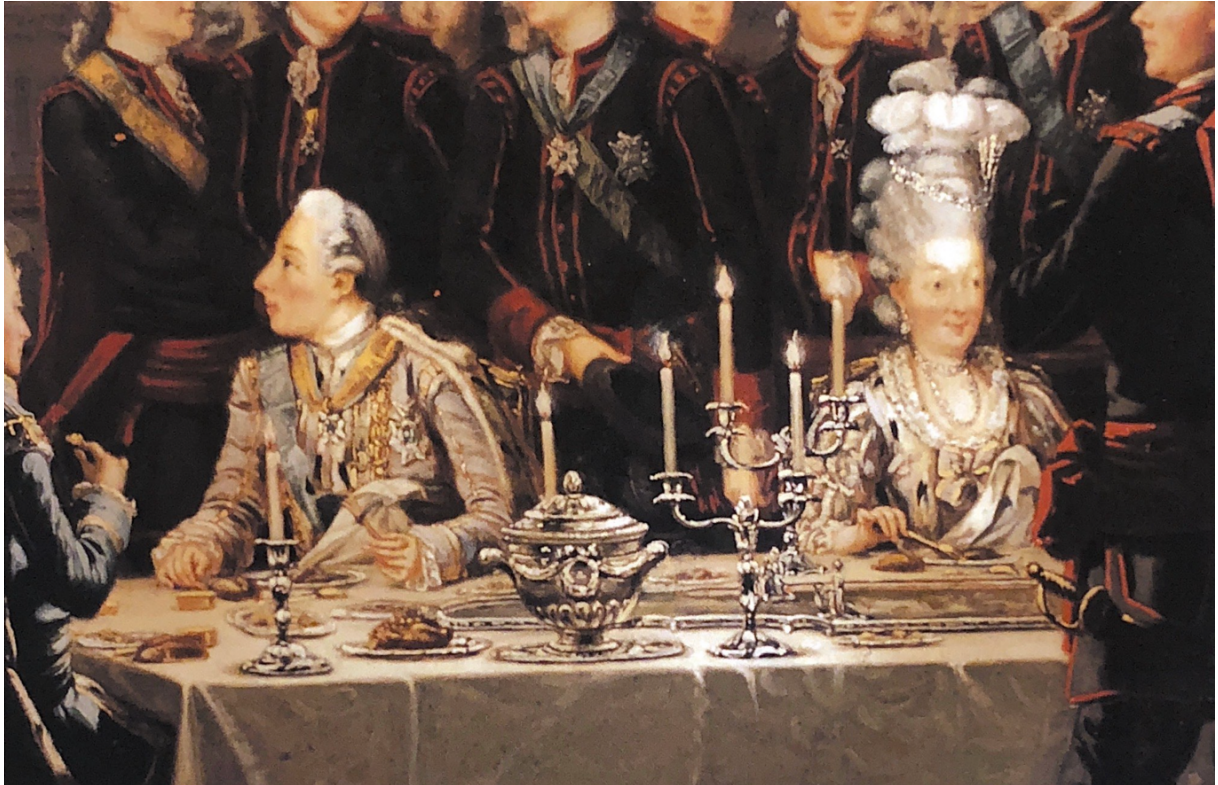


# *‘One Dress – One Nation!’*

*The societal implications of King Gustav III’s National Costume in late eighteenth-century Swedish Court Society*

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the societal implications of Gustav III's national costume in the context of Swedish court society during the late eighteenth century. With the aims of uncovering King Gustav III's view of the National Costume and its role in Swedish court society, as well as how we can understand the National Costume's meaning for the aristocracy in late eighteenth-century Sweden, this thesis presents a post-structural textual analysis of Gustav III's (1806) *REFLEXIONER, angående en ny nationel klädedrägt* (Reflections concerning a new national costume) in order to uncover King Gustav III's perception of and ideology behind the national costume. This is then juxtaposed with a similar analysis of a chapter from Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's (1902) journal, representing an aristocratic counter-perspective. This thesis presents a previously unexplored sociological perspective in studying Gustav III's National Costume. Departing from Norbert Elias' work around the court society, arguments are made for the interpretation of the National Costume as an instrument in court ceremonial, at the king's disposal, holding the potential to create a distance in power between the Swedish court nobility and the monarchy. Furthermore, it is argued that the National Costume represents an oppressive force to the Swedish court nobility as a social class.

**Keywords:** *National Costume; Nationella Dräkten; Gustav III; Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta; Kungahuset; Swedish Monarchy; Court Society; Absolutism*

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# 1 Introduction

“When luxury is allowed to ingrain itself into an impoverished country, it will soon become its most pressing plague” (Gustaf III 1806, 226)<sup>1</sup>. These are the words King Gustav<sup>2</sup> III of Sweden used to express his concern about the surging consumption of luxury commodities in Sweden towards the end of the eighteenth century. Swedish high society during this time was highly influenced by the French court, as was the rest of Europe, manifesting itself in language, architecture, and fashion among others (Ilmakunnas 2014, 9; Ilmakunnas 2015, 115-117; Wolff 2010, 373). The Swedish aristocracy<sup>3</sup> in particular had close ties to the French royal court and Parisian high society. Throughout the century, Swedish nobles sojourned in France for prolonged periods of time and for various reasons. Often this was in the context of military service, state official duty or a *grand tour*<sup>4</sup> (Ilmakunnas 2015).

Back in Stockholm, French luxury goods had become such an important instrument for distinction at court, that consuming French luxury was considered a necessity for a Swedish aristocratic lifestyle (Ilmakunnas 2015, 118). This did however not come without criticism, as foreign luxury was commonly regarded as having a negative impact on the Swedish economy (Runefelt 2004, 207-208). Moral arguments, which luxury has been met with since antiquity (Von Wachenfeldt 2013, 209; 214), also stayed relevant in the discourse around luxury, although they were intertwined with economic sentiments. Such arguments often centred around the idea that people ought to consume *ståndsmässigt*, a Swedish term voicing the concept of living and behaving appropriately according to one’s social position. This was important not only for the individual, as to not consume above their financial means, but it was also seen as a moral duty to society for there was great importance attached to the visibility and preservation of society’s four legal estates through clothing and behaviour (Runefelt 2004, 206).

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Gustaf III (1806) were translated from Swedish into English by me. Original: “När yppighet får inrota sig i ett fattigt land, blifver den snart dess mest tryckande plåga.”

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis two varieties of Gustav’s name will be encountered, one spelled with a ‘v’ and one with an ‘f’. Whenever I write about King Gustav III in my own words, I employ modern orthographic rules of Swedish, according to which his name would be written with a ‘v’. However, whenever I refer to Gustav III in a literary citation or quotation, I respect the spelling of the original source. Historical sources will often see his name written with an ‘f’ because of different orthographic standards in the past.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term ‘aristocracy’ refers strictly to nobility and thus excludes its other connotation of influential upper bourgeoisie.

<sup>4</sup> A *grand tour* was a customary trip through Europe which was undertaken by adolescent men of the aristocratic and upper bourgeois classes. It was a symbolic effort upon reaching adulthood with the goal of learning and seeing the world, becoming a gentleman of the ‘monde’ (Van Westrienen 1983, 2).



King Gustav III echoed such economic and moral arguments against luxury, and he aimed to dampen the surge in foreign luxury consumption by conceiving a plan for a large-scale dress reform. This plan entailed the introduction of a new distinctively Swedish style of court and civilian dress which was to replace the existing French style of dress. The king had supposedly been considering this idea since 1773 (Rangström 2002a, 247) and finally decided to realize the plan by July 1777 after encouragement of tsarina Katarina of Russia. By the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1778 the National Costume was introduced to the public for the very first time (Rangström 1997, 165). Rather than enforcing sumptuary laws in order to force all of his subjects to wear the National Costume, Gustav III opted to rely on the power of imitation. Leading by example, the king expected his subjects to follow suit and adopt the National Costume by free will (Gustav III 1806, 232; 238). The only exception to this strategy was at court where the costume was indeed part of the etiquette.

With the goal of economization in mind, the new attire was significantly less elaborate than the traditional French style, and the specifics of the attire's appearance were meticulously proscribed according to occasion and estate. At court, there was a distinction between the *Vardagsdräkten* (everyday-costume) (Figure 1), and the *Galadräkten* (gala-costume) (Figure 2) for



Figure 2 An illustration of the *galadräkten* (Rangström 1997, 168)

parties and more ceremonial courtly contexts. The *Vardagsdräkten* followed a colour-scheme of black with contrasting details in *Couleur de Feu* (fire red). Individuals were free to pick a fabric of choice, as long as it was produced in Sweden.

The *Galadräkten* looked largely the same but employed a different colour scheme of light-blue and white and was required to be made using silk fabric. The attire for the burgher man was called the *Almänna Dräkten* (General costume) (Figure 3), which was comprised of the same elements as the noblemen's attire, but it was made in one colour of choice and without any contrasting colour detailing. In practice, the general costume of the burghers was



Figure 1 An illustration of the *vardagsdräkten* (Rangström 1997, 168)

usually worn in all black (Rangström 2002a, 247). For noblewomen, the vardagsdräkten (Figure 4) employed the same black and Couleur de Feu colour palette as the men's attire. The colour palette was the same as the men's costume for all but the Galadräkten, which according to Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's (1902) description employed a colour palette of white with detailing in Couleur de Feu. However, I suspect that the colour palette for the Galadräkten was changed to gold and white upon looking through several of Stockholm's museum-databases where I did not encounter any exemplar of a white and red attire.

On the surface, the National Costume seems to be a response to a consumption of foreign luxury that was spiralling out of control. However, below the surface deeper issues are lurking. The idea of the National Costume had some impactful implications for the relationship between the nobility and the



Figure 3 An illustration of the 'allmänna dräkten' (Rangström 1997, 169)



Figure 4 Castle interior with a couple in conversation. Oil-painting by Pehr Hilletröm. The lady is wearing the 'vardagsdräkten'. (Bergman 1938, 5)

monarchy. For one, with the clear stance that Gustav III took on towards foreign luxury, continuing to indulge in these goods could increasingly be read as a political choice against Sweden. Not only were nobles faced with even more pressure to forsake foreign luxury goods, which to them were deemed as a necessity to display their status, but the National Costume also saw all nobles dressed in a uniform, relatively moderate, and unembellished court attire. It took away their ability to display their status and distinguish themselves from one another in the way that they desired.

### 1.1 Research aims and questions

This thesis embarks on an exploration of the potential underlying meanings of Gustav III's National Costume in late eighteenth-century Swedish court society. A key aspect in this exploration is the socio-historical context of the Swedish court society as a social phenomenon. As briefly scratched upon previously, the National Costume entailed a new direction for Swedish civil fashion which excluded French luxury goods. Considering the important symbolic value of French luxury for the court people of Sweden, one can assume that the very idea of this national costume could be a delicate matter to them, one that could potentially put strain on the relationship between the monarchy and the aristocracy. I therefore find it highly interesting to further explore the National Costume and how it was understood in Swedish court society during the late eighteenth century. This thesis will investigate this issue through two major questions:

*What was King Gustav III's view of the National Costume and its role in Swedish court society?*

Through this question I will assume the perspective of the absolute monarch to uncover how King Gustav III understood the idea of a national costume. It will take into special consideration the discrepancy between his vision of Swedish court life with a more nationalistic ideal on the one hand, and the existing culture of foreign luxury on the other hand.

*How can we understand the social implications of the National Costume for the aristocracy in late eighteenth-century Sweden?*

This question highlights the perspective of the Swedish court people in relation to the National Costume. It will explore how the National Costume was understood by Swedish court people, particularly the implications of the National Costume for the aristocratic way of life and how this matter was perceived by the Swedish court people.

This problem statement not only has the potential to shed light on the societal structure of the absolute monarchy in Sweden, but it also provides a deeper look into the social meaning of the National Costume as it pertains to the identity of the Swedish aristocracy. Especially this last point will be of value as the National Costume of Gustav III has not previously been approached from the perspective of identity. Furthermore, looking into the deeper social meaning of the National Costume in this way has the potential to reveal the central role of dress in society by exposing dress' deep ties to specific types of societies.

## 1.2 Previous research

Scientific research on Gustav III's national costume does not exist in abundance. The first and most extensive effort that exists in this regard was carried out by Eva Bergman (1938) in the form of a PhD dissertation. Bergman's dissertation is mainly historical, presenting a detailed analysis of an abundance of primary sources to reconstruct the historical context in which the National Costume finds itself. In her study Bergman assessed surviving exemplars of the National Costume as well as analyzing illustrations of the National Costume and finally researching contemporary literature and other written archival sources.

Bergman starts out looking into Gustav III as an individual, connecting recurring themes in his life to the conception of the National Costume. In this regard she points to Gustav's interest for clothing from an early age, his passion for theatre and his use of clothing for political purposes, empowered by his belief in the psychological power of dress (Bergman 1938, 11-13). Bergman also describes Gustav III's strong admiration for the historical rule of the French kings, especially Henry IV, as well as the continuous inspiration that the court ceremonial of Louis XIV, XV, and XVI formed for his own court (Bergman 1938, 13-15).

Continuing on, Bergman chronologically analyses events and developments leading up to the introduction of the National Costume in 1778 and a short while after its introduction. As such she starts out discussing an essay competition which was anonymously set up by the king in 1773. The competition asked for the submission of essays detailing the best pro and contra arguments for the idea of a national attire. In connection to this event, Bergman explores a letter correspondence between Gustav III and Carl Fredrik Scheffer, with whom Gustav III closely worked together to set up the essay competition. Through doing so Bergman uncovers some of Gustav III's goals as a monarch, such as his stride towards presenting the image of an enlightened monarch and his economically motivated concerns about luxury but also his worries and considerations on how to get the National Costume to be widely adopted in society (Bergman 1938, 22). Then Bergman discusses a plethora of other archival sources which she skilfully uses to reconstruct a broader context of the opinions towards the National Costume in Sweden and in wider Europe.

Bergman's work is quite valuable in that it is the first scientific investigation specifically geared towards the National Costume; at the same time, it is the most detailed one. Bergman's work provides us with a rich historical context around Gustav III's national costume, which aids in building an understanding of the National Costume in a historical context. That being

said, Bergman's work lacks a critical perspective. Her work is predominantly descriptive, centered around the perspective of Gustav III and she tends to accept many things as they are, even though a critical attitude would definitely be warranted. To give an example, she observes that the king contradicts his own ideology by having an outfit made in France in the cut of the National Costume (Bergman 1938, 29). There are many questions one could ask here, such as what this says about the genuineness of the king's arguments. Why did he choose not to support the Swedish textile industry, when this is what he held up as one of the main purposes of the National Costume? To me it begs the question of underlying motives on behalf of Gustav III, however Bergman does not explore such options.

Lena Rangström is the most recent academic who has written about the National Costume (1994; 1997; 2002a; 2002b). In collaboration with Stockholm's Royal Armoury, she has published several books about Swedish court dress, in which she devotes specific chapters to Gustav III's national costume. A lot of her writing about the National Costume seems to be based on Bergman's work, and she takes on the same historical approach. This leaves Rangström's work with the same dilemma as Bergman's: it presents a rich historical context but lacks critical considerations that go beyond establishing a historical narrative. The national costume is essentially diminished to a mere category in a larger effort of cataloguing court dress.

An additional recent study does not exactly discuss the National Costume, but it is still worth mentioning here. It concerns an article by Mikael Alm (2016). In his article he analyses the seventy-three responses to the before mentioned essay competition which was set up by Gustaf III and Carl Fredrik Scheffer. Alm uses the essays to explore prevailing notions of class hierarchy and its visibility through clothing in late eighteenth-century Sweden. While Alm does not discuss the National Costume itself, his article does make use of sources linked to the National Costume in a more critical approach. He takes on a sociological perspective, diving into the notion of class hierarchy in eighteenth century Sweden and what can be uncovered about its nature through the essays concerning the National Costume.

When it comes to previous research on the National Costume, we can say that it has been treated with much detail from a historical perspective. It is especially quite astonishing to see in Bergman's study how much archival material she has managed to bring to light and connect with one another in order to construct a rich historical context around the National Costume. That being said, other perspectives than the historical one are severely lacking. None of the previous studies have really questioned Gustav III's intentions with the National Costume, even

though they frequently encounter anecdotes which indicate underlying motives with especially sociological implications.

This thesis then contributes to the field of fashion studies by filling up this sociological gap in the study of the National Costume. In this thesis, this is done specifically by presenting the novel angle of the National Costume's role in court society. I propose the idea of the National Costume as an oppressive force to the Swedish court nobility and I explore its potential as an instrument for the royal position to create a greater distance of power between the monarchy and the nobility. Furthermore, I contribute to the field of fashion studies by further exploring the implications of dress in different types of societies, this thesis focussing on court society in particular.

### 1.3 Method and materials

In essence, this thesis aims to uncover how King Gustav III understood his role and the role of the nobility through the National Costume, as well as what the National Costume implied for the Swedish court people. In order to gain this understanding, I need to find a way to access the ideologies of these court people who existed about two and a half centuries before my own time. Luckily, artifacts of their world and their thoughts have survived for us to investigate through textual sources.

In social research, textual analysis as a method is widely used to investigate how other human beings make sense of the world (McKee 2003, 8). It can see texts as clues or traces of such sense-making practices (McKee 2003, 52). Textual analysis as a method knows a variety of approaches, fit for different goals, and it always requires a certain degree of creativity on behalf of the researcher in order to employ it with the intended material upon which it is applied (McKee 2003, 92). This can make textual analysis somewhat tricky, but it does not have to be if the approach is treated with care. To this extent, there are a few things to be considered regarding the adoption of textual analysis as a method in this thesis.

First, the approach that I am taking in this thesis is what McKee refers to as ‘poststructuralist textual analysis’, which is especially concerned with exploring sense-making practices. This means that it aims to understand how people understand the world around them in their particular cultural reality. Specifying this to the context of this thesis, we are then concerned with exploring how Swedish court people in late eighteenth-century Sweden made sense of the introduction of the idea of a national costume. Secondly, this approach departs from the assumption that there does not exist one universally ‘correct’ representation of the world, and consequently there does not exist a single one correct interpretation of a text either (McKee 2003, 52). The poststructuralist approach then does not aim to find a universal truth. Rather, “we’re interested in finding out likely interpretations” (McKee 2003, 52). Thirdly, an important distinction must be made between textual analysis in the context of traditional arts disciplines such as literature studies or film studies and in the context of social research. In the former, the text is understood as a self-contained work of art which ought to be studied in its completion in order to reach understanding. In the context of social research however, a poststructuralist approach regards the text as a lens through which we can understand human sense-making practices in general, which according to McKee does not require an assessment of every single element in the text (McKee 2003, 60-61). This makes sense, because the poststructuralist approach does not treat the text as a self-contained work, but as an extension



of a wider culture within which a specific issue is studied. In this vein, the researcher can without a problem select those parts of the text which appear to be relevant in answering the research question at hand (McKee 2003, 61).

Now that an understanding of poststructuralist textual analysis is established, we can dive into how the method is to be applied in this thesis. As stated before, this thesis aims to uncover how the National Costume was understood in Swedish court society during the regime of King Gustav III. It is especially concerned with two distinct contemporary perspectives, namely that of the monarchy and that of the aristocracy. This thesis will employ a poststructuralist approach to textual analysis of two important historical texts discussing the National Costume which represent both of these contemporary perspectives.

The first source is Gustav III's *Reflexioner, ångående en ny Nationel Klädedrägt* (Reflections concerning a new national dress)<sup>5</sup> (1806), which was a political essay of sorts establishing a detailed argument for the idea of a national costume. Before Gustav III wrote his *Reflexioner*, he already had a strong indication of what the attitudes at the Swedish court and in wider Swedish society were towards his idea, as well as some impressions from abroad and he wrote his *Reflexioner* with these attitudes in mind (Bergman 1938, 16-22; 27-28). Considering its political agenda, it is very instrumental to carefully consider the contemporary social and political context when analyzing Gustav III's *Reflexioner*. As he himself would have accounted for these factors when writing and editing his text.

The second source is the famous journal written by Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta of Holstein Gottorp, who was Duchess of Södermanland at the time the National Costume was introduced. '*Hedvig Elisabeth Charlottas Dagbok*' (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902) is widely known as an excellent work of reference into Gustavian court life and politics (Helsing 2015, 18). Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta wrote four pages about the National Costume in her journal in an entry for the month of January 1778, which will serve as an aristocratic counter perspective to the king's *Reflexioner*. It goes without saying that a journal and a political document are very different in their essence and might require different types of reading. Alaszweski (2006) writes about diaries that they "provide a rich source of data for researchers who wish to explore the development of an individual life, and the activities and relationships of particular groups in society" (33). Diaries are personal and one can expect to be presented with text that are highly subjective. In the tradition of historical research, diaries are often neglected or overlooked

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<sup>5</sup> My translation. Original title in Swedish: "*Reflexioner, angående en ny Nationel Klädedrägt, daterade den 16 Februari.*"

because of their subjective nature (Alaszewski 2006, 33). However, considering the more sociological direction of this thesis, this subjectivity becomes its very strength. After all, I am exactly looking for subjective opinions from the Swedish court aristocracy in order to discern what the National Costume represented for them. Considering the time constraints of this thesis, I have restricted myself to one diarist from the Swedish court aristocracy. This could be seen as a limitation, but as Alaszewski (2006) argues, such limitations “may be possible to minimize (...) by seeing an individual diarist (...) as typical or representative of a wider group” (33). Based on My Helsing’s (2015) evaluation of Duchess Charlotta’s journals as a “detailed analysis of court life and the politics of that time” (7), as well as Helsing’s (2015) analysis of the duchess’ close political alignment with the counter-royalist court aristocracy during Gustav III’s reign (9), I deem it appropriate to employ Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta as a representation of the Swedish court aristocracy’s self-interest. In this sense, Duchess Charlotta’s journals offer a unique way to access the attitudes and interests of Swedish court people in the context of the National Costume.

## 1.4 Theoretical Framework

### *1.4.1 The society of the princely court*

Late eighteenth-century Sweden around the time of the introduction of the National Costume was an absolute monarchy under the rule of King Gustav III. Under absolutism, governing power was highly centralized at the princely<sup>6</sup> court with little to no intervention by assemblies of society's estates (Elias 2006, 3). '*Die höfische Gesellschaft*' presents Norbert Elias' (2006) influential sociology of the French *ancien régime* society. A previous effort to construct a sociology of court society had been made by Max Weber (1978) in a study of patriarchal and patrimonial domination as part of an extensive anthology of the sociology of power (1006-1110). Elias builds upon Weber's work with a specific case study of the French court. Even though Elias studies the absolute monarchy in France, the analysis of its structure is applicable to other court societies around Europe at the time, whose absolute monarchs saw in France the ultimate example of this specific social formation and adopted from this example those elements which fit their specific needs (Elias 2000, 189). As we will see later, when assessing the society of the Swedish court through the French model, this is very true indeed for Sweden as well during the time of Gustav III.

Elias' sociological approach to studying the court society involved uncovering the structure of the court's social field in terms of power distributions and relationships of dependence (39). At the fundament of his investigation into court society was an understanding and acknowledgement that similarly to how the city and its urban people were the most influential and most representative of western society at his time – and which I would argue is still the case today in 2021 – the court and court people dominated society in most seventeenth and eighteenth-century European countries in terms of social significance and influence (Elias 2006, 40). As Elias (2006) points out: "the town merely 'aped' the court" (40).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century however, the sphere of influence shifted from the court to the city as Enlightenment thought grew more and more influential, inevitably announcing the demise of the absolute monarchy. This change, essentially marked by the revolutionary victories of the bourgeoisie over the princely courts, instilled a lingering disdain for the royal position in western society. It has obstructed our view of the historical significance of the court (Elias 2006, 41), but this significance is undeniable once we realize the following.

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<sup>6</sup> Princely in this context is used in the wider sense of 'princely rule', meaning to be ruled by a monarch of some sort, referring to various historical European sovereign titles such as king, emperor, sovereign prince, archduke, grand-duke, etc.

The Age of Absolutism' saw the formation of many similar absolutist courts throughout Europe, with similar manners and in communication with one another. What really developed here, was a cross European courtly aristocracy, with its centre in Paris and with a distinct culture. One could argue that the courts across Europe had more in common with one another than they had with the lower strata of society in their respective countries. They frequented many of the same social circles, they spoke the same language, they enjoyed similar tastes, manners, and lifestyles (Elias 2000, 189-190).

While it is true that these characteristics were intended to distinguish the courtly society from the non-privileged estates, the bourgeoisie adopted these very same characteristics, and after the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these characteristics came to be markers of distinction for the new capitalist hierarchy of society. These ideas of sophistication we can still observe today. So, it was really in the era of absolutism that our modern perceptions of manners, sophistication, civility, and politeness developed (Elias 2000, 190-191; Elias 2006, 44). A comprehensive account of court society, one of the last examples of a social figuration in the western world of non-bourgeois character, then surely allows us an increased understanding of the urban-capitalist society that we know today (Elias 2006, 44).

#### 1.4.1.1 Patrimonial domination in feudal society

Just as it is hard to understand modern urban society without assessing its precursor, court society, it is just as challenging to gain understanding of court society without considering the roots from which it sprung. This would be the feudal society of the Middle Ages. In the context of medieval France, the feudal 'court' referred in the first place to the house and extended households of the French kings and their dependents, including all the staff and other individuals that stood at their service (Elias 2006, 45). The feudal kingdom cannot exactly be understood in the bureaucratic framework of modern nation states. A bureaucratically governed state is characterized by a rationalized framework of legalized power. Weber (1978) notes that "the objective basis of bureaucratic power is its technical indispensability founded on specialized professional knowledge" (1007). What this means is that officials within a bureaucratic structure obtain their position of power based on merit. They are chosen because they possess a knowledge which is deemed as indispensable for the functioning of the bureaucratic structure. In turn, when they are in power bureaucratic officials are expected to adhere and commit to a framework of written rules based in its ideology on norms which are established via an abstract rationale, accumulated over time, and distinctively separate from any private interests (Weber 1978, 956-959).

Feudal society, however, is governed by a structure of patriarchal domination, in which power is derived from strictly personal loyalties. Weber notes that:

Under patriarchal domination, the legitimacy of the master's order is guaranteed by personal subjection, and only the fact and the limits of his power of control are derived from 'norms', yet these norms are not enacted but sanctified by tradition". (Weber 1978, 1007)

Thus, in contrast to bureaucracy, authoritative power in a patriarchal structure is not derived from a rationalized legality acquired through merit, but rather it is derived from personal relations that are held at an extremely high regard through traditional values.

Feudal society in Weber's (1978) understanding was an expansion upon the traditional patriarchal domination of the household (1007). In feudal society, we essentially see the king function as the patriarchal master of the kingdom, his extended personal household. In order to effectively run his kingdom/ household, the king appointed warriors as dependents to rule over different regions within his realm: his household was decentralized. In exchange, the appointed dependents swore their loyalty to the king and provided him with (mostly military) services. It is in this exchange of land ownership and rulership for loyalty where the nobility finds its origin. The nobility is in its origin a warrior class. In return for their loyalty, nobles were able to exert patriarchal dominance over their own regions of land. Here we also find the origin of the fundamental division of society into three fixed estates with distinct rights and privileges. The *clergy*, the *nobility*, and the *peasantry*. With the underlying structure of patriarchal domination, this figuration of power between the king, the privileged classes and the common people of the realm is solely based on values of a reciprocated loyalty and an exchange of services based on personal needs and motivations:

The master who decentralizes his household is largely dependent upon his subjects' compliance and always upon their capacity to deliver rent in kind. Hence, the master too "owes" something to the subject, not legally but according to custom and in his own self-interest: first of all external protection and help in case of need, then "humane" treatment and particularly a "customary" limitation of economic exploitation. (Weber 1978, 1010)

At this stage, when the king's patriarchal domination is extended to relations of dependents outside of his direct household, we speak of patrimonial domination (Weber 1978, 1010). And when the king organizes and exerts his political power over areas outside of the patrimonial structure, we speak of a patrimonial state (Weber 1978, 1013). The kingdoms of medieval society are most accurately marked by this patrimonial state structure. They were not yet nation

states, but there was already starting to form a more fixed demarcation of an area, united under one king and vying for power with other similar kingdoms with internal dependency structures.

In theory, the patrimonial structure grants absolute political power to the king since the extent of his power is not explicitly and/ or legally defined. But in practice the king's political power is limited by the mutual dependency between the king and the nobility as a result of the decentralized nature of the kingdom. Political power in medieval society was mainly military power, a monopoly on violence. In medieval societies, it was not unusual for high noble lords to have comparable military power to the king. This means that the royal position was in perpetual danger to be usurped by powerful nobles. (Weber 1978, 1010-1012).

The understanding of feudal society's patrimonial structure is an instrumental step towards building understanding of court society, as the latter evolved from the former. It allows us to understand that the governing structure in the kingdoms and empires of feudal and later court society Europe was in its essence domiciliary in nature. The patriarchal structure of the household was merely expanded to a bigger scale, all whilst keeping the patriarchal power relations intact. While authority over the feudal kingdom was at first organized as a decentralized power, granting local authority to the nobility over their corresponding appointed domains (Weber 1978, 1010), under Louis XIV this eventually culminated into an organisation of complete centralized state authority at the royal court, marking the onset of absolutism and the era of French rule which we now regard as the *ancien régime* (Elias 2006, 46) or in more general terms as court society.

#### 1.4.1.2 The Palace of Versailles as the stage of court society

The process of centralizing power in one place transformed the royal court of Versailles into the single most influential and representative sphere of its time, especially during the reign of Louis XIV. That is to say that whereas the medieval court shared much social and cultural influence with the power of the higher feudal lords, universities, and most importantly the Church, the royal court of the *ancien régime* became the sole social authority above all others (Elias 2000, 188-189). The system of the feudal estates was left unaltered, but the centralization of power at the royal court heavily impacted the relation of dependency between the monarchy and the estates. Most notably, it greatly decreased the political power of the nobility and increased the political power of the monarchy. That the power of the monarchy stood irrevocably over the power of the nobility was now undeniable. Whereas a noble title in feudal society corresponded with rule over territory in the kingdom, in the *ancien régime* it was only the king who ruled. Noble titles may still be connected to the possession of land in these

territories, but this land was now merely a source of income (Elias 2006, 71). So, under the *ancien régime*, the noble estate was essentially reduced from a class of political rulers to a social class with legal privileges.

It is with this knowledge that we can begin to come to an understanding of the structure of court society. Elias (2006) argues that “it was at the court of Louis XIV that the new court society was really formed” (88), and more specifically at the palace of Versailles. I am certain that most have some familiarity with the palace of Versailles, but a description of its scale is nevertheless helpful. Versailles is a complex of buildings that can house thousands of people. This entire complex was simultaneously the king’s house as the physical location of court society. Many of the members of court society had lodgings which were permanently allocated to them, and especially the highest nobility was almost perpetually present at court, even if they did not hold an office or other position in the governmental structure which would bind them to Versailles (Elias 2006, 88-89). Next-to-all court people also had a town house or *hôtel* in Paris (Elias 2006, 47), though many of the high nobility commuted daily from their *hôtels* to Versailles (Elias 2006, 88). At its peak, as many as 10.000 individuals had been present at Versailles (Elias 2006, 89).

The palace of Versailles was first and foremost understood to be a residence in its own right, only differentiated from the *hôtels* of the court people in its size, importance and character as a result of the rank of its master, the king (Lenglet Du Fresnoy 2017). Elias implicitly mentions this as well, stating that “The Palace of Versailles (...) cannot be understood in isolation. It forms the tip of a society articulated hierarchically in all its manifestations” (Elias 2006, 47). What this means is that the palace of Versailles, though it is in essence a residence, is the most extreme exemplar of a residence which we can find in French court society. It has all the elements that the *hôtels* of the court nobility would have, but enlarged to a gigantic scale, not only for practicality, but also to display the superior power and rank of the monarchy. Because of this reason, Elias points out that we should not understand the palace of Versailles in isolation. To understand how the king lives and how the nobility live with him, we should briefly assess how the court nobility themselves live in their *hôtels* in Paris (Elias 2006, 47-48).

The floor plan and the structural elements of an *hôtel* are very typical and quite consistent in its rudimentary form when different examples are compared. The physical structure of the ‘hôtel’ has a strong similarity to that of the traditional countryside house of the nobility in the



sense that all of its functional elements<sup>7</sup> are preserved, though adapted to fit the spatial constraints of the town (Elias 2006, 47-50). This fact, that the functional structure of the noble house remained the same, between different households as well as between locality, meant that the lifestyle of court people could (and would) remain largely the same, whether one was situated in the countryside or in the city, whether one was a host or a guest. This was largely made possible by a large and highly differentiated domestic staff, which also was a consistent between noble households, only differing in scale from the houses of lower lords to the house of the king himself (Elias 2006, 50-52). In this era, of course, it was a social reality that the servants were indefinitely different and beneath the noble occupants of the house according to the system of the estates: “What was always present (...) was the ineradicable distance, the deep-seated feeling that [the nobles] were concerned with a different race, with the ‘common people’” (Elias 2006, 53). This social distance, this hierarchy, is reflected in the very structure of the house, which positions one or more antechambers before each living or reception apartment where the staff of the house awaits the commands of their master:

This arrangement of rooms, providing for at least one antechamber to each of the masters’ rooms, is thus an expression of the co-existence of constant spatial proximity and constant social distance, of intimate contact in one stratum and the strictest aloofness in the other. (Elias 2006, 53)

To get a more visual idea of this arrangement of rooms I have included a floor plan of a conceptualized *hôtel* (Figure 5). Since the inscriptions are in French, I’ll briefly explain the lay out. We see that the central part of the building houses a *vestibule* or entrance hall in the middle. Left from the *vestibule* we encounter the one antechamber of this moderately sized *hôtel*. Just as described before, this antechamber grants entrance to the reception apartment which takes up the entire left wing of the building. So, while the

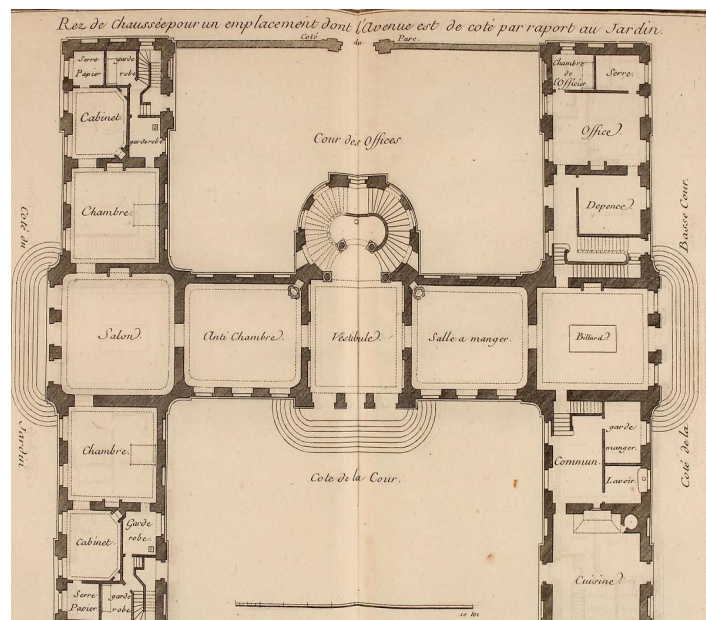


Figure 5 Ground-floor plan of a site which has the street on the opposite side of the garden. (De La Marquade, 1743)

<sup>7</sup> With functional elements I am referring to those elements which were considered necessary to run the noble household, such as stables, kitchens, storage rooms among others, but most importantly the servants quarters to house all the respective staff that carried out the practical tasks of the household.

staff and the master are in constant proximity through their mutual bond to the house, at the same time there is a perpetual social distance that is reinforced physically in the spatial structure of the house itself.

If we relate this back to the scale of the royal court of Versailles, we see this same structural hierarchy in a modified state. The great noble lords and ladies find themselves in a similar position at Versailles as the servants in their own households: they live like servants to the master of the household of Versailles, the king. Here, they are in a perpetual dichotomy between his proximity and his distance (Elias 2006, 53-54).

#### 1.4.1.3 The social structure of court society through etiquette and ceremony

We must remember that Versailles was not merely a home. The household of Versailles was simultaneously the seat of government of the kingdom of France with the king as its sole ruler. Here, the two seemingly distinct functions of lord of the house and ruler of the kingdom merge as one. Just as outside of the perimeters of Versailles all state actions had the character of a personal action of the king, at Versailles Louis XIV gave all domestic actions the character of state actions (Elias 2006, 47). This becomes hyper visible through the rigid etiquette and ceremony which became characteristic of the court of Versailles from the time of Louis XIV. One of the more famous examples of such etiquette was the *levée*, or the waking up of the king. I will give a synthesized description of this ceremony below.<sup>8</sup>

The ceremony of the *levée* started at a set time, when the king was woken up by his *premier valet de la chambre du roi*<sup>9</sup>. The doors to the king's bedroom were opened and entry was granted to those nobles who had the right to be present or even to assist the king while he got dressed. The pool of people that had the right to be present for the *levée* was made up of six groups which made separate consecutive *Entrées* throughout the ceremony of the *levée*:

- (1) The *Entrée familiale* which most importantly included the illegitimate sons and grandchildren of the king, as well as the legitimate princes and princesses *du sang*;
- (2) The *Grande entrée* which included the *grands officiers de la chambre et de la garderobe*<sup>10</sup> as well as the noblemen to whom the king wished to grant this honour;
- (3) The *Première entrée*, which despite its name was in fact the third entrance, included the king's readers and the intendants for entertainment, festivities, etc.;

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed description of the *levée* I would refer to Elias (2006, 91-92) or to Marion (1923, 223-224) for a French reader.

<sup>9</sup> 'The first valet of the king's bedroom' was a powerful court appointment, whose general role was that of the highest personal servant of the king. Practical responsibilities varied between courts and individual monarchs.

<sup>10</sup> The grand officials who oversaw the direction of the king's bedroom and his wardrobe.

- (4) The *Entrée de la chambre* included the lower *officiers de la chambre* as well as the *Grand Aumonier de France*<sup>11</sup>, ministers and secretaries of state, the state counsellors, the chefs of the king's guards, the marshals of France and other high ranking officials;
- (5) The fifth entrée included those noblemen and noblewomen who the first Gentleman of the Chambre deemed to be in sufficient favour to the king to be in his presence, and who thus were afforded the privilege to approach the king before others;
- (6) The sixth entrée is not an official entrée specific to the levée as the others were, but it was the most sought after one of all. Instead of entering through the main entrance of the bedroom, people who were granted this privilege were allowed to enter through a back door. This form of entry was not restricted to the levée, but those with this privilege were allowed to enter the king's royal *cabinets* at all times, except when the king was in council or when the king was working on a task with a minister.

The entrance of each group was highly regulated and specific members from each group had specific roles in the dressing of the king. While the levée was going on, the rest of the court who were not included in the ceremony gathered in the *Grande Galerie* which was situated directly behind the king's bedroom (Marion 1923, 223-224).

At first instinct, it would seem ridiculous to us that the practical act of getting dressed should involve so much protocol and regulation, or even that it should include the assistance and attendance of so many individuals. But what one should soon realize is that through this ceremony, the king transformed the simple act of getting dressed into a spectacle of hierarchy, in which he is the puppet master. Each act in the ceremony of the levée has a specific symbolic value of prestige or favour. The rank and the role that one is allocated in this ceremony, shows everyone present exactly what the individuals social rank is, expressed in terms of proximity to the king. The levée is a prime example of the general purpose of the etiquette and ceremony of the court: to make directly observable the differences and distinctions between ranks in everyday actions, or in Elias' words, to turn every-day actions into a "prestige-fetish" (Elias 2006, 94).

When such etiquette was first introduced by Louis XIV, he made sure to not let it escalate to the extent that the prestige-fetish overtook the primary functional elements of the practices which were governed by said etiquette. However, this tie unravelled itself over the years, especially during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI. Once the etiquette and the privileges that it dictated were established, it was able to be sustained by the growing competition between

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<sup>11</sup> A court official who was in charge of religious services in the royal chapel.

courtiers which it successfully provoked. With courtiers' growing anxiety to lose any afforded privileges, which were just as easily revokable as they were acquired on the king's whims, the symbolic function of the etiquette was allowed to constantly ingrain itself deeper and deeper into the social reality of the court with every single reproduction (Elias 2006, 94-95). To exemplify how the prestige-fetish of etiquette overtook the practicality it was intended to underline, Elias recounts a situation during the levée of Marie-Antoinette, where she was waiting to be dressed in her chemise. The dressing of the queen kept getting delayed because the person who had the right to dress the queen kept handing the chemise back to the chambermaid upon the entrance of a higher-ranking person. This happened three times in a row, all whilst the queen was left waiting completely in the nude (Elias 2006, 95).

The severity of the etiquette shows the psychological hold that socially constructed realities can have on figurations of people. The social meaning of etiquette was created just as much by the king's initiative as by the court's acceptance of its symbolic value, once it was created the court became enslaved by its very own creation. Elias notes how during the time of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, the etiquette had remained largely the same since Louis XIV. Everyone took part in the etiquette, mostly against their own will. But nobody dared to propose a reform of this mechanism (Elias 2006, 95). The etiquette and the scale of rank and prestige which it made visible at almost all times had become a necessity, because while the etiquette was certainly a burden to everyone at court (Elias 2006, 96), it also provided the court people with a sense of stability of their position (Elias 2006, 98). Any alteration of the system was fiercely contested, because the privileged feared that even the slightest alteration could bring down the whole system from which they acquired these privileges (Elias 2006, 95).

The constant anxious pursuit of rank and prestige was enough to keep the more privileged court people bound to court society to maintain their status, while it compelled the less privileged nobles to participate with the end goal of an increased rank in mind. Every single link in the chain of rank between an individual of a certain rank, and another of slightly inferior but almost similar rank posed a threat to the former. The performance of a particular service, a shift in the favour of the king or clever tactics could suddenly reverse the rank relation between two such individuals (Elias 2006, 97). A change in the pecking order of rank was not real if there was not a change in the routine of the etiquette, and the reverse thus implied the same. Then, courtiers that were looking to maintain their rank were vigilant for the slightest change of nuance in the etiquette, while those looking to improve their rank would stealthily attempt to manipulate it in their advantage (Elias 2006, 97).

What we can now realize is that the reality of court life for the nobility was far from comfortable, despite the otherworldly degree of luxury at Versailles. The reality of court society for the nobility was a perpetual state of tension, anxiety and hyper vigilance based around the competition for rank and favour. Through their mere presence at Versailles, the court nobility was not only perpetually made aware of their inferiority in rank to the king, but the etiquette of the court, and especially its rotation, was a constant reminder of the delicacy of their social position.

Then, the only way to be freed from the oppressing etiquette at court, was to leave court society all together, but this was unconceivable for most court people (Elias 2006, 96). Rank was the single most important factor in the social reality of the courtier, on which all his conceptions of rationality relied. These rationalities are different than those of bourgeois society, in which power is derived from the accumulation of wealth. This is easier to grasp for us today since we live in a similar capitalistic figuration of society, but to understand court society, we have to accept that rank and prestige took precedence over money.

The nobility was legally prohibited from engaging in commercial activities, doing so would result in a loss of nobility (Elias 2006, 76). Even less so did the nobility desire commercial activities which were not considered honourable in the slightest (Elias 2006, 80). After all, their elevated status as an estate was rooted in their history of a land-owning warrior class, while the common people were a commercial class. Their knightly ancestors fought physically for honour, prestige, and power. Naturally, the importance of these values was passed on to future generations. It *was* their social reality. Of course, those were times predating industrialization and the capitalist notions which grew common for the bourgeoisie during the time of court society. But for the nobility, the ethos of rank was still their social reality, as that is what they had been brought up with. One's purpose and one's self-value was still derived from the power acquired by prestige because this attitude predated the notion of commerce. So, even though the bourgeoisie developed an ethos of wealth, as trade and commerce developments introduced capitalist notions to them, wealth for the nobility did not mean anything if that wealth was not used to advance one's rank.

Already in feudal times, the chivalrous and clerical nobility had started developing a very specific symbolic system which corresponded with their elevated status as a social class over the common people. Luxury consumption in this regard was very important. As we can understand now, not because it signalled wealth, but because it was seen as a marker of respect and glory (Von Wachenfeldt 2013, 209) and it was an effective way to reflect symbolically the power that these privileged estates possessed. While these markers of status were already

important in feudal times, their importance reached unprecedented heights in court society. The endless competition for prestige and status at court, had from the beginning of feudal times had been fought out with violent physical conflict, although this became less common as ideas of civilization developed (Elias 2000, 180-182). But in the shift to absolutism, the nobility's scope of possibility to vie for glory and status became completely restricted to social life (Elias 2000, 182). If the noble lord still held his political power, he would more easily be able to assert his status over that of an inferior lord because of the greater extent of his political power. Without this right to rule, social prestige was the only way for a noble lord to express the rank correspondent to his title or to improve this rank (Elias 2006, 70-71).

To us it might seem frivolous, but to the court nobility such aspects made up the fabric of their whole social existence, upon which their happiness and life fulfilment depended (Elias 2006, 103-105). This ethos bound the court people to Versailles. Because of the importance of the king's favour in deciding one's rank in the aristocratic figuration, the only place where one could maintain or seek to improve rank was at Versailles. The *court* constituted the entire playing field of a life in *society* (108-109). Court people were psychologically forced to be at court, subjecting themselves to the anxious reality of prestige competition. The higher a rank one was able to secure, the more social power one enjoyed, and the smaller the opportunity for their social position to be influenced by others. And so almost any aspect of life at court, at least anything that constituted an interrelation between people, could become an opportunity to gain prestige (Elias 2006, 109). One's current rank, the title of one's family, the style of one's dress, one's intelligence, one's wit, one's posture, etc. And this is precisely why etiquette, how burdensome it may well have been, was so important to court people, for it is through the ceremony of etiquette where all the before mentioned aspects come together, and thus where the hierarchy of the court becomes most exactly visible.

Up until now I have focused on the role, or rather the consequences, of the etiquette for the nobility. Now, let us consider the role of etiquette for the king. For him too, etiquette is a marker of his social rank, the difference being of course that the king sits at the very top of the hierarchy. No one individual outranks him. It is this position which grants him his power to rule. This does however mean that the king is just as dependent on the aristocracy's inferiority to him, as they are dependent on his superiority over them. Legally, the king may stand outside of the three estates, but socially he is just as much part of the nobility as the rest. To rule as an absolute monarch, to singlehandedly yield all that power, the king's position needs to have distance so far away from his subjects that it is unimaginable that someone else could or should take it. It is through the ceremony of etiquette that the king achieves this distance (Elias 2006,

127-128). Etiquette was only able to function in this way because the nobility was already so preoccupied with honour and rank. If there was no nobility to live at his court and to symbolize the king's superior rank through hierarchy, then Louis XIV himself would not have any rank besides his one step up from the general population, who did not have the same precise chain linked hierarchy that the nobility had. The ceremony of etiquette thus not only gives the king power over the nobility, but it gives him his power to rule alone over his entire kingdom. Ceremony is the king's instrument for his absolute power (Elias 2006, 127).

For the king to maintain his superior rank, the structure of court society requires him to use the instrument of ceremony in a very specific way. Because of the king's rank, he does not have any pressure from above, unlike the nobility. However, he surely feels pressure of power from below him. This does render his task a bit easier, for all the king has to do is to ensure that the court people under him are too much in conflict with one another to ever conspire against him (129-130). This was achieved through the manipulation of his court in his own interest.

By transforming anything involving him and his court nobles into a possibility for the nobility to be shown favour or disfavour. One of his tactics then was to place high ranking nobility in favour. The high rank of their titles could see them as a potential threat to the throne, so by extending favour to them he made them feel like their rank at court was owed to him, his to be taken away at any time (Elias 2006, 130-131). In order to facilitate a better understanding of the role of etiquette for the monarch, I would like to call upon another example employed by Elias.

A certain Duc<sup>12</sup> de Saint-Simon, an officer in the French military, had notified King Louis XIV that he could no longer serve due to health reasons. Upon receiving the news, the king was reportedly not amused in the slightest, and is said to have proclaimed 'one more who is abandoning us' (Elias 2006, 98). When the Duc de Saint-Simon returned for the first time to attend the ceremonial *couchée*<sup>13</sup> of the king, he was surprised to be rewarded the honour of holding a special chandelier, which was a show of favour and distinction by the hand of the king. According to the Duc de Saint-Simon himself it was clear that it was an act of passive aggression. The king was agitated with him, but he did not want to show it at his first return at the ceremony. However, for the following three years, the king used every opportunity he knew how to show his disfavour towards the duke (Elias 2006, 98).

What this example shows us is how Louis XIV used the mechanism of etiquette and rank in his own interest. The king was already agitated with the duke when he returned to attend the

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<sup>12</sup> French noble title of duke

<sup>13</sup> The going-to-bed of the king



couchée, yet he did not immediately show his agitation. Instead, the king appears to have chosen some kind of strategy in which he chose to restrain his emotions at first and reward the duke with the privilege appropriate to his high rank before slowly stripping him of these privileges. Why he chose this exact sequence is unclear, perhaps to remind the duke that his rank depended on his grace. Either way it does show us that Louis XIV used his power in a calculated way. This opportunity was only afforded to him because of his superior ranking over anyone else. This position provided him with privileges that gave him the leeway to manipulate the etiquette as he saw fit, in order to decide the rank of the court aristocracy as he wished. Louis XIV saw the opportunity to use etiquette as an instrument to employ in the favour of the royal position, to make use of the struggle for rank among the court people direct it as a puppet master (Elias 2006, 99).

The king's particular employment of etiquette to dictate social rank, expressed through a nuanced and controlled allocation, then withdrawal, of favour translated directly to the court people's behaviour towards each other. We have already seen that the rank at court was initially dictated by the institutionalized rank of one's noble house, that is to say the official noble title of one's house. Additionally, among houses of similar rank there was an internal hierarchy initially dictated by ancientness. But intersecting with this official hierarchy, there existed a second stratum of hierarchy which was dictated by an individual's favour with the king and which ultimately grew more important than the institutionalized hierarchy. As the king showed his favour or disfavour, with a hyper controlled and nuanced cultivation of his social intercourse with others, the court people grew just as sensitive to recognizing these nuances and adapted their behaviour accordingly. It was dangerous for the sake of one's own rank to show any affection or rudeness to a person if it did not align with that person's position in the king's favour. So not only did the courtiers rely on the king's nuances, but also that of other courtiers to keep up with the fluctuations of rank at court society. So, while legally rank and precedence was more or less fixed, it was highly unstable in the social reality of court society (Elias 2006, 99). The slightest disfavoured nuance in a social interaction, when observed by other courtiers, could bring on a butterfly effect of at court that could see an individual sink in rank to complete social nothingness.

According to Louis XIV himself, a good cultivation of absolute power requires an awareness of everything that is going on in the king's immediate surroundings, and then especially an exact calculation of people's passions, weaknesses, desires and secrets (Elias 2006, 139). Louis XIV achieved this by literally having guards spy on his court people. By knowing what the court people were up to, he could use this information to set them against

each other, but maybe even more importantly to not be blindsided by a conspiracy. This is one of the reasons why Louis XIV centralized his entire administration in one place in the first place, so he could have this type of vigilance over his court people.

What is curious to realize here, is that there is nothing particular about Louis XIV as a person that allowed him to use this strategy. It does not require a specific talent to rule or other such qualities. The possibility to use ceremony in this way is thus already inherent to the royal position, all Louis XIV had to do was discover that he could take advantage of it in his favour (Elias 2006, 137).

#### 1.4.1.4 Manifestations of the aristocratic ethos

The medieval distinguished society of the noble class developed further and further into the court society idea of ‘good society’, as a result of the extreme vigilance of rank and appearance in court society:

A shared *savoir-vivre* and wit, a delicacy of manners and a highly developed taste. Through such immediately perceptible characteristics the members of the *monde* stood out from the mass of other people. Through these traits was developed the specific consciousness of prestige and public display in the *monde* that has (...) been shown to be the main factor shaping the design of [noble] houses. (Elias 2006, 69)

Participating in court society required a knowledge and cultivation of this highly developed symbolic system which involved every perceivable aspect of social life, from the decoration of rooms to fashion and even down to managing the body in terms of gestures and manners of speech (Elias 2006, 69-70). The knowledge of this symbol system could only be learned by frequenting good society in the first place, thus a matter of habitus in Bourdieu’s (2010) terms (166)

It were the court people themselves who produced this system which in the end enslaved them. Once the conception of good society had materialized, there was no escape from it without losing social position. Then, what would appear to us as luxury was to court people nothing but a necessity for maintaining one’s social position in the good society of the court. Berry (1994) described this characteristic of luxury in general terms, stating that “The crux of the matter is the ‘relativity; of luxury; one person’s luxury can be another person’s necessity” (33).

The high concern with reputation sets incredibly high stakes upon each and every social interaction for court people, giving social life a distinct gravity which in working class terms can only be compared with professional life (Elias 2006, 57). As Elias (2006) points out, “the

professional and business visits of bourgeois classes (...) derive their character from their connections with money-earning, career, the maintenance or enhancement of one's career and social position" (570). The seriousness or weight that comes with such business visits is distinctively absent in private bourgeois social life (Elias 2006, 57). In other words, there is a clear distinction between the professional sphere and the private sphere, which is mirrored in the spatial distinction between the private living space and the professional office. But the nobility was legally prohibited from engaging in commercial activities, doing so would result in a loss of nobility (Elias 2006, 76). Even less so did the nobility desire commercial activities which were not considered honourable in the slightest (Elias 2006, 80). After all, this was one of the most important distinguishing factors between the noble estate and the common people. The result of this distinction was a differentiated social reward for each group:

The reward of tax farmers is wealth, and wealth rewards itself. Fame and honour are the rewards of that nobility which knows, sees and feels nothing other than fame and honour. Respect and esteem are the reward of the high judicial and administrative officials. (Montesquieu 1768, 53)<sup>14</sup>

Court people, and thus court society knows no distinction between the private and the professional like the bourgeoisie does, because court people do not engage in commercial activity. For the aristocrat social life and professional life overlap, and in some senses social life *is* a professional life for the court aristocracy:

[The absence of occupation] gives social life at court and within court society a characteristic double face. On one hand it has the function of our own private life, to provide relaxation, amusement, conversation. At the same time it has the function of our working life, to be the direct instrument of one's career, the medium of one's rise or fall, the fulfilment of social demands and pressures which are experienced as duties. (Elias 2006, 58)

This severity of social life in court society is hard to imagine yet it is instrumental to understanding court society. Without acknowledging this aspect, it becomes easy to dismiss the scale and the opulence of the *hôtel* as decadence or conspicuous display of wealth. But once we recognize that which has been discussed so far, we can understand that the size and grandeur of a *hôtel* are not about displaying wealth but about displaying rank and prestige.

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<sup>14</sup> Translation taken from Elias (2006, 76). Original: "Le lot de ceux qui lèvent les tributs est les richesses; & les récompenses de ces richesses, font les richesses mêmes. La gloire & l'honneur font pour cette noblesse qui ne connoît, qui ne voit, qui ne fent de vrai bien que l'honneur & la gloire. Le respect & la considération font pour ces ministres & ces magistrats."

Simmel (1997) discussed the idea of how in class societies, morality and status can be linked to one another. In his understanding, honour is a product of class division functioning as a glue for a given social circle while simultaneously marking a clear line of divide between those inside and outside of said circle. In this sense, the honour of an individual represents at the same time the honour of their social circle or class (Simmel 1997, 189). Similarly, Elias describes a moral obligation among the aristocracy to appropriately reflect one's rank in one's lifestyle. This was as much a duty to oneself as one towards the hierarchy of the estates (Elias 2006, 58-59).

This hierarchy was so ingrained in society that it finds explicit expression in language use. Elias' refers to Diderot's *Encyclopédie* which was published during the *ancien régime* to illustrate this fact. For example, it is written that: "Dwellings take different names according to the different estates of those occupying them. We speak of *la maison (particulière)* of a bourgeois, *l'hôtel* of a noble, *le palais* of a prince or a king" (Elias 2006, 59). Other examples further illustrate how thorough the thinking in terms of social hierarchy was, such as a passage on specifically the *maisons particulières* built by the upper bourgeoisie, which "should have a character derived neither from the beauty of the *hôtels* nor from the simplicity of ordinary houses. (...) The 'orders of architecture'<sup>15</sup> should never play any part in their decoration, despite the opulence of those who have them built" (Elias 2006, 62). And for the *hôtels* of noble lords, "the character of their decoration requires a beauty fitting the birth and rank of the persons who have them built; nevertheless they should never exhibit the magnificence reserved for the palaces of kings" (Elias 2006, 65). The gravity attached to social prestige and hierarchy was thus so severe that court society developed a system where through taking one glance at a house, one could not only accurately determine what estate the family belonged to, be it nobility or bourgeoisie, but also approximately what rank that family held within the particular estate or even what function the lord of the house held in society (Elias 2006, 66). The description on the character of houses also shows how relatively irrelevant wealth was to a certain degree, considering that it is explicitly stated how a bourgeois house should not make use of certain decorative elements, even if the owner would have the means to finance their construction. In complete contrast, many a great noble family was sent into financial ruin as a consequence of their *hôtel* (Elias 2006, 73). This indicates that we are concerned with a different kind of ethos

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<sup>15</sup> Elias mentions in a footnote that: "The *ancien régime* recognized five such *ordres d'architecture*: the Ionic, the Doric, the Corinthian, a variant of the Corinthian called *l'ordre composite*, and the Tuscan. The expressive content of these styles in regard to different social classes was defined very exactly" (Elias 2006, 62).

in court society, one which produces an attitude that does not rationalize finances, but one that rationalizes *rank*, *prestige* and *hierarchy* above anything else (Elias 2006, 73).

This attitude constitutes a kind of subversion of the rationale of economy which we find in bourgeois society. In court society, it is absolutely justifiable to make purchases one cannot afford by taking on debt, as long as it serves the social prestige of the family (Elias 2006, 73). From the more predominant capitalist bourgeois perspective we know today, we see such a decision as faulty, signaling perhaps a lack of self-control or other personal flaws. But to understand court society, we must reject such judgements. We must understand that instead, such decisions are rational in court society, because it is a society with a different system of norms and values. This attitude both originates from the court society and sustains it. When we read about nobles going into financial ruin because of their houses or their lifestyle, to keep up with displaying their rank, we are inclined to think ‘why would someone let their lifestyle crush them financially?’ or ‘why wouldn’t they just work if they need more money to finance their lifestyle?’. But just as it is unimaginable for most of us to let prestige send us into financial despair, it was as unimaginable for the aristocrat to *not* put prestige before everything else. Social norms and values cannot be escaped without renouncing at the same time one’s belonging to the social group, to everything that an individual has been brought up with and has been conditioned to know and believe (Elias 2006, 73).

The proper display of rank is evidently not only a matter of properly representing oneself and one’s family legacy, but it is an instrument that reinforces the hierarchy of the estates. One could ask why the standard of proper display was able to reach such severe conditions that it ruined families in the first place?

#### 1.4.2 The Dress, the body, and the self

In ‘The Fashioned Body’, Entwistle (2015) recounts how for centuries, the body has been under strict regulation of social codes, conventions, and expectations of dress. Dress codes provide a framework through which the body is understood in a specific cultural or social context. They appear along various scales of society, from greater groups defined by national borders to smaller groupings within them. Each such a grouping has specific social and cultural norms from which these codes originate, governing how the body should appear. The codes of dress and the norms from which they stem constantly reinforce one another to the point where dress has become a layer of protection around a society’s norms and social order.

The moment the body transgresses a dominant code of appearance, it in essence defies the social order resulting in moral judgement (Entwistle 2015, 6-9). This is a tendency that we have witnessed throughout history and up until today, a point extensively explored by Aileen Ribeiro in *Dress and morality* (2003). In this sense, dress can be seen as an instrument which governs the body in a social context. This means that dress finds itself perpetually situated at the intersection between the private and the public. At first glance, dress is a highly personal practice through which we adorn our body. But at the same time, dress is a public display of it, inherently situating the body in a social context to be perceived and interpreted by others (7).

To Entwistle (2015), this warrants engagement with the concept of dress as an extension of the body and the self (9-10). In this sense, dress and the body can never be totally separated from one another. The body is always perceived in terms of social norms that are represented in and reinforced by our dress practices (Entwistle 2015, 8). What this implies for a sociological study of dress, is that we do not regard dress as an object, but rather as a social practice on the body or, in Entwistle's expression, as an "embodied activity" (Entwistle 2015, 10).

Entwistle's theoretical work builds upon the ideas of various theorists but most notably Foucault, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. Through their previous work, Entwistle establishes an understanding of the *body* as a socially governed entity and *dress* as a product of mediation between social power structures and individual agency:

The idea of fashion/dress as situated bodily practice acknowledges a very basic sociological tension between structure and agency: structures such as the fashion system impose parameters around dress; however, within these constraints, individuals can be creative in their interpretations of fashion and their practices of dress. (Entwistle 2015, 40)

We can draw a parallel to court society here. Court society as well is characterized by a sociological tension between structure and agency. The sociological structure of the court enforces very strict parameters on the court nobles. In the most extreme case such as in France, it left little no individual agency. Due to the strict etiquette, there was very small scope for individuals to fill in their social practices, placing massive constraint on the individuals at court. The king had a scope of agency that was larger, but him too was constrained by the structure of etiquette as we have seen. Because of this parallel, Entwistle's theoretical approach to the body as a socially governed entity could therefore form an interesting additional lens through which to approach court society and especially court dress.

### 1.4.3 Imitation and distinction

Lastly, I want to briefly present Simmel's trickle-down theory, as a similar perspective comes back in Gustav III's *Reflexioner*, as well as Elias' structure of Court Society. According to Simmel, there exists at the foundation of the human psyche an observable duality: the mind strives to grasp the general just as much as it seeks to pinpoint the particular; the former provides a stable picture within which the latter allows for movement and action (Simmel 1997, 187). This duality outs itself in a multitude of nuances and in various contexts (Simmel 1997, 187-188), but keeping to the social context with which this thesis is concerned, said duality comes to expression through a tendency for imitation on one side, and differentiation on the other (Simmel 1997, 188).

"Imitation", as Simmel (1997) puts it, "could be characterized as a psychological inheritance, as the transition of group life into individual life" (188). Socially, imitation provides comfort to the individual, as it relieves them from the burden of choice and its attached anxieties by becoming part of an established group or context. It allows the individual the affirmation of knowing that they do not stand alone in the actions which they take (Simmel 1997, 188). At the same time, as the imitative action transforms the individual into yet another outing of the collective, imitation adds to the firmness of the collective's foundation, providing even greater affirmation to the next individual that seeks similar comfort. This means that social phenomena are gradually anchored in society through a history of imitation over time.

Now, as soon as the individual decides to look to the future rather than to history and to imagine that which has not been before, imitation becomes its direct antithesis. On this opposing axis is where we find differentiation. Differentiation is thus marked by a movement towards the future rather than looking at that which was in the past. It is reflected in those who seek for something new within the permanent, those who choose to present an individual course rather than to adopt the collective one: differentiation channels a desire for change (Simmel 1997, 188). According to Simmel, the existence of this duality reveals itself in all aspects of social life:

Precisely because the longing to abide by that which is given, to act and be like others, is the irreconcilable enemy of those striving to advance to the new and individual forms of life, social life appears to be the battleground upon which every inch is stubbornly contested by both sides (Simmel 1997, 188)

In Simmel's conception, the duality of imitation and differentiation is at the core of the fashion phenomenon and is present in its every form, always as a specific figuration of both of



these forces and never exclusive to one of them. Fashion on one hand imitates a given pattern to a certain degree. This fact satisfies the need for social adaptation, to find comfort in a collective. On the other hand, through changes in its form, fashion satisfies the need for distinction. To Simmel, fashion is always an issue of class division. In this sense, the dominating class drives changes in fashion to create distinction from the lower classes, which in their turn aim to simulate the dominating class. As soon as the lower classes manage to appropriate the fashion of the dominating class, the latter abandons that particular form and moves on to a new fashion in order to keep the distinction intact (Simmel 1997, 189). This concept is known within fashion studies as the ‘trickle down theory’ and it’s important to note that it is not an entirely unproblematic concept (Rocamora 2016, 69; 75).

One of the more important critiques I would like to identify is that it has become quite obvious that all fashion is not created at the higher stratum, but rather a lot of fashion is created at the periphery of society. I would say that this has more to do with the outdated notion of the class society than with a more fundamental problem in the theory itself. Several academics agree that in societies marked by a more or less strict class distinction such as the early modern period, fashion was in fact popularized by the dominating class and imitated by the lower classes (Vinken 2005, 63; Veblen 2007, 59; Geczy & Karaminas 2019, 19-21). What has happened though in recent years, is that this relationship reversed. With this consideration, the notion of the ‘trickle down’ theory is very much relevant for a discussion of court society, overlapping with similar tendencies described by Elias in his study of court society. There, the perpetual struggle between the court nobility is marked by the same tension described by Simmel. The higher-ranking nobles, for the sake of maintaining their privileged position, aim to distinct themselves from the lower ranking nobles, while the latter group aims to imitate the former for the sake of improving their rank (Elias 2006, 95-97).

## 1.5 Historical Background

### 1.5.1 The Age of Liberty and the debate on luxury

A key aspect of context to consider around the rule of Gustav III is the impact of the The Age of Liberty (Frihetstiden). The Age of Liberty was a remarkable period in Swedish history between 1718 and 1772 where the power of rule over Sweden was not with the monarchy, but at the Riksdag. The Riksdag was a national assembly which represented the four societal estates of Sweden: the nobles, the priests, the burghers, and the peasants. It was thus a period of more democratic government in comparison to the preceding period of absolute monarchy. It should be considered however that during the Age of Liberty, the estates mostly fought for their own interest and the Riksdag was dominated by the nobility. Wolff calls it an Aristocratic republic (Wolff 2007, 1).

When king Adolf Fredrik died in 1771, tension grew between the new King Gustav III and the ruling nobility as Gustav III aimed to reinstate absolutism and transfer governing power from the Riksdag back to the monarch, which he managed to do in 1772. Rudolf Mauritz Baron Klinckowström (1878) describes this struggle while highlighting the political role of his great grandfather Axel von Fersen the Elder, who “always fought, insisting on the fundamental laws, for the cause of the citizen’s liberty, against attacks of Royal power, who have a tendency for despotism” (Fersen 1878, 9). As a direct descendent of a very prominent Riksdag nobleman, Klinckowström’s words echo the struggle for power between the nobility and the monarchy from the nobility’s perspective.

While French luxury commodities were highly coveted among the Swedish upper classes, its consumption attracted much criticism throughout the eighteenth century. Luxury of course had been a target of moral and religious judgement since antiquity (Von Wachenfeldt 2013, 209; 214), and such arguments had dominated Swedish discourse around luxury as well, especially from the early Middle Ages onwards. But, the eighteenth century saw a major shift throughout several areas of Europe which brought more economically motivated judgements, both positive and negative (Berg and Eger 2002, 9), most notably in France and England, but later flowing over to Sweden as well (Runefelt 2004, 203). This development happened in symbiosis with the domination of the economic ideology of mercantilism during the Age of Liberty, which in Sweden favoured a highly protected domestic economy (Magnusson 1987, 415; 420; 424).

In line with these developments, there dominated a view in Sweden during the eighteenth century that not all luxury was necessarily hurtful, but that it was foreign luxury and especially

French luxury which posed a substantial threat to the Swedish economy (Runefelt 2004, 207-208). This because Sweden, unlike France, did not necessarily have the natural resources or the highly developed craftsmanship to compete with the merchants of foreign wares. Then, allowing foreign luxury goods to be sold in the country was creating a situation with unfavourable competition for the domestic Swedish market (Gustav III 1806, 239), when the desired economic ideal of the time was to create a strong, self-sufficient national economy (Runefelt 2004, 206).

While such discourse around luxury was going on, there was at the same time much emphasis put on the relativity of luxury. Eventhough the nobility's luxury consumption was at times criticised in satires and depicted in caricatures, Ilmakunnas notes that aristocratic luxury was not the main issue perse in luxury debate. An issue was identified in cases where there was an excess of luxury relative to one's social standing (Ilmakunnas 2015, 117). This because the medieval way of dividing society into fixed estates was still being upheld, and this difference in class had to be marked through dress (Meyerson 1947, 625). Excessive luxury disrupted social order and it caused people to consume above their means, which "*drove honest, hard-working Swedes to poverty*" (Ilmakunnas 2015, 117). Demands from prominent Swedish politicians urged the nobility to consider their role as an example for Swedish society and their consumption. While the aristocracy was on one hand expected to consume in accordance with their rank and status, excessive luxury was considered inappropriate and not noble (Ilmakunnas 2015, 120).

While socially speaking there was thus room for the aristocracy to morally consume luxury to an extent, Swedish aristocrats often found themselves torn between their desire for foreign luxury and a duty to their country in terms of the economic benefit of Sweden. On the one hand, state legislature had throughout the eighteenth century taken a more hostile position towards imports of foreign luxury goods in an effort to promote and expand the Swedish industries and with-it Sweden's national economy. Aristocrats were also well aware that excessive luxury drew criticism. At the same time, the importance of distinction in a court society such as in Sweden under the rule of Gustav III, required of the Swedish aristocrats an experience of luxury which was ultimately sought after in French goods (Ilmakunnas 2015, 116). Ilmakunnas notes that:

For the Swedish aristocracy, French goods represented both positive and negative sides of ever-drifting connotations of the concept of luxury, since the aristocrats were well aware of the requirements of their rank, of the economic welfare of their country and of

contemporary debates on luxury. Luxury was necessary for an aristocratic lifestyle, but opulence and excess provoked criticism (Ilmakunnas 2015, 116).

This dilemma put pressure on the nobility because their consumption of foreign luxury could now be read as a political choice against the interest of Sweden. This was especially true when Gustav III introduced the National Costume, which saw the monarchy take a clear stance in the luxury debate that agreed with the contemporary discourse against luxury and condemned the aristocratic habits of foreign consumption. Now, the aristocracy's choice to consume foreign luxury could even be read as a stance against the monarchy.

### 1.5.2 The Swedish-French connection during the eighteenth century

To further understand why French luxury had such a hold on Swedish society, we must consider the strong cultural influence of France in not only Sweden but the entirety of Europe. European aristocrats in the early modern period were constituent to a social context and history that transgressed the borders of the nations in which they resided. The aristocratic lifestyle was as internationally oriented as could be at time. All royal courts in Europe had aristocrats stationed abroad as representatives of their country, luxury products were traded internationally, and aristocrats held correspondences and other social relations with peers from all over the continent (Wolff 2010, 374).

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Swedish aristocratic presence in France was strong. Affluent Swedish Nobles would at a young age travel through Europe for educational reasons, a phenomenon which was known as the grand tour (Wolff 2010, 374). The grand tour was a part of reaching adulthood and it was often linked to educational considerations, for example the acquisition of an artisan skill such as architecture, for military education or for the development of diplomatic skills. As a result of the strong political alliance between France and Sweden during the eighteenth century, Swedish military service in the French army was particularly prevalent, with more than a thousand Swedes having served in the French army from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the eighteenth century (Wolff 2010, 374-375). To further understand the degree to which Swedish nobles were at times integrated in Parisian high society, an example would be Ulrika Lovisa, Countess Tessin, who in the eyes of Queen Marie Leszczyńska of France and her court ladies “passed as a française thanks to the grand distinction of her manners, her politeness, her spirit and the ease with which she was able to express herself in the French language” (Tessin 1983, 20).

Considering the movement between Sweden and France and the strong diplomatic ties between both nations, we can say that there existed a strong relation between Sweden and

France during the eighteenth century, both politically and culturally (Wolff 2010, 373). With France being the more dominant cultural and political force, the cultural exchange that coincided with this relation mainly involved Sweden, and more specifically the Swedish élite, assimilating French culture rather than the reverse (Ilmakunnas 2015, 115; Wolff 2010, 373). Foreign courts looking to France as an example was not necessarily an uncommon phenomenon among the European courts of the early modern period. France developed the most influential and most centralized courtly society of all, and from Paris, codes of conduct, manners, taste, and language spread throughout Europe as foreign courts aimed to attain to similar ideals of power and distinction (Elias 2000, 189).

The degree to which French culture was adopted in Swedish court society was perhaps greater than in other contemporary examples such as the English and Spanish courts, which in comparison to Sweden retained a more distinctly national court culture. In Sweden, French had from the 1730s onwards become the main language of distinction, whereas this distinction was previously expressed through the German language (Wolff 2010, 373) and the Swedish aristocrat tended to model their lifestyle to the French example (Ilmakunnas 2015, 115). Gustav III even adopted the ceremonial etiquette of Louis XIV at the court of Stockholm (Rangström 1997, 166). *Francophone* would then be an appropriate adjective to attach to the Swedish aristocracy during the eighteenth century.

It is well documented that the Swedish nobility during the eighteenth century shared a deep appreciation for French ideals of luxury and lifestyle, be it in architecture, interior, fashion or luxury commodities. In a study on Swedish aristocratic city architecture between 1740 and 1795, Johanna Ilmakunnas observes that Stockholm's aristocratic town houses were highly influenced by the previously discussed *hôtels particuliers* of the French aristocracy. In Stockholm, not only were choices of architectural style and interior design based on the French baroque and rococo ideals, but also the floorplan and simultaneously the function of the town house as a political and social actor were adopted from the French example, though adjusted to a Swedish context and to the commissioner's personal wants and needs (Ilmakunnas 2014, 9-10). The Stockholm town house, like the Parisian *hôtel* was not only a reflection of the aristocrat's social position in Swedish society, but in a way one could say that it also was a manifestation of the owner's knowledge of the French way of life and their social network and resources in France. It was through their travels to France and above all their social relations with important figures in France that Swedish aristocrats were able to acquire French ideals of architecture, interior and ultimately *court society*. Here we can uncover a complex relationship between the Swedish aristocracy and French luxury.

### 1.5.3 The Swedish aristocracy's complex relation to Parisian luxury

France was and still is associated with a culture of refinement and craftsmanship. However, consuming French goods for the Swedish aristocracy was not merely a matter of obtaining quality. French luxury goods had actually become an important instrument of distinction in Swedish court life, and thus a necessity for the aristocrat to keep up with the struggle for status in court society. Ilmakunnas implies that this sentiment is augmented by the fact that Swedish aristocrats spent most of their time residing in Stockholm from autumn until spring, rather than in the countryside which was traditionally where the European aristocracy spent most of their time (Ilmakunnas 2014, 8; Imakunnas 2015, 117). This meant that shopping opportunities in Stockholm were readily available to them. Perhaps too readily available to satisfy the aristocratic need for distinction, which was then sought after in French luxury instead.

Considering the dilemma between the aristocrats' personal interests for distinction and the nation's economic and moral discourse on luxury, one can imagine how for the Swedish aristocracy, the consumption of French luxury goods could be accompanied by a lingering anxiety of overstepping one's margin of sensibility, of consuming above one's social standing. This idea is further explored in Ilmakunnas' case study on the luxury shopping experience of Swedish aristocrats in Paris (2015). Ilmakunnas explains that "Eighteenth-century [aristocratic] consumers were actors who actively made choices and decisions and took delight in their consumer experience" (Ilmakunnas 2015, 118). Shopping for luxury goods in Paris was a source of pleasure for the Swedish aristocrat, while at the same time being increasingly necessary for distinction in Swedish high society. There was an added social layer to the shopping experience in Paris, as Swedish aristocrats relied on the tastes and advice of their aristocratic social contacts in Paris high society and at the French court (Ilmakunnas 2015, 118). With the possibility for luxury shopping was endless in Paris, and unmatched by any other major European city, Ilmakunnas manages to dissect and illustrate how Swedish nobles restricted their shopping according to economic concerns and personal attitudes towards luxury.

In an analysis of Count Carl Gustaf Tessin's letter correspondences for example, Ilmakunnas found that while he held office as the Swedish ambassador in Paris between 1739-1742, he described his many art and luxury acquisitions as acts of lunacy and expressing a sense of shame and loss of control when recounting his purchases to his friend, the architect Baron Carl Hårleman. This reading is sustained provided the context that Count Tessin faced financial problems as a result of his purchases (Ilmakunnas 2015, 118). In another example, Baron Carl Fredrik Scheffer, who accompanied the Countess Brita De la Gardie's thirteen-year-old sister

Hedvig De la Gardie during her first time shopping on her own accord in Paris, comments on the volume of Hedvig De la Gardie's purchases, which he deemed extravagant and improper (Ilmakunnas 2015, 119).

From such examples one can gather that there was a process of (self-)monitoring involved in luxury shopping, as to not overstep the boundary between appropriateness and excess. While in these examples the individuals did not manage to shop within the margins of what was deemed appropriate for them, they do show an awareness of the issue with an air of concern rather than indifference.

As mentioned before, there was an understanding that the aristocracy had the duty to act as a moral example for the rest of society. And while it was also expected and needed for the aristocracy to consume luxury, this had to be done in accordance with one's ranking and status, avoiding excess which was deemed as neither noble nor elegant (Ilmakunnas 2015, 119-120). What was deemed luxury and what was deemed as excess was all relative, even among noble that frequented the same social circles. (Ilmakunnas 2015, 120). The appropriateness of luxury was totally relative to the family's influence, the individual's rank and the financial means available.

The social landscape of shopping was just as important as the shopping itself. Swedish aristocrats socialised in Paris high society and at the court of Versailles, where they would take advice on taste from French aristocrats (Ilmakunnas 2015, 118). They also used their contacts within France's high aristocracy as social capital required to gain access to exclusive suppliers and merchants in Paris, as illustrated by a close examination of Baroness Charlotta Fredrika Sparre's correspondences regarding distance purchases commissioned in Paris (Ilmakunnas 2015, 122). In these letters, it becomes clear that Charlotta Sparre had a deep knowledge of the inner workings of shopping in Paris in terms of manners and technicalities in placing orders. She also frequently used or mentioned her personal contacts in Paris in order to ensure that her commissions met the level of taste that she required or to gain access to exclusive merchants, who only accepted the highest aristocracy as their clientele. This social context of the shopping experience in Paris constitutes an additional layer of distinction, adding symbolic value to purchases beyond the French origins of the goods themselves.

The purpose of this section was to show exactly how much French culture and French luxury consumption played a part in the lives of the Swedish aristocracy. Ilmakunnas' case study gives much insight in the practices, and values of the Paris shopping experience for Swedish nobles. It also shows how integrated Swedish nobles were in Parisian society and the important role that the Paris market and Parisian society played for a Swedish Aristocrat. In the

introduction I already alluded to the fact that the national costume could potentially invoke an aversion on behalf of the nobility. This historical background has made clear some of the broader context of that notion as well as its severity.

### 1.6 Outline of the thesis

As stated before, this thesis aims to explore how the National Costume was understood and what it represented to the monarchy and the aristocracy in Swedish court society under King Gustav III. It does so by diving into two distinct main questions: (1) *What was King Gustav III's understanding of the National Costume and its role in Swedish court society*; (2) *How can we understand the social implications of the National Costume for the aristocracy in late eighteenth-century Sweden?* Throughout the upcoming analysis chapter, both of these questions will come together in symbiosis.

The analysis chapter is introduced with a short background to King Gustav III's *Reflexioner*. The purpose of this section is to give important context which I deem to be valuable in interpreting the king's writing. Similarly, a short background to Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journal will be presented with the same goal in mind.

Then, the chapter will dive into the actual analysis of both sources. The analysis will depart from Gustav III's (1806) '*reflections on a new national dress*', initially focussing on the first research question stated above. Here, we get familiar with Gustav III's arguments, providing us with an opportunity to get a glimpse of King Gustav III's principles in his decision to realize a new national attire. Then, as we dive deeper into the analysis, the writings of Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta on the National Costume will come in. Her journal, as stated before, comes in as a counter perspective to that of King Gustav III. This means that for the second part of the analysis, both Gustav III's and Duchess Charlotta's perspectives will be brought together in symbiosis, presenting a dual of sorts between the monarchic and the aristocratic perspective.

The chapter will conclude with an interpretation of the meaning of the National Costume in Swedish court society. Through this way of working with my sources, both of the main research questions will slowly but surely be explored and answered.

Finally, the finale chapter will wrap up this thesis and present a final conclusion and discussion of my findings.



## 2 Analysis

### 2.1 Background to King Gustav III's *Reflexioner*

It is essential to briefly assess the historical context around Gustav III's rule and the National Costume before we advance with the analysis of his *Reflexioner, angående en ny National Klädedrägt*. By establishing this context, we are enriched with ammunition towards a more educated interpretation of the text.

Gustav III showed a strong interest in clothing from his early childhood. A document written by the crown prince when he was only eleven years old already indicated his liking for the specific colour combination of black and red which he years later would choose for the vardagsdräkten at court (Bergman 1938, 12). But his childhood is interesting to assess for other reasons as well. As such it is important to note that Gustav III had from an early age looked up to France and its history, especially the historical rule of kings such as Henry IV whom he saw as heroes (Bergman 1938, 13). This admiration only grew when his crown-prince journey brought him to Paris, and when he left France, he made sure to keep in close contact with the happenings in this country, which he regarded as his ideal. Bergman mentions in particular his lengthy correspondence with the Swedish envoy in Paris, Count Gustaf Philip Creutz, who kept Gustav III up to date with developments in fashion and in the French court ceremony (Bergman 1938, 24).

In the meantime, Gustav III found inspiration in the dress of historical French and Swedish kings to conceive dress creations for the Royal theatre in Stockholm (Bergman 1938, 13; Rangström 2002a, 248). Bergman (1938) identifies Gustav III's great passion for theatre as the starting point of his interest in creating a distinctly Swedish attire (11), and the theatre world was in that sense a playground of sorts for the King to try out different options for what would eventually become the National Costume. Ever since the revolution of 1772 when Gustav III recovered the power of rule from the Riksdag back to the monarchy, he had started reintroducing historical Swedish costumes to the theatre and to his daily life, aspiring to invoke a sense of historical romanticism around the Swedish monarchy (Bergman 1938, 11). He used such sentiments for political aims, for example when he dressed in the traditional dress of the Dalarna people to ask for their help against an attack from the Danes in 1789 (Bergman 1938, 12). As we have already touched upon, the National Costume was no different.

Gustav III's *Reflexioner* presents a detailed sixteen-page discussion recounting the king's intent behind the National Costume and arguing for its benefit to Swedish society. It is dated on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1778, which was about two months before the official introduction of the new

National Costume on Stora Ordensdagen<sup>16</sup>. Bergman (1938) uncovered that the document was written with the help of Count Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna, who was *kammarherre*<sup>17</sup> to King Gustav III (26). Gustav III started working on the *Reflexioner* during the Christmas weekend of 1777 (Bergman 1938, 26).

Gustav III's *Reflexioner* was a political document, intended for distribution within Sweden as well as throughout wider Europe (Bergman 1938, 25-30). Before Gustav III wrote his *Reflexioner*, he already had a strong indication of attitudes in Sweden as well as impressions from abroad towards his idea of a national costume. He wrote his *Reflexioner* with these attitudes in mind (Bergman 1938, 16-22; 27-28). Already in 1773, the idea of a national costume had become a topic of public debate. This conversation was sparked by the previously discussed essay competition which in its turn instigated speculation and opinion in newspapers about the rumoured dress reform. King Gustav III thus had all the opportunity to consider the public debate when writing his reflections on the National Costume (Bergman 1938, 16-22). Bergman (1938) illustrates how many of the king's arguments answer to specific concerns that were raised in society in the preamble to the National Costume's introduction (27-28).

Bergman (1938) also highlights the desire that King Gustav III held to portray himself as an enlightened monarch, and that he was quite sensitive for opinions from abroad (22; 29). It appears that unfavourable opinions from abroad constituted one of the reasons why he momentarily dropped the issue of a national costume in 1774 (Bergman 1938, 29). When Gustav III revisited the idea in 1778, opinions were still quite mixed. In March, the Comtesse de La Marck wrote from Paris, disapproving Gustav's goals and informing Gustav III that Marie Antoinette had expressed herself mockingly about the idea. The French court would follow the developments in Sweden with interest. It seems however that the disapproval in France was mainly motivated by anxieties around the future of French trade, since the National Costume mainly targeted the expulsion of French luxury goods. The information provided to him by other foreign ministers gave him more confidence about his idea (Bergman 1938, 30). Another great boost of confidence came when received a favourable response from Voltaire when he sent him his *Reflexioner* in March of 1778. Gustav III had hoped for a favorable response, which he imagined to be an excellent weapon against all judgements that could stand in the way of his plans. He was then understandably very delighted to receive said praise (Bergman 1938, 29).

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<sup>16</sup> Stora Ordensdagen was a gathering of the association of the Royal Orders of Honour where discussions were held about potential suitors to receive a Royal Order of Honour (Nationalencyklopedin 2021).

<sup>17</sup> The office of *Kammerherre* (Chamberlain) was one of the higher offices at the royal court of Gustav III. The *Kammarherre* served as a high personal attendant to the king and was in charge of various domestic affairs of the royal household.

Finally, Gustav III himself admitted that it was a pleasant discussion with Katarina II of Russia about his ideas that made him finally to decide to make his plans a reality (Bergman 1938, 25).

What I have written above is to say that we must regard Gustav III's *Reflexioner* in a very specific way. The idea of a national costume did not come overnight, many years of deliberation preceded its introduction, and text was written with just as much consideration as illustrated by a concept version of the *Reflexioner* with many revisions and notes that has survived (Bergman 1938, 28). With Gustav III's political agenda and the purpose of persuasion, one ought to read between the lines in order to discern underlying meanings and motives. The king's words should not necessarily be taken at face value.

## 2.2 Background to Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journal

Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta was the daughter of Friedrich August von Schleswig-Holstein Gottorf, Prince-Bishop of Lübeck in northern Germany. She grew up at the small court of Eutin, which was a minor court within the Holy Roman Empire. Her father was the brother of King Adolf Fredrik of Sweden, the predecessor of King Gustav III. It is through this connection that Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta was wedded to King Gustav III's younger brother Karl, Duke of Södermanland, thus making her the Duchess of Södermanland (hereafter simply referred to as *Duchess Charlotta* or *the duchess*). Duchess Charlotta came to Sweden in 1774 and rather immediately entered Swedish court society (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 5-7).

From the year 1775, aged 16, Duchess Charlotta started journaling her life at the Swedish court. Her journal is very extensive in that it almost uninterruptedly covers the period between 1775 and 1817, a few months before her death. In her journal, Duchess Charlotta described in monthly entries any matters and events which she regarded to be of importance for a historical account of court life (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 3). Indeed, Charlotta had the specific goal in mind to leave behind a valuable account of Swedish history, a chronicle of Gustavian court life. As much becomes apparent from her words:

Not being in the position to do justice to the virtue of one's lifetime, to be able to at least after one's death leave an homage to the truth and reveal secrets which one cannot reveal in the circumstances in which one finds oneself, see here my goal, it is honest at least and with all my care, I instruct, those who want to, to trust at least my impartial pen. (Helsing 2013, 267)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> My translation. Original text: "Étant hors d'état de rendre justice à la vertu de son vivant, de pouvoir au moins après sa mort laisser un hommage à la vérité et dévoiler des Secrets que l'on ne peut révéler dans les Circonstances où l'on se trouve, voilà mon but, il est honnête d'au moins et tout en m'occupant, j'instruirais ceux qui voudront en croire au moins ma plume impartielle"

As we can read, Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta devoted herself to documenting the truth of her reality in writing, as it was the only option her position allowed her to meet this desire. She trusted two individuals to safekeep her writing after her death, namely Count Erik Ruuth and Baron Carl Göran Bonde, and she had expressed to them her wish that her endeavour was to be kept secret for at least fifty years after her death (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 3). These measures provided her with the peace of mind to write what and how she wanted, without the risk this could otherwise entail for a person of her exceptionally high social rank.

What sparked the duchess' desire to document the truth as she puts it we cannot say for sure, but it is not hard to imagine that it could have something to do with the stark contrast between her relatively free upbringing at the small court of Eutin and Gustav III's rigid etiquette at the court of Stockholm. Throughout her life, the duchess followed closely all developments in the politics of her time, she read a lot and she made sure to be social and engage in conversations. Pouring those aspects into her journal in the form of writing was a way for her to develop her own political voice (Helsing 2013, 16).

My Helsing (2013) analysed Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journal, as well as other documents written by Duchess Charlotta in order to discern a clearer picture of the duchess as a political actor at the Swedish court, and to give a more nuanced picture of the politics of Gustavian court life, which historians traditionally depicted with Gustav III as the sole player on the field (Helsing 2013, 8-9). One of Helsing's findings especially meaningful in the context of this thesis, is that despite her close association with the king, Duchess Charlotta slowly but surely started to show more resistance to King Gustav III through actively supporting anti-royalist aristocrats who showed resistance towards Gustav III's reign (Helsing 2013, 9). At the same time, she is said to have been an exceptionally intelligent, charming and agreeable person who was adored at court (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 9).

For these reasons, her high position at court, her outsider perspective and her known opposition to King Gustav III, the duchess' journal forms an excellent source to represent an aristocratic counter-perspective to King Gustav III's *Reflexioner*.

## 2.3 Gustav III's Reflexioner

### 2.3.1 Getting familiar with the king's arguments

Gustav III's *Reflexioner, angående en ny national dräkt* reads as a political essay. Gustav III starts out his reflections with a situational sketch of the state of Swedish society at the time regarding an increasing luxury consumption:

When luxury is allowed to ingrain itself into an impoverished country, it will soon become its most pressing plague. Attempts have been made to install many kinds of barriers against it, and at the general state meetings the voice of the nation has always spoken loudly against this evil. The law-making power has with many laws tried to subside the escalation; but everything has been in vain, the sickness has in its expansion deflected all resistance. (Gustaf III 1806, 226) <sup>19</sup>

Immediately we can draw parallels between the king's concerns and the general discourse around luxury in eighteenth-century Europe as previously discussed. Luxury had since antiquity been judged on religious and moral grounds (Von Wachenfeldt 2013, 209; 214). During the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries however, luxury also started to be judged following economic reasoning rather than just moral and religious ones (Runefelt 2004, 203). This shift in Sweden followed the trail of a larger shift of the same kind which swept throughout Europe, most notably France and England (Berg and Eger 2002, 9; Runefelt 2004, 203-205). In Sweden, the general discourse on luxury centred around the idea of protecting the domestic Swedish market from the competition of foreign luxury.

Similarly, Gustav III starts off his argument by introducing an economically reasoned discourse. He represents luxury as 'the major threat to an impoverished country', hinting at the state of the Swedish economy which needs protection. Continuing on however, a metaphor of luxury as a plague and as an evil entity is used, representing luxury as something that is inherently harmful, and thus drawing back from the old as all moral judgements of luxury. A similar argument is found later on, when Gustav III complains that:

The first youngster who returns home from his travels, or the first merchant of fashions who brings back the latest inventions, causes rapid changes in both court dress and town dress, and adding the heaviest expenses to accounts, not only for some individuals but the whole population. This is even more abominable considering that they harm the trade cycle, but they are just as shameful for their ability to be selfish when one remembers how such a new fashion often finds its origin in some vain brain's invention of one or the

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<sup>19</sup> My translation. Original: "När yppighet får inrota sig i ett fattigt land, blifver den snart dess mest tryckande plåga. Man har här sökt att sätta alla slags bommar deremot, och har vid de allmänna Riksmöten Nationens röst alltid högt ropat emot detta onda. Lagstiftande Makten har med hoptals lagar sökt utestänga dess öfverhandentagande; men allt har varit förgäfvets, sjukdomen har i sitt utbredande kullkastat alla motstånd."

other gender, if it perhaps doesn't stem from such persons whose livelihood is just as pleasant as it is despicable. (Gustaf III 1806, 228) <sup>20</sup>

Here, the king critiques young noblemen for bringing back foreign fashion styles picked up during a *grand tour*, as well as fashion merchants for selling foreign fashion in Sweden. Again, he combines economic and moral arguments to get his point across. On the one hand, he points out the damage that such practices bring to Swedish trade as well as the ever-increasing expenses that they induce for the Swedish population. On the other hand, he shames both of these groups for putting their own self-interest before the interest of the country. He judges the noblemen for putting their vanity before anything else while also judging the fashion merchants for profiting of a trade that is harmful to the domestic Swedish trade. Such arguments, combining economic rationale and moral judgement are reoccurring throughout the entire text.

Expanding his argument, the king states:

When it was no longer possible to display exquisite taste through the type and appearance of fabric, nor in the price and splendour of women's dress decorations, the fast shifts in fashion overtook all remaining quirks, and caused its costliness to increase much more in all elements that the re-creation of fashion requires. These elements, of which the import has long been forbidden, as well as for their highly exaggerated price beyond their worth, and for the smugglers' risk-fees for the adventure involving their secret imports, have multiplied expenses beyond need, and through the power that the female gender holds over public opinion, as well as that they so easily know to win over hearts, it has finally happened that the illegal import of such products has come to be seen as courtesy and as a way to please them. (Gustaf III 1806, 226-227) <sup>21</sup>

Gustav III describes here how the changes of fashion have reached a point where every single element of dress becomes subject to a degree of luxury that is economically unjustifiable or unsustainable, all in the name of 'displaying exquisite taste'. Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta (1902)

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<sup>20</sup> My translation. Original: "Den förste yngling, som från sina resor hemkommer, eller den förstå krämerska af moder, som medför det sist uppfunna, förorsakar ständiga ombyten i så väl Hofs som Stadsdräkten, och påföra ej allenast hvar enskilt, utan ock hela Rikskroppen de tyngsta utgifter, så mycket mer förhatliga, som i dess de skada handelsvägen, de tillika äro neslige för sjelftänkande förmågan, då man eftersinnar, huru ett slikt nytt mod oftast leder sitt ursprung ifrån någon fåfång hjernas påfund af ena eller andra könet, om det icke kanske härflutit ifrån sådana personer, hvilkas näringssätt är äfven så angenämt, som det är föraktligt."

<sup>21</sup> My translation. Original: När man icke kunde gå längre i utsökt smak å tygers art och utseende, icke heller i kostnad och dyrbarhet af fruntimmersklädnadens garneringar, öfver träffade modenäs täta ombyten alla öfriga nycker, och vållade dyrhetens så mycket mera tilltagande å alla de ämnen, som till modets omskapning tarfvades. Dessa ämnen, redan för flera tider tillbaka till införsel här förbudna, och till sitt pris öfver rätt värde vida uppsatta, till lurendrägarens skadeslöshållande för äfventyret vid deras hemliga införande, mångdubblade utgifterna ytterligare för den behöfvande, och genom det välde qvinnokönet äger öfver allmänna tycket, samt det de så lätt veta taga öfver hjertan, har omsider händt, att den olofliga införseln af sådana varor blifvit ansedd för en artighet och ett medel att dem behaga.

acknowledges a same severity in the surge of luxury consumption. It is worth to note that Gustav III is singling out women's role in this issue, which will soon see is a something that he keeps doing throughout his text.

What Gustav III also acknowledges here, is that the previous governments during The Age of Liberty had been trying for many years to address and solve the issue of luxury. He points out that a plethora of measures had been put in place forbidding the import of luxury wares, but also that such measures had never really worked. This because there was a widespread practice of smuggling going on which drove up prices even more for these goods which were already overpriced to begin with. Import embargos on foreign luxury wares were apparently so widely ignored that it had become normalized, an amicable deed even, to smuggle such wares into Sweden despite the well-known regulations.

The fact that laws were so ineffective, and that people would go through such lengths to acquire forbidden luxury products shows exactly how important luxury and the display of status were in Swedish society at the time. Here it is inevitable to draw parallels to Elias's analysis of French court society. He described similar developments in the escalating cost of luxury. The French aristocratic lifestyle towards the end of the *ancien régime* had grown so elaborate that it became financially unsustainable for many nobles. Yet, due to the ethos of rank and display in the noble estate, ceasing to indulge in this lifestyle was not an option (Elias 2006, 71). Considering that a similar pattern of financially escalating luxury is observable among the Swedish upper class, unstified by economic rationale, one could infer that Swedish court society had a similarly strong ethos of rank and prestige, overpowering economic rationality.

Continuing on, the king makes an additional comment concerning laws and regulations. He states that when it comes to luxury,

“The law is inadequate [to fight] against opinions. Through strictness, one can indeed become obedient; however, in certain cases strictness stands powerless and only results in disobedience” (Gustaf III 1806, 227).<sup>22</sup>

This statement tells us that Gustav III saw the issue of luxury as a psychological one. He claims that in order for a real change to come about, a change in mindset was needed in Swedish society. The issue of luxury had to be tackled at its root and he argues that despite many efforts, legislation, which only tackles the symptoms of the problem, has shown to be ineffective in achieving this. Instead, Gustav III describes how he wants to change dress practices not with

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<sup>22</sup> My translation. Original: Lagen är otillräcklig emot opinioner. Genom stränghet kan man väl blifva lydig; men i vissa fall är strängheten kraftlös och uppmuntrar endast till olydnad.

force, but rather by freewill, through the power of imitation and leading by example (Gustaf III 1806, 232).

It was mentioned before that Gustav III ascribed a certain amount of power to dress for political ends. The statement above shows clearer the extent to which Gustav III trusted in the power of dress and its social role. He judged a dress reform to be a great substitute for laws in the effort to address increasing luxury consumption. In fact, he even argues that a national attire had become the “only thing remaining and sufficient to resist the malaise against which is being complained” Gustaf III 1806, 229)<sup>23</sup>, as well as declaring: “be what other nations will soon stop being, dress yourselves in national spirit, and I dare to say that a national attire would contribute more to this than one would think” (Gustaf III 1806, 227).

What this tells us, is that the king attributes a great deal of psychological power to dress. Gustav III expected a change in dress practices to be the best way to change the attitudes that people held towards luxury. This assumption loosely echoes Entwistle’s (2015) perception of dress as a bodily practice (10; 40). The king surely recognizes a link between dress and the *self*, in the sense that to him, the existing dress practices had legitimized an ever-escalating desire for luxury among his subjects, which could only be corrected through a change in dress.

While this is a striking connection at first glance, looking further into Entwistle’s theory gives us clues of why the National Costume may have been destined not to work out in the way that Gustav III had hoped (Rangström 2004, 176). Entwistle’s (2015) conception of dress practices also presumes the existence of a “basic sociological tension between structure and agency” (40). This describes the presence of structural constraints within a fashion system, limiting the individual agency that individuals are allowed in their personal practices of dress.

In court society, as we have seen through Elias’ (2006) effort, dress was a manifestation of the larger societal structure of the court and it’s and the ethos of rank-display which sprung from it. In connecting these two concepts, one could assert that individual dress practices and psychological desires in a court society such as Sweden under Gustav III are perpetually constrained by the structure of the social estate hierarchy, and by the ethos of rank. *This*, was the actual source of the desire for luxury, dress being but one of its many manifestations.

Now of course, the absolute monarch would never address the structure in this manner, whether he was aware of it to such an extent or not, for it was this structure which granted him his power. But, as long as the structure of the estates and its function as a foundation of the fashion system would not be addressed, a lasting change in the desire for luxury would probably

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<sup>23</sup> My translation. Original: Denna utväg blifver dock den enda öfriga och tillräckliga, att mota de olägenheter hvaröfver klagas.



be quite unlikely. This idea is solidified by the knowledge that the National Costume in fact did not catch on to the degree that Gustav III had hoped, and it certainly did not eliminate the desire for luxury (Rangström 2002a, 248; Rangström 2002b, 141).

So far, we have already been able to discern some interesting things from Gustav III's text concerning his ideology. We have seen how Gustav III attached a great deal of importance to dress and its influence on society. We have also seen how the king's description of the state of Swedish society shows a parallel to the French *ancien régime* in the sociological structure of Swedish court society at the time and how the strong demand for luxury that it brought forth was met by the king with various economical and moral arguments. Now in itself, such arguments make sense. If luxury forms such a threat to Swedish society, of course it is the king's duty to address it, making it perfectly understandable why Gustav III chooses to address the issue in the way which he does. But if we consider what we know about Gustav III's Francophilia, abandoning French dress in favour of a distinctive Swedish style does seem like quite a departure from what he himself was used to and what he prioritized in life. After all, the king had since his childhood looked up at the French kings as inspiration and regarded the French rule with great admiration (Rangström 1997, 166-167). Furthermore, when we refer to Elias model of court society, we see how Louis XIV strategically made use of etiquette to keep the nobility at a safe distance and secure his own power (Elias 2006, 127-128). Would we be able to uncover similar strategies from Gustav III's reflections?

### 2.3.2 Questioning the king's intentions

In general, the king seems to be very precise and calculated with his language. To illustrate this, let us briefly refer back to some of the previously discussed excerpts. What becomes clear from those passages is that the king primarily has an issue with luxury from abroad, and we know that Swedish fashion at the time came primarily from France. Yet, not once in his text does he explicitly mention France or 'French' fashion in relation to Swedish dress practices. Instead, he uses terminology such as "a foreign style of court dress" (Gustaf III 1806, 227)<sup>24</sup>, "southern European attire" (Gustaf III 1806, 230)<sup>25</sup>, or "our present garment" (Gustaf III 1806, 235)<sup>26</sup>. When he describes dress-practices of the Russians however, he does not employ the same nuanced language. Instead, he bluntly and explicitly points out that Peter I of Russia wanted to

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<sup>24</sup> My translation. Original: "Utländskt Hof's klädedrägt."

<sup>25</sup> My translation. Original: "Södra Europas klädedrägt."

<sup>26</sup> My translation. Original: "Vår närvarande dräkt."

emulate *French, German and English* customs and manners (Gustaf III 1806, 233). Later on, he even refers to the Russian people as ‘barbaric’, stating how:

Peter I was faced with barbaric manners; arrogance, generated by ignorance, a disdain for enlightened nations a consequence of this pride. The regent sought more than its precursors, to meet the rest Europe, to finally attain its customs and the noble arts. (Gustaf III 1806, 232)<sup>27</sup>

It is needless to say that such a statement could be perceived as quite insulting to the Russian powers, yet Gustav III took no effort to employ the same delicate language as he did when addressing French luxury. Now this happens so consistently throughout his writing that it could not be a coincidence.

Self-admittedly, Gustav III attached great value to the opinions of his contemporaries (Gustaf III 1806, 240), and the conversation around the French influence in Sweden was not exactly a positive one. Knowing what we know about Gustav III’s love and admiration for France, I would argue it very likely that he is purposely avoiding explicitly naming France in the context of Swedish dress practices. Perhaps, this was indeed a conscious choice, as to not ruffle any feathers in France considering the already delicate position which the National Costume moved the relationship between Sweden and France towards. Perhaps, Gustav III purposely made sure to avoid any language that could be read as an explicit critique or attack on the culture of luxury in France which not only brought economic issues to Sweden, but within France as well. Observing this calculated language use warrants a further questioning of the king’s intentions with his *Reflexioner*.

## 2.4 Bringing in the aristocratic perspective

### 2.4.1 Challenging King Gustav III’s arguments

Before we dive deeper into Gustav III’s reflections, I want to bring in Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta’s (hereafter simply referred to as Duchess Charlotta) writing and compare it to what we have seen from Gustav III’s reflections so far. because there is quite some asymmetry between the two. Regarding the National Costume, Duchess Charlotta starts off saying:

It is said that this change [of attire] is brought forth for the sake of economy, but on if this would be justified opinions are varied; some say that it could maybe bring some cut-backs in costs for ladies, but not for gentlemen, though others claim the opposite. On my part, I

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<sup>27</sup> My translation. Original: ”Peter I fann barbariska seder, högfärd, alstrad af okunnighet, förakt för upplysta nationer, en följd af denna högfärd. Regenten eftersträfvade mer än dess företrädare, att nalkas det öfriga Europa, för att ock omsider ernå sederna och de ädla konsterna.”

don't see myself fit to give a judgement on the matter before I have gotten to wear the attire for a year, but I would however really want to believe that the cut-backs in costs will be greater for ladies than for gentlemen. (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 100)<sup>28</sup>

Here we get some insight in the attitudes towards luxury and the National Costume at court, which are apparently divided. Referring to the king's argument of the costume's economic benefit, the duchess describes two camps. On one side there are those who believe that the dress reform may cut down on costs for women but not for men, however others claim the very opposite. Rangström (1997) briefly described similar critiques in wider society that were voiced against Gustav III's economic arguments (168). Some argued that even though the National Costume may be durable, it will be quite expensive for customers to have several or even one exemplar made because of all the specific requirements that the costume needs to adhere to. Then there is also the question of what people should do with their already existing wardrobe. These considerations justifiably put into question Gustav III's economic arguments for the National Costume. Finally, Gustav III himself explained that he delayed the realization of the National Costume from 1773 because it became clear to him that it would not bring the economic benefit that was envisioned (Bergman 1938, 24).

Beyond economic reasoning, Gustav III projects full conviction in his text of the effectiveness of a national costume to change people's attitudes and behaviour. Bergman similarly discussed how strongly Gustav III was convinced of the psychological power of dress (12). But what we see at court is that the people are very doubtful about the whole idea and by no means were most of them persuaded by the king's arguments in his reflections, a manuscript of which was already in circulation by the time that the duchess wrote her journal entry (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 101). Some reasons for this doubt become clear from Duchess Charlotta's further observations on the costume and the attitudes at court:

The attire will reportedly be exceptionally simple for both genders. For the ladies it will probably fit well for well-figured individuals, but it will be highly unflattering for fattened ones. The gentlemen's attire will definitely be unflattering even for the well-figured and thus even more for those who do not have a great figure. Our young ladies are hesitant about not being able to wear as many knickknacks as they in their vanity would wish; even though the wiser ones would think that it can be just as good if it isn't all that grand. Among the gentlemen, all except the servile courtiers should prefer the old attire and

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<sup>28</sup> My translation. Original: "Det påstås, att denna förändring är framkallad utaf sparsamhetsskäl, men om det berättigade häruti äro åsikterna delade; somliga tro, att det törhända kan medföra besparing för fruntimren men ej för herrarne, då däremot andra påstå motsatsen. För egen del anser jag mig ej kunna fälla något omdöme härom, förrän jag fått bära dräkten under ett års tid, men skulle dock verkligen vilja tro, att besparingen blifver större för fruntimren än för herrarne."

would feel hesitant towards the new so called national costume. (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 100) <sup>29</sup>

According to Duchess Charlotta, the new attire is quite unflattering. The women's attire is apparently a bit better than the men's attire, although the duchess does expect some concern coming from women who prefer a more decorative style of dress. We do see that duchess Charlotta is most likely not one of those women, as she comments how 'wiser' women would not regard this as big of an issue. But the new attire seems to be especially unflattering for men. Among them, Charlotta expects that most would prefer the existing French style of dress, except the most 'servile' or subservient ones. This is significant for a couple of reasons.

First, one of Gustav III's arguments was the supposed ugliness of the existing style of dress, claiming that "one is quickly forced to admit that hardly any given attire is uglier and less comfortable for the eyes than the one we wear now" (Gustav III 1806, 229-230). It is then quaint that the design of the National Costume is unflattering to the extent that Duchess Charlotta expects most courtiers to prefer the existing dress styles. Now taste is of course subjective to a certain extent, but I would like to think that what is deemed as a flattering or unflattering cut of dress is something that is easily agreed upon, and something that Gustav III would especially strive for in the National Costume considering this remark regarding aesthetic quality.

Furthermore, Duchess Charlotta hints at a certain dynamic at court. One of a distinction between courtiers who she views as 'servile' or subservient to the king, and those who are not. She implies that those who would claim to prefer the National Costume, are only the subservient ones, and are thus not necessarily persuaded by the greatness of the costume itself, but by blind loyalty to the king. Not only does this further illustrate the general unpopularity of Gustav III's idea at court, but it also implies the existence of a very interesting distinction between court people: the loyalists who tend to follow the king out of principle; and another group, perhaps more critical of the king. This is an important aspect which will come back later, but first I will explore some additional problems in Gustav III's arguments.

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<sup>29</sup> My translation. Original: "Klärdräkten lär blifva särdeles enkel för båda könen. Damernas kommer nog att passa bra för välväxta personer men vara i hög grad missklädande för fetlagda. Herrarnes blifver säkerliken missklädande äfven för välväxta och således ännu mer för dem, som ej hafva vacker figur. Våra unga damer äro förtviflade att ej kunna få bära så mycket grannlåter, som de i sin flärdfullhet skulle önska; de mera förståndiga tycka dock, att det kan blifva lika bra, om det också inte är så grant. Af herrarne torde alla, utom de inställsamma hofmännen föredraga den gamla klädedräkten och äro förtviflade öfver den nya s. k. nationella-dräkten"

Amidst the more practical arguments which we have seen to be questionable so far, Gustav III relies a lot on what I would say are sentimental strategies, which are often masked by or implied within supposedly rational arguments. The king writes that:

Luxury in dress has maintained itself and prospered, supported not less by women's powerful assistance and encouragement, than by the thought one each naturally carries, that with the use of a form of dress, which another nation invented, not to give in to the same decoration and changes. (Gustaf III 1806, 226)<sup>30</sup>

Here, the king essentially states that Swedish people naturally carry an understanding that the splendour and fast changes of foreign styles do not necessarily need to be followed, but that this rational thinking has been clouded by women's enthusiasm for fashion. What the king is doing here, is that he rhetorically positions Swedish people as victims of luxury. He is not necessarily blaming Swedish people for their indulgence in luxury, he rather paints them out to be rational people who would know better, but who have fallen victim and have been persuaded to follow the foreign fashion trends.

This narrative of the Swedish people as victims of luxury comes back throughout Gustav III's entire argument. We have already seen how he describes luxury as the "most pressing plague" victimizing "an impoverished country" (Gustaf III 1806, 227). At a different point in the text, the king describes how foreign fashions "add the heaviest expenses to the accounts, not only for some individuals but the whole population" (Gustaf III 1806, 228). In this statement we can clearly read the narrative of Swedish society as a victim of economic harm by the hand of luxury.

But not only does the king describe foreign fashion as figuratively harmful, he even argues how it harms individuals physically. About the female attire, the king writes:

We find it hardly any better than half-naked, exposed to the harsh Nordic cold, their throats and half of their backs unprotected, their arms covered in gloves which are more fit to protect their skin from the weather than to expel cold; wide stiff robes, which, while they constrict their torso, leave free room for the harshest winter cold; (...) The habit barely is able to save the [female] sex from the timely death which their attire would otherwise bring to them; but a weakened health among most of them, their frequent nervous diseases, their frequent convulsions, which among them have been occurring for

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<sup>30</sup> My translation. Original: Yppigheten i kläder har bibehållit sig och fortfarit, understödd ej mindre af fruntimrens mäktiga bifall och uppmuntran, än af den håg en hvar naturligen hyser, att i bruk af en klädedrägts form, som en annan Nation påfunnit, ej gifva den efter i samma drägts prydnad och omskiften.

some twenty years, is definitely a consequence of the difference between the southern European attire and the northern climate. (Gustaf III 1806, 230)<sup>31</sup>

Here we can discern the severe physical harm which the existing attire played a part in for some women, as well as the general physical discomfort that it brought to those who wore it. Gustav mentions similar problems for the men's attire, although less detailed (Gustaf III 1806, 229). If we look at this concern through the lense of Weber's notion of patriarchal domination, this statement could be read as a strategic move. By going into detail and expressing his concern about the physical harm that women in particular have to go through as a result of the French dress style, Gustav III is invoking a kind of paternal sentiment. He is positioning himself as a concerned father who is deeply worried about the health of the people in his household.

Now this could have been a genuine concern if it weren't for the fact that he goes out of his way to blame women for luxury's increase almost every other page.<sup>32</sup> It is quite ironic, not only for the fact that he is expressing so much concern for the health of these women, but also because we have seen that the king is attempting to spin a narrative of the Swedish people as victims of luxury, while thus simultaneously blaming a good chunk of these very Swedish people for the surge of luxury in the first place.

Women have of course since antiquity been a specific target of harsh critique when it comes to luxury and dress (Ribeiro 2003, 23). During the Middle Ages, these critiques became more and more intense with very strong norms of moral discipline which were reinforced through induced anxieties around sin (Ribeiro 2003, 25). Lecky (1877) refers to this as 'religious terrorism' (3;7) as pointed out by Ribeiro (2003, 25). Interpretations of the bible installed a view of women as temptresses who are morally and intellectually inferior to men (Ribeiro 2003, 27). Gustav III attributes exactly such qualities to women. In his eyes, it is them who persuade (male) officers to smuggle luxury goods into Sweden (Gustaf III 1806, 227), and if a national dress is to be introduced, he claims it will be women who will resist a change in dress the most (Gustaf III 1806, 231). But it seems like Gustav III has let his preconceived notions on women cloud his vision, because from what we can gather from Duchess Charlotta's

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<sup>31</sup> My translation. Original: Finna vi dem föga bättre än halfnakna, blottställda för Nordiska köldens stränghet, deras halsar och halfya ryggar oskylda, deras armar betäckta med handskar mera tjenande att förvara från vädrat deras hy, än att utestänga kölden; vida styfkjortlar, som, under det de tränga deras lif, lämna fritt utrymme åt vintrarnas strängaste kyla; (...) Vanan blott formår frälsa könet från den hastiga död, som deras dräkt dem eljest skulle ådraga; men en försvagad helsa bland flesta delen af dem, deras mångfaldiga nervsjukdomar, de täta convulsioner, som bland dem sedan några och tjuge år tillbaka blifvit så gångbare, äro säkert an följd af skillnaden emellan södra Europas klädedräkt och det norras klimat.

<sup>32</sup> I don't find it fitting to discuss the various examples of this observation in detail, but I would like to stress that a specific mention of women's influence on the issue of luxury, or a dig at the female gender in general for that matter, can be found on pages 226, 227, 230, 231, 237, 239, that is on six out of the total sixteen pages!

journal, it were the male courtiers who had the strongest doubts towards his plans (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, 100). Furthermore, sources on the history of court dress describe how during the seventeenth century, certain elements of decoration such as rich embroideries were most abundant and elaborate in the male wardrobe (Rangström 1997, 174).

Besides the king's contradictory discourse on women, there is more reason to doubt the king's concern for his subjects' health in relation to dress practices. General Carl Gideon Sinclair for instance wrote that "This loyal attire" was "by no means fitting for a harsh climate" (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 101), and Katarina II of Russia expressed a similar concern (Bergman 1938, 30). And this makes sense, if we refer back to the description which Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta gave of the National Costume (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 100-101). Perhaps it covers a bit more of the body than the French costume did, but in general the cut of the dress did not change that drastically in this regard. The woman's chest and arms are still exposed as it had been with the French dress. The man's pants remain short, exposing the legs to the Swedish winter cold. In addition, the man's jacket of the National Costume is shorter than the jacket of the French style. Of course, a reader of the king's reflections would not necessarily realize this, considering the fact that he did not include a description of what the National Costume would look like with his reflections...

#### 2.4.2 The king's rhetorical strategy

The previous section has problematized some of the arguments brought forth by King Gustav III in his *Reflexioner*. We saw how he paints luxury out to be a threat that managed to intrude Sweden from the outside, victimizing the Swedish people. By doing this, he makes space for himself to come in with fatherly concern, arguing that he wants to assure the best for his people, desiring to shield them from this 'foreign' threat by providing them with the National Costume. One that will free them from the psychological vice of luxury, which will rid them from economic burden and which will finally manage to shield them from the harsh Swedish weather conditions. It surely would seem like a reasonable and genuine argument, if it weren't for the flaws and inconsistencies which were pointed out with the help of Duchess Charlotta's journal. However, I would say that the practicality of the arguments themselves is not necessarily the most important aspect of Gustav III's *Reflexioner*. Rather, there is a strong rhetorical narrative which does most of the persuasion. That narrative is one of strong nationalism.

From the very first paragraph, Gustav III starts planting the seeds of a nationalist sentiment which becomes a red thread throughout his reflections. All his arguments support the idea of foreign luxury as the ultimate threat to a superior Swedish society in one way or another.

We already saw how Gustav III argued that the Swedish people naturally hold the rationality to not follow foreign fashion trends, but that this rationale was clouded by an overabundance of foreign influences (Gustaf III 1806, 226). Besides invoking an image of the Swedish people as victims, this statement also marks an essential divide of an idealised Swedish culture versus an undesirable foreign culture. This sentiment returns frequently, for instance when Gustav III chants:

Remain Swedes, be that which your forefathers were under their ancient kings, brave, faithful subjects, obedient sons, tender men, caring fathers, good citizens, devout Christians (Gustaf III 1806, 233-234)<sup>33</sup>

With these words, Gustav III conjures up a highly romanticized picture of the Swedish people, reminding them of the honourable characteristics of their ancestors in times long since gone. In a similar vein, the king states that: “Our customs (I dare to say this for the honour of our nation) are far superior to those of the southern parts of Europe” (Gustaf III 1806, 233).<sup>34</sup> And to give a last example of this sentiment, the king states that:

We have become accustomed to not put enough esteem in ourselves, and to attach too much value to that which is foreign. (Gustaf III 1806, 233)<sup>35</sup>

There are plenty more instances in the text where such nationalist sentiments can be read, but the point should be clear: Gustav III makes aims at invoking strong feelings of nationalism in his text, to distinguish an idealized highly valued Swedish culture from foreign cultures.

As was discussed previously, Gustav III invoked this some historical romanticism in his costume designs for the theatre as well as for every-day wear. The goal here was to symbolize remind of the king’s successful coup in 1772 (Bergman 1938, 11). A similar thing can be said about Gustav III’s *Reflexioner*. Let us consider the following passage:

Experience (...) tells us that the nations authorities since about 30 years ago have never managed to find a means to the decrease of luxury and grandeur in dress, but at the same time all possibilities have not been thought out carefully. (Gustaf III 1806, 227)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> My translation. Original: ”Förblifven Svenske, varen det edre förfader varit under edra fordna Konungar, tappre, trogne undersåtare, lydaktige söner, ömsinte män, hulde fader, gode medborgare, trogne Christne”

<sup>34</sup> My translation. Original: ”Våra seder (jag vågar säga det till Nationens heder) öfverträffa vida den södra delens af Europa”

<sup>35</sup> My translation. Original: ”Hafva vi vant oss att icke nog högakta oss sjelfva samt att sätta för mycket värde på hvad utländskt är.”

<sup>36</sup> My translation. Original: ”Erfarenheten (...) besannar hos oss, att Nationens Fullmäktige sedan trettie år tillbaka städse bemödat sig att utfinna medel till hämmande af yppighet och öfverflöd i klädedrägter, men att ock i lika lång tid alla utväger icke mindre sorgfälligt blifvit upptänkte”



Here, Gustav III recognizes how in the past, efforts had been made to combat the increasing problem of luxury, but also that success therein was never met. Then, he mentions he does not believe that the previous governments have put in all the effort that they could have to solve this problem either. If we remind ourselves of that the “nations authorities” here refer to The Age of Liberty, a seemingly innocent observation acquires a new dimension. Now, we could read this statement as a critique of The Age of Liberty: an evaluation of the Riksdag-rule as inferior to his own rule; a denunciation of the idea of the nobility as the governing body in Sweden. This sentiment returns later on in the text, this time way stronger than in the previously mentioned passage:

Our customs (I dare to say this for the honour of our nation) are far superior to those of the southern parts of Europe, and the Swedish Nation must really have a very strong set of honourable characteristics if that hasn't been totally spoiled by 50 years of anarchical rule. A tendency to receive the impression of strangers during the tumult and the divide which prevailed among us, and controlled by foreign ways of thinking next to our current Government, we have become accustomed to not put enough esteem in ourselves, and to attach too much value to that which is foreign. (Gustaf III 1806, 233)<sup>37</sup>

This passage strongly illustrates that which was insinuated before: a disapproval and strong denouncement of Sweden under Riksdag-rule. He describes this period as “50 years of anarchical rule”, an ironic reframing of the phrase The Age of Liberty which was already used at the time and which the king understandably refused to employ in his position. Now one could wonder why Gustav III would make such a point to denounce The Age of Liberty in his text considering the fact that at that point, Gustav III had seized the power to rule for six years already. Here we can refer back to Elias' model of the court society.

Elias showed us how the centralization and consequently the absolutism of the French *ancien régime* was realizable through an increased distance in social and political power between the monarchy and the nobility (Elias 2006, 45; 46; 67). First realized by Louis XIV, this distance was fixed in place by the court etiquette of Versailles, which Louis XIV skilfully employed to control his courtiers and keep them at a safe distance of power (Elias 2006, 88-100). If we consider this knowledge of the structure of the French *ancien régime* and apply it

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<sup>37</sup> My translation. Original: Våra seder (jag vågar säga det till Nationens heder) öfverträffa vida den södra delens af Europa, och måste väl Svenska Nationen äga stort förråd af hedrande egenskaper, för att icke hafva blifvit alldeles bortskämd under 50 års anarkisk regering. Vane att under den villervalla och split bland oss herrskat, emottaga främmandes intryck, och styrde af främmande tänkesätt intill närvarande Regering, hafva vi vant oss att icke nog högakta oss sjelfva samt att sätta för mycket värde på hvad utländskt är.

to Gustav III's rule as an absolute monarch, who we have already seen was highly inspired by the rule of the French, it suddenly becomes clear as day what purpose such comments really serve. By discrediting and denouncing the Riksdag, the king is trying to de-legitimize the nobility as political rulers. It is a strategy to create more social and political distance between the monarchy as a ruling entity, and the nobility as its mere subject. Creating this distance, or should we say reinforcing it, allows the king to strengthen his position as an absolute monarch and to prevent the power dynamic from switching back to the nobility's favour as had happened on the dawn of The Age of Liberty.

To supplement this reading of the king's rhetoric, we can also consider what Weber (1978, 1010-1012) explained about the legitimacy of power. Weber argued that absolute power is in fact not completely without limit. In practice, the absolute monarch's power is subject to the mutual dependency between the monarch and his dependents, which for the sake of the monarch's self-interest will always require him to consider the psychological complaisance of his dependents. The nature of this dependency is the source of the monarch's legitimacy to rule. Similarly, King Gustav III depends on the complaisance of his subjects to legitimize his own political power. Discrediting the Riksdag-rule to secure the position of the monarchy is one way to achieve this, but we can discern another way in which the king is trying to win over his subjects in favour of the monarchy. This is where the rhetoric of nationalism comes back into play. On one side, the king positions the Swedish nation as distinctly honourable, superior, and strong of character (Gustaf III 1806, 233-234). On the other side, the king is painting Riksdag-rule out to be a threat to these very qualities (Gustaf III 1806, 233). We already saw the king argue how the "50 years of anarchical rule" which was "controlled by foreign ways of thinking" spoiled the good characteristics among the Swedish people (Gustaf III 1806, 233). Then indeed, not only is the king discrediting the aristocracy in terms of their capacity to rule, but he is also directly juxtaposing Swedish nationalist sentiments to Riksdag-rule as ridden with foreign influences. I can only imagine what Swedish noblemen should think upon reading such words. Between the lines, Gustav III is directly critiquing any nobleman who is more aligned with the Riksdag as rulers than with the monarchy. Siding with the Riksdag now not only means opposing monarchical rule, but it implies an opposition to Sweden as a nation.

Bringing back Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journal, this reading of Gustav III's words becomes even more apparent. We saw how the duchess described the existence of a distinction among court people between the "subservient" courtiers or 'loyalists', who were positive about the king's idea of a national costume based on their servile nature, and another group who she implies to be more critical of the king's ideas, who we could dub as anti-royalists following

Helsing's (2013) research (9). The existence of this second group is threatening to the royal position. Then we can read it as yet another example of the strategy employed by Gustav III to secure his position as an absolute monarch, similarly to the strategies employed by Louis XIV as shown by Elias (2006).

## 2.5 Interpreting the National Costume

What we have seen so far is that upon a closer analysis, many of Gustav III's seemingly straightforward and practical arguments fall to reveal an ulterior motive, one that does not so much worry for the economic benefit of Sweden as it worries to critique the rule of the nobility during The Age of Liberty. This line of argument prioritizes discrediting Riksdag-rule, diminishing the power of the nobility and augmenting the power of the monarchy. This reading of Gustav III's *Reflexioner* naturally is not limited to the context of the document itself. Since Gustav III's *Reflexioner* proposes an argument for the introduction of the National Costume, analyzed interpretations of this argument directly relate back to the idea of the National Costume in itself. So, what does my reading of the king's *Reflexioner* and Duchess Charlotta's journal imply regarding the underlying meaning of the National Costume?

I would argue it very likely that Gustav III's intentions with the National Costume go beyond the practical arguments which he presents in his *Reflexioner*. The king's hidden critiques of the idea of Riksdag-rule can be directly projected upon the idea of the National Costume itself. To make this point, let us refer once again to Duchess Charlotta's journal. At the end of her entry discussing the National Costume, the duchess makes a comment which hints towards what I hold the essence of the National Costume's meaning to be:

Should the king [on the matter of the National Costume] have mistaken himself, then it can either way not be changed, and we will be forced to go dressed as savages as well as spark attention and become talked about in the entirety of Europe. In the meantime, *it can probably have a certain effect, that all will be similarly dressed, because it is only allowed for princely individuals to wear coloured and costly clothing.* (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta 1902, 102)<sup>38</sup> [Italics added by me]

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<sup>38</sup> My translation. Original: "Skulle kungen härvidlag hafva misstagit sig, kan det i alla fall inte ändras, och vi blifva tvungna att gå klädda som vildar samt väcka uppteende och blifva omtalade uti hela Europa. Emellertid kan det nog vara af en viss effekt, att alla blifva lika klädda, emedan det endast är tillåtet för furstliga personer att bära kulörta och dyrbara kläder."

The duchess is playing it safe with her wording, but this comment carefully voices a critique about the king's true intentions with the National Costume. It can indeed have a certain effect that only princely individuals are allowed to divert from the proscribed requirements of the National Costume. This effect is clear as day in the illustration presented in *Figure 6*. It is not needed to read the description of the image to identify the king and queen in this illustration, for it is the stark contrast between the richly decorated silver dress of the individuals in the centre and the dull black and red attire of the people surrounding them that gives this social figuration away.



*Figure 6 Detail from an illustration by P. Hilleström in which King Gustav III and Queen Sofia Magdalena are wearing a silver iteration of the National Costume with rich gold decorations. Surrounding them are courtiers wearing the black and red vardagsdräkten.*

This image illustrates very directly the true meaning of the National Costume: It is a clear mark of distinction between the monarchy and the nobility.

In an analysis of aquarelle paintings depicting the notorious lynching of Count Axel von Fersen in 1810, Klas Nyberg (2015) argued how this lynching event was representative of the shifting social dynamic in Swedish society at the time (130-131). During the lynching, Axel von Fersen was stripped of his elaborate military attire, which represented the archaic luxury of the nobility and simultaneously the old order of society's estates. At the same time, he was beaten to death by richer members of the bourgeoisie, who through their attire represented new luxury and the growing power of the bourgeoisie. Nyberg concludes that the lynching and its symbolic clash between old and new luxury could be interpreted as a representation of the final clash between the privileged nobility and the underprivileged burghers, and with it the prevalence of the bourgeoisie as a social class in the modern age (Nyberg 2015, 162-163).

We can conjure up a similar analogy for the implementation of the National Costume. After the revolution of 1772 in which Gustav III reinstated the ruling monarchy in Sweden, Gustav III wanted to once and for all mark the irrevocable precedence that the monarchy held over Riksdag-rule and thus over the aristocracy. The national costume symbolizes this shift in the social figuration of the Swedish court. It represents the conclusion between an ongoing clash of power between the monarchy and the aristocracy during the roughly 50 years of Riksdag-rule in Sweden. In the end, the monarchy prevailed, and the National Costume is a constant

reminder of this. Here I would like to remind of the fact that the king started planning the National Costume in 1773. It was one of the first projects he took on after his successful coup which happened only a year prior!

However, the National Costume has even deeper implications than a mere representation of the defeat of the Age of Liberty. The national costume was a manifestation of Gustav III's broader efforts to invoke the character of absolutism from the French *ancien régime* in his own reign. He introduced a ceremonial etiquette *à la française* at the court of Stockholm which was taken out of the figurative handbook of Louis XIV, including the notorious *levée* (Rangström 2002b, 130). The social function of such etiquette at court society we have already discussed, as well as the burden that it posed on court people. Then, as part of this new etiquette, the National Costume acquires a very specific function at the Swedish court. It constitutes in fact a harshly oppressing addition to the court ceremonial.

With the requirement of the National Costume at court, Gustav III eliminated nearly all opportunity for distinction through dress for the Swedish court people, for they all went dressed nearly identical. I refer once again to *Figure 6* on the previous page. Meanwhile Gustav III flaunts the power of his royal position by ignoring his own rules and having a rendition of the National Costume made *in Paris* for his consort Sofia-Magdalena of Denmark (Bergman 1938, 29). The National Costume is thus yet another instrument in the ceremonial of the court for the king to exert his royal rank. With the almost complete elimination of individual agency in court dress, the Swedish court nobility has one less lane to assert their rank, thus becoming even more dependent on the ceremonial of the court to preserve or improve their position.

### 3 Finale

#### 3.1 Conclusion

After observations of the strong French influence in the Swedish aristocracy during the early modern period, this thesis explored the meaning of Gustav III's national costume in Swedish court society during the late eighteenth century. It did so specifically by asking two main questions: (1) *What was King Gustav III's view of the National Costume and its role in Swedish court society*; and (2) *How can we understand the social implications of the National Costume for the aristocracy in late eighteenth-century Sweden?*

A pre-investigation into the historical context of the National Costume revealed the problematic relationship between the aristocracy and French luxury goods. While these goods had long been an integral instrument for distinction at the court of Sweden, shifts in economic discourse saw foreign luxury as an economic threat. This discourse already saw its manifestation in import embargos and other laws targeting foreign luxury during the Age of Liberty. When Gustav III successfully reinstated monarchic rule with his 1772 coup, he soon set out to tackle the issue of luxury in a way that he himself thought the best option to be: through the introduction of the National Costume. With the monarchy now taking a clear stance on luxury consumption, increasing social pressure for the nobility and their habits of foreign luxury was quite imaginable.

To answer the two main research questions, an appropriate method was found in the form of a post-structuralist textual analysis applied on two historical documents with content discussing the national costume. The first of these documents was King Gustav III's *Reflexioner, angående en ny national klädedrägt*, the second document came in the form of an entry from Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journal. These documents represented two opposing perspectives, the monarchic and the aristocratic one respectively. Theoretically, the interpretation of the texts was largely supported by Norbert Elias' sociology of the court society, though additional perspectives by way of Entwistle and Simmel provided a wider framework for the analysis.

The analysis started out with a lighter reading of Gustav III's *Reflexioner*, getting familiar with his arguments. Here it was pointed out how the arguments presented by the king in his text corresponded with the wider discourse of luxury in Sweden at the time. Here it was also illustrated how Gustav III's writing reflected a conviction of the psychological power of dress and how it touched base with Entwistle's conception of embodied practice. Furthermore, it was

highlighted how Gustav III's text contained a testament of the ethos of rank characteristic of court society.

Continuing on, an effort to read between the lines uncovered particularities about the king's writing style which warranted a questioning of his intentions. Then, through bringing in the aristocratic counter perspective in the form of Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's journals, as well as some of the historical context of the national costume, it was shown how many of the king's initial arguments could easily be annulled. On the surface, Gustav III's *Reflexioner* proposed a clear argument for the idea of a national costume, grounded in what at first glance seemed to be rational considerations of economic, moral, and practical reasons. Reading between the lines however, there was a whole new line of argument discernible. This line of argument aimed to discredit the notion of Riksdag-rule, diminish the power of the nobility, and augment the power of the monarchy.

Naturally, this held implications for a reading of the purpose of the national costume in Swedish court society. Here, we are back with our two main questions, the first one regarding Gustav III's view of the National Costume's role in court society. Here I would argue that in the broadest sense, the National Costume for Gustav III had a political and psychological role in court society. To concretize this, the National Costume was a political tool to seal the coup d'état of 1772. With its historically romanticized appearance, it was a symbol of the glorious old days of the Swedish monarchy, before the "50 years of anarchical rule" ensued. The National Costume represented the fact that Gustav III had managed to restore this glory for the Swedish kingdom. Simultaneously, the national costume constituted a psychological weapon. Its introduction in the ceremonial etiquette of court had a direct utilitarian value for the king. With all courtiers wearing the same relatively sober costume, and the king free to wear what he wants, the National Costume visualized the increased power distance between the nobility and the monarchy at all times. With increased uncertainty and anxiety about rank among his courtiers, the king can rest assured of the increase in strength of his superior rank.

Of course, we have now also started to answer the second question, which regarded the social implications of the national costume for the aristocracy. This is essentially the reversed situation of what was described above. Depleted of their ability to freely dress themselves at court, the court aristocracy is forced to obscure into nothingness as the entire court is adorned with the same attire. The induced anxiety that this shift brings with makes life at court even more stressful than it already had been. In the king's presence, they are now not only made aware of their growing inferiority in power to the king, but also of his increased ability to manipulate their rank. As the king parades around in "Swedish" attire produced in France, with

rich decorations and embellishments, the nobility must look on in horror, with growing jealousy of the king's rank.

So, it is herein that the true meaning of the National Costume lies: As a symbol of the closing chapter of the Age of Liberty, the National Costume was Gustav III's measure to assure that something like the Age of Liberty would not happen again.

### 3.2 Discussion

The initial concept of this thesis aimed to incorporate many different diary sources from court aristocrats in eighteenth-century Sweden under Gustav III in order to construct a more comparative effort of the aristocratic attitude towards the National Costume. Unfortunately, due to time constraints of this thesis this was not possible. The alternative route of using Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta's (1902) journal as a representative of the aristocratic perspective worked well in the context of this thesis. However, for future research, the initial plan could be of high interest, as it would enrich the aristocratic perspective in this discourse.

As discussed earlier, not much previous research on the National Costume has been done, apart from historical studies. The major lack that I identified was the non-critical attitude towards Gustav III's intentions, despite frequent anecdotes which warrant a questioning of these intentions. Through arguing for a novel interpretation of the National Costume as an oppressive force to the Swedish court nobility and its functioning as an instrument for the royal position to create greater distance of power between the monarchy and the nobility, this thesis has taken the first step towards a more critical approach to the study of Gustav III's National Costume, employing a combined historical and sociological perspective.



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## Illustrations

Figure 1. An illustration of the vardagsdräkten. Rangström, Lena, ed. 1997. *Kläder för tid och evighet: Gustaf III sedd genom sina dräkter*, 168. Stockholm: Livrustkammaren.

Figure 2. An illustration of the galadräkten. Rangström, Lena, ed. 1997. *Kläder för tid och evighet: Gustaf III sedd genom sina dräkter*, 168. Stockholm: Livrustkammaren.

Figure 3. An illustration of the 'allmänna dräkten'. Rangström, Lena, ed. 1997. *Kläder för tid och evighet: Gustaf III sedd genom sina dräkter*, 169. Stockholm: Livrustkammaren.

Figure 4. Castle interior with a couple in conversation. Oil-painting by Pehr Hilletlöm. The lady is wearing the 'vardagsdräkten'. Bergman, Eva. 1938. *Nationella Dräkten: En studie kring Gustaf III:s dräktreform 1778*, 5. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.

Figure 5. Ground-floor plan of a site which has the street on the opposite side of the garden. De La Marquade. 1761. "Plan du rez-de-chaussée pour un emplacement dont l'avenue est de côté par rapport au jardin." In Vol 2 of *L'Art de bâtir des maisons de campagne où l'on traite de leur distribution, de leur construction, et de leur décoration*, edited by Charles-Étienne Briseux, Planche 150/ page 16. Paris: Chez J. B. Gibert.  
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## *Appendices*

**Appendix I** / English translation of '*REFLEXIONER, angående en ny Nationel Klädedrägt, daterade den 16 Februari 1778*' (Gustav III 1806).<sup>39</sup>

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When luxury is allowed to to ingrain itself into an impoverished country, it will soon become its most pressing plague. It has been attempted to install all kinds of barriers against it, and at the Riksdag the nation's voice has always spoken loudly against this evil. The Law-making Power has with many laws tried to subside its escalation; but everything has been in vain, the sickness has in its expansion deflected all resistance, luxury in dress has maintained itself and prospered, supported not less by women's powerful assistance and encouragement, than by the thought one each naturally carries, that with the use of a form of dress, which another nation invented, not to give in to the same decoration and shifts.

When it was no longer possible to display exquisite taste through the nature and appearance of fabrics, nor in the price and splendour of women's dress decorations, the fast shifts in fashion overtook all remaining quirks, and caused is costliness to increase much more in all elements, that the re-creation of fashion requires.

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These elements, of which the import has long been forbidden, as well as for their highly exaggerated price beyond their worth, for the smugglers' risk-fees for the adventure involving their secret imports, have multiplied expenses beyond need, and through the power that the female gender holds over public opinion, as well as that they so easily know to win over hearts, it has finally happened that the illegal import of such products has come to be seen as courtesy and as a way to please them.

The law is inadequate against opinions. Through strictness one can indeed become obedient; however in certain cases strictness stands powerless and only results in disobedience. Experience is more convincing here, than the rhetoric's concluding argument, and tells us, that the nations authorities in 30 years have never managed to find a means to the decrease of luxury and grandeur in dress, but that at the same time all possibilities have not been thought out carefully, making the laws given in this issue ineffective.

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<sup>39</sup> Translated by myself.

As long as a foreign style of court dress is worn, people will try to emulate its costliness and grandeur, and people will compulsively follow its changes.

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The first youngster who returns home from his travels, or the first merchant of fashions who brings back the latest inventions, causes rapid changes in both Court dress and Civil dress, and adding the heaviest expenses to accounts, not only for some individuals but the whole population. This is even more abominable considering that they harm the trade cycle, but they are just as shameful for their ability to be selfish when one remembers how such a new fashion often finds its origin from some vain brain's invention of one or the other gender, if it perhaps doesn't stem from such persons whose livelihood is just as pleasant as it is despicable.

In vain it has been attempted to hinder import-embezzlement. A brigade for toll-handling has hardly managed in this. The experience of our forefathers' time and the present condition clearly illuminate the truth about this. One merely has to glance at the geographical situation of the State to realise that our coasts are too widespread to shield against smugglers, as long as they, encouraged by profit, do not shy away from the most audacious ventures. That's why we must eliminate this evil from its root, and take away our possibility to keep copying others, through once and for all stepping away from our current form of dress, and distinguishing ourselves from the foreign, while at the same time disabling ourselves

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to wish for all those frivolities, which up until now have overwhelmed us, and which now have become almost unbearable to us. I do realize how such an idea (I would dare to say only because of its scale) should seem new, odd, yes maybe even too far reaching at first sight; but this solution has become the only thing remaining and sufficient to resist the malaise against which is being complained.

If one just wants to consider the health and the comfort of the body, general agreement would easily be won, because no attire is more uncomfortable than that which restricts all the body-parts it covers, which one cannot button up, which shields neither the breast nor the thighs, which is open because of its very cut, and which in its current general custom is so tight that it just does not shield our most important body parts from the cold. So it is true that the attire we wear now was invented in Europe's southern and warmer area; but not at all made for our Nordic climate.

If one also wants to consider the external appearance, one is quickly forced to admit that hardly any given attire is uglier and less comfortable for the eyes than the one we wear now. I'm just appealing to the testimony of our

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masters in good taste: I mean Painters and Sculptors. None of them would dare to dress a statue in the costume of our time; so little place does it have to fit in the pleasure of our eyes.

If we, following the male attire, similarly review the female attire, we find it hardly any better than half-naked, exposed to the harsh Nordic cold, their throats and half of their backs unprotected, their arms covered in gloves which are more fit to protect their skin from the weather than to expel cold; wide stiff robes, which, while they constrict their torso, leave free room for the harshest winter cold; I can no longer allow myself to extend my research; but maybe there are customs even less fitting for this strong climate where we live. The habit barely is able to save the sex from the timely death which their attire would otherwise bring to them; but a weakened health among most of them, their frequent nervous diseases, their frequent convulsions, which among them have been occurring for some twenty years, is definitely a consequence of the difference between the southern European attire and the northern climate. If we then, instead of a cold and uncomfortable attire, were to take on an attire, more warm, more comfortable, less tight and constricting, which would dress better in the sense that it would cover and protect, and which with the many

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pieces of which it is comprised, serve us to be more or less warmly dressed according to the whims of the weather, which here with us are more frequent than it occurs elsewhere: I say we should certainly not hinder ourselves and we should act like wise people, which, since it follows our own logic, would free us from desperately following another's. If one adds to these reasons what a good economic administration requires, not the slightest reason for hesitation seems to remain.

When it concerns Women, Russia provides us with a recent example of the resistance they formed in the beginning, but also of how short-lived this resistance has been; they willingly grew comfortable, convinced of the new attire's greater comfort and benefit. What is sought here is of greater importance, namely, to bring in a more comfortable, beautiful and health-conscious attire, to steer away from our Women's unbearable and idle monetary expenses, caused by the foreign fashions rapid occurring changes. Among those who have more than well equipped wardrobes, there should be some who will show resistance against this in the beginning; but I have no doubt that they will soon realise the purpose of this change, and that the habits will later consolidate with what this realisation has begun.

However I do imagine I will hear a lot of voices raise against this. I see apprehension and

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judgement arm themselves against all news. What!, says one, change the attire of a whole Nation? I answer: Why not? If this change only has as its goal to once and for always get rid of foreign fashions: if it is achieved through example, through the desire to please one's superiors, through the desire to resemble them who have the most precedence in the State: if it is introduced gradually, willingly, without coercion, without force: if the attire which is taken in instead is more comfortable, warmer, more in line with the conditions of the climate, and above all less costly because of its durability and unchanged form in comparison with the constant changes of the one which we abandon. What! says another one, towards the end of the eighteenth century one should want to distinguish oneself with an attire which should not resemble that of another Nation? It is desired to become barbarians again, this when Peter I in the beginning of this same century introduced the European costume among his people, to their much more novel civilisation? To this I answer: Peter I was faced with barbaric manners; arrogance, generated by ignorance, a disdain for enlightened nations a consequence of this pride. The Regent sought more than its precursors, to meet the rest Europe, to finally attain the customs and the noble arts. He thus devoted himself to every manner of making his subjects aware

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of their great distance to this standard and of their savagery. He wanted to persuade them against their own will, to introduce the precedence of the other populations before them. That was his plan. He could not do much more than win because he strived to resemble others. Perhaps we can win just as much by staying true to what we already are. Our manners (I dare to say this for the honour of our nation) are superior over those of the southern parts of Europe, and the Swedish Nation must really have a very strong set of honourable characteristics if that hasn't been totally spoiled by 50 years of anarchical rule. A tendency to receive the impression of strangers during the tumult and the divide which prevailed among us, and controlled by foreign ways of thinking next to our current Government, we have become accustomed to not put enough esteem in ourselves, and to attach too much value to that which is foreign.

If Peter I with reason should try to eradicate amongst his people its national way of judging and thinking, to accustom it to a state of mind, more devout, more enlightened, more European; if he felt it necessary to tell his subjects: stop being Russians, become Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, then I think for us it is just as important to say: remain Swedes, be that which your forefathers

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were under their ancient Kings, brave, faithful subjects, obedient sons, tender men, caring fathers, good citizens, devout Christians, in short: be what other Nations will soon stop being, dress yourselves in national spirit, and I dare to say that a national attire would contribute more to this than one would

think. This should for many seem like a paradox; but experience is here the most trustful leader: it proves more than the best concluding argument.

Among us there are only two classes of citizens among which the attire is distinct from other Nations: one of them is the military, which within itself maintains an esprit de corps which in their own eyes elevates them over others. Let us now descend from the highest command to the troops: does not the unity which reigns within each Regiment which considers itself a small separate Nation within itself, depend much on the similarity of the dress? Mark a single battalion of those with another uniform, soon the change will show itself which merely appears as the difference of dress. From that moment on, the Commander-in-Chief will not be able to give the slightest precedence to one battalion over the other, without arousing dissatisfaction, and soon afterward the unity among the small Nation will disappear.

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The Clergy is the second Estate of the State, distinguished from the others in its attire. Its customs, its seriousness, their reverence it is proven has more to do with the same, than one would imagine. If it would become free and open for the Spiritual, to by liking wear secular costume between the times and moments, when they would not perform public Worship, similarly to the desecration which has now found ground in England; one would soon see the ancient serious dignity belonging to their estate abandon them.

Yet more room for objections opens up. 'Where', it is said, 'should so many kinds of artisans go, who now support themselves with the manufacture of what belongs to our present garment?' This objection is important and it seems hard to find a solution to this issue on first glance; but I such matters a review of the situation will lead us to the right judgement. Let us then observe what kind of craftsman it is said should be driven to become beggars, and forced to move away from their homeland where there is no other way for them anymore to feed themselves: Tailors? they will be busy with their craft as long as clothes are worn. Cobblers? We need shoes at all times. Hat-makers? Round or triangle hats will give these just as much to do. Goldsmiths or those of us who produce

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gold and silver galloons? According to the ordinances and statutes that are still complied with, no one is allowed to wear them, except those individuals who belong to the Court and the Military. If instead of wearing a galloon around the brim of the hat, one surrounds the bucket of the hat with it, there is not much more changed than its position. However that does mean that less material would be needed, and

if so, the expenses of the less fortunate Officer will be reduced simultaneously. In addition, the incoming new custom has already done more in this regard, and gallooned hats are now out of fashion. Belt makers, who make metal and gilded brass buttons? The whole Military, in whatever uniforms it wears, can never go without metal buttons; and when it concerns other people, now more people will have the right to wear buttons made in Sweden; if this would be researched enough, most existing ones would be found to be either French or English. The Fabric manufacturers? Not only is the new garment generally made of cloth, but it may also be worn at the Court, and furthermore the whole Military cannot go without its garments made of cloth, which altogether makes for a rich market for the garment manufacturer; but once the colours have been decided upon, our Manufacturers no longer have to fear such frequent smuggling in foreign types of fabric as until now

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and especially ratiné, which nowadays seems to appear in abundance in all of Stockholm's market stands. The same Manufacturers can from now on simply seek greater improvements in the dyeing process, and through reaching absolute excellence in their fabrics, they can be assured of good sales, superior to the the foreigners.

As for the few remaining Silk factories which may still be with us, it is undeniably for them more advantageous to just manufacture fabrics of a color the measurements of which they can not miscalculate, than to constantly compete with the foreign fashioned ones, which they could not compare to anyways in excellence and appearance, or have time to imitate the designs, before that fashion is already over.

Thus, only they who trade with fashions remain, for whom a loss could arise, because those probably will no longer have their goods sold at double and often triple their value. But even though ladies' headdresses, of less importance to the State, yet a rather beloved thing to themselves, are not dealt with; these merchantesses of fashion should still be able to always find a vast field to exercise their trade, and sufficient means to earn their living.

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But still someone would say: 'Why should an attire be transformed, when against the increase of luxury in the one we wear now, the only thing needed would be a show of delight by the regent, to praise those who forsake fine frivolities, and simultaneously to openly condemn the rest, who through the costliness of their dress indulge themselves into foolish expenses hardly corresponding with their fortune?' I only ask that one takes a glance at the rest of Europe, then one will soon find answers to this objection. All strive to imitate and to be the first to adopt a foreign fashion, yes even the peoples ruled by regents who

show the least desire for adornment in clothes? Who does not know of a great Regent's disdain for such adornments. Revered in Europe, feared and obeyed by his subjects with his most minimal ideas, whose lifetime is remarkable in all journals, and who in the evening of his life saw himself, so to speak, as Europe's mediator, he has perhaps not with possession of great titles, but with all the right to demand obedience, persuaded those who are at its Court and are not Military, to not dress themselves in his own castle with foreign fabrics, the import of which is strictly forbidden in his country anyways. Under his eyes, the princesses of his own house do not wear any other fabrics and ornaments than those from the prescriptions, while at the same time

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the factories in its lands have attained a height of goodness, which the foreign hardly can compare to. To such an extent is the desire for dress people close to heart; to such a height can affection for fashion, and especially their amusing shifts, master the minds of those, who wear the same form of dress as a foreign nation.

For the rest, what is sought here is to dampen or rather to once and for all eradicate the ever-continuing changes of fashions, which have now increased so much that if a woman showed herself today dressed as she was only five years ago, one would already find her old-fashioned and little better than ridiculous, all of which has brought us a new kind of opulence, unknown to those who have lived before us, and especially painful to those of the sex who live in the countryside, who after one or at most two years away from the capital, find themselves compelled to renew their entire supply of clothing. This luxury, as useful as it may be to a rich country, where all the rudimentary materials needed for its maintenance are in abundance, and where the frequent changes of fashion are rather a source of new wealth through the taxation which foreigners surrender to; such a deadly destruction it brings upon a poor State, which must obtain all these needs from abroad.

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At last we have reached the last counter-argument, which would seem the strongest, the most persuading one. The question here is: What should our contemporaries think, when we want to separate ourselves so strongly from them? They will soon believe that we are going back to ancient barbarism. I would dare to say: if they like the reasons that have caused us to change costume, if they find it wise that we wanted to choose an attire for ourselves, comfortable of character, also distinct in appearance by its purity, because we were not rich enough to achieve the preciousness of their costumes, or longer willing to follow their opulence, then their approval will soon follow; but if among the many there were still some frivolous minds, who would believe a people to be barbarians, because they wear clothes which are cut shorter or longer than theirs; I answer them: *Judgement* does not belong to the eighteenth

century; the proper philosophy, which has been able to enlighten delusion and repel prejudices, has not yet managed to reach you. It is this philosophy which I call to my defense; not the pervert, which teaches to despise everything, to suppress reason with ridicule, which creates sects, and which, in order to rule alone, overthrows everything that should be respected; I appeal to the good-willing philosophy, which in doing so removes all harmful prejudice, all the small concerns, which

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mainly just steers away from great purposes which only bring useful things into the light, and which loves to honor with his encouraging support every bold undertaking, which aims for undisputed general good. Such is, I would dare to say, the change I have proposed here; it would certainly initiate a remarkable era in the history of this Kingdom. From the consequences one will soon learn the truthful benefit, and perhaps we will pass a verdict which several peoples would follow.

The Hungarians still retain the costume they have worn in the past. The Russian Empress, driven by the same noble way of thinking which lifts her no less above her gender than her contemporaries, and in order to no longer imitate the foreign customs, has already instilled for the ladies of her court a national costume. Poland, which has already lost so much reputation, is now occupied with its economy, and seems to desire a return to their ancient attire. We should then hurry to precede others, and avoid the annoyance that, since we were the first to arouse this thought, we would be the last to pursue it and carry it out.

**Appendix 2** / English translation of '*Letter for the month of January 1778 from Stockholm*' (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, 1902).<sup>40</sup>

(Content: festivities of the king's birthday, rumours that the queen is in good health, the king aims to instate a new costume, description of this same thing)

The Queen had organised a party for the king's birthday, in the afternoon the *cour* was held and after that the public meal. Later were those, who usually were at court, the gentlemen though only up until particular rank, but of the married ladies almost all, invited for dinner, which was had at different tables. At 6 [pm] there was a move to the opera, where just as with high-season events the king, the royal family and the court it had its place at the park. Amfion was performed, a new opera, for which the music has been composed by a sir Naumann, *Kapellmeister* for the prince-elect of Saxen, and who at the time was visiting here. After the opera one moved oneself home to dress up for the masquerade ball, which was held at the great apartment of the palace and started at 11 [pm]. Since one did not have to show a particular ticket and entry was free, the crown became awful, and one was being squeezed to death as well as suffocating of the warmth. The strong cold, which prevailed during the course of the day, and then was followed by the awful heat of the ball, gave rise to the quick occasion, that the day of the king, even though it was in the middle of winter, gave us a glimpse of the summer.

I have two great matters of news to report on today in my journal; the first is that the king aims to exchange our French attire with a national attire, and the second, that there is talk that the Queen is in favourable conditions, the second matter is not yet completely sure, but the issue of the attire seems to be completely settled. The preparation of sample garments has already begun in order to see how the attire will turn out. It is said that this change is brought forth for the sake of economy, but on if this would be justified opinions are varied; some say that it could maybe bring some cut-backs in costs for ladies, but not for gentlemen, though others claim the opposite. On my part, I don't see myself fit to give a judgement on the matter before I have got to wear the attire for a year, but I would however really like to believe that the cut-backs in costs will be greater for ladies than for gentlemen.

The attire will reportedly be exceptionally simple for both genders. For the ladies it will probably fit well for well-figured individuals, but it will be highly unflattering for fat ones. The gentlemen's attire will definitely be unflattering even for the well-figured and thus even more

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<sup>40</sup> Translated by myself.

for those who do not have a great figure. Our young ladies are hesitant about not being able to wear as many knickknacks as they in their vanity would wish; even though the wiser ones would think that it can be just as good if it isn't all that grand. Among the gentlemen, all except the servile courtiers should prefer the old attire and would feel hesitant towards the new so called national costume.

I will attempt, as well as I can, to provide a description of the new attire, so that you could imagine a depiction for yourselves. The women should always wear a black dress, the fabric they can choose after their own taste, as long as they adhere to the proscribed colours. The dress consists of a skirt with small so called "pocher", a bodice which is laced on the back, a long "tunique" which fits close to the body without a fold on the back, the arms are made of white gauze in puffs, with six strips of the same fabric as the dress, secured at the middle of the arm with a fold in the same fabric, thus dividing the strips in two sections, this type of sleeve is however just for ladies who are presented at court, other ladies wear all black folded sleeves; the train, which drops a long way to the ground, is on both sides secured with a knot of the same type of fabric. The whole dress and the skirt are very plainly trimmed with some folds of the same type of fabric. The dress should come with a high collar, which goes down to the middle of the breast, where it is secured with a rosette bow, which at the same time seems to keep together the the dress, it is of the same fabric as the trimming; on the sleeves at the wrists there is lacework and folded ribbons of the same colour. Finally, the attire comes with a belt of the same colour as the trimmings, with several carelessly hanging ends. Our hairdressing will remain after the French fashion, which with it abundance of plumes fits well with the dresses' antique cut. When women wear gala-attire, a white skirt and a white bodice is worn, the trimmings and the rest of the dress are then *fire-red*. In the king's company at the countryside however, monochromatic grey clothing is worn. This dress has the benefit of being really comfortable, and we get rid of these huge "panniers", which made us just as broad as tall.

The gentlemen's black and *fire-red* attire is truthfully hardly flattering, it is comprised of a very short fire red vest, which is however hardly visible, because the coat is mostly buttoned-up; this coat is black with a *fire-red* string in all the seams and it is lined with this same colour, it is not longer than that, when one relaxes the arms, it reaches the wrists. On top of the sleeves there are slitted poofs, which are characteristic of the dress; those who are not noblemen or who do not have the royal mandate, have this poof without the slits. The short trouser are also black, with a *fire-red* rosette bow at the knee instead of a buckle, a similar rosette is also worn on the shoes. Over the buttoned-up coat, a *fire-red* sash is worn; if it is unbuttoned however, the sash is worn over the vest. The attire also comes with a cloak, which is so long, that it reaches the crease of the knee, and so wide that one can wrap it around oneself, it is draped by being secured to the sash on the left side. The hat is round with a buckle and

several plumes attached on one side. The gentlemen's gala-attire is white, seamed and lined with *fire-red*, the vest and the sash also *fire-red* just like the cloak, which is lined with white. Those, who do not have the *ekolsundsuniform*, wear in the king's presence in the countryside a grey attire.

This is now, my dear friend, a careful description of this attire, which the king aims to instate and which at the moment makes so much fuss about itself, not only in Sweden but also the rest of Europe. A change can perhaps be of use when it concerns the ladies, because luxury in dress has reached such a height, that one should ruin oneself, if it were to remain in this way. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April the national costume will be worn for the first time. The king has for general clarification written some "reflections" on the national dress, which is exceptionally well written, but it is unsure if it will be confirmed by experience. Should the king in this respect have mistaken himself, then it can either way not be changed, and we will be forced to go dressed as savages as well as spark attention and become talked about in the entirety of Europe. In the meantime it can probably have a certain effect, that all will be similarly dressed, because it is only allowed for princely individuals to wear coloured and costly clothing.



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