‘Privé’ and ‘Particulier’ (and Other Words) in Seventeenth-Century France

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The following reflections follow in the wake of my doctoral dissertation, started in 1983,¹ then taken up again as a book with the title *Public et littérature en France au XVII^e siècle* (*Public and Literature in France in the Seventeenth Century*).² This first work, which discussed Jürgen Habermas’s great book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,³ sought to show that, contrary to what the latter wrote regarding France, in the seventeenth century the word ‘public’ did not designate all consumers, spectators, or readers of literary works, and so did not call for an immediate sociological analysis. The word ‘public’ designated the entire paradigm of the *respublica*, and also what Hannah Arendt calls the ‘public domain’:⁴ namely, both the entirety of so-called ‘public’ goods and people (the State and/or the people, according to the context; but sometimes only the royal court); and the scene in which these things, these goods, and these public people appear. Inevitably, I encountered straightaway the antonym of the word ‘public’, that is to say, the ‘particular’ and the epistemological problem of subjectivation.⁵ From there, my later work never stopped gravitating around the question of the articulation between public and particular: how does the individual relate to the public? How do personal, non-public relations link up with relations that are formed or viewed publicly? How are they communicated, through what lexicon, and according to what stakes? And finally, how is the articulation between subjective interiority and the external world conceived, for each person and by each person?⁶

1 Merlin H., “La Cour et la Ville, ou la question du *public* au siècle de Louis XIV”, *Les Cahiers de Fontenay* 30–31 (Paris: 1983) 91–103. All citations in this chapter were translated by Amanda Jane Vredenburg and revised by François Cornilliat, unless otherwise stated.

2 Idem, *Public et littérature en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1994).

3 Habermas J., *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: 1991).

4 Arendt H., *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: 1998).

5 Foucault M., *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (London: 1990).

6 Merlin-Kajman H., *L’Absolutisme dans les Lettres et la théorie des deux corps. Passions et politique* (Paris: 2000); idem, *L’Excentricité académique. Institution, littérature, société* (Paris: 2001); idem, “Le moi dans l’espace social, Métamorphoses du XVII^e siècle”, in

These questions are homologous and always mutually imbricated. But they are not identical. My aim is to show the value of making distinctions that we are not used to making.

There are at least two very different ways to construct the place of what we today call the private space. The first way is the most usual: it is the one that is connoted by the word 'privacy'. This way clearly and positively defines individual privacy as interiority (interiority of consciousness and emotions): it seems to denote that something is hidden and should not be accessible to public scrutiny; however it can be shared with others in the context of amorous relations, as well as in familial or friendly relationships. The second way understands the private negatively, founded on the term's sense of privation: the private is simply that which is not public. We will see that in the latter meaning, the private sphere can very well be neither strongly individuated, individualised, nor very intimate. It can even go entirely without any reference to an interior space, to one's innermost being. My idea is that in the seventeenth century these two ways joined together thanks to the valorisation and the autonomy of the 'particular'.

In modern French, privacy is translated by 'vie privée', or 'intimité' ('intimacy'). However, the second word, 'intimité', only appeared in French at the very end of the seventeenth century.⁷ Furthermore, during the seventeenth century, 'vie privée' did not exactly mean privacy, as Antoine Furetière's examples make clear.⁸ How, then, might we proceed to study the intimacy in the early modern context? Is privacy what anthropologists call an etic notion? If so, this notion may be useful when we seek to understand specific aspects of

Kaufmann L. – Guilhamou J. (eds.), *Raisons pratiques, L'invention de la société, nominalisme politique et science sociale au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 2003) 23–43; idem, "Sentir, ressentir: émotion privée, langage public", *Littératures classiques* 68 (2009) 335–354; idem, "Le privé et l'intimité au XVII^e siècle doivent-ils quelque chose à Horace?", in Delignon B. – Dauvois N. – Cottagnies L. (eds.), *L'invention de la vie privée et le modèle d'Horace* (Paris: 2017) 277–298.

7 'Intimité' is not defined by the dictionaries of that time, but the noun and adjective 'intime' is. Here is the entry from the first monolingual dictionary: 'amy particulier, & à qui on découvre son coeur & ses affaires plus confidemment qu'à tout autre' ('A particular friend, to whom one reveals one's heart and affairs in greater confidence than to all others'), Furetière Antoine, "Intime", *Dictionnaire universel* (The Hague – Rotterdam, Arnoud et Reinier Leers: 1690). This word was rare in the seventeenth century. Accordingly, I do not engage with this meaning in what follows.

8 '[O]n dit qu'un homme mene une vie *privée*, qu'il a une fortune *privée*, quand il vit en retraite & en particulier, sans charge, sans employ, sans se mesler d'affaires; qu'il vit en son *privé*, en homme *privé*' ('It is said that a man leads a private life, has a private fortune, when he lives retired from the world and as a mere individual, when he is free of offices, unemployed, and does not get involved in public affairs, that he lives in his private domain as a private man'), Furetière, "Privé", *Dictionnaire universel*.

seventeenth-century experiences. I would stress, however, that the 'vie privée' is also an emic notion since the syntagm *did exist* as such in early modern France. The private, terminologically speaking, belonged to a semantic cluster of words derived from the Latin *privatus*. Indeed, these words did not originate from Latin in the sense that Latin belonged to the past: the words resonated with meaning in the ways that Latin texts and references were read. This was true for France and for the rest of Europe. Such colinguism was a constituting element of early modern cultures.⁹ Naturally, we must be careful to avoid anachronism: the meaning of the 'vie privée' (the thing and the word) changed over time. Such changes, however, do not preclude that early modern notions and situations can be related to privacy in its contemporary meanings. Indeed, the differences in meaning of the same notion can be productive and spur on the imagination: past meanings, nested in our languages, make us aware of present tendencies as they come to the fore in our usage. I shall return to this point in my conclusion, after we have engaged with what 'vie privée' entailed in seventeenth-century France.

My research on this topic owes much to Reinhart Koselleck's influential book *Critique and Crisis*.¹⁰ Koselleck gives a clear and persuasive analysis of the disjunction between public and private spheres,¹¹ which was key to the monarchy's absolutist structure as it consolidated itself in the seventeenth century. Koselleck explains, largely correctly in my view,¹² that in the sixteenth century the civil wars of religion were fuelled by zeal, defined as a 'passion for the public'¹³ – that is, an ardent feeling encouraged by morality and religion, which prescribes that it is necessary to give everything to the public. According to this perspective, each person is an individual who, as such, should not have

9 Balibar R., *Le colinguisme* (Paris: 1993).

10 Koselleck R., *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: 2000 [1959]).

11 In the French translation of Koselleck's work, 'private sphere' is given as 'sphère privée'. Insofar as the distinction between public and private appears in early modern French texts – and bearing in mind that such a distinction is not only or always to be understood in oppositional terms, as a disjunction – the 'private' is given as 'particulier' rather than as 'privé'.

12 Koselleck's debt to Carl Schmitt has of course led scholars to take a critical view of his analysis. But forty years of research on this so-called 'disjunction between the public sphere and the private sphere' as a kind of silent contract between the sovereign and his subjects allows me to state that his analysis is a remarkable point of departure, presenting as it does the configuration of absolutism at the very beginning of the seventeenth century.

13 See Merlin H., "Fables of the 'Mystical Body' in Seventeenth-Century France", *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994) 126–142; idem, "Conjurer la passion de l'Un", *Rue Descartes* 12–13 (1995) 38–56.

any existence apart from belonging to the collective. In this way, each member of the body politic is supposed to give himself entirely to the public in order to participate in and contribute to the 'public good'. During the Wars of Religion, however, this zeal split: one part of the collective, zealously, opposed what they perceived as contrary to the public good, while another part of the collective, with equal zeal, defended this as the public good. After the assassination of Henry III (1551–1589), a third party – the so-called 'Politiques' – placed the new king, Henry IV (1553–1610), above these conflicts and made him the sole source of and criterion for the public good. Thus, the disjunction between what is public and what is particular reflects the political disengagement of subjects as they entirely abandoned their claim to sovereignty – understood as the responsibility for public affairs – and left it in the hands of the absolute monarch. In return, as illustrated by the Edict of Nantes (1598), all its imperfections and limitations notwithstanding, the sovereign was no longer responsible for his subjects' salvation, turning this, ethically speaking, into a matter of private consciousness.

Of course, things are not so clear-cut for everyone. For example, pious Christians would continue to reject any lack of inclusion between public good and particular interest, contesting the separation between state policies and private morals, because this disjunction is 'libertine' ('blasphemous') in their eyes. Thus, the Church continued to claim for the existence of a superior and all-encompassing public sphere. From this point of view, the *Respublica Christiana* appears as the mystical body of the faithful; it is the organic whole without which individuals would not have meaning. Nevertheless, corporative Catholicism gave way to a more personal, more intimate Catholicism, the first model of which came from the Reformation. The life of 'particuliers' became the probationary place of *true* behaviour. Sincerity, confirmed by interiority, replaced loyalty (which was proved only by exterior actions). Appearance ceased to be a straightforward manifestation of being; instead, and given that everything of value was considered to occur either within each individual or between individuals, concealment and simulation could be legitimised as a means to preserve public order. The emblematic place where this new autonomy came to the fore was the 'cabinet' (the French word for 'studiolo') and the salon. The disjunction between what was public and what was particular creeps in everywhere. In the seventeenth century, individual interiority hidden from the public begins to be an immense source of curiosity that was both satisfied and fuelled by literary fictions.¹⁴ Since visible manifestations of loyalty

14 Merlin-Kajman H., "Curiosité et espace particulier au XVII^e siècle", in Jacques-Chaquin N. – Houdard S. (eds.), *Curiosité et Libido sciendi de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, vol. 1

were no longer held in the same esteem as the hidden sincerity of actions performed, the invisible state of the inner self had to be authenticated. As an example of such modes of authentication, let us consider an astonishing text by the bishop and novelist Jean-Pierre Camus (1584–1652), where he praises François de Sales (1567–1622) and presents him as entirely devoted to the public. But how can Camus know this?

Il faut que je vous dise ici, [...] une de mes ruses, appelez-là malice, si vous voulez, quand il me venait voir en ma résidence [...] j'avais fait à dessein des trous en certains endroits des portes ou du plancher, pour le considérer quand il était tout seul retiré dans sa chambre, pour voir [...] de quelle façon il se comportait [...] aux plus menues contenance et gestes, dont on se licencie souvent quand on est seul. [...] Étant seul il était aussi composé qu'en une grande assemblée.¹⁵

Here, I have to tell you about [...] about one of my tricks – call it mischief, if you will. When he came to see me in my home [...] I had made holes in certain places in the doors and the floorboards in order to observe him, when he was all alone, secluded in his bedroom; to see in which way he behaved [...] up to the slightest attitudes and gestures, in which we often allow ourselves when we are alone. [...] While alone he was just as composed as if in a great assembly.

Even in solitude, the saint behaved *as if* he were in public, and this proves, according to Camus, that he entertained no separate existence. Indeed, François de Sales had entirely dedicated himself to the public. But his dedication had to be authenticated by the observation of his behaviour as 'particulier' and not simply by his public behaviour.

Slowly but surely, this idea grew stronger: the 'particular' became situated within the individual's separate existence and consciousness. One author played an important role in this process: Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592).¹⁶ Repeatedly denounced as a libertine by devout Christians,¹⁷ Montaigne, who secluded himself in his library to write his *Essays*, compares his innermost being to an 'arrière boutique' ('the backroom of a shop'). Equally emblematic with

(Paris: 1998) 109–135.

15 Camus Jean-Pierre, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, vol. 2 (Paris, Gervais Alliot: 1640) 3–5.

16 See Compagnon A., *Nous, Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: 1980).

17 Millet O., *La première réception des Essais de Montaigne (1580–1640)* (Paris: 1995).

regard to this disjunction is the following sentence: 'Le maire et Montaigne ont toujours été deux, d'une séparation bien claire'¹⁸ ('the mayor and Montaigne have always been two, with a clear separation').¹⁹ This sentence appears in a chapter of the *Essays* that expounds a radical critique of zeal. Thus, the 'clear separation' is based on the refusal to define the individual by ontologising his belonging to the public. 'The mayor' is a public figure; the title designates an individual, who holds a public office, a *dignitas*. 'Montaigne', then, is the individual conceived without reference to this public persona. Exploring a kind of subjective meaning of the metaphor of the king's two bodies,²⁰ Montaigne transfers true dignity from the public status to the individual, to the 'ego'.

Montaigne begins this chapter by citing a religious and moralising maxim that supports his father's virtuous behaviour: 'Il avoit ouï dire qu'il se fallait oublier pour le prochain, que le particulier ne venait en aucune considération au prix du général'²¹ ('He had heard it said that we must forget ourselves for our neighbour, that the individual was not to be considered at all in comparison with the general').²² For Montaigne, this maxim is an error, or even a lie. He demonstrates how we are born for our own selves and *not* for the public. Consequently, the *Essays* explores this new territory of the self, as revealed by the famous 'avis au lecteur' ('note to the reader'):

Je l'ai voué à la commodité particulière de mes parents et amis: à ce que m'ayans perdu (ce qu'ils ont à faire bientôt) ils y puissent retrouver aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs [...] Si c'eût esté pour rechercher la faveur du monde, je me fusse paré de beautés empruntées. Je veux qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans étude et artifice: car c'est moi que je peins.²³

I have dedicated it to the private convenience of my relatives and friends, so that, when they have lost me (as soon they must), they may recover here some features of my habits and temperament. [...] If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better, and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple,

18 Montaigne Michel de, *Les Essais*, book 3, chap. 10, ed. P. Villey, vol. 3 (Paris: 1931) 454.

19 Idem, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford, CA: 1976).

20 See Kantorowicz E., *The King's Two Bodies. A Study on Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: 1957).

21 Montaigne, *Les Essais*, book 3, chap. 10, vol. 3, 443.

22 Idem, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* 769.

23 Idem, "Au Lecteur", in *Les Essais*, ed. P. Villey, vol. 1 (Paris: 1930) 3–4.

natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice: for it is myself that I portray.²⁴

This statement reverses the usual *topoi* used in other paratextual notes to the reader. Montaigne's contemporaries would generally affirm that they were not writing for their own particular interest: authors routinely stated that they offered their work to the public, presenting it as a contribution to the common good. Montaigne states the opposite: 'C'est ici un livre de bonne foi, lecteur. Il t'avertit dès l'entrée que je ne m'y suis proposé aucune fin que domestique et privée. Je n'y ai eu nulle considération de ton service [...]'²⁵ ('This book was written in good faith, reader. It warns you from the outset that in it I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private family one. I have had no thought of serving either you or my own glory [...]').²⁶ And yet, Montaigne proceeded to publish his book! By publishing it, however, he was addressing his readers as other 'particulars', aiming for them to learn how to cultivate their 'selves'. This cultivation, for each person, is the true medium of dignity, his real office. Thus, to know oneself is the task each individual has to undertake. Montaigne's influence was considerable and extended to Camus, who, paradoxically, was one of his admirers. I will now look more closely at a succession of anecdotal scenes, most of them taken from literary texts, in order to evaluate their conception of private life using Montaigne as a guide.

1 The Birth of a King

The following scene is taken from Michèle Fogel's excellent *Rois de France*.²⁷ It does not come from the domain of literature, and seems simple. But far from being only a counter-example, it involves the story of an exceptional experience: that of Marie de Medici when she gave birth to her first child, Louis XIII on 27 September 1601. As she entered labour, Henry IV, according to the midwife's testimony, addressed his wife, who at this date was twenty-six years old, and reminded her that the birth would take place in public – that is, in the presence of the princes of the blood. The presence of these men was required as testimony to the fact that the royal couple's biological son had not been

24 Idem, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* 2.

25 Idem, "Au Lecteur", in *Les Essais*, vol. 1, 3.

26 Idem, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* 2.

27 Fogel M., *Roi de France. De Charles VIII à Louis XVI* (Paris: 2014).

substituted with another child. Knowing that the prospect of such publicity would dismay the young queen, the king urges her to overcome this feeling:

Je sçay bien ma mie que vous voulés tout ce que je veux: mais je con-
nais votre naturel qui est timide et honteux; que je crains que si vous ne
prenez une grande résolution les voyant [les princes du sang], cela
ne vous empêche d'accoucher; c'est pourquoi, derechef, je vous prie
de ne vous étonner point, puisque c'est la forme que l'on tient au premier
accouchement des Reines.²⁸

I am well aware, my dear, that you want everything that I want. However,
I know your nature, which is shy and bashful; so I fear that if you do not
maintain a firm resolution when you see them [the princes], it might pre-
vent you from giving birth: this is why, once again, I urge you not to be
stunned,²⁹ since this is the custom that is upheld for the first childbirth
of queens.

It is necessary to set the scene. Although the princes of the blood were not
exactly next to the queen, their positioning in the room allowed them a
direct view of the birth chair, and therefore of her genitals, which were called
pudenda in Latin and 'parties honteuses' in French ('the shameful parts'). This,
then, is how the baby was born. As soon as the king, the queen, and their close
relatives learned that the child was a boy, and France had a Dauphin, the doors
were ordered to be opened allowing no less than two hundred courtiers to
invade the room and huddle around the mother and baby. When the midwife
protested as the placenta had not yet been removed, the king replied: 'Tais-toi,
sage-femme, ne te fâche point; cet enfant est à tout le monde, il faut que cha-
cun s'en réjouisse' ('be quiet, midwife, and do not get cross: this child belongs
to all; everyone must delight in him').³⁰ The same evening Henry IV addressed
a letter to the Parisian municipality:

Très-chers et bien aimés. Entre tant de miraculeux témoignages de
l'assistance divine que l'on a pu remarquer en notre faveur depuis notre

28 Quoted by Fogel, *Roi de France* 15. Boursier Louise, *Récit véritable de la naissance de
Messeigneurs et dames les enfants de France*, suivi de *Comment et en quel temps la reyne
accoucha de monsieur le Dauphin à présent Louis XIII*, eds. F. Rouget – C.H. Winn (Droz:
2000) 73.

29 'Étonner' has a strong meaning in the seventeenth century. Here, the verb means 'to vio-
lently strike the imagination'.

30 Boursier, *Récit véritable de la naissance* 163.

avènement à cette couronne, il n'y en a pas un seul qui ne nous ait fait ressentir plus vivement les effets de sa bonté, que l'heureux accouchement de la reine notre très chère et très aimée épouse et compagne qui vient de mettre au monde un fils; dont nous recueillons une joie que nous ne pouvons exprimer. Mais comme les calamités publiques nous ont toujours plus ému durant nos misères passées, que la considération de notre particulier intérêt; aussi ne recevons-nous pas tant de plaisir et contentement pour ce qui nous touche dans cette naissance, que pour le bien général de nos sujets [...].³¹

Most dear and beloved people. Among so much miraculous evidence of the divine assistance that one could remark in our favour since our accession to this crown, there is not a single one that has made us feel the effects of his kindness more deeply than the queen's happy delivery, our dearest and beloved wife and companion who has just brought a son into the world; from which we receive a joy that we cannot express. But just as public calamities always moved us more during our former hardships than the consideration of our particular interest, so we do not receive as much pleasure and satisfaction for our own concern from this birth, as we do for the general benefit of our subjects [...].

Following Fogel's interpretation, the letter situates the history of kings between what it names the particular interest of the king and the common good of his subjects: it presents these two as necessarily and harmoniously linked to each other.³² But here, Henry IV's letter focuses on the general maxim according to which one must place the public interest above one's 'particulier intérêt' ('particular interest'). For a sovereign, even within an absolutist framework, such a lack of self-interest was a theoretical requirement: it is compatible with the metaphor of the king's two bodies, and for the king the distinction between private and public amounts to no disjunction but rather a positing of the private within the public the king dedicates himself to the common good.

However, I think it is clear that Henry IV's dedication to the public is very different from the queen's. In a certain sense, both shame and modesty are public feelings. It is in relation to a public – real or imaginary – that actions are experienced as shameful. Immodesty and impudence are scandalous, and everyone

31 Quoted by Fogel, *Roi de France* 15–16.

32 See Fogel, *Roi de France* 16–17.

knows that the sin of scandal (*scandalum*)³³ is much worse than simple sin because it is public. When Montaigne addresses the reader of his *Essays*, he refuses, on the contrary, to follow such rules of decorum: he explicitly states that he will depict himself as nakedly as public reverence will allow – that is, a lot more naked than what is usually agreed upon and appropriate. Indeed, zealous Christians would go on to be scandalised (in the canonic meaning) because they found Montaigne to have presented himself as far too naked. In this instance, then, the publication of the particular operates against purely public prescriptions of decorum.

Thus, the young queen's public childbirth breaches a boundary other than the one that opposes 'particulier' and 'public'. On the one hand, she is well aware that, by bringing a boy into the world, she is giving the public a royal heir: she could have pronounced the same sentence as Henry IV even without giving birth under the gaze of the princes of the blood. On the other hand, there is a certain asymmetry between the necessity of giving birth in public – that is, dynastic verification – and the intrusion that it implies. We could of course say that the queen had to sacrifice her private modesty for public interest. But it is incidentally something else that was assaulted: it was necessary for the queen to renounce her modesty and shame, qualities and values that are highly public, although attached to one's inner life. This time, the contradiction is in a way situated within the public sphere.

2 Too Familiar

Another anecdote allows us a greater understanding of the complexity of these nuances. Henri de Campion (1613–1663) spent part of his life in the service of François de Bourbon-Vendôme (1616–1669), the duke of Beaufort. In 1643, as Louis XIII lay dying, the queen, who foresaw the king's death, relied upon the duke of Beaufort rather than the princes. For a variety of reasons, this favour did not last. Campion recounts:

[La reine] remarqua que [le duc de Beaufort] faisait trop le familier avec elle devant toute la cour; même un matin, qu'elle était dans le bain, et qu'il n'entrait nul homme dans sa chambre, nous étions dans la pièce précédente avec la plupart des seigneurs qui attendaient l'heure de la voir: le duc, devant tout le monde, s'approcha de la porte de la chambre,

33 Fossier A., "Propter vitandum scandalum: histoire d'une catégorie juridique (XII^e–XV^e siècle)", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen-Age* 121.2 (2009) 317–348.

que l'huissier entrouvrit, et dit qu'on ne voyait point la reine; mais lui, le poussant, entra de force; action dont elle se fâcha si fort qu'elle le fit sortir avec des termes d'extrême colère. Je le vis revenir fort interdit, quoiqu'il fit le railleur.³⁴

[The queen] remarked that [the duke of Beaufort] acted in too familiar a manner with her in front of the entire court. One morning, while she was in the bath and no man could enter her bedroom, we were in the next room with most of the lords, who were waiting for the hour to see her: the duke, in front of everyone, approached the bedroom door, which the usher opened a little saying that no one could see the queen; but he, shoving him [the usher], entered by force. This action, however, angered her so much that she had him sent out with words of extreme ire. I saw him come back very disconcerted, although he pretended to make light of it.

As in our previous example, a boundary is crossed. But this time, the boundary is formulated in terms of 'familiarity': the Duke of Beaufort is *too* familiar with the queen. In being so, the duke, publicly, displays a level of familiarity that is not initiated by the queen. A maxim repeated in every treatise on manners and also present in Furetière's dictionary sheds light on the implicit issue: 'Il ne faut pas abuser de la familiarité dont les Grands nous honorent' ('the familiarity that the *Grands* honour us with must not be abused').³⁵ Beaufort was surely among the *Grands*, but a queen was naturally greater still. Furetière's dictionary further defines familiarity as 'Privauté, accès libre qu'on a chez quelqu'un avec lequel on vit sans façon' ('liberty, the free and informal access one has to someone with whom one lives without a fuss').³⁶ However, in the entry on 'privément' (privately or what is in a very private and familiar way), one finds this example that complicates the maxim quoted above: 'Ce Seigneur est fort affable, il vit privément avec tout le monde, avec ses domestiques' ('this Lord is very friendly, he lives privately with everybody, with his servants').³⁷ Finally, let us recall the definition of 'familièrement' ('familiarily'): 'D'une manière familière. Parler, agir, s'entretenir *familièrement*, en liberté, sans ceremonies' ('In a familiar way. To speak, act, to talk *familiarily* about something, freely, unceremoniously'). This definition is a negative one: to speak familiarly means to speak as if one were not in a ceremonial context – that is, in an official or

34 Campion H. de, *Mémoires* (Paris: 1990) 152.

35 Furetière, "Familiarité", *Dictionnaire universel*.

36 Ibidem.

37 Idem, "Privément", *Dictionnaire universel*.

public context. Nevertheless, it does not imply seclusion or intimacy or in other words: privacy.³⁸

As stated above, Campion's anecdote recounts the crossing of the familiarity boundary. Yet, this boundary is not related to that which separates the particular from the public. First, no 'public' stakes, in a theologico-juridico-political sense of the term, are in play. Second, all actions unfold in public, albeit in a different kind of public sphere, and, as Campion would have us believe, what particularly angers the queen is the public display of the duke's alleged familiarity, perhaps because it compromises her honour. However, this boundary seems devoid of an obvious link to privacy. This is not to say that no such link exists, but the duke seems not to have been aware that he had infringed upon the queen's privacy.

3 Agrippa d'Aubigné

Our next example is borrowed from a text by Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552–1630), a military commander of the Protestant party and the king Henry of Navarre's (the future Henry IV of France) companion in arms. He wrote love poems and a long epic poem, *Les Tragiques* (1616), denouncing Catholic atrocities during the civil wars and lamenting the betrayal of Henry IV when he converted to Catholicism. Aubigné also authored a historical text: although different in tone, the *Histoire universelle* (1616–1618) responded to the same goal and was condemned by the Parliament of Paris in 1620. Finally, a memoir, *Sa vie à ses enfants*, was published posthumously in the eighteenth century. Its dedication, addressed to Aubigné's children, includes the following statement: '[V]oici le discours de ma vie, en la privauté paternelle, qui ne m'a point contraint de cacher ce qui en l'Histoire Universelle eût été de mauvais goût' ('here is the

38 In her book *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*, Kathy Eden translates the Latin word 'familiaritas' just like the French word 'familiarité' as 'intimacy'. But, to focus on the French, the popular connotation of the term, to which Bakhtin had drawn our attention by associating it with the culture of Carnival, of the Fair, of the marketplace, a connoted dimension that runs counter to and conveys not all the world of intimacy, is completely lost in this translation. Eden K., *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: 2012). On this topic, see Tabelaing B., "La langue familière dans les jeux de la conversation. Ambivalence et communauté chez Sorel et Molière", in Stroeve A. – Gvozdeva K. (eds.), *Savoirs ludiques. Pratiques de divertissement et émergence d'institutions, doctrines et disciplines dans l'Europe moderne* (Paris: 2014) 105–120; idem, "Un lieu familier. Langue et relations familiales chez Saint Simon", in Hersant M. (ed.), *La Guerre civile des langues: Mémoires de Saint-Simon, année 1710* (Paris: 2011) 235–253; idem, "Émotion de la familiarité publique", *Littératures classiques* 68 (2009) 57–69.

story of my life, written in paternal freedom, which did not force me to hide what would have passed for bad taste in *Universal History*').³⁹ Aubigné proceeds to specify that this life-story comprises both the author's glory and faults: 'je vous conte l'un et l'autre comme si je vous entretenais encore sur mes genoux' ('I will tell you about both as if I still held you on my knees').⁴⁰ Given that Aubigné's children had already reached adulthood, this positioning of the intended readers is surprising, but within this setting, 'privauté' clearly signifies or connotes an attitude that makes it diametrically opposed to public behaviour. This dedication has often been compared to Montaigne's 'Note to the reader':

Mes défauts s'y liront au vif, mes imperfections et ma forme naïve, autant que la révérence publique me l'a permis.⁴¹

My defects will here be read to the life, and also my natural form so far as respect for the public has allowed.⁴²

Montaigne aimed, publicly, to share what was written to a private end. But Aubigné, conversely, draws a distinction between the *Histoire universelle*, which was published and engaged with public affairs, and the hand-written manuscript of *Sa vie à ses enfants*, of which he ordered 'that there only be two copies made'.⁴³

Even if certain episodes from the *Histoire universelle* evoke the role of Aubigné himself, nowhere does this highly public text include the story of Aubigné's life. It includes his actions as a particular individual acting for the public good. No details pertaining to his private life are narrated, however. Unlike Montaigne's note, the dedication to *Sa vie à ses enfants* respects the boundary between, on the one hand, the public that is the subject of the *Histoire universelle* and, on the other, the private life that has no place in such a grand narrative. The gap between public affairs and private affairs is as large as possible. It goes well

39 Aubigné Théodore Agrippa d', "Sa Vie à ses Enfants", ed. H. Weber, *Œuvres* (Paris: 1969) 383. I discuss here Kuperty-Tsur N., *Se dire à la Renaissance* (Paris: 1997) and Thierry A., "Agrippa d'Aubigné: de l'histoire aux mémoires et à l'autobiographie", in Schrenk G. (ed.), *Autour de l'Histoire universelle d'Agrippa d'Aubigné. Mélanges à la mémoire d'André Thierry* (Droz: 2006) 187–201. See also Merlin-Kajman H., "Mauvais goût, privauté, familiarité: le cas de *Sa Vie à ses enfants* d'Agrippa d'Aubigné", in Barbaferi C. – Abramovici J.-C. (eds.), *L'invention du mauvais goût à l'âge classique* (Leuven: 2013) 105–122.

40 Aubigné, "Sa Vie à ses Enfants" 383.

41 Montaigne, *Les Essais*, vol. 1, 4.

42 Idem, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* 2.

43 Aubigné, "Sa Vie à ses Enfants" 383.

beyond the opposition 'public-particulier', for in the *Histoire universelle*, of course, Aubigné examines, besides his own role as 'particulier' devoted to the public, the interplay of particular interests and the public interest. But with *Sa vie à ses enfants*, written for his children as if they were still sitting on their father's knees, Aubigné penetrates into a purely private realm that is unworthy of history proper. This opposition is also a question of style. Written in an elevated style, often full of indignation, the *Histoire universelle* is concerned with the sphere of royal majesty, public dignities, and corruption. *Sa vie à ses enfants*, on the other hand, is written in an informal style, although in the third person, and concerns the individual body: a person devoid of dignity, who is a mortal, sexual, fallible, and, consequently, a potentially laughable being. In this regard, the different representations of the future Henry IV in the two texts are revealing. The *Histoire universelle* adopts a point of view that is strictly political or theologico-political (even sometimes prophetic). By contrast, the point of view of *Sa vie à ses enfants* shows the familiarity between Aubigné and the king. Aubigné was, after all, Henry's companion in arms. One anecdote serves to illustrate this point. It is presented as one of those 'choses particulières qui n'étaient pas dignes de l'Histoire'⁴⁴ ('particular things that were not worthy of History'), which abound in the private narrative. Henry of Navarre is escaping from the French court where he had been held prisoner since the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Accompanied by his close friends, including Aubigné, the king stops in a village:

où lui étant arrivé de faire ses affaires dans une maie, une vieille qui l'y surprit lui fendait la tête par derrière d'un coup de serpe sans Aubigné qui l'empêcha et qui dit à son maître pour le faire rire, *Si vous eussiez eu cette honorable fin, je vous eusse donné un tombeau en style de Saint-Innocent; c'était:*

Ci-gît un Roi par merveille,
 Qui mourut, comme Dieu permet,
 D'un coup de serpe et d'une vieille,
 Comme il chiait dans une maie.⁴⁵

where he entered to do his business in a kneading trough, when an old woman, who surprised him there, was about to split his head from behind with a brush hook, if not for Aubigné who stopped her and said to his

44 Ibidem, 401.

45 Ibidem, 401.

master in order to make him laugh, *Had you met with this honourable end, I would have given you this epitaph in Saint-Innocent style:*

Here, surprise, lies a King
Who died, as God allows,
From an old woman's hook blow,
As he was shitting in a trough.

In *Sa vie à ses enfants*, adopting a burlesque tone, Aubigné repeatedly shows such familiarity – his liberty (*privauté*) – with Henry or with the *Grands*. This kind of corporeal lowliness, held so dear by Mikhail Bakhtin,⁴⁶ is nonetheless devoid of transgressive elements: the king laughs as much as his companions. Henry is considered here, and he considers himself, as a physical person caught in a sphere where affairs are neither public nor personal or fully private. Instead, they are private affairs in a more rudimentary sense: these affairs are unworthy of public light, be it ceremonial record or official protocol. What Bakhtin failed to see is that this marketplace culture of familiarity was not, at least not always, in *opposition* to official life, but simply its *other* side: one of relaxation, laughter, and rest. For as the king, his subjects can be conceived as possessing two bodies, the physical one being in a way easier to share than the public one.

4 Cyrano de Bergerac

In 1654, the libertine author Cyrano de Bergerac (1619–1655) published fictive letters entitled *Lettres diverses, satiriques et amoureuses*.⁴⁷ What follows is the beginning and the end of a letter entitled 'D'une maison de campagne' ('From a country house'), where the writer tries to convince his addressee, one of his close friends, to leave the court. This addressee is, as we are quickly given to understand, a *Grand*, who possesses a 'country house' – probably a seignorial estate – where the letter writer is now residing:

Monsieur,

J'ai trouvé le paradis d'Éden, j'ai trouvé l'âge d'or, j'ai trouvé la jeunesse perpétuelle, enfin j'ai trouvé la Nature au maillot. On rit ici de tout son cœur; nous sommes grands cousins, le porcher du village et moi; et toute

46 Bakhtin M.M., *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H.H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: 1968).

47 Cyrano de Bergerac Savinien de, *Œuvres diverses: Lettres satiriques et amoureuses*, ed. F. Lachèvre (Paris: 1933) 5–160.

la paroisse m'assure que j'ai la mine, avec un peu de travail, de bien chanter un jour au lutrin. O Dieux! un philosophe comme vous peut-il préférer au repos d'une si agréable retraite, la vanité, les chagrins et les embarras de la Cour? [...] Résolvez-vous donc une bonne fois à vous dépêtrer des embarras de Paris; votre concierge vous aime tant qu'il jure de ne point tuer son grand cochon que vous ne soyez de retour; il se promet bien de vous faire dépouiller cette gravité dont vous morguez les gens avec vos illustres emplois; hier au soir il nous disait à table, après avoir un peu trinqué, que si vous lui parliez par *tu*, il vous répondrait par *toi* [...].⁴⁸

Sir,

I have found the garden of Eden, I have found the golden age, I have found perpetual youth: in a word I have found Nature in the cradle. Here, one laughs with all one's heart; the village's pig keeper and I are close kinsmen; and the entire parish tells me that I am bound, with a bit of work, to sing at the lectern someday. Oh Gods! Can a philosopher like you prefer the vanity, the sorrows, and the annoyances of the court over the rest of such a pleasant retreat? [...] Resolve, then, to disentangle yourself from Paris's bothers! Your caretaker likes you so much that he swears he will not kill his huge pig until you have returned; he swears he will have you drop the solemn air that you put on to stare down people with your high offices. Yesterday evening he told us at the dinner table, after a drink or two, that if you spoke to him with *tu*, he would answer you with *toi*.

If we focus on the social relations that are represented here, we can see how the text, which is itself written in an informal tone – that is to say, joking and slightly burlesque – describes a freedom and a familiar equality in contradiction to the hierarchical, statutory distance that exists between the protagonists. Here, private life implies that one can speak informally ‘à tu et à toi’ with the pig keeper and the caretaker. If these same people met again in a procession, they would be separated by dozens of intermediary ranks. It must be noted that the use of the informal ‘tu’ for ‘you’ was very rare in seventeenth-century France. Furetière defines the verb ‘tutoyer’ as follows: ‘Traiter quelqu’un avec mespris, ou avec grande familiarité, en luy parlant par tu, et par toy. Il n’y a que les gens rustiques et incivils qui se tutoient. Les honnestes gens ne se plaisent point à être tutoyez’ (‘To treat someone with scorn, or with great familiarity, by speaking to him with “tu” or with “toi”. Only rustic and uncivil people do so. People of standing do not appreciate being addressed in this

48 “D’une maison de campagne” in *ibidem*, 35–38.

way').⁴⁹ The private life described here by Cyrano rests on a form of generalised kinship, almost as if everyone could hold each person on their knees! The public dimension of existence seems totally out of view. It is remarkable, however, that this shared familiarity does not include any level of intimacy. On the contrary, there is an almost farcical element to this scene in which each character indulges in entertainment and diversion, the very theatrical sharing of the simple, lowly, physical life, and the joyful display of belonging to the same species. This undoubtedly fundamental relationship is not unrelated to what anthropologists have called 'joking relationships'.⁵⁰ In the seventeenth century, such relations progressively take on a more personal, more intimate, and consequently much less laughable tone.

In 1624, Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac (1597–1654) publishes a collection of *Letters*,⁵¹ which he does not call 'lettres familières' ('familiar letters'), because, as he claims, their style equals that of great public eloquence. However, the letters speak of his illnesses, of his lovers, and 'joke' with people of a high public status. This publication triggered a long, violent quarrel, where Balzac was accused of libertinism for two reasons. Firstly, he encourages the letter's addressee, and by extension the readers of his collected *Letters*, to be more interested in their individual selves than in public affairs. Secondly, Balzac evokes his own body while also evoking, in the same collection, public affairs treated with a singular mix of mockery and seriousness. His project aligns with Montaigne's, but a Montaigne who would have exaggerated everything less out of concern for authenticity than to display a stylistic virtuosity.⁵² The vanity of this virtuosity was unanimously denounced by his enemies, who attacked the mixture of styles which led him to address his inferiors with a respectful tone, while public figures of high dignity were approached in a playful tone.

The letter from which I am going to quote is addressed to a friend who lived in the noise and confusion of the city, while Balzac himself had retired to the countryside. We therefore find ourselves faced with the same topical city-countryside dichotomy that we observed in Cyrano. Balzac begins by describing his country estate in terms quite similar to Cyrano's.

49 Furetière, "Tutoyer", *Dictionnaire universel*.

50 Mauss M., "Joking Relations", trans. J.I. Guyer, *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3.2 (2013) 317–334. See also Merlin-Kajman H., *L'Animal ensorcelé. Traumatismes, littérature, transitionnalité* (Paris: 2016).

51 Balzac Jean-Louis Guez de, *Les premières Lettres de Guez de Balzac*, 1618–1627, eds. H. Bibas – K.-T. Butler (Paris: 1933).

52 See Merlin-Kajman H., "Guez de Balzac ou l'extravagance du *moi* entre Montaigne et Descartes", *Rue Descartes* 27 (2000) 141–158; idem, *L'Excentricité académique*.

Mais le plaisir est que là dedans et par tout où je commande, il n'y a personne qui ne fasse l'amour librement; et quand je vois d'un côté de l'herbe couchée par terre, et de l'autre des épis renversés, je suis assuré que ce n'est, ni le vent, ni la grêle qui ont fait cela, mais que c'est un berger et une bergère.⁵³

However, the delight is that there and in all parts where I am in charge, there is no one who does not freely make love; and when I see flattened grass in one place and in the next see bent ears of grain, I am sure that the culprits are neither wind nor hail, but a shepherd and shepherdess.

The shepherd and the shepherdess may be less realistic than the pig keeper mentioned in Cyrano's letter, yet they are less 'low', in literary terms. This golden-age myth of egalitarian familiarity is coloured by the mention of a more concrete and more credible sociability, which also shows how the country estate served as a private retreat for public men:

Le grand duc d'Épernon est venu ici [...] laisser cette vertu sévère et cet éclat qui éblouit tout le monde pour prendre des qualités plus douces, et une majesté plus tranquille. Ce Cardinal [...] vint ici chercher du soulagement, et recevoir des propres mains de Dieu, qui aime le silence et habite la solitude, ce qui ne se trouve point [...] dans la foule du monde. Je vous apporterais d'autres exemples pour vous montrer que [...] les traces des princes et des grands seigneurs sont encore fraîches dans mes allées [...].⁵⁴

The great duke of Épernon used to come here [...] to leave behind this strict virtue and the brilliance that dazzles everyone to take up gentler qualities and a quieter majesty. This cardinal [de Richelieu] [...] came here to seek relief, and from the very hands of God, who likes silence and resides in solitude, to receive that which cannot be found [...] in the worldly crowd. I would bring you other examples to show you that [...] the footprints of princes and high lords are still fresh in my alleys [...].

Here, then, we are confronted with a private life that has been elevated by the presence of public persons of high dignity. At the end of the seventeenth century, Mme de Sévigné would describe an analogous place of retreat, but this

53 Balzac, *Les premières Lettres* 134–135.

54 Ibidem, 135–136.

time completely 'private', full of privacy. Staying on her estate in Brittany, she receives letters from her daughter, Mme de Grignan, married to a *Grand* who is more or less the governor of the region of Provence. Her daughter describes her incessant public activities, the marks of honour, and acts of deference that make up her daily life. She also describes the estate of Grignan, where she lives with her husband. This latter description displeases Sévigné, who finds Grignan to be cold and solemn. Mme de Sévigné refers to her own estate, evidently well-known by her daughter: 'le nôtre est d'une beauté surprenante' ('our [estate] has a surprising beauty') and continues by explaining in detail her work of embellishing the park. She then concludes: 'Pilois est toujours mon favori, et je préfère sa conversation à celle de plusieurs qui ont conservé le titre de chevalier au parlement de Rennes. Je suis libertine plus que vous' ('Pilois [the gardener] is still my favourite, and I prefer his conversation to that of quite a few who cling to their knighthood in the Rennes parliament. I'm more libertine than you').⁵⁵ In calling herself a 'libertine', Sévigné emphasises the positive connotation of the term: it denotes her preference for private freedom over the constraints of public life.

The conversation between Mme de Sévigné and her gardener is clearly more credible, or at least less transitory, than Cyrano's conversation with the caretaker or the pig keeper. Mme de Sévigné does not claim to be on excessively familiar terms ('à tu et à toi') with her gardener. Rather, she finds conversing about her garden and her estate to be part of the pleasure of retreating from ceremonial events. Writing during the assembly of the Estates of Brittany – a significant political moment in the powerful province that zealously guarded what remained of its autonomy from Paris – Sévigné describes the private estate as a symbol of the freedom from public constraints. While there, Mme de Sévigné eats frugally and lives a simple life. It is also the taste for such freedom that brings Mme de Chaulnes, the wife of the governor of Brittany, to the estate:

Mme de Chaulnes, Mlle de Murinais, Mme Fourché [...] vinrent ici jeudi. Mme de Chaulnes entra en me disant qu'elle ne pouvait être plus longtemps sans me voir, que toute la Bretagne lui pesait sur les épaules, et qu'enfin elle se mourait. Là-dessus, elle se jette sur mon lit, on se met autour d'elle, et en un moment la voilà endormie de pure fatigue. Nous causons toujours. Enfin elle se réveille, trouvant plaisante et adorant

55 Sévigné Mme de, Letter 177, "A Mme de Grignan, Aux Rochers, dimanche 28 juin [1671]", in Sévigné Mme de, *Correspondance*, ed. R. Duchène, vol. 1 (Paris: 1972) 281.

l'aimable liberté des Rochers. Nous allâmes nous promener, nous nous assîmes dans le fond de ces bois.⁵⁶

Mme de Chaulnes, Mlle de Murinais, Mme Fourché [...] came here on Thursday. Mme de Chaulnes walked in telling me that she could not endure not seeing me any longer, that all of Brittany weighed on her shoulders and that in sum she was dying. Whereupon she throws herself on my bed; we gather around her, and in a second she falls asleep from pure fatigue. We chat on. Finally, she wakes up, enjoying and adoring the lovely freedom of the Rochers. We went for a walk; we sat down deep inside the woods.

In this place, hierarchical distances and statutory distinctions cease to matter. However, unlike the two preceding examples, this place is also one of intimate memories, where the heart is free to recognise, express, and analyse itself. This intimacy is fittingly represented in letters addressed to the person she missed the most, her daughter. In another letter, moreover, she will tell her daughter how she was moved to tears by a humble compliment the gardener addressed to her when she announced the birth of her grandson to her servants. In this instance, then, private life is joyful without being laughable and is clearly open to a wide range of emotions. It is worth noting that, unlike Montaigne, Mme de Sévigné never uses, to express these differences, the logical opposition between public and particular.⁵⁷

This does not hold true for her friend, the cardinal of Retz (1613–1679), whose *Mémoires* were probably addressed to her. Retz was one of the leaders of the Fronde, sparked by the rebellion of the Parliament of Paris and certain *Grands* against royal absolutism during Louis XIV's minority. Thus, Retz was at the same time a protagonist of the story that he recounted as well as an observer of the interplay of particular interests. On the one hand, he never stops justifying his actions by professing that he acted for the public good. On the other hand, he accomplishes this without ever proposing a model of action that would sacrifice his particular interest. The following story unfolds

56 Sévigné, Letter 194, "A Mme de Grignan, Aux Rochers, dimanche 23 août [1671]", in *ibidem*, 226–329.

57 See Merlin-Kajman H., "Le partage du sensible dans les lettres de Madame de Sévigné", in Bombart M. (ed.), *Connivences épistolaires? Autour de Mme de Sévigné (Lettres de l'année 1671)*, actes de la journée d'agrégation du 1^{er} décembre 2012, Publications en ligne du GADGES (published online on 5 February 2013) <http://facdeslettres.univ-lyon3.fr/recherche/gadges/publications/le-partage-du-sensibledans-les-lettres-de-l-annee-1671-de-la-correspondance-de-mme-de-sevigne-625308.kjsp>.

after the end of the first Fronde. Retz summarises several recent public events before launching into an explicit digression:

Les affaires publiques ne m'occupaient pas si fort, que je ne fusse obligé de vaquer à des particulières, qui me donnèrent bien de la peine. Mme de Guéméné, qui s'en était allée d'effroi, comme je crois vous avoir déjà dit, dès les premiers jours du siège de Paris, revint de colère à la première nouvelle qu'elle eut de mes visites à l'hôtel de Chevreuse. Je fus assez fou pour la prendre à la gorge sur ce qu'elle m'avait lâchement abandonné; elle fut assez folle pour me jeter un chandelier à la tête sur ce que je ne lui avais pas gardé fidélité à l'égard de Mlle de Chevreuse. Nous nous accordâmes un quart d'heure après ce fracas, et, dès le lendemain, je fis pour son service ce que vous allez voir.⁵⁸

Public affairs did not busy me so much that I was not obliged to attend to particular ones, which gave me quite a lot of trouble. Mme de Guéméné, who – as I believe I already told you – had left out of fear during the first days of the siege of Paris, came back in anger at the first news she received of my visits to the Hôtel de Chevreuse. I was crazy enough to grab her by the throat, because she had spinelessly abandoned me; and she was crazy enough to throw a candlestick at my head, because I had not remained faithful to her with regard to Mlle de Chevreuse. We were reconciled fifteen minutes after this uproar, and the very next day I served her in a manner that you shall soon learn about.⁵⁹

The sequence opens with a clear opposition between public and particular affairs. Unlike Aubigné, Retz recounts both of these types of affairs within the space of the same text. Of course, Retz varies his tone, and particular affairs are treated in a lighter manner than public ones. Mme de Guéméné was Retz's mistress, whereas Mlle de Chevreuse became his mistress as well in Guéméné's absence. Having learned of this liaison, Mme de Guéméné returned to Paris in order to confront Retz. Seemingly, we have a very personalised sequence of private events. The story reports an almost tragic, paroxysmic moment, even if the speed of the narration, along with the parallelism of the formulas that characterise their gestures, give it a shade of retrospective self-mockery. Although this climax could potentially serve as the prelude to a definitive rupture between

58 Retz Cardinal de, *Mémoires précédés de La Conjuration du comte de Fiesque*, ed. S. Bertiére, vol. 1 (Paris: 1987) 522.

59 Ibidem.

the couple, the ending of this anecdote reveals quite the opposite: the two lovers reconcile fifteen minutes after their confrontation. One possible interpretation of this scenario, and the one perhaps most likely also to occur to seventeenth-century readers, is that the couple reconciled by making love.⁶⁰ Yet, despite the passage's domestic space of cheerfulness and humour, this particular affair, which is hardly in accordance with public morals (Retz was a member of the clergy), is not presented in a burlesque manner: Retz knows that the story will please his addressee, which is why he includes this event in his text despite it not being *worthy* of history proper. At no stage, however, is this private event deemed *unworthy*, low, base, or despicable.

The story continues and recounts a second personal affair ('affaire particulière') that has nothing private about it and that in fact borders on the public. Louis II de Bourbon (1646–1686), the prince of Condé and one of the highest-ranking princes of the age, sought to obtain an honorary privilege for the wife of a protégé. However, this promotion would have set off a chain of events, leading the ladies of the house of Rohan – including Mme de Guéméné, Mme de Chevreuse, Mlle de Chevreuse, and Mme de Montbazon – to lose certain privileges of their own. The ladies in question, led by Mme de Guéméné, asked Retz to intercede on their behalf. Condé accepted: and that, in sum, is the end of the second 'particular' affair. But he imposed a condition, which, this time, is a very clear allusion for Retz, and for the reader as well, to another 'particular' affair:

Mais je vous demande une condition sans laquelle il n'y a rien de fait: c'est que vous disiez, dès aujourd'hui, à Mme de Montbazon que le seul article que je désire pour notre accommodement est que lorsqu'elle coupera je ne sais quoi à M. de La Rochefoucauld, elle ne l'envoie pas dans un bassin d'argent à ma sœur, comme elle l'a dit à vingt personnes depuis deux jours.⁶¹

But I ask you for one condition without which nothing will be done: that this very day you tell Mme de Montbazon that the only item I wish from our compromise is that, when she cuts off Mr. de La Rochefoucauld's *je ne sais quoi*, she does not send it in a silver basin to my sister as she said she would to twenty people over the past two days.

60 This was the interpretation suggested by Michèle Fogel, author of *Roi de France*, in our discussions on the topic.

61 Retz Cardinal de, *Mémoires* 524.

The key to understanding this anecdote is that Condé's sister, Madame de Longueville, had just had a child from an adulterous relationship with the duke of La Rochefoucauld, and Mme de Montbazon said at every opportunity that she would emasculate him. We might say that the occasion allows the circulation of a pun: an emblematic instance of familiarity. Here, the pun, centring on questions of sexuality and therefore of corporeal lowliness, is an insult spread against Condé's sister by Mme de Montbazon, the mistress of the duke of Beaufort, whom we saw demonstrate too much familiarity with the queen in Campion's memoirs. These are far from public affairs, and yet the circulation of the pun itself could hardly be more public, although certainly not in the sense of the *respublica*. There is no promise of intimacy, and no privacy in a modern sense of the term – but a liberty made possible by the equal social status of the two women.

Retz referred to these three affairs that overlap in the narrative sequence with the same term: 'particular affairs' as opposed to 'public affairs'. Yet, the Cardinal could not have called them private affairs. What unites them is that they all involve people who are in no sense 'private' people nor are they leading a 'private life'. Rather, they take place during a pause in public affairs, on the fringes of them. What distinguishes them is that the last example is clearly familiar, whereas the second concerns the particular interests of women from the house of Rohan in a curial quarrel of precedence, very close to the public sphere: they are particular because they concern some members of the court (which was previously called 'le public'), but not all of them. The first example is, on the contrary, secret and intimate. What they all have in common is that none of them concerns the State and its institutions (no one is acting in charge of a public mission), but each one concerns Retz personally: each one concerns his 'particular person' – but on three very different levels.

5 Conclusion

Let us conclude by proposing a hypothesis. The term 'privé' ('private') in the seventeenth century had a negative sense: it presupposes negation or subtraction – relegation, secrecy, withdrawal, or retreat. A private man is a man without public status: even if a man with public status can sometimes live a 'vie privée', for instance in his country house, this 'vie privée' lasts only for a limited period of time. 'Particular', on the other hand, maintains a logical tone: the particular is the part included in the whole: every member of the 'respublica' is a 'particulier'. Consequently, even when the particular separates itself from the public as a result of a process of 'disjunction', the term retains a structural and

constitutive positivity. This positivity will absorb some of the characteristics of the familiar or private that had formerly only been seen as negative, giving them in turn a dignity, and an intimacy that ‘familiarité’ lacked. Until the seventeenth century, what in France was private, or fitted into its paradigm, was far from what we would recognise as privacy. As a sphere protected by law, this notion is the result of long-term historical construction. It is my belief that this construction is slipping away. I am not the only one to entertain this opinion. Facebook might be analogous to a court: a social formation but without a clear public aim. Twitter, on the other hand, is more obviously oriented towards the public, and, as demonstrated by daily examples in the USA, France, and elsewhere, public figures and rulers are speaking in a very *familiar* manner. It seems to me that this must be related to the development of incivility, or the violence referred to by Norbert Elias as the ‘process of decivilisation’.⁶² Even if the Eliasian notion of a process of civilisation remains open to debate, it was nonetheless, to my mind, linked with the development of privacy.⁶³

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62 Elias N., *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: 1997).

63 See Merlin-Kajman H., “‘Une troisième espèce de simple dignité’ ou la civilité entre l’honneur et la familiarité”, in Cosandey F. (ed.), *Dire et Vivre l’Ordre Social en France sous l’Ancien Régime* (Paris: 2005) 231–279; idem, “Civilité, civilisation, pouvoir”, *Annuaire de l’Institut Michel Villey. Droit & Philosophie* 3 (2011). Online edition. <http://www.droitphilosophie.com/article/lecture/civilite-civilisation-pouvoir-34>.

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