Portrait of the King

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The present work is, in a sense, the follow-up and consequence of *La Critique du discours: Etudes sur la Logique de Port-Royal et les Pensées de Pascal*. While researching that book I was struck by the prominence that the grammarians and logicians of Port-Royal gave to the notion of representation, as well as by the general equivalence they posed or presupposed between it and the notion of sign at whatever level on which they analyzed language (term, proposition, discourse) and in whatever domain that language belonged (verbal, written, iconic).

I placed this equivalence in question by inquiring into the Port-Royalist definition of sign as representation in two domains where the signifying function had to play an essential role, domains that nonetheless escaped to a certain extent the constraints of its rules of functioning. These were the exegetic domain, the discourse of God to man, and the rhetorical domain, the discourse of man to man. Representation in both cases ceased to represent, because in it began the play of figures. From that point on the analysis of language could no longer be purely and simply its description; surreptitiously, the analysis became its regulation, or rather its normalization. The Port-Royal *Logic* then appeared to me to be the exemplary text in which fact and right, observation and prescription, the given and the ideal—if not to say the ideological—intermingle indissolubly.

It was a question, then, of bringing to light an endeavor at work inside the theoretical and practical model of representation and sign, an endeavor that two indications animating the text itself were found to suggest. The first indication concerned the place and function of the Pascalian citations that intervened at key points in the theory of language as a countermodel to what the Port-Royalists
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were proposing. This countermodel, far from being imported from the outside as a heterogeneous element, was none other than that of Port-Royal, but only to the extent that it had begun to work in its articulations, in the play of its parts, in its pretexts as in its margins.\(^2\) Pascal called this internal endeavor, this flip side of the logicians' analytic mastery of language, not its hidden face, but rather the processes it deployed to accomplish itself, designating its critique in the same gesture.

I found the other indication while examining the additions made in successive editions of the *Logic* between 1662 and 1683. These additions concerned again two key problems in the representational model. On the one hand was the structure of the sign-representation, where the question of distinction and confusion between meaning and referent was raised, confusion being able to appear, paradoxically, as the mark of a true language and distinction, as that of error. On the other hand was the structure of the sentence-judgment, where the questions of its alethic and existential values was raised.\(^3\) Now in these texts, both occasional and essential, I encountered an example that, although privileged from the point of view of logico-grammatical theory, seemed to emerge from a domain outside of it. It concerned the formula that simultaneously presents, accomplishes, and summarizes the Catholic dogma of real presence, "This is my body," put in question by Calvinist ministers in the name of an "erroneous" linguistic interpretation of the word of Jesus Christ. This utterance, a speech act that leads toward a deictic by an ontological affirmation, a predicate that is the body of the subject of enunciation—is not this utterance a figure? Or else does the thing shown become in and through the speech act the act itself, that is to say, the body-subject? The question of the Eucharist from then on lost its status as additional and circumstantial example, as application of the theory of sign as representation, while founding, centrally, the representational model and, at the same time, putting it to work, challenging it, and ultimately producing its internal critique.\(^4\)

We still find today in this work both Pascal in his eminently quotable text and the Eucharist in its Catholically repeated formula. The work was dedicated, while playing a bit on words and on the rhetorical figure of the chiasmus, to the representation of the king and to the king of representation, dedicated, in other words, to the relationships between power and representation. These relationships could be reformulated as two questions: what about power and its representations and, inversely, what about representation and its powers? The expression of the conjunction of power in general with representation is uttered here as reversible into that of a double and reciprocal subordination, and that is what the present work explores in the field of politics. The first relationship is that the institution of power appropriates representation as its own. It gives itself representations, and it produces its own representations of language and image—to what ends? The second relationship is that representation, or the framework of repre-
representation, produces its power and produces itself as power—what are the powers of representation? These questions would remain empty, however, if the one or the many meanings of representation or of power were not made more specific.

What is re-presenting, if not presenting anew (in the modality of time) or in the place of (in the modality of space)? The prefix re- introduces into the term the value of substitution. Something that was present and is no longer is now represented. In the place of something that is present elsewhere, a given is present here. At the place of representation then, there is a thing or person absent in time or space, or rather an other, and a substitution operates with a double of this other in its place. Thus the angel at the tomb on the morning of the resurrection: “He is not here, he is elsewhere, in Galilee, as he had said he would be”; thus the ambassador in the foreign country. Such would be the first effect of representation in general: to do as if the other, the absent one, were here and the same; not presence but effect of presence. It is surely not the same, but it is as if it were, and often better than, the same. Thus the photograph of the deceased on the mantelpiece; thus the narrative of the battle of the past by the narrator of today. Alberti, in the second book of his treatise On Painting, was already writing that “painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive. Even after many centuries they are recognized with great pleasure and with great admiration for the painter.” A marvel of representation, this effect is its power, a power (a divine force, going along with Alberti) with a hold on the transitive dimension of representation; this thing that is other, the simulacrum of the same, is the direct object of to represent.

But we also read in the dictionary: “To represent: to exhibit, to expose to sight. To ‘represent’ one’s license, one’s passport, one’s birth certificate. To ‘represent’ someone, to make him appear personally, to put him in the hands of those who had put him in our trust.” To “represent,” then, is to show, to intensify, to duplicate a presence. It is no longer a question of being someone’s herald or ambassador in order to represent him, but to exhibit or show him in the flesh to those who ask for a reckoning. The prefix re- no longer introduces into the terms a substitution value but, rather, an intensity or frequency. The dictionary examples are revealing in their archaisms: they all concern to one degree or another the exhibition of a title. Thus, by the “representation” of one’s passport at the border the bearer not only presents himself really but also presents his legitimate presence by the sign or title that authorizes or permits, not to say compels, his presence. Representation lies here in the element of sameness that it intensifies through duplication. In this sense it is its reflection, and to represent will always be to present oneself representing something. At the same time representation constitutes its subject. Such would be the second effect of representation in general, to constitute a subject through reflection of the representational framework: it is as if a subject were producing the representations, the ideas he
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has of things; it is as if there were neither world nor reality except for and through a subject, the center of that world. This “idealistic” production and centering would be only substantivized simulacra of the framework’s functioning, and of the diversified effects resulting both from the reflection of the framework onto itself and from the intensification through redoubling of its functioning.

The first effect of the representational framework and the first power of representation are the effect and power of presence instead of absence and death; the second effect and second power are the effect of subject, that is, the power of institution, authorization, and legitimation as resulting from the functioning of the framework reflected onto itself. If, then, representation in general has indeed a double power—that of rendering anew and imaginarily present, not to say living, the absent and the dead and that of constituting its own legitimate and authorized subject by exhibiting qualifications, justifications, and titles of the present and living to being—in other words if representation reproduces not only de facto but also de jure the conditions that make its reproduction possible, then we understand that it is in the interests of power to appropriate it for itself. Representation and power share the same nature.

What do we say when we say power? Power is, first, to have the ability to exert an action on something or someone, not to act or to do but to have the potential of doing so, to have the force to do or to act. Power, in the most vulgar and general sense, is to be capable of force, to have—and I must insist on this property—a reserve of force that is not expended but that is in a state of being expendable. But what, then, is a force that is neither manifested nor exerted? As Pascal says, it is master only of external actions. As potential, power is also valorization of that potential as an obligatory constraint, generating duties as law. In this sense power means to institute potential as law, the former conceived as the possibility and capacity of force. And it is here that representation plays its role, in that it is at once the means of potential and its foundation. Hence the general hypothesis that supports the whole of the present endeavor, that the representational framework operates the transformation of force into potential and of force into power, and that twice, on the one hand by modalizing the force as potential and on the other by valorizing potential as a legitimate and obligatory state, and by justifying it.

How can representation carry out this transformation? On the one hand representation puts force in signs (as we put a boat in water) and on the other hand it signifies force in legal discourse. It carries out the substitution for the exterior act, where a force is manifested in order to annihilate another force in a struggle to the death, of signs of force, which need only be seen as a force to be believed. Representation in and through its signs represents force: as delegates of force, signs are not the representatives of concepts but rather the representatives of force, which can be grasped only in their representational effects. The power-effect of representation is representation itself.
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But what does a force do? We can grasp what it does in all clarity in the process of struggle of one force against another, and this process—even if it is a question of abstraction, it has the value of an ideal model of intelligibility—has no other objective than destruction. A force is force only through annihilation, and in this sense all force is, in its very essence, absolute, since it is such only to annihilate all other forces, to be without exterior and incomparable. Such is the struggle to the death of forces that we find in all political reflection on the origins of the state by Machiavelli, Hobbes, or Pascal, continuing to Hegel or Clausewitz, where this struggle signifies a rising to the extreme and a tendency toward the absolute of all force.

From then on, the placing in reserve of force in signs—which is power—will be at once the negation and conservation of the absolute of force: negation, since force is neither exerted nor manifested, since it is at peace in the signs that signify and designate it, and conservation, since force through and in representation will give itself as justice, that is to say, as law that obligatorily constrains under pain of death. Power is the tendency toward the absolute of the infinite representation of force, the desire for the absolute of power. From then on, representation (whose effect is power) is at once the imaginary satisfaction of this desire and its real deferred satisfaction. In representation that is power, in power that is representation, the real—if one understands by "real" the always deferred satisfaction of this desire—is none other than the fantastic image in which power will contemplate itself as absolute. If it is of the essence of all power to tend toward the absolute, it is in its reality never to console itself for not being so. Representation (of which power is the effect that, in turn, permits and authorizes it) would be the infinite work of force’s mourning of the absolute. It would operate the transformation of the infinity of a real lack into the absolute of an imaginary that takes its place. The whole of my study—from the "Overture," which, with Pascal, treats the univocal rapport between heterogeneous force and justice, to its Finale, dedicated, again with Pascal, to the strange figure of the legitimate usurper of a kingdom whose king was by chance found to be absent—aims to follow the path of the transformation, in diverse fields and on diverse objects, of infinity into the absolute, the infinite representations of the prince in the imaginary absolute of the monarch. The whole of this endeavor attempts to sketch a portrait of the king (a representation of power) in this philosophical frame that would be the monarch himself (power as representation).

To represent, I have said, is to make the dead man come back as if he were present and living, and it is also to redouble the present and to intensify presence in the institution of a subject of representation. How, then, is representation the satisfaction of the desire for the absolute that animates the essence of all power, if it is not by being the imaginary substitute for this satisfaction, that is, by being its image? The portrait of the king that the king contemplates offers him the icon of the absolute monarch he desires to be, to the point of recognizing and identi-
fying himself through and in it at the very moment when the referent of the portrait absents himself from it. The king is only truly king, that is, monarch, in images. They are his real presence. A belief in the effectiveness and operativeness of his iconic signs is obligatory, or else the monarch is emptied of all his substance through lack of transubstantiation, and only simulacrum is left; but, inversely, because his signs are the royal reality, the being and substance of the prince, this belief is necessarily demanded by the signs themselves; his flaw is at once heresy and sacrilege, error and crime.

If the present and presence of the prince signify the desire for the absolute of power, representation will also be the reflexive redoubling of this very desire—the production of a subject of representation animated by it: the prince is penetrated by the poignant care for his glory. The event and, indeed, the accident have no other reason and meaning than to be occasions for manifesting this concern and appeasing its uneasiness through exploits. But the great deed will always be insufficient to satisfy the thirst for glory. Hence this other paradox: that the reflection of presence always accuses more intensely, in the subject of representation that is its effect, the desire for the absolute of being a lack to fill, of being that empty place Pascal speaks of precisely with respect to the king, which is satisfaction always deferred. The king is first of all the movement of will or desire in the diversions of war, hunting, and ballet. The desire for the absolute of power, for the incomparable glory of the monarch, will take the form of time. The subject of representation, to realize itself as the subject of absolute power—the absolute monarch—will be produced as the effect of narrative representation, of narrative, and of the narrative of history, where is constructed, in the present of the prince’s extraordinary act itself, the memorial of the memory of the king, a memorial that completes time in a past that is an eternalized present.

On the one hand, then, we have an icon that is the real and “living” presence of the monarch; on the other, a narrative that is his tomb and subsists forever. Representation as power and power as representation are a sacrament in image and a “monument” in language where, exchanging their effects, the dazzled gaze and the admiring reading consume the radiant body of the monarch, the former by narrating his history in his portrait and the latter by contemplating one of his perfections in a narrative that eternalizes his manifestation. As we know, representation is at once the action of putting before one’s eyes the quality of being a sign or person that holds the place of another, an image, a political body, and an “empty coffin on which one stretches a cloth for a religious ceremony.”8

In addition, the philosophical and historical reflections that this work attempts on the relationships of power and representation lead directly, in the fields that this relationship articulates—that is, the political imaginary and symbolism of the absolute monarch—to finding again the Eucharistic motif. In my work on the Port-Royal Logic I showed the central and roundabout role that this motif plays in the theory of the sign and the practical philosophy of the discourse that pro-
longs and crowns the Logic. This encounter could appear to be the effect of chance or the illusion of a theoretic and philosophic obsession if Ernest H. Kantorowicz's great book The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology had not demonstrated in the most rigorous fashion the fundamental function, as juridical and political model, played by the Catholic theology of the Corpus mysticum in the elaboration of the theory of royalty and of the royal crown and dignity. But maybe it would have been fruitful to scrutinize with more refined instruments the complexities and displacements of a theology of the sacrament that, as Henri de Lubac has shown, refers simultaneously to a ritual and a liturgy, to a commentary and an exegesis, to a narrative and a history, and to an institution and a society, while being by definition and essence the repetition of a sacred mystery of the sign and of the secret. Such a wealth of signification could not but furnish orientations of thought and action and of conceptions and paradigms throughout a history that elaborates, from the imperial and pontifical notion, the national and secular state whose head is the king and whose members are an institutional framework of power, claiming for their own account that very perpetuity that had formerly been attributed only to the church and the vicar of Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Roman Empire and its emperor. Kantorowicz's work explores these models and these paradigms, which are all suspended, in one fashion or another, on the diverse functions of a unique utterance, "This is my body," spoken in a community that this utterance founds and makes such as it is.

We could also, from this point of view, consider the present study as attempting to examine the various domains of language—historical narrative and eulogistic discourse—or of image—historical tableau, medal, or portrait—as expansions of the utterance "This is my body" that the mouth of the prince would proffer, thus transforming his representations in their various modalities into so many signs of the political sacrament of the state in the real presence of the monarch. If the Eucharistic formula in its Catholic sense as applied to the king constitutes the center of the work, its whole development has consisted in fact in articulating with the sacramental theological utterance two other propositions: the political-juridical one, which was spoken in Parliament in April 1655 by the young Louis XIV, "L'état, c'est moi"; and the other, semio-semantic one, written between 1662 and 1683 by the logicians of Port-Royal in chapter 14 of the second part of their Logic, "The portrait of Caesar is Caesar," where "Caesar" is the generic name of the prince (that is, the portrait of Louis is Louis). A minute analysis, semantic and pragmatic, of the first proposition (formed notably in relation to the words that Louis XIV, in fact, said) would show that the essence of the state is not defined there either by a concept or by an individual. It resides neither in the king (or the royal dignity) nor in Louis XIV, but it is none other than the proper name ("me") of the "I" that utters, "The state is me." A text of Hegel's in the Phenomenology of Spirit shows that there lies the key moment of
absolutism: "For it is in the name alone that the difference of the individual from everyone else is not presumed, but is made actual by all. In the name, the individual counts as a pure individual, no longer only in his consciousness, but in the consciousness of everyone." And, as Vincent Descombes writes in his commentary: "Naming does not consist in finding a word for someone who is already there [a natural body] . . . , the unique being of him who is alone in being who he is. It makes of the difference between the one and all others a real difference. . . . It is the word of the Other which makes the subject emerge."

And there is the essential function of the discourse of flattery. "The state is me"—thus does the absolute monarch pose himself: the monarch, or power in its singularity; and the absolute, or power in its universality. We discover, then, the paradox of the proposition where some sentences about the young Louis are summarized: if "me" is the proper name of him who says here and now, "The state is me," then he who utters it localizes himself as a singular body in time and space. But the proposition, in the same verbal gesture, identifies him with the state, that is, with universal power in all places and at all times, everywhere present. In other words, the body present here of him who speaks now is none other than one body everywhere and always. Now a body at once local and translocal is precisely what the sacramental host realizes for Jesus Christ in the universal community of the church. But maybe it would be appropriate to say the reverse as well, and we would be approaching what René Demorais calls the obsession of classical discourse: never to utter the place where the king is not, which in the extreme would render all discourse of and about the king impossible, since to say that the king is here is to say that he is not elsewhere. To be everywhere and always present, is it not to make that presence equal, always and everywhere, to that retreat and secrecy that Pascal considers precisely as the fundamental trait of the Eucharistic body?

In the same way that the theory of the sign as representation was fashioned from the inside by the Eucharistic utterance "This is my body," which was its apparent application, the juridico-political "This is my body," that is, "The state is me," fashions the representations of the prince at once in order to make of them the real presence of a monarch and to reveal his phantasmal power.

"The portrait of Caesar is Caesar." As a matter of fact, when the Port-Royal logicians formulate this utterance in the fourteenth chapter of the second part of their Logic as an echo of the fourth chapter in the first part, where maps and portraits exemplify their definition of the sign as representation, their explicit purpose in using it as an example is to show that the person who utters it is understood by all as speaking "in signification and in figure." This is a simple way of speaking, which does not demand other preparation or manner, "because the visible rapport between these sorts of signs [natural signs whose prototype is the mirror image] and things shows clearly that, when one affirms of the sign the thing signified, one does not want to say that that sign is really that thing."
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only its figure, its representation. The portrait of the king remains a portrait, his sign.

Hence the utterance "That is Louis," spoken in front of a portrait of Louis, is three or four times figure: It is a type of metaphor.15 Such would be the "visible rapport," of which the logicians speak, between the sign and the thing, which then authorizes that the name of the thing be given to the sign. But it is also a type of metonymy.16 The visible rapport would then concern less the actual or supposed resemblance of the portrait of Caesar to Caesar than the manifest and evident relationship between the existence and the manner of a portrait and him whose portrait it is. It is also a type of synecdoche, that said of an individual, or autonomasy.17 The spectator of a portrait of Caesar, common "name" of a species, would designate it by the proper name of an individual, the name of "Caesar" whom the portrait represents.

The question posed by the logicians with the portrait of Caesar does not concern the linguistic description of a grammatical and semantic usage but a rule, or rather a norm. When does one have the right to give to signs the name of things? With the king's portrait this right is a natural right, because the portrait in general, and that portrait in particular, is a natural sign, and the three tropes of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche that are condensed in it are immediately justified by resemblance, correspondence, and connection (to use Fontanier's words), that is to say, simultaneously by a mimetic rapport, a rapport of internal dependency, and an external relationship. To name the king in front of his portrait is to say at once that the portrait resembles him, that he owes his existence to it, and that it includes his name.18

However, the introduction at the beginning of Chapter 14 of the example of the king's portrait and of the proposition uttered in front of it by its spectator, "It is the king," has no other objective than to found the validity, at the end of the same chapter, of another utterance pronounced by Jesus Christ and repeated throughout the earth, "It [this] is my body" ("c'est mon corps"). Just as "without preparation and offhandedly," we will be authorized to say of a portrait of the king that "it is the king," without preparation and offhandedly Jesus Christ was able to say of the bread, "It is my body." But whereas in the first case the visible rapport between the portrait and the king marks clearly that we mean that the king's portrait is, in signification and in figure, the king, in the second "the apostles not looking at the bread as a sign and not being at any pains as to what it signified, Jesus Christ would not have been able to give to the bread as sign the name of the signified thing, his body, without speaking against the usage of all men and without deceiving them."19 Consequently, we cannot hear "This is my body" in the sense of figure, but rather, "All the nations of the world are brought naturally to take these words in the sense of reality."20 There is a remarkable proximity between the two utterances and a no less remarkable distance in their interpretation: the same natural right authorizes the subject viewing
the prince’s portrait to give to the representation the name of him whom it represents, and to be understood as speaking in figure; and the faithful taking the body of Jesus Christ in communion are understood as making of the bread that body and as understanding the words of Jesus in the sense of reality, namely, that this bread here is his body. Between the Eucharistic symbols of Jesus Christ and the political signs of the monarch, Port-Royal underlines a contiguity but traces an insuperable boundary. It is this boundary that the desire for the absolute of power crosses with the fantastic representation of the absolute monarch in his portrait and in his name, traits legitimized by the utterance of just one name, a unique name authorized by the representation of the prince: a named portrait, the name of an image that is the presentation in which the monarch grasps himself as absolute.

To summarize schematically the Eucharistic model in its major articulations and to show how it was able to function as a juridical and political model, one could consider that in the utterance of the formula “This is my body” is produced a sacramental body visible as the real presence of Jesus Christ on the altar, a body present in reality that the symbolic species of the bread and wine dissimulate at the end of the performing act of language. But it should be added that the transformation of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ is the starting point of a commemoration of the historical sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ such as it is told in the Scriptures: a repeated and recited narrative that constitutes the consecrating ritual. On the altar is therefore also produced the absent historical body of Jesus Christ as narrative representation. Finally, this same transformation of bread into the body of Jesus Christ, serving “to conceive how Jesus Christ is the food of our souls and how the faithful are united among themselves,”\(^{21}\) that same body defines the communion place of the faithful and poses the signification of the spiritual work that is constructed in it: ecclesiastical body as symbolic fictive society at once visible and invisible.\(^{22}\)

If we attempt to transpose the remarkable structure of the theological body into the juridical and political domain, a transposition that brings to light the historical gesture of absolutism, we can consider that the king’s portrait—“It is Louis”—constitutes the sacramental body of the monarch who, as the visible host on the altar refers back to the transcendence of the word in the mystery of the Father, manifests and seals at once the unfathomable invisibility of Louis, the arcana imperium, and the mysteries of the royal substance.\(^{23}\) But we must also notice that the king’s portrait in its very dimension as sacramental, as presence of the king’s body in painted, sculpted, or written currencies, is also and indissolubly a narrative and historical representation. There is a dimension of narrative and of recitation in the royal portrait that is also the celebration of the king’s historical body, his monumental tomb in and through the representation of history. Finally, the king’s portrait envelopes the king in his name as his law embraces his image: the king as right, the king as state, the symbolic fictive body of the king-
dom in his head and soul. Thus the portrait as sacramental body of the king operates the historical body represented in the political symbolic body and lifts the historical body of his absence and imaginary in the symbolic fiction of the political body. The body of the king is thus visible in three senses: as sacramental body it is visibly really present in the visual and written currencies; as historical body it is visible as represented, absence become presence again in ‘‘image’’; as political body it is visible as symbolic fiction signified in its name, right, and law. And the tension that could be historically described and analyzed between the name of the living king—the seal of his law—and the effigy of the dead king displayed in his representation—the majesty of royal dignity—the portrait of the king as absolute monarch resolves this tension in its triple dimension, at once presence, ‘‘imaginary’’ representation, and symbolic name.24

We must return to the formula ‘‘The state is me,’’ which was not spoken but which summarizes and symbolizes, in an utterance both juridical and political, the royal discourse that Voltaire’s historical narrative reports to us, and whose effect he describes as the king’s body, a portrait-effect that is no doubt essential. Instead of a formula, then, this:

When in 1655, after the suppression of the civil wars, after his first campaign and his coronation, the Parliament again wanted to assemble on the subject of some edicts, the king left Vincennes in his hunting costume, entered the Parliament in great boots, whip in hand, and spoke these few words: ‘‘We see the misfortunes your assemblies have produced. I order that those that have begun on my edicts cease. Mister First President, I forbid you to allow any assemblies and all of you to call them.’’

To which Voltaire adds: ‘‘His majestic bearing, the nobility of his features, and the tone and air of mastery with which he spoke were more commanding than the authority of his rank, which until then had been little respected.’’25 The prince’s speech given here to be read in its immediate authenticity—‘‘his own words’’—taken however from a narrative of history as one of its sequences, produces, in the very text of the narrating historian and in the name of a glossing commentary, an iconic effect: the body of young Louis, but in truth constituted as royal body—majestic bearing, nobility of features, tone and air of master—by the reported speech and the circumstances that frame it. Louis suddenly becomes king as the portrait of a king, by a manifestation of will that resembles, in many respects, an inverted parody of the ceremony of the lit de justice where, ten years earlier, the king had been recognized king by Parliament in the days that followed the death of Louis XIII.26 The king’s portrait would thus be the framework whereby absolute order is represented through an individual in the text and makes of him its representative, the foundation of its power. Absolute order is incarnated in a body and becomes a body in the historical narrative. But the
king’s portrait is also, and inversely, the terminal product of a narrative operation that gives *absolute order as already inscribed in narrated reality*, which offers reality to be read as already articulated by it.27

According to this perspective, my endeavor aims to understand the real presence of the king in the currency of his portrait—his sacramental body—as an operator of exchange between image and name, narrative and law, reality and norm. The sacramental body of the king, the portrait of the king as absolute monarch, signifies and shows this place of transit between the name, where the body has become signifier, and the narrative, the story, through which law has become body. To prolong in all modesty the work accomplished by Kantorowicz for the Middle Ages, my study would propose the following hypothesis for “classical” absolutism: the king has only one body left, but this sole body, in truth, unifies three, a physical historical body, a juridico-political body, and a semiotic sacramental body, the sacramental body, the “portrait,” operating the exchange *without remainder* (or attempting to eliminate all remainder) between the historical and political bodies.

In 1662, in his sermon on the duties of kings, Bossuet states that,

To establish this power [puissance] that represents His own, God places a mark of divinity on the forehead and face of sovereigns. . . . God has made in the Prince a mortal image of His immortal authority. You are gods, says David, and you are all children of the Almighty. But, oh gods of flesh and blood, oh gods of earth and dust, you will die as men. It does not matter. You are gods even though you die, and your authority does not die. This spirit of royalty passes in its entirety to your successors and imprints everywhere the same fear, the same respect, and the same veneration. The man dies, it is true; but the king, we say, never dies: the image of God is immortal.28

Some years previously, on a little piece of paper, Pascal had analyzed the mechanisms of representational frameworks, describing the effects they produce and discerning their reason in the configurations they draw on political, juridical, and theological planes:

The custom of seeing kings accompanied by guards, drums, officers, and all those things that bend the machine toward respect and terror, causes their face to imprint on their subjects respect and terror even when they appear by themselves, because one does not separate in thought their persons from the retinues with which they are ordinarily seen. And the world, which does not know that the effect comes from this custom, thinks that it comes from a natural force; and from that come these words: “The character of Divinity is imprinted on his face, etc.” (25-308).29
Pascal’s thought, as if it were paraphrasing and parodying Bossuet’s apostrophes, brings to light power as representation and representation as power in the phantasm of a royal body, of a prince’s portrait, named “absolute monarch.”

My study also has the difficult ambition of pursuing the critical dialogue between the Catholic theologian who enters the court and the Jansenist moralist who leaves the world, in the form of and according to the structures of one of those court ballets that Louis XIV loved to produce for himself: a staging in representation of an episode of the history of representation and power in three entrances, but where the interludes would have the ironic function of showing the inner springs of the machines whose effect is the great spectacle of absolutism.