University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Department of Film

Memories of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* in French Film

by

James Jackson

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

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Abstract

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While the French Revolution brought about the end of Versailles as an active seat of politics and the *Ancien Régime* as a political and social system, both Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* remain important symbols of the past, and what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, in the cultural fabric French Republic, not least because they serve as a frame of reference for that paradox of continuity and disjuncture between 'old' and 'modern' France. With specific reference to film as a repository for historical memory, this thesis will examine the ways in which historical films that deal with Versailles and the monarchy (I will focus in depth on four case studies: *La Marseillaise*, 1938; *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, 1946; *Si Versailles m'était conte*, 1953, and *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, 1966) use this specific aspect of the past to speak the concerns of the present moment, to provide a sense of historical continuity, to affirm a particular social contract based upon a set of national traditions, or to bind the various traditions of France's past together into a common or shared culture predicated upon the existence of a national heritage. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* (as symbols, metonyms, epochs) hold such cultural, historical, and political weight that their memory is firmly embedded within French culture and regardless of their idiosyncrasies, differing tones, textures, and political or artistic perspectives, the various films about them, including the films under discussion. Moreover, it maintains (with close reference to the films) that in addition to being conduits for memory, historical films hold the capacity for *doing* History (with a capital 'H').

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Declaration of Authorship

Print name: JAMES JACKSON

Title of thesis: Memories of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* in French Film

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated
by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at
this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other
qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the
exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made
clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: Date:

Acknowledgements

I am eternally grateful to all those who have given me practical help throughout this project. My primary supervisor, Professor Michael Williams, has been a tremendous source of encouragement, as have my secondary supervisors, Dr Louis Bayman and Dr Mike Hammond. I would also like to give a special mention to Professor Lucy Mazdon, who was my main supervisor when I first started my PhD in 2017. Despite leaving the University of Southampton to take up a new post the University of Hull in 2019, she generously continued to read sections of my thesis and offer constructive feedback on my work.

On a more personal level, I am grateful to friends and family for their unfailing support.

This thesis received financial support from the University of Southampton in the form of the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship, so I am grateful to the institution for this.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Versailles va au cinéma!

> *O Versailles, par cette après-midi fanée*
> *Pourquoi ton souvenir m'obsède-t-il ainsi ?*
> *Les ardeurs de l'été s'éloignent et voici*
> *Que s'incline vers nous la saison surannée.*
>
> — Albert Samain, *Versailles*.[1]

Situated eleven miles west of Paris on marshy land that was little more than a humble village and farming community in medieval France is the grand Estate of Versailles. While imposing in its size and the way in which it ruptures the landscape, from the point of view of architecture and garden design, the culminative effect is one of intense harmony, where the place forms an agreeable part of the environment rather than being an obstruction of it. Inspired by the Baroque style of Vaux-le-vicomte but infinitely more ambitious and grandiose in scale, Versailles tames the surrounding environment with a topography that creates a meaningful aesthetic experience. Intricately designed parterres form a labyrinth of wonder, with each parterre sharing a relationship to another and contributing to the harmony of the whole garden. Symmetrical patterns and design are equally appealing to the eye both in the gardens and in the Palace's architecture, reinforcing a harmonious relationship between the building and the façade on to which the environment opens out. The intensity and rigour of form and style could almost be described as cinematic, almost anticipating the highly visual stimuli associated with the spectacle of film. Versailles is a cinematic space, and has accommodated filmmakers since the early 20th century, with at least two-hundred films having been shot at the Estate.[2] Louis XIV was only keen on allowing painters and engravers approved by the stringent bureaucracy of the

[1] Albert Victor Samain, "Versailles", in *Mercure de France*, issue 13 (Paris: Mercure de France, January-March 1895), p.270 "O Versailles, on this pale afternoon/
Why does your memory obsess me so?/The ardour of summer is fading away/ and now
the faded season is bowing towards us."

[2] LISTE DES FILMS TOURNES SUR LE DOMAINE NATIONAL DE VERSAILLES 1904 - 2011, 1st edn (Paris: Chateau de Versailles, 2011) <https://www.chateauversailles.fr/resources/pdf/fr/pedagogique/filmographie.pdf> [Accessed 1 November 2021].

Académie to record Versailles in all its glory, but by the 20th century, when Versailles had long ceased to be the centre of political power in France, no longer were the spaces of this Estate restricted to an élite. Following Louis-Phillippe's decision to open the *Musée de l'Histoire de France* at the Palace in 1837 to reconcile the conflicting positions of monarchy and revolution that had tainted the period, Versailles could be seen up close by the tourist, individual painter, poet, or *flâneur*. A place that would have once prohibited the gaze of the masses now opened its doors and invited them in, but for those not physically present, the proliferation of photography, daguerreotypes, magic lanterns, and peep shows during the 19th century meant that Versailles could be seen and admired by growing numbers of people in a growing number of ways. Coupled with technological innovations, rapid modernisation and burgeoning tourism, the wealth of images that could capture such places of historical interest as Versailles anticipated film's own interest in depicting or remembering the past, whether it be to document historical landmarks themselves; to use a historical landmark as a reference point to retell the events of something which happened there; to inform us about the people who inhabited such a place; to construct a fictionalised account of historical figures and events, or to exploit the texture, look, and feel of a historical site to create an entirely new story whose plot, themes, or characters lend themselves to such an environment. But the question of how historical films depict or remember the past with reference to particular landmarks, and to specific events and people, is not complete without some consideration of why it might the case that said films depict such places, events, and people in the ways that they do.

This thesis will investigate the ways in which historical films use the past, where it be to speak to the concerns of the present moment, to provide a sense of historical continuity, to affirm a particular social contract based upon a set of national traditions, or to bind the various traditions of France's past together into a common or shared culture predicated upon the existence of a national heritage. The question then becomes: what can the depiction of events, people, and places in historical films tell us about the moment of their production and the way said history is remembered by the culture, society, or nation at large? The verb 'remember' is used quite deliberately here because the primary concern in this thesis will be memory, or the way in which individuals, society, and culture shape the way we think about the past, rather than history, which is chiefly concerned with what happened in the past, where it happened, and how such people of a particular world lived, thought, loved, argued and so on. The

semantics of the nouns 'memory' and 'history' will be returned to shortly, as will the methods and approaches used by historians and adopted by filmmakers, but firstly, the subject matter at hand will be fleshed out, as will the particulars of the argument and the context for this study. While this thesis highlights film's important contribution to the production of historical memory within a nation, culture, or society, as well as the fact that understanding of film as a form of cultural memory can help clarify arguments around the approaches filmmakers take to brining the past to life, such observations are not in and of themselves original. Nevertheless, such observations facilitate the potential for original scholarship in the following ways: through close examination of the film (to look at the ways in which they *do* history), historical and cultural analysis (to investigate the relationship between film and other ways of remembering the past, and to explicate the significance of allegory, allusion, symbol, metaphor, conceit, and so on in the depiction of history) and archival research (to scrutinise the ways in which critics and other commentators at the time of the film's release responded to said depictions of history, and what this can tell us more generally about the importance of cultural memory). This thesis will address all of these factors, but where it fills a gap in scholarship (within film studies, memory studies, cultural studies, and history) and makes an original contribution to knowledge is through its content, which pertains to a very specific epoch within a very specific national and cultural context.

The main focus will be on the epoch ranging from the era of Louis XIV through to the French Revolution, which I loosely define as 'Versailles and the *Ancien Régime*'. Despite the French Revolution bringing to an end Versailles' role as an active seat of politics and the *Ancien Régime'*s integrity as a political and social system, both Versailles and the Ancien Régime remain important symbols of the past, and what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, in the context of modern France (for reasons I will go on to elaborate). The thesis will examine depictions of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* (as a place, epoch and symbol) in French film, unpacking what insights they can give us into the present moment and to historical memory in the French Republic. While 'Versailles' itself constitutes more than the Palace and is now a city and the regional capital of Yvelines in the Western part of Île-de-France, I use the word primarily to refer to the Palace of Versailles and its grounds during its time as the primary seat of power from the reign of Louis XIV through to the start of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the word is equally a metonym, for as Édouard Pommier points out in Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire: The construction of the French past*

(drawing on Charles Perraut's eloquent descriptions of the place), "Versailles epitomized the entire universe."[3] It is worth quoting in full Perraut's words, not least because they epitomise that inextricable link between Versailles as a place and Versailles as a symbol:

> Ce n'est pas un palais, c'est une ville entière,
> Superbe en sa grandeur, superbe en sa matière.
> Non c'est plutôt un monde, où du grand univers
> Se trouvent rassemblés les miracles divers.[4]

The word 'Versailles' denotes more than the physical place to which the name is given. If we think of the place as a museum of time, where, down each corridor, in every public salon and private bedroom, every stairway and parterre, there once contained real people, who thought real thoughts, and who did real things, the word 'Versailles' becomes more evocative. It comes to denote something much more than an elaborate palace and gardens. It was where Louis XIV's power was consolidated; where many grand fêtes, ballets and extravaganzas presided took place; where courtiers gathered in salons to talk and mingle; where distinguished members gathered for the premiere of Molière's *Tartuffe* and Racine's *Iphigénie*; where Voltaire was welcomed to the court for his poetry and plays; where the intrigues of Madame du Barry and Madame de Pompadour took place, and where Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette would be met by protestors as the gates as the Revolution was about to begin. 'Versailles' then should be understood as a place, a period of history, an idea (though these ideas were not static and evolved over time) and a symbol of national significance. Although Versailles symbolises France's monarchical past, and with its history of despotic Kings and self-indulgent courtiers seems to epitomise the very antithesis of democracy, progress and liberty, it nevertheless paved the way for modern France and the Republic. Alexis de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, published in 1856, argued that although the Revolution was an attempt for the French to disentangle themselves from the past and create new structures that were wholly different from those of the *Ancien Régime*, in the decades after, France reverted to a centralised

[3] Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Gallimard, 1992, [English translation: *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past – Volume III: Symbols*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, 1998], p.293.
[4] Quoted in, Ibid - "This is not a palace but an entire city/ Superb in its grandeur, superb in its substance/ No, it is rather a world, which takes in All the diverse miracles of the vast universe"

government, one akin to the processes of modernisation (in the arts and sciences) and centralisation which started under Louis XIV.[5] For Tocqueville, there was greater continuity between 'old' and 'modern' France than the disjuncture that had been thought previously.[6] This argument of this thesis has been conceived on this paradox of continuity and disjuncture between the two worlds and that memories of 'Versailles' and the monarchy in modern France reveal both their symbolic importance to France and that of the French state more generally, which sees itself as the chief custodians of its own history and culture. I will demonstrate, by unpacking the significance of Versailles and the monarchy in French film, that such ideas of cultural transmission permeate so deeply that how and why these films remember history in the way that they do can be interrogated by placing them within the broader structure of France's cultural memory.

'Versailles' in the broadest sense of the word has been acquainted with the moving images since the early 20th century. Its history on the screen could be described nothing short of eclectic, not least because the vast range of filmmakers and television directors who have incorporated it into their films have brought their own artistic, cultural, political, or even philosophical perspective to them. Nevertheless, the perennial interest in Versailles as a place, an epoch, a set of ideas or a symbol by filmmakers tells us that regardless of France's lengthening history of republican values, this particular historical phenomenon (the pre-cursor to the birth of the Republic) remains a crucial part of France's collective memory. A comprehensive list of films shot at Versailles, or which are about 'Versailles' in some form or another, is listed in the appendices, but if I were to briefly encapsulate what 'Versailles' on-screen, I would break it down as follows:

1. Films and television programmes that put 'Versailles' and the court at the centre of story (*Un Caprice de la Pompadour*, Joë Hamman and Willi Wolff, 1931; *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1946; *Si Versailles m'était conté*, Sacha Guitry, 1953; *Marie Antoinette Queen of France*, Jean Delannoy, 1956; *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, Roberto Rossellini, 1966; *Ridicule*, Patrice Leconte, 1995; *Le Roi danse*, Gérard Corbiau, 2000)

[5] Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, Paris, 1856 [English translation: *The ancien régime and the French Revolution*, translated by Gerard Bevan, 2008].
[6] Ibid.

2. Films and television programmes where the world of 'Versailles' and those affiliated with it are a fitting backdrop to a particular epoch in history, but they are not at the centre of the story (*La Marseillaise,* Jean Renoir, 1938; *La Fayette*, Jean Dréville, 1962; *Molière,* Ariane Mnouchkine, 1978; *La Révolution française: les Années-lumière,* Robert Enrico, 1989; *L'allée du roi*, Nina Companeez, 1996; *Jean de la Fontaine, le défi*, Daniel Vigne, 2007; *Molière,* Laurent Tirard, 2007)

3. Films which are set, or partially set, at Versailles, but where either a studio set or a different location stands in for the place (*L'affaire des poisons*, Henri Decoin, 1955), or films and television programmes where architecturally similar châteaux or studio recreations were used instead (*Versailles,* various, 2015-2018; *La Mort de Louis XIV,* Albert Serra, 2016)

4. Films which exploit the aesthetic of Versailles to create new locales, even if only used partially (*Le Mariage de Chiffon*, Claude Autant-Lara, 1942; *Madame de…*, Max Ophüls, 1953)

5. Films and television programmes about 'Versailles' and the *Ancien Régime* that were made primarily for a market outside of France, including Germany (*Madame du Barry*, Ernst Lubitsch, 1919), the United States (*Marie Antoinette,* W.S Van Dyke, 1938; *Dangerous Liaisons*, Stephen Frears 1988) and Britain (*Miss Morrison's Ghosts*, John Bruce, 1981; *A Little Chaos*, Alan Rickman, 2014), or films and television programmes about 'Versailles' which had a transnational reach (*Marie Antoinette,* Sofia Coppola, 2006; *Versailles*, various, 2015-2018).

The list is by no means exhaustive, but it gives us a general indication of what Versailles on the screen looks like, as well as highlighting films and television programmes in which the metonym of 'Versailles,' rather than simply the place to which the name refers, is pertinent. They together emphasise the temporal longevity and symbolic importance of this metonym, not only in France but across Europe and beyond. Not only are there films about 'Versailles' that were produced for domestic markets other than France. For example, some are pan-European co-productions, including *L'affaire des poisons* and *La Fayette*, which were both French-Italian co-productions that benefitted culturally and economically from the changes introduced to the European film industry after the Treaty of Rome. Others, such as the recent television series, *Versailles*, were collaborations. *Versailles*, for instance, was a collaboration between France and Canada, and was broadcasted in both countries on Canal+ and Super Channel on the same day respectively. The series aired the

following year in Britain and the United States, but what is telling is that the production was filmed in the English language and not the French language, reinforcing the fact that 'Versailles' is as exportable product whose cultural significance extends beyond France. Versailles has after all been a World Heritage Site since 1979 and is visited on average by around fifteen million people every year.

While it is important to acknowledge the cultural value of Versailles in a transnational context, it is of course in France where it remains most pertinent. Those films and television programmes produced primarily for the domestic market in France arguably draw our attention to the cultural and national specificity of 'Versailles', along with that paradox of disjuncture and continuity between the world of the *Ancien Régime* and the Republic, more so than those produced outside of France. And because it is this cultural specificity and its relationship to memory that is under consideration in my thesis, I will focus on French film and television programmes specifically. But while I have highlighted numerous examples of films and television programmes addressing the subject of 'Versailles' as a place, metonym, symbol or idea, to adequately address those broader questions around cultural memory outlined in the paragraphs above and elucidated upon in the paragraphs below, this thesis will not simply be an account of Versailles on-screen, rather it will analyse in detail four case studies which address the subject of 'Versailles' and the *Ancien Régime* in some form or another. These include Jean Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (1938), Marcel L'Herbier's *L'affaire du collier de la reine* (1946), Sacha Guitry's *Si Versailles m'était conté* (1954) and Roberto Rossellini's *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV* (1966). I am not in any way claiming that these examples are especially unique in how they remember 'Versailles,' or that they are representative of all films that address the place, period, metonym, or symbol of 'Versailles' in some way or another, but what they collectively highlight (through their approach to history and the contexts in which they were produced) is the continued relevance of 'Versailles' in the Republic, and through some process of historical memory, that paradox of disjuncture and continuity associated with it.

By engaging with case studies that were produced across a wide time span — the rise and fall of the *Front Populaire*; the outbreak of World War II; the German Occupation of France; the Liberation; the *épuration sauvage* and *légale* between 1944 and 1949; 'The Glorious Thirty'; the rise of Charles de Gaulle, and the birth of the Fifth Republic — and which, in their world of their stories, cover the period from

Louis XIV to the years of the Revolution between them, this thesis underlines how memories of 'Versailles' and the *Ancien Régime* remain of great cultural and symbolic importance to republican France and can speak to the present moment, regardless of the artistic, cultural, or political aims of the filmmaker. The insights these case studies can give us into the role film plays in remembering 'Versailles' and the *Ancien Régime*, and the question of what each case study will reveal about the nature of history and memory on film, will be set out more clearly later in this chapter, but I will just highlight what these case studies can illuminate with regards to the functionality of historical memory in film. Between them, we have Renoir's portrait of the fall of Versailles and the beginning of the French Revolution as a means to inspire political action in the present; L'Herbier's version of the infamous 'Affair of the Queen's Necklace' as a way of highlighting the fragile nature of institutions and the political sickness in France in the years immediately after the Liberation; Guitry's authorial account of the history of the Palace of Versailles as an effort to underline the permanence of the place and its vital role in healing the wounds of the past felt within Guitry himself and within the nation at large, and Rossellini's methodical take on Louis XIV's rise to power as a way of illuminating the didactic potentialities of television and observing *how* the past was lived through material culture as opposed to simply *what* happened in the past. The question of what 'method' or 'approach' looks like in each of these case studies will be elaborated on a little later in this chapter, but before I go any further, I should highlight that outside of retrospectives dedicated to the careers of their directors and to landmark moments in cinema history, these case studies have received surprisingly little scholarly attention in French film history. Therefore, this thesis is original both in its choice of case studies and in its commitment to unpacking how memories of 'Versailles' can highlight its cultural significance as a place, symbol, metonym, and idea representing both a continuity and disjuncture in French historical memory.

This thesis contributes original scholarship both here and its commitment to examining historical film not only as a conduit for *doing* history but a repository of historical memory. By engaging with case studies that contain memories of 'Versailles,' I will emphasise how the screen is part of a broader web of memory that can act as a conduit for highlighting how places of historical significance can speak to the present moment. The stress I placed on 'web of memory' is of profound significance to this thesis, because while I emphasise the place of film within this web,

it would be a mistake to treat film in isolation from other forms of cultural memory. Therefore, this thesis is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on history, politics, art history, song, literature, and philosophy to fully explicate the cultural, national and political significance of memories of 'Versailles.' Close analysis of the case studies will be enhanced by placing them within the context of their production, promotion and reception, as well as national, cultural, social, political, artistic and economic contexts where necessary. A breakdown of how the main chapters addresses the research questions will be fleshed out at the end of this introduction, but what I shall do now is briefly sketch out the shape of the remainder of this introduction.

Firstly, I will examine the role of 'method' and unpack key debates pertaining to film's own relationship to history, with reference to the work of Marc Ferro, Jonathan Stubbs, Robert Rosenstone, and Hayden White. After setting out this context, I will explicate exactly what 'memory' is, how it differs from 'history' and why the term might be helpful when examining how history is remembered by nation states and societies, and the role culture plays in transmitting or responding to this collective sense of remembering. I will unpack the notion of 'memory' in general terms before I examine its significance in the context French history and culture. I will refer to the work of one France's leading intellectuals and historians, Pierre Nora, whose magnum opus, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (first published in the 1980s), emphasised the necessity of historical memory and cultural inheritance in a France he believed had become ignorant of its past. I will interrogate what Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire*, or a site of memory, which as a concept is useful for highlighting that distinction between history and memory, but more specifically, I will examine Hélène Himelfarb's chapter, "Versailles: Functions and Legends," in that book, which puts this theory into practice. After setting up these broader concerns, I will move to look more closely at Versailles' place in French cultural memory after the Revolution, when it was no longer an active seat of politics. This includes the opening of the *Galerie de Batailles* to the public in 1837, the growth in tourism and the political, social, cultural and technological changes of the age which brought about a more pluralistic landscape for the dissemination of historical memory and anticipated the memories of 'Versailles' that we find in film, in France and beyond. I will then move away from how Versailles became part of France's cultural inheritance to a vignette of how each of the main epochs in Versailles' history - Louis XIV, Louis XV and the Enlightenment, Louis XVI and the Revolution - was documented through paintings, engravings, prose and

so on, and how such forms of cultural production highlight that schism between memory and history, or rather, that world as it was (to the best of our knowledge) and memories of that world shaped by the period itself. In the process, I will tease out how these memories inform the iconography of the case studies I will go on to discuss in subsequent chapters. I will then end this introduction by summarising why the case studies I have chosen are the most appropriate for tackling the research questions set out in the paragraphs above (including the paradox of disjuncture and continuity which inevitably arises when examining the symbolic and cultural importance of Versailles in a republic), the role of method in filmic depictions of 'Versailles' and the importance of memory and context in understanding how and why they represent history in the way they do.

1.3 Film and Historical Representation

If we were to approach the issue of historical representation in film from a common-sense perspective, we would immediately be drawn to the content of these films and whether or not they accurately depict the events, people, and places of history. But if we were to approach this issue from a scholarly perspective, we find that the issues surrounding historical representation in film are more complex and nuanced. It is necessary to go back to first principles and point out those features that are peculiar to historical films, features which may seem obvious to point out but are nevertheless overlooked. The *nature* of historical films, or their ontology, must be accounted for, as well as the circumstances that give rise to their production. It was Pierre Sorlin in *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, who pointed out that historical films do not exist in a vacuum but are rooted within a particular set of contexts, therefore it is necessary to ask how social, cultural, political, national, and intellectual factors shape how history is thought about a particular moment and how this translates to film.[7] The way in which history is depicted in said films may not always align with these trends, but more often than not they exist as manifestations of cultural memory. Examining how, and although admittedly bordering on conjecture, why, the past is remembered or depicted in the way that it is on screen can illuminate our understanding of what historical films are for, and how they can form part of a broader web of cultural

[7] Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1980).

memory. In this literature review, I will examine the ways in which scholars have approached the matter of historical representation in film and how such representations highlight the capacity for film to not only turn the events of the past into a compelling narrative and historical figures into larger-than-life characters, but to actually *do* history, the moving-image equivalent of conventional written history. But while these are very much concerns relating to the film itself, they are issues which cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the contexts from which such historical representations emerge. On the one hand, this thesis is concerned with how historical representation in film, through some form of artistic composition, reflects the moment in which such films were produced, but on the other, it is concerned with the historiographical questions which arise from such representations, and whether film is capable of *doing* history in the way historians *do* history - that is to say, historiography. Mirroring the concerns of the 'new' history associated with of E.H Carr, historiography priorities a scientific analysis of the past. The schism between historical evidence and historical fact is intentionally revealed, drawing our attention to the conscious choices a historian makes in selecting and examining their sources, and the epistemological challenges that arise in the process. Rather than simply gathering the evidence, identifying patterns, and emphasising the facts which are put together as a narrative, the historiographer is self-conscious of their own method and how they reach their conclusions. As will become apparent, the tenets of historiography and the practice of history can be usefully applied to the analysis of historical representations in film, which for the purpose of this thesis is even more useful still when attempting to get at the heart of why it might be that the filmmakers *tell* history in the way that they do and what their memories of 'Versailles' can tell us not only about the past but the moment of production from the point of view of culture, politics, society, and the nation state. By examining these issues, I will illuminate film's potential for disseminating historical memory with meaning, functionality, and rootedness.

While I draw a connection between the tenets of historiography and the methods employed by historical films, it is important not to lose sight of said films as artistic compositions. There is a danger of speaking (perhaps rather crudely) about the methods filmmakers employ and the data they collect as if they are technical documents, when in fact such films are often rich with allegory, metaphor, conceit, symbolism, and have a formal rigour and stylistic flair. It is vital that such features are

factored into one's analysis of *how* the past is represented, not least because they highlight that the medium is just as important as the message and that the nature of historical representation can differ significantly. It was Wittgenstein who criticised Hegel for "always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same," suggesting instead "that things which look the same are really different."[8] Jonathan Stubbs points out that historical films after all "exhibit a massive variance in iconography, narrative style, setting, plot, and character types", and that "simply being 'in the past' cannot be regarded as a coherent textual characteristic in itself."[9] There are instances, as is demonstrated in the chapter on Rossellini's television film, where storytelling is evident but takes a back seat to its didactic aims of *doing* history, and it is this desire for filmmakers to *do* history or produce something that could be considered the equivalent of written history (popular or academic) which became a prominent talking point for film scholars and historians in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly as a reaction to the fact that history on film, or film as a source of historical evidence, had been wilfully neglected by most historians. In the mid-1970s, Marco Ferro proclaimed that film does "not enter the historian's mental universe," especially when they are searching for primary source material.[10] Ferro, ventriloquising the mind of the historian, asks rhetorically, "in what way could a little bit of film showing *a train coming into the station of La Ciotat be useful to History?*" Because the cameraman has no identity in the eyes of the historians, "how could [they] refer to the image or even quote it?"[11] John O'Conner claims that "few historians think of film or television as anything more than lightweight entertainment, and in part because of the absence of any accepted, coherent, and comprehensive methodology for analyzing them as historical artifacts."[12] For O'Conner, film and television can be used not only to enhance our understanding of things that happened the past but to act as records of the past, and he proposes two stages of historical analysis of moving-image 'documents', one general and one specific, to put this in practice.

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[8] Rush Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 157.
[9] Jonathan Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.10.
[10] Marc Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire*, Paris, Denoel, 1976 (Gallimard, 1993) [English translation: *Cinema and history*, translated by Naomi Greene, 1988], p.23.
[11] Ibid, p.26 and 27
[12] John. E O'Connor, 'History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), pp. 1200-1209 (p.1201).

A general analysis should "[raise] the same types of questions that would be asked of any manuscript document-questions about its information content, its background context, and its historical influence. But these are questions that most historians are not used to asking about films or television programs, and they may have to acquire new tools to answer them."[13] But what are these tools exactly? O'Conner states that "[t]he full comprehension of the content of a film […] demands close consideration of camera angle, lighting, shot composition, editing, and the ways in which each of these and other elements of visual language add subtle (even unconscious) patterns of interpretation."[14] While O'Conner is talking about film as a historical source and not a form of historical representation, he stresses that a film's content, form and style provides insights into its production context and vice versa. The second stage of his suggested analysis highlights this relationship between film and context further in that it deals with "the nature of the historical inquiry," including "methodological concerns, its own approach to content, production, and reception analysis."[15] Ferro, at the time of writing in the 1970s, waxed lyrical about the recent arrival of 'new' history, which came to prominence in the 1960s. In particular, he took a keen interest in how the 'new' history emphasised "invisible, permanent structures" and was focused on "transformations, realizing that, over a long-time span, structures partially eclipse events."[16] In other words, the 'new history' brought with it a greater self-consciousness around how history is told and the context in which History (the practice) is produced. Ferro goes on to highlight that film "image or not of reality, document or fiction, true story or pure invention, is History."[17] But he proceeds to make a more nuanced ontological point which goes someway to clarifying this, "our postulate? – that what has not occurred (and even what *has* occurred)– beliefs, intentions, human imagination – is as much history as History."[18] Historical films can be examples of both History with a capital 'H' and history with a small 'h'. They take the events of the past and put them into a coherent narrative using a particular method. But the films themselves become part of history in the process of production. They are manifestations of cultural memory that can give us insights into the moment of their

[13] Ibid, p.1204.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, p.1207.
[16] Ferro, p.28.
[17] Ibid, p.29.
[18] Ibid.

production. This can be in the form of allegory, but it can also be in the form of myth. Allegory reveals a hidden meaning through an evocation of the past. Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), for example, combines the wonderfully theatrical *mise en scène* of the Boulevard du Temple with a motif of performance and masquerade to act, as Phil Powrie puts it, as a "thinly-disguised allegory of French resistance under the German Occupation".[19] Powrie notes that it "is imbued with [poetic realism's] fusion of pessimism and romanticism, shares its architectural monumentality and uses Jacques Prévert's screenplay as a means of exploring current socio-political tensions".[20] Carné's portrait of history, complete with symbolism and conceit, speaks as much to the present moment as it does to the era it is depicting, and is thus a pertinent example of how historical representation in film can allegorise the present. It is worth noting though that not all historical films are allegorical or made to speak the present moment — French filmmakers of the 1930s for instance "had little concern for history as a pretext for socio-political investigation".[21] Nevertheless, there are many instances where historical films exist as more than self-contained narratives. This might be through allegory, but it might also be through mythic storytelling.

Myths feed on widely held (but often false) beliefs about history, either to satisfy the zeitgeist of the present moment, to draw our attention to the past's constructed-ness, or to explain what we do not understand about the past in a way that is digestible. Myths, as Roland Barthes understood, owe as much to the circumstances out of which they either emerge or continue to be perpetuated as to what he calls their *substance*, or the thing (which could be a specific place, time, person) from which they originated.[22] Take the image of a stoic yet grief-stricken Joan of Arc facing off claims of heresy from the ecclesiast Pierre Cauchon in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Dreyer, 1928). The film, made at the request of the *Société Générale des Films,* reflected the heroic image of Joan formed in the wake of the Catholic Church's canonisation of her as a saint in 1920. The film is an example of how historical memory can be shaped by the myths and interpretations of the past circulating in the nation, society, or culture at large. To acknowledge historical films as myths is not

[19] Phil Powrie, *The Cinema of France* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), p.53-54.
[20] Ibid, p.52.
[21] Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p.213.
[22] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris, Les Lettres Nouvelles, 1957 [English translation: *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 1993].

simply an issue of truths and falsehoods — the functional role such stories about the past have in their own moment should also be accounted for. Nevertheless, as historical representations become subject to repetition, the ability to distinguish between truths and falsehoods can become more difficult, not least because the representation has the potential to blind us to the reality. For instance, in preparation for a service marking the 556th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt at Westminster Abbey, an effigy of Henry V was restored, complete with a new crown, head and pair of hands sculpted by Louisa Bolt.[23] It was widely reported that these newly crafted hands were modelled on the hands of Laurence Olivier, the leading actor who played the king in *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944), but this has since been regarded as false.[24] The fact that the restored effigy was thought not to be a memory of the original Henry but a memory of an actor's depiction of him just over two decades prior shows the extent to which the emergence of new myths can obscure the memory originally conceived. Our memories of Agincourt and Henry V are arguably shaped more by Shakespeare's play, which was written almost two centuries after the battle, than by historical documents (the St Crispin's Day Speech is a case in point). The quarrel between truth and myth is often left unresolved when memories of history are produced and reproduced, and the same can be said when new narratives about the past are composed. Robert Rosenstone asked,

> [h]ow can we not suspect that this is the medium to use to create narrative histories that will touch large numbers of people. Yet is this dream possible? Can one really put history onto film, history that will satisfy those of us who devote our lives to understanding, analyzing, and recreating the past in words? Or does the use of film necessitate a change in what we mean by history, and would we be willing to make such a change?[25]

Although films are very good at telling stories, are they any good at History? For Rosenstone, while it is true that a "historian could embody his view in a film, just as he could embody it in a play," the real question is, "[h]ow could he defend it, footnote

[23] Jennifer Barnes, *Shakespearean Star: Laurence Olivier and National Cinema,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.17.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Robert Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), pp. 1173-1185 (p.1175).

it, rebut objections and criticize the opposition?"[26] He says that "[w]ith those elements missing, one has history that is 'no more serious than Shakespeare's Tudor-inspired travesties.'"[27] We are back once again to the issue of historiography, but Rosenstone insists that "[t]he question for history on film […] is not whether historians always, or usually, or even sometimes, debate issues, or whether works take their place in a context of ongoing debates, the question is whether each individual work of history is, or must be, involved in such debates and involved so overtly that the debate becomes part of the substance of the historical work. To this, the answer is no."[28] In other words, even if film triumphs at what might be described as traditional narrative history but does not as a form of historiography, it is still *doing* History in some form or another, much in the same way the standalone works of Simon Schama are still *doing* History. History can still be History without being historiography, but equally, the medium through which it is conveyed to us is just as important as the history itself. Schama's erudite and highly literary books about the past are not merely conduits for the presentation of history but demonstrate History *as literature*. Historical films, by equal measure, demonstrate History *as film*. In other words, the peculiarity of the medium or art form is essential to how historical narratives are conveyed to us, whether as myth, allegory, or a form of didacticism. But even if the medium is essential to this process, Hayden White is less enthusiastic than Rosenstone about the presentation of history as a narrative, saying that,

> to many of those who would transform historical studies into a science, the continued use by historians of a narrative mode of representation is an index of a failure at once methodological and theoretical. A discipline that produces narrative accounts of its subject matter as an end in itself seems methodologically unsound; one that investigates its data in the interest of telling a story about them appears theoretically deficient.[29]

Nevertheless, he goes on to say that,

> the amount of narrative will be greatest in accounts designed to tell a story, least in those intended to provide an analysis of the events of which it treats. Where the aim in view is the telling of a story, the problem of narrativity turns on the issue of whether historical events

[26] Ibid, p.1176.
[27] Ibid, p.1177.
[28] Ibid, p.1178.
[29] Hayden White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Thinking', *History and Theory* Vol.23, No. 1 (February 1984), pp.1-33 (p.1).

> can be truthfully represented as manifesting the structures and processes of those met with more commonly in certain kinds of "imaginative" discourses, that is, such fictions as the epic, the folk tale, myth, romance, tragedy, comedy, farce, and the like.[30]

Film, for White, is just one of these "imaginative discourses" which, even if it presents us with real events and real historical figures, may not always intend to present the past truthfully or in manner akin to an academic historian's version of history. As I have already pointed out, the past may not be presented to us for its own sake but as an allegory or myth constructed by circumstance. But White is of course critical of narrative history, favouring historiography and the 'new' history, so how does he apply his philosophy of history to that of film? White coined the term "historiophoty," a portmanteau of historiography and photography, to denote a historiographical film. For White, historiophoty signifies "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse" and is distinguished from the "representation of history in verbal images and written discourse" associated with professional academic history.[31] For White, the chief problem "is whether it is possible to 'translate' a given written account of history into a visual-auditory equivalent without significant loss of content," but another "has to do with what Rosenstone calls the 'challenge' presented by historiophoty to historiography."[32] Rosenstone asks whether historiophoty "can adequately convey the complex, qualified, and critical dimensions of historical thinking about events, which, according to Ian Jarvie, at least, is what makes any given representation of the past a distinctly "historical" account?".[33] Elsewhere, he addresses the ontological implications of historiophoty:

> What exactly happens to history when words are translated into images? What happens when images transcend the information that can be conveyed in words? Why do we always judge film by how it measures up to written history? If it is true that the word can do so many things that images cannot, what about the reverse - don't images carry ideas and information that cannot be handled by the word?[34]

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[30] Ibid, p.2.

[31] Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), pp.1193-1199 (p.1193).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Quoted in Ibid.

[34] Quoted in, Bryan F. Le Beau, 'Historiography Meets Historiophoty: The Perils and Promise of Rendering the Past on Film', *American Studies*, 38:1, (Spring 1997), pp.151-155.

Byran Le Beau sums up Rosenstone's argument as one where "[f]ilm insists on its own truths […], truths which arise from its visual and aural realm."[35] But he says that "Rosenstone finds it difficult to explain exactly what those truths are."[36] Nevertheless, he "provide[s] a persuasive argument for the existence of such truths and point in the direction of their eventual discovery."[37] White argues that it is almost a truism to say film is more adept at representing certain kinds of historical phenomena, including landscapes and atmosphere, therefore such representations are not just a matter of content but the style and form of such films. This relates to my own argument that history on film should be seen as quite distinct from written history, and that because film often involves some form of artistic composition, and employment of allegory, myth and conceit, it moves beyond History as practice. Samuel Johnson once said of the historian:

> Great abilities (said he) are not requisite for an Historian; for in historical composition, all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent. He has facts ready to his hand; so there is no exercise of invention. Imagination is not required in any degree; only about as much as is used in the lowest kinds of poetry. Some penetration, accuracy, and colouring, will fit a man for the task, if he can give the application which is necessary.[38]

Even if Johnson was being flippant here, the premise of his claim that the historian, unlike the fictional writer, does not have to use their imagination, is wrong. The historian who realises the value of their craft understands that it is not merely about citing facts or treating the past as a kind of enclave, but to constantly justify why the task of remembering history is important to their contemporaries and indeed to organise the diverse details of the past into a compelling and coherent narrative. Although History in practice varies in its manifestations, when talking about history in imaginative form, be it in literature or film, there is certainly the potential there to draw from both sides of the History debate. E.H. Carr's History, which sees the task of the historian less as a pattern maker and storyteller and more as a theoretician, opens

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Quoted in James Boswell, R. W Chapman and Pat Rogers, *Life Of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.301.

up opportunities to offer big explanations for the direction of history. Traditional history, founded upon the primacy of evidence and narrative, and ruthlessly defended by Geoffrey Elton in the 1960s, exposes us to patterns and chronology. I argue that film, an imaginative medium through which cultural memory and History has the potential to manifest itself, is equipped at taking the best aspects of both approaches in its representation of the past. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that whether or not historical films see themselves as part of bigger historical debates or see themselves as standalone, no historical interpretation can claim to be absolute or all-encompassing. To be concerned with how film *remembers* history is to acknowledge this fact, though as I have already noted, it is important to understand the circumstances in which such memories, and their manifestation in film narrative, come into being in the first place. Although we should recognise that such memories are often contingent, and in the spirit of Heraclitus understand that to a certain degree 'everything flows, and nothing stays,' the postmodern view that all truth is relative and that we access everything through language, meaning that history for instance can only be understood as a set of competing discourses, arguably takes the argument too far. Rosenstone's work from the 1990s was more willing to embrace this epistemological relativism and was happy to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, and revelation and mystification, chiefly because he sees these binaries as constructed through language rather than ontologically distinct categories.[39] He even goes as far as to say we do not inhabit a real world.[40] This sceptical attitude towards truth and knowledge is arguably helpful, because while we cannot know everything about the past, and that any historian will bring his or her own biases to their interpretation of it, there are certain things that are true and facts which are independent of observation. The question then is not what alternative, fictional narrative does said film remember, but how do such memories tally up with the facts and what do such interpretations of history tell us about the moment in which the film is produced. In this spirt, I will now move on to unpack the term 'memory', highlight the differences between memory and history, and expose the schism between memory and history in accounts of 'Versailles'.

[39] Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film as History*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p.2.
[40] Ibid, p.1.

1.2 Historical Memory and *Lieux de Mémoire*

The word 'memory', derived from the Latin, *memor* or *memoria*, carries with it several meanings, the primary one being the faculty where the mind stores information. An essentialist would say that the act of recollecting something or remembering something is central to what we mean by 'memory,' but the conditions and circumstances in which the practice of recollection takes place are heterogenous and therefore not universal. Recollection, for instance, may be a conscious act, brought about through self-reflection, contemplation, and reminiscing. On the other hand, recollection may be an involuntary act, brought about through the senses. For example, the unintended recollection of one's childhood memories through an encounter with a certain taste, smell, or sight, as Marcel Proust so vividly illustrated in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The act of recollecting or remembering something is not merely a neurological phenomenon or an act which concerns only individuals. We often share memories with others and recall memories of those who have shared their memories with us. And outside our immediate circles, memories can be shared by people who we do not know personally but with whom we share commonalities. Joan Tumblety says of the term 'memory' that "we stretch [it] across cognitive and neural processes of remembering located in the human brain and the narrative expression of autobiographical memories found in memoirs," but also across "public acts of commemoration that mark significant events in the past, and for public apologies for past atrocities made by state authorities."[41] She highlights that we can talk of "social memory, collective memory and historical memory," but what are implications of the term within an academic context?[42] She identifies two ways in which historians approach 'memory': as source and as subject. In other words, "they seek evidence not only of memory (what is remembered), but evidence about memory (how and why the past is remembered in one way and not another)."[43] She elaborates on this by clarifying that "it is a question of how a certain view of the past is incorporated, sustained or alternatively eclipsed in the mediums of the present – at individual and social levels – that engages their interest." And to investigate this, "texts, objects and actions" are

[41] Joan Tumblety, (ed.). *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.1
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, p.2.

understood as "conduits for these selective processes of remembrance and memorialization."[44] The "mediums of the present" and the "texts, objects and actions" Tumblety is talking about can stretch across a wide range of cultural production. This thesis is chiefly focused on historical film, unpacking the medium's role in disseminating historical memory about Versailles and *Ancien Régime* in the context of the French Republic. The question of how and why the past is remembered in a particular way in historical films pertaining to this period, symbol, or idea of history will be examined the process. Tumblety's epistemological framework for examining 'memory' is equally useful when looking at the relationships between film and other forms of cultural production involved in disseminating memory, whether it be culture produced around the time of the said film's release or culture that in some way acted as a pre-cursor to the kinds of remembering we recognise in the films.

Many of films antecedents, including photography, magic lanterns and peep shows, were at the vanguard of memorialising Versailles at a time when Versailles had itself only recently established itself in the guise of a memorial, or to put it another way, became a museum piece. In many respects, the antecedents of film were in some sense already attuned to encapsulating that paradoxical sense of present-ness and of things growing older, minute by minute. The cinema would inherit this. As Jean Cocteau remarked, it 'films death at work,' or it makes us aware of life's mortality and the *pastness* of the past. Depictions of Versailles in film's antecedents of the 19th century, after the French Revolution, and especially after the opening of the *Galerie de Batailles* in 1837, imitated this simultaneous feeling of life and death, and the acceptance of the mortality of existence. A sense of loss and historical displacement is overcome in these depictions by their apparent acceptance of the inevitability of change. When Versailles became a symbol, a gesture, a museum piece, rather than an active seat of politics, these depictions accepted the changing state of affairs; they did not primarily exist to mourn the place, as it were. The Palace and gardens looked more alive than ever in John Vanderlyn's 1819 *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles,* and this followed a few unstable years for the Palace. After visiting Versailles in May 1814 to do some sketches of the palace and gardens, Vanderlyn worked on this twelve-feet high, and sixty-five feet long, canvas of the exterior of the

[44] Ibid.

palace of Versailles.[45] In 1819, his canvas was installed in a rotunda near City Hall Park, New York City, but the sheer size of the work, beautifully imitating the grandeur of the palace's façade, the symmetry of the ornate *jardin à la française*, the harmony of the basins, fountains, topiaries and sculptures, and the regularity of the arboreal backdrop, recreates the experience of visiting Versailles without actually being there.[46] It was the "prospect of [it being] restored to its former beauty and eminence" that "made it a subject of renewed visual and topical interest," and in line with seeing dwellers strolling about in the image, it was the ideal choice of location for discerning tourists.[47] After the Revolution, Versailles' décor and furniture was sold off, though it did have a brief spell as an arts and natural history museum and an infirmary for wounded soldiers, then as an imperial palace for the department of the Seine-et-Oise under Napoleon (he occasionally stayed at the Grand Trianon and undertook renovation work).[48] Following the death of Napoleon at Waterloo, Louis XVIII wanted to make Versailles the royal residence again, but the plans were dropped when it was realised such a project would be too expensive.[49] Despite this context, Vanderlyn's memorialising of the Palace and Gardens in no way laments the fact that Versailles' political significance had been greatly diminished, rather, it venerates the place in and of itself as an aesthetic object or like an exhibit in a museum. Louis-Philippe attempted to breathe new life into the place when he opened the Galerie des Batailles in 1837, but at the same time harked back to the past by putting on display France's military history dating back to the 5th century. Balzac humorously called it a "l'hôpital des gloires de la France," as if a kind of sanatorium where desperate attempts were made to nurse the many injuries inflicted on the place (and the aristocracy) during the Revolution and in the many uprisings that ensued afterwards.[50] Théophile Gautier wrote a sonnet shortly after the museum's opening, aptly named *Versailles*, in which he conceded that Versailles as it once existed had gone, but at the same time attempted to replace the sense of misery felt by those disaffected, and the heavy burden of the

[45] Kevin J Avery and Peter Lawrence Fodera, *John Vanderlyn's Panoramic View Of The Palace And Gardens Of Versailles* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988).Avery and Fodera,
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid, p.15
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Honoré de Balzac, *Oeuvres Completes De M. De Balzac: La Comédie Humaine* (Paris: Les Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1967), p.230. – "hospital of all the glories of France."

past continuing to weigh itself down on the place, with a feeling of contentment brought about by the enduring beauty of the place:

> Versailles, tu n'es plus qu'un spectre de cité ;
> Comme Venise au fond de son Adriatique,
> Tu traînes lentement ton corps paralytique,
> Chancelant sous le poids de ton manteau sculpté.[51]

Through a variety of metaphors that are lexically intertwined by their relation to the subject of ageing and the finite nature of life, Gautier underlines the moribund status of Versailles with a heightened feeling of dejection which self-consciously invokes the emotions of those who mourn its passing. This heightening of emotions could be understood (in the spirit of the poetry collection as a whole, titled *La Comédie de la Mort*) as a form of comedy, not in the sense that it is amusing or funny, but in the Dantean sense, where contrary to appearances (often bleak), all is well. By ending with the lines, "Les eaux de tes jardins à jamais se sont tues / et tu n'auras bientôt qu'un peuple de statues," Gautier emphasises that in spite of the passage of time and the knowledge that Versailles is no longer an active hub of politics, it will continue to hold memories of its former self in marble and stone *ad infinitum*.[52] In other words, Versailles will be eternally memorialised by the intrinsic value of its beauty and form has come to exist as an end in itself. Such a romantic view of culture is undermined however by historical circumstance, where the process of memorialising the past is symbolic and inextricably bound up with the national, political, and cultural context. Versailles, for instance, did not merely become an *objet d'art* when the Galerie des Batailles opened. Important ceremonials and events, for example, continued to be held there, which serves as a reminder that it did not cease to be an important site of memory. For instance, in 1855, Napoleon III arranged a ball at the Palace for Queen Victoria, and in 1871, the Hall of Mirrors was chosen as the location for William I of Prussia's proclamation as Emperor of Germany, symbolising Germany's victory and France's defeat. Moreover, in June 1904, the Hall of Mirrors hosted a banquet in honour of General Hoche of the Revolutionary Army, presided over by Minister for

[51] Théophile Gautier, *La Comédie de la Mort* (Paris: 15 Rue des Beaux-Arts, 1838), p.94 "Versailles, you are no more than a spectre of the city/ Like Venice in the depths of the Adriatic/ you slowly drag your paralytic body/ staggering under the weight of your sculpted cloak."
[52] Ibid - "The waters in your gardens have forever fallen silent/ And soon you will only have a population of statues."

War Louis André. *Le Radical* described Hoche as "le plus glorieux de tous les enfants de Versailles," which was a reference to both his impoverished upbringing near Versailles and his career as a general defeating the Royalists.[53] Versailles then was not simply memorialised by Ultra-Royalists or descendants of nobility, but by those who recognised its symbolic importance in the French landscape. Colin Jones argues that from the declaration of the First French Republic, successive governments attempted to grapple with the question of what purpose Versailles could serve in a modernised political system, but within a highly charged period of the early 19th century, no consensus was reached on this until Louis-Philippe made Versailles a site of memorialisation for the entire history of France.[54] Versailles then was "transformed from a place in which history was made into one where history was remembered," and reinforcing the points I made above about Versailles being recognised both for its symbolic importance across the political spectrum and increasingly as an autotelic phenomenon, Jones says that "Versailles was an iconic site in republican as well as monarchist tradition" and "was incorporated in the French political mainstream, republicanised and even depoliticised."[55]

As I have already alluded to, one area where Versailles was memorialised in ways that could loosely be described as apolitical is in the antecedents of cinema. Of course, it would be foolish to suggest that the politics and history of Versailles can be fully detached from its aesthetic, but there is no doubt that the emergence of new visual cultures through technological innovation coupled with the burgeoning interest in travel and tourism among the middle classes were conducive to Versailles' new status as an exhibit as opposed to an active seat of politics. The introduction of commercial railways in the early to mid-nineteenth century made visiting well-known destinations easier for increasing numbers of people. No longer was the traveller's experience a preserve of young aristocrats on their Grand Tour. Many of the railway lines opened in France at this time were concentrated in Paris. One of these, a connection to Versailles completed in the 1830s, was opened precisely to accommodate discerning visitors from Paris. But one did not have to live close to Versailles, or even travel to appreciate its splendours. Versailles could be brought to them. New forms of visual

[53] "Le Banquet Hoche: A Versailles — discours du ministre de la guerre", *Le Radical*, issue 180 (Port Louis: Le Radical, 28th June 1904), p.2. – "the most glorious of all the children of Versailles"
[54] Colin Jones, *Versailles: Landscape of Power and Pleasure* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018).
[55] Ibid, p.7.

culture expanded the long tradition of the travelogue, where the experiences of a traveller were recounted to the reader, or the spectator if in illustrated form. Visitor interest in Versailles and such places could primarily be understood on aesthetic and intellectual grounds, and we could say the same for depictions of such places in the antecedents of film.

In magic lantern catalogues from France to Britain to America, Versailles' attractions were listed repeatedly under headings such as "foreign views" or "stereoscopic views of world-renowned places of interest."[56] These included the "Palace," "Hall of Battles," "Grand Cascade," and "Salon of Marie Antoinette," each promising to give spectators a tour of the palace and gardens without them being there. These magic lantern shows were often accompanied by lectures and would have almost put the lecturer in the curator's role. In peep show slides, rich colours and painterly textures were often applied to images to create the illusion of time progression, such as those illustrated below (fig.1 and 2). The daytime slides portray Versailles as a communal place, welcoming to discerning visitors or local dwellers. The night-time slides convey its liveliness, with festivities ranging from fireworks to water shows. The careful application of coloured ink and the superimposition of these spectacular attractions on Versailles' topographical features harmonise with each other like the musical notes of a Chopin composition. The slides have a poetic air about them, and by aligning Versailles' attractions with the spectacle of fireworks and fountains, it memorialises in visual terms those who had experienced that sense of awe for themselves, justifying why so many felt they had to visit it.[57] The same can be said of those who photographed Versailles, such as an American called Charles C. Zoller,

[56] See Thomas Hall, *Hall's illustrated catalogue of magic lanterns, dissolving lanterns, and stereopticons for societies, parlour entertainment, panoramas, and public exhibitions*, (Boston: T. Hall, Boston, c1873); Lorenzo J Marcy, *The sciopticon manual, explaining lantern projection in general, and the sciopticon apparatus in particular*, (Philadelphia: J. A. Moore, 1877); A. Molteni, *Vues sur verre pour projection. Catalogue 32*, (Paris: A. Moltenis, 1880); Radiguet et Massiot, *Vues de voyages et explorations en projections lumineuses*, (Paris: Radiguet et Massiot, 1900); J. Theobald, *J. Theobald and Company's extra special illustrated catalogue of magic lanterns, slides and apparatus*, (London: J. Theobald & Co, 1900); W.B Moore, *Illustrated and Descriptive Catalogue and Price List of Stereopticons, Lantern Slides, Moving Picture Machines, Accessories for Projection* (Chicago: W.B Moore, 1902).

[57] "Chateau de Versailles slide from peep show" | Science Museum Group Collection", collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk, 2019 < http://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk /objects/co8457893/chateau-de-versailles-slide-from-peep-show> [Accessed 24 January 2019]. Most of the collection depicts French landmarks, including 'Bordeaux - les Quais et le Grand Theatre', the 'Chateau de Fontainebleau', Le Chateau de Granson (Lac de Neufchatel), but there are European landmarks included.

who snapped *Versailles – View of Park* on a visit there circa 1910.[58] While it is not clear whether Zoller intended to use the image for personal or commercial use, the photograph was very much the substitute for the visitor who had direct experience of the place, as it was in many other photographs and commercially in daguerreotypes from the mid-19th century.[59] Louis-Rémy Robert's *The Pyramid Fountain in the Gardens of Versailles*, a photograph included in Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard's 1853 guidebook, *Souvenirs de Versailles*, essentially did the same, though it was complemented by informative literature that took the reader on a journey through the many wonders of Versailles.[60] Readers no longer had to imagine what Versailles was like because a mechanical reproduction of that environment was right there in front of them. When these mechanically produced images started to move in the latter part of the century, spectators could more vividly share the memories held by early film of the sightseer's immersion in the attractions Versailles had to offer. But underneath this veneer of spectacle is that notion once again of memory as something that is contended with the past being something that cannot be recovered, rather than lamenting the past's passing. They are much like museum exhibits, which consciously recognises their pastness by virtue of the fact they surrender themselves to the observer and are fragments of times since past.

Figure 1 Grand Trianon (Versailles)' – Peep show slide day/night (1848).

[58] Charles Zoller, "Versailles – Objects – George Eastman Museum", Collections.Eastman.org, 2019 <https://collections.eastman.org/objects/281938/versailles?ctx=b053608f-d3da-4457-961e-e2e832c46645&idx=100 > [accessed 26 January 2019].
[59] Janet E. Buerger, *French Daguerreotypes* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.250.
[60] Bernard Marbot, *After Daguerre: Masterworks of French Photography (1848-1900) from the Bibliothèque Nationale* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), p.160.

Figure 2 'Chateau de Versailles' – Peep show slide day/night (1848).

The emergence of film coincided with the development of Modernism, which in the words of David Lowenthal, defined a moment when "the untrammelled future was all

the rage."[61] Through various artistic, literary and technological forms, Modernism sought to break away from the past and look to how the present could be transformed through innovation and novelty. The contract between past, present, and future was severed and the past itself became almost a self-contained, boxed-off exhibit. The narrator in L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* said that "[t]he past is a foreign country, they do things differently there," which sums up this ambivalence of knowing that one is a product of the past but at the same time recognising the difficulty in trying to imagine or understand it because its values and characteristics are different to one's own time.[62] The Modernists seem to take this idea to its logical conclusion: the past is so foreign and divorced from the present that we must completely disentangle ourselves from it. Early film very much embraced this, so when it brought architecture, cityscapes, and monuments from the past to the fore, they were treated less as objects to be mourned and more as sites that already had the quality of pastness. In other words, the objects of the past were integrated into the present by virtue of acknowledging their pastness, or their exhibit status. Equally, the past was shone in a new light through the innovative new tools the filmmaker had to hand.

Figure 3 A spectacular shot of the Latona Fountain as water spurts up and cascades down each tier of the structure— with hand-painted colour added (Les Grandes Eaux de Versailles, 1904).

Pathé Frères' *Les Grandes Eaux de Versailles* (1904), for instance, exposed spectators to the delights of a seasonal water show in the Gardens of Versailles. This event ran

[61] David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the spoils of history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.1.
[62] Lesley Poles Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2002), p.15.

weekly during the summer months and made Versailles a popular destination on Sundays for discerning visitors. The opening of Versailles-Rive Droite station in 1839, and later the *Compagnie des chemins de fer de l'Ouest* train service from Paris to Versailles, led to an increase in visitors. The event was often advertised in Parisian newspapers, including on one such occasion in *L'Intransigeant*. The importance of the railways is made clear by the advert's inclusion of ticket prices from Versailles to Paris.[63] To go to Versailles Rive-Droite station from Paris, it cost three francs first class and two francs, thirty centimes second class. It was slightly cheaper if travelling to Versailles Rive-Gauche, where the fare stood at two francs, seventy centimes for first class and one franc, eighty centimes for second class.[64] The Pathé Frères' short here captures the excitement of one such event. Huge crowds of tourists, who had most likely stepped off one of those trains to visit the Palace, can be seen in wide panning shots. Some are sitting, some are standing, and some are strolling, but they are all there to soak up the beauty of the dancing water features. Following the pan, the camera pauses on the jets spurting out water into the air before dispersing. In another wide shot, the Latona Fountain is placed centre frame as water cascades down each tier (fig.3). The swirling motion of hand-painted colours, from pinks and yellows to baby blue, demonstrates how the marvels of the past were arguably secondary to the novelty of what technology could do to shine them in a new light.

Candido Aragonez de Faria's illustration on the promotional poster (fig.4) for another Pathé Frères production, *Le Règne de Louis XIV* (Vincent Lorant-Heilbronn, 1904), illustrates a serious attempt to reunite the physical environments of the past with their own time, but the point about historical memory as an act of recognising that the past cannot be recovered still very much stands. As Robert Tombs points out, "[p]opular history, especially in novels or films, but also in many scholarly works, bridges that distance by projecting on to past peoples our own assumptions and ways of perceiving. We 'identify' with them not by understanding their difference, but by making them resemble us – the heroes most of all. This is the essence of sentimentalising the past, almost universal in popular representations."[65] Although *Le*

[63] "Chemins de Fer de L'Ouest, Dimanche 3 juillet, Grandes eaux à Versailles, BILLETS D'ALLER ET RETOUR", *L'Intransigeant*, issue 8754 (Paris: L'Intransigeant, 3rd July 1904), p.4.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Robert Tombs, "Robert Tombs · Dolorism: Biography · LRB 28 October 1999", *London Review Of Books*, 2022 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v21/n21/robert-tombs/dolorism> [Accessed 28 March 2022].

Règne de Louis XIV (of which very little has survived) does not necessarily sentimentalise the past, Tombs point that popular representations of history often end up resembling the present illustrates that historical films are not ipso facto conduits for recovering the past. Richard Abel's description of the film's two surviving shots, the first of which has "meticulously detailed costumes on human figures artfully arranged within a deep-space landscape" and the second is "a slow pan" that "extends one painterly composition into a panorama of the Versailles gardens," gives us an idea of how memorialising the past in historical film can aspire to verisimilitude while being consciously aware of the fact that the past can only be imitated and not reconstructed.[66]

Figure 4 A film poster for Le Règne de Louis XIV (Lorant-Heilbronn, 1904). The illustration is by Candido Aragonez de Faria.

L'Enfant-roi (Jean Kemm, 1923), a *ciné-roman* about the child who could have grown up to become Louis XVII, similarly reacquaints the backdrop of Versailles with its own time but does so in a manner that is more conscious of Modernism's self-awareness of the nature of historical memorialisation. *L'Enfant-roi*, while constituting a historical narrative, draws its reader's or spectator's attention to the nature of such storytelling by virtue of the fact the *ciné-roman*'s textual wholeness is brought about by the cross-fertilisation of moving images on the one hand and a combination of prose and images in book form on the other. Nevertheless, each form the story takes maintains internal coherence. Let's take the scene when Marie Antoinette, relaxing in

[66] Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914, Updated and Expanded Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.162.

the grounds of the Petit Trianon, is informed that crowds of rebellious peasants are en route to Versailles. Kemm captures this moment both beautifully and dramatically in three shots (fig.5, 6 and 7). The first is a long shot of Marie Antoinette and her family enjoying an afternoon picnic. The composed body language of the Queen on the bench, and the relaxed postures of the family sat comfortably in a circle around her, gives the impression of an environment untainted by worldly events, where the possibility of chaos seems almost unfathomable. The second is an intertitle appearing after the Queen has been informed about the uprising: "Je vais l'avertir !/ I will warn him!". That sense of comfort is abruptly ended. The final shot, which is a crowded long shot of the impassioned women of the famous 1789 March, sees them prepare to head to the Palace from Paris. The juxtaposition of these shots establishes a causal link between the follies of the monarchy and the oncoming Revolution, highlighting that the aloof world of Versailles did not anticipate what was to come, which proved to be its downfall. While the plot anticipates the story audiences would likely have been familiar with already as such a well-known moment in French history, Kemm attempts to reconstruct the very drama which made it so memorable in the first place. The filmic aspect of this *ciné-roman*, much like the written words and stills, has an internal coherence to it, though collectively, its memory of history is characteristic of modernism's interest not in story per se but the media through which the story is told. It also highlights that sense of mortality, and that the past is manifestly irretrievable.

Figure 5 Marie-Antoinette and her family resting gracefully in the gardens of the Petit Trianon.

Figure 6 "Je vais l'avertir!'/'I am going to warn him.'

Figure 7 Protesters in the city head to Versailles.

There are instances though when nostalgia plays a role in memorialising the past. A short film from 1920 called *Versailles* (which can be found in the Pathé Baby Collection), exemplifies this. In the short, a montage of water cascading down various fountains is accompanied by lines from Henri de Régnier's poem, *Fête d'eau,* and much in the spirit of Symbolist poetry's use of imagery to convey states of mind, the short film associates the marvels of Versailles with a realm of human experience that had now ceased to exist.[67] The spaces of Versailles elegiacally acquire a soul, which is to say they embody the shell of all those who lived and breathed there. The tone is contemplative, wistful, and nostalgic. That we inevitably move into the future is a fact of life, as is the mortality of our existence. But it is equally true that such facts can be difficult to accept, and that some form of longing is inevitable also. We might characterise this as a form of nostalgia Svetlana Boym describes as "reflective," which is a "longing [that] thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming —

[67] "Versailles | Pathé Baby Collection", *rbsc.Princeton.Edu*, 2019 <https://rbsc.princeton.edu/pathebaby/node/2413> [Accessed 24 January 2019].

wistfully, ironically, desperately."[68] Because of the sentiment involved, nostalgia can also signify regret, as in Marcel Proust's description of Versailles in *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*: "Versailles, grand nom rouillé et doux, royal cimetière de feuillages, de vastes eaux et de marbres, lieu véritablement aristocratique et démoralisant."[69] But sentiment can equally signify gratitude for what the past has left for posterity and why it should be conserved. Pierre de Nolhac, who was appointed curator of Versailles in 1892, expressed this sentiment in a poem he wrote called *Versailles Triomphant*:

> La France d'autrefois a laissé son image
> Faite de pierre et d'eau, de marbres et de fleurs ;
> Versailles lui compose un livre de grandeurs
> Où l'art de ses enfants l'exalte à chaque page.[70]

Nolhac sees the past as being all around us and as something that he and everyone else is a product of, which is why for him it is indispensable. William Faulkner goes as far as to say that "the past isn't dead, it isn't even past."[71] It is this fructifying of the past which ties sentiment and nostalgia together with memorialising the past, a trend equally observed in film by scholars such as Pam Cook, but in the context of this thesis, I deal with the question of memorialisation in a more utilitarian or functional sense, examining the potential reasons history is remembered in certain ways with reference to a variety of contexts and circumstances.[72] Nolhac's way of seeing is very pertinent to another aspect of 'memory' that was proposed by Pierre Nora in his magnum opus, *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Nora wrote the book in part because of what he saw as a growing feel of a historical amnesia or indifference to the past in France, one that began in the post-War years. For Nora, there must be a will to remember in the nation.[73] Nevertheless, he demonstrates that memory also has a history. French national history, based on the Lavisse model, was for him a memory passed through the filter of history, an authenticated memory converted into history. In other words,

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[68] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Tennessee: Ingram International, 2002), p.xviii. In
[69] Marcel Proust, *Pleasures and Days and 'Memory'*, Trans. by Edward Ousselin (New York: Dover Publications, 2014),p.200 - "Versailles, your renowned name, rusty and sweet, a royal cemetery of foliage, of vast fountains and marble, a truly aristocratic and depressing place."
[70] Pierre de Nolhac, *La résurrection de Versailles: Souvenirs d'un conservateur, 1887-1920* (Paris: Mon Autre Librairie, 2020), p.205. "The France of the past has left its image/ In stone and water, in marble and flowers/ Of these Versailles has composed a book of grandeurs/ Where the art of its children exalts each page."
[71] William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Vintage, 2013), p.85.
[72] Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004).
[73] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, Vol. III, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

what parts of the past had been taken up again in the present to create a significant past? To answer this question, Nora underlined the differences between memory on the one hand and history on the other:

> Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.[74]

This notion of memory as a constantly evolving phenomenon is particularly pertinent when contextualising the memorialising of history in culture. Nora uses the term *lieu de mémoire* to describe historical phenomena that become absorbed in the collective memory by dint of time, including places, monuments, and events. The English translation, a 'realm of memory,' or 'site of memory' is helpful in defining the term for it implies that the phenomena we think of as defining the past are in fact only partial encapsulations of it. Collective memories are shaped to a great degree by the composition of these fragments of various types – material, symbolical and functional. He noted that,

> Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.[75]

An interest in sites of memory on the one hand can reinforce that social contract between the past and present. Émile Durkheim recognised that because we are products of our past, a shared recognition among individuals of their inheritance is the

[74] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 7–24 (p.8).
[75] Ibid, p.7.

glue that binds together a functioning society.[76] An interest in sites of memory though can equally highlight a disjuncture between past and present, or a sense that history has been displaced or marginalised by memory. Nevertheless, in both instances, the reappearance of such sites in the collective consciousness can give us a meaningful glimpse into the context in which such memories arise in the first place. A pertinent text that deals not only with this very subject, but the specific instance of Versailles is Hélène Himelfarb's chapter in Nora's *Rethinking France Les Lieux De Mémoire, Volume 1: The State*, titled, "Versailles: Functions and Legends." She draws out the distinction between history and memory, and the role context plays in this, while also challenging a set of causal and teleological assumptions made about Versailles as a *lieu de mémoire* by historians and cultural commentators over time (in chapter two, I address a similar issue with regards to the *Marseillaise* anthem).[77] As I discussed in the last section, History (with a capital 'H') is quite different from history, and to a significant degree, the way in which History is practiced (whether written or filmed, or whether it is presented in the form of narrative, historiography, or dramatisation) is contingent on the context of its production, as I will maintain throughout the chapters of this thesis. Himelfarb similarly highlights the importance of context in the shaping of history and memory, but with specific reference to Versailles.

One of these disparities relates to that significant moment during the week of May 6th, 1682, when Versailles became the official residence of King Louis XIV. Reading history backwards, she asks, "did [the nobility] all feel that they were experiencing the 'definitive move' that later became such an important symbol?" and "did they arrive at Versailles convinced that they were going to live in the Sun Palace — that allegorical framework symbolizing the absolute monarchy for which the French kings had supposedly been searching since François I or Louis XI, or even as far back as Philippe le Bel?"[78] These questions highlight a potentially false teleology in how this date is often remembered. She claims that, contrary to popular conception, there "was no brutal separation from Paris" in the wake of the King's migration to Versailles, not least because he had not considered Paris to be his home for a long

[76] Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* [*Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique*], Trans by W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982).
[77] Hélène Himelfarb, "Versailles: Functions and Legends", in *Rethinking France Les Lieux De Mémoire, Volume 1: The State*, Trans. by Mary Trouille, 4th edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[78] Ibid, p.269.

time.[79] When the King ceremoniously arrived in Paris in 1660 to mark his reconciliation with the city, there was a great deal of tension between the city and Louis' court, which was caused by the ambitious projects undertaken at the Chateau de Vincennes and the Palais de Saint-Germain. Versailles was in fact seen as a project that would enable Louis to alleviate such tensions.[80] Nevertheless, Himelfarb claims that "it was not for Versailles that the king abandoned Paris beginning in 1668-1670. For, despite the enormous amount of work lavished on it, the chateau had remained strictly a place for hunting, parties, and vacations," and that it was at this time seen as "a highly personal creation, built strictly for pleasure in an unattractive location far from the conveniences of any city."[81] In light of this, she asks whether "Louis XIV's intentions [were] really clear at the time of his move?"[82] She claims that had the Stuarts not fled to Saint-Germain following the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the Court may have returned to the Chateau-Vieux at Saint Germain rather than remain at Versailles, not least because Hardouin-Masart was in the process of modernising the latter during the 1680s. Himelfarb is self-consciously indulging in counterfactuals here, but nevertheless emphasises the point that Louis' contemporaries would more than likely be surprised that we attribute so much importance to the year of *the* 'definitive move', when in fact Louis had already marked out his differences with Paris long before.[83]

Another issue Himelfarb raises is Versailles' state of completion when the 'definitive move' happened. She argues that in 1682, the royals arrived at Versailles to find that it was still a construction site. The King's daughter-in-law, La Dauphine-Baviere, moved out of her room because of the noise and the conditions.[84] Construction in fact continued for more than a century, so the completeness of Versailles was always in flux. The Revolution nationalised an essentially unfinished Palace, and it was arguably the projects undertaken by Louis-Philippe that ostensibly brought Versailles to a state of completion in 1871. This year marked the beginning of an era of curators who had backgrounds as historians and renovators, and whose projects harked back to how Palace looked at the end of the *Ancien Régime* – which is how we tend to remember Versailles (in terms of its decoration and furnishings) to

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid, p.270.
[81] Ibid, p.271.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid. p.272.
[84] Ibid, p.281.

this day.[85] Because of the ongoing renovation work, Himelfarb sees the history of Versailles as a *perpetuum mobile*, highlighting that there are "several *different* Versailles."[86] These "different" Versailles could equally refer to the shifting perceptions historians and commentators have about the place over time. One of these Himelfarb points to is the practical reason behind the King's decision to spend time at the Trianon and Marly, which is often overlooked. This may because the reason is quite banal: it was necessary for the King to be absent from the palace so that it could be cleaned.[87] In the 19th and 20th century though, historians tended to paint this picture of Versailles as being profoundly unclean and the antithesis of a salubrious environment. Himelfarb argues that there were often political reasons for this, namely that historians hoped to delegitimise absolute monarchy while promoting the necessity of "bourgeois rule" and Enlightenment values.[88] In her own time, Himelfarb laments that because they now knew that courtiers bathed and looked after themselves in almost the same way they did, they found themselves somewhat disappointed: "it is almost as if Versailles needs to have crawled with vermin and stunk of sweat and urine for today's public to appreciate the 'splendour' of the court."[89] The past may not be as foreign as some may have previously claimed. While Versailles itself housed around ten thousand people, consisting mainly of servants, groundskeepers, and security personnel, it was the visitors who brought the dirt with them to the Palace and grounds.[90] These subtleties may appear trivial, but they demonstrate how perceptions can be changed over time and in particular, that the history of Versailles proves to be more heterogeneous and fluid than many remember.

Pierre Patel's iconic painting of the Estate and grounds in 1668 intended to highlight the grandeur of the place, but in fact it reminds us of a place in transition, a hybrid of what was and what was going to be. Another enduring image associated with Versailles is Louis' emblem of the sun, but in fact, the emblem did not remain central to Versailles' décor, and by the end of the 1670s, it was used mostly for the King's military campaigns.[91] Even by then, the mythological aspect had faded away.[92]

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid, p.282.
[87] Ibid, p.277.
[88] Ibid, p.278.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, p.287.
[92] Ibid.

Nevertheless, the emblem of the sun remains an enduring image, but as Himelfarb affirms, the areas of Versailles that attract attention now "all present a direct, univocal, unambiguous political message: the affirmation of the king's power."[93] The Cour Royale, Grand Degré, Grand Gallery, Marble Courtyard and Parterre d'Eau are among the areas that attract attention, but she contrasts these with the apartments and groves, which were the centre of the quotidian, everyday practices of work, rest, and habitation.[94] These spaces were "dictated by the laws of comfort and pleasure alone, based on the culture and tastes of the period."[95] As for the place as a whole, she claims that "the history of Versailles, from Louis XIV's move there to its final transformation into a museum, was shaped above all by its functions and its occupants," and that "contrary to popular belief, the major shift in concept and iconography from sophisticated cosmological mythology to overtly political, simple statements was not due to the 'decadent irresponsibility' of Louis XV's reign or to the rise of the Enlightenment and the decline of the monarchy," but to a trend that can be traced back to the reign of Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, one concerning the transformation of Versailles into a public site of governance from a private retreat.[96] Himelfarb then challenges both evolutionary and teleological assumptions about the history of Versailles, drawing out the distinction between history and memory, and truth and myth in the process.

As I mentioned earlier on, myths should be thought of not simply as things that are not true but ways of condensing complex and nuanced events into easy-to-understand narratives about the past. Barthes would of course stress the importance of the social context in which such myths arise. This understanding of context is crucial to deepening our understanding of memory as distinct from history and in turn, the legacy of said history in particular contexts. Himelfarb tells us of an apocryphal story concerning "Louis XIV [walking] around Versailles surrounded by a fixed constellation of stars consisting of Corneille, Racine, Molière, Boileau, La Fontaine, Bossuet, Fénelon, Mme de Sévigny, Puget, and Lully."[97] Regardless of whether this story was true, it endures because it works as a metaphor for the absolute control Louis had not only of politics but of the arts. Himelfarb notes that many myths and fantasises

[93] Ibid, p.291.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid, p.293.

about Versailles were shaped by a post-Revolutionary view of the *Ancien Régime* through authors such as Dumas, Balzac, and Hugo.[98] Whether fictional or not, myths intend to encapsulate the spirit of what such a place was like, and what it symbolised, in a manner that is digestible. The legacy of a particular history and what it comes to represent at a specific moment is of equal importance. During the revolutionary period and the empire, Versailles attracted people who were not necessarily committed royalists, though Himelfarb argues that because Versailles was vacated by the Court, many residences could be purchased for a reasonable price, which "attracted social categories there who were locked into a timid conservatism."[99] Because of what Versailles had symbolised during the 17th and 18th century, the people who inhabited the area were thought of as counterrevolutionaries. The term *Versaillais* was used derogatorily by those in favour of the Paris Commune to label those counterrevolutionaries who had established themselves in Versailles, and to Himelfarb, is a reminder of how that crisis in 1871 "left an indelible mark, which continues to burn in the collective memory."[100] Aside from the Commune, she reminds us that 1871 is remembered for the Proclamation of Wilhelm I as emperor of Germany at Versailles, which signified a defeat for France. Then, in 1873, there was a plot to restore the monarchy, which took place in the Saint-Louis area of the town of Versailles, followed by the Dreyfus trial in the 1890s, which was moved to a Versailles tribunal.[101] These events collectively "[deepened] the wound and [reinforced] the connections already established between Versailles and treason, Versailles and reactionary backlash," even though the town and Chateau itself had a negligible influence on such events.[102] The solidification of myth then helps to shape the way in which Versailles and its legacy is memorialised.

Himelfarb argues that "this dialectical flow of memory helps explain the contradictory emotional charge that continues to be attached to Versailles, as well as the prudence and ruses that various regimes have employed in their use of the palace and the inability of historians to replace imaginary histories with true history in the collective representations of the town and the place."[103] This takes us back once again

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid, p.308.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid, p.304.

to that paradox of continuity and disjuncture I spoke of earlier on in this chapter. Tombs describes post-1789 France as the "the revolutionary nation," and the place where a "revolutionary tradition" has formed in the wake of "the only historical event that served as a chronological milestone for all French people … the great dividing point that separated the present from the past."[104] While that was the intention of the Revolution, the turbulent politics of the 19th century saw the country switch from a republic to an empire, then back to a monarchy and eventually back to a republic again. The Paris Commune even saw this kind of politics playing itself out again, with Versailles playing a symbolic role in the struggles. Underneath all of this though is that question of how and why Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* are remembered in the way that they are according to historical, cultural, and political circumstances, which in turn leads highlights the fact that *lieux de mémoire* are distinct from history proper. The myths and preconceptions associated with the history of Versailles Himelfarb identifies cannot merely be thought of as products of the time in which such memories are recalled, but as derivations of the very cultural production of the historical period in question. I will now revisit each of the main epochs in Versailles' history, pointing out the key iconography and culture that has helped shape memories of it, including the films I will go on to examine in the four principle chapters.

1.4 The Age of Louis XIV

An opulent palace standing in an eight-hundred-acre *jardin à la française*, and a grand canal dividing into two a symmetrical labyrinth of woodland, parterres, and mirrored lakes: these are the archetypal images of Versailles we often think of, but such views were not always been fixed on the landscape. They were the result of a vast project started by Louis XIV, so vast that the project was incomplete even after his death. Located eleven miles south-east of Paris, Versailles was a backwater with marshy land and forests rich in game, where Louis XIV's grandfather, Henri IV, and father, Louis XIII, went hunting.[105] Louis XIII would later build a hunting lodge on the grounds in the 1620s (rebuilding it between 1631 and 1634), but it was under Louis XIV when

[104] Robert Tombs, *France: 1814-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1996) p.7.
[105] Robert W. Berger and Thomas F. Hedin, *Diplomatic Tours in the Gardens of Versailles under Louis XIV* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

the topography of the place was radically transformed.[106] For Louis, Versailles was his Mount Olympus, and in keeping with Apollo, he thought of himself as the sun, an astronomical body whose light gives life to nature. The newly rearranged landscape would symbolise his taming of nature, and Versailles itself would be the ultimate symbol of his power and absolute control of France.[107] This doctrine of absolutism permeated all aspects of political, cultural, and intellectual life. Jean-Baptiste Colbert's appointment as *Vice-protecteur* of the Académie, for example, made him a gatekeeper of the arts and sciences on behalf of the King.[108] Accomplishments with the fields of art, music and science were seen as products of what the King saw as the greatness of his regime. Claude Lefèbvre's painting, *Allegory of Louis XIV, Protector of the Arts and Sciences* (1672), perfectly memorialises this very idea (fig.8). Because the arts were so vital to the state, all legitimate cultural output was skewed towards Louis' own tastes. Versailles itself was drawn and painted in a way that flattered the King and set a lasting impression for posterity. Nevertheless, this centralisation and bureaucratisation of culture was arguably Louis' way of asserting power after years of instability between the monarchy, the nobility, and the law courts in the years prior to him taking power.

Figure 8 Allegory of Louis XIV, Protector of the Arts and Sciences (1672), Claude Lefèbvre

[106] Ibid.
[107] Henri Bremond, *La Provence Mystique Au XVIIe Siècle* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1908), p.381-82.
[108] Michel Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles* [*Histoire des jardins de Versailles*] trans. By Adrienne Mason (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Figure 9 'The ring race and horseback parade near the Great Lawn.' By Israël Silvestre (1664).

One of the earliest attempts Louis made at Versailles to exalt his power was the week-long spectacular from May 7th-13th 1664 celebrating the start of the first building campaign at Versailles, entitled *Les Plaisirs de l'Isle Enchantée* (Pleasures of the Enchanted Island).[109] The event was dedicated to his mother, Anne of Austria; his wife, Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche, and his mistress, Louise de La Vallière, but it clearly intended to be more than entertainment for those close to the King. Louis insisted that each day of the event be recorded in engravings, not for his own delight but to distribute a strong message to his European neighbours, who received these engravings in the form of gifts. He wanted other courts to realise that he was destined to become the dominant power.[110] In one engraving from the first day (fig.9), Louis can be seen taking on a role of Roger in a chivalric romance inspired by Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem, *Orlando Furioso.* He is seen riding heroically on horseback down the Royal Way and Great Lawn (now the Basin d'Apollon) as an audience of discerning courtiers watch on. Roger (or Ruggiero) is a knight who falls in love with Alcine (or Alcina), who holds him, along with many other knights, captive in her enchanted palace. Follies erected in The Royal Way and Great Lawn make the already enchanting space of Versailles the ideal stand in for Alcine's Palace, and the fact there are considerably more knights in this spectacular than there were in the poem enhances

[109] Orest Ranum, "Islands and the Self in a Ludovician Fête", In David Lee Rubin, *Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture During the Reign of Louis XIV*, 1st edn (London: Associated University Press, 1992)
[110] Ibid.

the breath-taking nature of the performance.[111] The image of Louis in this engraving at the epitome of his stride was no coincidence. His participation in a ring race, where a lance had to be used to hook-off one of the rings suspended from a frame, is seen in full flow here, aligning those valorous and heroic attributes Roger has to himself. It is clear from this that Louis wanted to be portrayed as being worth more than the sum of all the qualities he claimed to have. The same can be of Versailles itself, where Louis' statements of grandeur were on show for all to see. Louis could flatter his courtiers and nobles with his hospitality while intimidating them with his statements of dominance.[112] When Molière's *Tartuffe* premiered during *Les Plaisirs de l'Isle Enchantée* at the Cour de Marbre, the most satisfying moment for Louis as he watched the play was probably the moment in the narrative when, after we think that Tartuffe has fooled everyone around him and will get away with wrongdoings because he claims to be infallible as a pious man, the audience are informed that the King, hearing about Tartuffe's fraudulent nature, demands his arrest. Although Louis was not on stage, courtiers would once again have been reminded that the King's power and influence was so pervasive that it even permeated fictional plays.

Figure 10'The Grand Divertissement Royal' by Jean Le Pautre (1668).

When Jean Racine's *Iphigénie* was premiered at the Orangerie in 1674, it was not Racine's genius per se that was important but its position within French culture during Louis XIV's reign. All cultural and artistic output was essentially an arm of the state,

[111]ibid, p.21.
[112] Robert W. Berger and Thomas F. Hedin, ibid.

so an evening spectacular such as *Divertissements de Versailles* was in fact an occasion for Louis to boast about the Franche-Comté victory. On 18th July 1668, a one-day event entitled *Le Grand Divertissement Royal,* took place in the grounds of Versailles to celebrate the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended a war between France and Spain.[113] The event emphasised just how far Louis would go to flaunt his power. In one engraving from the event, created by Jean Le Pautre, we can see a splendorous ball and banquet in full view (fig.10). Behind the king's carriage, a fireworks display takes place as jets of water spurt out from the newly erected water features. Among the embellishments were "giant porcelain jars, painted marble, and crystal chandeliers filled with hundreds of candles."[114] In the image, a trail of meticulously placed vases can be seen meandering around the luminous fountains, guiding us, and the guests present, to the palace, whose windows were adorned with the iconography of Olympia, including the gods Janus and Apollo. The engraving, and the event more broadly, intended to present Versailles as "an island palace, residence of the gods under Apollo's attentive and fertile gaze."[115] The fusion of Ancient Greek and Roman mythology with 'Louis XIV Style' aesthetics intended to reinforce that, like Apollo (a former deity of Olympia), Louis inhabits a powerful, magical, and enchanting space, except his is called Versailles.[116] Louis wanted himself and Versailles to be remembered as the heirs to Greece and Rome and the architects of an enduringly ambitious and powerful regime.

Figure 11 View of the Orangery in 1695, by Étienne Allegrain and Jean-Baptiste Martin's (1695).

[113] Ranum, p.22.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid, p.28.
[116] Ibid.

If we look at a painting such as Étienne Allegrain and Jean-Baptiste Martin's *View of the Orangery in 1695*, it perfectly demonstrates this idea of Versailles as a space that is worth more than the sum of its parts (fig.11). Painted near the base of the Escaliers des Cent Marches, the work gives us a detailed view of Jules Hardouin-Mansart's Orangery, an arboreal paradise with intricate parterres, water features, bronze sculptures, topiary, and nursery for several thousand exotic plants and trees. Orange trees, lemon trees and pomegranate trees were brought to the Orangery from the likes of Portugal, Spain, and Italy, almost symbolising Europe in one setting.[117] Representatives from European neighbours in fact often visited the Orangery, much to Louis' delight, who wanted them to feel the assimilation of Europe into Versailles and remind them of France's dominant position on the continent.[118] The baby blue sky and the pockets of orange-yellow hues reflecting on the edges of each cloud in the painting radiate a warm glow on the Saint Leu stone of the palace and the beige-coloured walkways. Versailles may be just outside of Paris, but it looks and feels like an oasis in this painting, reflecting the fact that Louis wanted the place to be remembered as one that is metaphorically everywhere at once. Adjectives that come to mind when looking at these engravings and paintings of Versailles are majestic, stately, grandiose, but we should also add deceptive because, in reality, Versailles was of course not an enchanted world akin to Mount Olympus or the magical result of Louis' divine powers. This was in fact the impression Louis wanted to give.

Two of the case studies I will examine in this thesis, *Si Versailles m'était conté* and *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV*, emulate much of this iconography in their depictions of the building of Versailles and Louis 'definitive move' to the Estate especially. Nevertheless, they differ quite significantly in their execution of it. *Si Versailles m'était conté* gives us a showy, flamboyant take on Louis' rise to power and reign, emphasising the overblown nature of Versailles and the importance of spectacle in the process. It also attempts to emulate the monarch's own romanticised view of himself and of the institution more generally. Louis' inspiration to build a palace on the grounds of Versailles for instance is seen to come from his father's and grandfather's earlier visits to the location, which on the surface may be taken as a case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* but in actual fact implies that the monarchy thought it

[117] Baridon, ibid.
[118] Ibid.

had a special kind of wisdom that passed down the line of succession. *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV*, on the other hand, observes Louis' rise to power and his 'definitive move' as a set of processes, decisions, and protocols governed chiefly by the laws of reason and a Weberian understanding of bureaucratisation within institutions. The film gives us less of a romanticised history of Versailles' inception, instead portraying it as the consequence of a series of rational decisions made following the turmoil of the Fronde and thwarted attempts to bring down the young Louis. Both films then adopt similar iconography in their depictions of Louis XIV's reign at Versailles, but the former tends towards immersion and spectacle (through self-conscious storytelling and *mise en abyme*) whereas the latter tends towards rationality and a sort of *Verfremdungseffekt*, as I will go on to explain in the appropriate chapters.

1.5 The Age of Louis XV and the Enlightenment

The Versailles of Louis XIV is often remembered as being the most definitive, with the subsequent monarchs seen as pale imitations, for reasons I will go on to explain. When Louis XIV died in 1715, the monarchy left Versailles for the Tuileries Palace. The heir to the throne, who was Louis XIV's great-grandson, was only five at the time, so Phillipe II, Louis XIV's nephew, became *le Régent* of France until the boy was considered of age.[119] When the heir to the throne turned thirteen, he was coronated at Reims Cathedral, before deciding to return to Versailles, a place he grew fond of in his earliest years. This would be the beginning of the age of Louis XV. Louis XV's return to Versailles was painted by Pierre Denis Martin in a work called *View of the Château de Versailles from the Place d'Armes* (1722). In it, we see Louis' carriage hastily approaching the grand, golden gates, where it would have continued down the courtyard towards the Palace entrance (fig.12). The painting very much brings to mind Pierre Patel's grand painting of Versailles from 1668, which is perhaps deliberate given that this Martin's painting illustrates the moment power has returned to Versailles, as if Louis is following in the footsteps of *le roi soleil*. In his own time, as with most kings, Louis XV was mostly portrayed as a national hero. Edmé

[119] John J. Hurt, *Louis XIV and the Parlements: The Assertion of Royal Authority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Bouchardon's sculpture of the King made in response to France's victory in the War of the Austrian Succession epitomises this.[120] But Louis XV's reign is often remembered as one that paled in comparison to Louis XIV's, so who or what is responsible for this? One person arguably responsible is one of Louis XV's contemporaries, the *philosophe* Voltaire. Voltaire famously described the age of Louis XV's predecessor as the "most enlightened of all ages," comparing it to the Italian Renaissance, and the ages of Caesar, Pericles and Alexander the Great.[121] He argued that it was an era that saw genuine leaps forward in the arts and sciences and in the triumphing of reason over the superstitions of medieval France (he praises these things more than Louis XIV's militaristic or diplomatic accomplishments).[122] As for the age of Louis XV, he saw it as politically and culturally stagnant. France's defeat in various wars (especially the Seven Years' War), along with growing debts, diminishing authority over *parlements*, religious tensions and the Enlightenment, contributed heavily to this picture Voltaire had already been painting. Voltaire was once considered favourable with Louis, and had his plays performed to the court, but Voltaire did not speak favourably of the king in his later years, accusing him of bringing about little reform in the *parlements*.[123] Voltaire was hardly in favour of turning the clock back to the age Louis XIV, but by acknowledging the advances in science and culture during his reign, he understood the significance of reason and its relationship to progress. Though it is arguably because the age of Louis XV was dominated by *philosophes* such as Voltaire, and controversies such as the publication of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, that such an age is remembered as a time when faith in old authorities declined significantly and attention turned to the virtues of reason, which in broad historical terms is remembered as the ancestor to the forefathers of the French Revolution, including Robespierre and Danton.

[120] Ibid.
[121] Voltaire, *The Age Of Louis XIV* (London: Fielding and Walker, 1779), p.1.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Michel Antoine, *Louis XV* (Paris: Hachette, 2006).

Figure 12 View of the Château de Versailles from the Place d'Armes. By Pierre Denis Martin (1722).

If we accept that the Age of Louis XV is often remembered as one where faith in the old authorities began to wane, to understand why, we have to consider the attitudes of the court itself rather than simply the external influence of the *philosophes*. Madame de Pompadour, the King's chief mistress, allegedly used the phrase, *après nous, le déluge !* ('after us, the flood!'), when comforting the King after a defeat by the Prussians.[124] This oft-remembered phrase almost sums up what we might perceive to be the weakness in Louis XV's reign. It signifies an indifference to the potential consequences of something that has happened on the basis that the consequences will not have to be dealt with in the short term. If Pompadour did indeed utter these words, then it was ironically foreboding, for the financial crises that unfolded during Louis' reign to a certain extent paved the way for the monarchy's downfall later on. But if there is any aspect of Louis XV's reign that is more desirably remembered than the reign itself, it is arguably its art and culture, such as the plays of Pierre de Marivaux and the artists of the *Rocaille* and Rococo movement. Nevertheless, the intricate swirls, curves, and patterns of *Rocaille* that increasingly decorated Versailles, rather than the grand, bold, and rigid statements of *Style Louis XIV,* almost served as a perfect metaphor for an age where the small was substituted for grandeur, and style for substance.

[124] Michael Mould, *The Routledge Dictionary of Cultural References in Modern French* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.43.

Figure 13 Bal masqué donné pour le mariage du dauphin. By Charles Nicolas Cochin fils (1745).

This emphasis on style of substance can be extended to the way in which sexual liaisons and social interactions have taken precedence in how Louis' reign is remembered over matters pertaining to politics and diplomacy. In February 1745, Jeanne Antoinette Poisson was invited to the lavish Yew Tree Ball, an event celebrating the marriage of the Dauphin and Maria Teresa Rafaela in the Hall of Mirrors. Disguised as a yew tree among several other courtiers, Louis declared his fondness for Poisson, who would become the Madame de Pompadour, before unmasking himself in front of the court.[125] Poisson was dressed as Diana, Roman goddess of the hunt, alluding to their previous meeting in Sénart forest.[126] Louis wanted his sexual endeavours to be remembered as classy and exuberant, and if we look at Charles Nicolas Cochin fils' painting of the ball, *Bal masqué donné pour le mariage du dauphin*, this is certainly the case (fig.13). But putting aside the elegance and Louis' relationship with pompadour per se, it is strongly believed that from the early 1750s through to 1765, Louis was alleged to have met a number of *petites maitresses* for sex in a small house on the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* (The Deer Park), including Marie-Louise O'Murphy and Louise-Jeanne Tiercelin de La Colleterie. Until her death in 1764, Pompadour was believed to have overseen all the arrangements at the establishment. Nancy Mitford points out though that she "accepted the Parc aux Cerfs as a necessity but had nothing whatever to do with it."[127] Pompadour was merely a supervisor to these young women, and her presence was to ensure that none of them

[125] Nancy Mitford, *Madame De Pompadour* (London: Vintage, 2011).
[126] Ibid.
[127] Mitford, p.139.

would rise to her level and be in equal favour to the King. While it is claimed that the well-being of the young women was taken care of, some on the outside viewed it as nothing more than a brothel where the king would go for pleasure. Others thought it could have been a myth all along, including the staunch royalist historian Jean-Baptiste Capefigue:

> There was never such a place with such a purpose, destined for the king's ignoble pleasures. In the *Bibliothèque Impériale*, certain pamphlets published in England and Holland, by refugees there and in Prussia, have been condemned as unfounded libels, false as gross, and cast out. From the archives of the city of Versailles, it results that the site called the 'Parc aux Cerfs' was detached from the park of Versailles, and sold for building by the acts of `1725 and 1735, that is, long preceding the scandalous adventures which have been invented there.[128]

But even if such activities did not take place on the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, the likes of O'Murphy and Colleterie were still heavily involved as mistresses to the King. The intrigue of Louis XV's court and the rumours surrounding the Parc aux Cerfs paint Louis XV as a self-indulgent character, one who prioritised personal pleasure above political and militaristic matters. John Hardman said of Louis XV that he "was no *dévot*, though he lived in perpetual fear of eternal damnation because of his string of extra-marital liaisons."[129] While Hardman is talking about the religious fate that Louis thought awaited him, it certainly chimes with the general murky picture often painted of his reign. This includes hostility towards the decadence of the Parc aux Cerfs. Some of these criticisms though may be owed to post-Revolutionary caricatures of his reign and prejudices towards the monarchy in general. As Mitford said, "[a]fter the French Revolution, when the monarchy was being blackened in every possible way, fabulous stories were told about Parc aux Cerfs. It was said to have been a harem fit for a sultan, the scene of orgies without name, and to have cost the county millions. In fact, it was a modest little private brothel, run on humane and practical lines."[130] Nevertheless, the general perception about his reign remains, and it is this emphasis on court intrigue over politics that suffuse memories of his reign later on, including in film. *Si Versailles m'était conté* presents Louis first and foremost as a decadent King who lacks the

[128] Quoted in, Annie Emma Challice, *The Secret History of the Court of France under Louis XV* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1861), p.147.
[129] John Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), p.1.
[130] Mitford, p.141.

political might of his predecessor and is pre-occupied by his extra-marital liaisons. Equally present is the self-indulgence of Louis' court, with court-jester-style appearances of Voltaire exposing the divide between the old authorities and Enlightenment values. Much like the oncoming deluge Pompadour spoke about, the film brings Louis XV's reign to an end subduedly, as if the age could not foresee the consequences that would arise from its failings. At the same time, it highlights the fact that it was an age of new ideas that would shape the future of politics in France, in turn romantically underlining a sense of continuity between Versailles and the Republic.

1.6 The Age of Louis XVI and Revolution

Coronated at Reims Cathedral in 1775, Louis XVI, grandson of Louis XV, became the last monarch to permanently inhabit Versailles. Louis-Ferdinand, Louis XVI's father and heir apparent under Louis XV until he died at the age of thirty-six, rejected the philosophes of Louis XV's age, describing them as "corrupt libertines … haughty spirits vain enough to think they could work out everything from scratch."[131] His son, nevertheless, was less dismissive of Enlightenment ideals. He pledged to abolish the land tax, labour tax, and serfdom, but his reign was met with other challenges that slowly turned the bourgeoisie and peasants against him.[132] These include food shortages, the increased price of bread, and financial crises spurred on by France's support for the American Revolution.[133] François-René de Chateaubriand traced the causes of the French Revolution that eventually took place to the absolutism of Louis XIV, in that it made people yearn for greater freedom. The monarchy would only last for around another one-hundred and forty years after Louis became King, only a fraction of the French monarchy's long history. This Evolutionary view of history though is too simplistic, as there were many other factors which contributed to the fall of the monarchy, including the burgeoning middle class, growing tensions between the monarchy and the parlements, the Enlightenment, internal conflicts about what privileges the Second Estate could get access to (particularly in relation to tax) in contrast to the laws imposed on the Third Estate by the *Ancien Régime*, the financial crisis, and reduced living standards for The Third Estate. Specifically, though, it was

[131] Quoted in, Hardman, p.2.
[132] Ibid, p.90.
[133] Ibid, p.87 and p.129.

the feeling of anger sparked by the food shortages, the scarcity of bread and its rising prices following a series of poor harvests which culminated in The Storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July 1789 and later, the Women's March on Versailles.[134] Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were eventually forced to flee the Palace as a result, but while these images of revolt are so iconic, forming part of the story remembered by so many, we should pause to reflect on how the transition from monarchy to Republic during the Revolution itself is often remembered. The Revolution polarised France immensely and was the origin of our modern politics. That is to say, the terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' are products of the divisions within the National Assembly: the royalists, in support of the King, were positioned on the right of the chamber and the revolutionaries, in defiance of the King, were positioned on the left. But further to the establishment of these political divides was the Revolution's attempt to implement Enlightenment reason and put into practice a whole new philosophy of human relations.

Figure 14 Signed letter of support for the Revolution titled "Tableau de la Révolution de France", Le Censeur Patriote *(July 31st, 1789).*

[134] Jules Michelet, *The Women of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird, 1855), p.36.

One of the leading figures in the Revolution, for instance, was Maximilien Robespierre, whose philosophy was very much influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Du contrat social*, Rousseau argued that society was the cause rather than corrective of the world's ills. His solution to this was to advocate primitivism, or the return to a much simpler way of life, but for many followers of his work, his lasting influence is the belief that human beings are inherently good, and that the individual precedes society. He said, "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[135] The revolutionaries thought that if humanity were simply freed from the shackles society places them in, which in this instance was the *Ancien Régime*, then humanity would be free and virtuous. We can often detect this Rousseauean sentiment in revolutionary journals, which adopt auspiciously fragrant language and poetic diction. For example, in the July 31st 1789 edition of *Le Censeur Patriote*, a signed letter in support of the Revolution titled "Tableau de la Révolution de France" waxes lyrical about how the Revolution was starting to unfold around them, "la voilà donc, enfin, cette révolution si longtemps désirée," before proceeding to describe the experience, "nous respirons l'air salutaire de la liberté" (fig.14).[136]

Figure 15 Execution of Louis XVI. By Isidore-Stanislas Helman (1794).

But we can equally look at the Revolution through another lens, one that resembles the Hobbesian nightmare. In his *Leviathan*, written in the 17th century, Thomas

[135] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* [*Du contrat social; ou Principes du droit politique*], trans. By H.J Tozer (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), p.5.

[136] 'Durgurt and co', "Tableau de la Revolution de France", *Le Censeur Patriote*, iss.1, (Paris: Chez Volland, 31st July 1789), p.3 – "So here it is, finally, this revolution so long desired/"we breathe the salutary air of freedom"

Hobbes presented a view of the human condition that Rousseau would not recognise. For Hobbes, social and political structures are not the problem but the solution to nature's barbarity, arguing that human beings are not inherently good and exist in *bellum omnium contra omnes* ("the war of all against all").[137] While he believed the antidote to this was absolute monarchy, we could substitute such a system with other kinds of social systems. The point is that a social system must be in place to keep people in balance. While the leading figureheads of the Revolution preached freedom, the very processes they used to mould human relations in their image depended upon social structures, even if they did not resemble the structures previously in place. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette are symbolic reminders of a world the revolutionaries wanted to move away from, and because they, along with other royalists, pushed for a counter-revolution, they were seen as incompatible with the new society and found guilty of high treason by the National Convention. Isidore-Stanislas Helman's engraving of Louis' execution demonstrates the extent to which every revolutionary cause needs heretics to highlight what it stands for and will tolerate (fig.15). The image of crowds watching on as the King, surrounded by rows of soldiers, is executed at the *Place de la Révolution,* draws our attention to the lengths this new regime went to implement its desired outcome. The execution very much appears like a piece of violent theatre, akin to a heretic's trial from the Middle Ages. It also epitomises the deep polarisations that spread across France in the space of those few years. Not only was the monarchy overthrown, but France was also de-christianised and traditions were torn up as part of the *Culte de la Raison* (Cult of Reason). Edmund Burke, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* argued that abstract reason severed the social contract and was antithetical to the task of understanding the complexities of the human condition. This included the practical steps needed to tackle the issues the revolutionaries were raising, such as food shortages.[138] And because there was this wholescale attempt to remap France according to these abstract laws, dissent became almost impossible. Eventually the Revolution's forefathers (Robespierre, Danton, Desmoulins) ended up being executed during the Reign of Terror. Chateaubriand, in one of his memoirs written after the Bourbon Restoration, noted his regret for the way the Revolution played out, especially the Reign of Terror. He recalled a once pleasant

[137] W. G. Pogson Smith, *Hobbes's Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
[138] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012).

moment with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette at Versailles before any of this could have been anticipated:

> She soon appeared, surrounded by a numerous and brilliant *cortège*; she gave us a gracious salutation; she appeared enchanted with life. And those beautiful hands which then carried with so much grace the sceptre of such a long race of kings, were, before being bound by executioner, to be employed in mending the rags of the widow, a prisoner in the Conciergerie![139]

Chateaubriand draws our attention to that false sense of immortality an institution can have, but also how he himself could not have anticipated what was to come. The monarchy's distance from the world around them may have appeared as a strength to them, but in actual fact, their blindness to the most pressing issues was a sign of their fragile state. Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun's painting, *Marie-Antoinette dit « à la Rose »* beautifully captures an innocent moment where Marie Antoinette innocently holds a rose while posing in her pearls and lace. At the time the work was painted, the rose simply epitomised her love of nature, which she often appreciated when strolling through the Petit Trianon, but since the Affair of the Necklace from 1784 to 1785, the rose, as it is associated with the Queen, has arguably taken on a whole new meaning. That is the infamous moment when Cardinal Rohan offered who he thought was the queen a rose in the Gardens of Versailles at night in an effort to reconcile their relationship, but in reality, this was a Marie Antoinette imposter, put in place by Jeanne de Valois-Saint-Rémy to get the Cardinal to loan money to her on the belief that is was going to the Queen's charity work when in actual fact it was being used by Valois-Saint-Rémy to enter into respectable society. To a certain degree, the rose has come to symbolise the deception at work, and the Cardinal's naivety in later agreeing to purchase a necklace following a faux request, which was then sold, much to his ignorance, on the black market. The rose then unintentionally reminds us of the scandal and one of the pre-cursors to the fall of the monarchy.

[139] François René vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Memoirs of Chateaubriand, Vol I* (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), p.171.

Figure 16 Marie-Antoinette dit « à la Rose ». By Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1783).

Two of the case studies I will examine deal with those the final years of the monarchy, and one focuses on those divisions that existed in France after the Revolution got under way and the monarchy had left Versailles. *L'affaire du collier de la reine* centres around the Necklace Affair and presupposes the damage it will do to the monarchy. The film places the Necklace Affair in the broader context of the monarchy's self-indulgence and introspection during this period, which heightened discontent and eventually led to the Revolution. It chooses to remember this event as a symptom of cultural collapse and institutional fragility, which was particularly pertinent in the post-War context the film was produced in, but it nevertheless stops short of showing us the Revolution and ends with the self-proclaimed 'Comtesse de la Motte's' public beating, which arguably spoke to the brutal collaboration trials that were unfolding at the time of the film's production and how far institutions are willing to go when they believe that they are on the right side of history. The other case study, *La Marseillaise,* begins at Versailles at the very moment the Bastille has been stormed, but rather than focusing on events which caused the Revolution, the film illustrates how the processes of Revolution itself brought about the fall of the monarchy. He mostly does this by telling history from the bottom, though he does follow the nobility's journey during these years, including their exile to Germany from Paris. Despite acknowledging the conflicted nature of the Revolution, Renoir overwhelmingly follows in the tradition of Rousseau. The principal revolutionaries in the film are mostly treated as virtuous and the principal nobles as at worst embodying a kind of displaced nostalgia. Memories of

Versailles and the *Ancien Régime*'s decline and fall are significant because they emphasise that paradox of continuity and disjuncture between a modern nation underpinned by republicanism and *laïcité* and an old regime dominated by monarchism and theocracy. These two case studies deal either with the causes or the consequences of the *Ancien Régime*'s self-indulgence and blinkeredness and go some way to showing us how the monarchy paved the way for modern France, as I shall go on to examine.

1.6 Chapter breakdown

Each of the four case studies will be given their own chapter, and while I place much emphasis on the historical, political, and national contexts in which they were produced (in addition to close examination of the films themselves), I do not tend towards historicism or simply reduce the films to a footnote of history, rather, I tease out the ways in which historical context can inform the kinds of remembering we see in the films. Versailles and the *Ancien Régime's* historical memory remained significant in the decades of the mid-20th century when the Republic had long been established but was nevertheless threatened in various ways. The small corpus of films examined cover the broad sweep of 'Versailles and the *Ancien Régime,'* from the rise of Louis XIV to the Revolution. While the films do not unanimously commit to one view of history (evolutionary, teleological), they all to a certain degree, and by virtue of when they were produced, address that paradox of continuity and disjuncture I mentioned earlier on in this introduction. The case studies are also rooted in within a web of cultural memory, meaning that they do not exist in a vacuum or as self-contained works of historical memory but as part of a much broader dialogue on historical interpretation and historiography. Should history primarily be about cause and effects and the process of one decision or action leading to a new set of decisions and actions? Or should history primarily be concerned with the direction of travel and preconceived aims of historical events? I will address these questions and various issues I have raised by examining each of the case studies in turn, and ultimately making the case for film as a conduit for both cultural memory and historical interpretation, while not losing sight of historical film as a form of artistic representation.

In ‘Chapter Two: *La Marseillaise’,* I demonstrate how memorialising history in film can serve an explicitly political function and paradoxically emphasise a desire to look forward to the future rather than look wistfully on the past. Focusing specifically on *La Marseillaise*, I will argue that Renoir memorialises the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the French Revolution with the aim of mobilising support for radical reform in his own time (both socially and economically). Although the process of memorialising the past itself implies a tension between the forces of conservatism on the one hand and progressivism on the other, I maintain that *La Marseillaise* debunks such a tension and demonstrates that tradition is not exclusively conservative; the Left equally has its own traditions. As the radical Leon Trotsky once remarked, ‘we Marxists have always lived in traditions.’ Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* in this film are metonyms for the ‘old’ authorities. Renoir’s focusing on the causes which led the fall of these ‘old’ authorities paints a picture of the Revolution as a distinct phenomenon with direction and purpose, which by way of analogy gives credence to the very social and economic reform Renoir desired in his own time. By recasting the events that led to the decline and fall of the monarchy and romanticising the collective spirit of the Third Estate as a force to bring about social and economic reform, Renoir hoped to raise the consciousness of his audience members to achieve his own vision of a leftist revolt against opposing forces. Inspired by the rise of the *Front Populaire*, Renoir hoped his film could rally around the working classes to support the movement. But while Renoir’s film draws on a tradition of radicalism, including Marxist interpretations of the French Revolution at the time, it is imbued with a Romanticist humanism that emerged almost concurrently with the Revolution in France and the Industrial Revolution in Britain. By memorialising both the radical and Romantic traditions of the French Revolution, Renoir presents the cause of radical politics as morally virtuous in the hope of encouraging the working class to stand with the socialists in the way the revolutionaries did with the bourgeois middle classes. An emancipatory view of that transition from ‘Versailles’ to Republic in *La Marseillaise* makes it sympathetic not only to the Left, but a specific type of leftism derived from Liberal, Enlightenment values that underpinned the identity of the Republic: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. This chapter ultimately demonstrates that memorialising history in film is not necessarily about fossilisation but emancipation. Film that seeks to understand the direction of history, rather than simply take us through its events, can often serve the function of inspiring radical change.

‘Chapter Three: *L’affaire du collier de la reine’* examines how history in film can be memorialised with an allegorical intention, and to even raise philosophical questions pertaining to the direction of history and the patterns that recur in it. Focusing on Marcel L’Herbier’s *L’affaire du collier de la reine*, I argue that the film not only retraces the events of the Necklace Affair, which had previously been memorialised by Alexandre Dumas in his novel and earlier film adaptations, it frames them within the broader concerns of the age (drawing our attention to the irreparable damage the Necklace Affair did to the monarchy and the *Ancien Régime*). By extension, the decadence and self-obsession of ‘Versailles’ we see in the film stands as both a metonym and symbol for social decline. The film reminds us that history is full of moments where institutions that thought of themselves as being immortal were in fact fragile and close to falling, a particularly pertinent allegory for the present moment, when French institutions had been tainted by the German Occupation and later, the *épuration sauvage.* L’Herbier raises philosophical questions pertaining to the direction of history at a time when there was an increasing reluctance to face up the past. A sense of disjuncture permeates the film, in part because Versailles, an enduring symbol of the monarchy and France’s prime place in Europe in the second half of the 17th century, had recently been in the hands of the Nazis. In addition to this, the dark cloud of the Occupation lingered after the War with the trial, imprisonment, and sometimes execution of those thought to have collaborated with the Germans. I will argue that the long, protracted depiction of the self-proclaimed ‘Comtesse de la Motte’s’ public torture at the end of the film serves very much as an allegorical projection of the past onto the present. *L’affaire du collier de la reine* reminds us that the images of the past can bear resemblance to the present but rather than fatalistically yield to the notion that history repeats itself, it implicitly raises the question of whether such circumstances can be avoided at all. The schism between determinism and free will is laid bare, and the evolutionary theory of history is challenged by the cyclical view of history. Using L’Herbier’s film as a case study, I will make the case for the use of history in film as both allegory and philosophic critique of the shape of history.

‘Chapter Four: *Si Versailles m’était conté’* examines historical memorialisation in film as something akin to conventional narrative history (where in academic or popular writing). Voice-over narration in historical films, much like the writer’s voice in a history book, gives such history its form and texture. The film examined in this chapter is *Si Versailles m’était conté,* which presents to us a history

of Versailles narrated by the director, Sacha Guitry. Historical memory in this film is collective, harking back to a well-known place, era, and symbol of French history, but it is mediated through the voice of its author. Through processes of self-conscious narration, *mise en abyme* and dramaturgy, the film treats 'Versailles' as a phenomenon that crosses effortlessly from 'old' to 'modern' France. It can be argued that the film is very much a love letter to Versailles, and by extension France, and was motivated by Guitry's desire for self-exculpation on the one hand and to further the interests of a much-needed renovation project for Versailles on the other. Because Guitry was not seen to have taken a very active role in the Resistance, he was accused of collaborating with the Nazis. I argue that this film was an effort clear his name and show his loyalty to his country. By telling us the intricate story of Versailles in a manner theatrical, flamboyant, and sometimes romantically apocryphal, the film harks back to the style and tone of Guitry's previous work in film and theatre, arguably with the intention of giving the French people a sense of historical continuity between Guitry before the Occupation and Guitry afterwards, and to provide an enduring backdrop for audiences hoping to forget the horrors of war and instead look forward to a prosperous future. Although Guitry's politics were not all too clear, the film is a pertinent example of the past being memorialised to heal divisions and reassert a sense of national identity following a decade of crisis. This chapter will demonstrate that historical films with a distinct 'voice' or 'author' can memorialise the past as a way of repairing a broken social contract brought about by varying circumstances, and reunite that bond between times gone by, the present, and the future.

'Chapter Five: *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV'* examines how history in film can be understood as an extension of academic or pedagogic history. In other words, film as historiography. Examining Rossellini's television film, *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, I argue that a stripped-back, undramatised, and less character-centric take on history, can legitimately be interpreted as an attempt at the practice of History (with a capital 'H'), especially given that the film places a lot of emphasis on 'how' the past was lived in its various forms and the processes and protocols which governed it. 'Versailles' is understood teleologically in the film, an entity with its own aims and purposes laid bare. *Si Versailles m'était conté* theatricalises the past, putting up a barrier between art and truth, whereas *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* attempt to separate appearances from reality as far possible, addressing the divide between representation as a form of flattery towards those inhabitants of the past who wanted

to be remembered in a certain way and a disinterested attempt at reconstructing the past as a close to how it might have been lived as possible. I maintain that Rossellini's film, despite being a form of artistic representation, aspires to be dispassionate towards history, with its emphasis on empiricism and rationalism. Thought processes constituting the interrelationship between entities within formal systems are prioritised over investments in common-sense, feeling, and intuition. Reason as Hegel understands it derives from the Enlightenment, as well as Rationalist thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, so when I claim that Rossellini adopts this view of history, I simply mean that he understands it as a mental process rather than suggest that the history depicted is mediated through our understanding of Reason since the Enlightenment. I argue that the film primarily draws our attention to the mechanics of 'Versailles' and Louis XIV's world, or rather the laws, procedures, and protocols which governed it. Spectacle, mystery, and wonder are negated in favour of observation, contextualisation, and explanation, and concerns with individual characters are side-lined in favour of highlighting the interrelationships between the thought processes of the age. Because it pays such attention to how the world of the past was lived, as opposed to what happened there, it also fits in with the academic fashion of time, namely the *histoire totale* ('total history'), while from an artistic point of view it invokes Italian Neorealism with its long takes and observations of life. I will argue that while there are other factors that contributed to the memorialisation of this specific history in the television film, such as the state-controlled ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française) and Charles de Gaulle and André Malraux's push to promote the best of French culture (including Versailles), *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* exemplifies film's relationship with history as one that is not merely concerned with representation but with the very practice of historical investigation itself.

In 'Chapter Six: Conclusion,' I will cross-examine the ways in which Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* are memorialised in the case studies, and conclude that whether understood as a metonym, symbol, idea, or epoch, depictions of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* in film encapsulate that paradox of continuity and disjuncture between 'old' and 'modern' France in a way that seems fitting given that modern France emerged as a result of the collapse of the very system it sought to entirely disentangle itself from. France may well have a long-established tradition of republican values, but nevertheless Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* provide a ready-

made image of those values that are so antithetical to the Republic that when exposed to memories of them, we are reminded of why the values of the Republic which replaced it are so important while not losing sight of the roots out of which the modern nation sprung. This thesis challenges the assumption that a return to the past in film is symptomatic of a warped imagination or a society that has become ossified, only able to look back at what has already been and gone. History on film can provide a sense of historical continuity, but by equal measure, can allow us to see the foundations upon which the contemporary world rests, or how the world as it we know it is similar or different that which came before us. Historical films, much like other forms of cultural memory, show us the things which bind the past to the present, while showing that us that the past is not merely something to be preserved in aspic, but something that can be memorialised to further our understanding of the present in which we live.

Chapter Two: *La Marseillaise* (Jean Renoir, 1938)

2.1 Romantic Portraits: The Fall of Versailles as Political Allegory

> *From this place and this time forth commences a new era in world history. And you can all say you were present at its birth.*
> — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Campaign in France.*[140]

Of the four case studies examined in this thesis, *La Marseillaise* is perhaps the most peculiar, not least because its eponymous title and subject matter (the French Revolution) seems to be odds with a thesis centred on memories of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime.* But I chose this film quite deliberately because although it does not centre around Versailles as a place, it deals with that defining moment of transition between old France, of which 'Versailles' was a prime symbol, and modern France, at which point 'Versailles' would cease to be an active seat of politics. In this chapter, 'Versailles' is not so much a place but a metonym for the monarchy and aristocracy, who, during the years of Revolution, were forced into exile. This chapter argues that *La Marseillaise* memorialises the past for a progressive cause, invoking a revolutionary tradition as a call to arms in support of the left-wing Popular Front. Like the other case studies examined in this thesis, *La Marseillaise* memorialises the past to speak to the present moment but does so with explicitly radical intentions. The film's take on the Revolution was inspired by new writings on the subject, such as those of Marxist historian Georges Lefebvre, rather than any will by French filmmakers at the time to broach the subject of history. C.G Crisp, for instance, notes how historical films were not favoured very much at all during this period.[141] Renoir judiciously searched the archives and consulted historians to give us a portrait of an era which he admittedly knew little about. He was advised by the *Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française*, whose founder, Georges Lefebvre, fashioned the notion of 'history from below.' In keeping with Lefebvre doctoral thesis, *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française*, Renoir's film charts the

[140] Johann Von Goethe, "The Campaign in France," in *Miscellaneous Travels of J.W. Goethe,* (London: Bell, 1910), p.118.
[141] Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

peasant's and ordinary person's role in bringing about political and social reform. At the time of consulting Renoir for his film, Lefebvre was also writing *The Coming of the French Revolution* (known in French as *Quatre-Vingt-Neuf*), which not only argued that the peasantry took an active role (especially in the countryside) in the Revolution, but that the bourgeoisie had little influence on their way of thinking. Told through the eyes of such irreproachable characters as Arnaud, a tax clerk, and Bomier, a mason, Renoir's take on the Revolution attempts to position itself as anti-bourgeois. Forefathers of the Revolution, from Robespierre to Danton, are nowhere to be found in the film. Renoir's tale invokes the spirit of Marx, where history is understood as one of class struggle and a desire for emancipation, nevertheless, Marxists have often viewed the French Revolution as a bourgeois and peasant rebellion against the monarchy and aristocracy in large numbers. More recent scholarship has challenged this idea on the basis that support for the Revolution among the bourgeoisie and peasant class (The Third Estate) was not as great as the Marxists believed, nevertheless, this chapter stresses how historical films can be guided by the historians of the time and can project the minutiae of scholarship, historiography, and archival research to a considerably larger audience without negating the broader cultural, political, social, and artistic capabilities of the medium the filmmaker is using.

While Renoir's film attempted to mirror Lefebvre's scholarship, there are apparent contradictions in *La Marseillaise'*s functionality. That is to say, the tension between historical remembering as a political act emboldened by the Marxist view of Revolution (as one of class struggle) and historical memorialisation as a humanistic project following in the vein of much of Renoir's work, where characters across social and political divides are treated as individuals with just reasons for acting in particular ways or making certain decisions. Martin O'Shaughnessy argues that Renoir's 'committed' films seem at odds with his image as a humanist, and that over time, our responses to the film have inevitably become somewhat distant from the original context in which these films resonated.[142] But while he begins with this hypothesis, he later argues that the two are reconciled in *La Marseillaise* because it "[groups] its individuals into a body with a shared purpose, but this body is made up of individuals who retain the power of reflection and are never forced into a monolithic mass of the

[142] Martin O'Shaughnessy (2015) Between the 'I' and the 'we': Jean Renoir's films of the popular front era. In: J Wardhaugh (ed.) *Politics and the Individual in France 1930–1950*. Oxford: Legenda, pp. 41–57.

sort to which fascism was drawn."[143] He goes on to say that "Renoir's people are too recalcitrant in their human idiosyncrasies and too haphazard in their staging ever to become *things* [italics are my emphasis]."[144] While some critics at the time of the film's release were acutely concerned by this incongruity between humanism and collectivism (as I will go to discuss later), it can be argued that the very Rousseauism it adopts in deference to Revolutionary thinkers themselves was one of the foundations of Marx's philosophy, which in conjunction with Hegel's theory of institutions, attempts to bridge the divide between the society and the individual. Rousseau's concept of the modern 'self' and his belief that humans are born free and good but corrupted by the shackles of society was taken up by the Romantics and later by Marx himself, but a more youthful Marx aimed to make the case for a common *human nature*, of which the individual formed a key part. He said, "*Society* is […] the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realised naturalism of man and the realised humanism of nature,", before concluding that "it is above all necessary to avoid once more establishing 'society' as an abstraction over against the individual. The individual *is* the *social being*."[145] Renoir's portrait of the French Revolution, which attempts to show us the direction of history, draws our attention to the ills of society (including class struggle) while attempting to offer a solution based on some conception of a collectivist human nature. *La Marseillaise* emphasises togetherness and solidarity and is infused with a sense of optimism. While a call to arms in spirit, the film highlights the importance of recognising the humanity in everyone. But for some, including *La Marseillaise'*s critics, the film's attempt at bridging humanism and collectivism made the film incoherent.

This chapter will maintain that Renoir's remembering of the French Revolution and the fall of the monarchy is inherently a political gesture with an internally coherent philosophy of humanity and theory of history. I will examine how such a philosophy and theory of history was manifest at the level of the film's production, distribution, and promotion, as well as in the film itself, before placing this within the context of its reception. But before I get to any of these details, I should briefly sketch out the cultural and national significance of the symbols and

[143] Ibid, p.54.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Quoted in, Terry Eagleton, *The Great Philosophers: Marx* (London: Orion Books, 2011).

iconography this film memorialises. Prakash Younger argues that *La Marseillaise* fundamentally "examines the effects of politics on culture" and "the title song's gradual emergence from the microcosmic obscurity of its origins (at once local and foreign — we are told the Rhine army song was brought to Provence by a Jewish Peddler) to become a cultural medium that binds people isolated by age, gender, occupation, class, and region into a coherent and dynamic nation."[146] The anthem epitomises popular struggle, as well as a changing political system where the peoples of a nation are no longer subjects but citizens. The film, which has the sub-title, "chronique de quelques faits ayant contribué à la chute de la Monarchie," proclaims to understand the direction of travel in history and the role class struggle and emancipation plays in it.[147] Renoir gives a great deal of attention to those at the bottom, or those lesser known, who played their role in the Revolution. Nevertheless, the film's portrait of the Revolution utilises two different types of *lieux de mémoire* to highlight the move from 'old' to 'modern.' One of these is "constructed" (the 'Marseillaise' anthem) and the other "imposed" (Versailles and the *Ancien Régime*). For Nora, imposed *lieux de mémoire* have a "symbolic and memorial intention [that] is inscribed in the object itself."[148] Constructed *lieux de mémoire,* by contrast, are formed by "unforeseen mechanisms, combinations of circumstances, the passage of time, [and] human effort."[149] The Marseillaise anthem constitutes the latter, for when the little-known Rouget de Lisle wrote the song in April 1792, it was intended as a military and patriotic song, but following the Insurrection in August of that year, it became a subversive anthem, or rather, part of the revolutionary cause. In Nora's magnum opus, it is noted that "[t]here are two sides to *La Marseillaise*: on the one hand it is a revolutionary tune that extols not just liberty but the values of a new world, while on the other hand it is a war song that expresses, with a zeal sometimes deemed 'sanguinary,' the patriotic sentiments of an embattled nation."[150]The Marseillaise anthem became memorialised during the 19th century as a republican symbol, both in France and in the liberal and national movements across Europe, and it was only in 1880 when the Marseillaise became the official anthem of France.[151] But in the wake

[146] Prakash Younger, *Boats on the Marne: Jean Renoir's Critique of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p.142.
[147] "A chronicle of a few incidents that contributed to the fall of the monarchy."
[148] Nora, p.X.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Nora and Goldhammer, p.29.
[151] Ibid.

of this, and the emergence of the left-wing song, *L'Internationale* (which was adopted by socialists during the late 19th century and late by the Bolshevik Party), the Marseillaise lost its subversive quality.[152]Nevertheless, Maurice Thorez, a long-serving leader of the French Communist Party (PCF), believed that the two songs could co-exist with one another, and so it would serve the interests of the Popular Front, then, the Resistance, and later, De Gaulle's France.[153]

The clash between the Marseillaise anthem and the iconography of displaced inhabitants of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* in the film draws our attention to contrast between the plight of the people (and the emerging Republic) and the static institution of Versailles, which had been draped over a suffocated nation by the divine powers of a monarch. The events of the film are framed within a revolutionary tradition, one that is class consciousness but in the spirit of Marx, is not ignorant of an aspiration for a common human nature. The idealism, Rousseauism, and collectivism of his portrait on the French Revolution was an allegory for his own hopes and desires for left-wing political reform in the 1930s. But aside from the class consciousness and Rousseauean philosophy, why else might Renoir have memorialised this aspect of history in particular? The influence of Lefebvre may have been one reason, but another may have been a resurgence in monarchical support on the far-right during the 1930s, factions those who would later form part of the Popular Front fought against. Calls to the restore the monarchy in France grew during the Interwar Years. *Action Française*, a movement determined to reverse all the changes that had been made since the Revolution — including the introduction of departments that had replaced the provinces and the secularisation of France that had separated the Catholic Church from the state — was founded in 1899 under Maurice Pujo, Henri Vaugeois, and Charles Maurras as a nationalistic and anti-Semitic reaction to those who came to the defence of Alfred Dreyfus when he was charged with treason.[154] Subscribing to a militant protectionism, the movement wanted the monarchy restored, and apart from their desire to restore the Orléanistes rather than the Bourbons, their vision was very much a return to pre-Revolutionary France. *Action Française* was sixty-thousand strong at its height, from the start of the First World War to the mid-1920s, but when the Catholic Church condemned the movement in the mid-20s, a huge blow was dealt to

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Samuel M. Osgood, *French Royalism since 1870* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013).

the movement because many of its supporters had been Roman Catholics.[155] In the 1930s, however, *Action Française* joined forces with other far-right movements for 6th February riots in the wake of the Stavisky Affair and the dismissal of Jean Chiappe as *Préfet de police* of Paris. On 3rd February 1934, *L'Ère nouvelle* published an account of what happened after the right-wing Chiappe was dismissed. Left leaning, the journal published a letter from M. Joly to the Hommes du Jour mocking the behaviour of the far right: "on entendit le chef des Camelots bredouiller dans les réunions publiques ces inintelligibles laïus dont se gaussent même ses amis."[156] The "Camelots" are a reference to the *Camelots du roi*, a youth organisation with sympathies to *Action Française.* He states that the militants "accueillaient leurs grands hommes au cri subversif de ‹ Vive le roi ›," but "les accents de la *Marseillaise* avaient, pour la durée de la foire électorale, remplacé ceux de la *Royale.*"[157] The likes of *Action Française* and the *Camelots du roi* believed these events to be an unequivocal attack on the right, culminating in violence just a few days later. Despite the fact key members broke away from the movement in the 1920s, its role in the 1934 riots arguably contributed to the collapse of the government. The incumbent Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, resigned over the issue and was replaced by Gaston Doumergue, who would form a National Union Government in the place of the *Cartel des Gauches*. While this quelled the far right, with Pierre Lavel dissolving most of these factions, a movement on the left developed as a reaction. The *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes* was founded, but internal fighting caused it to disappear quickly. A movement more seriously committed to anti-fascism was the Front Populaire, a coalition between the social-liberal *Parti républicain*, the centrist *radical et radical-socialiste*, along with the socialists and communists. The Front was led by Leon Blum — leader of the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO), and in June 1936, Blum was elected as Prime Minister. There was some disunity between the social-liberals, socialists, and communists, with the more radical parties calling for a general strike, but there was consensus on anti-fascism and

[155] Ibid.
[156] M. Joly, "Un portrait severe de M. Maurice Pujo", *L'Ère nouvelle,* Vol.5, No .877 (Paris: L'Ère nouvelle, 3rd February 1934), p.2. – "We heard the leader of the Camelots stammering these unintelligible speeches in public meetings, which even their friends laughed at"/"the militants welcomed their great men in the subversive cries of 'Vive le roi'"/"the accents of the *Marseillaise* had, for the duration of the electoral fair, replaced those of *la Royale.*"
[157] Ibid.

pacifism. Jean Renoir gave his full backing to the Front Populaire, and *La Marseillaise* was to be a vehicle for mobilising support for it.

Given this very context, Renoir's allegorising of the French Revolution and Versailles' fall in relation to the present moment arguably compounded the 'call to arms' message he hoped to convey. The political and moral dimension of *La Marseillaise* is rooted in an understanding of a *human nature* necessitated by historical circumstance. Those values of equality, liberty, and fraternity are reinvigorated and given a new lease of life, not out of nostalgia but political urgency. Historical films may invoke certain traditions or be rooted in familiar epistemological or historiographical formulas, but *La Marseillaise* demonstrates that returning to these traditions and relying on pre-existing formulas does not deem the task of historical memorialisation as an inherently conservative one, because the left equally has its own traditions and formulas (even if it does not always refer to them as such). It is worth noting though that it would be fallacious to suggest that there are two types of tradition, one belonging to the left and the other to the right, as it would be to suggest that these traditions are in any way fixed or that they must be all be adhered to at once to prove one's political credentials. *La Marseillaise*, for instance, is at times more indebted to a Romanticist tradition than to a Marxist one, and shifts between a liberal humanism and revolutionary collectivism, though he attempts to tie the two together by highlighting that for all individuals to be liberated and achieve some kind of self-realisation as the inherently benevolent mammals we allegedly are (in line with the *tabula rasa* hypothesis and Rousseau), it is in fact necessary for man and woman to recognise themselves first and foremost as social beings rather than Hobbesian creatures primarily driven by self-interest. Irving Singer sums this up when he says that the film "continues in the same humanistic, even anarchistic, voice" as *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (Renoir, 1936), which "constructs an archetypal representation of communal unity not dissimilar to what he must have found in Rousseau's philosophy."[158] An air of lyricism pervades the texture and feel of the film and its characters. Whether poor or aristocratic, there are character whose attributes we can sympathise with. For Renoir, everyone has their reasons. The marriage between

[158] Irving Singer, *Three Philosophical Filmmakers: Hitchcock, Welles, Renoir* (London: The MIT Press 2004), p.181.

humanistic and revolutionary traditions in the film are akin to William Blake's portrait of the Revolution, as seen through the eyes of the Duke of Burgundy:

> And thou black southern prison, move along the dusky road to
> Versailles; there Frown on the gardens — and if it obey and depart,
> then the King will disband
> This War-breathing army; but, if it refuses, let the Nation's Assembly
> thence learn
> That this army of terrors, that prison of horrors, are the bands of the
> murmuring kingdom.[159]

Blake conveys Burgandy's hopes that the Revolution will spread from the Bastille, and "move along the dusky road to Versailles". But the verb, "to move," here, as well as the later verb, "to frown," is rather a polite use of diction, suggesting a desire for civil disobedience rather than violence and unity rather than division. This is a missionary-like movement to spread revolutionary ideas, and even if the Royalists did not comply, the consequences should be to "let the Nation's Assembly thence learn" of the wickedness of those defending the King. The language does become more impassioned, but it is for the most part euphemistic and even diplomatic. Much like Renoir's film, Blake's poem is imbued with a 'revolutionary humanism' underpinned by Rousseauean thought, where it is society that is corrupt, not human beings. The messy picture of human conflict is underplayed by belief in the evolution and reform of moral character and the optimism of the will, echoing Victor Hugo's analogy of the "little man in Paris" who has so much more potential than society would give him credit for.[160] Nevertheless, while Renoir's take on the Revolution is history told from the bottom, and tries to indicate the direction of history as one of increasing optimism, fatalism catches up with it in the end, as Bomier's death shows. But as the character of Arnaud (an educated clerk in support of the Revolution) says, "our masters, instead of policing us, made us barbarians, by being barbarians themselves." Invoking Babeuf, the character's words remind us that violence can lead to more violence, but if we recognise our common humanity, history need not continue to play out in this way. Renoir's film sees history as a series of emancipations from the social and historical conditions in which it unfolded and intends to allegorise these conditions to the present moment, suggesting that political and social reform is the key to bringing about

[159] W.H. Stevenson, *Blake: The Complete Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2014), p.146.
[160] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.133.

transformations to our moral character and to any inclination towards violence and conflict. Serious tensions are played down and most conflict is caricatured as petty infighting between different classes. When, for instance, the royalists and revolutionaries spontaneously shout over each with cries of "vive le roi" and "vive la Révolution," they sound like battle cries for freedom more so than cynical bursts of hostility or agitation. The same can be said of that symbolic moment in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) when the *Marseillaise* anthem drowns out *Die Wacht am Rhein*. We can almost see them as quotations, or cliches, on freedom. For Umberto Eco, "[t]wo clichés make us laugh. A hundred clichés move us. For we sense dimly that the clichés are talking *among themselves* and celebrating a reunion."[161] In *La Marseillaise*, divergent 'quotations' reunite to capture the *Geist* of a historical moment, in turn memorialising a battle cry for freedom that Renoir hoped would inspire the push for political and social reform in the present moment. The next section of this chapter will detail the production context of the film and how its promotion points to its political intentions. Then, by examining *La Marseillaise* itself, I will argue that the memorialising of the past and tradition in historical films is not necessarily a conservative enterprise because tradition also belongs to the left, with this film invoking revolutionary and humanistic traditions as a call to arms in the moment of its production. Finally, I will explicate the ambivalence from critics on both the left and right, whose responses demonstrate that even if the instrumental value of the history being memorialised is aligned with the political or ideological outlook of the person responding to it, the very process of memorialising the past – aesthetic, political or humanistic – often proves contentious.

2.2 Le jour de gloire est arrivé! : La Marseillaise as a Call to Arms

If we are to understand the instrumental value of *La Marseillaise*'s portrait of history, and the impetus behind the film, we should look more closely at those years leading up to the film's release, the film's relationship to the Front Populaire, as well as broader social and economic factors. But it would wise to begin in reference to a press release printed around a year before the film itself was released on 2nd February 1938,

[161] Umberto Eco, ""Casablanca": Cult Movies And Intertextual Collage", *Substance*, 14.2 (1985), 11 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685047>.

in which the political intentions of the film were laid bare: "sur le plan strictement historique, le scénario, établi sur des documents irréfutables, doit rallier les suffrages de tous. Avec l'appui du gouvernement de Front Populaire et des organisations qui le soutiennent, ce film doit prendre une grande signification et se diffuser facilement à l'étranger en servant la cause du cinéma Français."[162] We are informed of the working relationship between Renoir and his allies in the emerging Front Populaire and the fact that the film would be a space for a political campaign. The press release nevertheless stresses that the narrative will be "strictly historical and based on irrefutable documents," so this film was presented early on as one that is practicing History and politics at the same time. Elsewhere, potential viewers and enthusiasts were informed that Ciné-Liberté, the film organisation associated with the Popular Front, was going to be behind the film.[163] The same source tells us that the film got the financial backing of the trade unions, which had, according to their estimates, five-and-a-half million members at the time, with two-franc shares sold by individuals in mass meetings to help raise the total budget of fifty-thousand francs.[164] Twenty-five thousand francs were also raised by The "Société d'exploitations et de productions cinématographiques *La Marseillaise*," with sponsors including Chautemps, Blum, Jouhaux and Thorez.[165] Those who were likely to see the film were asked to contribute forty sous to the production (though very little was raised using this method), and there was involvement from the C.G.T (Le comité de Coordination du Film) and Syndicat Général de Travailleurs de l'Industrie du Film.[166] From this syndicate of non-commercial sponsors and donations, Renoir demonstrated that those involved with funding the film, and the means by which it was achieved, was at one with the leftist values of the film. The headline to a *World Film News* article read, "Citizens of Paris

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[162] "Jean Renoir va entreprendre d'un Film sur la Révolution Française : « La Marseillaise » ", *La Cinématographique Française,* no. 954 (Paris: La Cinématographique Française, 12th February 1937), p.11 - "The narrative, strictly historical and based on irrefutable documents, must rally the votes of all. With the support of the *Front Populaire* Government and likeminded organisations, this film must have a big message and be easily accessible overseas, thus serving the cause of French cinema."

[163] Marie Seton, "Citizens of Paris Make a Film", *World Film News,* Vol.2, No .4 (London: World Film News, July 1937), p.35.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Pascal Mérigeau, *Jean Renoir: A Biography,* (Paris: Flammarion, 2016).

[166] Christophe Chauville, "La Réception Critique De La Marseillaise De Jean Renoir : La Représentation Cinématographique De La Révolution Française : Un Enjeu Politico-Intellectuel À L'Époque Du Front Populaire", *Cahiers D'Histoire De L'Institut De Recherches Marxistes*, 60 (1995), 35-49 <https://doi.org/http://pandor.u-bourgogne.fr/ead.html?id=FRMSH021_00008&c=FRMSH021_00008_FRMSH021_00008_de-1406>.

Make a Film", emphasising the fact the film made people feel as though they had made a contribution to the very film that would seek to represent them.[167] Some were unhappy about the film's overt political intentions, nevertheless, including journalist Henri Jeanson, who in 1935 became a key member of Ciné-Liberté, but left in 1937 in protest over the productions conditions of *La Marseillaise.* He proclaimed that "[t]he false Renoir never forgets that he is above all a political agent of the communist party, costumed and made up as a *cineaste.*"[168] For Jeanson, the "true" Renoir is the connoisseur of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, which is "the work of a free, courageous, and disinterested artist, whom money, demagogy, and false popularity had not yet corrupted."[169]

This objection to the overt politicisation of *La Marseillaise* speaks to the question of instrumentalism in the memorialisation of history, and whether history in film can be understood as political, as historiographical, or even as autotelic. If we look at some of the promotional material for the film, we find that while the traditions of the left in history are often recognised in some form, they are not as politically direct as in the press releases. One minimalistic poster adorning an issue of *La Cinématographique Française* on 26th March 1937 insists that "the French people have their film on the Revolution of 1789" (fig.17).[170] These words, capitalised in blue, stand boldly in the top left. At the bottom of the poster is the film's title in red and sitting proudly in the centre are the words "JEAN RENOIR." The blue and red typography are set against the white background, clearly invoking the iconic French Tricolour, which itself came into existence during the Revolution and became a prominent symbol of the Republic. The period of history in question is remembered primarily here as one of emancipation, and the Republic a symbol embodying the people. Those virtues of fraternity, liberty, and equality are assimilated into a history of emancipation. The declaration on the poster that "a film like *La Marseillaise* will go around the world" is not necessarily suggesting that the film would be an international success, but that its politics, based on political, economic, and social

[167] Seton, Ibid.
[168] Henri Jeanson's comments can be found in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/anthology, 1907-1939, Volume II 1929-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.249.
[169] Ibid.
[170] "La Marseillaise film poster", *La Cinématographique Française*, No. 960 (Paris: La Cinématographique Française, 26th March 1937).

change, has the potential to move us to a brighter, more optimistic future.[171] The poster is nevertheless rather subtle in conveying this message, and is certainly more subdued than the material found in the press releases.

Figure 17 La Marseillaise early film poster in La Cinématographique Française - 26th March 1937.

If we look at the style, form, and content of other types of posters the R.A.C (Réalisation d'art cinématographique) produced, we find that they promote Renoir's film as being more than just about historicity but the allegorisation of the past for political purposes. Some of their imagery is idealistic and somewhat reminiscent of Soviet art, highlighting the central place revolt and emancipation have in the historical period being memorialised. One poster includes an illustration of Bomier, who in the film is a humble mason turned revolutionary, spread across the page in an almost-full frontal pose (fig.18). The figure looks solemnly off to one side with a subtle frown, and from the way his head is positioned, we could imagine his body to be twisted slightly in a contrapposto pose, suggesting that he is about to move towards something. Positioned as if resting on his shoulder is an army of *sans-culottes* and *fédérés* raising their pikes and halberds in a uniform line, illustrating some form of linear progression as they march optimistically towards their destination. Bomier, an unknown figure whose dominance on the poster dwarfs the army of revolutionaries, reminds us that

[171] Ibid.

this film is a history told from the bottom and alludes to Renoir's hope of rallying the ordinary people of 1930s France around a movement for radical change. Elsewhere, Renoir himself noted that in the film, "personnages que nous présentons sont naturellement des révolutionnaires," because "chacun sait bien que les révolutionnaires sont toujours achetés."[172] Unknown characters are considered to be more sincere, rather than the likes of "Robespierre, Marat et Saint-Just ont fini leurs jours gorgés de l'or réactionnaire dans de luxueux palais."[173] While it was not true that these named figures ended their lives in this way (the irony being that they actually met with bloody endings), the point is that all of them became critical of certain tactics used by the revolutionaries and had bourgeois tendencies. Putting fictional characters front and centre of his film instead gave Renoir an opportunity to create archetypes of ordinary people as autonomous individuals who have the capacity to bring about political reform on their own terms. By memorialising images of humble men taking an active role in radical politics, Renoir hoped to inspire the humble men and women of his own age to play a role in bringing about radical political change.

Figure 18 R.A.C film poster with the character, Bomier.

[172] Jean Renoir, "Honneur aux Marseillais", *Regards*, issue 213 (Paris: Regards, 10th February 1938), p.3 – "Many of the characters we present are naturally revolutionaries"/"Everyone knows that revolutionaries are always bought."
[173] Ibid - "Robespierre, Marat and Saint-Just [who] ended their days gorged with reactionary gold in luxurious palaces."

In one other poster, a band of *Garde nationale* officers, and *fédérés* march in unison towards the future and a sea of *Garde nationale* flags flood the parade with an aroma of optimism (fig.19). To the left of this fanfare are the faces of Bomier and Arnaud, who are in some sense the anti-heroes of the film, but who nevertheless embody a Rousseauean vision of humanity. But once again, they symbolise the voice of the people. Their faces may be unknown, but their ideas are intended to speak for many. The illustrator sketches them in black and white, giving them the appearance of having been inscribed in France's historical record with a legacy that is worthy of praise. Symbols of the *Ancien Régime* and Versailles are almost absent here, aside from a medal etched with the conjoined busts of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. This medal depicts the one engraved by Conrad Heinrich Küchler, which was made in Birmingham in 1793 as a tribute to their passing. On the reverse of the medal is Louis XVI saying goodbye to his family before he is taken to the guillotine. The only memory of the 'old' France is a piece of material culture produced in retrospect of their life. The fragments of an irretrievable past anticipate the film's tendency to determine the direction of travel in history and the superseding of liberty, equality, and fraternity over their opposites. Taken as a whole, the posters memorialise various aspects of French history — including the evocative red, white and blue and the sea of *Garde nationale* flags — but the traditions it invokes are bound up with leftist ideas, including progress, and change.

Figure 19 R.A.C film poster with the National Guard and fédérés.

Further to this is the presence of a history as seen 'from the bottom,' which mirrors the focus of the film itself. Renoir consulted the *Cahiers de doléances* when doing his research for the film, sifting through the minutes of speeches and conversations held at the Jacobin Club.[174] But in early drafts of the script, Renoir included figures such as Robespierre or Danton, but in keeping with historiographical trends in historical scholarship, and taking the advice of Georges Lefebvre and fellows from *L'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française*, he decided that the film would be more effective if it traced the events of the Revolution from the perspective of unknown people.[175] By avoiding constitutional history, military history, or the *great men* theory of history proposed by Thomas Carlyle, Renoir could elevate the 'little men,' and stress their contribution to history in the hope of allowing large swathes of working class audiences to see themselves in these characters and feel empathy for them as they march towards liberty, equality, and fraternity. *La Marseillaise* then is not merely a subset of 'history from the bottom' scholarship, it is a radical form of historical remembering that capitalises on the traditions of the left in the hope of inspiring audiences to be supporters of the leftist alliance in their own time. The film is at once history, politics, and the work of a cineaste, but to understand how this multi-layered, allegorical remembering of the past addresses all three, and roots itself within its own partisan traditions, we must turn to the intricacies of the film itself.

2.3 "Vive La Nation, Vive Le Roi": *La Marseillaise* as a Traditionally Radical Film

La Marseillaise is at once radical and traditional in its portrait of history. The past is memorialised not out of nostalgia for a particular and concrete way of living that has ceased to exist but as an instrumental tool in reawakening the values, ethics, and traditions of a left that was awakened during the years of the Revolution. Owing to his ingenuity and experience in brings moral, ethical, and political issues to the screen through some form of artistic representation, Renoir brings together humanistic

[174] Michel Vovelle, *Les Images De La Revolution Française* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1989).
[175] Ibid.

critique with class struggle and collectivism in the hope of reaffirming the existence of a human nature and reinforcing that man and woman could only realise their capacities in and through the self-realisation of other people. It is only through our recognition of ourselves as *social* beings that meaningful and purposeful reform be achieved. The form this takes in the film is, as O'Shaughnessy notes, similar to *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* and *La Grande Illusion*, where the "capacity of the mobile camera to register the collective nature of action and to participate in the emergence of a group protagonist makes itself repeatedly felt."[176] An example is the "nearly two-minute long, virtuoso crane shot which shows the collective singing of the Marseillaise", which illustrates how individuals and small groups are tied to a larger context. This scene, with its prioritising of seamlessness over fragmentation, is "not simply noting that the personal is articulated within something larger; it is registering the transformation of the framework within which lives are led as they open onto history."[177] "Renoir's socialization of screen space," he maintains, is tied "to the spatial dimension of the shot, effectively relegating historicity to the narrative and neglecting what one might call the *mise en scène* of history."[178] Renoir then does not frame history as a kind of abstract geometry but as something manifest and concrete. The film shows us that it is not the power of ideas in-itself that is the driving force of history but the people who have the will to implement such ideas. The *antithesis* of the epoch Renoir memorialises, which is to say the schism of "constructed" and "imposed" *lieux de mémoire* in the form of 'Versailles' and the revolutionaries respectively, is heightened in the film not to emphasise conflict but to show the changing direction of travel in history in all its particularity, from monarchy to Republic. Renoir's adoption of the Marseillaise anthem (which was written by a French army captain in the wake of Austria and Prussia's invasion of France to raise the spirits of the troops and is alternatively known as *Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin*) in this film symbolises the power and capacities of the 'little man.' From its inception, the Marseillaise was an anthem for the people, a *de facto* song for the masses. Emperor Napoleon and the Restoration kings would later have the song banned for being suspiciously populist and anti-establishment, but since then, it has

[176] Martin O'Shaughnessy (2013) Shooting in deep time: the mise en scène of history in Renoir's films of the 1930s, In: A Phillips and G Vincendeau (eds) *A Companion to Jean Renoir*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 16–34, p.26.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid, p.22.

been widely adapted and quoted (by Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner and Elgar), and became France's official anthem in 1880.[179] In 1907, Georges Mendel synced up a gramophone with a camera to record a version of the anthem with Belgian opera singer Jean Noté. The three-minute film (aptly named *La Marseillaise*) begins with an empty wide shot of a cannon and French tricolour resting in the foreground against the backdrop of a rustic setting, then a soldier of the National Guard walks into the frame, takes off his tricorn hat and bursts into the Marseillaise. The power with which Noté projects his voice matches the visual of the soldier holding his head high with an upright posture. This film depicts the idea of the French Republic as something palpable; it is the living embodiment of the people who reside within it. Renoir's *La Marseillaise* memorialises the anthem so as to invoke its subversive origins and to lead us from a history of abstraction and symbolism to a concrete history of materiality and existence. Renoir highlights the instrumental value of traditions born out of the people and allegorises the struggles of the Revolution to heighten the urgency of what he saw as political and social reform in his own time.

To highlight the direction of history with a degree of certainty requires there to be *antitheses* present. From the very beginning of *La Marseillaise,* in the opening titles, we are given an immediate sense of the necessity of reform. The foundations upon which the revolutionary epoch will come into existence are laid bare before us in the form of a certain antiquated and fossilised image of Versailles. Overlying the credit is not, as we would expect, the *Marseillaise* anthem, but the anachronistic Michel-Richard Delalande's *Chaconne pour les trompettes, extraite des Symphonies pour les Soupers du roi,* a piece of Baroque music composed for one of Louis XIV's feasts. But while this composition bears little relation to the two-hour story which follows it, the fact the piece is symbolic of an old, stuffy aristocratic world that had not changed very much since Louis XIV, hints that perhaps this static world needs shaking up. Against the backdrop of the film's title card appears, 'La Marseillaise: A Chronicle of a Few Incidents that Contributed to the Fall of the Monarchy,' emphasising that this film will deal with the direction of travel in history and the conditions in which this epoch played itself out. Those responsible for shaping the course of this epoch is hinted at in the cast list, where characters are grouped according

[179] Alice L Conklin, Sarah Fishman and Robert Zaretsky, *Modern France And Its Empire, 1870 To The Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

to social status and rank: ‘La Cour,’ ‘Les Autorités Civiles and Militaires,’ ‘Les Aristocrates,’ ‘Les Marseillais,’ and ‘Le Peuple.’ From the outset, we get the sense that this film will be a narrative of history predicated on class conflict but not necessarily defined by oppression, struggle, and a labouring of the negative. The film equally memorialises the past to show the contrast between ‘old’ and ‘modern’ France, emphasising the virtues of emancipation, progress, liberty, fraternity, equality, and a common humanity indebted to Romantic humanism and Rousseauean philosophy.

Figure 20 Title card- ‘Chateau de Versailles- 14th July 1789.

Everything we see in the opening credits — the title card of Versailles, the anachronistic music, the pronouncement at the end, “Chateau de Versailles, 14th Juillet 1789” (fig.20) — epitomises the exuberance of a world that would be challenged and confronted by the events of the Revolution. In effect, it sets up the air of pretentiousness that will define the first scene. Set in the interiors of the Palace of Versailles (though filmed on a set) on the day later remembered as Bastille Day, this scene draws our attention a world of aloofness. Renoir treats this antiquated space as an entity siloed from the changing world outside, with inhabitants who are completely ignorant of the direction of travel in history. The scene begins with the triumphant sound of royal trumpets, as a medium-long shot of a king’s guardsman standing to attention in all his finery, against the backdrop of an intricate tapestry, fades into being. A guard of senior rank then enters the shot from the left-hand side, exclaiming,

"présenter les armes!" and "en avant, marche!!"[180]The guard meets his request, marching out of the frame and followed shortly behind by the senior guard. The camera remains static as further instructions can be heard out of shot. Into the now vacant space marches in another guard, fulfilling the same duty as the guard who was there initially. Once he stands to attention, the camera begins to pan left, exposing us to the deep space of the whole corridor, down which guards march in unison. As they march away from the camera, servants pass by, moving through the space as if to remind us that this spectacle is an everyday custom rather than a ceremonial affair. The camera is not eager to follow the guards or fixate on any specific subject. It is almost ghostlike; half-present and half-absent. Renoir gives us the impression that those who inhabit this space are so rooted in tradition, feeling, and intuition that their way of acting in the world to them appears ordinary and self-evident. But by making us aware of the date in which this takes place prior to the scene, we are almost become sceptical of these customs as existing self-evidently. In the spirit of Hobsbawm, Renoir reminds us that these traditions and protocols are *invented*, or not as embedded as intuitions may believe us to think. The people of Versailles however are so invested in their intuitions that they cannot foresee the direction of history, in turn reinforcing their aloofness to the world around them. This is reinforced further by the arrival of La Rochefoucauld. As the guards march away, the camera moves apathetically in their direction, but gets distracted by La Rochefoucauld walking in the opposite direction towards us. The camera follows him into the antechamber, where he waits patiently to see the King. Tonally, this is in keeping with the formality of the few seconds before, but when La Rochefoucauld enters the Louis XIV's chamber, there is a sudden moment of bathos. We find the King lying in his bed in his night clothes after a day of hunting, waiting for his meal to be served. When finally served, the king hastily tucks into a juicy chicken, as if a scavenger, and swigs his wine in a manner lacking all sense of decorum. The King's gluttony and paucity of good taste is reminiscent of those eating habits employed by Henry VIII in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Corda, 1933), and although these images may border on hyperbole, they go some way to revealing a sense of the animalistic behind the façade of regal sophistication. The hyperbole employed by Renoir also speaks to the king's blasé attitude and lack of self-awareness, which is significant not least in light of La Rochefoucauld's announcement

[180] "Present arms!" and "forward march!"

that the Bastille has been stormed as he dines. Louis does not seem to understand the gravity of the situation at all and responds to the announcement by asking rather dismissively whether or not this storming is a revolt. The character of Rochefoucauld responds (as the real man did) with, "non, Sire, c'est une révolution!"[181] Renoir's incorporating of this infamous quotation into the story is an attempt to elicit a certain kind of knowing, self-conscious response from his audience, who can see the direction of travel in the way that the King and Versailles could not. Immediately after Rochefoucauld's declaration, Renoir fades to black, which in-itself signifies both the transition from a seemingly inconsequential moment (from the perspective of the King and Versailles) to another, and the immediacy with which such a seismic declaration is followed by the empirical acceleration of events outside of the fossilised environment of Versailles. It is only the opening scene which takes place at Versailles, which itself plays into the idea that Renoir's memorialising of history is non-static and fast moving. It disregards traditions as fast as it creates new ones, all to demonstrate the direction of travel and to heighten its own political functionality and instrumentality.

Even if the physical entity of Versailles does not reappear after the first scene, Versailles as a metonym (or imposing synecdoche) does. The characters who were in some way associated with it — Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Princesse de Lamballe and Monsieur de Fouguerolles — remain a part of the narrative, reminding us of the epochal shift taking place and the direction of travel. Nevertheless, the Hegelian dialectic of the film, and the *antithesis* between two opposing worlds, is not simply a means to highlight the conflict present. As Prakash Younger notes, "the first two sequences […] present us with an entire country of characters already in the process of opening their eyes to each other and the radical possibilities of the French Revolution."[182] Characters of different social statuses are not always hostile to one another, they sometimes recognise their own vices and virtues as well as the vices and virtues of others. Characters are often presented as more than stereotypes or part of some socially determined tribe. Renoir points to their innate goodness and a potential for a common human nature. As André Bazin said:

[181] "No, your majesty, it's a revolution!"
[182] Younger, p.142.

> Even when defending a particular moral or social truth, [Renoir] always does justice to the men who oppose this truth and to their ideals as well. He gives every chance to ideas, and every chance to individuals. This artistically fruitful approach is particularly apparent in *La Marseillaise* in the manner in which he presents the émigrés and the court of Versailles.[183]

Even if Renoir ends up being more sympathetic towards the *peuple* than to the aristocrats, this is not because he sees them as being innately virtuous and the latter as inherently corrupt. He takes the view that the social and political institutions themselves disable the capacity for a common human nature and do a great deal of damage to those whose capacities are never realised by them or by anybody else. On the other hand, because the social and political institutions which gave the nobility great privileges and material rewards are in this film depicted as being in disarray, the nobility itself suffers from this sense of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual impoverishment. The film accelerates quickly, taking us from place to place and the direction of travel becomes more certain. But there are moments when the pace stalls, and where momentum is secondary to contemplation. One such moment is felt early on when the Marquis de Laurent's fort is occupied by the patriots in Marseille, forcing him to become a German émigré, along with many other nobles. A physical gulf between the nobility and *La France* opens because of their displacement, a moment realised by Renoir by the shift of events from Marseille to the drawing room in the hotel Stadt Coblentz in Germany. These hotel scenes have an air of detachment about them and demonstrate that while history is accelerating very quickly in France, an inevitable sense of nostalgia with regards to rootedness and tradition pervades the nobility's diminishing world. But while Renoir is unambiguous in showing us the direction of travel, for the purpose of highlighting the virtues of a shared human nature, we are made privy to their capacity for emotion and, like everybody else, a certain vulnerability.

The scene opens with a shot of the hotel's signage, drawing our attention immediately to the foreignness of this non-French location. The camera then pulls back slowly, where in medium close-up, standing next to the sign with a subdued expression on his face, the Marquis de Saint Laurent is positioned. Laurent's proximity to the sign establishes a link between him and the foreign location, reinforcing that he

[183] André Bazin et al, *Jean Renoir* (New York, N.Y.: Da Capo Press, 1992), p.65-66.

is not at one with his surroundings but nevertheless he has no control over the situation and must adjust to it. Laurent's eyeline is drawn to the other side of the room, where his wife, Madame de Saint Laurent, is playing a slow, solemn rendition of Chateaubriand's lyrical poem, *Souvenir du pays de France*, on the harpsichord. The Marquis' subdued facial expression in tandem with the sombre musical score implies an air of melancholy. At first, the song appears incidental, but as the scene draws on, it becomes apparent that it symbolises the hopeless situation the nobility finds themselves in. Nevertheless, the scene is visually and aurally sorrowful; the anguish felt in Madame de Saint Laurent's voice permeates the formal structure of the entire sequence. Following on from the opening shot of the Marquis standing next to the hotel's sign, the Marquis gracefully walks out of view, captivated by his wife's enchanting words. The camera then slowly pans around the room, where we find one noble playing chess, one spinning a yoyo upwards and downwards, and two playing a game of cards. As the camera continues to pan, we can see several aristocrats standing near the doorway, listening carefully to Madame de Laurent's song. From the *mise en scène* alone, this scene depicts an evening of leisure, but a closer look at the pan and a more judicious appreciation of the tonal qualities of the music exposes this recreational spectacle as a charade. The noble playing chess is doing so alone. He is not invested in the game but is playing it as a means of distracting himself from his own misery. The noble with the yoyo is in the same predicament. He too looks like he is trying to bleach out the realities of the external world. And, after the Marquis walks away from the hotel sign towards his wife, he does not take the direct route. He walks over towards the window with his back to the camera, then, as the camera pans around further, he meanders around the seated nobles, past the card players, and then finally towards Madame de Laurent. His waltzing about the place and staring out of the window at nothing specific suggests that his mind is pre-occupied by his displacement. Renoir reminds us that he and the nobility are not at home here, and no card nor chess game can alter the circumstances.

Figure 21 Medium close-up of Marquis de Saint-Laurent lost in his own thoughts.

We get the sense that the Marquis, and those around him, are becoming increasingly nostalgic for the traditions to which they are accustomed. Renoir does not intend for us to share that nostalgia, nor is he nostalgic himself. He emphasises the nostalgia of the characters as a means of expressing in the most diplomatic way their *human* qualities and how anyone might react in the wake of displacement. Renoir gives them dignity as human beings, regardless of the fact we are not meant to sympathise with the class system from which they greatly benefitted. This heightened sense of emotion is conveyed when the Marquis approaches his wife and listens tentatively to every word she sings, while the camera fixates on his sombre facial expression. He looks down towards her in a medium close-up, imbuing the moment with pathos (fig.21).

Figure 22 Medium-long shot of the Marquis gazing contemplatively at Madame de Saint-Laurent singing.

In another shot (this time a medium-long shot), the Marquis stands upright as he looks sorrowfully at his wife (fig.22). At this point, the song becomes the central focus and a collective expression of all their emotions. The Marquis is lost in his own thoughts as he listens to her. His facial expression implies regret, but his body language indicates that he is trying to supress his emotions, although such emotions already seem to be externalised by the sentiment of the song. One of the verses goes as follows:

> O ! qui me rendra mon Hélène,
> Et ma montagne et le grand chêne ?
> Leur souvenir fait tous les jours
> Ma peine :
> Mon pays sera mes amours
> Toujours ![184]

Everything about this verse — its weeping use of literary apostrophe ("O ! qui me rendra mon Hélène"), its saccharine references to nature ("ma montagne et le grand chêne ?") and its Romantic diction ("Leur souvenir fait tous les jours Ma peine") — is wistful and sentimental, but its use of the future tense ("sera") implies a certain level of confidence that despite the circumstances, their country will forever be their home, even if their roots and traditions are preserved only through memory. The natural imagery of the oak tree and the mountain symbolise rootedness and longevity. For the nobility, their traditions are the foundation on which the nation rests. They are perceived by them as having existed from *time immemorial*, when in fact, as the film's leftist outlook implies, these traditions are in fact *invented*, or rooted in a historical context. Renoir reminds us once again that France as the nobles remember it is coming to an end, and the direction of travel is determined. Their nostalgia is one sense akin to tragedy, as their hope that things will go back to how they were will not come to pass. Terry Eagleton argues that tragedy within a context of transition unfolds "at times when one way of life collides with another, or when a traditional world-view, while still retaining a degree of authority, is confronted by forces it cannot easily accommodate."[185] As we see the nobles standing wistfully around the harpsichord,

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[184] Oh! who will give me back my Hélène,
And my mountain and great oak tree?
Their memory makes me sad every day:
My country will be my love
Always!

[185] Terry Eagleton, *Tragedy* (London: Yale University Press, 2020), p.56.

listening to every word that is being sung by the Marquis' wife, we bear witness to their own tragic sense of the future not looking all too pleasant for them. The heightened sense of emotion here follows in the tradition of Romantic humanism and one of its greatest influencers, Rousseau. Renoir reminds us that history may be about conflict, injustice, the fight for liberty, and so on, but equally, it is about people, and those people share with others their capacity for empathy and understanding.

The film sees history as being primarily driven by social, economic, and political forces rather than individual will. It is not deterministic, but it emphasises that the ills of the world are not the result of Man in his primitive state but the social and political conditions in which history itself unfolds. Renoir, particularly through the characters of the nobility, seems to attribute any self-interest (and self-interest within pre-established tribes) as the product of social pressures, pressures which inhibit the capacity for self-realisation and common ground. As the scene in the hotel progresses, for instance, sentimentality morphs into selfishness as one noble suggests to the others that if they are to safely return to France and restore it to how it was, they should collaborate with the King of Prussia (whose kingdom opposed the Revolution). The sentimentalising around Chateaubriand and their displacement from a nation they are ostensibly devoted to is in fact not much of a devotion to the nation at all but to their own self-interest. The noble in question waxes lyrical about meeting the King of Prussia and claims that even the most "jacobin obstiné" could not believe that "tous les hommes sont créés égaux."[186] This noble believes that the traditions and customs of monarchy are self-evident and infallible. The Marquis de Laurent, who, despite being sceptical of allying himself with Prussia (whom he describes as a nation of protestant "hérétiques"), shares a similar view of traditions and customs, in particular the presence of the Catholic church in *Ancien Régime* France. Tradition for them is justified by intuition and by the fact of longevity, but in a similar vein to the opening scene, Renoir draws our attention to the fact that said traditions have an origin and have not always existed, in the same way that, for instance, the universe has an origin and has not always existed (contrary to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas' beliefs). This scene highlights the conservative forces against which the revolutionaries will fight and emphasises the false pretences on which the nobility claims their self-evident right to rule. It reinforces their willingness to conspire against the people of France to

[186] "stubborn Jacobin" and "all men are created equal"

protect their own interests, as Monsieur de Fouguerolles does when he ceases the opportunity to mention that the Duke of Brunswick is likely to lead Prussia to victory against the French Revolutionaries. The sublime sense of entitlement these characters have is tantamount to an admission of defeat. The nobility seems to think that by virtue of inheriting the traditions and customs of a system to which they are part justifies their thoughts and actions at every turn, but Renoir highlights that said traditions and customs originate in the very system that for the revolutionaries was the source of France's problems. He draws our attention to the possibility of a history of tradition, where tradition is consciously aware of its own origin and the social and historical conditions in which it came into being. Once again, the past is for Renoir a place where new traditions are invented and old ones abolished, where the direction of travel is mapped out against the social and political backdrop.

Because Renoir maps history out against the social and political backdrop, the film's remembering of the past has instrumental value, which is to say it has a means to a desired end. The 'call to arms' message of the film is enhanced by a view of history as a series of emancipations, where its direction is determined by the capacity of individuals and groups to realise the potential of themselves and others. The film understands history as something that constantly shifts and changes according to social and political forces, but while this momentum is presented as a force for good, the film also recognises that such momentous forces are equally about loss as they are gain. Take for instance the pervasive sense of nostalgia felt by the nobility as they lament their displacement from the hotel in Germany. The physical disconnect is affirmed by Monsieur de Fouguerolles, who reminds his fellow nobles that "cet hôtel n'est pas Versailles."[187] The hotel is in fact a site of torment for him and his fellow nobles, a constant reminder of their dispossessed status. The film has the nobles reminisce about Versailles from a place that is transitory, fleeting, without tradition, reinforcing the chasm between them and their home. Their nostalgia is emphasised by their attempts to recover those memories of Versailles and its atmosphere. In a moment of blissful detachment, the nobles recall various dance routines they used to perform there, and then, in a moment of whimsy, they begin to dance. For a moment, the hotel room becomes an imagined space, a faux Galerie des Glaces. While the nobles are fully aware that this hotel room is no adequate substitute

[187] "This hotel is not Versailles"

for Versailles, the spectacle of the dance against a backdrop (complete with a chandelier, checkerboard floor, and curtains and draperies) illustrates a fanciful attempt to recover the lost atmosphere of Versailles (fig.23). We get the sense that they are blissfully lost in the moment but blinded by their own delusions. Renoir presents those who were once affiliated with Versailles as out of touch and removed from the concerns which faced many ordinary people in France. History for Renoir is inevitably moving forward, and epochal shifts are almost certain to take place. The film sees the world of monarchy and Versailles as already antiquated and out of kilter with the direction of travel.

Figure 23 Aristocrats attempting to relive their time at Versailles in the drawing room.

But this notion of some aspects of history being out of kilter can only be emphasised by exposing us to the *antitheses* of the past which point to the direction of travel. As we have already seen, Renoir depicts the nobility as self-interested and sympathetic to forces who are not working in France's interest (when the Prussians invade later in the film, it is the nobility who are ultimately painted as responsible for the brutality). On the other hand, the National Guard, the *fédérés* and the people of Marseille are unequivocally treated as virtuous. Take the scene when the National Guard arrive in Paris for the July 14th celebrations. We see crowds of people cheering and applauding in various long shots seamlessly intertwined with the parade itself. The space is saturated with a sea of tricolours and bunting, and decorative poles with helical patterns are aplenty. The *mise en scène* is profoundly uplifting, with spirts heightened further as men and women cheer and dance and field music (consisting of drums, horns, and fifes) is played, culminating at the moment officers step up on to the

rostrum. The feeling of pomp and circumstance emphasises the strength of feeling and that history is being made. It is almost as if their battle has already been won and the direction of travel is such that the previous chapter in France's history seems almost forgotten. In one sweeping wide shot, Renoir moves us out of the immediate action to reflect on the course of history. Our attention is diverted from groups of jovial people celebrating to children of the poor (in the foreground) playing under an alcove, as if it were an adventure playground. Next to the alcove lies a battered sign, "ci-git la Bastille" (fig.24).[188] The remnants of a recent past are laid bare and all that remains are the foundations of the Liberté Tower of the Bastille (which was rediscovered in 1899). The battered sign sits there like a discarded relic. The aura of greatness the *Ancien Régime* aspired to is now nothing short of insignificant. It is a forgotten citadel that has been abruptly erased from the collective memory of those present at the event. In the spirit of Shelley's sonnet on the fate of history, "Nothing beside remains" of this old world.[189] As the camera pulls back, the Guard march through the streets. Crowds of people cheer and doff their hats. The world of the *Ancien Régime* seems almost a distant memory. Imposed *lieux de mémoire* are being disassembled in place of a constructed *lieu de mémoire,* and the virtues of this epochal shift are laid bare. This mood of joy and optimism is apparent because the direction of travel in history seems self-evident. Social and political forces are the guiding force of history here.

Figure 24 Wide shot of the parade in Paris.

The same can be said of those moments in the film where the antitheses of history clash, though not to show us who winners and losers of history are, but to expose the

[188] "Here lies the Bastille."
[189] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p.194.

follies of conflict in general. If there is a direction of travel, it is for Renoir about the self-realisation of one's social role and to see the commonalities between oneself and others, not a descent into *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The scuffle between the nobles and revolutionaries on the Champs-Elysées is one such moment in the film where the follies of conflict are exposed. The *fédérés* are seen marching up the avenue when cutaways to the exterior of a café sees nobles sneering at them from a sedentary position. As the *fédérés* near, the nobles jump out of their seats, gather in a crowd, and forming an ensemble, begin to sing a parody of *Ça Ira*. The cadence and meter of the song is identical, but the lyrics are altered. At one point, they chant, "oui, nous vaincrons, nous enverrons les révolutionnaires au gibet !".[190] Following this, one of the nobles takes it upon himself to walk through a crowd of *fédérés*, looking around him in disgust as he is doing so, before provocatively shouting, "Vive le roi !". In response, a *fédéré* shouts, "vive la nation !", at which point each side is prompted to compete to see who can shout their slogans the loudest. As this verbal rally escalates, a noble is chased away by the many crowds, and then a battle of sorts commences in the middle of the road. I say 'of sorts' because a battle *qua* battle will often reveal the horror and brutality of war to us, whereas here we get more of a quarrel and a few tit-for-tat scuffles. The conflict soon becomes farcical: in nearby fields, a *fédéré* is pushed into a pool of water by a noble, then that same noble is pushed into the pool by a *fédéré*. The scene is playfully quaint, with its chief purpose being to expose the follies of conflict. For instance, as soon as begins to rain, the fighting comes to an end, and they all scuttle off. This conflict is a far cry from the Reign of Terror and is more indebted to a view of humanity proposed by Rousseau than the Marquis de Sade. The pettiness of the fighting ridicules human conflict and views it primarily as the product of social and political forces. History in this film then is understood as a process of negotiating social and political forces, which in turn gives impetus to the instrumental value of the film's remembering of the past.

[190] "Yes, we will win, we will send the Revolutionaries to the gallows!"

Figure 25 Wide shot of the nobility watching a Chinese shadow puppet show

Similar observations can be made about history in the Chinese shadow puppet show scene. Conflict is once again viewed as something that is inflicted upon humanity through political and social forces. In the scene, an audience of mostly nobles attend a show caricaturing the Brunswick affair (which states that if the royal family is harmed, the citizens will be harmed in retaliation). Renoir's employs *mise en abyme* to draw our attention to the irony of the nobles immersing themselves in a show which is openly mocking them. In one wide shot of the auditorium, rows of nobles can be seen immersed in the show, highlighting their lack of self-awareness and inability to foresee the direction of travel (fig.25). This is enlarged by the fact the show itself employs metaphor and allegory to critique the monarchy. In the show, we see the king attempt and fail to serenade 'Marianne' (a symbol of *La France*) with a song about his desire to kiss her if only there were not a physical abyss between them. The king is made to look foolish when says that he is the one who created this abyss in the first place. The show satirises the king's oversight that he is the one responsible for that widening gap between the people of France and the monarchy. But despite its critical view of the monarchy and nobility, the nobles are seen to enjoy it. As the performance continues, it becomes apparent that a group of *fédérés* and their wives are part of the audience. One noble shouts "regardez, c'est les marseillais!", provoking a hysterical response from other nobles present, but given that these nobles decided to watch a humorous denouncement of the Brunswick Manifesto (à la Camille Desmoulins' in the salon above the Café de Chartres) exposes them as lacking self-awareness and an

inability to see history unfolding before them.[191] Because the tensions in the auditorium and in the puppet show itself are presented as farcical, it suggests that the scene's object of critique is once again the social and political conditions of the moment than individuals. By way of allegory, Renoir emphasises that the direction of travel is determined by the will to reform structures and to realise commonalities in what are seemingly trivial differences between people. This of course ties into the film's instrumental value, and Renoir's desire to disseminate these values to achieve reform in his own time.

The impetus for reform is in this film understood as a self-conscious and critical reaction to the forces which attempt to disguise the fact that all is not well by passing off their intuitions and common sense as *a priori* justifications for stubbornly keeping things as they are. One such example is the scene where King Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and ministers are seated around a table to discuss whether to implement the Brunswick Manifesto. The disparity in this scene between our expectations of how such a discussion ought to take place and how it actually takes place enlarges the aloofness of the involved parties and the incongruity between their attitudes and those of the revolutionaries. By emphasising the visceral over the intellectual, Renoir exposes a nobility who are out of touch with reality but equally brazen about their contempt for the people. He reinforces how ill-judged their decision making was and how the chasm between the nation and 'Versailles' grew wider as a result. During the scene, Renoir seldom cuts to a master shot of the proceedings, instead cutting between the characters using medium close-ups and close-ups. As a consequence, we experience this less as a diplomatic affair and more as a personal exchange between individuals whose positions of authority we know are weakening. The opulence of the Tuileries Palace, in which the meeting takes place, is pure window dressing, for as they talk, Renoir cuts to an exterior shot of revolutionaries throwing stones at the gates. We get a clear sense that the nobility's place in this world of

[191] "Look, it's the Marseilles'!"

grandeur and excess is increasingly untenable yet they themselves fail to grasp the full gravity of the situation.

Figure 26 Close-up of King Louis XVI reading the Brunswick Manifesto.

The scene is full of long takes, especially of the king in close-up (fig.26) or medium close-up, which repeatedly highlight his distress and frustration to us. In one such shot, the king is hunched over the table, painstakingly reading out the details of the Manifesto while asking the minister to turn the pages for him. The king's abrupt tone emphasises his frustration with the content of the Manifesto, which is confirmed when he states, "les vrais auteurs de ce manifeste sont irresponsables."[192] Nevertheless, Renoir soon emphasises that the king has no strength of character when, after a ministers cites an acquaintance of his who would "préférerait voir camper les Prussiens sur la place Louis XV alors que notre économie s'effondre vers une victoire qui renforcerait l'audace de ceux qui ont semé le désordre," and Marie Antoinette brutally exclaims, "les révolutionnaires peuvent entrer dans le Palais, mais ils n'en sortiront pas vivants," he begins to change his mind.[193] He initially objects to the Queen's lament for subjects who "n'obéissent plus," but soon after, yields to her grievances and has the Manifesto put to the Assemblée Nationale.[194] The abundance of self-interest apparent in this scene echoes earlier remarks by the nobility regarding their willingness to work with the wealthy courts of foreign allies. Indifference towards the people is further manifested in the portrayal of Marie Antoinette. We often

[192] "The real authors of this manifesto are irresponsible."
[193] He would "prefer to see the Prussians camp in the Louis XV square while our economy breaks down to a victory that would reinforce the audacity of those who caused the disorder"/ "the revolutionaries can enter the Palace, but they will not leave here alive."
[194] "No longer obey."

see her in long-duration medium shots (fig.27), but there is one moment in particular that highlights her indifference most of all. As she rants about the importance of the Manifesto, a baroque composition can be heard in the background (either J.S Bach or Jean-Philippe Rameau), creating a disparity between the moment she inhabits and the era to which we might think she belongs. The Baroque music would have been at home in the earlier part of the 18th century, so to this end, the queen is very much depicted as an anachronistic entity who is indifferent to the demands of her time. Renoir then shows us a royal family blinded by their own vanity, which he also demonstrates has consequences. Immediately after this sequence, when the Manifesto has seemingly been implemented, the film cuts to a short montage sequence of conflicting newspaper front pages on the issue, from the *Journal des débats et decrets* and *Révolutions de Paris* to *Les Actes des Apôtres* and *L'Ami du peuple*. Overlaying these visuals are the sounds of jeering and shouting, which gives substance to the conflict at hand. But these sights and sounds not only epitomise the growing anger among the people, but the rapid speed in which history is unfolding. Renoir is not at all ambiguous about the direction of travel, reminding us that the reactionary actions of the nobles are to their detriment.

Figure 27 A medium shot of Queen Marie Antoinette giving her verdict on the Brunswick Manifesto.

Figure 28 Wide shot of the King and fellow officers descending the stairs to seek protection from the Legislative Assembly.

Nevertheless, while pace of change is depicted as fast and the course of history certain, when the chips are down for the nobility and their fate sealed, Renoir reverts to a Rousseauean ambience. This is not done out of sympathy or nostalgia for the old institutions but to remind us that because history fundamentally involves people, it is necessary both morally and ethically to emphasise a shared *human nature*, even among those we may oppose, most crucially if one has faith in innate human goodness and the belief in our capacities for self-realisation. Take for instance the sense of tragic loss felt in the Insurrection scene. Although the scene begins with the king seeming almost indifferent to the grave situation that is about to unfold —accepting his fate while indulging in a meal — as soon as he leaves his private chamber, an overwhelming sense of emotion pervades the space. Cries of "vive le roi" are bellowed from the lungs of faithful courtiers known to him at Versailles. Troops then doff their tricorn hats as he descends the staircase with fellow officers to seek protection from the Legislative Assembly. The tone is sentimental yet dignified as he descends (fig.28), with courtiers kneeling and bursting into a rendition of *O Richard, O mon roi* from the Gréty opera, *Richard Coeur de-Lion*. The original song enlarged the grave situation another king, Richard I, found himself in, and his hopes of being rescued. The context in which the song is sung here is similar, as the court pray that Louis will be able to rescue himself from impending doom. Although he appears stoic in his stride, we get the sense from his solemn gaze that he is not hopeful of a positive outcome. When he makes his request that the Legislative Assembly be protected outside, some of his guards are persuaded to join the revolutionaries, giving weight to

his previous defeatism and poignance to the sentiments expressed by the court. When the king re-enters the Tuileries Palace, and knows that his time there is limited, the space becomes the relic of a dying institution and the symbol of a rapidly changing France. Historical events and epochal shifts accelerate quicker in the film than those who oppose them would wish, but in presenting history in this way, Renoir gives us a degree of uplifting certainty about the capacity for reform and change.

The forces of history are enlarged in the film to a greater degree in the scene where the king and his family make a dignified exit from the palace. Because this palace was never Louis' natural home and was in some sense a transient space that 'stood in' for Versailles after their displacement, the fact of their departure only enhances the sense of finality that increasingly consumes the nobility. The tone of the sequence is melancholy, almost funerary in fact. The family leave the palace wearing black overcoats, and solemnly walk as bells toll ominously in the background. A sense of foreboding looms over them like a dark cloud. Imprisonment and execution are inevitable, but Renoir's sentimentality does not take us as far as the guillotine; they are on their way to a refuge. He encourages us to see the revolutionary change as being brought about by stealth, with no intended recourse to violence. A wide shot (with a long duration) encapsulates the moment the family walk down the avenue for the last time. They look so exposed in the open environment, and the grandiosity of the visual, with its striking one-point perspective and symmetrical line of trees on either side of the avenue, dwarfs them greatly (fig.29). It almost has the grandeur of a Jean Le Pautre engraving of Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV, but without the institution behind it to grant it its symbolic importance. The sheer height of the trees in the shot casts huge shadows over the 'procession', giving the shot a bleak and morbid feel. As the family approach the foreground of the shot, the camera cranes down gradually, reaching eye-level at the very moment the Dauphin runs ahead of his family towards the autumn leaves strewn over the ground. We then see him scoop some of the leaves up in his hands before throwing them at his sister in a playful manner. The King remarks that "the leaves have fallen early this year," a metaphor for the despair they feel at the rapid acceleration of change and the sense of foreboding felt as winter approaches, the season when life symbolically reaches its end. The tone is at this point despondent, and echoes lines from Baudelaire's *Chant d'automne*:

C'était hier l'été ; voici l'automne!

Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ[195]

Renoir reminds us that the Dauphin is too young to understand what is going on or to change his circumstances and reinforces the innocence of childhood, but in this most sombre of moments, the king cannot bear the sight, so he quietly distracts the Dauphin, takes his hand, and walks forward with a sense of decorum. Renoir does not pan or move the camera in any way as the family approach the camera, so we are eventually left with an empty deep shot. For a moment, we are contemplating what will become of each of them and how the monarchy will be remembered. Renoir reminds us that the burden of suffering and tragedy is very much part of our human nature, and although his film emphasises the certainty over the direction of travel, he is willing to show dignity to the individuals who make up this history.

Figure 29 Wide shot of the King and his family departing the Tuileries Palace for the last time.

The film often conveys a clear sense of the direction of travel, but this is primarily achieved through an optimistic tone (even if moments of optimism are intercut with more sombre moments). Nevertheless, for Renoir to demonstrate the necessity for social and political reform in the years of the Revolution, he must also show some form of injustice and the fatalism that corresponds with the corrupt institutions he is attempting to delegitimise. In the film's denouement, after the royals leave the Palace, we see the King's troops determined to defend the Palace while revolutionary forces

[195] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs Du Mal : The Complete Text of The Flowers of Evil*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: D.R Godine, 1982), p.239 – "It was summer yesterday; now it's autumn, Echoes of departure keep resounding in the air."

are determined to storm it. It is this point in the film when the brutality of conflict is enlarged. Take the moment when Renoir shows us a number of Swiss guards loyal to the King being lined up and blindfolded in preparation for the firing squad. Although these executions are stopped, the reality of what the horrors of conflict are like is intensified. In the amidst of this warfare, one of the film's protagonists, Bomier, is wounded in the street and tragically dies of his injuries in the arms of his lover. Because Bomier is presented as an ordinary, kind, and loving character throughout, this scene is all the more poignant. The tragedy of warfare is put on display, but the Rousseauism underpinning the film implies that it is political and social forces, rather than Man in his pure state, that eventually kill him here. But despite this tragedy, a feeling of optimism and hope is restored at the end of the when *La France* (and *le peuple* it represents) unites as a force of equality, liberty, and fraternity against its Prussian enemies. Because Renoir has shown us the brutal reality of the social and political conditions out of which the new, brighter future of the Republic is born, he emphasises the impetus for reform and the necessity of epochal shifts in history.

In the epilogue of the film, the *Marseillaise* anthem returns as the troops march to defeat Prussia. When we see them march collectively into the distance, the direction of travel is given certainty. That line of Goethe's from this chapter's epigraph then appears on the screen, a line whose origin was around a campfire on the evening of September 20th, 1792, as the Prussians were thwarted by the French army at the Battle of Valmy. The Battle of Valmy marked a huge victory for France and gave impetus to the National Convention's declaration of the birth of the Republic and the end of the monarchy in France. The final shot of the Marseilles troops taking the next step towards a new France (which itself is a synecdoche of the people) emphasises the direction of travel and sets in stone a revolutionary tradition where the possibility of repelling the social, moral, and political conditions of an old system in favour of a new one is possible. The film's ending gives us a romantic view of the Revolution and leaves Renoir unequivocally siding not only with the Republic, but the humble man going off to fight to change the course of history. The 'humble man' is epitomised by *La France*, which can encompass people of various backgrounds and statuses. Renoir reminds us that we are social beings with a common human nature and can achieve things better as a collective. While the film unequivocally demonstrates the direction of travel and uses history as an instrumental tool, or as a 'call to arms' to the demands of the present, critics were divided on the extent to which they thought this was the

case, or whether his film was more humanistic and aesthetical in its approach to history.

2.4 Renoir's Revolution: A call to arms, a work of art or a generous characterisation of history?

Although the clash between two very different worlds in *La Marseillaise* was intended as a political allegory on the direction of travel and thought of as necessary for rallying the people around the Front Populaire, critics were not always drawn primarily to the fact that it was intended as such. This is arguably because Renoir treats his characters, of both the Third Estate and the *Ancien Regime*, generously on the whole, so his portrait of the Revolution is less forthcoming than we might expect of a political film. The heightened aesthetic also contributed to this, with several critics evaluating the film primarily in terms of its *look* and *feel*. For a film that used history primarily as an instrumental tool of politics, it was often the case that critics of a certain political persuasions did not necessarily judge the film *a priori* by their own politics, but on its own terms. Take *L'Action Française*, the newspaper representing the monarchist political movement. Their review was rather complimentary. Francois Vinneuil, who admits he expected the film's portrait of the Revolution to be purely motivated by politics, concludes that it not only has aesthetic and cultural value but is the work of an artist more than a political campaigner:

> Si surprenant que cela puisse être, dans cette affaire de La Marseillaise, l'artiste Jean Renoir, ayant attendu patiemment Je jour où ses innombrables conseillers se décourageraient et lui laisseraient le champ libre, a su sauvegarder ses droits. Je pense même que l'artiste a pris le pas sur le militant. Le que sa doctrine et sa propagande lui commandaient, il aurait pu le dire sous beaucoup d'autres formes. Son goût a parlé avant ses opinions. Pour mon compte, je partage souvent ce goût.[196]

[196] Francois Vinneuil, "L'Ecran de la Semaine 'La Marseillaise'", *L'Action Française,* issue 42 (Paris: L'Action Française, 11th February 1938), p.4 –."However surprising that may be, in this affair of La Marseillaise, the artist Jean Renoir, having patiently waited for the day when his innumerable advisers would be discouraged and leave him free rein, knew how to safeguard his rights. I even think that the artist took precedence over the activist. What his doctrine and his propaganda commanded him; he could have said in many other ways. His taste spoke before his opinions. For myself, I often share this taste."

Vinneuil waxes lyrical that Renoir did not succumb to the pressures of patrons, donors, and activists. He talks with enthusiasm about the film's artistry, humanism, and ability to move a spectator in the way that Pierre-Auguste Renoir did with his Impressionist paintings, even though he admits his lack of sympathy towards its political messages:

> J'aime beaucoup la longue randonnée des Marseillais, devenant peu à peu des fans tassions, à travers les paysages, changeants vêts par un peintre qui est bien le fils de son père : boucles de la vallée du Rhône, coteaux do Bourgogne, forêts de Île-de-France. Je trouvé ingénieuse et savoureuse l'idée de nous avoir fait deviner les remous du Paris révolutionnaire dans un petit théâtre d'ombres chinoises, où le menu peuple conspue M. Veto qui proteste de sa tendresse pour la nation au son d'un grêle clavecin, cependant que quelques amoureux, oubliant la politique, se prennent la main et se regardent dans les yeux.[197]

Louis Aragon of *Ce Soir* makes similar observations, believing Renoir's poetic realism to be a continuation of Le Nain's depictions of humble life and Gustave Courbet's Realist paintings of peasants and workers. He says that "cette œuvre formidable de vie est comme toutes les grandes œuvres d'art, elle se prolonge dans le cœur de ceux qui la voient, et, c'est dans ce cœur que leg passions modernes s'éveillent par la vertu des images d'autrefois," and claims that because of this, the film's political agitation is not as pronounced as Renoir had perhaps intended.[198] He even says that,

> Avant tout, il faut parler de ce qui est la pierre de touche du succès, de l'image extraordinaire de vérité, d'humanité, de vraisemblance du roi Louis XVI qui risquait tant d'être le point d' achoppement du film, et qui, grâce au grand acteur qui est Pierre Renoir, donne au film sa force convaincante, son dynamisme humain.[199]

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[197] Ibid – I really like the long hike of the Marseillais […] through the landscapes: loops of the Rhone valley, hillsides of Burgundy, forests of the Île-de-France. I found ingenious and savoury the idea of making us guess the eddies of revolutionary Paris in a small Chinese shadow theatre, where the common people shout at M. Veto who protests his tenderness for the nation at the sound of a storm within, while a few lovers, forgetting politics, take each other's hands and look each other in the eyes."

[198] Louis Aragon, "La Marseillaise", *Ce Soir* issue 345 (Paris: Ce Soir, 10th February 1938), p.8 – "This formidable work of life is like all great works of art, it is prolonged in the heart of those who see it, and it is in this heart that modern passions are awakened by the virtue of the images of the past."

[199] Ibid – "Above all, we must speak of what is the touchstone of success, of the extraordinary image of truth, of humanity, of plausibility of King Louis XVI who risked so much to be the stumbling block of film, and which, thanks to the great actor Pierre Renoir, gives the film its convincing force, its human dynamism."

He welcomes the fact that the film sculpts each character in a way that moves beyond the contours a stereotype of a particular social class. Although Aragon was appointed to *Ce Soir* by the PCF and was himself a member of the party, he did not let his own politics censor his aesthetic and intellectual response. He concludes by saying that the film's aesthetic flourishes and sensitive approach to character development are more worthy of appreciation than the political message per se, which draws our attention to the fact that its memorialising of history can be understood as an end to be appreciated in-itself rather than simply an instrumental tool. His thoughts in some sense anticipate those of François Truffaut, who in 1957 said that "Renoir serves up an entire world, where all causes are presented with the objectivity, generosity, and intelligence which mark all his work."[200] But while Truffaut, and by implication Aragon, see the film's generosity and objectivity as virtuous, the left-leaning *La Dépêche* concluded that these attributes gave the film an overall bland flavour that made it neither art nor politics. Jacques Bonheur describes it as "une œuvre intéressante et généreuse" but then asks, "mais est-ce du cinéma? Non. Est-ce de la politique? Non. Est-ce ce que l'on a convenu d'appeler ‹ une grande fresque › non ?" So, what was it? He says that in order to make cinema, "ne suffit pas de nous montrer quelques images mouvantes magnifiques," and laments that this film is merely "un discours illustré" which "à la longue se fait d'une monotonie lassante." He concludes that we get "un résultat hybride, honnête certes, mais manquant de brillance."[201] While Bonheur does not merely dismiss the film on political grounds, such a nonchalant response is certainly at odds with the call to arms Renoir envisaged it to be. Even if we look at those critics who judged it primarily according to its representational rather than aesthetic aspects, we find that there was no consensus on what Renoir's view of human nature is, and that his message was somewhat ambivalent and far from universally accepted even among left-leaning newspapers.

Marcel Achard in *Marianne* argued that Renoir went too far and was excusing violence in his portrait of history. He describes Renoir as an "apôtre de la guerre civile" and deplores the "applaudissements politiques" from the audience with

[200] Dudley Andrew and Anne Gillain, *A Companion To François Truffaut*, 1st edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013).
[201] Jacques Bonheur, "Défense et critique de La Marseillaise", *La Dépêche*, issue 25368 (Toulouse: *La Dépêche*, 18th February 1938), p.5 – "an interesting and generous work"/ Is it cinema? No. Is this politics? No. Is this what we have agreed to call 'a great fresco'? No"/ "it is not enough to show us some magnificent moving images"/the film "over time becomes boringly monotonous"/we end up with "a mixed result, honest, of course, but lacking in brilliance."

"chaque exécution d'aristocrate, chaque suppression de Suisse, ou, si l'on est de l'avis contraire, chaque assassinat de Marseillais."[202] "Je ne connais pas d'excuse au meurtre d'un homme par un autre" he continues, and even goes as far as saying that "La Marseillaise est un encouragement à la haine," ultimately calling it a "regrettable apologie des mauvais instincts de l'homme."[203] Achard's puritanical suspicion of violence on-screen is enhanced by his belief that Renoir gave moral credence to killing based on political grounds, hence why audience members allegedly cheered when a character on their side, so to speak, killed someone on the other side. He believes the film's portrait of history illuminates the darker side of humanity.

But when it comes to mediating on how human relations are borne out on-screen, Horace de Carbuccia's reaches the opposite conclusion in *Gringoire*, but reaches a similar conclusion on the subject matter being tainted by over-politicisation. He says Renoir's portrait on this critical moment in French history is "joviale [et] accomplie dans l'ordre et la méthode," and asks provocatively, "où sont les têtes coupées promenées au bout des piques, où sont les innocents massacrés ?"[204] For Carbuccia, the film is disingenuously Rousseauean, and implies that the absence of violence indicates a positive avoidance in bringing the brutality of the Revolution to the fore. Both critics suggest, contrary to Bazin and Truffaut, that sensitivity and objectivity are put to one side in favour of political posturing. We could say that this response was reached by *a priori* political biases but given that some critics on the left were also divided on this issue suggests that over-politicisation in the film's remembering of history was not approved or disapproved simply according to political affiliation. The same can be said of those critics who believe the film's aesthetic is more important than its political messages. So, when Dudley Andrew says *La Marseillaise* offers us a "distinctive manner of evoking the past, challenging France by thrusting in its face a democratic view of the Revolution," he is right, but what we

[202] Marcel Achard, "La Semaine à l'Ecran", *Marianne*, issue 278 (Paris: Marianne, 16th February 1938), p.17 – "The apostle of the civil war"/"political applause"/"each execution of an aristocrat […] or, if one is of the contrary opinion, each assassination of Marseillais."
[203]Ibid – I don't know of any excuse for killing one man by another"/ "La Marseillaise inspires hatred"/ the film is a "regrettable apology for the bad instincts of man."
[204] Horace de Carbuccia, "Répétez-le…", *Gringoire*, issue 484 (Paris: 18th February 1938), p.3 – The film is "jovial, accomplished in order and method"/"Where are the severed heads paraded at the end of the pikes, where are the innocent slaughtered?"

can conclude is that there was ambivalence from the critics on what aspects of the film were most worthy of attention.[205]

This ambivalence from critics would have most likely disappointing Renoir, not least because of his unequivocal use of history as a form of politics, but there was arguably another factor in this, one outside of Renoir's control. In a footnote under reprinted article by Henri Jeanson, Abel notes that "[a]s the Popular Front coalition disintegrated in 1937-38, the sectarian divisions within as well as outside the French Communist Party implicated leftist filmmakers in their bitter infighting."[206] By the time the film was released in February 1938, that sense of political excitement Renoir had intended to build up had waned. The Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) initially took a large number of seats in parliament, but by 1938, it was a movement that had already been written off as a failure.[207] Under the Front Populaire, production levels were still below where they were almost a decade earlier and inflation effectively cancelled out the value of the higher wages workers were earning. Their efforts to improve working conditions by reducing the number of working hours in a week to thirty hours proved unsuccessful as it adversely affected productivity.[208] Not only this, but growing indifference to the Communists, who had supported the coalition but later voted against them in the Munich Agreement, led to strikes.[209] France was also failing in its foreign policy and the strength of its military was criticised — it needed to change course if it was going to face up to the rising fascism in Germany.[210] Although the political movement Renoir tried to rally the people around was close to dissolution by the time his film was released, the film still enlarges the idea that the direction of travel can be mapped out, that the leftist tradition of reform and change is still alive, and that history can be used as an instrumental tool to inspire political action. Even if a good percentage of the critics themselves were little apathetic towards its politics and instead favoured its aesthetics or sensitivity towards the various characters who foregrounded the Revolutionary backdrop, the film still demonstrates the use of history in film as an instrumental tool of politics.

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[205] Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p.171.
[206] Abel, p.250.
[207] Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Bernard and Dubief, ibid.

The *Marseillaise* anthem sung throughout the film emphasises that echoing battle cry for freedom. It also epitomises *La France* and the importance of *le peuple* in bringing about change. Although the film has its fatalistic moment with the death of Bomier, the march towards Valmy at the end of the film emphasises that in the face of tragedy, the course of history must still play out, and can be driven by the will and determination of those willing to carry on and fight for what they believe in rather than simply accept the morals, politics, and traditions of the monarchical system that had been in place. Much like the self-sacrificing words of *Il était un petit navire* heard in *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir inscribes the virtue of taking the "memory of sacrifice [to help] prevent its repetition, maintaining an opening to the future."[211] Optimism becomes the antidote to fatalism, and is in this film the driving force of history. Part of its instrumental value as a historico-political film is its cherishing of leftist traditions. For Renoir, the progressive aspects of the Revolution should not be severed from the present, but form part of a continued commitment to social and economic reform.

This chapter has focused primarily on the political potential of historical film, while acknowledging that it can still be attentive to historical sources, whereas the next chapter will examine historical film's potential as allegory and philosophical critique. If *La Marseillaise* attempts to show the direction of travel, the next film aims to highlight its uncertainty. Using Marcel L'Herbier's *L'affaire du collier de la reine* (1946) as a case study, I will argue that historical film can draw our attention to the complex shape and pattern of history and highlight the difficulty of establishing whether said history is pushed in a certain direction by the free will of individuals or the determinism of epochal shifts. By memorialising a huge scandal that did irreputable damage to the monarchy against the backdrop of a recently liberated France, the film highlights the uncertainty of change and the fragility of institutions.

[211] Martin O'Shaughnessy, *La Grande Illusion: French Film Guide* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p.75.

Chapter Three: *L'affaire du collier de la reine* (Marcel L'Herbier, 1946)

3.1 Fragile institutions

> *[E]very high civilisation decays by forgetting obvious things.*
> — G.K Chesterton, Quoted in, *G.K Chesterton: A Biography.*[212]

"QU'est l'histoire?", Victor Hugo once asked: "un écho du passé dans l'avenir. Un reflet de l'avenir sur le passé."[213] Echoes and reflections may resemble the very objects being echoed or reflected, but they are not identical. Echoes alter the direction of the sound in the same way reflections change the direction of a wavefront. They can both be thought of as impressions. History as Hugo understands it is always an image or projection of a reality that was once lived, never a direct copy of it. His allusions to echoes and reflections are a reference to the story of Narcissus and attempt to highlight the obstacles which underline the indeterminacy of knowledge, the myth of traces, and the presence of illusions. Memory is one such echo or reflection, and by taking up this metaphor, we can examine more carefully the question of how history is remembered over time and why it is the case we remember history in a particular way and with a certain intensity at certain moments. Using *L'affaire du collier de la reine* as a case study, this chapter will argue that historical films have the potential to do more than simply organise the events of the past into a coherent narrative (and through some form of artistic representation), they can function as allegories or tools for enhancing the audience's understanding of the moment of the production as much as the history itself. L'Herbier's film is a story about the incident of the Necklace Affair, but it is arguably less an account of the actual events and more a homage to Alexandre Dumas' own version of the events in his 1848 novel. Like Dumas, L'Herbier focuses on the consequences that arose from such an event and ends up speaking to broader concerns around the direction of travel and the extent to which interventions of the part of those believe they can shape the course of history can have serious repercussions for how

[212] Ian Ker, *G.K. Chesterton: A Biography* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2011), p.417.
[213] Victor Hugo, *L'Homme qui rit* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), p.482- "What is history? An echo of the past in the future; a reflection from the future on the past."

said history unravels. Both Dumas and L'Herbier point to the damage caused to the institution of Versailles and the nobility through both decadence and blinkeredness, but more specifically, they emphasise how the public flogging and brutal torture of the Comtesse de la Motte by the authorities, which was intended to highlight that the *Ancien Régime* would not tolerate such criminal behaviour, in fact had the opposite effect, and emboldened the beliefs of those who thought the monarchy and nobility were becoming more and more inept. Dumas' novel was published in the wake of the 1848 Revolution, so the memory of the Necklace Affair in this sense would have an appropriate allegory on the potential for history to repeat itself. This chapter will argue that L'Herbier's adaptation, produced shortly after the Liberation and in the midst of the collaboration trials, uses the memory of the Affair to present a sceptical view over the certainty of history and the brazen attempt of any party to believe they are the 'Elect', or can say with the confidence that they are on the right side of history, not least because it can drive these parties to make enemies out of former allies and martyrs out of followers. Historical memorialisation in this sense is instrumental like *La Marseillaise*, but the difference is that *La Marseillaise* aims to meet political ends whereas *L'affaire du collier de la reine* is primarily allegorical.

While *L'affaire du collier de la reine* was produced in a post-Vichy climate, the memory of defeat, occupation, and repression lingered (and continued to linger for decades). The historian Henry Rousso coined a term for this pervasive, unwanted lingering, or a 'un passé qui ne passe pas' ('a past that doesn't pass'): 'Vichy syndrome'.[214] Rousso was not primarily interested in charting the history of *Les Années Noires* but how France dealt with it in the years and decades following the Gaullist Resistance, with reference to a host of cultural production —the press, literature, cinema and so on — that either exposed or obscured the memory of it. He observes that by the late 1960s, the horrors of collaboration became increasingly exposed as political dissent, trials of former collaborators, and iconoclastic culture burgeoned, but in the first decade after the Allied victory, rival myths were constructed to help France forget about the horrors of Nazi Occupation and to unite around the belief that the Gaullist Resistance was an unequivocal good.[215] But in this chapter, I will argue that *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, a cultural product of this first decade,

[214] Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[215] Ibid.

airs a sceptical and somewhat less certain view of the direction of travel by way of historical allegory. The torture of the Comtesse speaks directly to the present moment, and in particular, the collaboration trials. The film challenges the certainty of evolutionary, progressivist, and Marxist histories. Instead, it draws our attention to the fact that the course of history is not easy to predict nor is it easy to identify the forces who will determine the future. Is history driven by the free will of individuals or is determined by other forces? Equally, the direction conflicting parties may intend to take history is not always clear cut. L'Herbier's film arguably draws a parallel between the *Ancien Régime'*s response to the Necklace Affair and the Resistence's response to those who were alleged to have collaborated during the Occupation. Because the events of the Necklace Affair in the film are framed by a critical and reflexive view on the course and direction of history, it is arguably the allegory that is more important than the events of the Necklace Affair itself. But much like in Dumas' novel, it is the eccentric character of Cagliostro within the text who enlarges this critical and reflexive view of history. He is almost a Cassandra-type entity, a wise prophet whose warnings are seldom taken seriously by those who are most in need of such advice. Take this extract from Dumas' novel, where Cagliostro addresses his fated interlocutor, Madame du Barry:

> Ah, I see well you are all incredulous; this fatal incredulity I have had to contend against all my life. Philip de Valois would not listen to me, when I told him to leave open a retreat to Edward; Cleopatra would not believe me when I warned her that Antony would be beaten: the Trojans would not credit me, when I said to them, with reference to the wooden horse, 'Cassandra is inspired; listen to Cassandra'.[216]

Almost echoing Edward Gibbon's explanations of why Rome fell in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Cagliostro's seemingly frivolous yet profound witticisms are to Dumas what the Fool's rages were to Shakespeare in *King Lear* or the pseudonymous Bickerstaff was to Jonathan Swift. He speaks in riddles, but he represents someone who exposes those who are blighted by their ignorance and cannot see the direction of travel. Readers of Dumas' novel were living in the wake of

[216] Alexandre Dumas, *The Queen's Necklace*, 1st edn (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1848), p. 13 <https://archive.org/stream/queensnecklace00dumauoft/queensnecklace00dumauoft_djvu.txt> [Accessed 4 March 2020].

the 1848 Revolution, which brought an end to Louis-Philippe's reign as monarch of the Orléaniste dynasty. Witnessing the rise and fall of monarchies in his own lifetime, Dumas uses historical memory to emphasise that civilisation is a mortal beast. By portraying the likes of Madame du Barry as brazen and enlightened (she later found herself a victim of the Reign of Terror), Dumas stresses how blissful ignorance on the part of institutions is symptomatic of their decline. L'Herbier's film similarly acknowledges patterns in history and how certain ways of thinking can have a profound impact on the course of history. Produced under the dark cloud of the *Épuration sauvage* (comprised of the trial, imprisonment, and execution of those found guilty of collaborating with the Germans) at the Studios de Saint-Maurice in Paris, and on-location at the Palace of Versailles, *L'affaire du collier de la reine* critically examines the behaviours of institutions then (through some form of historical representation) and now (by way of allegory). Equally, through its display of custom, tradition, and protocol through spectacle, the film encourages us to reflect on the relationship between said institutions and the values and traditions underpinning them. This chapter will argue the case for this film as an allegory by looking firstly at the historical context in which was produced and its promotion. Then, I will examine how the film itself frames the events of the Necklace Affair and the Geist of the era within a critical and reflexive philosophy of history. Finally, I will turn to the film's reception and ask whether or not L'Herbier's memorialising of the Necklace Affair and critical narrative of history resonated with critics at the time, and why.

3.2 War, Occupation, Trial: The historical backdrop to *L'affaire du collier de la reine*

To substantiate the claim that *L'affaire du collier de la reine*'s approach to historical memory is critical, reflexive, and allegorical, we must look more closely at the context of its production. In a collection of essays titled *Intelligence du cinématographe*, L'Herbier proposed that the cinema should be an "agent de liaison de l'humanité."[217] Suzanne Langlois explains this view using the theological term, "œcuménique," which is used in Christianity to denote the virtuous principle of Christians of various

[217] Marcel L'Herbier, *Intelligence du cinématographe*, (Paris: Corrêa, 1946), p.31 - "liaison officer of humanity."

denominations working together to promote a vision of Christian unity.[218] For L'Herbier, the cinema, like Christianity, has multiple 'denominations,' nevertheless, he believes that it has potential (in conjunction with other forms of cultural production) to powerfully express and disseminate ideas and values to a 'unifying' nation. He passionately believed that film needed to have a national character, and in the 1930s, he set up a union to help strengthen the industry's infrastructure against uncontrolled imports of productions outside of France.[219] But two years after the Allied victory, when the Blum–Byrnes agreements were signed, this protectionist approach was superseded by a *laissez-faire* alternative, resulting in the influx of popular culture from the United States. Produced in the same year as the agreement, *L'affaire du collier de la reine* retains a certain national spirit with its focus on an incident specific to France, its backdrop of Versailles, and its relevance to the political milieu in which it was produced.

The critical and reflexive way in which the memory of the Necklace Affair and its fallout is presented to us and the way this historical backdrop ultimately speaks to the present moment sets itself up to be a prime example of his ecumenical vision of cinema. In the wake of the Allied victory, French culture often had difficulty confronting its recent past (as well as the present unfolding before them), but the ending of L'Herbier's film uses the veneer of history to question (though open to interpretation) the morals and ethics of the Gaullist Resistance. If cinema is to be an "agent de liaison de l'humanité," it has a duty to address the concerns of the moment. One of these concerns is what Rousso retrospectively called *résistancialisme*, which denotes the exaggerated historical memory of the Resistance during World War II, particularly its scale and significance, along with the level of anti-German sentiment.[220] The myth is arguably embodied in De Gaulle's Liberation speech in 1944, where the nouns 'Paris' and 'France' are used repeatedly as synecdoche for the Resistance, ingraining the point that it was unequivocally the Resistance fighters who liberated France and moved the nation towards a period of hope and optimism.[221]

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[218] Suzanne Langlois, *La Résistance dans le Cinéma Français 1944-1994: De la Libération de Paris à Libera me* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), p.22 – The term quoted translates into English as "Ecumenism"

[219] Jean A. Gili, "De l'occupation à la libération: Marcel L'Herbier et la naissance de l'IDHEC", in *Marcel L'Herbier, l'art du cinéma*, (Paris: Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 2007), p. 299.

[220] Rousso, Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

L'Herbier's film arguably demonstrates, albeit through the veneer of history, that the Resistance had a darker side to it. But the veneer of history through which this critique of the present moment is presented though is equally pertinent in another sense. A film emphasising the increasingly fragile position of the monarchy in the aftermath of the Necklace Affair resonates with the present moment because at the very centre of this institution was Versailles, a quintessentially French entity that had in the years of the Occupation been used by the Nazis to symbolise German victory and French defeat. A propaganda newsreel from 1940, approved by Goebbels' Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, achieves what many other forms of propaganda including flattering articles on German artists like Breker attempted to achieve. It "foster[ed] the image of Germany as a land of proud and enduring culture now triumphant over that of defeated France."[222] The newsreel's voice-over (in German) informs its viewers that:

> A Swastika flag flies above Versailles, where in 1871 German fate was moulded, and where in 1918 German humiliation was sealed. Paris, the longed-for goal, is ours. France's heart and soul, the centre of the French arms industry, the birthplace of democracy and liberalism, is now in German hands. The Reich's military flag is hoisted at the Eiffel Tower.[223]

The diction, at once haughty ("German fate was moulded"), aggrieved ("in 1918 German humiliation was sealed") and vengeful ("Paris, the longed-for goal, is ours"), dramatically summarises the highs and lows of the past seventy years in Germany as the Nazis saw it. A high point for them was the Proclamation of the Wilhelmine Empire in 1871 at Versailles. A low point was the "humiliation" faced by the imposition of reparations following the First World War. But their claim that "German fate was moulded" in 1871 reinforces a confidence that they were always destined to fulfil their goal, stating brazenly, "Paris, the longed-for goal, is ours." This sense of entitlement is reinforced by the visuals, including wide shots of German soldiers walking around the palace gates and the Cour de Marbre, and most potently of all, a wide shot of the Swastika being hoisted up a flagpole on the palace roof (fig.30). Such

[222] Barbara McCloskey, *Artists of World War II* (London: Greenwood Press, 2005), p.21.
[223] "Swastika Flag Rises Over Versailles And Paris", *Encyclopedia.Ushmm.Org*, 2020 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/swastika-flag-rises-over-versailles-and-paris> [Accessed 4 April 2020].

a stark image intended to convey the message that the Republic had been toppled and the Germans had taken control. Goebbels proclaimed the occupation of Versailles a victory, and during this time, the *Kunstschutz,* charged with protecting the arts, worked to ensure any damage to the palace, in the form of either looting or bombing, was kept to a minimum. But despite this, a lack of funds and shortage of combustibles meant that it was difficult to heat the place, resulting in many rooms being left to freeze and the Palace fell into further disrepair.[224] This dire situation with Versailles would brought home the fragility of history, culture and institutions, something L'Herbier addresses in his allegorical portrait of history.

Figure 30 Wide shot of the Swastika being hoisted up a flagpole on the roof of Versailles.

Much like the Hungarian novelist Antal Szerb's part historiographical, part polemic novel about the Necklace Affair, which was written during the War and employs humour and anecdote to reveal the frivolities of Versailles and the damage caused to the monarchy by the events, L'Herbier's allegorical film uses history as a creative act of resistance against the volatile backdrop in which it was written. Although the film was released only two years after the Allied victory, and amid the *Épuration sauvage*, its wise observation of patterns in history almost gives it an authority on which to put past and current events in perspective. As Hegel wisely told us, "The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk."[225] The allegorical nature of the film is hinted at the visually striking promotional material for the film, where a haunting

[224] Jones, Ibid.
[225] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Allen W Wood, *Elements Of The Philosophy Of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.23.

similarity between the fallout from the Necklace Affair and the dark cloud that hovered over France in the aftermath of the War is apparent. One poster (fig.31) is an illustration of the Comtesse de la Motte being restrained by three guards in a dark, dingy prison, while a ghostly image of whom we believe to be Marie Antoinette looms over her in disgust. The image depicts the Comtesse facing the brutal consequences of her actions, which include attempts to make extortionate profits from selling very expensive diamonds from a necklace that had been bought under false pretences. She is portrayed as submissive and helpless, her body language symptomatic of physical exhaustion. Her tense posture, kneeling against her will as her body is stretched, along with her head held in an upward pose, and her mouth open, indicates the physical struggle of desperation and a desire to break free from the restraints. Her nice clothes and jewellery have been stripped from her, and her hair is less stylised than it is for most of the film. She has been stripped of her dignity, and the façade of who she claimed to be is torn apart. The dark blue hues reinforced of the hard-to-determine location in which she is restrained only illuminates this sense of hopelessness. The dark colour palette and bland wall tells us that this woman is isolated and helpless. Her fate looks sealed as she kneels in the cell, but as we look upon this image, we are arguably invited to see beyond the historical moment to the Collaboration trials of the present day, where another institution inflicted pain and humiliation upon those thought to be guilty of a crime in the hope of strengthening its cause.

Figure 31 One poster design for L'affaire du collier de la reine.

Above the restrained Comtesse in the poster is Marie Antoinette, or quite possibly her lookalike, Nicole Le Guay d'Oliva, whom Rohan mistakenly believes is Antoinette when they meet in the Gardens of Versailles in the film. The disproportionate body size and withdrawn look of the character gives her a spectral look, visually separating the temporal and spatial presence of the two women. The face of Marie Antoinette is offset forty-five degrees from the Comtesse, as if to show us that this character cannot bear to look upon the woman who has brought so much disrepute to the monarchy and the Queen herself. She is visually in distress here, emphasising the fact that her fate is uncertain and sums up Thomas Carlyle's own words on the Queen: "sorrows of the sovereign, sorrows of the woman, thick-coming sorrows environ her more and more."[226] If alternatively, we see not Marie Antoinette herself but the imposter in this image, it becomes a very clear metaphor for the burden of guilt overwhelming the Comtesse and the blindness of the monarchy to what was going on. The latter is a theme that is prevalent within a different poster for the film (fig.32).

Made up of three layers, the poster sees Viviane Romance's character occupying the foreground, Count Cagliostro and Cardinal Rohan occupying the midground, and the court, bathed in a divine, golden glow, with lavishly expensive costumes and baroque architecture, occupying the background. The poster is Versailles frozen in a capsule. This is an institution untainted by any signs of eclipse. The colourful imagery breathes life back into a world long since gone, and the institution looks as if it is in its prime. The over-saturated look of the costumes, along with the painterly-like hair and skin pigmentation, erase the differences in kind between the characters and remind us that what we see before us is Versailles rooted in an idea of how those inhabiting the world at the time would have seen themselves, but underneath all this decadence we find the very things that will cause irreparable damage to the institution. The image of the necklace, originally made for Madame du Barry at Louis XV's request, takes pride of place just above the film's title. An unconscious association is made between the redness of the typography and the red cloth on which the necklace is neatly displayed. The image of the necklace is enhanced by the fact the object sits in isolation from everything else. This not only tells us that the object is of great significance to the film but to the course of history.

[226] Thomas Carlyle and Henry Traill, *The Works Of Thomas Carlyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.94.

Figure 32 Another poster design for L'affaire du collier de la reine.

Although the poster has the Palace of Versailles shimmering like a sacred temple on the surface, when we look closer, it gives us clues to the darker truths hidden within. The principal characters are placed around the necklace, with the Comtesse nearest to the foreground. Her charming smile, glistening white teeth, delicate face, and thinly curved eyebrows paints her as a sincere figure, but at the same time, her charming beauty is very much in keeping with the femme fatale roles she played in Julien Duvivier's *La belle équipe* (1936), Abel Gance's *Vénus aveugle* (1941) and Edmond Gréville*'s Une femme dans la nuit* (1943). On the top-right, Cardinal Rohan stands piously, holding his cross. He directs his gaze towards an elixir held up by Cagliostro (the third in the trio of corrupt individuals). The elixir symbolises the Count's apparent wisdom, though a certain passivity on behalf of Rohan implies an underestimation of things foretold. Cagliostro is given a place on the poster at the expense of others who played a prominent role in the Affair because his warnings about history repeating itself, along with his preaching about the virtues of foresight and the vices of ignorance, speak to the allegorical concerns of the film. The fragrant aesthetic of the poster overall simultaneously highlights the riches of an institution that thought it would last indefinitely and the decadence and excess that blinded the nobility to the fraudulence that would fracture the stability of their institution. Both the promotional material and the historical context to the film demonstrates the film's efforts to use history as an allegorical tool to engage critically and reflexively with issues such as

the indeterminacy and unpredictability of the course of history, the fragile nature of institutions, and the complexity around the desire of individuals and institutions to want to steer the direction of travel. To flesh these ideas out further, we must turn to the film itself.

3.3 The Path to Self-Destruction? : The Necklace Affair and its Historical Memory as Allegory

While I have so far emphasised the film's ending as the place where the critical, reflexive, and allegorical dimensions of historical memory is most explicit, I will argue that such dimensions are present throughout the film, where L'Herbier deals with such issues as the indeterminacy and unpredictability of the course of history and the fragile nature of institutions. Spectacle and dramatised motifs are employed to expose the excesses and follies of Versailles (and the world of nobility), and to highlight the nobility's blindness to the direction of travel pre-emptied by the events unfolding around them. L'Herbier's suspension of the narrative in favour of spectacle at moments when the court is gathering or the queen is promenading only works to enlarge the reality that unbeknown to these aristocrats and royals, time is of the essence. Nevertheless, unlike in Renoir's film, the direction of history is not confidently pronounced. André Gide once noted that, "toutes choses sont dites déjà ; mais comme personne n'écoute, il faut toujours recommencer."[227] He was referring specifically to the myth of Narcissus, which centres around a hunter who falls in love with his own reflection, and by virtue of his beauty, is destined to stare at this reflection for the rest of his life, but he was using this to make a point about the metaphysics of free will and whether or not free will can co-exist with determinism. There are situations where free will is either present or absent for reasons that cannot be attributed to metaphysics. Individuals and institutions can make certain decisions or choose to take certain actions, but such decisions and actions are only made in the context of external factors. This worldview is known as compatibilism, which links to L'Herbier's reflexive view of history as a complex and hard-to-grasp mechanism, where individuals and institutions do not have full control of their destiny but

[227] André Gide, (1892) "Le traite du Narcisse", *Entretiens Politiques et Littératures*, 4(22) : 20-8. "Everything that needs to be said has been said before, but since nobody listens, we have to keep going back and beginning all over again"

nevertheless decisions and are in some sense attempts to steer the direction of travel, even if there are opposing forces from different directions. To unpack these ideas, I will examine several moments from the film, including the scene where Cagliostro exposes the frivolities of the nobility before their own eyes at a soiree; the scene where the Cardinal meets whom he wrongly believes to be the Queen in the Bosquet de la Reine; the scene where the Cardinal is arrested in the Hall of Mirrors for his involvement in the Affair, and the final scenes where the Comtesse receives her punishment for her role in the scandal.

Figure 33 Wide shot of the Cardinal's carriage as it arrives at Versailles.

From the very beginning of the film, L'Herbier employs spectacle to stress two things: the functionality of tradition and protocol within the institution of Versailles and the fate concealed from said institution by its detachment from the external world. The direction of travel is at once certain and uncertain, as we as the audience know of the monarchy and nobility's forthcoming decline but the characters who inhabit this world do not. The serene quality of the opening shots that follow the ceremonial trumpets of the titles work to emphasise this, as we are immersed in a world that is yet untainted by the burden of history. A wide panning shot (fig.33) of the *Cour d'Honneur* gracefully capturing the moment Cardinal Rohan's carriage heads towards the entrance of the palace is accompanied by the subtle, ambient sounds of a chiming clock and the clopping of the horses' hooves on the ground as they pull the carriage. As the carriage pulls up outside the entrance, the camera ceases to pan, fixing itself in a long shot where, from a distance, several footmen wait for the Cardinal to alight.

Because the cinematography is non-intrusive, and we comfortably view the action from a distance, the world before us has a certain serene, untroubled quality about it. The spectacle rekindles the space of Versailles and the era in which it still played an active, functional role. The ambient sound of the *cadran d'horloge de la cour de Marbre* chiming as the carriage arrives in the forecourt subtly indicates the notion of things ticking along in an orderly fashion, and when the camera is in the process of panning across, L'Herbier inoffensively cuts to a medium shot of the clock (fig.34), a utilitarian yet symbolic object signifying the functionality of the institution. The clock's Louis XIV-style embellishments (including an Apollon mask symbolising *le roi soleil*'s belief that this institution was on par with the greatness of classical antiquity, decorative crowns, *fleurs-de-lis*, royal weapons, winged cherub, and a copper and bronze painted dial), not only conceal the mechanical work inside but symbolise the wealth and power of Versailles as an institution. The medium shot of the clock, in tandem with the wide panning shot of the forecourt and the sereness of the image, gives us the sense that what we see before us is a stable world yet to be tainted by the direction of travel.

Figure 34 Close-up shot of the cadran d'horloge de la cour de Marbre.

The presence of tradition and custom immediately sets up a thread of historical continuity, and points to Versailles' rootedness, a rootedness that strengthens the functionality of the institution. It is through spectacle that this is achieved but given the tumultuous context in which this film was produced, it perhaps also serves to highlight the disjuncture between the stability of that world and the instability of

L'Herbier's own. Hannah Arendt, in response to René Char's declaration, "notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament," said that because intellectuals freed themselves from their professional careers during the Resistance, they experienced freedom in ways they had not before, but upon returning to their careers after the Allied victory, they once again found themselves entrapped by the professionalisation of thought, leading to disillusionment and nihilism.[228] She argues that these short bouts of freedom, or the discovery of one's 'treasure,' could only ever be ephemeral because tradition, which sets the benchmark for what is of value, could not have anticipated them coming into being, and without said traditions, the contract between past, present, and future is broken and society loses its sense of direction.[229] Through spectacle and dramatized motifs, L'Herbier emphasised that traditions have a functional and meaningful role, but the same time, they are employed as a method of historical critique. When we see those long, elegant takes of the queen promenading along the peristyle of the Grand Trianon as dazzling courtiers spectate, or those fresh, airy shots which linger on the intimate conversations of nobles as they stroll about the scenic gardens (accompanied by grand orchestral music), L'Herbier temporarily suspends narrative development in favour of a spectacle that seems to remind us that in spite of the unfolding events, the world of monarchy continues to act as if untainted by anything. He underlines the notion that although time is of the essence, the nobility believe that their tranquil way of life will continue *ad infinitum*.

The framing of two interior wide shots on the *escalier de la reine* early in the film achieves a similar level of historical critique and reflexivity. One of these shots lingers behind the balustrade at the top of the stairwell as courtiers stroll about (fig.35), the other is positioned halfway up the stairwell and captures in a balanced and almost-symmetrical composition the graceful ascendence and descendance of courtiers on the stairwell (fig.36). Both these shots are frozen capsules of a world since gone and embody the unity of a particular place at a particular time. The world of Versailles we see here is steeped in tradition and protocol. But L'Herbier is equally critical and reflexive by the fact these shots are framed within a playful ironic exchange between two nobles who expose some of the weaknesses in the institution of Versailles and the Catholic Church. The conversation is triggered when the courtiers

[228] Quoted in, Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.3 – The Char quote translates into English as "our inheritance was left to us by no testament"
[229] Ibid.

peer out of the window and spot the Cardinal's arrival, and it begins with one of them waxing lyrical (with a hint of sarcasm) about the Cardinal's credentials, and predicts good things for his future, "Ambassadeur, Prince de l'Empire, Chef de la Sorbonne, Grand Aumônier de France, […] et très bientôt, sans doute, Premier Ministre du Royaume."[230] His interlocutor bluntly responds, "vous plaisantez, Monsieur, Rohan est un faible," to which he retorts, "Sa Majesté a un faible pour les faibles."[231] Through this exchange, we immediately get the sense that there are those within the institution who are unhappy with how it is being run, but at the same time, the facetiousness of these nobles tells us that even those who are critical do not take seriously the idea that the direction of travel could change imminently. The criticality L'Herbier brings to this scene is made clear when after the exchange has ended, the two nobles turn to look upon the spectacle of their follow courtiers strolling about the place, at which point those two wide shots described above come into being. While the shots in-themselves signify a unification of certain values and traditions and point to the rootedness and functionality of the institution, when framed in the context of the previous exchange, the spectacle becomes a critique of the institution's blissful ignorance of its flaws, and by extension, its fate. The spectacle of tradition and functionality brings into focus a teleological view of history, where the institution's inherent purpose is made clear to us, but this teleology is simultaneously undermined by a critique of the institution's parochialism and ignorance of its own flaws.

Figure 35 Wide shot of the courtiers of Versailles strolling up and down the escalier de la reine *(taken from near the top balustrade).*

[230] "Ambassador, Prince of the Empire, Head of the Sorbonne, Grand Almoner of France, […] and very soon, without doubt, Prime Minister of the Realm"/
[231] "You must be joking, Monsieur, Rohan is such a weakling"/ "His Majesty has a weakness for the weak."

Figure 36 Long shot of courtiers of strolling up and down the escalier de la reine.

Because the spectacle of these opening scenes enlarges both the rootedness of Versailles as an institution and its blindness to the outside world, the film is not firmly committed from the outset to the idea that their fate is sealed. The direction of travel is foreshadowed but not pre-determined, but as the film progresses, it becomes increasingly clear through the decisions and actions of certain characters (or lack of) that the destiny of the institution is heading down the path of self-destruction, even if unbeknown to the characters. It is only the figure of Cagliostro who seems to expose the follies of the world in which he forms a part, and by having him speak in riddles to characters who are indifferent to the potential consequences of their actions and decisions, the film enlarges the chasm between the volition of individual characters and the fate their decisions and actions will have on the direction of travel. The audience is supposed to be on the same level as Cagliostro, who can see the direction of travel in a way that the characters surrounding him simply cannot. The scene in which distinguished guests at a soirée in Paris (hosted by the Comtesse) listen to the wise musings of Cagliostro as they dine, drink, and socialise, employs irony, metaphor, allusion, artifice, and spectacle to illustrate this very schism. Rhetorical flourishes akin to the exalted conversations of an Ancient Greek symposium and an aesthetic resembling the artificial manners and sociability of a salon draws our attention to the sublime and intellectual on the one hand and the trivial and bathetic on the other. The scene exposes the Comtesse's reluctance to take seriously Cagliostro's warnings against her getting involved with the Necklace Affair and the failure of those nobles present to acknowledge the potentially grave situation in which they will find themselves if the Affair does indeed proceed. But looking at the scene from a critical

distance, it self-consciously underlines the significant role those choices and decisions made by individuals or groups of people play in shaping the course of history, even if these individuals and groups are oblivious to the potential consequences of the choices and decisions they make.

Figure 37 Medium two-shot of the Comtesse and Cagliostro dining at the table.

Figure 38 Long shot of courtiers dining.

The spectacle of the gathering does not aim to put up a mirror to the world it is depicting, nor does it attempt to be sincere. The magnificence of the soiree and the self-assuredness of the guests is presented to us ironically, in that it exposes rather than endorses the follies behind the veneer. The artifice works to reinforce the guests' lack of self-awareness and pre-empts the nobility's incompetence in responding to,

and dealing with, events unfolding around them. Take the moment where the Comtesse and distinguished guests are sat around dining table listening to Cagliostro while they eat in a convivial manner. The Comtesse, sat next to Cagliostro, is visibly delighted to have him in her presence at this point, and her self-assured facial expression in one medium two-shot shows that she is confident that fellow guests are equally delighted to have him in their presence as well (fig.37). The shot evokes a feeling of comfort, which can equally be felt in the long shot tightly packing in several guests around the beautifully laid table as they partake in whimsical exchanges and indulge in sumptuous food (fig.38). In both these shots, we get the sense that everyone present is fully absorbed in the material pleasures of the gathering, but more importantly, they are perfectly content with Cagliostro's presence. In the long shot, Cagliostro occupies the centre of the frame and is, ipso facto, the focal point of the gathering, but aside from the composition, the timing of this long shot's appearance is equally important to conveying the jovial atmosphere. It is immediately after Cagliostro's outlandish claim that he has been working on the creation of a celestial star "depuis 1784 ans" when this shot appears, so its narrative function is to capture the response of the guests, which is one of enthrallment.[232] They gasp with amazement at his story in the same way a spectator at a circus might in response to a magic trick or stunt. In other words, the guests are like passive receptors, moved by what is on the surface but not all motivated to interrogate the substance or semantic logic of Cagliostro's claims. Only the footman is visibly sceptical. At the very moment Cagliostro makes his outlandish claim, the footman standing closest to him with an open bottle of wine glances at him before walking away to pour the wine in someone else's glass, suggesting that the footman thinks Cagliostro has had too much to drink, whereas the guests view it as a sincere statement. Unlike the footman, whose role in this spectacle is non-participatory and therefore more authentic, the guests are taken in by the whole theatre of it, and go on to accept other claims by Cagliostro, including his encounter with the baby Jesus and "hommage aux mages de Bethléem."[233] L'Herbier emphasises the guests' absorption in myth, and failure to distinguish fact from fiction. The irony in the spectacle highlights that disjuncture between the nobles'

[232] "For 1784 years"
[233] "Homage to the Magi at Bethlehem"

view of themselves as enlightened and our view of them as being out of touch, which in turn pre-empts that history will not move in their favour.

Figure 39 Medium shot of Cagliostro revealing his elixir.

Figure 40 Medium shot of the Comtesse's reaction.

A critical distancing between the way characters think and act in the moment and the implications such thoughts and actions will have on the map of history is created in the film through ironic spectacle, but as the scene develops, it is the Comtesse who becomes the centre point of this critique. A marked shift in the tone and mood of the scene occurs when the Comtesse and guests move into the drawing room. As they are in the process of walking into the drawing room, Cagliostro makes another one of his exuberant claims: that he has lived for over two-thousand years. To great amazement from the guests and a half-grimacing smirk from the Comtesse, Cagliostro then attempts to demonstrate how he has managed to live so long by showing off a medicinal potion to the guests. The sublime sense of enthrallment in the atmosphere is felt in a medium shot where Cagliostro holds up the elixir so it can be seen and

conspicuously glares at the object as it glows (fig.39). The elixir becomes the de facto centre of the shot but having Cagliostro visible on one side and a guest staring in awe at the object on the other once again reinforces the irony of what we are seeing. The sense of amazement felt by the guest, and the gasps we hear from the other guests off-screen, underlines that it is to them a sublime experience — they are taken in by the whole charade. But at the same time, the performative quality of the demonstration highlights to us the quackery that is evident here. Once again, the guests are portrayed as passive automatons, but the difference this time is the Comtesse's scepticism. In a reaction medium shot, the Comtesse subtly grins as the incandescent glow of the elixir lights up her face, perhaps illustrating that she is inclined not to believe what she is seeing but at the same time is astonished by its sublime quality (fig.40). This feeling of astonishment is, as Edmund Burke pointed out, "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."[234] But through a sudden move from the sublime to the bathetic, we get this sense that the Comtesse's suspension of motions is, unlike many of the other guests, momentary. In a shift of tone, Comtesse turns to the guests and jokes that Cagliostro "doit déjà avoir consommé quelques bouteilles," suggesting that nobody should be taking Cagliostro's claims at face value.[235] Cagliostro responds in a more formal register than we are accustomed to by admitting that he is intoxicated but that his discourse is more than wordplay, "avec votre permission, oui Madame, ainsi les gens bien informés m'attribuent à tort le don de lire le passé, alors que je ne fais que me souvenir parce que j'ai vu."[236] Through his elevated diction, we get the sense that Cagliostro wishes to highlight the disparity between the knowledge he possesses and that of the other characters. He admits that his foresight is not a spiritual gift but an aptitude to read history, which by implication reinforces the Comtesse's short-sightedness and the shallowness of the other guests. It is through these disparities that L'Herbier draws our attention to the potential implications both ignorance of the past and short-sightedness have for the direction of travel.

[234] T.O. McLoughlin and James T. Boulton, *The Writings And Speeches Of Edmund Burke: The Early Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.230.
[235] Cagliostro "must already have consumed a few bottles"
[236] "With your permission, yes I have, Madame, thus the well-informed people mistakenly attribute to me the gift to read the past, whereas all I do is remember because I have seen."

Figure 41 Long shot of Cagliostro addressing courtiers.

Figure 42 Long shot of Nicholas' arrival.

Although the guests appear to take Cagliostro's claims very seriously, they miss the significance of the various allusions and analogies he professes. For example, when Cagliostro claims to have seen "les pyramides se construire," the guests seem to accept it face value, but the frequent allusions he makes to civilisations like Ancient Egypt and Babylon are in fact a reminder that organised societies throughout history had an origin and an end point, even if they saw themselves as infallible.[237] The disparities of knowledge between Cagliostro and surrounding characters enlarges their blindness to the shape of history and that choices, decisions, and actions in-themselves are integral to shaping the direction of travel, in turn implying that this weakness is symptomatic of institutional fragility. This sense that the guests are blind to these things is reinforced in a very-long shot we see of them standing in a horseshoe-like formation

[237] "The pyramids being built."

around him as if they are in awe of being mystified (fig.41). But we are reminded of the ironic nature of the spectacle when L'Herbier cuts to a wide shot of the Comtesse's husband, Nicholas, as he enters the room and, with an air of caution, walks towards the guests as a quartet (including a pianist, cellist, violinist, and violist) can be seen playing in the corner of the room (fig.42). This breakaway shot almost reminds us of the spectacle's constructed-ness and the dramaturgical quality of Cagliostro's oratorical flourishes. It almost mimics the performative aesthetic of the salon, which Camille Paglia describes as "a spectacle of dazzling surfaces" akin to "the petrified object-world venerated by the aesthete", where "words, faces, and gestures are exhibited in a blaze of hard glamour."[238] For Paglia, the salon is the epitome of elegance, described by Jean-Paul Sartre as "the quality of conduct which transforms the greatest quantity of being into *appearing.*"[239] The spectacle L'Herbier presents to us is at once elegance and artifice, and as Nicholas listens to Cagliostro waxing lyrical about seeing "Vercingétorix se rendre à César" and "Jeanne d'Arc se faire brûler," we get the sense from his nonchalant facial expression and physical distance from the others that this amounts to nothing more than showiness, a view the Comtesse increasingly takes as this scene unfolds.[240] Shortly after Nicholas' arrival, she sarcastically exclaims, "n'est-il pas incroyable ? Disons, plus qu'incroyable, mais quel dommage que, étant si plein d'illumination, vous ne connaissiez même pas la température à Versailles alors que vous êtes à Paris."[241] The Comtesse appears brazen and assured, but to the audience, we are once again drawn to that disparity between Cagliostro's knowledge and her own. Disapproving of her flippant remarks, Cagliostro reminds her of her vulnerability by pointing out the fact that once had to beg on the streets and lived "dans la charité," at which point there is a sudden change in the scene's tone from the light and frivolous to the dark and serious — the music even stops.[242] Visually disturbed by what he is hearing, Nicholas interjects and demands that Cagliostro leaves, but Cagliostro dismisses him as a "gendarme" and an "ivrogne" who equally lacks the capacity for true perception.[243] The aloofness of those who will

[238] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), p.532.
[239] Ibid.
[240] "Vercingetorix surrender to Caesar"/"Joan of Arc being burnt to death"
[241] "Isn't he amazing? Let's say, more than just amazing, but what a pity that, being so full of enlightenment, you don't even know the temperature at Versailles while in Paris."
[242] "In charity"
[243] A "gendarme" and a "drunkard"

participate in the Necklace Affair is emphasised here through the figure of Cagliostro, along with their naivety in not facing up to the potential consequences of getting involved with it in the first place.

Figure 43 Medium shot of Comtesse's reaction to the Cardinal's endorsement of Cagliostro.

This equally applies to the Cardinal, who in response to Nicholas' request that Cagliostro leave, brazenly says, "si j'invite le soleil à déjeuner, il serait insensé de l'accuser d'être trop brillant."[244] The Cardinal's remarks are in complete contrast to his earlier dismissal of the occultist as a "charlatan,", suggesting that he has come to appreciate his wisdom, but much like the other guests, there is no sense that he has understood the implications in what Cagliostro says.[245] In a reaction shot to the Cardinal's remarks, we see the Comtesse's cold, resentful feeling towards him, reinforcing the fact that she seems to value her own ego and ambitions over the long-term consequences (fig.43). In both instances, and in the context of the scene as a whole, L'Herbier highlights the disparity those who can foresee the direction of travel and those who cannot, though he does not commit to a view of history that endorses either determinism or free will. Nevertheless, using irony, spectacle, allusion, and metaphor, he reinforces how those characters who will go on to have some involvement in the Necklace Affair are oblivious to the fact that their choices, decisions, and actions will have some influence on how history plays itself out.

[244] "If I invite the sun to lunch, it would be foolish to accuse him of being too brilliant"
[245] "Charlatan"

The fate of these individuals, and the direction of travel for the nobility more generally, is compounded by the woeful choices and decisions we see them make as the film progresses, which almost goes to vindicate Cagliostro's function as a critical device in the film. Spectacle, allusion, and artifice extend to many aspects of the film as a way of offering a critical and reflexive view of history, but there is one scene where the internal world of the film becomes self-consciously artificial and staged, unbeknown to the character who finds himself in this faux environment. This is the scene where the Cardinal meets 'the Queen' in the Bosquet de la Reine (located in the Gardens of Versailles), with the aim of reconciling their relationship, but as we know from the Comtesse's first encounter with Nicole Le Guay d'Oliva in the tavern (where she goes by the nickname, "la reine," because of her likeness to Marie Antoinette) and Cagliostro's warning to the Cardinal ("soyez sur vos gardes, votre Eminence, l'avenir vous éclairera"), the encounter is staged.[246] But because the Cardinal is ignorant of this, Caglistro's word foreshadow the stark implications of the forthcoming events. The subtle use of lighting and the strategic placement of characters in certain parts of the *mise-en-scène* helps to construct that world of artificiality the Cardinal walks into. The blocking of the characters among different parts of the space reflects the disparities in knowledge between them, as do the shadows, which, for instance, limit what the Cardinal can see, thus minimising his capacity to see the faux nature of the situation. When the Cardinal enters the open space of the court, decorated with bronze vessels and granite vases, the stage is all set, and 'la Reine' is waiting for her cue under the alcove. The Comtesse tentatively watches on from the shady perimeter of the court, amidst a grove of trees and plants, as the Cardinal doffs his hat, kneels, and with a tender voice, formally addresses 'la Reine' as "Madame." We then see 'La Reine' then takes a cautious step forward, taking care to remain half in the shadows to conceal her true identity, before informing the Cardinal "Je sais maintenant que je peux compter sur votre dévouement."[247] A veneer of sincerity protrudes this utterance, delivered in a gentle, inoffensive cadence, as does her offer of a white rose, which the Cardinal gracefully accepts before placing gently it under his nose (fig.44). On the surface, this moment has all the makings of a chivalric romance, in which the Cardinal believes he is smelling the sweetness and sincerity of love, but we as the audience know that the

[246] "The Queen" and "be on your guard, your Eminence, the future will enlighten you."
[247] "I know now that I may count on your devotion."

emotive language and romantic gestures are artificial. The rose is for the Cardinal a symbol of love, but it is in fact a memento of his own gullibility and short-sightedness. The white rose could equally an allusion to Le Brun's painting, *Marie-Antoinette dit « à la Rose »* (1783), in which Marie Antoinette holds a rose in a flowery garden, and while this painting pre-dates the incident of the necklace, its invocation reminds us how an innocent world untainted by the forces of history can be rapidly dissolved in the wake of seemingly inconsequential choices and actions which are in fact consequential.

Figure 44 Long shot of the cardinal excepting a rose from the 'Queen'.

Figure 45 Medium-long shot of the Comtesse watching on from within the grove.

That sense of the Cardinal being taken in by the lie around him, and of being ultimately short-sighted, is reinforced through the punctuating shots of the Comtesse watching on from a distance. Medium close-ups, mid-shots, and medium-long shots of her responding act as forms of caesura, or momentary pauses which critically distance us from the artifice. In one medium-long shot, for instance, we see the Comtesse smirking

as she hides herself in the shadows of the grove, which at once shows her relief that the Cardinal is buying into the lie and her anxiety that he may see through the charade (fig.45). But at the same time, these punctuating shots work to emphasise the Cardinal's short-sightedness, which is further accentuated when, after "la Reine" is summoned away and the Comtesse steps out of the shadows, the Cardinal seizes the moment and offers the Comtesse a precious diamond as a "souvenir de cette nuit," or as a token of his gratitude to her for arranging the evening, which is of course ironic as this night will prove largely responsible for his downfall.[248] But regardless of the disparities in knowledge between the characters, as well as the audience and the characters, the scene in general works as a form of dramatic irony demonstrating that all those who are complicit in the Affair cannot, unlike the critical observer, foresee the consequences of their actions. The allusions and artifices of this scene works to underscore the self-indulgent nature of these characters, which by extension highlights their indifference to the direction of travel and how this might affect the perception of the First and Second Estate. This scene, in keeping with the film in general, views history as something which pivots on the decisions, choices, and actions of individuals and institutions, even if said decisions, choices, and actions are perceived by those implementing them as minor or inconsequential.

But it is not just the short-sightedness of those involved in the Affair who are presented as being responsible for the changing direction of travel. The preoccupation with spectacle and artifice enlarges the short-sightedness and decadence of the monarchy itself, who fail to do something about the Affair until it is too late. When, towards the end of the film, the Cardinal is summoned to Versailles by the real Queen, and is then subsequently arrested in the Galerie des Glaces, we get the sense from the pacing, *mise-en-scène,* and dialogue that the world of the monarchy and nobility is so insular and blinkered that the direction of travel towards Revolution appears almost inevitable. For example, L'Herbier's emphasis on the spectacle of the court and its artificiality accentuates the self-indulgence of the nobility while underlining their obliviousness to this fact. The scene beings with the Cardinal preparing to head to the Chapel of Versailles for mass, but after a footman informs him that the Queen would like to see him, he alters his plans and heads towards the Queen. As the Cardinal walks down the Galerie des Glaces, a long shot follows him through the space at a steady

[248] "Souvenir of this night"

pace (fig.46). L'Herbier captures the grandeur of the room and the enormity of the congregation, as the imposing sound of the organ resonates in this most ceremonial of atmospheres. Louis XIV Style chandeliers dangle from the ceiling, pilasters beautify the walls, and sparkles of light shimmer through the arcaded windows. Courtiers bow and curtsy as the Cardinal walks through the space, giving him the appearance of someone with unfettered power. But all the pomp on the surface seems to remind us that despite the circumstances, and despite time being of the essence for the institution, courtiers and nobles go on acting and behaving in a way that could only suggest their short-sightedness. This is reinforced when L'Herbier intercuts the wides with an exchange (in medium shot) between two courtiers, who wax lyrical about how marvellous it is that the Cardinal has been summoned for an audience with the Queen, not realising the real reason he is being summoned. Their misconstrued view of what is going on works to enlarge the self-absorbed nature of this world and reminds us that even those institutions which look healthy on the surface are not infallible, and certainly not immune to the forces of history.

Figure 46 Wide shot of the Cardinal walking through the Hall of Mirrors.

The short-sightedness of the courtiers and nobles is reinforced further when the Cardinal arrives to hear the reason why he has been summoned by the court. As he approaches the Queen, he has a certain rigidity in his posture and a certain inelegance in his bow, which in conjunction with his nervous touching of his cassock and fondling of his crucifix, suggests that he knows inside that there is something amiss. This feeling of apprehension, and the sense that he feels exposed, is emphasised in a wide shot where we also see the Queen seated with a straight posture and emotionless gaze, facing ninety degrees away from the Cardinal and refraining from eye contact (fig.47).

We immediately get the sense that despite the circumstances, she is not wilfully going to allow her reputation to be damaged, and although we sense apprehension in the Cardinal, he arguably tries to suppress this through his bold speech. He shamelessly declares to the Queen, "Votre Majesté avait daigné m'appeler devant toute la cour ; c'est encore mieux qu'un pardon," to which she abruptly responds, "vous n'êtes pas ici pour être gracié, Monsieur le Cardinal, mais pour essayer de vous justifier."[249] The Cardinal's brazen words highlight his failure to the grasp the seriousness of the situation or to foresee the level of humiliation he will receive when he is arrested in front of the court, but when the Cardinal is asked to leave and must retrace his steps down the Galerie des Glaces, his brazenness is greatly diminished, and the direction of travel significantly enlarged.

Figure 47 Wide shot of the Cardinal addressing the Queen.

[249] "Your Majesty had deigned to call me before the whole court; this is even better than a pardon"/ "you're not here to receive a pardon, Monsieur le Cardinal, but to try to justify yourself."

Figure 48 Wide shot of the Galerie des Glaces and the Cardinal's arrest.

The Cardinal's departure very much mirrors his arrival, in terms of pacing, tone and aesthetic. A wide shot slowly follows his long walk back through the Galerie des Glaces, and although we know that this experience is internally painful for the character, to the courtiers, it is as if nothing has changed as they continue to bow and curtsy to him (fig.48). Still blind to the situation, the court cannot predict what is about to happen, reinforced when one courtier says to another, without any irony intended, "A côté, madame, la reine fait la paix avec M. le cardinal."[250] Despite the circumstances, the long take shows the Cardinal proceeding with equanimity, as if attempting to hold on to his dignity for as long as possible. But the protracted nature of the shot makes this walk seem lengthier than it really is, as the character becoming progressively boxed in by the overwhelming presence of courtiers. This growing sense of things closing in on the character culminates with the surprise announcement, "Monsieur le Cardinal, je suis obligé de retenir votre personne!", at which point the hitherto oblivious courtiers gasp.[251] The Cardinal's dignity is instantaneously taken away from him and the direction of travel becomes clearer. Although the Cardinal is later acquitted in court for his involvement, this scene's transition from the artificial to the real breaks down the veneer of spectacle and in turn exposes the fragility of the institution. Although Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* wake up to the situation from this point on, L'Herbier demonstrates that the direction of travel has already shifted because of the choices, decisions, and actions made by the Cardinal and others, and

[250] "Next door, Madame, the Queen makes her peace with M. le Cardinal."
[251] "Monsieur le Cardinal, I am obliged to detain you!"

that the damage to its reputation has already been done. Nevertheless, L'Herbier does not commit either to free will or determinism but draws our attention to the fact that there are patterns in history which may indicate the direction in which an institution or individual is heading.

As the film approaches its end, the changing reality and direction of travel is brought home by the shattering of spectacle and artifice. That is not to say, for instance, the scene in which the Comtesse is tried does not employ spectacle, it does, but it is a different kind of spectacle. It is a long visual and aural display of an unflattering reality, deliberately laborious and painstaking to reflect the overwhelming sense of guilt hovering over her like a dark cloud and the inevitability of what is to come. But there is another reason why we L'Herbier spends a long time on this trial sequence and the final scene in which the Comtesse is tortured: they speak as much to the time in which the film was produced as the time in which these events took place. They are potential allegories on the collaboration trials which took place in the aftermath of the Allied victory, and that misguided sense of certainty about being on the right side of history. The torture scene resonates especially because of its pertinence to the moment and its invocation of those horrific images of public humiliation and torture of those thought, but not necessarily proved, to have collaborated with the Nazis. In this instance, L'Herbier is saying something about the treatment of women in these circumstances. The torture we see on screen is drawn out and excessively thorough, not because it intends to be sadistic or act as form of *schadenfreude*, but because it seeks to highlight the lengths the authorities went to assert their moral righteousness while emphasising that the methods used to achieve justice can be as unjust, if not more unjust, than the original injustice. Wide pans of the prison's exterior reveal the large, open arena outside the Salpêtrière where this brutality is about the unfold. The vastness of the space creates a feeling of exposure, but at the same time, a sense of entrapment because the courtyard is cut off from the outside world by the large, external gates. The torture is almost medieval, as we see crowds of people jeering and shouting from behind the gates as the Comtesse is dragged to the podium, restrained, and then repeatedly flogged. The loudness of her cries and the harshness of the instrument striking her body are accentuated to mirror the painful image of the bloody scars as they appear on her back. The intensity of the sounds builds up and up as the pain clearly becomes harder to bear, but the true horror of the torture inflicted upon her is in fact at its worst where we are met with near

silence. Once the flogging ends, and the Comtesse stops screaming, a long take forces us to witness the sight of every tear and the sound of every laboured breath. The shot accentuates the level of despair she is in and signals that she could not physically or mentally face any more torture. But this period of silence does not mark the end of the torture and is in fact the tension-building caesura anticipating the final branding (with a 'V' for voleuse). There is a sense that the authorities have overstepped their mark in their attempt to steer the direction of travel, an allegorical pointer to the authorities overseeing the collaboration trials of the post-Liberation years.

Figure 49 A close-up of the Comtesse's despair as she is punished.

The audience are encouraged to observe patterns in history and how a Godlike certainty and conviction that one is on the right side of history can prompt institutions to act in all kinds of ways to achieve their aims. This is reinforced through the prolonged spectacle of the branding. A medium shot of the Comtesse sees her lying helplessly on the podium as the torturer removes a metal rod from the urn. L'Herbier then punctuates this with two reaction shots, one showing the crowds sudden change from jeering and shouting to timidly looking away from the action, and the other showing the Comtesse's husband clutching the bars of his cell as he reluctantly looks down at the torturous spectacle that he cannot bear to watch but feels he must. L'Herbier then moves to show her being restrained by various guards as she tries to resist what is coming. The intensity of the moment is the heightened through a range of shots, including a close-up of the hot iron that is about to be thrusted upon her body and a medium close-up, shortly followed by close-up, of her screaming and shouting "Non!", as she breathes uncontrollably. L'Herbier gets in very close to the action and builds the tension until the very moment the iron touches her body, at which point

discordant, orchestral sounds come in to express the horrific pain and emotion she no longer has the energy to externalise. A close-up then lingers on her exhausted body as she screams silently, before despairingly lifting her head and glaring out into the wilderness while her teary-eyed husband looks on helplessly from behind the bars (fig.49). But while her wounds are exposed here, so too are the wounds of the authorities, and specifically, the monarchy. In response to what they have just witnessed, one justice says to another, "ce n'est pas la voleuse que l'on marque ici, c'est la reine de France," which is met by complete bewilderment from the other justice, as if to suggest that even in these circumstances, certain representatives of the authorities were so blinded by their own moral certainty that they would act in any way they could to stop the direction of travel changing course.[252]

The ethical implications behind this sublime sense of certainty that one can determine the direction of travel if one believes that one is on the right side of history are enlarged greatly towards the very end of the scene when L'Herbier moves seamlessly between three shots using a dissolve (one of the Comtesse's despairing glare into thin air, one of the justices shaking hands with each other in confidence that what they have witnessed vindicates the authorities, and another of the Comtesse in the same position as she is in the first shot). Through this editing choice, L'Herbier draws our attention to the disparity between the injustice committed on the one hand and the moral righteousness of the authorities who committed it on the other. The historical backdrop equally becomes transparent as conditions of the present moment rise to the foreground. The scene ends with that sorrowful image of the Comtesse sat on the podium in agony, as a subtle rendition of *Dansons la Carmagnole* is played in the background, a French Revolutionary song (and 'constructed' *lieu de mémoire*) satirising the 'triumphs' of the monarchy. In conjunction with that tragic final shot, the music underlines the failures of the authorities and sounds the death knell for the *Ancien Régime*. But if we strip away all the period décor, we find that the subject matter is just as applicable to the France of L'Herbier's own time, when French citizens and former members of the Gaullist Resistance turned on their own and pointed the finger at those they thought should be punished, all in the name of justice and righting the wrongs of the past. Much like a number of films produced in the wake of the Occupation (Robert Bresson's *Dames au Bois de Boulogne*, 1946; Georges

[252] "It wasn't the thief that has just been branded here, it was the Queen of France."

Lacombe's *Martin Roumagnac*, 1946; Claude Autant-Lara's *Le Diable au corps*, 1947, and Julien Duvivier's *Panique*, 1946), which Susan Hayward argues had to "attest to a need to project the immediate past on to a different set of narratives that are removed from the immediate arena of guilt," *L'affaire du collier de la reine* uses the backdrop of a historical incident to bring to mind the realities of the present.[253]

L'Herbier raises certain moral and ethical questions through his critical, reflexive, and allegorical portrait of history, but much in the same way he avoids committing to a certain metaphysic of history itself, these questions are not posed explicitly but are left up to the audience (whose views on collaboration may have been conflicted) to judge for themselves. Julian Jackson argues that in these post-War years, there was much hysteria around the question of collaboration and conflicting views on how collaborators should face justice.[254] The Communists thought that the government was too lenient, calling for purge of all collaborators without question, whereas the Vichy collaborators likened the purges to a massacre, claiming that there were one-hundred thousand victims.[255] This figure is exaggerated, but there were still between thirty to forty-thousand victims, and according to the Comité d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, nine-thousand were executed without due process.[256] Albert Camus argued at the time that "the executioners' hatred engendered the victims' hatred. And once the executioners had gone, the French were left with their hatred only partially spent. They still look at one another with a residue of anger."[257] He argued that "the most difficult battle to be won against the enemy in the future must be fought within ourselves, with an exceptional effort that will transform our appetite for hatred into a desire for justice."[258] Camus is fully aware that when violence occurs in the name of justice, there is no victor, and so humans must take it upon themselves as responsible individuals to ensure that justice in its proper sense can be achieved. Although L'Herbier's film does not moralise on the issue of justice, the very fact that it spends a lot of time on that torture and exposes the perversions of history strongly implies that its position is not too dissimilar to Camus', even if the film is less

[253] Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), p.134.
[254] Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.577
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Quoted in, Mark Orme, *The Development of Albert Camus's Concern for Social and Political Justice* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), p.139.
[258] Ibid.

committed to Camus' metaphysics of free will and his strong conviction that "if the duration of history is not synonymous with the duration of the harvest, then history, in effect, is no more than a fleeting and cruel shadow in which man has no more part."[259] Although *L'affaire du collier de la reine* does not subscribe to a gloomy, deterministic view of history either (which Isaiah Berlin thought to be false on the grounds that such a metaphysic would demand too much of a shift in our moral character and psychology), he nevertheless reminds us that there are patterns in history and external forces which impact upon the choices and decisions made that by individuals and institutions.[260] L'Herbier stresses the importance of historical memory as a tool for understanding the present, which in a period of deep uncertainty, where there was little consensus of how to move forward, was deeply pertinent. Rather than give us an emancipatory view of history, as Renoir does in *La Marseillaise*, he foregrounds through spectacle, artifice, allegory, and allusion the way in which the scandals, injustices, and perversions of the past can speak to the present moment and to the broader metaphysics of history.

3.4 The Critical Response

While I have argued that L'Herbier's treatment of the Necklace Affair is allegorical in nature, and speaks to the immediate concerns of post-War France, critics at the time seldom acknowledged anything beyond the events of the story itself. Many observed that the film highlighted the inward-looking nature of the *Ancien Régime*, and how the Affair caused irreparable damage to the monarchy, but the parallels between the past and the present were often not commented upon, which in part may be attributed to fact that this would have been hugely contentious. Critics were overall nonchalant about the film, claiming that it did not offer any original insights into the Affair, was an empty recasting of Dumas' novel, and was a triumph of style over substance. Charles Ford said, "ce n'est pas la première fois que l'on porte à l'écran mette ‹ affaire › , il est donc regrettable que l'auteur du scénario n'ait pas cherché à jeter sur la trame royale une lumière quelque peu renouvelée."[261] He continued, "Marcel L'Herbier a

[259] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p.266.
[260] Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).
[261] Charles Ford, "Chronique des cinémas", *La Gazette provençale*, No.370 (Paris: La Gazette provençale, 7th October 1946), p.2 -"this is not the first time that we have brought 'Affair' to the

mise en scène l'histoire qu'on lui avait donnée sans essayer de lui accorder plus d'importance qu'elle ne méritait!"[262] For Ford, the film did not offer anything that earlier film versions had already offered, including Etienne Arnaud and Louis Feuillade's version from 1909, Camille de Morlhon's from 1912, and Gaston Ravel and Tony Lekain's from 1929.

The review in *Force Ouvrière* shares similar concerns about the content but is mixed on the aesthetic. It praises the visuals of the Palace of Versailles, which "sous la magie de la lumière apparaît infiniment plus photogénique," as well as Viviane Romance's performance, but its criticises its costumes and "gestes compassés et solennels" because it believes these features do adapt well to the screen or shine any new light on the Affair.[263] François Chalais commented on how the costumes and décor are simulacra of the period and invoke the "gravures d'époque" but once again, he concludes that the "film est l'image de son origine" and therefore nothing more to it than its spectacle.[264] He also thought that the cinematography only emphasised what is already familiar about the past rather than shining a new light on it through the lens of the present. While these critics are very much indifferent to L'Herbier's employment of spectacle and artifice and see his depiction of the Necklace Affair as rather shallow, I maintain that through its content and aesthetic, the film provides insights into the metaphysics of history and was very much produced in the same vein as those films Hayward identified as addressing the issues of the present moment without using the collaboration trials themselves as the centre point of their moral, philosophical, and political critique. In L'Herbier's film, the past is not, as many critics seemed to think, merely décor but is a conduit through which events of the immediate

screen, so it is unfortunate that the author of the screenplay did not seek to shed a somewhat renewed light on the royal fabric."

[262] Ibid – "Marcel L'Herbier staged the story he had been given without trying to give it more importance than it deserved."

[263] "L'affaire du collier de la reine", *Force Ouvrière,* No.39 (Paris: Force Ouvrière, 19th September 1946), p.11 – "under the magic of light appears infinitely more photogenic"/"formal and solemn gestures."

[264] François Chalais, "Cinema: Histoire aux enchères - Le Collier de la Reine", *Carrefour,* No .109 (Paris: Carrefour, 19th September 1946), p.9 – "engravings of the time"/the "film is the image of its origin"

past can be addressed within a narrative that occupies a different place and a different time.

Figure 50 An illustrated strip depicting the events of the Necklace Affair in Carrefour.

But even if these critics did not see the film as an allegory that drew parallels between past and present, they did at least recognise that the film has a sense of foreboding and uses the story of the Necklace Affair to show how it did irreputable damage to the monarchy. Stéphane Jourat noted that "l'héroïne, très authentique voleuse, intrigante et faussaire, n'en sert pas moins de symbole précurseur à la Révolution."[265] *Force Ouvrière*'s account is almost identical: "le scandale soulevé par de la Motte et qui éclabousse de sa boue les marches du trône fut l'un des signes précurseurs des grands craquements révolutionnaires."[266] And above a featured article in *Carrefour* is a short, illustrated strip depicting the events of the Necklace Affair, ending with a giant 'V' suspended above the prison where the Comtesse is tortured, illustrating that this is not merely a punishment for the her but an indictment of the *Ancien Régime* as a whole. (fig.50). The large 'V' equally symbolises the degree of certainty the *Ancien Régime* had in being the arbiters of justice and of thinking that they could steer the direction of travel, but at the same time, it reminds us how their desire to show onlooking citizens how it dealt with those who did wrong did very little to save their reputation. On this horrific spectacle of torturing the authorities saw as justice, Chalais claims that L'Herbier's depiction goes too far, and panders to the visceral far more than the intellect:

[265] Stéphane Jourat, "Les Films de la Semaine", *Combat*, No .718 (Paris: Combat, September 1946), p.2 -"The heroine, a very authentic thief, schemer and forger, […] serves as a symbolic precursor to the Revolution."

[266] "L'affaire du collier de la reine", ibid – "The scandal raised by de la Motte, and which splashed its mud on the steps of the throne was one of the precursory signs of the great revolutionary cracks."

> L'Herbier et Spaak d'avoir bâclé un sujet qui, au demeurant, en valait un autre pour le simple plaisir d'amener une scène de flagellation et l'apposition d'un fer supposé rouge sur l'épaule en chair, surtout, et en os, de Mme Viviane Romance. Je ne suis pas adversaire du sadisme dans les arts. Je suis adversaire des arts qui se servent du sadisme pour parer à leur insuffisance.[267]

He goes on to say that "le passage est pénible sans être beau," and Romance "joue avec sincérité le jeu d'une impudeur sévèrement retenue dans les limites de la plus rigoureuse pudeur."[268] While I have argued that final scene's excessive violence or sadism, as Chalais terms it, in fact reinforces the horrific nature of it and the injustice that is done in the name of justice, Chalais comes to the conclusion that the scene's excesses are a quick route to spectacle in a film lacking substance, rather than a way of encouraging any sort of meaningful reflection on the subject matter. But we could argue that his parochial view of the film is shaped somewhat by the time in which he wrote his article, when there was a general reluctance to acknowledge or discuss the morality and ethics of the collaboration trials. A retrospective on the film by Chalais, or any of the other critics, years later may have led them to interpret it differently, and perhaps notice that it was quite possible L'Herbier had the collaboration trials in mind when producing the film. Hugo's characterisation of history as a reflection that reproduces the qualities of things past but does so in a way that is distorted or misshapen is pertinent here, not least because it recognises that at the moment of its production, a set of moral and ethical assumptions may be circulating that alters how one views the past. The same can be of approaches to history, whether evolutionary, cyclical, Carlylean, Marxist, Total. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that retrospectives of historical modes of interpretation or assumptions made at a specific moment of the past can alter our perception of what was at stake at the very moment of this film's remembering of the historical events in question. Because the film was produced against a backdrop of uncertainty and aimed to confront the realities of the present by way of spectacle, artifice, and allegory, I maintain that the film's reworking

[267] Chalais, ibid – L'Herbier and Spaak [have] botched a subject which […] was worth another for the simple pleasure of bringing about a scene of flogging and the affixing of a purportedly red iron on the flesh, shoulder, and above all, the bones of Mrs. Viviane Romance. I am not an opponent of sadism in the arts. I am an opponent of the arts which use sadism to overcome their insufficiency.
[268] Ibid – "The passage is painful without being beautiful"/"Romance plays with sincerity the game of impudence severely held within the limits of the most rigorous modesty."

of history has instrumental value. This is made possible by the fact memories of the Necklace Affair are generally placed *a priori* in the context of the decline of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* as institutions in the years that followed rather than be treated as an isolated series of events. L'Herbier's decision to memorialise this incident specifically lends itself to a more critical, reflexive, and allegorical view of history where the bigger picture can be considered, which in turn acts as a springboard for interrogating not just the historical moment but the present moment, even if the film ultimately relies on some form of artistic representation. Historical film then cannot always be characterised simply as a narrative about the past, but as something which can provide insight into the present moment and on the broader metaphysics of history. And much like *L'affaire du collier de la reine,* the next case study I will examine similarly memorialises the past as a way of speaking to the present moment, but what is equally demonstrates is the potential for historical film to have authorial presence (akin to popular narrative history), which it does so by way of self-conscious storytelling and *mise en abyme*.

Chapter Four: *Si Versailles m'était conté* (Sacha Guitry, 1953)

4.1 History: The Path to Self-exculpation

> *Ce film lance une mode qui ne se démodera pas. Tout le monde voudra désormais voir et être vu à Versailles.*
>
> — Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, L'Institut de France.[269]

Although all four case studies can in some sense be described as historical narratives, Guitry's *Si Versailles m'était conté* is the most self-conscious of the fact that it is a narrative. For many of his celebrated works, including inoffensive Boulevard comedies and light-touch films, Guitry did not hide away behind the scenes but made himself visible to the audience, sometimes in an acting role but often as an all-knowing narrator guiding the audience through the story with added charm, wit, and sometimes irony. Guitry often employed *mise en abyme* to turn the world of his stories into a stage. Ivone Margulies describes his films specifically as "unabashedly theatrical," and noted that "their grafting of theatrical tropes into cinema was not only thematic but involved an active address to the audience, an attempt to establish contact across the theatre pit or screen."[270] *Si Versailles m'était conté* charts the history of Versailles from the reign of Louis XIV through to the years of the July Monarchy, but it is framed explicitly within the context of the present and unveiled to us moment by moment with the guidance of its all-knowing 'author,' who sets the scene for the audience either through a voice-over or a piece to camera. This chapter will argue that the film's deliberate use of *mise en abyme* and *exercice de style* emphasises both the value of History as a form of storytelling and the personal contribution an 'author' can make to memorialising the past in historical films. Equally, I will make the case that such an approach can illuminate the utility of historical memory in the context of the present moment, which in this instance was about renewing the enthusiasm for Versailles when it was in desperate need of

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[269] Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, *Réception De Marc Ladreit De Lacharrière À L'Académie Des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Canal Académie, 25th January 2006) <https://www.canalacademie.com/ida184-Reception-de-Marc-Ladreit-de-Lacharriere-a-l-Academie-des-beaux-arts.html> [Accessed 27 June 2020] -"This film launches a trend that will not go away. Everyone will now want to see, and be seen, in Versailles"

[270] Ivone Margulies, "Sacha Guitry, National Portraiture And The Artist's Hand", *French Cultural Studies*, 16.3 (2005), 241-258 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957155805057292>.

restoration and, from Guitry's personal point of view, an effort to self-exculpate himself from accusations of collaboration.

The framing of history through the omniscient voice of Guitry and, near the end of the film, the all-knowing curator who shows tourists around the Versailles as it stands in the present, emphasises the permanence of the place at a time when it had fallen victim to the ravages of time. *Si Versailles m'était conté*, following in the tradition of several showy, historical pageants produced by Guitry (including *Les Perles de la couronne*, 1937 and *Remontons les Champs-Élysées*, 1938), employs a self-conscious narrative technique to frame a panorama of Versailles' history in the broader context of the place's enlarged position in France's historical memory. It is also a very personal work that makes Guitry its author, illustrating his own commitment to preserving France's historical memory. Guitry once declared, "je suis un de ces hommes à qui l'on ne pardonne rien. Je n'ai qu'une passion : le travail ; je n'ai qu'un seul bonheur : aimer. Je n'ai qu'un amour : la France," and this fawning sense of admiration for *l'Hexagone* here is the tone he strikes with *Si Versailles m'était conté*.[271] The film indulges in the minutiae of that world through Guitry's eyes, a world that is akin an elaborate theatre production. We should think of it as a museum of quotations, ideas, and *tableaux vivants*, where each individual exhibit is compartmentalised behind a window that we spectators peer through one by one, as Guitry guides us around the space. Margulies describes it as a "[pretext] for the anecdotal display of wax figures and the scenes work as portrait frames through which illustrious physiognomies, identified via well-established clichés, body forth in costume and makeup."[272] But while it has many individual components, the conceit of the film is that sense of continuity it provides between the various eras of Versailles history, achieved by the framing devices and the coherence of Guitry's storytelling. Because of this, the film almost anticipates Nora's idea of Versailles as a *lieu de mémoire* and bridges the gap between memory and history.

Guitry's authorial role in the film's memorialising of the past at once demonstrates his interest in bringing together theatre, film and collecting, as he did in his documentary films.[273] Apart from being a formal and stylistic choice, the framing

[271] Quoted in André Bernard, *Sacha Guitry* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2002), P.62 –"I am one of those men who cannot be forgiven. I have only one passion: work; I have only one happiness: to love, and I have only one love: France"
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid.

device and the personal take on history was arguably an attempt by the director at self-exculpation, and it on this very point where I will begin, setting out the historical conditions which led Guitry to make the film. I will then turn to look at how such framing devices as Guitry's authorial role and the adoption of *mise en abyme* formed a central part of the film's marketing strategy. Following this, I will closely examine Guitry's personal yet theatrical take on the history of Versailles, paying particular attention to these devices as well as the prominence of storytelling as a way of conveying historical memory. Then, finally, I will assess the mixed critical response to the film (with some interpreting it as reverential and others as mocking), before asking what these responses tell us more broadly about Versailles and the monarchy's place in France's historical memory. But to begin to assess the role of historical memory in these large terms, and to understand its relationship to the film, we must examine Guitry's place within this milieu, and what guided him to make the film in the first place.

The best place to begin is Vichy France, where, after the collapse of the Third Republic, Guitry continued to work in both the film and theatre industries. Because of this, there were suspicions about his motives, with some regarding his decision to continue working under this Regime an act of stoicism in the face of oppression whereas others saw it as a capitulation to the fascists. A similar level of mistrust around his intentions was present in the response to the 1944 documentary, *De 1429 à 1942 ou De Jeanne d'Arc à Philippe Pétain*, which was viewed by some as a tribute to France's past glories but others as a tribute to Marshall Pétain. Guitry's name had already been included on a list of suspected collaborators to be tried in 1942, but after France's liberation in 1944, he faced arrest and was forced to relinquish his position at the *Académie Goncourt*. Although he was eventually found innocent, he was forced to spend time in the Drancy internment camp, which detrimentally impacted his health and left him psychologically scarred. On 14th November 1944, the communist *L'Humanité* proclaimed with disgust, "Sacha Guitry est relâche!", and were alarmed by the fact he been allowed to leave without charge.[274] The newspaper takes a hard line on the issue, described Guitry as the man "qui s'est vautré aux pieds de l'envahisseur, […] qui a banqueté avec les tortionnaires, […] qui a ramassé des

[274] "Sacha Guitry est relâche", *L'Humanite,* No .77 (Paris: L'Humanite, 14th November 1944), p.1 – "Sacha Guitry is released!"

millions pendant l'occupation," before going on to say that he was released "purement et simplement," which is their eyes was unjustifiable on the grounds that there was not enough evidence to prove his innocence.[275] The Christian democratic *L'Aube* had similar suspicions, reporting that "ni le magistrat ni le praticien ne sont au courant de cette indisposition mystérieuse" that led to his release.[276] Two years after his release, Guitry was still met with hostility, such as the incident on the evening of 27th May 1948 when he was kidnapped by members of the Lyonesse Resistance following a screening of one of his films. The story was reported in many newspapers such as *L'Aube, L'Aurore*, *Les Dernières Dépêches de Dijon*, and *Combat.* The latter ran with the headline, "Sacha Guitry 'Kidnappé' à Lyon par des Résistants qui l'obligent à rendre hommage aux victimes des Allemands," and quotes the resistance fighters as saying that having Guitry present his new film "dans la capitale de la Résistance constitue une provocation et une insulte envers les victimes des collaborateurs et leurs familles."[277] This humiliating situation highlighted the extent to which Guitry remained under suspicion by his fellow compatriots. So how would Guitry attempt to exculpate himself and demonstrate that he was no enemy of France? The answer was potentially the production of *Si Versailles m'était conté*, which would emphasise the permanence of Versailles in the context of France as a nation and its significance within French historical memory at a time when funds were desperately needed for its restoration. Because the film played this symbolic role while also acting as a conduit for the funds, it was arguably Guitry's best attempt to exculpate himself. But where does Guitry's film fit in amongst the web of cultural memory surrounding Versailles at the time?

Following a period of neglect during the War, Versailles' historical memory was enlarged when, in 1949, André Cornu, Secretary of State for Fine Arts, launched a three-year campaign to restore the unloved palace, called 'Saving Versailles.' He

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[275] Ibid – "who wallowed at the feet of the invader, […] who banqueted with the torturers, […] who gathered millions during the occupation"/"pure and simple"

[276] "L'Epuration: La curieuse maladie de Sacha Guitry", *L'Aube,* No .2455 (Paris: L'Aube, 12th November 1944), p.3 – "neither the magistrate nor the general practitioner are aware of this mysterious indisposition"

[277] "Sacha Guitry 'Kidnappé' à Lyon par des Résistants qui l'obligent à rendre hommage aux victimes des Allemands", *Combat,* No .1210 (Paris: Combat, 27th May 1948), p.6 – "Sacha Guitry kidnapped in Lyon by Resistants who force him to surrender a tribute to the victims of the Germans"/"in the capital of the Resistance constitutes a provocation and an insult to the victims of collaborators and their families"

used a radio broadcast to put his cause at the forefront of national consciousness, saying that Versailles "is not only an artistic masterpiece that France must fear seeing disappear, but in each of us an irreplaceable image of France."[278] Guitry's vision of a film that could address this aspect of historical memory was set out in a radio show titled, *Et Versailles vous est conté*, where he admitted that he had initially planned to make a film that would have used the backdrop of the Occupation as a springboard for him to critique those who collaborated with the Nazis, but with the permission of the Ministry, he instead seized the opportunity to make a film about Versailles.[279] But given that he had planned to make a film critiquing those who collaborated suggests that he had in mind something that would exculpate him from guilt. By choosing to instead make a film about Versailles, he wilfully committed to the expansion of Versailles' historical memory and promoted the cause of its restoration. After Cornu's announcement, Versailles' historical memory was disseminated across the nation in all kinds of ways, including postage stamps that were adorned with a reproduction of Maurice Utrillo's painting of Versailles' entrance and gold-leaf gates, circulated from December 1952 (fig.51 and 52).[280] Administered by the state-owned PPT (Postes, télégraphes et téléphones) and emblazoned with "République Française," these stamps emphasised the necessity of preserving this past treasure of national, cultural, and aesthetic importance to posterity, and by 1954, Four million francs had been raised for the cause through their distribution.[281]

Figure 51 Versailles-themed postage stamp circulated in 1952.

[278] Jones, ibid.
[279] Antoine de Baecque, *Camera Historica: The Century in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p.81.
[280] Églantine Pasquier, "André Cornu et La Sauvegarde de Versailles", *Journals.Openedition.org*, 2018 <https://journals.openedition.org/crcv/13234> [Accessed 12 December 2018].
[281] Pasquier, ibid.

Figure 52 A blown-up print of Maurice Utrillo's oil-on-canvas in colour.

The stamps were just one source of funding for the *Sauvegarde* campaign. Another was a *son et lumière* event called, "To All the Glories of France," at the Palace in June 1953, where two-thousand lights were installed and the stage work of Maurice Lehmann, music of Jacques Ibert, and voices of André Maurois and Jean Cocteau were employed to bring the spectacular to life. Pasquier notes that the event traced "les heures glorieuses de l'histoire de France à travers le château de Versailles, ce qui contribue à en faire un symbole national et républicain auprès des spectateurs, qui ‹ viennent de tous les pays et de toutes les classes sociales ›."[282] Both the *son et lumière* and the stamps intended to highlight the wonders of the past the French people had inherited and reinforce that sense of historical continuity that was so important after a period when many were reluctant to confront the past. The self-conscious storytelling and framing devices of Guitry's film equally brings about this sense of continuity. Guitry selects various moments in Versailles' history and points to the great cultural achievements of architects, painters, playwrights, poets, sculptors, landscape artists, musicians, and philosophers, but all these things are displayed liked museum exhibits for the spectator to see and admire, with Guitry's framing device fancifully intertwining them under an umbrella of French historical memory. Equally, these framing devices — authorial presence, *mise en abyme*, the self-conscious interpretation of history as narrative, and the flaunting of various *exercices de style* – turn the world of the past into an *objet d'art* or some romanticised entity that exists in

[282] Ibid – "the glorious times of French history through the Palace of Versailles, which contributes to making it a national and republican symbol to spectators who "come from all countries and social classes."

a state of permanent revery. This sense of permanence and reverence is in keeping with the film's symbolic and functional role, which, as I will now go on to examine, is a feature not only of the film itself but its promotional material.

4.2 Authorial Presence and Mise en Abyme in the Promotion of *Si Versailles m'était conté*

An advertisement in *Paris-presse-Intransigeant* boasting about the "distribution exceptionnelle, une mise en scène grandiose, un esprit éblouissant"" of Guitry's film and the fact that "Sacha Guitry conçu, écrit, réalité et interprété" it perfectly sums up the necessity of an authorial presence, theatrical aesthetic, and *mise en abyme* in the presentation of Versailles' historical memory.[283] it equally shares many attributes with Guitry's previous work, including *Remontons les Champs-Élysées* (1938) and his short play, short play, *Dieu sauve le roi*. *Remontons les Champs-Élysées* relies on an all-knowing narrator (this time a teacher) to guide the audience through the history of the Champs-Élysées from the Place de la Concorde in 1617 to Place de l'Étoile in 1938, covering events from the establishment of the first puppet theatres, the early career of Richard Wagner, and Louis-Philippe's exile. The film's poster echoes the framing device used in the film, as the teacher (a descendant of Louis XV, Marat, and Napoleon I) looks upon the minutiae of history from an all-knowing distance (fig.53). This is reminiscent of Guitry's didactic address to the audience from a desk at the start of *Si Versailles m'était conté* (rather like an authoritative schoolmaster disseminating knowledge and wisdom), as well as the curator's instructive tone at the end of the film. But in addition to its self-conscious framing of historical memory through storytelling, this film is deliberately showy and theatrical. In one scene from *Remontons les Champs-Élysées*, a succession of sweeping shots surveys the revelries of a ball at the court of Napoleon III, before a dizzying camera rotation and sea of lively images superimposed on top of each other capture the awe-inspiring sense of ostentation as guests lose themselves in the joys of the Metra waltzes and music by Pierre-Jean de Béranger. Likewise, *Dieu sauve le roi* merges theatricality with authorial presence as Guitry, in character as Louis XIV, breaks the fourth wall to address King George VI

[283] "*Si Versailles m'était conté* promotional poster", *Paris-presse-Intransigeant* (Paris: Paris-presse-Intransigeant , February 1954), p.4 – "exceptional delivery, grandiose staging, dazzling spirit"/"Sacha Guitry conceived, wrote, directed and performed in the film"

and his queen in the audience. The framing device is exploited further when the character of Lord Churchill steps forward, addresses the king and then, accompanied by the "Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr,", sings Marie de Brinon's *Dieu sauve notre Roy!*.[284] And it is after this reflexive gesture that the play comes to an end, signalled with the stage direction, "et le rideau se ferme."[285]

Figure 53 Film poster for Remontons les Champs-Élysées.

Guitry's tendency to have himself or other characters step outside of the narrative to frame the historical world on display continued with *Si Versailles m'était conté,* as anticipated in the film's promotional material (fig.54, 55 and 56). But in addition to the framing device, the illustrations in the promotional material present the past to us as if frozen moments from a stage play. All Versailles' a stage, and it against this backdrop where the events of history are performed, from something as small as a romantic encounter on the Escaliers des cent Marches to something as grand as a gathering in the Hall of Mirrors. Their excessive use of colour and oversaturated pictorial quality show that what we are looking at is history as a series of *objets d'art* or *tableaux vivants*. The illustration of the peasants storming the gates of Versailles *in medias res* places a conflicting moment of history in aspic and brings together clashing *lieux de mémoire* (including the façade of Versailles, the peasants, the royal guards, and the tricolour) into a reconciled present. The chasm between history and memory is bridged and what we are seeing is one exhibit in the long continuous museum of

[284] Sacha Guitry, "Dieu Sauve le Roy", *Paris-Soir*, No.134 (Paris: Paris-Soir, 23rd July 1938), p.6.
[285] Ibid – "And the curtain falls."

France. In conjunction with the brightly coloured stills, vivid compositions and an extensive cast list comprised of many well-known French actors and actresses of film and theatre, the posters seem to place Versailles at the pinnacle of this national coalescing, which in turn anticipates the symbolic and functional role of Versailles in the film.

Figure 54, Figure 55, Figure 56 Film posters for Si Versailles m'était conté.

This sense of Versailles as the pinnacle of historical memory in France is underlined further by making Versailles a stage and the life of its inhabitants a piece of theatre. In the second of the three posters, for instance, the grandeur and magnificence of a court gathering in the Hall of Mirrors is framed within deep blue stage curtains, as if we are looking at a performance on a theatre stage. The *mise en abyme* aesthetic is enhanced by the positioning of a guard donning a justaucorps and holding a battle-axe in front of those curtains. It gives the image a sense a depth and plays with the boundaries between the historical world as it existed and the historical world as it is remembered through some process of mediation. The guard stands nobly like a chorus from an Ancient Greek play or Shakespeare's *Henry V,* ready to invite the audience to immerse themselves in the performance. Every detail of this performance is visual ode to the past and revitalises the energy of a place Gérald Van der Kemp (senior curator of Versailles from 1953 to 1980) described as "disgusting, empty, dead." Guitry's film seems to share Kemp's ambition to make the place feel "alive again, beautiful to look at, what it was in the time of kings."[286] At a point when Versailles was in desperate need of attention, Guitry reminds French audiences of all its riches, but nevertheless, stresses that all these niceties cannot be taken for granted. Through an aesthetic of theatricality, *mise en abyme*, and authorial visibility, *Si Versailles m'était conté*

[286] Jose Luis de Vilallonga, *Gold gotha* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p.313.

projects a view of history that brings it together with memory. Having the past recounted to us by an omnipresent Guitry almost romanticises the subject matter because its creator is very much at one with the thing he has created. In turn, the symbolic and functional role of the historical film, and Guitry's personal desire for self-exculpation, is underlined. To flesh out these ideas more robustly, I will now examine the film itself.

4.3 The Framing of Versailles' Historical Memory

The film's title, translated into English as, "If Versailles were told to me," very much exemplifies the film's self-conscious presentation of historical memory as narrative, and brings the impersonal notion of place into dialogue with the potentially affecting notion of memory. Versailles is not merely treated as a historical artefact in the film but the fulcrum of France's past, present, and future. Through Guitry's narration (in-vision and voiceover) and a variety of framing devices, a romanticised conception of Versailles comes into being and the passage of time is almost treated as a means of reconciliation. In other words, a conflicted and messy past — ranging from the reign of Louis XIV to the Revolution — is redeemed by the continuous presence of a place that in this film serves as a metonym for France and a living embodiment of time as reconciliatory. This section will examine a range of scenes covering each epoch depicted in the film, while taking account of the heightened aesthetic and framing (Guitry's narration and *mise en abyme*) these moments in history are often mediated through. I will argue that by employing such devices, Guitry enlarges Versailles' historical memory while at the same time highlighting the significant role storytelling itself can play in making the past 'live' again. Historical memory in this film bridges the gap between what has been, what is, and what is yet to come. As T.S Eliot remarked, "time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future, and time future contained in time past."[287] Because of the film's financial role in the raising of fund for Versailles, Guitry underline the permanence of the place and treats it as a metonym for the nation's shared heritage, in turn making the past feel 'alive' and reinforcing the symbolic and functional role of historical memory in historical film.

[287] T.S Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), p.1.

Figure 57 Courtiers curtsy before the king and queen in the Hall of Mirrors.

Guitry works to illustrate the permanence of the place through various framing devices, one being a recurring *tableau vivant* used to signify the beginning of each new epoch (fig.57). The film repeatedly uses the Galerie des Glaces as a marker of this permanence, and each tableau has an almost identical composition with the vast space of the gallery consuming almost two-thirds of the shot and the gathering of curtsying courtiers dressed in colourful and exuberant costumes pushed into the bottom-third. The king and his queen are framed in the middle of the shot as they ceremoniously walk down the central aisle. Because each new shot represents the beginning of a new era in Versailles' history, subtle changes are employed to signify the lapse in time. The obvious difference is the king and queen involved, but another difference is the marked change in the style of dress the courtiers wear as they wait to catch the king's eye in the hope of becoming a closer acquaintance of his. So, while Guitry draw out distinctions between the various phases of Versailles' history, the almost identical composition emphasises that sense of permanence the place has acquired by dint of time. Versailles becomes a repository for memory, and through framing devices such as this and the voice-over narration, Guitry romanticises the past and highlights the place's symbolic importance.

To romanticise the past is to breathe new life into an ostensibly dead phenomenon. Guitry achieves this spectacularly in one moment in which the première of Molière's *Tartuffe* on 12th May 1664 (as part of *Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée*) is reimagined within a *mise en abyme* aesthetic. Guitry opens with a deep shot of a makeshift stage in the Cour de Marbre, decorated with atmospheric candles and

foregrounded by silhouettes of spectating courtiers, including Louis XIV himself. The camera then slowly dollies forward as two actors of the age (Armande Béjart, Molière's wife, and Du Croisy, a member of *La Troupe de Molière*) are seen performing as Elmire and Tartuffe in a moment from Act III, Scene III. By employing *mise en abyme,* Guitry recontextualises this canonical work within Versailles' own origins but at the same time highlights the fact that both the play and the place where it was first performed have both achieved a state of permanence. The lines we hear spoken during this fleeting moment draw our attention to the sensitivities of the age in which was produced while equally pointing to the fact that such lines could easily be transposed to the present, in turn emphasising its timelessness. For instance, we hear Elmire suggests that Tartuffe should "armer mieux votre sein," and says he can do so without too much effort because he is a "dévot,"[288] to which Tartuffe boldly responds:

> Ah! pour être dévot, je n'en suis pas moins homme;
> Et lorsqu'on vient à voir vos célestes appas,
> Un cœur se laisse prendre, et ne raisonne pas.[289]

Guitry selects a moment in the play in which the fawning quality of the diction and the sweetness of the alexandrine prosody sums up the eponymous character's incorrigible lack of self-awareness and reinforces the sense that he has been taken in by the fakery of his own devotion to the Church and is not fully aware of his own hypocrisy. While the play can be seen as a product of institutional bureaucracy (the *deus ex machina* of a figure implied to be Louis XIV demanding that Tartuffe be arrested for corruption at the end of the play would have certainly flattered the king), it equally defied social convention by mocking of those who espouse the views of the Catholic church but do not always practice the religious piety they preach. Therefore, as we look upon this *mise en abyme* of the play being performed, we see it both a product of Louis XIV's world but equally as a work which has long outlived it. Guitry aims to highlight the richness of ideas and creativity nurtured at Versailles and that the history contained within the place is not a relic to be discarded but something that acquires of state of permanence.

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[288] "Fight your instincts more"/"devotee"

[289] "Although I am devout, I am no less a man.
When we are faced with heavenly beauty such as yours,
Our hearts are smitten straightaway, we cannot pause"
.

Figure 58 Sacha Guitry sits at a desk in the Palace of Versailles, ready to give us the story of Versailles.

This notion of symbolic permanence is equally felt by the film's use of another framing device: Guitry's piece to camera (as himself) in the opening five minutes of the film. From the very beginning, Guitry takes on the authority of a curator, passionately and entertainingly attending to the minutiae of history while enlarging the historical memory of Versailles. History becomes self-consciously absorbed in memory from the moment the credits sequence for technical personnel stops running, and we fade in with a medium shot (later a long shot) of an ornate, Louis XIV Style desk with curved legs and complete with statuettes (see fig.58). The desk is vacant at first, but within seconds, and accompanied by the evocative strings of a harpsichord, Guitry walks over to the table, sits down, puts his glasses on and consults a weighty, crimson-red book with "Si Versailles m'était conté" and the personal signature, "par Sacha Guitry," embossed on the front cover. Guitry's formal attire (a blue suit with a white shirt, black tie, and handkerchief) gives him the authoritative look of a professional historian. Then, much like a historian who is about to give a lecture, he turns a leaf in the book, before proceeding to read aloud a handwritten passage:

> On nous dit que nos rois dépensaient sans compter, qu'ils prenaient notre argent sans prendre nos conseils. Mais quand ils construisaient de

> semblables merveilles, ne nous mettaient-ils pas notre argent de côté ?[290]

Complete with a few rhetorical flourishes on the burden of historic guilt and the odd aperçu on time as reconciliatory, this passage sums up Guitry's immediate attempts to facilitate a shift towards a perception of Versailles as a national symbol no longer the preserve of a small elite but a place the French people in general can now appreciate. The passages repeated use of the first-person plural, "nous," underlines this sense that this place (and its past) is a fundamental part of the nation's historical memory, which in turn works as a rhetorical device for legitimising the importance of preserving Versailles' heritage for posterity. Although it would be foolish to second guess Guitry's motives for doing this, such rhetoric points back to his desire for self-exculpation rather than serving as implicit evidence for any sympathies towards the monarchy. René Benjamin noted that Guitry seldom made his political views clear in his work or elsewhere, and although elsewhere, another author acknowledged that Guitry was friends with some of those associated with *Action Française* (including Leon Daudet, who helped him get elected to *l'Académie Goncourt* in 1938) and awarded the Jules de Goncourt award to the royalist, Kleber Haedens, in the wake of his expulsion from *l'Académie Goncourt*, such anecdotes provide no hard evidence on Guitry's position on the monarchy.[291] But even it is difficult to discern Guitry's actual political views, these early moments in the film enlarging historical memory once gain imbibe the notion of Versailles' permanence and historical film's capacity for doing this.

As Guitry proceeds to turn the pages of the book, the camera closes in on each individual page containing an image of a character from the film and the actors who play them. Some of these roles, like Guitry's Louis XIV, are more prominent, whereas others are fleeting cameo appearances. And among the lengthy cast list are not only the big stars of French cinema but those from the land of Hollywood. Orson Welles appears as Benjamin Franklin and Claudette Colbert as Madame de Montespan. Welles' austereness may be a far cry from the stichomythic wit of Colbert's screwball comedy performances, but for Guitry, it is this excessiveness, this flaunting of

[290] "We are told that our kings spent without counting, that they took our money without taking our advice. But when they built such wonders, did they not put our money aside?"
[291] Bernard, p.125.

showmanship and this deification of performance, which can best capture the brilliance of the nation's heritage, especially the heritage of Versailles and the monarchy. By tying the images of the all-star cast in character to the historical figures themselves, Guitry emphasises a vision of history that is bound up with memory and draws our attention to the fact that what the audience is about to see is not a story of Versailles' history per se, but *Guitry's* story of Versailles' history. Ralph Waldo Emerson once claimed that "there is properly no history, only biography," which is to say that history is made up both of the experiences of once living and breathing people and laws that "pre-exist in the mind," ergo the process of relaying that history is a biographical one.[292] By creating an immediate visual association between the stars and the historical figures they are playing, and by drawing our attention to the fact that this history as told through the medium of storytelling, Guitry makes the past feel alive rather than dead, which works to reinforce the pertinence of the very place the film puts at its centre.

Figure 59 A still from Guitry's 'book' of credits.

Another way Guitry makes the past feel 'alive' and underlines the symbolic importance of Versailles is by indulging in apocryphal storytelling. One such example can be found shortly after the opening sequence, and it concerns a minor character dressed in a tunic and carrying a pickaxe somewhere in the pastoral French landscape, who is simply introduced as "paysan" (peasant) in the credits (fig.59). The 'paysan' is the first character to appear in the film, but he represents something more than

[292] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p.237-240.

himself. At first, we see him strolling through the countryside where he happens upon King Henri IV of France (grandfather of Louis XIV) and the young Dauphin (who will become Louis XIII), who are curious as to their exact whereabouts. All Henry knows at first is that they are in some rural idyll, so to find out more, he asks the peasant for enlightenment. The peasant at first gives him a rather nondescript response, informing them of the obvious fact that they are "sur une colline," but he is not being at all facetious here, rather, he uses this as a pre-cursor to speak of a legend concerning a family who used the name Versailles at some point in history.[293] By having Henry's perfunctorily retort, "ce n'est pas un mauvais nom," Guitry entertains the apocryphal notion that the name given to the palace and grounds two generations later is in part owed to the imagination of an ordinary Frenchmen, who in turn serves as a metonym for the nation.[294] This subtle yet powerful idea is brought amusingly to the fore when the peasant responds to Henry's remark with, "Je te le [the name Versailles] donne."[295] Guitry romanticises the historical memory of Versailles' origins by treating this encounter as something that is to the characters inconsequential but for history consequential. The fructifying of the past, and attempts to make history resonate symbolically across time, underlines the utility of the film: to enlarge the historical memory of Versailles across France. The implication that Versailles in some way speaks to every French man and woman is present here, as it is in a later example of apocrypha, when a revolutionary young sculptor named Louison Chabray faints upon meeting the king following an arrest by his guards for bursting through the palace gates. During her short time inside the palace, the king offers her a drink, and as this unfolds, Guitry shows us fellow protesters waiting outside eagerly for Chabray to emerge. When she finally does exit the palace, she tells her fellow protesters, all gathered in the grounds, that the king offered her a drink, to which they gasp with amazement. Having these revolutionaries momentarily suspend their fight and be enthralled by the charm of Versailles is another example of apocrypha being deployed to show that Versailles is symbolically part of France rather than something which runs counter to it.

[293] "On a hill"
[294] "Not a bad name"
[295] "I give it [the name Versailles] to you"

Figure 60 King Louis XIV admires the workmanship that is going in to building Versailles.

This theme is a recurrent one throughout the film, but it is particularly pertinent in the scenes where we see Versailles in the process of being built and Louis taken on a tour of his future residence. Visuals underlining the fundamental role of workers in bringing the wonders of the place to life are framed by Guitry's voiceover narration that speaks of Versailles as being made in "son [Louis'] image pour démontrer sa puissance."[296] The fact we see various parts of the space, both interiors and exteriors, beginning to take shape in a series of shots puts the workers craftsmanship and hard labour at the centre of the spectacle, which in turn enlarges Versailles' historical memory to a broader range of people. Take the long shot of Louis being shown around what will become the Salon de l'Oeil de Boeuf (fig.60). The *mise en scène* is tightly packed together and cluttered, with several ladders occupying the foreground and midground of the shot. We are immediately drawn away from the spectacle of the room itself towards the process of its construction, but equally, the arrangement of the ladders is very much like the arrangement of apparatus in a children's adventure playground, which comes to mind when we see Louis climb a ladder to admire his surroundings, including the decorative gold-and-white-patterned coving, the low-hanging chandelier, and the round window above the marble fireplace. The camera's tilt upwards as Louis reaches the top of the ladder and tilt downwards (back to its former position) when Louis climbs down from the ladder. The playfulness of this

[296] Versailles was made "in [Louis'] image to demonstrate his power."

moment heightens that sense of childlike wonder Louis has for the space around him and endorses the craftsmanship of the workers. Louis' sense of admiration is reinforced further when, after a worker temporarily suspends his labour and stands politely on the rung of another ladder in deference to him, Louis nods his head at him in approval of the work he is doing. This symbolic gesture in conjunction with the framing device of the voiceover underlines the significance of the worker's involvement in the building of Versailles, and although the worker is not the central focus throughout Guitry's film, unlike Renoir's *La Marseillaise*, he certainly etches their faces onto the building blocks of the place's past. Rossellini, as I will go on to demonstrate in the next chapter, does something similar in his artistic representation of the rise of Louis XIV, but his reasons for doing so are rooted in a commitment to a particular historical methodology rather than an attempt to make a symbolic gesture. Much like in the auction scene later in the film, Guitry depicts the workers as symbolically important contributors to Versailles' history, who, ipso facto, deserve a stake in the process of remembering the place. In the context of a moment in Versailles' history when it desperately needed the people of France on its side, Guitry's film attempts to enlarge the memory of the place so that it, in some romanticised sense, speaks to France as a whole.

Guitry also attempts to do this by inspires a mode of thinking where *a priori* political or ideological assumptions about Versailles are subordinate to the audience's intuitive judgements about the aesthetic value of the wonders we see before us. Even if the wonders of Versailles were produced under strict state control, Guitry wants his audience to marvel at the wonders of the place on their own terms, or as *objets d'art*. The attitude towards these wonders is akin to Walter Pater's view of art, who said that it "comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."[297] Such a view is emphasised at various points in the film, but one key moment is when Louis is taken to see the magnificent work the gardeners, engineers, and labourers are undertaking in the gardens. Filmed from the balcony that is overlooking the Parterre d'eau, workers can be seen in the process of transforming the topography of a space where two long, rectangular pools will sit on a level substrate to surrounding paths and walkways.

[297] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies of Art and Poetry* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), p.221.

Heavy beams of wood and wheelbarrows heaped full of vegetal material are transported from one place to another and various Mediterranean plants, from citrus to pomegranate, are moved to be planted in the adjoining parterres. Just by observing these images, Guitry underlines the great mechanism of skill and creativity essential to the completion of a project that will see artificial and the natural brought together in perfect harmony. Even though the political framework in which this spectacle unfolds is made clear through a long shot of Louis observing the work being undertaken from the balcony above (fig.61), followed by a wide shot of the grounds, where, in the midground, we see workers putting down their tools, gathering fervently in a crowd and reciprocally doffing their hats to Louis while chanting "vive le roi" (fig.62), Guitry does this primarily to symbolise ordinary people's involvement in shaping Versailles' historical memory. Guitry seems to want his audience to admire the ingenuity of the project's design, construction, and execution in its own right, and that such wonders produced as a result should undoubtedly be left for posterity, which in turn ties into the film's involvement in the appeal to have Versailles restored to its former glory. By encouraging appreciation for its own sake, Guitry paradoxically heightens the functional role of historical memory in the film.

Figure 61 The King doffs his hat to the workers of Versailles.

Figure 62 A long shot of the workers doffing their hat in the presence of the King.

A similar feeling is evoked when Louis approaches a frail Andre Le Nôtre, greets him with a kiss, and then pushes him around the garden in his wheelchair, giving him a guided tour of his own creations. We see labyrinths and parterres sing in harmony with the natural landscape, serene lakes sat comfortably on the greenery, and water fountains spurting out liquid high into the sky, then cascading elegantly before dispersing back into the pool of water from which it arose. When, early on in the film, Andre Le Nôtre and Louis Le Vau (Versailles' architect) silently nod as they sit opposite Louis and listen to him setting out his vision for the estate, we are reminded that all artistic and cultural production at Versailles is moulded by the state, but this sentimental tribute to Le Nôtre a little later in the film homes in on the reality that such beauty and opulence are not possibility without the ingenuity and creativity of individual minds. Guitry elevates the aesthetic and sees it as more important than political divisions, which is especially significant in light of the film's *raison d'être*, namely, to highlight the symbolic importance of Versailles and expand its historical memory in the context of the nation as a whole against the backdrop of the push to restore Versailles. The scene where Le Nôtre is shown the wonders he helped create is imbued with sentiment, and it is equally through this attempt to romanticise the spaces of Versailles that the film's *raison d'être* is underlined.

One other mesmerising moment from the film is when we see King Louis and his queen ride along the Grand Canal in a gondola as part of an evening *fête champêtre*. Taking place after the first phase of construction is over, these dazzling visuals

highlight the Apollonian perfection of the space and remind us of those state-funded engravings of such events from the 1660s and 1670s. Consider the extreme-long shot of the *fête champêtre,* where a small regatta of several gondolas float on the canal in a homage to the Queen of the Adriatic's waterways (fig.63). We know that it is an allusion from Guitry's romanticised framing of the shot with the words, "la célèbre fête de la Petite Venise."[298] As pretty red and green orbs illuminate the façade of the Palace and reflect against the night sky on the 'Venetian' waters, one Venetian gondola floats elegantly towards us, with Louis and his wife on board. The crimson hull and gold-embroidered awning on the gondola complement the intimate, romantic space surrounding it, as does the light and airy Italian serenade, which is ostensibly non-diegetic at first, but as the gondola approaches the foreground, we realise it is the gondolier who is singing. This heightened sense of aestheticism culminates when the space is infused with colour. Flares are lit, fireworks burst into colour, and water from the fountain spurts into the air. Guitry captures the harmony between place, sound, and movement, with each element as important as the other though unquestionably more spectacular in combination. As that Goethean aphorism goes, 'music is liquid architecture; architecture is frozen music.' Although the scene very much encapsulates a moment when Louis' power is in the process of being consolidated, Guitry makes it one of those 'moments', to reuse Pater's term, an *exercise de style* based on the engravings of period which enlarges the notion that Versailles' beauty transcends the political and historical moment and in turn should be preserved for posterity.

Figure 63 Wide shot of 'Little Venice'.

[298] "The famous fete of Little Venice."

Figure 64 A wide shot of the King in his bedchamber.

This sense of romanticising Versailles through a process of aestheticising the past is further emphasised through an *exercise de style* akin to the spectacle of theatre. The film's symbolic and functional role is strengthened by turning Versailles into a 'stage,' with its self-exculpatory role heightened by Guitry's own presence on this 'stage,' not only in the role of the narrator who frames the events but as Louis XIV himself. Take the moment a growlingly ill Louis is sat in his bedchamber while being visited by members of his family and courtiers. Long shots epitomise this notion of life as theatre in the sense Kenneth Burke and Irving Goffman described, as well as Habermas' theory that Versailles not only emphasised the greatness of the French state but was designed to overwhelm its visitors, echoed in Peter Burke observation that "[t]he image of the king was also projected for the benefit of the king's subjects" (fig.64).[299] The noble postures of Louis made immortal by Le Brun and Rigaud are invoked here but not fully realised, mostly because this a Louis who is a pale imitation of his former self, but nevertheless a king who is determined to tend to his duties as he fights the demonic forces of old age, immobility, and deteriorating health. However, unlike Albert Serra's elegiac treatment of the Louis' final days in *La Mort de Louis XIV* (2016), where we see him bedbound throughout and bear witness to the vulgar sight of his gangrene been treated by his physician, Guitry imbues the moment with a sense of showiness and enlarges the historical memory by way of an *exercise de style* akin to theatre.

[299] Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p.153.

This meta-theatrical presentation of Versailles equally works to make the past 'live,' as it were, though this dramaturgical feel for history is not restricted to those moments where the exuberant spectacle of court gatherings and regal showmanship are brought to the fore but those moments 'backstage,' including private conservations and personal affairs. Take for instance the intrigues of Louis XV's court, where an emphasis on the Dionysian or sensual realm mirrors the unregimented golden swirls of Rocaille that adorn the spaces in which such intrigues take place. But it is not only the spaces themselves that give the scene a smooth, effortless, and leisurely texture. French cinema sensation Jean Marais' haunting beauty and platonic appeal brings charm and elegance to the role of Louis XV and French cinema sweetheart (turned Hollywood actress) Micheline Presle plays Madame de Pompadour with graceful sophistication. In tandem with the intricate *mise en scène*, an ethereal and graceful aroma is emitted. Their domiciliary elegance is also at one with the shiny mirrors, delicate porcelain, gilt bronze candelabra, and Ormolu clocks surrounding them, and their costumes set a tone that is far from austere: he is wearing a vest with blue and white stripes, overlayed with a light blue justacorps, and she is wearing a light pink, crumpled-silk dress. Their coquettish exchanges and elegant body language may take place in a private room, but their interactions appear just as staged as public exchanges and courtly interactions. Various points in the film where characters light-heartedly interact with each other (often complete with genteel circumlocutions) in the presence of the court and in more intimate spheres are framed by the playful tone of the harpsichord, whose jovial rhythms work to satisfy the *pathea* of an entire scene, and choral preludes and codas anticipate or round off the performative nature of the thing we are about to see or have just witnessed. Lute stops are a recurring leitmotif that work to this effect, binding the *objets d'art* of history together in perfect harmony and making everything flow dramaturgically, as if the rules of exchange are scripted beforehand. In a sense, all Versailles' a stage, and the courtiers are its players. This notion of Versailles as a metaphor for the theatre and history as a kind of play script links to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical view of society where "in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure."[300] Guitry reminds us that every interaction at Versailles is carefully arranged

[300] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.40.

and that it is the responsibility of every individual, even in private conversations, to follow its etiquette and imitate the mannerisms of others. A more self-conscious example of this is the masquerade party in which inquisitive courtiers converse with one another incognito to guess whose company they are in and to extract as much information from others about the potential secrets other courtiers may hold. This meta-theatrical discourse enlarges the view that all Versailles' courtiers are performing with one another, which in turn works to highlight the place as one organic unity made up of delightful spaces and lively inhabitants. The history of Versailles is unequivocally romanticised, which works to emphasise the film's functional and symbolic use of the past.

Because these 'staged' moments are so evocative, Guitry almost aligns his depiction of this world with how those who inhabited it at the time would have wanted to be seen and remembered. In one short 'moment' bridging two scenes, we see elaborately dressed courtiers promenading along the open peristyle of the Grand Trianon's checkerboard walkway and around the colonnade of Romanesque, red marble columns. Some are ascending the steps to the colonnade and others are descending them to the gardens below. Bathed in a pleasing sunlight, this spectacle reinforces leisure qua leisure, but leisure that nevertheless feels rehearsed, as if the courtiers are posing for an Etienne Allegrain oil on canvas. This sense of that the minutiae of Versailles are staged or rehearsed is enlarged further in scenes where a disjuncture between those who inhabit the world of Versailles and those who are visitors from the outside is exposed. One example is the scene where we see Voltaire humorously expose the follies of Louis XV's regime in front of the King and Madame de Pompadour, who appear to be lost in their own 'performance.' Within the context of the bigger narrative, this scene sets in motion the direction of travel and draws our attention to the role the *philosophe* played in inspiring a radical shift in French politics and society, but at the same time it underlines the fact that Versailles as an institution in some ways nurtured the very ideas that would lead to such cataclysmic changes. The rupture between Versailles and modern France is mended by Guitry, who, for pragmatic and instrumental reasons pertinent to the moment of the film's production, aims to emphasise that sense of continuity in French history and enlarge the symbolic and functional importance of Versailles.

Figure 65 A long shot of Voltaire hunched in his chair while Louis XV pontificates.

Figure 66 Long shot of Fragonard painting Madame de Pompadour.

This romanticised notion of historical continuity in the spaces of Versailles' is epitomised in the image of Voltaire hunched in a chair in the corner of a salon, donning a cane, periwig, and cravat, while subtly ridiculing the Catholic notion that Man is "fait à l'image de Dieu" and other such ideas that were at the beating heart of the First and Second Estate (fig.65).[301] Intercut with a wide shot of Madame de Pompadour being painted by Jean-Honoré Fragonard as she listens to what Voltaire says with curiosity, Guitry romantically presents Versailles as a place that does not censor but welcomes open criticism of it in its spaces (fig.66). This is reinforced when Louis XV walks over to the corner of the room, and with an upright posture and assured tone sums up the scene we are witnessing: "Madame De Pompadour pose pour Fragonard,

[301] "made in God's own image"

tandis que Voltaire sourit d'un air blasphématoire. C'est la toile qui doit être peinte. J'aime les peintures de bataille, mais ce que je vois maintenant immortalise le siècle. Génie, talent et beauté. Cet accord entre le mobilier et les couleurs, entre les tissus et les mots, entre la forme et la pensée. Je suis ému."[302] Accompanied by *style galant* music, this speech ironically constitutes a truth about the direction of travel and the important role *philosophes* such as Voltaire played in accelerating a shift away from monarchism and religion to reason and liberty. Much in the same way Pompadour giggles at Voltaire's crass, bumbling utterances (which substitute crisp punchiness for sardonic intemperance) because she does not take what he is saying seriously, Louis' speech sums up this paradox of disjuncture and continuity that surrounds the memory of Versailles. Voltaire's frightfully relaxed posture and less-than-genteel mannerisms makes him look as though he has just walked out of a William Hogarth painting. He has the demeanour of a jester whose very presence is at odds with the refined aesthetic surrounding him. Nevertheless, by virtue of his presence, Guitry romanticises this notion of Versailles as an accommodating space, or one that nurtures ideas and progress.

This is equally true when, only a few scenes later, Voltaire, among a room of *philosophes*, address the question of where the country is heading. Voltaire brazenly remarks, "vers la révolution, sans aucun doute," a point which another *philosophe*, Rousseau agrees with, but it seems they have differences on how such social and political change should be brought about.[303] Voltaire believes Reason is the key whereas Rousseau believes Emotion is the answer. The Rousseau and Voltaire moulded by Guitry are very much caricatures of their own writings, and their mannerisms work to magnify their trivial yet intellectual differences. Rousseau is portrayed as introspective and emotional and is not taken seriously by those around him. Voltaire, on the other hand, is deeply rational, emphasised in a line such as, "Montesquieu parlait d'une révolution dont vous êtes responsable ; toi et tes livres admirables," which, as it is spoken, visibly bothers Rousseau.[304] Nevertheless, by presenting this quarrel to the audience, Guitry is not attempting to take sides with a

[302] Madame De Pompadour poses for Fragonard, while Voltaire smiles blasphemously. That's the canvas that should be painted. I like battle paintings, but what I see now immortalises the century. Genius, talent, and beauty. This agreement between furniture and colours, between fabrics and words, between form and thought. I am moved."

[303] "to the revolution, without a doubt"

[304] "Montesquieu spoke of a revolution for which you are responsible; you and your admirable books"

particular philosophical point of view but highlight the fact that such topics of discussion and debate, which run counter to the interests and beliefs of the monarchy (and are central to the Enlightenment), effectively take place within the spaces of Versailles. If Guitry's portrait of history is akin to theatre, then in this 'act' of the film (that is to say, Louis XV's reign), it is the *philosophes*, with their ideas of reason, equality, individualism, and rationalism, that take centre stage. Nevertheless, it is in the context of Versailles where this 'performance' takes place, so while these moments effectively anticipate the events that will completely change the course of history, the spaces of Versailles acquire a certain permanence where characters of all kinds from history continue to 'live', so to speak. In turn, this works to strengthen the case that Versailles is a necessary part of French history that cannot be dispensed with and must be preserved for posterity.

Figure 67 Extreme-long shot of Louis XV's bedroom window.

Figure 68 High angle wide shot of courtiers leaving the Palace of Versailles

Moreover, Guitry is arguably giving us a commonly held perspective of Louis XV's reign (one held by Voltaire himself), which is that it was an age where artists and *philosophes* triumphed, rather than the King himself. This is underlined through the framing of Louis' swansong with the voiceover, "un soleil s'est éteint avec la mort de Louis XIV; pour annoncer la mort de Louis XV, quelqu'un a soufflé une bougie dans la fenêtre," which, by way of metaphor, underscores the widely held belief that Louis was not as central to his era as Louis XIV was to his.[305] The final moments of Louis XV's reign carry fewer ounces of ceremonial avoirdupois in the film than *le roi soleil*'s farewell, whose final goodbyes were met with a big audience and whose passing was marked with the King's coffin carried slowly down the torch-lit staircase outside his chambers at night by several men. Even in the absence of courtiers, it still had the weight of a grand ceremonial, as if France had died with him. In the case of Louis XV, his death is dealt with in a less ceremonial, more modest way. For example, from the exterior of his bedchamber, we see the flame of a candle sat on the windowsill blown out by a footman, who then proceeds to close the windows (fig.67). Just after the candle is blown out, Guitry cuts to a high-angle wide shot capturing the moment courtiers— dressed in their suits, stockings, periwigs, and colourful silk dresses— leave the palace, looking behind them with shock at Louis' passing (fig.68). The irregular position of the shot visually underlines their shock, but equally, by seeing the action from above rather than on ground level, and from a distance, Guitry almost

[305] "A sun went out with the death of Louis XIV; to announce the death of Louis XV, someone blew out a candle in the window."

detaches us from this deeply personal and private moment. Nevertheless, the visuals on their own seem not to forbid the assumption that this is just another ordinary night. It is only by virtue of Voltaire's warning about Louis' illness prior to this scene, Guitry's nonchalant voice-over ("Versailles fut prévenu, et la cour était morte d'un mal contagieux"), and the slow tempo, low-frequency vibrations of brass instruments (including a wistful, melancholy trombone), that these assumptions are falsified.[306] On the one hand, the scene mimics the decorum that would be in abundance in such circumstances but on the other reinforces that Louis XV did not define his age in the way Louis XIV did. It is ideas that were paramount in the epoch of Louis XV, but nevertheless Guitry keeps Versailles at the centre of these historical developments through the various framing devices and self-conscious narration of history.

Figure 69 Extreme-long shot of the 'Hameau de la Reine'.

By showing the spaces of Versailles carry over across the ages, Guitry reinforces the permanence of the place. He underlines this once again in the voice-over framing and theatrical *exercise de style* which accompany the depiction of the years of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Guitry introduces their era by observing with irony the "unblemished reputation" of the King and Marie Antoinette and that "Versailles [sortit] de sa torpeur avec l'arrivée de Louis XVI."[307] He also enlarges the historical memory of the era's fate by saying that Louis' arrival "a été accueillie par la France avec beaucoup de sympathie was welcomed by France with great sympathy," but he seems to reign in the course of history by virtue of his authorial presence, saying "ne

[306] "Versailles was informed, and the court was dead from a contagious evil"
[307] "Versailles [came] out of its torpor with the arrival of Louis XVI"

nous précipitons pas, revenons à l'époque où Marie Antoinette ordonna la construction de cette adorable petite ville" (the faux village called the Hameau de la Reine, built near the Petit Trianon in 1783 for the Queen).[308] These storytelling devices frame the visuals of the scene, which as we can see from the scene's opening wide shot, is "cette adorable petite ville" Guitry speaks of (fig.69). Appearance wise, this sylvan retreat is dressed as a farming village with Norman cottages, artificial lakes, and Flemish châteaux. Everything about it reinforces the art of pretence, a world of appearances Marie Antoinette herself manufactured. Guitry begins this era with appearances and ends it with consequences. The opening shots of nobles promenading and gossiping in this pastoral landscape could have come straight out of Watteau's painting, *The Shepherds*, which itself depicted townhouse aristocrats pretending to be shepherds in the country (a recreational activity indicative of their newly found freedom after leaving Versailles). As the aristocrats roam this theme park of eternal leisure, the king looks on at them mimicking the habits of the outside world. What we see is a learned and intentional lapse in their postures and manners, which immediately reinforces this sense of artifice and performance. And not only through the visuals do we get the sense that these characters are in fact acting with one another, historical events are themselves described in theatrical terms by Guitry, emphasising once again that he is again exalting the role of the all-knowing storyteller of history and cultivator of memory. Overlaying the images of roaming aristocrats, we are told that "l'infamie montait déjà autour de lui [le Roi] ; voici les acteurs de l'impensable complot."[309] The "acteurs" he is referring to are those who stand in the grounds among the King and Marie Antoinette, but there is more than one layer of meaning to this collective noun in that two of these 'actors' present are in fact acting for a very different reason. Cardinal Rohan and the Comtesse de la Motte (those notorious figures who took part in the Necklace Affair) are present, but in this open-air façade, they appear to be no more acting than those around them. By framing them in this way, Guitry, much like L'Herbier, draws our attention to blinkered nature of the monarchy and their failure to grasp what was going on under their noses. But, although goes on to provide a detailed commentary of the events of the Necklace Affair, it is certainly more fleeting in nature than the events we see in *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, and is made to feel less

[308] Louis' arrival "was welcomed by France with great sympathy"/"Let's not rush, let's go back to the time when Marie Antoinette ordered the building of this adorable little town"

[309] "The infamy was already rising around him [the King]; here are the actors of the unthinkable plot."

consequential, less dramatic. This is because Guitry, unlike L'Herbier, frames the events with a voiceover that is already aware of the direction of travel. Guitry is more interested in guiding us through as many spaces and as many time periods in French history where Versailles played a part as possible, which goes to reinforce that feeling of symbolic permanence.

Figure 70 Long shot of a Versailles salon in which Robespierre outwits the King and fellow courtiers.

Because of Guitry's insistence on guiding us through as many spaces and time periods Versailles can accommodate, the film inevitably has to deal with those clashing ideas as epochal shifts take place, and as the film reaches its latter stages, this becomes more apparent. Nevertheless, Guitry romantically depicts Versailles as a place that can accommodate and withstand these antitheses, as is made clear in that moment when Robespierre is invited to join Louis, Marie Antoinette, and a few other nobles around a table to speak about the latest political issues. The farcical tone of the scene is curiously at odds with its serious subject matter, but this arguably goes to underline the fact the King and fellow nobles are not really phased by Robespierre's grand statements, including a warning to the King not to be overprotective towards the Bastille, or else needless deaths will occur, which nobody present seems to take too seriously. When, for instance, Robespierre affirms this warning by saying to Monsieur Lavoisier, "c'est toi qui écrivais : 'Sainte égalité, chasse les ténèbres, ouvre les verrous de la terrible Bastille," Lavoisier smugly responds, "'egalité sacrée', poète prévoyant, il est à l'abri d'éventuelles représailles."[310] We are humorously drawn to the fact that

[310] "You were the one who wrote: 'Holy equality, chase away the darkness, open the bolts of the dire Bastille"/"'Sacred equality', foresighted poet, he's safe of eventual retaliation."

members of The Second Estate say one thing and do another, and in the specific case of Lavoisier, the irony in his brazen belief that his foresight will make him immune to any retaliation. This is confirmed when, ironically says, "je ne me vois pas mourir sur l'échafaud," which is at odds with the fate of the real Lavoisier.[311] We then hear Marie Antoinette abruptly concurs with his remark by saying, "moi non plus," followed by a medium shot of each person round the table declaring "ni moi": a disparity exists between their inner confidence that all is well and our knowledge of their actual fate.[312] We then have the comical moment where Robespierre stands up and then looks down upon the sneering aristocrats with a knowing grin. The consummation of this fate occurs in a constructivist montage, where a medium shot of each noble appears in rapid succession as Guitry counts sequentially in the voiceover, "un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq," and a drumroll becomes apparent in the background. On "six," Guitry cuts back to Robespierre bowing his head to each of them as a way of ridiculing their fanciful belief that the Revolution will not come to pass. In the final shot of the scene, Robespierre stands with his arms raised, as if the ringmaster of a circus who has just outwitted those around him (fig.70). Guitry employs a humorous tone here to romantically illustrate that although the direction of travel at this point in history compounded Versailles' authority, the spaces of Versailles nevertheless accommodate discourses on progress, equality, and liberty. This in turn highlights Versailles' sense of permanence, and even when the film gets to the Revolution itself, it does not jettison the symbolic importance of the place in favour of the people but gives the people an opportunity to play a role in this performance and have their stake in the history of a place that by the time this film was released essentially belonged to them, the people of France. The tone of the revolutionary scenes is in fact quite jovial, with song and dance incorporated into the *sans-culottes'* call on their fellow citizens to march on Versailles. Running concurrently to their preparations to march is the scene where writer and royalist Antoine de Rivarol is asked by Louis why it is he is hearing stories about the Third Estate feeling discontented with the monarchy, to which Rivarol responds, "ils ne se sentent plus français, ils n'aiment plus leur travail. Ce manque d'intérêt est ce qui me semble le plus grave. L'ouvrier qui ne termine pas la tâche dit : ‹ ça ira › ; le paysan dit ‹ ça ira ›, ‹ ça ira ›, puis répète ‹ ça ira › ; J'ai peur qu'un jour

[311] "I don't see myself dying on the scaffold"
[312] "Neither do I"/"Nor I"

ils le chantent."[313] Rivarol then proceeds to mimic the refrain of the song, "Ça ira! Ça ira! Ça ira!" but because he speaks rather than sings these words, Guitry humorously underlines a disparity between the subjunctive and the actual, and draws our attention to the emptiness of Rivarol's warning, given that moments later, Guitry cuts to a wide shot (fig.71) of the golden gates of Versailles, where crowds of men and women holding their pikes and pitchforks congregate (some climbing up on to the gates themselves), while singing the refrain as a battle cry for freedom:

> Ah ! Ça ira ! Ça ira ! Ça ira !
> Les aristocrates à la lanterne
> Ah ! Ça ira ! Ça ira ! Ça ira !
> Les aristocrates , on les pendra ![314]

By hearing Rivarol speak the lyrics of the song one moment and the *sans-culottes* sing them the next, Guitry comically implies that the *sans-culottes* have carried on where Rivarol left off and makes it look like Rivarol has spurred them on. The effect of this juxtaposition is the creation of a romantic conceit where the world of Versailles is seen to be fancifully partaking in the Revolution. The theatrical *exercise de style* embodied in the song and dance is contextualised by the eternal presence of Versailles. Guitry gives us a panorama that figuratively repairs the rupture between Versailles and modern France, which speaks to functional role of history in this film and the symbolic importance of the place to France as a whole.

[313] "They don't feel French anymore, they don't enjoy their work. This lack of interest is what seems most serious to me. The worker who does not finish the task, says, 'ça ira'; the peasant says, 'ça ira', 'ça ira', then repeats 'ça ira'; I fear that one day they will sing it"

[314] Ah! It will be fine! It will be fine! It will be fine!
The aristocrats to the lantern
Ah! It will be fine! It will be fine! It will be fine!
The aristocrats we will hang them!

Figure 71 Wide shot of Édith Piaf singing 'Ça ira' atop the golden palace gates of Versailles.

This attempt to bind the two is underlined by Édith Piaf's cameo appearance in this sequence as a 'woman of the people' who, standing atop a ladder leant against the gold-leaf-painted bars of the palace gates, takes centre stage in the spectacle. Much like the image of the *sans-culotte,* the *chanteuse realistes,* of which Piaf was one, conjured up an image of France based on working-class *faubourgs*, cobbled streets, berets, the accordion, and baguettes. More specifically, David Loosely notes that Édith is not only "an emblem of French chanson" but "also of French identity, human resilience in the face of suffering, and that impalpable totem, 'the people'."[315] When we see her standing atop the ladder, she is almost the human embodiment of Marianne, and a metonym for *La France*. The peasants surrounding her are like backing singers, complementing a musical performance that brings together the various symbols of France in perfect harmony in the context of a permanent Versailles. Like Guitry, Piaf had been accused of collaborating during the Second World War, so in addition to enlarging the historical memory of Versailles, Guitry arguably uses this spectacle as a moment of renewal and exoneration. The upbeat tone of Piaf's voice plays into this and makes the past feel 'alive'. Consider the momentum that is created by her animated body movements as she sings a verse from the song:

> Trois cents ans qu'ils nous promettent
> Qu'on va nous accorder du pain.
> Voilà trois cents ans qu'ils donnent des fêtes
> Et qu'ils entretiennent dans catins !

[315] David Loosely, *Edith Piaf: A Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p.15.

Voilà trois cents ans qu'on nous écrase
Assez de mensonges et de phrases !
On ne veut plus mourir de faim![316]

Modelled on the structure of a *contredanse*, the song has a certain jovial feel to it, which is reinforce when the peasants burst through the gates and run towards the palace doors. While the buoyant tone of the scene betrays the indignant tone of the lyrics, the point of showing us this spectacle is to put *le peuple* at the centre of stage and underline that even they played a role in the story of Versailles' history. Even when we see a peasant being arrested and taken to the King to explain herself, before she is set free and, to their delight, shares her story with the other peasants (as mentioned earlier), it reinforces this romantic idea of every French man and woman having a stake in Versailles' history.

Guitry reminds his audience that Versailles is a part of their inheritance and enlarges the necessity of preserving this museum of the past for posterity. Towards the end of the film, we see an auction of various furniture and items that belonged to Versailles take place near the Grand Trianon, romantically underscoring the fact that that the objects of the past essentially belong to the people. Moreover, we see people singing and rejoicing outside of a Grand Trianon decorated with the colours of the French tricolour, Napoleon (in his renowned bicorn hat and overcoat) honouring the legacy of Louis XIV by walking into his bed chamber and bowing his head, and Louis-Philippe signing the paperwork to open a museum at Versailles honouring "toutes les gloires de la France," all of which bring the iconography of old and modern France together in one mass gallery.[317] The consummation of this is the museum sequence towards the end of the film, which ties history and memory together and underlines the permanence of Versailles as a space, symbol, and metonym. A museum guide takes a group of visitors around the palace and into different rooms, but from the increasingly static camerawork, we get the sense that there is a general reluctance to explore the place in full and shows that there are certain memories of Versailles that

[316] Three hundred years they promise us
That we will be given bread.
For three hundred years they have been giving us parties
And they entertain whores!
For three hundred years we have been crushed
Enough lies and slogans!
We do not want to starve anymore!
[317] "All the glories of France"

Guitry thinks ought to be repressed. There is a feeling of nervousness about entering one room in particular: the Galerie des Glaces. In an exchange between two staff members, one of them uneasily alludes to year 1871, when the German Empire was proclaimed in the Hall following a French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Then, shortly after, the camera reluctantly takes us to the entrance of the Hall, where, superimposed on the geography of the space is a dreamy image alluding to William Orphen's oil-on-canvas, *The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 28 June 1919*. If the allusion to 1871 brings to mind German victory and French defeat, the allusion to 1919 prefigures the growing resentment capitalised on by the Nazis towards Germany paying back reparations, a resentment which would culminate in the rise of fascism and eventually the war that would see France occupied. This subdued moment potentially speaks to Guitry's desire for exoneration, and his efforts to distance himself from the horrors of the past while retaining what he considers to be its positive aspects. But more generally, the framing of Versailles' past within the context of the present moment, along with the employment of *mise en abyme*, a theatrical *exercise de style*, and a self-conscious storytelling approach to history, enlarges the historical memory of Versailles as a whole and gives the place an aura of permanence. Guitry encapsulates this romantic idea that Versailles has been passed down through the generations and must be preserved for posterity. But despite the symbolic and functional role of history in the film, and Guitry's commitment to the restoration of Versailles, some critics interpreted his framing of the past as mocking and ironic, as I will now go on to unpack further.

4.4 *Si Versailles m'était conté*: The Response

Through various framing devices, a self-conscious approach to history as narrative, and a theatrical *exercise de style*, Guitry's film enlarges the historical memory of Versailles and romantically highlights the place's symbolic importance to France, in turn heightening the functional role of the film, which is to underline the necessity of Versailles being preserved for posterity. Critics however were divided on how the history of Versailles is memorialised in the film. The Duke of Brissac, affiliated with the literary supplement in *Le Figaro* and president of the Friends of Versailles, proclaimed, "I expected, if not quite propaganda […] at least a principled work that

did justice to our history, our art, and Versailles itself."[318] François Truffaut, who along with Alain Resnais, often admired Guitry for his cinematic style more than for his flamboyant, theatrical takes on history, actually praised *Si Versailles m'était conté*'s depiction of the nation's history, and even waxed lyrical about how the *Ancien Régime* "contributed to the grandeur of France for several centuries: Christian feeling and a sense of honour, respect for the clergy and nobility, the keystones of a justly hierarchical society."[319] Truffaut is not necessarily defending such an institution but praising the rational organisation of a system on its own terms, much in the same way we could praise the vast irrigation projects in Ancient Egypt that enabled farmers to control the water level and flood the land to enrich the soil and grow crops in abundance. This process of rational organisation helped Egypt as a civilisation to flourish, and it seems that Truffaut is making a similar point about the way Guitry, through various framing devices and formal and stylistic elements, memorialises the wonders of Versailles' past. Although *Si Versailles m'était conté* did not fit into the three dominant trends of French cinema at the time ("fairy tales", "foxy women", "swashbucklers"), historical films were nevertheless a popular genre around the time of its release (Christian-Jaque's *Fanfan la Tulipe*, Christian-Jaque, 1952; *La Dame aux camélias*, Raymond Bernard, 1953; *Madame du Barry*, Christian-Jaque, 1954, and *Marie Antoinette Queen of France*, Jean Delannoy, 1956).[320] But these historical films listed could be categorised as examples of *tradition de qualité* (in part an industry reaction to the influx of American popular culture in France after the Second World War), though this was not a tendency Truffaut ascribed to *Si Versailles m'était conté* nor Guitry's films generally, owing perhaps to Guitry's distinctive style (following in the tradition of his earlier portfolio) and the important cultural role the film played in enlarging Versailles' historical memory and aiding the calls to restore the palace.[321] Conversely, this romanticised depiction of Versailles as a metonym or symbol for the nation was not shared by all critics. Jean Poperen, in *La Nouvelle Critique*, pointed out that a film claiming to serve or represent the people of France should not have

[318] Quoted in, Baecque, ibid.
[319] Quoted in, Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *Truffaut: A Biography* [*François Truffaut*], trans.. By Catherine Temerson (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), p.85.
[320] Susan Hayward, *French Costume Drama of the 1950s: Fashioning Politics in Film* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), p.82-83.
[321] Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Post-war French Cinema* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.17.

Versailles at its heart.[322] Poperen asked where the references to 'Le Grand Hiver' (the Great Frost of 1709) and the famine which followed it were, and provocatively queried,

> Versailles n'est-il pas l'expression du génie français au moment où la monarchie féodale, parasite isolé de la nation, mais nourrie des forces et de l'intelligence de la nation — la bourgeoisie et le peuple —, commence ù dévaler la pente ? [323]

For Poperen, a film that seems to want to represent the people of France must see them represented there, but not as a tokenistic gesture. Because of his own and *La Nouvelle Critique*'s Marxist sympathies, he could not get on board with a film that seemed to marvel uncritically at it through spectacle and a theatrical aesthetic.[324] While Guitry's panorama of Versailles was arguably an attempt to exonerate himself, show his loyalty to France and his support for the restoration of Versailles, Poperen believes that such a film could not possibly be a film for ordinary people when they are not at the heart of its narrative. Poperen's emphasis on class in part reflects his views associated with the PCF, but he also criticises the film's reliance on quotation, cliché, and artifice, saying that a veneer of excess merely covers up the unoriginality of what lies beneath: "cette histoire pourrait se passer à Bagdad, chez le grand Mogol ou les Incas […]. De Versailles il n'y a ici que les murs, les pelouses et les noms."[325] Jean Dutourd, on the other hand, praises the film's formal and stylistic devices, and draws a connection between the framing devices and Guitry's oeuvre more generally:

> C'est un des rares hommes de notre temps (et de tous les temps) qu'on puisse appeler par son prénom tout court sans qu'on le prenne pour un autre. Cela le situe quelque part entre Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Maurice C chevalier qui jouissent avec lui de ce privilège. Le lecteur

[322] Jean Poperen, "Versailles conté par un Versaillais", *La Nouvelle Critique*, No .56 (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1st June 1954), pp.174-178.
[323] Ibid, p.177 – "Isn't Versailles the expression of French genius at the moment when the feudal monarchy […] nourished by the forces and the intelligence of the nation — the bourgeoisie and the people — begins to hurtle down the slope?"
[324] Ibid, p.178.
[325] Ibid – "this story could take place in Baghdad, at the home of the great Mughal or the Incas. […] Of Versailles, there are only the walls, lawns and names here."

> décidera duquel il est le plus proche. Ensuite M. Sacha Guitry, qu'on le veuille ou non, fait partie du folklore français.[326]

Even though Dutourd admits that the film has its fair share of historical inaccuracies, he is mostly approving of its *exercise de style*. He openly admits that the kind of history we get in this film is "tantôt vraies, tantôt romancées, tantôt carrément apocryphes ," and that "Assez souvent l'auteur joue au petit jeu […] il fabrique des rencontres exemplaires ou met dans la bouche de ses personnages des prophéties faciles, mais cela s'accompagne toujours d'un clin d'œil complice."[327] He seems to like Guitry's tendency to mould historical characters according to popular memories of what these people were actually like. Although this can often take the form of caricature, the film was perfectly in line with the tone and style of Guitry's previous films, including *Les Perles de la couronne* (1937), which traces the history of several valuable missing pearls through a narrative of discovery. Intertwined with the protagonist setting out to find them is a panorama of history ranging from Elizabeth I and Clement VII to Henry VIII and Napoleon. Accustomed to Guitry's attention to detail and comprehensive sweeps of the past, Dutourd affirming that Sacha Guitry "connaît très bien *Les Ebénistes du dix-huitième* siècle, de M. de Salverte, *L'Histoire du costume*, de Viollet-Le-Duc, tous les bons auteurs français et des dizaines d'excellents ouvrages sur l'art décoratif." While he admits that Guitry's is often excessive and thinks that it offers nothing profound, he employs a stream of adjectives ("c'est beau, c'est riche, c'est souvent léger ou facile") ending with an adverbial phrase, "mais ce n'est jamais bêle," emphasising that these characteristics outweigh the limitations of the film.[328] Moreover, he notes that,

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[326] Jean Dutourd, "Le Cinema par Jean Dutourd: Sacha chez Louis", *Carrefour*, No .492 (Paris: Carrefour, February 1954), p.10 – "He is one of the few men of our time (and of all time) who can be called by his first name without being mistaken for another. This places him somewhere between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Maurice C Chevalier, who enjoy this privilege with him. The reader will decide which one is closest. Mr. Sacha Guitry, like it or not, is part of French folklore."

[327] Ibid – "sometimes true, sometimes romanticised, sometimes downright apocryphal"/"quite often the author plays a little game […,] he creates exemplary rendezvouses where he puts in the mouths of his characters light prophecies, ones that always come with a knowing wink."

[328] Ibid – Guitry "knows very well *Les ébénistes du dix-huitième* siècle by M. de Salverte, *L'Histoire du costume*, by Viollet-Le-Duc, and all the good French authors and dozens of excellent works on decorative art"/"It's beautiful, it's rich, it's often light or easy"/"but it's never dull"

> Tout est si bien joué, tout est si somptueux et si soigné que, par la magie des légers commentaires et du talent de soixante ou quatre-vingts vedettes, on ressent de temps à autre un petit choc, on est dépaysé. Sous ces fantaisies, sous ces arbitraires, il y a un sens vrai de la saveur d'une époque.[329]

Dutourd ends up excusing the excessiveness of the film by praising the coherence of the formal and stylistic devices Guitry employs. He then concludes by saying that he believes the film has potential to bring about national unity and, in the spirit of Guitry's desire for self-exculpation, takes the opportunity to praise the director's stoicism in the face of persecution and character assassination.[330] Based on the few responses I have looked at, we get a sense of how divisive the film proved, and that it was both celebrated and lambasted by liberal and conservative critics alike, but criticism of the film did not merely rest with the critics, it extended to the upper echelons of the government.[331] Gaston Palewski, the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, put forward a motion requiring André Cornu to detail the extent to which the state invested in this film and "the guarantees provided in exchange for [the government's] participation as regards to artistic and technical questions, as well as the level of historical faithfulness required to ensure the film's release both in France and abroad."[332] Cornu denied that the state had invested any money into the film's production and noted that the only contract signed between the two parties was permission to film at the Palace of Versailles in exchange for a share of the film's profits, which would be invested in the Palace's renovation.[333] While some in government believed the film betrays the nation and ridicules its history, Cornu was keen to draw their attention to the fact fifty-six million francs were raised, possibly to quell their disapproval. On historical inaccuracy, Cornu implies that their displeasure is fallacious, and turns to the Ancient Greeks to contend that film continues the "age-old feud between art and truth."[334] Does it really matter that we see Napoleon bowing his head in respect to former monarchs?

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[329] Ibid – "Everything is so well played, so sumptuous and so neat that, by the magic of mild commentary and the talent of sixty or eighty stars, we feel from time to time a little shock, we are disoriented. Under these fantasies, under these arbitrary ones, there is a true sense of the flavour of an era."
[330] Ibid.
[331] Baecque, p.87.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid.

And can artistic licence not triumph over realism if one is enlarging historical memory as a symbolic gesture?

Figure 72 Extreme-long shot of the cast descending the One-hundred Steps Stairway.

Figure 73 Extreme long shot of the film's final parade, as the French tricolour is flown above.

At the very end of the film in two highly symbolic long takes, we see all the characters who have played a role in this panorama of Versailles (kings and queens, counts and countesses, courtiers and courtières, poets and playwrights, philosophers and theologians, aristocrats, and peasants) descend the Escalier des cent marches (fig.72 and 73). Guitry treats it almost as a curtain call at the end of a theatre performance and is the moment in the film where the historical memory of Versailles becomes a metonym for the France as a whole. One great image of France is created when, after the characters descend the stairway (as military personnel on horseback stand in unison), the National Guard play *La Marseillaise*. Trumpets, drums, and brass

instruments can be heard as the French tricolour is flown high in the sky. Guitry takes poetic licence by framing the vast catalogue of history, ideas, thoughts, and traditions in France in one image. Guitry almost anticipates Nora's concept of a *lieu de mémoire* in his self-conscious blurring of history and memory and aims to remind his audience that because Versailles is of great symbolic importance, it is necessary for it to be preserved for posterity. This ties in with his desire to cast aside doubts about his political sympathies during the War and show that he was a committed French citizen. Although some critics thought that the film's flamboyant and theatrical treatment of Versailles' history was sardonic and woefully inaccurate, with others dismissing the possibility that it could be a film for the French people at all, the moment where Guitry best attempts to reconcile the conflicting events of the past are in those mythic final moments where Versailles becomes a metonym for *La France* and that sense of national unity. What this chapter has demonstrated overall is this idea that once again history can speak to the present moment, but more specifically, through various framing devices and formal techniques, historical memory in film can be processed through a self-conscious, reflexive form of storytelling that elevates the presence of its author like a written work of popular history. Guitry's film, much like the other case studies in this thesis, is in some form or another *doing* History as much as presenting it, but in the next chapter, using Rossellini's *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV* as a case study, I will make the case for historical film as a form of historiography, where it is fully aware of its methodology and the fact it is less a seamless narrative and more a compilation of accounts and documents.

Chapter Five: *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* (Roberto Rossellini, 1966)

5.1 A Historiographical Study of Versailles

> *Louis XIV seems to have known that he would live to be old. His plans, both artistic and political, were for a long a term; they ripened slowly and were confined to nobody.*
>
> — Nancy Mitford, *The Sun King*.[335]

Although all four case studies examined in this thesis are in some sense *doing* History, Rossellini's television film, *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, is the most explicitly historiographical or akin to *doing* History (with a capital 'H') proper. That is to say, it is does not *narrate* the events of the past with a pre-supposed cause and effect logic but treats each moment with a certain phenomenological integrity where it feels as if we are observing the *reality* of how life in the past once was. Such an empirical reality depends upon the interrogation and explication of recorded documents and accounts from the period, and although such material can never tell us how the past really was objectively, they can open up the possibility of bringing the specificity of that world to us. In this chapter, I will argue that historical film can aspire to be taken seriously as History rather than a fictionalised or sensationalised account of the past. Because *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* homes in on the phenomenological integrity of the past and attempts to uncover how it was lived (incorporating the range of human experience) rather than simply recounting its events, I will argue that it could be categorised according to what the Lucien Febvre of the Annales School called an *histoire totale* (total history). Rossellini's film is, out of all the case studies, the one that best attempts to separate memory from history and appearance from reality. Nevertheless, it cannot offer a mirror image of the past, only a *reflection* of it (to invoke Hugo's definition of history). Even if the film tries to obscure the fact that it relies on some system of meaning in its construction and attempts, as the ideal of realism, to record without comment, it still constitutes some form of artistic representation. Moreover, the film's attempts to merely be an observer of history, or to be close to the document and to the minutiae

[335] Nancy Mitford, *The Sun King* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), p.4.

of the past through some kind of disinterested empiricism is equally challenged by the fact that there appears to be an overarching metaphysic of Reason in how said historical phenomena is organised on-screen. Rossellini seems to be interested in the interrelationship between entities within formal systems as well as drawing our attention to general patterns in the protocols, practices, and behaviours of Louis XIV's Versailles. I will maintain that the film is as much concerned with the abstract and general as it is the concrete and particular. This may be a film about Louis XIV's rise to power and 'definitive move' to Versailles, but equally, it is a film about power, governance, and leadership, which may equally explain the conclusions of those critics (as examined shortly) who saw it as an allegory on the rise to power of Charles de Gaulle, who was president of France at the time of its release. This chapter then will make the case for historical film not only as an example of History with a capital 'H', but a 'History' that is attentive to an abstract logic of thought and action which can be observed on a transhistorical level.

Hegel argued that Reason (with a capital 'R') has always had a latent presence in history, but what do I mean exactly when I employ the term? Reason, which in many respects is synonymous with rationalism, is the theory that the best way to acquire knowledge is by thinking through problems or hypotheses from the point of view of logic or by marking out the interrelationship between ideas within formal systems. Rationalists, from Descartes onwards, believed that genuine knowledge is certain, and this could only be grasped through reason and logic, whereas Empiricist such as Bacon, Berkeley, Hume, and Locke, believed that we can understand the world best through our senses, or by placing an emphasis on experience and experimentation. Although these two schools of thought appear to be in opposition, they actually complement each other. Hegel, for instance, was not opposed to an empiricist epistemology but he did not believe that all of the sensory content they took to be certain knowledge was certain at all. Intuition, observation, and experimentation had to be conceptualised, and because historical scholarship involves these processes, it is essential that the historian be attentive to concepts, and for Hegel especially, to the concept of Reason. He said that "we should have the firm, unconquerable faith that Reason *does* exist there; and that the World of intelligence and conscious volition is not abandoned to chance but must show itself in the light of

the self-cognizant Idea."[336] If we treat Rossellini as an historian and *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* as a historical 'document,, we could argue that the film is very much at one with Hegel's philosophy; empirical study of the past is mediated through the lens of Reason. Rossellini's camera observes how the world of Louis XIV operated on a minute level, but rather than focusing on individual characters and their experiences of the world, it maintains a critical distance from the action and maps out the internal logic of the thoughts, actions, and decisions of those who inhabited that world. This is of course achieved through some form of artistic representation, though in keeping with the idea that the film constitutes History with a capital 'H', it can be described as didactic as much as artistic in that it holds the capacity to inform its audience how and why people in the past acted and thought in the way that they did. When Rossellini was asked about the state of the arts and their function in a 1966 edition of *Cahiers du Cinema*, he replied,

> Dans n'importe quelle culture et dans n'importe quelle civilisation, l'art a toujours eu un rôle important : c'est de donner la signification de la période historique qu'on vivait, et une signification qui était accessible à tout le monde. De Giotto à Homère, c'était comme ça : le sens vrai des choses. Au-delà de toute préoccupation didactique. L'art aujourd'hui a perdu ce rôle, il me semble.[337]

At the time of this interview, Rossellini had moved away from film as an agent of fictional storytelling and instead became interested in art as a tool of revelation. Nevertheless, this attempt to dispel the illusions of life and get closer to how it is actually lived was very much the *raison d'être* of his Neorealist films, so in a sense his shift towards the didactic was a logical continuation of this. But unlike the naturalistic ordinariness of Neorealism or writers such as Émile Zola or Thomas Hardy, *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, as a didactic film, seems more interested in striking a balance between empirical observation and rational explanation, in an attempt to get closer to how things in the past really were and why they were that way at all. If Plato criticised the arts in *The Republic* for obscuring reality, Rossellini does

[336] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* [*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*], trans. By J. Sibree, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), p.10.
[337] Jean Collet and Claude-Jean Phillippe, "Entretien avec Roberto Rossellini" Cahiers du Cinema, issue 183, (Paris: Cahiers du Cinema, 1st October 1966), p.16 -"In any culture and in any civilization, art has always had an important role: it is to give the meaning of the historical period that we were living, and a meaning that was accessible to everyone. From Giotto to Homer, it was like that: the true meaning of things. Beyond any didactic concern, art today has lost this role, it seems to me."

everything he can to demystify its poetry. At one point in the film, the character of Nicolas Fouquet says, "en matière de monarchie absolue, il n'y a que les apparences," but these appearances depend upon an internal logic with certain intentions and motivations, which Rossellini tries to illuminate.[338] Iris Murdoch once said that "[w]e live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion. The great task in life is to find reality."[339] Rossellini's task is very similar, as it is in many films with a didactic underpinning, but to grasp a better understanding of the rationale *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* has for looking at the past, it is worth laying out the production context. Broadcast on Saturday 8th October 1966 at 9pm on Première chaîne de l'ORTF and produced and financed by the state-run Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF), *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, along with a host of other didactic, historical television productions (mostly Italian) — *The Iron Age* (1965); *Acts of the Apostles*, (1969), and a series of biographies about Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Jesus Christ and Saint Augustine — affirmed Rossellini's belief that television was the ideal, democratic means of opening up a world of the past to an audience dispassionately and trying to stay close to the truth as possible. But in addition to its didactic function, the film was arguably part of De Gaulle and Malraux's accelerated mission to preserve French culture. In an addition of *French News: Theatre and Arts* (a magazine affiliated with Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the USA and responsible for promoting the best of French culture), we are explicitly told that Rossellini was "asked by the O.R.T.F to do a biography of the King" and that the director had "read Phillippe Erlanger's account of Louis XIV and immediately began work."[340] There is a possibility that Rossellini's decision to invoke Versailles' historical memory was guided for cultural reasons by the French state, but nevertheless, the film itself seems to stay clear of any temptation to romanticise the past, as we got with Guitry's film, and instead lets Reason reign supreme over emotion.

Like much of Rossellini's work after the War Trilogy, *La Prise de pouvoir Par Louis XIV* is more cerebral than personal. When T.S Eliot proposed his "impersonal theory" of poetry in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," where a good poem keeps itself distant from the poet and the poet keeps himself distant from the

[338] "Where absolute monarchy is concerned, there are only appearances."
[339] Quoted in, Susan Ratcliffe, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.266.
[340] Anon, *French News: Theatre and Arts* (New York: The Cultural Services of the French Embassy, 1966), p.6.

poem, he believed the thing that should justifies that distance between the two is a respect for tradition.[341] If were to apply such a theory to film and in particular *La Prise de pouvoir Par Louis XIV,* we could say that Rossellini distances himself as an authorial presence from the film, but he does so in respect for Reason and truth. At the same time though, the film's rational efforts to draw a distinction between appearance and reality by exposing the nuts and bolts of a particular era, as it were, overlaps to a certain degree with Georg Lukács' theory that art (he was talking about the novel) stripped of its inherent meaning leaves behind an unconsecrated view of existence.[342] *La Prise de pouvoir Par Louis XIV* deliberately allows faith in the theatrics, spirituality, and metaphysics of the past to gradually dissipate, stripping away the divine image of Versailles and leaving behind its naked structure. For example, the film does not simply reveal a magnificent feast being served to Louis XIV or the spectacle of courtiers waiting for Louis to walk into the room, it observes the process behind them. The audience is, for the most part, not encouraged to marvel at the spectacle but to observe the processes, systems, and mechanisms behind it. It is these very features which are of interest to the rationalist, as well as a general suspicion over individual experience and emotion. James Roy MacBean notes that it is not a film about Louis XIV but one "which examines *the taking of power* [the emphasis here is my own] by Louis XIV. The film's principal focus, then, is not Louis himself, but the mechanism of power as understood and manipulated by Louis XIV."[343]

The events that prompted Louis XIV to set up his estate at Versailles are present in the film, as are the individuals who brought about said changes, but they are primarily treated as moments which instigate the emergence of self-cognizant ideas. Nevertheless, as a Marxist critic, MacBean dismisses claims of impersonality and apoliticism as "disingenuous" and says, "it hardly seems possible that he is unaware of the essentially political nature of the act of demystifying history."[344] Instrumental rationality and rational certainty about knowledge is treated with suspicion by Marxists, who believe these concepts grow out of the forms of awareness that members of a give society are likely to have depending on that society's social

[341] T. S Eliot, *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1998), p.30.
[342] Georg Lukács', *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* [*Die Theorie des Romans*], trans. By Anna Bostock, (Cambridge: M.I.T Press, 1971).
[343] James Roy MacBean, "Rossellini's Materialist Mise-En-Scène Of "La Prise De Pouvoir Par Louis XIV"", *Film Quarterly*, 25.2 (1971), 20-29 < https://doi.org/10.2307/1211537 >. p.20.
[344] Ibid.

structure, rather than existing *a priori*. For the rationalists, there is certain knowledge to be found independently of social, economic, and political forces. Epistemologically, Rossellini's film seems to put faith in the idea that we can get at historical truth, firstly through close engagement with the document and secondly by conceptualising the underlying processes of observation and intuition present within these documents. Ontologically, Rossellini strikes a balance between materialism and idealism, the former holding that things exist *out there* in the world and the latter holding that what exists originates in the mind. Much like any other work of history, Rossellini's film does not claim to contain absolute knowledge of the era it is depicting, but at the same time, it does not fall into the trap of epistemological relativism. To do so would be to endorse a view of art and life that Plato proposed in his *Allegory of the Cave*, where a group of prisoners chained up in a cave with no exposure to the outside world believe that the flame-lit wall they are forced to look at (onto which the shadows of puppets are projected) constitutes actual reality. For a film that aims to separate myth from reality, or if we were to see it in Brechtian terms, rely on the *verfremdungseffekt* to dispel illusions, this Platonic metaphor does not apply. But while I have so far argued that this is achieved through a particular epistemological framework, it is also achieved by the fact it gives greater attention to the ancillary details of the past à la *histoire totale*. This historical method proposed the Annales School concerned itself with examining the whole world of the past: how they thought, what they ate, how they practiced their faith, how they managed day-to-day activities. William Guynn says that "by restricting the action to historical figures about whom a great detail is known, [Rossellini] is able to make use of the unusually rich documentation on Louis XIV and his court: the commentaries of courtiers and foreign envoys; records of conversations; reports; not only Louis XIV's Mémoires, rich in anecdote and revelatory of Louis's intentions, but also those of Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Motteville, among others."[345] The film's emphasis on the minute details of the past, along with both an empirical and rational epistemology, underlines its historiographical status, but at same time, the film arguably played a role in enlarging Versailles' historical memory within the cultural context of 1960s France.

[345] William Guynn, *Writing History in Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.87.

5.2 Charles de Gaulle, Louis XIV *de nos jours* ?

Michel Cadé and Francois de la Bretèque argued that the rise of Louis XIV in the film vaguely mirrors the rise of Charles de Gaulle, who had been in power for eight years by the time of its release.[346] Moreover, Leger Grindon suggests that the film could be interpreted as one which either supports the Fifth Republic or is infused with critiques that could allegorised with Gaullism.[347] But at the same time, if we accept Rossellini's claims in *Cahiers du Cinema* about art's role in separating truth from ideology, then we have reason to believe that he was not committed to glorifying any regime or embracing critiques of Gaullism at all. Conversely, the analogy between Louis XIV and De Gaulle, or the implied political message of the film, is worth is mentioning if we accept this to be one of the main reasons the ORTF wanted a film on the subject of Louis XIV's seizure of power in the first place. And if we look more closely at the politics of the V^{e} République, there are some loose parallels to be drawn. One of these is the dual-executive system that replaced the parliamentary system. Under this system, the head of state (president) was separated from the head of government (prime minister), as was the legislature from the executive, meaning that the president had greater autonomy.[348] An early example of this was a law that gave the president and his cabinet permission to rule by decree for up to six months.[349] While a dual-executive presidential system is of course not an equivalence to the absolutist system of monarchical rule adopted by Louis XIV, there are general parallels to be drawn regarding individual power, leadership, and governance, as well as some ideal, Weberian belief in the power of bureaucracy. De Gaulle thought his politics embodied *l'esprit de la nation* ('the spirit of the nation'), which in-itself is reminiscent of Louis XIV's alleged use of the phrase, *l'était, c'est moi* ('I am the state'). If De Gaulle is Louis XIV *de nos jours*, André Malraux, his first Minister of Culture, is Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Malraux's commitment to the preservation of French heritage during the 1960s was felt necessary to strengthen the French people's grasp of their own culture

[346] The arguments made by Michel Cadé, Francois de la Bretèque and Leger Grindon can be found in, Emmanuel Bury, "Le Signe Versaillais à L'épreuve Du Film: Simple Décor ou Matrice pour L'imaginaire", in *Siècle Classique et Cinema Contemporain*, 1st edn (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2009), p.49.
[347] Ibid.
[348] John Gaffney, *Political Leadership in France: From Charles de Gaulle to Nicolas Sarkozy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[349] Ibid.

and De Gaulle's long vision for the country, which in some sense is similar to Colbert's role at Versailles. 'Everyone is, has been or will be a Gaullist,' as the saying goes, and one way of disseminating this ideology is through culture. In a speech on heritage given to the Assemblée Nationale on 14th December 1961, Malraux declared,

> Puissions-nous ensevelir un jour, à côté de la statue de Mansart ou de celle de Louis XIV, l'un des maçons inconnus qui construisirent Versailles et graver sur sa tombe, grâce à la loi que nous vous demandons de voter aujourd'hui : ‹ A Versailles, bâti pour le roi, conquis par le peuple, sauvé par la nation ›.[350]

There are echoes here of Cornu's romantic belief that Versailles' historical memory belongs to every French person, one arguably shared by the many politicians and philanthropists who got involved in raising money for its restoration at various points in its history. After the First World War, for instance, when there was a shortfall in funding for the Palace and repairs were essential, businessmen and philanthropists, including John D. Rockefeller Jr., donated huge sums of money, much to the delight of the Society of Friends of Versailles.[351] From 1932, the state made an annual investment of four million francs, then after the Second World War, they committed to further restoration, and it was Cornu's desperate call for the restoration of Versailles in the early 1950s (after launching a three-year campaign, *Sauvegarde Versailles*, in 1949) that would prompt a new wave of repairs under De Gaulle and Malraux, through to the 1970s and beyond (under the conservator, Gérald van der Kemp).[352] De Gaulle and Malraux's level of commitment was reinforced by a series of decrees mandating each part of the process, and following the signing of the Malraux decree on July 24, 1959, which signalled a broader call to restore architecture of historical significance to France, a series of other decrees and laws followed: the Debré decree in February

[350] André Malraux and Michel Lantelme, *La Grande pitié des monuments de France: André Malraux : Débats Parlementaires* (Paris: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), p.72 - "May we one day bury, next to the statue of Mansart or that of Louis XIV, one of the unknown masons who built Versailles and engrave on his tomb, thanks to the law that we ask you to vote for today: 'At Versailles, built for the king, conquered by the people, saved by the nation'"

[351] Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (Lexington: Plunkett Lake Press, 2019); Xavier Laurent, *Grandeur et misère du patrimoine, d'André Malraux à Jacques Duhamel (1959-1973)*, (Paris: Ecole des Chartes, 2003), p.104.

[352] Charles-Louis Foulon and Jacques Ostier, *Charles de Gaulle: Un Siècle d'histoire* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 1990) ; Fabien Oppermann, "Les Tribulations Des Écuries Du Roi, Versailles Au Xxe Siècle", *Livraisons D'histoire De L'architecture*, 6.1 (2003), 99-108 <https://doi.org/10.3406/lha.2003.950>.

1961, which saw the furniture taken away for display in public collections or in government buildings returned; a new easements law on July 21, 1962, which made it easier for contractors to enter and work on a site they did not own, and, a law on July 31, 1962 granting Versailles one-hundred million extra francs.[353] Gérald van der Kemp, who oversaw these projects, was commended by De Gaulle for his "sens artistique. son goût et son ingéniosité," along with elevating the "politique de grandeur" around Versailles.[354] Between 1965 and 1966, at De Gaulle's request, the Grand Trianon was restored, which once again epitomises De Gaulle and Malraux's commitment to preserving and promoting French heritage.[355]

Versailles' historical memory remained prominent under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle, and by extension the French state, during the 1960s, especially at a time when an explicit effort to promote French history and culture was encouraged by both him and Malraux. One such method of disseminating French history and culture would be through the media, and because the ORTF was under strict control of the government, this national agency would have been the ideal channel for achieving this. Therefore, it seems perfectly plausible to suggest that the ORTF asked Rossellini to make a film about Versailles and Louis XIV for cultural and ideological reasons. To take us back to the specificities of the film itself, we find that its concrete empiricism is underpinned by a more abstract commentary on forces of Reason in history. The particular becomes general when we see that there are observable patterns in the thoughts and actions of individuals and institutions over time. If indeed any analogy was intended by Rossellini with De Gaulle, it is one that highlights the continuity of the office of power rather than the individuality of the person holding it. He draws our attention to the general principles that underline any civilisation while underlining the specific way in which Louis XIV seizes power and establishes an absolutist regime at Versailles. The concrete seems to explain the general and the general seems to explain the concrete, all in the pursuit of getting closer to the truth of the past, which in turn speaks to the close relationship between the film and the practice of History. To unpack this further, I will now turn to examine the film itself.

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[353] Xavier Laurent, "Les Sept Merveilles De France : La Loi De Programme Du 31 Juillet 1962 Sur Les Monuments Historiques", *Livraisons D'histoire De L'architecture*, 3.1 (2002), 113-125 <https://doi.org/10.3406/lha.2002.902>.

[354] Charles-Louis Foulon and Jacques Ostier, ibid ; Laurent, ibid - "artistic sense, taste and ingenuity"/"politics of greatness"

[355] Fabien Oppermann, *Le Versailles des presidents* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), p. 121-140.

5.3 A Historical Study of the World of Louis XIV

Although I have so far argued that *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* is almost akin to academic history, with its respect for reason and empiricism, and the fact it gives us something similar to a method of French historical scholarship that was *de rigueur* in the1960s (*histoire totale*), Rossellini's main source of reference was actually a 1965 biography of Louis XIV (appropriately called *Louis XIV*) written by Philippe Erlanger, who was not an academic but a civil servant, journalist, art critic, and biographer. Nevertheless, Erlanger adopted much of its rigour, as Guynn affirms, *Louis XIV* is the "kind of biographical history that must have appealed to Rossellini: it tells its story following the linear development of the King's life, it avoids excessive discursive commentary, and it presents historical moments with a great richness of anecdotal detail."[356] While Erlanger was not an academic historian, his biographies fell somewhere between literary psychological studies and scientific historical research (or historiography). Guynn goes on to state that Erlanger's "account of situations and events is enriched with psychological analysis: he foregrounds the characters' intentions, closely intertwining the political and the personal."[357] But this 'psychological analysis' and '[foregrounding of] characters' intentions' is not, as it may appear at first, an appeal to emotion but to reason. *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* similarly reveals the psychology of the characters, but it does so not to tell us how they are feeling but how their thought processes and actions are bound up with the cognizance of the historical period they inhabit. The question is not 'what are these characters feeling inside?' but 'how do the mechanics of Louis XIV's world, and the presence of Reason, shape the way they think and act with one another?' When Erlanger was asked for his opinion on Rossellini's film, he replied, "everything in the film is in my book, but seeing it, I was fascinated. It's all exact and yet I recognised nothing. I discovered a new world."[358] Visually observing the Louis XIV's world unfold in *plan-séquence* rather than having it described in words to us is an entirely different way of experiencing the past, not least because what we are seeing has the illusion of an empirical reality. Louis XIV's contemporaries could not record the world around them on camera, but Rossellini depicts it as if it were a live recording of the

[356] Guynn, p.87.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Anon, p.6.

time, observing the world passing by moment by moment. This sense that the camera is *observing* real events is underlined by the fact non-diegetic music is kept to a minimum and the sequences follow the logical order of things in the court. Rossellini creates the illusion that he is holding a mirror up to reality and is exposing the disjuncture between the world as it actually existed and the romantic ideal Louis XIV wanted posterity to remember (as illustrated in paintings, engravings, literature etc.). But this illusion of dispassionate empiricism is underpinned by an instrumental rationality that tries to *explain*, rather than simply *observe*, the thoughts, actions, and behaviours of those who inhabited the past. In the early 1970s, Ragnhild M. Hatton argued that "Louis XIV has been, and is, a controversial character, one who has been judged politically rather than historically in the past."[359] As to why this might be, she says "[t]his seems to be the fate of historical persons who, for one reason another […] impressed themselves on their ages."[360] But in a footnote, she says that Erlanger's biography is successful historical because he "always informs his reader on what printed memoirs or letters he builds," and ultimately deals with Louis XIV on a historical rather than political level.[361] Erlanger's dissection of the past is rigorous and scientific, and Rossellini aims to achieve something on the same level. By drawing our attention to how the entire machinery of the past worked and operated in minute detail, Rossellini indirectly gives us an *explanation* for it, rather than simply presenting it to us as a spectacle. To understand how these methods and concepts work in practice, I will examine several moments from the film, including the levee, the conversation between Louis and his mother, the construction of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles, the formal gathering of the court in the Palace, the preparation and delivery of the Louis' banquet, and the final moments in the Palace Gardens and Louis' private chambers.

In the previous chapter, I spoke about a connection between the court of Louis XIV and theatre, but unlike Guitry, who embraces the theatricality of the past, Rossellini ultimately tries, in a Brechtian sense, to *explain* how the spectacle works and the context in which it can be placed. The levee scene at the Château de Vincennes, for example, is not really interested in immersing the audience in the spectacle of the

[359] Ragnhild M. Hatton, "Louis XIV: Recent Gains in Historical Knowledge", *The Journal of Modern History*, 45.2 (1973), 277-299 < https://doi.org/10.1086/240963 >. p.277.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid, p.284.

lever du roy and morning prayer but *observing* and *documenting* the rational processes which lead to the creation of the spectacle in the first place. On one level, Rossellini exposes us to the empirical reality of the process behind the spectacle through *observation*, but on another, he rationalises what we are seeing through *explanation*. When the scene begins, for instance, the audience are not thrown straight into the ritual but are exposed to those few moments just before it takes place. The first thing we see is Louis' darkened bedchamber, where in the corner of the room, a small pack of greyhounds pace around as a servant can be seen sleeping on the floor. The environment at first has a non-descript feel about it, not least because there is a lack of an establishing shot of the room and the lighting is dim, and by the time we are made privy to the fact we are in the King's bedchamber and see him in bed, we are so accustomed to the environment that we do not have a strong feeling about his presence. Rossellini's camera seems to observe a very human, ordinary way of life, reminiscent of Neorealism. Spectacle and action become part of this long process of observation rather than things which are foregrounded from the moment the scene begins. Shortly after we see the dogs wandering about, for instance, the camera observes the moment the sleeping servant is awoken by one of the dogs after he licks her face, at which point we see her rise from her slumber (already dressed in her wool dress, which underlines this idea that no time can be wasted in preparing for the court's arrival to watch the spectacle of the levee). The camera then watches her open the shutters at the rear and side of the room (the wood creaks as she does this) as the light from outside gradually seeps through the windows into the dark chamber. We then see her proceed to open a chest, out of which she pulls the clothes Louis will wear for the day, before resting them over the back of a chair for the King's convenience after the ceremony. As we bear witness to the scene being set, our attention is drawn to the necessity of organisation and the labour of those who make the spectacle possible in the first place. Rossellini's approach is very much the opposite to Guitry's, whose film emphasises spectacle and theatricality at the expense of forensic observation and rational organisation. This is reinforced when the servant walks over to the side door to let the valet in. She is followed by the dogs, one of whom gets over excited and stands in the doorway, in turn blocking the valet's path. Because the dog obstructs his path, the servant apologies sincerely and escorts the dogs back to the corner of the room. What is underlined here are the lengths those who help to make the spectacle of Louis XIV's world possible will go to ensure any errors or mistakes go unnoticed. At the same time,

by drawing our attention to matters of protocol and documenting the preparation for the levee, Rossellini contextualises the forthcoming spectacle with a rational *explanation* of what we are seeing, as a historian would with reference to his sources.

Figure 74 A long shot of courtiers kneeling in the presence of the king, who is saying morning prayer.

Figure 75 A medium two shot of the king and his wife in bed.

This rational *explanation* extends to the spectacle itself, which Rossellini breaks down into fragments. As the valet pulls back the curtains of the King's four-poster bed (where we see Louis and his wife, Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche, lying in bed together), the light from the window gently brushes across the royals, awakening them from their slumber as the courtiers enter the room. The spectacle depends not only upon the King himself but the presence of courtiers to spectate, and as we see the courtiers enter the room, and then, in perfect unison, bow and kneel before the King (all captured in one long shot, fig.74), it is if we are watching a performance of a performance, classic *mise*

en abyme in the confined space of Louis' bedchamber. We are reminded that the courtiers have had to learn their stage directions in advance, in order to make the spectacle function, so to speak. Now that the court is watching, Louis proceeds to say a prayer in Latin, and their presence is depended upon in order to respond collectively to each line in the same manner a congregation would in liturgic *preces*. The performative nature of the spectacle is reinforced when Louis mumbles part of the Latin, as if what is being done is for appearances' sake. Nevertheless, the way Rossellini's camera observes this moment betrays a feeling of being immersed in the spectacle. Take for instance the medium two shot of the King and Queen sat side-by-side in bed, with their head to waist visible, which emphasises a kind of neutrality as he says his prayer (fig.75). It is as if the draperies have been stripped away to reveal the humans whose very ordinariness is usually obscured by the pretence of showiness. A similar observation can made of the levee itself, where the King and Queen, along with each courtier, has to be in the know in order to sustain the artificiality of their personae. For example, after the prayer concludes, the courtiers rise, and the Queen claps her hands twice in a short and sharp manner. Within the context of the diegesis, this non-verbal gesture is a signal which the courtiers would understand, but Rossellini draws our attention to one courtier who is baffled by the signal, precisely to *explain* rather than simply *observe* what is going on. This is also when Rossellini breaks up the spectacle, by moving to a medium two shot of two courtiers, at which point one courtier whispers to another, "que se passe-t-il, la reine appelle-t-elle ?", to which the other courtier responds, "non, elle annonce que le roi a rempli ses devoirs conjugaux hier soir."[362]Through this short exchange, the spectacle is contextualised and by extension rationalised, as we now know that the gesture signifies that the King's has fulfilled his religious obligation and had sexual intercourse in order to please God. Because the two courtiers whisper to each other, it is unlikely that courtiers surrounding them could hear what was being said, underlining on the one hand the spectacle as something which should go uninterrupted and on the other reminding us that the spectacle of the prayer and levee depends upon everyone present playing their part. Equally, by giving us some of the context about what we are observing, Rossellini

[362] "What is going on, is the Queen calling?"/"No, she's announcing that the king performed his conjugal duties last night"

distances us from the beliefs and assumptions held at the time about how one acts in the world, and by cutting away from the empirically observed ritual to a courtier explaining to another what is happening, Rossellini draws our attention to the peculiarity of the ritual and its origins within an epistemological framework that is theological rather than empirical or rational in origin. It is almost as if a museum guide or curator is standing by an exhibit, not only describing what he is seeing but explaining what those at the time of its creation believed and thought. Rossellini's film almost aspires to the objectivity of a historian, even if he relies on some form of artistic representation to create this illusion.

Rational explanation in this film though goes hand-in-hand with long, drawn-out observation, both of which subordinate the demands of narrative. For example, after we see a maid approach Louis' bed with an ornate, silver-gilt chalice, a footman with silver dish, and another servant grasping a plate of food, Rossellini cuts to a medium shot of Louis taking a swig of his drink, before asking, "quelles nouvelles de Son Eminence ?" (referring to Cardinal Mazarin, who is gravely ill), at which point Louis is informed that the Cardinal wishes to see him.[363] This brief exchange gives us some context of when in the narrative we are and anticipates where the King will go after leaving his bed chamber, but because Rossellini is not chiefly in pursuit of narrative, he does not cut to the next scene immediately, rather, he stays in the bedchamber, almost insisting that we see the remainder of the levee. For example, we witness Louis' requests for alcohol to clean his hands and face, which are met quickly by the servants, then, we see him get out of bed as the servants change him out of his night-shirt into his day clothes. This moment is captured in a long shot, which underlines both the necessity of protocol and the significance of appearances in Louis XIV's world (fig.76). Rossellini's insistence on prolonging the scene reinforces something akin to the *histoire totale,* where events are secondary to the question of how the past was lived. Bearing witness to the painstaking procedure of the spectacle (the servant's early preparations, the valet's invitation to the chamber, the king's awakening, the arrival of the courtiers, the morning prayer, the arrival of the King's breakfast, the King's morning wash, and finally his dressing) underlines just how efficient protocol in the presence of the King was but equally, given where the scene starts, he turns the spectacle into something rather ordinary and strips it of its sacred

[363] "What news of His Eminence?"

quality by turning to *explanation*. Because Rossellini stops to observe the process and study the details, he is better able to rationalise the past and avoid the temptation of immersion in the spectacle. Rossellini's film then, of all those examined in this thesis, is the most committed to achieving some kind of objectivity and is the most judicious when it comes to using his sources, hence why the case can be made that his film is the most historiographical in nature.

Figure 76 A long shot of the king surrounded by servants who dress him and courtiers who watch the spectacle unfold.

Although Rossellini is invested in getting closer to the truth about the past through rationalism and empiricism, this film is arguably the most fictionalised of Rossellini's didactic films. This is not a contradiction of what I have said previously because Rossellini is still primarily committed to unveiling how Louis XIV's world operated rationally, but there are more examples to be found where narrative exposition (through dialogue) is given more prominence than in his other histories. Nevertheless, narrative, and by extension character, is always in service to a set of presuppositions about the world in which these event unfold and the characters who inhabit it. These presuppositions are based on a rational understanding of the laws, protocols, and procedures which govern Louis world before and after he adopts his absolutist doctrine. Take the scene where Louis visits his mother, Anne of Austria, to discuss his plans to adopt an absolutist form of government. Rossellini seems to underline first and foremost the strategy by which a new form of governance comes into being, more so than arouse our curiosity around the personal matters of the King. While the exchange takes place in the private space of his mother's chambers, it is not in any

way intimate. It functions as a kind of Socratic dialogue between the two, where the King can think through the strategies, protocols, and procedures that will underpin his regime. On entering the room, Louis addresses Anne formally, "Bonjour Madame," and kisses her on the cheek as she sits in an upward pose behind a foot stool in a chair next to a table (fig.77). The formality of her posture is matched by the solemnity of her black dress (a Spanish influence), underlining her level of integrity as former regent of France. Madame de Motteville once spoke of how Anne's "uprightness" and "piety" gave her power and dignity, often "embarrass[ing] the cardinal."[364] Shortly after arriving, Louis sits down on a stool to her right, and standing next to her (holding her hand) is Louis' brother, Philippe. Anne and Philippe's closeness here possibly alludes to the widely commented upon bond between the two (Anne often referred to Philippe as "ma petite fille" as a child as she did not want him to grow up in the image of his brother).[365] Philippe remains silent here too, reflecting Anne's desires for him to be removed from the immediate world of political, judicial, and militaristic matters, so his brother can take centre stage. Nevertheless, Louis' modest position in this shot emphasises that in this context Louis is reduced to the status of a son (rather than a king), but Rossellini's distant framing strips the moment of familial warmth and instead observes it through the prism of rationality.

Figure 77 A long shot of the king seated next to his mother, Anne of Austria, whom he is confiding in about Mazarin and his future plans.

[25] Madame de Motteville, *Memoirs of Madame de Motteville on Anne of Austria and Her Court*, trans. By Katharine Prescott Wormeley , (Boston: Hardy, Pratt and Company, 1901), p.viii.
[365] "My little girl"

The scene's rational tone is curiously at odds with the emotional semantics of their exchange. For example, Anne acknowledges that Louis seems to be upset, at which point he solemnly informs her that he has just had a conversation with Mazarin that "peut-être notre dernier," before admitting that "je l'aimais [Mazarin] et il m'aimait."[366]Anne's response though, in form of short, sharp exclamations and interrogatives, underline an attempt to extract as much information about Louis' way of thinking, rather than to empathise with what he is saying. For instance, she disputes his declaration of love by saying, "tu le détestais," and is doubtful of his devotion by pointing out that he called the Cardinal "le grand turc."[367] As the exchanges progresses, Louis stands up and leans over the back of her chair, implying restlessness and vexation at his mother's doubting of his beliefs. When he detects an air of hypocrisy in her critique by saying, "tu l'as soutenu contre toute la France," she claims that she no longer supports him because "il m'a tenu loin du gouvernement."[368] While Louis understands her position, he concludes that Mazarin is his only true friend and the only person in whom he could confide, but the conversation leads us from personal feelings to strategy when he says that in the absence of Mazarin, the legacy of the Fronde will come back to haunt him. Although there are emotional statements here, Rossellini ultimately bypasses them to get at the rationale behind his decision making. In light of his comments on the Fronde, Louis does not appeal to emotion but attempts to find a practical solution to curtail the dissent from the nobility and legal system that has previously undermined the monarchy, concluding that "l'état doit devenir une réalité."[369] Through the dialogue, Rossellini does not merely provide us with exposition, he is attempting to rationalise and *explain* the functionality of ideas and policies. In other words, the past can be understood as a web of self-cognizant thoughts. Although there are moments, including in one medium-long shot, where Louis and his mother are seen in close proximity to each other, they nevertheless appear so distant emotionally, especially given that Louis seldom makes eye contact with her and is almost despondent in his body language and facial expressions (fig.78). There is a consistent attempt by Rossellini to suppress emotion in favour of reason, not least because his primary aim is to give us a clear *explanation* of why Louis would

[366] "may have been our last"/"I loved him [Mazarin] and he loved me"

[367] "You detested him"/"The great Turk"

[368] "You supported him against the whole of France"/"He has kept me far removed from government"

[369] "The state must be made a reality."

go on to do what he did rather than to immerse in the emotions whims of the characters. Much like the professional historian, Rossellini gives precedence to reason rather than emotion, which goes to reinforce the film's didactic rather than immersive function.

Figure 78 A medium-long shot of Louis revealing to his mother his ambitious future plans.

Even those moments that appear to be more narrative driven and fictionalised, such as the scenes involving the faction who want to bring down the King, their inclusion is not to create drama but to put in context the reasoning behind the King's decision to accelerate his plans. The faction in question was not a myth, but Rossellini takes some poetic licence in its execution, particularly in the dialogue of scheming courtiers. For example, after the King and his mistress, Madame de la Vallière complete their hunt at Fontainebleau, we see them strolling at a distance in a secluded wooded area as a courteous party of faithful courtiers gather on the grass outside. The casualness of this moment, accentuated by the distance on the one hand and the ambient sounds of birds tweeting on the other, conjures up a sense of false security and a kindred spirit between the monarch and his courtiers. We get this sense of false security when Rossellini homes in on a two-shot of Fouquet and his accomplice, Suzanne du Plessis-Bellière, smirking in a snide fashion as the King and his mistress emerge from the wood. Suzanne turns to Fouquet and asks suggestively in the form of *double entendre*, "aimez-vous la chasse?", at which point Fouquet retorts, "Oui, cela facilite les réunions privées."[370] Through the camerawork and exchanges, Rossellini underlines

[370] "Do you like hunting?"/"Yes, it makes private meetings easier"

the extent to which these characters are not at one with their environment and revel at how they can criticise the King's 'private meetings' with his mistress in broad daylight. He equally highlights the thought processes of those who thought they could see through the King and expose his weaknesses. Rossellini does include these exchanges to create drama but to explicate a set of reasons for plotting against the King in the first place. This process of dissenting almost has its own internal logic, and Rossellini exposes this to underline why these people thought in the way that they did, which in-itself overlaps with the practice of a historian.

Figure 79 A medium two shot of Suzanne and Louise.

By placing an emphasis on why these people thought in the way that they did, Rossellini de facto rationalises their decisions as well as their attempts to hide the fact that they are scheming against the king. Take for instance the scene inside a salon, where among courtiers socialising and playing card games, a sly Fouquet and Suzanne try and blend into their environment. Rossellini draws our attention to their methods of scheming and calculation through camera and *mise en scène*. The camera at first surveys the salon as courtiers play card games, but it does so on Suzanne's terms, whose casual stroll mirrors the pace of the camera and the medium-tempo chord progressions of the background harpsicord. She snakes around the floor slowly but assuredly, observing the court, and waiting to pounce like a serpent would to the living thing it wants to inject its venom into. Her prey in this instance is Vallière, who is seen watching the King from a distance as he partakes in the games. We could mistake her for being vulnerable to attack, especially with her youthful charm and innocent smile,

but we get the sense that she can clearly see behind the cold, faux smile of Suzanne, whose efforts to engage her in conversation by claiming that Fouquet has taken a romantic interest in her (saying he admires her beauty) are understood by Louise to be nothing short of a sinister plot to get her to turn on the King. A medium-two shot encapsulates the uncomfortable nature of this exchange, with Suzanne moving closer towards Louise as if the seemingly naïve young woman is about to be completely manipulated by an older, wiser, and more maternal figure (fig.79). Suzanne even adopts a patronisingly superior tone to her voice, asking "le jeu ne t'intéresse pas ?", to which Louise replies, "non, je perds toujours."[371] Such an admission by Louise appears to expose her vulnerability, but in fact it goes to emphasise Suzanne's naivety as she does not realise that Louise knows that she is attempting to manipulate her. When, for instance, Suzanne tries to persuade Louise to take up Fouquet's offer of a financial gift, Louise's response is vacuous and cold, her eyes are wandering, and her visage barely looks upon that of Suzanne's. Rossellini draws our attention to the fact that Louise knows that there is something untoward here, as is confirmed when shortly after she requests a private conversation in the corner of the room with King to inform him of what Suzanne has just said. Only at this point do we begin to see the King's own rationalist method for dealing with the schemers (with an audience of courtiers around him, Louis says to his mother, "Madame, j'ai décidé que le prochain conseil des ministres aura lieu à Nantes," and requests that the court depart within three days, so that he can demand the arrest of Fouquet and Suzanne there), and by exposing the chasm between what Suzanne thinks Louise knows and what Louise actually knows through the interplay of *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, Rossellini sets in motion a process that will eventually enable Louis and his allies to bring the schemers down.[372] This scene constitutes one of the few moments in the film where narrative ostensibly takes precedence over observation and explanation, but it could be argued that this scene is not intended to drive the narrative forward as such but to underline the rational thought processes which guided Louis XIV to establish a new system of governance. We should think of this scene in the same way we think about other scenes in the film: as a web of self-cognizant ideas which underline the notion that every idea, thought, and action of the past can be rationalised.

[371] "aren't you interested in the game?"/"no, I always lose"

[372] "Madame, I've decided that the next Council of Ministers will take place in Nantes"

Rossellini does not give us narrative for its own sake, but as a by-product of observation and explanation, and the same can be said of spectacle in the film, especially in the many scenes at Versailles itself. Louis' power comes to fruition with the building and opening of Versailles, and Rossellini highlights this primarily by mechanising the extravaganzas taking place there rather than treating them as delightfully charming or attractive spectacles to be appreciated uncritically. In other words, he takes what we would ordinarily and intuitively view as organic unities of form (spectacle) and through excessive observation and distancing (in long takes) ends up rationalising what we are seeing, in turn sabotaging the illusion of such forms being organic in the first place. Even if a sequence such as *le roi danse* may have immersive qualities to it, its ultimate aim is arguably to draw our attention to the underlying bureaucratic structure which underpins the artifice of such entertainment in the first place. In a Weberian sense, as this institution of Versailles comes into its own, it becomes more deeply rooted in a set of pre-determined protocols and procedures with their own rational logic. The first scene at court exemplifies this spectacularly, and in keeping with his attempt to portray things as authentically as possible, Rossellini gives us plenty of time to absorb the aura of Versailles, and the pomposity of court protocol, through long, drawn-out takes. These takes expose every mannerism, every look, every inflection, all of which (in tandem with a pleasant, Jean-Baptiste Lully-esque melody) constitutes the surface of an underlying bureaucratic machinery. This is reinforced by the fact that although the King is the main attraction for the courtiers, Rossellini runs the shot for a considerable amount of time before he enters the room, suggesting that it is the scrutiny of procedure and protocol which is paramount here. We see courtiers converse and interact with one another while keeping up appearances in the process. H.W Eve noted that "at the court of Louis XIV, the strictest outward decorum prevailed,"[373] and Saint-Simon recorded that,

> The frequent fêtes, the private promenades at Versailles, the journeys, were means on which the King seized in order to distinguish or mortify the courtiers, and thus render them more assiduous in pleasing him.[374]

[373] H.W Eve, *Racine: Athalie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p.xv.
[374] Louis de Rouvroy duc de Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon on the Reign of Louis XIV and the Regency* , translated by Bayle St. John (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), p.364.

The longevity of the takes observes every individual's scrupulous attempts to be at one with their environment, dressing and acting in a way that would be agreeable to their peers. Louis' court is disciplined extravagance, and it is the King who sees himself as the centre piece of this propaganda machine. Rossellini heightens the excessive nature of the spectacle in the drawn-out shots, but ipso facto underlines the bureaucratic restraints placed upon the court. When the announcement is made that Louis is about to enter the room, the courtiers disperse into two crowds, allowing Louis to walk through the middle (fig.80). We see Louis enter the space with grace, holding a cane in one hand as he promenades leisurely past the court. Many pairs of eyes gaze upon him as he enters wearing his extravagant crimson and red coat with flared white sleeves, feathered hat, and intricately designed cravat. Courtiers bow, curtsy, and doff their hats as he passes, reminding us that *le roi soleil* is metaphorically speaking the centre of the solar system and the courtiers are the planets orbiting the sun. But Rossellini's fixation on the spectacle without immersion reminds us that they are the cogs in the machine who keep the mechanics of Versailles ticking over. Because Rossellini takes us into this environment before Louis walks in, we see the spectacle come into being rather than beginning with the spectacle *in medias res*, laying bare the blueprint underlining the rational logic of this world.

Figure 80 A long shot of courtiers at Versailles spectating the king's colourful entrance.

This rational logic is equally laid bare when we observe Louis question a courtier (the Marquis de Vardes) who is not at one with court protocol. Louis first of all approaches the Marquis (who kneels before him), before asking him a series of questions, including one about his doublet, which Louis suspects is of foreign origin. Because

his costume is at odds with what Louis' expects to see at the court, Louis treats him with suspicion, but to quell this suspicion, Vardes prostrates himself before the King, admitting that what he is wearing looks ridiculous. By observing this moment, Rossellini underlines the degree to which this world functions on the basis that everyone around the King must adapt themselves to the environment and make themselves agreeable. Equally, he stresses how precision and harmony in Louis' world were not merely aesthetic concerns but part of a bureaucratic process through which Louis exercised control of those around him. The procedures at court are shown to have strict rules like games or heraldry, and by observing a moment where somebody breaks one of those rules, Rossellini reveals the rigid, mechanical system of logic this world was based on. The same can be said of a prolonged sequence where the camera lingers on a model trying on a costume that has been made for Louis as the King watches, and then, after a considerable amount of time, Louis states bluntly that he is dissatisfied with the sizes. The amount of time given to his moment reflects a historical truth that Louis wanted to make France the leader in bespoke fashion (he and Colbert ushered in new guilds that would guarantee excellence both in the training and quality control of the fashion industry), and the King's brutal selectivity underlines the lengths he went to make every aspect of his regime a symbol of France's power in Europe.[375] Rossellini draws our attention Louis' obsession to detail, and how appearances can leave a lasting impression on an outsider looking in on an institution, in turn highlighting the bureaucratic logic of Versailles' showiness. By breaking down the artifice of Versailles through exposure to the processes which led to its creation in the first place, Rossellini's film could be understood as a work of historiography seeking to *interrogate, explain,* and *contextualise* the sources of the past, albeit through a process of artistic representation.

[375] Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Figure 81 A wide shot of Louis scrutinising the blueprint of the future palace on the building site.

This notion that Rossellini *explains* rather simply *observes* the spectacle of Versailles, and underlines its bureaucratic logic, is illustrated in those moments before the place becomes a reality, such as the scene where Louis visits an excavated piece of land on which "la plus grande et la plus belle orangerie du monde" will be housed.[376] Rossellini uses a variety of wide shots and medium close-ups to observe Louis talking through the building plans with designers and ministers while looking at a blueprint of how Versailles will look architecturally and topographically, but let's just take one of the wide shots where he stands front and centre as if he is the chief architect of the project (fig.81). Standing around Louis are his ministers (including the very senior Colbert, who has been instrumental in working out ways to make Louis' ideas a reality) and the genuine chief architect of the project, Louis le Vau. In the distant background, we can see many grafting stonemasons and landscapers working to bring the Orangery to life. But having Louis stand in the centre of the frame reflects his belief that Versailles is the product of his own ingenuity and divine right to rule. Le Vau, along with the workers, are to Louis merely the cogs in the machine. Nevertheless, we are equally drawn to the sounds of axes clacking against the rocks and cutaways to the masons cutting into the landscape. This underlines the arduous process of its construction, and while he draws our attention to the worker, he does not set out to convey their subjective experiences but contextualises them within a broader logic relating to the processes of Versailles' construction.

[376] "The largest and most beautiful orangery in the world"

Figure 82 A wide shot of the Orangery under construction, with workers toiling away against the backdrop of the palace façade.

Rossellini's contextualisation of this process equally highlights the disparity between appearance and reality, or the way Louis would have wanted posterity to remember Versailles and how History actually understands it. Take for instance the moment we hear Louis put pressure on Le Vau to deliver something marvellous ("la postérité le juge [le roi] à la mesure des édifices qu'il a bâtis ; après moi, Versailles restera le palais de ma dynastie").[377] From Rossellini's camerawork, we are fully aware that the process of bringing the spaces of Versailles to life is the collaborate effort of many, but for Louis, he seems himself as the chief architect. The disparity between the two is reinforced when Rossellini cuts to a wide shot of workers tending to the yet-to-be-finished archways of the Orangery that will sit beautifully among the pastoral and arboreal delights it will offer on completion. By observing workers chiselling away at the landscape, hammering rocks, pulling tons of heavy material on carts up the hill, and carving out a formerly uninspired environment, Rossellini betrays the myth that this beautiful space is merely the product of Louis himself. This is reinforced further when, after pausing on this site briefly, Rossellini cuts to a wider shot of the landscape under construction, where, in conjunction with masons working in front of the palace façade, we now also see the architect's blueprint sitting alone on the stand in the foreground, demonstrating how this ambitious plan is becoming a reality (fig.82). This is followed by the use of a dissolve and match cut revealing the moment the building site transforms into the pleasantly alluring orangery complete with well-manicured

[377] "posterity judges him [the king] by the measure of the structures he's built; after me, Versailles will remain the palace of my dynasty."

lawns and orange trees around the perimeter (fig.83). Through the editing here, Rossellini reminds us that the end result is the product of a set of practical, logistical, and strategic processes while equally reminding us that the finished piece is part of the artifice that Versailles' very logic depends upon. Hitherto incomplete Greco-Roman pillars and classically inspired archways are now part of this façade, and at one with the splendour and magnificence of an environment that could have been borrowed from Étienne Allegrain and Jean-Baptiste Martin's *View of the Orangerie* (1695). Accompanying the visuals is a baroque-style piece of music (written by Betty Willemetz), which fades in to convey that triumphant sense of totality. Music is applied where the spectacle demands it, and in this film, it is very rarely used, but in this instance, it momentarily underlines the Apollonian artifice of Louis' Versailles. Observing this transformation of the environment reminds us that the very mechanism or rational logic that keeps Versailles intact depends upon appearances. Rossellini does not immerse us in the spectacle but demonstrates that its very existence depends upon a rational system of logistics, strategies, and practices.

Figure 83 A wide shot of the completed Orangery in all its glory.

Greater credibility is given to this view of the past as a rational system of logistics, strategies, and practices in the scenes where we are exposed to an *histoire totale* of a Louis XIV banquet. We do not just see each dish taken upstairs to a salon where Louis dines in front of an audience of enthralled courtiers but the whole process: the chopping, mixing and cooking of ingredients, the garnishing, the final plating up, and the delivery of the food to the King. The scene begins in a busy kitchen, where at first the camera is facing an open door. In front of this, cooks, maids, and chefs pace back

and forth, tending to their designated roles. In the hallway, a servant descends the stairs and enters the kitchen in earnest. He is on his way to inform the head chef that the King is ready for his next dish, but rather than go directly to the head chef, he circulates around the busy space, observing what stage this army of culinary staff are at in preparing the food. As he winds his way around the narrow passages between the worktops and tables, the camera moves with him. Rossellini gives us a gastronomic study here of the ingredients being used and the laborious processes the maids and cooks go through to prepare the dishes. We see freshly cooked meat carried on plates from the fire, and flour and yeast mixed together in a bowl to make bread. Delving into the minutiae of the 'backstage' processes involved in perfecting the Louis' banquet 'onstage' reminds us that the world of appearances at Versailles is held in place by the hard work and perseverance of those behind the scenes. By highlighting the strenuous process of producing the perfect dish, Rossellini reveals the sheer ostentation of the King and the near-impossible nature of the demands placed upon the serving class. Nevertheless, the fact that they undoubtedly meet these demands demonstrates a huge feat of achievement on their part.

Figure 84 A wide shot of the serving area, where we can see the chief chef presiding over the process.

Strategies, practices, and the rational organisation of this feast is emphasised further by the fact we bear witness to the long process of approval each dish has to go through before it reaches the table. When the aforementioned footman enters the plating-up room, the final touches are being made to a dish. He waits patiently as, in a wide shot of the serving area, we hear the head chef (standing on a platform observing each step of the plating process) shout across to a maid, "prudent! Sa Majesté déteste les œufs

durs qui ne sont pas parfaitement cuits !" (Fig.84).[378] The footman then interjects, "Sa Majesté a commencé la huitième séance," prompting the head chef to bellow a series of commands: "garnir le poulet !", "préparez les corbeilles de fruits !", "garnissez-le d'épinards – n'oubliez pas de le parsemer de pain rôti !".[379] When a cook turns away from the table to show the chef what he has plated up, the chef is unimpressed, shouting, "et le pois!"" (and on his demands go).[380] No matter how inviting the dish they serve up, we get the sense that at Versailles, only perfection was good enough. When Rossellini takes us into the King's dining area, it very much feels annexed to the preparation scene rather than a spectacle in its own right, encouraging us to think about the processes behind the final result. This includes the role servants played in making Versailles flourish, and by homing in on the action in the kitchen, Rossellini moves beyond including them as a bit of window dressing or as extras and instead draws our attention to the role they played in their own right. As with many other scenes, what we see here is Rossellini's attempts to rationalise the past, which means he is concerned with the interrelationships between entities within a formal system, or rather the processes, strategies, and logistics that relate one thing to another. If Rossellini acknowledges the various empirically derived accounts of how banquets were presented to the King and the court at Versailles, then it is logical that he chooses to *contextualise* and *explain* the processes they went through to achieve such grand banquets. Rossellini moves away from how things appear on the surface to the processes which brought these things into being, aiming to get close to the truth of how things were done at Versailles.

[378] "Careful, His Majesty hates hard-boiled eggs that aren't perfectly cooked!"
[379] "His Majesty has begun the eighth sitting"/"garnish the chicken!"/"prepare the fruit baskets!"/"garnish it with spinach – don't forget to sprinkle it with roast bread!"
[380] "And the peas!"

Figure 85 A wide shot of the king sat at the table waiting to eat the food that is brought to him, with many courtiers spectating.

Rossellini underlines the logical steps the maids, cooks, chefs, and servants had to go through to get the food to Louis' table, but the abrupt manner in which he cuts between the kitchen and the dining room highlights the schism between appearance and reality. We move from the hustle and bustle of the kitchen environment, and the cries of the head chef, to the rehearsed silence of the salon, where Louis is sat in the centre of a table waiting for his next dish (fig.86). Courtiers watch with intrigue and anticipation as Louis selects the dish he wishes to consume. For them, it is as if the spectacle is achieved by magic; those who make it happen are hidden away behind the curtains, so to speak. But the way the dining scene looks, and feels is interesting, not least because the room is not one that belongs to Versailles — it was in fact filmed in the Salon d'Hercule at the Château de Maisons-Laffitte in northwest Paris. The architectural style of the building is Baroque and precedes Versailles, but it is similar in style to the Vaux-le-vicomte, which itself had architectural overlaps with Versailles. But in the Salon d'Hercule in particular, note the rather subdued pattern displayed within the oval medallion that hangs on the wall behind Louis above the fireplace. Originally, a painting of Hercules was displayed here, but now it houses the *Portrait of Louis XIV* in his coronation robes, painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud in 1701. Rossellini covers up the painting to avoid anachronism and to make this environment look less like the Salon d'Hercule. While not a room at Versailles, its ornate furnishings, golden décor, and caryatids bearing fruit at the bottom of the medallion could easily pass for one of its salons. Another peculiar fact is that the banquet scene was filmed not by Rossellini but by his son Renzo, though Rossellini still had creative control over how the sequence would play out, and it does take a similar approach to many other sequences

in the film.[381] That is to say, it unfolds is without too much *joie de vivre*, and rather than marvel at the grandeur of the sights, Renzo unveils the logical and rational process which enabled such marvels to play out seamlessly in the first place.

Figure 86 A wide shot of courtiers watching the King.

The spectacle of the banquet is desacrilised by virtue of our long exposure to it. The excesses are almost explained away as part of a rational process. At first, the King nibbles on his *hors d'œuvre* and has supplementary bread delivered to the table. He then demands some complementary music, which a servant sees to immediately by walking through the gathering of courtiers towards the back of the room where he looks up at the balcony and exclaims, "la musique du roi!".[382] A four-piece quartet then stand up and bow to the King from the balcony, before resuming their seats to play a Baroque-style composition on the violin. It equates to a kind of music of the spheres, where the celestial bodies dance in harmony with one another, and where the values of the state are underlined by the coming together of various components. Coupled with this is a frame-within-a-frame shot of the King and his brother seated in a sort of vestibule while courtiers observe the King's gastronomic display. This is classic *mise en abyme*. We watch the courtiers watching the King, like a theatre audience would a play. Both the music and *mise en abyme* reinforce this idea that by not having a single note out of tune or a courtier out of place helped maintain the artifice of Versailles (fig.86). The mathematical harmony and rational organisation on display, with rules followed like an algebraic equation or geometric pattern, highlight

[381] Patrizo Rossi, *Roberto Rossellini: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K Hall, 1988), p.21.
[382] "The king's music!"

Rossellini's likening of spectacle at Versailles to bureaucratic protocol. Focusing on the minute details of the banquet also draws us to some of its excesses. When the main dishes are brought out, Louis turns his nose up at one of them and has it taken away instantly. Despite all those hours the cooks spent preparing it, he does not look at it twice. Their hard graft in the kitchens goes unappreciated and unnoticed by Louis, and we are encouraged not only to see how pedantic the King was, but the painstaking and bureaucratic thought processes underpinning such a spectacle. By contextualising the spectacle, Rossellini strips away the illusion of the past as an organic unity and instead reminds us that it can be underpinned by a logic of reason.

Figure 87 A wide shot of courtiers waiting to greet the king with their show of deference.

Figure 88 A wide shot of courtiers addressing the camera in the South Parterre.

Figure 89 A long shot of Louis ascending the stairs on which courtiers bow and kneel in his presence.

This logic of reason, and a persistent focus on *observation* and *explanation*, culminates in final sequences of the film, where Rossellini encourages us to ask what all this grandeur, wealth, and power really meant to Louis. It starts in the South Parterre, or the Jardin des Fleurs, where the solemn music from the opening sequence can be heard once again. Courtiers promenade around the parterre in all their finery, along with the King, and in two separate wide shots from early on in the scene, courtiers turn towards the camera then with a solemn gaze, the men doff their hats and the women curtsy (fig.87 and 88). It is as if we are observing them from Louis' point of view, but in addition to this, our attention is drawn primarily to the unusual breaking of the fourth wall rather than the prettiness of the neatly cut hedgerows, well-manicured lawns, small Cyprus trees, and rows of delightful flowers which surround them. For a moment, Rossellini puts us in Louis' shoes, and tries to underline the fact that for him, it was probably the case that he did not see the world of appearances he constructed at Versailles as an organic unity but as a set of strategies, practices, and rational processes which would strengthen his regime. In another long shot of the gardens, we see Louis stroll along a path with his ministers as courtiers bow and kneel at his feet, but we now know that all Louis sees around him is a world of appearances covering over the mechanics which lie underneath (fig.89). Nietzsche once said of the Greeks that "they knew how to live: for that purpose it is necessary to keep bravely to the surface, the fold and the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in forms, tones, and words, in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial - out of

profundity!".[383] If Louis compared himself to Apollo, and a bearer of truth, light, and poetry, then we can compare Versailles to Greece, a culture equally replete with spectacular gatherings and obsessed with surfaces, under which we can find a set of strategies and some kind of rational logic. Apollonian forces of logic and order aim to keep Dionysian chaos and irrationality at bay at all times, and because of Rossellini's insistence on observation and contextualisation, we almost become increasingly blasé about the intuitive splendour of what we are seeing. A work of art such as Charles Le Brun's allegorical painting, *Le roi gouverne par lui-même*, affirms the absolutist status of Louis XIV and the symbolic nature of power and status, whereas Rossellini's film strips away the aura of Versailles, so what we are ultimately left with is an unconsecrated view of the past. In the spirit of a historian, Rossellini takes the mystifying and unexplainable, then subjects it to a process of rationalisation, observation, and contextualisation.

Figure 90 A long shot of a dressed-down Louis reading a copy of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims in his chamber.

Such ideas culminate in the last sequence of the film, where Louis retreats to his office. The artifice of Versailles, and in particular the King, is stripped back when, in a long take, we see Louis remove the outer garments of his dress, his periwig, and regalia. In these final moments, we realise that within the context of Versailles as an institution, Louis is *le roi soleil*, but in the solitary confines of his private office, Louis has the appearance of an ordinary human being. This idea of things being stripped back ties

[383] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*], trans. By Josefine Nauckoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.8.

into the fact that we then see him wandering around the room reading the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld, before taking a seat to read aloud what is to him the most important maxim of all: "Ni le soleil ni la mort se peuvent regarder fixement."[384] As he reads this, the camera slowly zooms in to find Louis almost lost in thought (fig.90). We see him look out into thin air, and then, after a moment, the film comes to an end. Ending the film on this maxim is significant because it functions as a metaphor for Louis, who feels that he cannot be looked at directly. It equally sums up a motif Rossellini has reasoned with throughout the film: that Louis is no demi-god nor divine being, just a human who happened to take up this responsibility by virtue of an institution that granted it to him by birth right, and equally, Versailles is no enchanted palace. The film's emphasis on *observation*, *explanation*, and *contextualisation* throughout provides a route to explicating the laws, protocols, and procedures of a certain epoch in history. While these laws, protocols, and procedures manifest themselves differently in different circumstances, the key point is that there is a rational logic, or a set of embodied truths, regarding the birth, survival, and death of civilisations. Rossellini then does not simply muse on the nature of Versailles as an institution but the rational logic of civilisations more generally (this may substantiate those claims that this film is an allegory on Charles de Gaulle's France). The methods employed in the film give us an unconsecrated, even Brechtian, view of Louis' seizure of power and the genesis of Versailles, which in turn speaks to the broader concerns that Rossellini was aspiring to get as close to the truth as possible and demystify the past à la historians, even if this is achieved through some form of artistic representation. I will now turn to examine the reception of the film, highlighting the key observations that were made in regards to the film, and whether or not critics saw its potential as an audio-visual equivalent of historiographical study.

5.4 The medium is the message? The Response to Rossellini's Didactic Approach to History

While it can be argued that Rossellini's film offers a perspective on history that is in some sense transhistorical (with its recognition that civilisations organise themselves at the most fundamental level in similar ways), his insistence on *observation* and

[384] "Neither the sun nor death can be looked at directly"

commitment to something akin to an *histoire totale* means that he in no way sacrifices the specific for the general, as he himself made clear:

> History, through teaching visually, can evolve on its own ground rather than evaporate into dates and names. Abandoning the usual litany of battles, it can surrender to its social, economic and political determinants. It can build not on fantasy, but on historical knowledge, situations, costumes, atmospheres, and men who had historical significance and helped the social developments by which we live today. Some characters, then, considered from a psychological viewpoint, can through their human qualities, become the embodiment of action.[385]

So, while Rossellini was drawn to the chain of events leading to Louis' seizure of power, he was more interested in the rational logic underpinning them, and when he talks about the "situations, costumes, atmospheres" of the past, we know that the question of *how the past was lived* and the processes and protocols underlining the thoughts and actions of those who inhabited it for Rossellini key to getting closer to the truth. While he was probably aware that no reconstruction of the past can claim to be wholly accurate, he nevertheless attempts to make sense of history by gathering empirical research and then moving logically through the evidence to understand the interrelationships between particular thoughts and ideas, and how these formed part of the processes that shaped the past. This differs hugely from the Marxists critics, for instance, who treat empiricism and reason with suspicion, and believe that we reach conclusions not in face of evidence or *a posteriori* reasoning, but in light of the dominant ideology within a society. Rossellini, despite being labelled as a Marxist by some, labelled artists and intellectuals who invoked such ideas as alienation as "whiners," so it is unlikely that Rossellini had such intentions with his own work.[386] Peter Bondanella said that,

> Unlike leftist intellectuals and artists who had a Marxist ideology to substitute for the so-called capitalist ideology that was supposedly embodied in commercial cinema, Rossellini rejected the idea of ideology altogether and believed in the possibility of intellectual neutrality, of presenting facts without a completely biased point of view.[387]

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[385] Quoted in Jose-Luis Guarner, *Roberto Rossellini* (London: Praeger, 1970), p.117.
[386] Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.127.
[387] Ibid, p.127.

Rossellini said in his interview with *Cahiers du Cinema* that "it is necessary to know things outside any ideology. Every ideology is a prism."[388] When Bondanella says that Rossellini believes in presenting the facts of history "without a *completely* biased point of view [italics, my emphasis]," the adverb "completely" may be an admission that complete objectivity cannot be achieved but it does not negate the idea that there are truths to be found independent of an ideological framework.[389] While ideology can certainly masquerade as truth, it is false to suggest that all truth is ideology; there are things which are true that exist independently of ourselves and of social pressures. Rossellini understands that his historical films are interpretations, and that like any other interpretation, they have their limits, but at the same time, the reasoned approach he brings to the evidence, the presentation of events according to causes and effects, and the attempt to separate appearance from reality through a minute study of how people lived in the past shows that he was in the pursuit of enlightenment rather than indoctrination, which is very much antithetical to the goals of an ideologue.

Further to these epistemological questions are Rossellini's changing views on film and television in the years leading up to the release of the film. Bondanella points to a Marshall McLuhan-styled essay Rossellini wrote in 1961, entitled "Audio-visual Means of Communication and Man in a Scientific Society," in which he recognised that television "could provide a democratic diffusion of culture to large, commercial audiences" in a didactic manner, but as a form of "instruction" rather than "education."[390] He associated the latter with telling people what to think rather how to think, whereas the former would "allow the 'student' to make his or her own choices."[391]For Rossellini, historical film could be educational without being moralistic or ideological. Monique Pantel, in her review of the film, asked, "Pourquoi ne pas, comme autrefois, tourner des scénarios originaux, inventés ?", which is followed up with the answer, "parce que les gens ont besoin d'être éduqués, de connaître leur histoire dans les moindres détails."[392] Without quibbling too much over

[388] Quoted in, Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid, p.125.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Monique Pantel, "Avec Louis XIV, Rossellini fait de la "Planification Éducative", *Paris-presse L'Intransigeant,* (Paris: Paris-presse, L'Intransigeant, 25 September 1966), p.7 – "why not, as in the past, shoot original, invented scenarios?"/"because people need to be educated, to know their history in every detail."

semantics, the verb "educated" was to her what "instruction" is to Rossellini. She observed that the film "joint l'utile à l'agréable, l'esthétisme à l'instruction, qui remplace à lui tout seul (du moins, peut-être, Rossellini le pense), une vingtaine de livres d'histoire."[393] Robert Chazal went further, stating, "bientôt ils apprendront vraiment l'Histoire en regardant la télévision ou en allant au cinema," and argued that Rossellini "partant du livre définitif de Philippe Erlanger sur Louis XIV, a créé un genre nouveau : le cinéma historico-réaliste, dont les caractéristiques sont une recherche constante de la vérité et la parfaite restitution d'une ambiance."[394] While his first point may have been fanciful, he certainly foresaw the potential of 'historico-realistic' films: "il n'en reste pas moins que le but de cette entreprise nouvelle est atteint et que l'Histoire par le cinéma et la télévision est devenue une réalité."[395] In addition to pointing the instructive potential of Rossellini's film, critics equally distinguished it from commercially driven films. Michel Aubrant asked:

> Est-ce un film de cinéma ? Non, si l'on considère que cette œuvre de Rossellini, primitivement destinée à la télévision, a été financée par l'ORTF, c'est-à-dire par l'Etat-mécène, sans qu'aucune notion rentabilité intervienne à priori, sans que soit posée la question de savoir si le film répondrait aux goûts et aux désirs du consommateur.[396]

Aubrant though lamented the fact that the film would not be immune to taking on the identity of a commodified product:

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[393] Ibid - "combines the useful with the pleasant, aesthetics with instruction, which alone replaces (at least, perhaps, as Rossellini likes to think) some twenty books of history."

[394] Robert Chazal, "La prise du pouvoir par Louis XIV' de Rossellini c'est la naissance du cinéma historico-réaliste" *Paris-presse, L'Intransigeant,* (Paris: Paris-presse, L'Intransigeant, 9th October 1966), p.11 – "Soon [people] will really learn History by watching the television or going to the movies"/"starting from Philippe Erlanger's definitive book on Louis XIV, created a new genre: historico-realistic cinema, the characteristics of which are a constant search for truth and perfect restitution of an atmosphere."

[395] Ibid – "The fact remains that the goal of this new enterprise has been reached and that history through film and television has become a reality."

[396] Michel Aubrant, "'LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV', DE ROSSELLINI – N'était-ce pas plutôt la prise du cinéma par La télévision?", *Paris-presse, L'Intransigeant,* (Paris: Paris-presse, L'Intransigeant, 13 October 1966), p.5 – "Is this a cinematic film? No, if we consider that this work by Rossellini, originally intended for television, was funded by the ORTF, that is to say by the patron state; without any notion that profitability occurs a priori; without asking the question of whether the film would meet the tastes and desires of the consumer."

> Il est cependant curieux de noter que l'œuvre de Rossellini a été réalisée en couleurs et pour grand écran ; qu'elle fut présentée pour la première fois à Venise, en clôture du festival de cinéma ; et, ce qui est plus troublant, qu'elle paraît destinée, après son passage sur le petit écran, à une exploitation normale dans les salles de cinéma.[397]

The film was shown at the Venice Film Festival on 10th September 1966, and later at La Pagode in Paris for seven weeks, but they were both well-known at this point for screening art films— the latter was also associated with the *Association française des cinémas d'art et d'essai* (AFCAE). Even if this did not satisfy Aubrant, the television project itself was a success, attracting an audience of around twenty million on Première chaîne de l'ORTF. The virtues Aubrant saw in having the involvement of the ORTF (including its public service obligation to disseminate the culture it thought fulfilled the essential mission of promoting France) are not invalidated by the film's later cinema showings. The whole ethos of Rossellini's film and television histories was there regardless, however, he puts this down to the OTRF's involvement in the first place:

> Qu'on ne nous casse pas les oreilles avec des sornettes comme le nivellement des esprits ou le recul de la culture. Un film aussi ambitieux et aussi rigoureux que celui de Rossellini était impossible à Imaginer dans le contexte cinématographique actuel, sans intervention de l'État m'éocène. L'Histoire, au cinéma, c'est Dumas, ce n'est pas l'Histoire des historiens, ce n'est pas l'Histoire de Philippe Erlanger — auteur du remarquable ‹ Louis XIV › dont s'est inspiré Rossellini.[398]

While Aubrant seems to overstate the alignment between Rossellini's ambitions and the ORTF's *raison d'être* — the ORTF originally wanted Jacques Rivette to shoot the film, but when Rossellini accepted, he brought his own vision with him — he, nevertheless, understands that unlike historical films which revel in blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, Rossellini's film attempts to rationalise the events, thoughts, and actions of the past. Even when Erlanger (the man whose

[397] Ibid – "It is curious, however, to note that Rossellini's work was done in colour and for the big screen; it was presented for the first time in Venice at the end of the film festival; and what is more disturbing, it seems intended, after its passage on the small screen, for normal exploitation in cinemas."

[398] Ibid – "Let us not get our ears broken with nonsense like the levelling of minds or the decline of culture. A film as ambitious and as rigorous as that of Rossellini's was impossible to imagine in the current cinematographic context, without the intervention of the state patron. History in the cinema is Dumas, it is not the History of historians, it is not the History of Philippe Erlanger - author of the remarkable 'Louis XIV' from which Rossellini's was inspired."

biography inspired Rossellini's rational film) co-wrote the screenplay of *Marie-Antoinette, reine de France* (1956) with Jean Delannoy, fictionalisation took precedence over reason. Aubrant says that Rossellini reminds us that moving images can "de refuser le clinquant, le pittoresque et le frivol pour s'en tenir à la rigueur des faits," and that his film is one "d'idées et non de passions vulgaires."[399]Rossellini pays greater attention to what the past was probably like, how people actually lived, what they thought and said, and how they interacted with each other.

The way in which Rossellini brings Versailles and the monarch to the screen is quite different to the other films examined in this thesis. He does not immerse us in the unfolding narrative but observes, explains, and contextualises the events that led to the seizure of power by Louis XIV and the genesis of Versailles, so as to unpack the rational logic and processes that underlined the era in question. He takes the *lieux de mémoire* associated with the world of Louis XIV, strips it down, and reconstructs according to the laws of reason. He also embraces a method akin to the *histoire totale*, where the minutiae of the past are revealed so minutely that they represent an unconsecrated view of the regime. Through processes of empiricism and rationalism, Rossellini unveils to us both the concrete specificity of history and the abstract generality of civilization processes and strategies. The film may speak to the cultural context in which it was made (Malraux's mission to preserve France's cultural heritage, De Gaulle's 'spirit of the nation' and the involvement of the ORTF), but the question of whether the film's rational look at history is in some way an allegory on the Fifth Republic speaking to Gaullists and anti-Gaullists alike) is open to interpretation. Nevertheless, what this chapter as a whole has underlined is the potential for the historical film's identity to be aligned with that of written historical research or scholarship. It has equally demonstrated that historical films need not just give us an account of the past, they can (through some form of artistic representation) *observe*, *explain*, and *contextualise* the working of the past so as to grasp a clearer sense of how the past was lived and how the rational logic underpinning it can be applied on a transhistorical level. We may see *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* on the surface as a study of Louis' consolidation of power, but ultimately, it is a study of

[399] Ibid - "refuse the flashy, the picturesque and the frivolous to stick to the ritual of facts"/"of ideas and not of vulgar passions."

the human condition and the laws, traditions, and protocols which shape civilisation, and perhaps a declaration that the world of Versailles, seemingly an anachronistic entity, in fact shares more similarities to the time this film was released than may at first seems obvious.

Chapter Six: Conclusion- Echoes of History

> *You are entering the heart of the nation's heritage, a place where Louis XIV, the Sun King, is remembered alongside other great men and great moments in history that is still unfolding and in which, if only by virtue of your presence here, you have a part to play.*
>
> — Michel Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*.[400]

IN the preceding four chapters, I have demonstrated that historical films need not simply be understood as conduits for some kind of historical representation but as vehicles for *doing* History (even if the shape, tone, and texture of each varies considerably). Equally, I have demonstrated how historical films can speak to the present moment as much as, if not more, than the epoch in history it is depicting. The historical films examined in this thesis all participate in some process of historical remembering, either to draw our attention to the fact that, as Mark Twain once said, history 'often rhymes,' but equally that harking back to the past can ignite passion for a certain tradition, cause, or *zeitgeist* in the present moment. Even though all the case studies (and in fact the wider corpus of films about Versailles and the *Ancien Régime*) were produced in the context of a France with lengthening republican values, each filmmaker (regardless of their artistic, political, or cultural philosophy) in some way uses this historical backdrop to speak to some issue in the present moment, perhaps because Versailles seems to maintain such cultural weight in France (which can arguably be attributed to that paradox of disjuncture and continuity between 'old' and 'modern' France). What I will now do in these final paragraphs is cross-examine the case studies according to these trends and compare how their shape, tone, and texture informs the way they *do* History. Only by doing this can we possibly highlight the potential of historical film as History, as well as its capacity to act as a conduit for historical memory.

While all four case studies seem committed to using the past as a way of speaking to the present moment, it is in *La Marseillaise* and *L'affaire du collier de la reine* where the concerns of the present seem to seep through the images of the past most prominently. We could in fact go as far as to say that their images function like

[400] Baridon, p.1.

windows on the world, where more about the present is revealed than the past. Historical images of the peasants rising up against the aristocracy in *La Marseillaise*, for instance, reflect that passion Renoir hoped workers of his own age would be injected with to support the Popular Front and bring about social reform. In *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, an equivalence is made between the treatment of the Comtesse de la Motte by the authorities at the end of the film and the treatment of those accused of collaborating during the Second World War by the Gaullist *Résistance*. But one key difference between the films' attempts to make history speak to the present is their tone. *La Marseillaise* is tonally optimistic and has this feeling of momentum which underlines a certainty about the direction of travel, whereas the latter is much more subdued, invoking the past more as an allegorical and philosophical critique of institutions and the direction of travel than a call to arms. Nevertheless, despite their obvious tonal differences, there are overlaps in the feel and pacing of a few sequences. The Insurrection scene in *La Marseillaise*, along with the scenes in the German hotel, for instance, exhibit a remarkably slow-paced and melancholy-toned aura that is at odds with the general feeling of optimism present in the film. They almost function like poetic caesurae, which, rather than interrupt that feeling of certainty regarding the direction of travel, reflect Renoir's attempts to strike a balance between history as something guided by class struggle and something underpinned by romantic humanism. When we see the monarchy's peaceful departure from the Tuileries Palace during the Insurrection, it almost feels dignified. The direction of travel may become ever clearer, but at same time, individuals (regardless of their social status) are not deprived of their *moment*, as it were. Even when Renoir later removes us from the immediate action to linger on the death of Bomier, for example, he does not do so to halt the direction of travel and spoil that feeling of optimism but to remind us of Marx's view that history often repeats itself, 'first as tragedy, second as farce,' and that part of an attempt to alleviate tragedy and injustice is by liberating people from corrupt institutions and offering a different kind of social order. We are equally exposed to injustice and corruption in *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, but the direction of travel is less certain than it is in *La Marseillaise*. The slow pacing of scenes including the trial of the Comtesse de la Motte and her public torturing outside of the prison at the very end of the film should be thought less as examples of caesurae and more as epilogues to a series of incidents. L'Herbier lingers on these moments in the film for a considerable length of time, primarily because they speak directly to the

present moment. The long, arduous trial of the Comtesse is like a collaboration trial (she is automatically assumed to be guilty) and her punishment is reminiscent of the kind of brutal punishment a woman accused of collaboration would have faced around the time of this film's production. Its bleak tone and slow pacing highlights that sense of injustice brought about by institutions that strongly believe they are on right side of history. An equivalence is drawn between the forces of the *Ancien Régime* and those of the Gaullist *Résistance* in order to speak to this injustice but L'Herbier's film is nevertheless more meditative in how it approaches these issues of injustice and tragedy than *La Marseillaise*, which aims to spur its audience into action.

In addition to these questions of tone and pacing is the employment of song and music in the films. *La Marseillaise* includes a repertoire of music, but its most important piece of music is the one that is reflected in its title, 'La Marseillaise.' The anthem is sung repeatedly in the film, and much like those evocative images of the Revolution, this repetition underlines the changing direction of travel in the film and gives the impression that more and more people are taking on the values of *le peuple*. A prominent example is the montage sequence where *fédérés* march through towns and villages and across vast swathes of the French countryside singing the anthem while peasants and workers watch on with pride. By hearing the rhythms of 'La Marseillaise' resonate widely across the country, we get this of growing collective of people who wish to bring about social change and march optimistically into the future. Because the song is symbolically important to modern France and *le peuple* (it was originally an anthem of the people), hearing it repeatedly establishes a lineage between generations of reformers and revolutionaries, which in turn strengthens the 'call to arms' message of the film. The use of music in *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, by contrast, does not aim to mobilise support for a cause or spur its audience into action through song and music, even though it does adopt another constructed *lieu de mémoire* in the form of *Dansons la Carmagnole* at the end of the film. While a revolutionary song written to satirise the monarchy, its use in the film is rather subtle in that we hear it without lyrics and with a less pronounced rhythm as the Comtesse looks helplessly into the distance following her torture. Nevertheless, the use of this anthem works to underline the fact the Necklace Affair and its fallout did irreversible damage the reputation of the monarchy and give us some indication of where history is heading without being too bold. The anthem merely reminds us that the punishment inflicted on the Comtesse de la Motte has been done by an institution that is arguably

beyond salvage, in turn establishing a lineage between the world of monarchy and the world of modern France that will come into being when the institutions of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* collapse. Allegorically, this anthem, in conjunction with the images, may also point to the horrors which followed the Liberation, and predicts a rather bleak direction of travel if such injustices cannot be dealt with more diplomatically. Music is similarly employed at the end of *Si Versailles m'était conté*, but with completely different intentions. On the Escalier des cent marches, a band of trumpeters play their own rendition of 'La Marseillaise,' and although it is same anthem we hear in Renoir's film, it does not use it as part of a mobilising strategy, it employs it only once as a symbolic gesture to establish a sense of continuity between 'old' and 'modern' France, or more specifically, between Versailles and modern France.

This sense of continuity plays into the self-exculpatory vision of Guitry's film, and his aim to stress the permanence of Versailles (very much anticipating Nora's concept of a *lieu de mémoire*). This is not only conveyed through the music at the end of the film but through its various framing devices. Historical events are framed by Guitry's voice-over and in-vision narration, as well as the museum curator at the end of the film. Rather than simply charting Versailles' history from in its origins in the *Grand Siècle* to Louis Phillipe's opening of the Galerie des Batailles in 1837, the film self-consciously recognises itself as narrative history, and acknowledges that each epoch in Versailles' history has a distinct purpose. It guides us through Versailles' spaces with a noticeably theatrical *exercise de style* and set of 'quotations' that contribute to its overall feeling of permanence, and through images such as those of the Revolution and Napoleon, it romantically establishes a sense of continuity between old and modern France. *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* equally conveys a sense of permanence, though it does this less with symbolic intentions (at least this is not explicit in the film), rather it conveys the notion (through observation, contextualisation, and rationalisation) that memory lasts both through the objects which tell us 'how' the past was lived and a set of rational processes, decisions, and actions which can be abstracted from the epoch under study and repurposed in the present moment. If we accept the interpretation that the film was an allegory on Charles de Gaulle's premiership, then it would be perfectly reasonable to suggest that it establishes a link between past and present, or Versailles and modern France, rather than highlighting a disjuncture. Nevertheless, the film's pursuit of truth through

empiricism and reason puts its desire to establish a sense of continuity between past and present at odds with Guitry's method for establishing continuity, which is achieved primarily through authorial presence, various framing devices, and a theatrical *exercise de style*. A disparity between the films in how they establish a sense of continuity is equally apparent in the tone they adopt, as well as their focalisation.

Because *La Prise de Pouvoir Par Louis XIV* adopts a method akin to the *histoire totale* and aspires to build a fuller sense of how past was lived through observation, contextualisation, and rationalisation, its tone is somewhat indifferent. In other words, it does not aim to immerse its audience in the drama and spectacle of the past, but critically distance them from it. It is this distant observing where we can say something about focalisation, or rather the perspective through which the narrative is presented. Although the film subordinates narrative in favour of observation and rationalisation, we could argue that insofar as we are given narrative information it is presented through the lens of empiricism and rationalism rather than a specific character. We see courtiers and workers operate in this world together, but Rossellini does not home in on, glorify, or celebrate any particular group or individual. Servants, maids, footmen, stonemasons, and builders are present not because Rossellini wants to tell the story through their eyes but because they are an inextricable part of the depicted world's mechanics. They in effect rationalise and contextualise the spectacle of history, and form part of the process in which the artifice of Versailles comes into This is quite different to *La Marseillaise*, where the focalisation is primarily on workers, peasants, and *fédérés*, each of which are depicted by Renoir as emblems of the revolutionary idea. Tonally, the film is one of optimism, and as we get from the collective singing, marching, and dancing, it is one that does indeed celebrate and glorify the worker. However, it is crucial to note that Renoir focalises the worker not simply to highlight class struggle and oppression, or to fixate on the negative, but to underline the ways in which workers can realise their powers and capacities to liberate themselves from current social order. Equally, while class divisions are remembered vividly in its portrait of the Revolution, the film actually attempts to construct a human nature, where each individual has capacity for self-realisation, and in turn, realises this same capacity in others. The film's optimistic tone and focalisation of the worker plays into Renoir's idea of history as a tool for social change or a way of spurring the audience into action. A sense of continuity between the world of the past and the world of the present is underlined through the repeated gestures and traditions of change and

revolution on the left. *Si Versailles m'était conte* exposes us to a broad range of individuals, which stress from monarchs and courtiers to philosophers and peasants, but he does this to underline a certain romantic view of Versailles as place which represents *La France* in general. Peasants and workers are depicted as being part of its story rather than as outsiders to it, or oppositional figures willing to rebel against it. By establishing this romantic sense of continuity and treating the spaces of Versailles as a synecdoche of *La France*, the film speaks to the broader cultural context in which Versailles' memory was being enlarged (that is to say, the calls to restore the palace after years of neglect).

Attempts at enlarging historical memory and underlining the symbolic importance of the past through historical film speaks to that broader disparity between memory and history, a disparity which is in fact mostly united in Guitry's film because of its self-conscious authorship and narration (it exemplifies Rosenstone's History as narrative *par excellence*) but is less so in the other films. *La Marseillaise*, for instance, can, on the one hand, be described as *doing* History by the fact Renoir drew upon the expertise of Georges Lefebvre and the *Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française*, as well as a catalogue of historical accounts and quotations (one of the most well-known being La Rochefoucauld's declaration to Louis XVI, 'non sire, 'c'est une révolution!'). At the same time, the fact Renoir's film emphasises the emancipatory power of history and shows the audience how one epoch transformed into another rather than simply taking a snapshot of the epoch as a whole, tells us that the film is not simply an academic account of the decline of the monarchy and the Revolution but a conduit for enlarging the historical memory of a revolutionary tradition, with the aim of cementing enthusiasm for the Front Populaire. That is not to say historians never use their work to enlarge certain kinds of historical memory. Historians in the Marxist tradition (of which Georges Lefebre's work forms a part) often underline the direction of travel, and in the spirit of Walter Benjamin, believe that history is in a state of flux and can be defined in the present. Renoir's film appears to be doing something similar, though it is equally underscored by a romantic tone and texture that is more in line with the similes of revolutionary poetry, such as Wordsworth's description of *le peuple* in *The Prelude* as "uprisen, Fresh as the morning star."[401] If

[401] William Wordsworth and Andrew Jackson George, *The Prelude Or, Growth Of A Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem*, 1st edn (New York: D.C. Heath & Co, 1888), p.190.

the tone and texture of *La Marseillaise* enlarges the historical memory of the Revolution as a way of cementing their enthusiasm for social change, then the tone and texture of Rossellini's *La Prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* is very much the antithesis. More cerebral than emotional, it attempts (through disinterested observation and rational explanation) to disentangle itself from the mystifying notion of memory to get as close as possible to the matter of how the past the was lived. Putting the interpretations of the film as an allegory to one side, it is the most explicitly historiographical (a form of 'historiophoty', as White might describe it), not least because it tries to distance us from, rather than immerse us in, the world of the past. It creates the illusion that we are seeing the past objectively without any value judgements imposed upon it. The world of the past becomes an event in knowledge, and is contextualised by a rational logic, which Isaiah Berlin describes as "a logically connected structure of laws and generalisations susceptible of demonstration and verification [that] could be constructed," and leads to a "rejection of the authority of revelation, sacred writings and their accepted interpreters, tradition, prescription, and every form of non-rational and transcendent source of knowledge."[402] Through a rational process of contextualising and explaining, Rossellini's film attempts to intellectualise the past, but these are not the only tools at a filmmaker's disposal for intellectualising the past, as it were. *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, for example, critiques the complex shape and direction of history inside the story itself, through the wise remarks of Cagliostro on the one hand and the justice at the end of the film, who, after witnessing the Comtesse de la Motte's torture, notes that such an act constitutes a punishment for the monarchy more generally. But in each instance, these memories enlarge a set of questions which speak to the present moment and to the direction of travel in history. The film offers a reflection on the past that could be described on the one hand as a process of deliberate remembering (the contemporary relevance of those images of the Comtesse de la Motte's torture) but on the other, a process of intellectualising the past (its dealings with the complex shape of history and the pattern of civilisations).

What all four case studies seem to demonstrate is that historical films are neither exclusively conduits for historical memory nor praxes for *doing* history but are

[402] Henry Hardy and Isaiah Berlin, *Against The Current: Essays In The History Of Ideas*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p.1-2.

often a combination of both. This may of course tell us that history and memory as concepts in and of themselves can never be totally separated, and in fact, they frequently overlap with one another. Nevertheless, to argue that historical films are conduits for historical memory requires a different focus than to argue the case that historical films are praxes for *doing* history. The former depends primarily upon knowledge of the contexts (political, national, social, economic, cultural) in which said historical films are produced, as well as how and why certain events, people and places were being remembered so voraciously (or not) at the time of their production. The latter, however, depends upon the shape and texture of the historical films themselves, including how they engage with their sources, how they organises material, and how they convey this information to the audience through a variety of formal and stylistic devices. But the point at which history and memory overlap is the recognition that any historian (or someone who is dealing with the past) is inevitably going to be influenced by the values of their own time. R.G Collingwood recognised that the past is a different world from that of the historian's, and has its own values, but nevertheless maintains that historians should "call the past, *as such*, into being by recollecting and by thinking historically), which is achieved by "disentangling it out of the present in which it actually exists."[403] Whether this can be achieved is a point of great contention, not least because of the difficulty in separating history and memory. But if we consider the historical films examined in this thesis, we find that the dialogue between history and memory actually lends itself to demonstrating that the past is not simply dead but something which can be analogised or contextualised to the present. Whether we are talking about fiction films or traditional narrative history in books, there is always an attempt on behalf on the filmmaker or historian to reignite the relevance of the past in the someway, and this is achieved in both instances not simply through the presentation of historical content but through some formal or stylistic use of language (verbal or visual).

To return to the culturally specific role of history and memory as it applies to this thesis, the case studies examined demonstrate that Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* form such a crucial part of French culture (which we may attribute to the paradox of disjuncture and continuity mentioned throughout) that they lend

[403] Jan van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), p.36.

themselves to various kinds of artistic, political, or philosophical perspectives on the past and insights into the present moment, whether to stress the importance of imparting French patrimony to posterity, establish some sense of historical continuity and lineage of the nation's past, or to draw our attention the bigger patterns that mark history and civilisation. Thomas Gaehtgens notes that Versailles represents more than the sum of its own parts — it is a metonym, synecdoche, metaphor, and symbol for a period in French history that "was so determinant that Versailles represents much more than a lieu de memoire among others. Its political and cultural influence spread all over Europe and its effects are still visible today."[404] Emmanuel Macron, the incumbent president of France and a staunch defender of the Republic, rather enjoys the pomp and pageantry of his address to Congress at Versailles and has an apartment at the hunting lodge located next to the Palace, known as La Lanterne. The French state more generally has long been committed to the preservation of Versailles, and in 1995, the *Établissement public du château, du musée et du domaine national de Versailles* was set up (and led by Catherine Pégard) as a body responsible for this task. In 2003, the body announced a €500 million investment for the 'Grand Versailles' restoration project. Versailles, in a France long defined by republican values, is not treated as a relic of a bygone age but one vital piece of *L'hexagone*, vital in the sense that it was Versailles which effectively paved the way for modern France. *La France* is suffused with its memory, and this memory is manifested in a web of culture from art and literature to film and performance. Versailles is a *lieu de mémoire* artists, writers, and filmmakers have consistently referred to in the various iterations of the Republic, and this continues into the present day. This thesis has focused in depth on how a cross-section of historical films dealing with memories of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* can be understood as conduits of memory and praxes for *doing* history, but further scholarship could offer a broader survey of these memories in film and culture across a longer time period or even in a transnational context. Further scholarship to this end could examine cross-cultural exchanges, and how these exchanges shape the way in which memory and history are negotiated across nations, such as in the recent *Versailles* (2015-2018) TV series, whose cultural exchanges are French, Canadian, and Québécois. But what I have highlighted through this

[404] Quoted in, Claire Goldstein, *Vaux and Versailles: The Appropriations, Erasures, and Accidents That Made Modern France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p.19.

examination of historical film (and would hope future scholarship highlights) is a method of enquiring into the workings of memory that was pioneered by Pierre Nora, who thinks "about the nation without nationalism and about France without any universalistic *a priori*; whose inspiration is almost ethnographic; and whose method therefore consists in shedding light on the construction of representations, the formation of historical objects over time."[405]

[405] Nora, xxi.

Appendices

Appendix I: Key Dates in the history of Versailles and the *Ancien Régime*

1500s – what we now call the *Ancien Régime* (owing to the French Revolution) begins with the late-Valois dynasty and early-Bourbon dynasty

1607 – The Dauphin (who will become Louis XIII) visits Versailles for the first time on a hunting trip with his father, Henri IV (the first Bourbon monarch of France)

1630 - *la journée des Dupes* (Day of the Dupes) – first major event to take place at Versailles (a standoff between Marie de' Medici and Cardinal Richelieu, with Louis XIII in the middle)

Reign of Louis XIV

1664 - *Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée* takes place at Versailles to mark the beginning of the building campaigns

1668 - The 'Great Royal Entertainment' takes place to celebrate the King's victory after the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle

1682 – Versailles is established as a formal seat of power

1685 – A reception for the Doge of Genoa takes place in the *Galerie des glaces*

1686 – A Reception is held for the Ambassador of Siam

1697 – The marriage of the Duke of Burgundy and Marie-Adélaïde takes place

1715 – A reception is held in the *Galerie des glaces* for the Ambassadors of Persia**;** Death of Louis XIV on 1st September after a 72-year reign

Reign of Louis XV

1717 - Peter the Great visits Versailles

1722 - The Court returns to the Palace after seven years

1742 - The ambassadors of the Sublime Porte are invited to the Palace; The Yew Tree Ball takes place, where Louis XV became more closely acquainted with the future Marquise de Pompadour

1757 – An assassination attempt was made on King Louis XV by Robert-François Damiens as he was leaving the Palace

1763-1764 – The young Mozart visits Versailles

1770- The dauphin and Marie-Antoinette marry

1774 - Louis XV dies after 59 years on the throne

Reign of Louis XVI

1777 - Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II visits the Palace

1778-1783 – The United States of America (as a nation) is recognised at Versailles, then in 1778, Benjamin Franklin visits the Palace, where he is promised military assistance by Louis XVI

1783 - The first hot air balloon flight is carried out by the Montgolfier in the Palace grounds

1784-1785 - The affair of the diamond necklace

1789 – Louis XVI is forced to Summon he Estates General (the beginning of the French Revolution); Jeu de Paume Oath sworn in near the Palace of Versailles; on 6th October, the King departs Versailles, marking the end of Versailles as an active seat of politics

Post-French Revolution and 19th century

1797 - The Special Museum of the French School is created

1805 - Pope Pius VII visits Versailles shortly after coronating Napoleon

1837 – Louis Philippe, King of the French, opens the historic galleries

1855 - Queen Victoria visits the Palace

1871 - Proclamation of the German Empire in the *Galerie des glaces*

1871-1879 – the debates of the parliamentary assemblies are held at the Palace

1875 – The Third Republic is officially proclaimed at Versailles

20th century

1919 - The Treaty of Versailles takes place

1940 – The *Wehrmacht* occupy Versailles

1950s – Calls to restore the Palace grow; Sacha Guitry makes *Si Versailles m'était conté*

1962-1966 - André Malraux takes on the project of restoring the Grand Trianon

1982 - President Mitterrand hosts the G7 summit at Versailles

1995 – *The Établissement public du château, du musée et du domaine national de Versailles* is set up

1999 – A hurricane at Versailles causes serious damage

21st Century

2003 - The "Grand Versailles" project announced, which proposed to include the replanting of the gardens (given that 10,000 trees were lost during the storm)

2004-2011 – Phase One of the "Grand Versailles" project takes place (which includes the modernisation of its utilities and heating systems)

2006 - The restoration of the Hall of Mirrors is completed

2012-2016 – Phase Two of the "Grand Versailles" project takes place (which includes updating all the heating systems, as well as repairs to the roofing and woodwork at various points around the Estate).

2015 – To commemorate 300 years since the death of Louis XIV, a re-enactment of a grand masked ball took place in the grounds of the Palace.

Appendix II: Timeline of Films/Television Programmes/Documentaries that are either about Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* (this includes the epoch in general) or were Filmed at the Estate in some capacity

1904

Le Règne de Louis XIV, dir. by Vincent Lorant-Heilbronn (Pathé Frères, 1904).

1908

Plusieurs scènes sur Marie-Antoinette, dir. By Henri Lavedan and Georges Lenôtre (Film d'art, 1908).

1911

L'affaire du collier de la Reine, dir. By Camille de Morchon (Pathé frères**,** 1911).

1923

L'Enfant roi, dir. by Jean Kemm (Société des Cinéromans, 1923).

1925

Fanfan la Tulipe, dir. By René Leprince (Société des Cinéromans, 1925).

1927

Napoléon, dir. By Abel Gance (Ciné France, Films Abel Gance, Isepa-Wengeroff Film GmbH, Pathé Consortium Cinéma, Société Westi, Société générale des films, 1927).

1929

Le collier de la reine, dir. By Gaston Ravel and Tony Leklain (Gaumont-Franco Film-Aubert, CGC L. Aubert, 1929).

1930

Un Caprice de la Pompadour, dir. By Joë Hamman and Willi Wolff (Ellen Richter Film, Les Établissements Jacques Haïk, 1931).

1938

La Marseillaise, dir. by Jean Renoir (Societé d'Exploitation et de Distribution de Films (SEDIF) and Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), 1938).

Marie Antoinette, dir. By W.S Van Dyke (MGM, 1938).

1942

Le Mariage de Chiffon, dir. By Claude Autant-Lara (Industrie Cinematographique, 1942).

1946

L'affaire du collier de la reine, dir. by Marcel L'Herbier (Île de France Film, 1946).

1953

Madame de…, dir. By Max Ophüls (Franco London Films, Indusfilms, Rizzoli Film, 1953).

Si Versailles m'était conté, dir. by Sacha Guitry (Cocinor, 1953).

1954

Madame du Barry, dir. by Christian-Jaque (Filmsonor, Francinex, Les Films Ariane, Rizzoli Film, 1954).

1955

L'affaire des poisons, dir. By Henri Decoin (Franco London Films, Excelsa Film 1955).

Napoléon, dir. By Sacha Guitry (Courts et Longs Métrages, Filmsonor, Francinex, Rizzoli Film, 1955).

1956

Marie Antoinette Queen of France, dir. by Jean Delannoy (Franco London Films, Les Films Gibé, Rizzoli Film, 1956).

1961

Napoléon II, L'Aiglon, dir. By Claude Boissol (Films Matignon, 1961).

1962

La Fayette, dir. By Jean Dréville (Les Films Copernic, Cosmos, 1962).

1966

La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV, dir. by Roberto Rossellini (ORTF, 8th October 1966).

1975

Marie-Antoinette, dir. By Guy-André Lefranc (TF1, 1975).

1978

Molière, dir. By Ariane Mnouchkine (Les Films 13, Les Films du Soleil et de la Nuit, Antenne-2, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1978).

1980

Lady Oscar, dir. By Jacques Demy (Kitty Music Corporation, Shiseido, NTV, Toho, Ciné Tamaris, 1980).

1981

Miss Morrison's Ghosts, dir. By John Bruce (Anglia Television, 1981).

1985

Liberté, égalité, choucroute, dir. By Jean Yanne (Les Films 21, FR 3 Cinéma, Les Producteurs Associés, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie, Societa Investimenti Milanese, 1985).

1988

Dangerous Liaisons, dir. By Stephen Frears (Lorimar Film Entertainment, NFH Limited, 1988).

1989

La Révolution française: les Années-lumière, dir. By Robert Enrico (Les Films Ariane, Films A2, Laura Films, Antea Cinematografica, Alcor Films, Alliance Communications Corporation, 1989).

1994

Jefferson à Paris, dir. By James Ivory (Touchstone Pictures, Merchant Ivory Productions, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, 1994).

1995

Ridicule, dir. By Patrice Leconte (Epithète Films, Cinéa, France 3 Cinéma, 1995).

1996

Beaumarchais, l'insolent, dir. By Edouard Molinaro (Téléma, Le Studio Canal+, France 2 Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, Canal+, 1996)

L'allée du roi, dir. By Nina Companeez (Ciné Mag Bodard, France 2, La Sept-Arte, Société Française de Production (SFP), January 1st 1996).

2000

Le Roi danse, dir. By Gérard Corbiau (K-Star, France 2 Cinéma, 2000).

2001

The Affair of the Necklace, dir. By Charles Shyer (Alcon Entertainment, 2001).

2006

Marie Antoinette, dir. By Sofia Coppola (Columbia Pictures, Pricel, Tohokushinsha Film Corporation, American Zoetrope, 2006).

2007

Jean de la Fontaine, le défi, dir. By Daniel Vigne (Cinétévé, France 2 Cinéma, 2007).

Molière, dir. By Laurent Tirard (Fidélité Productions, France 2 Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, Wild Bunch, 2007).

2008

Versailles, le rêve d'un roi, dir. By Thierry Binisti (Les Films d'Ici, France 2, Château de Versailles, 2008).

Versailles, dir. By Pierre Schoeller (Les Films Pelléas, 2008).

2009

Louis XV, le soleil noir, dir. By Thierry Binisti (Les Films d'Ici, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Château de Versailles, France 2, 2009).

2010

Nannerl, la sœur de Mozart, dir. By René Féret (Les Films Alyne, 2010).

2011

Midnight in Paris, dir. By Woody Allen (Mediapro, Versátil Cinema, Gravier Productions, Pontchartrain Productions, Televisió de Catalunya, Catalan Films & TV, 2011).

2014

A Little Chaos, dir. By Alan Rickman (Artemis Films, BBC Films, 2014).

2015

Versailles, dir. By various (Capa Drama, Incendo Productions, Zodiak, 2015-2018).

2016

La Mort de Louis XIV, dir. by Albert Serra (Capricci Films, 2016).

Filmography

La Marseillaise, dir. by Jean Renoir (Societé d'Exploitation et de Distribution de Films (SEDIF) and Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), 1938).

Director: Jean Renoir
Screenplay: Jean Renoir
Cinematography: Jean-Paul Alphen, Jean Bourgoin, Alain Douarinou, Jean Louis, Jean-Marie Maillols
Editor: Marguerite Renoir
Sound: Jean Bertrand, Joseph de Bretagne, J. Demede
Music: Joseph Kosma, Henry Sauveplane
Principal Cast: Pierre Renoir (Louis XVI), Lise Delamare (Marie-Antoinette), Louis Jouvet (Roederer), Andrex (Honoré Arnaud), Léon Larive (Picard), William Aguet (Duque of Rochefoucauld-Liancourt), Aimé Clariond (M. de Saint-Laurent), Edmond Ardisson (Bomier), Jenny Hélia (Louise Vauclair), Jean Ayme (M. de Fougerolles), Irene Joachim (Mme. de Saint-Laurent)

L'affaire du collier de la reine, dir. by Marcel L'Herbier (Île de France Film, 1946).

Director: Marcel L'Herbier
Screenplay: Charles Spaak
Cinematography: Roger Hubert
Editor: Émilienne Nelissen
Sound: René-Christian Forget
Music: Maurice Thiriet
Principal Cast: Viviane Romance (Jeanne de la Motte), Maurice Escande (Le cardinal de Rohan), Jacques Dacqmine (Rétaux de Villette), Jean Hébey (Le roi Louis XVI), Michel Salina (Le comte de la Motte), Monique Cassin (Nicole, la fille Oliva), Jean-Louis Allibert (Camille Desmoulins), Pierre Dux (Cagliostro), Marion Dorian (La reine Marie-Antoinette)

Si Versailles m'était conté, dir. by Sacha Guitry (Cocinor, 1953).

Director: Sacha Guitry
Screenplay: Sacha Guitry
Cinematography: Pierre Montazel
Editor: Raymond Lamy
Sound: Joseph de Bretagne
Music: Jean Françaix
Principal Cast: Michel Auclair (Jacques Damiens), Jean-Pierre Aumont (Cardinal de Rohan), Jean-Louis Barrault (François Fénelon), Jeanne Boitel (Madame de Sevigné), Annie Cordy (Madame Langlois), Gilbert Bokanowski (Louis XVI), Gino Cervi (Cagliostro), Jean Chevrier (Turenne), Aimé Clariond (Rivarol), Claudette Colbert (Madame de Montespan), Nicole Courcel (Madame de Chalis), Danièle Delorme (Louison Chabray), Yves Deniaud (Le paysan), Daniel Gélin (Jean Collinet), Fernand Gravey

(Molière), Sacha Guitry (Louis XIV – older), Pierre Larquey (guide to musée de Versailles), Jean Marais (Louis XV), Georges Marchal (young Louis XIV), Lana Marconi (Marie-Antoinette), Mary Marquet (Madame de Maintenon), Gaby Morlay (Madame de la Motte), Giselle Pascal (Louise de la Vallière), Jean-Claude Pascal (Axel de Fersen), Édith Piaf (Woman of the People), Gérard Philipe (D'Artagnan), Micheline Presle (Madame de Pompadour), Jean Richard (Du Croisy/Tartuffe), Tino Rossi (the gondolier), Raymond Souplex (commissaire-priseur), Jean Tissier (guide to musée de Versailles), Charles Vanel (Monsieur de Vergennes), Orson Welles (Benjamin Franklin), Pauline Carton (La Voisin), Jean Desailly (Marivaux), Gilbert Gil (Jean-Jacques Rousseau), Marie Mansart (Madame de Kerlor), Nicole Maurey (Mademoiselle de Fontanges), Jean Murat (Louvois), Jean-Jacques Delbo (Monsieur de la Motte), Louis Seigner (Lavoisier), Brigitte Bardot (Mademoiselle de la Rosille)

La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV, dir. by Roberto Rossellini (ORTF, 8th October 1966).

Director: Roberto Rossellini
Screenplay: Philippe Erlanger, Jean Gruault
Cinematography: Georges Leclerc, Jean-Louis Picavet
Editor: Armand Ridel
Sound: Daniel Couteau, Claude Fabre, Jacques Gayet, Jean-Paul Quiquempois, Betty Willemetz, Jean-Claude Brisson
Music: Betty Willemetz
Principal Cast: Jean-Marie Patte (Louis XIV), Raymond Jourdan (Jean-Baptiste Colbert), Giulio Cesare Silvagni (Cardinal Mazarin), Katharina Renn (Anne of Austria), Dominique Vincent (Suzanne, Marquise du Plessis-Bellière), Pierre Barrat (Nicolas Fouquet), Fernand Fabre (Michel Le Tellier, Marquis of Barbezieux), Françoise Ponty (Louise de la Vallière), Joelle Laugeois (Maria Theresa of Spain)

For the list of films (in alphabetical order by title) mentioned in the body of this thesis (that in some way deal with Versailles and the *Ancien Régime* and/or were filmed (partially or totally) at the palace), see below:

A Little Chaos, dir. By Alan Rickman (Artemis Films, BBC Films, 2014).

Dangerous Liaisons, dir. By Stephen Frears (Lorimar Film Entertainment, NFH Limited, 1988).

Jean de la Fontaine, le défi, dir. By Daniel Vigne (Cinétévé, France 2 Cinéma, 2007).

La Fayette, dir. By Jean Dréville (Les Films Copernic, Cosmos, 1962).

L'affaire des poisons, dir. By Henri Decoin (Franco London Films, Excelsa Film 1955).

L'allée du roi, dir. By Nina Companeez (Ciné Mag Bodard, France 2, La Sept-Arte, Société Française de Production (SFP), January 1st 1996).

La Mort de Louis XIV, dir. by Albert Serra (Capricci Films, 2016).

La Révolution française: les Années-lumière, dir. By Robert Enrico (Les Films Ariane, Films A2, Laura Films, Antea Cinematografica, Alcor Films, Alliance Communications Corporation, 1989).

Le Mariage de Chiffon, dir. By Claude Autant-Lara (Industrie Cinematographique, 1942).

L'Enfant roi, dir. by Jean Kemm (Société des Cinéromans, 1923).

Le Règne de Louis XIV, dir. by Vincent Lorant-Heilbronn (Pathé Frères, 1904).

Le Roi danse, dir. By Gérard Corbiau (K-Star, France 2 Cinéma, 2000).

Les Grandes Eaux de Versailles, dir. by Unknown (Pathé Frères, 1904).

Madame de…, dir. By Max Ophüls (Franco London Films, Indusfilms, Rizzoli Film, 1953).

Madame du Barry, dir. by Christian-Jaque (Filmsonor, Francinex, Les Films Ariane, Rizzoli Film, 1954).

Madame du Barry, dir. By Ernst Lubitsch (Projektions-AG Union, 1919).

Marie Antoinette, dir. By Sofia Coppola (Columbia Pictures, Pricel, Tohokushinsha Film Corporation, American Zoetrope, 2006).

Marie Antoinette, dir. By W.S Van Dyke (MGM, 1938).

Marie Antoinette Queen of France, dir. by Jean Delannoy (Franco London Films, Les Films Gibé, Rizzoli Film, 1956).

Miss Morrison's Ghosts, dir. By John Bruce (Anglia Television, 1981).

Molière, dir. By Ariane Mnouchkine (Les Films 13, Les Films du Soleil et de la Nuit, Antenne-2, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1978).

Molière, dir. By Laurent Tirard (Fidélité Productions, France 2 Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, Wild Bunch, 2007).

Ridicule, dir. By Patrice Leconte (Epithète Films, Cinéa, France 3 Cinéma, 1995).

Un Caprice de la Pompadour, dir. By Joë Hamman and Willi Wolff (Ellen Richter Film, Les Établissements Jacques Haïk, 1931).

Versailles, dir. by Unknown (Pathé Baby, 1920).

Versailles, dir. By various (Capa Drama, Incendo Productions, Zodiak, 2015-2018).

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