1715:
Panoptical Modernity:
Versailles/Absolutism/
Persian Harem
- PART TWO -

Week 11 – Lecture 1

13 November 2007
“Modernity” = “rationalization”

efficiency

centralization

bureaucratization

Panopticon = “see all”

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

“Utilitarian” = maximize utility
Definition of Absolutism:
“The ruling power is not subject to regularized challenge or check by any other agency – e.g., judicial, legislative, religious, economic, or electoral.”

NB: MODERN NOT MEDIEVAL!!! Pope/bishops/nobility (castles)

17th-century Absolutism:
Five elements
1. Legislative: rule without consent and counsel of nobility [i.e., “Second Estate”]

- **1614**: last meeting of the *Estates General*
  - Henry IV --- assassinated in 1610

- Eliminate possibility of being checked by nobility / aristocrats [British “House of Lords”; USA “Senate”]

What’s the problem with the *Estates General* not meeting since 1614?
Because they’re changing!!! And they’re your source of money!!!

And more than that --- the “Third Estate” is now the “class” that has the fluid capital!!! You need their taxes!!!
2. RELIGIOUS: **1685**

Revocation of Edict of Nantes (1598)

- Abolish religious toleration and opposition
- Appoint all its bishops; make them absolutely dependent on you [and not, e.g., the Pope]
  - “Gallicanism” = French Catholicism

1685: Revocation of Edict of Nantes
3. *Lettre de cachet* = “sealed letter”  
*[cacher = “to hide”]*: a letter signed by the king – commands recipient to obey orders without delay and without explanation

*Lettre de cachet* used to authorize someone’s imprisonment [e.g., in Bastille] indefinitely without due process

NB: against British principle of “writ of *habeas corpus*” [you have the body]
4. Versailles:
Louis XIV abandons the Louvre for Versailles
“Plot $x$ on vertical and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on horizontal …”
Versailles as the global center of MODERN RATIONAL ORDER
Vaux-le-Vicomte :: U.S. Capitol

RATIONALITY!!!
Lawmakers reason: rational discussion [neo-classical, not Gothic]
5. Strategies of Legitimation:
   a) “Sun King” ideology
   b) Neo-Classicism
   c) Baroque Dance

a) “Sun King” Cultural Ideology
JFK and Jackie as royals

Kennedys as “family”:
suburban?
aristocratic?
Nantucket?
Ronald Reagan: man of the “West” not-Eastern plain-spoken; transparent; not-Nantucket

Nec pluribus impar: “not unequal to many”

- Thanks to Copernicus: a heliocentric universe!
- 17th-c. representation [cf. Newton]: the world revolves around Louis!!! [and Versailles]
  - But note ambiguity: Inquisition trial of Galileo, 1633 !!!
  - Gallicanism --- relationship to Catholicism centered in Rome???
“Gallicanism” --- from Roman Empire name for province of “Gallia”
French absolutist version of Roman Catholicism: King of France able to appoint bishops --- absolute control over all aspects of life
[Opposed to “ultramontanism” --- over [ultra] the mountains [Alps]]

A DE-CENTERING OF FOCUS:
NO LONGER ROME (POPE)
OR “HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE”
(SPAHISH/AUSTRIAN HABSBURGS)
RATHER: LOUIS XIV BOURBONS ARE CENTER

Sun King coin, 1674

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Triumph of Louis XIV, Joseph Werner [1664] (Versailles)

- Louis as Apollo, god of the sun
- Heliocentrism – 17th c.
  - i.e., ultra-modernist
- but also……
- Ancient [for legitimation]
  - Neo-Classical imagery: roots monarchy in Ancient ROMAN EMPIRE [for greater legitimacy]
  - Classical but not “humanist” / renaissance
    - i.e., not Republican!!!
• Neo-classical symbols:
  – Muscular body
    – [the real Louis had a stomach “three times the size of ordinary men” at his death]
  – Laurel wreath: victory
  – Roman toga
  – Lyre in left-hand
    • Apollo god of music, i.e., “harmony of spheres”
  – Horses:
    • ancient myth of sunrise - sunset [four corners of earth]
b) Neo-Classicism

Medieval Illustrated
Manuscript: Louvre palace
Medieval Louvre Palace

Louvre: Bernini Proposal
[“Italian Baroque”]
Bernini

Louvre: Claude Perrault [1630-1688] [Neo-Classical]
Louis XIV’s “classical” age: Vying for the center of the Baroque 17th c. [Paris, not Rome!]
Louvre (Paris)
St. Peter’s (Rome)

What will be the symbolic center of the Baroque?

1650: Paris or Rome?
Legitimation project: Louis XIV – not Pope or Holy Roman Emperor– is true heir of the Roman Empire
c) Baroque Dance

A young Louis XIV

Dance as a marker of status

i.e., rationality / grace / civilization
Baroque Dance acts as a **RITUAL**:

- **Ritual takes routine acts and their contextually determined meanings**—exaggerates them, stylises them, refines them, and sets them into a pattern of expressive sequences of visual and auditory symbols.

- **Ritual reinforces a particular collective identity.** If you participate in a ritual you are acknowledging its function within society. Rituals are not just abstract ideas but they do things—-they have an effect on the world (or on your world view).

- **It's easy to identify a ritual when you see one at work:**
  -- sharing a sense of special occasion.
  -- a group of people with common beliefs.
  -- a formulaic event—it’s repeatable.
  -- people expect there to be rules as a condition of public ritual.
  -- highly symbolic: use of special clothes, instruments and gestures (uses paralanguage)
  -- needs to follow some time-hallowed precedent in order to be effective.

Ritual effects collective identity

Ritual draws boundaries of inclusion/exclusion and establishes social hierarchies --- establishes order in a world of chaos
Ritual acts out a “symbolic space” that correlates with “social space” in other words: it marks out social class/status
17th-c. Absolutism: a fully-ordered universe legitimated by REASON – NOT GOD but MATHEMATICS.