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# 21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR
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# BOARD-ER GAMES

## DEFINING SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE IN PIERRE DUVAL'S CARTOGRAPHIC *ENJEUX* (CA. 1660)

Sasha Rossman

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes a seventeenth-century geographic board game designed by the geographer Pierre Duval (1618–1683) to celebrate the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1660. The game takes its players through the events of twenty-five years of war between France and Spain, staged largely along the perimeters of France. Contextualizing the game's visual structure within the historical and semantic French discourse of borders allows us, I argue, to understand Duval's object as an agent in border-building practices. These practices were neither located physically on France's borders, nor were they top-down. Instead, Duval's game suggests that a border imaginary could be constructed in the capital through collaborative operations in the form, for instance, of play. This border imaginary figured French state boundaries in the mid-seventeenth century as "frontiers" and, I suggest, this involved a gendered as well as a spatial dimension. When seeking to understand state formation and its mediation through visual culture, this paper implies, moreover, that seemingly trivial objects such as games which generally lie outside of the art historical cannon reveal themselves as a rich investigatory terrain.



## KEYWORDS

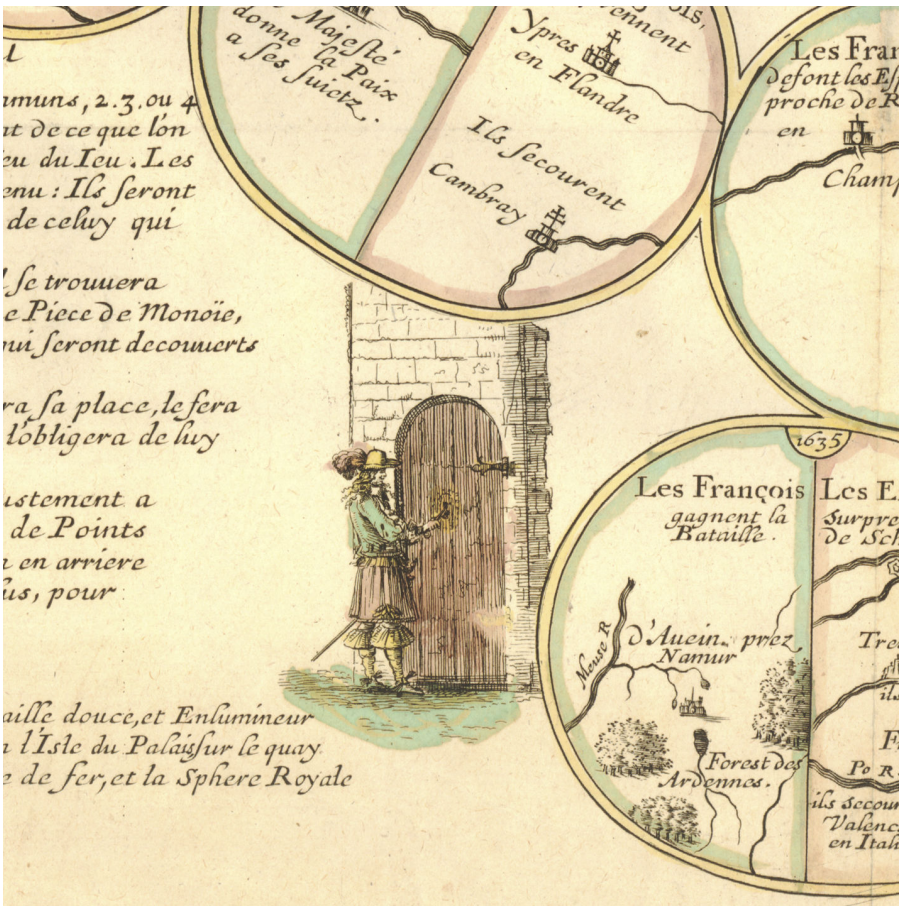
Board games; Play; Borders; Frontiers; Seventeenth-century France; History of cartography; Pierre Duval.

Knock knock! Who's there? Why, it's a well-heeled French gentleman [Fig. 1]! Immediately identifiable as French from his foppish 1660s costume, *monsieur* sports a sword and voluminous plume in his *chapeau*; and he appears to be fitting a key into the lock of a wooden door of a fortress-like gate.[1] Our gentleman stands at a double, if not triple threshold. On the one hand, he is poised here at the edge of a game to which the door he unlocks is a portal. The game is geographer Pierre Duval's *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour La Paix* (1660), printed and distributed, as the gameboard tells us, with the Privilege of the King for twenty years [Fig. 2]. At the same time, the figure is about to enter a historical narrative. He will embark on a journey through the course of the Franco-Spanish War, which lasted for twenty-five years, beginning in 1635 and ending in 1660 with the Peace of the Pyrenees. These dates constitute the beginning and end of the game's spiral format, which derives its format from what is known as the classic "game of the goose" (*jeu de l'oie*). Simultaneously, the figure stands at a particular kind of geographic threshold: in entering the game and the history of the war, Duval's *jeu* also takes the figure – and the players for whom he is a stand-in – to the sites in which the war played itself out. These were primarily located around France's edges, though they also included several locations farther away such as Italy. Our figure, and the game's players, thus, find themselves at various moments of overlapping boundaries.

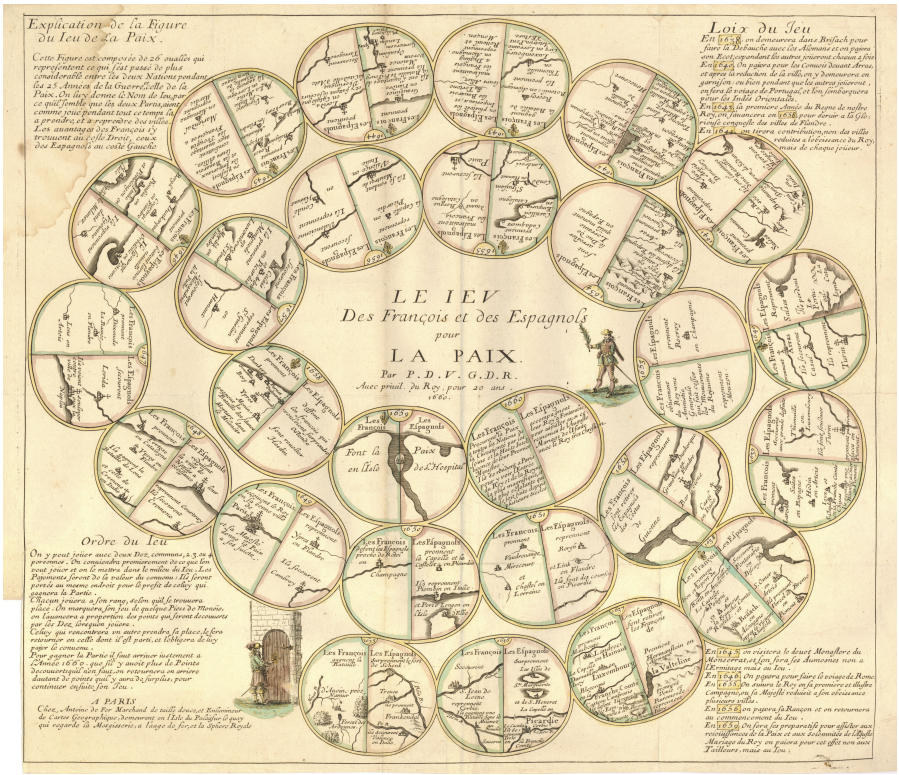
The nature of these boundaries is the subject of this essay. They were also the subject of a semantic shift that took place in seventeenth-century France, as the term "frontier" (*frontière*) came to dominate the French discourse around boundaries and borders, replacing earlier words like "*limites*" and "*fins*".[2] This coincidence in the production of discursive, spatial, and political borders makes Duval's game a rich lens through which we can examine the historically specific nature of borders, as well as their mediation. Borders, I will suggest, are entities which emerged historically not only through political negotiation and mapping, but also through

1
I began with the "knock knock" formula because it provides a performative example of how the game interpolates its players. It is also how Louis Althusser describes interpolation in the formation of subjectivity: entering a doorway (or game board) and finding what one expects to find inside. As Althusser describes, one knocks on the door at a friend's house, "We all have friends who, when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question 'Who's there?', answer (since 'it's obvious') 'It's me'. And we recognize that 'it is him', or 'her'. We open the door, and 'it's true, it really was she who was there'." Louis Althusser, On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production [1971], in: *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Breuster (December 1, 2024).

2
See Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1989; id., Natural Frontiers Revisited. France's Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century, in: *The American Historical Review* 95/5, 1990, 1423–1451; Daniel Nordman, *Frontières de France. De l'espace au territoire XVIe–XIXe siècle*, Paris 1998; André Burguière and Jacques Revel (eds.), *Histoire de la France. L'espace français*, Paris 1989; and Lucien Febvre, Frontière. The Word and the Concept, in: Peter Burke (ed.), *A New Kind of History from the Writings of Febvre*, London 1973, 208–218.




[Fig. 1]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 2]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix*, 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

processes of participatory visualization and performance, including objects like Duval's game.

Analyzing the ways in which *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour La Paix* articulates space helps us to understand how specific notions of bordered statehood began to emerge in seventeenth-century France as part of a constellation of ideas that were formulated in a diverse mediascape long before they established themselves consistently on the ground. It also serves to show how seemingly trivial objects like board games provide art history with a vital terrain for analyzing how border-building developed in the early modern period as part of a collective endeavor. The construction of overlapping boundaries – political, spatial, social – was not a top-down territorial operation but rather part of a collaborative process, which art historical analysis can illuminate.

As a cartographer, Duval was not particularly original or intrepid. He was a traditional armchair *géographe*: that is, he did not travel to the places he mapped, but rather compiled other people's graphic and textual information into new maps, tables, and atlases.[3] He studied with his uncle Nicolas Sanson who was, in contrast, a much more influential *géographe du roi*. Sanson significantly helped codify the image of France for generations by creating popular "base maps" and pedagogical tables that geographers could overlay with various types of information (juridical, political, rivers, roads, etc.) [Fig. 3].[4] Sanson worked closely with the monarchy and Duval himself became an official *géographe du roi* by 1650. Like his uncle, Duval's fortunes were tied in numerous ways to the Crown and other noble patrons, whose favor he explicitly courted through objects like games and atlases dedicated to them.

At the same time, Duval directed his output to a rapidly expanding market for printed cartography in Paris, where he sold his wares at publishers' shops near the Palais de la Justice on the Ile de la Cité, as well as in the Rue St. Jacques on the Left Bank.[5] In the 1750s, geographer Robert de Vaugondy (a descendent of Sanson) wrote,

3
See Mireille Pastoureau, *Les atlas français XVIe–XVIIe siècles. Repertoire bibliographique et étude*, Paris 1984, 135–137; Naomi Lebens, *Prints in Play. Printed Games and the Fashioning of Social Roles in Early Modern Europe*, PhD diss., University of London, 2016.

4
James R. Akerman, The Structuring of Political Territory in Early Modern Printed Atlases, in: *Imago Mundi* 47, 1995, 138–154; Mireille Pastoureau, *Les Sanson. Cent ans de cartographie française 1630–1730*, Lille 1982.

5
They are marked sometimes on his games: Antoine de Fer, for instance. On the history of French cartography see Monique Pelletier, *Cartographie de la France et du monde de la Renaissance au Siècle des Lumières*, Paris 2002 as well as ead., National and Regional Mapping in France to About 1650, in: David Woodward (ed.), *History of Cartography. Cartography in the European Renaissance*, vol. 3, part 2, Chicago 2007, 1480–1503; Christine Marie Petto, *Mapping and Charting in Early Modern England and France. Power, Patronage, and Production*, Lanham, MD 2015; and Mary Sponberg Pedley, *The Commerce of Cartography. Making and Marketing Maps in Eighteenth-Century France and England*, Chicago 2005.


[Fig. 3]
Nicolas Sanson (published by P. Mariette), *Carte des rivières de la France curieusement recherchée*, 1641, handcolored engraving, 51 × 41 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

> Le goût pour la géographie, qui s`étoit introduit dans les collèges, l'avoit engage à faire des cartes in douze & in quarto, pour l'intelligence des auteurs classiques; Il avait si bien gagné que nul écolier n'étoit bien reçu de son professeur s'il n'étoit muni de son Duval.[6]

Clearly, Duval looked to capitalize on new developments and formats in the print market and geographic games marketed towards a literate Parisian audience were indeed a significant innovation in this regard.[7] Not only did Duval himself have to lay out significant sums to have engravers and printers make his games, but his patrons would have had to spend a not entirely insignificant amount of money to purchase them: presumably around six to ten *sous* on a game (a bit more than the price of a pound of butter).[8] A 1665 inventory of the publisher Nicolas Berey lists a version of the *Jeu de la Paix* affixed to a board at the even larger sum of 10 *sols*.[9] These were, therefore, objects of leisure made for an urbane and literate Parisian public to learn about the world.

Few physical examples of these games remain.[10] As with most board games, they were made to use rather than preserve. Of late, several scholars have begun to attend to them. Game historian Adrian Seville, for instance, has worked on collecting and cataloguing games of the goose in all variations, including Duval's, whose work he has placed in a longer chronology of cartographic and other pedagogical games. Naomi Lebens's work on seventeenth-century print culture has argued for the seriousness of games in Duval's output, putting to rest the idea that these objects were somehow ludic outliers in an otherwise serious geographer's business.[11] Ting Chang has also recently analyzed one of Duval's geographic games as an example of incipient French colonial ambitions, with the game's type of virtual travel providing Frenchmen and women the possibility to access (and profit from) the world through a playful

6
"The taste for geography, which had found its way into the schools, had led him to create maps in twelve and in quarto, for the understanding of classical authors; he had succeeded so well that no student was properly received by his teacher unless he was equipped with his Duval." Robert de Vaugondy, *Essai sur l'histoire de la géographie ou sur son Origine, ses progrès & son étal actuel*, Paris 1755, 225.

7
See Lebens, Prints in Play, 105–145.

8
Ibid., 138.

9
See Marianne Grivel, *Le commerce de l'estampe à Paris au XVIIe siècle*, Geneva 1986, 229.

10
These collections include the British Museum, Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Waddeston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others.

11
Adrian Seville, Thierry Depaulis, and Geert H. Bekkering, *Playing with Maps. Cartographic Games in Western Culture*, Boston 2023; Adrian Seville, *The Cultural Legacy of the Royal Game of the Goose. 400 Years of Printed Board Games*, Amsterdam 2019. See Lebens, Prints in Play, 105–145.

form of pedagogy.[12] Here, I want to take a different tack and ask a different question, namely, what can we glean about borders specifically through Duval's Game of Peace? As previously mentioned, the impetus for this question emerges in part from the development of a French semiology of borders in this period, a process in which objects like Duval's were instrumental. At the same time, the very nature of the board game as an object confronts us with the question of borders per se.[13]

Scholars of play have long defined the ludic as a zone cordoned off by borders from the world at large. In *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga wrote of play as being delimited by a sort of "magic circle", observing that play "proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner".[14] Roger Caillois subsequently specified that games, in particular, depend on the delimitation of space:

> There is a place for play: as needs dictate, the space for hopscotch, the board for checkers or chess, the stadium, the racetrack, the list, the ring, the stage, the arena, etc. Nothing that takes place outside of this idea frontier is relevant. To leave the enclosure by mistake, accident, or necessity, to send the ball out of bounds, may disqualify or entail a penalty. The game must be taken back within the agreed boundaries.[15]

In Duval's *Jeu de la Paix*, the board's boundaries are collapsed onto the boundaries of France as they were being defined and redefined by the constant exchange of fortified cities on the kingdom's perim-

12
Ting Chang, Le jeu du monde. Games, Maps, and World Conquest in Early Modern France, in: Bronwen Wilson and Angela Vanhaelen (eds.) *Making Worlds*, Toronto 2022, 201–236.

13
Art historical literature dealing with the topic of borders and seventeenth-century France tends to focus on landscape painting or the gardens at Versailles. I do not engage directly with this literature here in order to concentrate the discussion on board games. For discussions of borders in other media, see Thomas Kirchner, Landschaftsmalerei und politische Souverenität. Zu einem Bildtypus der französischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts, in: Ulrike Gehring (ed.), *Entdeckung der Ferne. Natur und Wissenschaft in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Paderborn 2014, 203–223; Julie-Anne Plax, Seventeenth-Century French Images of Warfare, in: Pia F. Cuneo (ed.), *Artful Armies, Beautiful Battles. Art and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden 2002, 131–155; Martin Warnke, *Politische Landschaft. Zur Kunstgeschichte der Natur*, Munich/Vienna 1992; Horst Bredekamp, *Leibniz und die Revolution der Gartenkunst. Herrenhausen, Versailles und die Philosophie der Blätter*, Berlin 2021; Pablo Schneider, Der begrenzte Raum – Versailles zu Zeiten Ludwigs XIV, in: *Städel-Jahrbuch* 20, 2009, 201–218; Chandra Mukerjee, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles*, Cambridge 1997. For a theoretical analysis of the specific qualities of the board game as a bounded field see Steffen Bogen, Mit Regeln spielen. Bericht aus einer Spielewerkstatt, in: Karen Aydin, Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn, Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen, and Mario Ziegler (eds.), *Games of Empires. Kulturhistorische Konnotationen von Brettspielen in transnationalen und imperialen Kontexten*, Berlin 2018, 349–388.

14
Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London 1949, 13.

15
Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, Chicago 2001, 7.

eter. On the game's top left corner, inside the thin line tracing the board's outer perimeter, the player reads:

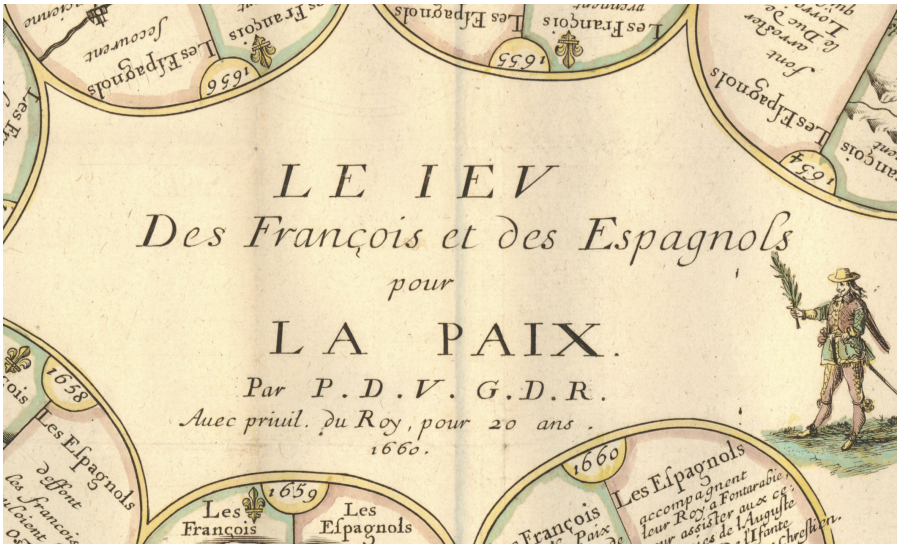
> This figure comprises 26 ovals which represent the most important events that took place between the two nations during the 25 years of war, and that of peace. We call it a game because it seems like the two parties had been playing during all of this time at taking and re-taking cities. The French advantages are located to the right, the Spanish on the left side.

Simultaneously, the ordered nature of play described by Huizinga and Caillois is defined on Duval's gameboard as falling under the purview of the monarch, whose *privilège* furnishes the very ground or legal basis of the printed game which is simultaneously a topography of France's edges with the king at the center of the board's spiral [Fig. 4].[16]

In the following, I propose that we examine first the specific form of the goose game and consider why and how it may have been an expedient format for Duval. Having established this, we will then analyze how the game and its format dovetail with the developing discourse and terminology of French borders in the period. Finally, I want to conclude by pointing to the gendered nature of Duval's creation and think about how the goose game and the politics of gender overlapped with concurrently emerging spatial imaginaries in mid-seventeenth-century France. The final space of Duval's game – and the culmination of the Play of War and Peace between the two monarchies – is marked by the triumphant procession of Louis XIV into Paris with his new bride, the Spanish Infanta, who he had brought back from the Pyrenean frontier [Fig. 5 and Fig. 6]. This performative act of incorporation is part of the broader border theater into which Duval invites his players as a group of fellow travelers to collectively join in a voyage to the center of the board.[17] Here, I suggest, they become literally and metaphorically fortified by the pedagogical and topographical *parcours* that they have traveled. Walled in to the game's center, they find themselves in a bulwarked enclosure, surrounded by a *frontière* – to use the period expression – that both conjoins them as Frenchmen and separates them from those on the other side.

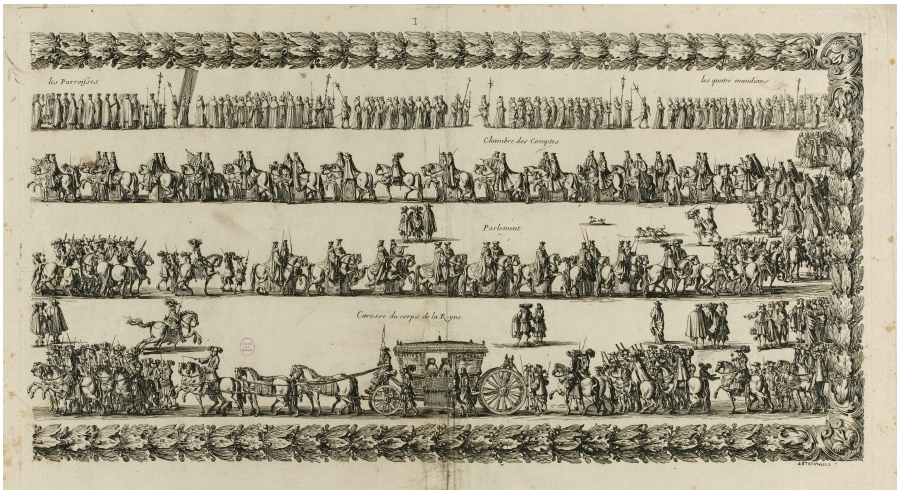
16
On privileges and printing see, e.g., Peter Fuhring, The Print Privilege in Eighteenth-Century France, in: *Print Quarterly* 2/3, 1985, 175–193; on the French print market generally in the seventeenth century see Grivel, Le commerce de l'estampe à Paris.

17
See Richard Taws on how goose games could assume a very different ideological bent in the context of the French Revolution. Richard Taws, Wargaming. Visualizing Conflict in French Printed Board Games, in: Satish Padiyar, Philip Shaw, and Philippa Simpson (eds.) *Visual Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, London 2017, 56–70.




[Fig. 4]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).


[Fig. 5]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 6]
Jean Lepautre, *Cortège de l'entrée: Carrosse du corps de la Reyne, L'Entrée triomphante de Leurs Majestez Louis XIV, Roy de France et de Navarre et Marie-Thérèse d'Austriche, son espouse, dans la ville de Paris [...]*, 1662, copper engraving, 30.4 × 47 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris, G.43017 (April 17, 2025).

## I. "The Goose That Lays the Golden Egg". The Expansive Limits of the *jeu de l'oie*

*Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour La Paix* was Duval's fourth topographic game, and his third game in the format of the goose. Analyzing why the goose game may have appealed to his interconnected commercial and political interests demands that we consider the format of the goose game and how it interpolates a group of players. In doing so, one remarks that compared to other games like checkers or cards, the goose game is a format that depends on the pronounced orchestration of relationships between periphery and center. This, I suggest, overlays in Duval's work with the geographer's professional *enjeux*[18] and has implications for thinking about France in terms of boundaries articulated as *frontières*. Before elaborating upon these points, however, we will visit the history of the *jeu de l'oie* and the parameters that define its format.

The game of the goose developed in late fifteenth-century Italy (*gioco dell'oca*) before spreading around Europe.[19] It seems that it arrived in France with Marie de Medici, first being mentioned by the child Louis XIII's doctor Jean Hérouard, who noted his enjoyment of the game in 1612.[20] The *jeu de l'oie* is a race game: its basic form is a spiral which leads from the lower left corner of a board counter-clockwise into the board's center. The winner is the first player to arrive at the end of the linear spiral, proceeding along it according to the roll of two dice. It is entirely a game of chance. Movements are determined by lucky (or unlucky) throws and the instructions associated with the squares on which players land.

In terms of its formal attributes, the game thus consists of a line that weaves itself around a central oval, so that the player who wins is also the player who is most deeply entrenched in the center. There can be no divergences from the spiral path, although players can move back and forward along it depending on the squares they encounter. As opposed to games like checkers or chess in which two players confront each other head on, the agonistic relationship between the players of the goose game is more diffused. One plays with a group of other people, all of whom have collectively given their authority over to the dice as well as the rules of the game, which are generally printed on the edges of the gameboard. The

18
Defined in Furetière's Universal Dictionary (1690) as: "Enjeu: f.m. L'argent que l'on met au jeu pour voir qui le gagnera" (the money that is put into a game to see who will win it). Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel, Contenant generalement tous les Mots François, tant viewx que modernes, & les Termes de toutes les Sciences et des Arts: Divisé en trois Tomes*, The Hague/Rotterdam 1690, 723.

19
Seville, The Cultural Legacy. The general type of game, as Seville observes, has global parallels, but the specific form of the game of the goose developed largely in this European context.

20
Élisabeth Belmas, *Jouer autrefois. Eassai sur le jeu dans la France moderne (XVIe–XVIII siècle)*, Seyssel 2006, 132.

winner takes the money that each player has placed in a common pool at the outset of the game. Playing the game thus creates a group of similarly minded players that collectively accepts a centralized authority embodied both by rules and luck. The players also accept the narrative, forward movement of the spiral towards a center, which circumscribes their actions and potentially rewards them with a small chunk of change.

Conventionally, the spiral consisted of sixty-three squares, a number associated with patterns of 3s and 7s, which held symbolic significance within both Kabbalah and Christian traditions. In the 1580s, the goose game became popular at the Medici court with its humanist interests.[21] Its balance of good and bad potential events was likewise equilibrated, evoking a narrative of potentially even exchanges played out as if over a lifetime.[22] In trying to explain the significance of the number sixty-three, Le Père Ménestrier thus suggested in 1704 that sixty-three was "l'année critique et climatérique, laquelle, quand on peut passer, il semble que l'on n'ait plus rien à craindre [...] que l'on peut atteindre une douce viellesse, jusqu'a la decrepitude".[23] On this metaphorical "path of life", the game's eponymous geese squares were moments of positive change, whereas the squares occupied by the symbols of a labyrinth, well, inn, prison, or death were moments of stoppage and misfortune [Fig. 7].

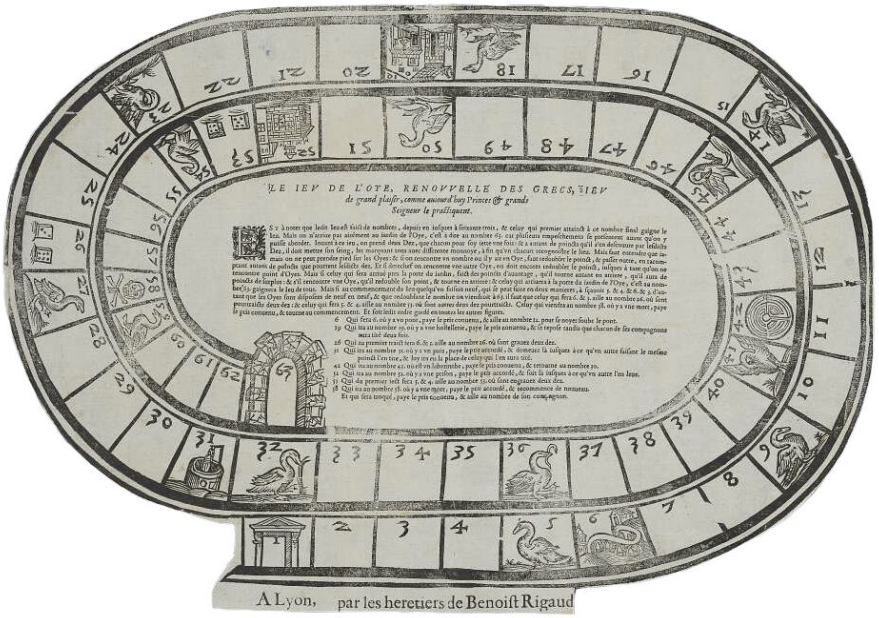
Perhaps because of its conceptual simplicity and the generic nature of its good and bad events, the goose game lent itself to all kinds of thematic interpretations, which began to proliferate through print in the seventeenth century. Although its form was in a sense highly restrictive, the goose game format nonetheless hatched many eggs. Like a cartographic "base map", the game of the goose format could be transformed into a vehicle for any number of topics. Early examples of thematic variations in France include the goose game as a game of love or versions featuring heraldry made around the same time as Duval's geographic variants. Duval was not the first of his contemporaries to make geographic games, but he seems to have been the first in France to realize the market and pedagogical potential of conflating geographic instruction specifically with the goose game format.[24]

21
See Seville, The Cultural Legacy.

22
Belmas, Jouer autrefois, 133.

23
"The critical and climactic year which we can live, after which it seems that we have nothing more to feat [...] and with which we reach a sweet old age, until our decrepitude." Cited in René Poirier, Le jeu de l'oie dans l'histoire, la littérature et l'art, in: René-Henry d'Allemagne (ed.), *Le noble jeu de l'oie en France de 1640 à 1950*, Paris 1950, 37. The first game of the goose rules that are codified appear in Louis de La Marinière's *Maison académique* of 1654. Belmas, Jouer autrefois, 132.

24
For a chronology of cartographic race games, see Seville, Depaulis, and Bekkering, Playing with Maps, 47–80.




[Fig. 7]
Artist unknown (published by the héritiers de Benoist Rigaud), *Jeu de l'oie*, ca. 1600, woodcut, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, IH624 © HAB (April 9, 2025).

His first geographic game appeared in the early 1640s.[25] It was called the *Jeu du Monde* and it took players around the globe, moving from the polar circle (at bottom left) and ending in France, whose shape we find in the game's interior circle alongside two roundels containing world maps with the four continents [Fig. 8]. Comparing this game – and Duval's subsequent goose games – with contemporary geographic games in other formats helps us to tease out the ways in which his *jeux de l'oie* make use of the center-periphery relationships of the format in a manner that one may think of in terms of bordering procedures, or performances.

The printmaker Stefano Della Bella and playwright Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, for instance, devised a number of card games for the young Louis XIV at the behest of Cardinal Mazarin, including a game of geography, printed in 1644 [Fig. 9]. These cards contained short descriptors of places, like France, whose card reads: "Formerly Gaul, bordered by the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Rhine, and the Sea. Fertile and populous." The caption accompanies an allegorical rendering of France as a woman riding a galloping horse, sword drawn, somewhat in the manner of seventeenth-century emblem books and Commenius's *Orbis Sensualis Pictus*: bite-sized pieces of geographical information were made "fun" and digestible thanks to their brevity, and illustrations that affixed a recognizable image to a text in the mind.[26] Della Bella and Desmaret's cards were neither cartographic nor topographic. They attached geographical information as a written text to human figures, not spaces and places.

Geography became an exercise akin to identifying qualities of historical figures, as in the other games which the duo made in the same period, like the *Cartes de Rois de France* (1644), or the *Jeu des Reynes Renomées* (1644).[27] In flipping the cards over, the dauphin could use pictures to memorize short facts and information, which he could also organize and sort in different fashions. For example, in the *Jeu de la Géographie*, an allegorical card for each continent (Europe, Asia, Africa, America) is the organizing key for the respective continental cards. If the cards are shuffled and mixed, the user (in this case the dauphin) can reorder them into groups akin to a period geographic table in which geographical information is organized for learning purposes into simplified, hierarchical lists rather than maps [Fig. 10]. In terms of the spatialization of knowledge, this

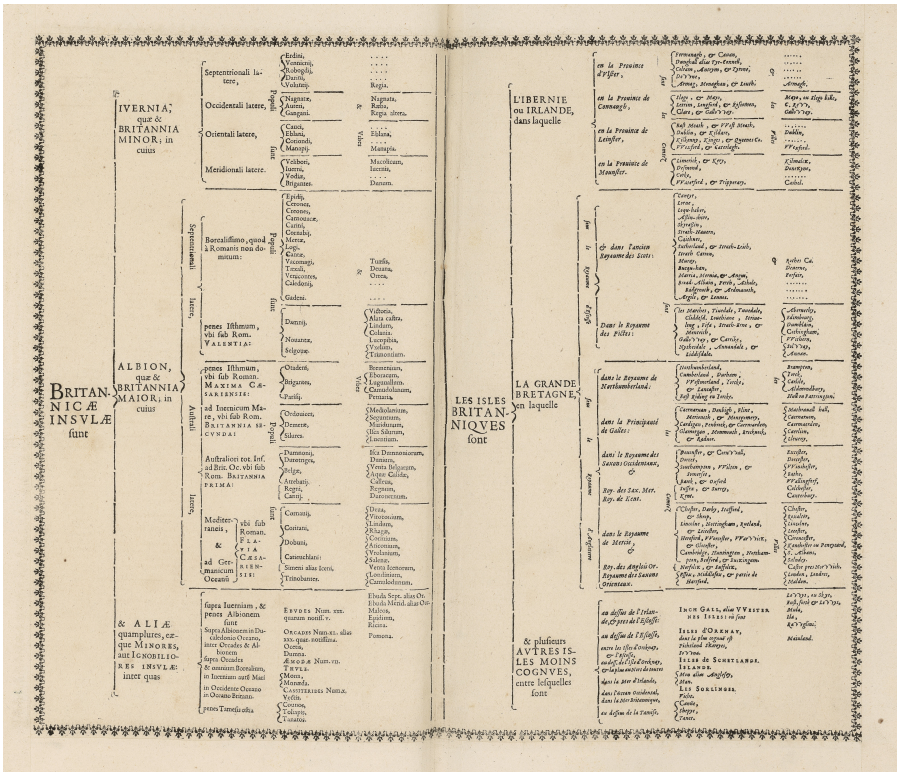
25
On the dating of the *Jeu du Monde* see Lebens, Prints in Play, 107.

26
Paris Amanda Spies-Gans, A Princely Education through Print: Stefano della Bella's 1644 Jeux de Cartes Etched for Louis XIV, in: *Getty Research Journal* 9, 2017, 1–22; Orest Ranum, Jeux de cartes, pédagogie et enfance de Louis XIV, in: Philippe Aries and Jean-Claude Margoin (eds.), *Les jeux à la Renaissance*, Paris 1982, 553–562; Hugh Gaston Hall, *Richelieu's Desmarets and the Century of Louis XIV*, Oxford 1990, 212–236, and Lebens's chapter on these cards in Prints in Play. On education and images in early modern France see Jean Adhémar, L'enseignement par image, in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 1988, 64–70.

27
These can be viewed here and here (April 9, 2025).


[Fig. 8]
Pierre Duval, *Le Jeu du monde*, 1645, etching on paper, 40 × 51 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).


[Fig. 9]
Stefano Della Bella and Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, two cards from *Jeu de la géographie*, *France* (left) and *Monomotapa* (right), 1644, handcolored etchings, each 11.7 × 3.8 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 10]
Nicolas Sanson, *Britannia Insulae Sunt / Les Isles Britanniques sont*, 1651, 40 × 47 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

game of geography thereby facilitates the acquisition of knowledge not through the delineation of a spatial or topographic imaginary but rather in terms of a textual list rendered more colorful through the addition of figurative images.

Duval's contemporaneous *Jeu du Monde* took a different approach [Fig. 8].[28] Della Bella and Desmarets were a printmaker-draughtsman and a playwright respectively, but Duval was a geographer looking to corner a market in the burgeoning Parisian map trade. Although he could have put maps on playing cards, he opted to adapt the goose game as a format.[29] In doing so, he combined certain elements of maps and certain elements of atlases with the constitutive elements of the game, which perhaps cleverly pointed people whose interest the game piqued in the direction of his other wares. On the board, Duval spatialized the acquisition of geographical knowledge in a surprisingly complex, but tidy manner. In each corner of the board, we find a cartographic (not allegorical) image of a continent, with Europe at the top left next to the "Explication de la Figure", followed by Africa at top right, Asia at bottom right, and America at bottom left. Adjacent to America, sits a nude female figure pointing the way from America (a reference to ideas about Americans and their lack of clothing?) into the game's spiral, beginning with the polar caps. The game then winds around the spiral through America, then Africa, then Asia before circling into the center toward Europe, where France occupies the winning inner circle. As Chang has noted, Duval in one sense "unmade" the world, by creating jumps and fissures between locations rather than having the players progress along a seamless line, as would be the case in later travel games.[30]

On the other hand, Duval's geographical *parcours* does have a constructive logic: one moves from the very far away (the polar caps) through an increasingly well-known world towards Europe. The order may have diverged sequentially from the conventional European geographical organization, which began with Europe. But the reversal arguably made more sense in terms of the game's format and structure. Having entered into the spiral from the most remote locations (in the Americas), players wound their way towards Europe, where France constituted the winner's circle. The winner won not only the money in the pot, but also geographical knowledge gathered along the way. In "France", at the board's center, Duval hints that the winning player could assemble the geographical information they gleaned into the image of a coherent globe in which all of the continents were included; indeed Duval

28
See the brief summary of the *Jeu du Monde* in Seville, Depaulis, and Bekkering, Playing with Maps, 53–55, and Lebens's chapter on Duval; see also Chang, Le jeu du monde, 209.

29
The so-called "Bowes" cards in England, by contrast, use Christopher Saxton's maps of the fifty-two English and Welsh counties on a deck of fifty-two playing cards (April 9, 2025).

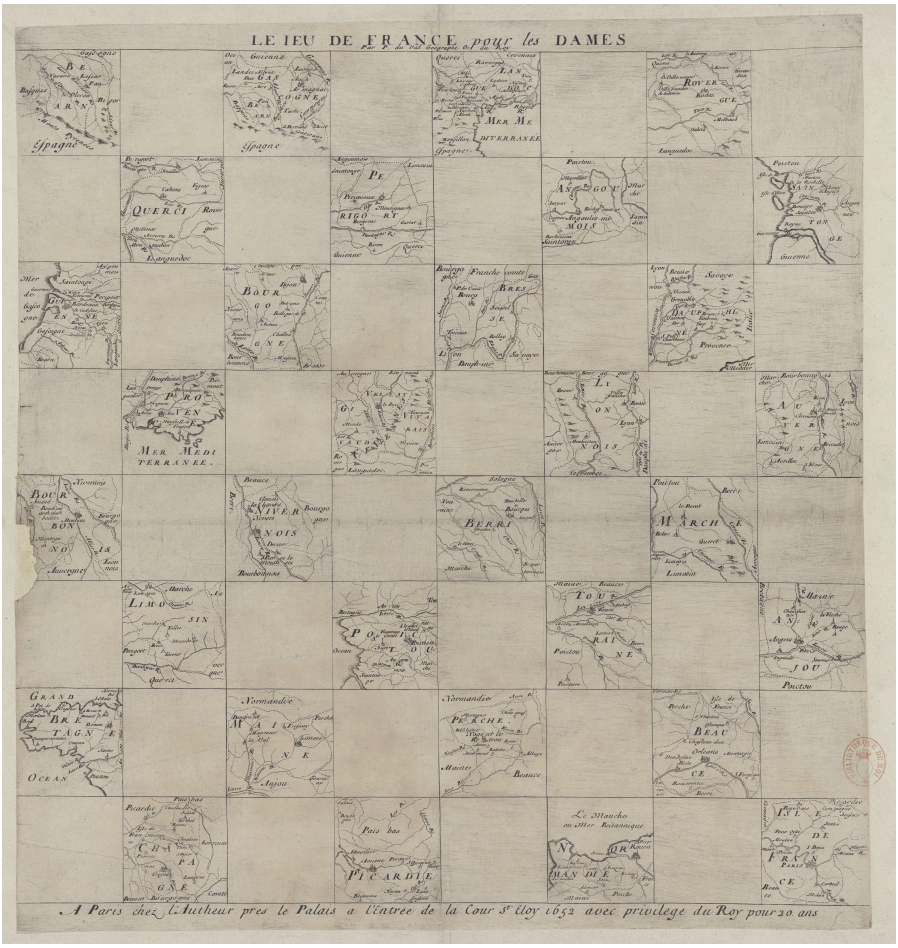
30
See Chang, Le jeu du monde, 208.

has placed the globe in the central vignette directly above the word "*Monde*" as if to reiterate that it was in the game's center, in France, that the world was to be conceptually assembled through the practice of geography and cartography. This, he suggests, will be profitable not only for the winner, but the winner specifically as a Frenchman whose voyage has returned to its point of departure: in the center of France, in Paris, where the game would have been purchased on the Rue St. Jacques (*à l'esperance*), as the board tells us.

In terms of cartography, the gameboard conflated the world map with the flat board of the game to efficient effect. The globe could become a journey, in which new places were encountered through small vignette maps in each of the sixty-three squares. Because the conventional goose format left so much space blank, Duval could simply fill it up with cartographic information. He thus also adapted the "content" spaces of the *jeu de l'oie* to his geographical matrix. In a small booklet of instructions accompanying his *Jeu du Monde*, players learned for instance that whoever landed on space 34 (Persia), for example, lost two turns due to the compelling nature of the female courtiers, or needed to pay a penalty in China on space 36, since the Chinese had banned entry into their realm (death came in Sweden, in the form of a shipwreck). These "instructions" provided associations with the geographical locations while assuming the functions of the traditional unlucky squares. At the same time, Duval exhorted the players to name the location on which they had landed out loud, to better memorize geography. In this sense, Duval activated the map and transformed it into a new kind of interactive and embodied, as Chang and Lebens have both noted, geographic pedagogical tool.

If Duval's game was characterized by a kind of newly embodied form of knowledge acquisition through geography, we might think further about the ways in which the center-periphery structure of the goose game intersected with Duval's geographical lesson. Duval's second game is instructive in this regard, for it diverged from the goose format. In 1652, he made a checkerboard called *Le Jeu de France pour les Dames*, with sixty-four blank squares that alternate with squares containing maps of all of the French provinces [Fig. 11]. In shifting the format from the collective journey of the goose to the two-person game of checkers, Duval relinquished the kind of bounded logic that held his earlier goose game in place.

Movements in checkers are determined by strategic reaction, meaning that there can be no programmatic path that guides a player across space along a fixed narrative that encompasses all of France. Thus, Duval's *Jeu pour les Dames* leaves it unclear how exactly knowledge is to be acquired through play: France's provinces are bound to remain disjointed rather than conjoin as the game's final crescendo in a final image that places the group of places – and not only the winner – in France. This dilutes the pedagogical qualities that informed the earlier *Jeu du Monde*. For by orchestrating a group journey along the goose spiral, Duval had also provided simultaneously a cartographic lingua franca that the players held




[Fig. 11]
Pierre Duval, *Le Ieu de France pour les Dames*, 1652, etching, 43 × 40.5 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

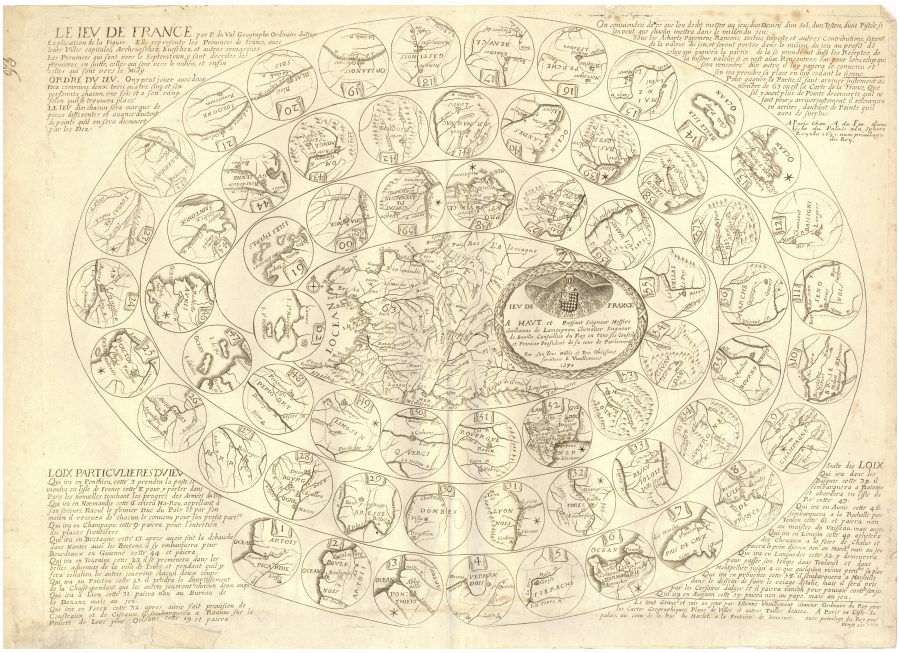
in common, and which thereby constructed a perspective on the world coded specifically as French. Considering that while playing the goose game, players used small figures as stand-ins for themselves, we might understand the center-periphery relations that the *Jeu du Monde* embodied as placing the winners and their friends inside of France looking outward at the surrounding world. This world appears as a type of boundary constituted by knowledge of the world, which builds a shared horizon.

This may explain why Duval therefore reconfigured the *Jeu pour les Dames* for his next game into a goose game version called the *Jeu de France*, first published in 1659 [Fig. 12]. Here, Duval placed the French provinces into the goose spiral, culminating again in a map of France in the center. This format seems to unite a France that had been shaken by the internal conflicts of the Fronde as well as the long years of the Franco-Spanish war, which was in its concluding phases at the moment the game was first published.[31] Unlike in the checkers version, here the players once again move in a spiral, traversing all of France (beginning in the northeastern provinces and circling around counter-clockwise) so that the entire expanse of the kingdom is necessarily covered by the fellow travelers. The journey of the players through France incorporates their movements into a united map of the kingdom which serves visually and conceptually as their ultimate goal at the center of the board. This is a kingdom whose individual parts have all been conjoined within the framework of the board game printed under the aegis of the *privilège du roi*, an authority that the players have accepted – just they have accepted the "order" (*ordre du jeu*) of the game, as well as its "laws" (*loix particulieres du jeu*), which are spelled out in the game's corners. Playing the game means entering into the boundaries of its particular rules as well as its cartographic space. Together, these ensure an order and continuity that manifests itself in the collection of provinces under a central French regime, to which the group of players have subjected themselves.

Like the earlier *Jeu du Monde*, the later *Jeu de France* is dedicated to important figures in the upper echelons of Bourbon society and administration. Duval dedicated the *Jeu de France* to Guillaume de Lamoignon, first president of the Paris parliament, and a magistrate known for codifying French law. The *Jeu du Monde* was dedicated to Gabriel de Rochechouart de Mortemart (Comte de Vivonne), who was *Premier Gentilhomme de la Chambre du Roi*, and whose son would later participate in the victories depicted in the *Jeu de la Paix*, and who would become a *Maréchal de France* and viceroy of Sicily.[32] In

31
Other forms of art, like ballet, could also serve this function, as Ellen Welch has observed about this period of civil unrest. See Ellen R. Welch, *A Theater of Diplomacy. International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France*, Philadelphia 2017, 62. I would suggest here that Duval's games are performative instruments that operate similarly. See also the libretto of the *Ballet de la Félicité, sur le sujet de l'heureuse naissance de Monseigneur le Dauphin*, commissioned and staged to celebrate the birth of Louis XIV (April 9, 2025).

32
Chang, Le jeu du monde, 210.




[Fig. 12]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu de France*, 1671, etching, 38.5 × 52.4 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.92 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

dedicating his games to them, Duval was looking for patronage, just as he was simultaneously attempting to find a purchasing audience on the larger map and atlas market. In terms of the visual language of his maps, though, one can also see how these potential patrons appear – in word and through their coats of arms – as part of the centralized French perspective that the games actively participate in building as part of an interactive, collective geographic experience.

Market interest and a political program were not divorced in Duval's geographic practice. Involved in a legal dispute with a publisher over the re-use of printing plates in the 1650s, Duval wrote in a *factum* that as a *géographe ordinaire du roi*, he would not be likely to give up the rights to continue using his stock of material: this would "oblige him to remain idle, particularly in a time in which the prosperity of the King's victorious forces gives ample material to make new Maps".[33] The expansion of French monarchic power thus, according to him, engendered an expanding market for cartography. The choice to develop a game format like the goose game, with its emphasis on limits and boundaries (of individual action, as well as of space) facilitated a type of play in which learning and submission to a central authority coded as the French Crown were happy bedfellows – at least in the eyes of Duval who could profit from it as a maker of maps and geographical games.[34]

We can discern this especially in certain spaces of the *Jeu de France*, which explicitly and directly interpolate the players good subjects of the king's military campaigns [Fig. 12]. The player who lands on square 3 (Ponthieu), must make haste to "take the *poste*" and hurry to the Isle de France (square 8) to bring news of the progress of the king's armies. The player who lands on Champagne (square 9) will pay a fee for the upkeep of the "*places frontières*". The metaphorical "ends" of the game thus seem, as in the *Jeu du Monde*, to performatively culminate in a center fortified by a periphery in which knowledge is assembled and a view of the world outside of a unified and ordered France (or educated audience in Paris) is hatched. In the *Jeu de France*, tracing the map of France through its constituent parts ends in a French map that is unified and ordered, labeled and known. Perhaps this is the golden egg that the goose game promised to lay in Duval's work: a ludic format that was both expansive and highly delimited allowed itself to be adapted to ends that conflated personal profit with the political aims of an increasingly centralized political regime.

The *Jeu de France*'s recourse to a vocabulary of militarized frontiers brings us back to the *Jeu de la Paix* and to the initial question of how the visual qualities of this game overlapped with both the

33
Cited in Lebens, Prints in Play, 118.

34
Pastoureau prints the inventory made upon his death, noting, "Duval n'atteignit pas une grande prospérité: décédé le 29 septembre 1683, sa succession fut estimée alors à 8 872 livres tournois seulement." Pastoureau, Les atlas, 136.

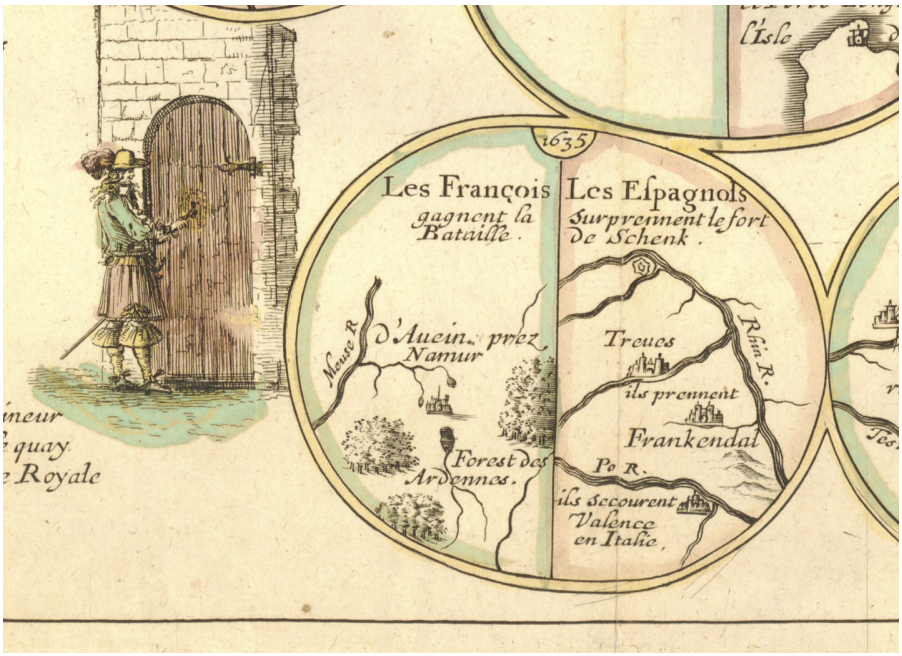
emerging form of the kingdom's borders and the specific semantic valence of the "frontier" as an emerging boundary concept in 1660. If the game of the goose was one that depended on center-periphery relationships, then how were the boundaries that surrounded a French center(s) understood and, accordingly, conveyed in Duval's cartographic *jeux*? If France generally appears in Duval's games as unified and complete, how did his game of peace articulate France's edges? Perhaps because the *Jeu de la Paix* is the only one of Duval's goose games to conjoin a specific historical narrative with topographic elements – leading up to the Treaty of the Pyrenees, which attempted to define and regularize certain boundaries – this object gives us particular insight into how borders could be represented and mediated; in the format of the game, they could moreover be rehearsed again and again, each time the game was played.

## II. "It Is a Blind Goose That Knows Not a Fox from a Fern Bush". Building Frontiers through Games of War and Peace

In *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix*, our Frenchman has entered the scene by crossing over the gameboard's perimeter, traversing the "Ordre du Ieu" at lower left. Having accepted the rules that govern the game, he seems to be moving into the goose spiral via the shop of publisher Antoine de Fer in Paris, named to the left under the door (on "l'Isle du Palais [...] a l'aage de fer, et la Sphere Royale") where he would have purchased the *jeu* that will take him, virtually, around the perimeters of France where the battles of the Franco-Spanish war were staged over twenty-five years [Fig. 13]. The first of these ovals opens in 1635, where we encounter a topography that is typical for the rest of the game's spaces [Fig. 14]. The oval is divided in half, with the French on the left (in the British Museum version, the French sides are outlined in green and the Spanish in pink) and the Spanish on the right. Here we find two opposing sides struggling for military and spatial dominance.[35] *Les François*, the text reads, win the battle at left. Below this text, we find a cartographic rendering of the Meuse (Maas) River, below which we discover a topographical rendering of a small town labeled as "D'Avein, prez Namur" with some trees in cavalier perspective surrounding some small waterways running through the "Forest des Ardennes". We are in a Flemish landscape in which cartographic elements (schematic waterways seen from above) combine with chorographic elements like the village and the trees. We do not know whether the relationships between these elements are in any way accurate in terms of distances, for there is no overarching scale

35 The hand coloring in the British Museum version of the game underscores the military rivalry between the two warring parties. In his instructional introduction to geography, *La sphere Francoise*, Duval writes that colors serve the important function of clarifying divisions (and boundaries) on maps: "Une exacte Division est encore necessaire pour un bon usage des Cartes. On la fait d'ordinaire avec des couleurs [...]." Pierre Duval, *La Sphere Francoise, C'est à dire Le Traité de Geographie qui donne la connoissance & l'usage du Globe & de la Carte, avec les figures necessaires pour ce sujet*, Paris 1663, 47.


[Fig. 13]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 14]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

as there would be on a map. Presumably, they are not: On the other side of a horizontal line that divides the French victories from the Spanish side, we see renderings of Spanish victories that move from the fortress of Schenk (represented schematically as a star-shaped *place forte*) above a chorographic representation of the city of Trier (Treves), on top of a chorographic rendering of the city of Frankendal (which the Spanish have taken) on the banks of the Rhine. The latter nearly incongruously intersects with the Po river, on whose banks we find another small city view with the label "ils secourent Valence en Italie". Duval has plugged the major battles and events of the year into the two halves of the oval, divided between the two sides depending on the outcomes. Geographical relationships are hinted at (Schenk being north of Italy, or the Ardennes south of Namur, for example). Cities appear next to appropriately labeled waterways; hills and mountains also appear where they should, for instance the (unlabeled) Alps between the Rhine and the Po. Yet there is no coherent, measured *cartographic* space.

Instead, Duval defines the zones around France's edges as border regions in which the priority of both warring parties is to control space through the conquest of fortresses and fortified cities. The result is a kind of geographic "*pêle-mêle*" rather than clearly differentiated boundaries. On the other hand, the schematic division of the ovals into two halves delineates a very clear boundary: a border between the French and the Spanish, a clear division of space and power that stands in contrast to the relative hodgepodge on the ground. What are we to make of the overlay of these two models of borders – one a clear boundary and the other a zonal *melée*?

Duval's multifaceted representation of these contested border areas to France's south, east, and north as a face-off between two clearly differentiated parties aligns closely with the period conception of the border as a "*frontière*". In the 1960s, French historian Lucien Febvre examined the semantic history of the French word for frontier, observing that it initially appeared as a feminized adjective of the word *front*, in the sense of a military front. To "*faire front*" meant to confront the other side as if on the battlefield.[36] "Frontier" could also be used as a noun in the Middle Ages, meaning either an architectural façade or a military line-up of a front row of troops directed towards an enemy.[37] At this time, a frontier did not mean a political boundary. Other words for such borders were used instead, including *bornes*, *fins* (implying a "strip of land and the border region of a country"), *lisière* (which was also the border of a fabric sheet), or *limites* (from Latin *limes*), which came to be the most frequently used term through the sixteenth century to indicate the edge of a political territory.

36
Febvre, Frontière, 208.

37
Ibid. On the emergence of territory as a word and concept see for example Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, Chicago/London 2013.

Historian Peter Sahlins has noted that it is a modern truism to think that borders have moved historically in an evolutionary manner from a frontier-like zone (inflected by notions of the American west) to a linear demarcation between states.[38] In pre-modern France, these two boundary models often coexisted, and the notion of a frontier did not necessarily precede that of a linear border, a concept and practice of border marking that in fact had an ancient pedigree. In medieval and early modern France, a *seigneurie*, which as Sahlins notes often formed within the linear ancient "limits" of Gallo-Roman territorial divisions, could be quite precisely designated on the ground through boundary stones or other markers.[39] The French kingdom could also have its edges marked by natural phenomena like trees, rivers, and rocks, as well as man-made barriers like trenches.[40] At the same time, border regions in particular often operated in modes that traversed these demarcations, creating a zonal, or frontier-like region of activities that spanned multiple authorities. French space – both in the interior and in border regions – existed as a plurality of jurisdictions, only one of which was royal. The borders between these jurisdictions *might* overlap, and might dovetail with royal jurisdiction, but often they did not.

Since sovereignty in pre-modern France was conceived in terms of a juridical relationship between king and subject (substantiated through oath and ritual), rather than a *territorial* relationship, this meant that spatial demarcations between different states and different jurisdictions often intersected unevenly.[41] The complexity of the situation on the ground has led historians of French cartography like Joseph Konvitz to observe that they "were often easier to describe verbally than to represent cartographically".[42] Nonetheless visual representations of borders existed; one of these is Duval's game and other maps that found different strategies for dealing with the complex situation on the ground. Before delving into these different representational strategies more closely, it is useful to more fully develop the semantic and political meanings of the frontier and the limit, notions which stood sometimes in opposition and sometimes in relative harmony with each other.

While in the thirteenth century, the French *frontière* arose as a concept and word that insisted in new ways on royal territory as

38
Sahlins, Boundaries, 4.

39
Ibid., 5.

40
Ibid. See e.g. also Paul Bonenfant, A propos des limites médievales, in: *Hommage à Lucien Febvre. Eventail de l'histoire vivante offert par l'amitié d'historiens, linguistes, géographes, économistes, sociologues, ethnologues*, vol. 2, Paris 1953, 73–79.

41
Sahlins, Boundaries, 2–9.

42
Josef Konvitz, *Cartography in France 1660–1848. Science, Engineering, and Statecraft*, Chicago 1987, 32.

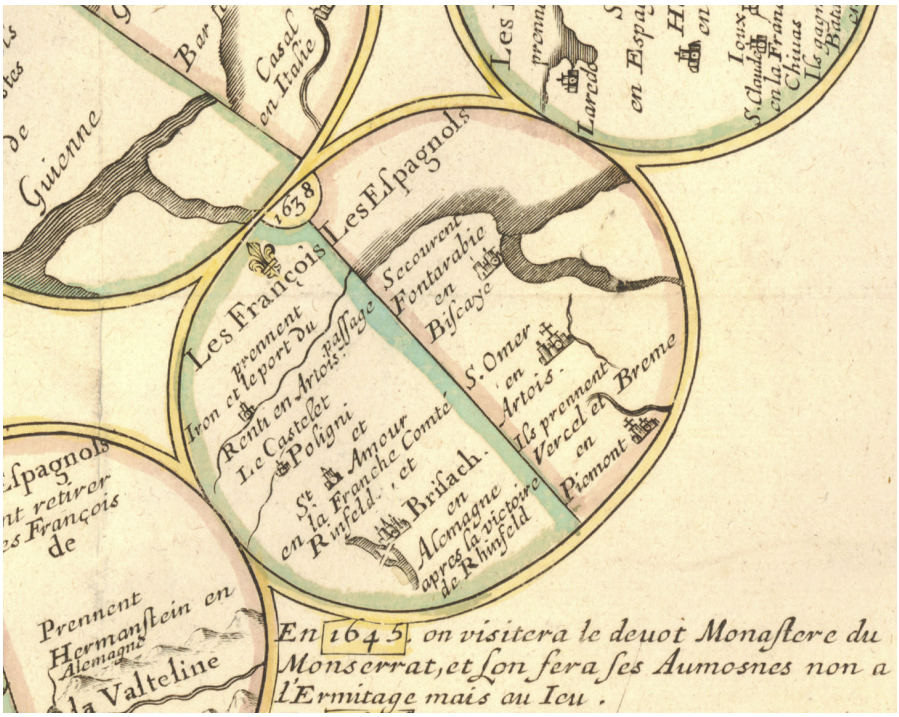
a defensive zone, by the sixteenth century the word "*limites*" with its juridical and peaceful allusions had largely replaced frontier as a dominant border concept in language and practice. A discursive swing again took place in the seventeenth century, which witnessed a shift back to the predominance of the *frontière*. For then, during the process of the Bourbon monarch's consolidation of power, this architectural and military term frontier began to "bury" itself again into the French language as well as into the earth, as Febvre describes, in efforts to strengthen the border through a series of fortified *places* along the kingdom's edges.

The guiding notion of border politics in this period was the struggle against "Habsburg encirclement". In order to combat being surrounded by both wings of the house of Habsburg, Cardinal Richelieu aimed to take over individual fortified spots in order to build a network of "doors" through which the French could pass and also use to keep the enemy out. The idea was not so much to set up a consistent defensive border *wall* as to build a bulwark consisting of strategically scattered points that would facilitate entry and exit into the Empire, Spain, and the Spanish Netherlands.[43] The frontier was conceived in terms of militarized control of passageways rather than linear divisions. French policy, for instance, aimed to maintain strongholds on the eastern side of the Alps (hence the incursion below the mountainous Alps and Po region that we see in the opening oval of 1635 in the *Jeu de la Paix*), or on the eastern bank of the Rhine as at Breisach, which we find for instance in the oval of 1638 represented as a city across the Rhine, which connects to the French bank of the river via a bridge [Fig. 15].

To mobilize and justify this defensive-offensive frontier discourse, French geographers working in support of the monarchy and Richelieu during the mid-seventeenth century frequently drew on a combination of both history and geography. Often, recourse was made to a supposed ancient past that reinforced the notion of France's so-called "natural frontiers". The Jesuit Philippe Labbé who worked as a geographer and publicist for the monarchy wrote, for instance in the voice of Richelieu that the cardinal's goal was to "restituere Galliae limites quos natura praefixit, reddere Gallis regem gallum, confundere Galliam cum Francia, et ubicumque fuit antiqua Gallia ibi restaurare novam".[44] In doing so, Labbé and others could draw support from maps like one by Nicolas Sanson of Ancient Gaul from 1649 [Fig. 16]. Here, we find Ancient Gaul defining itself in large part through rivers and mountains: the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees, which become a shorthand for its edges, particularly when rendered in bold color.

43
Sahlins, Natural Frontiers, 1433.

44
To "restore to Gaul the limits that Nature has traced for her, to submit all the Gauls to a Gallic king, to combine Gaul with France, and everywhere the ancient Gaul had been, to restore the new one". Cited in Gaston Zeller, La Monarchie d'Ancien Régime et les Frontières Naturelles, in: *Revue d'histoire moderne* 8/9, 1933, 305–333, here 312.




[Fig. 15]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

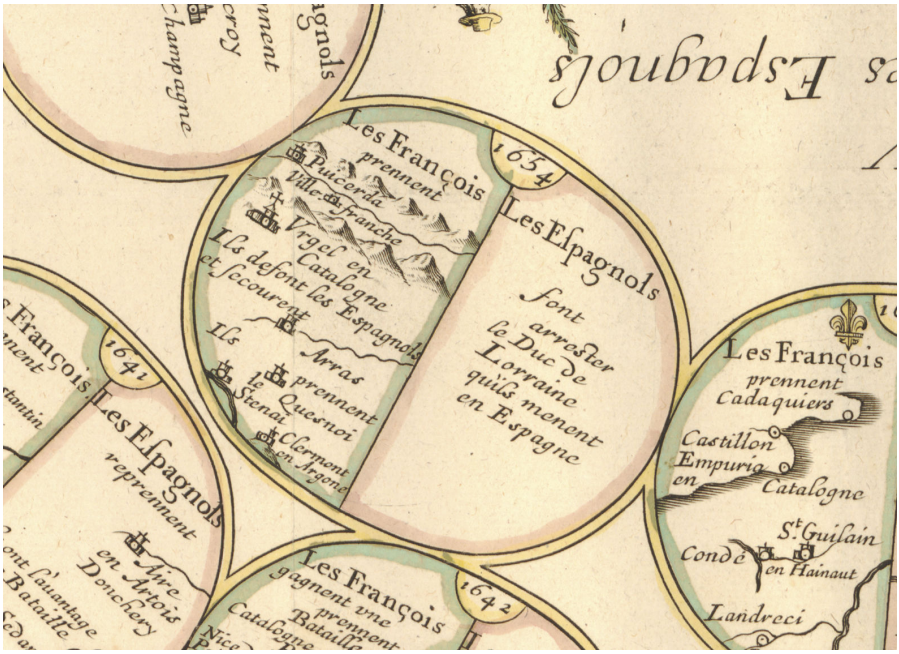

[Fig. 16]
Nicolas Sanson, *Galliae antiquae descriptio geographica / autore Nicolas Sanson Abbavillaeo; Robert Cordier sculpsit*, 1627, engraving, 107 × 112 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

This rhetoric of "natural frontiers" and the frontier as a set of fortified entry and exit points could be conflated rhetorically as well as on maps and other topographic objects like Duval's games in creative ways. In his *Jeu de la Paix*, for instance, we see how the notion of the frontier as a militarized division conjoins a face-off situation (the oval divided in half) with a cartographic and chorographic language that depicts the military frontier as a topography of *places fortes*, rivers, and mountains. Duval unites these representational modes in a liberal manner, so that geography and historical narratives intertwine flexibly. In the 1654 oval, for example, at the top of the French half we find the French armies victorious in the Pyrenean valley of the Cerdagne located above a river in Flanders by Arras, nearby which the French are enjoying further victories [Fig. 17]. North and south flip here in disregard for a coherent cartography, in favor of a temporal depiction that suggests a flow of events in time, one on top of the other. The map further presents mountains and rivers as a means of denoting natural as well as man-made "frontiers" as barriers and passages. Simultaneously, the linear demarcation between the two halves of the oval highlights an imaginary of the frontier as a clearly demarcated face-off. In 1654, on the Spanish side, there appear to be no victories to report: instead of topography we read a text saying that the Spanish have arrested the Duke of Lorraine and taken him back to Spain. Punctual historical events and geographical locations combine in the game to present an incoherent cartographic space, but a coherent depiction of a *frontière* evolving over time.

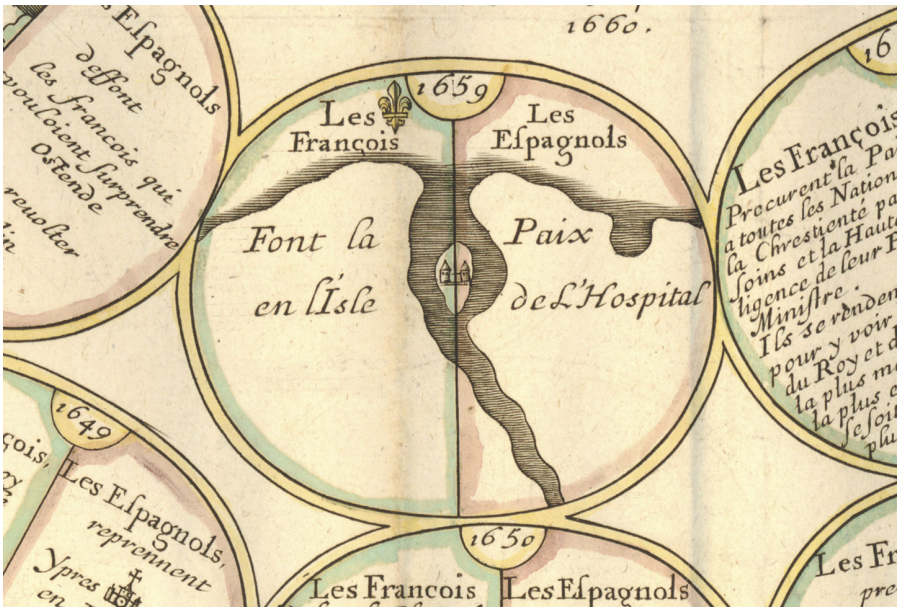
As Sahlins has observed, the situation in the Cerdagne that we find in the 1654 oval, crystallized some of the seventeenth-century border conundrums between natural frontiers and *limites*. This manifested itself in the context of the Treaty of the Pyrenees that concludes Duval's game. In the penultimate oval in Duval's spiral (1659), the geographer brings us to a small building on the center of an island in the Bidassoa River near Bayonne, where Mazarin and Don Louis de Haro met to "make peace on the Island of the Hospital" (now better known as the Island of the Pheasants, or for the peace event, the *Ile de la Conférence*) [Fig. 18]. In the game's oval, the dividing line between France and Spain has disappeared; war appears to have given way to peace, although in fact the frontier has simply been interiorized into the building on the island, as we will see.

After the many years of war, a peace agreement had finally been reached between Spanish representatives in Paris with Mazarin prior to the meeting on the small island in the river between the monarchies, a "natural frontier".[45] There were precedents for choosing this location. The famous "exchange of princes-

[45] See Daniel Séré, *La paix des Pyrénées. Vingt-quatre ans de négociations entre la France et l'Espagne* (1635–1659), Paris 2007, for a detailed account. Other events had taken place on the same site: Louis XI met Henry IV in 1463 there, Francis I was exchanged for his two children there in 1526 and Charles IX and Catherine de Medici came to meet her daughter nearby in 1565. Sahlins, Boundaries, 27.




[Fig. 17]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 18]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

ses" had taken place there in 1615, a double marriage alliance between the Bourbons and the Habsburgs which the new peace treaty would revisit since a marriage between Louis XIV and his cousin Maria Theresa of Spain would seal the accord.[46] For the occasion of the 1659 conference, the island was neutralized and a special architecture was built to accommodate symbolic equality, as Mazarin described in a letter to War Minister Michel Le Tellier:

> equal lodgings, and a large room at the head of the island equidistant from the two lodgings in which there will be two doors, one on his side and one on mine, by which we can enter, each holding rank in the chairs which will be prepared for us on each side of the room, which we will take care to build and to furnish, each one his own half.[47] [Fig. 19]

The frontier, thus, reappears as a representation of a militarized face-off inside of the barrack, something that the symmetry of Duval's oval *lacking* a frontier nonetheless suggests. The peace process thereby took up the architectural aspect of the frontier as a paradoxical prerequisite for ratifying a peace agreement. A border that otherwise did *not* have a linear expression on the ground was called into being so that the two opponents could meet in order to *fix* borders in the Pyrenees, among other sticking points of the treaty talks.[48] This border was both a line and a frontier.[49]

The difficulties in discerning the border in places like the Cerdange valley in the mountains were manifold. Historically, the region had been zonal, stretching across the mountains into both France and Spain. But Article 42 of the Treaty of the Pyrenees mobilized a rhetoric that claimed that "the Pyrenees Mountains, which anciently divided the Gauls from the Spains, shall henceforth be the division of the two said kingdoms".[50] This presented problems, for it was unclear where the Pyrenees began and ended. In response to the problem, both sides attempted to mobilize various types of information: modern historical information, antique his-

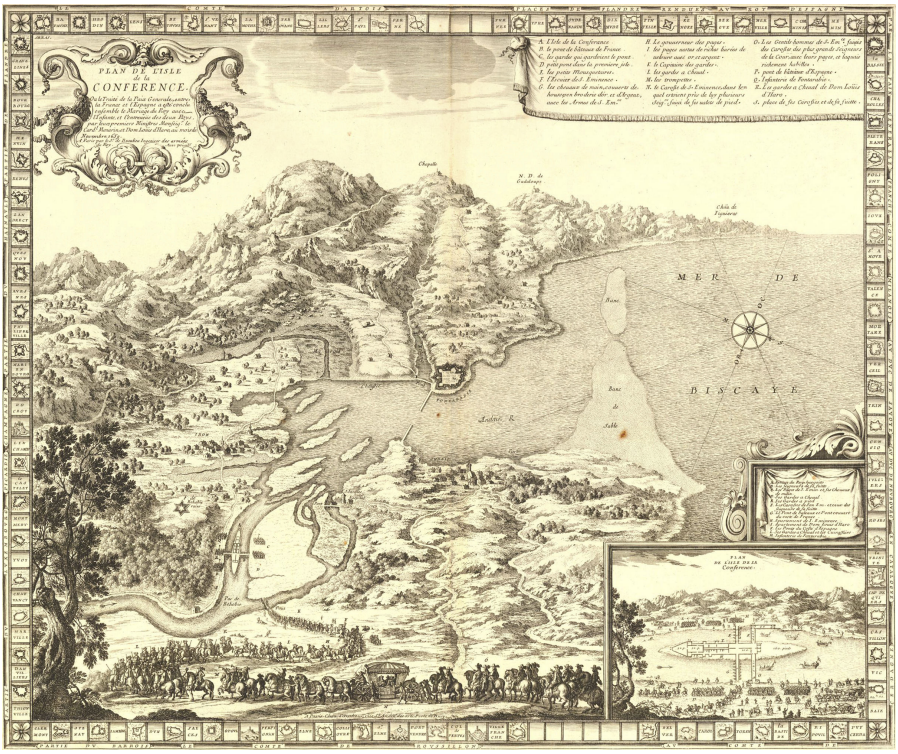
46
See especially Séré, La paix des Pyrénées on the details of the negotiations.

47
Cited in Sahlins, Boundaries, 25.

48
On the architecture of diplomacy at the border, see Thomas Rahn, Grenzsituation des Zeremoniells in der frühen Neuzeit, in: Markus Bauer and Thomas Rahn (eds.), *Die Grenze. Begriff und Inszenierung*, Berlin 1997, 177–206. On the face-off at the *Ile de la Conférence* as a competition through the display of art see José Luis Colomer, Paz política, rivalidad suntuaria. Francia y España en la isla de los Faisanes, in: id. (ed.), *Arte y Diplomacia de la Monarquía Hispánica en el siglo XVII*, Madrid 2003, 61–88.

49
On the figuration of the border as a line in these types of early modern diplomatic situations, see especially Rahn, Grenzsituationen.

50
Sahlins, Boundaries, 20.




[Fig. 19]
Artist unknown (published by Sébastian Pontault, Seigneur de Beaulieu), *Plan de l'Isle de la Conference*, 1659, etching, 45.5 × 54.2 cm, London, British Museum, 1925,0728.16 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).

tories, even anthropology in the form of interviews with locals.[51] Maps came into play relatively late in the negotiations. Mazarin only seems to have examined them after three weeks of negotiating, and having done so complained that the Spanish were trying to "pass off as mountains those which are not, and which strictly speaking are hills".[52]

Ultimately a compromise was reached in which the two sides divided a certain number of villages in the Cerdagne between themselves. The division was neither linear, nor based around the semblance of a "natural frontier". Instead, the French received thirty-three dispersed towns and villages, and the Spanish kept the rest.[53] Ironically, the fictive architecture of a linear border-cum-*frontière* that enabled the French and Spanish parties to conclude a peace treaty in the diplomatic structure on the island in the Bidassoa produced a result that was not linear at all and certainly not "natural". Instead it conformed more to ideas about the frontier in terms of controlling passages through networks of fortified points.

Yet in a map of the Cerdagne made by Duval as part of an atlas compilation of the *Acquisitions de la France par la Paix* (1679) we find that the geographer has rendered a chain of mountains in the center of the valley where there are, in fact, none [Fig. 20].[54] The mountains serve here to indicate the notion of a "natural frontier", but this frontier did not exist. The mountains in the map clarify nothing about the situation on the ground, which we find simultaneously represented by dotted lines denoting provincial divisions along the lines of different jurisdictions. The kinds of creative juxtapositions between different types of borders and representational schemes that we discern in Duval's game thus also find expression in his cartography, as in the atlas containing the Cerdagne map which was designed to advertise French expansionism under Louis XIV. There were, of course, other types of border maps in seventeenth-century France. Beginning with Henry IV, the monarchy began to commission engineer-cartographers to make maps of border zones for military purposes.[55] A survey of 1602–1603, for instance, resulted in a set of eighteen maps of the region between Calais and Hirson [Fig. 21]. These depict the border as a dotted line in astonishing

51
Ibid., 32–49.

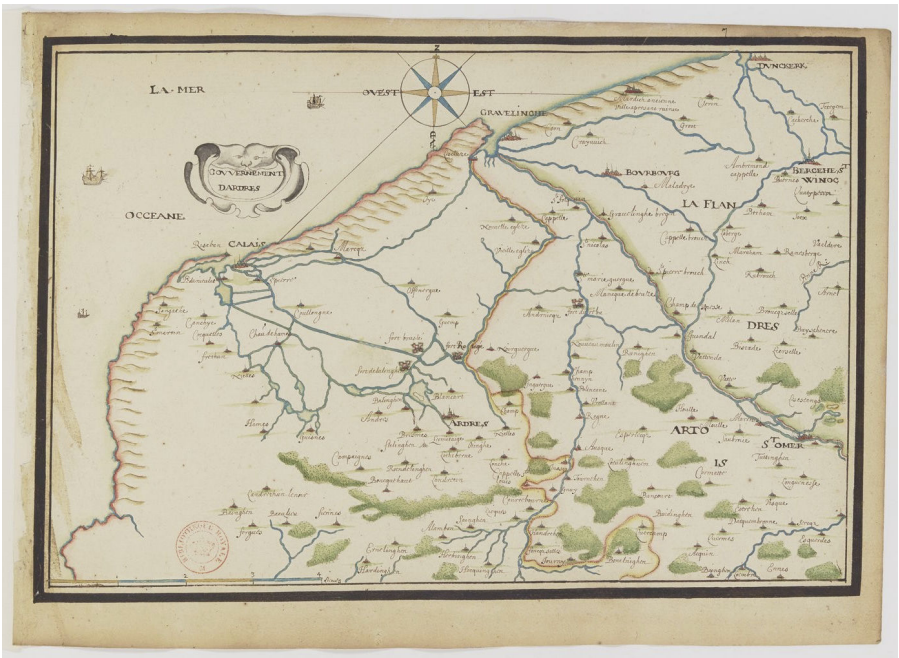
52
Cited in ibid., 39.

53
See ibid., 49–53.

54
Id., Natural Frontiers, 1430.

55
On the Picardy maps, see David Buisseret, The Cartographic Definition of France's Eastern Boundary in the Early Seventeenth Century, in: *Imago mundi* 36, 1984, 72–80. See also id., Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps in France before the Accession of Louis XIV, in: id. (ed.), *Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps. The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago 1972, 99–123.


[Fig. 20]
Pierre Duval, *Les 33 Villages de Cerdagne Cedés a la France part la Traité de Livia*, 1667, 14.9 × 8.6 cm, in: Pierre Duval, *Acquisitions de la France par la Paix*, Paris 1679, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 21]
Artist unknown, *Cartes, plans et vues de la Picardie et pays voisins*, ca. 1601, handcolored manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

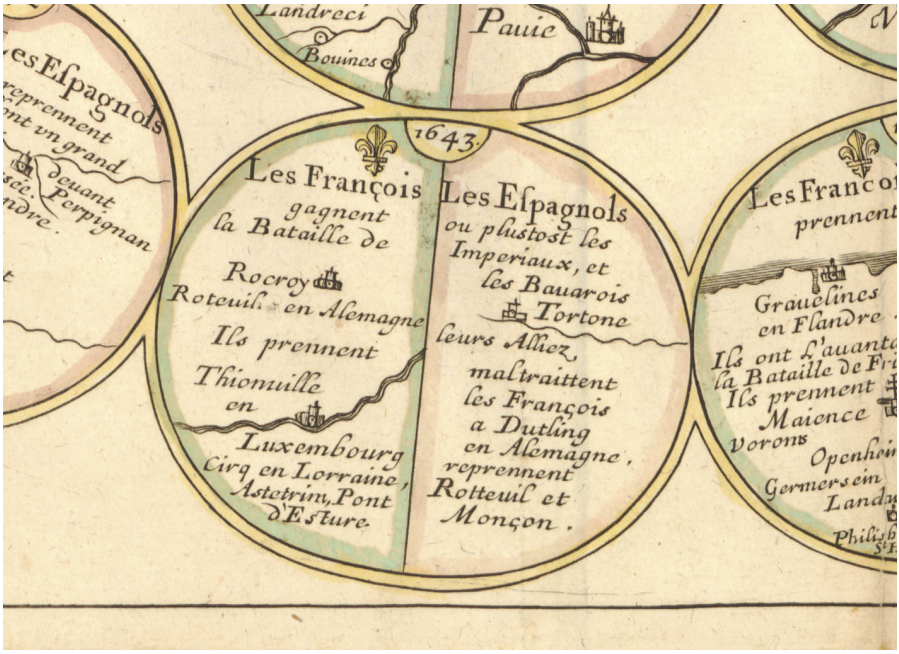
detail, with remarkable consistency, and with uncanny accuracy. Yet these specialized manuscript maps with a limited audience served an entirely different purpose than Duval's printed game.

Duval's game created a kind of simplified matrix for a wider audience far from the border – in Paris specifically, the seat of the central regime – to experience a multitude of events (twenty-five years of war!) and to understand these events and their far-flung locations as constitutive of a France with geographical as well as shared cultural contours. The game brought both players and places into a set of overlapping notions of boundaries in a manner unique to the format of the *jeu de l'oie*. On one hand, it rallied the punctual dots of the fortified places for which the Spanish and French competed on the frontier within the fold of the goose game's delineated perimeters. The game provided a format that allowed the players to make sense of a veritable cascade of information by placing this information within a simple, bounded set of frames. One frame was the overlying "frontier" construction of a face-off between two sides so that a disparate frontier that had no linear borders could be easily understood as part of a clear historical narrative. This narrative culminated in a peace treaty which determined a new set of borders between France and Spain, even though these were not clear, or simple, in border regions.

Meanwhile, the individual ovals helped to collate information by framing it. This information included not only what was legible in the game, but also potentially encompassed that which would have also been familiar to players through a larger stock of printed images and news accumulated throughout the course of the war. Events like the French victory at the Battle of Rocroi in 1643, for example, had engendered numerous representations in the form of commemorative broadsides and prints [Fig. 22, Fig. 23, Fig. 24, and Fig. 25].[56] Most, if not all, of the battles were also the subject of reports in early newspapers like Théophrast Renaudaut's *Gazette de France*, which Renaudaut started in 1631 and which rapidly became a key source of news around France as well as a monarchist mouthpiece.[57] As consumers of a range of printed materials in a multifaceted media landscape, the purchasers of Duval's game would not have interacted with his *jeu* in a bubble. Gathering even a small selection of information related to the Battle of Rocroi, from individual prints and broadsides to a full issue (no. 65, 1643) of the *Gazette*, we can today get a sense of how Duval's *Jeu de la Paix* encapsulated historical and geographical information into a highly concentrated form [Fig. 26]. Only snippets of a larger narrative appear in the game's ovals. But the literate public could have associated the simplified information on the game with the more

56
On Rocroi and print media, see Barbara Gaehtgens, Prints, Politics, and a Child King. The Battle of Rocroi in 1643, in: *Getty Research Journal* 7, 2015, 1–18.

57
See Howard Solomon, *Public Welfare, Science and Propaganda in 17th-Century France*, Princeton, NJ 2015, 100–122.

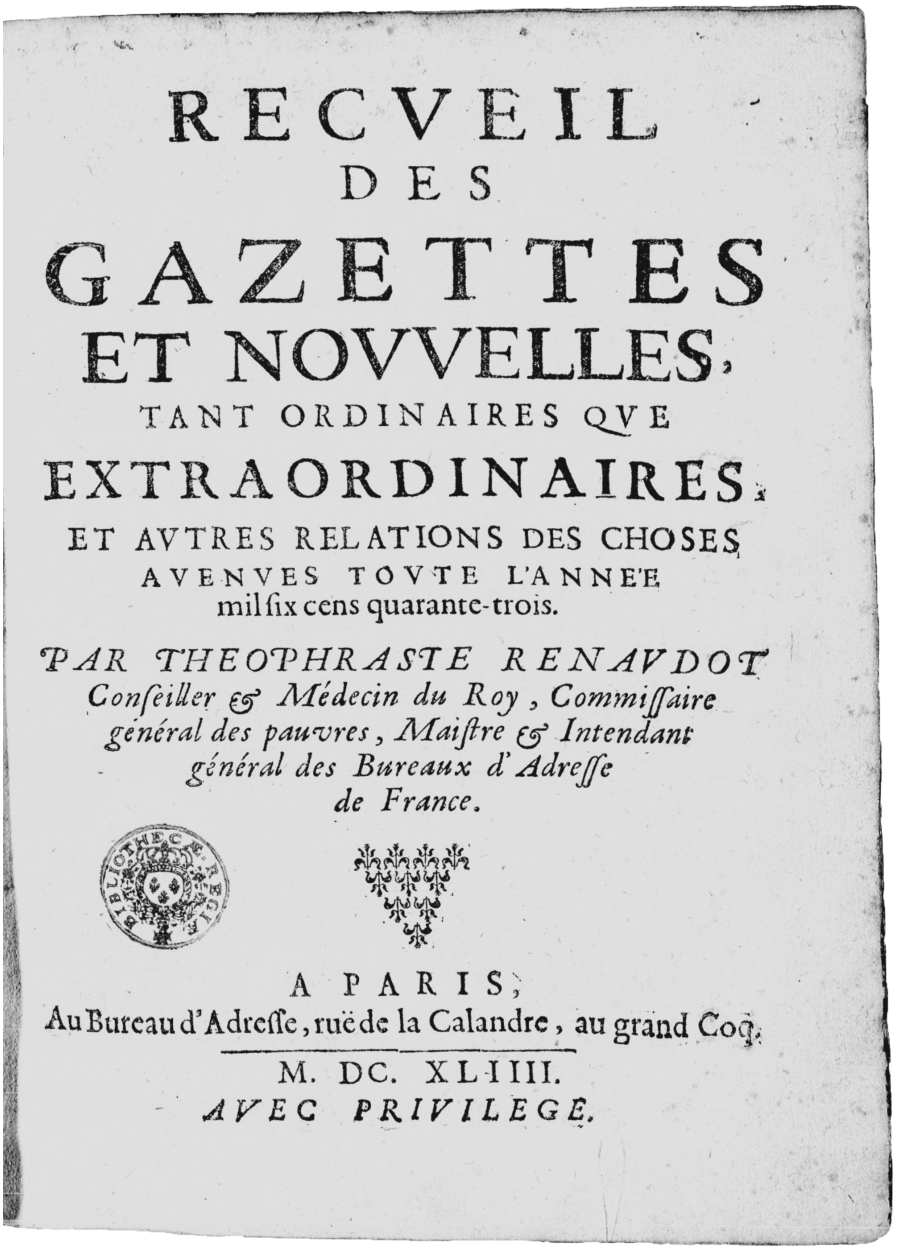



[Fig. 22]
Pierre Duval (published by Antoine de Fer), *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* (detail of [Fig. 2]), 1660, handcolored etching and letterpress, 40.5 × 45.7 cm, London, British Museum, 1893,0331.67 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence (April 17, 2025).


[Fig. 23]
Stefano della Bella, Sébastian de Beaulieu, and François Collignon, *Bataille de Rocroy, Ordres de bataille des deux armées lesquelles demeurèrent en présence l'une de l'autre depuis trois heures après midy jusques au lendemain cinq heures du matin que le combat commença 1643*, 1694, engraving, two sheets, 58 × 48 cm and 29 × 48 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

[Fig. 24]
Artist unknown, *Anne d'Autriche, Louis XIV enfant et Philippe de France duc d'Orléans*, 1643, engraving, 44.1 × 53.9 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).


[Fig. 25]
Artist unknown (published by A. Boudan), *Les Heureux commencements du règne de Louis XIIII, sous la généreuse conduite du duc d'Enguien*, 1643, engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).



RECVEIL
DES
GAZETTES
ET NOVVELLES,
TANT ORDINAIRES QVE
EXTRAORDINAIRES,
ET AVTRES RELATIONS DES CHOSES
AVENVES TOVTE L'ANNE'E
mil ſix cens quarante-trois.

*PAR THEOPHRASTE RENAVDOT*
*Conſeiller & Médecin du Roy, Commiſſaire*
*général des pauvres, Maiſtre & Intendant*
*général des Bureaux d'Adreſſe*
*de France.*



A PARIS,
Au Bureau d'Adreſſe, ruë de la Calandre, au grand Coq.

M. DC. XLIIII.
*AVEC PRIVILEGE.*

[Fig. 26]
*La Gazette*, 1643, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

voluminous cascade of printed information flowing through seventeenth-century Paris recounting the war's events through almanacs, broadsides, printed newspapers, and pictorial prints as the war unfolded in the public eye.[58]

Put another way, Duval's game would not have been legible outside of the larger flourishing context of French print-media culture, including geographical products like maps, tables, atlases, and even games. The simplified format of the goose's spiral would thus have provided players with a bordered parameter in which to bind disparate forms of printed information together in the mind, and on the gameboard. Just as geographical tables (like his uncle Sanson's famous examples) allowed for a simplified framework into which one could place geographical information as if in mental cubbies, the *Jeu de la Paix* presented a simple format in which previously ingested information could be easily spatialized and "stored" as well as gained.[59] But in Duval's game, information was reduced to basic topographic points and incomplete sentences: the French win the battle, the Spanish kidnap the Duke of Lorraine. Irony, subversive subtlety, and potentially divergent paths are heavily circumscribed. The game's board constituted a kind of common ground, which traded in generalized information (facts about wins and losses) while also delimiting – bounding – potentially unpredictable fallout.

Fittingly, the end of the game was entirely predetermined: in Duval's *Jeu de la Paix*, even if the *dénouement* differed each time the game was played, the ultimate result was never in question as opposed to chess, checkers, or cards where the victor remains unknown until the game is over.[60] Here, the conflict between the French and the Spanish did not translate into a conflict with an unknown finish between players. The end of the game is peace between the two kingdoms. The goose game thereby brought a group of literate, well-heeled, French-speaking, probably Parisian, players together to visit historical and geographic sites on the peripheries of France in the manner of virtual tourists, with a minimum of agonistic strife. This *parcours* ended in a peace that settled certain spatial and political disputes. It thus concentrated the players into a center bounded by a perimeter of time and space on the gameboard; it provided a kind of fortified architecture – a frontier – in which players were united in a secure center looking out at

58
On media and the Treaty of the Pyrenees (specifically the marriage of the king) see Abby E. Zanger, *Scenes from the Marriage of Louis XIV. Nuptial Fictions and the Making of Absolutist Power*, Stanford, CA 1997.

59
I have further discussed this suggestion in another article: Materializing Borders and Learning to Think in Limits, in 17th-Century France, in: *Artium Quaestiones* 35, 2024 (April 9, 2025).

60
Of the *jeux de l'oie* from the Revolutionary era, Taws writes, "The successive stages of the game embodied the 'meantime' of those living through a time of war, but possibly hundreds of miles from the conflict itself. They allowed participants to empathize with the effects of war as if simultaneous action, even though the form of the game effectively required that it represent a process judged to have been completed, in part at least." Taws, Wargaming, 62.

shared, but distanced, experiences of the periphery. This periphery was simultaneously the perimeter of the board, the French frontiers, and a conceptual matrix.

Peace, at the center of the gameboard and the end of the game's spatial-historical narrative, manifests itself therefore as a fortress constructed through the shared acquisition of knowledge gained through a highly attenuated agonistic type of play. The French gentleman has sheathed his sword and entered the "magic circle" of play. To use the vocabulary of anthropologist Victor Turner, the liminal experience of the game's multiple borders served as a vehicle for a collective performance that overcame communal fractures and the strife of the long war and civil unrest by channeling and diffusing them into the controlled space of the goose game. Playing the game can thereby be understood as a means of generating a social *bond*, an affective community conjoined by symbols and sentiment and held together by a border erected between the French, on one side, and the Spanish on the other.[61]

Who, though, was the ultimate beneficiary of this game? Duval, perhaps, although he did not generate much profit from it, as Mireille Pastoureau has pointed out.[62] In conclusion, I will suggest that in attending to the *Jeu de la Paix*'s final ovals (1659–1660), we might further inquire into the nature of the game's prospective players and potential winners. These spaces of the game, where the players encounter the marriage of Louis XIV to the Spanish princess, subtly demand that we think about the ways in which gender mapped onto the border discourse that the game asked its players to rehearse.

## III. What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander? En-Gendering Borders in Duval's *Jeu de la Paix*

In 1672, Mme de Sévigné wrote to her daughter, "Je voudrais bien que vous n'eussiez joué qu'à l'oie et que vous n'eussiez point perdu tant d'argent".[63] The implication, for Sévigné and for her contemporaries, was that the goose game was a safe bet. This is because, as previously mentioned, the goose game mitigated financial risk since the sums deposited in the collective pool were limited and could only be increased in the small doses dictated by the board's rules. For this reason, the *jeu de l'oie* was an inoffensive type of leisurely

61
See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, New Brunswick, NJ/London 2008, especially 131–165. Benedict Anderson famously locates this kind of affective bond in the medium of print culture, even though he discusses a later historical period. We can nonetheless observe similar dynamics in the case of seventeenth-century French print culture put in service of the Bourbon state. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1986.

62
Pastoureau, Les atlas, 136.

63
"I wish you had only played the game of the goose and had not lost so much money." Cited in Arrif Abdelmajid, Julien Baudry, Emmanuelle Chapron, Pierre-Marie Delpu, and Laurent-Sébastien Fournier, *Jeu de l'oie. Histoire et métamorphoses*, Paris 2019 (December 1, 2024).

pursuit, as opposed to other forms of gaming like cards and dice. The outcome was, more or less, predetermined. Much moralizing ink was spilled in seventeenth-century France, as Elisabeth Belmas and John Dunckley have shown, debating the mores of games and chronicling the social ills that it brought forth: explosions of the passions, the dissolution of morals, and the concomitant erosion of the social body through the loss of fortunes and social slippage.[64] A pedagogical goose game like Duval's Game of Peace, however, served a clear social purpose, teaching its players about history and geography while reining them into a pro-monarchy fold coded as a male-dominated, patriarchal space. It was here that his game's money-pot was located, at the point where Louis XIV, returned from the Spanish border and entered Paris triumphantly with his new bride.

This patriarchal space had been formed legally in early modern France as part of an enduring state-making enterprise in which the rising *noblesse de la robe* (especially Parisian parliamentarians, like Guillaume de Lamoignon to whom Duval dedicated his *Jeu de France*) had sought to shore up its position by regulating the transfer of family fortunes.[65] They had done so in part by enacting laws that circumscribed women's freedoms regarding marriage, birth, and inheritance rights.[66] This was important for them because they viewed control over these domains as necessary for the continuous accumulation of wealth and power achieved through venal offices. The Crown also had an interest in the consolidation of the *robe*'s power because the sale of offices generated substantial revenue *and* a loyal bureaucratic support structure, both of which were key to consolidating increasingly centralized power. Historian Sarah Hanley has termed this the "family-state compact", noting that the Parisian judiciary reordered family relationships in the service of both individuals and the centralizing state through a series of laws passed from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century. These laws superseded religious authorities and "regulated alliances in terms of family interests, not those of church or children".[67] The name of

64
On seventeenth-century gaming, politics, and the "scourge" of gambling, see Belmas, Jouer autrefois; John Dunkley, *Gambling. A Social and Moral Problem in France, 1685–1792*, Oxford 1985 and Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, Wheels. A Different History of French Culture*, Philadelphia 2005.

65
Sarah Hanley, Engendering the State. Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France, in: *French Historical Studies* 16/1, 1989, 4–27.

66
Ibid.

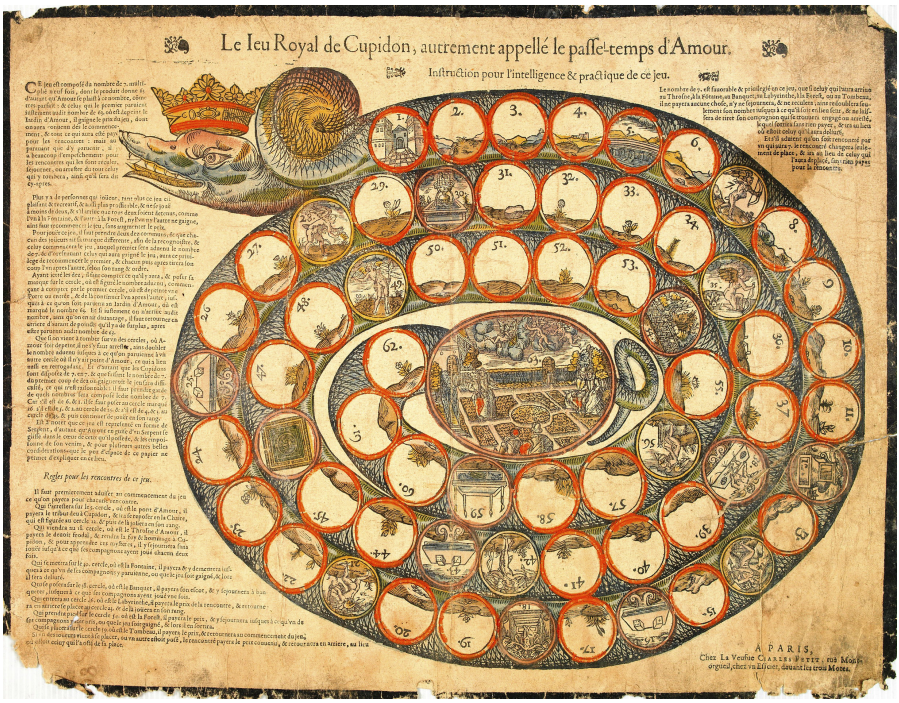
67
For instance, an edict of 1639 obliged priests to require a couple to procure written parental consent, also proving their parent's social status and address in order to hinder clandestine marriage as well as socially disadvantageous matches. Likewise, children from clandestine marriages were disinherited. Similar, related laws worked to require witnesses for births, and even aimed to reward fathers who bore many children, as in 1666 when an edict proclaimed that "marriages are the fecund sources from which the strength and grandeur of states is derived". Ibid., 12. Consequently, it promised to reward fathers of more than

*this* game was: keep the money firmly in the family pot – and make sure that fathers control it. This was a practice echoed rhetorically in a state discourse that framed the king as a *pater familias*.[68] The fortification of family affairs, as associated with the king's own family (to be born of his new bride) finds a parallel in Duval's game, in the final ovals of 1659–1660, where it also dovetails with the game's theme of capturing (and defending) fortified towns.

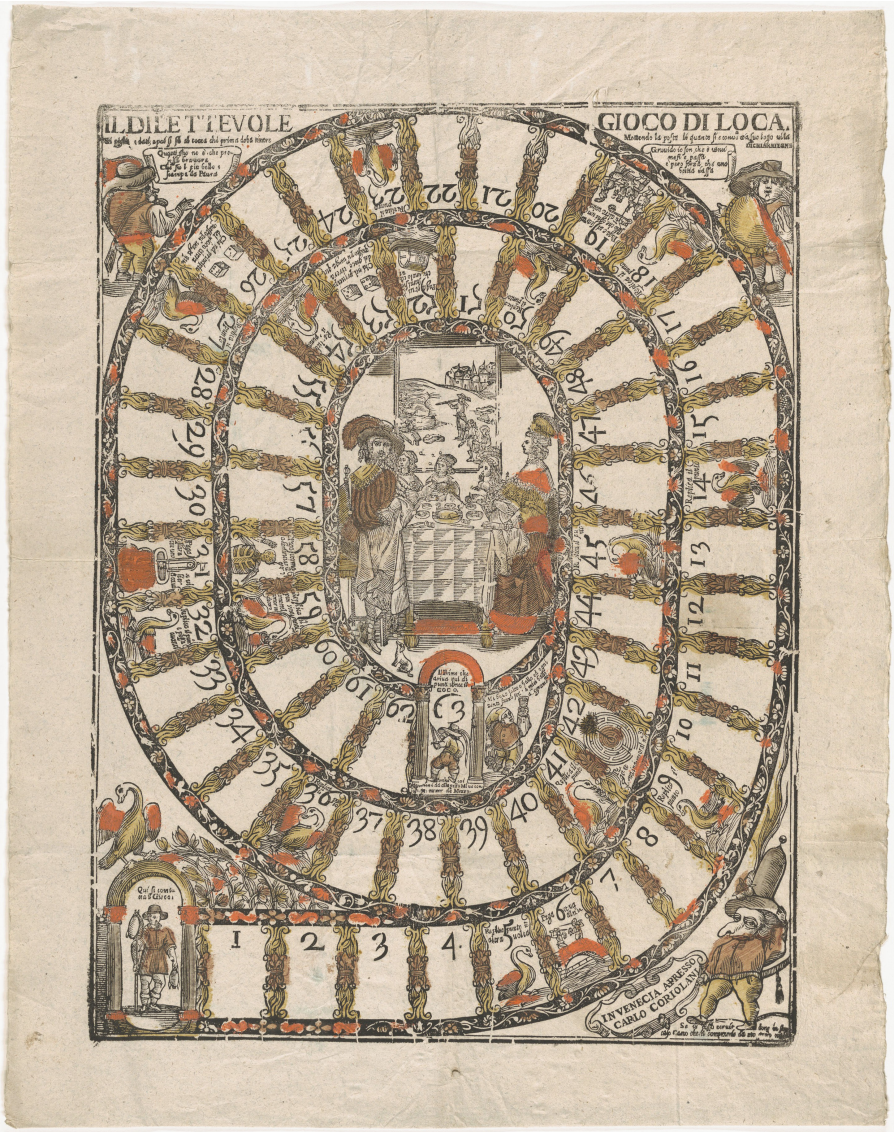
As in other contemporary goose games in which love is a theme, here marriage appears as the final goal in the topsy-turvy spiral journey through life. It is the space of peace which comes only after many turbulent years of struggle. In *Le Jeu Royal de Cupidon, autrement appelléle passe-temps d'Amour* (ca. 1640), players enter the spiral and progress through a wilderness of difficulties before alighting – victoriously – in a *hortus conclusus* in the game's center, where several couples promenade under a gaggle of cupids who take aim with their arrows from above. Sixty-three is the perfect number for love, the game says, since it is made of three (for men) and four (for women), and the "*tres parfait*" number sixty-three [Fig. 27]. The spiral itself takes the guise of a snake, which, as the game hints, is a sign of female temptation, because love – like a snake – slides into the hearts of those in its thrall and poisons them. In an Italian game of the second half of the seventeenth century, a humble fisherman (the stand-in for the player) enters into the goose spiral [Fig. 28]. By the winning space at the center of the board, he has become a wealthy *pater familias*, surrounded by wife and children at a well-set dining table. A window behind them shows the now wealthy man as a hunter, taking aim with a firearm, presumably at the bird served on the table below. As in the game of cupid, there is a subtle ambiguity which pervades this scene, between happiness and violence, joy and discontent. Both games pose the question of whether love is a kind of (feminine) trap. The production of these types of interactive images against the backdrop of the legal situation in France implies a connection between the goose game and the state regulation of family affairs in games that explicitly frame the goose path as a family matter. In Duval's *Jeu de la Paix*, marriage (and the associated peace) takes on an explicitly national dimension that maps onto the play for border strongholds that we have previously analyzed. Here, the goose game's spiral format and the thematic of war and love conspire to intertwine the language of the *frontière* and that of marriage. The French fear of Habsburg encirclement is conquered

ten living children with tax exemptions. Likewise, women's access to their dowries (as both brides and widows) was severely curtailed.

68
On construction of the family and the state in terms of paternalistic relations in early modern French political philosophy, see for instance Nannerl O. Keohane's discussion of Jean Bodin in ead., *Philosophy and the State in France. The Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Princeton, NJ 1980, 69–70.




[Fig. 27]
Artist unknown (published by La Veusve Charles Petit), *Jeu (Le) Royal de Cupidon, autrement appellee le passe-temps d'Amour*, 1640s, handcolored woodcut, 40 × 52 cm, Collection A. Seville (April 17, 2025).




[Fig. 28]
Artist unknown (published by Carlo Coriolani), *The Pleasant Game of the Goose (Il Dilettevole Gioco di Loca)*, after 1640, woodcut with contemporary hand coloring, 59 × 46.5 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Purchase, Jefferson R. Burdick Bequest, 2016 (April 17, 2025).

by incorporating the Spanish princess into what French literary historian Joan DeJean has called "fortress France".[69]

As in his *Jeu de la France*, Duval's peace game interweaves its players with patriotic events. These are not only battles, but also, subtly, the biography of the young Louis XIV, whose life path unfolds as the players (on their respective life paths) play in the goose spiral. In Duval's game, the figure of the king never appears physically, but Louis XIV (whose father died mid-war in 1643) appears in the game's rules on multiple occasions. In 1643, for example, "the first year of the reign of our King, we advance to 1658 to serve at his glorious conquest of the cities of Flanders". Landing on 1644, "we draw a contribution not from the cities that the King has conquered and reduced to submission, but from each player". In 1655, "we follow the King in his first and illustrious campaign, where his Majesty reduces several cities to submission". And finally, in the penultimate oval of the game during the peace conference on the island, "we prepare to attend the joyful celebrations of peace and the solemn affair of the King's marriage, we do not pay tailors for *cet effet*, but put money in the pool". In an early modern wedding of marriage politics and diplomacy, the successful signing of the peace treaty on the island we see in oval 1659 prepares, in the game, the king's marriage which the players will attend. In this manner Duval's game took on aspects of the "love" goose game variations which invariably end in marriage and combined them with a royal French biography consisting of the conquest of *places fortes* and culminating in the peace treaty and marriage on the Spanish border at the *Ile de la Conférence*.

In actuality, the drawn-out peace process on the island threatened to undermine the marriage. Squabbling about issues like the boundaries in the Pyrenees, among other points of contention, had postponed the nuptials for months, while both courts waited nervously nearby on their respective sides of the frontier.[70] When the marriage did finally occur in 1660, the appetite for information was ample – and Mazarin actively encouraged publications to document the event, marshalling reports in the form of pamphlets, prints of the marriage contract, edicts, and pictorial prints.[71] As Abby Zanger observes, "The report from the border was apparently official work".[72]

69
On the concept of seventeenth-century France as a fortress, see Joan DeJean, *Literary Fortifications. Rousseau, Laclos, Sade*, Princeton, NJ 1984.

70
Daniel Séré details the final months of bargaining about the fate of the Prince of Condé, questions related to borders/the exchange of *place fortes*, and the marriage. See Séré, La paix des Pyrénées, 461–528.

71
See, for instance: François Colletet, *Traité de paix entre les couronnes de France et d'Espagne, avec le contract de mariage du Roy Tres-Chrestien et de la Serenissime infante* [...], Paris 1660.

72
Zanger, Scenes from the Marriage, 70.

Zanger and Margaret Carroll have analyzed the weddings that took place at the Spanish-French border, both in 1612 (where Louis XIV's and Maria Theresa's mothers were exchanged) and in 1660.[73] On each occasion, the gendered transaction of bodies crossing the border positioned princesses as objects through which border politics were negotiated and performed. In the context of Duval's game, it is helpful to briefly cast a glance at select pamphlet descriptions that drew parallels between the kind of siege warfare that characterized the dynamics of exchange on the Habsburg-French frontiers and the (supposedly) peaceful event of nuptial union that marked the onset of peace, represented as the game's final, and most enclosed, circle at the board's center. The most numerous pamphlets recounting the event and the subsequent royal wedding procession back to Paris for an audience far from the border were penned by François Colletet and published by Jean Baptiste Loyson.[74] The latter also published texts describing the treaty negotiations, and he received royal permission to print and distribute his accounts, of which the first, the *La Nouvelle Relation Contenant L'Entreveue et Serments des Roys pour L'Entiere Execution de la Paix* from 1660, was a bestseller: it ran through four editions.[75]

In a suspenseful passage, Colletet describes how, desiring to catch a glimpse of his future wife (and assess her suitability), Louis XIV entered the border architecture on the island that we have described incognito [Fig. 29]. While the building was carefully structured to create a clear and measured boundary that expressed parity between the two kingdoms, Louis's surreptitious entry transformed the space into a frontier zone in which the princess was rendered an object of scopic besiegement. Colletet writes,

> Sur les deux heures le Roy monta à cheval, suivi seulement de dix ou douze Seigneurs qu'il avait nommez [...] & avec cette petite troupe le Roy inconnu s'estant approché de l'Isle de la Conference, suivant le projet qui en avoit esté fait [...] & entra dans un Cabinet, où il trouva Monsieur le Cardinal avec Dom Louis d'Aro. Ensuitte il se rendit par un autre endroit de la Salle, où estoit de Roy d'Espagne & l'Infante, avec la Reyne Mere & Monsieur, à la faveur de Monsieur le Cardinal & de Dom Louis d'Aro, qui se tenoit dans le dehors de la porte ouverte de cette Salle, le Roy derriere eux, qui

73
See ibid., and Margaret Carroll, The Erotics of Absolutism. Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence, in: *Representations* 25, 1989, 3–30.

74
Zanger counts thirty-four. See Zanger, Scenes from the Marriage, 71. An ample selection can be found here (April 9, 2025).

75
Zanger, Scenes from the Marriage, 75.

[Fig. 29]
Sébastien de Beaulieu, Adam Perelle, and Ludovic Richer, *Vue de l'ile des faisans ou fut conclue la paix entre la France et l'Espagne*, engraving, 40 × 45 cm each, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

> couuroient aussi son dessein, vit un long temps la Reyne son Espouse [...].[76]

The Infanta, here, becomes an object for the king's *dessein*, a word which Antoine Furetière defined in his *Dictionnaire Universelle* first as a "project, enterprise, or intention" ("Le prince a de grands desseins").[77] Here, as in siege warfare, the king's design is to position himself so that he cannot be seen but is able to capture the princess with his gaze. The pamphlet deliberately exposes the king to the curious public's view, providing them a glimpse of Louis XIV conquering the otherwise off-limits bride. This visual preview was a prelude, of course, to the passage of the Infanta over the border and into the king's French church, court, and bed. The nuptial ceremony and consummation of the marriage inscribed the Spanish princess into the French political body in a reversal of Habsburg encirclement.[78]

The ritual of the foreign princess's body becoming captive to the king's design positioned her as a personified form of dowry, a guarantee for the marriage and concomitant peace which concluded twenty-five years of war. In subsequent discussions of the king and his new queen's procession into Paris, this monetary dimension of the captured queen-as-booty appears frequently. In a preview of the grand royal entry in Paris that took place at Vincennes, Colletet describes the king both as a brave warrior and as "Pere de la Patrie" with "une veritable tendresse pour les fideles Bourgeois" who wants to show them "le thresor qui luy est le plus cher & le plus precieux du monde".[79] Thinking in terms of Duval's game, we may already

76
François Colletet, *La Nouvelle Relation Contenant L'Entreveue et Serments des Roys pour L'Entiere Execution de la Paix*, Paris 1660, 11: "At two o'clock the King got on his horse, followed by only ten or twelve Lords that he had named, the rest of the court by express order remained here [...] and with this little troupe the King, incognito, approaching the isle of the Conference and following the project that had been laid out. He promptly alit at the end of the bridge, & followed only by his Captain of the Guards, crossed the bridge and entered into a small room where he found the Cardinal with Dom Louis of Haro; then he made his way to another part of the Room, where the King of Spain & the Infanta with the Queen Mother and brother (Monsieur) were, and with the help of the Cardinal and Dom Louis of Haro who placed themselves in the outside of the open door of this room, the King behind them, which also covered up his scheme (*Dessin*), gazed for a long time at the Queen, his wife." See Zanger, Scenes from the Marriage, 77.

77
Furetière, Dictionnaire Universel, 629.

78
On the 1660 marriage and the problem of the princess's liminality, see Zanger, Scenes from the Marriage. When Louis XIV's father and mother were married at the same spot years before, his father's doctor reported on the difficulties Louis XIII had consummating the marriage. His report indicates both the violent erotics of the event and its intensely public nature. After some goading from his courtiers, Louis XIII returns to Anne of Austria's bedroom, having failed to perform the deed on a previous attempt. Now, in the evening, he is "put into bed with the queen his wife in the presence of the queen his mother". The latter remains to witness. Later, Louis emerges and shows off his bloody penis to those assembled. See Carroll, Erotics of Absolutism, 19.

79
"As Father of the Country having a true tenderness for the faithful bourgeois [...] the treasure which is most dear to him and the most precious in the world." François Colletet, *Recit Veritable et Fidelle de tout ce qui s'est faict & passé dans la Cavalcade du Roy et de la Reyne,*

draw a parallel here between the position of the gentleman playing the game to win the collective pool of money at the spiral's end and the king as a father figure who triumphs on the frontier and brings his treasure back to Paris for all to see. This is a treasure that he has literally enclosed in gold; the queen is subsequently marched through Paris:

> Elle estoit si richement vestuë, que c'estoit une merveille quand on jettoit les yeux sur elle [...] Sa robbe estoit d'un Brocard d'or, entierement couvetre de broderie en bosse d'or & d'argent & sie pesante, que tout Paris s'estoinnoit de voir cette grande Princesse porter cette charge sans aucune contrainte; car outre cette richesse elle estoit charmarrée de rubis, de perles, & de pierres precieuses, qui brilloient comme autant d'Estoilles, & qui n'estoient pas d'un petit poids, puis que c'estoit en effet l'élite des plus beaux joyaux de le Courronne.[80]

Among this public, we find the players of Duval's game who have contributed money to the communal pool of funds to join in the festivities. The players bear witness to the completion of the border spectacle – which they could have followed through pamphlets like Colletet's – documenting the king's victories at war, the diplomatic table, and, finally, his foreign queen whose corporeal transformation from Spanish princess to French treasure marked the beginning of peace.

In playing the game, Duval's players incorporated themselves into the boundaries of the state and its marriage politics. These politics included on one hand the very public media spectacle of the king's marriage at the Spanish border and, on the other, the ways in which the Bourbon administration regulated marriage more generally through the delimitation of women's freedoms. Significantly, the king does not appear as a figure on the board; instead, we only see the gentleman player entering the game and then again in the center of the board in the space of "peace" where he brandishes an olive branch. Our player has been physically envelopped into the game's political program and surrounded by the overlapping boundaries that define the French state as well as Duval's board.

As a format, the goose game was well-suited to carry such subtle implications for several reasons. One, the game was valued in seventeenth-century France (as we have seen with Mme de Sév-

*au Parc de Vincennes A la Monstre Generale des Colonels & Bourgeois de Paris*, Paris 1660, 6 (April 9, 2025).

80
Id., *Nouvelle Relation contenant la Royalle Entrée*, Paris 1660, 23–24 (April 9, 2025). She was "so richly dressed that it was a marvel when one looked at her: she had only a simple headdress of crepe on the top of her head which floated at the will of the wind, in order that everyone could see her more conveniently. Her dress was of gold brocade, entirely covered with embroidery embossed with gold and silver and so heavy that all Paris was amazed to see this great princess carry this load so freely because besides these riches she was bedecked with rubies, pearls, and precious stones, which shone like as many stars and that were not of a light weight, because they were, in effect, the elite of the most beautiful of the crown jewels."

igné) precisely because it was a form of recreation that did not deplete family fortunes and social mores. Two, in Duval's version, the collective pot of money can be understood as a more general "French" financial pool into which the Infanta is also incorporated. The biography of the king overlaps with the "biographical" journey of both the kingdom and its borders over twenty-five years of war as well as the "biographies" of the players who journey virtually through the game's temporal-geographical spiral. Playing the game thus becomes a form of state-building, in which parallels are drawn between the game's perimeters, the frontiers of the kingdom, and the domain of the family with its *pater familias* at the helm.

We might usefully compare Duval's overdetermined play with borders to Madeleine de Scudéry's famous *Carte de Tendre* (Map of Tender), an engraved allegorical type of map, or game, included in her 1654 novel *Clélie* [Fig. 30]. In the land of Tender, we see two women dressed *à l'antique* guiding a gentleman, dressed like Duval's player, through a landscape composed of feelings (e.g., probity, sensibility, respect). There are no frontiers in this imaginary world, and no ineluctable path through the emotional realm of the heart bounded only by *terres inconnues*. As Joan DeJean has explored, in the world of collaborative writing and speaking embodied by Scudéry's novels and the social practices of the mid-seventeenth-century salon, the *Carte de Tendre* can be understood as a place in which women's inclinations, built through dialogue, are not bounded by the will of men (or the state).[81] Hence this map – which stands in for the playful dialogic practices of the literary salon – becomes an open rather than a bordered tool for building social relations. Paths are mapped through sentimental *inclinations* of the heart rather than through prescribed obligations. These inclinations develop, moreover, through conversation rather than through the kind of scopophilia that Colletet describes when the king visually entraps the princess on the island.

This stands in contrast with Duval's map and the impossibility of escaping its path towards the stately marriage procession at its center. Lawrence Bryant has characterized the king's 1660 royal entry into Paris indeed as the last in a long era of royal entries in which the procession had hitherto served a dialogic purpose with the city. The 1660 event, however, removed dialogue and presented the king as free from any constraints other than his personal will.[82] Bryant writes,

81
On Scudéry and the Carte de Tendre see for example Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies. Women and the Origins of the Novel*, New York 1993, 71–93, and Claude Filteau, Le Pays de Tendre. L'enjeu d'une carte, in: *Littérature* 36, 1979, 37–60.

82
One way in which this phenomenon articulated itself was by rerouting the procession path. As Bryant notes, previous *joyeuses entrées* into Paris had passed through neighborhoods that were important to the bourgeoisie, such as the dense and ancient Rue Saint Denis. The 1660 entry, in contrast, went "through the newer centers where the Parisian political and juridical elite resided", ending up right by the Palais de la Justice on the Place Dauphine, where an obelisk was erected for the event devoted to "l'autorité royalle", presided over by the king and queen in a triumphant chariot. This was also in immediate proximity to


[Fig. 30]
François Chauveau (attributed), *Carte du Tendre*, engraving, in: Madeleine de Scudéry, *Clélie*, 1654, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF (April 17, 2025).

> The 1660 entry turned on one great theme, the ruler's will either to make war or to maintain peace. No virtue, personification, or institution defined the king's duty or obligation, since he had no duty other than to his own glory. When peace triumphed in the form of the queen, the subjects rejoiced because the king had found his glory to lie *in conquest by love* rather than by war.[83]

## IV. Conclusion

Duval's game, I have suggested, thus explored boundary making on several dovetailed levels. It combined the traditional iconography of the goose game – the "life journey" trope – with the life of France's monarch, while also conflating this with the French *frontière* that constituted itself through the twenty-five years of war with Spain; the Treaty of the Pyrenees and its specific border performances and language further concluded both the war and Duval's game. The geographer mobilized the goose game format to generate interest in his output on the geographical print market in Paris and, in doing so, participated in forming state-building subjects through the medium of play – itself a bounded activity as Huizinga and Caillois have theorized. If we follow Sarah Hanley's analysis of the family-state compact's role in building French absolutism and consider the conflation of the royal marriage and peace at the end of Duval's spiral, we can also further see how the dynamics of border-building take on a gendered nature in the geographer's *Jeu de la Paix*.[84]

Just because one plays a game, however, does not necessarily mean that one wholeheartedly espouses its ideology. One can play monopoly and not be a cut-throat capitalist "in real life". But in accepting the rules of a game, one enters its magic circle. And for that time, one operates within the game's limits. In Duval's *Jeu de la Paix*, we have seen how those limits themselves mapped onto emergent notions of the *frontière* as a specific kind of boundary, a punctual militarized façade designed to control points of exit and entry. Re-playing Duval's game today with sensitivity to its

Antoine de Fer's *Sphere Royale*, meaning that the end of the royal procession (and the path of the game) coincided with the very location in which Duval's game could be purchased. Lawrence Bryant, *The King and the City in the Parisian Royal Entry Ceremony. Politics, Ritual, and Art in the Renaissance*, Geneva 1986, 210–211.

83
Ibid., 212. Emphasis mine. It is notable that, several years later during the War of Devolution, Louis XIV's preferred battle painter, Adam-Frans van der Meulen, developed a pictorial formula that pictured the queen seen through her carriage window directly under a town that the king's army had conquered on the occasion of triumphant entries into *places fortes* that the king had vanquished. In such images, Maria Theresa appears as a portrait as well as an equivalent to the besieged (and conquered) city. The justification for the war was that the Infanta's dowry had never been paid and, thus, areas of Habsburg control ought to "devolve" to Louis XIV. In van der Meulen's images, therefore, we understand the equivalence of the Queen and the vanquished city as being linked specifically to the monetary sum of the unpaid dowry. See for instance, Adam-Frans van der Meulen's representation of the royal couple's triumphant entrance into Arras in 1667 (the painting is later), now in the Louvre: INV 1475; MR 829; MV 6057.

84
I thank Alaa Dia for the term "border-building".

semantic dimensions helps to reveal how French boundaries in the early modern era were mediated through a broad "mediascape" including interactive objects like games.[85] These objects did not represent "the border" as a line, or a fact, but rather formed it as a process of acculturation. They helped to generate specific points of view on one side or the other of various frontiers, often far from the border itself: "*au deça*" vs. "*au delà*".[86] For Pierre Duval, it was handy that this point of view could, through the game of the goose, overlap with his professional practice as a geographer. For players, Duval's games provided a common ground upon which to rehearse ideas about geographic spaces and their boundaries. This was perhaps, ultimately, the greater *enjeux* of Duval's innovative bo(a)rder game.

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85
A printable version of Duval's *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix* [Fig. 2], including the transcribed and translated rules of the game, can be found here.

86
"Mémoire des divers parties que M. de Lionne peut proposer touchant le Roussillon", in: FAMRE MD Espagne, vol. 53, fol. 15: "Instructions du Roy", June 1, 1656.

# JOHANN MORITZ RUGENDAS' *VOYAGE PITTORESQUE DANS LE BRÉSIL*

## RACE, SLAVERY, AND A MORBID SUBLIME PLEASURE

Miguel Gaete

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## ABSTRACT

Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858) is widely regarded as one of the most significant Romantic European painters in nineteenth-century Latin America. His extensive body of work, which includes thousands of drawings, lithographic albums, and hundreds of paintings, establishes him as one of the most prolific artists to explore and portray the continent. In 1822, Rugendas embarked on an almost three-year journey across Brazil, depicting its people and landscapes. The primary outcome of this journey was his celebrated *Picturesque Voyage in Brazil*, published between 1826 and 1835 in French and German. Hitherto, *Voyage pittoresque* has been viewed as a critique of the slave trade, positioning Rugendas as an advocate for racial equality. However, this article argues that Rugendas' portrayal of slavery reveals an ambiguous and inconsistent stance on racial issues, complicating the narrative of a fierce denouncer of slavery built around his figure. Through detailed analysis of the album's texts and images and foregrounding overlooked evidence, this essay challenges the notion of the volume as an antislavery manifesto, highlighting its racialist undertones and the complex interplay of pain, pleasure, the picturesque, and the sublime.

## KEYWORDS

Romanticism; Rugendas; Race; Slavery; Brazil; Latin America; The picturesque; The sublime.

Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858) is regarded as one of the foremost Romantic European painters in nineteenth-century Latin America. His monumental body of work on the continent, comprising thousands of drawings, oil sketches, canvases, and engravings, has been likened to a "6000-piece jigsaw", establishing him as one of the most prolific travelling artists to have ever visited the continent.[1] In 1822, Rugendas embarked on a scientific exploration in Brazil, serving as a nature illustrator hired by Baron von Langsdorff.[2] After some friction, however, the Bavarian artist parted ways with the expedition and embarked on an almost three-year journey across Brazil, where he profusely depicted its people and lavish nature.[3] The primary outcome of this first journey was his celebrated *Picturesque Voyage in Brazil*. The album was published in instalments between 1826 and 1835 by Godefroy Engelmann, a Franco-German publisher and chromolithographer, and was issued in French and German under the titles *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil* and *Malerische Reise in Brasilien* respectively.[4] In this album, Rugendas presents a comprehensive account of his adventures and observations, offering an in-depth survey of the landscapes and human geography of the country.

*Voyage pittoresque* is divided into four thematic sections. The initial part vividly portrays Brazilian landscapes, predominantly focusing on Rio de Janeiro and nearby regions. It delves into the natural and mineral richness, capturing the outward appearance of the country "as it appears to the traveller painter's eye".[5] The subsequent section, titled "Portraits et Costumes", deals with the ethnic make-up of Brazil and the relations between the Black, white

1
In 1848 the state of Bavaria acquired 3,356 drawings by Rugendas. See *Chile y Juan Mauricio Rugendas / Chile und Johann Moritz Rugendas* (exh. cat. Santiago de Chile, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and Augsburg, Kunstsammlungen & Museen Augsburg), ed. by Christof Metzger, Patricio Muñoz Zárate, and Christof Trepesch, Santiago de Chile/Worms a. R. 2007, 32. According to Pablo Diener's estimation, Rugendas produced around 700 oil paintings, 200 watercolours, and 4,500 drawings during his second journey alone. Id., *Rugendas. América de punto a cabo. Rugendas y la Araucanía*, Santiago de Chile 1992, 28.

2
Newton Carneiro, *Rugendas no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro 1979, 19. For a full account of that expedition see G.H. Langsdorff, D. E. Bertels, B. N. Komissarov, and T. I. Licenko, *A Expedição do Acadêmico G. I. Langsdorff ao Brasil (1821–1829). Catálogo completo do material existente nos arquivos da União Soviética*, Sao Paulo 1981.

3
Six years after his initial expedition, the Bavarian painter embarked on a second voyage to America. During this extended journey between 1831 and 1846, he explored countries such as Mexico, Peru, and Argentina before eventually settling in Chile.

4
The French edition was translated by Philippe de Golbery, and a comprehensive single-volume edition was published in 1835. For this paper, I have primarily worked with the French edition.

5
Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*, transl. by Philippe Golbery, Paris 1827, 7.

and Indigenous populations.[6] The third section is titled "Moeurs et usages des Indiens et des Européens", while the fourth centres on the "Moeurs et usages des Nègres". The melange of renditions of enslaved Black people in this concluding section encompasses scenes of slave markets, their varied cultural practices – including dances and games – genotypes, as well as "picturesque" depictions of tortures and punishments. It is this latter set of images upon which I will focus to develop the central argument of this article.

Although not universally agreed upon, *Voyage pittoresque* has often been hailed as a condemnation of the slave trade and the cruelties endured by enslaved Africans in colonial Brazil. As a result, to many, Rugendas has risen to the stature of an advocate for racial equality and abolition in nineteenth-century Latin America, with an image forged of him as a redeemer of society's most disadvantaged – a figure whose work vehemently condemned and challenged the institution of slavery by exposing its inherent inhumanity. However, this article takes a somewhat divergent stance. Through a closer visual analysis that underscores Rugendas' ambiguous and inconsistent racial position, I aim to demonstrate that his graphic account of slavery in Brazil falls short of providing equal consideration for Black and Indigenous people and forceful condemnation of slavery.

I contribute to this debate by challenging the notion that *Voyage pittoresque* serves as an antislavery manifesto, foregrounding its racialist precepts and the pronounced discursive dissonance evident when contrasting images and text. The primary argument posits that, rather than being a straightforward denouncement of enslavement, Rugendas' depictions of punishments and torments were driven by a multi-layered and contradictory perception of enslaved Black people. As I will elaborate in the subsequent pages, the slavery scenes included in *Voyage pittoresque* should be understood, firstly, as stemming from Rugendas' distinct hesitancy on racial matters. Even more crucially, they resulted from an intricate synergy in which pain and pleasure, alongside the picturesque and the sublime, played pivotal roles. Thus, although Rugendas' visual work might have had some impact on societal views regarding slavery, it falls into a category of depiction that primarily aimed to satisfy the tastes of an almost exclusively white readership, which derived its deepest pleasures from acts of voyeurism in works that ostensibly claimed to be empathetic.[7]

6
Rugendas reckons the total population is 4,000,000 people, with 843,000 whites (*Weiße*), 628,000 mix-raced individuals (*Farbige*), 1,987,500 blacks (*Schwarze*), and 300,000 Indians (*Indier*). Ibid., 1, Section "Portraits et costumes".

7
Marcus Wood, Slavery and the Romantic Sketch. Jean-Baptiste Debret's Visual Poetics of Trauma, in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 43, 2014, 39–48.

## I. On Truthfulness

Among the 100 lithographs in *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*, *Nègres a fond de calle* (*Blacks in the Ship's Hold*) [Fig. 1] undoubtedly is the most acclaimed and has garnered the most scholarly attention. This lithograph serves as the opening of the section "Moeurs et usages des Nègres". According to art historian Hugh Honour, *Nègres a fond de calle* was one of the first explicit images of slavery ever to be exhibited at the Paris Art Salon (it was displayed there in 1827), lending remarkable historical significance to this rendition.[8] At first glance, this print is a striking portrayal of the deplorable conditions on board the slave ships leaving the African coast and heading to Brazil with human cargo.[9] The group comprises thirty-one semi-naked Africans, including women, men, and children of various ages. The focal point of the scene is the man straining upwards to have his bowl filled with water through the hatch while white members of the crew are shown removing the corpse of an African man.

As stated in the legend of *Nègres a fond de calle*, this was created by the French engraver Isidore Laurent Deroy following Rugendas' instructions and based on the Bavarian painter's design "drawn from life" (the inscription "dessiné d'après nature" appears at the bottom of the sheet). This detail has been pivotal in the discussion around Rugendas as a reliable observer and denouncer of these scenes. "Drawn from life", along with slogans such as "drawn on the spot", were prevalent in nineteenth-century accounts, lending credibility to the images. As Claudio Greppi explains, "on the spot" became an expression that conveyed "the spirit of a mode of landscape representation in which true knowledge of the natural world – and its botanical, zoological, human, and aesthetic forms – is based on direct observation in the field".[10] Thus, expressions like "on the spot" and similar phrases linked the creation of these images with the construction of authoritative knowledge about distant places, blurring the border between the artist and the naturalist. This was especially true for Rugendas, who engaged theoretically with various scientific disciplines throughout his life, informing his visual work with the postulates of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Johann

8
Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (ed. by Ladislas Bugner), part 1, vol. 4: *From the American Revolution to World War I* (ed. by Karen C.C. Dalton), Cambridge, MA/London 1989, 145.

9
Brazil's foundation was established through the subjugation of Indigenous communities and the forced enslavement of millions of Black Africans. Out of the 12 million Africans who were forcibly brought to the New World, nearly half, equating to 5.5 million individuals, were transported to Brazil between 1540 and the 1860s. For an introduction to this topic see Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil. Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830*, Cambridge 2010; Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*, Cambridge/New York 2010.

10
Claudio Greppi, "On the Spot". Traveling Artists and the Iconographic Inventory of the World, 1769–1859, in: Felix Driver and Luciana de Lima Martins (eds.), *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, Chicago 2005, 23–42, here 23.


[Fig. 1]
Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Nègres a fond de calle (Blacks in the Ship's Hold)*, 1827–1835, lithographic print, 29.5 × 35.4 cm, Sao Paulo, Mario de Andrade Library, in: id., *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*, Paris/Mulhouse 1827–1835, 261 © Mario de Andrade Library, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Kaspar Lavater, Franz Joseph Gall, and others, earning him the title of "ethnology illustrator".[11] In this context, the inclusion of "drawn from life" on *Nègres à fond de calle* not only confirms that Rugendas witnessed and sketched these events in situ but also reflects the complex interplay between science and art, elevating this illustration to what W. J. T. Mitchell terms a "certificate of the real".[12] This, in turn, clarifies why illustrations and lithographs created by Rugendas and other contemporary artists portraying slavery were perceived in their time, and sometimes still today, as "documents rather than works of art".[13]

If Rugendas is seen as embodying the nineteenth-century travelling artist – an exemplar of the "quintessential eyewitness" who "bore testimony to the truth" while producing a wealth of visual and written data for illustrated knowledge[14] – this is largely because of his connection with Alexander von Humboldt. As his protégé, Rugendas was, at least in theory, deeply committed to veracity and scientific accuracy, leaving little room for sentimentalism and subjectivity in his depictions (this approach, which was common among abolitionists, according to Wood, "mimicked the dispassionate attitudes of the slave masters themselves").[15] When he tried to convince the editor Johann Friedrich von Cotta to publish his Latin American works, he granted that his album would be "picturesque and instructive regarding vegetation, the physiognomy of landscape, mountains, clouds, inhabitants, customs, clothes, portraits, monuments, historical scenes, fauna", emphasising that his studies would be "as instructive as interesting and picturesque".[16] He would insist on this point in a letter to the French Minister of the Interior, Count Duchatel:

> I spent most of my life in South America studying the nature and the different races of its inhabitants. My main undertaking was to reproduce nature faithfully, and I never sacrificed the truth in favour of appearance. My intention was to make

11
Miguel A. Gaete, *Cultural Exchanges and Colonial Legacies in Latin America. German Romanticism in Chile, 1800–1899*, Amherst, NY 2023, 4. Also see Helmut Schindler, "Rugendas y los Araucanos. Apuntes etnograficos", in: Diener, Rugendas. América de punta a cabo, 71–106.

12
W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, Chicago 1994, 15.

13
Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art, 145.

14
Sarah Thomas, *Witnessing Slavery. Art and Travel in the Age of Abolition*, New Haven, CT 2019, 2.

15
Wood, Slavery and the Romantic Sketch, 39.

16
Cited in Diener, Rugendas. América de punta a cabo, 15; Renate Löschner, *Lateinamerikanische Landschaftsdarstellungen der Maler aus dem Umkreis von Alexander von Humboldt*, PhD dissertation, Technische Universität 1976, 182–185.

> it possible for my work to be used with confidence by geographers, naturalists and artists.[17]

The emphasis on truthfulness in Rugendas' words is reflected in the array of topics he addressed and in the use of lithography as a medium. In an early review of *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*, published in 1827 in *The Literary Gazette* in London, it is read: "Lithography can hardly be better employed than on a work of this sort, where it can afford us perfect notions of various scenes, of the vegetable and animal world, of costume, and the manner of the people."[18] In the 1820s, the newly developed medium had gained immense popularity among Romantic artists, becoming synonymous with precision and reality, thus increasing the status of Rugendas' work's as "real".[19] Nevertheless, the first pertinent question arising from these facts is how truthfulness functioned as a form of denunciation in Rugendas' depictions of slavery in Brazil and the ways in which it achieved this.

Although the review published in *The Literary Gazette* makes no mention of it, the "truthful" depiction of slavery somehow became linked with an inherent censure of this practice, as though the mere representation equated to automatic denouncement. This assumption is partly driven by a persistent narrative of Western benevolence in the study of nineteenth-century travelling artists, which, though perhaps less pronounced, still persists today as an academic outlet for deeply entrenched racial anxieties. In this narrative, Western artists journeying in distant lands tend to be portrayed as champions of the suffering and tormented enslaved person – or the Indigenous people, or the poorest for that matter – attributing to their images the power to challenge slavery and injustice by the mere act of representing the physical and mental subjugation of these people. While this may hold true in many cases where images played a crucial role in the abolition of slavery by sensitising readers and viewers – Josiah Wedgwood's 1787 *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* being a paradigmatic example – it is also true, as Marcus Wood has convincingly demonstrated, that many images generated by the abolition movements "lacked knowledge and lacked tact".[20]

The reliability and social value of Rugendas' Brazilian oeuvre rest on the assumption that he was an eyewitness, and therefore, his depictions *must* be accurate, almost in a photographic (or

17
Pablo Diener and Maria de Fátima Costa, *Rugendas e o Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro 2012, 37.

18
Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil, par Maurice Rugendas, in: *The Literary Gazette. A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 549, 28 July 1827, 481–496, here 493.

19
On the social impact of lithography in France and beyond see Wilhelm Weber, *A History of Lithography*, New York 1966; *Set in Stone. Lithography in Paris, 1815–1900* (exh. cat. New Brunswick, NJ, Zimmerli Art Museum Rutgers), ed. by Christine Giviskos, Munich 2018.

20
Wood, Slavery and the Romantic Sketch, 39.

lithographic) sense. By and large, Rugendas' Brazilian works, and particularly *Voyage pittoresque*, have been interpreted as instances of what Sarah Thomas denominates the "language of sympathy" or "language of sensibility" – images that aimed to stimulate feelings of sympathy and empathy in readers and viewers.[21] Consumers of these albums relied on the authenticity of the images to emotionally connect with the message, assuming the artist witnessed rather than imagined the portrayed scenes.

However, this assumption poses particular challenges in the case of Rugendas, especially when considering the possibility that he might have intentionally altered some of his depictions. Even more so, Rugendas probably never witnessed the scene in *Nègres a fond de calle*, as Hugh Honour and Pablo Diener have implied, creating it in Paris after meeting Alexander von Humboldt in 1825, following his journey in Brazil.[22] The questionable reality presented by Rugendas' artworks did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. Many early commentators noticed that his depictions were not always as exact as his mentor von Humboldt deemed them to be. Criticism came principally from the scientific community, where some quickly pointed out that Rugendas' designs had "better taste than truth".[23] The harshest disapproval concerned the portrayal of Brazil's Indigenous people: "The part of the Indians is by far the worst, they are in its great part inventions, and the portraits are not characteristic."[24]

Despite early criticism, some scholarship on Rugendas has continued to emphasise an alleged abolitionist critique based on the reliability of his images. For instance, to this day, the webpage of the Morgan Library & Museum labels Rugendas as an "ardent abolitionist".[25] Similarly, Gertrude Richert celebrates Rugendas' "highly impartial portrayal" of the final stage of the slave trade in Brazil, "deserving even greater acclaim" for this.[26] Robert Slenes has gone even further, arguing that an abolitionist message with Christian roots is concealed within Rugendas' imagery, particularly evident in

21
Thomas, Witnessing Slavery, 40.

22
Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art, 144.

23
Diener and de Fátima Costa, Rugendas e o Brasil, 65.

24
Prince Maximilian, undated letter to Enrich Rudolph Schinz, Zentralbibliothek der Universität Zürich. Cited in ibid.

25
The Morgan Library & Museum, *Johann Moritz Rugendas* (13 August 2024).

26
Gertrud Richert, Johann Moritz Rugendas. Ein deutscher Maler aus der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Ibero-Amerika, in: *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* 16/3–4, 1942/1943, 67–94, here 75.

*Nègres à fond de calle*.[27] In comparing the early sketch and the final version of the lithograph published in *Voyage pittoresque* [Fig. 2], Slenes postulates that Rugendas modified crucial elements of the composition to dramatise the pain suffered by enslaved Africans in ship cargoes. According to Slenes, Rugendas would have consciously expanded the space between the deck and the standing figure at the centre to intensify the tension, compelling the figure to stand on tiptoe, with the body and arms stretched to the limit, expressing desperation. Moreover, Rugendas would have redrawn the scene's lighting to create focal points on the sailors removing the corpse and the thirsty man begging for water.[28] Truth be told and agreeing with Sarah Thomas, the final version of *Nègres a fond de calle* [Fig. 1] presents a remarkably vigorous image of the enslaved Africans, creating a counterintuitive effect that lessens the horror it arguably intends to represent. Upon comparison, it is readily visible that the skeletal figures in the sketches become more muscular and stronger in the final print, and the initially asphyxiating space transforms into one that is airier and more habitable, even suggesting feelings of pleasure and comfort. I shall return to this point shortly.

Slenes also asserts that the figure of the dead African carried by white sailors would evoke the body of Christ in representations of the entombment in seventeenth-century art. Slenes sees definitive proof of this Christian message in the two Africans with arms folded at the foot of the mast, whom he compares with the chastised Christ in some representations of the *Ecce Homo*.[29] He concludes that Rugendas' position on Africans and slavery must have been close to that of the *Société de la Morale Chrétienne*, a champion of social reform and the leading French abolitionist movement of the 1820s.[30] What Slenes overlooks, nonetheless, is that even if Rugendas engaged with the agenda of the *Société de la Morale Chrétienne* at some point, eventually influencing *Nègres a fond de calle*, this could have been either to entice broader audiences or simply please his mentor Alexander von Humboldt, who effectively was an active participant in abolitionist discussions in Paris.[31] This supposition gains ground when examining documents and issues of the *Journal de la Société de la Morale Chrétienne* published between 1823 and

27
Robert W. Slenes, Overdrawn from Life. Abolitionist Argument and Ethnographic Authority in the Brazilian 'Artistic Travels' of J. M. Rugendas, 1827–35, in: *Portuguese Studies* 22/1, 2006, 55–80.

28
Ibid.

29
Id., African Abrahams, Lucretias and Men of Sorrows. Allegory and Allusion in the Brazilian Anti-Slavery Lithographs (1827–1835) of Johann Moritz Rugendas, in: *Slavery & Abolition* 23/2, 2002, 147–168.

30
On the Société de la Morale Chrétienne see Marie-Laure Aurenche, *Le combat pour la liberté des noirs dans le Journal de la Société de la morale chrétienne*, 2 vols., Paris 2011.

31
Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art, 144.

[Fig. 2]
Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Nègres a fond de calle (Blacks in the Ship's Hold)*, 1822–1825, pencil on paper, 13.5 × 23.7 cm, Sao Paulo, Mario de Andrade Library © Mario de Andrade Library, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

1841, available on the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, none of which contain the name 'Rugendas'.

It is also important to remember that *Voyage pittoresque* was a commercial endeavour that sought to profit from its subject matter. As Diener and de Fátima Costa have pointed out, by the time *Nègres à fond de calle* was published, the theme of the slave ship had become a common motif in art.[32] Consequently, the use of Christian analogies – particularly the image of the *Ecce Homo* – along with the blending of disparate narratives and the manipulation of the lived experiences of enslaved people to fit the Western trope of the *redentor*, seems more like an attempt to cater to European tastes through a fashionable trend rather than a genuine personal defence of enslaved Africans in Brazil. This distinction becomes even more apparent when comparing the images with the text of *Voyage pittoresque*. In doing so, a reality that is starkly different and contradictory begins to materialise, as I will now endeavour to demonstrate.

## II. A Matter of Biological and Cultural Inferiority

"Like the abolitionist Humboldt, Rugendas disapproved of Brazil's slavery system and supported gradual emancipation and racial harmony."[33] This statement, taken from a 2022 blog post by a cruise company promoting South America as a destination for "cultured travellers", reveals just how deeply this recurring assumption about Rugendas is entrenched, extending even beyond academia. It seems to have become a standard view that because Humboldt was an outspoken abolitionist and egalitarian, Rugendas – his disciple – must have shared these views as if such ideas were inherently transmitted via osmosis. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that Rugendas' stance on racial issues was ambiguous and contradictory, to say the least. This obscurity is evident from the outset of his Brazilian journey. As mentioned earlier, Rugendas travelled to South America as an illustrator for the scientific expedition led by the naturalist Baron von Langsdorff, who, as Hugh Honour notes, significantly impacted Rugendas' attitude towards slavery.[34] Problematically, Langsdorff owned the hacienda Mandioca in Rio de Janeiro, where he kept enslaved African workers. Far from being an abolitionist, Langsdorff defended slavery by arguing that it was a "way of civilising and

32
Diener and de Fátima Costa, Rugendas e o Brasil, 538.

33
Veronica Stoddart, Postcards from a New World. 19th Century Paintings of South America, in: *Discover by Silversea* (blog), 26 April 2022 (20 March 2025).

34
Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art, 144.

Christianising Blacks, transforming them into citizens", which, in his opinion, "was better than leaving them abandoned in Africa".[35]

On this account, while the Bavarian artist may have supported abolitionism, this might not have necessarily been driven by an egalitarian perspective. In reality, Rugendas' view of slavery was more rooted in a sense of human compassion (moral) than in biological or cultural principles – two entirely different considerations. It goes without saying that abolitionism is not equivalent to antiracism. In Hanna Arendt's terms, Rugendas' work would be the expression of pity as "the perversion of compassion" in the sense that pity "does not look upon the fortunate and unfortunate in equal measure; rather, it can only exist in the presence of misfortune".[36] Moreover, it is worth noting that in Brazil, the "rhetoric of contamination" was pivotal in antislavery and abolitionist discussions. "Social hygienists" advocating for abolition primarily argued against slavery because they believed it had adverse effects on white society, exposing them to what they perceived as the questionable morality of enslaved individuals and not because slavery was inappropriate per se.[37]

This divergence becomes evident in the language and the racial classification system employed in the text of *Voyage pittoresque*, which bears a striking similarity to the systems devised and used by racialist scientists like Christoph Meiners and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.[38] Rugendas, for instance, identifies three races in America based on external characteristics: the Caribbean in the north, some tribes from Chile in the south (the Araucanians or Mapuche are specifically mentioned), and finally, "the various tribes resembling the Mongolian race from the ancient continent".[39] These racial observations align with certain conceptions propagated by Meiners, who, in his *Grundriss der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1786), classified Asians, Africans, and Americans as "mongolised",

35
The mechanism that combined slavery and German colonialism, devised by Langsdorff, is explained in detail in Débora Bendocchi Alves, Langsdorff e a imigração, in: *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros* 35, 1993, 167–178, here 170.

36
Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York 2006, 84.

37
Lamonte Aidoo, *Slavery Unseen. Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History*, Durham, NC 2018, 150.

38
It is important to note that the authorship of the text has long been a subject of scholarly debate. Although it is now widely accepted that Rugendas' friend, the journalist Victor Aimé Huber, wrote most of the text based on information provided by the painter, some authors, such as Newton Carneiro, have credited Rugendas with complete authorship. See Carneiro, Rugendas no Brasil. Nevertheless, in this article, I align with the view of Diener and de Fátima Costa, acknowledging that even though Aimé Huber wrote its content, the album fully reflects Rugendas' thinking. Id., Rugendas e o Brasil, 25 and 64.

39
Rugendas, Voyage pittoresque, 2.

"inferior", and "ugly races".[40] Blumenbach, on the other hand, was one of Rugendas' main intellectual references, and many of his ideas permeate *Voyage pittoresque*.[41] He, for example, proposed a congenital physical difference and placed Black people (referred to as "negroes" in his terminology) at the lowest point of his racial scale. Blumenbach associated Africans with subjective notions of evil, dishonour, sin, and other notions that Caucasians – "the most beautiful race of men" – decided to identify with the term "black".[42] These arbitrary racial categorisations ultimately solidified a hierarchical arrangement of human diversity, reshaping the mental framework that has perpetuated conventional racism ever since.[43]

A closer perusal of *Voyage pittoresque* reveals further evidence of the influence of these ideas. Portraits of Africans and Indigenous groups featured in the album closely echo Blumenbach's concepts regarding people's skin colours and cranial shapes as indicators of evolutionary stages and human typologies. Furthermore, the inclusion of semi-frontal and profile portraits, inciting explicit comparisons, mirrors the widespread conviction propagated by Pieter Camper and other theorists that "the facial angle grew wider as one progressed from apes through to Africans, Tartars, Indians, to Europeans, and then to the heroic statues of classical Greece".[44]

Most of the ethnological descriptions in the album are imbued with unmistakably bigoted and condescending definitions of Africans and Indigenous people. For instance, although Rugendas seemingly sympathised with Africans, he still believed them "inferior to other races".[45] To Rugendas, much of the perceived inferiority of Black people was cultural. By and large, Rugendas considered Africans "civilised", "albeit less so than Europeans", and not so "barbaric" or "savage" as people usually portrayed them.[46] Even more significant for him was a congenital biological hindrance that

40
Susanne Zantop, The Beautiful, the Ugly, and the German. Race, Gender, and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century Anthropological Discourse, in: Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller (eds.), *Gender and Germanness. Cultural Productions of Nation*, New York/Oxford 1998, 21–35, here 23.

41
Victor Aimé Huber, the co-writer of the text, was also very close to Blumenbach. Details of their relationship can be found in Aimé Huber's biography by Rudolf Elvers, *Victor Aimé Huber. Sein Werden und Wirken*, 2 vols., Bremen 1872, vol. 1.

42
Teresa Washington, *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence. Divinity in Africana Life, Lyrics, and Literature*, New York 2014, 39.

43
Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, New York/London 1996, 405.

44
Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*, New York/Basingstoke 2007, 18.

45
Tomás Lago, *Rugendas, Pintor Romántico de Chile*, Santiago de Chile 1960, 24.

46
Slenes, African Abrahams, Lucretias and Men of Sorrows.

delineated the division between whites and Blacks, as explicitly mentioned in specific passages of *Voyage pittoresque*. In the section "Portraits et costumes", it is maintained that

> the true superiority of whites over negroes is not only in external things [...], rather, it is an intrinsic and organic superiority; that creates between the negro and the white the same relationship, in some way, as those which exist on the part of the woman or the child towards the man.[47]

The power exerted by the white man over the *negro* is also described in terms of "animal magnetism", with the "superiority" being explained as occurring due to a "greater intensity of the nervous system, by a greater activity of its functions".[48] For Rugendas, the primary rationale for ending slavery was rooted more in moral considerations than in a strictly egalitarian racial perspective (or pity rather than solidarity), evident in the segment where he openly acknowledges the biological superiority of whites over Black people and posits the end of slavery in terms of simple benefits: "Every day things happen which, apart from the advantage of civilisation, prove a real and physical superiority of the white over the negro, and no one is more disposed to recognise it than the negro himself." He goes on to set a parallel between the relationship slave–master and son–father, concluding that "nothing is easier for a good master than to convert the slavery into a benefit for both parties".[49]

All this information is crucial as it unveils the complexity of Rugendas' racial awareness, offering a broader range of options for interpretations of his visual work beyond the presumed antislavery message based on egalitarian views.

## III. Concealing a Morbid Sublimity

Putting aside the antiracist/antislavery discourse fabricated around Rugendas' *Voyage pittoresque*, I want to redirect the focus to explore a distinct interpretation. This perspective delves into two pivotal romantic aesthetic categories, namely, the picturesque and the sublime. I will elaborate on how these categories served as catalysts for a series of colonial fantasies and preconceptions concerning the enslaved body.

Incorporating the word "picturesque" in the album's title is certainly the first indication of the conflicting messages we encounter when reading its content. Picturesque, at least as it was understood in the European pictorial tradition, especially in Britain,

47
Rugendas, Voyage pittoresque, 22.

48
Ibid.

49
Ibid.

fused poetry, gardening, and art into a novel way of experiencing landscapes.[50] It differed from the concept of the beautiful principally in its focus on charming views or scenes and by embracing and incorporating elements of irregularity, roughness, and asymmetry, such as ruined castles and rocks. These were aspects that would typically be excluded from the category of beauty.

> Turn the lawn into a piece of broken ground: plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs: break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road: mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones, and brushwood; in a word, instead of making the whole smooth, make it rough and you make it also picturesque,

says Gilpin in his famed 1792 *Three Essays. On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel, and On Sketching Landscape*.[51]

Despite the subtle distinctions that delineate the picturesque from the beautiful, the picturesque still falls within the same range of positive and enjoyable aesthetic experiences associated with the subjective and emotional perception of landscapes. However, Rugendas' album appears to contradict these concepts in various ways. For instance, the ostensibly objective, pseudo-scientific and Humboldtian tone it adopts challenges the more pictorial foundation inherent in the British construal of the term. In Britain, this category never sought scientific accuracy but rather a meticulous arrangement of components in a composition in order to elicit an aesthetic response. As an aesthetic category, it occupied the opposite end of the spectrum, to such an extent that the picturesque was often considered unreliable, misleading, and "removed one step from what is real".[52] Archibald Alison's standard definition of the picturesque, which appeared for the first time in his 1790 *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, explains it as those objects in nature that recall pictures we have seen before, being a purely emotional and imaginative feeling originated from the association of ideas and memories of the spectator.[53]

Hence, by and large, the picturesque lacked objectivity, providing scant elements that could be identified as scientific or approaching a level of informative accuracy. This introduces additional elements of doubt to the presumed condemnation of slavery in *Voyage pittoresque*. As previously explained, this notion assumes that

50
Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque. Studies in a Point of View*, London 1967, 4.

51
William Gilpin, *Three Essays. On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape*, London 2009, 25.

52
Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, Chicago 1991, xii.

53
Hussey, The Picturesque, 15.

Rugendas had observed and depicted his picturesque scenes with accuracy and on the spot, though such requisites were never intrinsic to the picturesque. Furthermore, as an aesthetic category that encouraged a formulaic visual reproduction of the surroundings by arranging pre-formed elements taken in a rather selective manner, the picturesque mainly aimed to elicit enjoyable feelings in the beholder.[54] George Mason's *Supplement* to Samuel Johnson's *English Dictionary* is eloquent on this matter, defining picturesque as: "what pleases the eye; remarkable for singularity; striking the imagination with the force of painting; to be expressed in painting; affording a good subject for a landscape; proper to take a landscape from".[55] If that is indeed the case, considering its intrinsic nature as a landscape category, on what basis could images of slavery be labelled as "picturesque"? What manner of twisted pleasure or positive response can these particular images evoke?

Although it could be rightly argued that since Rugendas' album consisted of a compilation of travel material, the inclusion of the word "picturesque" in the title was a simple association by which this category became a means to assimilate the travel experience – "domesticating the unknown and reorganising the unstructured"[56] – or that it simply corresponds to the commercial exploitation of the label,[57] the reality is that we are faced with a more convoluted situation. To fully comprehend this issue, it is imperative to discard the commonplace postulation that European aesthetic categories functioned universally beyond the confines of Europe or the Western world. When doing so, we soon realise that, in reality, different aesthetic categories often worked in conjunction, overlapping, blending, and reinforcing each other. Crucial, in this regard, is the interaction between the picturesque and its counterpart, the sublime. Even though both terms unfolded in Europe as essentially landscape aesthetic categories, in distant territories, they might have evolved into something distinct, integrating racial aspects and, ultimately, a series of Western fixations concerning the subjected body of perceived inferior cultures and races.

In this light, despite being generally conceived of as separate and opposing constructs, the picturesque and the sublime, in reality,

54
See for example the formula to create picturesque scenes proposed by William Gilpin. Gilpin, Three Essays, 25.

55
Ian Chilvers, *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, Oxford 2015, 480.

56
Pablo Diener, Lo pintoresco como categoria estetica en el arte de viajeros. Apuntes para la obra de Rugendas, in: *Historia* 2/40, 2007, 285–309.

57
Hundreds of publications on journeys through America launched between 1800 and 1899 in Germany, France, England, and other European nations included in their titles the word picturesque. A search on WorldCat shows that between 1800 and 1899, about 5,000 volumes were published in French with the title of picturesque. A similar number of books have the word in their titles in English, whilst just 1,514 books were published in German under the title of *Malerische*. A similar search using the same parameters with the keyword "sublime" retrieves 1,747 results, with 733 books in English, 396 in French, and only 99 in German.

operate in tandem within Rugendas' album. In this dynamic, the former serves as a façade to conceal the latter. This notion gains further credence when considering that the sublime evolved as an aesthetic theory openly embracing the exploration of negative or unpleasant experiences, such as those elicited by slavery imagery. Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is a pivotal source to substantiate this point.

In principle, according to Burke, vision held paramount importance as the sense through which "real sympathy" can occur. Tom Huhn contends that this emphasis on vision, to Burke, stems from its seeming immediacy and "purity".[58] European voyagers who personally witnessed the brutality of slavery often articulated their profound consternation at the sights they beheld, leading them to convey their sentiments through what Sarah Thomas refers to as the "language of sensibility".[59] While this can be partially true, embracing this perspective confines the primary emotions that European artists could feel in the face of these scenes to horror and consternation. This perpetuates the image of the European artist as a liberator who weaponised art for a higher purpose. Furthermore, by restricting representations of slavery solely to such sentiments, we overlook the existence of multiple levels of deployment of this "real sympathy" and even the possibility of feeling a sort of gratification in viewing and depicting them. If we extend the spectrum of possibilities beyond the preconception that depicting scenes of slavery equates solely to horror, and that representing this horror inherently implies denunciation and condemnation, it becomes conceivable that, instead of dismay, Rugendas might have depicted pleasure through apparent pain. Such a possibility would align perfectly with Burke's concept of the sublime and is utterly consistent with the views of other travellers and writers from the "age of sensibility", who somehow came to the conviction that "witnessing torture is sublime".[60]

In the second section of his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke explains that pain and pleasure are each of a positive nature and by no means necessarily dependent on one another for their existence. This implies that pain and pleasure can coexist without affecting each other and without contradiction. The famous passage from section VII reads:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is

[58] Tom Huhn, *Imitation and Society. The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant*, University Park, PA 2010, 59.

[59] Thomas, Witnessing Slavery, 40.

[60] Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory. Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America*, New York 2000, 235.

> conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[61]

Within the specific framework of nineteenth-century travel narratives outside Europe, such a dynamic of displeasure and delight entrenched in the sublime might have given rise to what can be termed a "morbid sublime pleasure", that is, the expression of scenes involving racialised and brutalised humans, which despite (or because of) their remarkable violence and gruesome nature, exerted a magnetic attraction on both the artist-eyewitness and the readership. Crucially, the depiction and dissemination of these scenes of cruelty staged in exotic settings were paradoxically interpreted as acts of pity and condemnation. As images of pity, they are the perversion of compassion.[62] Furthermore, in many cases, as observed in Rugendas, these images were veiled with the more naïve and ethically safer denomination of picturesque as a means to counterbalance and conceal the twisted fascination they elicited. Categorising these images as manifestations of disapproval and censure towards suffering, violence, slavery, deprivation, and the like would, therefore, be an intuitive yet concerted way to grapple with this ambivalent feeling.

*Nègres a fond de calle* [Fig. 1] fully epitomises how the morbid sublime pleasure works. Upon closer examination, one can discern a harmonious interplay of pain and pleasure represented by the different postures and various signifiers of the enslaved people distributed across the ship's hold. Overall, except for two women on the right and the deceased body, there are no explicit signs of terror or explicit suffering conveyed by these individuals' facial and bodily expressions. The majority of them exist in what Burke defines as a "state of indifference", that is, in neither pain nor pleasure.[63] In contrast, several subtle signifiers suggest an idea of pleasure and comfort in this image. For instance, only one slave, the woman in the bottom right corner, is shackled to a post; the rest have been released from their chains. As mentioned earlier, the physical constitution of the enslaved Africans appears sturdy and muscular, showing no indications of desperate starvation or extreme dehydration. Even the male African asking for water does so in a docile manner, while his companions seem unperturbed. If it

61
Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London/Oxford 1998, 12.

62
"Pity may be the perversion of compassion, but its alternative is solidarity. It is out of pity that men are 'attracted toward *les hommes faibles*', but it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited." Arendt, On Revolution, 84.

63
Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 7.

were an overt condemnation of the dearth of water and a "metonym of desperation and death" in slave ships, they would undoubtedly be frantically congregated around this vital source.[64]

The diminished impact of pain and distress in this depiction tallies with the album's text. The opening lines of "Moeurs et usages des Nègres" suggest that the situation of enslaved Africans in Brazil was not "that terrible" after all: "What we have said in previous issues on the state of slaves in Brazil makes it clear enough that they are not as unhappy as we generally imagine in Europe."[65] Subsequently, it is stated that "there are many Europeans who, once they come to the country, find that the situation of slaves is portrayed in very exaggerated colours; and immediately they change their minds and become strong minds".[66] The last section of this paragraph shows the origin of that idea while shedding light on the little distress shown by the enslaved people in *Nègres a fond de calle*:

> What undoubtedly contributes a lot to this is the fact that negroes are gifted, like children, with enjoying the moment entirely and passionately, without worrying about the past or the future. At the same time, extremely little is required to bring them into a frenzy of delight.[67]

Here, Rugendas seems to imply that any suffering or punishment inflicted upon them is easily overcome by the natural disposition of Black people to find "amusement" everywhere, even in situations of distress. The message to convey is unequivocal: if they live in the present without concern for the past or future, much "like children", any suffering or punishment inflicted upon them results not in harmful sequels but in a peculiar form of delight.

## IV. Pain, Pleasure, and Distance

Rugendas' conjecture that Black people had minimal necessities and were innately prone to unrestrained states of enjoyment carries a sexual innuendo that connects with key nodes of Burke's theorisation of the sublime. The erotic and sadistic nuances arising from the interplay between pleasure and pain in the sublime, as well as its effects on the body, are pretty evident in Burke's *Philosophical*

64
Slenes, African Abrahams, Lucretias and Men of Sorrows.

65
Rugendas, Voyage pittoresque, 25, 4th division.

66
The last part of the sentence is slightly ambiguous: "[...] et tout aussitôt ils changent d'idée et deviennent des esprits forts". Ibid.

67
Ibid.

*Enquiry* and have been subject to ongoing scholarly speculation.[68] It is not surprising, therefore, that Rugendas alluded to this connection, particularly in his Brazilian works, through the overt sexualisation of the bodies of enslaved Black women and physical chastisements.

The eroticisation of Indigenous and Black women was a pervasive feature in Rugendas' oeuvre, consistently romanticised in the literature as a trace of his personality as a Casanova – an attribute supposedly befitting an adventurous European traveller artist in exotic lands.[69] Nonetheless, I argue that such inclination was undoubtedly less innocent and intimately connected with the morbid sublimity conveyed by works like *Nègres a fond de calle*. This phenomenon has been extensively discussed in scholarship. Frantz Fanon, for instance, accurately described it as the white man's irrational nostalgia for the "extraordinary times of sexual licentiousness, orgies, unpunished rapes and repressed incest". Behind this "irrational nostalgia" lies a blatant form of domination and justification, in which, by projecting his desires onto the Black man, "the white man behaves as if the black man actually had them".[70] More recently and in a similar vein, Marcus Wood has framed the display of extreme and perverse brutality against the Black body as a dynamic where it becomes a space for "white pornographic projection".[71] While this projection encompassed both men's and women's bodies indiscriminately, the latter appeared to be Rugendas' preferred target. His depictions profoundly reflect a Western perspective in which enslaved women were perceived as carnal, "animalistic" creatures governed solely by sensual desires. As Ruby Hamad has demonstrated, this view systematically dehumanised and hypersexualised them, shaping an image of these women in the Western imagination as being immune to pain and sexual mistreatment.[72]

In the specific context of colonial Brazil, Rugendas' work mirrors a violent mechanism of power wherein sex was used against men, women, and children to control, degrade, and bolster white male supremacy.[73] In *Nègres a fond de calle* [Fig. 1], this becomes

68
See for example Michael William Templeton, *Sadomasochism in the Aesthetics of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant*, Miami 2001; Peter Cosgrove, Edmund Burke, Gilles Deleuze, and the Subversive Masochism of the Image, in: *ELH* 66/2, 1999, 405–437.

69
See for example Carlos Franz, *Si te vieras con mis ojos*, Madrid 2016; Patricia Cerda Pincheira, *Rugendas*, Santiago de Chile 2016.

70
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, New York 1962, 30.

71
Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*, Oxford/New York 2002, 139.

72
Ruby Hamad, *White Tears/Brown Scars. How White Feminism Betrays Women of Colour*, London 2020, 23–24.

73
Aidoo, Slavery Unseen, 4.

visible, for instance, in the little distress shown by the female Africans in the ships' hold despite the grisly topic of the scene. When redirecting our focus away from the central figures towards the secondary actions, we observe that the positioning of the legs and arms of the two women lying on the floor in the centre and those on the left side of the lithograph strongly suggests a sexual disposition that opposes the alleged denouncing ethos of the picture. This condescending stance echoes quite effectively the deep-rooted picture in the Western male imagination of always disposed non-white women in distant and exotic lands. With careful observation and without much effort, we can identify this pattern in the works of European painters in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.[74] Susanne Zantop places these types of images imbued with a fulfilling nature and an unconscious subtext that links sexual desire for others to the yearning for power and control within a broader pattern of colonial fantasies notably evident in Germans overseas. To Zantop, these colonial fantasies of sexual bliss frequently concealed obsessions with conquest and appropriation in cross-cultural and cross-racial contexts.[75] Territorial domination, physical and mental subjugation, and violent male fantasies typically operate in conjunction, forming the breeding ground for the morbid sublime. Rugendas' album resulted from these correlative actions. This phenomenon appears to become more intense in slavery environments where physical and mental agony serves as a catalyst for its expression.

Another related and crucial element in the phenomenology of the Burkean sublime involves a specific distance that must exist between the beholder and the scene for a complete experience of the sublime. This issue can also be examined in connection with Rugendas, the slavery scenes depicted in *Voyage pittoresque*, and his readership. Burke acknowledges the necessity of a "certain distance" in section VII of his treatise, where he asserts:

> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience.[76]

Such a distance can be construed in physical, cultural, and emotional terms, denoting a sensitive detachment. In this manner, the

74
On this point see a comparison between Rugendas' depictions of women in Brazil and Delacroix's women in Algiers. Miguel Gaete, Territorial Fantasies, Sexual Nuances, and Savage Energy. Orientalism and Tropicality in Eugène Delacroix and Johann Moritz Rugendas, in: *Culture & History* 2/11, 2022, 1–18.

75
Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870*, Durham, NC 1997, 3.

76
Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 11.

depictions of punishments found in the section "Moeurs et usages des Nègres" could be deemed "enjoyable" solely due to the separation between the beholder (the readership) and the distant scenario, in this case, Brazil, where the tortures took place.

Another manifestation of this distance is presented by lithography itself as a faithful medium of reality reproduction (although not as precise as photography), delivering just the right dose of realism for pain not to "press too nearly". The third level of separation is implicit in the relationship between the eyewitness and the action being observed. The majority of European artists were "fortunate" spectators of many of these cruelties precisely due to their privileged status as white, Westerners, and educated male individuals. This immediately positioned them in a cultural vantage point from where they securely and confidently observed, fantasised, judged, and depicted these acts. It is this separation – unfolded as physical, emotional, and cultural – that, according to Burke, allows us to relish the observation of other people's suffering, becoming the substratum of the morbid sublime pleasure as illustrated by Rugendas. Burke is unequivocal on this matter:

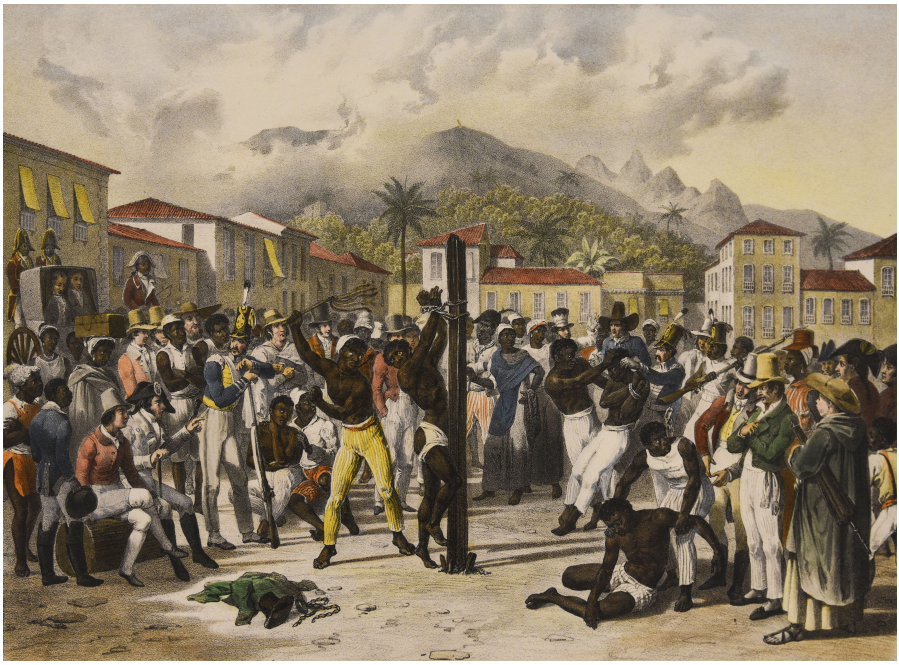
> I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others; for let the affection be what it will in appearance, if it does not make us shun such objects, if on the contrary it induces us to approach them, if it makes us dwell upon them, in this case I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating objects of this kind.[77]

Such a distance keeps these renditions in the realm of the pseudo-fictional or a controlled reality. They are assumed to be authentic documents of truth but could also be inventions. Certainly, not every gesture, object, and body included in these images truthfully corresponds to the reality of the experience. Yet, this ambiguity – the possibility that at least a minimal part of it might be illusory – releases the image from the unbearable burden of reality. These "certain modifications" are what make images of this sort enjoyable. Burke expresses this in terms of fictionalisation: "Do we not read the authentic histories of scenes of this nature with as much pleasure as romances or poems, where the incidents are fictitious?"[78] Today, we recognise that the actual experiences of enslaved Africans in the Americas and elsewhere were far more brutal and hardly relatable through European aesthetic norms: reality was too painful to be sublime.

This wicked satisfaction aroused by others' sufferings and misfortunes, the necessity of distance, and the erotic hint adumbrated

[77] Ibid., 15.

[78] Ibid., 23.



[Fig. 3]
Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Punitions publiques sur la Place Sainte Anne*, 1827-1835, lithographic print, 29.5 × 35.4 cm, Sao Paulo, Mario de Andrade Library, in: id., Voyage pittoresque, 274, image in the public domain, photo: Wikimedia commons (28 March 2025).

by Burke also becomes discernible in other prints displaying overt acts of violence against enslaved Africans. Let us take *Punitions publiques sur la Place Sainte Anne* as a case in point [Fig. 3]. The scene displays the public whipping of a Black man carried out at St Anne Square. The punisher is another Black man, probably an overseer or driver.[79] In contrast, the well-dressed white men who mostly integrate the crowd assume a passive observational stance, constituting a first instance of separation or detachment, following Burke's argument. White and Black onlookers give an account of the commotion around this event and its refined theatricality. Suggestively, the punctum of this image is the exposed derriere of the afflicted man, alluding to the broadly recognised intimate connection between whipping and sex and the aforementioned sadistic constituent of the sublime.[80]

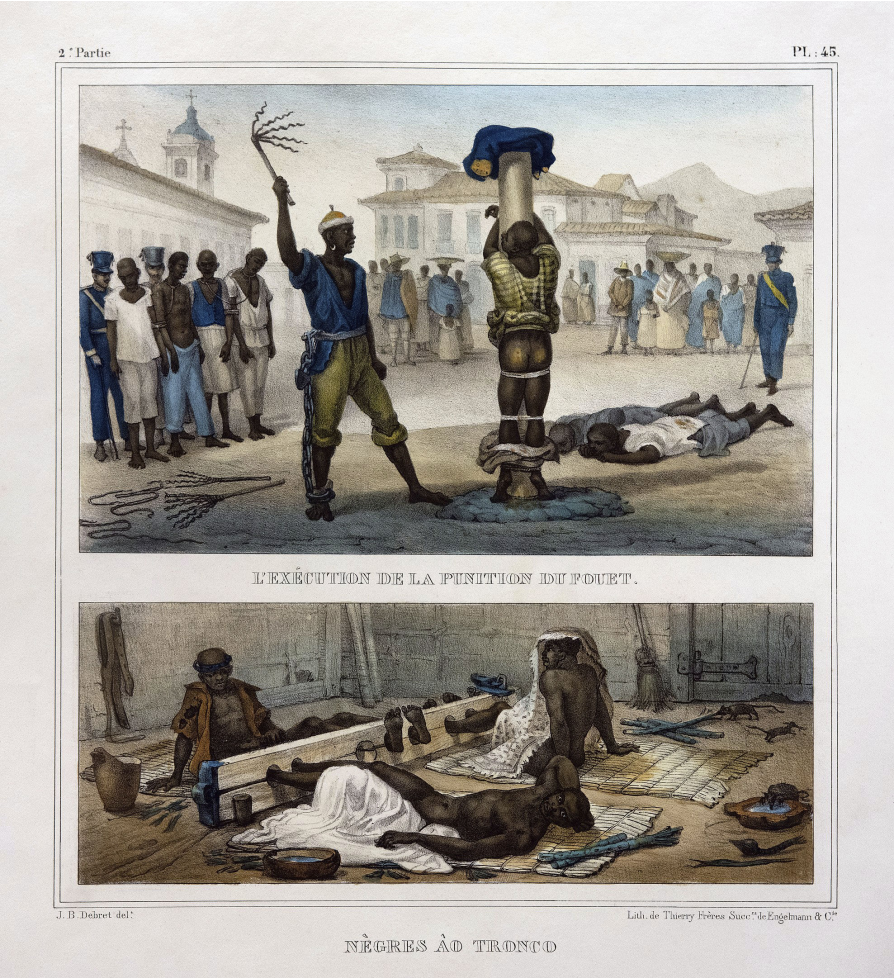
In fairness, European artists in Brazil could scarcely suppress this iniquitous captivation. On the contrary, they seemed to make a deliberate effort to emphasise it. French artist Jean-Baptiste Debret – a friend of Rugendas in Brazil – also produced a *Voyage pittoresque*.[81] One of its illustrations, *L'exécution de la punition de fouet* [Fig. 4], is nearly identical to Rugendas' *Punitions publiques* [Fig. 3]. The main difference is that, unlike the German, Debret almost entirely omits the white onlookers, instead focusing attention on the blunt presentation of a Black man's buttocks, which is made even more prominent by being framed with clothing and ties. In the same plate, directly beneath this provocative and sexually charged image, another illustration *Negres ao tronco* depicts three enslaved men immobilised by a pillory. The man in the foreground assumes an inviting posture, reminiscent of the women lying on the floor in *Nègres à fond de calle* [Fig. 1]. It is impossible not to think that Rugendas and Debret were engaged in a complicit dialogue with one another, playfully and brazenly projecting their sexual preferences and fetishism onto the bodies of enslaved men and women.

In Rugendas' album, more than in Debret's, a thin line separates the eyewitness from the voyeur. In the same manner as in the operational logic of the Burkean sublime, the viewer requires a separation from the object; similarly, the voyeur also needs this distance to derive pleasure. The voyeuristic distance accentuates the power imbalance between parties: "the voyeur invades the scene

79
It was a common practice in all American regions, notably in Brazil, the United States, and Cuba, to order other enslaved Africans to execute the punishments. In Brazil, the "overseer" or "driver" was known as *feitor*. Robson Pedrosa Costa, *Paternalism, Transgression and Slave Resistance in Brazil*, Boston, MA 2022, 39.

80
George Ryley Scott, *The History of Corporal Punishment. A Survey of Flagellation in Its Historical, Anthropological and Sociological Aspects*, London 2010, 29.

81
The full title is *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Bresil ou sejour d'un artiste francais au Bresil*, and it was published in Paris by Firmin Didot between 1834 and 1839.




[Fig. 4]
Jean-Baptiste Debret, *L'exécution de la punition de fouet* and *Negres ao tronco*, 1830, lithographic print, 16 × 13 cm, Sao Paulo, Mario de Andrade Library, in: Jean-Baptiste Debret, *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil*, Paris/Firmin Didot 1834–1839, 92, image in the public domain, Wikimedia commons (28 March 2025).

and responds to it without requiring the consent of the watched."[82] This imbalance lies at the heart of *Punitions publiques* [Fig. 3]. The clothing of the tortured man lying on the floor suggests that he was unclothed in public. The attire, including a top hat and tailcoat, implies that he was likely not an enslaved person but someone who previously enjoyed the privileges of the white masters and subsequently fell into disgrace. Consequently, the man was stripped of both his social status and physical dignity, marking the initial and most humiliating stage of the punishment. It is clear that this form of penalty is only impactful with the element of public voyeurism, where the public gaze can be as lacerating as the whip, confirming Saidiya Hartman's assertion that slaves were "vehicles of white enjoyment, in all its sundry and unspeakable expressions".[83] This understanding was firmly established in Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, where public whippings were common until 1829, after which they were confined to the privacy of the *Calabouço*.[84]

Besides the two most discernible intimations of voyeurism in *Punitions publiques* [Fig. 3] – namely, the crowd of people depicted in the scene and the album's readership – which figuratively acts as an extension of the multitude assembled at St Anne Square – there is a third level of deployment of this voyeurism which becomes detectable in another lithograph: *Chatimens domestiques* [Fig. 5]. In this plate, the castigation is also carried out publicly in the garden of a manor house. The master of the hacienda is disciplining two of his female servants. We are invited to witness this domestic scene in which we distinguish Rugendas' typical combination of various emotions. Pain is concentrated in the central group, while the remaining individuals seem to navigate through different scattered emotions. A Black man turns his back to the act of punishment while another covers his ears. The white people on the right are depicted engaging in different leisure actions, unresponsive to the scene. Only one person seems fully absorbed in the castigation: "the man in blue", partially concealed in the background. Although this cannot be confirmed with full certainty, it is likely that the figure is Rugendas himself, especially considering that travelling artists very often bolstered their credibility as eyewitnesses by including themselves within their depicted scenes.[85] In this case, however, what is more important is the instrumental role that this "external witness" plays in amplifying the scene's morbid sublimity.

82
Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh. Race, Power, and Masochism*, New York 2014, 38.

83
Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection. Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford 1997, 23.

84
Jaynie Anderson, *Crossing Cultures. Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, Melbourne 2009, 517.

85
Thomas, Witnessing Slavery, 28.


[Fig. 5]
Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Chatimens domestiques*, 1827–1835, lithographic print, 29.5 × 35.4 cm, Sao Paulo, Mario de Andrade Library, in: id., *Malerische Reise in Brasilien* [1835], Stuttgart 1986, 269 (28 March 2025).

When compared, for instance, to John Stedman's literary work, which largely exploited emotional resources to project his fantasies in slavery tales – attempting to convince the reader that "he suffers as a witness more exquisitely than the slave suffers as a victim", and delighting in "the intensity of his ability to empathise" – it seems clear that Rugendas never intended to generate real empathy.[86] Instead, "the man in blue", whether Rugendas or not, acts as a "pornographer". He is not a slave, not a master, not a member of the master's family, nor a casual observer; rather, he is an infiltrator who attests to the event's veracity and execution, acting in collusion with the distant beholder of the printed image. Thus, the primary function of "the man in blue" is to establish a one-to-one form of intimate interplay with the reader that appeals to individual voyeurism (a sort of "I am you, and you are me") rather than to the masses gathered around the punished as a collective voyeuristic entity, as seen in *Punitions publiques* [Fig. 3].

These examples from *Voyage pittoresque* demonstrate that, contrary to the common assumption that artists positioned themselves as sympathetic observers decrying the cruelties of a system seemingly beyond their agency, an uncomfortable truth lay beneath: artists were often active participants in a structure of power and control that fostered a voyeuristic dynamic that eventually became a twisted form of entertainment, a by-product of colonial activities safely and conveniently repackaged as picturesque or sublime.

## V. Conclusion

This essay has critically examined Johann Moritz Rugendas' most renowned Latin American work, *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*. Released in instalments between 1826 and 1835, the album has been extensively celebrated for its purported condemnation of the brutalities inflicted upon enslaved people in nineteenth-century colonial Brazil. However, this article has taken a divergent stance that challenges this prevailing interpretation by highlighting discrepancies between the images and the racialist tone that imbues the album's text.

One of the album's most notable images is *Blacks in the Ship's Hold* [Fig. 1], which remains a potent depiction of the deplorable conditions aboard slave ships departing the African coast for Brazil with human cargo. Much of its status as a testament to the dreadful reality endured by enslaved Africans rests on the assumption that Rugendas witnessed these scenes firsthand and depicted them from life. Nonetheless, as demonstrated throughout this article, the veracity of these images is a complex topic, entwining authenticity, faithfulness, and slavery's condemnation in a convoluted narrative. This narrative has often been shaped by a pervasive white saviour ethos that permeates the study of nineteenth-century European

86 Wood, Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography, 140.

artists exploring distant lands. In reality, Rugendas' racial views were by and large equivocal and contradictory, showcasing conflicting viewpoints on abolitionism and slavery through both his images and texts.

A central argument posited in this essay is that rather than serving as an antislavery manifesto, the album acts as a medium in which colonial fantasies and Western preconceptions about the enslaved body intersect with two aesthetic categories: the picturesque and the sublime. The treatment of the picturesque in the album reveals an evolution of the concept diverging significantly from its traditional use to describe pastoral European landscapes, incorporating racial elements and ultimately reflecting Western fixations on bodies of perceived inferior cultures and races.

The aesthetic concept of the sublime also provides a valuable framework for reinterpreting Rugendas' work, mainly through the exploration of negative or unpleasant experiences. Edmund Burke's insights prove particularly illuminating in understanding how Rugendas' depiction of slavery merges ideas of delight and pain that are central to the sublime. This interplay of discomfort and fascination inherent in the sublime gave rise to a "morbid sublime pleasure" evident in scenes depicting racialised and brutalised humans. In spite of, or most likely because of, their significant violence and gruesome nature, these scenes held a magnetic appeal for both the artist-eyewitness and the readership. The depiction and dissemination of such scenes of cruelty, set in exotic locations, were paradoxically viewed as expressions of pity and condemnation. *Nègres a fond de calle* [Fig. 1] epitomises this morbid sublime pleasure, blending elements of pain and enjoyment in varying degrees, interwoven with a sadistic sexual undertone reminiscent of early theorisations of the sublime.

The eroticisation of Indigenous and Black women was a prevalent theme in Rugendas' body of work. Within the album, this element reflects a broad spectrum of white colonial fantasies that flourished in the context of colonial domination and slavery, portraying Black individuals as carnal beings driven solely by sensual desires. This sexual undertone is accompanied by a sense of detachment and distance that is essential for the enjoyment of such scenes. The perverse satisfaction derived from the suffering and misfortune of others, the need for emotional detachment, and the erotic suggestion outlined by Burke's concept of the sublime are also evident in other prints depicting explicit violence against enslaved Africans. Two notable examples are *Punitions publiques sur la Place Sainte Anne* [Fig. 3] and *Chatimens domestiques* [Fig. 5]. In these illustrations, a subtle, almost imperceptible divide exists between the eyewitness and the voyeur, further reinforcing a connection with the sadistic aspect of the sublime.

As discussed in this paper, Rugendas' portrayal of "picturesque slavery" was shaped by a complex interplay of aesthetic and ideological factors that go beyond mere denunciation. This nuanced approach challenges the simplistic assumption that instinctively

associates such representations with a forceful stance against the underlying structure of oppression. This reassessment could also apply to other artists whose works may exhibit similar manifestations of a morbid and profoundly ingrained form of pleasure.

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# PERSPECTIVES ON INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE AND THE ARTIFICATION OF CLIMATE ACTIVISM

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## ABSTRACT

The wave of staged art vandalism by climate activist groups in 2022 confronted museums with a dilemma: in their role as guardians of objects, they must prevent such actions, but in their function as forums for social discourse, they must be receptive to climate activism entering their spaces. To navigate this challenge, some museums have adopted a strategy of "institutional capture", incorporating activism through "artification". This article analyzes four examples from museums in the German-speaking realm that sought to legitimize activist interventions by recasting them as art-like – an on-demand aesthetic experience of protest or performative reenactment of direct action. However, the aim of this accommodation is twofold: to pacify activism and discourage similar incidents, while primarily reasserting the museum's institutional legitimacy at a time of increasing erosion.



## KEYWORDS

Climate activism; Institutional capture; Artification; Activist turn; Museum studies; Institutional Critique.

In October 2022, two German climate activists from the group Letzte Generation entered Berlin's Natural History Museum and glued themselves to the scaffolding of a dinosaur skeleton in an act of peaceful protest. A year later, the traces left behind by this direct action became an exhibit in their own right. Two large green circles now mark the adhesive residue on the scaffolding, in which the imprints of the activist's fingers can still be recognized. The accompanying text emphasizes: "Although we do not condone property damage, we want to preserve the traces of this action." The recognition of the direct action's merit and its simultaneous condemnation reveals the dilemma museums found themselves in when suddenly confronted with the surge of staged attacks on artworks and historical artifacts.

The first attack on the *Mona Lisa* in May 2022, with what appeared to be a buttercream cake, was followed by thirty-eight similar actions in the same year and only a few more in the subsequent two years – including another attack on Da Vinci's Gioconda, involving soup as the weapon of choice.[1] By throwing liquid foods at artworks, gluing themselves to museum walls, and filming these actions for online dissemination, climate activists developed a new distinct protest aesthetic that triggered emotional responses in the public: fury, skepticism, approval. The protests forced the institutions to weigh up their conserving function as custodians of cultural artifacts against their role as public forums for addressing contemporary issues, such as the climate crisis. According to these two seemingly conflicting roles, art museums reacted in two ways.

The first was repression: bag bans were imposed and significantly more security personnel was hired. This strategy of preventing climate protests in museums has been supplemented at the legal level of state prosecution as a deterrent from further action. The two young activists who staged the most well-known protest action – hurling Heinz's tomato soup on Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1888) at the National Gallery in London – were sentenced to twenty months and two years in prison. In response to a similar incident in June 2024, where a Riposte Alimentaire activist defaced a Claude Monet painting, the French Minister of Culture announced that she would work with the Ministry of Justice "to develop a penal policy for this new form of crime that attacks the noblest aspect of our cohesion: culture!"[2] This authoritarian rhetoric of law and order also prevails in Italy or the US, where two activists were sentenced to one year

1
Nives Dolsak, Museum-Related Climate Activism 2022, in: *Harvard Dataverse*, 2023 (January 31, 2025).

2
Garreth Harris, "It Must Stop!". French Culture Minister Pursuing New Law to Deter Art Activists, in: *The Art Newspaper*, June 4, 2024 (January 23, 2025).

in prison for pouring red powder on a museum display case holding the US Constitution.[3]

However, the museums' second type of response aimed to achieve the same outcome – pacifying the protest – but takes a very different approach. I call it "institutional capture". This term describes strategies to transform climate protests in a way that neutralizes their impact on the museum, redirecting them towards the institution's objectives and diminishing their effectiveness: defanging the protest. The capture of the activism is aided by a blurring of categories. Art historian Wolfgang Ullrich notes that "for some years now, art activism, in particular, has been defining the aesthetic-formal standards of political protest in public space". As a result,

> every action is perceived as an art action, which is why it is not only quickly reduced to a rebellious anti-gesture, but above all understood as something almost like a work of art, in which every single element can withstand a thorough interpretation.[4]

The very notion that such acts could be considered art, and therefore subject to aesthetic critique, reflects a broader tendency within the art world to frame various forms of protest through an artistic lens. This is particularly true for climate activism of recent years.

The influential art critic Jerry Saltz, for instance, was unconvinced by the protests. Not because he took offense at the art vandalism, but because the message of this "kind of performance art" was "muddled and unconvincing".[5] In other words: bad art! Still, Saltz went on to say that he "wouldn't be surprised to see Plummer and Holland's protest [the staged vandalization of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*] included in upcoming lists of top-ten artworks 2022". And, indeed, Saltz's prediction was quickly validated when the German art magazine *Monopol* placed the climate activists on its "Top 100 Most Important People in the Art World 2022" list.[6] While skepticism about the protests' effectiveness persisted in the art world, others expressed solidarity with the activists, particularly as the

3
Elena Goukassian, Climate Activists Who Dumped Red Powder on US Constitution at National Archives Sentenced to Prison, in: *The Art Newspaper*, November 22, 2024 (January 22, 2025).

4
Wolfgang Ullrich, Die Auftritte der Letzten Generation aus kunsthistorischer Sicht. Performance oder doch bitterer Ernst?, in: *Tagesspiegel*, March 6, 2023 (February 2, 2025). Translation of this citation and all the following citations by the author.

5
Jerry Saltz, Mashed Potatoes Meet Monet. Climate Activists Have Been Celebrated for Defacing Great Paintings. Why?, in: *New York Magazine*, December 6, 2022 (January 23, 2025).

6
Monopol Top 100. Das sind die wichtigsten Persönlichkeiten der Kunstwelt, in: *Monopol*, November 21, 2022 (February 1, 2025).

first convictions were handed down. Some artists identified with the activists on both a personal and an artistic level, seeing their actions as part of a broader tradition of politically charged performance art. Pussy Riot member Nadya Tolokonnikova, for instance, publicly called for the release of the two young protesters who threw soup at *Sunflowers*. Writing an opinion piece for *The Guardian* and posting on Instagram, she recalled her own experience: "I was 22 once and also received a two-year sentence for an artistic, non-violent action."[7] Art historical discussions on climate activism in museums have also emerged. They have sought to contextualize such actions within a history of iconoclasm and its connections to other art forms, such as Action Painting,[8] or analyze the protests themselves through an art historical lens.[9]

The integration of activism into the art sphere not only transforms activism itself at its ontological level but also reshapes the museum as an institution. Over the past decade, curators have increasingly engaged with activist movements, recognizing that protesters intentionally select museums as sites of demonstration, while also viewing their own curatorial practice as a form of activism. It is within this dynamic that Pınar Durgun, who works at the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin, poses the following question:

> Here is a thought for museums: Would people be protesting to raise awareness of climate change in a museum that treats climate change as a serious matter and hosts an exhibit on climate change?[10]

This text sets out to examine instances where museums have taken up this challenge, exploring what happens to both activism and the museum when such inclusion occurs and under what circumstances institutions open their doors voluntarily to climate activist groups.

Philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt examined how Western capitalist states responded to the rising protests and social movements of the late 1960s. They identified two distinct approaches: the repressive kind and the effort to "change the composition" of the protesting masses, "integrating, dominating, and

7
Nadya Tolokonnikova, Van Gogh Is Turning in His Grave at the Harsh Just Stop Oil Sentence. I Know, because I Spoke to Him, in: *The Guardian*, October 3, 2024 (February 2, 2025).

8
See for instance Kerstin Schankweiler, Die Letzte Generation im Museum, in: *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 37/4, 2024, 324–334.

9
See for instance Anne Bessette and Juliette Bessette, On Environmental Activism in Museums, in: *e-flux*, December 6, 2022 (February 2, 2025).

10
Pınar Durgun, Is Protest Really the Problem in Museums? (Imagine) Museums as Places of Dialogue, Collaboration, and Disruption, in: *Forum Kritische Archäologie* 12, 2023, 21–24.

profiting from its new practices and forms".[11] These approaches form two sides of the same coin. In the German-speaking realm, as opposed to most other European countries, the repressive approach is complemented by the process of institutional capture. I argue that the museum's use of appropriation of climate activism is a pacifying strategy stemming from its declining authority and increasing reliance on external socio-political forces. Critical discourses can be inverted to ultimately (also) benefit the institution, a tactic seen in the institutionalization of Institutional Critique. The crucial difference, however, is that climate activism is not an artistic practice, and that activists do not consider themselves as artists. How is activism then turned into something art-like? I will examine four case studies that offer different perspectives on institutional capture through an "artification" of the activism and offering insight into the roles of both the traditional notion of a museum and the operations of contemporary art museums.

## I. Fatal Historicization. From Reality to the Museum

After having put the climate activists' fingerprints on display, the director of the Museum of Natural History described them as a "contemporary document of the climate crisis".[12] Despite the immediacy of the protest and the ongoing actions by climate activists, the museum's framing transforms their traces into historical documents from a bygone era. The museum's archiving logic, which facilitates the shift from the immediacy of protest to its instant historicization, is grounded in its relationship to "real" history, "reality", or, as art theorist Boris Groys occasionally also refers to it, the "realm of the profane".[13] This relation, according to him, is neither defined by the museum being secondary to "real" history nor by it merely documenting or reflecting it.[14] Instead, reality itself becomes secondary to the museum, as the real can only be understood in comparison to the museum's collection. Depending on what the museum chooses to collect, archive, and exhibit, our perception of reality shifts. Or, as Groys puts it, "reality can be defined in this context as the sum of all things not yet collected".[15]

When an object from the "real" world enters the museum space – subjected to its system of collecting and archiving – it crosses the

11
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2000, 268.

12
Johannes Vogel cited in Sarah Dapena Fernandez, Letzte Generation. Handabdrücke werden jetzt in Museum ausgestellt – "Zeitdokument der Klimakrise", in: *Berlin Live*, October 6, 2023 (February 1, 2025).

13
Boris Groys, *Über das Neue. Versuch einer Kulturökonomie*, Munich 1992.

14
Id., On the New, in: *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38, 2000, 5–17, here 6.

15
Ibid.

boundary between mere, profane existence and valorized culture. It is reinterpreted, reassessed, and modified; in short, its ontological status is transformed. This transformation, brought about by the museum, is the central focus of this article. How can this change be identified in the context of climate activism, and through what specific museum practices does it occur?

In the museum, a different sense of time prevails. It is characterized by a simulated durability – a sense of permanence reinforced by the conservation of objects, technical interventions that grant collected artifacts a kind of artificial longevity, which translates to the stable context of the universal museum. Alexander Araya López and Colin J. Davis, in their recent text on climate activism in museums, identify this sense of longevity as one reason individuals visit museums or acknowledge renowned masterpieces, as it "reinforce[s] their pursuit of significance and engage[s] in cultural worldview validation, fostering a sense of security against mortality anxiety".[16] It is arguably precisely this simulated sense of security and permanence that drives climate activists into museums – to challenge and destabilize it in the face of acute climate crisis. This may explain why, in October 2022, the two activists chose a dinosaur skeleton for their protest: a species that went extinct millions of years ago on this very planet, yet whose remains are artificially preserved in natural history museums around the world.

However, the sense of permanence prevalent in the museum does not mean, by implication, that the objects it cares for and exhibits, collects, and preserves, are thought to be *alive* forever. On the contrary, Groys contends that museums demonstrate the elements of the past as "incurably dead".[17] In contrast to cemeteries – sometimes invoked as an analogy to the conservationist function of Western museums – which conceal the dead to create a space of mystery and potential resurrection, museums display artifacts, rendering them static objects of contemplation. They are places "of definitive death that allows no resurrection, no return of the past" despite keeping the objects miraculously intact on a material level.[18]

The musealization of the Letzte Generation's efforts then undermines the movement's core objective: to persistently emphasize the urgency of fighting climate change *before* it is too late. The conventional function of Western museums, acting as preservers that cast a shroud of historicity and pastness over their collections, appears incompatible with the goals of climate activism. This museal approach borders on cynicism – albeit unintentional – as it evokes an image of a future where Earth has perished, yet museums

16
Alexander Araya López and Colin J. Davis, On Art and the Limits of Dissent. Climate Activism at Museums and Galleries, in: *Protest* 4/2, 2024, 143–176, here 9 (February 28, 2025).

17
Boris Groys, On Art Activism, in: *e-flux* 56, 2014 (February 1, 2025).

18
Ibid.

eternally safeguard the remnants of efforts to still save that very planet, preserved for an audience that is no longer there to see and contemplate.

## II. The Visual Earmarks of the Museum World

The Museum of Natural History's approach to managing the protest that took place in its spaces relied on traditional museological tools. The example underscores how institutional capture operates, at first, mostly at a perceptual level, using curatorial strategies to pacify the visual impact of protest, making climate activism appear congruent with the expectations of museum audiences. In a second case, this approach, which relies on the traditional tools available to the museum, becomes even more apparent. On October 30, 2022, a protester threw fake blood on Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's painting *The Clown* (1886/1887) at the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin, which was then taken down for restoration.[19] However, the artificial blood splatters on the textile wallpaper could not be easily removed and remained prominently visible. Presumably in response to this conspicuous circumstance in the Impressionist room, the stains were contextualized with a small sign. It referred to the incident, explaining the origin of the stains and the absence of the painting. For a few weeks, this was how visitors found the Impressionist room, leading many to consider the stains as being "on display" and photographing the scene. The museum itself commissioned a photographer to document the extraordinary state of the room. In his pictures, he staged a Rodin statue in front of the bloodstains. The photographs then served as illustrations for an article in the museum's own online publication about the restoration of the painting [Fig. 1].[20]

In this instance, while I do not claim that the iconoclastic gesture has been intentionally presented as art, the earmarks of the world of the museum reveal themselves. In this world, first and foremost, it is specific visual and conceptual codes that govern how something is exhibited to ensure that it is understood as on display by visitors. Consequently, the alteration of the relationship between object and audience on a visual and spatial level implies a change in the ontological status of what is displayed. This, of course, brings to mind the old joke that modern art, such as ready-mades, is indistinguishable from everyday objects to the "untrained eye" of visitors who thus end up taking photos of a fire extinguisher. In this case, however, it remains unclear whether the stains more closely resemble a fire extinguisher or the remains of a contemporary art performance, as the museum's response remains ambiguous. The Alte Nationalgalerie itself seems uncertain about how to position

19
The woman was eventually not identified as a climate activist, however, she employed the same tactics to protest for "more democracy", the police stated.

20
Kevin Hanschke, Die Bild-Rahmen-Einheit. Verglasung ist kein Vollschutz, in: *SPK Magazin*, December 14, 2022 (January 25, 2025).

[Fig. 1]
Exhibition view of the Impressionist room at the Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin, 2022 © SPK, Photothek. Photo: Thomas Imo.

itself vis-à-vis this incident. Nevertheless, the case illustrates both the ambivalence and the power inherent in the museum space, generating valences between the mere thing and the cultural object that are not easily navigated by either the institution or its visitors.

## III. The Ready-Made Museum Practice

As the first two examples have demonstrated, the museum can bring about a transformation in an object without altering the visual appearance of it. The ready-made serves as a prime example of this. Though it appears to be just an ordinary object from the realm of the real, the profane, it is largely the museum's context that allows it to be recognized as a work of art. Boris Groys terms this subtle shift "difference beyond difference", defining it as the hallmark of true novelty – an object that appears indistinguishable from others yet is fundamentally different. As he puts it, "the museum also functions as a place where difference beyond difference, between artwork and mere thing, can be produced or staged".[21] While the museum has always fulfilled this role, its authority in distinguishing and redefining value boundaries has become even more essential since Duchamp and the subsequent evolution of art.

However, the museum – or rather, the very idea of it – has since undergone significant change. The universal museum, once tied to grand master narratives and singular truths, has long been dismantled along with the stability of its context, collection, and authority. The contemporary art museum has transformed into a kind of theater, incorporating rotating exhibitions, loans, private collections, biennials, festivals, parties, fashion shows, augmented by catalogues and discursive programs – and as the next case illustrates – interventions.

The Viennese Leopold Museum went a step further in its reaction to the staged vandalization of its Gustav Klimt painting *Death and Life* (1910/1915) by two activists of the Letzte Generation Österreich, who doused it with black, oil-like paint. Instead of integrating the protest gesture into the museum's exhibition environment, the museum responded with a self-produced protest gesture. For the intervention *A Few Degrees More (Will Turn the World into an Uncomfortable Place)* in 2023, fifteen paintings of the collection permanently on display were slightly tilted – a reference to the degree of global warming [Fig. 2 and Fig. 3].[22] *A Few Degrees More* can be understood as an attempt to fit the protest gesture into the environment of a museum by having the gesture mimicked by the institution.

21
Groys, On the New, 8.

22
The intervention was a cooperation of the Leopold Museum with CCCA (Climate Change Centre Austria) and was developed by the Austrian creative agency Wien Nord Serviceplan.

[Fig. 2]
Exhibition view of the intervention *A Few Degrees More (Will Turn the World into an Uncomfortable Place)*, at the Leopold Museum, Vienna, March 22 – June 26, 2023 © Leopold Museum, Wien. Photo: Andreas Jakwerth.


[Fig. 3]
Exhibition view of the intervention *A Few Degrees More (Will Turn the World into an Uncomfortable Place)* at the Leopold Museum, Vienna, March 22 – June 26, 2023 © Leopold Museum, Wien. Photo: Andreas Jakwerth.

The Leopold Museum shifted the authorship of the protest to itself. This approach corresponds with the more recent shift in museums' self-image as platforms and public forums offering a space for socio-political discourse. Nevertheless, many museums continue to claim a hegemonic position of control. Director of the Leopold Museum, Hans-Peter Wipplinger, firmly believes in the museum's primary role as a space that shares a unique, interdependent connection with "the world": "Art museums [...] regard themselves as spaces of inspiration and reflection about our being and thus have the potential to positively impact our future actions by making societal phenomena more visible", he stated in a press release.[23]

The contrast between the two conceptions of the art museum – one rooted in tradition, the other reflecting contemporary approaches – becomes evident here, along with the tension between them. The historical understanding of the museum that Wipplinger seems to evoke is not only that of a counterpoint to society, which can also be interpreted as a Foucauldian heterotopia, a space of difference, but at times even as the embodiment of transcendence. On the other hand, it is now generally accepted that the museum must be lifted out of this privileged position, must engage critically with its inherent connections to historical and contemporary injustices, and must recognize and fulfill its social and public function. Rather than the authoritative civilizing and educational mandates of the museum, it now prioritizes the individual visitor and their experiential journey.[24] With state funding becoming increasingly scarce, museums are under growing pressure to improve their effectiveness, expand their reach, and segment visitors into categories for tailored services and assessment.[25] "Every large exhibition or installation [...] is made with the intention of designing a new order of historical memories, of proposing a new criteria for collecting by reconstructing history", Groys writes accordingly.[26] "These traveling exhibitions and installations are temporal museums which openly display their temporality."[27] This change is evident not only in the museum's social responsibilities and audience engagement but also in how it navigates and presents notions of time and difference.

23
A Few Degrees More (Will Turn the World into an Uncomfortable Place), Leopold Museum Press Statement, March 22, 2023 (February 1, 2025).

24
Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere*, Chichester 2011, 6.

25
Rina Kundu and Nadine M. Kalin, Participating in the Neoliberal Art Museum, in: *Studies in Art Education* 57/1, 2015, 39–52 (February 28, 2025).

26
Groys, On the New, 15.

27
Ibid.

The contemporary museum is no longer merely a space where "difference beyond difference" is produced and staged; it also curates multiple tailored versions of this difference. Unlike the historical notion of permanence and uniqueness, these versions openly embrace their temporal limitations and polyphony, making them adaptable and flexible. This transience, combined with diverse presentation methods, enables museums to showcase multiple perspectives simultaneously. While the art museum has traditionally been able to craft a world that exists apart from what was considered *real* life, its contemporary version has the tools to construct what I call "ready-made worlds".

By this, I also draw on philosopher and psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik's concept of a "ready-made territory", which illustrates the distinction between the capitalist appropriation of non-capitalist territories or forms of resistance, and cultural practices of incorporation, such as those propagated in the Brazilian Anthropophagic Movement. In the 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago*, poet Oswald de Andrade argued that Brazil's history of "cannibalizing" other cultures serves as a way of asserting its identity in resistance to European postcolonial cultural domination.[28] The criterion for whether a culture was allowed to participate in the "anthropophagic banquet" was, according to Rolnik, whether and to what extent it was able to provide the receiving system with the means "to create new worlds based on the current demands of life".[29] Instead of denying or merely imitating the colonizers' cultures in artistic production, anthropophagy sought to devour and deconstruct them – unraveling and transforming these very cultures while allowing the receiving culture itself to be unsettled and reshaped by them, ultimately giving rise to new hybrids. This process was even interpreted as a form of self-transcendence, with cannibalism seen as a symbolic, empowering mechanism of other-becoming.[30]

In contrast, capitalist appropriation first of all very seldomly acts from a subaltern position. While it can be a strategy of self-preservation in times of crisis, it typically seeks to primarily change what it incorporates by necessarily changing itself during the process, often through imitation. This is evident in practices like "pink-washing" or "green-washing", where corporations rebrand to appear socially and politically progressive or environmentally friendly without implementing substantive changes to support these claims. Rolnik argues that the difference between these two modes of capture lies in the capitalist strategy of creating enclosed, delimited territories to contain newly appropriated elements, thereby

28
Oswald de Andrade, Manifesto Antropófago, in: *Revista de Antropofagia*, 1928, 3.

29
Suely Rolnik, *Zombie Anthropophagie. Zur neoliberalen Subjektivität*, Vienna 2018, 15.

30
See for instance Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, Chicago/London 1992.

neutralizing their transformative potential while preserving the illusion of innovation. The spaces that arise after the shock of cultural or systemic appropriation within a capitalist system are always predefined, which is why Rolnik describes them as "ready-made territories".

I contend that while the museum creates possible worlds, they are predefined from the start. They only offer curated glimpses of uncharted territories, new paradigms, or speculative futures while inherently constraining these visions within predetermined institutional boundaries, where meanings, narratives, ideologies, values, hierarchies, and possibilities for action are prescribed. This does not necessarily mean that museums are acting within a strictly capitalist logic; rather, this reflects a broader hegemonic mode of operation, in which cultural frameworks and the power they carry shape the ways in which difference is presented, absorbed, and contained. What I refer to as "ready-made worlds" not only encompass the museum's power to define the boundaries between what is considered real and profane and what is deemed art, but also involve the creation of culturally, philosophically, phenomenologically and hermeneutically pre-constructed, carefully curated environments tailored to specific groups simultaneously.

One could also think of these museum-fabricated worlds as a world of a video game: pre-crafted, with a specific history, populated with characters, and, most importantly, governed by consistent, inherent rules. They are detailed and coherent backdrops, providing a foundation for users to play in, to move around, explore, and create their own stories. In the museum, this allows the enhancement of the visitor's experience of movement and immersion, offering diverse narratives and perspectives within only one set physical space. Rather than merely assigning value, the museum has evolved into a space that adapts quickly to societal shifts, such as climate change and the activism around it, curating multiple flexible worlds that reflect and respond to such movements.

For *A Few Degrees More*, the Leopold Museum built a ready-made world around the activist action. Rather than disturbing, disrupting, or counteracting the world of the museum, as the activists' actions did, the museum's intervention was conceived and designed to perfectly fit into it. The transformation of black paint on a Klimt painting into the tilting of a Klimt painting is comparable on a visual level as both contradict the conventional earmarks of art presentation as described in the first two cases. The Leopold Museum, however, opted for an alternative, much tamer aesthetic in which the violent, iconoclastic aspect of colorful foods on the objects were replaced by their repositioning in space, preserving the paintings' integrity. Furthermore, the framing of this change in visual codes aligns with its promotional language. The interpretation is consistent with the established context: the art museum is an important space for alternative, exploratory and creative thinking where real-world problems can be contemplated and world-changing thought and action initiated.

Fitting the protest into its own ready-made world, the museum can underscore the updated metanarrative of itself as an institution in tangible service of society. The art museum becomes the better activist. After the attack on the Klimt painting, Wipplinger had announced that the museum was in solidarity but that "attacks on works of art are definitely the wrong way to go".[31] The museum's own intervention, in contrast, is supposed "to proactively make a constructive contribution in the hope that other museums and galleries will join this movement by gently turning their art and cultural treasures into climate ambassadors"[32] – the intervention becomes a "positive climate action".[33] Wipplinger suggests that the meaning and significance of the actions are entirely different. While one is productive and positive, the other is destructive and negative. The museum claims for itself the more authentic enactment of these world-improving ideas and actions, which the climate activists carried out only crudely and deficiently. Yet one can speculate as to whether the museum would have installed the "positive climate protest" at all if the climate activists had not staged the protest in the Leopold Museum in the first place. In the case of *A Few Degrees More*, the museum did not generate activism but transformed it into a ready-made museum practice.

## IV. Value Capture and Value Coding

In 2022, ICOM (International Council of Museums) updated its definition of a museum to do justice to the shifting image of the institution. Accordingly, a museum today is a

> permanent institution in the service of society [...]. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.[34]

Notably, this definition encompasses the inherent tension between notions of time and difference within the institution, which serves as the foundation for my concept of the museum as a set territory presenting a range of ready-made worlds, as it is considered a *permanent* institution while simultaneously offering *varied experiences*.

31
Hans-Peter Wipplinger cited in Leopold-Museum hängt als "positive" Klimaaktion Bilder schief, in: *Der Standard*, March 21, 2023 (February 2, 2025).

32
Leopold-Museum hängt als "positive" Klimaaktion Bilder schief.

33
Ibid.

34
ICOM Approves a New Museum Definition, ICOM, August 24, 2022 (January 28, 2025).

In the next case study, however, I would like to focus on the aspect of the contemporary museum mentioned in the definition – one that is described as inclusive and participatory, engaging with different communities. In November 2022, amid the wave of staged art vandalism by climate activists, ICOM Germany issued a statement, co-signed by ninety-two museum directors worldwide, which did not explicitly condemn the activists' actions but stressed that they "severely underestimate the fragility of these irreplaceable objects".[35] The signatories, as "museum directors entrusted with the care of these works", expressed being "deeply shaken by their risky endangerment".[36] However, just six months later, ICOM Germany took a different stance, inviting the climate activist group Letzte Generation to stage a performance on International Museum Day, May 21, 2023, at eight major museums across the country.

Letzte Generation and its other national branches are, of course, responsible for most of the staged attacks on artworks across Europe. Alongside the black paint splashed on the Klimt painting at the Leopold Museum, members of the group also threw mashed potatoes onto a Monet painting in Potsdam, glued themselves to iconic works such as Rafael's *Sistine Madonna* (1512/23) in Dresden, the *Laocoön* group (200 BC to the 70s AD) at the Vatican, and a Goya painting at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

Accepting the invitation, the activists staged an art performance – a four-hour "permanent reading" – in the lobbies of, among others, the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, and the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. Only two months earlier, in March 2023, activists of the group had tried to paste over the security glass of Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) with an altered image but were stopped by security guards of the Kunsthalle Hamburg [Fig. 4]. On May 21, however, there were a few chairs, a small podium, and a microphone in the lobby of the Kunsthalle [Fig. 5]. Additionally, some museums displayed a video installation that summarized the media's response to the climate actions by Letzte Generation in museums, aiming to provoke discussion.[37]

Between the attempt to stage the vandalization of an artwork at the Hamburger Kunsthalle and a reading performance in its lobby lies, first and foremost, what I have previously only hinted at but, in this case, is explicitly affirmed. The museum's ability to stage or produce the distinction between an artwork and a "mere thing" is fully realized here, as Letzte Generation is not protesting but rather invited to *perform protest*. Beyond this ontological shift, the

35
Statement: Attacks on Artworks in Museums, ICOM, February 19, 2024 (January 28, 2025).

36
Ibid.

37
See Angelika Schoder, Konstruktiver Klima-Protest. Museen kooperieren mit der Letzten Generation, in: *musermeku*, May 23, 2023 (February 20, 2025).

[Fig. 4]
Photograph of activists from the group Letzte Generation during their protest action at Kunsthalle Hamburg, on March 19, 2023 © Letzte Generation.


[Fig. 5]
Photograph of activists from the group Letzte Generation during their reading performance at Hamburger Kunsthalle, on May 21, 2023 © Letzte Generation.

group's two actions within the space of the Hamburger Kunsthalle differ through the process of what philosopher C. Thi Nguyen calls "value capture". His notion describes how social and institutional structures can reshape an individual's motivations by offering simplified, often quantified versions of complex values. This process is exemplified by social media platforms like Twitter (now X) where the gamified environment gradually shifts users' focus from genuine communication to pursuit of measurable metrics, aligning behavior with the platform's reward system rather than users' original intentions.[38] In the case of the International Museum Day, there was no gamified scoring or point system. But there is a game that is played, and it has rules. When a museum employee of the Hamburger Kunsthalle was asked if she was afraid of mashed potato on the day of the performance, she replied: "No, I think that's an unspoken law for today."[39] The art institution, long subject to scholarly analysis of its ritualized norms,[40] unilaterally sets the terms for activist engagement through its subtle governance of its own spaces. By inviting protesters, museums implicitly establish boundaries, chief among them the rather obvious expectation to refrain from staged artwork destruction. This tacit agreement between museums and activists was presumably intended to extend beyond the event, a hope that has so far been fulfilled for German museums.

According to art educator Nora Sternfeld, if an invitation were a matter of a "change of perspective that makes a difference", it would be aimed at "the entire rules of the game and not merely the possibility of playing along".[41] And, of course, there is much more to the rules of the game than not to attack artworks. In this context, museums subtly reassert their authority by channeling activist energy into sanctioned forms of expression, effectively domesticating dissent within the confines of institutional decorum and pre-existing hierarchical structures. One may speculate whether the museum would really have accepted just *any* performance by the activists, or if a reading seemed to be the least objectionable option.

A four-hour reading performance on a makeshift podium in the museum lobby operates on a much lower level of affect and with practically no visual impact. The activists' original motivation – drawing attention to the climate crisis, conveying their feelings of existential fear, and expressing concern for both human and nonhuman life on Earth – seems to have been transformed into a desire to be taken seriously as interlocutors, rather than "misunderstood

38
C. Thi Nguyen, *Games. Agency as Art*, Oxford 2020, 201.

39
Jens Büchsenmann, Lesen statt kleben. 'Letzte Generation' kooperiert mit Museen, in: *NDR Kultur*, May 22, 2023 (January 28, 2025).

40
See for instance Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, London 1995.

41
Nora Sternfeld, *Das radikaldemokratische Museum*, Berlin 2018, 76.

as terrorists", as one activist explained.[42] The scale and scope of the action have been greatly reduced. The audience for the reading performance is limited to museum visitors, whereas the original protests were primarily aimed at a secondary, digital audience, as Kerstin Schankweiler points out. She details the protest at the Barberini Museum in Potsdam, where two activists threw mashed potato at a Monet painting, knelt in front of it, and one began a prepared monologue. While museum visitors immediately expressed their indignation, the activist continued without interruption, as her rhetorically framed questions were not intended to spark dialogue with the audience in the room, but rather to engage a much broader audience beyond the museum in the digital realm [Fig. 6]. Viewers of the video were meant to undergo what Schankweiler describes as "affective media witnessing", in which they "become witnesses to the affects, following the iconoclastic act up close, as if they were there themselves".[43] These protest actions of staged art vandalism are strategically designed to leverage the attention economy driven by digital platforms, producing powerful visuals while stirring intense emotions (whether positive or negative) in video viewers. This original approach, aimed at the digital space and shaped by its platform-capitalist, media-spectacle-oriented nature, was inverted in the reading performance by the museum.

By imposing an institutional framework, the activism was quantified, making it consumable within the museum's ritualized behavioral context. Its original impact and intent had been altered: instead of an unannounced disruptive action, the activism was integrated into the normative idea of something exhibitable that visitors could come by and *look at*. Climate activists thus changed from outsiders to insiders, from rioters to invitees, from vandals to performers. This sort of value capture successfully transforms activism's emotional resonance, making it controllable and consumable within the museum's ready-made world.

## V. Politics of Deference

Another case where a museum opted to invite climate activist groups into its own space – getting ahead of them before they could invade it – is constituted by the exhibition "#noclimartchange". "While other museums currently want to keep climate protection groups out for fear of attacks", according to the German art magazine *Monopol* in its description of the exhibition, the "Tyrolean Ferdinandeum voluntarily brings them into its own rooms".[44] It was the

42
Irma Trommer of the Letzte Generation said: "The hope is that people will get to know us and see: Hey, this has nothing to do with terrorism." In: Büchsenmann, Lesen statt kleben.

43
Schankweiler, Die Letzte Generation im Museum, 330.

44
Alia Lübben, Etwas abzusperren, ist mir innerlich zuwider, in: *Monopol*, December 19, 2022 (February 28, 2025).


[Fig. 6]
Photograph of activists from the group Letzte Generation during their protest action at the Museum Barberini in Potsdam, on October 13, 2022 © Letzte Generation. See Jan von Brevern and Anna Degler, Editorial. Distanz. Ein Annäherungsversuch, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* 4/3, 2023, 349–360, here 350 (April 15, 2025).

museum's head of marketing communications who developed the exhibition concept, based on the credo: "We don't exclude anyone, we include them."[45] For five months, the museum offered a room to four climate activist groups, among them Letzte Generation. The exhibition included a mural of a street blockade with a chair for visitors to sit on, a photograph smeared with red paint and numerous posters and banners from climate demonstrations that became part of the museum's collection after the exhibition ended [Fig. 7 and Fig. 8]. The room that was given to the climate groups was located between the cloakroom and the entrance to the regular exhibition space. What the Ferdinandeum offered was a literal in-between space.

An "in-between space" is how Nora Sternfeld describes the museum itself: "between what they refer to and what can happen in them and with them".[46] The in-between space presupposes the operation of institutional capture. It is within the difference between the space the museum seems to offer – infinite and vast – and what it actually offers – a confined and regulated territory – where institutional capture takes place. The room that presupposes capture is also the main concern of philosopher Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò's book *Elite Capture*.[47] Táíwò understands a "room" both metaphorically, as a social place in society, a class, that can be entered through the accumulation or inheritance of economic, cultural and symbolic capital, as well as literally, like the classroom, or the courtroom. Both understandings are necessarily linked. Táíwò argues that unequal societies are structured through many different rooms which become progressively more inaccessible as one ascends the social and economic hierarchy. To change such a societal structure, "we have to challenge how those rooms are put together, the security system that controls access to them, and the rules that dictate what happens in them", he asserts.[48] To show that the art museum is not only an elitist institution but lives up to the shift in its identity as an inclusive platform facilitating discourse on social change, marginalized groups or individuals supposedly representing such a group are increasingly invited into it. Táíwò calls this symbolic invitation the "politics of deference". Politics of deference, he argues, locate "attentional injustice in the selection of spokespeople" to represent

45
Michael Klieber, #NOCLIMARTCHANGE – Klimaaktion im Museum, in: *cba.media*, January 24, 2023 (July 8, 2023).

46
Sternfeld, Das radikaldemokratische Museum, 38–39.

47
Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, *Elite Capture*, London 2022, 72.

48
Ibid., 75.

[Fig. 7]
Exhibition view of the exhibition *#noclimartchange* at the Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, 2023
© Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck. Photo: Maria Kirchner.

[Fig. 8]
Exhibition view of the exhibition *#noclimartchange* at the Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, 2023
© Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck. Photo: Maria Kirchner.

marginalized groups and invite them in this attributed function into the room of an elite.[49]

The museum is a room of an elite and the invitation extended to activist groups – marginalized not by identity, but by their political and radical practices, positioned outside and in opposition to mainstream policies and institutions – can be understood as politics of deference. By emphasizing its function as a platform, as in the case of "#noclimartchange", the museum seems like an inclusive, non-hierarchical field rather than an exclusive room of elites. The focus on "participation" in their public relations communication represents a common feature of deferential politics. Sternfeld elucidates that in the paradigm of museum participation, art and culture should transition from being merely "for everyone" to "with everyone".[50] The museum platform and its field of representation is constantly extending under the label of creating visibility for marginalized groups in society. However, the "invitee" is given a dubious role, as Sternfeld analyzes:

> From the perspective of the 'everyone' (meaning marginalized positions that have not yet been won over as part of 'everyone' – or better, as target groups) to whom the new institutional discourses are directed, this means that they are to be invited to participate on the one hand and are to be available as objects of representation on the other.[51]

Sternfeld thus describes what could be characterized as the core problem of politics of deference. In Táíwò's words, "rather than focusing on the actions of the corporations and algorithms that much more powerfully distribute attention", the politics of deference – although often enacted with good intentions – only defer efforts to the symbolic sphere.[52] Which is why, as a default political orientation, it can even work counter to the interests of marginalized groups. It distorts the efforts to remodel the "whole house to the specific rooms that have already been built for us".[53] The art museum seems to be particularly susceptible to this dead end since it fundamentally assumes its identity to be that of a "symbolic place" anyway, as for instance the director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle

49
Ibid., 74.

50
Sternfeld, Das radikaldemokratische Museum, 74.

51
Ibid.

52
Táíwò, Elite Capture, 74.

53
Ibid., 83.

calls it in the context of the reading performance of Letzte Generation.[54]

Another important characteristic that distinguishes the art museum in this context is its dual nature as a "room": it represents a metaphorical space that is exclusive and difficult to access, while also functioning as a physical architectural space that remains (relatively) open to entry. The climate activists took advantage of its physical accessibility. However, their actions also breached the boundaries and the laws that govern the museum as a metaphorical room – notably, from their marginal vantage point. But by excepting the deferential act of an official invitation inside, the tables are turned again. Even if it is only a small anteroom of the foyer that is given to activists as their own physical space, it does represent inclusion in the metaphorical room of the museum. Following Táíwò's argument, this dynamic can be understood as policing or "regulating traffic within and between" rooms.[55] Sternfeld comes to a similar conclusion in her analysis of the discursive use of the word "participation" in the museum, invoking philosopher Jacques Rancière's theory of "politics vs. police":

> In Rancière's political theory, politics takes place when the 'part without a share' demands its share in the name of equality – thus breaking through the policing logic of administration and organized inequality. Taking up this idea, participation seems to be above all a policing moment: voluntary self-participation in view of voluntary self-regulation.[56]

The museum hopes for the "voluntary self-regulation" of the activists, a kind of quid pro quo in exchange for an invitation into the museum's rooms.

## VI. The Crisis of Cultural Legitimacy

The art museum adopts these various, often intersecting forms of climate activism appropriation mainly as a defensive strategy. This defense is not limited to countering the immediate threat of further gestural attacks on artworks in the museum's care. Rather, I argue that the museum is responding to a much deeper, underlying challenge that it perceives to its position.

Over the past decades, feminist, anti-racist, queer, and postcolonial struggles have profoundly altered the role of the art museum, holding it accountable for its involvement in historical and contemporary injustices. Since the 2018 *Report on the Restitution of African*

54
Büchsenmann, Lesen statt kleben.

55
Táíwò, Elite Capture, 113.

56
Sternfeld, Das radikaldemokratische Museum, 77.

*Cultural Heritage*, European museums have, if slowly, begun returning looted artifacts, while US institutions debate deaccessioning to address racist and misogynistic collecting practices. Global movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have spurred debates over systemic sexism and racism in museums, leading to protests against board members and donors, such as Warren Kanders at the Whitney Museum and the Sackler family's ousting from sponsorships. The COVID-19 pandemic brought further scrutiny, with protests and strikes over inequitable staffing policies and layoffs, pushing some museums like the Guggenheim and Tate Modern toward unionization. More recently, US museums have become sites of pro-Palestinian demonstrations, while German institutions face heated debates around the Israel-Gaza conflict and the accusation of censorship.

These movements underscore a broader shift in the perception of art museums. As Sternfeld notes, the loss of faith in the museum's canonizing authority reflects a "crisis of representation". Former director of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Peter-Klaus Schuster, adds that museums "can no longer hide behind an authority, not even their own", and must justify their actions with transparency.[57] Having experienced a gradual loss of inherent cultural legitimacy over the past few decades, museums can no longer afford to selectively ignore or reject political discourse – increasingly, they rely on it.[58]

This shift in the museum's (self-)perception is mirrored in ICOM's redefinition of what a museum is supposed to be today. Changes enforced externally were also driven internally. Over the past decade, the activist turn in curatorial work has introduced critical practices within institutions. Curators, in particular, act as intermediaries who no longer see their role solely in the care of art, as suggested by the etymological origins of their profession, but rather in rethinking the canon, critically reflecting the mechanisms of the institution, and fostering discourse – partly by creating opportunities for debate. Activism from outside is being carried out and incorporated within the museum.

In one possible interpretation, the beginning of this development could be traced back to the first generation of artists engaging in the conceptual art practice of Institutional Critique in the 1960s. What started as an artistic inquiry into the workings of art institutions gradually permeated curatorial, academic and museum work, focusing on the injustices embedded within the structures of the art world. Over time, Institutional Critique itself became institutionalized. Writing a *Curriculum for Institutional Critique* in 2003, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson feared that the conceptual artistic prac-

57
Peter Klaus-Schuster cited in Barry Schwabsky, Agents of Malaise. Are Museums in Crisis?, in: *The Nation*, March 8, 2022 (January 30, 2025).

58
See Gavin Grindon, Curating with Counterpowers: Activist Curating, Museum Protest, and Institutional Liberation, in: *Social Text* 41/2, 2023, 19–44.

tice "threatens to devolve into a gimmick".[59] This, she argued, was in large part because of its absorption by the art museum, dreaming of itself as "agent of the avant-garde" and, in the late 1990s, "has proclaimed itself to be not a site of political engagement but one of epiphanic inspiration"[60] – a belief that is still held by museum professionals like Wipplinger. I would argue that what has shifted since Bryan-Wilson wrote her curriculum, especially over the past decade, is that museums have indeed been progressively compelled to view themselves as "sites of political engagement". Weakened by the erosion of their once unquestioned cultural authority, museums are now dependent on these external forces to carry counter-hegemonic discourse into them. Although this discourse is often highly critical of the institution, museums have adapted and learned to incorporate criticism, protest, or activism in order to remain relevant and maintain some of their hegemonic role. This may have pushed the museum into a position where its first response is to incorporate any kind of critique that enters through its doors, such as climate activism. However, the key difference between the appropriation of Institutional Critique and the emerging appropriation of climate activism by art museums is that climate activists are not artists and do not view their protests as art. Consequently, I argue, the museum is making a category mistake.

This category mistake by art museums might stem from what artist Gregory Sholette describes as the "increasingly tenuous line – if a line still exists at all –" between the "*Art of Activism* and the *Activism of Art*".[61] The distinction between the "inside" and "outside" of institutions – and by extension, the art world, including its hierarchies and networks of power, influence, and capital – has become increasingly blurred and contested in both theory and practice. The "Activism of Art" over the last fifteen years has been dramatically enhanced by groups such as Decolonize This Place, Gulf Labor, Occupy Museums, P.A.I.N., and BP or Not BP, as well as Liberate Tate. They see the museum as "enmeshed with other institutions, notably those of large fossil fuels, arms, and pharmaceuticals companies", as art historian Gavin Grindon explains their shared conviction.[62] The groups, while not necessarily understanding their activism as art, emerge from within the art world and frame their protests using the language and symbols of visual art and museum practices, rather than positioning themselves as outsiders. "With their own infrastructure rooted in the curatorial labor

59
Julia Bryan-Wilson, A Curriculum for Institutional Critique, or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art, in: Jonas Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism*, Oslo 2003, 89–109, here 103.

60
Bryan-Wilson, A Curriculum for Institutional Critique, 103.

61
Gregory Sholette, *The Art of Activism and the Activism of Art*, London 2022, 13.

62
Grindon, Curating with Counterpowers.

of movements", Grindon explains "they do not rely on the career support structures, funding sources, or apparatus of representation required by professional artists."[63] This enables them to occupy both inside and outside positions simultaneously. Visual Culture scholar Emma Mahony, who studies artistic climate activist groups such as Liberate Tate, describes this strategy as an "interstitial practice" that navigates between engagement and exodus, producing "double agents inside the museum".[64]

In clear contrast to these groups, climate activists like Letzte Generation do not target museums or the art world. In fact, this approach is sometimes criticized for being too vague and lacking the precision needed for meaningful impact. As art historian Giovanni Aloi argues, unlike groups such as BP or Not BP, which target museums, sponsors, or board members complicit in the climate crisis, climate activists risk their actions being reduced to mere spectacles that are "instantly absorbed and assimilated by the capitalist media matrix that endlessly multiplies them".[65] In this text, my focus, however, is not on evaluating the success or effectiveness of the activists' strategy. Rather, I aim to highlight that Letzte Generation utilizes museums as platforms for impactful visuals – an approach described by Sholette as the "Art of Activism" – with their primary target being something other than the art world. While they enter museums, target artworks, and employ visual means – their actions are based on the production of images – their true targets are governments, political parties and their climate policies, as well as the public discourse and sentiment surrounding the urgency of the climate crisis. The museum serves first and foremost as an effective backdrop.

The activists thus forge a strategically deliberate relationship with the museum, leveraging what it can offer for their goals. In doing so, they consciously align themselves with the suffragettes, who over a century ago in Great Britain demanded women's suffrage setting off a wave of *actual* art vandalism.[66] Art historian Nicola Guad discusses the rationale behind this protest strategy, noting that "attacks on paintings in galleries demonstrate 'a subtle awareness of institutional power, for it aims to shift the struggle from the non-legitimized public space outside in the streets to the

63
Ibid.

64
Emma Mahony, From Institutional to Interstitial Critique. The Resistant Force That Is Liberating the Neoliberal Museum from Below, in: T. J. Demos, Emily Eliza Scott, and Subhankar Banerjee (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*, New York 2021, 409–417, here 412.

65
Giovanni Aloi, Art/Protest, in: *Art Monthly* 476, 2024, 13–16, here 15.

66
Just Stop Oil spokesperson Emma Brown specifically mentioned the conscious reference to the art vandalism of the Suffragettes during the panel discussion "Climate Activism in Art Spaces" at the conference *Climate Crisis >> Art Action* at Whitechapel Gallery, London, March 2–3, 2023.

hyper-legitimized public space inside the gallery'".[67] I assume that, in addition to the dramatic effect of the museum as a stage and the visual and affective power of the splattered artworks, it is this subtle awareness of institutional power that brings the climate activists into the museum.

## VII. From Activism to Art? Artification as Defense Strategy

Ultimately, this seems to be a tug-of-war between climate activists and art museums, each pulling from opposite ends of the rope, attempting to shift the strategic relationship in their favor with the tools available to them. This struggle unfolds against the backdrop of two very different crises: the climate crisis and the crisis of the museum's diminishing cultural legitimacy. It is most likely that climate activists are indifferent, even ignorant, to the museum's crisis of legitimacy. In fact, I would contend that they continue to act precisely because they still hold a traditional conception of the museum's role and identity, defined by its cultural hegemonic position and values such as permanence, preservation, originality, and the authority to assign value. Seen in this light, the tug-of-war is not only taking place against the backdrop of two crises, but is also unfolding on two – not entirely overlapping – terrains, with activists and museums strategically engaging on the basis of different conceptions of what a museum represents. However, I do not assert that the museum and its curators are indifferent to the climate crisis. What I hope to have shown, instead, is that the art museum, driven by its commitment to its contemporary role as a platform for societal discourse and engagement, incorporates climate activism through its transformation into something art-like. This dynamic raises questions concerning nothing less than the ontological status of art today.

The artification of climate activism by museums unfolds on multiple levels. As I have analyzed in various cases, it is often retrospectively: activist gestures or their remnants are pacified and integrated into the visual and spatial environment of an exhibition space through typical museological tools. At the Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin, this happened through the contextualization of a wall text, while at the Natural History Museum Berlin, the visual marker of two green rings were installed to direct the viewers' attention to the traces of fingerprints left by climate activists as a contemporary document of the climate crisis that merits preservation. In this case, the activists' gestures are incorporated into the museum's archival logic: they are conserved and thus historicized.

In other cases, museums do not wait for activists to invade their space and leave their mark, but preemptively invite them into it. However, they were invited not as activists per se, but as legitimate

[67] Nicola Gauld, "I Attack This Work of Art Deliberately." Suffragette Activism in the Museum, in: Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds.), *Museum Activism*, New York 2019, 369–379, here 376.

participants in the art world. The Ferdinandeum invited four climate activist groups to curate an exhibition, where they staged the vandalization of paintings, smearing red paint over a photograph as an exhibit, and drawing vehicles on the museum's white wall for visitors to sit in front of, recreating a protest scene on a motorway. These mock-ups of protest scenes and dummy activist gestures then became part of the museum collection. Letzte Generation's invitation to eight major German museums on International Museum Day explicitly defined their presence as a performance. This redefinition of activism as performance art was further reinforced by ICOM's linguistic framing.

In both cases, the invitation led the activists to merely simulate or perform protest. The museum-driven transformation thus shifts climate activism from unauthorized, visually expressive protests in museum spaces to invited performances inspired by activism. The activists' own imitation of their protest stands in paradoxical contrast to the concurrent movement of contemporary art, which in the last decade has sought to impact and bring about change beyond the realm of art, on a material level. The desire and aim of directly effecting social, economic, political and especially ecological realities unite climate activists and a large part of contemporary art; they merely come from different directions – and now converge in the museum.

For Groys, only works that resist clear classification as either art or non-art – neither fully adhering to traditional artistic criteria nor belonging entirely to the everyday world – are deemed "new" and "alive" and thus worthy of inclusion in the museum's archiving logic.[68] One could argue that climate activist actions meet this standard. However, Groys specifies, only the fact that their authors act as "historical agents of this logic" makes them worthy of being archived. Climate activists do not consciously act within this logic. On the contrary, as Wolfgang Ulrich points out, while activists could claim their actions as art – "opening the door to an ironic or Dadaist interpretation"[69] – they deliberately refrain from invoking artistic freedom. Instead, they accept prison sentences, consciously facing the socio-political and legal consequences.

In summary, contemporary art and activism converge in the museum not because activists perceive their actions as art, but because the museum actively frames and accommodates them as such. This is not, I would contend, because this form of climate activism is genuinely regarded as *good* art – nor as new, radical, or even particularly interesting, for that matter. The question then becomes: What does it signify when museums incorporate material they do not value artistically? As proposed in my analysis, museums engage in what Herbert Marcuse termed "repressive tolerance",

68
Groys, Über das Neue, 77.

69
Ulrich, Die Auftritte der Letzten Generation aus kunsthistorischer Sicht.

driven by a dual fear – fear of damage to their collections, and equally, fear of witnessing their already fragile cultural legitimacy and societal role erode further in the face of protest movements. Yet, the museum does not tolerate activism for what it is but instead tolerates its artified version – a version it has actively constructed itself – an imitation staged for the museum's world, resembling protest art, performance art, and the like. This dynamic exposes the core insight of this relationship: museums, not activists, drive this transformation and, when necessary, can carry out the entire process independently. As the intervention *A Few Degrees More* at the Leopold Museum has demonstrated, it is the museum that actively operates as an "historical agent of this logic", navigating between the realms of art and the real, no longer dependent on the activist's presence. The museum can both create and receive its own protest. This cycle of protest and assimilation – replicated by both the activists and the museum – suggests that the contemporary museum's true occupation is the continuous negotiation of its own legitimacy.

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# REVIEWS
# REZENSIONEN

# ALL THINGS FOREIGN, ALL THINGS STRANGE

Review of the exhibition: *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst*, Kurpfälzisches Museum, Heidelberg (October 19, 2024 – January 12, 2025).


Reviewed by
Kacper Radny

## I. Introduction

The exhibition *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst* (*The Invention of the Foreign in Art*) was presented at the Kurpfälzisches Museum in Heidelberg, Germany, from October 19, 2024, to January 12, 2025 [Fig. 1]. It was curated by the museum's Painting and Graphic Collections Manager, Dr. Julia Carrasco. The showcase included over eighty works spanning a wide variety of media, including paintings, drawings, prints, decorative arts, photography, sculpture, and video. This collection featured visual art from the late Middle Ages to the present. The vast temporal scope of the exhibition reflected its ambitious goal of sufficiently addressing the concept of the "foreign" in art and provided space for Old Masters such as Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, alongside contemporary artists like Gülsün Karamustafa, Lisl Ponger, and Yinka Shonibare.

Housed in the museum's space and organized across three color-coded rooms, each focusing on two specific subcategories, *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst* critically analyzed and illustrated the ways European visual art, from the late Middle Ages to the present, has constructed and represented the concept of the

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[Fig. 1]
A view of the entrance to the exhibition. Photo by the author.

"foreign". The exhibition's modern design appealed to both devoted art enthusiasts and casual tourists. Despite its chronological core, it intertwined older and more contemporary works, creating a dynamic narrative.

Structurally, all pieces were assigned to one of six thematic sections based on their subject matter rather than their time of creation. As visitors progressed through the exhibit, they were encouraged to delve into Europe's early perspectives on other cultures, question the authenticity of Orientalist depictions, examine the role of gender in imperialist cultures, and explore the influence of non-European art on modern European art movements. Toward the end, the exhibition highlighted the artwork chosen as its cover image, focusing on the portrayal of skin color in art and its role in expressing societal hierarchies. This section underscored how the "White Gaze" has historically marginalized Black individuals, often casting them in the role of the exotic "other".

## II. Room 1: "Beyond Europe: Expansion and Imperialism" / "Danger and Fascination"

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors were greeted by a striking, magenta-colored space [Fig. 2]. Their attention was immediately drawn to a video installation in front of them: Selma Alacam's *Different Conditioning* (2011). In this work, the German-Turkish artist stamps her face with ink using a seal carrying the German federal eagle symbol. The contemporary artwork engages with a multitude of issues, including identity, state agency, gender, and ethnicity – all themes explored throughout the exhibition.

After watching the video, visitors were encouraged to read the introductory texts serving as a preface to the exhibition. The introduction opened with four guiding questions: "What do we perceive as other, and why? What does this have to do with us personally? When do we feel like a stranger? And what role does art play in this?"[1] This ambitious conceptual framework could have felt overwhelming. However, the curatorial team clarified that the exhibition did not aim to provide conclusive answers. Instead, they invited visitors to engage with the artworks and reflect on their own perspectives regarding the themes presented.

With this in mind, visitors were encouraged to continue through the exhibition with an open mind, ready to have their views challenged and broadened. Adjacent to the introduction, a small note alerted visitors to the presence of numerous elements in the artworks that, by today's social norms, could be considered racist, misogynistic, or otherwise offensive. The curator also explained the use of the upper-case spelling of "Black" and lower case "white"

[1] Quoted from the *Introduction* text plate provided as a part of the exhibition.

[Fig. 2]
View of the first room of the exhibition space. Photo by the author.

throughout the exhibition, as per a statement by the Associated Press.[2]

The first section of the exhibition, titled "Beyond Europe: Expansion and Imperialism", served as a fitting entry point. It examined European expansions into Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Americas, exploring how European visual culture imagined and depicted so-called "others". Many of the artworks in this section, including book illustrations and graphics, exemplified how those in power used visual language to assert Europe's supposed superiority and justify the subjugation of non-European peoples. A notable example was Jan van der Straet's *Allegory of the Discovery of America* (1591), which depicts Europe as a finely dressed man and the Americas as a naked, startled woman – imbuing the colonial process with an added layer of sexual domination [Fig. 3].

The first room of the exhibition continued with the second section, "Danger and Fascination", which highlighted the cultural significance of the Ottoman Empire's conquest of Constantinople (1453) and its territorial expansion into Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Following a brief introduction to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, the curator explained how visual elements associated with the Ottoman Empire became widely known in Europe as symbols of the barbaric, uncivilized, and heathen "other".[3] This framing even influenced depictions of biblical stories that predated the Ottoman Empire. For example, Aert de Gelder's *Joseph and Judah with the Cup* (ca. 1682) portrays Joseph in richly ornamented clothing and a turban inspired by Ottoman fashion, marking him as the "foreign" figure.

The overarching goal of the first section was to introduce visitors to the concept of the "other" as understood in European art during the Early Modern period – namely, the "non-European", the "exotic", or the "Oriental". With its thoughtful selection of artworks, the section successfully established this foundation, encouraging visitors to reflect on how visual arts have historically shaped perceptions of foreignness. By referencing Said's *Orientalism*, the curator seamlessly transitioned visitors into the second room of the exhibition.

## III. Room 2: "Escapism and Masquerade" / "Imperialism and Questions of Danger"

The second room of the exhibition evoked a more tranquil atmosphere with its silver-blue walls [Fig. 4]. The third section of the show, "Escapism and Masquerade", was introduced to visitors through a text displayed by the entrance. Although this section

2 Associated Press, *Explaining AP style on Black and white*, July 20, 2020 (December 28, 2024).

3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London 2003 (1978).


[Fig. 3]
Jan van der Straet, *Allegory of the Discovery of the Americas*, 1591, Copper engraving, Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, in: *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst* (exh. cat. Heidelberg, Kurpfälzisches Museum), ed. by Julia Carrasco, Heidelberg 2024, 32.

[Fig. 4]
View of the second room of the exhibition space. Photo by the author.

included more daring contemporary pieces, it maintained the chronological exploration of the evolution of the concept of "foreignness". The curator highlighted the historical importance of the Battle of Vienna (1683), after which the Ottoman Empire ceased to be a significant threat to European sovereignty. This shift facilitated the development of stronger diplomatic and trade ties between Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

As a result, numerous visual elements were borrowed and appropriated from the "Orient" by European upper classes. A prominent example of this trend is Johan Peter Hoffmeister's *Portrait of Prince Max Joseph in Turkish Attire* (1764, after Johann Christian von Mannlich). This large canvas, further enhanced by its richly decorated golden frame, depicts the future King of Bavaria in a full-body portrait, dressed in clothing inspired by Ottoman fashion. Notably, his family had no direct ties to the Ottoman Empire. However, Bavarian courts and intellectual circles, inspired by broader European trends, developed a fascination with Ottoman art, architecture, and culture. Bavarian elites actively collected artifacts and embraced the allure of Ottoman exoticism, which found expression in their architecture and artistic endeavors. The choice to portray the young prince in such outlandish attire served to underscore his family's importance, power, and international cultural sophistication. The painting also reinforced notions of European superiority and white supremacy through the inclusion of a similarly aged Black boy in the background. The boy's darker skin tone and submissive pose render him almost invisible, blending him into the composition as a decorative accessory.

The fourth section of the exhibition, "Imperialism and Questions of Gender", shifted the focus to the nineteenth century and Europe's imperial history. Drawing from the work of Rana Kabbani and Linda Nochlin, Julia Carrasco explored the gender politics of that era.[4] Among paintings, photographs, and illustrations of deserts and half-naked women, visitors were reminded that these visuals were constructed from the perspective of a white, male gaze. Both female bodies and desert landscapes were designed to align with European fantasies rather than depict factual truths.

This point was emphasized by the inclusion of Gülsün Karamustafa's *Fragmenting/Fragments* (1999), an installation of twenty-seven printed panels showcasing fragments from prominent French Orientalist paintings. Each panel isolates parts of female bodies from these works. Stripped of their original contexts, the fragments of naked skin starkly reveal the sexualization, alienation, and subjugation of women. Juxtaposed with Karamustafa's work was Parastou Forouhar's daring digital print placed right across it, *The Grass Is Green, the Sky Is Blue, and She Is Black* (2017). This piece depicts a dark, floating, human-like figure reminiscent of traditional depictions of Muslim women [Fig. 5]. The figure is set against a large,

[4] See: Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, London 1986, 112–138; Linda Nochlin, The Imaginary Orient, in: *Art in America*, 1983, 119–131.

[Fig. 5]
Parastou Forouhar, *The Grass Is Green, the Sky Is Blue, and She Is Black*, 2017, Digital print, owned by the artist, in: Die Erfindung des Fremden, 111.

empty space decorated in European baroque style, creating a stark contrast between the two seemingly incompatible elements. The work challenges viewers to confront their assumptions and understanding of the role of Muslim women, particularly within a European context.

Through these two contemporary works, the exhibition's curator presented femininity as yet another form of "otherness", a condition experienced by women across ethnicities and religions. While the first room of the exhibition established the well-entrenched perception of the "other", the second room offered a more nuanced understanding of the process of "othering". Central to this exploration were depictions of women, who have predominantly been portrayed as alien, inferior, and in need of subjugation. By incorporating contemporary artworks, the curator effectively drew attention to the persistence of similar issues in modern society.

## IV. Room 3: "Idealisation and Appropriation: Non-European Art in Expressionism" / "The White Gaze"

Entering the final exhibition space of *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst*, this time painted gray, visitors were immediately drawn to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Still Life with Sculptures and Flowers* (1912). This canvas served as a quintessential case study for the fifth section of the exhibition, "Idealisation and Appropriation: Non-European Art in Expressionism" [Fig. 6]. In this section, visitors were introduced to the cultural realities of the twentieth century and, with them, the emergence of modernist art in Europe. The curator focused on the German Expressionists from the group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), who famously turned to non-European visual cultures for inspiration in their quest to create so-called "primitive" art. The curator, in line with the prevailing scholarly consensus, argued that this inspiration constituted appropriation and ultimately reinforced Eurocentric, colonial stereotypes about non-European "others".[5] In this context, Kirchner's work, regardless of his personal intentions or beliefs, reveals itself as fairly problematic, at best.

The issue of cultural appropriation flowed seamlessly into the works featured in the sixth and final section of the exhibition, "The White Gaze". This section predominantly showcased contemporary art, with a significant portion of the limited exhibition space dedicated to selections from Maxine Helfman's series *Historical Correction* (2012). Eight photographs from the series were displayed, each featuring portraits of Black individuals dressed in dark baroque clothing, posed against a black background. Through this series, Helfman sought to highlight the racial inequalities embedded in centuries of European art, which often denied Black subjects agency and

5 See, for example: Marianna Torgovnick, Making Primitive Art High Art, in: *Poetics Today* 2/10, 1989, 299–328.

[Fig. 6]
View of the third room of the exhibition space, with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Still Life with Sculptures and Flowers* visible on display. Photo by the author.

individuality. This historical erasure continues to resonate in the collections of many European museums today. One of Helfman's photographs, *Sirch*, was chosen by the curator to extend the critique of "The White Gaze" beyond the museum walls [Fig. 7]. It featured prominently on posters and leaflets advertising the exhibition throughout Heidelberg and Germany.

Exiting the third exhibition room, visitors returned to the entrance of the show, once again encountering the Medieval depictions of the "other". By this point, viewers were expected to reflect on the myriad ways in which (predominantly male) Europeans have historically imagined, visualized, and, through these depictions, subjugated different groups of people – be it non-Europeans in the Middle Ages, the Ottomans in the Early Modern Period, women and their bodies in the nineteenth century, or People of Color today. Thus, the purpose of the questions posed by the curator at the start of the exhibition – "What do we perceive as other, and why? What does this have to do with us personally? When do we feel like a stranger? And what role does art play in this?" – was not to compel visitors to provide definitive answers. Instead, the questions themselves challenged visitors to critically examine their own place in society today and to consider their personal ways of looking at – and seeing – the "other" in art.

## V. Conclusion

Heidelberg is known for its cosmopolitan character, thanks to its university, which attracts many international students, and its touristic appeal, drawing visitors from around the world, which made the city an excellent backdrop for *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst*. The exhibition tackled a dangerously vast and ambitious scope, which the relatively regional Kurpfälzisches Museum could have had issues addressing with adequate care. However, through a clever and space-effective selection of artworks, curator Julia Carrasco succeeded in presenting a show that, despite its spatial limitations, made meaningful contributions to many issues faced by contemporary societies. One can only guess how much more insightful this exhibition could have been, had it been organized on a bigger scale.

By transcending the focus on specific issues such as misogyny, racism, or (although absent from the exhibition) queerphobia, the curator demonstrated that these and other similar prejudices share common qualities. Historically and visually, these biases have been used to construct the concept of the "other" in societies. The exhibition invited visitors to reflect on this shared dynamic and its persistence in visual culture today.

The exhibition was curated with accessibility as a priority. All texts, artwork titles, descriptions, and the complimentary audio guide were provided in both German and English. For those unable to visit the exhibition in person, the curator compiled a

[Fig. 7]
Maxine Helfman, *Sirch*, from the series *Historical Correction*, 2012, Inkjet printing on paper, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, in: Die Erfindung des Fremden, 166–167.

catalogue bearing the same name, featuring contributions from authors (in order of appearance) Josua Walbrodt, Robert Born, Melanie Ulz, Karin Tebbe, Silke Förschler, Leonie Beiersdorf, Kea Wienand, Christiane Wanken, and Birgit Haehnel.[6] The catalogue also includes reproductions of all the artworks featured in the exhibition. Unfortunately, it is available only in German, which may limit its accessibility for non-German speakers. For those who do speak German, however, or are willing to translate the modestly sized texts, the collection opens up another dimension to the purely visual elements of the exhibition itself. The essays from the book remain faithful to the curator's guiding idea, but they also bring its findings into scholarly realms and provide a multitude of references for further reading. As such, it is certain to remain a decent scholarly work in its own right.

Through this catalogue, the exhibition's legacy is expected to endure well into the future. Addressing themes of representation in visual art – encompassing racial, gender, and other marginalized identities – the broad scope of *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst* serves as an excellent introductory resource, provided readers can navigate the language barrier. For those who experienced the exhibition firsthand, regardless of their personal beliefs, the astute selection of artworks was sure to offer an engaging and thought-provoking experience. The exhibition could also be used as a role model for how to engage with highly provocative topics with sufficient attention and care. Visitors were likely to leave the museum equipped with the critical skills necessary to identify and question representations of the "other" the next time they explore a museum collection elsewhere.

6 *Die Erfindung des Fremden in der Kunst* (exh. cat. Heidelberg, Kurpfälzisches Museum), ed. by Julia Carrasco, Heidelberg 2024.

# DANIEL SEELBACH, *DER HERRSCHER IM MASSENMEDIUM. FRÄNKISCHE BILDPOLITIK AUF MÜNZEN UND SIEGELN IM KULTURVERGLEICH*

Millenium Studies 105, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2023, 466 pages with 6 color and 70 b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-11-134157-6 (Hardback), ISBN 978-3-11-134168-2 (Open Access Ebook).


Reviewed by
Simon Coupland

Daniel Seelbach's book compares Frankish seals and coins with those in other regions in five sections, each of which covers a period marked by a distinctive form of coin production or circulation. These are: post-Roman gold; Merovingian silver; early Carolingian coinage to the age of empire; later Carolingian, and the tenth century. A final section compares royal and imperial titulature and the imagery used on seals and coins across the entire period and whole area under discussion.

Rarely has this reviewer read a book with a more misleading title. "The ruler in the mass media. A cultural comparison of Frankish image policy on coins and seals" gives the impression that this published version of a doctoral thesis will examine the way in which successive Frankish rulers used the iconography of coins and seals to convey a political message, and how this related to other contemporary cultures (p. 6). This would be an interesting topic worthy of study, but three factors mean that the author is severely hampered in that task from the outset. The first is that Daniel Seelbach decided

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to focus solely on the use of royal portraiture on seals and coins, rather than examining iconography in general – in essence *Bildnispolitik* rather than *Bildpolitik*. This considerably limits the scope and, in this reviewer's opinion, usefulness of his study. Because the second factor is that Frankish coinage from the period 500 to 1000, the time frame under consideration, rarely incorporated a named royal portrait.[1] The exceptions were either short-lived or circulated in limited areas, so that such portrait coins were hardly ever a "mass medium" among the Franks. The latter point is equally true of seals, whose usage was confined to the elite, as Seelbach acknowledges (pp. 140, 201, 339), underlining the unfortunate choice of title of the volume. The third factor follows from the first two, namely the author's narrow focus on named royal portraiture coupled with the very limited production of such coins among the Franks means that the book frequently devotes more space to Byzantine parallels rather than to the Frankish coinage and seals of the title.[2] What the book offers, therefore, is a consideration of the use of royal and imperial portraiture on coins and seals in the early Middle Ages among the Franks and in Byzantium and, more briefly, among the Lombards, Anglo-Saxons, and Visigoths.

It is therefore unfortunate that Seelbach's knowledge and understanding of Frankish coinage, a core element of the book, is frequently inadequate and/or inaccurate.[3] An example of the former is his discussion of the silver coinage of the Merovingian period (a term which Seelbach consistently shuns, to this reviewer's bafflement, just as he repeatedly avoids the terms "Carolingian" and "Byzantine"). For example, any serious discussion of eighth-century coinage should unquestionably refer to the many works of Philippe Schiesser, the current expert on Merovingian deniers, and of Michael Metcalf and Wybrand Op den Velde, the leading authorities on the proto-pennies ("sceattas") minted in the Netherlands and England. Yet in each case only one of their extensive range of studies of this period is included. Similarly weak is Seelbach's treatment of the iconic issue of gold *solidi* bearing the image of Louis the Pious (814–840), surely one of the most important expressions of Frankish *Bildpolitik* on coins of the Carolingian period. This is accorded only a single paragraph (pp. 177–178), and the key articles which are devoted to it are either overlooked or ignored, with Seelbach citing only more general literature discussing the type in broader

1
So the section on Frankish portrait coinage of the seventh and eighth centuries (section 3.3.1) is just two lines long, saying essentially: there was none (p. 121). But on this see below.

2
For example, all three excursuses are about Byzantium, not the Franks (pp. 80–84, 135–139).

3
The reviewer's area of expertise is Frankish numismatics so I cannot fairly judge whether the discussions of sigillography and Byzantine coinage are equally flawed.

contexts.[4] The book also contains an alarming number of errors, far too many to list here. At times this is due to carelessness or a failure to check sources. For example, on page 173 Seelbach states that there are only about thirty surviving portrait coins of Charlemagne, citing a work from 2010; two pages later he notes from a 2018 article by the same author that it is in fact forty-five. A supposed *Porträtdenar* of Louis the Stammerer (877–879) from Sens (p. 223) turns out on closer examination to be a regular monogram denier.[5] At other times Seelbach appears to misunderstand the period entirely. Thus he states that Charles the Bald (840–877) struck up to 50 million coins in the Netherlands, an astonishingly large figure, citing Ildar Garipzanov as his source (p. 217).[6] In fact the latter was referring to the volume of coinage in Charles's entire reign, extrapolating from the (much smaller) number of coins minted in Belgium. Had Seelbach read Garipzanov more carefully, or consulted the article by Michael Metcalf which Garipzanov was citing, he would have understood this.[7] For this reviewer it is surprising that this work was awarded a doctorate and then published in the prestigious *Millennium Studies* series without errors like these being spotted and corrected.

It could be argued that this is pedantic nitpicking, focusing on minor errors of detail rather than considering the broader sweep of the book. Here, too, this reviewer regrettably found the book falling short of expectations. Although it includes analysis of both seals and coins, the volume of material available means coinage is discussed at much greater length. This is reflected in the four specific questions which Seelbach says the volume sets out to explore, namely: why were royal images absent from Frankish coins from the eighth century onwards? Why did this tendency continue into the tenth century, despite the production of portrait coins like Charlemagne's? Why were East Frankish seals more militaristic in their imagery after 840? And why did coin types in 'unstable' Italy remain broadly similar in the same period (p. 8)? For reasons of brevity we will consider just the first two questions as representative of

4
Absent from the text and bibliography are Philip Grierson, The Gold Solidus of Louis the Pious and Its Imitations, in: *Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde* 38, 1951, 1–41; Rory Naismith, Six English Finds of Carolingian-Era Gold Coins, in: *Numismatic Chronicle* 170, 2010, 214–225; Guillaume Sarah, Nouvelles réflexions sur les monnaies d'or de Louis le Pieux et leurs imitations d'époque carolingienne, in: *Revue belge de numismatique* 160, 2014, 23–42; Simon Coupland, Recent Finds of Imitation Gold *Solidi* in the Netherlands, in: *Numismatic Chronicle* 176, 2016, 261–269.

5
Georges Depeyrot, *Le numéraire carolingien. Corpus des monnaies*, Wetteren $^{3}$2008, 51, but see his entry no. 931.

6
Ildar H. Garipzanov, Coins as Symbols of Early Medieval 'Staatlichkeit', in: Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (eds.), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat. Europäische Perspektiven*, Vienna 2009, 411–422, here 413–414.

7
D. Michael Metcalf, A Sketch of the Currency in the Time of Charles the Bald, in: Margaret Gibson and Janet Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom*, Aldershot $^{2}$1990, 65–97, here 91–92.

the work as a whole, and will see that in both cases Seelbach's understanding and analysis of the source material is weak and his conclusions consequently unfounded.

The first stated aim is to examine why royal images were absent from Frankish coins from the eighth century onwards. Seelbach's oft-repeated premise that this coinage is "aniconic" is, however, incorrect, even with his unusual use of the term as meaning "not bearing a portrait" rather than "not bearing an image" (pp. 8, 110, 121–123, 337). Many Merovingian deniers include a bust, wearing sometimes a diadem, sometimes a mitre, occasionally a helmet. Others include a facing portrait.[8] They are not, therefore, even using Seelbach's terminology, aniconic, and merit discussion. True, they do not name the monarch, but coins of Paris depicting a figure with a mitre should give pause for thought. We cannot tell whether this represented a specific bishop, but it surely portrayed episcopal authority. Is it not therefore equally likely that a diademed or radiate bust (as at e.g. Rouen, Sens, or Orléans) communicated royal authority, whether or not it depicted the current ruler? The same is true of sceattas, among which a significant group (Series G), possibly minted in Quentovic, depict a diademed figure looking at a cross, widely believed to represent Constantine I (306–337). None of these eighth-century coins bearing a *Herrscherbild* feature in the book, for as we have already noted, Seelbach states that there were no images of Frankish kings on coins of this period (section 3.3.1, p. 121). Yet the examples cited (and there are others) cry out for inclusion and discussion. Who do these figures represent? If they are not the reigning monarch, why do they depict a king or emperor? In line with the book's title, what political message did they convey to the people who used them? And if the king no longer directly controlled the mints, who oversaw coin production, and why are other scholars wrong to see evidence of royal authority in minting at this time?[9] These are important questions about Frankish *Bildpolitik* which go unasked and unanswered.

As for Seelbach's second question, regarding the Carolingians' limited use of portraiture on coins, this he attributes in part to a Frankish preference for the written word (pp. 122, 185–186), in part to the influence of Arabic dirhams, to which this was a Christian response (pp. 122–123, 138, 158–159, 337, 340–341), and in part to the population's hostility to the introduction of new coin types, particularly those bearing the ruler's image (pp. 165, 185–186, 189, 341). None of these hypotheses stands up to scrutiny. With regard to the first, Carolingian rulers undeniably attached importance to what was written on coins. Pippin III ensured that virtually all his

[8] See for example Philippe Schiesser, Marc Parvérie, and Wybrand Op Den Velde, A Hoard of Merovingian Deniers and Sceattas from Combrailles (Creuse), in: *Numismatic Chronicle* 180, 2020, 445–480.

[9] For example Rory Naismith, *Making Money in the Early Middle Ages*, Princeton, NJ/Oxford 2023, 272–281.

coinage bore his royal title in some form or other, and Charlemagne standardised the design of his coinage over the course of his reign, so that after the reform of 793 all his deniers looked the same, even to those who could not read.[10] And yet his portrait coins were even more impressive, their dies engraved at the palace by highly skilled craftsmen. Seelbach himself recognises that they and the portrait coins of Louis which followed "testified to Roman imperial greatness, power and prestige" to a greater extent than other Frankish coins (pp. 173–175). That they did impress people is evident from the fact that portrait coins were more likely to be retained than other types, and more often gilded and/or mounted to be worn as jewellery (p. 186, n. 386). They were thus more highly valued than coins which carried only text. The *Christiana religio* coins of Louis the Pious were likewise turned into pendants, but for a different reason. With a cross on one face and a church on the other, these were symbols of faith even for those unable to read the eponymous inscription, and were worn as Christian amulets, notably in frontier regions and outside the empire.[11] They bear powerful witness to the fact that Frankish rulers understood how to use the mass medium of coinage as propaganda with or without a portrait. Every mint in the Frankish empire, from Brittany to Italy and Frisia to the Mediterranean, struck identical coins, putting into the hands of even the illiterate peasantry pennies which, by their uniformity, communicated imperial power and authority, and by their imagery and epigraphy witnessed to the Christian faith. They demonstrate that while words undoubtedly mattered to Carolingian rulers, iconography mattered too.

As for any Arabic influence (pp. 122–123, 138, 158–159, 337, 340–341), the numismatic evidence does not support the theory that either Pippin III or Charlemagne was influenced by the design of Abbasid (or indeed Umayyad) dirhams. In the south-west, Pippin's relationship with the Caliphate was marked by hostility and conflict, culminating in his capture of Narbonne in 759. In Italy, the vanishingly few finds of dirhams all postdate Charlemagne's coinage reform of 793, as do the north African coins found in the Rhine valley. In the north, the flow of Arabic silver into Frisia only began in the mid-ninth century. Furthermore, recent lead isotope analysis conclusively shows that there was no Arabic silver in Carolingian coinage.[12] Finally, the notion that Charlemagne's portrait coinage

10
Simon Coupland, Charlemagne and His Coinage, in: Rolf Große and Michel Sot (eds.), *Charlemagne. Les temps, les espaces, les hommes. Construction et déconstruction d'un règne*, Turnhout 2018, 427–451, here 431–434.

11
Jens Christian Moesgaard, Christiana religio, in: *Skalk* 6, 2004, 12–17; Simon Coupland, Un témoin numismatique de la présence des Vikings en Normandie?, in: *Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique* 62, 2007, 69–71.

12
Jane Kershaw, Stephen W. Merkel, Paolo D'Imporzano, and Rory Naismith, Byzantine Plate and Frankish Mines. The Provenance of Silver in North-West European Coinage during the Long Eighth Century (c. 660–820), in: *Antiquity* 98/398, 2024, 502–517.

might have been rejected by the populace (pp. 165, 185–186, 189, 341) is equally unfounded, and unsupported by the sources Seelbach quotes. There are capitularies which set out sanctions against those who rejected good coinage, but these were repeated regularly at times unrelated to changes of type. There is in fact no evidence that the coinage reform of 793 provoked hostility, or that the populace would have opposed the introduction of a portrait type.

To summarise, the premise behind this book is a good one, based on the insight that "The *denarius* was undoubtedly the most widespread written object in western Europe" (p. 189). In this respect coinage differed significantly from seals (p. 140). However, the author's decision to study only named royal portraiture means that the opportunity to explore "Fränkische Bildpolitik im Massenmedium" – the stated aim of the volume (p. 6) – is severely restricted. Nor does the large amount of space devoted to Byzantine seals and coins help with that task, since there was little relationship between the two cultures and rarely any Byzantine influence on Frankish practice (pp. 6–7, 141, 195, 270–271). As a result, a book which at first glance appears full of promise, is, in this reviewer's opinion, deeply disappointing.

# MARIA SCHRÖDER, *DIE BEINSÄTTEL DES 13. BIS 17. JAHRHUNDERTS. REITZEUGE ALS SINNBILDER RITTERLICH-HÖFISCHER IDEALE*

Neue Forschungen zur deutschen Kunst XV, Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft 2024, 458 Seiten mit 321 Farb- und 21 s/w-Abb., ISBN 978-3-87157-267-8 (Hardback), ISBN 978-3-98501-264-0 (Open Access Ebook).


Rezensiert von
Renate Prochno-Schinkel

Das Buch – eine Dissertation an der Universität Leipzig – trägt einen Titel, der neugierig macht, aber auch ein wenig irreführend ist. Das eigentliche Thema sind nämlich die Einlegearbeiten auf den Beinsätteln, weniger die Sättel selbst. Wer sich mit Elfenbeinen und Knochenarbeiten befasst, wird sich gerne und mit Gewinn in dieses Buch vertiefen. Der Textteil umfasst 118 Seiten, der Katalogteil knapp 100 Seiten, der Bildteil mit insgesamt ca. 340 hervorragenden Fotos 170 Seiten.

Die Arbeit bietet einen Überblick über den Gesamtbestand der erhaltenen Beinsättel: Aus dem 13. und 14. Jahrhundert ist je ein Sattelfragment mit Elfenbeineinlagen erhalten. Ein Großteil der Objekte stammt mit 25 Sätteln aus dem 15. Jahrhundert, die alle – wie auch fast alle späteren – keine Elfenbeineinlagen, sondern solche aus Bein (Knochen) oder Hirschhorn tragen. Jeweils zwei Sättel stammen aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert, und aus dem 19. Jahrhundert sind sechs Stücke erhalten geblieben, die ältere

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Exemplare nachahmen, zwei davon aus Gips. Aus dem 18. Jahrhundert ist keiner erhalten, was die Autorin aber nicht thematisiert. Die Prunksättel waren wie Gebrauchssättel gebaut. Einige weisen Gebrauchsspuren auf, so dass die Vermutung naheliegt, dass sie – ähnlich wie Prunkschilde – bei festlichen Anlässen benutzt wurden. Lediglich diejenigen des 19. Jahrhunderts, die als Reitsättel schlicht unbrauchbar sind, wurden als Fälschung oder als Kopie zur Vervollständigung von Sammlungen angefertigt (S. 31, S. 66).

Der Gesamtbestand ist mit derzeit 37 bekannten Objekten klein. Deshalb ist es schwierig, allgemeine Aussagen zu treffen. Darum steht die Analyse der einzelnen Stücke im Vordergrund, wobei es dank der Seitenblicke auf andere Artefakte aus Knochen, Horn und Elfenbein der Autorin immer wieder gelingt, Individuelles und Allgemeines voneinander zu unterscheiden. Dabei diskutiert sie – methodisch sauber – verschiedene Thesen, um alle Möglichkeiten, zum Beispiel im Hinblick auf Lokalisierung und Datierung, zu erproben. So kann die Verfasserin Unsicherheiten beziehungsweise Irrtümer der bisherigen Forschung bereinigen, wie die Frage der Echtheit zweier früher Sattelfragmente (Kat. Nr. 1 und Nr. 2) oder die Datierung des Gonzaga-Sattels (Kat. Nr. 29).

Der Objektkatalog ist zusammen mit dem Bildteil das Kernstück des Buches, weshalb Ersterer vorweg besprochen wird. Jeder Eintrag ist vorbildlich nach Lokalisierung, Datierung, Material, Maßen und Gewicht, heraldischen Zeichen, Provenienz, Erhaltungszustand und Restaurierungen, Beschreibung, stilistischer Einordnung, Ausstellungen, Literatur sowie Internetquellen gegliedert. Hier sind die Anmerkungen als Fußnoten leicht einsehbar, was die Benutzung erleichtert.

Lokalisierungen und Datierungen können notgedrungen mitunter nur pauschal sein. Die Beschreibungen sind detailliert, behandeln auch die ikonografische Analyse der Darstellungen und ergänzen sich mit den Fotos zu einem äußerst nützlichen Arbeitsinstrument. Hier zeigt sich die Kenntnis der Originale, vor allem beim Bericht zum Erhaltungszustand. Im Vergleich mit dem Fließtext finden sich in den Katalogeinträgen alle relevanten Informationen und Interpretationen in konziser Form.

Der Bildteil ist bestechend. Er reproduziert zunächst in chronologischer Reihenfolge die Sättel. Dank des großen Buchformats sind die Fotos in guter Größe und hervorragender Qualität gedruckt. Linke und rechte Seiten, Vorder- und Rückseiten, oft auch Ober- und Unterseiten der Sättel sind auf diese Weise sehr gut dokumentiert. Außerdem wurden zahlreiche Detailaufnahmen hinzugefügt.

Auf die Tafeln der Beinsättel und ihrer Details folgen die Vergleichsabbildungen als eigener Teil. Im Text sind die Abbildungsziffern eingefügt, jedoch fehlt ein entsprechender Hinweis, dass Vergleichsabbildungen dann gemeint sind, wenn die Abbildungsziffer kursiv gesetzt ist. Auch sind die Anmerkungen als Endnoten gesetzt, nicht als Fußnoten. So wird die Lektüre durch Hin- und Herblättern erschwert.

Die Bibliografie führt Lexika, Wörterbücher und Enzyklopädien gesondert auf. Das ist nicht sinnvoll, denn Verfasser/innen von Lexikonartikeln werden mit ihrem Autor/innennamen als Kurztitel zitiert. So muss man gegebenenfalls in zwei Abteilungen suchen. Die gesonderte Auflistung der Quellenwerke hingegen ist sinnvoll. Das detaillierte Register umfasst Quellen, Personen sowie Orte und ist ein weiteres nützliches Arbeitsinstrument.

Der dem Objektkatalog vorangestellte Textteil soll die Aufgabe erfüllen, die Sättel in einen größeren Kontext zu stellen. Das gelingt, wenn auch einige kritische Bemerkungen hierzu erlaubt seien.

Das erste Kapitel erläutert als Einführung die jeweiligen Gemeinsamkeiten der Sättel, aufgeteilt nach Jahrhunderten. Hier fließen schon einige Einzelanalysen ein, um solche Gemeinsamkeiten zu erklären. Warum man nach dem 14. Jahrhundert vom Elfenbein abging, beantwortet Verfasserin erst im dritten Kapitel – ein kleiner Verweis wäre bereits hier angebracht gewesen.

Der Stil der überwiegend figürlichen Darstellungen wird ausführlich behandelt, da er für die Lokalisierung und Datierung das wichtigste Kriterium der Verfasserin ist. Die Ikonografie kommt erst in zweiter Linie zum Tragen. Das führt dazu, dass eine als „Frauenkampfszene" bezeichnete Darstellung nicht schon im Textteil (S. 20), sondern erst in einem späteren Kapitel (S. 48–50) gedeutet wird. Auch hier wäre zumindest ein Seitenverweis hilfreich gewesen, denn erst hier macht die Autorin anhand motivischer Vergleiche klar, dass es sich um keinen Amazonenkampf, sondern um einen Tugend-Laster-Kampf handelt, eine sogenannte Psychomachia.

Das zweite Kapitel untersucht zunächst, ob und welche Leserichtung für die Darstellungen beabsichtigt war, ohne jedoch immer zu einem eindeutigen Ergebnis zu kommen, denn die Darstellungen sind – nicht zuletzt aufgrund der häufig beigegebenen Schriftbanderolen – auch als Einzelszenen verständlich. Nach dem 15. Jahrhundert wurden mythologische Figuren, wie zum Beispiel Herkules, beliebter. Das gilt auch für Rüstungen, Schilde und Armbrüste (S. 37, S. 66). Diese Sujets waren also keine Innovationen. Hinsichtlich der häufigen Minneszenen gilt wohl, dass diese gemeinsame Motivik „vielleicht verursacht durch soziale und künstlerische Vernetzungen zwischen den Sattelurhebern oder den Gebrauch von Musterbüchern" (S. 25, sinngemäß auch S. 37) war. Auch der heilige Georg samt Drachen war ein beliebtes Motiv dieser Prunksättel, ebenso wie Tierkampfszenen im Zusammenhang mit Liebeswerbungen. Dabei geht die Verfasserin nicht von den einzelnen Darstellungen der Sättel aus, um deren genaue Vorbilder zu identifizieren, sondern schildert typische Szenen der Liebeswerbung aus der Literatur, um sie dann auf den Sätteln zu entdecken (wobei die Autorin die Männer gelegentlich als „Knaben" bezeichnet). So verbindet die Verfasserin die Szenen zwar mit ihrem literarischen Ursprung, doch sagt es in dieser Ausführlichkeit wesentlich mehr über die Minne-Vorstellungen als über die Sättel aus. Zwar führt Schröder zahlreiche Beispiele mit inhaltlich ähnlichen Szenen aus

Druckgrafik, Tapisserien, Buchmalerei und so weiter an, aber es bleibt beim allgemeinen Kontext. Wenn die Autorin ins konkrete Detail geht und an einer Stelle die These äußert, ein Drache unterhalb einer Dame einer Minneszene könnte „die unterdrückte sexuelle Triebhaftigkeit versinnbildlichen" (S. 40) und dies lediglich mit einem pauschalen Verweis auf den Physiologus begründet, wünscht man sich eine eingehendere Analyse. Dass die Minnethematik im 15. Jahrhundert allgegenwärtig war, ist bekannt und wird hier nochmals vor Augen geführt. Aber warum diese auch auf Prunksätteln so beliebt war, erörtert die Verfasserin nicht und begnügt sich mit dem wiederholten Verweis, dass sie „ein Mittel zur Zurschaustellung einer elitären Zugehörigkeit und der gesellschaftlichen Abgrenzung nach unten" (S. 43) waren. Doch das waren Prunksättel ohnehin, selbst ohne bildlichen Schmuck. Insofern bleibt die Frage unbeantwortet.

In derselben Ausführlichkeit bespricht Schröder den heiligen Georg samt Drachenkampf, einem ähnlich beliebten Motiv, war doch der Reiterheilige Patron der Ritter. Wenn die Variante des Heiligen stehend mit Lanze im deutschsprachigen Raum des 15. Jahrhunderts besonders häufig ist (S. 44, nach Wolfgang Fritz Volbach), so fragt man sich, ob die entsprechenden sieben Sättel dort entstanden sind. Die Autorin geht dieser Frage aber nicht nach. Laut dem Bildkatalog werden vier nach „Österreich", genauer nach „Wien oder Salzburg" lokalisiert, und je einer nach „Norditalien/Österreich", „deutsch (?)" und „Norditalien". Dieselbe Frage stellt sich bei den fünf Sätteln mit einem berittenen heiligen Georg: Zwei stammen aus „Österreich" beziehungsweise sind als „süddeutsch" deklariert, die anderen stammen aus „Mitteleuropa". Hätte man hier nicht zu einer spezifischeren Analyse schreiten können? Ergibt sich womöglich auch für die Minnedarstellungen eine ähnliche räumliche Konzentration – immer unter dem Vorbehalt der geringen Menge erhaltener Objekte?

Zudem wurden profanierte Abwandlungen des Drachenkampfes mit Minneszenen kombiniert, was nur bei Beinsätteln auftritt, wie die Autorin feststellt. Als Erklärung zieht sie das Hohelied heran, wobei Braut und Bräutigam mit Maria und Christus, in geistlicher Minne verbunden, gleichgesetzt wurden. Den heiligen Georg interpretiert sie in diesem Zusammenhang als Beschützer Mariens und „Sinnbild einer geistlichen Minne" (S. 48). Jedoch fehlen für diese Interpretation literarische Parallelen, und die Autorin erklärt nicht, warum sich die Kombination von Minneszenen und heiligem Georg einzig auf Sätteln findet.

Eine weitere ikonografische Analyse ist in ähnlicher Ausführlichkeit der Psychomachia gewidmet, die eines der beiden frühen Sattelfragmente (Kat. Nr. 1) schmückt. Manches in diesem Kapitel hätte sich kürzer fassen lassen, aber die Ausführlichkeit mag den Anforderungen an eine Dissertation geschuldet sein, die einen gewissen Textanteil fordert.

Das dritte Kapitel behandelt Materialfragen und Materialikonografie. Im späten Mittelalter wurden Elfenbein und Knochen

durchaus voneinander unterschieden. Hier erläutert die Verfasserin, warum die Satteleinlagen des 15. Jahrhunderts ausnahmslos aus Knochen beziehungsweise Hirschhorn bestehen, nicht aber aus Elfenbein: Der Grund war offenbar die zunehmende Knappheit von Elfenbein (S. 57). Die Fertigungsbedingungen von Elfenbein- und Knochenschnitzereien werden ebenso dargestellt wie Überlegungen zur zeitgenössischen Wahrnehmung von Elfenbein respektive Knochen – in der ikonografischen Deutung dürfte es hier keine Unterschiede gegeben haben, wie Schröder überzeugend ausführt.

Im vierten Kapitel geht es um die urkundlichen, bildlichen und literarischen Quellen des 12. bis 18. Jahrhunderts zu Beinsätteln. Zunächst wird anhand von Inventaren die Aufbewahrung in Rüst-, aber auch in Wunder- und Schatzkammern zusammen mit anderen außergewöhnlichen Artefakten anhand einiger Beispiele geschildert. Dass der Beinsattel zu den geforderten drei verschiedenen Sattelarten gehörte, die die Sattlerzunft in Lübeck und in Prag von ihren Gesellen verlangte, zeigt, wie stark verbreitet die Beinsättel zumindest im 15. Jahrhundert waren. Ob diese verziert waren, muss offenbleiben; jedenfalls dienten sie ganz offensichtlich nicht zuvorderst der Repräsentation, sondern wurden in häufiger Benutzung verschlissen. Dafür spricht auch, dass sie nicht zu Sammelobjekten wurden. Hier müsste die Verfasserin ihre These etwas verfeinern: Wenn Beinsättel offenbar stark verbreitet waren, dienten wohl nur die Exemplare in Luxusausführung der Repräsentation. Ob die Materialikonografie des Elfenbeins, die Reinheit, Mut und Tapferkeit implizierte, auch bei der „Alltagsversion" von Beinsätteln mitschwang, mag zutreffen, denn ein Reitpferd war in jedem Fall eine kostspielige Angelegenheit.

Gleichzeitig sind in Paris und in Burgund durch Quellen mehrere hundert Beinsättel samt Zaumzeug für den Gebrauch belegt. Aufgrund der Quellen lassen sich hier aber nur die Sättel für den Hof beziehungsweise den Hochadel erfassen. Fünf bildliche Darstellungen – darunter eine Spielkarte – mit etwas langatmigen Beschreibungen dienen als Beispiel dafür, dass Beinsättel als Luxusgegenstände auch in Gemälden verewigt wurden. Ebenso erscheinen in der höfischen Epik Sättel aus Elfenbein und Walknochen, die verschenkt werden, manchmal als diplomatische Präsente wie in der Realität: Insgesamt sind sie in der Literatur aber wertvoller als reale Beinsättel. Die Epik nennt auch Frauen als Besitzerinnen, was für die realen Sättel noch nicht erwogen wurde. Der Dekor, soweit er überhaupt beschrieben wird, ähnelt mit Minnethemen und Kampfszenen den erhaltenen Stücken. Ob die Beinsättel aber tatsächlich „in Nachahmung der literarischen Figurenbeschreibungen" entstanden sind (S. 89), erscheint gewagt und wird auch eher en passant geäußert. Zwar datieren die frühesten erhaltenen Sattelfragmente aus späterer Zeit als die Epen, aber sie werden in den Umkreis der Pisani und nach Sizilien lokalisiert. Heldenepen aus diesen Regionen behandelt die Verfasserin jedoch nicht. Gleichzeitig existierten auch Prunksättel samt Zaumzeug anderer Art, die beispielsweise mit Gold und Edelsteinen geschmückt waren. Auch

sie erscheinen in den Epen. Die Autorin erwähnt diese gelegentlich, geht aber nicht darauf ein, inwiefern auch sie ein Bildprogramm besaßen, das sich vielleicht mit denen der Beinsättel deckte, wo sie verbreitet waren und wann sie ihre Hochzeit erlebten. Das hätte die Stellung der Beinsättel weiter erhellt, wird aber auch im abschließenden Ausblick (S. 95) nicht angesprochen.

Kapitel 3 und 4 basieren auf Forschungsliteratur und steuern keine neuen kunsthistorischen und literaturgeschichtlichen Erkenntnisse im engeren Sinn bei. Aber die Gemälde und Epen werden hier auf die Beinsättel hin gelesen, und diese Lektüre ergänzt beziehungsweise bestätigt die vorherigen Schlüsse der Autorin und rundet zugleich das Gesamtbild der Beinsättel ab. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung sind im letzten Kapitel, dem Resümee, klar und wohltuend straff zusammengefasst.

Leider hemmen immer wieder orthografische Fehler im Text und bei Eigennamen (so etwa „Elfriede Graál“ statt „Gaál“; „Paula Nutall“ statt „Nuttall“, „Massaccio“ statt „Masaccio“) und grammatikalische Fehler sowie sprachliche Mängel den Lesefluss. Wenn zum Beispiel vom „Wirkbereich der Beinsättel“ (S. 11) die Rede ist, stutzt man. Was meint die Autorin mit der Formulierung „der maßgeblich überarbeitete Possenti-Sattel“ (S. 26): Ist hier „mutmaßlich“ oder „stark“ gemeint? Die „Ganzkörperansicht“ wird üblicherweise als „ganzfigurig“ bezeichnet, die „Halbansicht“ als Halbfigur. Aufsätze als „Artikel“ zu bezeichnen, hat sich in der jüngeren Generation eingebürgert, aber dieser Anglizismus weckt im Deutschen die Assoziation an Zeitungs- und Lexikonartikel. Wappen „in Kombination“ (Kat. Nr. 2) sind Allianzwappen. „Heraldische Zeichen“ ließen sich jeweils genauer bezeichnen. „Reiter [...] die prosaisch auf ihren Pferden sitzen“, verwunderten die Rezensentin. Solche Beispiele ließen sich noch vermehren. Die Devise „Deus fortitudo mea“ des Herzogs Ercole I. d’Este übersetzt Schröder als „Gott gib mir Kraft“ (S. 23). Wäre hier nicht „Gott [ist] meine Stärke“ korrekt? Insgesamt aber erschließt Schröder eine wenig beachtete Objektgruppe in hervorragender Weise, vor allem durch den Bildteil und den Objektkatalog.

# PRITA MEIER, *THE SURFACE OF THINGS. A HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE SWAHILI COAST*

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Rezensiert von
Jürg Schneider

Die Swahili-Küste ist, fotografiegeschichtlich gesprochen, keine *terra incognita*, aber sie wurde bis anhin nicht so eingehend erforscht wie die west- und zentralafrikanische Küste und deren Hinterland. Heike Behrendt (*Contesting Visibility. Photographic Practices on the East African Coast,* 2013) und Isolde Brielmaier (*I Am Sparkling. N. V. Parekh and His Portrait Studio Clients. Mombasa, Kenya, 1940–1980*, 2022) haben über die Geschichte der Fotografie, einzelne Fotostudios und Fotografen in Kenia und breiter zur ostafrikanischen Küste geforscht und publiziert. Online-Ausstellungen wie *Sailors and Daughters. Early Photography and the Indian Ocean*, kuratiert von der US-Amerikanerin Erin Haney, positionierten sich als Ausgangspunkte für eine weiter gefasste visuelle Geschichte der diversen Gesellschaften der Welt des Indischen Ozeans. Zu dieser Gruppe von Autorinnen und ihren Forschungen gesellt sich nun Prita Meier und legt mit *The Surface of Things. A History of Photography from the Swahili Coast* eine Geschichte der Fotografie an der ostafrikanischen Küste vor, die gleichermassen die lokalen wie auch die transozeanischen Bezüge und Einflüsse untersucht und nachzeichnet. Sie beansprucht damit – so steht es auf der Website des Verlags – «the first major history of photogra-

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phy from coastal East Africa»[1] zu schreiben. Diesen Anspruch relativiert Meier jedoch im einführenden Kapitel des Buchs gleich selbst, wenn sie anmerkt, dass die in ihrem Buch präsentierte Geschichte der Fotografie lediglich *eine* von vielen möglichen ist, die über die Fotografie an der Swahili-Küste geschrieben werden können.

Die Forschung zur afrikanischen Fotografie, die sich mit wenigen Ausnahmen lange auf die Studiofotografie West- und Zentralafrikas aus den 1940er bis 1960er Jahren konzentrierte, interessierte sich für Aspekte der Identitätsbildung und Fragen nach den Selbstbildern, die entkoppelt vom gelebten Alltag der Porträtierten entworfen wurden. Diese Fokussierung auf das Porträt und seine sozialen Dimensionen war zwar äusserst produktiv, argumentiert Meier, doch andere Aspekte der Fotografie in Afrika, bei denen es nicht in erster Linie um die Menschen auf den Fotos ging, blieben weitgehend unberücksichtigt. Ausgehend von ihrer Arbeit mit Fotografien von der Swahili-Küste beobachtet die Autorin, dass diese – insbesondere vor der Unabhängigkeit Tansanias von Grossbritannien in den 1960er Jahren –, primär als ein bewegliches Gut verstanden wurden, das an der Schnittstelle von Objektivierung und haptischer Erfahrung existierte. Überraschenderweise geht es dabei um etwas, das normalerweise nicht berücksichtigt wird: die Oberfläche der Dinge (*The Surface of Things*).

Prita Meier argumentiert in *The Surface of Things* im Wesentlichen gegen zwei Positionen: zum einen gegen eine, wie sie es nennt, «terrazentrische» Perspektive, zum anderen gegen Definitionen von Fotografien der Swahili-Küste durch Begriffe wie «hybrid» oder «transkulturell». Sie betont, der Hauptbeitrag ihres Buches bestehe darin, dass es sich auf die «Mobilität» von Fotografien über Ozeane und Bedeutungssysteme hinweg konzentriere. Ein ozeanischer Rahmen verschiebe den Schwerpunkt der kunstgeschichtlichen Forschung von einer Ursprungskultur hin zu einer neuen Kultur und weg von der Nachverfolgung eines Bildes, einer Form oder eines Stils. Dadurch würden Fragen nach kulturellen Grenzen irrelevant, denn die Swahili-Küste und die afrikanischen Inseln im Indischen Ozean, so Meier weiter, seien durchlässige Geografien, deren relationale kulturelle Logiken und Praktiken die Rezeption und Bedeutung der Fotografie auf tiefgreifende Weise prägen (S. 232).

Die Swahili-Küste bietet damit eine andere Genealogie zum Verständnis der frühen Geschichte der Fotografie im Allgemeinen. Als reisendes Objekt – als ein Artefakt der ozeanischen Konnektivität (S. 1) –, wie Meier es formuliert, veranlasste die Fotografie diejenigen, die sie betrachteten und benutzten dazu, sie als ein Ding in der Welt und nicht als eine Darstellung der Welt – ein Ding, das etwas über die Welt aussagt – zu verstehen. Darüber hinaus ging es beim Betrachten, Ausstellen und Posieren für Fotos oft

1 Princeton University Press, *The Surface of Things. A History of Photography from the Swahili Coast* (22.04.2025).

primär um Äusserlichkeiten. Menschen spielten bewusst mit der Fähigkeit der Fotografie, ein kontingentes – sogar objektiviertes – und oberflächliches Selbst zu schaffen. Was die Swahili-Fotografie einzigartig machte, war, unterstreicht Meier, nicht ein bestimmtes Merkmal oder ein stilistischer Aspekt des fotografischen Bildes, sondern vielmehr der Umgang mit den Fotografien (S. 233).

In *The Surface of Things* dienen das Medium Fotografie – und im Besonderen einzelne Fotografien – sowohl als Fenster, das sich auf die Geschichte der Swahili-Küste und den mit ihr verbundenen transozeanischen Raum öffnet, als auch als Mittel zur Reflektion der Umstände ihres Gebrauchs und ihrer Genese. Meier analysiert die Fotografie als Instrument kolonialer Autorität und als Medium, mit dem die Kolonisierten ihren Platz in einer sich schnell verändernden Welt verhandeln, herausfordern und neu definieren konnten. Sie konzentriert sich dabei auf Fotografien des späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, die aus mehr als dreissig privaten und öffentlichen Sammlungen und Archiven in Afrika, Europa und den USA stammen. Diese Vielfalt des Quellenmaterials ist eine der grossen Stärken des Buchs.

Neben einer historischen und kulturellen Analyse bietet *The Surface of Things* auch eine detaillierte Auseinandersetzung mit der Ästhetik der Fotografie. Meier untersucht die Bildsprache von Fotografen (es sind tatsächlich nur Männer) der Swahili-Küste und achtet dabei besonders auf die formalen Qualitäten der Bilder, einschliesslich Komposition, Beleuchtung und Rahmung. Sie argumentiert, dass diese visuellen Elemente nicht nur auf technische Entscheidungen zurückzuführen sind, sondern eng mit den kulturellen und politischen Kontexten verknüpft sind, in denen die Fotografien entstanden sind.

In der Einleitung wird die Gliederung des Buches vorgestellt: Von der klaren Strukturierung in sieben Kapitel, die unterschiedliche Aspekte der Rolle von Fotografien als Oberfläche und Objekt beleuchten, profitiert die Studie sehr. Im ersten Kapitel, *Itinerant Photographs* («Reisende Fotografien»), zeigt die Autorin auf, wie eng die Fotografie an der Swahili-Küste mit dem Handel im Indischen Ozean verknüpft war: Nicht nur Fotografien, sondern auch Fotografen fanden ihren Weg aus den Hafenstädten Südasiens nach Mombasa oder Sansibar. Und wie andere transozeanische Objekte fanden die Fotografien als neue Konsumgüter Eingang in die Wohnstuben der wohlhabenden Küsteneliten. Dieses Eingangskapitel stimmt die Leser und Leserinnen auf die nachfolgenden Kapitel ein, indem es zeigt, wie die Fotografie in lokale und globale Muster der Kommerzialisierung und Ausbeutung von Menschen eingebettet war. In den Kapiteln 2, 3 und 4 untersucht Meier, weshalb Fotografien der Swahili-Küste von den Körpern junger Frauen und Mädchen dominiert werden und welche psychische, sexuelle und körperliche Gewalt in vielen Fällen angewandt werden musste, um diese Fotografien herzustellen. Um diese Frage zu beantworten analysiert die Autorin im zweiten Kapitel, *Stilled Life* («Stillstehendes Leben»), die Produktion und den Gebrauch solcher Fotogra-

fien durch Männer. Im dritten Kapitel, *Oceans of Postcards* («Ozeane von Postkarten»), verfolgt Prita Meier, wie Fotografien – als Postkarten – tausendfach reproduziert wurden und weltweit zirkulierten. Fotografien von Frauen von den afrikanischen Küsten des Indischen Ozeans wurden so zu einem Massenmedium. Dass viele der dargestellten Frauen Sklavinnen waren, die zu den Aufnahmen gezwungen wurden, entging den zeitgenössischen Betrachterinnen und Betrachtern – oder es interessierte sie nicht. Das vierte Kapitel, *The Ornamental Body* («Der geschmückte Körper»), zeigt, welch fruchtbaren Boden die fotografische Objektivierung von Frauen in der Swahili-Tradition fand: Reich geschmückte Frauen (*wampambe* auf Swahili) wurden als Staffage, allein zum Vergnügen und Genuss der Anschauenden, ausgestellt und in offizielle Zeremonien und Auftritte der Eliten integriert.

Die zweite Hälfte des Buches wechselt die Perspektive und wendet sich der Frage zu, was jene, die sich portraitieren liessen oder porträtiert wurden, schliesslich mit ihren Fotografien machten oder von diesen erwarteten. Kapitel 5, *Trading the Gaze* («Handel mit dem Blick»), zeigt am Beispiel der Busaidi-Sultane von Sansibar, wie die lokale Handels- ebenso wie die politische Elite Porträtfotografien (*Carte-de-Visite*) in die Tradition des Austauschs von Geschenken übernahmen, die einen integralen Teil von Handelsbeziehungen darstellten. Wie Postkarten zirkulierten diese Selbstdarstellungen weltweit und wurden in *Carte-de-Visite*-Alben gesammelt, die in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Mode waren. Während die Sultane die Art und Weise, wie sie sich in den Portraitfotografien zeigten und inszenierten, anfänglich kontrollieren konnten, änderte sich dies mit der Etablierung des britischen Protektorats in Sansibar 1890, als Porträts der Sultane zunehmend vom britischen Kolonialapparat hergestellt und verwaltet wurden. Die lokalen Herrscher sassen nun *für* die Briten Modell und wurden in die visuelle Kultur des britischen Empire integriert. Im sechsten Kapitel, *Satorial Subversion* (der Rezensent konnte keine wirklich befriedigende deutsche Übersetzung finden) untersucht die Autorin, wie junge Männer mit der Wahl ihrer Kleider, die sich an einer transnationale Dandy-Ästhetik orientierten, eine aufgezwungene Rassenhierarchie konterkarierten. Sie leisteten damit nicht zuletzt einem Zwang Widerstand, sich «lokal» oder «tribal» zu kleiden, der von den Europäern ausging, um die lokale Bevölkerung «an ihrem Platz» zu halten. Das siebte Kapitel, *Pose and Appearance* («Pose und Erscheinung»), argumentiert, dass die Geschichte der Fotografie an der Swahili-Küste, wie anderswo auf der Welt, durch Brüche und Veränderungen geprägt war. Im Unterschied zu den vorhergehenden Kapiteln, in denen es um die strukturelle Gewalt des Fotografiert-Werdens ging, zeigt dieses letzte Kapitel, dass sich Frauen aus der Elite wie auch aus den ärmeren, erwerbstätigen Schichten fotografieren liessen, um im Sinne eines emanzipatorischen Aktes der Selbstermächtigung etablierte Protokolle und Normen herauszufordern.

Insgesamt verdeutlicht Prita Meier in *The Surface of Things* anhand einer grossen Anzahl von Fotografien – hervorzuheben sind die vielen Bilder aus lokalen Archiven und Sammlungen – das enorme Vermögen von Fotografien, sowohl an bestehende lokale Traditionen anzuknüpfen als auch in einer vorwärts gerichteten Bewegung des kritischen Umgangs mit diesen zu funktionieren. Ihr Ansatz, die Fotografien danach zu befragen, wie mit ihnen umgegangen wurde und was sie selbst bewirkten, erweist sich als äusserst fruchtbar, nicht zuletzt, weil damit Fotografien als dynamische Objekte ernst genommen werden, die ihre Bedeutung in einem weiten geografischen, zeitlichen und sozio-politischen Raum auf- und entladen. Das Studium der Fotografie vom Selbst zu entkoppeln, da diese nur unzureichende Quellen zu dessen Verständnis seien, wie die Autorin einleitend deklariert (S. 16), gelingt ihr nicht immer überzeugend. Hierzu stehen ihr die sehr langen und detaillierten Bildbeschreibungen im Wege, in denen sie zwar immer wieder darauf hinweist, dass Gefühle und andere Schlüsselelemente der Persönlichkeit schwer zu lesen und in den Fotografien zu erkennen sind, dann aber doch, insbesondere im zweiten und vierten Kapitel, sehr ausführlich Mimiken und Gesten der Porträtierten beschreibt und die Gefühle analysiert, die diese ausdrücken.

Prita Meiers These, dass der Blick auf und durch ein ozeanisches Rahmenwerk neue analytische Werkzeuge für Erforschung der Geschichte der Fotografie in Afrika bietet, ist berechtigt und verdient es, weiter verfeinert und auf andere Regionen und sozioökonomische Kontexte erweitert und angewendet zu werden.[2] Eine Bemerkung sei dem Rezensenten erlaubt zu den nachträglich von der Autorin abgedeckten Körperpartien auf einzelnen Fotografien in Kapitel 2 (S. 61, 62, 76, seltsamerweise nicht auf S. 77, 85): Meier vermerkt dazu, dass diese Fotografien wegen der Art und Weise, wie Frauen und Kinder von den Fotografen gezwungen wurden, sich vor der Kamera zu entblössen, verändert wurden («Screens have been added to protect their bodies», S. 19). Man kann nun sicherlich unterschiedlicher Meinung darüber sein, wie heute mit

2
Bei aller gebotenen Bescheidenheit möchte der Rezensent der Autorin vorschlagen, sein Konzept des *Atlantic Visualscape*, welches ebenfalls eine transozeanische Dimension zur Analyse von Fotografien bereithält, zur Kenntnis zu nehmen. Dieses Konzept basiert auf dem Argument, dass die Einführung, Aneignung sowie technische und ästhetische Weiterentwicklung der Fotografie, des ersten wirklich globalen Bildmediums in West- und Zentralafrika, nur verstanden werden können, wenn diese im grösseren Rahmen einer Beschleunigung und Verdichtung von wirtschaftlichen, sozialen und politischen Beziehungen auf einer globalen Ebene eingeordnet und darin wiederum als Teil der atlantischen Geschichte betrachtet werden. Die vom Soziologen Anthony Giddens beschriebenen Dynamiken der Moderne, genauer: Das Herauslösen sozialer Beziehungen aus konkreten räumlichen Gegebenheiten und ihre Rekombination über unbestimmte Zeit-Raum-Distanzen im Rahmen dieser Prozesse weisen Fotografien eine zentrale Rolle im Konzept des *Atlantic Visualscape* zu. Vgl. Jürg Schneider, Exploring the Atlantic Visualscape. Eine Geschichte der Fotografie in West- und Zentralafrika, 1840–1890, Diss. Universität Basel 2011 und ders., African Photography in the Atlantic Visualscape. Moving Photographers – Circulating Images, in: Sissy Helff und Stefanie Michels (ed.), *Global Photographies. Memory – History – Archives*, Bielefeld 2018, 19–38 (22.04.2025).

solchen Fotografien umzugehen ist.[3] Der Schreibende jedenfalls empfindet einen nachträglichen Eingriff als eine Bevormundung, sowohl des lesenden Publikums als auch der Porträtierten. Das Unrecht ist geschehen, ohne Zweifel, aber weshalb sollten wir es nicht sehen?

Zusammenfassend und abschliessend lässt sich festhalten, dass sich *The Surface of Things* nicht nur wegen seiner editorischen Qualität und seiner wertigen Ausstattung in der Landschaft der heute recht zahlreichen Werke zur Geschichte der Fotografie in Afrika profiliert, sondern auch wegen seines Ansatzes, einerseits über das Bild hinauszugehen und Fotografien als relationale Objekte zu verstehen und nach ihrer Rolle zu befragen, die sie nach der Aufnahme spielen, und anderseits Fotografien in einen weiteren geografischen Rahmen einzuspannen. In diesem Unternehmen bleibt die Autorin, anders als der Titel des Buches vermuten lässt, alles andere als an der Oberfläche der Dinge.

[3] Ob oder in welchem Umfang eine Zensur von heute als offensichtlich rassistisch oder sexistisch wahrgenommen Büchern oder Kunstwerken sinnvoll, notwendig oder überhaupt zulässig ist, ist eine Frage, die in den Medien und der Öffentlichkeit seit einiger Zeit intensiv und kontrovers diskutiert wird. Man erinnere sich etwa an die Kontroverse um die Bücher des Kinderbuchautors Roald Dahl, deren Text sein Londoner Verlag so abgeändert hat, «dass er den Anforderungen der politisch korrekten neuen Empfindsamkeit genügt». Vgl. Thomas Ribi, Niemand ist dick, und Frauen müssen nicht unbedingt weiblich sein. Die englischen Ausgaben von Roald Dahls Kinderbüchern werden dem politisch korrekten Zeitgeist angepasst, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 22.02.2023 (22.04.2025).

# BURCU DOGRAMACI AND MARTA SMOLIŃSKA, *GRENZE/GRANICA. ART ON THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER AFTER 1990*

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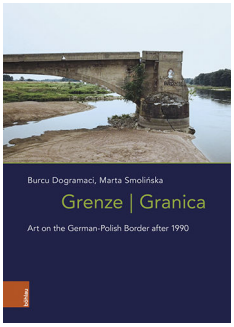


Reviewed by
Vera Faber

In the volume *Grenze/Granica*, Burcu Dogramaci and Marta Smolińska examine the evolution of artistic expression along the German-Polish border since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The analysis is centred on the artistic engagement with the transformation of border narratives in the context of shifting political orders, migration, displacement, and lost homelands. An examination of the Oder and Neisse rivers, which delineate the present-day German-Polish border, reveals ideas of the "river as border" and the "border as river" as essential elements of this narrative.

This volume represents the culmination of a multi-year research project spearheaded by the two authors, aligning itself with the field of Border Aesthetics and particularly drawing upon the concept of borderscapes. The authors demonstrate an adept and productive integration of these approaches with diverse historical and cultural studies methodologies, which they apply to analyse selected examples from artistic and curatorial practices.

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In contrast with the long-held assumption that borders are primarily geographical or political lines, borderscapes are inherently linked to processuality and transgressivity. This encompasses the surrounding space, the actors involved, and the discourses taking place within them. In the field of Border Aesthetics research, this concept has been enhanced by the incorporation of valuable approaches, with a particular emphasis on the symbolic, epistemological, and media representations of borders and their critical examination within creative practices.

In *Grenze/Granica*, the concept of borders is explored as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon, encompassing temporal and spatial layers, textures, and narratives. These borders are seen to undergo continuous transformation as a result of the actions and involvement of the actors involved. This variability is characterised by a diversity of textures. In this context, the authors posit that border rivers "function as boundary object twice over: it can be defined as a forum that is both physical and representative, but also symbolic" (p. 43).

In illustrating how art responds to the presence, transformation, and transgression of geographic, political, and symbolic borders, the authors demonstrate how art itself becomes part of the borderscapes and their fluidity and mutability. Consequently, art provides a platform for constructive discourse, although its utilisation is contingent upon the prevailing political climate. Moreover, the authors repeatedly assert that borders do not inherently serve as barriers; they can also function as conduits for connection. In this context, the term "sharing" is understood not only in the sense of physical and metaphorical division, but also of communal sharing (p. 90). Various concrete and abstract configurations are presented that challenge, transcend, or negate the river as a border. Bridges, for instance, are such connecting elements that have long played a central role in the discourse surrounding the Oder river as a border.

The introductory chapter, which adopts a historical perspective, addresses the border between Poland and Germany that was established following the Second World War and which runs along the course of two "troubled waters", the Oder and the Neisse rivers. The border is presented as a fluid and troubled aspect of the history of the region in question. The rivers have long served as territorial and epistemic boundaries. They have been affected by territorial shifts and ideological discourses on division throughout history, experiencing the transition from a "hard" to a "soft" border following Poland's accession to the European Union (p. 11). Alternatively, one may conceptualise this as a transition from a "concrete" to an "abstract" border. In addition, an extensive bibliography in the volume's annex provides a comprehensive overview of research on art along the German-Polish border post-1990.

The second chapter is concerned with the methodological aspects of the subject matter and examines the relationship between borders and rivers from a theoretical standpoint. The methodological approach of viewing "art at the border as river and river as

border" is introduced through the use of subversive cartography, an analysis of the specific palimpsest nature of the Oder borderscape, and an investigation of contrary movements against the current. Subsequently, five chapters are presented which employ a constructive analytical approach in order to illustrate the application of the initially outlined methodological approaches to various thematic clusters. These chapters are supported by case studies, which have been subjected to detailed analysis in some instances and which employ a more concise approach in others. The corpus of evidence has been derived from a number of exhibitions and art projects that were realised following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, with some of these projects situated directly at the border. These projects employ a variety of different media and technological contexts, which demonstrates the highly versatile nature of this collection in terms of both the conceptual and artistic aspects involved.

The subsequent chapter, entitled "Border as River – River as Border", defines rivers as semiotically charged objects that are actively involved in practices related to borderscaping. In this way, they serve as a "a channel of communication, a realm of memory for both Germans and Poles, a privileged place for writing history (of the Future?)" (p. 44). Conversely, a deficiency in trust can impede cross-border collaboration, as the authors demonstrate through an examination of political transformation processes (p. 131). Border Art is, for instance, perceived as a "subversive cartography" of "rivers as borders" (pp. 44–52), which challenges the conventional practices of spatial demarcation. It does so by exposing the arbitrary nature of these boundaries and their capacity for change. The authors introduce the concept of "assemblage" alongside various approaches to the idea of "palimpsest", consistently applying these concepts to selected case studies in the volume. To illustrate, the authors present the fictional city of "Słubfurt", which was initiated by performance artist Michael Kurzwelly in 1999. The term signifies the symbolic convergence of two settlements on either side of the river, Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. Historically, these two settlements constituted a singular municipality. However, the river now serves as a political border, situating both towns in different countries. The project illuminates not only the social and spatial dimensions of the river but also its functions as "a boundary object that binds the borderscape together across national divides, and supports mutual socio-cultural communication between diverse actors" (p. 48). The authors also put forth the intriguing argument that the politically existent border is now effectively a "phantom border". This term refers to a border that was once present but now only remains as a "soft border", with residual effects that continue to shape different layers, narratives, and textures. In this context, the importance of the past and the applicability of relevant theories from Memory Studies become particularly evident.

Chapter 3, "History of the Future. Ruins, Remains and the Border-Aesthetic Palimpsest", focuses on the analysis of border reminiscences. In doing so, the chapter provides a comprehensive

examination of the symbolic and tangible impact of borders in the present. The fortress of Kostrzyn/Küstrin on the current border exemplifies the overlapping of different temporal and epistemic layers – concerning history, the past, the present, but perhaps also the future. This site is interesting because, from a historical perspective, it seems to have no connection with the present. The border zone can be seen as a "transit zone" which, in its state of abandonment, reflects the current relationship between the two countries (p. 79). The abandoned ruins challenge conventional border narratives of "totality", as the authors have identified them as representative of the fragmentary (p. 79).

The concept of the "palimpsest" is once more associated with the notion of the "border assemblage", which refers to the relief-like superimposition of diverse border forms. It is also noteworthy to mention the installation entitled *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* (A Table for Küstrin) created by the Swedish artist Hanna Sjöberg. The authors posit that in 1993, Sjöberg set in motion the processes of "borderscaping" and "palimpsesting" in this now-abandoned and much-forgotten location. The installation comprises a variety of objets trouvés from the vicinity of the fortress, which not only evoke historical layers but also allude to the shifting of borders. The authors conclude that Sjöberg's work clearly demonstrates "that all the layers of the border palimpsest are inextricably intertwined" (p. 88). Of particular interest is the thesis that the objects are "non-human actors and actants" in the borderscape, which broadens the inherently open concept of borderscapes with a systems-theoretical aspect, ultimately grounded in assemblage.

It is also noteworthy that subsequently, a number of artists commenced engagement with the border landscape that surrounds the Kostrzyn Fortress. This has resulted in the organisation of two notable exhibitions: "Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place" (2004) and "Memento Kostrzyn" (2012). In their analysis, the authors attribute a functional role to the exhibited works as media of memory, drawing on the conceptual framework of Aleida Assmann's "archaeology of memory".[1] In this sense, memory, whether individual or collective, requires a medium of representation for inscribing itself in the memory of the individual or collective. Artefacts are considered to have the potential to link the past with the present; this is illustrated by Elżbieta Jabłonska's installation entitled *Borders – Limitations*, which represents past border layers in the form of a now-non-existent barrier. The analysis presented in this section is somewhat cursory; it would be beneficial to provide more detailed examples to obtain a greater understanding of the subject matter.

The following chapter, entitled "Mapping the Border. Artistic Journeys and Practices in Border Zones", examines the manner in which artists, basing their work on case studies, transfer their perceptions of the border landscape into cartographic material in a

[1] Aleida Assmann and Dietrich Harth (eds.), *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt a. M. 1991, 13f.

variety of media. This concept is once again illustrated by presenting the border as a shared, semiotically imbued space, rather than as a mere dividing line. Similarly, the chapters "Border Passages. Artistic Reflections on Traveling Workers and Migratory Languages" and "Artistic Queer(y)ing of the Border Region" address the questioning of border narratives in the context of migratory movements and queer and gender studies. This represents a particularly contemporary approach to border studies, which has drawn great interest in these areas in recent years.

In synthesising the discussion on post-1990 art, the authors identify two pivotal concepts: "Art as Scar" and "Border Art as Concerning" (p. 232). These concepts exemplify how art can be perceived as a reflection of and a catalyst for engaging with the intricacies of the socio-political landscape. The authors propose that this form of art functions as "a sensitive seismograph of the socio-political situation in the border zone", capable of measuring critical borderscaping processes and the processual ontology of the border (p. 232).

In conclusion, this volume presents a compelling contribution to the study of symbolic and concrete borders and their transcendence through artistic practices. By analysing contemporary art at and on the German-Polish border post-1990, the study not only inaugurates a new field of enquiry but also provides insights into a specific and previously little-known form of border art. The volume demonstrates particular strength in articulating the intention, artistic concept, and practical implementation. It demonstrates a notable transdisciplinary approach, encompassing a wide range of art forms, including classical panel painting, cartography, photography, film, installation, objets trouvés, sound media, and more. The concept of border fluidity, particularly in the Polish-German case due to the geography of the river as a border, introduces a very convincing new approach to border research. The link to Memory Studies seems particularly fruitful. The structure of the volume is logical and consistent, with the authors maintaining a clear focus on their research question and the defined corpus throughout. The text is well written and maintains interest across the chapters, with each section offering a distinct artistic perspective on the borderscape. The extensive bibliography is very useful, as is the index, both of which can be found in the backmatter.

The almost ninety colour and black-and-white visual examples are of particular note, serving two functions: to elucidate the analyses presented and to provide a concise and highly intriguing overview of artistic works situated at and along the German-Polish border. The visual representations, which reflect the high performativity of artistic artefacts, permit readers to experience the multidimensionality and complexity of the border landscape. Such illustrations may even prompt readers to explore this space in person. Given the variety of methodological approaches employed, some of which could benefit from further clarification, it would be beneficial to provide additional context. To illustrate, the concept of

"palimpsest" in relation to memory cultures, and its basis in Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* may deserve further elucidation.[2] Although the volume may initially appear to employ an overly ambitious methodological approach, the various concepts are effectively and efficiently elucidated in the case studies, which serve to integrate these elements in a coherent and systematic manner. The methodology presented herewith is promising and could be fruitfully applied to other fluvial border formations that exhibit comparable political, geographic, and cultural characteristics. The Danube River may be taken as an illustrative example.

[2] Gérard Genette, *Palimspestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris 1982.

# CLAIRE BISHOP, *DISORDERED ATTENTION. HOW WE LOOK AT ART AND PERFORMANCE TODAY*

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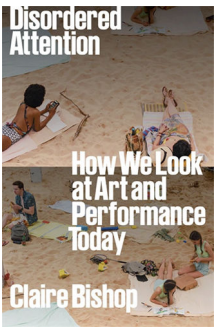


Reviewed by
Eva Kernbauer

In modernist theory, the capacity to view artworks with undivided attention, ideally in a one-on-one white cube setting free from distraction, is an undisputed prerequisite for art audiences. This is not only significant because artworks are laborious creations and deserve to be duly appreciated, but also because, in an age of capitalist mass production, they are precisely those cultural artifacts that allow and encourage us to train our visual and mental faculties and to experience ourselves as free individuals. This "liberating quality of avant-garde art" is an important argument for its raison d'être, and an important measure of artistic quality, requiring an ideal setting and ideal audience behavior.

While art is a training ground for this fundamental human faculty, attention is linked to judgment in a broader philosophical sense: to discernment, to the control of our faculties and to mental health (in the Enlightenment tradition), to participation and political emancipation (in Marxist and post-Marxist theory), and to time, presence, and empathy (in the more recent aesthetics of care). In a time and world in which bestselling books such as *Stolen Focus* warn us that we are losing our capacities to "think deeply" through the manipulations of the digital apparatus and the temptations of

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the entertainment industry, we may also have lost our competence to adequately appreciate art.[1] At the same time, it is questionable whether art demands undivided attention at all today, and whether art institutions do not encourage quite different behavior, given that in the former white cube, we are now constantly connected to the outside world, encouraged to comment, exchange, and go online for information. Clearly, art is not only viewed but also created and presented with digital connectivity in mind.

The exposure of art, institutions, and audiences to digitality and its attention economies is the overarching theme of *Disordered Attention*, a collection of four essays written by Bishop over the past decade. Rather than dismissing current developments as merely catering to inattentive scatterbrains and their preferred event model of culture, Bishop examines how art comments on and responds to the attention crisis. In contrast to the negative, sometimes even alarmist, assessment of most other commentators, she offers a more nuanced and less pessimistic, but by no means uncritical account of what she calls "hybridized spectatorship": the way we are always connected to digital devices in museums (QR codes and other online sources offering additional material, touch screens encouraging participation and feedback, our own mobile phones tempting us to exchange with the outside world), how we are constantly "networked to multiple elsewheres" (p. 4), both locally and temporally.

While taking a different stance from, for instance, Irit Rogoff's *Looking Away*,[2] Bishop is similarly wary of the promises of undivided attention in the gallery, asking how it has been reorganized in cultural environments. Reviewing the history of studies on attention – one of the most important contributions to the subject comes, of course, from art history, namely Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (1992) – she traces the history of what she calls "normative" attention: focused, directional, hierarchical, aimed at mastering and controlling its object. She points out that it was only in the late nineteenth century that the cultural sector began to demand this kind of response from its audiences, disciplining and systematically excluding minority positions in terms of social status, age, gender, and race, and stereotyping any deviations as uncultured and barbaric. With this in mind, "disordering" attention may rather be a promise than a threat. But while she refers to adjacent discourses such as feminist, disability, queer, trans, and Black studies, Bishop does not draw from them to offer a new concept of spectatorship, but instead asks to what extent art has contributed to and responded to current shifts in attention.

1
Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus. Why You Can't Pay Attention, and How to Think Deeply Again*, New York 2022.

2
Irit Rogoff, Looking Away. Participations in Visual Culture, in: Gavin Butt (ed.), *New Criticism. New Approaches to Art and Performance*, Oxford 2003, 117–134.

In retrospect, there are some trends that point to longer-term shifts in curating that seem to anticipate current events. Bishop points to the increasingly overwhelming material presented in major exhibitions since the beginning of the millennium, citing Okwui Enwezor's *documenta 11* of 2012, which famously included 600 hours of video material alone in its 100-day run. Since then, we have become accustomed to visiting exhibitions in the full knowledge that we will not be able to see them "in their entirety", not to mention the increasing number of accompanying programs. Bishop welcomes this as a rejection of the illusion of mastery in favor of an aesthetic of chance and incompleteness, which is connected to artistic shifts of the last few decades. In terms of both curating and art, she argues for "pushing back against this association between meaning and profundity, or what I call a depth model of culture. While some cultural objects have longevity and seem timeless, others are slight but have the virtue of being timely and provoking intense debate" (p. 6). Still others play with casualness, such as the two performances Bishop cites in her introduction: *Sun and Sea (Marina)*, 2019, Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Lina Lapelytė's multi-character "opera-performance" running on loop, a critical and popular success at the Lithuanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019, and Kevin Beasley's *The Sound of Morning*, showing Black dancers engaged in casual activities at an intersection in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Though different in their settings, both works do not expect or demand full attention, not even attendance for their entire duration (this was different for the repetition of *Sun and Sea (Marina)* in more theatre-like settings, as for instance when I saw it again in Vienna at Wiener Festwochen in May 2023, with audiences booking time slots; for the setting in Venice, this was not the case), or vanishing to the point of being barely discernible to bystanders.

In the four essays that follow the introduction, Bishop discusses artworks from the last three decades that offer different perspectives on the impact of digital connectivity. While these certainly do not offer an overarching theorization, they combine the author's characteristic blend of art criticism and art historical contextualization, offering definition of genres and pointing to disruptions, demarcations, and transformations of major categories.

I cannot count how often I have used the first two essays "Research-Based Art: Information Overload" and "Performance Exhibitions: Black Box, White Cube, Grey Zone" (the two I was previously familiar with) in the classroom, and found them immensely inspiring to students (ongoing artists, art historians, and art theorists). The essay on research-based art offers one of the first attempts to historize and define major shifts within the genre, citing an early example of an installation working with documents and information, Renée Green's *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992) to point out its potential to challenge the politics of truth and history-writing. This is all the more important as Bishop argues that research-based art is especially prone to remain structured along-

side the status quo of digital technology and its attendant politics of truth, often doing little to counter the accumulation and fetishization of material and data. Visitors are regularly left with an overwhelming accumulation of material and information, with no clear idea of what even might happen if they would be able to actually work through it. She also cites examples such as Henrik Olesen's *Some Gay/Lesbian Artists and/or Artists Relevant to Homosocial Culture I–VII* (2007), with its ironical nod to the potential of getting lost in the maze of online (re)searches, and its approximation of image panels that manage to echo both the results of a Google image search and Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

The second essay, "Performance Exhibitions: Black Box, White Cube, Grey Zone" probably comes closest to the introduction and the book's title, offering an account of the entry of (dance) performance into the gallery and the subsequent transformation of both. The somewhat puzzling distinction between "art" and "performance" in the book title makes sense here, as performance emerges as a genre particularly capable of (and accused of) transforming the way we see art in museums, while also expecting us to perform in our role as audiences. Much of the negative criticism mentioned in the introduction stems from observations made in relation to performance exhibitions (which leads to some repetition in the theoretical layout), especially their event-based nature and Instagrammable aesthetics. The way Maria Hassabi's *PLASTIC* (2015) or Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective* (2012) challenge and guide audience attention is an integral feature of both, and even more explicitly so in the case of Anne Imhof's *FAUST* (2017), where the audience's ongoing recording on mobile phones directly responded to the set-up of the performance as a glossy spectacle, structured by the use of glass panels. These developments are also interesting in terms of historiography, in the way that "live" performance is once again being transformed as a genre, and in the way that contemporary art, under the conditions of digital connectivity, is taking another turn, albeit one that was already prepared in the 1960s, in intersecting art and documentation, conceptuality and potentiality, becoming something that can happen "anywhere or not at all".[3]

Bishop's third chapter, "Interventions: Seizing the Moment", offers a distinction between art activism and art interventions and takes up the wider topic of socially engaged art that she has already explored in her brilliant 2012 book, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Citing Voina's amusing *Dick Captured by the FSB* (2010) and Pussy Riot's *Mother of God, Drive Putin Away* (2012), as well as the practice of Tania Bruguera, whose term "political timing specificity" Bishop draws on, are excellent cases in point to show that the dependence of artistic interventions on the immediate effects of media efficiency should not be dismissed as a sign of their secondary value, but is essential in situations of

[3] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All. A Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London 2012.

political repression. She also offers a tentative genealogy of interventionist art, reminding us of its importance in the guerrilla tactics of 1960s and '70s South and Central American art, as well as of its roots in Futurism, which makes its supposed current seizure by the Alt-Right a debatable argument.

The fourth essay, "Invocations: Contemporary Art Quotes Modernist Architecture", seems a somewhat haphazard approach to the important, long-standing phenomenon of quotations and appropriations in contemporary art. While the essay certainly makes sense within the book, and while the sheer accumulation of citations and repetitions of modernist art and design such as Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* is impressive, her somewhat inconclusive data collection seems dangerously close to what she criticized as problematic in research-based art in the first essay. Bishop presents this approach as an example of what she proposes as a methodology of "distant reading" (rather than "close reading", a term and methodology borrowed from literary scholar Franco Moretti), which she argues is intended to reclaim a model of art-critical, broad-scope writing that could be analytical and offer judgments about types of practice rather than individual artworks (she also explains this in the introduction). But even if her stated discomfort with the monographic model of art analysis is insightful and persuasive, and I agree that we need to consider the interconnectedness of artists and artworks more carefully and systematically, I think she actually underestimates her own ability to offer very incisive critical readings of individual artworks using what I have already described as her characteristic combination of art history, theory, and criticism. Having her veer off into a kind of cultural analysis that describes phenomena rather than individual engagements with them would certainly be a loss not worth the corresponding symmetry of rejecting the depth model of analysis along with the depth model of culture.

*Disordered Attention* is by no means an exhaustive, not even a systematic study of attention, but succinctly points to perspectives on spectatorship as a collective phenomenon and practice. As in most of her writing, Bishop's observations are as highly relatable as they are critical, and while I am not sure whether I agree with all of her observations and hypotheses, the book is more than a collection of essays with an interesting introduction. It offers a series of insightful approaches to the current status quo that focus on artistic responses and how to assess them. At a time when much writing on art gets lost in the broader conflict zones of cultural analysis and an often superficial understanding of the politics and ethics of art, *Disordered Attention* is a highly inspiring return to art critical and art theoretical analysis, thinking (and thinking deeply, I might add) with and through art and foregrounding its actual position and contribution to today's world. This is a companion book to work with, and to get back to repeatedly, as the phenomena Bishop has set out to describe will undeniably move forward.

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