament de la personne dont on voit le Portrait.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 269. Cf. the definition in de Piles’ \textit{Remarques} to his translation of du Fresnoy’s \textit{De arte graphica}, which does not include the idea that recognition should be immediate and without hesitation: ‘[Pour ce qui est des Portraits, &c] … [La fin des Portraits] consiste à exprimer le veritable temperament des personnes que l’on represente, & à faire voir leur Phisonomie.’ Roger de Piles, \textit{L’Art de peindre du Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy, traduit en Français avec des remarques necessaries et tres-amples} (Paris: Nicolas Langlois, 1668), 137.

\textsuperscript{149} In \textit{Conseils de R. Nanteuil pour l’exécution des portraits au pastel}, the portrait painter Robert Nanteuil (1623/30–1678) evoked the significance of the portrait’s overall impression and the primacy of this effect over the scrupulous rendering of detail. Writing on character in Maxime XXIX, Nanteuil observed that in order to recognise a person even in the darkness of evening, it would be sufficient to see the silhouette: ‘si le soir on reconnoit les gens sans voir distinctement les parties de leurs visages, mais en vertu du tout ensemble, il s’ensuit que le tout ensemble ou la masse des objets doit être préférée en peinture à la recherche du particulier’. Quoted in Niderst, ‘La Ressemblance au XVIIème siècle’, 259.

\textsuperscript{150} ‘L’on voit beaucoup de Portraits correctement dessinés qui ont un air froid, languissant & ébêté; & d’autres au contraire qui n’étant pas dans une si grande justesse de Desssein, ne laissent pas de nous frapper d’abord du caractere de la personne pour laquelle ils ont été faits.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 265. \textit{Principes}, 161.
being essential to likeness, it ought to be handled as exactly as the design. This part is the more valuable, as ‘tis rare and difficult to hit. A great many painters have come to a likeness by strokes and outlines; but, certainly, they are few, who have shewn in colours the tempers of persons.\textsuperscript{151}

The relationship between drawing as a means of rendering accurately the proportions of the human body and colouring as a means of sustaining the overall visual effectiveness of a painting had been an integral part of the colourist discourse already in the 1670s. The line of reasoning of de Piles in his discussion of likeness is reminiscent of the idea that Louis-Gabriel Blanchard advanced in defence of colour in the context of the quarrel of drawing and colour. In a lecture ‘On the Merits of Colour’ (\textit{Sur le mérite de la couleur}) held on 7 November 1671, Blanchard emphasised that the essential aim of the art of painting was to imitate nature and to deceive the eyes of the spectator. This aim was attainable better (if not only) with colour, because colour was for the art in distinction to the art of sculpture and, for that matter, poetry. A painter is a painter ‘only because he uses colours capable of seducing the eyes and imitating nature’.\textsuperscript{152} Hence, Blanchard maintained that a painting with mediocre drawing but good and harmonious colouring deceived the eyes more powerfully than a painting excellently drawn but with mediocre colours.\textsuperscript{153} From Blanchard’s point of view, the effect the representation stood above exactness; thus, a painting in the colourist mode offered a more truthful imitation of nature, that is, of nature as it appears to the eyes.

Thirty-six years later, de Piles elaborated further on the relationship and the differences between drawing and colouring in the chapter on ‘Colouring’ included in \textit{Cours de Peinture}.\textsuperscript{154} De Piles maintained that, whereas drawing was a part, which the arts of sculpture, architecture, engraving and painting shared, colouring alone was essential for painting.\textsuperscript{155} Here de Piles related to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{151} ‘Le coloris dans les Portraits est un épanchement de la Nature, lequel fait connoître le véritable temperament des personnes: & ce temperament étant une chose essentielle à la ressemblance, il doit être représenté avec la même justesse que le Dessein. Cette partie est d’autant plus estimable qu’elle est rare & difficile. On a vu une infinité de Peintres qui ont fait ressembler par les traits & par les contours: mais le nombre de ceux qui ont représenté par la couleur le véritable temperament des personnes, est assurément très-petit.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 271. \textit{Principles}, 165.
\item \textsuperscript{152} ‘… un peintre n’est peintre que parce qu’il emploie des couleurs capables de séduire les yeux et d’imiter la nature’. Blanchard, ‘Le mérite de la couleur’, 436.
\item \textsuperscript{153} ‘Pour ce qui est d’imposer aux yeux, il est certian qu’un tableau d’un dessein médiocre où les couleurs seront dans tout leur éclat et dans toute l’harmonie possible fera plus d’effet et trompera davantage nos yeux qu’un où le dessein, d’une dernière justesse, renfermera des couleurs médiocres. Et la raison de cela est que la couleur, dans la perfection que nous la supposons, représente toujours la vérité et que le dessein ne représente que la possibilité vraisemblable.’ Blanchard, ‘Le mérite de la couleur’, 438. See also Teysse\'dres, \textit{Roger de Piles}, 169-73; Annie Becq, \textit{Genèse de l’esthétique française moderne 1680–1814}, [1984] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 90-1, Lichtenstein, \textit{Eloquence of Color}, 148-9.
\item \textsuperscript{154} De Piles did not present the chapter on ‘Colouring’ at the Academy but added it only in \textit{Cours}, alongside the chapters on ‘Portraiture’ and ‘Landscape’. Teysse\'dres, \textit{Roger de Piles}, 650.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Piles, \textit{Cours}, 313–15.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
paragone-debate. More particularly, he dismissed drawing as a means by which painters and sculptors imitated the ‘real quantity of objects’. Colouring, on the other hand was the means by which painters imitated both ‘the apparent quantity and the quality of everything visible’, for the purpose ‘not only to please the eyes, but also to deceive them’. Consequently, in his treatise on portraiture de Piles mentioned neither good or bad likeness nor good or bad painting. Instead, he translated the traditional distinction between good likeness and good painting in terms of his overall theory of perfection in painting – true (vrai) painting, or properly the synthesis of close observation of nature (le vrai simple) and idealisation (le vrai idéal) in a compound vrai parfait. Indeed, this view is in conformity with the classicist definition of imitation. Yet, for de Piles such changes in the appearances of nature were necessary in order to find the most agreeable effect for the greatest satisfaction of the eye (according to the specificity of the art), rather than for the sake of an ideal conception of substance for the satisfaction of the mind. In this sense, likeness in a portrait and the portrait’s properly pictorial, lifelike effect become depended on each other. In fact, they seem to coincide altogether.

The implications of de Piles’ understanding of truth in painting for his views on portrait painting are evident in his disapproval of Philippe de Champaigne’s portraits (Plate 5), which he considered too bound to the exact rendering of the sitter, ‘of which he was a slave’. Champaigne’s portraits, de Piles maintained, impeded the overall expression of life and hence failed in the creation of the necessary effect of truth (i.e. illusion) and surprise. In contrast, de Piles chose a portrait of a servant girl by Rembrandt (1606-69) to illustrate his idea of truth (verité) in painting and its ultimate effect (Plate 6). That this effect was supported by means of colouring rather than drawing is evident also in the famous Balance de Peintres included in Cours de peinture, in which de Piles assigned to Rembrandt only six points for drawing. This was the lowest rank for drawing in the entire ‘table’. Rembrandt shared it with Caravaggio (1571–1610), Palma

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156 ‘La fin du Peintre & du Sculpteur est bien l’imitation; mais ils y arrivent par differentes voies, le Sculpteur par une matiere solide en imitant la quantité réelle des objets; & le Peintre en imitant avec des couleurs la quantité & la qualité apparente de tout ce qui est visible: en sorte qu’il est obligé non-seulement de plaire aux yeux, mais encore de les tromper en tout ce qu’il représente.’ Piles, Cours, 316–17. On the views of de Piles on drawing and colour as two distinct parts of the education of young painters, see Lichtenstein, Blind Spot, 42–9; esp. 44. Teyssèdre, Roger de Piles, 264.

157 ‘Il s’est toujours fort attaché au Naturel & à imiter avec assez de fidelité ses modèles: mais il ne les savoir pas disposer d’une façon à leur donner de la vie & du mouvement. Il n’a pas bien connu ce qu’il faut retrancher du vray pour le rendre moëleux, léger, & de bon Goût, ni adjouter ce peu qui le fait paroître animé; il me semble en un mot que tout son savoir étoit dans son modéle dont il étoit esclave, bien loin de le faire obéïr à son Génie ou du moins aux règles de son Art.’ Piles, Abrégé, 507. See Bonfait, ‘Du masque au visage’, 40; René Démoris has pointed out that de Piles frequently avoided the term ‘illusion’, using instead the term ‘truth’ (vrai). René Démoris, ‘Roger de Piles et la querelle du coloris’, in Rubens contre Poussin, 24. See also Puttfarken, Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985).

159 Piles, Cours, 10.
Vecchio (c. 1480–1528) and Lucas van Leiden (1494–1533). 160 Hardly surprisingly, for colouring, de Piles awarded Rembrandt with seventeen points—an achievement which he shared with Rubens, Van Dyck and Jacopo Bassano (c. 1510–1592) and which was surpassed only by painters of the Venetian-Lombard school such as Giorgione (c. 1477-1510), Titian (c. 1488–1576) and Paolo Veronese (1528-88).

Performing likeness: likeness as appearance and artefact

Depending on the function of portraits, likeness, as the perceived degree of conformity between the sitter and the representation, could be a major concern, to the extent that the artistic qualities of the portrait would matter little or not at all. 161 Likewise, to reduce likeness to the simple conformity of physical features would be misleading. Rather, as Olivier Bonfait has pointed out, likeness, establishes a 'vague zone' in which the visible and the invisible interfere. 162 Likeness operates thus on the border between visible and invisible and hence between body and character, appearance and substance.

Indeed, likeness was of utmost concern for commissioners. 163 If displeased with their likenesses, commisioners had the possibility to lodge a complaint with the commissariat of the Châtelet. 164 The legal procedure in cases of disagreement between a client and a supplier (painter, sculptor, engraver etc.) was set in a royal prescription of 1667. 165 Upon the estimations of two experts, an appointed judge resolved the issue. Each of the disputing parties had the opportunity to choose an expert amongst members either of the Academy or the Académie de Saint-Luc. If the case regarded a portrait, the presence of the sitter was required so that the experts could judge the likeness.

The fact that a complaint about lack of likeness in a portrait was taken as seriously as to allow a legal inquiry offers enough evidence of the importance attached to this concept. In this regard, however, it should be point out out that financial issues were at stake likewise. Likeness had a price—the more expensive the portrait, the greater the demand for likeness. 166 As extant expert reports show, the plaintiffs often refrained from attending the setting up of the

160 Piles, ‘La balance des peintres’, Cours, 489–93, followed by a table (n. pag.) including the names of the most famous painters and the scores he had assigned them for composition, drawing, colouring, and expression respectively, on a on a 20-point scale.
162 Bonfait, ‘Du masque au visage’, 36.
166 Chatelus, Peindre à Paris, 177.
experts’ reports.167 This suggests that the majority of the complaints might have been bold attempts to reduce the price of a portrait to be paid, rather than manifestations of a serious concern for the degree of likeness.

Complaints presented directly to the painters seem to have been even more numerous and the history of portrait painting in France offers many anecdotes about the misfortunes of some portrait painters and the witty responses of others to the objections of displeased commissioners.168 In this context, the concept of idealisation is brought forth, as a reminder that a portrait that resembles the sitter may be understood as a portrait that pleases the sitter. De Piles, too, devoted the final pages of his chapter on portraiture to what he conspicuously called la politique [du portrait], in which he particularly advised the painter to refrain from letting the commissioner see the portrait before its completion.169

The success of a portrait was also measured in relation to the degree to which it satisfied the spectator’s idea of the represented person. In a well-known passage from a letter to her daughter, Madame de Sévigné offered a brief, stern judgement on François de Troy’s portrait of Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire, Mademoiselle de Bavière, future dauphine of France (1679).170 The likeness was unsuccessful because it neither captured the sitter’s beautiful countenance nor suggested her intellectual virtues (esprit).171 Apparently, Madame de Sévigné’s judgement was not based on personal acquaintance with the sitter but relied rather on prior understanding of the sitter’s character, as others had characterised it: ‘one praises her esprit, her teeth and her stature’.172 De Troy’s portrait, however, did not confirm Madame de Sévigné’s expectations of how such qualities should be rendered in painting – she deemed the portrait but moderately beautiful (très médiocrement beau).

The response of Madame de Sévigné to de Troy’s portrait conformed to contemporary definitions of likeness in art treatises, such as those of Félibien in his seventh Entretien and of de Piles in Cours, which emphasised that a portrait should comprise both the outer and the inner qualities of the sitter. The response of Madame de Sévigné was also in conformity with the understanding of what constitutes likeness in the much fashionable at the time literary

167 See Wildenstein, Rapports d’experts.
169 Piles, Cours, 297–301.
170 The original of this portrait has not survived. Several portraits of Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire de Bavière have survived, albeit only copies. See further, Dominique Brême, François de Troy, 1645–1730 (Toulouse: Musée Paul-Dupuy/Paris: Somogy, 1997), 41–2.
171 ‘Le portrait de Madame la Dauphine est arrivé; il est très médiocrement beau. On loue son esprit, ses dents, sa taille; c’est où de Troy n’a pas trouvé à s’exercer.’ Sévigné, ‘Letter to Madame de Grignan’ (29 December 1679), Correspondence, 2: 776.
172 Madame de Sévigné mentions de Troy’s portrait and comments on the appearance of the future dauphine in several letters from 1680. See Brême, François de Troy, 40.
portrait. In the late 1680s, for instance, Pierre Richelet offered the following definition:

The [literary] portrait is a solemn, cheerful, or satirical description of a person. It is concerned with the body, the mind, the virtues, or the vices … In it, things are made as to inspire admiration, love, or revulsion; and one tries to indicate in it in a natural way the air, the face, the habits and the inclinations of people. One of its most sensible beauties consists in it. One should though not paint so much from nature that one does not go a bit further, but without offending the truthfulness (vraisemblance). The great painters practice it this way and one should imitate them.

In a manner similar to that of the painted portrait, a good literary portrait implied a description of the sitter’s physical features; a good portrait should also render the sitter’s inner qualities. However, the writer’s task was not only to imitate what he or she saw – likeness as the exact description of the sitter’s physical features – but also to take into account other aspects that could be beneficial to the work. Richelet’s definition points to the variety of emotions that a literary portrait was expected to create, ranging from admiration and love to revulsion. The vices and the inspiration of revulsion, which Richelet allowed in the literary portrait, were not part of the repertoire of the painted portrait – the rendering of such qualities, often in the guise of allegory, was instead in the domain of the grotesque and the so-called ‘fantasy portraits’.

Definitions of both types of portrait – the painted and the literary – apparently emphasise the idea that the representation should add something else to the exterior manifestations. The expectation that a portrait should create an effect on the reader, or the spectator motivated such an emphasis. To succeed, however, the writer should imitate the painter.

Antoine Furetière’s dictionary offers another illuminating example of the ‘vague zone’ implied by the late seventeenth-century notion of likeness. Furetière’s definition is particularly interesting for its approach to the issue

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175 On the fantasy portrait, see Melissa Percival, Fragonard and the Fantasy Figure: Painting the Imagination (Farnham Ashgate, 2012), esp. Ch. 2; Percival discusses the fantasy portraits known as ‘tronies’, particularly popular in seventeenth-century Dutch painting, that were particularly apt for the symbolic representation of vices and the expression of various strong emotions. Percival, Fragonard and the Fantasy Figure, 58–9.
from two different perspectives: a personal (subjective) perspective and a social (intersubjective) perspective. Furetière offers two definitions of the word ‘Portrait’. The first runs as follows:

PORTRAIT. s. m. Representation made of a person such as she is in nature. Narcissus, seeing his portrait in the water fell in love with it and drowned. When looking in a mirror one sees his/her portrait.\(^{176}\)

Furetière’s first definition defines likeness as an image of a person as she is perceived in nature. This definition relates to the person’s view of oneself. As a mirror image, it is accessible only to the person standing in front of the mirror. The mirror image reflects thus a subjective view. Through the invocation of the myth of Narcissus, this definition also relates to the idea of self-love and vanity.\(^{177}\)

Furetière’s second definition regards specifically portraiture and implies something else than a mirror image:

PORTRAIT, is also said of the work of a painter who traces artfully from nature the figure, the image and the representation of a person. … Here is a portrait from nature, vivid and resembling. He has been flattered in his portrait. This portrait is well-done, it lacks but speech.\(^{178}\)

Furetière’s second definition reiterates most of the conventional ways of viewing portraiture. More importantly, however, this definition of the word portrait suggests a complex person: a figure (outline of a body etc.); an image (mirror image but also mental images, ideas), as well as representation (mental images and images, which through memory present to the mind the image of a person as she is). Although related, these words had different connotations. While this definition invokes a person as she is, that is, objectively, at the same time it implies the views and the judgements of others: the painter’s, but also those of spectators.

Marcia Pointon has observed that although likeness ‘enables the viewer to match a representation with a given human subject’ this procedure involves a culturally determined reading.\(^{179}\) Furetière’s second definition of ‘portrait’ spells

\(^{176}\) ‘PORTRAIT. s. m. Representation faite d’une personne telle qu’elle est au naturel. Narcisse voyant son portrait dans l’eau, en devint amoureux, & se noya. Quand on regarde dans un miroir, on y voit son portrait.’ Furetière DU, 3: 188; DU, 2nd edn, 3: n. pag.

\(^{177}\) The myth of Narcissus and its linking to the theme of vanity, sin and death was a recurrent element in early-modern criticism of portraiture. See Pommier, Théories du portrait, 162, 265.


\(^{179}\) Pointon, Hanging the Head, 81 and 8–9; Coquery, ‘Le portrait vu du Grand Siècle’, 28–9.
out such an awareness clearly. He does not define the portrait as likeness in the
meaning of a mirror image but as an artefact, the meanings of which are
determined in interaction between people as well as by social and aesthetic
conventions and expectations. Consequently, de Troy’s portrait of the future
Dauphine, discussed above, may not have lacked in respect to the sitter’s
physical features. Rather, the effect that the portrait created did not conform to
the expectations. In this sense, Madame de Sévigné judged the portrait
lacking in what might be defined as the compound effect of the interplay
between appearances (acted out by the sitter and the painter in the portrait), on
one hand, and her expectations of encountering a particular character
embodied in the social self, on the other hand. To match the representation
of the future Dauphine with Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire de Bavière implied that
the appearance of the person in the portrait was expected to correspond to the
idea (and the ideal) of the appearance of a future Dauphine, according to the
rules of propriety (bienséance). Aesthetic conventions and social dimensions here
merge.

Judith Butler’s definition of gender as a performative act helps deepening
the analysis of the ways in which the supposedly inner character (invisible) is
figured on and through the body (visible) and, by the same token, how
character is fused with the understanding of likeness. Commenting on Simone
de Beauvoir’s well-known statement that a person is not born a woman but
rather becomes a woman, Butler states: ‘Gender is the repeated stylization of
the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that
congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of
being’. Substituting ‘character’ for ‘gender’, Butler’s statement applies to the
processes that determined the representation and the understanding of likeness
as a compound of a person’s inner qualities and physical features in the late
seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. In this sense, rather than being
– the person as a ‘natural self’ or substance – the self in late seventeenth-century
culture of honnêteté may be interpreted as appearing; as looked at and judged on
appearances.

The issue may be illustrated with two fashion prints, gravure de mode
representing Madame la Duchesse d’Albret and Femme de qualité en habit brodé, from
the 1690s (Plates 7-8). In pose, attitude, facial expression, even the slight tilt of
the head, the two figures appear as almost identical. Visually, they seem as if
they have been fashioned on each other or appearing in the same role – that of
a femme de qualité. Words, by way of inscriptions, rather than appearance

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180 See West, Portraiture, 22.
181 Philippe Riondet has observed that in 1730 the portrait of ‘Madame la Dauphine’ by de Troy
was described as ‘true to likeness’; Riondet, ‘Le portrait au XVIIe siècle’, 55–6.
182 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge,
1993), 33.
183 I borrow the expression ‘natural self’ from Pointon, Hanging the Head, 112–13. See also
Stanton, Aristocrat as Art, esp. Ch. 3.
articulate the difference between the two figures. Sarah Cohen has interpreted seventeenth-century fashion prints as visual forms that both reiterated the performative practices that shaped the aristocratic body and complicated these practices 'by fragmenting “aristocratic” identity into kaleidoscopic options'. The very process of reproduction allowed for a variety of transformations by way of small adjustments of facial features, gestures, accessories or the backdrops. In this regard, the fashion prints functioned in the same way as painted portraits in their multiple variations of pose and adjustments codified in a limited number of conventional portrait types.

The repetitions and variations in fashion prints and various portrait types suggest a parallel to role-play. Role-play as metaphor for the construction of the self through bodily appearance permeated seventeenth-century literature on social comportment. For instance, Chevalier de Méré, a prolific writer on matters concerning the principles and the practice of honnêteté and the art of pleasing in aristocratic society, described the comportment of the honnête homme as a role to be performed. ‘Being a good actor in life is a very rare talent; it demands spirit and precision to find perfection’, he stated. Méré emphasised the importance of propriety (bienséance) attainable only if the enacted role was suitable for the person who performed it. In addition, he associated the talent to play a role with the quality of bon air, that is, with the visual/bodily expression of character. Le bon air, in turn, related closely to the quality of grace (grâce) and was, therefore, a prerequisite of pleasantness (agreement).

188 ‘Ce talent d’estre bon acteur me semble fort necessaire aux personnes du monde, & c’est à peu prés ce qu’on appelle aujourd’hui, pour parler à la mode, avoir le bon air.’ [Méré, Antoine Gombaud], *Les conversations* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1670), 49; (Méré, *Œuvres complètes*, 1: 42).
Quoting Méré, Domna Stanton has noted that *le bon air* was immediately visible and more regular than *agreement*; the latter being conceived of as a more complex, sinuous and thus a more rewarding quality; *le bon air* inspired admiration, *agreement* inspired love. The fact that the performance of character was defined in terms of role-play spells out the awareness that character was accessible only through outward, bodily appearances that could be used at will. If acted well and according to the rules of propriety, the performance of character could not fail.

Benedetta Craveri has observed that in the seventeenth century ‘social presentation – *paraître* – prompted the complete “exteriorization” of self’. Following the strict rules of propriety (*bienséance*), the inner qualities of the self, were figured on the body – or performed – by way of bodily movements, gestures and language. In the same way, seventeenth-century fashion prints and portraits can be interpreted as images in which the self performs a role, part of a larger, collective performance. Like Richelet in his definition of the literary portraits, Chevalier de Méré reached to the analogy with painting to explain this idea. To judge well of a person’s appearance, Méré advised, ‘one should not consider separately what is pleasing in her, because to know her value one should look at her as an entity, like a picture’. Performance in society and performance in art were in this sense intertwined and the awareness that personal identity is created (and re-created) in complex performative acts, rather than in-born, is clearly spelled-out.

Marcia Pointon has captured the interplay between these two notions in the following observation: ‘When the body is understood to be an artefact, the boundaries between self as represented in visual imagery and self as mobile representation cease to operate and imagery may be seen to inform the productions of meaning in life as well as the reverse.’ In this sense, Pointon’s distinction between the *self in art* and the *self as art* can be pushed a step further and redefined as *the self in art as art*.193

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189 Stanton, *Aristocrat as Art*, 126.


191) ‘… pour bien juger d’une personne agréable, on ne doit pas considérer séparément ce qui plaît en elle; car pour en connoître le prix il faut la regarder toute entière comme un tableau.’ Méré, *Les agréemens*, 91; (Méré, *Œuvres complètes*, 2. 35).


193 In an interesting analysis of François Boucher’s *Madame de Pompadour at her Toillette* (1758), Melissa Hyde has suggested that the portrait evokes the double association of ‘woman-as-artist’ and art-as-artifice; Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo*, 117, 127–8.
Spectatorship: experience between knowledge and pleasure

The superficial beauties of painting and the superficial beauties of talk

Turning once again to the account of Madame de Sévigné quoted in the opening of this chapter – why would Madame de Grignan have laughed if she had seen Monsieur Faucher admiring her portrait? Why was Monsieur Faucher’s ‘manner of admiring’ amusing?

Roland Fréart de Chambray (1606–76) offers an idea of the elements in the painting that Monsieur Faucher might have been admiring and of the words that he might have used. Fréart de Chambray’s *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, published in 1662, offered one of the first coherent expressions of French classicist theory of painting. *Idée* was preceded only by Félibien’s anonymously published *De l’origine de la peinture et des plus excellens peintres de l’Antiquité* (1660), included in a revised version in the first *Entretien* (1666). Several years later, in his *Remarques* to Du Fresnoy’s *De arte graphica* (1668), de Piles included Chambray’s *Idée* among the books that a painter should read to learn the precepts of the art; or, if not the whole work, ‘one should read at least the Introduction’. In the introduction, Chambray condemned the *curieux modernes* who allowed themselves to be seduced by the ‘superficial, imaginary beauties of painting’ (*ces beautez superficielles, ou plustost imaginaries*) and described their manner of viewing paintings in the following words:

... they have even invented a Jargon expressly for them, with which, accompanied by gestures and very emphatic expressions, they exaggerate magnificently in order to make one admire the Freshness and Loveliness of the Colouring, the Freedom of the Brush, the bold Touches, the Colours thickly pasted and well nourished, the separation of the Masses, the Draperies well cast, the rare Folds, the Masterful Strokes, the Grand Manner, the Muscles strongly felt, the beautiful Contours, the beautiful Tints, and the Softness of the Fleshtones, the beautiful Groups, the beautiful Passages, and a great many other

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chimerical beauties of this kind, that one newer saw in the Works of the great Ancient Painters.\textsuperscript{197}

The 'superficial, imaginary beauties' that Chambray denounces in his denouncement of the state of deterioration in the art of painting and the taste of the \textit{curieux moderns}, are reminiscent of the 'external lustre', which Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne attacked in his lecture in 1672. They are also reminiscent of the 'superficial perfections' and the 'finery', which Madame de Coulanges praised Mignard for not having resorted to in his portrait of Madame de Maintenon. The elements that Monsieur Faucher admired in Mignard’s portrait of Madame de Grignan seem to have been such 'superficial beauties' as well.

The vivid description of Madame de Sévigné helps imagining Monsieur Faucher gesturing in front of the portrait, accompanying his enthusiastic flow of words by other emphatic, bodily and facial expressions, not unlike Chambray’s \textit{curieux moderns}. Moreover, as Madame de Sévigné indicated in the same letter, Monsieur Faucher had spent time in Rome; he was therefore acquainted with painting: 'He is a roman; he is knowledgeable in it [painting]'.\textsuperscript{198} Yet, he was 'like a fool for half an hour' and Madame de Grignan would have laughed, had she seen his manner of admiring the portrait. The English edition of Madame de Sévigné’s letters, published in 1811, interpreted this classification as 'he stood gazing like a fool for half an hour'.\textsuperscript{199} The translation suggests a spectator who struck by the pictorial qualities of the painting, stops to admire it – speechless. This, however, was not the case with Monsieur Faucher’s experience of the paining.

The meaning of the word ‘fool’ (\textit{fou}) in the late seventeenth century was a person who had lost his or her mind and sense (\textit{raison}).\textsuperscript{200} Moreover, a fool was distinguished by his or her excessive talk, usually due to an exaggerated


\textsuperscript{198} ‘Il est romain, il s’y connaît.’ Sévigné, \textit{Correspondance}, 2: 91. According to Roger Duchêne, editor of Madame de Sévigné’s correspondence, Faucher had most probably developed his interest for painting during his long sojourn in Rome as a secretary of the French ambassador, Cardinal Cézar d’Estrées (1628–1714). Sévigné, \textit{Correspondance}, 2: 1128, n. 2

\textsuperscript{199} Madame de Sévigné, \textit{Letters}, 2: 147; emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{200} ‘FOU … veut dire qui a perdu l’esprit. Qui n’a plus de raison … Fou, s. m. Qui a perdu le sens. Qui n’a point de conduit. [Les foux font les fêtes & les sages en on le plaisir]’. Richelet, \textit{DF}, 347.
attachment to something. Considering the late seventeenth-century meaning of the word fool, it seems that Monsieur Faucher had much to say about the portrait; probably a lot more about the painter’s ‘masterly touches … the carnation, the brilliance, the flesh, and the head [that comes] out of the canvas, which Madame de Sévigné could account for in the limited space of a letter. A fool’s talk, moreover, was coupled with extravagance. To act in an extravagant manner was defined thus as ‘not knowing what one is saying while talking’; being extravagant implied the loosing of one’s judgement and common sense and was exemplified with being infatuated with one’s own talk.

Benedetta Craveri has described the practice of conversation in the seventeenth century as ‘a precise strategy involving politesse, esprit, galanterie, complaisance (obligeness), enjouement (cheerfulness), and flatterie’; its foremost aim was to please – its ‘application full of pitfalls’. Unlike the conversation of the savants, the true bonne tête homme despised affectionation of all kind and particularly, the conversation of the bonne tête homme ‘made no display of learning, it neither demonstrated nor persuaded’. Monsieur Faucher responded to the invitation of Madame de Sévigné to talk about the painting in comparison with another portrait by Mignard in a manner inconsistent with the rules of polite demeanour (bienséance). He rejected not only the comparison, but also called her ‘ignorant’. He appears to have been carried away by his own talk to such an extent that his maintenance of bonne manners failed, not unlike a fool. In this sense, the amusement of Madame de Sévigné seems to have been over the manner in which Monsieur Faucher expressed his admiration, rather than the elements in the painting that he admired; amusement over a clumsy – and failed – attempt to distinguish oneself as knowledgeable, rather than a rejection of a particular kind of spectatorial experience.

Accommodating spectatorship with the effects of painting

Chambray’s condemnation of the preferences of the curieux modernes for ‘the superficial beauties of painting’ is a powerful expression of the opposition between the appeal of painting to the spectator’s mind and the appeal of painting to the senses, particularly to the eyes. This condemnation was predicated on the idea that the essence of painting and the basis for its perfection resides in its capacity to reach the spectator’s mind. The source of appeal of the painting to the mind was ideal beauty embodied in the subject.

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203 Craveri, Age of Conversation, 345.

204 Craveri, Age of Conversation, 342.
matter by means of the painter’s intellectual activity – reasoned design/drawing. In this context, it is interesting to note Poussin presented his famous definition of painting as ‘imitation made by lines and colours on a flat surface of everything beneath the sun; its end is delectation’ in a letter to Chambray. Antony Blunt has suggested that Poussin employed the word ‘delectation’ in the meaning of the term diletto as it was understood by sixteenth century Italian literary theorists, namely as ‘the delectation of the soul produced not by the sensual beauty of verse but by the intellectual beauty of allegory’.207

Firmly anchored in the classicist paradigm, for Chambray the appeal of painting to the spectator’s eyes resided in nothing else but such sheer appearances – superficial and imaginary beauties – associated with colour and, in extension, with the manual work of the painter. For Chambray, however, the painter’s reputation among erudite spectators (les scavans) could be established only upon paintings that manifested well-reasoned invention of the subject. Consequently, he identified the essence of spectatorial experience as the appreciation and judgement of subject matter and invention as distinguished from mere execution. Art should provide moral edification and opportunity for the exercise of imagination anchored in classical learning. Such an experience entailed ‘reading’ of the depicted subject matter and a description in the tradition of ekphrasis. The painter’s manner of creating illusion and pictorial elements such as the choice of colours and the handling of the brush merited no particular interest.208

Chambray’s attack on the taste within the milieu of the curieux moderns was also an expression of the ideals of the seventeenth-century French humanistic culture espoused by the scavans, members of the classically educated nobility of the robe (noblesse de robe). As Todd Olson has pointed out, the nobles of the robe regarded classical learning acquired in the collège not only as a mark of social distinction but also as a means for the acquisition and the maintenance of power and legal authority.209 For the nobles of the robe, the deterioration of the arts of which Chambray despaired was a sign of the general deterioration that threatened the country and their own political power under the influence of the Prime Minister, Cardinal Mazarin (1602–61). During the Fronde (1648–53), members of the nobles of the robe instigated a storm of criticism against

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205 ‘Car il est certain qu’après toutes ces beautez superficielles, ou plustost imaginaires, si l’Invention du Sujet qu’on traite n’est bien raisonnée … jamais un Ouvrage ne donnera de réputation à son Auteur parmi les Scavans.’ Chambray, Idée, 62-3. Translated and quoted in Posner, ‘Concerning the “mechanical” parts’, 584, n. 5.
207 Poussin, Lettres, 174, n. 17. Cf. René Démoris, ‘À propos d’une delectation perdue’, for the view that the classicist theory advanced in the Academy consciously subdued Poussin’s emphasis on delectation as the aim of painting in favour of instruction.
209 Olson, Poussin and France, 21 and Ch. 1.
Mazarin, which spread mainly in the form of *libelles*, known as *mazarinades*. These texts attacked Mazarin’s reputed extravagance and indulgences embodied in his excessive disposal of money, his love for spectacle and not the least his collecting practice. In much the same manner as that in which Chambray described the preferences of the *curieux modernes* for the superficial beauties of painting, this criticism was overtly directed against all kinds of subtleties and artificial effects, the sole purpose of which was to dazzle the sight, supplanting thus reason by confusion.210

Félibien in turn, although he shared Chambray’s classicist taste, obviously struggled against the allurement of colour. A number of passages in his *Entretiens* demonstrate Félibien’s fascination with the effects of colour.211 The seeming uneasiness of Félibien in acknowledging the qualities of colour can be explained with the low position of colour, properly mechanical. This becomes obvious in his first *Entretien* published in 1666. Félibien observed that colour alongside drawing were inferior to the painter’s intellectual conception of subject matter because ‘they regard only the practice and belong to the artisan, what makes them less noble than the conception of subject matter, which is entirely free and accessible to knowledge even without being a painter’.212 A year later, however, Félibien extended this argument in the ‘Préface’ to the academic conferences. In what appears as an attempt to secure the idea of painting as a liberal art, he added that not even the parts that regard the hand should be considered as entirely mechanical because in painting the hand is always guided by the mind, as without imagination ‘not a single line or a brushstroke can be successful’.213 Accordingly, whereas *travail méchanique* was but the representation of a body by the simple tracing of lines and the application of colours, the actual arrangement of composition on the canvas, *ordonnance*, for which the painter employed the skills of drawing and colour, exceeded the merely mechanical in that it followed the idea already present in the painter’s mind.

In the fifth *Entretien* (1679), Félibien seems to have reached an impasse. The subject of the conversation was the Lombardian school, particularly the art of Titian. Félibien addressed the question of whether it was more estimable that

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212 ‘Les deux autres parties qui parleroient du DESSEIN & du COLORIS, ne regardent que la Pratique, & appartiennent à l’Ouvrier, ce qui les rend moins nobles que la première [la COMPOSITION] qui est toute libre, & que l’on peut scavorir sans estr Peintre.’ Félibien, *Entretiens*, 1: 46. This passage appeared already in Félibien’s *De l’origine de la peinture*, 3.
213 ‘… dans la peinture la main ne travaille jamais qu’elle ne soit conduite par l’imagination, sans laquelle elle ne peut presque faire un seul trait ni donner un coup de pinceau qui réussisse’. Félibien, ‘Préface’, 55.
the painter deceives the eyes by his art or that the painter reveals his invention in elaborated multi-figure history or allegory paintings that do not deceive the eyes as much as others.214 This obviously related to the issues raised in the wake of the quarrel of drawing and colour and recalls particularly Blanchard’s line of reasoning in the lecture ‘On the merits of colour’ as well as the views of de Piles presented in Dialogue sur le coloris and in Conversations. Apparently with these views in mind, Félibien maintained that ‘those with predilection for the art of Titian and the other Lombardian painters’, distinguished between two criteria for the judgement of the painter’s responsibility: the knowledge of how things should be histories and the knowledge of bien peindre, the latter criteria was precisely the part that Titian had chosen to develop in his art.215 In this respect, Félibien’s account of the art of Titian appears almost as a defence of the colourist view.216 The conversational structure of the text allows Félibien also to expound on the beauties of the painter’s work. Thus, he was able to recast the dyadic concepts colour/drawing, effect/subject matter, eye/mind, by putting the order of preferences in reverse.

The distinction made by Félibien between the knowledge of invention and the practical skills of painting recalls his distinction between likeness and good painting in the seventh Entretien, discussed above, in which the skill of painting elevates the status of the genre. Similarly, the turn from celebration to reservation in Félibien’s account of the art of Titian, recalls the turn in his earlier account of the art of Van Dyck. By way of conclusion, Félibien maintained that although Titian’s paintings were very agreeable and much appreciated because of the beauty of colour that pleases the sight, Titian was nevertheless not in possession of all the parts of the difficult art of painting.217 Ultimately, the knowledge of invention surpasses the skill of painting.

Writing on the art of Nicolas Poussin in his ninth Entretien (1688) Félibien established a distinction between a good painter and an erudite (sçavant) painter.

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214 ‘Comme l’esprit du Peintre paroit dans tout ce qu’il fait, repartis-je, vous pourriez plustost demander lequel est le plus digne d’estime, ou celui qui sçait tromper par la force de son Art, ou celui qui montre beaucoup d’invention & de feu dans de grands ouvrages, mais qui ne trompent point comme les autres.’ Félibien, Entretiens, 3: 94–5.


216 See Jérôme Delaplanché, ‘La touche et la tache’, in Rubens contre Poussin, 63; and, for further references, n. 210, above.

217 ‘Je sçay bien que ce sçavant homme n’est pas accomply dans toutes les parties, & que ceux qui l’ont imité en Lombardie & ailleurs n’ont pas possédé tout ce qui fait un grand Peintre. Toutefois ils n’ont pas laissé de faire des ouvrages tres-agreables & fort estimés, parce qu’on y trouve une beauté de couleurs qui plaist à la veuë.’ Félibien, Entretiens, 3: 97.
Félibien's point being that the difference stems from the painter's ability to engage the spectator in an intellectual activity:

Considering the paintings of this excellent man [Poussin], I see that there is a great difference between good painters and erudite painters. I call a good painter he who in his works expresses himself with order, much strength, grace and clarity, and he who by imitating well what he wishes to represent, satisfies the ordinary minds and pleases the eyes of everyone; but only him who, not only possesses these beautiful parts, but also draws the attention of the minds of first order to his works, ennobles the most ordinary subjects with the sublimity of his thoughts and finds in his imagination and in his memory, as if it were in two inexhaustible sources, everything that would render his works completely perfect.218

According to Félibien, ennobled imitation holds greatest interest and value in painting; it not only pleases everyone but also merits the admiration of the most elevated minds.219 However, the painter could achieve such a kind of imitation only through the exercise of the intellectual faculties of imagination and memory – an ability that resided at the core of the distinction between bon peintre and sçavant peintre. With this distinction, Félibien attained two ends. He acknowledged, once again, the qualities of Titian's pictorial mode, which, nine years earlier, had made him yield to the allurement of colour at the expense of subject matter. At the same time, he was able to reassert the primacy of Poussin.

Eye and mind: instruments of spectatorial experience and judgement

Félibien's solution to the problem posed by the beauties of painting, particularly their allurement to the eye of the spectator, is recorded emphatically in his tenth and last Entretien, published in 1688. Not only in tone but also in argument, this lengthily passage is conclusive of Félibien's views on the essence of painting and spectatorial judgement:

Thus you may know already that in order to judge well a painting and the genius of he who has made it one should first observe the invention of the painting; if it

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218 ‘Mais il est vray que quand je considere les Tableaux de cet excellent homme, & ceux de quelques Peintres qui ont cû du merite, je voy qu’il y a une grande difference entre les bons & les sçavans Peintres. J’appelle un bon Peintre celui qui dans ses ouvrages s’exprime avec ordre, avec beaucoup de force, de grace & de netteté, & qui en imitant bien ce qu’il veut representer satisfait les esprits ordinaires, & plaist aux yeux de tout le monde. Mais celuy-là seul me paroist digne d’estre appellé sçavant, qui non seulement possede toutes ces belles parties, mais encore qui attirant sur ses ouvrages l’admiration des esprits mesme du premier rang, ennoblit les matieres les plus communes par la sublimité de ses pensées, & trouve dans son imagination & dans sa mémoire, comme dans deux sources inépuisables, tout ce qui peut rendre ses Tableaux entierement parfaits.’ Félibien, Entretiens, 5: 3–4, emphasis added.

219 Félibien's inclusion of tout le monde points to an awareness of the fast developing market for paintings and the perceived problems that a larger audience brought forth in regard to the judgement of the art. See Becq, Genèse de l’esthétique française, 210–13.
is new, noble, and agreeable. The disposition of the subject will let you know if the artisan has judgement and if there is order in his thoughts. It is in drawing that the painter displays the strength of his mind, his knowledge, and the fruits of his studies. … No matter what beauties the painter’s colouring gives to his work, no matter what agreement of colours he maintains in order to make it agreeable and pleasant for the sight; no matter what light and brightness he spreads in order to illuminate it, no matter what shades he attempts in order to strengthen and reveal its brilliance, if all this is not sustained by drawing, nothing would subsist, no matter how good and elaborate. […] so that one should make difference between the judgement that the eye makes of a painting and the judgement that reason gives it. One is satisfied with pleasure, the other seeks the truth and the probable; which shows that the light of reason ought to guide all actions of the mind, as the light of the eye guides the actions of the hand; and that one should exercise great prudence and discernment in order to distribute these things according to what is necessary to satisfy equally the eyes and reason.220

Obviously, Félibien aimed at a vindication of the colourist view on what constitutes the professional responsibility of the painter and the basis of good spectatorial judgement. Although the essence of painting consisted in that it not only satisfied the mind but also the eyes of the spectator, the relationship between these two facets of the effect that painting produced was strictly hierarchic. As the painter was obliged to subordinate colour to design, so the spectator who possessed the necessary knowledge of painting and good judgement was expected to subordinate the effects that painting produced upon the senses to reason. Consequently, it held equally for painter and spectator that the fleeting charms of natural appearances, embodied in the lustre of colour, should be subjected to the unfailing truthfulness of reason, embodied in subject matter through drawing/design (dessin/dessein).221 Yet, although arguing for the primacy of design over colour, Félibien provided in this passage, once again, a

220 ‘Ainsi vous pouvez sçavoir à présent que pour bien judger d’un Tableau & du génie de celuy qui l’ai fait, il faut regarder d’abord quelle est l’Invention de ce Tableau; si elle est nouvelle, noble, & agréable. La Disposition du sujet vous fera connoistre si l’Ouvrier a du jugement, & s’il y a de l’ordre dans ses pensées. C’est dans le Deffein que le Peintre fait paraistre la force de son esprit, sa science, & le fruit de ses études. … Quelque beauté de coloris qu’un Peintre donne à son ouvrage, quelque amitié de couleurs qu’il observe pour le rendre aimable & plaisant à la veûë; quelques jours & quelques lumieres qu’il y répande pour l’éclairer, de quelques ombres dont il tasche de le fortifier & d’un relever l’éclat, si tout cela n’est soutenu du dessein, il n’y a rien, pour beau & riche qu’il soit, qui puisse subsister. […] De sorte qu’il faut mettre de la difference entre le jugement que l’œil fait d’un Tableau, & celuy que la raison en donne. L’un se contente de l’agrément, & l’autre recherche la verité & la vray-semblance. Et par là vous voyez que la lumiere de la raison doit conduire toutes les operations de l’esprit, comme la lumiere de l’œil les operations de la main, & qu’il est besoin d’une grande prudence & d’un grand discernement pour distribuer toutes choses selon qu’il est necessaire pour la perfection d’un ouvrage, lors qu’on veut satisfaire également les yeux & la raison.’ Félibien, *Entretiens*, 5: 288–91.

221 Seventeenth-century French art theory applies the word *dessin* with reference both to the intellectual conception of subject matter (its design or composition) and to drawing (dessin). Becq, *Genèse de l’esthétique française*, 67, Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art*, 44.
vivid record of the manner in which colour in painting exercised its pictorial effectiveness by taking hold of the spectator’s experience at the expense of subject matter.222

This passage also suggests that in the process of viewing Félibien distinguished between two different ways of looking at and providing judgement on painting. The first one was directed towards the imitation of objects. Focus was on the pictorial means by which the painter has rendered the represented subject, particularly colour as a means of sustaining illusion through various degrees of tone and luminosity. Looking at painting in this manner does not require particular knowledge; rather, such a looking involves pleasure for the eyes. The second manner of looking at and judging paintings regarded the expression of noble ideas and ideal beauty. Focus shifts from the pictorial means of the painter towards the subject matter. These two ways of looking at painting were seemingly associated with different kinds of spectators.223 On the one hand, tout le monde or every spectator who possesses an ordinary capacity of judgement and imagination and, on the other hand, the erudite spectators or the esprits meme du premier rang.224

As pointed out in the Introduction, according to de Piles, a proper experience of painting begins with a surprise and immediate satisfaction for the eyes. As Thomas Kavanagh has elegantly put it, in the initial encounter with painting the spectator’s experience depended ‘on an element of sensual surprise antithetical to the mind’s proclivity toward reflection’.225 The view that the painting attracts spectatorial attention by force of its pictorial effectiveness at first glance was closely linked to the view that paintings were not only for spectators possessing knowledge of painting or prior interest for the art but also for everyone.

The reason for this view was straightforward. As de Piles observed in Conversations, ‘it would be strange if paintings were made for the painters and concerts for the musicians’; every spectator who possesses common sense (homme de bon sens) would be able to judge a painting, if not also to provide an explanation of this judgement.226 Thirty years later, in the opening of Cours de

224 Cf. the definition of Academie Française of ‘esprit’ as also signifying ‘les facultez de l’ame raisonnable. … La facilite de l’imagination & de la conception’ and, sometimes, the faculties of imagination (l’imagination), understanding (la conception) as well as judgement (le judgement) alone. DAF, 1: 399.
226 ‘Ce seroit une chose bien estrange, que les Tableaux ne fussent faits que pour les Peintres, & les Concerts pour les Musiciens. Il est tres-certain qu’un homme d’esprit qui ne sera point instruit des preceptes de l’Art, peut bien juger d’un Tableau, encore qu’il ne donne pas toujours raison de ses sentiments, & qu’il ne les dise si vous voulez, qu’avec incertitude; s’il n’en juge pas en Peintre, il en jugera en homme de bon sens.’ Piles, Conversations, 21.
peinture de Piles introduced a distinction between two ideas of painting. The first idea of painting (idée générale) was accessible to everyone – ‘les ignorans, les amateurs de Peinture, les Connoisseurs, et les Peintres mêmes’; this is the principle idea of painting: to imitate nature in such a way that would lead to the aim of painting, namely to seduce the eyes. The second idea of painting, in turn, regarded the aspects of the theory of painting.

De Piles articulated the idea that painting elicits different response with different spectators also by pointing at two different dimensions of the viewing process: on the one hand, the experience of the whole, le tout ensemble, understandable and enjoyable for everyone; on the other hand, the close viewing, pleasant for the competent spectator. Thus, de Piles pointed out that ‘a learned picture pleases the ignorant only when it is at some distance, but connoisseurs will admire its artifice from up close and its effect at a distance’. This second idea of painting was accessible to ideal spectator of de Piles as well as to the perfect painter. The spectator’s focus here shifts from the effect of painting (l’effet du vrai, illusion) to the art of painting, which comprises both knowledge of the principles of painting and mastery of technique.

De Piles distinction between ways of experiencing paintings differs from that of Félibien in several important ways. Apparently, de Piles reversed the hierarchy of qualities in the painting. Whereas Félibien distinguished the representation of subject matter as the principal aspect of the painting to assure the quality of the work, de Piles emphasised the primacy of the pictorial effect, regardless of subject matter. If the spectator would take interest in a painting depended on its initial effect. De Piles lets Pamphile explain:

It is not the eye that should look for the painting, but the painting that should attract the eye and force it, as it were, to look at it. Given that it is made for the eyes, the painting should please everyone, some more others less, according to the knowledge of those who look at it. Thus, to determine the beauty of a

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228 ‘Il y a une seconde idée, qui est, comme nous avons dit, particulière aux Peintres … Cette idée regarde en détail toute la théorie de la Peinture …’ Piles, Cours, 5.

229 ‘Un Tableau savant ne plaira aux ignorans que dans sa distance, mais les connoisseurs en admireront l’artifice de près, & l’effet de loin.’ Piles, Cours, 263.

painting it is not sufficient that the connoisseurs approach it at random, in order
to see if there is anything that satisfies them. 231

The difference between Félibien’s and de Piles’s views on the assessment of
quality implies a difference between ‘reading’ and ‘viewing’ paintings. It also
suggests a distinction between pleasure for the mind and pleasure for the eyes.
To access the qualities of a painting and to be able to explain such a judgement,
de Piles’s ideal spectator (in this case, the connoisseur) does not turn to the
represented subject first but to the manner of representation. In this sense, de
Piles’ views on spectatorship also relates to the late seventeenth-century
aristocratic disdain for scholarly activities that threatened the idleness and hence
the agreeableness desired in social interaction. 232

Spectatorship as a sign of distinction
In a period that saw a notable increase of interest in collecting and a
Corresponding growth of interest in issues of taste, the ability to demonstrate
knowledge of painting and provide quality judgements of works of art was
regarded as a sign of sophistication. 233 The need for qualified spectatorship was
also intimately linked to the growing art market, which required competence for
the identification and evaluation of paintings of varying, often uncertain
quality. 234 In this context, the role of the spectator and spectatorship as an act
became more differentiated.

In the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, besides the word
spectateur, language offered several terms for spectators/consumers of art:
curieux, amateur, connoisseur. These terms related to various sets of practices such
as learning, collecting and sociability. Concerning painting, these terms were
linked to practices such as the acquisition of paintings, their arrangement
(display) and the manner of responding to them. Thus, rather than discernment
and taste in selecting objects, a distinguishing feature of the curieux was the
fervour, occasionally seen as a sign of mere greed, with which they gathered

231 ‘… l’œil ne doit pas tant aller chercher le Tableau, comme le Tableau doit attirer l’œil & le
forcer, pour ainsi dire à le regarder. Puisqu’il est fait pour les yeux, il doit plaire à tout le
monde, aux uns plus, aux autres moins, selon la connaissance de ceux qui le voyent. Ainsi ce
n’est pas assez pour établir la beauté d’un Tableau que les Connoissses s’en approchent à
tout hazard, afin de voir s’ils y trouveront quelque chose qui les satisfasse.’ Piles, Conversations,
80–1.
233 See, e.g., Crow, Painters and Public Life; Krzysztof Pomian, Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and
Venice 1500–1800, [1987], trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge UK/Cambridge Mass:
William Ray, ‘Talking about art: the French Royal Academy Salons and the formation of the
234 Posner, ‘Concerning the “mechanical” parts’, 590. Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early-
paintings, sculptures, various natural as well as handcrafted curiosities.  

235 *Amateur*, in turn, referred to an art lover – for instance an *amateur de peinture*, non-practitioner – as well as to a lover of beautiful things/objects more generally (*amateur des belles choses*). Contrary to the *curieux*, the *amateurs* were distinguished both by their knowledge of the art and by their taste.  

236 *Connoisseur*, finally, was an *amateur* who possessed not only knowledge and taste, but also discernment and the ability to provide justification for it.  

The meaning of these terms was not stable. Rather, they were imbued with connotations that varied between social groups, communities and institutions. In addition, the meaning of these terms was subjected to constant changes, following the shifts in the understanding and the evaluation of the social practices and the cognitive activities that they suggested. The differentiation between *amateurs* and *curieux*, on one hand, and *amateurs* and *connoisseurs*, on the other hand, became more rigorous towards the mid-eighteenth century, when the articulation of ideas on the concept of the art public became livelier and the corresponding need for distinguishing the spectators, their erudition and the authority of their judgement more pronounced.  

237 Although established in the dictionaries of the late seventeenth century, the difference between these terms was not consistently articulated. By 1700, for instance, de Piles employed the terms *curieux* and *amateur* in a hardly systematic manner, to designate different kinds of spectators but also interchangeably; the term *curieux*, however, appears more frequently than *amateur*.

Nevertheless, as there were *curieux* and *curieux ignorans*, there were also not only *connoisseurs*, *connoisseurs habiles* and *connoisseurs savans* but also *demi-connoisseurs*.  

238 The amateur, on the other hand, was an *amateur* or *amateur de beaux-arts*, *amateur de peinture* or *amateur des belles choses* – there was, in other

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238 In the writings of de Piles, *curieux ignorans*, e.g. *Cours*, 16; *demi-connoisseurs*, e.g. *Abrégé* (‘Des desseins’), 67.
words, no equivalent of *amateur* to either *curieux ignorant* or *demi-connoisseur.*\(^{239}\) In this sense, the term *amateur* seems the most stable notion, exclusively charged with positive connotations. This observation points to the value assigned to the unprejudiced assessment of the arts. Because of their association with the market, the *connoisseurs* could be suspected of delivering judgements for their own benefit. Qualifications such as *connoisseur desintéressé* emphasised the difference and pointed to the value assigned to the ability to recognise the agreeable by virtue of taste, rather than by precepts, the latter being precisely the aspect that distinguished the *amateur* from the *connoisseur.*\(^{240}\) Although the first systematic articulation of this view appeared in 1719 in Abbé Du Bos’ *Réflexions critiques sur la poesie et sur la peinture*, it is important to point out that the spectator behaviour it suggested was integral to a shared practice in late seventeenth-century aristocratic culture.\(^{241}\) Chevalier de Méré, for instance, remarked in a letter to M. Costar:\(^{242}\)

Those who judge painting are so good to say, this one excels in drawing, that one in invention, the other in colour, the other in the costume, another in the contrast, another in the attitudes. … I judge nothing, I say only what I feel, and the effect that everything produces in my heart & in my mind … because the feeling [*le sentiment*], when it acts without reflection is usually a good judge of *bien-séance* & the pleasures [*agrémens*], and that the best proof that something has to please is that it appeals in effect & mainly to people of good taste.\(^{243}\)

Following the ideals of *honnêteté*, Méré described an exercise of spectatorial experience anchored in personal feeling rather than scholarly principles or objective rules. As mentioned, de Piles too espoused the view that the spectator should approach painting without preconceived ideas. However, this view was not without implications. Soon after the publication of *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture*, the painter Pierre de Sève (1623–95) held an academic lecture entitled ‘Contre un ouvrage intitulé *Conversations*’.\(^{244}\) As the title suggests,

\(^{239}\) In the writings of de Piles, *amateur de beaux-arts*, e.g. *Abrégé* (‘De la Conoissance des Tableaux’), 78, 84; *amateur de peinture*, e.g. *Abrégé* (‘De quel Auteur est un Tableau’), 98; *amateur des belles choses*, e.g. ‘La Vie de Rubens’, in *Dissertation*, 13.


\(^{242}\) Abbé Pierre Costar (1603–1660), scholar and Latinist who frequented l’hôtel Rambouillet, friend and admirer of Vincent Voiture (1595–1648); also involved in the posthumous publication of Voiture’s works in the 1650s. Craveri, *Age of Conversation*, 400–1, 459.

\(^{243}\) ‘Ceux qui jugent de la Peinture savent si bien dire celui-cy excelle dans le dessein, cetuy-là dans l’invention, cet autre dans le Coloris, cet autre dans le Costume, un autre dans le Contraste, un autre dans les Attitudes […] je dis seulement ce que je sens, & l’effet que chaque chose produit dans mon cœur & dans mon esprit … parce que le sentiment quand il agit sans reflexion est d’ordinaire un bon juge de la bien-seance & des agrémens, & que la meilleure preuve qu’une chose doit plaire c’est que elle plait en effet, & principalement aux personnes de bon goût.’ Chevalier de Méré, ‘Lettre, à Monsieur Costar’, *Lettres*, 1: 139–41.

de Sève intended his lecture as criticism of the views on painting and connoisseurship developed in *Conversations*.245 De Sève identified the ideas of de Piles as ‘pouring from the same source’ as those of the proponents of colour in the academic debate of five years earlier and launched a full-scale attack on de Piles’ book by pointing out its inherent contradictions. 246 Among these ‘contradictions’, de Sève noted the idea that the spectator should rely on his/her common sense in order to judge of ‘the effects that the principles of painting should produce’.247 De Sève seems to have found this idea obviously inconceivable to such an extent that he did not deem necessary to comment upon it at all.

Indeed, whereas rules for the correct viewing of painting were neither necessary nor desirable, knowledge of the principles of painting was essential. The issues is apparent in de Piles’ account of the reader he intended his *Cours de peinture*, namely either ‘the learned in painting, or the ignorant’.248 The addition of ‘the ignorant’ is important. Apparently, the possibility to acquire such knowledge required at least a certain predisposition. Consequently, de Piles wrote ‘for such as are born with an inclination to this fine art, and may at least have improved by conversing with able judges, and learned painters … in a word, for young pupils … and for all those, who … are docile enough to embrace those truths which may be hinted to them’.249

Conversation as a mode of spectatorial experience

In the late seventeenth century, the ability to demonstrate knowledge of painting and familiarity with its technical vocabulary in conversation was regarded as a fashionable quality of cultivated people. The passage from Méré quoted above as well as Chambray’s condemnation of the viewing habits of the

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245 De Sève’s attack on de Piles’ *Conversations* may not have been entirely successful; it does not seem to have elicited any recorded reactions; nevertheless, it was reread four times in the Academy during the next forty years: 4 October 1698, 3 December 1712, 7 October 1713 and 5 November 1718; *Conferences I*, 2: 624; see also, Mérot (ed.) *Les conférences*, 235.

246 ‘Il y a quelques années que l’on parla en diverses assemblées du mérite de la couleur … Et l’on voit encore aujourd’hui couler d’une même source certains écrits, sous le titre *Conversations*, qui tendent à persuader que le partage du peintre est la couleur, et que les proportions et le dessin sont des propriétés singulières à la sculpture … J’avoue que cette entreprise est un peu hardie qu’elle se confond par son propre langage, en se contredisant à soi-même en divers endroits.’ Sève, ‘Contre un ouvrage’, 625–6.

247 ‘Et ailleurs il dit que le spectateur n’a qu’à s’abandonner à son sens commun pour bien huger de ce qu’il voit, que ses yeux naturels sont capables de juger des ressemblances aussi bien que des effets que doivent produire les principes de la peinture (p. 94).’ Sève, ‘Contre un ouvrage intitulé *Conversations*’, 626.


curieux modernes, offer also evidence that the interest of spectators for the art of painting involved the existence of a vocabulary through which judgements on the pictorial qualities of painting could be articulated.

The second half of the seventeenth century witnessed a vogue of published conduct manuals, collections of model conversations and other prescriptive texts on proper social behaviour. Scholarship has linked this vogue to the increasing demands of an audience eager to learn the art of sociability as a means of confirmation as well as means to enhance one’s social status.\(^{250}\) Similarly, the increasing number of treatises on the art of painting, usually composed as dialogues or conversations, has been linked to the growing audience eager to learn the proper way of looking at, evaluating as well as talking about painting.\(^{251}\)

The French reading audience interested in the art of connoisseurship had already access to a book on the subject, *Sentiments sur la distinction des diverses manières de peinture, dessin & gravure, & des originece d’avec leurs copies*, written by the engraver, member of the Academy Abraham Bosse (c. 1602–76) and published in 1649.\(^{252}\) As Donald Posner has pointed out, Bosse’s *Sentiments* was concerned with classification through a value-neutral identification of the authors of paintings, their distinction as well as the distinction between originals and copies and the distinction between copies and imitations of particular painter’s manner (style). By contrast, de Piles’ *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture* was meant to establish the grounds upon which connoisseurship could stand, not only as a science of attribution but also as one of aesthetic judgement.\(^{253}\) In 1676, André Félibien published in turn a large volume entitled *Des principes de l’architecture, de la sculpture, de la peinture et des autres arts qui en dependent*, to which an extensive dictionary of the proper terms for each art was added.\(^{254}\)

Language for the discussion and judgement of paintings entered also the monolingual dictionaries as terms for painting (*termes de peinture*). For instance,

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Richelet’s *Dictionnaire François* (published 1680) included terms such as: *perspective arienne*, *carnation*, *chair*, *coloris*, *cromatique*, *fond de tableau*, *suavite* and *tout-ensemble*, the last three with reference to the *Remarques of de Piles* on Du Fresnoy’s *De arte graphica*. The dictionaries of Furetière (1690) and Académie Française (1694) included various *termes de peinture* as well. Additionally, in 1694, Thomas Corneille, member of the Académie des sciences, published *Dictionnaire des Arts et des Sciences*. As the title indicates, Thomas Corneille intended this dictionary specifically to provide definitions of terms related to the arts and the sciences, offering thus a complement to the dictionary of the Académie Française, which aimed rather at providing mondain definitions suitable for the needs of the *bonnête homme*.

The choice of terms in the dictionaries varied and so did their definitions. The term *coloris* (colouring), for instance, offers an illuminating example. Richelet defined *coloris* as part of the art of painting ‘by which one gives the painted objects the colour which suits them’. The dictionary of Furetière offered a more elaborate classification of the term. It defined colouring as ‘the manner of applying and blending colours to make a picture’ and provided a point of reference, naming Raphael as the painter possessing the most beautiful colouring among all painters. In addition, Furetière explained the proper way of conceiving colouring in painting and emphasised the role of colouring in contrast to drawing. Three years later, Corneille defined ‘colouring’ as ‘the manner of applying and blending colours to make a picture by observing the friendship and antipathy between them’. Further, quoting Félibien, Corneille pointed out that *coloris* applied primarily to carnations and that the term properly regarded colouring in history paintings also suitably in conjunction with the adjective *beau* rather than in landscapes, for which *naturel* was more suitable. The definition of Académie Française related closely to that of Corneille, pointing out that the term mainly applied to human figures but also provided examples of the proper use of the term in conjunction with relevant

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255 Richelet, *DF*.
256 ‘*Coloris, s. m. Partie de Peinture* par laquelle on donne aux objets qu’on peint la couleur qui leur convient.’ Richelet, *DF*, 150–1.
258 ‘… ce Peintre a le dessein correct, mais il n’a pas le coloris assez vif & esclatant. le coloris est ce qui donne les luminie & les ombres convenables aux parties des objects qu’on veut representer. il faut pour faire un beau coloris, que le clair ne se precipite pas dans le brun, ni le brun dans le clair, & que deux couleurs ennemis ne se touchent pas immediatement.’ Furetière, *DU*, 1: 577.
adjectives, such as ‘fresh’, ‘tender’, ‘bright’, as well as expressions suitable in conversations about pictures or the skills of painters.\textsuperscript{261}

The terms for painting included in the monolingual dictionaries offer evidence of the increasing need for cultivating the ability to speak about painting in the late seventeenth century. Apparently eclectic in their selection of sources, the terms for painting in contemporary dictionaries provided a framework for the structuring of the spectator’s experience independently or together with other literature on the arts.

Andrew McClellan has pointed out that early eighteenth-century collections were arranged in such a way that paintings by different artists, schools and/or genres were juxtaposed in order ‘to emphasize the stylistic identity and pictorial qualities of individual works through juxtaposition with paintings of different type’.\textsuperscript{262} This practice followed contemporary views on the appropriate way of looking at and discussing pictures, articulated in the writings of Félibien and de Piles, who repeatedly emphasised the value of comparison as a means of assessing the qualities of pictures. The aim of such display and viewing, or ‘performative’ connoisseurship as McClellan designates this phenomenon, was to ‘reveal the pictorial qualities of a given work by means of contrast and comparison with pictures of a different type’ providing thus occasion for the exercise of connoisseurial skills and could serve as a tool for instruction in the knowledge of the art.\textsuperscript{263}

On 2 September 1699, following upon more than ten years of interruption, an exhibition of painting by members of the Academy in Paris opened its doors.\textsuperscript{264} The exhibition, on this occasion held for the first time in the \textit{Grande...
Galerie in the Louvre, lasted twenty days. The livret informed that the painters and the sculptors of the Academy wished ‘to renew the old custom of exhibiting their works to the public to obtain its judgement and to maintain among themselves that esteemed rivalry so necessary to the advancement of the fine arts’. Almost one third of the works exhibited were portraits.

There are three known engravings commemorating the Academic exhibition prior to the mid eighteenth-century, all of the event in 1699 and included each in an almanacs for the year 1700 (Plates 9–10). The engravings show a large view of the Grand Galerie at the Louvre where the exhibition was held for the first time, entirely indoors whereas the earlier exhibitions were all held at the courtyards of the Hôtel Brion and the Palais Royale. The audience consists of nobles of the sword, nobles of the robe, ecclesiastics and children likewise. The figures are depicted in lively poses, some greeting each other, socialising; others look at the paintings, pointing towards particular ones from distance or examining details from up close; conversing. The anonymous authors of the engravings obviously have put effort in the juxtaposing of the figures to create various contrasts. Certainly, the similarities between the engravings in the depiction of the figures and their comportment are due to pictorial conventions. These similarities, however, are also indicative of the social conventions that guided performances in polite society. The engravings offer a view of a social event – people seeing others and being seen; showing off their countenance, refinement and, probably also their knowledge of the arts.

Thomas Crow has argued that the Academy believed that the audience ‘had to be brought along slowly’. Yet, a closer look at the engravings of the exhibition of 1699 suggests a greater diversity. In this sense, the engravings suggest that at least part of the audience was already well advanced. For instance, one of the engravings, also less known, includes a fascinating detail (Plate 10). A male couple on the left seems to be involved in a lively conversation. One of them – an ecclesiastic or perhaps noble of the robe –


266 According to the livret of the proto-Salon in 1673, 40 of 113 paintings were portraits (35 per cent). In 1699, 74 of the 244 works (31 per cent) at the exposition were portraits. In 1704, the number of portraits increased to almost half the total amount of paintings, 210 works of 440 (48 per cent); Heinich, Du peintre à l’artiste, 261. Heinich has suggested that the decrease in support from the Crown was a decisive factor for the relative decrease in the number of history paintings shown at the Salons of 1699 and 1704 and the corresponding increase of works in other genres, particularly portrait painting. Heinich, Du peintre à l’artiste, 84–5. See also Coquery, ‘De l’atelier au Salon’, 21.

267 Collection des livrets, 2: 5–6.

268 See Berger, Public Access to Art, 63.

269 Crow, Painters and Public Life, 38.
points at a bust sculpture placed on a high pedestal beside the wall. The other – apparently a noble of the sword – points in turn towards a painting, perhaps portrait in an oval frame. They seem to be engaged in a comparative viewing and conversation and perhaps a *paragone* discussion. It is indeed possible to interpret the two figures and the performance in which they seem to be engaged as a visualisation of the debate over the relative value of the arts of painting and sculpture, and in extension colour and line/drawing; or else, as a reference to the debate between Ancients and Moderns. The conversations in Charles Perrault’s *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*, for instance, feature the Abbé (proponent of the moderns), the Président (proponent of the ancients) and the Chevalier (who keeps a neutral, properly *bonnête* attitude). The possibility that the engraving offers to identify the two conversing men as representatives of different social groups and tastes would have encouraged spectators familiar with the strategies employed in contemporary literature to interpret the conversing couple accordingly.

By 1714, the collection of the Academy on display in the Louvre was newly rearranged and open for ‘those who love the arts of design’. A year later the secretary of the Academy Nicolas Guérin (1645–1715) published the first catalogue of the collection, *Description de l’Académie Royale des Arts de Peinture et de Sculpture*. In the introduction, Guérin stated the following:

> We know all too well that since paintings [Ouvrages de Dessein] are made to be seen, it is through the eyes that we must judge them; that the most eloquent descriptions could not give but an ambiguous idea, and that no matter how lively the prise of their Authors, they would always keep in suspense the listener’s approval of the work’s qualities … Thus, we do not have the temerity to believe that the works about which we must speak, profit from the simple narration of their subject, to we confine here. Again, what is done for the eyes demands the intervention of the eyes, nothing else can compensate for the impression that the imagination receives through this channel.

Guérin’s reluctance to provide judgements on the paintings is hardly surprising. His aim was to provide a description to guide visitors, not judgements on the academicians’ works. The inclusion of special foldout charts of the exhibition rooms with numbered indications of each work – paintings as well as sculptures

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271 ‘On sçait trop bien que tous les Ouvrages du Dessein n’étant faits que pour être vûs, ce n’est aussi que par les yeux que l’on en doit juger; que les plus éloquentes descriptions n’en pourroient donner par le ministre de la parole qu’un notion tres-équivoque, & que quelque énergiques que pussent être les loisanges qui y seroient employées en faveur des Auteurs, elles ne laisseroient pas de tenir toujours en suspens fur la qualité de l’Ouvrage l’approbation de l’auditeur […] On n’aura donc pas la temerité de croire que les Ouvrages dont on doit parler, tirent aucun avantage du simple recit de leur sujet à quo on se renferme icy. Encore une fois, ce qui est fait pour les yeux demande l’entremise des yeux, rien ne pouvant d’ailleurs suppléer à l’impression que l’imagination en reçoit par ce canal’. M. [Nicolas] Guérin, *Description de l’Académie Royale des Arts de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Paris, 1715), 2, 5–6.
– suggests this as well.Obviously, the purpose of these charts was to facilitate the visitors’ appreciation of the works by providing them with the names of the painters, the titles of the works, their dimensions and short descriptions of their subject matter. The charts thus replaced the concierge who usually provided visitors with such information at the time.

Guérin’s statement can be seen as an expression of the ‘invisible’ spectator at the time of Louis XIV, beholding the glory of the King’s Academy. Nevertheless, Guérin’s explanation also suggests the extent to which the idea that paintings addressed the eyes first and that they should be judged by the eyes had been accepted; or rather, that if spoken about, the paintings should be present and that the exchange between painting and spectator should be reciprocal, as if and in a conversation.

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273 On the concierge, often a painter, see Adhémar, ‘Les critiques d’art français’, 231–2.

2. The moment of attraction: the subject’s appearance

Staging appearances

Defining pictorial composition: subject matter and pictorial form

Pictorial composition in early modern art theory was understood as the method of organising the subject represented in the picture. Although subject matter and pictorial form were not regarded as separable, definitions inevitably pointed to the central question of the relationship between narrative content and pictorial form, that is to say, to the question of how the ordering of the elements in a painting convey the narrative and/or symbolic meanings of subject matter.275 Two major tendencies in the various definitions of pictorial composition can be singled out – one that regarded pictorial composition primarily as a means of enhancing the didactic ends of painting and another that regarded composition as means of structuring and enhancing the spectator’s visual satisfaction.276 As suggested in the introduction to the present study, this difference in emphasis resided at the core of the late seventeenth century debate between poussinistes and rubenistes.

In the early eighteenth century, Abbé Du Bos took a stance concerning these two ways of conceiving pictorial composition, accepting both. In Réflexions critiques sur la poesie et sur la peinture (1719), Du Bos distinguished between two kinds of pictorial composition – picturesque and poetic:

With regard to painting, the ordonnance thereof, or the first arrangement of those objects which should fill a picture, ought to be divided into picturesque and poetic compositions. I call picturesque composition, the arrangement of such objects as are to have place in a picture, with regard to the general effect of the piece. A good picturesque composition is that arrangement, whereof the first glance produces a great effect, pursuant to the painter’s intention, and to the end he had in view. For this purpose a picture ought not to be embarrassed with

275 Mary Sheriff has pointed out that although the academic hierarchy of the genres divided subject matter and pictorial form ‘into the mental conceptualization of the chosen subject and its physical execution’, the two were not regarded as separable. Sheriff, Fragonard, 47–9.
276 Thomas Puttfarken, ‘From central perspective to central composition: the significance of the centric ray’, Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft 21 (1986), 156. See also, Puttfarken, Discovery of Pictorial Composition.
figures, tho' it should have enough to fill up the picture. … The poetic composition is an ingenious disposition [arrangement] of the figures, calculated to render the action it represents, more moving and probable. It requires that all personages be connected by a principal action …

Dean Tolle Mace has suggested that the difference between these two kinds of composition was shaped in the discussion of already existing paintings. Mace points also out that this difference was largely a matter of taste. Within the academic discourse, whether a picture was described in terms of what would be defined at a later date as ‘poetic’ or ‘picturesque’ composition depended on the aspects of the painting that the commentators were looking for, following their habits of vision and their preferences for either the Roman or the Venetian-Lombard school of painting. In this sense, Mace concludes, ‘the victory of “picturesque” over “poetic” composition in the early eighteenth century did not come about because of a contemporary revolution in the art of painting; rather, it was a victory of a certain way of seeing, of a certain taste.’

Different tastes undoubtedly determined the manner in which painters/spectators responded to the paintings in view - how they looked at the paintings and how they described what they were looking at. However, Mace’s observation overlooks the tension inherent in the issue of how to combine the picture’s appeal to the eyes with its appeal to the mind and the linking of this tension to the different genres. The definition of Du Bos not only maintained this tension but also underscored it. Indeed, Du Bos took into account both kinds of composition: one that privileged the agreeable overall effect of the painting and another that put emphasis on the conspicuous rendering of the subject matter. At the same time, his definition related to the hierarchy of the

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genres. Du Bos distinguished between the arrangement of objects and figures and the agreeable effect for the sight – the ‘unity of object’ – and the ingenious invention of actions and the arrangement of the figures – the ‘unity of subject’ (or unity of action). He stated further that ‘[t]he talents for poetic and picturesque compositions are so distinct, that we observe some painters excel in one, who are very ignorant of the other’. In regard to history painting, however, Du Bos clearly favoured a classicist taste. Consequently, he disapproved of de Piles’ Balance des peintres, which granted equal score (or rank) for composition to Paolo Veronese and Poussin. According to Du Bos, ‘the Italians themselves allow, that Veronese is no way to be compared in the poetic part of painting to Poussin, who in his lifetime had the title of the painter of men of wit, the most flattering encomium that can bestowed upon a painter’.

For de Piles, in contrast, subject matter and pictorial effects could not be separated. Thus, de Piles stated, ‘as in a picture there ought to be a unity of subject for the eyes of the understanding, so there ought to be a unity of object for those of the body. This unity is only to be procured by the knowledge of the claro-obscuro, and without it we cannot view an object with ease or satisfaction’. Consequently, de Piles did not see a contradiction between the arrangement of subject matter in a clear, legible manner and the visual effectiveness of the picture, designed to please the eye. Rather, subject matter and visual effectiveness required the same kind of ‘pictorial structure’, as Thomas Puttfarken has observed. To this observation can be added that, although intertwined, subject matter and visual effectiveness acquire significance in a sequence linked to the spectator’s experience as it unfolds in time, from the first glance towards the sustained viewing of the picture and from the overall visual effect towards the interpretation of various meanings related to the depicted subject matter.

In his Remarques on Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy’s De arte graphica (1668), de Piles stated that the ultimate end of painting was to deceive the eyes pleasingly, thus emphasising the difference between painting and the other arts,
notably poetry. Likewise, de Piles offered an alternative to the classicist conception of composition in regard to the division between the intellectual and the mechanical parts of painting. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the ‘Préface’ to the academic conferences of 1667, Félibien specified that the actual arrangement of the composition (ordonnance) exceeded the purely mechanical (i.e. the representation of a body by the simple tracing of lines and the application of colours) in that it followed the idea already present in the painter’s mind. De Piles developed the potential of this point by assigning to composition a properly intellectual status. In effect, he brought the concepts of invention and disposition together among the intellectual activities of the painter, thus elevating the status of the actual arrangement of composition on the canvas.

In the terminology of de Piles, Félibien’s ordonnance became œconomie du tout-ensemble, defined as the arrangement of forms and colours, light and shade on the canvas to produce a visual effect at first glance (effet au premier coup d’œil). Moreover, although de Piles brought together invention and disposition on the level of the intellectual activities of the painter, he distinguished between both concepts. To invention, de Piles assigned the finding of the subject and the making of an appropriate choice of moment from history (the subject), which the painter dealt with. To disposition, in turn, he assigned the distribution of the groups and figures so that the whole composition (œconomie du tout-ensemble) would produce the same effect on the eyes as a music concert produces on the ears. The final definition of composition, which de Piles presented in his lecture on disposition, held at the Academy on 3 September 1704 and published later in Cours de peinture, runs as follows:

In my division of painting, I have assigned to composition, which is the first part of it, two things; to wit, invention and disposition; and in treating of invention I have shewn that it consists in finding objects proper for the subject the painter would represent. If they are not well distributed, the composition will never give full satisfaction to the unbiased spectator, nor have a general approbation. But however advantageous the subject be, how ingenious the invention, however faithful the imitation of the objects chosen, œconomy and good order is what gives value to every thing; and in the fine arts, draws attention, and fixes it, till

286 ‘… la fin du Peintre est de tromper agréablement les yeux’, and ‘Si le Peintre veut arriver à la fin, qui est de tromper la vue, il doit faire choix d’une Nature qui s’accorde à la foiblesse de ses Couleurs …’ Piles, L’Art de peindre, 84, 133.
288 ‘L’Invention trouve simplement les choses, & en fait un choix convenable à l’Histoire que l’on traite; & la Disposition les distribue chacune à sa place quand elles son inventées, & accommode les Figures & les Groupes en particulier, & le Tout-ensemble du Tableau en général; en sorte que cette Oeconomie produit le même effet pour les yeux, qu’un Concert de Musique pour les oreilles.’ Piles, L’Art de peindre, 85.
the mind is replenished with whatever, in such a work, can both instruct and please. And this economy I properly call disposition.289

Following the idea that painting was a visual art and should therefore address the eyes of the spectator first, de Piles emphasised that a picture should attract essentially by visual means, at the very first moment of the spectator’s encounter with the painting; the revelation of the depicted subject matter, properly part of the painter’s invention, came second.290 In this sense, unless the painting succeeded in the creation of an immediate, properly visual effect, there would be neither illusion nor attraction and hence the spectator would not even notice the painting, not to mention look at it.291

De Piles definition of composition and the division between disposition and invention parallels his reasoning on the proper means to achieve likeness in a portrait, discussed in the previous chapter. As likeness should strike the spectator at first glance, so should the effect of disposition. Invention, on the other hand, relates to faculties other than sight. In a manner similar to the successive revelation of the sitter’s inner character, invention reveals itself at a later stage in the spectator’s experience of the painting and engages the mind.

Performing virtuosity: Largillierre’s Self-portrait, 1711

In a Self-portrait painted in 1711, Largillierre represented himself half-length in front of the easel (Plate 1). The painter wears a red-brown velvet coat revealing a conveniently unbuttoned white shirt underneath, its wide sleeves rolled back above the wrists; the soft curls of the well-done wig loosely tied up with a blue silk ribbon. The painter poses, his body at an angle towards the picture plane, turning his face towards the spectator. At the same time, with his left hand he designates in an eloquent gesture a freshly begun painting displayed on an oval canvas in the background. The outlines of the composition, clearly visible, indicate that it represents the Annunciation.292 In his right hand, resting on a

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289 Dans la division que j’ai faite de la Peinture, j’ai dit que le composition qui en est la première partie, contenoit deux choses, l’Invention & la Disposition. En traitant de l’Invention, j’ai fait voir qu’elle consistoit à trouver les objets convenables au sujet que le Peintre veut représenter. Mais quelque avantageux que soit le sujet, quelque ingénieuse que soit l’Invention, quelque fidelle que soit l’imitation des objets que le Peintre a choisis, s’ils ne sont bien distribués, la composition ne satisfera jamais pleinement le Spectateur desinteressé, & n’aura jamais une approbation generale. L’économie & le bon ordre est ce qui fait tout valoir, ce qui dans les beaux Arts attire notre attention, & ce qui tient notre esprit attaché jusqu’à ce qu’il soit rempli des choses qui peuvent dans un Ouvrage & l’instruire, & lui plaître en même-temps. Et c’est cette Oeconomie que j’appelle proprement Disposition.’ Piles, Cours, 94–5; Principles, 58.


291 Puttfarken, Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art, 96.

292 Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 47–8; Bajou, La peinture à Versailles, 318; Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 64; Rubens contre Poussin, cat. no. 41, 168. No such painting by Largillierre exists today. However, Largillierre’s post-mortem inventory records two paintings with this motif; ‘Inventaire après décès de Nicolas de Largillierre’ (Paris, Archives Nationales. Minutier central, XIV, 329, March 26, 1746), in Georges de Lastic, ‘Nicolas de
binder heavily loaded with sketches, the painter holds a penholder (porte plume or porte-mines) with elegance as though it were an extension of his fingers. The penholder is loaded on one side with sanguine and on the other with white chalk. The preparatory sketch for the Annunciation, visible in the background seems to have been outlined with the later. 293 The portrait’s overall composition suggests a sense of ease and straightforwardness.

The painter’s choice of self-portrait formula - in front of the easel, penholder in hand and a sketch portfolio, rather than palette and brushes - is suggestive. 294 Catherine Soussloff has noted that in self-portraiture ‘the importance of the discursive context of the artistic identity cannot be completely avoided, for the way that any individual artist views himself must rely in some way(s) on the concept that the culture holds of the category “artist”’. 295 Although both palette/brushes and penholder/sketch portfolio denote artistic activity, the two alternatives bear different connotations. Whereas palette and brushes connote ‘painting’, or rather ‘colour’, a penholder and portfolio connote ‘drawing’. The inclusion of a penholder and a portfolio invokes the idea of a learned artist (artiste) by contrast with an artisan – an idea, which resided at the heart of the traditional association of drawing with the mind and invention and colour with manual work, the hand and mere copying. Consequently, Largillierre’s self-presentation with a penholder and a sketch portfolio, rather than with a palette and brushes, and the inclusion of a history painting in the background can be seen as an indication of the painter’s desire to be associated with learning, invention and, not the least, with history painting. 296 Largillierre’s contemporaries would have recognised this indication likewise.

Leaving aside the inherent meanings of conventional accessories such as professional tools and other symbolically charged objects, which painters traditionally employ in their self-fashioning, Largillierre’s Self-portrait can be interpreted as embodiment of the theme of the painter as a virtuoso artist on more levels. At first sight, the painting suggests an effect of instantaneousness.

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293 Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 64.
294 Largillierre represents himself with palette and brushes in Self-portrait, with Gérard Édélienck and a commissioner, painted about 1686–1688 (148 × 123 cm, Norfolk, Virginia, The Chrysler Museum of Art); and in Family portrait painted about 1704 (127 × 167 cm, Bremen, Kunsthalle). In the Self-portrait painted in 1707 (93 × 73 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art), the painter represents himself with a pencil and portfolio, but includes also a palette and brushes on a shelf in the background. An autograph version of the Self-portrait of 1707 (93 × 74 cm.) is preserved in Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts.
296 Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 47-8, with reference to Camille Gronkowski, L’Exposition N. de Largillierre au Petit Palais, Gazette des belles-arts 17 (1928); See also Bajou, La peinture à Versailles, 316.
Seemingly, this effect derives from the tension inherent in the painter’s choice of moment—a moment frozen as if in a snapshot, yet in the midst of movement, comprising thus a suggestion of continuation. The visual focus, that of the painter but also that of the spectator, is brought on the face but also on the hand with the penholder. In this sense, Largillierre’s Self-portrait appears as a representation of momentary perception. The painter’s pose—the dynamic juxtaposition of the forward turn of head and gaze and the backward twist of the gesturing hand—reinforces the tension between movement and repose and encourages a corresponding, flickering movement of the spectator’s gaze between the head in the compositional centre and the hand in the foreground and back towards the gesturing hand. In fact, without the gesturing hand the portrait’s dynamism and the effect of immediacy would diminish noticeably. In addition, the pictorial means employed in this Self-portrait reiterate the virtuosity and the self-consciousness suggested by the painter’s pose and facial expression. Finally, as observed already at the opening of this study, the painter, gazing slightly from above, appears as if in the moment before he would speak, or having just spoken. The painter and in a derived sense the painting demonstrate in this sense not only an awareness of facing a spectator but also the anticipation of a response.

But, to what extent might such observations on the effects of Largillierre’s Self-portrait have been relevant for spectators in the early eighteenth century?

The appearance of difference

In the 1752 Supplement to Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres, Antoine Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville (1680–1765) included a Vie (Live) of Largillierre. According to d’Argenville, the character of truth that Largillierre’s paintings induced was astounding—astounding because Largillierre painted everything from practice:

What he [Largillierre] created acquired a character of truth particularly surprising as he did everything from practice; no model, no mannequin: He had viewed and examined nature so often that it was always present to his imagination. Sometimes, when comparing his paintings to the natural, nature eludes and the skilled man seems mannered. Largillierre always prided himself on not copying anything: he flung his thought on the canvas without any preparatory study, except for the likenesses of heads and hands.298

297 The first edition of d’Argenville’s Abrégé (1746) included only the Lives of deceased painters. Largillierre died in 1746 and hence his Live was added later. [Antoine Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville], M*** des Sociétés Royales des Sciences de Londres & de Montpellier, Supplement a l’Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres ... (Paris: De Bure l’Aîné, 1752), 3: 246–53.

298 ‘Ce qu’il a produit prend un caractère de vérité d’autant plus surprenant qu’il faisait tout de pratique; plus de modèle, plus de mannequin: Il avait si souvent vu & examiné la nature, qu’elle étoit toujours présente à son imagination. Quelquefois en approchant ces Peintures du naturel, la nature
D’Argenville developed this observation in parallel to the art and life of Hyacinthe Rigaud. D’Argenville established this parallel already in the opening of his Live of Largillierre, stating that Rigaud was the only painter who could rival Largillierre for the title Vandyck de la France. 299 Several pages later, d’Argenville concluded: ‘No one could be more closely related to the famous Rigaud; although devoted to the same genre, very different in their manner of painting, they competed for nothing but quality’.300

Largillierre and Rigaud – closely related, yet different.301 Indeed, in the Live of Rigaud, d’Argenville described the painter’s approach differently: ‘Rigaud painted everything from nature, without copying it slavishly and such as it appeared; he made an exquisite choice from it: fabrics, clothing, even a sword, a book, everything was present to his eyes, and the truth shone in everything he did’.302

D’Argenville’s claim that Largillierre painted from imagination was adapted from an anonymous obituary, published in Mercure de France, soon after Largillierre’s death in 1746.303 Similarly, when d’Argenville stated that Rigaud always painted from nature, he was in fact rephrasing a passage from the obituary for the painter, written by Largillierre’s godson and pupil Hyacinthe Collin de Vermont (1693–1761) and published in Mercure de France in 1744.304 As

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299 ‘Ce Peintre [Largillierre], à qui la qualité de Vandyck de la France n’a pu être contestée que par Rigaud, a augmenté en 1656. le nombre des grands hommes nés dans la ville de Paris.’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], Supplement, 3: 246:

300 ‘On ne peut être plus lié qu’il l’étoit avec le célébre Rigaud; quoiqu’attachés tous deux au même genre, très-opposés dans leur manière de peindre, ils ne disputoient entr’eux que de mérite.’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], Supplement, 3: 250.

301 Rosenberg discusses d’Argenville’s comparison of the two painters with Van Dyck and points out that whereas the comparison appears six times in the Live of Rigaud, it is mentioned only three times in the Live of Largillierre; Rosenberg, ‘Foreword’, 18–19.

302 ‘Rigaud ne peignoit rien que d’après nature; sans la copier servilement & telle qu’elle se présentoit à lui, il en faisait un choix exquis: étoffes, habillemens, jusqu’à une épée, un livre, tout étoit devant ses yeux & la vérité brilloit dans tout ce qu’il faisoit.’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], Abrégé, 2: 411.

303 [Anonymous], ‘Nicolas de Largillierre’, Mercure de France (March 1746), 213. The passage in question reads as follows: ‘À force d’avoir vû & examiné avec attention la Nature, de l’avoir copié exactement pendant plusieurs années, & d’en avoir fait de grandes études, il ne se servoit presque plus de Modèle, de Mannequin, ni de choses réelles devant ses yeux; tout étoit présent dans son imagination, Meubles, Etoffes, Habillemens, Instruments de Musique, Livres, Architecture, Fleurs, Fruits &c. qu’ou peut dire qu’il rendoit comme la Nature même.’ D’Argenville appears to be the first to compare the two painters with Van Dyck, replacing thus the parallel between Largillierre and Correggio (1489–1534)/Peter-Paul Rubens, which the obituary suggests in a comment on the beauty of Largillierre’s brushwork (la beauté de son Pinceau). [Anonymous], ‘Nicolas de Largillierre’, 214.

it happened, both Collin de Vermont and the anonymous author of Largillierre’s obituary echoed, in turn, already established ideas on Rigaud’s and Largillierre’s respective approaches to painting. For instance, a familiar example of the praise that Rigaud received for his precise rendering of nature offers the commentary of Saint-Simon (1675–1755) on a portrait of abbé Rancé, painted in the late 1690s: ‘Rigaud was at that time considered to be the best in Europe for catching likenesses’.305 The third edition of Germain Brice’s Description de la ville de Paris published in 1698 included a reference to the house of Rigaud – ‘another excellent portrait painter’ – at rue Neuve des Petites-Champs, close to Place des Victoires, where one could see his works, which were approved of by everyone knowledgeable in painting. Among living masters, stated Brice further, few could surpass Rigaud in the art of painting portraits from nature.306 In the edition of 1698, Brice’s guide also included the name of Largillierre, ‘whose portraits were highly esteemed and gave him great reputation’.307 Apparently, the idea that Largillierre rendered nature without a model was also included in verse ‘by a famous poet’ prising the painter’s works, quoted by d’Argenville.308

Although scarce, these examples suggest that the image of Rigaud as a painter who worked from nature and the contrasting image of Largillierre as a painter who relied on imagination emerged in their lifetime already. Nevertheless, d’Argenville appears to have been the first to elaborate the potential of these contrasting views and to put in print the idea of a difference

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306 ‘A l’entrée de la ruë Neuve des Petits-Champs, qui commence à la Place des Victoires; demeure HYACINTE RIGAULT, natif de Perpignan dans le Roussillon, excellent Peintre pour le portrait. On verra chez lui de ses ouvrages, qui ont l’approbation de tous ceux qui se connaissent en peinture, & l’on peut dire à sa louange, que parmi les Peintres vivans, il en est tres-peu qui portent aussi loin que lui l’art de peindre les portraits d’a près nature, ce qui lui a aquis une grande reputation.’ Germain Brice, Description nouvelle de la ville de Paris, ou, recherche curieuse des choses les plus singulières & les plus remarquables qui se trouvent à présent dans cette grande ville, 2 vols (Paris: Nicolas Le Gras, 1698), 1: 200.

307 ‘Nicolas de l’ARGILIERE Parisien Peintre tres-renommé demeure dans une maison presque vis-à-vis cette Fontaine [de ruë Sainte Avoys]. On estime fort les Portraits qui sortent de ses mains, & les grands ouvrages de peinture que l’on voit de lui à l’Hôtel de Ville & à Sainte Geneviève du Mont lui ont acquis de la reputation.’ Brice, Description nouvelle, 1: 255.

between the respective modes of painting of Rigaud and Largillierre. A difference that might have facilitated the comparative viewing of pictures, which late seventeenth and early eighteenth century art theory advised spectators to pursue in order to advance in their knowledge of the art.

Eighteenth-century biographical accounts such as d’Argenville’s Abrégé have influenced significantly the scholarship on French art and artists. The scholarship on Largillierre and Rigaud is no exception to this. In monographs and exhibition catalogues in particular, d’Argenville’s Abrégé has been used as a source of information about the lives of the painters and as an evidence to support interpretations of their works. However, as d’Argenville’s account brings together facts, anecdotes and observations on paintings, drawings and artistic manner in general, so do many art historical studies. They retain the conflation between ‘life’ and work, artistic intentions and pictorial mode or style, intrinsic to the genre of artists’ biographies. While these aspect of artists’ biographies as a literary genre must always be considered, the scattered remarks on particular works and individual style in accounts such as d’Argenville’s may be read and analysed as indications of possible spectatorial responses to paintings. From such a perspective, focus shifts from painter to spectator – also the author, or rather the authors – and, in this sense, also to the effects of the paintings.

As Colin Bailey has pointed out, d’Argenville’s Abrégé occupied a central place in an expanding body of scholarly literature on French art and artists in a period of heightened cultural patriotism. Promoting the French school and its merits was indeed high on the agenda for d’Argenville: ‘let us grant to our compatriots, when they deserve it, the praise that we so easily bestow upon foreigners’, he urged in the introduction to the first edition of Abrégé already. Additionally, d’Argenville had another explicit aim with his work, namely to provide instruction on the art of painting and its judgement. As he acknowledged in the introduction, whereas everyone had the liberty to judge according to their own taste and knowledge, ‘those whose discernment is not vast enough to grasp at first all that there is to grasp in a work, would not object to find a clear road that would lead them to the exercise of judgement and the refinement of their knowledge’.

309 Issues that arise from such an approach have been highlighted in Soussloff, Absolute Artist.
311 ‘... accordons à nos compatriotes, lorsqu’ils le meritent, les éloges que nous prodiguons si facilement aux étrangers’. [Dezallier d’Argenville], Abrégé, 1: ix.
312 ‘Au reste on ne prétend assujettir personne au jugement que l’on a porté sur les plus fameux peintres, chacun est dans la pleine liberté d’un juger selon son goût & ses connoissances; les personnes instruites n’ont pas besoin de lumieres, celles dont les vuës ne sont pas si étendues, & qui ne saisissent pas d’abord tout ce qu’il y a à saisir dans un ouvrage, ne seront pas fâchées de trouver une route frayée, qui les conduise à exercer leur judgement, & à parfectionner leurs connoissances.’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], Abrégé, 1: xiv.
Following the conventions of early modern art theory, which valued the intellectual dimensions of the art of painting higher than its practical counterpart, the idea advanced by d’Argenville that Largillierre’s approach to painting was grounded on imagination elevated his work to the status of history painting and his talent to genius. ‘The genius of this singular man applied to everything; it is this superiority of talent that Horace names mens divinior’, stated d’Argenville. Similarly, the idea that Rigaud painted always from nature was invariably coupled with selective imitation, that is to say, with the positive counterpart to simple imitation, implying thus reasoning and judgement. D’Argenville’s view of Largillierre’s and Rigaud’s respective approaches to painting can be understood therefore as an adjustment of observed differences to fit two versions of the same elevated idea of imitation as a creative process. At the same time, d’Argenville was able to elaborate on the qualities of the works (as well as on the characters) of two French painters – two compatriots – while also leading the readers towards the proper ‘exercise of judgement’ and the ‘refinement of their knowledge’ on the art of painting.

Performing difference: variations on the theme of looking

A comparative viewing of Largillierre’s Self-portrait (1711) and a Self-portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1710) (Plate 2) adds further aspects to the analysis. Such a comparative viewing of the two paintings is possible today at Musée de Château, in Versailles, where the two painting share a wall and visual level; only one painting, a conversation piece by Jacques Autreau (1656–1745), separates the two self-portraits. Such a display offers also the opportunity to explore an example of a spectatorial experience in the fashion of ‘performative connoisseurship’, as suggested by d’Argenville’s account on both painters.314

A comparative viewing of the two self-portraits in the early eighteenth century was most probably possible in the picture cabinet of the Parisian amateur Louis d’Assenay, the commissioner and first owner of the paintings. According to Germain Brice, Louis d’Assenay had gathered in his house on rue des Fontaines ‘several judiciously-chosen works by modern artists’, among which works by Rigaud and Largillierre ‘of singular beauty that do honour to these great painters’. The self-portraits were probably painted on behalf of

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313 ‘Le génie de cet homme rare s’étendoit à tout; c’est cette supériorité de talens qu’Horace appelle mens divinior.’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], Suplement, 3: 250.
314 I borrow the term ‘performative connoisseurship’ from McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 34.
316 ‘Dans la même rue des Fontaines, DASSENAY, amateur de la peinture, a rassemblé plusieurs pieces d’un choix judicieux, des maîtres modernes les plus habiles. On voit chez lui des ouvrages de Rigault & de l’Argilliere, d’une beauté particulière, & qui font bien de l’honneur à ces grands Peintres’. Germain Brice, Nouvelle description de la ville de Paris et de tout ce qu’elle contient de plus remarquable … Huitième édition revue et augmentée de nouveau, 4 vols (Paris: Julien-Michel Gandouin/François Fournier, 1725), 1: 76. It the 7th edition of Description, Brice mentioned
d’Assenay. Later, d’Assenay also commissioned engravings after the self-portraits from François Chéreau (1690–1729) and Pierre Drevet (1663–1738) respectively (Plates 11-12). Louis d’Assenay also commissioned from Largillierre a three-quarter-length portrait of himself. The portrait shows d’Assenay standing beside a table, the engravings prominently featured on it – Drevet’s engraving after Rigaud fully recognisable; Chéreau’s engraving after Largillierre beneath. This series of commissions suggests that d’Assenay not only valued the two self-portraits, but also regarded them as pendants. It is therefore most likely that he had the paintings displayed as such, side by side, in his picture cabinet.

A view of the picture gallery of the amateur Jean de Julienne (1686–1766) offers an idea of how such an arrangement might have looked in the eighteenth century (Plate 13). Julienne owned the two self-portraits in the mid-century, presumably after an acquisition at the sale of d’Assenay’s estate. Rigaud’s and Largillierre’s self-portraits were displayed as pendants, separated by two works by Ludovico Carracci, an Angel and Virgin, facing each other to form an Annunciation. Farther, to the left of Largillierre’s Self-portrait a seascape by, or attributed to, Claude Lorrain and a Self-portrait attributed to Rembrandt. To the right of Rigaud’s Self-portrait Julienne had another seascape, also by, or attributed to, Claude Lorrain and a female portrait, attributed to Van Dyck, which concluded the arrangement. Although not surprising, Julienne’s choice to put a Rembrandt beside a Largillierre and a Van Dyck beside a Rigaud becomes more understandable upon recollection of d’Argenville’s classification


318 Neil de Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet have suggested that although Julienne’s gallery was arranged in the mid eighteenth century, it offered an example of earlier hanging conventions. Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, ‘Transforming the Paris Art Market, 1718-1750’, in Mapping Markets for Paintings in Early Modern Europe 1450-1750 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006), 395.

319 Upon Julienne’s death, following his will the two self-portraits were bequeathed to the Academy; Louis Clément de Ris, Amateurs d’autrefois (Paris: E. Plon et Cie, 1877), 300; Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 47; Bajou, La peinture à Versailles, 316, 318; Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 64; Perreau, Rigaud, 140–2.

320 Ziskin, Sheltering Art, 201. See also Colin B. Bailey, ‘Toute seule elle peut remplir et satisfaire l’attention: the early appreciation and marketing of Watteau’s drawings,’ in Alan Wintermute (ed.), Watteau and his world: French drawing from 1700 to 1750, exh. cat., The Frick Collection, New York and The National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, 1999), 81;
of the two painters as alike yet different and his linking of the former with imagination and the later with learned, selective imitation of nature.

When viewed side by side, the first impression of the self-portraits by Largillierre and Rigaud is of intended correspondence. \(^{322}\) Identical in dimensions, bust length, positioned at a slight angle to face the spectator but also each other, both painters depict themselves in red-brown velvet coat, white shirt, the sleeves rolled back above the wrists; one wearing a wig, the other a turban. Both painters hold a porte-crayon in an overtly elegant manner – the hand resting upon a portfolio filled with drawings, the portfolio in Rigaud’s *Self-portrait* less tattered. \(^{323}\) The self-portraits equally suggest the image of a confident painter and the display of seemingly effortless virtuosity. In both, the inclusion of a penholder and a sketch portfolio invokes the idea of a learned artist. \(^{324}\) A small difference though, in the guise of addition: as noted above, Largillierre’s *Self-portrait* suggests a further reference to invention through the inclusion of a history painting – the *Annunciation* in the background. The depicted painters’ head and hands act in like manner as the paintings’ visual centre. However, the effect is different.

In a comparative viewing of the two self-portraits, the overall sense of seeing the images of two confident artists acquires further dimensions. Differences appear, as the inherent dynamism and the seeming instantaneousness of Largillierre’s *Self-portrait* gradually stand out, in contrast to the calmness and the stability in that by Rigaud. Whereas Largillierre’s *Self-portrait* appears as a representation of a momentary perception, Rigaud’s offers the spectator a representation of the painter in the process of sustained looking. The depicted painter’s posture – the hands resting on the vertically positioned portfolio, the penholder, also suggesting a vertical line – reinforces the impression of steadiness. The sense of movement in Rigaud’s *Self-portrait* is comprised mostly in the accessories – the tilt of the turban, the folds of the coat as well as the curtain, which closes the space behind the depicted painter in the upper left-hand corner of the picture. If Largillierre’s *Self-portrait* encourages the spectator’s gaze to flicker between the head in the compositional centre and the hand in the foreground, Rigaud’s *Self-portrait* invites the spectator to a sustained,  

\(^{322}\) Recently, Hannah Williams has brought focus on the formal cross-references between the two self-portraits, which she interprets as ‘acts of emulation’, ‘a dialogue of respectful acknowledgements of the other’s abilities’. Williams, *Académie Royale*, 266-7.

\(^{323}\) The uniform, even colouring of the left hand in Rigaud’s self-portrait bears witness of later interventions. I am grateful to Nicolas Milovanovic for discussing this aspect with me and confirming this observation.

\(^{324}\) Rigaud’s choice to depict himself with a penholder and portfolio deserves attention, as he usually represented himself with palette and brushes, e.g. in *Self-portrait in red coat*, 1692 (Karlsruhe, Gemäldegalerie); *Self-portrait with turban*, 1698 (Perpignan, Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud); *Self-portrait*, 1712 (private collection); *Self-portrait with palette*, 1716 (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi); *Self-portrait with black ribbon*, 1727 (Perpignan, Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud); *Self-portrait, painting the portrait of M. de Castanier*, 1730 (Perpignan, Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud); ill., in Perreau, *Rigaud*, 135–49.
almost contemplative viewing of the head and the hands and subsequently of the surrounding accessories.

As outlined above, the differences between the two portraits stem from the overall composition of both paintings. The differences, however, also involve the respective 

manière de peindre

of Largillierre and Rigaud, which differentiated the two painters, according to d’Argenville’s.\footnote{Dezallier d’Argenville distinguished between \textit{manière} (manner, style) and \textit{manieré} (mannerism). Accordingly, \textit{manière} developed out of the various ways in which the mind conceived of something. In d’Argenville’s view, the painter’s manner of conceiving nature is realised in the working method, in \textit{le faire} of the painter. \textit{Manière}, in turn, was the result of mere practice and hence deviated from both nature and truth. [Dezallier d’Argenville], \textit{Abrégé}, 1: xx.} In the process of examining the painter’s \textit{manière}, the arrangement of folds and the rendering of draperies were likely to attract attention. Likewise, the representation of fabrics appears as a major pictorial theme in Rigaud’s \textit{Self-portrait}. The comparison with Largillierre’s \textit{Self-portrait} reinforces this impression. The careful rendering of fabrics in Rigaud’s \textit{Self-portrait} – the conspicuously highlighted velvet turban, lined with brocade and the silk-lined velvet cloak elegantly arranged around the depicted painter’s shoulders – invites the spectator to examine the rendering of different materials emphatically. D’Argenville’s observation (again rephrasing the obituary) on Rigaud’s mastery of painting draperies seems in this sense motivated. Drapery was Rigaud’s foremost object of study, d’Argenville stated, he was able to vary all kind of fabrics ‘in a hundred different ways’ and through an ingenious liaison of the folds ‘make them appear as one piece’ and so lifelike that ‘one has to touch them’ to believe they are not real.\footnote{‘Les draperies qu’il [Rigaud] sçavoit varier de cent manières différentes & faire paroître d’une seule pièce par l’ingénieuse liaison des plis faisoient sa principale étude. S’il peignoit du velours, du satin, du taffetas, des fourrures, des dentelles, on y portoit la main pour se détrromper …’ [Dezallier d’Argenville], \textit{Abrégé}, 2: 411.} Once again, d’Argenville adapted a passage from the painter’s obituary and, once again, the two accounts relate to an idea that finds support in the process of viewing paintings by Rigaud.\footnote{See Collin de Vemont, ‘Essai sur la vie & les ouvrages de M. Rigaud’, 8.}

But, what of d’Argenville’s statement that Largillierre painted from imagination, coupled with the less flattering observation that his paintings might seem mannered sometimes, that is to say, that they were presumably painted from imagination, or habit? Such an impression might be inferred from Largillierre’s \textit{Self-portrait}. The impression of a momentary perception, which the portrait suggests, can be seen as the representation of the painter performing the idea of a painter who approaches his work from imagination – as if he had ‘flung his thought on the canvas without any preparatory study’, as d’Argenville would have it.

The impression of movement, which the depiction of head and hand in Largillierre’s \textit{Self-portrait} suggests, and the complementary flickering between foreground and background, are reinforced in comparison to the overall impression of Rigaud’s \textit{Self-portrait}. Most conspicuous is the contrast with the
sense of the painter looking attentively towards the spectator, which the later induces. Moreover, when viewed side by side, Largillierre’s Self-portrait exhibits a slight disproportion between the head and the hand resting on the sketch-binder, on one hand, and the painter’s shoulder and arm, on the other hand. The impression is as though the painter’s head/hand and body were seen from two different viewpoints. The depiction of the head and the hand suggests a frontal viewpoint at eye-level, the foreshortening of the body suggests, in turn, a view slightly from below. It takes time to notice this difference of viewpoints. The difference may also remain unnoticed. However, it becomes palpable when the original size of the painting is reduced – the greater the reduction of size, the more obvious becomes the difference.\textsuperscript{328} Engravings after paintings involve the process of reducing the size of the image. François Chéreau’s engraving after Largillierre (Plate 11) shows that the engraver’s trained eyes did not overlook the difference.

In the engraving, Chéreau has chosen a lower viewpoint for the depiction of the window ledge, which reduces the impression of disproportion between the body and the head while retaining the overall effect of the painter’s pose and gesture. Pierre Drevet’s engraving after Rigaud (Plate 12), in contrast, maintains the frontal view suggested by the painter in the self-portrait. In addition, Chéreau has transformed the painter’s coat into a sumptuous drapery, flowing over and out of the picture space. Indeed, interpretations of portraits in engravings often feature draperies flowing out of the picture frame and so does Drevet’s interpretation after Rigaud’s Self-portrait. Yet, in Chéreau’s engraving, this conventional feature also counterbalances the foreshortening of the body.

Commentaries on Largillierre’s portrait painting from the second half of the eighteenth century frequently included the observation that drawing and proportions in the painter’s works could be lacking sometimes. In the catalogue of La Live de Jully’s sale in 1764, for example, the description of the portrait of a woman known as La Belle Strasbourgeoise (1703, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg) suggests some of the qualities for which Largillierre’s works were appreciated but points to some alleged shortcomings: ‘This painting can be seen as one of the painter’s most beautiful; one finds in it the softness of his pencil, coupled with the fierceness of colour, but without exaggeration, a deficiency that he gave way to sometimes. It owns likewise correctness in drawing that can be found in few of his pictures.’\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{328} This effect is especially obvious in reproductions of the portrait in books, exhibition catalogues etc., in which its size is greatly reduced.

\textsuperscript{329} ‘Le tableau peut passer pour un des plus beaux de cet artiste, on y trouve la suavité de pinceau, jointe à la fierté de la couleur, sans être outrée, défaut dans lequel il tombait quelquefois. Il est aussi d’une correction de dessein que l’on trouve dans peu de ses tableaux.’

The description in the catalogue of La Live de Jully’s sale echoes a similar observation by the Comte de Caylus in his *Vies d’artistes du XVIIIe siècle*. Caylus pointed out that Largillierre possessed the most beautiful palette, always accompanied with freshness and harmony but his figures were short, with somewhat heavy proportions, and concluded by the already conventional assertion, ‘which the practice [of painting from memory] always amounts to’. In 1776, this view had undergone a transformation. In his *Extrait des Différens Ouvrages publié sur la vie des peintres*, Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de la Ferté (1727–94), amateur and intendant of the Menus-plaisirs du Roi during the reign of Louis XVI, altered d’Argenville’s remark slightly. In Papillon de la Ferté’s view, Largillierre’s ease for painting and the abundance of commissions that followed upon this, forced him to abandon the exactitude, which a painter should never lose from sight and which could have rendered his works a lot more deserving. As Largillierre never consulted nature and did everything from practice [de particé] his last works had more effect than truth, concluded Papillon de la Ferté. As late as in 1890, Honoré Gibert, conservator at the Musée d’Aix (presently Musée Granet), observed in a discussion of Largillierre’s *Portrait of Madame de Simiane as Flora* (1730, Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence) that the proportions of the depicted figures were ‘not entirely beyond reproach’. Nevertheless, Gibert concluded, the painting’s overall effect made up for these ‘imperfections’.

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331 ‘La trop grande facilité de ce peintre, & la quantité de portraits qui lui étoient successivement demandée, l’engageoit à sacrifier cette exactitude & cette vérité qu’on ne doit jamais perdre de vue, & qui auraient rendu ses ouvrages beaucoup plus précieux’. [Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de la Ferté], *Extrait des différens ouvrages publiés sur la vie des peintres* (Paris: Ruault, 1776), 2: 564.

332 ‘Comme il ne consultoit point la nature & faisait tout de pratique, ces derniers ouvrages ont plus d’effet que de vérité.’ [Papillon de la Ferté], *Extrait*, 566.

333 ‘Contrairement à Rigaud, Largillière, disent ses biographes, travaillait la plupart du temps sans modèle; les conséquences de cette manière de faire ne sont que trop apparentes ici. Le jet des figures n’est pas absolument irréprochable; dans la principale d’entre elles, les bras s’emmanchent mal, mais l’aspect général, l’impression d’ensemble rachètent amplement ces imperfections.’ Honoré Gibert, ‘Dix portraits et dix-neuf lettres de Rigaud et de Largillière’, *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifique* (Paris, 1890), 309.
Means of attraction

The moment, the effect: painting-'machine'

As seen, true painting for de Piles was a painting that surprised the spectator at first glance (l’effet au premier coup d’œil) with its effect of illusion (l’effet du vrai). Further, it was properly disposition, as part of pictorial composition, which provided the foundation of the painting’s capacity to sustain illusion and attract spectatorial interest. The emphasis on the moment in conjunction with an emphasis on the effect, both of which are inherent in de Piles’ conception of composition is important. Consequently, he equally emphasised the moment of the sitter’s appearance when he described the way in which a portrait should address the spectator:

In short the portraits, in this sort of attitudes [easy and natural] must seem to speak to us of themselves, and, as it were, to say to us – Stop, take notice of me: I am that invincible king, surrounded with majesty – I am that valiant commander who struck terror every-where; or who, by my good conduct, have had such glorious success … I am that famous artisan, who was so singular in his profession, &c. … I am that high-spirited lady, whose noble manners command esteem, &c. … I am that cheerful lady, who delight in smiles and joy, &c.

De Piles’ definition of true painting as a picture that by visually effective means surprises the spectator at first glance and attracts attention recalls likewise contemporary definitions of the word spectacle. In the first edition of Dictionnaire Universel (1690), Furetière defined spectacle as ‘an extraordinary occurrence that surprises and is looked at with emotion’. Four years later, the Académie Française rephrased Furetière, while simultaneously providing a more specific definition. Accordingly, a spectacle was defined as ‘a representation, offered to the public in order to amuse it; [spectacle] is also used for every extraordinary object, which attracts the regard, the attention and arrests the sight’. The revised edition of Furetière’s dictionary reiterated the definition of

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334 Puttfarken, Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art, 42–6, 80–3.
335 ‘Enfin il faut que dans ces sortes d’attitudes les Portraits semblent nous parler d’eux mêmes, & nous dire, par exemple: Tien, regarde-moi, je suis ce Roi invincible environné de majesté: Je suis ce valeureux Capitaine qui porte la terreur par tout, ou bien qui ai fait voir par ma bonne conduite tant de glorieux succès … Je suis cet artisan fameux, cet unique dans ma profession, &c. Et pour les femmes: Je suis cette sage Princesse dont le grand air inspire du respect & de la confiance: Je suis cette Dame fiere dont les manieres grandes attirent de l’estime, &c. Je suis cette Dame vertueuse, douce, modeste, &c. Je suis cette Dame enjoué que n’aime que les ris, la joie, &c.” Piles, Cours, 279–80. Principes, 169–70.
336 ‘SPECTACLE. s. m. Accident extraordinaire qui étonne, que l’on considère avec quelque émotion.’ Furetière, DU, 3: 587.
337 ‘SPECTACLE. s. m. Représentation que l’on donne au public pour le divertir. L’Opéra est un beau spectacle; la comédie est un agréable spectacle … / Spectacle, se dit aussi, De certaines grandes actions, & ceremonies publiques … / Spectacle, se dit aussi, de tout objet extraordinaire, qui
Académie Française but substituted ‘emotion’ for ‘attention’, defining thus spectacle as ‘an extraordinary object that surprises, that attracts the regard, arrests the sight and that is considered with emotion’. As in de Piles’ definition of true painting, contemporary definitions of the word spectacle in monolingual dictionaries equally put emphasis on the moment – the moment of surprise and attraction – and on the spectator’s response.

The analogy between spectacle and painting opens for understanding of disposition as mise-en-scène. However, here mise-en-scène is not to be understood as a space comprising various props, into which the sitter is positioned and through which he or she becomes ‘readable’ as a subject. Rather, shifting focus from the subject of the painting to the subject of spectatorial experience, I understand the concept mise-en-scène as encompassing the materiality of the performance, namely, the structure and the sequence and disappearance of various material elements on stage according to the intentions of the artists, as defined by Erica Fischer-Lichte. Similarly, although by different means, pictorial composition encompasses the ordering of the elements in the picture in a manner that would produce the best possible effect at first glance as well as attract and sustain the spectator’s attention through the process of experience in which the creation of meaning unfolds. To assess the painting’s initial moment of attraction, however, it is useful to narrow the analogy to theatrical machines.

In his Remarques on Du Fresnoy’s De arte graphica, de Piles defined disposition in analogy to a machine as the ‘just assembling of many pieces, to produce one and the same effect’. Forty years later, in Cours, de Piles referred once again to SPECTACLE. s. masc. Objet extraordinaire qui étonne, qui attire les regards, qui arrete la vue, & que l’on considere avec quelque émotion. / SPECTACLE, se dit aussi de certaines grandes actions, & ceremonies publiques. … On veut être ému, & touché par le spectacle, & quand les Acteurs nous laissent immobiles, on a regret à l’innocence, & à la tranquillité qu’on remporte; & on est indigné de ce qu’ils n’ont pas su troubler notre repos. Nic. [Nicéron] / On dit Etre en spectacle; pour dire, Etre expose à l’attention publique. … On dit aussi dans le même sens, Etre le spectacle.' Furetière, DU, 2nd edn, 3: n. pag.


338 Cf. Grootenboer, ‘How to become a picture’, 323.
341 Marc Bayard has argued against a straightforward analogy between theatre and painting. According to Bayard, theatre can serve as analogy to painting only from the mid-seventeenth century, when the spatiality of scenic decorations could be fully explored through stage machinery and when the scenic arts gradually became ‘real social phenomena’. Marc Bayard, ‘In front of the work of art: The question of pictorial theatricality in Italian art, 1400–1700’, in Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels (eds), Theatricality in Early Modern Art and Architecture, (originally published in 2010 as Special Issue, Art History, 33:2) (Malden, MA/Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 75-6.
342 ‘Une machine est un juste assemblage de plusieurs pieces pour produire un mesme effet.’ Piles, L’Art de peindre, 77. See also: ‘Et en effet le Tableau veut estre regardé comme une machine dont les pièces doivent estre l’une pour l’autre, & ne produire toutes ensemble qu’un mesme effet, que si vous les regardez separement, vous n’y trouverez que la main de l’Ouvrier,
the painting with the term *machine*, on this occasion, however, explicitly in relation to the desired (and required) overall effect of the picture. Thus, he specified that the part of painting contributing the most to ‘the effect, which calls to the spectator, arises principally in colouring of all the parts; by which we are to understand the *clair-obscur*, and the general harmony of colours, as also such we call *local*, or colours which faithfully imitate those of any particular object’. Indeed, de Piles added that the other parts of the painting contributed to the effect ‘of the whole *machine*’ by ‘mutually assisting each other; some to form, others to adorn the objects painted, in order to give them a taste and grace that may instruct, respectively, both lovers [of art] and painters, and in a word, may please every one’.

Conceived of as a *machine*, disposition can be interpreted as having the same purpose as the machines employed to create various spectacular effects in theatre, ballet and other performance. Moreover, the analogy emphasises the reproducibility of the machine, while suggesting at the same time that the effects produced are inherently performative in the sense of being unique for each performance. In portraiture, various conventional portrait types were equally reproducible. At the same time, the experience and the reception of individual portraits depended on the juncture of the sitter’s and the painter’s performances, embodied in the painting, on one hand and the performance of the painting enacted in the particular setting and conditions of display, on the other hand.

*Le tout ensemble* — between discursive and visual unity

De Piles defined the ‘whole together’ (*le tout ensemble*) as fundamental to composition, because it was ultimately linked to the effect of the painting at

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343… ce qui a le plus de part à l’effet qui appelle le Spectateur, c’est le Coloris composé de toutes ses parties qui font le Clair-obscur, l’harmonie des couleurs, & ces mêmes couleurs que nous appelons Locales, lors qu’elles imitent fidèlement chacune en particulier la couleur des objets naturels que le Peintre veut représenter.’ Piles, *Cours*, 19–20; *Principles*, 12.

344 ‘Mais cela n’empêche pas que les autres parties ne soient nécessaires pour l’effet de toute la machine, & qu’elles ne se prêtent un mutuel secours, les unes pour former, les autres pour orner les objets peints, pour leur donner du goût & de la grace, pour instruire les amateurs de Peinture d’une manière, & les Peintres d’une autre; enfin pour plaire à tout le monde.’ Piles, *Cours*, 20; *Principles*, 12.

345 Sarah Cohen has highlighted an interesting passage from Bernard de Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), in which the author explained the difference between the mechanical theory of motion of Descartes and the traditional accounts of movement with the workings of theatrical machines. Cohen, *Art, Dance, and the Body*, 44.

346 Fischer-Lichte has called attention to the difference between the concepts of *mise-en-scène* and *performance*, in contrast to *mise-en-scène*, *performance* ‘includes any kind of materiality (not only that intended or planned) brought forth over its course’. Fischer-Lichte, ‘Transforming spectators’, 89–90.
first sight and therefore to the painting’s effect of illusion. Portraits by Largillierre from the early years of the eighteenth century show a consistent subordinated to such a visual unity. Notable means for the reinforcement of such a subordination of the composition to a unified view are the extended use of half-shadows and colour reflections and a new conception of the background and its role for the arrangement of the whole. 347 The effects of such an approach for the unified view of the picture can be exemplified in a comparison of two portraits in a similar three-quarter-length size, depicting a female sitter in essentially the same pose.

The Portrait of a Woman, perhaps Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny, signed 1696 (Plate 14) features the sitter in a garden setting. A large parrot perching on the brim of a stone fountain occupies the foreground. The fountain closes the pictorial space on the left-hand side of the picture. On the opposite side, this function is assigned to a black attendant, standing slightly behind the sitter, his gaze turned towards her, a lap dog in his arms. 348 The bright colour scheme is dominated by broken orange-red, grey, ochre and umber. The pictorial space surrounding the sitter is subordinated in tone. Visually, the composition it is divided in two triangular parts: a lower, darker one, including the fountain and the servant, in warm earths and a higher, brighter one, dominated by the partially cut-off statue placed in an architectonical niche, in cold ochre. The principal light focuses on the portrayed, the brightest parts assembled around the face and the folds of her silk dress. The definition of forms is clear, almost linear. The architectonic backdrop, against which the sitter’s body stands out, brings to mind a piece of theatrical scenery. The minute rendering of the elements in the foreground, notably the sitter’s figure and the parrot, aids to the immaterial impression created by the background.

About a decennia later, by 1711, Largillierre painted the portrait of Portrait of a Woman, presumably Elisabeth de Beauharnais (Plate 15). The composition is almost identical in regard to the sitter’s pose and attire. The differences appear notably in the setting and the colour scheme. The architectonical backdrop has been replaced by lofty foliage in an open garden or park. An orange tree in a large urn occupies the place of the fountain. The black attendant and the dog are gone. The portrait’s colour scheme is based on two pairs of complementary colours: red and green, on the one hand, blue and orange, on the other hand. The former contrast is most notable in the sitter’s dress and the foliage; the latter, in the juxtaposition between the sky and the brighter parts of the foliage, even though the contrast between orange and blue seems to have lost most of its strength, due to the darkening of the varnish. 349 Subtle variations of hue

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347 Mérot, French Painting, 205.
348 On this portrait, particularly on the inclusion of the black attendant, or slave domestic, see Gabriella Josepha de la Rosa, The Trope of Race in the Portraiture and Print Culture of Ancien Régime France, PhD diss. (Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008), 294-9.
soften the potentially vibrating contrast between the complementary colours: orange in the red dress, green in the sky and, on a larger scale, the above-mentioned tints of orange and green in the foliage occupying most of the background. In this respect, the background acquires an important role for the visual unity of the overall composition. It serves as a basis for the contrast between the complementary colours and, at the same time, as a site of balance between them.

The effects of these differences are important. In the *Portrait of a Elisabeth de Beauharnais*, the prominent tonal contrast between dark and light areas in the central part of the picture emphasises the head and the upper part of the sitter’s body. A range of mid-tones envelops, as it were, the sitter’s head, reinforcing thus visually its central position in the picture. At the same time, the lower part of the foreground seems to recede, aided by the orange tints in the folds of the dress which, following a spiral turn, appear further away in the left-hand side of the background and again, darker, on the opposite side behind the sitter. In contrast, the sitter in the *Portrait of Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny* appears as if being ‘enclosed’ in iconographical references conveying aspects of the sitter’s inner character, virtues and social standing. The elements in the painting that encode conventional verbal messages/narrative reinforce discursively the sitter’s central position in the painting.\(^{350}\)

Certainly, both portraits invite interpretation on a symbolical level. Myra Nan Rosenfeld has interpreted the *Portrait of Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny* as alluding to the sitter in mythological guise, either Venus or a water nymph.\(^{351}\) Rosenfeld points out that the blossoming tree in the left-hand side of the background, probably an orange tree, is a traditional symbol of matrimony. Similarly, the *Portrait of a Elisabeth de Beauharnais* features the sitter ostensibly touching a blossom of an orange tree.\(^{352}\) Although similar in composition and possibly carrying similar symbolical meanings, the two portraits invite the spectator to assume different attitudes.

Norman Bryson’s distinction between ‘discursive’ and ‘figural’ aspects offers terminology for the analysis of the ways in which these two portraits communicate meanings to the spectator. Bryson defines the discursive aspects of an image as ‘those features which show the influence over the image of language’ and distinguishes them from the figurative aspects of an image, or ‘those features that belong to the image as a visual experience’.\(^{353}\) As shown, in the *Portrait of Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny* the differentiation between the depicted elements – almost linear - entails a focus on the narrative (or

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\(^{350}\) See also above, Chapter 1, 71-2, for a discussion on reading vs. viewing in regard to spectatorial experience.

\(^{351}\) Rosenfeld, *Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 123.

\(^{352}\) Because of this feature, it has been suggested that the portrait was painted on occasion of the marriage of Elisabeth de Beauharnais to Michel II Bégon in 1711. Chomer, *Peintures françaises*, 171.

discursive) aspects and the symbolic meanings of the picture. Outline, colour and tone serve in this sense as tools aiding the spectator's anchoring of the representation in a readable narrative. Conversely, in the Portrait of a Elisabeth de Beauharnais colour and tone serve as means of bringing together the depicted elements. Colour and tone become thus visually effective tools. Whereas the colouring in the Portrait of Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny aids the spectator's exploration of the aspects charged with discursive meanings, in the Portrait of a Elisabeth de Beauharnais discursive aspects mediate the sitter's character to a lesser extent, focus is rather on the portrait's effect, anchored in pictorial means. The spectator is encouraged to focus on the central part of the pictorial space and the middle ground, while the background (also less charged with discursive meanings) remains largely indistinct. The metaphor that such an effect brings to mind is the bunch of grapes of Titian, which de Piles included in his Cours de peinture to illustrate his views on the functioning of the eye and le tout ensemble and to which Largillierre devoted a small picture, painted in 1677.\(^{354}\)

From drawing to painting: visual unity and its discontents

Largillierre's portrayal of his stepfather, the landscape painter Jean-Baptiste Forest (1636–1712) is preserved in two stages: a small preparatory drawing in sanguine and the final version of the portrait, exhibited at the Salon in 1704 (Plate 16). A comparison between the two images offers opportunity to consider aspects of the painter's working process and of the ways in which the preparatory drawing, as a record of an initial pictorial thought, has been adjusted to the overall effect of the painted portrait, as a material object.\(^{355}\)

In the preparatory drawing, the sitter's figure is outlined as seen at an angle, seated on a chair in front of an easel, palette in his left hand, turns sideways, towards the right-hand side of the drawing sheet. A firmly drawn line across the figure's left knee indicates a painter's stick.\(^{356}\) Vast hatchings indicate the shaded areas in the sitter's figure and the main tonal values of the background. The strongest contrast between light and shade is in the area of the face in juxtaposition with the painter's cap and the palette, in turn, contrasted against a deep shadow beneath. On the back of the chair and bellow the sitter's figure, two words have been written: 'rouge' (red) and 'marron' (brown). Apparently intended as an aid to the working process, the words are each linked to the figure through a line; one running from 'red' to the left sleeve of the dressing gown and the other, from 'brown' to his knee.

\(^{354}\) Two bunches of grapes, 25 × 34 cm, Institute néerlandais, Frits Lugt coll. See Brême, Largillierre, 138-9, ill.

\(^{355}\) Dominique Brême has discussed this preparatory drawing in the catalogue to the exhibition Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle at Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, when it was shown for the first time. Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 126, and 127 ill.

\(^{356}\) Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 126.
In the final version of the portrait, the painter’s initial thought has undergone several changes. The easel has been moved to the left, so that only half of it is visible; the back of the chair lowered and an armrest, upon which the painter supports his arm, added. The tilt of the head has been straightened; the shape of the cap changed to triangular, the tip of the lining pointing away and into the background. The opening of the painter’s dressing gown has been diminished so that the visual linking between the face and the white shirt creates a strong visual focus against the darker dressing gown. Likewise, the conspicuously rendered highlights on the painter’s cap, contrasting the brocade top against the black lining and the background, draw the spectator’s attention towards the central part of the picture. The change in the depiction of the palette contributes equally to this effect. In the painted version, the palette has been turned with the back against the spectator. Without this change, the palette would have competed visually with the area around the face – the in-picture light would have reached the palette from the left, highlighting the depicted colours and hence attracting the spectator’s eyes. In the painted portrait, only small colour patches, barely discernible from distance, indicate the depicted colours on Forest’s palette.

While reworking the preparatory drawing, the painter seems to have sought after a composition grounded on visual integration with a centralised focal point. In this respect, however, yet another change calls attention, particularly for not being obvious at first glance. Whereas in the drawing the sitter is depicted sitting upright, in the painted portrait he leans slightly backwards. The angle between the sitter’s upper part of the body and the knees has been widened with the result that the whole figure creates an oblique line, running diagonally across the picture plane, from bottom left towards upper right. The sitter rests comfortably in the chair, as he also does in the drawing, and yet, in the painted portrait his posture suggests a sense of movement.

Likewise, considering the downright direction of the dressing gown’s folds, the sitter’s right leg makes an odd impression. Following the direction of light from its source on the left, the gown should have been darker in the areas covering the inside of the leg, that is, if it were stretched out. However, even when taking into account the likely increase of the transparency of oil paint with time, the impression remains as if there is no leg underneath the gown. Assuming that the sitter is depicted bending his right leg under the chair might explain its odd position. Yet, as the sitter seems to lean slightly backwards, such an assumption would amount to a rather uncomfortable sitting posture. Regardless of the angle from which the spectator chooses to look, the position of the depicted sitter’s right leg remains odd.

357 Also pointed out by Brême, *Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle*, 126. However, Brême’s discussion of these changes aims to show that the sketch was executed prior to the portrait, rather than to explore the import of these changes for the painting’s overall effect.
As suggested earlier, to judge by the overall effect of the portrait, the painter seems to have expected the spectator to look at the central part of the painting: the face and the upper part of the body. In this sense, an explanation for the oddity of the depicted sitter’s right leg can be advanced upon the assumption that the spectator is not supposed to look at this part of the picture; at least not in such an attentive manner as I have up to now. Such an assumption, however, calls for a consideration of the conditions of display of the portrait.

The display of portrait paintings is essential for their effect and consequently for the spectator’s experience. Obviously aware of the issues that might occur when the opinion of others were involved, de Piles dedicated the closing of his chapter on portraiture to ‘the politics’ (La Politique) of portrait painting. Particularly, he advised the painter to refrain from showing a portrait to others, except to other painters, prior to the varnishing and the putting of the portrait in its frame. Likewise, de Piles did not elaborate on other practical issues concerning the display of the portraits. In contrast, the Dutch painter and theoretician Gérard de Lairesse (1641–1711) provided many practical advices in his Het Groot Schilderboek (1707). Lairesse pointed out that to achieve the desired effect the painter must take into account the display of portraits and maintained that:

… low horizons, or points of sights, are the best and most natural in a portrait, and will most deceive the senses, if the light and distance, with respect to the place where the picture is to be set, be well observed; otherwise the effect will be contrary to what we expect. This conduct is chiefly necessary in portraits hanging high; for being so much above the eye they must needs have a low horizon. But as portraits are moveable, how natural and like soever they be, and well managed, if they hang not in proper places they will not have a good effect …

In line with this observation, it is not surprising that at the Academic exhibition of 1704 the Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Forest was displayed above eye level.

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358 ‘Il ne faut jamais faire voir son ébauche si ce n’est aux Peintres de ses amis pour en apprendre leur sentiment. Il est même fort à propos de ne faire voir aucun ouvrage fini que dans sa bordure, & après avoir été verni.’ Piles, Cours, 298.

According to the *livret*, the portrait occupied a place on the second level in *trumeau* XII, above the portrait of ‘M. le Comte d’Upsé’.  

In the *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Forest* the definition of form in the pictorial space has been subordinated to the search for an overall effect; attention to correctness in drawing and proportions abandoned in favour of visual attractiveness. Turning once again to the seeming oddity in the depiction of the sitter’s leg, I would suggest that the painter has taken the risk to dispense with accuracy in order to achieve a unified visual effect that would attract the spectator at first glance. Nevertheless, this risk might not have been as pronounced at the time, since the portrait’s display would have been in all probability closer to that in which it was exhibited in 1704, than to the conditions of display in which it appears today.

Artful imitation: grace and enthusiasm

In an analysis of drawings by Watteau, Sarah Cohen has observed a tension between correctness and effect in the depiction of single figure bodies similar to that in the *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Forest*. Although depicted in positions ‘impossible to execute’, these figures appear nevertheless ‘spontaneous and “exact”’. Cohen discusses this tension in terms of a union between ‘the mimetic and the overtly stylised’ and links this tension to the larger issue of the relationship between art and nature.

As seen in the previous chapter, for de Piles a good portrait was the portrait that struck the spectator by way of its lifelike effect. Essential for de Piles’ argument was the idea that this effect depended on colouring – the properly pictorial counterpart of colour in nature – rather than drawing, which did not have a bearing role for this effect. Although taking nature as a starting point, to achieve perfect imitation, the painter ‘should not only imitate what one sees in nature, but also what one may see, that is advantageous in the art’.

Jacqueline Lichtenstein has brought attention to the polysemy of the terms *nature* (*nature*)/*natural* (*le naturel*) in late seventeenth-century art theory by pointing out that as employed in the academic conferences the terms *nature* and *natural* could signify the object, the mode as well as the effect of imitation. In the theory of de Piles, however, as Lichtenstein observes, the terms *nature* (*nature*) and *natural* (*le naturel*) became explicitly dependent on each other. As de Piles identified natural imitation with the imitation of nature, *nature* acquired a

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363 ‘Il ne faut pas seulement imiter ce que l’on voit; mais ce que l’on peut voir d’avantageux à l’Art […] Un peintre qui ne fait que ce qu’il voit, n’arrivera jamais à une parfaite imitation: car si son ouvrage lui semble bon de près, & sur son chevalet, de loin il déplaira aux autres & souvent à lui même.’ Piles, *Cours*, 262, 272.
double connotation'; first, an empirical, which linked imitation directly to the observation of nature (nature) and, second, a pictorial, which linked imitation exclusively to pictorial imitation, since ‘the natural in de Piles’ conception was nothing other than an effect of art’. Nature in painting should appear natural. De Piles explained:

There is, however, no part of painting where nature is always proper to be imitated, that is, such nature as offers itself by chance. Though she is the mistress of arts, yet she seldom shews us the best road; she only hinders us from going astray. The painter must chuse her according to the rules of art, and if he does not find her to be such as he looks for, he must correct what offers to him. … So the artist must not imitate all the colours which indifferently present themselves to the eye; but chuse the most proper for his purpose; adding others, if he think fit, in order to fetch out the effect and beauty of his work. His objects must not only be, each of them, fine, natural, and true, but there must be also an union of the whole together.

The better to achieve the necessary ‘union of the whole together’, that is to say, a convincing pictorial composition the effect of which would recreate the effect of vision, de Piles recommended painters to use of a convex mirror as an aid to improve the appearances of nature, because ‘objects that are seen there with one glance of the eye, make together one whole, and a whole much more agreeable than that which the same objects would produce in an ordinary glass, or, I will venture to say, even in nature itself’. Turning once again to Largillierre’s Self-portrait, I would suggest that the perceived distortion in the proportions of head, hand and body might be explained as a conscious pictorial strategy to produce the effect of nature. Joanna Woods-Marsden has noted that in self-portraiture the head usually dominates over the hand compositionally and thus visually because the head was understood as ‘the part of the body responsible for the conception of the work’ whereas the hand was ‘the part of the body responsible for its execution’. A familiar example in early modern painting of challenge to this

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366 ‘Cependant il n’y a point dans la Peinture de partie où la Nature soit toujours bonne à imiter telle que le hazard la presente. Cette maîtresse des Arts nous conduit rarement par le plus beau chemin, elle nous empêche seulement de nous égarer. Il faut que le Peintre la choisisse selon les règles de son Art; & s’il ne la trouve pas telle qu’il la cherche, il doit corriger celle qui lui est présentée. … Il [le Peintre] songe non-seulement à rendre ses objets chacun en particulier, beaux, naturels, & vrais: mais encore il a soin de l’union du tout ensemble … Ainsi bien loin que cette savante exageration énerve la fidélité de l’imitation, au contraire elle sert au Peintre pour jetter plus de vérité an ce qu’il imite d’après Nature.’ Piles, *Cours*, 307–8. *Principles*, 187.
hierarchical relationship is the *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* by Parmigianino (1503–40) (Plate 17).\(^{369}\) In the same interpretative vein, Thierry Bajou has linked the prominence of the depicted painter’s hand in Largillière’s *Self-portrait of 1711* to the symbolic aspects of the hand’s rendering in Parmigianino’s *Self-portrait*.\(^{370}\)

The parallel between the self-portraits of Largillierre and Parmigianino in respect to the prominence granted by both painters to the depiction of the hand is motivated. However, part of its resides in what Bajou does not say about it. A comparison between Largillierre’s *Self-portrait of 1711* and Parmigianino’s *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* suggests that Largillierre might have conceived the composition with the aid of an actual convex mirror or with the idea of how such a mirror reflects objects in nature. However, whereas Parmigianino diminishes the head equally as he magnifies the hand, Largillierre depicts both hand and head in the same scale but slightly bigger than the rest of the body. The mirror in Parmigianino’s *Self-portrait* is smaller – as is also the ‘mirror’-painting – creating thus a greater distortion. In this sense, the distortion in Parmigianino’s *Self-portrait* serves as an unconcealed demonstration of the painter’s technical skills.\(^{371}\) The distortion in Largillierre’s *Self-portrait* is less ostensive. Similarly, de Piles’ advice to painters to use a convex mirror was intended for the purpose of recreating the effects of vision, rather than an aid for the display of technical skills. Therefore, de Piles also stressed the importance of choosing a mirror of ‘a reasonable size’ to be ‘usefully consulted for particular objects as well as in general for the whole together’.\(^{372}\)

The notion of grace (grâce) offers possibility to develop this issue. In the culture of honnêteté, grace was defined in contrast with beauty (beauté). Beauty, incorporated in perfect bodily proportions, was an objective quality. Grace on the other hand was the ineffable quality that pleases the most.\(^{373}\) Closely related to the notion of agreement (agrément), grace was understood as a quality that could be prefigured on the body by way of gestures, speech and expression. For de Piles, likewise, grace was an elusive, ineffable quality – neither the painter

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371 Jodi Cranston has observed that the distortion of the body in Parmigianino’s self-portrait is indicative of the ‘dislocating experience of the self’, in the tradition, which understood the mirror as an instrument of self-reflexivity. Cranston, *Muddied Mirror*, 25.

372 ‘(Je suppose le Miroir convexe d’une mesure raisonnable, & non pas de ceux qui pour être partie d’une petite circonférence corrompent trop la forme des objets.) Je dirai en passant que ces sortes de Miroirs qui sont devenus assez rares pourroient être utilement consultés pour les objets particuliers, comme pour le général du Tout ensemble.’ Piles, *Cours*, 109–10; *Principles*, 67–8.

nor the spectator could tell its cause; grace pleased and captured the heart without passing through the mind.\textsuperscript{374} Equally in conformity with the ideals of bonnéteté, de Piles distinguished between beauty and grace. Whereas beauty had its origin in principles, grace had the capacity to please ‘without rules’.\textsuperscript{375} Grace, in this sense, was the subjective counterpart to beauty. While animating everything that was pleasing, grace escaped reason because its effects could not be put into words but only experienced through the senses.\textsuperscript{376}

In his theory, de Piles coupled grace with the notion of enthusiasm (enthousiasme).\textsuperscript{377} Accordingly, grace resided at the heart of true painting and its capacity to surprise the spectator at first sight. As soon as the spectator had felt this inexplicable quality, he or she was transported to a state of enthusiasm:

> Now as he who considers a work, is raised to that degree of elevation, which he finds in it, so the transport of mind, which comes up to enthusiasm, is common both to the painter, and the spectator; yet, with this difference, that it has cost the painter a course of labour, and repeated efforts, to heat his imagination, and bring his work to the perfection of enthusiasm; whereas the spectator, without having the trouble to examine particulars, finds himself transported at once, without his knowledge, and, as it were, without his consent, to that degree of enthusiasm, which the painter inspires.\textsuperscript{378}

Sometimes, however, enthusiasm came at a price: ‘I own, indeed, that one of the effects of enthusiasm is, that it often hides some fault by means of the transport it generally causes: But this is no great misfortune; for, in fact, enthusiasm, with some faults, will always be preferred to a correct mediocrity; because it [enthusiasm] ravishes the soul, without giving it time to examine any

\textsuperscript{374} ‘Un Peintre ne la [la Grâce] tient que de la Nature, il ne sçait pas même si elle est en luy, ni à quel degré il la possède, ni comment il la communique à ses Ouvrages: elle surprend le Spectateur qui en sent l’effet sans en pénétrer la véritable cause: mais cette Grace ne touche son cœur que selon la disposition qu’elle y rencontre. On peut la définir, ce qui plait, & ce qui gagne le cœur sans passer par l’esprit.’ Piles, \textit{Abrégé}, 11. See also Puttfarken, \textit{Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art}, 108–9.

\textsuperscript{375} ‘… mais ses Tableaux [du Peintre qui possède son Art dans tous les détails] ne pourront être parfaits si la Beauté qui s’y trouve n’est accompagnée de la Grace. […] La Grace & la Beauté, sont deux choses différentes: la Beauté ne plaît que par les règles, & la Grace plaît sans les règles. Ce qui est beau n’est pas toujours gracieux, & ce qui est gracieux n’est pas toujours beau; mais la Grace jointe à la Beauté, est le comble de la Perfection.’ Piles, \textit{Abrégé}, 10–11.

\textsuperscript{376} See Becq, \textit{Genèse de l’esthétique française}, 216.

\textsuperscript{377} On the concept of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century, see Mary D. Sheriff, \textit{Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{378} ‘Or comme celui qui considère un Ouvrage suit le degré d’élévation qu’il y trouve, le transport d’esprit qui est dans l’Enthousiasme est commun au Peintre & au Spectateur; avec cette différence néanmoins, que bien que le Peintre ait travaillé à plusieurs reprises pour échauffer son imagination, & pour montrer son Ouvrage au degré que demande l’Enthousiasme, le Spectateur au contraire sans entrer dans aucun détail se laisse enlever tout à coup, & comme malgré lui, au degré d’Enthousiasme où le Peintre l’a attiré.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 114–15; \textit{Principles}, 70–1.
thing, or to reflect on particulars’. The ease with which de Piles dismisses faults in favour of emotional effectiveness is in accord with the ideals of bonnéteté. As Thomas Kavanagh has observed, a defining quality of polite society in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries was ‘not an ability to display one’s learning but a talent for all those forms of exchange incarnating the instantaneous flash of brilliance and wit’. In like manner, Largillierre’s Self-portrait might have been seen as an instance of such an instantaneous brilliance, which, for its achievement, could stand the risk of some faults.

Landscape as setting

By the mid-seventeenth century landscape painting as a genre was becoming increasingly popular among collectors and art lovers in France. Part of the genre’s allure was that it offered spectators the opportunity to indulge in the pleasures suggested by an imagined promenade outdoors. In his Het Groot Schilderboek, Lairesse described the various elements in nature, which in the painted landscape amounted to such a pleasing experience, emphasising the variation, the contrasts and the effects of these elements: ‘What is more acceptable than shady groves, open parks, clear waters, rocks, fountains, high mountains, and deep misty valleys? All these we can see at once; and how relieving must the sight be to the most melancholy temper? Lairesse also advanced the idea that ‘a landscape is the most delightful object in the art [of painting], and has very powerful qualities, with respect to sight, when by a sweet harmony of colours, and elegant management, it diverts and pleases the eye.’ The capacity of landscape painting to please the eyes was also

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379 ‘J’avoue qu’il paroit qu’un des effets de l’Enthousiasme est de cacher souvent quelque défaut à la faveur du transport commun qu’il nous cause; ce qui n’est pas un grand malheur. Car en effet l’Enthousiasme avec quelques défauts, sera toujours préféré à une médiocrité correcte; parce qu’il ravit l’ame, sans lui donner le tems de rien examiner, & de refléchir sur le détail de chaque chose.’ Piles, Cours, 124; Principles, 76-7.
381 Mérot, *French Painting*, 213. See also Olson, *Poussin and France*, 213–44, on Poussin’s landscape painting in relation to the ideals of elite spectators, members of the nobility of the robe, who endorsed a classicist taste.
384 ‘… Landschap het vermaakelykste voorwerp in de Schilderkonst is, en in der daad met zeer vermogende hoedanigheden omtrent het gezicht voorzien, wanneer het door een lieffelyke samensmelting van koleuren, en met een eierlyke schikking gepaard, de aanschouwers vermaakt en verlustigt.’ Lairesse, *Het Groot Schilderboek*, 1: 344; *Art of painting*, 1: 231.
emphasised by de Piles in the opening of the chapter on landscape, included in *Cours de peinture*:

Among all the pleasures which the different talents of painting afford to those who employ them, that of drawing landskips seems to me the most affecting, and most convenient, for by the great variety, of which it is susceptible, the painter has more opportunities, than in any of the other parts, to please himself by the choice of the objects. The solitude of rocks, freshness of forests, clearness of waters, and their seeming murmurs, extensiveness of plains and offskips, mixtures of tress, firmness of verdure, and a fine general scene or opening, make the painter imagine himself either a hunting, or taking the air, or walking, or sitting, and giving himself up to agreeable musings.

Landscape offered thus painters opportunity to display their artistic skills and, equally, to take pleasure in the very process of painting by indulging in the delights of imagination. Landscape became also increasingly common as a setting for portraits in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Many portraits in the colourist mode feature a landscape setting as well.

Landscapes in portraiture frequently included columns and draperies in the manner of Van Dyck and the tradition inherited from fifteenth-century Venetian portraiture. A shared characteristic of these landscapes was the spectacular lighting and inherent movement – a clouded sky, often a sunset behind a mountain at the distance, trees and branches leaning as if having been bend in a sudden wind blow. Shady foliage, bare trunks, rocks and boulders reminiscent of the landscape settings in portraits by Van Dyck was also used frequently. Examples of such a landscape in the œuvre of Largillierre appear for instance in the portrait of *Mlle de La Fayette* (1697, Château de Parentignat, Puy de Dôme) and, emblematically, in the portrait of a woman known as *La Belle Strasbourgeoise* (1703, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg). Later portraits reiterate these features, as seen for instance in the *Portrait of a Woman as a Water Nymph* (Plate 18) and the portrait of a *Young of a Young Nobleman in Hunting*.
Dress (Plate 19). These landscapes share a repertoire of elements that could be combined in various ways depending on the type, the size and the composition of the portrait. The frequent reiteration of stock features in landscape settings in early eighteenth-century portraiture, as exemplified by the Portrait of a Woman as a Water Nymph and the portrait of a Young Nobleman in Hunting Dress, suggests that these landscapes depicted imaginary views, rather than particular places associated with the sitter.

In the chapter on landscape, de Piles distinguished between two types, or styles (style) of landscape: heroic and pastoral, or champêtre. The former was best exemplified in works by Poussin, the later in works by Titian and the Flemish painter Jacques Fouquier (1590/91–1659). In the heroic landscape type (style), exemplified in works by Poussin, art and nature coexist, drawing on ‘everything that is great and extraordinary in either’; however, if nature in such a landscapes is not ‘expressed the way chance makes us see her every day’, it is at least represented in ideal form, ‘as we imagine she ought to be’. De Piles defined in turn the pastoral landscape type as ‘a representation of countries, rather abandoned to the caprice of nature than cultivated;’ and specified further: ‘We there see nature simple, without ornament, and without artifice; but with all those graces with which she adorns herself much more, when left to herself, than when constrained by art’. It is therefore not surprising that the landscape type in many colourist portraits is of a similar kind to that which de Piles defined as champêtre.

Landscape as setting also offered various possibilities for the conjunction between aesthetic and socio-politic aspects in portrait painting. As a backdrop painted about 1690–95. Jean de Cayeux, ‘Rigaud et Largillierre, peintres de mains’, Études d’Art VI, Musée National des Beaux-Arts d’Alger (1951), 46. A dating about 1715 has been proposed by Georges Sortais and by Jean Cailleux. Cailleux grounds his suggestion on the observation that type of headdress worn by the sitter became fashionable only about 1713–14; Jean Cailleux, ‘Oudry et Largillierre: Notes sur quelques portraits’, L’Art du dix-huitième siècle, Advertisement Supplement, Burlington Magazine 125:969 (1983), viii. Georges Pascal has in turn advanced the idea that the portrait represents the duchess of Berry (1695–1719), granddaughter of the duchess of Orléans. For details on this portrait, see Nicole Garnier-Pelle, Chantilly, Musée Condé peintures du XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux/Chantilly: Musée Condé, 1995).

390 De Piles mentioned also Claude Lorraine as an exponent of the heroic landscape. Other painters mentioned as exponents of the pastoral landscape type were Rubens, [Annibale] Carracci, Agostino Carracci (particularly his engravings) and, repeatedly, Paul Bril, Sébastien Bourdon, and [?] Brueghel. Piles, Cours, 204, 207, 213, 217, 224, 229, 240–1, 256–7. Mérot has suggested that for de Piles, alongside Poussin and Lorrain, the painters of the Bolognese School (i.e. the Carracci) were exponents of the heroic landscape. Mérot, French Painting, 214.

391 ‘Le style Heroïque est une composition d’objets qui dans leur genre tirent de l’Art & de la Nature tout ce que l’un & l’autre peuvent produire de grand & d’extraordinaire. … & si la Nature n’y est pas exprimée comme le hazard nous la fait voir tous les jours, elle y est du moins représentée comme on s’imagine qu’elle devroit être.’ Piles, Cours, 201–2; Principes, 124.

392 ‘Le style champêtre est une représentation des Pays qui paroissent bien moins cultivés qu’abandonnés à la bizarrerie de la seule Nature. Elle s’y fait voir toute simple, sans fard, & sans artifice; mais avec tous les ornemens dont elle fait bien mieux se parer, l’orsqu’on la laisse dans sa liberté, que quand l’Art lui fait violence.’ Piles, Cours, 202–3.
for portraits, a landscape could indeed convey various meanings, for instance as
a reference to the land owned by the sitter, or as a reminder and celebration of
the sitter’s travels.393 This landscape type depicted most frequently in French
portrait painting by the turn of the eighteenth century and described in the art
theory as champêtre, evokes the ideal of pastoral, which at the time enjoyed
renewed popularity through Honoré d’Urfé’s celebrated pastoral novel L’Astrée,
published between 1607 and 1627. Likewise, this type of landscape related to
the early eighteenth century fête galante as an elite social practice.394

Portraits in a landscape setting involve a specific challenge to the visual unity
of the picture. Although depicted in the open, the sitter was painted in the
studio, usually with a light source from the left. As a result, a certain
discrepancy between sitter and setting often characterises portraits of this type
– the setting appears as a piece of theatrical scenery, not unlike the Portrait of
Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny. This quality stands in an inverse reciprocal
relationship with the degree to which sitter and setting have been visually
integrated in terms of pictorial procedure – colour, claire-obscure and
technique.

Placing the sitter in a landscape setting, on the other hand, offered means
for the adjustment of the composition to enhance the portrait’s overall effect.
De Piles, for instance, observed that in portraiture, the tone and the colour of
the sitter’s head and hair determine the colour and the tone of backgrounds and
the draperies. However, ‘when the former [the hair] is a bright chestnut, we are
often embarrassed, unless help’d by means of a curtain, or some accident of the
claro-obscuro, supposed to be behind, or unless the ground is a sky.’395 A
landscape as backdrop offered in this sense a range of possibilities to create
such ‘accidents’.

Dimensions of pictorial space: movement and transformation

The Portrait of Jean Pupil de Craponne, signed in 1708, presents the sitter against a
wooded landscape and a spectacular, cloudy sky above (Plate 20).396 The
composition follows a conventional portrait type: bust-length, the sitter
occupies most part of the picture; the face depicted frontally, the body slightly
turned to the left. In this portrait type, conventional attributes that signify the

393 Filipczak, ‘Motifs in Van Dyck’s portraits’, 59. On the meanings of landscape as setting in
eighteenth-century portraiture, see e.g. Norlander Eliasson, Portraiture and Social Identity, 19–35.
394 See Crow, Painters and Public Life, 66–74.
395 ‘Pour les fonds, il y a deux choses à considerer, le ton, & la couleur. On doit raisonner de la
couleur du fond, comme on raisonne de celles des habits à l’égard de la tête … Ce qui
détermine le ton du fond est ordinairement le ton des cheveux, & quand ils sont châtins-clairs
on est souvent fort embarrassé à moins qu’on ne se serve du secours d’un rideau ou de
quelque accident de Clair-obscure que l’on suppose derrière, ou que ce fond ne soit un ciel.’
Piles, Cours, 275–6; Principes, 167.
396 Signed, verso, ‘Mre Jean Pupil. Peint par Largillierre, 1708’. For details on this portrait, see
Chomer, Peintures françaises, 167.
character or the social status of the sitter are reduced to a minimum or omitted altogether. Posture, dress, the setting and the overall effect of the portrait thus convey the signification of the sitter’s social standing and character. In the absence of hands, this type of bust-length portrait also amounts to a heightened focus on the sitter’s face. In addition, the possibilities to suggest movement and hence to animate the sitter were not many.

Jean Pupil de Craponne is dressed in a brown velvet attire and white lace collar. His face – thin and slightly elongated, with a prominent bony nose and conspicuous wrinkles that emphasise a pair of piercing eyes and a vague smile – is depicted in a conspicuously ‘realistic’ manner. A sumptuous allongé wig seems to pour down from the top of de Craponne’s head, surrounding his face and sweeping over his body, almost as a cloud of smoke or foam. A deep shadow accentuates the transition between the face and the wig and the contrasting white lace collar and emphasise further the face. The dynamic depiction of the sitter’s coat suggests a sense of movement. By way of highlights and deep shadows, the folds of the drapery create a series of billowing diagonals running from the bottom left towards the middle right part of the composition. The white lace collar picks up, as it were, the strongest diagonal, which comes to a halt at this point, or rather changes direction following the turn of the wig and over the sitter’s head, suggesting thus a spiral movement. This movement is supported by the surrounding landscape, both in tone and depictive procedure, as the sitter’s body seems to dissolve in the landscape.

The Portrait of a Woman, perhaps the duchess de Beaufort (Plate 21), can serve as another example of the ways in which the depiction of sitter and background interact in the creation of a visually unified composition while simultaneously conveying a sense of movement and character to the figure by means of colouring. The sitter poses against a wooded landscape similar to that in the Portrait of Jean Pupil de Craponne. Likewise, depicted frontally, the sitter tilts her head slightly to the left, the body slightly turned to the right. An important element in the portrait is the visual prominence of the blue drapery. The visual prominence of the blue drapery can be seen as an example of how elements in the paintings were employed to highlight the sitter’s face in a favourable manner, an aspect on which de Piles elaborated as well. Accordingly, as portraits – particularly female portraits – should strive not only for a decorous representation (convenance) but also for pleasantness (agreement), the

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397 Percival, *Fragonard and the Fantasy Figure*, 85
398 Emmanuel Coquery, for instance, has described the apparent realism in the depiction of Jean Pupil de Craponne’s face as close to caricature. Coquery, ‘Le portrait français’, 66.
399 Museum van der Bergh, Antwerpen, houses an autograph version of this portrait (79 × 63 cm.). Another portrait, known as *Portrait of a woman, called Madame de Boisguilbert* (80 × 65 cm, Château Montmirail), depicts a different sitter (face) but features the same composition, background, clothes and accessories. For these two portraits, see Bonfait, ‘Du masque au visage’, 39, ill.
ability to bring forth the best sides of the sitter’s appearance while hiding the less flattering ones, was imperative. A fair-skinned face, for instance, should be juxtaposed with cold nuances: ‘a white, lively, and bright tint, ought never to be set off by a fine yellow, which would make it look like plaster, but rather by colours including green, blue, or grey, or such others as, by their opposition, may make the tint appear more fleshy than usual in fair women.’

The visual prominence of the blue drapery creates also a subtle tension between foreground and background. The reason for this is that a cool colour such as blue, which by virtue of tone recedes into the picture plane, has been applied in the foreground, whereas a warm colour, such as ochre, has been granted a receding role. Moreover, the compositional foreground reiterates the deep blue hue of the drapery. Blue appears in the hair and its adornment, as reflexions in the yellow-tinted brocade lining of the drapery and, finally, in a brighter hue, in the lining of the dress. Conversely, the ochre nuances in the brocade dress are reiterated in the headdress as well as pervade the background, most notably in the brighter, mid-part of the landscape surrounding the sitter’s head. The relationship between foreground and background, between close and distant view in the pictorial space is thus put under pressure. This effect can be described as tension because it holds the spectator’s eye at the surface, while at the same time, has the potential to draw it into the pictorial space. This tension also relates to the effects of visual unity in the Portrait of a Elisabeth de Beauharnais, in which the background reiterates the contrast between the complementary colours in the foreground.

This observation brings the analysis to a further point concerning the effects of pictorial composition in colourist portrait painting: the inherent dynamics of pictorial space. Norman Bryson has noted similar ambiguities in the definition of pictorial space in Rigaud’s celebrated Portrait of Gaspard de Gueidan as Celadon, 1735 (Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence). Bryson points to the tension (although he does not actually use this expression) between stability and movement, notable in the juxtaposition of head and hands, on the one hand, and the fluttering drapery, on the other hand, and describes the pictorial space as neither two- or three-dimensional, but ‘something in between’. According to Bryson, such ambiguities relate to the ‘commitment to an elimination of coherent space’ of painters exponents of rococo painting. In a number of

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400 Piles, Cours, 274.
401 *Dans les Portraits d’homme, il suffit de chercher deaucco de vérité & beaucoup de force; mais aux Portraits de femmes, il faut encore de l’agrément, & faire paraître dans un beau jour ce qu’elles ont de beauté, & temperer par quelque industrie ce qu’elles ont de défauts. C’est pour cela qu’auprès d’un teint blanc, vif, & éclatant, il faut bien se garder de mettre d’un beau jaune qui le feroit paraître de plâtre; mais plutôt des couleurs qui donnent dans le verd, ou dans le bleu, ou dans le gris, ou dans quelques autres semblables couleurs qui par leur opposition contribuent à faire paraître plus de chair ces sortes de teins, que l’on trouve ordinairement aux blondes.* Piles, Cours, 274–5; *Principles*, 166–7.
portraits by Largillierre featuring a landscape setting, particularly three-quarter-length compositions, the pictorial space inhabited by the sitters is contracted in the sense that it encloses the depicted bodies rather than sustains an impression of spatiality. The dimensions and the positions of the various elements in the setting are not clearly defined. The depiction of rocks and trees, plants, foliage and clouds, even dogs apparently follows the logic of clair-obscur essentially in the service of visual effectiveness rather than topography. The bodies of the depicted sitters, too, frequently seem to defy the legibility of pictorial space.

In Portrait of a Woman as a Water Nymph (Plate 18), the sitter’s body dissolves, as it were, beneath the deep folds of the dress to the extent that her left hip and leg seem almost immaterial. Likewise, in the portrait of a Nobleman in Hunting Costume (Plate 19), the sitter’s right leg is depicted frontally, the thigh in a strong foreshortening as to suggest a comfortable, relaxed sitting posture. At the same time, his left leg plumbs down and out of the picture plane, suggesting thus a different configuration of the depicted space. Such ‘contrivances’ add to the overall impression of the sitter’s posture as natural, by way of suggesting movement and, at the same time, appropriate. In the same way as in the Self-portrait of 1711 and the Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Forest, discussed earlier, the effects of such ‘contrivances’ reside in a tension between empirical observation of nature and pictorial representation of nature; a tension between nature/natural and artfully natural. These effects work as parts of a machinery, the purpose of which is to create not only a surprising but also a pleasing effect on the spectator’s eyes, at first glance.

In the Portrait of Antoine le Prestre, comte de Puy-Vuban (Plate 22) the sitter, seen slightly from below, is depicted standing in a authoritative pose, looking steadily towards the spectator. In a commanding gesture, with his right hand he points towards the background in which the silhouette of a town emerges against a white cloud. The portrait was probably painted after 1704, when Antoine le Prestre was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Louis, prominently featured across his shining armour, and appointed governor of the town Béthune, depicted in the distant background. The portrait’s composition follows the pictorial conventions in representations of militaries, for instance in works by Juste d’Egmont (1601–74) and Pierre Mignard, and modified by Rigaud and Largillierre in the early eighteenth century.

404 See also e.g. Portrait of the Countess de Montmoreau and her sister, about 1714 (145 × 113 cm, location unknown); Brême, ‘Un géant retrouvé’, 66, fig. 56; Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 215–16 (recorded with different dimensions; location identified as The New York Historical Society) and Portrait of Françoise Turettini as Diana, 1721 (140 × 107 cm, Musée d’art et d’histoire, Genève).

405 Bajou, La peinture à Versailles, 45, 47, ill.; Compare Hyacinthe Rigaud’s Portrait, presumably of Charles-Auguste de Goyon de Matignon, comte de Gacé, 1691 (136 × 113 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen), Perreau, Rigaud, 200, ill.
Scholars have celebrated the Portrait of Antoine le Prestre for the skilful rendering of various materials and for the pictorial technique, which has been characterised as *non-finito* in the overall depiction of the background yet meticulous in the depiction of the town. The catalogue to the exhibition *Rubens contre Poussin* describes the rendering of the background in this portrait as strongly aiding the figure to stand out from the background. Indeed, the unfinished aspect of the background contributes to the figure coming forward in the pictorial space. This effect occurs particularly in the central and the lower part of the picture by means of meticulous finish in the depiction of the sitter’s attire.

There are however further aspects of the relationship between the figure (the depicted sitter) and the pictorial space that add complexity to the effect of a visually distinct foreground, which stands out against a less defined background. The rendering of the figure further to the right and most notably that of the wig becomes gradually closer to the rendering of various elements in the background. The wig and the clouds, the armour-clad forearm, the foliage and the rocks, the fur-lined mantle and the distant (or is it close?) trunk: each seem to reiterate the rendering of the other, challenging thus in a subtle way the differences in shape, volume and substance. Whereas the image sustains the spectator’s recognition at first glance, tensions such as these create an effect of spatial ambiguity.

Erika Fischer-Lichte has pointed out that the space created by seventeenth-century theatrical machines was a performative space: it addressed the spectator’s senses as well as emotions. The analyses in this chapter have shown that the analogy between theatrical machines and portrait paintings by Largillierre concerning their effects on the spectator at first sight can be applied to the creation of instable or transformative space. In portraits such as those discussed above, the pictorial space can be understood as instable and hence dynamic in the sense that it has the potential to suggest visual transformations in a subtle interaction with the bodies which inhabit it. Such transformations support the initial effect of illusion. After a few moments of viewing, they have also the potential to influence the spectator’s movements by suggesting ambiguities and hence unsettling the effect of illusion and awakening curiosity, or attraction.

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407 *Rubens contre Poussin*, cat. no. 42, 170.
408 *Rubens contre Poussin*, 170.
3. From attraction to attention: setting the spectator in (e)motion

Towards a conversational exploration of portrait painting

In search of the sublime

Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century culture of honnêteté showed an interest in appearances, which likewise involved an interest for the manner in which these appearances were enacted in a pleasing way. Such an interest was also embedded in Piles’ idea of true painting as a painting that surprises and calls the spectator to approach, as if to enter in conversation with the figures that it represents. Hence, he described the stage of spectatorial experience that follows on the initial attraction as engaging an interest not only for the represented subject but also for the means of the painting. He wrote: ‘And we no sooner approach it [painting], but we are entertained, not only with the fine choice … but also with the true and faithful imitation, which attracted us at first sight, and afterwards lets us into all the particulars of the piece’.

This view, however, raises several questions. If the overall effect of the painting attracts the spectator at first glance and from distance, once approached, how does the painting sustain attention? If attraction of spectatorial interest depends on the effect of surprise at the view of pictorial illusion, what urges the spectator to ‘enter in conversation’ with the painting? By what means does the painting maintain the spectator’s interest in the close exploration of painting?

In a lecture on the art of portrait painting held at the Academy in 1750, the portrait painter Louis Tocqué (1696–1772) described an intense experience of two portraits by Rigaud, representing the painters Pierre Mignard and Martin Desjardin.

Why do they always animate me when I look at them? It is because they create an illusion, because I believe to enter in conversation with those they represent. I see the canvas appear to breathe. I see the soul painted in the face. I want to understand this mystery. I approach, I believe to perceive the blood circulating

410 Et quand nous sommes auprès d’elle, nous trouvons que non-seulement elle nous divertit par le beaux choix … mais encore par l’imitation vraie & fidèle qui nous a attiré d’abord, qui nous instruit dans le détail des parties de la Peinture …’ Piles, Cours, 4–5; Principes, 3.
under their skin and in this, I admire the effect created by the beautiful transitions and the variety of shades.\textsuperscript{411}

In the process of this experience, Tocqué approaches the work and explores it from up close. In this sense, the account provides a vivid description of the transformation that a spectator’s experience may undergo in the act of viewing a painting, as it shifts from initial attraction to sustained attention. Tocqué is enthused – the paintings animate, they excite, they inflame.\textsuperscript{412} Apparently, this effect originates in the illusion, which the representation sustains at first sight. In terms that unmistakably recall de Piles, Tocqué describes the effect as one that forces him to approach the paintings as if to enter in conversation with those represented. Although the choice to approach the paintings – ‘to understand this mystery’ – is Tocqué’s own, the impulse to do so stems from the effect of \textit{le tout ensemble}. Subsequently, Tocqué approaches the paintings and admires the transformative effects of illusion – the momentary impression of perceiving ‘the blood circulating under their skin’. Likewise, he admires the manner of execution – ‘the beautiful transitions and the variety of shades’.

The transition, from attention to the painting’s effects of illusion to the painter’s manner of creating illusion, recalls the turns in Monsieur Faucher’s experience of the portrait of Madame de Grignan, discussed earlier.

Roger de Piles linked the initial impact of the painting to the spectator’s further exploration with the aid of the notions \textit{enthusiasm} and \textit{sublime}, pointing out that they contributed equally to the elevation of the spectator’s understanding. However, whereas enthusiasm was defined as ‘a rapture that carries the soul above the sublime, of which it is the source’, and its effect situated ‘in the thoughts and the whole together’, the effect of the sublime was perceptible ‘both in the general and in the particulars of all parts’.\textsuperscript{413} The enthusiasm seized the spectator in an instant, prior to any conscious thought

\textsuperscript{411} ‘Pourquoi m’echauffent-ils toujours lorsque je les regarde? c’est qu’ils me font illusion, c’est que je crois en la sensation avec ceux qu’ils me représentent. je vois la toile qui semble respirer. je vois l’âme peinte sur le visage. je veux pénétrer ce mystère. je m’approche, je crois apercevoir le sang qui circule sous la peau; et j’admire en cela l’effet que produisent les beaux passages et la variété des ombres.’ Louis Tocqué, ‘Réflexions sur la peinture et particulièrement sur le genre du portrait’, [1750], in \textit{Le Discours de Tocqué sur le genre du portrait}, ed. Arnauld Doria (Paris: Jean Schemit, 1930), 28–9. Doria indicates that the phrase ‘je vois la toile qui semble respirer’ has been crossed out in the first manuscript and excluded from the second version. Tocqué, \textit{Le Discours de Tocqué}, 28, n. 4. On Tocqué’s lecture as an example of an ‘engaged’ spectator’s experience and for another reading of this passage, see, Williams, \textit{Académie Royale}, 136–9.

\textsuperscript{412} In the eighteenth century, the word ‘echauffer’ was defined as synonymous to ‘animate’, ‘excite’, ‘inflame’, e.g. ‘Eschaûffer, se dit figurément pour, Enflammer, animer, exciter; remplir d’ardeur.’ Furetière, \textit{DU}, 2nd ed, 2: n. p.

\textsuperscript{413} ‘La différence neanmoins qui me paroit entre l’un et l’autre, c’est que l’Enthousiasme est une fureur de veine qui porte notre âme encore plus haut que le Sublime, dont il est la source, & qui a son principal effet dans la pensée & dans le Tout ensemble de l’ouvrage; aulieu que le Sublime se fait sentir également dans le général, & dans le détail de toutes les parties.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 116.
and feeling; its only sign being the pleasure it caused.\textsuperscript{414} As suggested by de Piles, enthusiasm relates to a state of rather inexplicable character and hence to taste, which implied a subtle combination of good sense (\textit{bon sens}), judgement and fine wit (\textit{bel esprit}) that found its proper expression and application in the faculty of discernment.\textsuperscript{415} The sublime, on the other hand, required ‘at least a few moments of reflection’, as the spectator was seizing it.\textsuperscript{416} In this sense, de Piles conceived of the sublime as a quality of a more properly intellectual character, which suggested conscious, reflective understanding.\textsuperscript{417}

This difference between enthusiasm and sublime as two distinct effects of the painting in relation to spectatorial experience raises the question of the kind of reflection implied in the spectator’s seizing of the sublime and of the relation of this reflection to the elements in the painting that sustain it. Thomas Puttfarken has argued that, ‘since enthusiasm is the highest effect of disposition’, the sublime should be understood as related to invention, or to the subject matter of the paintings.\textsuperscript{418} However, Puttfarken’s insistence on the separation between pictorial effectiveness and subject matter in painting, which he identifies as a key element in the theory of de Piles, suggests that the sublime does not relate to the properly pictorial effects of painting.\textsuperscript{419}

In \textit{Cours de Peinture}, de Piles maintained that the process of painting offered the painter greater pleasure than the finished work, because while still at work the painter had complete command of ‘the principles and the secrets of the art’ and could handle them to his ‘own liking … whereas, when the work is finished, it commands the painter, and obliges him to be satisfied with it, be the performance what it will’.\textsuperscript{420} This passage appeared in de Piles’ chapter on colouring and preceded a discussion of aspects that the painter ought to observe in the employment of colours to create a picture pleasing for the eye. These aspects included the variety of hues, the turn of the parts, the exaggeration of colours and their juxtaposition to create contrast. Apparently,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{414} L’Enthousiasme nous enleve sans que nous le sentions, & nous transporte, pour ainsi dire, comme d’un pays dans un autre sans nous en appercevoir que par le plaisir qu’il nous cause. Il me paroit, en un mot, que l’Enthousiasme nous saisit, & que nous saisissions le Sublime.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{415} Lichtenstein, \textit{Eloquence of Color}, 16-18; 161; See also Sheriff, \textit{Fragonard}, 135–6.
\item \textsuperscript{416} ‘L’Enthousiasme a encore cela que l’effet en est plus prompt, & que celui du Sublime demande au moins quelques moments de réflexion pour être vu dans toute sa force.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 116.
\item \textsuperscript{418} Puttfarken, \textit{Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art}, 108, 122.
\item \textsuperscript{419} See also Sheriff, \textit{Fragonard}, 47–9.
\item \textsuperscript{420} ‘Seneque en parlant de l’agrément de la Peinture, dit, que le plaisir qu’elle donne en peignant est bien plus grand que celui que l’on reçoit de l’ouvrage, lorsqu’il est entierement fini. Je suis absolument de cet avis, parce qu’en travaillant on manie à son gré les principes, & les secrets de l’Art: on leur commande (pour ainsi dire) … au lieu que l’ouvrage étant fait, il commande à son Auteur & le contraint de se contenter du succès en quelque état qu’il puisse être.’ Piles, \textit{Cours}, 351–2; Principles, 213.
\end{itemize}
de Piles expected the spectator to take interest in examining the principles that the painter had applied in the process of painting and in this sense to share the painter’s pleasure. At the same time, it does not seem possible to separate the interest of the spectator for the painter’s pictorial procedure from the interest for subject matter. Not the least, because such a separation would amount to an incomplete understanding of the painting, as it would equate aspects of the paintings and of de Piles’ theory ‘to the much more modern notion of abstract formalism’, as Puttfarken observes likewise. Rather, it is the interrelation of pictorial effects and subject matter that should be seen as residing at the core of enthusiasm and consequently in the effect of the sublime.

Illusion and artifice: viewing distance and the size of the tableau

The distinction between initial attraction and attention as a necessary condition for the sustained exploration of painting from up close, which follows upon de Piles’ view of the interaction between painting and spectator, has been described as contradictory. The contradiction is embedded in the requirement that a picture should be both illusionistic to the point of deceiving the spectator and, at the same time, attractive as a distinct kind of artefact.

Indeed, an important condition for illusion to be effective is the unchangeability of the artefact. Illusion in this sense presupposes a fixed, immobile eye. Similarly, the viewing of detail raises the issue of the position from which the spectator looks at the painting. Late seventeenth-century art theory was sensitive to this issue. Both classicist and colourist views sanctioned the experience of paintings from distance, usually referred to as reasonable distance (distance raisonnable), or the distance from which the painting creates the best effect. The view of de Piles on this matter makes no exception. Accordingly, there was a reasonable point from which the painting should be viewed, as it would lose much of its beauty if the spectator leaves this point by moving forward or backwards.

For de Piles, the importance of keeping the right distance to a picture was also closely related to his conception of the essence of painting, namely that the picture should create an effect of illusion (l’effet du vrai) already at first glance. In order to experience this effect fully, the spectator was expected to maintain the appropriate distance from the painting. In this sense, once the spectator has experienced the effect of painting from reasonable distance, the painting had attained its ultimate end as an art of pleasing the eye. At the same time, de Piles repeatedly pointed out that the connoisseur also takes interest in the painting from up-close:

Not all paintings are made to be seen from close up or held in one’s hand, and it is enough that they produce their effect from the place at which people usually look at them, except that the connoisseurs, after seeing them from a reasonable distance, wish to come closer to examine the artifice. For there is no painting that does not have its point of distance from which it should be seen, and it is certain that it would lose much of its beauty if the one who looks at it leaves this point to move closer or further back.\textsuperscript{424}

Scholarship usually distinguishes between two modes of spectatorial experience relevant for spectators by the turn of the eighteenth century: experience from distance, for all spectators, and experience from up close, reserved for the connoisseurs of art who would approach the painting in order to examine its technique, properly the style/manner and the hand of the artist. Such views of spectatorial practice as the preferred mode of experience of elite spectators are grounded in art theory and theories of connoisseurship. Particularly concerning the experience of colourist painting and the theory of art of de Piles, scholarship emphasises the importance of the initial effect of painting and therefore the experience from distance.

Attending to the difference between the enthusiasm and the sublime as defined in de Piles’ theory, Louis Olivier has argued that the relationship between these two notions and their effects is analogous to the relationship between the ordinary spectator’s looking at a painting and the sustained exploration of the connoisseur.\textsuperscript{425} Olivier supports this observation with reference to de Piles’ distinction between the two ideas of painting – one accessible to every spectator and another relevant to the knowledgeable spectator, acquainted with the theory of painting.\textsuperscript{426} This distinction implied also that whereas ordinary spectators, properly \textit{les ignorans}, would be pleased only when looking at a painting from distance, the knowledgeable spectator would approach the painting and admire its artifice.

Small-size paintings, replicas after larger originals, offer an interesting object of analysis concerning the issue of the proper distance required for the experience of a painting. Such paintings were popular in the early eighteenth century and Largillierre’s inventory records a large number of this kind.\textsuperscript{427} Some of these small-size paintings were probably executed as \textit{modelli}, or illustrations

\textsuperscript{424} ‘… tous les tableaux ne sont faits pour estre veus de prés, ny pour estre tenus à la main, & il suffit qu’ils fassent leur effet du lieu d’où on les regarde ordinairement, si ce n’est que les Connoisseurs après les avoir veus d’une distance raisonnable, veuillent s’en approcher ensuite pour en voir l’artifice. Car il n’y a point de tableau qui ne doive avoir son point de distance d’où il doit estre regardé: & il est certain qu’il perdra d’autant plus de sa beauté, que celuy qui le voit sortira de ce point, pour s’en approcher ou pour s’en éloigner.’ Piles, \textit{Conversations}, 300.

\textsuperscript{425} Olivier, ‘Idea of the connoisseur in France’, 12.

\textsuperscript{426} Olivier, ‘Idea of the connoisseur in France’, 11.

of the final state of the project in reduced format to be shown to
commissioners for approval before the execution of the work proper.428 A
number of Largillierre’s small formats seem however to have been what was
usually called ricordo – a reduced replica (if autograph) or a copy (if studio work)
after a standard-size portrait.429 Another term, which referred to such small
format paintings, was petit du grand, commonly used at the art market to
designate small works painted after larger ones. The purpose of such small-size
replicas was multiple: preserving the memory of a painting, future use as an aid
to the making of copies without having to borrow the original from its owner,
an example to be shown to the clientele.430 In addition, such small-size replicas
could serve as a source for engravings. Finally, amateurs of painting often
commissioned small replicas of larger portraits.

Two paintings by Largillierre, today in Musée Condé in Chantilly, offer
examples of this particular kind of paintings. One is the Portrait of Marie-Anne de
Châteauneuf, Mlle Duclos, in the role of Arianne (Plate 24), a version of a large
original (Plate 23). The second painting is the Portrait of a Woman as a Water
Nymph (Plate 18), discussed earlier. In these small-size paintings there are no
obvious repaints; rather they witness of definiteness typical for a finished
work.431 To experience these paintings, however, the spectator has to come
close. The difference in the experience of such paintings and large
compositions is obvious in a comparison between the two portraits of Mlle
Duclos, in the role of Arianne, the large painting allowing multiple positions to
be taken in front of the painting, the small-size painting allowing but few. The
position up-close, which the small-size painting entails, amounts to a different
viewing in that attention is in a sense already prescribed in the act of looking.

Attention: inquietude, illusion and pleasure

Furetière’s dictionary defined the word ‘attention’ as a function of the hearing
or the sight, in conjunction with the mind. The application of the mind alone,
or ‘pure attention’, was a particular case that regarded contemplation. Furetière

428 Part of the few preserved examples of oil sketches attributed to Largillierre were executed in
connection to the commissions for group portraits of the alderman of the City Council of
Paris, which Largillierre acquired on three different occasions, in 1689, 1697 and 1722. On
Largillierre’s sketches for the group portraits of the aldermen of the City Council in Paris, see
Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 78–87, ill.; Perreau, Rigaud, 57–9, ill.; Rosenfeld,
Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, 140–69, ill.; George de Lastic, ‘Rigaud, Largillierre
et le tableau du prévôt et des échevins de la ville de Paris de 1689’, Bulletin de la Société de l’art
français (1975), 147–56. See also Gronkowski, ‘L’Exposition N. de Largillierre’, 334; Pascal,
Largillierre, 17–18, 26.
429 Brême, ‘Un géant retrouvé’, 42.
431 Lastic has pointed out the importance of the repaints for determining if such work is an oil-
sketch or a reduced replica of a larger original. George de Lastic ‘Rigaud, Largillierre et le
tableau du prévôt et des échevins de la ville de Paris de 1689’, Bulletin de la Société de l’art français
(1975), 154.
exemplified further the meaning of attention: ‘Absent-minded people lack attention. A good speaker must awaken the attention of his audience from time to time, must know how to arise attention’. Furetière also defined ‘attention’ in relation to the accuracy with which something is studied: ‘I read this work with attention, I judged it with attention; this book is so obscure that it demands a lot of attention to understand’. In contrast, Académie Française defines ‘attention’ exclusively as ‘application of the mind to something’, even though the examples were similar to Furetière’s, including listening to a speech with attention.

Although Furetière’s definition outlines the meaning of the word attention, it does not provide an explanation of how attention operates. Attention appears both as a faculty that absent-minded people lack and as an application of the mind and the senses (hearing and sight). As a function of the mind, attention was also seen as requiring additional stimulus – the speaker ought to awaken the attention of the audience from time to time and to know how to keep it active. A sort of moderate obscurity appears as the single more specific condition of attention inferable from Furetière’s definition (the book is so obscure that it requires a lot of attention to be understood). Accordingly, this last example suggests that a moderate lack of clarity could function as a stimulus for attention. As a means for awakening attention such a moderate lack of clarity is reminiscent of the rhetorical figure ‘Doubt’ (Doute), which, as defined by Bernard Lamy in his La Rhétorique, ou L’Art de Parler, signified the sense of uncertainty that the orator could suggest in order to revive the attention of distracted listeners.

Michael Baxandall has discussed the concept of ‘attention’ in the eighteenth century as part of the new understanding of the ways in which the spectator organises the impressions from the surrounding world as perceived by the senses. This new understanding, Baxandall points out, was determined by the developing at that time psychological empiricism, which brought about a new

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434 ‘ATTENTION, s. f. Application d’esprit à quelque chose. Avoir attention à ce qu’on fait, à ce qu’on dit. … écouter avec attention un discours,’ DAF, 2: 538; and, NDAF, 1: 106.

435 ‘On feint quelquefois de douter afin d’obliger ceux à qui l’on parle de considerer les veritez ausquelles ils ne font point attention.’ Bernard Lamy, La Rhétorique, ou l’art de parler, 3rd edn (Paris A. Pralard, 1688), 116. This part of the definition of ‘Doute’ was not included in the earlier editions, cf. e.g. Bernard Lamy, L’art de parler (Paris: A. Pralard, 1675), 69–70.

conception of attention as one (memory was another) ‘source of psychological organisation that would enable one sense impression to be related in the mind to another sense impression’. The stimulus for attention – the ‘source of psychological energy that would prompt the mind to move from one sense impression to another’ – was conceived of as a sense of ‘uneasiness’ – borrowed from John Locke and translated in French as *inquietude*, sometimes as *ennui*. Uneasiness was understood as a state of the psyche ‘generated by desire or need’. Attention and uneasiness became the two poles in ‘a dynamic relation’.

Abbé Du Bos offered an example of this new thinking about attention in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719). For Du Bos, a function of painting and poetry was to feed the soul’s hunger for activity when attention to both external perception and its internal reflection was disordered, that is to say, when a person experienced the painful condition of *ennui*. From this followed Du Bos’ observation that the attraction of painting resided primarily in its manner of representation because its representational method (**technique**) was more difficult and less familiar to the spectator than that of poetry, namely, language. Painting had in this sense greater capacity to feed the soul’s natural need for activity. Du Bos observed:

The art of painting is so extremely delicate and attacks us by means of a sense, which has so great an empire over our soul, that a picture may be rendered agreeable by the very charms of the execution, independent of the object which it represents: but I have already observed, that our attention and esteem are fixt then upon the art of the imitator, who knows how to please, even without moving us. We admire the pencil that has been so capable of counterfeiting nature. We inquire how it was possible for an artist to deceive our eyes to that degree, as to make us take colors laid on a surface for real fruit.

In what can be read as an echo from de Piles, the passage from Du Bos implies that painting attracts attention with its capacity to create illusion and to stimulate attention by way of its manner of creating illusion. Painting therefore

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437 In Baxandall’s definition, psychological empiricism understood the human ability to perceive the surrounding world as ‘the product of the individual’s history of organizing items of experience, accumulative experience of interrelated sensations from the various senses’. Baxandall, ‘Attention, hand, and brush’, 184.

438 Baxandall points out that in mid-eighteenth-century, for instance in Condillac, the priorities were reversed: whereas for Locke ‘uneasiness’ was a product of desire and need, for Condillac desire was a function of *inquietude*.


has the capacity to maintain the spectator’s attention even with less elaborated subjects. Du Bos linked further attention to pleasure, assigning thus a more intellectual character to the later. He specified:

I shall not dispute any of these facts; all that can be inferred from hence amounts to no more, than that pictures may sometimes be the cause of illusion; but it does not follow, that an illusion is the source of the pleasure derived to us from poetic and picturesque imitations. A convincing argument hereof, is, that the pleasure continues when the danger of being surprized is over. The pictures please us without the assistance of this illusion, which is only an incident, and a very rare one too, of the pleasure they afford us. The pictures please us, tho’ we actually recollect that they are no more than a piece of canvas, on which a variety of colors have been artificially laid.

The view of Du Bos that painting has greater capacity to feed the soul’s natural need for activity because of its difficulty offers a parallel to Furetière’s view that a moderate lack of clarity could serve as a stimulus for awakening attention. However, Du Bos separated the spectator’s awareness of the representational device from the spectator’s involvement in the mimetic effects of the painting. The spectator, according to him, accepted the illusion, if not for a moment.

The passage quoted above articulates such a separation. The effect of illusion is defined as but an incident albeit a pleasing – properly ‘danger’ implying thus the risks of seduction. Pictures, nevertheless, please the spectator even without this effect. Du Bos’ view of imitation and its relation to truth permeated much of the discourse on the arts. Bernard Lamy, for instance, voiced the same view in his treatise *Treatise of Perspective* (1701):

Tis the Ingenuity of him that imitates, which please; what we see is not real, and Falsehood cannot be agreeable; therefore ‘tis the Likelihood, or the art of representing Truth, which renders Painting so charming; and Painting doth not please, but so far as it savours of this Art. We should take no pleasure in seeing a Picture, in which every thing were represented in its natural bignest; that is to say, if it were a perfect Perspective made according to all the Rules; and if we were so

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442 ‘Je veux bien tomber d’accord de tous ces faits, qui prouvent seulement que les tableaux peuvent bien quelquefois nous faire tomber en illusion, mais non-pas que l’illusion soit la source du plaisir que nous font les imitations Poétiques ou Pittoresques. La preuve est que le plaisir continué quand il n’y a plus de lieu à la surprise. Les tableaux plaisent sans le secours de cette illusion, qui n’est qu’un incident du plaisir qu’ils nous donnent, & même un incident assez rare. Les tableaux plaisent, quoi qu’on ait présent à l’esprit qu’ils ne sont qu’une toile sur laquelle on a placé des couleurs avec art.’ Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques*, 1: 623–24. *Critical Reflections*, 1: 352.

The interest of de Piles for the pictorial aspects of painting and the linking of these aspects to spectatorial attention and pleasure was intertwined with illusion in a manner different from that of Du Bos. Whereas Du Bos separated the spectator’s involvement in the illusion of the representation and the spectator’s awareness of the representational device, de Piles did not make such a distinction; rather, for him the spectator’s acceptance of illusion and the awareness of the means of representational coexisted. These two aspects converged in the concept of artifice, which brought together nature and truth. The artifice of painting encompassed in this sense the artfulness of the representation. As Jacqueline Lichtenstein has argued, de Piles separated the problem of pictorial truth from the metaphysical question of how representation relates to truth; thus, the painter’s preoccupation regarded the issue of how to imitate nature in painting. Conversely, in the encounter with the picture, the spectator was not expected to judge the representation of reality but the reality of representation. Regardless of the genre, truth in painting (le vrai parfait) referred only to the relation between picture and spectator. This very convergence made a painting ‘true painting’, which was capable to surprise, seduce as well as retain the spectator’s visual interest.

Marianne Hobson has offered terminology for addressing this difference through the terms ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ illusion. ‘Soft’, or ‘bimodal’ illusion builds upon the spectator’s acknowledgement that illusion in art is both ‘true’ and ‘false’; to be effective, this kind of imitation presupposes that ‘involvement and awareness coexist within an experience’. ‘Hard’ or ‘bipolar’ illusion, according to Hobson, demands in turn that the spectator ‘makes a mistake about what he sees be it only momentarily’. Hobson identifies the former specifically with ‘rococo’ art and colourist aesthetics as defined by de Piles and the later with developments in French painting in the second half of the eighteenth century.

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444 ‘C’est l’esprit que fait paraître celui qui imite, qui plaît: ce qu’on voit n’est pas veritable, & le mensonge ne peut être agréable, c’est donc vraysemblance qui rend une Peinture charmante, c’est l’art qui sçait représenter la verité. Aussi la Peinture ne plaît qu’autant qu’on apperceust cet art. On ne prendroit aucun palisir à voir un Tableau dans lequel toutes choses seroient représentées dans leur grandeur naturelle, c’est-à-dire qui seroit une parfaite perspective faite selon toutes les regles, si on estoit tellement trompé qu’on ne s’apperceust pas de son erreur, & qu’on ne sentist que c’est une imitation ingenieuse.’ Bernard Lamy, *Traité de perspective, ou sont contenus les fondemens de la peinture* (Paris: Anisson, 1701), 119–20. Trans., *A Treatise of Perspective, or the Art of Representing all manner of Objects as they appear to the Eye in all Situations*, translated by A.F., an officer of His Majesties Ordnance (London, 1702), 93. For an earlier expression of this view in Lamy’s writings, see Bernard Lamy, *Nouvelles réflexions sur l’art poëtique* (Paris: André Pralard, 1668), 81–3.


447 Hobson, *Object of Art*, 47.

448 Hobson, *Object of Art*, 49.
Hobson’s rather sharp division of the two kinds of illusion as two distinct modes practiced in the first and the second half of the eighteenth century may be seen as disregarding the complexities of painting at the time; not the least concerning differences in the practice of different genres and contexts.\textsuperscript{449} Regardless of this objection, the two concepts are useful as tools for understanding of the relationship between illusion and artifice as elements in pictorial imitation.

For de Piles, as Michael Baxandall has observed, control of the spectator’s visual attention to painting was a determining factor for the picture.\textsuperscript{450} Likewise, Baxandall maintains, the primary interest of de Piles with attention was as an effect of the picture at first glance, rather than with the sustained exploration of the painting and did not follow the new thinking about attention.\textsuperscript{451} Indeed, de Piles presented much of his thinking about attention as an effect of the first glance, rather than as an account of the spectator’s sustained exploration of painting. In addition and contrary to Du Bos, de Piles did not attempt to offer any systematic account of attention in relation to the ideas of psychological empiricism. Although de Piles continuously pointed out that the connoisseur approached the painting in order to admire and examine the painter’s artifice, he did not write much about what such an exploration involved. He referred both to ‘the fine choice’ and to ‘all the particulars of painting’. One reason why de Piles did not discuss this issue explicitly might have been that he did not aim at providing rules for the correct looking at pictures. Another reason, I would suggest, was that de Piles did not need to address the issue of spectatorial attention separately as for him, if the painting succeeded in attracting the spectator at first sight, attention would follow of necessity.

Nevertheless, de Piles’ writings demonstrate the awareness of the potential of elements in the paintings to reinforce spectatorial attention. Indications of elements that spectators might consider in the close exploration of painting are scattered throughout his writings. When addressing spectatorial attention to painting de Piles rarely used the concept of ennui. When he did so, however, his use of the concept was close to the meaning of ennui, as Du Bos employed it, even though it did not occupy as central a role in the spectator’s experience as that which Du Bos would grant it later. Ennui, according to de Piles, implied a sense of displeasure and weariness. The use which de Piles made of the term is close to Furetière’s definition of ennui in \textit{Dictionnaire universel}: ‘Boredom/weariness. n. m. Dejection, discord, dullness, displeasure.


\textsuperscript{450} Baxandall, ‘Attention, hand, and brush’, 184. Baxandall identifies a similar preoccupation with attention as a means for guiding the spectator’s experience of painting in William Hogarth’s \textit{Analysis of Beauty}, published 1753. However, Baxandall differentiates Hogarth’s primary interest with attention as an account of the spectator’s sustained exploration of the picture.

\textsuperscript{451} Baxandall, ‘Attention, hand, and brush’, 184.
Boredom/weariness is nothing but a lack of pleasure caused by whatever from the outside that troubles.\textsuperscript{452}

What gives pleasure according to de Piles, in the early \textit{Remarques} (1668):

Bodies of diverse Natures which are aggroup’d (or combin’d together) are agreeable and pleasant to the Sight, &c. As Flowers, Fruits, Animals, Skins, Satins, Velvets, beautiful Flesh, Works of Silver, Armours, Instruments of Musick, Ornaments of Ancient Sacrifices, and many other pleasing Diversities which may present themselves to the Painter’s Imagination. ‘Tis most certain, that the Diversity of Objects recreates the Sight, when they are without Confusion; and when they diminish nothing of the Subject on which we work. Experience teaches us, that the Eye grows weary with poring perpetually on the same thing; not only on Pictures, but even on Nature itself. … Thus to content and fill the Eye of the Understanding, the best Authors have had the Address to sprinkle their Works with pleasing Digression, with which they recreate the Minds of Readers …\textsuperscript{453}

As a remedy against weariness (ennui), attention was seen as prerequisite of pleasure. In order to keep the spectator’s attention, the painter ought to fill the composition with various objects – pleasing diversities. However, in this passage, attention and pleasure relate to elements of subject matter rather than the pictorial effects.

Several remarks relevant to the issue of how the painting sustains attention appear in \textit{Cours de peinture}, particularly in the chapters on clair-obscure and landscape. Here, in the chapter on clair-obscure:

The memory of man is often limited to a few ideas, which he is therefore obliged to repeat. The way for the artist to avoid a tiresome repetition, is, to have recourse to that inexhaustible fountain, nature itself … The harmony of nature, in her colours, arises from objects participating of one another by reflexion […] Variety of tints, very near of the same tone, employ’d in the same figure, and often upon the same part, with moderation, contribute much to harmony. The turn of the parts, and the outlines, which insensibly melt into their grounds, and artfully disappear, bind the objects, and keep them in union; especially as they seem to conduct the eye beyond what it sees, and persuade it, that it sees what it really does not see […] We must avoid as much as possible, the repetition of the same colour in a picture; but ‘tis commendable to approach it by the principles

\textsuperscript{452} ENNUI. s. m. Chagrin, fêcherie, tristesse, deplaisir. L’ennui n’est autre chose, qu’une privation de tout plaisir, causée par je ne sçai quoy de dehors qui importune.’ Furetière, \textit{DU}, 2nd edn, 2: n. pag.

\textsuperscript{453} ‘[Les Corps de diverse nature agroupnez ensemble, sont plaisans à la vue.] Comme les Fleurs, les Fruits, les Animaux, les Peaux, les Satins, les Velours, les belles Chairs, les Argenteries, les Armures, les Instrumens de Musique, les Ornemens des Sacrifices Antiques, & mille autres diversitez agreables, dont le Peintre pourra s’aviser. Il est certain que la diversiteit des objets recree la vue, quand ils sont sans confusion, & qu’ils ne diminuent en rien la force du Sujet que l’on traite. L’experience nous apprend, que l’œil se lasse de voir toujours les mesmes choses, non seulement dans les Tableaux, mais encore dans la Nature … Aussi pour satisfaire l’œil de l’entendement, les meilleurs Auteurs ont eu l’adresse de semer leurs Ouvrages de digressions agreables, pour delasser l’esprit.’ Piles, \textit{L’Art de Peindre}, 139–40 ; \textit{Art of painting}, 193-4.
of union and elegance. … The eye grows tired with viewing the same objects; it loves a well imagined variety; repetition is forfeiting in all things [eg. repetition is the mother of weariness].

The passage is similar to that quoted earlier, from the Remarques. However, although de Piles retained the elements properly linked to the depiction of the subject (in relation to allegory) and emphasises their importance for upholding spectatorial attention, he moved focus to the specifically pictorial elements. In this sense, in this new version, the passage articulated the linking of attention to the pictorial procedure and pleasure more clearly. As repetition causes weariness, de Piles singled out variation and contrast as a remedy, emphasising contrasts between light and shade, reflections of light (coloured), variations of colour (tone and hue; *tone* and *teinte*) as well as variations of line/outline to suggest distinction between sharp and blurred zones. As a remedy against weariness, variation and contrast also become potential stimuli for spectatorial attention.

The linking between boredom and attention becomes more explicit in de Piles’ later writings. In the chapter on landscape, in *Cours*, he pointed out the necessity of attending to the variety of the trees, which was ‘so great, that the painter would be inexcusable not to put in practice upon occasion, especially when he finds it necessary to awaken the spectator’s attention’.

Finally, also in the chapter on landscape, de Piles pointed to the potential of brushstrokes to retain spectatorial attention, stating that ‘repetition of the same touches in the same landscape is as tiresome to the eye, as monotony in discourse is to the ear’. Nevertheless, de Piles’ focus was not on the brushstrokes per se but on the depiction of various tree trunks, bark and foliage.

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454 ‘La memoire de l’homme est souvent bornée à un petit nombre d’idées au delà desquelles il est contraint de répéter. Le Peintre n’a qu’un moyen d’éviter l’ennui de la répétition, c’est d’avoir recours à la source inépuisable de la Nature … L’harmonie de la Nature dans ses couleurs, vient de ce que les objets participent les uns des autres par les-reflets […] La varieté des teintes à peu près dans le même ton, employée sur une même figure, & souvent sur, un même partie avec moderation ne contribue pas peu à l’harmonie. Le tournant des parties & les contours qui se perdent insensiblement dans leur fond, & qui s’y évanouissent avec prudence, lient les objets & les tiennent dans l’union principalement en ce qu’il semble conduire nos yeux au delà de ce qu’ils voient, & les persuader qu’ils voient ce qu’ils ne voient pas […] Il faut éviter autant qu’on le peut de repeter la même couleur dans le même Tableau, mais on peut bien en approcher par principe d’union & d’élegance. … L’œil se lasse des mêmes objets, il aime la varieté bien entendue; & en toutes choses la répetition est la mere du dégoût.’ Piles, *Cours*, 352–5; *Principles*, 214–15.

455 ‘La varieté des formes est même si grande, que le Peintre seroit inexcusable de ne la pas mettre en usage dans l’occasion, principalement lorsqu’il s’apperoit qu’il a besoin de reveiller l’attention du spectateur.’ Piles, *Cours*, 234; *Principles*, 142.

456 ‘… la repetition des mêmes touches dans un même Paisage, cause une espèce d’ennui pour les yeux, comme la monotonic dans un discours pour les oreilles.’ Piles, *Cours*, 233.
Négligence and brushwork

Studies of eighteenth-century French painting frequently point out the positive attitude of elite spectators and theorists, particularly of Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–90), towards the exercise of painterly brushwork – le faire of or the visible marks of the painter’s presence. In the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, appreciation for painterly brushwork was more reserved. Although a taste for the visible marks of the painter was already evident, early eighteenth-century elite spectators appreciated brushwork in the guise of a subtle touch (touche). A similar view is also evident in de Piles’ observations on the pleasure derived from pictorial elements in a landscape painting. Significantly, de Piles employed the word touche, to designate brushstrokes in discussions about the painter’s procedure in the depiction of landscapes, particularly trees. Likewise, examples of free brushwork in French painting of the early eighteenth century typically appear in small-scale landscape painting or in compositions set in a landscape, as for instance in works by Joseph Parroucel (1646–1704) and Antoine Watteau.

The relationship between painterly brushwork and spectatorial pleasure in the eighteenth century was established through association with the term negligence, derived from spezzatura, originally defined in Baltassarre Castiglione’s sixteenth-century treatise Libro del Cortegiano (publ. 1528). Spezzatura denoted a particular ease inherent in the self-presentation of the aristocratic body. Although requiring practice, the effectiveness of such a kind of performance was seen as dependent on its naturalness. It was in this very subtle balance, understandable only for the aristocrat that the pleasing aspects of spezzatura or negligence resided. As Domna Stanton has observed, among others, négligence related to agrément in that the appeal of both was conceived as residing in their (certain) ambiguity and (seeming) imperfection. These ideal of aristocratic performance entered also the discourse on painting. In verse LX of his De arte graphica, Du Fresnoy reiterated the ideal attached to aristocratic performance as seemingly easy and natural in relation to the necessity to make things in a manner that should seem to have been conducted with ease in order to please:

… those things which seem to be slightly touch’d, and perform’d with Ease; because they are ever full of Spirit, and appear to be animated with a kind of

457 Sheriff, Fragonard, 117-52, esp. 120-26.
459 Piles, Cours, 232, 235, 240-1. In ‘Termes de Peinture’, added to the early Conversations, de Piles reserved the word touche as a word to be employed in discussions of landscape painting, ‘Touches d’arbres’, specifically in regard to the depiction of foliage: ‘C’est ainsi que l’on appelle les feuilles des arbres peints. On dit les arbres de ce paysage sont de touches differentes, ou touchez differemment. Ce peintre touche bien un Arbre.’ Piles, Conversations, n. pag.
460 Sohm, Pittorese, explores Marco Boschini employment of this strategy to justify painterly brushwork in seventeenth-century Italian art theory. See also Sohm, Style, esp. 160-4.
461 Stanton, Aristocrat as Art, 130.
Celestial Fire. But we are not able to compass these things with Facility, till we have for a long time weigh’d them in our Judgment, and thoroughly consider’d them: By this means the Painter shall be enabled to conceal the Pains and Study which his Art and Work have cost him, under a pleasing sort of Deceipt: For the greatest Secret which belongs to Art, is to hide it from the Discovery of Spectators.462

In his comment to Du Fresnoy’s verse, de Piles elaborated further the idea of negligence in painting as the artful arrangement of objects to create the effect as if these were the result of natural easiness:

As also those things which seem to be slightly touch’d, and perform’d with Ease, &c. This Ease attracts our Eyes and Spirits so much the more because it is to be presum’d, that a noble Work, which appears so easy to us, is the Product of a skilful Hand which is Master of its Art.463

The impression of such easiness, however, stemmed from a certain unfinished quality of the work – unfinished in the sense of not being overworked. Attention is here directed towards the painter’s means of creating pictorial illusion not because of the difficulty of the technique, but for the pleasure of following the painter’s work and being able to recognise its mastery in its seemingly easy, natural manner. In 1677, de Piles pointed out this aspect of the spectatorial already in his Conversations:

The most finished works … are not always the most pleasing. The paintings artfully touched make the same effect as does a speech in which things not being explained in all their circumstances let the reader judge, who finds pleasure in imagining what the author has had in mind. Minute details in the discourse weaken a thought and devoid it of all passion and pictures in which everything is brought to an extreme finish often fall in coldness and dryness. A good finish requires some negligence in many places, not meticulousness in all parts. It is not necessary that everything appears in a picture but that everything is there without being there.464
De Piles reached to poetry and rhetoric, to explain his point. Also in 1677, Chevalier de Méré expressed a similar view in his *Conversations*. For his purposes, he reached in turn to painting: ‘The excellent painters do not paint everything, they give exercise to the imagination, and leave more to think about than they reveal’.465

Krzysztof Pomian has identified a difference between looking at a painting in order to establish its author and looking at a painting in order to make judgement that ‘weights up its beauties and imperfections’.466 When looking at painting with the first object in view, according to Pomian, the spectator’s gaze ‘switches from the canvas to the painter, or more accurately to the workmanship behind the end result, to ‘the touch and the manner’. Its meaning becomes less important than its substance, and the *esprit* which presided over its creation surrenders its pre-eminence to the artist’s dexterity’.467 Considering the views of de Piles and Méré with Pomian’s remark in mind, a junction becomes evident between the two ways of looking at paintings that he identifies; or else, the way of looking at paintings, suggested by de Piles and Méré does not seem to fit in either.

The greatest value of the paintings of ‘excellent painters’ (according to Méré) or ‘the paintings carefully touched’ (according to de Piles), just as the value of social performance, resided in that they stimulated the spectator’s imagination by suggestion and hence opened for the spectator’s participation in the performance of the painter or the aristocrat. Ultimately, when addressing the spectator, such paintings, addressed also the spectator’s self-love. It was neither the way of looking at paintings of the connoisseur, which Pomian had in mind, nor that of the *savant* with taste for Poussin’s paintings, as suggested by Félibien. As Mary Sheriff has put it: ‘In allowing the viewer to participate in the painting, the artist emulated the courtier who seduced his audience by appealing to its vanity’.468 The reward such paintings promised to the spectator was pleasure.

finir toutes choses, tombent souvent dans la froideur & dans la secheresse. Le beau fini demande de la negligence en bien des endroits, & non pas une exacte recherche dans toutes les parties. Il ne faut pas que tout paroisse dans les Tableaux, mais que tout y soit sans y estre.’
Piles, *Conversations*, 69–70.


Artifice and imagination

Interplay between distinctness and ambiguity

Illusion demands subordination of the detail to the whole. At the same time, illusion demands distinctness, as opposed to ambiguity. However, as shown, ambiguity, or moderate lack of clarity, was one of several aspects relevant to elite spectators contemporary to Largillierre.

At the initial stage of spectatorial experience, elements in the paintings executed in a higher degree of formal definition serve as a visual focus and, ideally, attract the spectator’s attention. Such elements offer the possibility of an immediate, effortless recognition of the main subject of representation. In portrait painting, that is the represented sitter – the figure, the hands and particularly the head. In the portraits of Largillierre, as in most portraits at the time, the faces are depicted in smooth finish. Only seldom, a thicker layer of paint is visible, as for instance in the Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Forest, discussed earlier. Yet, such instances do not disturb the overall smoothness, which characterises the face, their purpose usually being to add to the overall effect of illusion by subtly highlighting the roundness of particular forms.

As the effect of illusion attracts the spectator’s attention, the paintings have the potential to retain attention and encourage close exploration of the picture, as areas with lesser definition add a sense of ambiguity to the process of recognition. This sense of ambiguity has its origin in the tension, which the above-mentioned juxtaposition entails, between the initial promise of effortless recognition and the seeming resistance to such an effortless recognition of the less defined areas in the painting. In the previous chapter, this tension was in analogy to the effects created by theatrical machines on stage and described as an effect that supports the initial address of the painting designed to induce surprise and attraction. I will now pursue this tension from a different perspective, namely from a view up-close.

The Portrait of Marie-Anne de Mancini, duchess de Bouillon offers a good example of this tension and the resulting interplay (Plate 25). The portrait is a standard size bust portrait. The sitter looks out of the frame and away from the spectator. Her body fills most part of the picture’s lower half. The sitter’s face suggests a sense of overall comfort and dignity. The triangularly shaped composition, which her head and body built, reinforces this impression. The strongly lit figure contrasts against the dark background, which closes the space behind. However, it should be noted that the background seems to have been more spacious originally, before the varnish has darkened. Traces of a heavy green drapery are discernible behind and to the right of the sitter.

The sitter is lavishly dressed in a golden brocade robe with glossy band in pale yellow-green silk and a red silk coat with a pearl-grey band, yet glossier. The elaborate headdress is adorned with a veil (now bare visible due to the
darkening of the varnish), which seems to have covered the back of her head and shoulders. A piece of jewellery, fastened à la mode on the top of the headdress, matches an identical one on her right shoulder and perfects her attire. The hands are not visible and there are no other accessories or symbolic objects to suggest meanings. The sitter’s character appears by means of the pose, the diverted gaze, as well as the artfully arranged attire.

Two focal points capture particularly the spectator’s attention: the face and the body of the sitter. The sitter’s facial features, engrossed in a stream of cold light, are articulated clearly. The face sustains hence recognition at first glance and from distance. The strong contrast between the bright skin and the dark background apparently reinforces this effect. The sitter’s body, on the other hand, or rather her dress and her décolleté, unsettles the spectator’s recognition from distance. Whereas the spectator is in no doubt of the object of representation at first glance (and from distance), the depiction of details implies uncertainty. In a manner similar to the effects of ambiguously defined spatial relationships in portraits discussed in the previous chapter, the sitter’s body, insists on capturing the attention of the spectator and sets the spectator in motion.

From up-close, the details take hold of the whole. On one level, ambiguity is sustained by the variety of colours in the depiction of the dress: vermillion and crimson lake, yellow and red ochre, green-blue as well as highlights applied in thick white and ochre. Ambiguity coupled with variety takes over in this sense the distinctness of the face. However, the spectator’s recognition is never fully challenged. As Michael Podro has pointed out, ambiguity in representational painting operates on the border between recognition and non-recognition but never crosses it. 469 Such is likewise the case in the Portrait of Marie-Anne de Mancini.

The interplay between distinctness and ambiguity in the portrait is reinforced additionally by means of contrasts. The apparent tranquillity of the depicted face contrasts against the clothes, depicted as though in motion. From up-close the face seems as if stepping back, away from the dynamic play of contrasts in which the various elements in the depiction of the body seem to be involved. On an ontological level, this would imply that the face recedes into the picture plane, into the fictive space of the picture. The sitter’s body, on the other hand, remains visually on the surface.

Speaking details: texture, facture, gesture

In his study Shadows of Enlightenment, Michael Baxandall offers a detailed description of Largillierre’s and Rigaud’s pictorial procedure, as seen in two portraits – Rigaud’s Portrait of Gaspard de Gueidan Playing the Musette (1738, Musée

469 Podro, Depiction, 23.
Granet, Aix-en-Provence) and Largillierre’s *Portrait of a Young Nobleman in a Hunting Dress* (Plate 19):

Part of the decency of these portraits is that paint and sitter are treated in the same manner. Paint can pose as being representational; even pose as being illusive, while holding back from fully being either. … The distinct reality of the pigment as pigment is sustained in lively tension with what is only a performance of illusionism, fine fabrics and glossy leaves being conspicuously paint: perception flickers between paint and painted. […] these pictures are entertainments and are still very enjoyable, but their representation of optical facts is a representation of the pictorial representation of optical facts. […] such pictures, being representations of painting, are committed to testing our perceptual tolerances. They are partly about what can be got away with, deploying paint that has a partly independent agenda to do with being paint. […] Perceptual tolerance is tested by first alerting us to light with these cues, isolating them partly by differentiating their levels of pictorial specificity or styles of detail, and then denying any systematic consistency among them. Pressure is put on perceptual systematicity which is replaced by a marvellous balancing of diverse pictorial idioms.470

Baxandall’s analysis is sensitive to the ‘artificiality’ of the representations and its specificity. These portraits did not engage with the depiction of optical facts; if they did so, it was but on a level of suggestion, not as optical facts but as the potential appearances of such facts. For all its lucidity and depth of insight, however, analysis stops short of explanation. What was the function of this ‘lively tension’, sustained by paint posing as being now representational now illusive? Why test the spectator’s perceptual tolerance?

Turning once again to Tocqué’s lecture, another passage shows the importance attached to the rendering of details in portrait painting. Apparently following de Piles, Tocqué stressed the significance of the overall composition and the effect of *le tout ensemble*. Ha asserted that since most of the public was not acquainted with ‘the beauties of the detail’, if the principal object (in this case the figure/the sitter) did not succeed in calling upon the spectator’s attention, the details would be useless, no matter how well painted.471 The effect of *le tout ensemble* was also a necessary condition for the experience of the ‘enlightened amateur’, as an amateur would not take an interest in a portrait of an unknown sitter, unless it captured attention through its pictorial qualities – through a composition that ‘strikes’ and details that ‘arrest’.472 Likewise, this remark points to the significance attached to the knowledge of the sitter’s


472 ‘L’amateur éclairé qui ne connoist pas toujours ceux que vous avez peint fera peu de cas de vos tableaux, si la composition ne le frappe, et si les details ne l’arretent.’ Tocqué, ‘Réflexions’, 32.
identity for sustaining the spectator’s interest in the portrait. As a portrait painter, Tocqué was certainly aware of this.

Tocqué’s remark suggests an appreciation for the skilful rendering of details in a manner that offers an unambiguous, transparent view of the represented world. Such is the implication of his view that regardless of kind – ‘furniture, fabric, embroidery or lace’ – no detail escapes the eye of the ‘enlightened amateur’ who demands that ‘everything should respond to his idea of the objects’. Interpreting Tocqué’s words in such a manner may be to push the interpretation too hard. Yet, his approach to the rendering of details in many of his portraits offers support for such an observation.

In the Portrait of Madame Dangé Tying Knots (Plate 26), for instance, Tocqué has depicted all details with minute attention, leaving no ambiguities. Although the rendering of details respects their gradual recession in space, their pictorial distinctness remains. The only instance in the painting that appears ambiguously and also ostensibly points to the medium is the part of the sitter’s drapery in the foreground; a device referred to as repoussoir, the purpose of which was to direct the spectator’s eyes into the pictorial space.

The gesture of demonstration in painting, as defined by Claude Gandelman, is an ‘appeal signal’; it appeals to the spectator to focus his or her attention on a particular object or a detail inside the representation. I borrow Gandelman’s term at its most general, to indicate a dimension of the tension between distinctness and ambiguity, discussed earlier, to analyse here in terms of texture and facture. I conceive of this dimension as a ‘conversational’ gesture. With the term texture, I designate here the mimetic materiality of the depicted objects, that is, for instance, when a depicted lace looks like a ‘real’ lace. With the term facture, I designate the visibility of the pictorial procedure. The visibility of the pictorial procedure – facture – can be seen in this sense as functioning as a gesture of demonstration in a derived sense.

Although it engages in a performance of illusionism, Tocqué’s Portrait of Madame Dangé Tying Knots does not really engage in a performance of the kind described by Baxandall in his account of the pictorial procedure of Rigaud and Largillierre. Rather, in Tocqué’s portrait facture (in the foreground) has the function of directing the spectator’s gaze away from itself, towards the middle ground of the painting, where the depictive procedure can be described as sustaining the illusion of texture: ‘furniture, fabric, embroidery or lace’. In Largillierre’s Portrait of Marie-Anne de Mancini (Plate 25), on the other hand,

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473 ‘Soit meubles, etoффes, broderies, dentelles, rien ne lui echappe, il veut que tout reponde à l’idée qu’il a des choses.’ Tocqué, ‘Réflexions’, 32.

474 Claude Gandelman, Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 14. Gandelman identifies five different functions of the gesture. Two illocutionary – distancing and indexing; two perlocutionary – gaze directing and ideological directing; and yet another perlocutionary function – emphasising, which is a subdivision of the ideological directing. Gandelman, Reading Pictures, 21–7.

facture may point away, towards something else in the painting but also towards itself. The multiplicity of juxtapositions of elements showing either texture or facture in various degrees and on various levels in the pictorial space, including elements in-between, suggest a variety of possibilities that properly ‘entertain’ the spectator’s attention.

The juxtaposition of more clearly defined parts to in lesser definition, sustains the interplay between ambiguity and distinctness. This juxtaposition also structures the spectator’s recognition of the represented world. Not unlike the way in which a refined conversation might have evolved in the late seventeenth or the early eighteenth century, the process of spectatorial experience of portrait paintings in a pictorial idiom such as Largillierre’s could evolve freely and yet adhere to pictorial conventions.

Touching with the eye

Traditionally, hands have been granted particular importance in portrait painting, both for their expressiveness when assuming various rhetorical gestures and for the difficulty of depicting hands that, if mastered, was regarded highly. In 1768, however, Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens remarked in his *Examen critique des différentes écoles de Peinture* that the hands in portraits by Largillierre were drawn with lesser precision and elegance than those by Rigaud. Indeed, a comparison of two studies of hands (Plates 27–28) shows a difference between Rigaud’s and Largillierre’s painterly approaches that might explain the remark of Boyer d’Argens and his preference for Rigaud’s manner of depicting hands.

Rigaud’s and Largillierre’s studies of hands might have been painted to show to commissioners a variety of choices for the depiction of hands. From a marketing point of view, the repetition of distinctive motifs such as hands might be seen as a kind of ‘branding’, which enables pictures to be identified with a particular name amongst the various, competing producers of similar kinds of work. The depicted hands in both studies have been identified in specific portraits.

A comparison between the two studies of hands allows the identification of a range of differences in the manner, the disposition and the proportions. The hands in Rigaud’s study are depicted in overtly elegant configurations. Rather than in movement, the hands rest on something. They appear calm. In contrast, the hands in Largillierre’s study seem more active. Although, most of the

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476 Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d’Argens, *Examen critique des différentes écoles de peinture* [1768] (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1972), 222: ‘Il est vrai qu’il était incorrect quelquefois, & que ses mains n’étoient point dessinées avec la même précision, & la même élegance que celles de Rigaud.’


478 Cayeux, ‘Rigaud et Largillierre, peintres de mains’.
depicted hands in both studies are involved in touching different objects, the hands in Largillierre’s study suggest a more palpable contact with the objects they hold or touch.

Touch, in the meaning of the spectator actually touching, would destroy illusion in painting. Touch, however, suggested in the painting, may also reinforce the sense of illusion and texture as it invokes the sense of touching. Attending to painting in terms of touch implies in this sense the acknowledgement of the materiality of the painting as a bearer of meanings. One way to suggest the sense of touch in painting is by sustaining illusionism to the point of naturalism. Joseph Koerner, for instance, has observed that Dürer, in his Self-Portrait (1500, Alte Pinakothek, Münich), ‘allows his own hand to manipulate the fur, thereby fulfilling the impulse of a viewer who, astonished by the picture’s naturalism, might wish to reach out and touch the represented object’. Koerner maintains further that Dürer’s gesture ‘augmenting our sense of sight with a vision of touch, celebrates the magical presence or quiddity of the painted world.’ Likewise, touch can be suggested by the materiality of the paint, embodied in brushstrokes or other visible painterly marks. Touch in this sense enacts the painter’s gesture creating the painting. It may also enact the touch of the sitter. Both these effects can be seen as embodied in Largillierre’s Study of Hands.

The Portrait of a Woman, perhaps Anne Thérèse de Marquenat de Courcelles (Plate 29), offers another prominent example of such an embodiment. From up close, in the middle of the portrait’s composition, the spectator encounters a representation that ostensibly oscillates between illusion and materiality, texture and facture. An attempt to apply the metaphor of gesture confirms, once again, the dynamics of similar juxtapositions and their potential to sustain spectatorial attention with possibilities to attend to both illusion and artifice. The painter’s handling of matter – represented (fabrics) and representing (paint), texture and facture – are properly embodied in the sitter’s hand holding the drapery that surrounds her body. The hand seems almost as if it sinks in the paint (the material transformations of the painting with time taken into account).

The meaning of the word touch (toucher) as defined in late seventeenth-century dictionaries was complex. Furetière, for instance, singled out thirteen distinct meanings of the word toucher (a noun and a verb). In an analysis of Furetière’s definition, Lucile Gaudin-Bordes has identified four main

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480 Koerner calls this gesture ‘a little adventure of the represented body into the material of its world’, Koerner, Moment of Self-Portraiture, 163.
481 See Lajer-Burcharth, ‘Pompadour’s Touch’.
482 For an analysis of the response to visual art works as an embodied experience in which the representational simulation of actions, emotions and corporeal sensation interact and the relation of such response to neutral processes in the brain, see David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, ‘Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience’, Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11:5, (2007), 198–203.
connotations. Firstly, to touch is also to be touched. In this sense, touch implies reciprocity, between the act of touching and the touch. Secondly, touch involves the sense of touch (touching by the hand or the finger) and the sense of sight, in the meaning of coming into contact, ‘touching’, through the eyes. The master trope for this second meaning is the Doubting Thomas, who has to touch in order to believe in what he has touched/seen. Thirdly, touch implies a distinction: touch divides and transforms in a direct sense, for instance dividing the sacred from the profane, dividing one from another. Finally, touch implies a distinction, or contamination in a figural sense, for instance in the meaning of being touched, the heart or the soul being touched by an emotion. Gaudin-Bordes relates this fourth sense of the word touch to the only meaning of the word that Furetière explicitly links to the arts: the touch of the lute-player on the cords, the touch of the artist, as well as the poet.

Turning once again to the Portrait of a Woman, perhaps Anne Thérèse de Marquenat, it is possible to distinguish several meanings that might have been suggested in the gesture of touching. First, the conventional meaning attached to touch embodied in painting as the painter’s touch. In addition, also conventionally, albeit only implicit in Furetière’s definition: the sitter’s gesture might be seen as connoting devotion, the gesture of touching, or rather the gesture of bringing one’s hand to the heart, being a traditional gesture of devotion. However, the sitter in the Portrait of Anne Thérèse de Marquenat does not designate her heart. She conducts the gesture with her left hand instead. The difference is evident in comparison to Mignard’s portrait of Madame de Maintenon, discussed earlier. In this sense, it would be plausible to assume that the gesture is one of affection, rather than devotion.

Further, in relation to the previous meaning, the gesture in this portrait might be seen as also suggesting the idea of intimacy – symbolically, in the representation, as well as actually, in the act ofspectatorial experience. The size of the portrait and its probable display within a domestic and thus a less formal setting, would have allowed the spectator to approach the picture at ease. In this respect, yet another meaning can be advanced. As the gesture, seen as embodying touch, might inspire the spectator to approach, similarly the

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484 Gaudin-Bordes, ‘Peindre le toucher’, 94; the episode is recounted in the John 20: 24–9.
486 The possibility that the portrait might have been seen as a mirror image and hence as the sitter enacting a gesture of devotion as well as reinforcing the sense of touch in the spectatorial experience is intriguing but, to my mind, not plausible. I will therefore not pursue it further.
representation at large might act as a reminder of the necessity to respect the proper distance in society.487

The interplay between the urge to approach the painting, which the embodiment of the sense of touch might inspire and the reminder of the necessity of keeping the right distance from the portrait/the represented subject, socially sanctioned but also inherent, as it were in the pictorial procedure is evident is many portraits by Largillierre. Depending on the display of the portraits, their type and size, as well as the occasion of viewing, this interplay might take different avenues.

The Portrait of Louis-Urbain Le Peletier (Plate 30) and the Portrait of a Man, perhaps Jacques de Laage (Plate 31), for instance, offer examples in which the sitter is depicted actively using his or her hand, hence potentially suggesting the sense of touch. Their representational function is emphasised in the poses, the settings, the clothes as well as the size of the portraits.488 Although not necessarily commissioned for display in a public context, the portraits suggest a different display also in a domestic setting, in spaces accessible to visitors. In both portraits, the gesture embodying touch can inspire the spectator to approach not only by the illusionistic rendering of the act of holding/touching but also by the apparent corporeality/tactility of the representation. In the Portrait of Louis-Urbain Le Peletier, the sitter’s pose, one hand in an eloquent gesture thus conventionally signalling a honnête homme in the midst of conversation evokes an invitation to approach.489 This invitation is further emphasised by the sense of touch is embodied in the sitter’s left hand crumpling the gloves and reinforced additionally in the rendering of the robe, which likewise reiterates the effect of this gesture. In the Portrait of Jacques de Laage, this effect is suggested less ostensibly but not the less effectively. The impulse to approach is sustained by the depiction of the folded letter, which the sitter holds in his left hand, conspicuously pressing it with his thumb as if to call attention to it. Simultaneously, the authority inherent in both portraits and their probable display in a formal setting and above eye level sets limits to the spectator’s possibility to approach. What remains in such a spectatorial situation is the urge to come closer; its fulfilment is completed in the painting in the sense of the spectator touching with the eyes the sitter’s act of touching with the hand.

In the Portrait of a Woman, perhaps Anne Thérèse de Marquenat, the urge to approach the painting entailed by the embodied effect of touch and the


488 A number of Largillierre’s portraits reiterate elements of these portrait types in various constellations, as for instance in the Portrait of an Alderman (c. 1703, The Detroit Institute of the Arts); See Rosenfeld, Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, esp. cat. no. 28, 166–7, ill.

corresponding need to respect the proper distance in society create an unsettling spectatorial experience, emotionally and bodily. Due to the sense of intimacy, which the half-length format and the gesture of the sitter’s hand suggest, the impact of this impression might have been greater here, than it was in the case of the two portraits discussed above. From up close – closer than would be possible had the portrait been larger or of a more official type – the painter’s presence, manifest in the depiction of fabrics, might take over the spectator’s attention. Simultaneously, the illusionistically rendered details (hand, face, lace) continue to remind of the depicted sitter’s presence and hence of the need to keep a proper distance. The painter’s touch and the sitter’s touch coexist even at the closest view. Be it may for a moment, before stepping back, the spectator might take pleasure both in the sense of touching with the painter’s hand and in the sense of touching with his/her eyes the sitter’s act of touching with the hand.

Engaging imagination

The spectatorial situation described above suggests an experience in which involvement with the illusion in the painting and awareness of the pictorial procedure of the painting sustain both emotional and bodily movement. Such a spectatorial experience might be seen as engaging the spectator’s sensibility because it relates to sensory experiences – seeing but also touching a particular object; feeling its texture; coming close (perhaps too close) to a person – and hence engages the body equally as it engages the mind. This idea would have been conceivable by the turn of the eighteenth century as well. According to Furetière’s definition, sensibility was properly the ability of the senses to receive impressions from objects. Moreover, sensibility related both to the body and to the mind.

The final analysis in this chapter aims to show how this twofold condition of the spectatorial experience – emotional and bodily – might be understood as engaging the spectator’s imagination.

Largillierre’s Portrait of a Family is a conventional, three-quarter-length family portrait of a couple and their child (Plate 32). The figures are depicted in

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490 On the potential of half-length single-person images to suggest various emotions and hence influence spectatorial response, see Percival, *Fragonard and the Fantasy Figure*, esp. Ch. 2.


492 Sensibility, by the turn of the eighteenth century, was conceived of as relating primarily to the body; imagination, in turn, was understood as a faculty of the mind. See Becq, *Genèse de l’esthétique française*, 115–44.

493 The portrait has been dated differently. Rosenfeld, ‘Largillierre: problèmes de méthodologie’, 72, suggests a date about 1730. In contrast, Lastic and Brême maintain a date about 1715–1720. Brême, ‘Nicolas de Largillierre’, 46–7; Brême, *Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle*, 128; See
informal poses, in a seemingly informal atmosphere outdoors – the husband sitting on the left, his spouse on the right, their daughter standing in the middle, singing. Although vague, the text on the music sheet is discernible. It has been transcribed accordingly: 'love without pain and pleasure …' (l’Amour sans peine et sans plaisir). The identity of the sitters is unknown. The depiction of the husband as hunter, his wife in an elegant dress, their daughter singing, music sheet in her hand, places the sitters in the context of elite outdoor leisure life and emphasises their social standing. Likewise, the compositional elaboration and the size of the portrait suggest that the sitters were sufficiently affluent, or perhaps acquainted with the painter.

Family portraits in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century served as a sign of social status. As such, they adapted conventions employed in pendants, emphasising martial propriety and adherence to ‘normative gendered characteristic’. The hierarchy of patriarchal order was sustained by various compositional means, in the juxtaposition of poses, attributes and clothing. Typically, the male sitters in family portraits were represented as public figures, emphasising their social position or occupation. Representations of their female counterparts emphasised in turn virtues associated with ideals of femininity and


This portrait occupies a central position in Largillierre’s œuvre, equal to that of the Portrait of Louis XIV (1702, Musée du Louvre, Paris) in the œuvre of Hyacinthe Rigaud, and the portrait of Portrait of the lute player Mouton (1696, Musée du Louvre, Paris) in that of François de Troy. Brême, François de Troy, 37f. Paris. According to Brême, these portraits have been singled out as archetypal works and thus served to sustain a particular image of these painters: Rigaud as the painter of the court; de Troy as the painter of the artists; Largillierre as the painter of the wealthy upwardly middle class. This traditional view was challenged in 1981, when Lastic published Largillierre’s marriage contract, will and inventory. Lastic pointed out that the idea that the commissioners of Largillierre and Rigaud belonged to different social spheres originates in Dézallier d’Argenville, who claimed in his Abrégé that Largillierre had told him in person, that he preferred working for ‘the public’ rather than for the court because private commissioners ‘required less effort and payment was quicker’ (Supplement, 3: 298); Lastic, ‘Documents notariés inédits’, 2. See also Brême, Largillierre, peintre du Grand Siècle, 43.

The song has not been published and its author has remained unidentified; A. de Mirimonde, ‘Musiciens isolés et portraits de l’école française du XVIIIe siècle dans les collections nationales’, Revue du Louvre 5 (1966), 145. The transcription leaves some doubt. Rather than l’Amour sans peine et sans plaisir, it is more likely that it should be l’Amour sans peine est sans plaisir (‘Love without pain is without pleasure’).

It has been suggested that the portrait represents Largillierre and his family; Georges de Lastic has in turn argued that it represents the engraver François Chéreau and his family; Georges de Lastic, ‘Portraits d’artistes de Largillierre’, Connaissance des Arts 9 (1979), 22. See also Schnapper, ‘Position of the portrait in France’, 66. See also La Collection La Caze, CD-ROM, complete catalogue, 595.

Schnapper, ‘Position of the portrait in France’, 60.

motherhood. The male figures usually address the spectator; the female sitters turn their gaze towards their husbands. 499

Family portraits could also serve as a record of the family union and celebration of affection. Orest Ranum has argued that French early-eighteenth-century family portraits in outdoor settings, such as Largillierre’s Portrait of a Family, both alluded to the bucolic atmosphere in which shepherds and shepherdesses ‘made both love and music’ and exemplified, at the same time a ‘domestication of natural spaces’. 500 Further, adopting conventions from still-life painting such portraits ‘evoked an atmosphere of love and friendship in marriage’. 501 Hence, the flowers on the daughter’s head signal Flora and spring, perhaps youth and the freshness of virginity. The music almost sacralises the space separating the three persons, linking them in harmony. 502

As suggested by Ranum, Largillierre’s Portrait of a Family was intended most likely as a demonstration and celebration of the family union. However, it did so in a complex manner, by fully engaging the spectator’s imagination. At first sight, the portrait reiterates the conventions for figuring the distinct roles of husband and wife but sets them in interplay, adding ambiguities that sustain attention in a subtle manner. 503 Whereas the male figure dominates the left-hand side of the composition and hence conventionally signals greater prominence, the right-hand side of the painting occupied by the two female sitters attracts attention at first sight by means of colour and contrasts. The intense hues in crimson red and lake in the wife’s dress act as a focal point, which is further emphasised by the blue ribbon, loosely hanging from her dress and reinforced by means of contrast against the white silk lining and the background. 504 The background in dark greens makes the wife’s face stand out in sharp outline. Yellow is applied in the golden embroidery on the daughter’s dress. 505 The juxtaposition of intense colours in this part of the picture brings to mind de Piles’ maxim on the necessity of a certain exaggeration in the application of colours to sustain the portrait’s desired effect: ‘If you would have your work, therefore, to produce a good effect in the place where ‘tis to hang, both the colours and lights must be a little loaded [i.e. exaggerated], but learnedly, and

503  Recent studies of the ways in which social roles were figured in portraiture have called attention to their ambiguities. See e.g. Retford, Art of Domestic Life and Norlander Eliasson, Portraiture and Social Identity.
504  On the role of red colour in portraits by Largillierre from the perspective of perceptual psychology, see MacGregor, ‘Le Portrait de gentilhomme de Largillierre’, 35–6.
505  Primary colours in the sitters’ clothes serve frequently as a visual focus against backgrounds in broken colours. See Martin Kemp, The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990).
with discretion.'

In contrast, the colour scheme of the left-hand side of the portrait is more restrained. Continuity of tone, rather than contrast, dominates: greys in the velvet coat and the *allongé* wig of the depicted man and highlights in white in the open collar and the sleeves of the shirt. The difference between the two parts of the portrait demonstrates how symbolical signification and visual impact work together to create meanings on different levels.

The interplay between various levels of meanings is skilfully arranged by means of light. The light rotates, as it were, slowly towards the centre of the composition. The depicted light falls on the husband’s face from the left but reaches the faces of daughter and wife frontally. A comparable adjustment of the conditions of light can be observed in Rigaud’s *Portrait of the Léonard Family* (Plate 33). Rigaud employs light and shade as a means of contrasting the figure of husband with the figures of wife and child, while simultaneously balancing the composition and directing the spectator’s visual focus towards the centre of the canvas. As seen above, in Largillierre’s *Portrait of a Family*, the first objective is achieved mainly by means of contrast in the colour scheme. The employment of light is used, as in Rigaud’s portrait of *the Léonard Family*, to sustain a consistent yet dynamic relationship between the figures.

In Largillierre’s *Portrait of a Family*, a continuous movement of the spectator’s eye is suggested in the half circle created by the figures though their distribution in the pictorial space. The arrangement of the sitter’s hands entails a further spur for such a movement of the eye. This movement may start from the husband’s right hand, conspicuously hidden in the shadow, yet accentuated by the white sleeve and the dog peeking from behind. The movement might continue towards the girl’s gesturing hand and further towards the hand holding the sheet of music, the wife’s right hand and finally, at picture’s border, to the wife’s left hand, resting steadily. However, while following this movement, as suggested by the hands, the spectator might also take a detour through the discovery of the husband’s left hand, depicted in shadow. Whereas less prominent at first sight, due to the subdued colour scale, in a sustained viewing and already from distance, the husband’s figure entails distinct visual interest through the depiction of the hands. The conventional prominence of the depicted husband is in this sense reinstated.

On yet another level and further into the process of viewing, the portrait might be seen as invoking the senses, most notably the sense of hearing, sight and touch. The inclusion of music in the portrait might be seen as indicating hearing. The sense of sight, in turn, might be seen as embodied in the gaze of the husband – the only figure in the portrait that addresses the spectator directly. Likewise, the dog, or rather the dog’s eye peeking from behind,
conspicuously focused by means of in-picture light in the midst of a deep shadow, reiterates the evocation of sight. Finally, the figure of the wife carries the evocation of touch. Her hands are depicted resting, yet as if grasping the fabrics. The depiction of her right arm particularly is reminiscent of that in the *Portrait of a Woman*, perhaps Anne Thérèse de Marquenat, discussed earlier.

By invoking the senses pictorially, Largillierre’s *Portrait of a Family* also engages the spectator’s imagination. Imagination in the early eighteenth century was conceived in relation to the experience of material objects. Furetière, for instance, defined imagination as ‘faculty of the soul to conceive objects in the mind’, which differs from the intellect in that it presupposes that the things imagined have been experienced, sensed in their corporeality. In this sense, imagination was seen as requiring experience of material objects.

Similarly, Largillierre’s *Portrait of Family* first heightens the spectator’s sensibility by offering impressions of embodied experiences of sight, hearing and touch. The spectator returns the husband’s gaze; ‘hears’ the music, which in this case might have been ‘read’ likewise, hence opening for a more complete experience; ‘touch’ with the eyes, by seeing the wife’s hands acting. In this way, the portrait engages the spectator’s imagination.

Although following the rules of propriety the figures do not engage directly with each other as seen for instance in Rigaud’s portrait of the Léonard family – or perhaps because they do not do so precisely – the act of touch is a likely route towards which the spectator might have directed his or her imagination. Moreover, early eighteenth-century spectators would have recognised the linking of touch to affection as seen in contemporary prints, for instance those of Antoine Trouvain (1656–1708) and Nicolas Arnoult (16...–17...). In such representations, touch was invariably coupled with affection and the promise of love and friendship, often put in explicit contrast to falsity and deception.

The celebration of the union of love and martial harmony in Largillierre’s *Portrait of Family* is figured as a visual narrative. Rather than by traditional symbols, this narrative is performed by pictorial means. To infer the meaning of the painting, the spectator has to engage in this performance. Rather than ‘reading’ meaning in the sense of interpreting conventional signifiers, the spectator is encouraged to experience meaning, to look actively and feel, as well as move – the eyes but also the body – in order to be moved. The sense of pleasure is hence encouraged throughout the spectatorial experience. In this process, the spectator re-enacts the act of the painter and shares the painter’s creative pleasure. In also in this way that the spectator, enthused by the painter’s enthusiasm, reaches the state of being able to grasp the sublime.

508 ‘IMAGINATION. s. f. Puissance, faculté de l’ame pour concevoir les choses, & s’en former une idée. … L’intelligence, c’est la perception qu’a nôtre ame sans aucune image corporelle. Mais le propre de l’imagina­tion est de faire concevoir les objets sous des images corporelles, tracées dans le cerveau. Elle n’a donc pour objet que les choses sensibles & corporelles.’ Furetière, *DU*, 2nd ed., 2: n. pag.
Final discussion and conclusions

Painting, pleasure and the eye

In the eight edition of his *Description de la ville de Paris*, published in 1725, Germain Brice described Largillierre’s house in the following manner: ‘Nicolas de Largillierre, an excellent painter and of great reputation, lives on rue Geoffroy l’Angevin … Few years ago, he built himself a comfortable house where the amateurs of painting come to see his works, which give them very great satisfaction.’

Largillierre, then almost seventy years old, was at the height of his reputation, which most likely explains why Brice speaks of a painter whose house the amateurs visited to see his works and to be pleased by them rather than specifically designating Largillierre as a portrait painter. The passage nevertheless suggests that portrait painting enjoyed the esteem of the amateurs, when read in the context of a period in which looking at paintings and particularly portrait paintings was an integral part of aristocratic leisurely activities as well as served as occasion to engage in a performance which, if acted out well was conceived as a sign of social distinction. Likewise in the art theory by the turn of the eighteenth century, notably through Roger de Piles, painting was understood as essentially visual art, the purpose of which was to recreated appearances in its own, properly pictorial means and hence to please the eyes.

The present study has explored some of the ways in which the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye was enacted in portrait paintings by Largillierre and spectatorship with taste for colour by the turn of the eighteenth century. The spectator addressed in the study has been modelled upon an elite audience that shared a common discourse anchored in the aristocratic ideals of *bonnêteté*. Hence, the spectator has been conceived as active, prepared to approach the paintings and to engage in their performance. In doing so, the spectator attends to their mimetic as well as to their material aspects, to the object (or subject) of the representation as well as to its process; looks for the various levels of meaning that such an exploration might produce for the purpose of spectatorial pleasure.

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Pictorial effectiveness and sites of tension

Illusion in early eighteenth-century French colourist theory was defined as l’effet du vrai, the effect of pictorial truth. Neither ideal nor as observed in nature, the truth of painting was particular to the art – a properly pictorial effect.

Drawing on the theory of Roger de Piles, in the present study pictorial effectiveness has been understood as the capacity of the painted image to attract and engage the spectator in a dynamic experience by means of its pictorial aspects and depictive procedure. The analyses have allowed the tracing of various elements in the paintings and aspects of their experience in relation to the idea of painting as an art of pleasing the eye. These aspects are not always immediately referential and the spectatorial response they elicit may exceed the possibilities of a straightforward verbal articulation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these pictorial aspects depends on the overall referentiality of the image.

The portraits address the spectator both through elements of accomplished illusionism and through elements that may appear ambiguously. These elements have the potential to influence the spectator’s response by entailing uncertainty to recognition. They may relate to the depiction of pictorial space, the sitter’s pose, the clothes, the accessories and the surrounding, the later particularly in landscape settings. Elements of this kind work on the border between involvement and awareness and call attention to the origin of the represented world in the representational.

As these elements originate in the tension between the promise of effortless recognition inherent in the immediate effect of illusion and the seeming resistance to such an effortless recognition, they can be defined as sites of tension. In the process of analysis, several sites of tension have been identified. In outline, they might be defined as follows:

Correctness and contrivance. The tension between correctness and contrivance relates to imitation conceived as artful and hence regards the relationship between perceived correctness in the proportions of the human body and perceived contrivance, to suggest an effect of seeming naturalness or to sustain illusion following the model of centralised focus of vision as suggested by the use of a convex mirror.

Depth and surface. The tension between depth and surface relates to the experience of pictorial space and the spatial relationships between the material objects and bodies as well as the ‘immaterial’ or atmospheric elements, such as skies and clouds. Degrees of distinction in the definition of spatial relationship can support the experience of depth in the pictorial space but can also sustain uncertainties in the recognition of spatial relationships. It involves also depth and surface, in the sense of the depicted space but also in the sense of the pictorial device, by
calling attention to the process of structuring the pictorial space, equivalent to the spectator's recognition. Indistinct definitions of pictorial space have the potential to influence the spectator's movements and suggest the impulse to approach the painting.

**Distinctness and ambiguity.** The tension between distinctness and ambiguity resides at the core of the pictorial effectiveness of the examined paintings. This tension is particularly obvious in the depiction of garments and draperies as well as in the wigs and the surrounding background, particularly in the depiction of foliage and clouds. In the depiction of clothes, most notably in the draperies, the tension between distinctness and ambiguity is enacted in a more complex manner. It relates also to the relative indistinctness of details depicted in shadow. The tension between distinctness and ambiguity engages the spectator's mobility: of the body, as it invites the spectator to move back and forth and of the eye, as the spectator's eye moves about the canvas, flickering between various elements in the picture.

**Texture and facture.** The tension between texture and facture relates closely to the tension between distinctness and ambiguity. It is sustained from up close, as the spectator approaches the painting. Texture and facture, in juxtaposition, may work as 'conversational' gestures by pointing away but also towards themselves and hence directing the spectator's attention to particular details in the paintings. Furthermore, the tension between texture and facture reinforces the spectator's awareness of the pictorial device and the creative presence of the painter.

**Sight and touch.** A tension between sight and touch has been identified in relation to the viewing of hands holding or touching. This tension may suggest an imaginary embodiment of the sitter's touch. It reminds also of the material qualities of colour and its responsiveness to the painter's touch. In relation to the spectator's position in front of the painting, the tension between sight and the sense of touch entails pleasure.

The tensions outlined above follow a sequence in the spectatorial experience only to an extent. It should be emphasised that all the identified tensions need more than a few moments to be perceived. The initial impact of the painting, the moment in which it attracts the spectator, cannot be grasped in a way that would allow analysis. What can be perceived, instead, is the painting's and the spectator's interaction in time. These tensions may have a role as means of attraction as well as maintain the spectator's experience of the paintings. Most notably, they add to the complexity of the process of recognition, hence encourage and structure the
spectator’s attention by directing it towards elements in the painting in ways that require not only movement of the eye but also of the body. The spectator is attracted to come close to the paintings. At the same time, in the viewing from up close, tensions between illusionistically and ambiguously rendered details might set the spectator in a back and forth movement. Likewise, the sense of the represented world beyond the representational device – the sense of illusion – is encouraged equally in the viewing of the paintings from distance and from up close. The spectator’s involvement with illusion in the painting, suggesting the sitter’s presence, on one hand, and the awareness of the depictive procedure, suggesting the painter’s presence, on the other hand, are encouraged at all levels of the experience as well as from various viewing distances. In this sense, Largillierre’s portrait paintings embody pictorial effectiveness through the process of representation but reveal it only in the process of visual experience. Through involvement in the illusion sustained by the paintings combined with awareness of the representational device, the spectator engages his/her senses, imagination and experiences the art of pleasing the eye.

Experiencing meaning with taste for colour

Portraiture is as a social activity. Likewise, by the turn of the eighteenth century, the act of looking at paintings and the ability to discuss them had become a social activity shared by aristocrats and the upwardly mobile strata equally in search for opportunities for the display of taste as a sign of social distinction. Similarly, elements that sustain ambiguities and invite the spectator to participate in the creation of the painting by competing it in the act of viewing offered pleasure corresponding to that of completing the performance of the honnête homme. The profusion of such elements as well as the complexity of the relationship between such elements in the paintings by Largillierre examined shows the relation of his pictorial idiom to these social ideals.

The initial impact of the portraits in the process of the interaction between spectator and painting can be understood in analogy to the situation in which the spectator, similar to a member in a theatrical audience, attends the opening scene of a spectacle. In this sense, the portraits might be seen as having the potential to ‘act’ in a manner similar to that of theatrical machines designed to create a forceful, surprising impact on the spectator, attract interest and induce emotions by their appearance and working.

The sustained experience of painting, in which the spectator approaches, has been conceived in analogy with conversation. Although the portraits examined do not depict talk (as for instance in paintings by Watteau) they can be seen as embodying conversational patterns. The portraits address the spectator not only by means of depicting the sitter turning towards the spectator and reinforcing such a direct address through conventional rhetorical gestures of
the hand, but also by means of their pictorial procedure. Interaction is encouraged at various viewing distances and through various means. The analogy with conversation has been productive as it also reminds that the situation of spectatorial experience of a portrait might be influenced by the social conventions governing social interaction.

For their effects, the sites of tensions outlined above relate to the viewing distance of the spectator. This has raised the issue of the display of the paintings and the implications of display for the spectator’s experience. The display of portraits and the linking of practices of display to the distinct functions of portraits as well as portrait types are essential for the spectator’s experiential possibilities, notably for the possibility to view the paintings from up close. As shown, the display of portraits is important for the experience of the proportions of the depicted figures and the spatial relationship between different elements in the pictures. Assuming a viewing position unlike those entailed by the portrait’s composition could lead to a disadvantageous apprehension of distortions. On the other hand, if skilfully concealed such contrivances could be seen as a mark of the painter’s elevation of mind, embodied in the creative process in a state of enthusiasm. Such was the view of de Piles and he shared it with late seventeenth-century theorists on social comportment and taste.

Elements in Largillierre’s paintings, which have served as examples for the identification of sites of tension, were traced back to eighteenth-century commentaries on the painter’s work. These commentaries praised invariably the painter for his versatility, his mastery of technique and his ability to create illusion. At the same time, Largillierre was also reproached frequently for allowing certain incorrectness in the proportions of the figures and the hands as well as for mannerism. The idea that he painted de pratique, that is to say, from memory rather than from nature, became a commonplace in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this respect, the established at the time comparison his works with portraits by Rigaud, does not seem to have been beneficial. When looked at with the discerning eye of a connoisseur, attending to the process or the hand of the painter in terms of anatomical and perspectival correctness – the correct rendering of proportions and the distribution of objects in the pictorial space according to the laws of linear perspective – many of Largillierre’s portraits might present opportunities for the advancement of criticism. The frequent reiterations of elements in the paintings, typical for the studio-practice of portrait painters, most likely reinforced the sense of nature eluding the painter’s eye, as Dezallier d’Argenville put it.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, when most of these commentaries were written, the practices of elite spectators – amateurs and connoisseurs – were already defined and institutionalised. These practices were also distinguished from those of the curieux. By the turn of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, neither the figure nor the practice of the elite
spectator was clearly defined; rather the amateur shared characteristics with both the connoisseur and the curieux.

Beyond the silent eloquence of colourist painting

Although equipped with knowledge of the proper ways of delivering judgements on paintings as well as technical vocabulary to put their judgments in words, spectators in the early eighteenth century understood the practice of the painter in relation to the effects of the painting, rather than independently. The judgement of the painting was inseparable from its experience. Such an understanding of the practice of elite spectatorship is inherent in colourist art theory by the turn of the eighteenth century. As conceived by de Piles, painting as an art of pleasing the eye should attract every spectator. Once attracted, the spectator could give him/herself to the pleasure of looking at an agreeable representation. The spectator – amateur or connoisseur – might follow the invitation of the painting to approach and to enter in ‘conversation’ with it. At this stage, the painting addresses the spectator in a complete way; it engages the mind by way of actively involving the spectator’s body and hence the senses and the soul. The spectator becomes in this sense an actor, whose active participation in the encounter with the painting becomes integral to the creation of meaning. As has been shown, colourist portrait paintings encourage such a spectatorial experience in various ways.

Colourist portrait painting exemplified in works by Largillierre can be seen as a site in which mind and body, intellect and senses, sight and touch, likeness and identity interact. Understanding the portraits in such a way and looking at them accordingly opens for an interactive experience in which potential meanings are enacted on various levels, in a continuous yet controlled and socially determined oscillation. The meanings of such paintings unfold in the process in which the spectator experiences actively and hence completes their performance – with the eyes of the body and with the eyes of the mind. To reach beyond the ‘silence’ that these paintings might seem to impose, the spectator needs to approach them as embodiments of the art of pleasing the eye.
Plates
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(Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles)/Gérard Blot)
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(Photograph © RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles)/Gérard Blot)

(© 2015. Photo Scala, Florence - courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali)
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(Photo © Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/By Permission of the Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery)


(Photograph: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

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(© 2015. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence)
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(Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Philippe Fuzeau)

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Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski

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