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Great Designs and Global Colonialism

Sir Balthazar Gerbier (1592–1663), El Dorado, and the Transnational Politics of Knowledge

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▼ **ABSTRACT** This essay resituates "great designs" within the history of projecting by exploring how the schemes of Sir Balthazar Gerbier (1592–1633) interacted with what became known historiographically as the French *Grand Dessein*, the Dutch *Groot Desseyn*, and the English *Western Design*. Analyzed from the perspective of the history of knowledge, great designs are revealed to be risk-taking, uncertain, and constructed from fragments of disparate knowledges. Period views of great design can illuminate how public policy related to private individuals, what the temporality of planning was, and how success and failure were viewed. This reconsideration can inform how we construct narratives concerning European history, politics, and global colonialism and understand processes of change.

▼ **KEYWORDS** projects; agents; planning; design; reason of state; failure

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To a generation of historians writing at the height of European colonialism, great or grand designs represented the acme of national drama. Historians such as Thomas Carlyle who propounded a "great man" view of history identified "Great Designs" (capitalized by Carlyle) as embodiments of national will.[1] School textbooks such as *Great Leaders* compiled historical essays by Hume, Gibbon, and Schiller showcasing the great designs devised by great men.[2] The early-twentieth-century *Cambridge Modern History*, which detailed the great designs of Henri IV, Gustavus Adolphus, Napoleon, and many others, aimed to offer master narratives.[3] Great designs, assumed to be national, rational, coherent, and clear, were the strategies directing the forward march of civilization.

Since the 1960s, many historians have rejected the "master narrative" as a "grand schema for organizing the interpretation and writing of history."[4] Contingency replaced destiny as a historiographical desideratum. Scholars have sought a history of empire that coalesced from below through indeterminate processes of creolization far from European centers of power. Overseas empire pursued through "private means" seemed to counter the centralizing tendencies of absolutist states.[5] The central strategizing that in Whig history foresaw and directed major historical events became unwelcome topics of historical analysis even as great designs remained embedded in national historiography.

This scholarly avoidance of planning as a subject of analysis not only precludes critical evaluation of how vestigial great designs survive in current historiography, it also entrenches Whiggish assumptions about the nature of planning. Those assumptions include a binary opposition between contingency (associated with fly-by-night adventurers) and planning (associated with central great statesmen). This avoidance thus begs questions of historically specific forms of planning. The history of knowledge can raise these questions by denaturalizing statecraft and by reconsidering what we frame as central and what we identify as success in the execution of a plan.

By the turn of the seventeenth century, policy and the reason of state were synonyms in English.[6] Across Europe, the reason of state energized new ways of thinking about risk-taking in settings of great uncertainty.[7] In contrast to established law and customary morality, policy revolved around contingency. Political survival required quickly shifting, hidden action. States simulated false ends and dissimulated their interests, attempting to secure them among state

1 See Carlyle, *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 2:422–23. All translations are my own.
2 Ferris, *Great Leaders*, 134, 189, 308.
3 Kelley, *Frontiers of History*, 101.
4 Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth*, 232.
5 Roper and Van Ruymbeke, "Introduction."
6 Paul, *Counsel*, 153.
7 Brugger, "Dealing with Uncertainty"; Van Groesen and Müller, *Far from the Truth*; De Vivo, *Information*; Montcher, *Mercenaries of Knowledge*; Henneton and Roper, *Fear*; Leemans and Goldgar, *Early Modern Knowledge Societies*; Keller, *Knowledge and the Public*.

secrets, the *arcana imperii*. The political stage became the focus of intense observation, emotion, and interpretation. Agents and intelligencers reported on this drama to statesmen as well as to wider publics through newsletters and pamphlets. They offered a hot knowledge commodity and played privileged roles in scene-setting and analysis.

Projects were a vehicle through which statists responded to fleeting opportunities. They can be defined as disruptive, temporary, risk-taking interventions that organized intelligence, techniques, and arguments in attempts to seize advantages. Once seized, those advantages might confer long-term benefits. The failure to act quickly might also result in long-term disadvantage. States faced a continuous flow of Machiavellian moments in which it was very difficult to discern which opportunities were the most vital to pursue.

This view of time and contingency in early modern policy undercuts early twentieth-century differentiations between "schemes entertained for a moment" and the "settled and continuous policy" of great designs.[8] Great designs were merely particularly ambitious projects that claimed higher stakes.[9] In contrast to the singular great designs identified in national histories that resolved moments of crisis, great designs were constantly proposed and suspected. Accusations of stealthy great designs flew back and forth during the English Civil War.[10] According to Marchmont Needham (in an anonymous pamphlet), the Dutch "great designe hath been to be Free Men themselves, and to make the world (as far as they are able) their slaves and vassals."[11] An English "great design (*groot desseyn*)" would wrest the African slave trade from Dutch control.[12] Projects proposed by individuals might also rise to the level of great design. The London intelligencer Samuel Hartlib (1600–1662) considered the proposal of Balthazar Gerbier (1592–1663) to methodize all French records a "great designe."[13] Gerbier also called his London academy, for which he recruited Hartlib's aid, a "great and laborious" "designe."[14]

High risk could make a design "great." The attempted escape of Charles I in 1648 was deemed "too great a design in respect of the many hazards."[15] Yet the high risk of failure did not preclude attempts and even enhanced their glory. Thirty-nine New England divines congratulated John Dury (1596–1680) "in conceiving so great a design" of uniting all churches, although unlikely; "However the issue of the matter fall, yet it is a great deal, to have attempted in a great Design."[16] As Nehemiah Grew (1641–1712) wrote, "The greatest

8 Leathes, "Henry IV of France," 678.
9 Keller, "Air-Conditioning Jahangir."
10 Charles I, *The discovery*; Booth, *A declaration*; Anonymous, *The Grand Designe.*
11 Anonymous, *The case stated*, 29.
12 De Witt, *Brieven*, 350.
13 Greengrass et al., *Hartlib Papers*, 28/1/20A.
14 Gerbier, *To all Fathers*, 2.
15 Hyde, *State Papers*, 2:xlvii.
16 Norton, *Copy*, 10.

Designs that any Men undertake, are of the greatest uncertainty, as to their Success." Yet, "although a Man shall never be able to hit *Stars* by shooting at them; yet he shall come nearer to them, than another that throws at *Apples*."[17]

This essay analyzes great designs from the perspective of Gerbier, an individual who made a career from collecting projects and selling them as great designs. In order to seize every opportunity, the reason of state encouraged individuals to tender proposals in return for rewards and patents. Such policy unintentionally admitted a wide range of transnational individuals into areas of state secrets.[18] While many individuals proposed designs of public import, agents or intelligencers fashioned careers as collectors and connoisseurs of past projects that they might select, recast, and proffer at opportune moments.

In the modern historiographical treatment of great design, the marginalization of some individuals as untrustworthy schemers served to sanitize other figures as the charters of steady policy and national destiny. In this essay, I focus on Gerbier because of his unsavory reputation as a self-serving adventurer.[19] I seek to resituate great designs as the products of practices such as his. Those practices underwrote Gerbier's extraordinary success in winning numerous clients over the course of a forty-year transnational career.

As Marika Keblusek has noted, Gerbier was "loyal to any patron paying him to do that job." Such "versatility" was "one of the defining characteristics of early modern agents in general."[20] This was not without danger to clients; when Gerbier served both Charles I and Elisabeth of Bohemia in Brussels, he betrayed the latter, although he managed to remain in her employ for another four years.[21] Gerbier defended himself through an analysis of the contingent history of designs and interests. The death of Henri IV deprived the English Crown "of the design that Henri IV had projected when he once had made a levee of 72 thousand men," which would have been necessary to the cause of a Protestant Palatinate. Without Henri IV, the "friends" it would be necessary to recruit for "such a great design" were "divided by interests." Supporting Elisabeth in that design would only endanger her family.[22]

Utilizing the reason of state, agents in the knowledge economy, whom Lisa Kattenberg calls "thinker-agents," developed histories, analyses, and projections for navigating contingency.[23] Analyzing versatility and opportunism through the lens of the history of knowledge can reframe the nature of early modern policy. This essay touches on the modern national treatment of great design in Henri IV's *grand dessein* (the design Gerbier notes above), the Dutch

17 Grew, *Anatomy*, 24.
18 Keller, *Interlopers*.
19 De Boer, "Balthazar Gerbier"; De Boer, "Een Nederlandsche goudzoeker"; Keller, "The 'framing'"; Keller, "Pennetrek."
20 Keblusek, "Introduction," 3.
21 Akkerman, *Elisabeth Stuart*, 325.
22 Gerbier, *Des-Abusé*, 13.
23 Kattenberg, *Power*.

Groot Desseyn, and Cromwell's *Western Design*. It then discusses Gerbier's knowledge practices and how they can inform historiographical treatment of great design.

French, Dutch, and English Designs

The French Grand Dessein

Many modern historians identified Henri IV of France as inaugurating the age of great design in a plan to unify Europe described in the statesman Sully's *Mémoires*.[24] Today Sully's account of the "Grand Design remains a seminal text in the history of European statecraft" for some.[25] Other scholars observe that the prominence of Henri IV's *Grand Dessein* owed much to later editing. By the mid-eighteenth century, Sully's *Mémoires* featured a single *Grand Dessein* on its title page.[26] Earlier writers situated this "*grand dessein*" within the context of many royal "*projets*," such as canal building, the promotion of manufactures, and, as part of Henri's "design for enriching his people," a royal commitment to receive any proposal "advantageous to his subjects."[27]

The Dutch Groot Desseyn

In 1621, after the expiration of a truce with Spain, the United Provinces prepared for war by founding a joint-stock company, the West India Company (WIC), on the model of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie—VOC). The WIC aimed to intervene in Spanish American colonies and appropriate the Portuguese West African slave trade. Beginning in the twentieth century, historians have termed this a *Groot Desseyn*, using seventeenth-century orthography.[28] As Benjamin Schmidt writes, "global expansion, both in the East and West Indies"

> originated from a singular imperial vision…at the pivotal moment when the Dutch *became* Dutch following their national revolt against the Spanish Crown. This formative, defiant political moment also marks the opening chapter of the Dutch 'enterprise of the Indies' (to invoke Columbus's famous expression) and imperial 'grand design' (the term favoured by early Dutch colonialists: *groot desseyn*).[29]

24 O'Connor, "Politique"; Guizot, *L'Histoire de France*, 533; Earle, *An Outline*, 11.
25 Rehman, "Sully," 271.
26 De Béthune, *Memoirs*, title page; Davies, *Europe*, 662.
27 Péréfixe de Beaumont, *Histoire*, 275–76, 310, 352, 373.
28 See Brandon and Fatah-Black, "For the Reputation"; Den Heijer, "Het 'groot desseyn.'"
29 Schmidt, "Hyper-Imperialism," 72.

However, "contemporary records show no initial visionary plan but rather an opportunistically created, often contested series of steps that put the West India Company on its ambitious project."[30] The term *Groot Desseyn* was not used in the period to describe the founding of the WIC. The historian Lieuwe van Aitzema (1600–1669), who described other plans as great designs, did not describe the establishment of the WIC as such.[31] According to John Thornton, S.P. L'Honoré Naber in 1930 first asserted the existence of a *Groot Desseyn* (although in fact Naber refers to a "Groote Schema").[32] The *Groot Desseyn* may have been a construction of Cornelis Goslinga, for whom it signified a unified plan embodying a national destiny, centered on Brazil, and carried out by a single institution, the WIC. In contrast, Goslinga dismissed Gerbier as a peripheral "adventurer."[33]

Since then, historians have debated the nature of the *Groot Desseyn*.[34] Goslinga preserved its essential unity across diverse colonial interventions by imagining "a fascinating and brilliantly conceived drama" playing out in varied scenes.[35] Others have argued that the original *Groot Desseyn* failed and was replaced by a "second Dutch Atlantic system" after the fall of Dutch Brazil when the WIC subcontracted South American colonialism (as in the patent it granted Gerbier's Guyanese Company).[36]

The Western Design

Following treaties concluding the first Anglo-Dutch War in 1654, the English government was left with "160 sayle of shipps well appointed swimminge at sea." It considered how to seize the moment and re-employ the fleet "in some advantageous designe." Some proposed attacking France, others Spain, with Cromwell pushing for the Spanish Americas.[37]

Early modern sources called the plan to attack the West Indies a "great design."[38] However, it was only one of many.[39] Victorian historians singled it out as Cromwell's "great design."[40] Samuel Gardiner observed that a note on Council proceedings referred obliquely to "the 'Western Design,' (a phrase equally applicable to an attack on Bordeaux or an attack on San Domingo)";

30 Thornton, "The Kingdom of Kongo," 192.
31 Van Aitzema, *Saken van staet*, 1:62, 1186, 2:358.
32 Naber, *De West-Indische Compagnie*, 20–23.
33 Goslinga, *The Dutch*, 421.
34 See Emmer and Klooster, "The Dutch Atlantic."
35 Goslinga, *The Dutch*, 157.
36 Brandon and Fatah-Black, "'For the Reputation,'" 85, 91.
37 Armitage, "The Cromwellian Protectorate."
38 Kalinowska, "'The Great Design'"; Anonymous, *A Brief History*, 210.
39 Offen, "English Designs," 401.
40 Carlyle, *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 4:279; Gardiner, *History*, 3:399; Gardiner, *Cromwell*, 298.

this phrase strategically concealed the fleet's target.[41] After that one usage, the term "Western Design" was hardly, if ever, employed again to refer to this event in the period.

In 1914, Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at King's College London, Arthur Percival Newton, a major proponent of British colonialism, adopted the term "Western Design." Newton conceptualized the Western Design as a long-term, colonial vision motivated ideologically by Puritanism, "England's true foreign policy."[42] Thereafter, the Western Design became a major topic of Interregnum history, often identified with Puritanism.[43]

The Secrets of Hennin

In a 1653 manuscript, *A Summary Relation*, Gerbier defended his notorious career to Oliver Cromwell and Bulstrode Whitelocke. He reminded them that he had alerted the Commonwealth to "an intended designe" on Cromwell and others. His embeddedness with various powers kept him "continually advertised of severall dessignes both of the Spagnolised Royalist, the French, the Papall and the Lorrain." He interacted with enemies so that he could make them "imbroyled among themselves" and incapable of hatching "mischeef against this State." He recalled the American secrets he disclosed to the Commonwealth far surpassing the "designs of the late Sir Walter Raleigh." A rebellious Spanish secretary had offered them to Buckingham in Madrid in 1623. This secretary identified a golden land whose inhabitants possessed powers of alchemical transmutation and could be conquered by a small army, "on which dessigne the Late Duke off Buckingham was bent" under cover of preparing for an amphibious attack on the Isle of Ré off the coast of France. Gerbier entrusted the secrets to Cromwell and Whitelocke to employ in "Pious dessigns towards the propagation of the kingdome of Christ and… for the Oposing of all Antichristian persons."[44]

Gerbier alluded to a manuscript entitled *Hispaniola St Domingo Jamaica etc. Don Hennings Discovery to the Duke of Buckingham 1623 Since unciphered and attempted by Cromwell*, which was discussed by a committee chaired by Whitelocke.[45] *Don Hennings Discovery* described an undertaking in the West Indies fit "whensoever any Nacion findes it selfe agreived by the Spaniards and would attempt to break that Kinges dessigne." Gerbier stressed that these secrets were cobbled together strategically to undermine the prior design of Spanish American empire. He also highlighted their versatility. Anyone could

41 "14 ships of war to be prepared for the Western design." Gardiner, *History*, 2:475; Green, *Calendar, Domestic, 1654*, 201.

42 Newton, *The Colonising Activities*, 314.

43 Korr, *Cromwell*, 96; Kupperman, "Errand."

44 BL, Add. 32093, fols 306v–307r. "A summary relation."

45 Oxford MS Clarendon 4, 61r–74v. Green, *Calendar, Domestic, 1651–1652*, 325.

make use of them against Spain—even political opposites such as Buckingham and Cromwell.

In addition to identifying the land of American alchemists, the manuscript comprised more prosaic secrets: a mine of gold in Jamaica, a plan for invading Hispaniola and Santo Domingo, a scheme for capturing the Spanish gold and silver mule train, resources for colonizing Jamaica and Florida, a plan for piracy against Honduran indigo cargo, a plan to hold the president of Santo Domingo ransom, tips for identifying gold-bearing earth, and a technique for protecting miners from the fumes produced by the mercury amalgamation process for purifying gold. It included a copy of a contract between Buckingham and Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden for military protection from Spain for Buckingham's new American state. This collection of intelligence was endorsed, "Presented, and the design attempted and in some measure attayned by Cromwell Anno 1652."[46] Paul Sellin has confirmed Buckingham's plan through contracts in Latin and French preserved in Swedish archives between Buckingham and Gustavus Adolphus for undertaking this "glorious design (*glorieux dessein*)."[47] In contrast to the attention paid to the *Grand Dessein*, the *Groot Desseyn*, and the Western Design, few scholars have discussed this glorious design. Modern accounts of the "Western Design" do not mention it.[48]

The opportunism and versatility of this design contradict the historiographical view of great design as an ideologically motivated, unique vision for national destiny crafted by a statesman at a critical moment in that nation's history. In a 1656 Dutch pamphlet, Gerbier advertised the interest of many statesmen in his plan (the King of Spain, the King of Portugal, Cardinal Richelieu, and the States General of the United Provinces).[49] He also offered it to Cardinal Mazarin in 1643 and to Buckingham's exiled son in Paris in 1649, and he discussed it in 1648 with Prince Rupert.[50] He developed and marketed this "glorious design" by drawing on practices deployed by many similar agents in cobbling together the designs of the period. Such practices can help us reconsider the nature of great designs.

Gerbier's Practices

Connecting Mobilities

Gerbier usually named the rebellious secretary "Hennin." This individual may be identifiable as the Walloon secretary of foreign languages, Jorge de Henin

46 Green, *Calendar, Domestic, 1651–1652*, 75v.
47 Sellin, *Treason*, 264–65.
48 See Pestana, *The English Conquest*.
49 Gerbier, *Tweede Deel*, [Br].
50 De Boer, "Balthazar Gerbier," 144; Rawlinson C 254, 60–87v; Greengrass et. al., *Hartlib Papers*. October, 1648, 10/2/19A–B.

(*floruit* 1597–1628). Henin returned to Madrid in 1623 after two years in England (1621–1622). Gerbier called Hennin a Fleming by birth and a secretary of foreign languages.[51] He noted that Hennin could not escape Spain for several years. When he at last headed to England, Hennin befriended Cornelis de Glarges, an agent of the States General, at Calais and eventually died in Holland.[52] A "Master Hennin" was buried in the Hague in 1634 in the de Glarges family section.[53]

Henin positioned himself as a model *hombre de estado,* a "professional intermediary" who connected "global mobilities." As Claire Gilbert has discussed, apparently national reform discourses were "forged through the circulation of diverse models and experiences." Henin's case showed how "rivals like England, the United Provinces, Morocco, and Spain benefitted from the exchanges embodied by agents like Henin."[54] An identification of Gerbier's informant with Henin would add a dimension to Henin's known career in the Ottoman Empire, Morocco, Spain, England, Flanders, Denmark, and Poland, especially as Gerbier claimed that his informant spent many years in the Spanish Americas.

Henin composed memorials for Spain on topics such as English colonialism and commerce in the Americas. He warned that nothing yet of the Spanish Americas had been lost except Bermuda. The Spaniards had neglected Bermuda as unimportant and thus allowed the English to seize it. The English had now taken advantage of Bermuda's situation. Coupling Bermuda with their colonies in Virginia and New England, they could eye the coast of Florida as a base for their great designs ("*grandes disignios*") upon all of America.[55]

Gerbier identified Hennin as the source for key interventions against Spanish empire. Yet he also attributed a "Spanish Overture whereby the Cloath trade may be made more worth to the English then the gold Mines are to the Spanish" to "one Done [sic] Hennin." Notably, the political aims of that plan contrasted sharply with Hennin's other secrets, as it would "indissolvably" fix "the Spanish Interest" to "that of the English Nation."[56] Versatile transnational agents collected divergent strategies, often from one another, to be utilized for shifting political opportunities.

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51 Gerbier, *To the Parliament*, 7; Fernández, *England and Spain*, 113.

52 Bodleian, Ms. Rawlinson C. 254, [82r].

53 Van der Muelen, *De registers*, 39. Counterevidence includes the rendering of the Spanish informant as the already dead "Anthonio Peres" in one pamphlet and as "Antonio Hennin" in another. Gerbier, *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, 23; Gerbier, *Sommary Description*, [A2v].

54 Gilbert, "Professions of exchange," 125–26; Fernández, *England and Spain*, 81.

55 BL, Add. 14003, f. 222.

56 Gerbier, *To the Parliament*, 7.

Compiling Secrets

The collection of secrets provided the method through which agents circulated and stored individual projects and recombined them into great designs.[57] Gerbier composed a massive calligraphic folio volume, *Secret Mirror of Virtue and Sciences*, showcasing "secrets" he could offer potential clients.[58] For his family's own use, Gerbier compiled a collection of "Secrets," left, as he wrote in French, Dutch, and English, "to my Heires for a memory." He bound it together with a family history and genealogy.[59]

Gerbier drew no distinction between secrets of conquest and secrets of nature. After describing uses of mercury ranging from making bullets that can penetrate armor to faking seals, he concluded, "it is a great secret of nature (*c'est un grand Secret dans la Nature*)."[60] His family manuscript encompassed many alchemical secrets, several French designs of Henri IV (such as a plan for manufacturing salt and a canal connecting the Atlantic and the Mediterranean), three techniques for sinking enemy ships and entire navies, techniques for destroying enemy gates and canals, for preventing worms in wooden ships during long voyages, for writing and speaking in code, for imitating seals and writing, and for resealing packets of military orders "to put in orders contrary to what had been there previously," a supply list for an invasion force for six months and the merchandise necessary for trade with "savages," instructions on how to bargain for hiring a naval crew, and the "narrative of a Spaniard to the Duke of Buckingham concerning a gold mine used by savages in America and by moors in Africa."

As was standard practice, Gerbier often noted august provenances (such as Phillip II of Spain, Queen Elizabeth, and Marie de Medici) for medical recipes in his family book of secrets. He likewise recorded the provenance of projects. One project for a public land registry had been realized in the United Provinces, and Henri IV tried to realize it earlier in Picardy.[61] The "glorious and advantageous design" for connecting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic recalled a previous "project (*proiect*)" connecting the Rhône to the Saône.[62] As with recipes, novelty was not necessarily desirable in projects. Historical provenances lent credibility to projects that could be resurrected as opportunities arose. The canal project of Henri IV was resurrected in the 1630s and finally realized during the reign of Louis XIV.[63]

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57 Eamon, *Science*; Keller, "Mining Tacitus."
58 Wellcome Library, MS 2505.
59 Gerbier, Clements MS 6, [this section is unpaginated].
60 Ibid., 20r.
61 Ibid., 29r-v.
62 Ibid., 30r.
63 Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 43.

Pressuring

An artist, architect, and costume and stage designer, Gerbier adroitly staged political drama. In *The Damaging Effects of Evil Favorites and Grand Ministers of State in the Belgian Provinces, in Lorraine, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and England*, he told thrilling tales of opportunities lost, seized, and stolen.[64] In printed pamphlets, he stirred up public opinion to stimulate political action.[65] He toggled between these and more tailored manuscripts to encircle potential clients, reinforcing the view he arranged and heightening its stakes.

Gerbier authored a series of pamphlets between 1650 and 1652 on the eve of the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), a conflict that generated some 278 pamphlets.[66] His 1650 *Most Humble Remonstrance* publicized the manuscript offers of Hennin's secrets he had made to Parliament, and the delays of various subcommittees in considering them. It also exposed "A French secret design" for sending fireships (laden with bombs) to blow up London bridge, and Gerbier's offer of "massoned mine ships" to counter this scheme. Then, in an anonymously published 1652 pamphlet, the *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue* (advertised as a translation of a Dutch pamphlet), he had his characters, an English sea captain, a Dutch merchant, and a Frisian statist, discuss the *Most Humble Remonstrance* aboard ship.[67]

Gerbier also offered his bomb design (based, he claimed, on the very bomb the Duke of Parma had deployed against his ancestors in Antwerp) to the Dutch and the French.[68] Writing to the government of Vlissingen, Gerbier warned of the designs ("*desseynen*") of the English to deploy fireships against that city; he proffered his bomb design as a countermeasure.[69] The English Council of State had sent Gerbier to broker peace with the States General in August 1652; instead, he drummed up further hostilities. In late October 1652, Gerbier reported to the States General how in a letter dated September 3, Captain [George] Bishop cried "crocodile" tears at the thought of war between nations allied by religion and interest. Meanwhile, Gerbier alerted the States General to an "English pernicious design" Cromwell was preparing to deploy a "dangerous machine" against Dutch warships and the merchant fleet. The English had hatched a "design with the Spaniards" as well as a "design with the Portuguese" to appropriate the gold and silver mines and treasures detailed in the 1623 enciphered papers of a Spanish secretary Gerbier had sent to the States General. He suggested that the latter ally with Spain by revealing the English plans for "realizing their designs." He offered to serve the Dutch

64 Gerbier, *Les Effects*.
65 Peacey, "Print," 285.
66 De Bruin, "Political Pamphleteering," 69.
67 Gerbier, *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, 1–2.
68 Ministère, *Catalogue*, 15–16. NAL, Clements MS 6. Wellcome Library MS 2505.
69 Zeeuws Archief, ZI-III-1026.

abroad; he knew the languages, customs, humors, and ways of managing many foreign nations.[70]

The same day George Bishop wrote to Gerbier, Bishop also wrote to Bulstrode Whitelocke with intelligence from the Netherlands:

> Their next designe is for the silver Fleet from spaine … But the cheif designe is for this Fleet to stere in the night between Callice & Dover & to Joyne with De ruyters… Now is your time to bee lively… They have an intent to fire the Sovereigne & your other shipps in the Downes by store of Fireshipps; or fight them; of that you must bee carefull.[71]

Gerbier had likely supplied Bishop with this intelligence. Gerbier applied pressure from afar on Whitelocke and his committee, charged with reviewing Gerbier's proffers to England, including *Don Hennings Discovery*.

By February 1653, Gerbier pressured Whitelocke directly. He urged peace with the Dutch in order to overthrow "sundry monstrous designs hatcht against this State… I have sayd somewhat in print in the second part of a Sea Cabin dialogue."[72] Gerbier thus boasted of his authorship of the anonymously published *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, which in turn discussed his previous pamphlets, which in turn discussed the manuscript proffers he had made to Whitelocke's committee some years previously.

Manipulating Emotions

In the *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, Gerbier laid bare the utility of his tales of gold and adventure. In order "to move men towards the planting of a Colonie, and to beget in them a disposition to abandon their naturall Soyle, to inhabit another: They must be entertained with the hopes of conquesting some great matter, and the which must be hard to come by, for that else it would not seem to be a worthy undertaking for them." Only grand causes, such as "conquesting of the golden Fleece" or the "pulling of that dayled beast, Anti-Christ out of his Romish seate" or "the enlarging of a Nations bounds on other Soveraignes and Nations," could "keepe the peoples mind in a longing expectation, and in a constant resolution."[73] The greatness of a great design was itself efficacious because of the manipulatable emotions such grandeur elicited.

In 1661, Charles II issued a proclamation for encouraging Jamaican settlement.[74] The moment Gerbier saw "his Majesty's proclamation for encouraging planters in Jamaica," he rushed to advise the King, bringing forth once again Hennin's intelligence from 1623. Its lure of colonial gold could entice a wealthier colonizer than the royal proclamation would. If "his Majesty thinks of

70 NA, The Hague, 1.01.02, inv. nr 12589.59.
71 Whitelocke, *Papers,* Vol. 12 [162v-163r]. 3/13 September, 1652.
72 Whitelocke, *Papers,* Vol. 13, fol. 15.
73 Gerbier, *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, 25.
74 Charles II, *Proclamation*.

extending his power in the West Indies, by throwing open the gold mines which a Spaniard told his late Majesty existed in Jamaica, and showing the possibility of acquiring great gain and booty in the Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan, and other adjacent places, it would draw a number of adventurers far more considerable than bare planters, who must be transported and maintained at his Majesty's own vast expense."[75]

In another manuscript proffering secret intelligence of a Brazilian mine to Charles II (that Gerbier claimed to have stolen from the WIC archives), Gerbier described a captain of his acquaintance "who hath lived 18 yeares and above on the continent of Guaiana" and who knew "those among the Americans that can shue the way to el DORADO." Although he had already alerted Charles to the instrumental use of such myths, he still fed him those myths. Switching suddenly from his swashbuckling tone to a more politick voice, however, Gerbier urged Charles to pursue the Brazilian mine both as an avenue to a broader American conquest and as a strategy for pacifying English rebels. It offered "an opportunityes to a Plus ultra, wherewith the Spanyard have layde a greate waight in the ballance of the European gouvernement." Besides conferring such huge advantages in international politics and trade, it would also offer advantages in domestic politics, since "theire would be occupation for much People that may require to be diverted from Inland Seditions by the hopes of greate Progresses to be made in the American parts."[76] Hopes of conquering "further beyond" would divert the minds of rebels from sedition and transplant them physically far away.

This second register, while seemingly more dispassionate that the authorial voice Gerbier deployed in recounting legends of El Dorado, also represented a form of emotional management of the client. Intelligencers made clients *feel* that powerful levers to the balance of power were in their grasp. However, such feelings were not mere lies. The ability to evoke an intimation of insider information was itself valuable. Gerbier proffered his chameleon-like ability to shift registers and conceal intentions. If a ruler wished to dissimulate the ultimate ends of a colony beneath a façade, Gerbier had expertise to offer.

Managing Doubt

One of his many critics, William Sanderson, claimed Gerbier was "out of repute both with the King and Parliament, for his doubling with either."[77] Gerbier acknowledged he was not to be trusted but further argued that nobody should be. Only "mutual Interest (which ought to be betwixt Nations, as well as betwixt man and man)" was "the main rule of Friendship," especially when

75 Sainsbury, *Calendar*, 69.
76 Bodleian, MS Clarendon 92, 177.
77 Sanderson, *A Compleat History*, 580.

"cemented by a mutual profit."[78] Gerbier presumed his words would not be trusted based on his identity alone. However, if they contained "true advice, infallible arguments, and maxims founded on reason, equity, and possibility, they should be believed, even if they were written by the hand of a Turk."[79] Moreover, if one could not believe him, one could rely on the "interests" of other actors that aimed at the same ends.[80]

Gerbier also managed doubt by stressing it. He characterized his proposals as a "guess."[81] He encouraged his audience to insure themselves against loss should they pursue Hennin's intelligence. He applauded his audience for skepticism, since "men cannot be cautious nor wary enough in making of Ifs?."[82] He also advertised his own skepticism. In 1657, he professed himself reassured that the voyage testing Hennin's claims on behalf of an association of Zeeland merchants found everything as Hennin had described. He himself "had had no certainty that there really were gold mines in the places noted in the Spanish Document that he had given to the investors, with the forewarning to those investors that if they wanted to wager their investments in this expedition they should do as an adventure upon the conditions specified in the contract."[83]

Conclusion

In the early modern period, great designs were subjects of intelligence and interpretation within dissimulative political theater. In the modern period, they became the drama undergirding the rise of nation states. Historians have sought to identify unified "great designs" as established policies or ideologies charting the future at an existential moment in a nation's history. They excluded wheeling and dealing, the cobbling together of secrets, whisper campaigns, and the manipulation of emotions from the practices of crafting great designs. Those exclusions impoverish our understanding of how the project of colonialism was carried out.

The same historians who looked back on seventeenth-century colonialism as an ideologically unified design saw their own time as the "scramble for Africa."[84] Resituating great designs within the temporality and spatiality of period projects—that is, within fleeting opportunities and continually shifting situations—can help us re-envision design as also a scramble in which versatile, transnational agents such as Gerbier played central roles.

78 Gerbier, *Some Considerations*, 4.
79 Munich, BSB, Clm 10402, #106, folio 266.
80 Ibid.
81 Gerbier, *Sea-Cabbin Dialogue*, 20.
82 Gerbier, *To the Parliament*, 10.
83 Gerbier, *Waarachtige Verklaringe*, [A2].
84 Newton, *A Hundred Years*, 254.

Gerbier related to all three of the national great designs discussed above. He interpreted Henri IV's great design and connected it to political decisions by other powers. He also collected and vended multiple other grand designs of Henri IV. The colonial patent he ultimately won on the basis of Hennin's secrets has been interpreted as the failure of the WIC's "*Groot Desseyn*" for the conquest of Brazil. Contemporaries identified his offer to Cromwell of the same secrets as one of Cromwell's inspirations for the "Western Design." Yet, more important than Gerbier's direct connections to these three designs are the ways his practices can help us reconsider the historiographical treatment of great design.

For example, in her account of the conquest of Jamaica, Carla Gardina Pestana opposes a historical narrative that the "Western Design" failed and that Jamaica was an opportunistic afterthought. She argues that both Restoration royalists and historians have ignored the origin of Jamaica's colonization in Cromwell's design due to its Puritan commitments. Yet Pestana does not discuss how Cromwell's plan built on many earlier precedents, such as previous amphibious warfare in Buckingham's assault on the Isle of Ré or his plan to follow Hennin's advice (including the conquest of Jamaica).

A consideration of the great design as a versatile period genre would minimize the ideological commitments of a design. It would query historiographical distinctions between original designs and afterthoughts. The greater the design, the likelier failure became. Contingency and adaptability were built into designs. For this reason, Cromwell did not "tye you [his commander, Venables] up to a method by any particular Instruction."[85] Proponents of ambitious projects shrugged off the consequences of failure. Grew argued that even though doomed to failure, "no harm" resulted from shooting at stars.[86]

It was through continual failed attempts that changes which later historians deemed the successful outcomes of a planned design, such as colonialism, were wrought.[87] As this special issue has discussed, snowballing projects reshaped environments, enclosed resources and knowledge, eroded indigenous power, created new problems for future projects to solve, and produced "abiding material and imaginative debris."[88] Phillip Boucher described early French colonial policies as "haphazard, ad hoc, and… experimental."[89] The history of projects suggests that policy was ad hoc, experimental, and opportunist by design.

85 Venables, *The Narrative*, 112.
86 Grew, *Anatomy*, 24.
87 Keller, *Interlopers*.
88 Ibid.; Graan and Rommel, "Projects," 2.
89 Boucher, "French Proprietary Colonies," 163.

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